

Events in Navajo History

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ORIGIN OF THE MA'IDESGIZHNI CLAN

Navajo clans are of major importance in the affairs of the tribe and of the events of early Navajo history, few are as significant as the origins of the various clans. A person is born a member of his mother's clan, but is also "born for" his father's clan and feels a close relationship with all people of both his own clan and the clan for which he was born. In addition, each clan is closely related to other clans so that there are clan groups. The exact number of clans is not known with certainty. There are probably today some fifty or sixty clans and a number of others are now extinct. The number of major clan groups is nine and a few smaller groupings are recognized. A person may not marry a member of his own clan nor of his father's clan and certain clans within the clan groups are not allowed to intermarry.

Thus a Navajo has a large number of clan relationships and these kin-based ties through his own clan, his father's clan, his wife's clan and the clan groups to which these are assigned extend his potential for personal contact within the framework of traditional kin rights and duties throughout a great part of the tribe. It is this complex network of relationships which has held the tribe together as a unit in spite of its wide geographic spread and the many changes and challenges which it has faced in the last few hundred years.

No one knows just when the clan system first began among the Navajos. Of the other southern Athabaskan tribes only the Western Apaches (Dzilghaa') have a similar clan organization, so that it is only logical to conclude that when the first migrants ancestral to these tribes arrived in the southwest they did not have a clan system. The many similarities between clans of some of the pueblos and those of the Navajos and Western Apaches are strong evidence that the idea was obtained from the pueblos, although just when or how is not known. Over half of the clans have simple place names that suggest they began as bands or local groups of the early Apaches de Navajo. The rest, making up well over 40% of the clans, claim origin from other peoples, many of them pueblo tribes.

The Navajos seem never to have had an adoption ceremony for making new members of the tribe, as did some other groups. Instead, immigrants may be thought of as becoming "naturalized citizens" when they acquired clan membership. The rule that all people must marry outside their own or closely related clans was effective in integrating any immigrants who arrived in large numbers.

One of the clans of great importance which had a foreign origin

is the Ma'idesgizhni or Coyote Pass Clan. The name of the clan is the same as that still given to the present-day Jemez Pueblo. It is said that this clan was originally founded by a Jemez girl who was captured during a war by a member of the Ti'aschil' Clan and sold to a member of the Tsenjikinil' Clan, with whom the Ma'idesgizhni still claim a relationship. This would have taken place sometime before the Spanish Reconquest of the Rio Grande Pueblos in the 1690's.

As is true of some other clans, this captive was the originator of the clan, but later additions of people who came to the Navajos from Jemez also became Ma'idesgizhni. The Pueblo people revolted against their Spanish rulers in 1680 and successfully drove them out of New Mexico. Twelve years later, however, the Spaniards returned and there was fighting throughout much of the 1690's until the New Mexican pueblos submitted once again to Spanish rule. Many Pueblo people were unwilling to give up and fled to areas still free. Some went east to live with the Plains Apaches, others far to the west to join the Hopis in their continuing resistance to conquest and others sought refuge among the Navajos.

In July 1694 Spanish forces attacked a fortified pueblo built high on a mesa north of the present town of Jemez. The Jemez defenders fought valiantly, but the guns and swords of the Spaniards gave them an advantage for which even the high cliffs of the mesa were not enough to even the odds. The village, called in Jemez Astialakwa, was destroyed, 84 Jemez were killed and 361 taken prisoner. According to Spanish reports ten women escaped. Navajo tradition tells of Jemez women and children who managed to tie sashes and buckskins together to make a rope by which they were able to descend the cliffs and escape in the dark. The women from Astialakwa are said to have joined the Navajos and married men of the Beside The Water Clan.

The Jemez continued to resist, however, and in 1696 another Spanish force again attacked some who had taken refuge at Astialakwa. Again they were defeated with a loss of 32 men and most of the Jemez abandoned their country, fleeing to both the Hopi villages and Acoma and to the Navajos. Jemez tradition states that some went to Largo Canyon in the Dinetah. It is probable that some people from the neighboring pueblos of Zia and Santa Ana, who had allied themselves with the Jemez against the Spaniards, also

fled at this time and began the Ti'izitlzhiniil and Ti'ogii Clans at this time.

A Spanish army attacked the Navajos in the Dinetah sometime during the years 1712-15. One soldier later stated that there were more than 200 "Christian" Indians, doubtless Pueblo refugees, there at that time.

In 1745 Spanish priests visited the Dinetah in hopes of converting the Navajos. They visited a Navajo "pueblo" which they said was named "los Coyotes." This was probably one of the pueblos or small houses built by the refugees in or near Largo Canyon and the name was probably a poor translation into Spanish of Ma'idesgizhni or "Coyote Pass People." It should be noted that the Spanish word "pueblo" may be translated as either "town" or "people." The report of the priests seems a good indication that the Jemez refugees had become Navajos by 1745.

Navajo aid at the time of the Reconquest was later repaid by the Jemez people during the Carson Campaign and exile to Fort Sumner, when some Navajos found refuge at that pueblo.



PUEBLITO IN LARGO CANYON of the kind built by the Pueblo refugees who fled to the Dinetah to escape the Spaniards in the 1690's. (NLC photo)

Dearest One

As I lie here in my lonely tonight,
I pray for the moment I can hold you tight,
The hours seem like many ye
The thought of you brings t
tears.
I really hope and pray that God protect you in every way.
My heart pains with every I
Thinking of the day we will a
meet.
As I think of the things in the I
I only wish I hadn't taken st
lonely task.
My only request is that you
And in your heart I always
I love you and there could ne
never be anyone but you.
Love is something that can
explained.
Love is a many splendored th
I love you and only you and I
you know my love is true.
I hope you can understand lo
hard on this particular I
A soldier leads a lonely life
I pray to God that som
you'll be my one.
When I close my eyes, you
oh, so near, but when I w
Oh, God, why are you not h
It hurts so much when I w
my lonely heart almost bre
I am sorry for things I have
in the past,
But I pray to God our love
always last.
I don't want to sit here in the



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