

The church and the Navajos

Background of community

Tape #273

NAVAJO

Father William Brown (Navajo linguist)

April 21, 1968

Interviewer - Austin Leiby

Side 1

The interview is Father William Brown, Episcopal Missionary Reverend at the Carson Post, Navajo chapter, located about 15 miles south of U.S. 84.... Midway between Blanco and Bloomfield New Mexico.... Father Brown is a Navajo linguist and a amateur historian on Navajo affairs....and is considered in the area to be an expert... He is my contact in the beginning of my investigations into the Carson Post historical background....

A. I was here for about a year in 1958, 59. I was on the staff of the San Juan Mission, this is one of their outstations and I took care of and I used to come out here once a week on Thursdays and I can't say that I, about the same families here now that there were then...now, very little change....

Q. Navajo?

A. Yes, Navajo...there has been very little change in that community in the last ten years now this is as far back as my knowledge goes, now I mean there have been a few changes but not many and then there are more cars, more modern type houses and that sort of thing, than there were ten years ago, but beyond that, there really hasn't been a change and in fact I would be inclined to go on back forty or fifty years....and there would still be very little change....

Q. What is the area size, the Carson Post area?

A. I wouldn't know how to define it at all....in the church?

Q. How many families are there?

A. Do you mean in the church?

Q. Well in the mission...

- A. Well the inclusive place, there are 100 families, now that would include every family, anyone that has been baptized here in the church in one priod, like there could have been many families that is the Assemblies of God now....
- Q. Yeah.
- A. That doesn't include people that have visited there, no....
- Q. What portion of Carson Post would you say have visited the church?
- A. I would say almost all of them....I would think so...not all, I mean there are some families that aren't in....
- Q. And about how many in the family?
- A. They are large... I guess there are about 8 or 9 in the families...
- Q. So it would be close to about 1000....
- A. Oh yes...every bit of that I guess...because I figured...I did count up... I figured 1500 and, I counted fifty families or more that had one member in church last year, the families that have shown some activity and I counted at least 450 people in this church....
- Q. So that would be a close guess then now? What connection does the Carson Post Navajo come in with the main Navajo band....? What, do they have council, what is their relationship with the main Navajo?
- A. Are you speaking now in terms of family relationships, or are you speaking in terms of....political ties?
- Q. Well you could put political ties in there....
- A. I am not clear on all the details of this....all of the quote, "Navajo area" includes the Navajo reservation and some outlying areas too....that are inhabited by Navajo people, are organized very much into chapters....this is kind of a town meeting...it is kind of an voluntary organization, which everyone in the area is set up for work and usually arises originally and this results of some felt need, becomes a community gathering place...and the chapter meets from time to time and the people discuss all kinds of affairs that they are on the community welfare and we are in a chapter, it is right there behind the trading post... I think covers what are marked on the BIA

maps as two separate areas....the Carson Community and the Wolferly Community....the Carson Community is the area from here west and the other is east...it is pretty hard to tell which is which...even though they do practically amount to one unit. It is a great thing of course....it is not anything that is formally laid out....you know, this of course is not part of the reservation, it is in checkerboard county...

Q. So then they have no...no...quasi-ties with the other community?

A. Oh yes...I think so....

Q. What are the needs for this type of relationship? Is there a council?

A. There is a tribal council, it consists of 74 members...and now I am, now you raise a point, I could not say with authority, whether these districts are all on the reservation... or if these outlying areas are included...the tribal council... 74 districts and each of them have a council.....

Q. Will you find that out for me, if they do have a representative and who he might be.....?

A. I would think so, really the difference between this part of the country, reservation proper it is, not really very evident you know on the surface...

Q. You know Raymond Nakai don't you?

A. No, I have never met him....

Q. But you know of him?

A. Yes but I have never met him....

Q. Has he made a visit over here?

A. No.....Crownpoint during the last election...he really enjoys running each time quite a campaign, it was a hard fought campaign, everytime Nakai was supposed to appear he would cancel it at the last minute...and they would bring somebody else...and I have never seen the man.... Well he was supposed to give the commencement address at the Crownpoint boarding school, and didn't show up and somebody else came in his place and this happens all the time, I never could figure out, this is most certainly equally gave people a impression about him, but it is possible that he would be doing his job instead of campaigning...

- Q. I was wondering....the Carson Post people are terribly poor, exceedingly poor...
- A. I wish I knew, had more figures about this, now....I think that I read a paper not long ago by Kent Fitzgerald... giving a survey and an analysis that the Navajo, the community in this Eastern Navajo Agency, it is not named, I wondered if it wasn't something comparable to this and I asked him the other day, he said no, he said Carson would be more prosperous than the community he studied, because of more access to employment...and it has a little money from other sources...the community of this survey had 51% of the families had an income of less than \$1000..... annual income...now this neighborhood is a little bit better off than that...
- Q. Using a \$1000 figure, would you agree with that?
- A. For this area?
- Q. Yes, for this area...
- A. Well, probably but I don't know, it is pretty hard to say... the income is, I don't really know...the... Now last...was it last summer or the summer before, I guess it was.... that we began having this great impact of the great society....
- Q. You mean feeling it out here?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. In what way?
- A. Well in the programs, in the poverty programs....the HIT program...for example....
- Q. HIT?
- A. It is a Home Improvement Program....and there are a great many men from this community that was enrolled in that...they, the requirements were that they were on a certain scale that they must make less than \$3000 and they wrote in the program, they were given two hours a day of schooling, trades, like school from 8 to 10 in the morning....and then they worked six hours on building...and any time.... family that wanted....and improvement and enlargement for a new home....they would applyit has worked through the chapter....the chapter which sort out of these application and sort them out in order of need.....

- Q. Chapter...what chapter, you mean the Navajo chapter?
- A. Right....and they would rate them in order of need,
and the family was supposed to provide the materials...the cost of the materials.....the cost....but the government program paid the men for the labor...so it kind of killed three birds with one stone...and improving the housing, giving the men some wage work and at the same time training them for some labor skills....
- Q. Getting back to the....
- A. This program alone brought quite a bit of money to develop the community, it didn't make everybody a millionaire...
- Q. But you have noticed the increase.
- A. Well you notice, the one thing that you do notice is the increase in the, you notice quite a change in the housing don't you? Many of the houses of families were built and added on to in this program and just a great many of them, and one thing that I noticed that many had enough to buy a car of some sort...not always much of a car...
- Q. Just as long as it was transportation....obviously this has increased their employment capability....for being able to get out.....?
- A. Well I suppose so....
- Q. Do you have any idea what the unemployment figure is for Carson Post? Percentage....
- A. I don't know....I will tell you, I think here, maybe most of the Navajo community, there are a great number of men that work off and on....
- Q. Do you mean by desire, by wish?
- A. I think that partly that is the kind of work they are getting and partly it is a matter of desire and wish... and it is typical and of course this is changing some now, because of the, just economical and sociological factors... but think that the physical position of the Navajo, they have no desire to live his life for the sake of a time clock....he wants to enjoy life...he will work until he gets a little ahead and pay off his debts and swear with the trader and then he will have some time to be home with his family and enjoy it...and of course this is another

factor, much of the work that many of them get is not here, they have to go away to get it....

Q. Usually Farmington?

A. Farmington or railroad...many of them work on the railroad from time to time...maybe Wyoming, California, Washington.

Q. And they come back....?

A. Yeah, come back....

Q. And like proceed with the work here?

A. This kind of work pattern...is....I wouldn't say that every Navajo does it, you can't say, every....but I think this kind of a pattern is sort of more typically agreeable to Navajo living styles and the business of just having a job that you work at week after week, year after year....

Q. The pueblo people that I work too, they seem to like that, that type of work, but maybe that's not the way it works but mentally speaking of the good old days.....those were the good old days... Well now getting back to Kit Carson Post, I imagine that it is named after Kit....

A. No, it is a trader....

Q. His name is Carson?

A. Ben Carson, and his wife's maiden name is Carson...her parents...

Q. How long have they, how long have that family been in the area?

A. No...anymore...I don't know... Mr. Carson is an old man now...

Q. How old is he?

A. I don't know exactly.....but I guess he must be around in his 80's at least....

Q. You said that you could arrange for me to talk to him, a day when.....

A. Well, he doesn't live here, he lives in Scription House... way over the west side of the reservation...sort of north of Tuba City.....

- Q. Do you know exactly where? Have you been there?
- A. Yes, I have been there... I have been through there, I have never met the Carsons, but his daughter....
- Q. Is he the one that originally founded the trading post?
- A. I suppose so.... Now Mrs. Trolat...is his daughter....
- Q. Mrs. Trolet?
- A. Drolat..... D R O L A T.....and he has had this trading post and of course his son-in-law carried on this one.... I don't know if he is actively managing or not....
- Q. He has that post out there or owned one?
- A. Well he gave me this church in Seneca....
- Q. How old is it?
- A. Well, very....the church was built in 1930....and here the land was in 1938 and I don't quite remember the cemetery was built in 1935, I think....
- Q. Now....I am pressing you on the local situation now what I am really interested in at the moment... As pastor of the church, you must come into contact with the group that seems to be the most prominent...that is the family, which is prominent what I am trying to find out is who toyou appears to be the family which that is more influential and more...
- A. This is not true...
- Q. No?
- A. I think that it is kind of a generally thought, over to Holbrook, maybe to a more greater extent that is proved, but the Episcopal church is sort of the place where you meet the more upper levels of society....and the peoples that are...
- Q. I wouldn't say all the levels....
- A. In the...this community the opposite tends to be true...on the whole, I think the Navajo Assembly of God congregation is more prosperous, more community leaders, more automobiles and so forth than this church.... I think there is a historical

reason for that....see the Episcopal church has been here for forty, fifty years...up until ten years ago...see... about the time that this situation was just starting to break , when I did my first tour of duty and it was the only church in the community...you could love it, hate it, stay away from it, but that was the one that...stay away from or be indifferent and we've had...if you will allow me to rest for a minute...a year or two ago we had a meeting over at Fort Defiance with Father Boone Porter who is from general seminary...who is giving us some of the theories that were used to gain Roman power...and a man that wrote about fifty years ago on missionary methods and Allen told the son that his book wouldn't be ready for another fifty years and so it was exactly true....yeah, I mean he is now being read and taken quite seriously....

- Q. Well was this western oriented...Western USA oriented? These thoughts?
- A. Well his experiences were in China, but you know he was dealing with missionary methods and a situation where things were being avangelized by a foreign group coming in...
- Q. Yeah equally.....?
- A. Now Navajo country fits that description even if it isn't the USA or perhaps it is pretty well covered, but he said that he was concerned particularly by the ministry... and so on and he said what often happens is you have a foreign mission, a.... foreign missionary, that the control and the government and the policy and general operation continue to be in the hands of the foreign group, that is of the missionary...the evangelizing group...rather than the native group...any community he said has leaders and always going to be leaders in any community, leaders that arise out of the community. If the leaders in the native congregation od not have an opportunity to exercise their leadership which is very often the case because of the control being kept in the evangelizing what isvery likely to happen sooner or later is a chism, that this leadership has to assert itself, if it can't assert itself in the church it will assert itself outside the church and form a split group...sometimes tis is of a rather wild sort.....and yet I said if you have lived at Carson for the past fifty years, you couldn't have given a more accurate description...
- Q. John Whitney today...did you hear him talking with me outside today....and he was talking about the other churches ...he was making remarks that seems to bear out what you say...

- A. Oh was he....I consi-er that this is true.
- Q. By the way, what happened to his hands?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. Was he born like that?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. Was he born like that?
- A. I don't know.....
- Q. He had been drinking and I said do you drink as regularly as that?
- A. I think he does and to an extent, I really don't know... I think...
- Q. Is he a good solid supporter of the mission's activities?
- A. Oh he doesn't come to church very much, he doesn't care... the family of which he is a part...is really the core family...these women that were here, all his sisters...
- Q. What family?
- A. Well the family that was sitting half way up there was his mother...Woody....
- Q. The whole family name?
- A. Yeah, that is Lucy Thompson, Chiris Yazzie....those two boys were her grandsons.
- Q. Oh you mean Eddie Begay?
- A. No....Eddie Begay that is not related to them, but these two boys that were at this meeting...were George Thompson and Roy Yazzie...their mothers are both...
- Q. They are nice boys...well who...the Begays, what part do they take in community affairs in, where do they fit in...?
- A. Tom Begay is crippled, you know?
- Q. No, I didn't...

- A. Well Eddie's father had a car wreck about six years ago.... and as a result he is completely paralyzed....he had to go back to a wheelchair, he has no use of his arms and legs any part of his body...and Mrs. Begay you may know...
- Q. She is a fine lady....
- A. Yes, she is a very fine lady...and they, she too has certainly had her hands full....
- Q. Yes, I understand that she has quite a few children....
- A. Eight...eight...
- Q. Oh eight....
- A. And a couple of years ago, her sister was living with her too in a separate house...that was just being built at that time, but in that one house were two sisters, the Begays and her sister...Helen and Tsosie...Helen is lame.....she Tsosie...Helen is lame...she has apparently a crushed leg, or I am not sure what, the way she walks....and a genital hip deformity which is very common among the Navajo females.
- Q. Invert?
- A. Yeah, it can be corrected surgically if they get it soon enough...within the first year or two, I think...they can correct this too....you don't see it much these daysbut it is extremely common....
- Q. Is this because of the mid-wife activity?
- A. Yeah, yeah.
- Q. Is it religious in any way?
- A. No, no, I don't think so...but it is simply that in the last ten or fifteen years, alot more of the kids have been born in the hospital...
- Q. Yeah, but I mean...
- A. Yeah, rather that at home, it is a traditional method of childbirth...this can happen...
- Q. Yeah, but it seems strange though, that it would be a hippie dream.
- A. Yeah, well its due to the method of delivery....

- Q. This is why, I wondering that wheather the delivery had some religious origins...you know that they would do it...
- A. Not specifically I don't think.....I think thats the way they all did it.
- Q. How strong is the native religion as opposed to that?
- A. I really don't know...I don't...really want to talk about it...Nowadays there is quite a bit of ambiguity when you say the native religion....meaning traditional Navajo mythology...and medicine men or whether you mean peyote...or whether you mean peyote...or whether you mean the....
- Q. Well it is, many branches of it, but now....
- A. Well peyote of course is a different thing...and it is.... I guess as much alive as Christianity....as...
- Q. Its.....is the Peyote very active?
- A. I don't think it very active, th4re are some people, I don't mean the special ones....I do know some of the people...
- Q. Do you have any in your church?
- A. In this church?
- Q. I mean St. Luke's.....
- A. Well, there is a lady who is coming to church who's..... never been baptized and the, she shopped around, for the Mormons and the peyote but lately I think she's going the Mormon's way. I haven't seen her in church for quite a while.....
- Q. Are the Begays recent converts?
- A. Oh no, no...now...Miss Begay's mother, I did baptize just a couple of years ago, but I forget now...they got around to getting baptized..... I would say at that, family that they were in that way, they were pretty traditionalyou know...
- Q. The Begays....Mrs Begay...she's working with the pueblos now, I get feelings of influential power groups and she gave the feeling of being influential....

- A. I started to outline her situation...and she and her sister were living together you know and she has a husband who is completely paralyzed...her sister is lame...she has well seven children I think. I have to count them to be sure... but including a boy that is about 8 years old who is mentally defected... I understand is a result of an illness and but, he is just, well I think he is a complete idiot. I asked his brother, his older brother the other day...where he had to go in every once in a while to check his and I sometimes thought that he seemed to be a little aware of this... and this, twins one died and so Mary has got a housefull.....17 or 18 people in one room.
- Q. Is this a hogan or is it....?
- A. No, this is a frame house, one room house...and then there are...infants, I don't remember..... I mean he is mentally defected.
- Q. Well I noticed that she was very involved....
- A. Well Mary has managed and managed well.....
- Q. She was involved in church activities.....and...it appears to me of course...what did he do before the accident....?
- A. I don't know..I don't know...I don't know whether I met him or not...I suppose I did, but I wasn't much aware of it....
- Q. Well, I see Mrs. Hoffman is here....
- A. Because, he's a very good friend and...
- Q. Well, what I wondered if you could do would be to....find out the answers to some of my questions because I would like to ask you more and find out more about....
- A. Well I think because of the way that...
- Q. I am not interested in prying into secrets but I am interested in getting an overview of the Carson Post and what it's basic organization is, how it operates.....what influences cause it to operate.....little things like that....
- A. Because the Navajo Assembly of God congregation is better, but I think we do fine....they are more aggressive people... and those who are likely to be.....
- Q. Did you say progressive...?

- A. Aggressive...
- Q. What about progressive?
- A. I don't know..quite how to...what you make of progressive...
- Q. Well you know...
- A. More acculturated you mean?
- Q. Well more interested in bringing acculturation than bringing it in....fitting in Carson Post as a community in the modern world....in the community....
- A. Well, I don't know, I don't know just thinking in terms of say...tradition and culture, I don't notice any difference in them but I think that people who are more aggressive and therefore making more money and maybe more prosperous in salaries are more likely to be found in that congregation than in this congregation and this congregation are more likely to be the people who are independent and less aggressive people...
- Q. Well, thanks very much Father...

END OF TAPE