

Tape #395  
NAVAJO  
District Council Meeting at  
Fort Wingate  
Recorded by Tom Ration  
April, 1969  
Side One

CAC, HOME IMPROVEMENT,  
TODAY'S CULTURE,  
PERSONAL HISTORY OF  
TOM RAFAEL.

This is Tape 1 about the District Council meeting, District 16, which we have mostly every once a month and how it is named is District Council meeting from all parts of outside Eastern Navajo Agency has to gather from each District, and they talk about different things and we'll find out how it is set up. One of the Navajo Councilmen, a Navajo that is uneducated, but still he is a Councilmen of its District is going to talk about how the District Council meeting has to be arranged every other month. And the District Council member, the District Councilman's name is Tom Rafael, is going to be the speaker in the first run of the meeting... Mr. Rafael has been in the Council seat for quite a numbers of years; he is about around 55 years of age; he is a very smart man. He is now going to tell you how the ONEO and the ONEO has made a connection through how that they have helped the Navajos and their country. So, Tom Rafael is going to be the speaker of the Councilmen this morning. So, here is Mr. Rafael...

The Chairman and Vice-chairman and the Secretary of the meeting and the visitors and the member of the community from each District and the agents from each District and

the BIA from all side of the outside Reservation and the people of the community, I am very gladly that I have been given a chance to say a little about how things were started by the OEO, the Economic Opportunity Program. I have say hello to all of you and I am very thankful to have the little speech that I like to say and tell you about. I don't have very much experience about all these things, but I just want to tell you how it happen to start in the earliest 1966. During the time of 1966 and before that, 1965, there was not hardly anything to talk about but we was just digging into our Navajo money, the oil money that what we have in the bank. During the time when the Navajo headquarter was to be built I was one of them, in the year in 1965 I was made a Councilmen for my District. I was very young and I don't even know how to read or write. In all, what the people had voted for me was because of how I talked about things and describe things among my people. I have long know all these things by my father who died in the past year. He was one of the Navajo leader in the earliest days. I was raised in the south area of Baca, New Mexico. My mother had died and my father had died, during the time of my age was about 18 years of age. I didn't have any happiness with my parents. During all that time there was nobody to teach me how to be a good boy or be a good man, but somehow the Almighty had

help me in my thought and my mind of working things in the right way...this was the way I been raised up. I was not being taught to talk about good things, I just happen to make up my mind to stay good. So, that's the way I happen to came up to the Councilman of my District. I have learned my silverwork during the time of a man that was called Stephen Charlie who taught me how to work silver, and my first silverwork I made was at Smith Lake, New Mexico. During that time there was man named by L. C. Smith. That was what the Post Office and the trading post was named too. That was why it had a little land water lake nearby the store which was called Smith Lake because Mr. L. C. Smith was the first trader that move up to the lake, so the lake was called next to his name and it was called Smith Lake, New Mexico now. So, this is the way I had my dear old life started. During that time silver-working was very popular; we used to work day and night on jewelry at home. He gave the silver out to us and we used to go home and work our silver out all night long, or for two days and two nights. Everything was quiet in these days, never thought of that I was going to be a Councilman in these days. So, I went on with my silverwork at Smith Lake, New Mexico. I was working there for at least five or six years. I think you people wanted to know about how I grew up, that's the only reason I'm telling you all the

steps I went to. So, my friend, there is alot of ways to be good and proper, this is the way I grew up...at first I learned how to do silverwork and then on I used to go to different meeting. In different meetings I have pick up words that I never did thought about it or know about it, so I been learning all things in Navajo way of doing. So, I'm telling you this in the truth way. From there on I used to go to different meetings and everytime when I get to a meeting I usually listen what the head leader is saying or who is in charge...or sometime the agency from Crownpoint or Shiprock comes to talk to people about alot of good things and alot of good ways of living. So, this is where I get my Indian way of life, and I like meetings. Everywhere I go to meeting, I always pick up a word that I never did heard and it would be a good word that I know. This is the way I have gathered all my good ways of talk and sometime we have meetings so often.

We didn't have no Chapter Houses in these days, we usually gather among all the camps. The first Chapter House or Chapter Hogan that we ever went to was at Smith Lake about 3/4 of a mile from the highway to where Mr. Ration is now. He was the first one that had a meeting, Chapter Home at his place. His wife owned the allotted land and she let us use the rights of the land to gather up so often. In these days, Chapter officer were not paid.

In all these years I have went to different meetings like I told you. Finally, things keep adding out of Window Rock. They were growing into different sort of things that which would be a way the Navajo people would like. So, I like to say that I sure am thankful of all these things that I have went through. Here at this little hogan the Chapter Officer were not paid in these days. The Chapter officer was voted to be a leader of the District, of their community little place, so even then I was not the Chapter office, I was just a visitors to every meeting. I used to live at north of Smith Lake about a mile and a half on the road, working day and night...this was the way I made my living. At the same time I used to go to different classes of Chapter meetings, this is where I learned how to pick up what I am today, a Councilor. I never did talk good because I was just learning. Finally, I keep adding what I am doing. I'm learning so fast that every time when people have made meetings and sometime they make a little mistake, so this is where I come in to straighten out the ideas of what they are talking about. This is the way the people learn about how good I was in the first start. During the time of the Smith Lake Chapter I learned quite a lot what they are talking about and what they want to know and the Chapter Hogan was there for quite a numbers of years at

Tom Ration's place. From there on there was a missionary that used to live at Smith Lake, a Presbyterian missionary. There were more people coming to the meeting every time, every meeting and we can't crowd in through the little hogan so we used to sit under the trees to talk about things and discuss things. We kept on years after years and we move about here and there. Finally, I think people had a very good understanding about what the Chapter officer were talking about. In these days the Navajo Tribal money hasn't come out yet, it was still talking about at Window Rock. And then from there on we move up to Smith Lake where the Presbyterian Church was. He had a big house, we asked them that if we could use it for a Chapter House and he made agreement and says okay we can use it. So, from there on, we used to use the house. Later on they have build a log house to meet in. This was the Presbyterian priest decided to do so we follow his order then. We was there for at least three or four years at the Presbyterian church's house together every year, and we have made good, we have went more further than we was from the first start. People has been hiding themself from different places but we have talked them into come. Finally, mostly all the Navajo were gathering every meeting. This was a very good thing to do. And then later on the Navajo Tribe and from Smith Lake, the

people have learned to gather up every so often. Finally, at Window Rock they have decided to build Chapter Houses throughout the nation, the Navajo Reservation. There is about around 100 Chapter Houses throughout the...I like to explain more better detail about how the Chapter started. So, we started in a poor way from the time of Mr. Ration's home and we move up on to Smith Lake Presbyterian Church. From the church we made good, but the Chapter officer was not being paid yet. We just get together and talk about things which we think it would be more better than it will be, so we will run it our way for so many years. Finally, the Window Rock people had decided to draw out some amount of money to pay the Chapter officers and today it is legal that the Chapter officer are being paid every meeting they have. They started with a poor pay, every meeting the Chapter officer was getting ten dollars for a meeting to talk to the people. Later on, it added up, they added up to eight more dollars and then it was eighty dollars. Money was kept raising on, years after years. Finally, it went up to twenty dollars and then recently it went up as far as thirty dollars today and it's still in it Chapter officer is paid thirty dollars a day for each meeting, for twice a month. The District Council meeting is for once a year. The District Council meeting was set up for once a month, I mean, not

a year...and the Chapter officer has to meet twice a month and it is three meeting in one month, two Chapter meeting and one District Council meeting, that makes three meeting a month. This is the way it's been running. So, the total amount of money cost about ninety dollars a month for each Chapter officers. So, this is kept in our old time law. Here at Smith Lake we have about at least twelve years, something like that and the District Council has not been chose to run yet. Thing was kind of going slow every time and finally, it grew up into a better deal that each District should have a Councilman or during the time that they have talked about if they would be paid for their trouble to be an officer. This was arrangement between the Tribal Council at Window Rock. Finally, they made up a budget throughout so much a year's time for the meeting, throughout the Navajo territory for each District. And then finally, there was a set up made that the Navajo Tribe will build a Chapter Houses throughout the nation, Navajo nation or throughout the Navajo Reservation here and there. District was being split up into 100 pieces that covers the Navajo Reservation. This is the way it started and then during the time of building the headquarter of Window Rock, the Superintendent of the Reservation was running the whole deal that the whole Navajo Tribe was under their control. For many years the



Navajo people has talked about their money and then finally they dugged out into an open where it went into meetings and finally the Navajo itself thought about have their own community Chapter Houses in each District. So, this is the way it has been set up to build Chapter Houses throughout the Navajo Reservation. Today we have over 100 Chapter Houses. Since then, they made rules throughout the Navajo country and these rules were made at Window Rock and then the Chairman was to be voted for. That was set up by the Navajo people itself and then the Chairman was elected. When the Chairman was elected there were alot of different thing came up...how the Navajo would be controlled throughout the nation, that is the reason why these Chapter Houses were set up. There would be different Councils to run its own District and the people of the District should vote for each man whoever they wish to be their Councilman. And that is why I say that I never did thought about that I was going to be a Councilman in these days. I was a jewelry smith that time and jewelry work was pretty high then, we make...we used to make regular Mexican silver dollars to make up bracelets and rings, earring, necklace, stones and all different kind of silver-ware works. In these days silver came in by the carload. There were quite a number of silversmith in these days but today they all died out and some of them are...didn't

care to work silver because of their superstitious of silverware work has been set up. So, one day I was working with silver at home and I decided to go to the meeting and then when I got there there were a discussion going on about voting for a Councilman. There were two different places where Chapter was met, there was one at Mariano Lake, one at Pinedale, one at Smith Lake, one at Borrego Pass, one at Casamero Lake, one at Prewitt, New Mexico, and one at Buffalo Spring and Church Rock. Well, Church Rock was out of my District, and there were seven small District that was set up for one Councilman. I was at the meeting, people was talking about different man and then finally they had me numbered out that they wanted to be one of their leader for a Councilman and I was ashamed of myself that I was so scared and shaking that I don't know what to say. In the first place I used to talk like no man's business, but at that meeting when the people says that we want you to be our Councilman to talk for us at Window Rock. So, that was a big thing to me in these days and it was a pretty good size problem that a man like that is uneducated and didn't know what the rights of English was, to be a Councilman for seven Chapters...that was why I was shaking. Finally, somehow, the people was talking about me throughout the seven Chapters and finally they have already voted one place at

Smith Lake, and there was about 100 in favor of me at Mariano Lake there was over 100 in favor of me, Pinedale there was over 100 in favor of me, throughout the Chapter Houses, Thoreau was over 100, Baca over 100 and Casemero Lake was over 100. All these Chapters were for me and I had the point of 700 vote and over so I was elected for a Councilman Chairman and the first time when it was started. Since then, I started into the seat of the Council which everything was new to me. I didn't even know how to talk against different things, I was just learning, everything was new to me when I went to Window Rock. I never did thought of such a things that would come to me. From there on I never did talk about anything for about one year, in about a year's time I was very much acquainted with everything and started to learn about different problem which Councilmen were talking about and the Chairman of the Navajo. I kept on learning piece by pieces, I was in the Councilman seat for four years. In the end of four years I have opened my eyes for alot of good reason, I have open my mind for all kinds of reason for my people. There were alot of things to work on and to talk on, to talk about and to fight about. From there on I had a pretty well experience for four years to be in the Councilman seat. Everything was moving on slow but sure. From the last day of my permissions expired, the

people got together again and re-elected me for another four years. From there on I was re-elected, I win the chair again and then from there on I have more better experience about alot of things how things are running and what Washington and the Tribe were talking about. So, I got on to work and start to roll things along as what my people wanted me to do. In the next four years I was in the Councilman seat again, I never did thought of anything else which was bad and always on the right side of a good reason. I have done pretty good for my people and for the next four years. On the end of another four years this was my eighth year, from there on my people didn't know who to put in, it was everything new to them and I think they got on the ball again and I was re-elected again, another four years, this was my twelfth year. Things was getting better every year and I have more experience then and finally when I didn't know nothing about education or how to talk English I was in the Councilman seat for eight years and this is where I learn a little English and little writing, where I pick it up myself. I think it is a very good thing to be a Councilman in a way of what you can learn...kept things going on for another four years, I went up to twelve years of the Councilman seat and then another year was about over and I decided myself that it would be better for let somebody

else to take my seat and so I thought to give other a chance of him to run for the Councilman. And then I told the people to elect another Chairman, I am not tired, but I want somebody else to learn the Navajo Councilman ways. There are alot of good educated boys and man in throughout our District, so let us give the education, educator boys to run for the Councilman. I had set up words all over my District, I was running seven Chapter and all there were over 100 Chapter District that usually have one Chairman to each Chapter, but I don't know why they gave me seven Chapters. So, I was running for seven Chapters and I sure worked hard for these seven District. All this time for every four years I make good for my District and I have sent word out throughout the Chapters for about another month, I started about two months, three months ahead of time so I thought I could give other a chance, but still they tried to find out one or two, but there was nothing happen. In the end of month's time, in the end of the month's time there was nobody found which would be as good as I am, so I had to give that much ahead of time, but there was nothing happen in these days. So finally, the word came back to me, there was nobody found. The appointment of the Chapter District was set up again, all throughout the Chapter Houses there were nobody set up that would run against me. I was appointed again, this

is my twentieth year now, I am in the Councilman chair for twenty years, I was re-elected again. I didn't wanted to say no because of my people which I thought that my people thinks of me that I am doing good so I didn't want to talk back anymore so I was re-elected again so this is my twentieth year. And then finally as I say that the Navajo Economic Opportunity started in 1966 and the following year.

In the following year I was elected again and then the ONEO, the OEO was talked about at Window Rock during the time of my office. There was a man named Peter MacDonald, a very smart man. He went through high school and college, he was the one that set up the ONEO going back to Washington, back and forth until he got the money that he could use to help the Navajo people, and then there were quite a number of different programs was set up how it would be started to run. First was which they call Community Aid. Community Aid is the program which in each District its people has to be find out a way of their living. The Community Aid suppose to go around and find out about their problem in each home, individual home, one by one, the Community Aid has to go to every home. So, in every Chapter there was a Community Aid was been selected as to find out its people, how they are living. If they are poor they need help, if they have a little

thing to live by they were suppose to be the tail end, this is the way the Navajo Economic started out. And from this Community Aid he has to report poor families that need help in the way of housing. So, he puts on a note of it from each home or each family, just like in the earliest days how they got these census number, so every Navajo is known who they are and where they live and what they are doing. And the Community Aid is suppose to be the Aid of its people, so he reports all these things into Fort Defiance. The Navajo Economic Opportunity Office is at Fort Defiance, Arizona, at the old jailhouse. It's about two miles north of Window Rock, so Mr. MacDonald is a director of that program of the Economic Opportunity Program. This is the way it is running today.

Throughout the Navajo country everything seems to be settling down in a good way of living. These Community Aid and what they call a Community Action Committees were set up, as many as they want to. There might be 6 or 8 or 10 or 12 or 15, up to 20 Community Action Committee, and they usually have a Chairman and a Vice-chairman and a Secretary. These Community Action Committee has to discuss about their people, how they could be run and how they could arrange things for them to live in the good life. All these problem has been taken place for the last three years and in throughout the Navajo Reservation we have done

good for our people building houses.

From the ONEO Program has quite a few different branches of things that has been run out through the Navajo Reservation. There is what they call Home Improvement and they train a skill of learning carpenter and plastering and all kinds of different things that the Home Improvement director are teaching our younger generation throughout the Navajo country. For all this year in about three year's time we have quite a few building of houses has been put up for the Navajo poor people. There are lumbers being brought, cement, windows, doors and sheet rocks and all different kinds of lumbers, windows and chicken wires, they cover houses with. Some places they are built out of adobes, some of the Home Improvement make adobes, some of them like adobe houses, some of them like to make houses out of rocks, some of them like to build lumber houses....lumber frames...all these things has been worked among in different programs throughout the Navajo country. So, most of the Navajo has now under way of good living in their homes and they are very thankful and glad about what the OEO has done for them from Washington and so far we know there is another program came out as to feed poor people for a certain amount of money which they can live by as they go along. What they call purchase order has been drawed out to different stores



and they buy a whole bunch of groceries for themselves. And just recently the Tribal Council has voted that there will be over 100 garden tractors to be bought and given to different Chapter Houses and one Tribe to haul things around with, and this is for mostly lower income people that are very poor. And at the same time they were suppose to work on garden. There are alot of things to be done to build better roads to their home and to build good pasture for their stock. All these things has to be taught to the Navajo and so the Navajo people are now in under way of very good living as I say, and we are still continue on with a more better way of life.

Just recently there was a university has been built at Many Farms to teach the uneducated Navajo people that never did went to school to remodel their own types of way of living in the earliest days. The Navajo people has almost lost their trade which they had known in their generation like basketweaving, rug weaving and pottery making and weaving belts, weaving rugs, blankets of all kinds, they even forgot how to grind corn. The reason why they have almost pretty near forgot all these things was because that they never been taught that in their young days. All they done was going to school, play basketball, football, baseball and run race, that's all they learn in school and that's the reason they have

forgotten their old ways of trade. So, that is why the university is set for the Navajo people at Many Farms. The uneducated has learned quite a many things that they have never did thought about...weaving rugs, the younger generation are taught and the older people that don't know how to make things, they are taught to do things and some of them are taught to drive big Caterpillers, farming equipment, big road trucks, semi, all these things are being taught at the university. This is how the Navajo are growing in to a better way of living which we all Navajo appreciate today and this is what I say that the ONEO has taught the Navajo to learn in their old ways.

So, from way back in 1860, the Navajo people was a great different from they are now today. In 1860 the Navajo, they didn't know nothing about what is would be up to 1968, so I think in the past 100 years or more we have got to a place where we all should be. Then as everybody would know that the Navajo people are the largest nation in the United States, so this is what we have worked about in our District. I think that is the reason why my people wants me to be re-elected in the earliest days. I have worked pretty hard for them as in a matter of how things would be better for them. So, my time is coming, is running out again for the next election. I don't know if I would be elected again and I do hope that

they will pick somebody else because other people needed to learn in a way of a Councilman. It is hard, but then we all should learn how to run things in a Navajo ways of life. For the last past ten years or more the Navajo people was very poor in every way of life. As to their home, they used to live in hogan, they used to have dirt floors for many years. Dirt floors cause sickness, dirt floors cause many things out of the dust. Today the Navajo people is about almost off the floor of dirt... they have good floor, some of them have cement floors, some of them lumber floors which is good to live in. They are very clean people today. Some of them have running water in their houses like white people. There are more things yet to come in the future, if we all work together, fight together, talk together, make things run in its way it should be. There are silversmith going on at Many Farms, also. All these things that has been forgotten are on its way to returns of old times. We all do hope that it will never die, it will be keeping on from generation to generation, we hope. If all the Navajo leaders and helpers would work together I think it would be running that way.

And so I have told you most of my problem which I wanted to tell you while we are gathering here for a bigger meeting. This meeting is called District Council

meeting because we meet from all different Chapter Houses throughout the Navajo Reservation. We are learning alot of things in American way of doing, but I am not trying to say that I am the best one in the country, but I'm just telling you that how things has run in the past time which we hope that what all things should, how things should run for our people

There is another good question that we still got on hand...and the big problem that I wanted to mention is about our culture...of old time ways as a ceremonial has been run throughout the nation. There are quite a number of Navajo has talked about that it would be best to being renew in different places throughout the Navajo country. This is one big problem that we have on mind to this year up to date. There are mostly quite a numbers of ceremonial that has been lost and died out which I say about dying out is there is no younger generation that wanted to learn about its old culture and a reason of there are more educated children that is in a young generation which has mostly live in a way of our American life that they don't seem to care to learn about their old culture way. Like in the earliest days they used to have different kinds of medicine man throughout the nation. This is what the... this is a way of a Navajo life that has been brought up in the country which we all...they are going into a better

way of living. Most of the people are very happy about what is going on through the Reservation, how the ONEO is working with its people. Mr. Peter MacDonald has done a great deal for us today as more better in a way of the Navajo Tribe is doing...which the Navajo Tribe is running is by, with our own money. But today as we know that what money we are using is what the government gave us... what the government is giving us to make a better life in through our Navajo Reservation and they are rebuilding things that it used to be running in the earliest days. So, as we know so far that what the Chapter in the earliest days in the way of starting was a very good idea of doing to gather up as a community and talk about things how we could work together, talk together, and live together in every way of our life. This was a very good idea for our people and like one problem that we have losing as I always talk about that the worst part of it is our legends and cultures where our old forefather used to do in the earliest days of their ceremonial and chant songs are all lost out and nobody else is trying to help the Navajo not to lose their cultures. So, I think it is a very good problem to think about and to talk about which we used to carry out in the earliest days of our forefathers' time and most of the people throughout the world has known our Ceremonial during the time of the Gallup

Ceremonial time. This is a big problem which we are now talking about, that that we shouldn't lose, we should keep it up as long as we Navajo Indians are called Indian in throughout the nation. Not only the Navajos but the other nations of Navajo Tribe and Ute Tribe, Comanches, Sioux, Cheyennes, all these Indian Tribes should keep their cultures as long as they can if they would remember all things how they used to do it. So, that's what I'm after right up today that I wish and do hope that we would keep it on from time to time. And as I say that our old culture ways are dying off and is about gone now, the best part of it, because of our young generation are not taught in a way of their old culture ways. There used to be dances, big fire dances, big score dances, bit Yeibechei dances, all kinds of things. So, this is what I'm telling you today that we are so far out in our way to better way of living and it is about, little better than 100 years since we've been pulling on and on until we got up this far.

The great leader Manuelito and Paracito and Granado Mancho had done a great deal for us in the past year during the time of the treaty. So, this is what we are in a great thankful for these great leaders in the earliest days. They were not educated like us, but they knew what they were doing, so they put us back to where there was all

kinds of riches. They put us back where we can find oil, they put us back where we could find uranium, and they put us back where we have all kinds of timber to build our good houses with. So, this is what we are glad about that some of these days we will keep their records as great man like you do Washington, like you do George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and all along the line of your great man. I think we will have to print our leaders as soon as we are straighten up to where we can be known and have our culture back as they should be. We are still working on our culture so that we will have a history. We are now going along with such good plans today through our Navajo nation, so that's why I say that soon or later we will be talking about our great leader in the earliest days. We got one of our great leader statue that is still up at Gallup, New Mexico on Keller Mercantile Company. This is what we are now looking up to that we once had bad times and today we are more in better way of living because of our great leader that we had in the past time. So, I am...we are all thankful with what Mr. Paracito and Manuelito and Granado Mancho and some other leaders that we know of today and they are known and talk about that we are now living in the year of 1969. Mostly every Indian in the country has a way of traveling. White people has brought good things to us

which we call automobiles. Today we travel like lightening so I guess we don't know what else to talk about in a way of our life that has been brought up to us, up to this day. We have half of our Navajo nation educated. Our young generation are going to school and now we have what we call Head Start which everyone else says, pre-school. This is what we got in our whole Navajo Reservation today and we are now very thankful for our great leaders which has brought up, brought us up to this point of living. As we know by the Lord Jesus Christ who art in Heaven as a matter of saying hollow by thy name in the Kingdon and the glory for which he has made us. And this is what we are now looking up to, we know there are a Creator that once lived that made the whole universe and our earth and the ocean that are around us. It's a powerful thing that we have today and we all know that things are getting worse, it looks like the whole world will be coming to the end soon, but at the same time we pray thee, oh Lord, that if we should die before we wake you will take our soul to keep. This is one of the greatest question that we got in the Navajo nation today. Half of our nation are believers in the Bible and most of the Navajo people are looking up to the new world.

So, my friends and listeners, I think I will come to a conclusion of my story what I have told you that I



wanted to tell you and that's that I have done, I have told you all what I know in life which is going on today in our whole Navajo Reservation. So, I hope you listeners has a very good understanding of what we are today. Our Navajo nation are getting to where they are willing to stand in front of any public with what little education they learn. So, I thank you all, I think this will be my end, I thank you again.

END OF TAPE