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Along Navajo Trails

Will Evans, Susan Woods, Robert Mcpherson

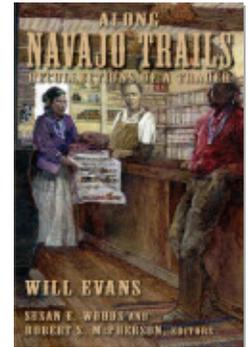
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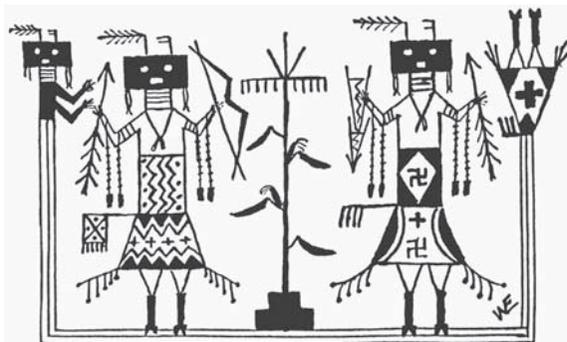


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Postscript

The Death of a Man, the End of an Era



As Evans prepared to celebrate his seventy-seventh Christmas, he passed from this life. On December 6, 1954, the white community of Farmington and the Navajo community surrounding Shiprock became aware of his death. His obituary announced that he had died quietly after several months of failing health. But it was a peaceful farewell, as his wife, Sarah, three sons—Ralph, Richard, and David—and daughter, Gwen, paid their last respects.

To the Navajo community, Missing Tooth [Awóshk'al'ádin] had “gone away.” In Window Rock as the Navajo Tribal Council held session, Chairman Sam Akeah brought the news to many of the tribal advisors who had known and worked with Will. He had often noted in his “Navajo Trails” column, which he wrote right up to his death, the passing of another elderly Navajo with a piece of the tribe’s history. He also mentioned that, sometime, the two would meet again. That time had come.

The white community again recognized Will for his accomplishments—his authoritative study of the Beautiful Mountain uprising, his knowledge of Navajo lore, his stint in the state legislature (1928), his service as police judge, and his presiding as justice of the peace, before retiring from public life. His artistic creations were another tangible means by which he was remembered. Indeed, on August 30, 2002, an open house at the Farmington Museum featured an exhibit entitled “Painting with a Passion: Will Evans and the Navajo.” There the public encountered his close-to obsession in using Navajo symbols to beautify his home, on everything from lampshades and tables to vases and wall hangings. His art has now become a collector’s item.



Evans resting in the mountains near his home in Farmington, 1952.

But Evans's real legacy rests in what he has preserved in Navajo and trader history. At a time when there was comparatively little interest in the People, he set about to consciously capture the personalities, culture, and events of this isolated group living on the northern part of the Navajo Reservation. What could have been a passing fancy became a lifelong immersion to learn of a very different, when compared to his Welsh ancestry, group of people.

Will it make a difference to present and future generations? Hopefully so. As a personal example, when this manuscript was in various stages of preparation, Jim Benally of Provo, Utah, helped the authors with translation and spelling. During his assistance, he discovered that his grandfather, Slim Policeman, was featured in a lengthy section of the book. It is unnecessary to point out the personal nature the manuscript then assumed.

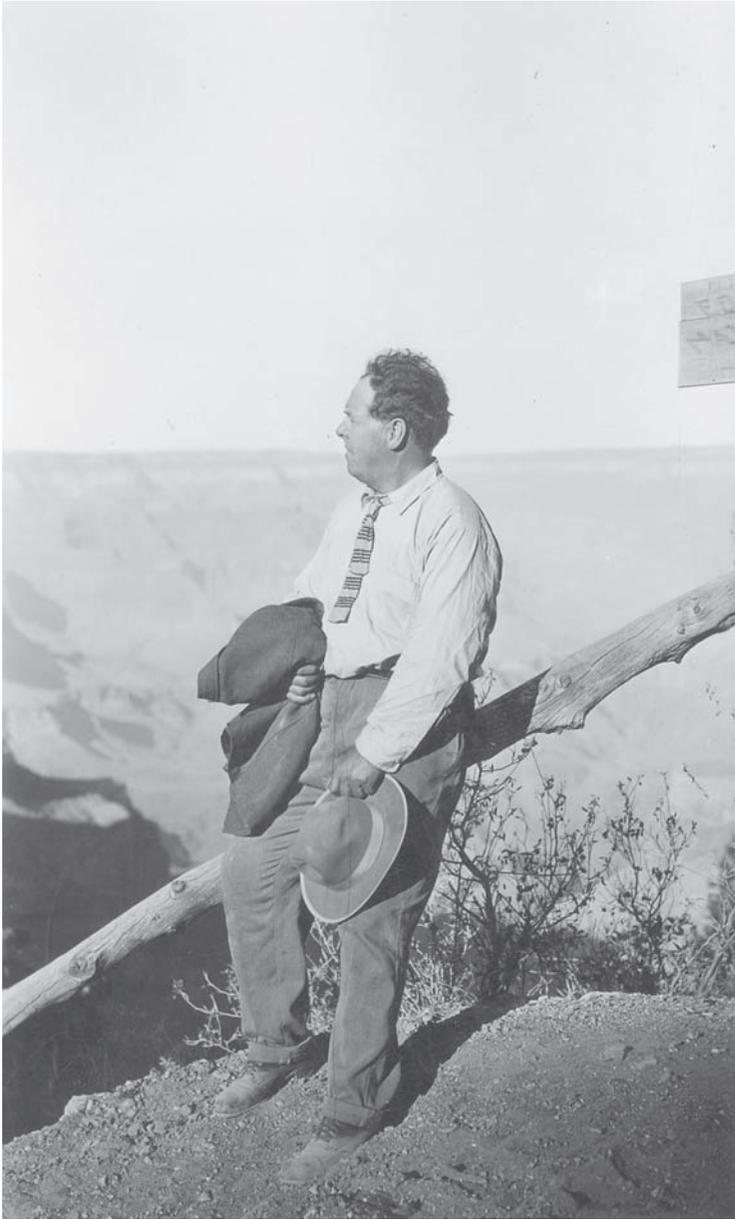
With Evans's passing, the era of trading posts and Navajo traditional lifestyle dependent upon them were also fading. He missed the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the Federal Trade Commission hearings (1972–1973) and the closing of many posts because of changes in Navajo and white society. He also missed the conversion of many posts into convenience stores and the revolution in transportation that made going off reservation a normal, almost mandatory, way of life. And he missed the very controlled aspect, so prevalent in the twenty-first century, of collecting and preserving cultural knowledge on the reservation.

Perhaps it is just as well. Living at a time when everyone struggled to survive, Evans enjoyed personal relationships and activities that enriched



Will Evans as he appeared near the end of his “Trail,” surrounded by his personal art pieces and the traditional artifacts he collected over a lifetime. His legacy continues.

his life. As mentioned previously, he had no regrets—only fond memories, even though times were often hard. He later rejoiced in the difficult experiences he encountered and was anxious to share with others the lessons that came from those trials. He did so sensitively for the era in which he wrote. Future generations can be thankful for what he has done in recording the past. May they live as well.



Evans at the Grand Canyon, 1926, around the time that he began to write "Navajo Trails."