

I9791
N31
Pam. 15



COPYRIGHT APPLIED FOR

Facts About The Navajos

...BY...

R. M. BRUCHMAN

Winslow, Arizona, October 1923

History of the Navajo Nation

THE Navajo Indians as we know them today were discovered by the Franciscan Fathers from Spain by way of Mexico about three hundred years ago. The name "Navajo" was given this tribe by these Spaniards, and was not their original name. The Navajos call themselves "Dine", pronounced as if it were spelled Din-eh, with the accent on the last syllable, this being a word in their language. The origin of the Navajo is shrouded in mystery, and what little is known is clouded by a mass of legendary history passed from father to son, and varying in many cases. The average Navajo will tell you that his tribe has always lived in this locality but that many years ago a part of the tribe was separated and lost from the main body, but what became of them no one knows, and there is a belief to a certain extent that some day this lost remnant will be found. Mr. Bruchman states that at one time he had the carcass of a supposed "Mermaid" at his trading post and would tell the Navajos that this was one of the members of their lost tribe and that some believed it. The Navajo tribe at the time of their discovery by the Spaniards was estimated to number about 7,000 but today the population is fixed at 30,000, this, being one of the few American Indian tribes that have increased. The Navajo Indians are a distinct tribe having their own distinct language and customs. It is true that the Apache Indian speaks a dialect of the Navajo language but members of both tribes are certain that there is no blood relation or connection between the two. Some scientists have drawn the conclusion that there is a similarity between this tribe and the Arctic Indians, on account of the fact that there is a noticeable likeness in facial features and anthropological indications, and thus that they might be descendants of this Northern people.

Marriage Customs

THE bucks, or men of their tribe, sometimes have two or more wives, which of course is polygamy and against the law of the land. But whenever a government agent is near these surplus wives are passed as relatives. When a young buck falls in love with a Navajo maiden he makes all advances and marriage is purely a commercial enterprise. The parents of the boy get together with the parents of the girl and purchase price for her arranged. This may be paid in livestock or money, or both. The girl has no say so. There is no divorce among the Navajos but simply a mutual separation after which both parties are regarded as single and may marry at will, no odium attaching thereto. If the married couple do not get along together they simply separate and there are no hard feelings, and no hearts broken, and nothing is thought of it by the other members of the tribe. The son-in-law and mother-in-law must never see each other as it would mean bad luck of some kind, the Navajo believing that one or both may get sore eyes and lose their eye sight.

Commercial Life of the Navajos

THE Navajo Indian shears his sheep with American shears, but will shear any day in the year they happen to need wool for rugs. The weaving of a Navajo rug is both a commercial and religious operation as the rug is a prayer offering. It is not necessary for a Navajo to own land as he has plenty of it, and wealth is not counted by money but in livestock. Sometimes, also, the number of wives a man has is an indication of his wealth, but it is also a matter of personal taste.

Festivities and Dances

THE Navajos have many celebrations and festivals where dances occur, or that is we call them dances for lack of another word. The Harvest dance in September is one of the main attractions. But perhaps the greatest, and most seldom seen, is the marvelous Fire dance which happens only once in a great while. During the ceremony celebrating members anoint themselves with some unknown substance and walk in fire and carry burning logs with no hurt at all to them.

Cooking and Eating

THE cooking fire is made by matches whenever possible but if none are around it does not bother a Navajo in the least, as he utilizes the friction method with wood in starting a fire. The Navajos are great meat eaters and usually barbecue or stew their meat. They are very fond of fat horse and colt meat and the prairie dog is considered an exceptionally delicate dish. The tribe formerly used pots of its own making but now use modern pots of metal. They are fairly clean in their cooking. They do not eat fish because many years ago some Navajos tried to cross the San Juan River and turned into fish, so that if they were to eat fish now they would be eating the direct descendants of their ancestors.

Medicine Men of the Tribe

THE medicine men are highly regarded by the tribe and sometimes receive a high price for their efforts in behalf of the patient. When a Navajo is not feeling well or happens to be sick it is thought that there is an evil spirit haunting him and he generally knows what particular kind of a spirit it is and must call the medicine man who is in control of this identical spirit, who then treats him for it by spells and incantations. When he is too sick to recognize this evil spirit his friends then call in what we would term a diagnostician who names the spirit and what medicine man to call in. If the medicine man fails to bring about a cure it is not his fault as the patient or diagnostician named the wrong evil spirit and they must call in some other medicine man who controls it and so on until the right one is found. However, if the patient dies it is still not the fault of the medicine men, but because he was a very bad Indian and has himself turned into an evil spirit. The medicine man's fee ranges from ten to one hundred dollars. One should give the medicine man further credit, however, as he often uses very effective herbs and remedies which are direct in their action. Along this line the Navajos claim that they have always had some herb or preparation that will perpetuate youth, the same as claimed by the discoverers of our modern monkey gland treatment.

The Navajo Reservation

THE Navajo Reservation covers about 11,000 square miles, most of it lying in Arizona, but with about 650 square miles in New Mexico. Winslow, Arizona, is the nearest railroad point to the Southern part of the Navajo Reservation and is known as headquarters and clearing house for the Navajo Indians and their products. The Reservation itself, bounding it roughly, goes North to the Utah and Colorado line, South to within twenty miles of Winslow, West to the Grand Canyon, and East almost to the San Juan Basis of New Mexico.

GOVERNMENT

Although the Navajos are supervised by the United States Government, nevertheless they are allowed to govern themselves to a great extent. There is no head chief of the entire tribe and each band has its own recognized chief whose word is law. Roughly though, the entire tribe may be divided into four great sections ruled by over-chiefs whose jurisdiction usually extends within fifty miles of where ever he may be. The chief is head man and supreme judge and is looked to for advice and decision on all problems by his followers. This is an elective office and the chief usually rules as long as he can keep the respect of his people, whether it be a few years or a life-time. However, he may recalled at any time and a new chief selected by a majority vote of the tribe.

Navajo Nomadic

THE Navajo is nomadic in his living conditions, a great deal like the "gypsy" tribe. This is true almost entirely to the fact that they must move from place to place depending upon the water and grass supply for their live stock, and sometimes quick moves and over long distances are necessary, especially during seasons of drouth and summer months.

INDIANS ARE SELF-SUPPORTING

The Navajo tribe is self-supporting and does not receive any assistance from our government aside from educational facilities. Every family has its own horses, sheep, goats, etc., and these are depended upon for the commercial life of the tribe. When the Spainards first invaded this part of the country they brought with them flocks of sheep and goats. During this time the Indians would steal any of this livestock whenever they had a chance. In the year 1869 the United States Government gave

) the Navajo tribe about 30,000 head of sheep and some 2,000 head of goats. Today they have over a million head of sheep and goats. They produce about two millions pounds of wool and about a half million pounds of this is worked up in Navajo rugs, their most famous product known today.

FAMILY LIFE

) The Navajo Tribe is by far the largest and strongest in the Southwest. As a rule, and almost always, they are of a very happy disposition, and kind and loving to their children. Each family is very loyal to its members. Seldom indeed is it that a Navajo parent whips his offspring. One will find male superiority very visible and active with the tribe as a whole. Although the typical Navajo family is usually composed of many children, the male child exercises special privileges. If it were to happen (and it often does) that a father dies it is nothing unusual to see a boy, of fourteen or fifteen years old, boss of his family, or his father's followers, even including the older women. The women do all the cooking and housework and the squaws are also the blanket and rug weavers.

Burial Customs

THE Navajo burial customs are unique and well illustrate their belief in witch-craft. When a Navajo dies, if he happens to die in a hogan it is caved in on him and burned, this constituting his burial. All of his jewelry is buried with him and instead of placing flowers on the deceased, the relatives buy cloth of some kind or a robe and shawl and cover him with these gifts. Everyone keeps away from the hogan with the exception of the pall-bearers consisting of four Indians not related to the deceased. These pall-bearers remove all their clothing with the exception of the breech cloth and when all preparations are made the hogan is caved in on the corpse and fire set to him. During the funeral ceremonies not a word is spoken or whispered by anyone. Of course this form of burial is prohibited by our government and sometimes the pall-bearers will dig a grave with a pick and shovel and give the deceased a Christian burial. However, these tools are always borrowed from some white man because if they use their own tools they could never again be touched by an Indian having become possessed of an evil spirit. This is also the reason why the hogan is burned so that it may not be touched again.

The "Hogan", or Home of Navajos

AS has been previously stated the Navajos wander in bands from place to place, setting up their "Hogan", pronounced (Hoh-gain) accented on last syllable, whenever and wherever fancy strikes them. This "Hogan" is their house and is made semi-spherical in shape the same as an orange cut in half. It is made with cottonwood or cedar logs interlaced together and help up by pressure against each other. All "Hogans" have an opening at the top from 3 to 5 feet for ventilation purposes and also as an outlet for smoke from the cooking fire. The opening for a door in a "Hogan" always faces East on account of the fact that the Navajos are to some extent sun worshipers like most other Indians. A "Hogan" may be any size to accommodate the immediate family. Some are as large as 20 feet in diameter. Cracks between logs in the "Hogan" are stopped with earth. The average "Hogan" is as comfortable as the usual modern dwelling, even in the coldest weather. A fire is maintained on the ground in the center of the "Hogan" for cooking and warming.

Other Customs

THE bucks, or men, pluck their whiskers with tweezers made from tin cans or silver coins. However, this is done only in lieu of shaving. There are some bearded Indians. The most appreciated gift to the Navajo is a good quality of turquoise. Once in a great while the Navajos will honor a white man by membership in the tribe. All of the older Indians tell stories and repeat history to the younger generation and often the young people pay for this knowledge. There are a great many visitors to the Reservation and there are no objections, but white visitors are supposed to have permits issued by Indian Superintendent living on the Reservation. The Navajos do not like to be photographed as they fear bad luck.

Navajo Legend---Beginning of Time

THE following is one of the more popular of the many popular Navajo legends and is translated into everyday English, leaving out all Navajo names and made as simple as possible.

“Once upon a time all Navajos lived underground and in this underground world there was a river. It so happened that one day a prominent young man and woman got into a boat and went down this stream and never came back. Later the rest of the Navajos found out that these two came to an opening of light in the roof of the world and climbed to the surface of the earth. This was the beginning of time for the present Navajo Tribe as this man and woman started the population on top of the earth and all Navajos are now direct descendants from them.”—Note: The Navajos still believe that the underworld Navajo tribe still exists underground. This belief is borne out by the fact that even today no Navajo will harm any reptile or anything coming up out of the ground as it is looked upon as a Saint.

Navajo Rugs

ALL Navajo Rugs are hand woven and practically all weaving is done by the sqaws or women of the tribe. All weavers are trained from childhood up and it requires a life time of study. The loom is identical with those used by the weavers of Oriental Rugs. The loom usually is stretched in the open between two trees. Navajo Rugs are prayer offerings and for this reason the mode and method of operation has never changed since before the time the white men came to the Navajo country.

The best Navajo Rugs usually have a grey background interwoven with beautiful symbolic patterns in white, black, and sometimes there is a relieving touch of vivid Indian red or warm brown and soft orange. The genuine Navajo rug itself is always entirely of wool and dyes used are absolutely fast. No two Navajo Rugs are exactly alike in pattern, therefore the intrinsic value of each rug is peculiarly its own.

The Navajo Rug comes in the more popular sizes from approximately one and a half by three feet to six by nine feet in size. They are oblong in shape and while it is true none are made to an exact

size yet it is possible to obtain a particular sized rug to fit very close to that wanted by the customer. Navajo Rugs will out last practically any other rug known. This is due to the fact of the long wearing quality of the long fibre wool of the Navajo sheep. Colors are woven straight through a rug and patterns are identical on both sides thus a rug is reversable at any time. The typical Navajo Rug usually weighs about a third of a pound to the square foot. These rugs are put to any use that rugs are ordinarily used for and in the colder climates they are excellent for robes. They make an artistic, economical, useful, and valuable floor covering, unapproached by anything else for this usage.

Price is determined by fineness of weave, the artistry of the pattern and somewhat by size. The Navajo Rug costs retail for about \$30.00. Some rugs of exquisite weave and large size sell as high as \$1000.00. As the Navajos are becoming more civilized they are taking up other lines of work, therefore, decreasing the supply. At the same time popular demand for these rugs is increasing due to their economy in wear and their artistic and novel appearance. On account of the above facts a Navajo Rug has a distinct heir-loom value because the Indians will not use machinery as each rug is a prayer offering and in fact there has been no machinery invented that will manufacture a Navajo Rug.

Navajo Language

THE Navajos have no written language whatever, but utilize signals and signs by twigs along a route, drums, fire, smoke, etc., and all the usual savage signs. The Navajo Indian has a distinct language which is peculiarly his own. It is a guttural language and also a tonal language, as the same word with different inflection means several things. The Navajos of the interior have a small vocabulary, but those residing near white people and their towns have a much larger vocabulary, owing to the fact that they invent new words for things they see or hear about. About 25% of the young generation speak English. As a rule, however, the Navajo does not like to talk English as it is hard for him to learn and they always prefer to speak their own language, even if they know English.

A FEW NAVAJO WORDS

NECKLACE—YO—(yoh) Pronounced same as Spanish Yo.

HOW ARE YOU?—Ha-la-ne (Hah-lah-ne) No Accent.

RUG—De-yo-ge (Dee-yoh-gee) Hard g, accent middle syllable.

PRETTY—Ne-zh-ni (Nee-zhu-nee) No Accent.

Beliefs and Customs

THE Navajo is very superstitious and is a great believer in witch-craft. He has a vivid imagination and peoples both his known and unknown world with a vast number of good and evil spirits. The Navajo is polytheistic in religion and has many Gods, although he believes in a supreme being of his own race. A certain belief in future life is also had, with rewards and punishments to some extent, based on the Indian idea. There is quite a number of Christian Indians, and missionaries have been very successful and established a number of missions on the Reservation. The Navajo Indian is an individualist and not a fatalist, and he is taught this from the very beginning of his existence. They have no music as we know it but do indulge in a great deal of singing, in fact all prayers are offered in song.

Navajo Morals

THE typical Navajo has a strong conception and a plain understanding of right and wrong as we know it and are remarkably free from sex sins considering their crude methods of living and their nomadic instincts.

*THIS BOOKLET is bound with a
Genuine Strand of Wool used in
the weaving of a Navajo Indian Rug.*