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## Along Navajo Trails

Will Evans, Susan Woods, Robert Mcpherson

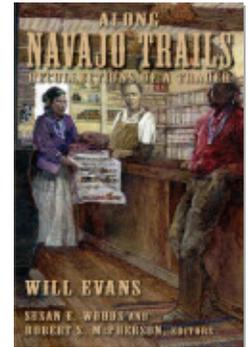
Published by Utah State University Press

Evans, Will & Woods, Susan & Mcpherson, Robert.

Along Navajo Trails: Recollections of a Trader 1898-1948.

Logan: Utah State University Press, 2005.

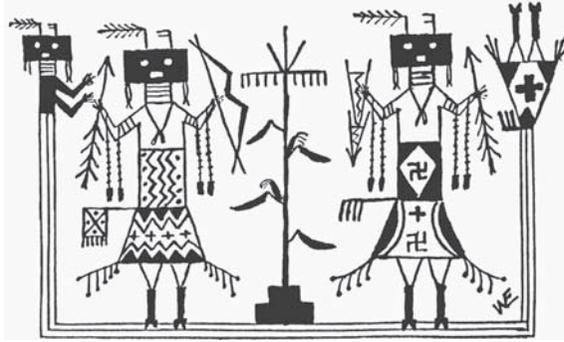
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## Starting Along the Trail



*From start to finish, Will Evans was proud of being a trader and liked to talk about it. He wrote in the style of his times, using descriptive phrases and colorful detail to create an image of life in a trading post, the people who frequented it, and the events of his day. Lengthy sentences and a certain amount of repetition were also common fare. Not long on analysis, Evans was a storyteller and a good one at that.*

*In keeping with this style, this introductory chapter is framed in a fictional setting that encloses two accounts by Evans. The first is one of his most widely publicized articles on his entrance into the trading business. This was a formative experience that describes the founding of the Sanostee Post and a lonely Christmas in the midst of Navajo land. There is no missing the isolation this young man felt, surrounded by a strange culture, cut off by winter storms, and short on basic amenities. Yet it was a deeply moving experience that he often referred to in later life. He grew to love and understand the Navajo, as what at first seemed foreign became customary.*

*The second piece is Evans's description of a typical exchange in a trading post. He provides detailed context that seems simple and yet creates a vivid impression. For instance, the dialogue between the trader and customer is basic and so slow that the reader begins to feel how time-consuming and elementary these transactions were. A sense of the realities of this workaday environment is clearly related.*

*What follows is context. While Evans often wrote about the dramatic and colorful, his daily life was much more like what is described here. And since these days are now gone forever, the reader can catch a glimpse*

*of yesteryear, when wool and blankets spelled survival for both customer and trader in the Navajo world of the first quarter of the twentieth century.*

Imagine. It is December 1917. By obscure starlight, you thread your horse along a trail over a sage-covered plain. Shiprock, framed against the Carriizo Mountains, is dark, darker than you remember from the last time you passed this way, but a thin shaft of light in the distance serves as a polestar for your journey. A few wisps of snow swirl about your horse's hooves before sifting through the brush on their way to an eddy at the base of a pinyon tree. The freezing wind at your back causes a shiver and gives one more reason to adjust your coat's collar.

You have been riding now for two long hours, and the cold has numbed toes and fingers. As you draw closer to the light, pungent smoke from a juniper fire fills your nostrils. The hitching rail outside the trading post is visible now, its worn surface ready to hold your horse's reins. Pushing the heavy wooden door open, you fumble for an instant to unhook your coat sleeve from the door latch. Senses are jarred by the onrush of light, heat, and smells of the store. Blinded momentarily, you squint. A wave of warmth radiates from the potbellied stove, providing welcomed relief from the winter cold.

Loosening outer clothing, you sit on a bench and begin to notice details. The stove rests in the middle of the "bull pen," surrounded by three high, wide counters running along the perimeter of the room. A middle-aged man stands behind one of them with his elbows propped against the well-worn boards. His once curly hair is beginning to gray and recede, but his blue eyes have the glint of youth and he is trim for his age. Checked shirt, wool pants, and a wide belt show signs of daily wear from a business that demands lifting and handling.

Behind the counters against which Will Evans rests are sacks of Arbuckles Coffee, flour, sugar, tubs of lard, and rounds of cheese, whose aromas blend. Canned goods with brightly colored labels and dry goods—work pants, shirts, harnesses, ropes, saddles, wash tubs, axes, and a variety of other tools—line the shelves and hang from the ceiling. The dirt floor is swept clean except for a small wooden box holding the residue of chewing tobacco and spittle from the day's customers. Everything else is tidy.

Evans, known to the Navajos as "Missing Tooth in Front," draws a deep breath and welcomes you to his domain. A trader of nineteen years, he invites you to hear about his life and the people with whom he trades and lives. His reputation as a well-known raconteur is second only to



Claude Youngblood and Evans behind the counter at the trading post in Fruitland, New Mexico.

his reputation for honesty. He does not realize it now, but he will spend another thirty-one years in this line of business before finally hanging his hat on a different peg. A person does not remain as a trader in isolated posts unless he is accepted and trusted by his clients. Competition with other stores is growing now.

Unlike many other traders, who are just as fair and responsive, Evans has one characteristic that makes him different. He enjoys writing. Few, if any, of these other men take the time to record their experiences and those of the Navajo with the detail he musters. He realizes now, and will continue to realize for the remainder of his life, that Navajo culture is dynamic and is moving increasingly into the white man's world. Even the trading post, which allows Navajos to remain on the reservation to shop and sell their wares, is an institution of change. Evans, with urging from Navajo elders, wants to record what they tell him for their own people in generations to come.

With a small sigh and twinkle in his eye, he presses his waist against the counter, reaching for a leather-bound book with black pages. On each sheet are two or three black-and-white photographs of the land, the people, and events that have formed his world for years. He is proud of the fact that he has had the foresight to take pictures of those he works with, since many are old and some have passed on. Few traders had the ambition to record the faces of their daily customers. Not so with Will. He is a "shutterbug."

Coming around the counter, he puts another cedar log in the stove, adjusts the vent, and sits down on a wooden chair before you. The faint

Wedding photo of Evans  
before his marriage to Sarah  
Walker, May 11, 1902.



smell of sweat mingled with oil from wool and freshly chopped wood gives a pleasant odor in this warm environment. He offers a quick glance, insures you are comfortable, then tilts back his chair to inspect the ceiling, as if his stories hang next to the harnesses and washtub above. He begins his story softly.

“Late in 1898 when I was twenty-one years old, I decided that coal mining and farm work were simply too much labor. I received an offer to assist in building a trading post in the northern Navajo Reservation in New Mexico and gladly accepted. On December 7, 1898, Joe Wilkins, old-time wagon freighter, and Indian trader Edwin Seth Dustin, pioneer teamster and freighter, and I set out from Fruitland, New Mexico, with two wagons, each drawn by a four-horse team. One wagon was loaded with lumber, roofing materials, nails, and other construction supplies, a tent and poles, a kitchen range, and a small heating stove. The other wagon held various groceries and dry goods to stock the shelves of this new store.

“After fording the San Juan River, our party topped the rock-covered hills and headed southwest. We followed a horse trail, then waded the muddy Chaco Wash that flows through a gap in the great Hogback Ridge. We then left the wash and returned to our course on a series of horse trails marked with water holes and Navajo camps. Late in the afternoon we reached Barber Spring and camped for the night. Our destination lay twenty or more miles ahead in the Sanostee [Tse’Alna’ozt’i’i], anglicized to Sa-Nos-Tee, meaning ‘Overlapping Rocks’ Valley, where Joe Wilkins had a permit to open a store.<sup>71</sup>

“I enjoyed the trip and the changes of scenery along the northwestern side of the Hogback. What a country we had crossed that day, so different from the green hills of Wales, where I was born. The Navajos had few, if any, wagons at that time, so there were even fewer roads to travel. We simply set our course and moved on. The two wagons traced the first wheeled tracks in that wilderness, making a primitive road that was

traveled for years and still exists, though it is now used only as a camp-to-camp trail by Navajos.

“We could not help discussing the plight of these people as we sat around our campfire that night. The government in Washington had given them a large slice of country for a reservation. I had often looked over the arid hills and flats, waterless save for an occasional spring, and had thought, ‘What a worthless stretch of country. What a shame to relegate human beings to such a life! The government has again given the Indians the short end of the stick!’ Many white men who visited Navajo land in the early days believed Uncle Sam had treated them badly by shoving them into the confines of this reservation, then practically deserting them to shift for themselves.

“Late in the evening of December 10, 1898, three weary travelers arrived on the banks of Sanostee Wash, in the central portion of the valley near Little Water [Tó ‘áts’úísí]. I estimated that Navajos had farmed this area, whose name meant ‘Valley Surrounded by the Great Rock Fence,’ for about three hundred years. Abundant evidence of earlier populations still existed, too. Ruins of cliff dwellings and other remains of this ancient culture were found along the arroyo.

“A small stream of clear water meandered through the wash, even in dry weather, from the mouth of Sanostee Canyon, one of the beautiful spots on the Lukachukai range of mountains. Several miles from the canyon’s opening stood an immense natural bridge of red sandstone. The surrounding hills were covered with evergreens.

“We chose a campsite in the shelter of a high bank a short distance from the stream, believing it would be a good spot for the trading post. A storm had been brewing all that day. Darkness fell shortly after we made camp and with it came a steady snowfall. I was chosen to remain on watch for the camp that night, while Wilkins and Dustin rode upstream to stay with the well-known Bizhóshí clan beneath the rimrocks of the valley. Bizhóshí was an old medicine man, who led his clan with force.

“When I awoke at daybreak, I shook almost twelve inches of snow off my bedroll before arising. Wilkins and Dustin soon rode back to camp, and we set to work shoveling snow to clear a spot, erecting the tent, then bringing in the table and chairs. This was to be my home for the balance of the winter.

“With the lumber and other materials, we hastily built the walls and roof of a small, temporary building. We applied battens over cracks in the upright plastering, spread heavy tar paper over the roof, and installed a half-window and door. The result was a 16 x 20 foot building, the first store opened in the northeastern foothills of the Lukachukai Mountains.



Sanostee Trading Post, where Evans began his career. This post was also the home of the Frank L. Noel family for ten years. Frank L. Noel Collection (P-166), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harld B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

“After shoveling six inches of snow from the interior and setting up the heating stove, we spent most of the evening placing shelves on one side of the shack and making a high, rough counter over which to trade. I was to measure, weigh, and sell directly from the sacks of sugar, potatoes, onions, and beans.

“Next day we opened the case goods and placed them on the shelves; then came the small stock of dry goods, shirts and overalls. By the second evening of our arrival, the Sanostee Trading Post, J. R. Wilkins, owner, was launched. Meanwhile, the storm slackened, so Ed and I took a team and wagon into the foothills and hauled a load of cedar [juniper] for firewood.

“On the third morning after our arrival the storm began to intensify. Joe and Ed decided to return to the San Juan and bring another load of goods and building material once the storm was over. So I was left alone to trade the meager supply of goods for pelts, blankets, and what little cash the Navajos had.

“Snow continued to fall until twenty to thirty inches lay on the level ground. I had taken over the jobs of cook, dishwasher, bed-maker, and trader. During the day business was mildly brisk though the Navajos were afoot. Loneliness, especially in the early evening after their departure, settled down like a pall. Christmas was less than two weeks away, adding to my feelings of isolation.

“The Big Snow had taken a terrible toll on Navajo livestock. Many horses died from the cold and lack of forage, which was plentiful but could not be uncovered. Sheep, the main source of meat, lay in pitiful



A ch'įdii hogan located southwest of Shiprock. Believed to be inhabited by the spirit of the person who died inside, these structures are either deserted or destroyed. Photo by Richard P. Evans.

heaps, victims of the bitter northwest winds and snow. I knew that when spring came there would be thousands of carcasses huddled in the gullies. The ghostly remains of animals, frozen where they stood, were now completely covered by drifting snow.

“Before long, trading stock of the most vitally needed supplies was gone. I was forced to close the store, saving a supply of food to sustain myself until relief arrived. The long winter of loneliness and inactivity dragged on. I had an old Hammond typewriter and a supply of paper so I tried my hand at composing poems and essays. This helped a little to pass the slowly moving time.

“Because of the shortage of food and supplies in the area, dinner at my camp attracted many hungry Navajos who eagerly accepted a small hand-out. When I ran short of firewood, I knew it was vitally important to locate a new supply. My search was limited to a very small area because of the deep snow, so I ventured a short distance up the creek and found the crumbling remains of a ‘Cheendy’ [ch'įdii] hogan on the bank. This is a home in which a Navajo has died and so use of any part of it is taboo.<sup>72</sup> Taboo or not, here was firewood I badly needed, so I carried a log from the old hogan back to camp, then continued to use this source of wood. In a day or two the ‘handout gang’ failed to show up at noon. The dangerous wood had done the trick. No Navajo would eat food cooked over a ‘tabooed’ fire like that.

“Christmas arrived after endless days and nights of utter loneliness. I was not above a tinge of despair, wondering when my friends with

their wagons would arrive. I found myself in an interesting situation that Christmas Eve, living in a world rigidly circumscribed by a waist-high blanket of white. My domain, if it can be called that, was a few hundred feet of narrow trails through the snow, the longest extending from the store door to the edge of the stream, which was now frozen solid, forcing me to melt snow.

“There were rough, snowy trails from the scattered hogans to the store, but I had no means of travel other than on foot, not even a burro and a sharp stick to make him go. There was no telephone line to the outside world, not even along the San Juan River, at this time. I had no access to newspapers or the few magazines available in those days. I had brought along some books for diversion and they helped, but I truly missed reading and learning about the day-in, day-out world.

“That year, 1898, was eventful. The Spanish-American War had been fought and won in short order. Even as late as December, the names of Teddy Roosevelt, Admiral [George] Dewey, General [William R.] Shafter, Admiral [William T.] Sampson, and others were prominent in news dispatches. When I left Farmington, New Mexico, and the San Juan River behind, all national news ended for me.

“The Indians began to make inquiries as Christmas Day approached. Early missionaries had spread the story of the Christ child and Christmas traditions. Word traveled quickly on the reservation that this was a day of presents passed around by the white brothers. The early traders at places like Round Rock, Hubbell’s at Ganado, and posts near Ft. Defiance, Arizona, handed out gifts to their customers on Christmas Day. The Navajos’ main question was ‘How many days to Christmas?’ My answer was ‘Tomorrow is Christmas.’ ‘It is so,’ they replied, and went away satisfied.

“Evening came and loneliness bore down more heavily than ever, as I thought of Christmas in the San Juan Valley. There would be a Christmas tree at the meetinghouse and a profusion of parcels for everyone, then a dance, perhaps until the late hours of the night. There would be violin music possibly accompanied by a guitar, this meager orchestra adding to the joyfulness. I tried to push these reveries from my mind and picked up a copy of Dickens’[s] *A Christmas Carol*. The kerosene lamp was all I had to light my tent, but it was enough. I finished the story and dreamily allowed the book to slide to my lap. I thought of the words ‘Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse. . . .’

“I became fully aware of my situation and surroundings. ‘Why,’ I said to myself, ‘there is no house here, just a snow-banked tent and a small slap-sided store in a sea of heavy snow!’ The house that was home to me

was fifty miles away in a trackless white wilderness. As for a mouse, none would approach my humble quarters in such a cold setting! I picked up the water pail and walked into the night to get a breath of fresh air, traveling the narrow frosty trail to the stream that was frozen solid. I had to dip a pail full of snow that could later be melted for a cheery cup of Adam's clear, pure ale.

"While standing on the frozen path I scanned the heavens with a feeling of awe. From zenith to horizon and every point between, a myriad of little diamonds twinkled and glittered in the sky. To the north the stars of the Big Dipper shone brightly, making their circuit around the North Star. The Evening Star shone well above the westward horizon this night, reminding me of the Star of Bethlehem.

"There were no angels singing, yet in the distance I could hear the voice of a Navajo lad raised in an old tribal song. The snow-clad heights of the Lukachukais gleamed in the brilliant starlight. Enchantment is not the proper word to describe my feelings as I stood there; loneliness was lost for the moment, carried away by this indescribable night and the spirit and romance of the season.

"Christmas Day dawned clear and cold. When the sun had risen high in the sky, groups of Navajos trooped toward the store. A few wore shoes, most had none, their feet and lower legs wrapped in burlap or pieces of Navajo blanket which they later dried over campfires to make ready for their next trip.

"My friends smiled as they recited their well-practiced singsong greeting of the day: 'Melly Ke'eshmish, Melly Ke'eshmish!' They expected gifts, which posed a problem since my stock was practically gone. Fortunately, in the sweets department there was a pail of old-fashioned barber-pole striped stick candy. I also had a box of cookies with a hole in the center and covered with coarse, multi-colored sugar. There was also a box of small cull apples called Indian Apples. I decided to share what I had for as long as it lasted.

"The children came in with their feet wrapped in rags, their thinly clad bodies shivering with cold, and their noses running. I gave each a stick of candy and cookie. The older people happily accepted an apple. Their shy smiles showed that my small gifts were genuinely appreciated, knowing as they did of my limited supplies. The last of my calamity-stricken neighbors came in just as the sun dipped toward the western mountains. Once they left, my stock of apples, candy, and cookies was gone. What remained around the stove was an aura of peace on earth and goodwill to men. Their expressions of thanks, which I felt really came from their hearts, awakened in me a feeling of warmth that combined

both happiness and pity. How such a small gift could bring forth such hearty expressions of gratitude was one more evidence of the power of the spirit of Christmas.

“My neighbors might not have accepted my small contribution. They could have easily destroyed me and taken everything. But the spirit of the day prevailed, and thankfulness and good will rested over the little snow-bound valley of Sanostee. So ended my first Christmas in Navajo land. My loneliness, profound and painful, has become a memory of one adventure amid a host of experiences over a lifetime. Every year as the Christmas holiday arrives, I remember the gentle message from my friends, ‘Melly Ke’eshmish, Melly Ke’eshmish.’

“My lonely isolation ended with the advent of spring [March]. Joe Wilkins came in with a load of building material for a permanent store. Ed Dustin also brought in a wagon load, and the day after his arrival we began work on the new building.”

Evans pauses. He shifts his boot to the side of the wood box and pushes his chair up on two legs. A deep sigh and he continues.

“That is how it all began for me, how I got into the trading business. Now the Navajos are highly dependent on this economic system. A trading post, by necessity, is a department store. Away from towns served by the railroad, I have to stock a variety of supplies for my customers. A trader and his post are the center and heart of the Navajo community. He is their creditor, advisor, and at times, their midwife and undertaker. He supplies them with flour and coffee, sugar and salt; he measures out their cloth, fits their feet with shoes and stockings, clothes them with shirts and trousers, shades them with hats and umbrellas, protects them with coats and shawls, dispenses their medicine and soft drinks, satisfies their sweet tooth, weighs their nails and bolts, and supplies their tools. Very little money enters into these transactions.

“Let’s say a Navajo woman has woven a blanket or rug. When she comes to the store, she has already set a value on the rug, somewhere in the neighborhood of what she thinks the trader will offer for it. She enters the post with the rug enclosed in a used flour sack and conceals it under the trader-supplied Pendleton shawl she wears summer and winter.

“Shyly, she sidles over to the counter and places the flour sack on it. The trader walks over to where she stands and, if she is a visitor from an outlying district, extends his hand and shakes in the loose, brief motionless handclasp of the Navajo. In quiet low tones they converse.

“‘Hello, my cousin.’

“‘Yes, my friend.’

“Although obvious to both, the conversation continues.



Painting of Navajos and Will Evans trading inside his post, by Kelly Pugh.

“‘Where did you come from?’

“‘Beyond Shiprock.’

“‘Unh.’ This grunt is used in the tone and meaning of ‘I see.’

“‘On what day did you come?’

“‘Yesterday, by horse; I came alone.’

“‘Yes, that is good. Is that a rug that you have brought in? I will look at it.’”

“The trader unties the rag-string that binds the gathered end of the sack and grasps the folded rug, his trained fingers at the same time recording the feel of the rug to see if it has a coarse or fine texture. She takes hold of the bottom of the sack and holds it as the trader pulls the rug out and places it, still folded, on the counter scales. Having weighed it, he carries it into a room reserved for rugs and spreads it out on the floor. Swiftly, deftly, while she is on her way into the room, his fingers have pulled the wool or yarn apart enough to reveal the warp. This is examined



Trade tokens used by the C. H. Algert Co. of Fruitland in place of cash.

for the spurious, oft-rejected twine warp used in place of the native spun wool which denotes a genuine, totally handmade rug. While she waits shyly by the doorway or examines the select rugs he has hung on the wall, the trader stands off a short distance from the rug spread on the floor, his eyes taking in its design, weight, quality of weave, and size.

“How much do you want for it?”

“That is for you to say; you are buying it.”

“It is not straight; that end is wider than this one. Nine pesos and four bits (\$9.50), I think.”

“Nine and four bits. I thought it was worth at least eleven.”

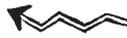
“No, it is narrow at one end and there is a mistake in the border in that corner.”

“I will take the blanket. Perhaps the white man at the Hogback will pay more. I will leave it for ten, my friend. Ten is good. I have come from far away and weaving is hard work.”

“All right, ten.”

“All right, my friend.”

“The rug is left upon the floor, and the two return to their places in the store. The trader draws from his shirt pocket a small notebook and pencil, opens to a page, and writes down the amount of the rug, then leans back against the shelves, waiting. It is good to create a spirit of patience and endurance for Navajos are very slow ‘trading out a rug.’ Minutes drag by between orders no matter how small the transaction. Conversation about goods during a purchase is endless.



“How much is the flour?”

“For money, one peso and nine blues.’ (The Navajo word for blue denotes ten cents and yellow means five cents.)<sup>73</sup>

“The little sack is how much?”

“One peso.’

“Bring me a big one and some baking powder for one blue.’

“The sack of flour is carried in from a nearby storeroom and laid on the counter. The can of baking powder is placed on the flour, the trader draws a line with his pencil through the \$10 and writes directly below it \$7.90.

“Navajos invariably standardize their purchases by buying first flour, then baking powder, sugar, salt, coffee, potatoes, lard, bacon, cloth, thread, bias tape, and last of all, when there are only about two “blues” left, soda and candy for the children. They are a frugal people. Purchases are made carefully and wisely, stretching the trade to the limit.

“While the trader has been recording the deal, the woman’s fingers have been deftly counting, lips moving silently. Under her breath she whispers to herself the results of her subtraction. Aloud she asks the trader for verification.

“How much left?”

“And so it goes. Each purchase brings forth questions about price, what kind, how many, how much? Each purchase must always be subtracted and the balance announced to the buyer. The storekeeper’s notebook records it all. Traders have found that to rush the process creates confusion and suspicion. Navajos feel that by putting the transaction on paper, it is insurance against making an error.

“Cash purchases are also long drawn-out affairs. Each article is paid for and change given individually. A Navajo comes to the counter and with a loud ‘Ssssss!’ engages the attention of the trader, who says ‘What?’ inquiringly.

“Soap.’

“What kind?”

“Shirt-washing soap.’

“How many?”

“Two. How much?”

“One blue.’

“The bars of soap are tied together with string and placed before the customer. He fumbles slowly in one pocket. Empty. The other pocket is carefully, slowly searched. The trader waits silently. Unconcernedly, when minutes have slipped by in the treasure hunt, the Navajo’s brown fingers bring forth a very aged and faded dollar bill. The trader gives him change from the register and stands waiting without a word.

“More soap.’

“What kind?’

“Hand-washing soap.’

“What color?’

“White. Strong, good smelling soap. How much?’

“One blue.’

“A fifty cent piece is given in payment, rung on the register, and change returned.

“Tobacco.’

“Chewing or smoking.’

“Chewing.’

“What kind?’

“Horse shoe.’

“How much?’

“Just cut one yellow’s worth.’

“The five cents is paid and registered and the trader stands waiting. Thus it goes, ad infinitum. Why doesn’t he pay for all of this in one lump sum? A Navajo would answer, ‘It is not done that way. The white man might cheat on the amount. In this way, he does not cheat. He gives me the right change and I know how much money is left to draw from.’”

“Confidence engendered by circumspect dealing and honest treatment does not in the least alter this mode of business; it is just the Navajo’s way, guided by tradition and careful parental advice. For instance, John Kee would come into the store and order a quarter’s worth of potatoes. His eyes follow the trader’s hand reaching up toward the hanging rack which holds the paper bags.

“That paper is too small. It will short weigh me.’

“No. It is large enough,’ replies the trader. He dumps potatoes into the sack, John intently watching every move as though he suspected cobblestones interspersed with the potatoes. The trader puts the filled sack on the scales. John is waiting, eyes focused upon the indicator, checking to see if the weight corresponds to ‘last time,’ or his last purchase of potatoes. If the white man has missed his estimate in filling the bag and the weight was short, John watches every ounce as the trader drops in more potatoes. If the bag was filled beyond the proper weight, suspicion flames in his dark eyes as potatoes are removed and returned to the bin.

“John Kee, like many of his fellow tribesmen, has not yet been to school, but he can read the scales and, perhaps by laborious practice in writing numerals under the tutelage of some school boy, has learned to read numbers and price tags on merchandise. He can even write his name, a clumsy almost unintelligible scrawl of letters, learned perhaps by



Unidentified man and Evans surrounded by a load of wool at the C. H. Algert Store in Fruitland. The heavy, cumbersome bags are burlap, six to seven feet long, stuffed with uncleaned wool.

tracing and retracing, times without number, the name someone has written out for him. He does not recognize the marks as letters. He has only memorized by repetition a strange design or scrawl which is accepted by the white man as his name on paper. And like many Navajos, he is adept in the use of the simple arithmetic he needs to get along. He can add, multiply, and subtract in a queer, intricate, self-taught system, which is nevertheless an efficient one that he knows and uses thoroughly.

“That is how trading with the Navajos has been for years.”

Evans shifts his weight and pauses for a response. He sees your interest and knows there is much more to tell. Rising, he reaches across the counter for a manuscript he calls “Navajo Trails” resting by his photo album.

“Here. If you want an idea of my life...and...the stories I have heard, you can read this and look at these pictures.” And so you will. You have been drawn to this friendly gentleman whose words are tinged by a slight accent he says comes from his Welsh upbringing. The typed pages, though overwritten with notes in a flowing script, have an impressive neatness and volume. A few customers have begun to trickle into the store, dividing Evans’s attention, and you ask if there is some quiet place where you can read uninterrupted. Evans excuses himself from his customers and opens the door to his Kiva Room, a mini-museum and rug room, draped with rugs, saddle blankets, and Pendleton shawls. He motions you toward a padded bench, painted with designs similar to figures woven into the rugs. He quietly closes the door and you begin your journey into the printed pages that represent the recollections of Will Evans, trader to the Navajo.