

American Indian Oral History Collection
Transcript Record

Tape Number: 832 Side: 1

Dating of Taping: 10/71

Field Worker(s): Margaret Spray

Tribe(s): Misc

Location(s): Albuquerque

Narrator/Event: Leola Kessler (Anglo) - BIA Teacher & Supervisor

Additional Narrator(s): _____

Subject(s): Education on the Navajo Reservation in the
1930s/40s

Comments:

Education

AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORICAL RESEARCH PROJECT

University of New Mexico

Tape Number: # 832

Tribe: Anglo

Informant: LEOLA KESSLER

Informant's home address:

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~~Band or Clan:~~ Teacher & Supr. (etc.) for BIA, 1935-1965
on Navajo Res.

Date and location of interview: 10/20/71 10/26/71 Above

Field Worker: Margaret Szasz

Date of transcription: November 3, 1971

Contents:

EDUCATION ON NAVAJO RESECUATION
(especially area around Chinle)

1930's : estab. of day schools - community education centers
bi-lingual texts
Navajo teachers
Navajo weaving & silver making - in schools

1940's : Effect of WWII on Navajo Education
Take Morgan - brief reminiscence

Evaluation of Interview:

Very helpful - many stories of the Res. in the crucial - turning point years
of the late 1930's and the 1940's

Future Prospects:

May talk with her again - She is willing

Tape #832 (side 1)
MISCELLANEOUS
Leola Kessler (Anglo)
Teacher & Supervisor (BIA)
October 20 & 26, 1971
By Margaret Szasz

EDUCATION ON NAVAJO RESERVATION

1930's

- estab. of day schools & Community educ. centers
- bi-lingual texts
- Navajo teachers
- Navajo weaving & silver making in schools

1940's

effect of W.W.I on Navajo education

Jake Morgan-brief reminiscence

- Q. This is an interview with Leola Kessler, Leola to begin with, I would like to know a little bit of your background before you went into BIA teaching... you said that you had received your master's degree... Was this before you went in to work for the Bureau?
- A. Yes, it was.
- Q. You mean, what year then?
- A. It was in about 1924, right about there.
- Q. Oh, what happened in between then and the time that you began to work for the Bureau?
- A. I taught in public schools in Colorado.
- Q. Oh, and you were teaching at what level?
- A. Well I taught several levels, first of all I started out with primary work, however, that was my major field and prior to that, I was not able to get employment in my major field which was teaching home economics and I taught in the northern part of the state at Fort Morgan and during that time that I taught...
- Q. And this, did this continue until you went to work for the Bureau?
- A. No, it continued until the Depression years... and of course, naturally everybody's funds were reduced including the school boards and they assumed that they could get along with the bare essentials which excluded home economics and consequently I lost my position and returned to my home town... teaching in the junior high school.

- Q. I see.
- A. And teaching the ordinary subjects.... in an ordinary high school they didn't need home economics.
- Q. But it was a job.
- A. It was a job, that's right.
- Q. So you had quite actually, you have had a diverted teaching background.
- A. Yeah, well it has been you might say, from the first grade through senior high school.
- Q. And when did you first begin to work for the Bureau?
- A. In the 2nd of January 1935....
- Q. That is a momentous day.
- A. Well, yes, quite a way to start the new year.
- Q. What.... Could you tell me the reasons why you decided to work for the Bureau?
- A. Yes, at the time that I was really forced to return to public schools, teaching all subjects in junior high, the salary had gone down so low that I thought that I couldn't afford to have as much invested as I had in my education and accept the salaries that were being given... and just by chance one evening I happened to pick up the paper and the noticed that the Civil Service Commission was advertising for teachers in the Indian Service... Now the Indian Service was a perfectly new thing to me, I had no idea what it was or anything about it, except that there was this announcement that there were vacancies and the salaries ranged from a certain grade to a certain grade and anybody that was interested might find out by filling out a Civil Service application.
- Q. Oh.
- Q. So it was really quite by chance.
- Q. Isn't that something.... but prompted as much by the low salary that you were getting at the time, as anything else.

- A. That's right... and I wanted to try to get back into my own field for which I was trained.
- Q. Actually then, this means then that the salaries that the service was offering at that time were competitive if not greater than the public schools?
- A. They were greater than the public schools salaries, where I was teaching. I would not say that that was true throughout the whole nation, but in this system.
- Q. Right, so well, beginning teaching now during the years, there had been different programs, I understand for teachers beginning to work with the Bureau as far as their specific training to teach Indians. Did you have any specific training before you started teaching?
- A. No, not before I started teaching, no... not with Indian children.
- Q. One of the things you asked me, you know... what themes I was going into in education, well one of the things, important things, at least I think that went on in the '30's was what was called in-service training, the summer sessions?
- A. That was started after I was in, actually in the service.
- Q. It started in '36 I believe... at least that is what my records indicate... that summer... Now you had been teaching, say a year or so before, before that started, did you take part in those sessions?
- A. Yes, I did.
- Q. Can you tell me anything about them?
- A. Well the first sessions that I recall were those that were offered at Ft. Wingate High School and they were offered during the summer... our own supervisors and Dr. Beatty and others participated in the leadership of these sessions and we were given the opportunity to attend the various class groups and where the theory and the philosophy of programs were pointed out, of course teaching of the Indians children were described to us and then later it developed to the point where there were actual demonstrations of the teaching of Indian

children by either experienced teachers and later actual Indians' Service teachers who they themselves were Indians.

- Q. When that first year or whether it was that year or not... Dr. Beatty came out you said... I have only talked to maybe one other person who knew him..... Could you give me your impressions of him?
- A. Well to me, he was a wonderful person... he had visions that really were beyond his day... he foresaw the future more than anybody could see... or knew of at that time and he was a very kind man, a patient man, I think we never forgot a name, regardless of whether he saw you once way out here, in the reservation or maybe he saw you in some other part of the country, but he never forgot a name and he could always walk right up and speak to you and call you by name.... but I think to me, one of the outstanding things was his foresight, of what needed to be done and what should be done to help these children and their education. He was really a marvelous person.
- Q. When I was back at the Bureau in the summer of 1970 I was talking to a Bureau employee who had been working, he had worked out on the Navajo reservation I think in the late '40's during the emergency program and he had been around for a long time and I think he had seen Beatty and he had a number of years behind him and a perspective and he said when he found out what I was doing, he said... you know what I think about the Bureau leadership is that we no longer have the kind of leaders that we had in the 30's and 40's when Beatty was in charge of education and the people like Collier were around.
- A. Well, I have always said that I was extremely fortunate in that I taught those years under some of the best leaders I ever knew and that was in the 30's and the 40's and until I retired... The Indian Director of Education in the office in Washington was an outstanding person and I don't think that I ever have a supervisor who wasn't an outstanding person. I have always been very grateful for that. Why I should be so fortunate I don't know.
- Q. Would, did you have any contact with John Collier?
- A. No, not directly.

- Q. His would be the influence over the whole thing but probably didn't....
- A. Of course indirectly we would receive various directions but I myself had no direct contact with him.... my contacts were of course, farther down the line.
- Q. Certainly, well I am glad to hear about Beatty because you know, you have done research and when you spend so much time reading materials like letters that people wrote back and forth you begin to feel as though you know them but you never are able to capture that essence in the person that you can when you have actually talked to them yourself and I think that is one of the reasons why I am glad that I am in a more recent topic because I can talk with people who did know them and Beatty comes out in these letters and as a marvelous person, his insights are tremendous and so I am glad to hear your comments on him too... that reinforces my idea.... Where did you go when you started, was it in Chinle right away?
- A. Yes, at Chinle.
- Q. And the school was what size? Was this one of the day schools?
- A. Well at that time it was beginning to open the day schools, in fact in a way I started participating in the opening of the day school.... I went into Chinle, which at that time was a boarding school and they had beginners, what we call beginners school, about fourth grade although children would range anywhere from maybe six years old to 20 years old and during that summer and fall the day schools were just beginning to open up.
- Q. That was '35?
- A. That was '35, and of course primary work as well as teaching home economics to a group of girls, certain days of the week, but other days were devoted to community work with adult people and part of my work as a community teacher and especially during the summer months was working with these adults and going out into these schools and getting these schools ready to be opened in the fall.
- Q. Out of Chinle?

A. Out of Chinle... and they gave me a, assigned me an extra car... I never knew which car I was going to have. Sometimes it would be a pick-up and sometimes it would be a passenger car, but usually it was a pick-up because you could carry more in a pick-up than I started off the next morning not knowing exactly where I was going until I was on my way and we would go out, I would go out to these schools and one time my supervisor, my principal asked me if I would go out to a certain day school, which was opening in the fall and try to get people to recognize that this school was there and that it would be opening in the fall and there no furniture out there at that time and so the only (?) to take was to (?) on the back of the pick-up... and better get some groceries out there, there is a little trading post out there but we won't have much else. So I put on my mattress and my box of groceries and some pillows and some bedding and started out and the roads were of course unpaved at that time and many times you would your course by certain washes or certain wind mills or something like that and I had to go down into a deep wash and I knew that I had to go down slowly but I really had to get the gun to get out of there because it was pretty steep and so as soon as I thought I was able to, I gave it all the gas I could and luckily I made it out but when I got to the top and somehow or other I looked back and I realized that I didn't have a mattress and I, so I stopped where I would be safe, the car would be safe and I went back down and the mattress was at the bottom of the wash.... So there was a question of whether I should back down and pick up the mattress and see if I could tug it up or... and I decided maybe tugging was the best, but I got my mattress.

Q. You took these trips all by yourself?

A. Yes, we did in those days, we didn't think anything of it.

Q. Well I was just thinking in terms of hauling mattress and...

A. Oh well...

Q. This, you were, were you raised in a rural community?

A. No, I was born in Denver and went to school in Denver and my father died and my mother went down to the

southern part of the state to teach, and she taught in a mining camp, not what you would call a rural community by any means, but a community unto itself, which was quite different from many communities so that was my background not rural, not city... partly city and partly this mining camp.

- Q. But you must have spend some time outdoors then?
- A. Well not too much, no.
- Q. So the type of thing that you are talking about then...
- A. Was a new experience and because it was new I suppose in a fascinating... I thoroughly enjoyed it.
- Q. Did you learn to speak Navajo?
- A. No and I am sorry that I didn't because I have always had a problem in learning to speak languages even when I took languages in high school but I did get to the point where I could understand more than I could speak... and it was surprising that even though you don't always speak that you can relay messages and they can relay messages to you... by motions of the hands, expressions of the face, pantomime and we got along pretty well.
- Q. Well what... when you go out, say to this particular community you are speaking there couldn't have been very many people that spoke English, is this true?
- A. Yes, only the trader and his help...
- Q. And you would... Did you use an interpreter then?
- A. Yes, oftentimes a trader would help to interpret.
- Q. Could you discern any of the reactions on the part of the Navajo as to the idea of your coming out on your own and the proposal that you had?
- A. Sometimes... sometimes not, I think the first thing that... now this wasn't when I went to the day school but when I started with the community work mainly. The principal said that he would take me out to the home, to introduce me to people and so this was my first trip out. And the first time we went out, there was alot of people around the hogan

and when we got there why they were all gone and I thought, well that is funny because they were about, we saw them about and as we approached the hogan, there was no one and so he himself was an Indian, of another and he had worked there and he knew the people very well and so he walked up to the door, that is the blanket, so to speak and called a greeting and lifted the blanket and walked in.... and that was my very acquaintance with, first acquaintance with the customs of the Navajos and I always found that that was true when you travel along and you see the people outside and when you got there they were gone and they went inside, that was customary, you just didn't rush out and make a big fuss over the people but you went inside and got things ready, and awaited their coming and they great you... And you didn't walk right in and say hello but you walked in and sat down and after a bit, after a little period of silence then somebody got up and came over and then we shook hands and we were off.

- Q. How did you go about learning these things, just by experience?
- A. By experience, mostly and by the help of the superintendent.
- Q. Did you learn anything of this type in the summer session?
- A. No, this all happened before the summer session cause I think the summer session, let's see, I went in in January and I think this first summer that I was there was pretty much taken up with beginning the day schools to a point of opening.... and they all didn't open at the same time... because they weren't all, the construction wasn't finished at the same time but a number of them were ready. As I recall it was probably about the next year that we went into the summer sessions. So alot of this was gathered as you went about.
- Q. Did they ever teach you anything like this in the summer sessions, to people who at that time were new? Or was this just something that you were expected to learn from your own experiences?
- A. Well I think that in the summer session when we did have these orientation courses this was given to

people, yes, so that they would have an understanding, wouldn't be so shocked or wouldn't feel embarrassed at what was taking place.

Q. But wouldn't this be one of the hardest things, being aware of cultural ways and not offending the other culture?

A. I think so, because without ever knowing that you had offended someone, not meaning to at all, well you yourself could feel offended and have no reason for feeling so.

Q. One of the things that I have read during this period is, this is the first time that the Bureau began to use anthropologists in their education.

A. Yes, I had great fortune, I guess you might say, of meeting many of these anthropologists and both at Chinle and at Window Rock, later and out at the day schools and I can recall distinctly out of Denehotso which is out on the northern part of the reservation that one of the anthropologists was working up there and he stayed out there for weeks at a time and at night, well when we made those trips they were long trips and they took alot of time to go and come because the roads were not paved and when we went, you know that you were going to stay for awhile and you took your suitcase and your groceries, you knew that you were going to spend several days there. So at night one of the greatest enjoyment that I had was to sit and listen to these anthropologists, what they thought and what they discovered and what they had done and it was really wonderful.

Q. Do you remember any of them in particular who were working out there at the time?

A. Well if you can turn that off for a minute, I think I can get...

Q. Well, sure I can.

Q. Some of the anthropologists taught in the summer session or so I have on recording... Did you take any of their courses or sit in on any of them?

A. That I can't recall for sure, I do know that I have

personally talked to them.

- Q. Well that is even better for me it is.... you know, any particular recollections on their attitudes or what they talked about.
- A. Well, no, except that their general series as they were working seemed to be expressive at this time was very informal discussions such as around the dinner table.
- Q. The best kind....
- A. Yeah, the best kind.
- Q. Well that is terrific... Oh, when you.... I am just jumping all over, but when you were working in the day schools at Chinle, had they started to use the bi-lingual texts or was this a little before?
- A. They were being developed at the time when I worked there. As I remember, Robert Young worked on them and Willie Morgan was working on them, bi-lingual part of it... and it was in the beginning stage.
- Q. Ann Clark is listed....
- A. Yes, Ann Clark, a great deal of writing. Of course her books have been... in Navajo and English both.
- Q. Did you know her at all?
- A. Yes, I did.
- Q. Did you? She taught up at Santa Fe, I hear.
- A. Yes, I haven't seen her for many years, but I knew her.
- Q. How did she gain so much knowledge?
- A. Well she taught in the Indian Service too and I guess gained the knowledge that way and studying and she was a born writer.
- Q. That is right... but you didn't have a chance to use those texts?
- A. No, I didn't use them because my teaching was in a different line, you see, my teaching was in home economics and with community work, see.

- Q. What... when you got into the community work, was it with the day school?
- A. Well yes and in addition to the day schools, it was with the people themselves, directly, oftentimes I would go into their homes.
- Q. What was the connection between the schools and the community?
- A. When the schools first opened up, they were a community center and the people were encouraged to come in and make use of the laundry facilities because at the time they had to haul water many miles from the windmill or from maybe just a pool and it was hard to wash, so they could bring their clothing in and wash in the laundry room and they were encouraged to come in and bathe in the shower rooms and they were encouraged to come in and learn how to use the sewing machine instead of having to sew all these yards and yards of skirting by hand... The men were given help with the repair of axles and...
- Q. What was your role in all of these things?
- A. Well my role was, more concerned in the day school. I was more concerned with the Navajo housekeeper, we called her then, in learning to prepare the meals for the children and also in helping her to learn and maintain certain standards of cleanliness in the preparation and serving and then after that if there were people, adult people, in the school that did want to learn to use the sewing machine I would work with them there at the school but other times, as I said, I would go directly into the home and when I did that the men at Chinle would load up an old treadle type of sewing machine on the back of the pick-up and I would take off with that and go up to Canyon de Chelly or down, what we used to call the valley, which would be down towards Many Farms and I would drive up in front of the hogan and the men got so they knew me and they would come out and take the machine and take it into the hogan or if it was nice we would work under the shade, the summer shade or sometimes we would meet at the trading post and work outside in the shade of the wall outside of the trading post and right down on the ground.
- Q. So you... it was more fun then to go out than it was to stay at the school?

- A. Well, I tell you, both were fun, really.
- Q. Tell me, you speak of the woman who was cooking for the children, was this in one of the day schools?
- A. Yes, that would be in the day schools.
- Q. So she was cooking a lunch?
- A. See, they were actually day school and the children would come in and they would have their noon meal there.
- Q. What kinds of things did she cook? Was it a mutton diet or...?
- A. At that time of course, our diet perhaps was not as extensive as it is right now, but it was nutritious and it was adequate and maybe consisted of beans and maybe meat and probably we would be getting mutton, and of course we always had cabbage and carrots which at first the children didn't like because it wasn't on their diet at home... and we had to learn to like it and now I think it is just as accepted as one of those things that you just need but that was more or less the program.
- Q. Well what was the process of finding this woman, were you involved in the hiring of her for instance?
- A. No, of course that was done through the personnel office, and often it was a girl who had been to school and who had some knowledge of English but then during the war years, that became kind of a difficult time because many of the men moved off of the reservation down to the railroad tracks and their families followed them and we would take girls who did not have a speaking knowledge of English and train them.
- Q. That would be challenging... Was the idea of the day school as a community center, would you say it was successful?
- A. I think it was, I think it had to be learn to be, just like anything that is new... people have to learn to understand it's purpose and whether it really lives up its purpose and perhaps maybe some were more successful than others depending on the personnel, in the day school and depending on the location of the day school... In some places they were far removed

from the homes of the people and then considering the fact that the people are nomads and maybe right now their homes were within a few miles of the schools, but during the middle of the winter, maybe many months they were many miles from the school... factors vary.

- Q. What, in the 30's provisions were made for the children to be bussed in, would you describe....
- A. This was later on.
- Q. This wasn't during the 30's.
- A. As I remember, now I can be mistaken and time goes by and you don't pay too much attention to it but during the war the war presented many problems... as I said, we had unpaved roads and we were, well we were bussing the children in but it became such a problem because the weather would always be bad and the roads would be bad and maybe in stormy weather the bus driver would no more than get the children in and be able to feed them a meal and because the weather looked so bad, we were afraid that you weren't, the bus driver would not get the children back home before the storm hit and be stranded. It became quite a worry and that is when many of the day schools turned into, actually boarding schools.
- Q. This is during the war?
- A. Yes, during the war.
- Q. Isn't... this is still a problem today on the Navajo reservation, is it not? The lifestyle of the people plus the fact that there are really not central communities as you say, they are nomadic.
- A. Right, today, if you are speaking of today I don't know, I am out of touch here.
- Q. Well, say the '60s.
- A. Because I think things have changed alot, in fact there are things paved roads that I never expected to see in the 30's... probably the problems still exist to some extent I am sure in the isolated places
- Q. Well I know, like the big wrangle that Bob Roessel had with the Bureau for the one school that he was trying to maintain, this was in the 50's, I forget

now which one it was, but the Bureau didn't want to build... they didn't feel that they could afford to build a road for the school, consequently it just fell apart. I don't know if you were involved in this situation or not.

A. No, not in the 50's, I was away from the reservation.

Q. You were away.

A. So on some of that I lost out on.

Q. But the situation was so unique as far as... that I was just going over... as you said the roads and the fact that people move around. I have read, and Beatty summarizes in one of his last books, I think it was Education for Cultural Change, he summarizes the day school programs which he calls, I think, a ten year experiment, and he says that, for all of these reasons it became almost a total failure, say at the end of ten years because so many things were working against it and in a way it was almost idealistic although it must have been a tremendous thing to be involved in and for instance the day school where you were, children might have come as you say, from many miles and sometimes during part of the year and then be close at other times of the year, is this right?

A. This is right.

Q. I can see the Bureau as kind of hitting your heads against the wall.

A. Of course, I think we are all inclined to think that a child obtains his best education when he comes to school everyday, but if he comes part of the time, then he has to miss a month or two to three months and this is going to be hard to maintain an educational program and keep the child up to a grade level because he misses out on so much.

Q. But while it was in existence, as you say, in that period of the 30's you would term it as a success and while you were....

A. Well I think that it eventually let to a good thing, because the people got acquainted with the school. They recognized it as a community center as well as the educational center and then when the war hit and their boys wrote back and told them to send their

youngsters to school, see, there was always a little opposition there for sending a child to school, the Navajo didn't see that or realize the value of an education at this time. And when the boys wrote back from the war saying that they could see what they had missed. They urged their parents to send their children and I think the war had a great turning point there. But all this, I would say was the background that was indispensable.

Q. Did you get this feeling from some of them that they didn't see the value of education?

A. Oh yes!

Q. How was it expressed?

A. Oh, by the fact that school was to open on a certain day in September. Some of the parents brought the children in and others didn't, others would say, after the sings are over, well they would bring them or after the harvest, or we'll bring them.... and anytime was alright. Or will you bring them at six years of age, well maybe 8 years of age was just as well as 6 to them.

Q. I see what you mean.

A. They just didn't quite see it as we saw it.

Q. When you were responsible that summer to help getting the day schools started, did you go into the homes and talk to the people?

A. I tried to, yes.

Q. And encourage them to bring their children in.

A. Yes, I would sometimes run into them at the trading posts, that was where the people would gather, at the trading posts and it was a strange territory, where I wasn't sure where I was going to locate. I might travel all day and not find a thing... a trading post was sometimes to meet the people because you knew that they were coming into the post, sometimes to do their trading.

Q. You had no guidelines then for knowing where to go in the area? In other words, you went along and the first hogan you saw, was this it?

- A. Yeah, well actually there wasn't very good census at that time and my census were developed later because we realized the need of a census and as the census was developed of course the hogans were tried to be pin pointed on the map... about nevertheless a pin point might not mean anything because they might be way off over here.
- Q. Oh, I can forsee that as being almost impossible to take a census, so much moving. How many day schools were you involved with in ultimate?
- A. Well, just those that were in the Chinle area and let's see, offhand... well, let's see, there would Round Rock and there would be Dennehotso, Kayenta and then Lukai-chukai, I would say five or six, possibly.
- Q. That is, if I have my geography straight, sounds like a pretty big area.
- A. It is a big area, I think that the Tuba City area is also a big area but Chinle is a big area, it's a scattered area.
- Q. Going clear over to Kayenta, that is 100, over 100 miles from there is it not?
- A. No, Kayenta...
- Q. So you had to drive from Chinle clear over to Kayenta?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Wow!
- A. And Dennehotso, now when I went to Dennehotso from Chinle that was where I counted my windmills to make sure I was on the right road, I started off from... came down here then we would go up to... now this is a dirt road in through here and up to Gallup here and well actually (?) there is Many Farms and then we turned off on this dirt road and one time I was taking a group of new teachers out there and I got lost. I miscounted my windmills and finally I realized that the territory looked strange and so I turned around and came back and it wasn't until evening that we got out there. And it was around oh, 10 or 11 o'clock at night before I came back in. There weren't telephones at that time, when they were first coming out, there wasn't (?) for us, and so people at the centers were

always closely knit groups and we kind of watched over each other... if we didn't come back when we thought that they should, we sent out somebody to look for them.

- Q. Closely knit groups is an art of necessity actually.
- A. In many ways, socially as well as in business and socially not only the employees but the Indians around.
- Q. It was... it must have been like living in another country actually.
- A. To me it was...
- Q. I mean having really very little connection with the rest of the United States you know.
- A. Well, we were so isolated for one thing we didn't get our mail at first, I think, only two or three times a week and one winter we had a terrible snow and we didn't get any mail that time for a long time because nothing went in or out, our supplies went down, coal went down for fires and so we really were isolated and then the day school when it first opened, as I said, they had no phones they had lights, so it was really rather primitive.
- Q. Were these schools some of the ones that I had read about, like weren't they built by the Navajo themselves and didn't they try to use native materials for construction?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Were they construction-wise, were they fairly successful?
- A. Yes, I think they were, yes, because they're hogans, and although you might think that they would be cold they're being constructed of adobe. They do have some covering for the door and when they did have a little fire in there, they are fairly warm.
- Q. That is what I understood, that they are ideal actually for that kind of climate, so I hadn't been in one in the winter.
- A. Of course, there is the smoke hole and of course you have the dust and the snow, sitting down through there and nowadays you have a door but in those days you had

a blanket.

- Q. Somewhere I read that this is partly the cause of trachoma for the children.
- A. Of course the dust and dirt and also the lack of water.... hands being washed and after handling...
- Q. Everything...
- A. Everything...
- Q. Your position, would be more or less in charge of the five schools which were so widely scattered, were there several other people who had this position in other parts of the reservation?
- A. No, I wasn't in charge of these schools, I was just, you might say a helper to the person who was in charge and there would be one teacher, maybe two teachers and there would be a head teacher, who would be in charge of the day school and so actually I was a helper to them and then the other districts, the other areas, there would also be a teacher like myself doing this type of work.
- Q. You were the liason man? When you say helper, I don't know exactly what you mean.
- A. In the sense that I helped with nutrition and sanitation.
- Q. Oh, in your particular area.
- A. That is right, in my particular area, but I wasn't in charge of this school.
- Q. But you did have to go from one to the other?
- A. That is right.
- Q. In that sense they were depending on you for that. Well, your area of nutrition and sanitation and so on, were there helpers in other areas that traveled from school to school?
- A. Yes, there were.
- Q. Is that right, such as?
- A. Well say in the Tuba City area or the Crownpoint area,

Kaibeto area....

- Q. Was there someone for instance who was a specialist in curriculum or something of that type which would travel from school to school?
- A. Oh yes, we have very good supervisors when I first went in there was a supervisor of education and a supervisor of home economics and a supervisor of, I suppose you might say industrial arts and they traveled the entire reservation and how those poor people ever did it alone I will never know.... because that is a huge territory and naturally we didn't get to see them very often but they were excellent people and very good in their subject matter and very good in training those people.
- Q. And I would think that they would be as much as in anything else, a help in keep you in touch with what is going on elsewhere.... well.....

This is October 26, a continuation of our discussion on October 20th... Now these are questions for Dr. Ellis in regard to Jake Morgan, the first Navajo tribal chairman....

- Q. Leola, could you just tell me what you recall about Jake Morgan?
- A. Well it has been many years ago.... Of course since I knew Jake Morgan and as I remember his home was (?) Kaibeto. He was a man of small stature and a man who really undertook a huge responsibility in this organization since he was the first tribal chairman and had no precedent set for him... He was a man of great convictions and stood for the things that he thought his own people needed and wanted and sometimes perhaps because of this strong convictions he may have been misunderstood by people not understanding him. However he did do a huge job in the organization of the tribal council and is witnessed by the fact that it has been a continuous session or existence since his undertaking the first tribal chairmanship.
- Q. Can you think of any particular instances or any of the particular areas that he was so vocal? Or had such strong convictions which made him misunderstood?

- A. Well I think... perhaps there were several, although I don't recall distinctly... probably education was one...
- Q. In what way?
- A. In the way he felt educational programs should be administered.
- Q. Was he opposed to the BIA administering it or what?
- A. No, I don't think that he was exactly opposed to it, but I think that he had a lot of ideas on the way it might be improved to benefit his people.
- Q. Did you know him personally?
- A. Not personally...
- Q. I see, I understand that he was very anti-New Deal and very anti-.... opposed to the Wheeler-Howard Act, do you recall anything about that?
- A. I don't recall that too well.
- Q. That would be a little before you came up there anyway... Do you know anything about his belonging to the American Indian Federation?
- A. No, I don't.
- Q. Do you know anything since you were both at Chinle and then up at Shiprock, right?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Do you know anything about a faction within the tribe, say Chinle representing one faction and then Shiprock area the other?
- A. No.
- Q. You didn't run into that at all?
- A. I don't recall that.
- Q. Because that was suggested to me that he might have represented a Shiprock faction.
- A. It might well have been, but I don't recall.

- Q. Chee Dodge was from Chinle?
- A. Yes, he was around Crystal... which is north of Fort Defiance.
- Q. Within the general radius of the Chinle area.
- A. No, at that time we spoke of Chinle as one area and Fort Defiance as another area.
- Q. Oh I see... I didn't know that, was there factionalism at this time in the 30's when you were there?
- A. Well I can't recall that there was among the people themselves.
- Q. Okay, well if I knew more.....

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- A. (Collier) his program with the stock reduction did hit the Navajos with a bang, you might say, because Navajos depended on their sheep for their livelihood not only was it for their livelihood but their skins were their beddings, the animal itself was their food, the wool from the animal was a means of obtaining wool for the weaving of the rugs... and they just couldn't see the reduction of their stock.
- Q. Wasn't part of the problem the language barrier also?
- A. Well always the language barrier is a problem to anything.
- Q. I mean in a sense that, wasn't it difficult to explain why....
- A. They had to interpret, yes, because many times in one language or another there is no word for a certain word in that particular language and the other language, which will mean the same thing and you have to explain in a round about way... and in so doing it loses its original meaning.
- Q. It was my understanding that this was one of the reasons why the bi-lingual program started on the reservation in the schools... bi-lingual teaching and the writing... of the Navajo alphabet was so that some of the people would be able to understand.
- A. Yes, and then too it was a means of, well I suppose

that's right because it was a means of getting information to the adult Indians too, who had no previous education in reading or writing and through their own language the efforts of Willy Morgan and Robert Young they could learn very easily to read this written Navajo language... and to obtain information which was current.

Q. But it still didn't convince them?

A. No.

Q. Even so...

A. Well sometimes... there are things we read in the papers nowadays that you don't even convince us either.

Q. Right, well we will get off of these general topics of Collier and so forth and get back to our education which I know you have been working on. Where did you want to start this morning, Leola?

A. Well I believe that I promised you that I would look up the names of one of the anthropologists which I couldn't recall on our last visit... and if you are acquainted with this, The Enduring Navajo by Laura Gilpin. She mentioned this anthropologist and his name is Richard Van Balkenburg and that was a man who did, or was out in the northern central part of the reservation in the day schools at the time that I would go out into these schools, go out to the day schools on the reservation and as I mentioned, often at night and he would get to discussing his theories about their origin and the problems that he encountered doing his work and so forth.

Q. What was his... Did he have an official position?

A. I don't know... but he was one of the anthropologists.

Q. But he was in the area for a good time is that right?

A. Yes, for some time and he did go out into the field among the Indians themselves.

Q. And which part of the reservation was this?

A. That was Dennehotso and Kayenta.

Q. What were his origin theories, do you remember?

- A. Well they discussed the fact that whether or not the Navajos did cross the Bering Strait down to Canada and into the Southwest that way. The fact that there seemed to be a very similarity in their languages and then they discussed the fact that the wife seemed to be the matriarch of the family rather than the father and things of that nature in general.
- Q. Do you recall by any chance what he considered some of his great problems were?
- A. No, I don't any more.
- Q. That is too much detail.
- A. That has been too long ago.
- Q. It has. I have trouble remembering ten years ago.
- A. Too bad I didn't learn to keep notes but I was too busy at that time and I didn't do it.
- Q. Yes, that is very true... speaking of that, discussing Indian culture. In some of my notes I have that Navajo weaving was taught in school, did you encounter any of that?
- A. Yes, I did. We had quite a program at Fort Wingate High School, where one of the most noted Navajo weavers in charge of the weaving department and the home economics teacher there worked very closely with her and she developed a pamphlet on Navajo weaving and on the natural vegetation, which was used by the Navajo themselves for dyes. There were beautiful rugs produced there and at Shiprock we had another outstanding Navajo weaver by the name of Reva Burnside (?) and she too taught the girls this art. The thinking was that of course, the girls were away from their families maybe nine months out of the year and three months they were home, they had little opportunity to get this instruction from their parents and it is an art, a skilled art, a beautiful art and it seemed a shame that it should die out.
- Q. And it is taught only at the high school level, is that right?
- A. Yes, I would say yes, high school or junior high.
- Q. Had it already started when you began?

A. Yes.

Q. This is the way that I have that down in my notes, that it started before 1935 then....

A. It was developed, yes...

Q. It was a going program when you started?

A. Yes.

Q. Was anything taught to the younger children in the day schools or were they considered close enough to home?

A. I think they were considered close enough to home and another thing of course, their time in school was more or less limited as I think I said before, by the fact that they were bussed in in the morning and then taken home at night and should the weather be bad, many times they would not even reach school until late in the morning and possible all that could be done was to feed them and then if the storm was bad, see that they get started home so that they wouldn't be caught in the storm and be out all night. But we tried to reach the younger children in the day schools and at that age it was preferable that the young, shall we say, learn the fundamentals than the weaving and then of course, they too were at home and their mother had the opportunity to teach them, do that teaching theirselves.

Q. What happened to this booklet that was written up on Navajo weaving, do you know?

A. I don't know if it was ever published but I have it in a duplicate form here and I am not sure whether it is available in the library or whether it was ever published by Haskell, I just can't say but I do have a copy.

Q. Well you are lucky.... there is no references to it in any of the places that I have looked up that is the reason that I ask, I don't think....

A. It is quite a while you see too.

Q. Well let me look at it though here, just briefly.

A. The silver work, I have run across no references to the silver work, none of that was taught in the schools.

Q. (?)

A. Yes, it was taught in the school... Fort Wingate High School offered again a very good program in silversmithing to the boys and there again we had a skilled Navajo silversmith by the name of Roanhorse and his work is very well known, in fact I am told that some of the traders even here in Albuquerque can pick up a piece of silverwork and say, this is Roanhorse or this was Yazzie or... whoever might have been the creator. He did beautiful work and he taught the boys too, at Fort Wingate High School and then later on when I was at Shiprock again a Navajo, a young man by the name of Yazzie, Justin Yazzie. He himself again was a skilled artist and he too instructed the boys in this art.

Q. Was this in the 40s?

A. It was the early '40s at Shiprock that I recall because that was the time that I was there and then the silversmithing at Wingate, I think, was going on even in the late '30s.

Q. When did you leave the Navajo reservation?

A. In '50... well actually I left the reservation in '56.

Q. Well then do you recall this... Did this continue clear through the 40's, this type of teaching of the crafts?

A. I think it began to die out some towards the late years.

Q. This is what I thought, but I haven't had any... one tell me you know specifically that this is true. Do you have any idea why? I mean would you relate it to Collier no longer being there?

A. No, I couldn't exactly say why it discontinued..... was probably not entirely discontinued but maybe not as much emphasis placed on it as there was.

Q. In the reading I have done on Willard Beatty's thinking, which we spoke of last week, I have come to the conclusion that as the years went on he became more and more convinced and particularly you see the change after the war that it was more important for the Indians to understand the way of the white man than it was to stress his native culture. Now Beatty wasn't jumping back to the earlier 1930's and earlier theory

that there should be no Indian culture taught at all but it seems as though he sort of leans toward stress of white man's culture and this is why I was asking you the question on the continuation of the arts and crafts... there seems to be a fight...

- A. Well I think it continues, but there wasn't the great stress that there was at the first and perhaps maybe it was because of the boys who came home from the service who had been out in the world, which was a new and strange experience... understanding that they needed to be able to communicate and to understand other people's ways of living in order to get along. And I remember in my reading that some of the boys would write home and tell their parents to please send their little brothers and sisters, that they themselves didn't realize how important it was to go to school until they got into the service... and found that they needed this better understanding of other people.
- Q. Then what you are really saying is this change came as much from the Navajo people and from the directors of the Bureau.
- A. I would think so, as far as my thinking is concerned and it was at that time that we begin to notice a greater interest in education on the part of the Navajo, we begin to get more children in, say at an earlier opening date of the school year than we had previously and we began to get more children in and in fact, at that time we came to a point where we actually did not have accommodations to care for the children, we were broadening the school.
- Q. This was after the war?
- A. And during the war... and all these years we had urged the Navajos to bring their children in, bring the little ones in, the six year olds, bring all of them in and bring them in on the opening day of school and as I previously mentioned, time meant nothing to them. If it was more convenient to come in after the fall ceremonials had been conducted, well that was fine, they would bring them then. But now we find that they are bringing them in earlier and we are finding ourselves in the embarrassing fact that here we have urged them to bring them in and now we are short of accommodations for them, so when they were bringing them in we couldn't say, no we have no

place for your child... You'll have to take him home and so we did the very next best thing, which I suppose to people nowadays would seem very shocking... but it wasn't then... We took whatever buildings that were available, like for instance the Navajo worked very closely with us on that and in many times we were offered the chapter houses, the Navajo chapter house as a dormitory to keep the children in so that they would be able to go to these day schools. Other times perhaps we had a garage or a little store house, out from the main school building and all the things that had been stored in this building, whether it be coal or whatever it was was removed and the building painted and cleaned up and beds put in and many, many times the beds were almost touching each other which was a very bad condition and we all realized it. But was the best that we could do and in order to avoid say at night a child who was in bed turning over and coughing or sneezing into another child's face, we had them sleep head foot, head foot and if he did cough he would cough over on the other child's foot instead of in his face... and nevertheless it was an emergency measure and we did manage to bring many children into school and keep them in school that way... We probably would be criticized terribly now for it and we ourselves realized that it was bad, but how could you say no to a person when they bring their children in after all these years we have been saying, please bring them in....

- Q. How ironic, how, did you have quite a few Navajo teachers?
- A. During the war years as I think everybody realized, many teachers as well as other people went into the service and that was true of the Navajo too, we lost many of our teachers to the service not only teachers but our maintenance men and all types of our employees and so not only were we faced with where to put the children, but how we were to educate them with our shortage of staff. So our director took the Navajo, some of the Navajo assistants who had had a high school training and put them in the classrooms and thus we were able to keep the children in school and some of those teachers later went over to Flagstaff or elsewhere and moved on to college degrees and many of them stayed with us until they retired.
- Q. So actually the war was a real incentive.

- A. The war I would say, was a great turning point, really a historical turning point in the Navajos.
- Q. Perhaps more so there than anywhere else in the country... as far as reservation were concerned.
- A. Well I don't know... I can't speak for other reservations.
- Q. But the language problem on the Navajo reservation is so much greater than on other reservations.
- A. Yes, I think that was true.
- Q. One thing I wanted to ask you about the 1930's thing, we didn't get last week... one of the changes that I have been reading about that took place, well actually even before you started working... was the change from a uniform curriculum which was supposed to be taught in all Indian schools all over the country to a curriculum which was more adapted to local needs and to the local environment and also a curriculum which was more in conformity with state regulations. How did your curriculum on the reservation in the '30s fit into this change?
- A. Well I can speak better from the standpoint of the subject which I taught... rather than the pure academic subjects because of course I was concerned with home economics and community work and when I first went to the reservation my school superintendent, being a man, had little to offer me as to what I should teach in home economics and my home economics supervisor had the entire reservation to cover and it was several months before she was able to come out and visit me and give me pointers and by that time I had pages and pages of things to ask her, but I can see the idea that surely people living as they did and children coming to school at an older age than they would in a public school... maybe these girls would be in school in a few years, it would be a year until they would be married, that certainly I wouldn't teach them how to give a pink tea as I had in public school in Colorado. It would have to be a very practical thing, we had coal burning ranges and at home of course they had an open fire in the center of the hogan. And so how did you adapt to things... Here they made their clothing by hand and a sewing machine to save their

time and effort and actually I more or less was quite free to work things out on my own... and when my supervisor came she approved what I was doing and so it went.

- Q. Well this would be the ultimate in local adaptation wouldn't it?
- A. Right.
- Q. Cause your whole program was geared around the way that they lived.
- A. Yes.
- Q. I am sure that it was easier for you, I am guessing, to teach them sewing... they could see the advantages sewing with the machine, than to try and change their ways of cooking.
- A. Well that is true, however I do recall one time I was having a community class down in the valley, very close to Many Farms what is known there as Frazier's store, although the name has been changed since then, we were working outdoors and as I drove up to the store, there was a former school girl sitting there and she had her baby in her arms and of course many of the foods that they had fed the babies, you wonder how they ever survive but of course many of them didn't but she was feeding the baby a food which in our class-work we had discussed and said that it wasn't the best type of food to feed a very young baby and when she saw me, she said, Miss Kessler, I know you told me that this wasn't the best food to feed the baby, but she said my grandma says it's alright... So they had great respect for their elders, for their grandparents but if grandmother said it was alright, it was all right. And yet she was torn there, between two different things... she was trying to carry out the respect and the knowledge that her grandmother had given her and she was still debating the knowledge and the teaching that she had learned in school.
- Q. Do you recall what it was?
- A. Do I recall what it was?
- Q. What the food was?
- A. No, I don't recall what it was, but it was melon or

pop or something of that sort.

- Q. Well if it was pop, it is already showing cultural in it...
- A. Yes, we ourselves were told as we traveled across the reservation that the water varied you know from place to place and some places it would be, like around Shiprock, it was when I first went up there it was sulfur and it was terrible, it smelled terrible. It was later changed and it was alright... but in some places it wasn't too good and in order to avoid diahrrea and become ill it would be best for us to drink pop, rather than drink the local water and then it may have been a very good reason on the part of the Navajo for drinking pop.
- Q. Certainly.
- A. Because he realized that too.
- Q. Did the women nurse their babies for long?
- A. Yes, a long time... many times I have seen a woman come to the home economics cottage and sew and she would nurse while she was sitting there at the machine... sewing.
- Q. I see... Did you when you taught home economics, did you include standards of cleanliness and things of this type?
- A. Oh yes, yes... However you must consider that the teaching of it and the actual doing of it were two different things because people didn't have running water and in fact in many cases went miles and miles for water and what water they had was in a barrel in a covered wagon or in a spring board, or a long distance and that water was very precious, you just didn't use it by the gallons and waste it.
- Q. We might learn a lesson from them.
- A. We might, we might lower our own water bill.
- Q. How did you adapt teaching cleanliness to that kind of a situation? I mean, what could you teach them when they were so restricted?
- A. Well you would have to, I think you yourself have to

learn a new standard.

Q. Oh, you change?

A. You change, you learn that you don't need a whole basin of water to wash your hands that you could wash them with a little water, maybe a cup full of water, rather than a whole basin full.

Q. Didn't they use sand too as a cleaner?

A. Yes, I think they did.

Q. Well actually then, Leola, as far as any standards of state curriculum requirements, you didn't encounter them at all in home economics?

A. I didn't at first, later on under Dr. Boyce, we began to develop, that was I would say, during the war years, we were on duty, oh approximately 11 months of the year, because we were allowed only so many days annual leave depending on the length of time we had been in the service and many people would say, well what do you do in the summer time if you don't have vacation? Well there were many things that we did and one of the things was development of a curriculum and that I remember we sat down many, many hours over at Santa Fe, where all the teachers came together and different ones were heads of different groups and we wrote on, up what we call curriculum which we would adapt to our usage on the reservation and I think it became quite widespread. Work continued on that for many years and then '46 as we were at Tuba City and when the war ended and at that time we were still working on it and then after the elementary group, although I didn't work on this, later they worked it on into a high school curriculum.

Q. Now this was total curriculum, this wasn't just home economics?

A. Oh no, this is total now.

Q. And the teachers, yourself included, who were writing this, came just from the Southwest?

A. At first, and then later from all over.

Q. I see, and this wasn't connected with the in-service

training that you had say at Fort Wingate and...?

A. It wasn't the type of service training where we would say, now teaching a class you will find it easier to do this and this... no, it wasn't that type of thing.

Q. You didn't have the anthropology courses and...?

A. That is right.

Q. I see, that is very interesting, I don't think that I have ever encountered that particular thing that you are talking about and it must have been very influential.

A. It was... because this would list the goals that were desirable goals, the minimum goals. Now you can go beyond those if you could, but these were minimum goals and ways to achieve these goals with a bi-lingual child... it became quite a complicated thing and our director was a very capable man, Dr. George Boyce... and he was very thorough in the fact that he insisted that anything that went into that should be written in very simple terms... that our Navajo teachers could pick it up and understand it, that anyone could understand it that was not full of gobblidy gook and what not.

Q. Educational terms? Was this used by the emergency Navajo education program?

A. Well...

Q. That started in the late 40's?

A. Yes, and I think that later on it became used quite widespread.

Q. I have seen some booklets that were titled, "Minimum Essential Goals" and this type of thing and I wondered if this was what...

A. Yes, it is a little green book, booklet, you might say.

Q. One last thing on the '30s... you speak so often of your community work... Now how did this work? You, was it at the school, did you go out to the homes, what was the procedure?

A. Well first I went out to the homes, in order to acquaint the people that there was such a thing in existence... and I started out with sewing because as we previously said the last time, it was the easiest way to reach the people... so the agency as I needed a car on certain days of the week when I did not have classes in school and the men would load an old sewing machine on the back of the pick-up and perhaps we would go sailing up Canyon de Chelley, if the sands were right, if the water bed was too wet and well I didn't know if it was too dry, I would get stuck in the sand, well that wouldn't be a very good time to go up the Canyon... Well then I would go down the valley or over on the Mesa, towards Black Mesa and there were roads, were such that I could go and, of course, maybe the first time or two I had an interpreter with me and then later on I got to the place where I went alone and I, as I said, communication... even though I did not speak their language and they didn't speak mine, we got along fine and I don't believe that I have ever been treated any better by any group of people, or shown any more courtesy than I was by the Navajos.... I recalled one time, I went up to a hogan and like I say, of course you would see people out and then as you get there nobody is there... and so you call when you reached the door and somebody comes in and you go in and you sit down and you wait a while before any conversation takes place and then after a few minutes, you get up and we shake hands and I motion to the fact that I have a machine in the car, did they want to use it today and well, yes, they guessed so and so the men bring the machine out and the women didn't know how to treadle it or anything else and so we had a lesson first in how to handle the machine and well... of course, one of the things that I remember that they wanted to do was not only to make skirts and blouses for the women, but also shirts for the men... and there were no tables or chairs and so you got down on the floor and/or outside the hogan and you cut out the garment and worked as best as you could that way... and then when noon time came, I didn't want to embarrass the family... you know, their thinking that they had to feed me and so I would go back down to the car to get a lunch I carried in the car and I came back up and ate it and when I got back up, here they had taken cardboard boxes and cut and spread all over the floor for me and just to make my work easier for me. And then in another home... much the same type of thing happened, only in this case, of course, there were no chairs in the home either but they had gone

out and taken the wagon seat off of the wagon and brought it in and a woman had gotten a pendleton shawl and placed it over the seat and that was to be my chair.

- Q. That's wonderful...
- A. Now if anybody could be treated with more courtesy I don't know... who could.
- Q. This was... you were the first person to come in here with any kind of a machine?
- A. Well I can't say for sure, if I was I was among the first and then after the women began to learn about sewing, many times they would come down to the trading post and then they would come on over to what we called the home ec cottage and they might spend an hour or they might spend all day just sewing as fast as they could or if they came in, well maybe we got off into other things such as if they had the baby there... and the baby needed clothing or something of that sort... well we would begin to talk about food for the baby and one thing just grew into another without being forced.
- Q. I see... and did this kind of thing happen in the home too? That is changing from one thing to another?
- A. Yes, we discussed.....

END OF TAPE