

## The Navajo

Several treaty attempts between the Americans and the Navajo occurred between 1849 and 1868. None of the attempts solved the problem that existed between the two groups; some conflict always seemed to interrupt the peace time. Items in the treaties also proved to be problematic at times. The failure of the treaties led to the forced march of the Navajo from Fort Defiance to Fort Sumner, which was latter referred to as the “long walk.” The “long walk” was the breaking point for the Navajo that caused for there to be a lasting peace in 1868. The Navajo were a very proud people, but could no longer deal with the harsh conditions that they faced, and eventually surrendered to the United States.

The treaty of 1849 was the beginning of the United States’ dealing with the Navajo. The Mexicans and Americans had just finished a war with each other, and they signed a peace treaty in 1848. The land that the Mexicans ceded to the United States was where the Navajo lived. The late 1840’s was the first time that the Americans and Navajo had formal contact with each other. The Mexicans, while claiming the area of the Navajo, ruled from a distance and did not really care about what the Navajo did. The Americans, on the other hand, wanted to set up military posts and have direct rule over the Navajo.

James S. Calhoun, a Georgia native went to New Mexico and became the Indian agent for the area. The Navajo did not respect the Americans that now claimed ownership over them; the Navajo viewed the Americans as weaklings. This was picked up by Calhoun and he thought that only through a show of force would the Navajo respect the Americans, and sign a peace treaty with the United States. Calhoun worked closely with

military governor Brevet Lieutenant Colonel John M. Washington. Washington agreed with Calhoun on the idea of forcing the Navajo into submission. On August 16, the infantry and artillery left Santa Fe, followed by the cavalry. All intended to meet up again three days later at the pueblo of Jemez<sup>1</sup>.

For the most part the Navajo wanted peace, according to their headmen. There were, however, a few “ladrones” (Spanish word for thieves) that the headmen said were uncontrollable. On August 30 the exploration reached the valley of Tunicha and set up camp. While camped, the Navajo chiefs came to have a meeting with Washington and Calhoun. During the meeting, Washington believed that the Navajo were sincere about peace, so he went ahead and laid out his skeleton treaty for the chiefs to discuss for the next days official meeting. On August 31, another meeting took place between Washington, Calhoun, and three chiefs: José Largo, Archuleta, and Narbona. During this meeting, Washington and Calhoun believed that another meeting at Cañon de Chelly would be a good place to finish the treaty talks<sup>2</sup>.

After the last council had ended, the problems started to happen. Captain Doge saw in the Navajo horses what he thought was his horse and informed Washington of this. Washington ordered that the animal be returned at once. If the Navajo were unwilling to comply, they would be fired upon immediately. The Navajo, fearing trouble, fled on their horses and were fired upon as they fled. As a result, six Navajo were killed, including chief Narbona<sup>3</sup>.

Washington and Calhoun felt it was important to keep moving for Cañon de Chelly and reached there six days later. Once there, Washington and Calhoun encountered Mariano Martinez, one of the headmen of the area. Martinez told

Washington and Calhoun that his people desired peace and would organize a meeting on September 9, when the treaty between the Navajo and the United States would be signed. Some of the items mentioned in the treaty included: Navajo were now under jurisdiction of the United States; perpetual peace, laws enforcing trade, Navajo deliver The murder of murders Micente Garcia; captives and stolen property to be delivered to the United States by September 9 1850; citizens of the United States committing outrages against the Navajo to be subjected to the penalties of law; free passage through Navajo territory; military posts and agencies to be established; the United States can adjust territorial boundaries, donations, presents, and implements to be given; and to be binding after the treaty is signed<sup>4</sup>. In all, there were eleven points to the treaty.

Calhoun was pessimistic about the Navajo, even though they outwardly showed friendship. The Navajo felt differently, however. For the first time, their territory had been penetrated by a foreign people. They had also witnessed the death of one of their oldest leaders, Narbona, as a result of dealing with the Americans<sup>5</sup>. The treaty between the Navajo and the United States was already on shaky ground with pessimism on the Americans' side, and with not the best feelings by the Navajo after the death of Narbona<sup>6</sup>.

The Navajo and the Americans continued to get along with each other through the early 1850's. In 1851, Fort Defiance was built; it was the first fort built in Arizona. The purpose of the fort was to control the Navajo who were considered one of the wild tribes of the area. Then in 1855, a new Indian policy took effect. Congress put in place an Indian Appropriation Act, which allowed the New Mexico Superintendency \$30,000 to negotiate treaties with the more wild tribes of the area.

With the passing of the Indian Appropriation Act, more money and supplies were able to be given to the Navajo, and for a new treaty which added variables to the Treaty of 1849 to be signed. David Meriwether and his son, Raymond, and W.W.H. Davis made their way to Fort Defiance in July. From there they went to Laguna Negra to meet with the Navajo. When arriving at Laguna Negra Meriwether was greeted by 1,500 to 2,000 buckskinned warriors from all but one of the tribes that the United States has had contact<sup>7</sup>. Meriwether was very pleased with this turnout:

I have come to meet with the Navajos, and I am glad to see so many present. I am glad the Navajos and the whites have been at peace so long a time and hope they will remain at peace. I have come to see you and agree upon a country the Navajos and whites may each have, that they may not pasture their flocks on each other's lands. If we have a dividing line so that we know what each other's country is, it will keep us at peace. I will explain the kind of a treaty I desire to make with you, and when I am through I want you to counsel with each other whether you will agree to such a treaty, and grant an answer in the morning<sup>8</sup>.

Meriwether went on to explain the treaty and what the Navajo would gain from signing the treaty.

The next morning, the Navajos and the United States again met to talk about the treaty. Before they could however, the Navajo decided to select a new spokesman for them. The spokesman selected was Hastin Chilhajin, more commonly known as Manuelito. After this, Meriwether started to read the treaty to the Navajo through translators. After each point of the treaty, if agreed upon, the headmen would show their approval by raising their hand. The first three points met with approval; the fourth did not. The fourth point concerned boundaries: The Navajo were to give up several spots that were sacred to them. However it was pointed out by Meriwether that many of the Navajo sacred land would be included in the land given to them. Meriwether then continued to read the rest of the points and was again stopped at point nine. This point

dealt with Navajo forcing other tribesman to surrender. In the Navajo culture this was very offensive, and the person who tried to force another to surrender faced the possibility of death. Meriwether insisted on this, because if the army went in to look for people causing problems they would not be able to tell one Navajo from another and that would cause more problems. Eventually the headmen agreed to this point<sup>9</sup>.

On July 18, the treaty was signed. There were ten articles to the treaty of 1855. The first discusses peace and friendship. The second discusses abstaining from hostilities and promoting friendship. The third discusses Navajo ceding all land to the United States, living on reserved land, cultivating the land, and states that the President can withhold annuities whenever the Navajo violate the treaty. The fourth discusses the particular land that is for the Navajo. The fifth discusses the United States paying for the land that the Navajo ceded to them. The sixth states that the annuities can not be taken to pay the debts of individuals. The seventh says that no liquor is to be made or sold in the area. The eighth states that laws already in place about trade shall continue. The ninth states that Navajo agree to surrender individuals that commit crimes. The tenth states the treaty will be in effect when the President and the Senate ratify it<sup>10</sup>.

The Treaty of 1855 added to the Treaty of 1849. The treaty made the previous land that the Navajo held larger. They were set in the form of reservations after land was ceded to the United States. In addition to the land issues being settled, annuities were also guaranteed to the Navajo. The Treaty of 1855 added very nicely to the Treaty of 1849.

After the 1855 treaty, things were looking good. Starting in 1858 a downward spiral began in the relationship between the Navajo and the United States. In 1858,

Manuelito had sixty of his livestock shot by the army. This infuriated Manuelito. He then took his case to the governor at Fort Defiance and swore to drive the whites off his people's homeland. The army, along with 160 Zuni mercenaries, burned Manuelito's villages. This is when Manuelito began to organize the Navajo headmen for war against the United States. If Manuelito's complaint would have been taken more seriously by the governor, the situations which followed could have been avoided<sup>11</sup>.

The troubles continued in 1860 when the Navajo attacked Fort Defiance. Over 1,000 warriors, led by Manuelito and Barboncito, attacked Fort Defiance and came close to over running it, before turned back by superior gunfire. The attack on Fort Defiance marked the beginning of the Navajo Wars. This was a major turning point in the West. Victory was thought to be on the side of the Navajo since a year later the army left when the Civil War started. However this was not the case, more hardship laid ahead for the Navajos<sup>12</sup>.

After the attack on Fort Defiance, the army took a new approach to dealing with the Navajo. This strategy was called "Scorched Earth." It was led by Colonel Kit Carson, who took command in 1863. The policy of "Scorched Earth" was to burn all of the crops, livestock, and homes of the Navajo. This caused the Navajo to come close to starvation, and have no choice but to go to Fort Defiance for help. A few bands of Navajo were able to hold on longer than others. After many months of this, about 8,000 men, women, and children were forced on a 300 mile forced march to Bosque Renondo. This march became known as the "Long Walk" by the Navajo people. Carson believed at Bosque Renondo the Navajo would become "happy and contented people". This

however was not the case. The conditions at Bosque Renondo were very poor and unsuitable<sup>13</sup>.

Manuelito and Barboncito were headmen that were able to escape the tortures of Bosque Renondo for a couple of years. The two of them band together their tribes in 1862 and refused to go on the march to Bosque Renondo. Barboncito swore he would never surrender<sup>14</sup>. This lasted until 1864, when Barboncito was captured and sent to Bosque Renondo. Then in 1865 Barboncito led a rebellion of 500 that escaped from Bosque Renondo; only to surrender and return in 1866<sup>15</sup>. Barboncito later became head chief of the Navajo during the treaty of 1868. It was not until after 1868 that army admitted that the experiment at Bosque Renondo was a failure.

General Carlton had thought that only 5-6,000 Navajo would need to be supported there: Carson believed that the number would be larger. The actual number that ended up being at Bosque Renondo according to the research of Frank McNitt, was around 11,600 Navajo<sup>16</sup>. There were 336 officially reported deaths and 220 escapes during the “Long Walk”.

The suffering continued while at Bosque Rendondo. The food supply for the Navajo was short at Bosque Renondo in part because of Carlton underestimating the number of Navajo, the Civil War, and the food that was received was given to the soldiers first. The food that was left over was given to the Navajo. Some Navajo became so hungry they would resort to digging through fresh horse manure to look for undigested corn kernels. The water in the area was also bad; the waters around Bosque Renondo had alkaline in it<sup>17</sup>. As the Navajo spent more and more time at Bosque Renondo, around 2,000 Navajo died from disease and malnutrition<sup>18</sup>. This caught the attention of

Congress and the Department of the Interior. As a result, Carleton fell out of favor with his peers. The “Long Walk” was very devastating to the Navajo people. Afterwards, the Navajo people were not considered a threat to the United States. The hardships of Bosque Renondo lasted for four years.

In 1868, a new treaty was made between the United States and the Navajo. The treaty was negotiated between Barboncito and General William Tecumseh Sherman. The goal of the negotiations was to return the Navajo to their homeland. The United States had realized that keeping the Navajo at Bosque Renondo had become too expensive and was not a good idea. Sherman’s original plan was to relocate the Navajo to Oklahoma, but Barboncito refused to sign to this and instead insisted on returning to Navajo homeland<sup>19</sup>:

When the Navajos were first created, four mountains and four rivers were pointed out to us, inside of which we should live, that was to be our country and was given to use by the First Woman of the Navajo tribe. It was told to us by our forefathers that we were never to move east of the Rio Grande or west of the San Juan River, and I think that our coming here violated the Navajo spiritual law, and has been the cause of so much death among us and our animals. Many of the men here were once very wealthy; now they have nothing. At home, we could grow corn anywhere; here the land is not productive<sup>20</sup>.

The land given to the Navajo was one tenth of what was originally theirs, and did not even include the best of their lands. Those lands had been taken by whites while the Navajo were imprisoned at Bosque Renondo. The land given to the Navajo was on the border of Arizona and New Mexico, and even at the time was seen as not being able to support the Navajo people. The United States government gave the Navajo 13,000 sheep, corn, flour, and food staples to last for two winters until they could establish their agriculture, if they agreed to never make war with the United States again<sup>21</sup>.



The terms of the Treaty are in 13 points, the first being peace and friendship. The second discussed the reservation boundaries and who is allowed on them. The third discussed what buildings the United States are allowed to build on the land. The fourth stated that the Indian agent will reside on the reservation in the buildings built by the United States. The fifth stated that heads of family wishing to continue farming will be allowed to select the land that they want, not exceeding 160 acres. The sixth stated that the Navajo must give up their children between the ages of 6 to 16 to the white man to be educated in the white man's way. The seventh discussed seeds and agricultural implements. The eighth discussed delivery of articles in lieu of money and annuities. The ninth was in seven different parts, the main part being stipulations by the Indians as to outside territories. The first two parts dealt with railroads, the third with residents, travelers, and trains, fourth dealt with women and children, fifth with scalping, sixth with roads and stations, seventh with military posts and roads. The tenth point is cession of reservation not to be valid unless agreed by three fourths of all adult Indians. The eleventh stated that Indians go to reservation when required. The twelfth dealt with appropriations, and how they were to be disbursed. There are five parts to go along to that, the first was with removal, the second with sheep and goats, the third with cattle and corn, the fourth with what happens with the remainder, the fifth with removal and how that happens. The thirteenth point dealt with the penalty for leaving the reservation area<sup>22</sup>.

The Navajo after the Treaty of 1868 were no longer considered a wild tribe, and no longer posed a threat to the United States. The treaty of 1868 was accepted by the Navajo. There was no more fighting between the United States and the Navajo. The area

of the Navajo reservation started out small, but has grown enormously since, and is now the biggest United States reservation with 16 million acres, mostly in Arizona, and 140,000 people. The Navajo are a very proud people, and the chance to return to their homeland after being at Bosque Renondo was enough to keep them from going to war with the United States again. The Navajo were more willing to live on a reservation in their homeland than to have to move to Oklahoma. This is why the treaty of 1868 was successful. The Navajo knew what they faced and decided that they would be happier in their homeland. The “Long Walk,” was also a deciding factor to the Navajo. It was a horrible time for them and represented another reason to make peace with the United States and be able to return to their homeland. The “Long Walk” showed the Navajo to what extent the United States was willing to go to keep control of them.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>2</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>3</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>4</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>5</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>6</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1849* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1849.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1849.cfm))

<sup>7</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1855* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1855.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1855.cfm))

<sup>8</sup> Meriwether as viewed on Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1855*

([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1855.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1855.cfm))

<sup>9</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1855* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1855.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1855.cfm))

<sup>10</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1855* ([http://lapahie.com/dine\\_treaty\\_1855.cfm](http://lapahie.com/dine_treaty_1855.cfm))

<sup>11</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *Navajo Timeline* ([http://lapahie.com/timeline\\_USA\\_1848\\_1868.cfm](http://lapahie.com/timeline_USA_1848_1868.cfm))

<sup>12</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *Navajo Timeline* ([http://lapahie.com/timeline\\_USA\\_1848\\_1868.cfm](http://lapahie.com/timeline_USA_1848_1868.cfm))

<sup>13</sup> The View Zone, *The Long Walk*, (<http://www.viewzone.com/day3w.html>)

<sup>14</sup> Navajo History Index, *Navajo Long Walk*, (<http://www.cia-g.com/~rockets/nmnavajo.longwalk.htm>)

<sup>15</sup> Southwest Indian Relief Center, *Barboncito 1820-1871*,

([http://www.swirc.org/bio\\_barboncito.cfm?ep=9&ec=1](http://www.swirc.org/bio_barboncito.cfm?ep=9&ec=1))

<sup>16</sup> S.J. Reidhead, *Long Walk of the Navajos*, Wild West Magazine, December 2001, Viewed on

(<http://americanhistory.about.com/library/prm/blongwalk3.htm>)

<sup>17</sup> S.J. Reidhead, *Long Walk of the Navajos*, Wild West Magazine, December 2001, Viewed on

(<http://americanhistory.about.com/library/prm/blongwalk3.htm>)

<sup>18</sup> S.J. Reidhead, *Long Walk of the Navajos*, Wild West Magazine, December 2001, Viewed on

(<http://americanhistory.about.com/library/prm/blongwalk3.htm>)

<sup>19</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *Navajo Timeline* ([http://lapahie.com/timeline\\_USA\\_1848\\_1868.cfm](http://lapahie.com/timeline_USA_1848_1868.cfm))

<sup>20</sup> Barboncito as viewed on San Juan Heritage, *Barboncito*,

(<http://dine.sanjuan.k12.ut.us/heritage/people/dine/biographies/barboncito.htm>)

<sup>21</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *Navajo Timeline* ([http://lapahie.com/timeline\\_USA\\_1848\\_1868.cfm](http://lapahie.com/timeline_USA_1848_1868.cfm))

<sup>22</sup> Harrison Lapahie Jr., *U.S. Treaty with the Navajo, 1868* ([http://lapahie.com/Dine\\_Treaty.cfm](http://lapahie.com/Dine_Treaty.cfm))

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