Timeline and Sources on Spanish, American, and Navajo History
by Carol Harvey


SPANISH/MEXICAN HISTORY

1609 September 28
Spanish colonists at the first Spanish settlement in New Mexico, San Gabriel del Yunque, located between the Rio Grande and Chama Rivers, were ordered to remain at the site after they petitioned the Viceroy to permit them to return to New Spain (Mexico) because the harassing raids and constant thefts of their livestock by Navajos made life too hazardous for them. The settlement, however, was abandoned a short time later and moved to a more secure location where Santa Fe was founded.

1626 n.d.
The first known documentary reference to Navajos (from the Tewa word Navabu, meaning large area of cultivated lands) as such was in 1626. During the Spanish and Mexican Periods, Navajos were referred to as "Apaches," "Apache-Navajos," or "Apaches de Navajo" more frequently than not. This occurred also during the American Period beginning in 1846 to some extent, and indeed, even today among the Chicano population occasionally one hears the Navajos referred to as "Apaches". Fray Gerônimo de Zárate-Salmerón, who went to Jemez as a missionary in 1622, and established the mission of San José at the pueblo of Giusewa, in his Relación of events in California and New Mexico from 1538 to 1626 wrote that one only had to go out by way of the river Zama [Chama]; and that past the nation of the Apache Indians of Navajü there is a very great river, [the Colorado or Bucena-Esperanza] ... And that all was plain with good grasses and fields between the north and northwest; that it was fertile land, good and level, ...The river sufficed for a guide.

1659 September 4
Governor Bernardo Lopez de Mendizábal (1659-1661) dispatched an army of 40 Spaniards and 800 Christian Indians commanded by Captain Juan Dominguez y Mendoza against the Navajos along the San Juan River (known as the Rio Grande at this time) for the purpose of laying waste their fields, destroying their power, and making captives.

1708 April 6
The governor wrote to the Duke of Albuquerque that the Navajo nation was continuously at war with the Moquis, but that they were at peace with the Zunis, where the Navajos ". . .always entered in peace." At this time the Rio Chama Valley was the principal path of entry for Navajo marauders striking at the pueblos in the Rio Arriba.

1747 August 12
On the west side of the Rio Grande adventuresome pioneers founded Abiquiu and Ojo Caliente, prior to 1747. In August of that year, both of these plazas were raided by the Utes and Navajos, and the survivors fled to places of safety.

1748 July 20
It was reported, relative to the condition of the Navajo country that, there had been a severe drought in the year 1748. An Indian who resided in the Province of Navajo for over a year arrived in Taos with a story of Navajo loss of crops." It was further reported that the Navajos, who numbered more than 2000, were at war with the Utes, that they held many slaves, and on occasion, visited the Jemez Indians.
1838 December 21
In a campaign against the Navajos, Captain Don Pedro Leon Lujan and his troopers attacked a Navajo ranchería in the Arroyo de Tunicha east of the Tunicha Mountains. In his diary, Captain Luján recorded: ". . .1 disposed to attack them...which I did, making war upon them and giving them a tenacious and rapid fire until eight at night, . . . In this engagement of Arms I succeeded in killing two warriors and a woman, capturing six little slaves of both sexes, taking 20 horses and mules, 40 hides. . .and buckskins, 14 saddles, some 20 sacks of corn that were found. .and other loot. ." (Diary of Lujan, Dec. 8-25, 1838)

AMERICAN HISTORY (commencing 1848)

After the Americans came to Santa Fe, they protected the Mexicans because they were American citizens. The Navajos were not citizens and when they raided the Mexicans, American soldiers would come to the aid of the Mexicans. This was a puzzle to Manuelito because no soldiers ever came to the aid of the Navajos when the Mexicans raided the Navajos and stole their children. The raiding back and forth had been ongoing for centuries.

1848 October 15
On this date, the Republican reported: "The following is a correct list of the number of inhabitants of New Mexico, 1848, with the exception of the county of Valencia, which at present, the returns have not been handed in, but it is supposed that that county contains over 30,000 souls, including the civilized Indians. Whites Indians
County of Taos 6,039 283
County of Rio Arriba 5,642 352
County of Santa Anna 1,917 1,987
County of Bernalillo 4,989 833
County of Bade 3,572 013
County of Santa Fe 5,992 590
28,151 4,057
Total so far as heard from 32,208"

1849 March 20
At Santa Fe, Orders were issued to the effect: "In consequence of the non-arrival of the troops designated for the ninth military department, and the limited force now present, it becomes necessary to raise an additional military force for the protection of the property and lives of the inhabitants of the territory of New Mexico against the depredations of the marauding bands of Indians which infest it. For the purpose specified above, the services of five volunteer companies will be received for six months, unless sooner discharged—three of the companies to be mounted... One mounted company will be raised in the Rio Arriba, and rendezvous at Don Fernández de Taos; one mounted company in the Rio Abajo, and rendezvous at Albuquerque, and one mounted and two foot companies at Santa Fe... ." (Orders No. 2, March 20, 1849)

On August 31, 1849, the Americans met with the headmen to explain that they were going to build forts and begin settling the land.

The first fort the Americans built in Navajo country was Fort Defiance. The Navajos were ordered to keep their livestock away, but since there was no fencing that was impossible. One morning, the soldiers came out and shot all the Navajo livestock on the Fort premises. In February 1860, Manuelito led 500 warriors against the Army's horse herd which was grazing a few miles north of Fort Defiance in retaliation for the American soldiers killing their livestock. The Navajos suffered more than 30 casualties but captured only a few horses. During the following weeks, Manuelito and his ally Barboncito built up a force of more than 1000 Navajos and in the darkness of the early hours of April 30, 1860, they attacked Fort Defiance. They were determined to wipe it off the face of the land. When daylight came the Navajos retreated thinking they had taught the Americans a good lesson.
The Americans considered it an act of war. A few weeks later, Colonel Edward Richard Sprigg Canby, led 6 companies of cavalry and nine of infantry into the Chuska Mountains to attack the Navajos. A year of cat and mouse followed, with small skirmishes but no success on the part of the Americans.

1851 September 17
Governor Calhoun wrote to Agent E. H. Wingfield on this date:

The Navajo Indians are traveling in every direction through this Territory, committing murders and depredations. It is utterly unsafe to penetrate, in any direction, towards the localities of the wild Indians without an escort, or such other protection, and facilities as will secure safety and subsistence in traveling through wastes and uninhabited regions. (Calhoun to Wingfield, Sept. 17, 1851; Abel, 1915, pp. 426-427)

1851 September 20
From Taos, New Mexico, one Theodore D. Wheaton wrote Governor Calhoun: "I write this at the request of some 500 of the citizens of the counties of Taos and Rio Arriba, who are anxious to make a campaign against the Navajo Indians who have done, as you are well aware, infinite injury to the property and persons of the inhabitants of this Territory--The citizens of whom I refer labour under much difficulty for the want of arms, as most of them have but their bows and quivers of arrows and in this respect possess no advantage over the Indians; but unarmed as they are they are only waiting authority from your excellency to organize and do all in their power to repel these ruthless invaders from their land and to save their property and lives and prevent slavery and outrage from their wives and children..." (Wheaton to Calhoun, Sept. 20, 1851, Abel, 1915, pp. 427-428)

In January 1861, Manuelito and Barboncito, Herrero Grande, Armijo, Delgadito and other rico leaders agreed to meet Colonel Canby at the new Fort being built, Fort Fauntleroy (later changed to Fort Wingate). The leaders promised it was best to live in peace and promised to drive the ladrones from the tribe that were causing the problem.

Peace lasted until September 22, 1861, at which time the Navajos felt they had been cheated during a horse race at the Fort by the soldiers. Navajos, women and children were shot and bayonet. After the massacre no Navajos were seen around the Fort.

In the meantime, the Civil War was underway and there were battles near Santa Fe between the Confederates and the Union Army, with the Union Army defeating the Confederates at Glorieta Pass. That being done, Brigadier General Carleton, Commander of the U.S. Army of New Mexico Territory, turned his attention to the Navajos. He called the Navajo land, "a princely realm, a magnificent pastoral and mineral country." "The Navajos were wolves that run through the mountains and must be subdued."

General Carleton turned his attention first to the Mescalero Apaches. His plan was to kill or capture them and imprison them on a worthless reservation along the Pecos River, leaving the rich Rio Grande Valley open for land claims and settlement by American citizens.

In September 1862, he sent out an order:

"There is to be no council held with the Indians, nor any talks. The men are to be slain whenever and wherever they can be found. The women and children may be taken as prisoners, but of course, they are not to be killed."

The Mescalero chiefs submitted to Carleton's demand and took their people into imprisonment at Fort Sumner.
In December 1862, several Navajo leaders traveled to Santa Fe to meet with General Carleton seeking peace. They were told unless they went to Fort Sumner there would be no peace. This the Navajos were unwilling to do.

On June 23, 1863, General Carleton set a deadline for removal to Fort Sumner. He gave them until July 20 to turn themselves in.

"After that day every Navajo that is seen will be considered as hostile and treated accordingly." No Navajos surrendered.

General Carleton ordered Colonel Kit Carson to march his troops from the Mescalero country to Fort Wingate and prepare for a war against the Navajos. Carson was reluctant; he complained that he had volunteered to fight the Confederates, not Indians and he sent Carleton a letter of resignation. Kit Carson liked Indians. In the old days he had lived with them for days at a time. He had fathered a child with an Arapaho woman and lived with a Cheyenne woman. After marrying the daughter of a wealthy Spanish man though he wanted a place at the top so he withdrew his resignation.

Kit Carson knew the only way to conquer the Navajos would be to destroy their crops and livestock, a scorched-earth policy. This is what he did, even burning the peach trees in Canyon de Chelly.

On October 17, 1863, El Sordo (for his brother Delgadito) and Barboncito sued for peace. They had no food left.

1863 December 8
On this date, the Rio Abajo Weekly Press published the following poem:

"JOHNNY NAVAJO"
Come dress your ranks my valiant First, and stand up in a row
Kit Carson he is waiting to march against the foe,
This day we march to Moqui—o'er lofty hills of snow
To meet and crush the savage foe—bold Johnny Navajo.

Chorus—Johnny Navajo—O Johnny Navajo.
We'll first chastise, then civilize, bold Johnny Navajo.

To the ladies of New Mexico whose hearts and albums too
Bear sad remembrance of the wrongs the savage Indians do
We bid a long farewell, the best recompense we know;
Our absent dangers have their search in Johnny Navajo.

On January 6, 1864, the American soldiers entered Canyon de Chelly, the last stronghold of the Navajos. Though they had no major battles, they destroyed all Navajo property.

The Navajos lost heart. As Manuelito said, "We fought for that country because we did not want to lose it. We lost nearly everything. The American nation is too powerful for us to fight. When we had to fight for a few days we felt fresh, but in a short time we were worn out and the soldiers starved us out."

On February 21, Herrero Grande's band surrendered.

Navajos were sent to Fort Sumner, the first group of 1,430 leaving March 13, 1864. A second group of 2400 left thereafter. The Long Walk was 250 miles.

In April, Armijo surrendered.
By September, only Manuelito's band had not surrendered. Those who escaped from Fort Sumner and got back reported that they were living like prairie dogs in burrows.

Star Chief Carleton reported to Washington that Fort Sumner was "a fine reservation. There is no reason why they will not be the most happy and prosperous and well-provided for Indians in the United States... At all events..., we can feed them cheaper than we can fight them."

"These six thousand mouths must eat and these six thousand bodies must be clothed. When it is considered what a magnificent pastoral and mineral country they have surrendered to us, a country whose value can hardly be estimated, the mere pittance, in comparison, which must at once be given to support them sinks into insignificance as a price for their natural heritage."

"The exodus of this whole people from the land of their fathers in not only an interesting but a touching sight. They have fought us gallantly for years on years; they have defended their mountains and their stupendous canyons with a heroism which any people might be proud to emulate; but when, at length, they found it was their destiny, too, as it had been that of their brethren, tribe after tribe, away back toward the rising of the sun, to give way to the insatiable progress of our race, they threw down their arms, and, are brave men entitled to our admiration and respect, have come to us with confidence in our magnanimity, and feeling that we are too powerful and too just a people to repay that confidence with meanness and neglect - feeling that having sacrificed to us their beautiful country, their homes, the associations of their lives, the scenes rendered classic in their traditions, we will not dole out to them a miser's pittance in return for what they know to be and what we know to be a princely realm."

On September 1, 1866, Manuelito surrendered with twenty-three warriors. They were all in rags, their bodies emaciated. They still wore leather bands on their wrists for protection from the slaps of the bowstrings but they had no bows or arrows. One of Manuelito's arms hung useless at his side from a wound. Now there were no more war chiefs.

Eighteen days after Manuelito surrendered, General Carleton was removed from command.

For two years, the Government studied the situation trying to decide what to do - leave the Navajos there or send them to Oklahoma or let them return to part of their homeland.

The new superintendent of Fort Sumner, A. B. Norton, pronounced the soil unfit for cultivation of grain because of the presence of alkali. "The water is black and brackish, scarcely bearable to the taste, and said by the Indians to be unhealthy, because one-fourth of their population have been swept off by disease. The reservation had cost the government millions of dollars. The sooner it is abandoned, Norton added, and the Indians removed, the better."

General William Tecumseh Sherman was sent from Washington to conclude a treaty with the Navajos which was signed June 1, 1868, allowing the Navajos to return to their homeland. Not all of their land was restored but at least they would not go to Oklahoma. They received 1/4 of their original homeland - 3.5 million acres.

Returns of Navajo Captives, November 1, 1867

"In compliance with instructions from the General Commanding, dated October 1867, the Indians have been turned over to Mr. Theodore H. Dodd, Indian Agent. Receipt dated November 1, 1867. The Military Indian Commissary is settling his accounts."

The U. S. Presidents during this period were:

James Buchanan: 1857-1861
Abraham Lincoln 1861-1865

Andrew Johnson 1865-1869

U.S. Grant 1869-1877

NAVAJO HISTORY


BEFORE FORT SUMNER

Navajos were hunters and gatherers. They hunted for deer and used certain plants for food: sumac, pinon nuts, yucca fruit and chokeberries. Corn was planted annually.

Other Neolithic man formed villages, centralized authority, assembled elaborate social and material cultures, crops and herds - not Navajo, no villages, limited material possessions what could be packed and transported readily, self-reliant, independent.

They fought with the Pueblos, the Hopis, the Zunis, the Comanches, the Utes, the Paiutes, the Spanish and the Anglos.

RITA WHEELER (P. 75)

Bows and arrows were not the most effective weapons. The spear was the best weapon used. It was a long spear with a very sharp point. A man could stick it right through the heart of an enemy or an animal. They were as good as guns. With them a lot of enemies were killed.

FORT SUMNER

YASDESBAH SILVERSMITH

About the whole bad period from before the Long Walk until they got settled back in their homeland, my ancestors said, "We suffered from everything, especially hunger. We ate just about all the birds there were, also bears and porcupines. Crows were about the only bird that couldn't be eaten. Some people tried it, but they said the meat was so bitter they couldn't swallow it."

In one story, "They had been told by Manuelito not to take off one by one. They were rounded up by Manuelito and started on a journey to the Tohatchi Mountains because of the attacks from every direction by other tribes like the Pueblos, as well as the Mexicans. The enemies traveled in groups on horseback, and there would be as many as two hundred of them.

FRANCIS TOLEDO (P. 144)

So Manuelito led his people to the base of the Tohatchi Mountains. There, he told the Dine to capture eagles for their feathers, and to gather lots of feathers, to make two bows each, and spears.

"We will not be killed poorly; we will be considered dangerous," Manuelito said. The Dine did what they had been told. Each man had two bows and lots of arrows. Then Manuelito told them to hunt deer and not to lose a single piece of ligament because they were used to grease and make bows. When spring came, Manuelito told his people to make poison arrows. Snake blood was used, and the poison was put on the
points of arrows. When the Dine were being attacked, they used their poison arrows. When an enemy was hit by one of the arrows his body would become swollen and he would not live long. That is why the Navajo were considered dangerous.

RITA WHEELER

My own grandfather, Only One Joint still headed the family. He was a very brave man, the one who would travel great distances and could out-run horses. He kept the family well fed and he held it together. One time, upon his return home, he told the group that he had seen on his trip where people were gathering at Fort Defiance from all directions. Many leaders are there, and food is being distributed he said. I think we should go and get our share. The reason for the gathering and food distribution, according to my grandfather, was that the White Man said that all tribes had become our enemies, and that the White Man would help us survive. The journey to Fort Sumner never was mentioned until it was time to leave Fort Defiance. My ancestors didn't realize that they would be confined even at Fort Defiance and that plans for the march to Fort Sumner had been made which they were not aware of at the time.

CURLY TSO (p. 103)

A majority of the Navajos didn't know the reason why they were being rounded up, and different stories went around among the people. There were reasons like: The government in Washington had ordered that all Navajos be rounded up and bunched together at Fort Defiance and then taken to Fort Sumner where they would be put to death eventually - killing them by means of subjecting them to different diseases, starvation and exposure, as well as using every other possible way to kill all of them. The government's reason seemed to be that the white people coming this way needed more land, and Navajos were scattered out too far and lived on some of the best lands; so in order to give the white people the lands, plans were made by the government to kill most of the Navajos and send the rest to Oklahoma or perhaps to round them up and force them to live close together like the Hopis.

They were given coffee, sugar, flour, baking powder, salt and other ingredients. They did not know how to fix those things.

HOWARD GORMAN (P. 31)

When it seemed there was not a sign of any more Dine, they quit scouting around and reported back to their headquarters. They decided that more searching was useless. From Fort Defiance the Navajos started on their journey. That was in 1864. They headed for Fort Wingate first, and from there they started on their Long Walk. Women and children traveled on foot. That's why we call it the Long Walk. It was inhuman because the Navajos, if they got tired and couldn't continue to walk farther, were just shot down. Some wagons went along, but they were carrying army supplies, like clothes and food. Mules pulled the wagons. So the Navajos were not cared for. They had to keep walking all the time, day after day. They kept that up for about 18 or 19 days from Fort Wingate to Fort Sumner. On the journey the Navajos went through all kinds of hardships, like tiredness and having injuries. And, when those things happened, the people would hear gun shots in the rear. But they couldn't do anything about it. They just felt sorry for the ones being shot. Sometimes they would plead with the soldiers to let them go back and do something, but they were refused. This is how the story was told by my ancestors. It was said that their ancestors were on the Long Walk with their daughter, who was pregnant and about to give birth. Somewhere beyond Butterfly Mountain on this side of Belen, as it is called, south of Albuquerque, the daughter got tired and weak and couldn't keep up with the others or go any farther because of her condition. So my ancestors asked the Army to hold up for a while and to let the woman give birth. But the soldiers wouldn't do it. They forced my people to move on, saying they were getting behind the others. The soldiers told the parents that they had to leave their daughter behind. "Your daughter is not going to survive, anyway; sooner or later she is going to die, they said in their own language," ... Not long after they had moved on, they heard a gunshot from where they had been a short time ago. "Maybe we should go back and do something, or
at least cover the body with dirt," one of them said. By that time one of the soldiers came riding up from the direction of the sound. He must have shot her to death. That's the way the story goes.

These Navajos had done nothing wrong. For no reason they had been taken captive and driven to Fort Sumner. While that was going on, they were told nothing - not even what it was all about and for what reasons. The Army just rounded them up and herded them to the prison camp. Large numbers of Navajos made the journey. Some of them tried to escape. Those who did, and were caught, were shot and killed.

The Navajos had hardly anything at that time; and they ate the rations but couldn't get used to them. Most of them got sick and had stomach trouble. Others died of starvation.

MOSES DENEJOLIE (P. 243)

The rest of the people were all driven to Fort Sumner. The U.S. Army surrounded them all the way. It was said that some Navajos starved to death during the long, tiresome journey. At the time of the Navajo roundup, some Dine got pretty weak, especially while on the Long Walk... The U.S. Army fed corn to its horses. Then, when the horses discharged undigested corn in their manure, the Dine would dig and poke in the manure to pick out the corn that had come back out. They could be seen poking around in every corral. They made the undigested corn into meal. Plenty of hot water was used with a very small amount of corn; and it was said that hot water was the strongest of all foods.

At times, they would kill a rabbit or a rat. If a rat was killed, the meat, with the bones and intestines, would be chopped into pieces, and twelve persons would share the meat, bones and intestines of one rat.

D.T. BEGAY (P. 217)

While at Fort Sumner, the guards...would give orders, herd the people around to make them work. At the same time, they would separate husbands and wives, and they would herd the women folk away and rape them, taking them by force. (Herbert Zahne)

The Navajos were attacked twice by the Comanches. It was found that when a warrior of the Comanche tribe was killed, they never left the body there. They recovered the body and took it back with them. During the attacks two women at the back of the enemy battle line blew whistles, and then the enemies would attack our people heavily. The enemies' horses were highly decorated; so were the enemies themselves. They dressed in hides. Their shields were made of cowhide, which was hard and as slippery as ice. When the Navajos shot at them, the bullets would not go through, and arrows also would just fall back. As I said before, the Indians who attacked our people were highly decorated - with feathers and bells. The feathers and bells scared our people. Some almost fainted.

MOSES DENEJOLIE

The people begged to be sent home. The Dine held a special ceremony to seek guidance about whether they would be sent home. They believed the Coyote was an indicator of direction, so they caught a female Coyote. Barboncito told the Dine to stay calm and he approached the Coyote. When he walked up to it he made or did what is called the Put Bead in Coyote's Mouth ceremony. The Coyote was facing east. Barboncito caught the animal and put a piece of white shell, tapered at both ends, with a hole in the center, into its mouth. As he let the Coyote go free, she turned clockwise and walked off timidly, with her tail between her legs - toward the west. Barboncito commanded the Dine to make way for the Coyote, and they did. Once she had gone through the circle, the Coyote started running westward, and Barboncito remarked, "There it is, we'll be set free." Four days later the commanding officer asked the Dine if they really missed their country. The Dine responded noisily, "Yes, we miss our country very much and would like to go back." Soon after that, they were set free and walked back to Fort Defiance, Arizona.
Many Navajo believe they would not have been set free but for the Coyote ceremony.

HOWARD GORMAN

There was one thing that isn't mentioned in the White Man's histories. A wooden post was put in the ground, and a billy goat was hit in the mid-section with a stick so that he struck the post repeatedly with his head and horns. I don't know how long this continued. But, after a while, the brains of the goat came out, and that's when they got through with him. Then the general turned to the Navajos and said, "Nowhere, at no time in the future, whatever you do, don't break this treaty. If you get in trouble with Washington or the U.S. Government again and do the things you should not do, that is what is going to happen to you people."

POST FORT SUMNER

They walked back to Fort Defiance, and rations were given to them, along with one - three sheep. Navajos began to live their old lives again. The goats they could get from the lands of the Mexicans with something that they had for exchange. They were also given iron hoes, shovels, picks and axes, and they were told to work with those tools on the land they once had.

Children from each family were sent to school at different times, like a certain family would not send all its children at once, although they might all be of school age. Often, to prevent them being sent to school, parents would hide their children. I suppose that each family had its reason for wanting to keep children at home, like needing them to herd sheep and to help around the hogans.

MODERNIZATION PERIOD

1921 Oil discovered.

1923 Tribal council formed. 12 delegates and alternates.

7/7/23 First Tribal Council meeting, Chee Dodge first Chairman.

Chapters organized. First five chairmen: Chee Dodge, Marcus Kanuho, Clah Cheschillige, Henry Taliman, Tom Dodge.

Window Rock chosen for capital in 1935.

1933-36 Indian Sheep Reduction period - voluntary then compulsory.

1940-45 World War II

1950 Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act - economic development

1950 Funding for schools.

(Chairman of the 50's Sam Ahkeah and Paul Jones)

1958 Navajo Forest Products Industries

1959 Navajo Tribal Utility Authority

1962 Utah Mining & Manufacturing coal lease granted

1968 Navajo Community College

1969 Navajo Nation


1995 Navajo Oil and Gas Company

**MISCELLANEOUS**

Language - Navajo - Athabascan family

Political Structure - Council. Consensus and collective decision-making.

Clan system matrilineal.

Man-nature relationship is one of harmony. Time sense is present oriented. Activity is focused on inner development.

Law is based on mediation.

Arts: storytelling, weaving, silversmith (jewelry making), music, dance, sandpainting (religion).