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Northern Navajo Frontier 1860 1900

Robert Mcpherson

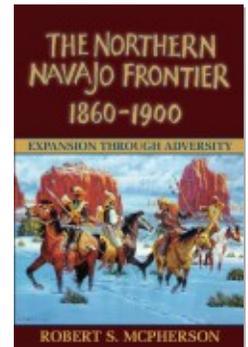
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6 / Boats, Booze, and Barter: Trade on the Northern Navajo Frontier, 1870–1910

The trading post as a part of Native American economics has been a long-standing institution, dating back to the early 1600s. Both troublesome and helpful, traders required continuous regulation by the government because of their frequent interaction with Indians. This was particularly true by the 1870s, as organized trade grew in economic importance to the Navajos, who were now established on a reservation and started on the road to “civilization.”

On the northern Navajo frontier, however, agency control from Fort Defiance was sporadic and often after-the-fact, creating an open season for white entrepreneurs seeking trade opportunities. Mormon and gentile, settler and itinerant, scoundrel and saint descended upon the area stretching from the San Juan to the Little Colorado River to ply their trade with Utes, Paiutes, and Navajos. The result: a period that started in chaos but ended in a semblance of order, making possible the golden years of the trading posts in the early 1900s.¹

As mentioned previously, the Navajos viewed the San Juan River as their boundary with the Utes, a belief that had mythological as well as historical origins. Although most of the river did not become an official border of the reservation until 1884, it was still a landmark used by the Navajos to delineate their territory. And it was to this border that traders came to do business. As early as 1870, the agent received word that a man named Charley was frequenting the northern part of the reservation to trade goods, especially arms and ammunition, in exchange for livestock stolen from the Mormon settlements in southwestern Utah. He then drove the horses and cattle to Albu-

querque and sold them.² Official records do not indicate that Charley was caught. Others soon joined the trade in arms and ammunition.

This was especially true as increasing numbers of settlers moved onto the public domain and started to hem the Utes and Navajos into their prescribed reservations. Troubles resulted that provoked fears of armed resistance; the Navajo agent in 1876 received word that Utes were in the Chusca Valley encouraging the Navajos to buy as much gunpowder and lead as they could in preparation to wage a war against the encroaching whites. The agent then expressed a sentiment that would serve as a recurring theme for the next thirty years—the desire for control of the off-reservation trader. After saying he realized that recent legislation had been passed concerning Indian trade, the agent pointed out that the act needed to be more stringent when dealing with the sale of arms and ammunition

for if I understand it rightly, it applies to Indian traders and not to any citizen who may see proper to trade with the Indians. Upon this reservation there is [only] one licensed trader. . . . Anyone can establish a trading post within a quarter of a mile and be outside of the control of the agent. And one party who has such a trading post informed me that he preferred to have his store outside of the reservation, for the reason that one could not prevent his trading with the Indians and getting such prices as he pleased.³

When this is contrasted with what was desired by the Indian Office in its “Rules and Regulations” dated August 15, 1876, it is apparent why so many traders stayed off the reservation. For instance, the applicant seeking a license (1) had to be of “unexceptionable character”; (2) could not have had a license revoked; (3) needed letters of reference or to be known to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs or Indian agent; (4) had to be bonded at \$10,000; (5) was required to provide the agent with invoices and bills of lading to check prices; and (6) was permitted to sell only goods “as may be approved by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and at prices he shall fix from time to time.”⁴ In addition, no alcohol could be sold, while arms and ammunition were to be traded only in limited quantities by special permit. Thus, instead of encouraging cooperation, tight control in a frontier setting drove prospective traders to the fringes of the reservation to reap their profits.

Navajo customers were not long in crossing the San Juan. Selling staples such as flour, sugar, salt, coffee, and tools, the traders bought raw wool, woven blankets, silver, and livestock, all of which were shipped to the railhead at Alamosa or Durango.⁵ Also, many Navajos had already crossed the river to graze their sheep on the public domain and to hunt in the La Sal and Blue Mountains. The trader had only to offer desirable goods, and a line of customers appeared at his counters. D. M. Riordan, a Navajo agent, complained in 1883 that “the Indians are persistently encouraged to leave the reservation by the

small traders living around through the country surrounding the reserve. These men generally treat the Indians pleasantly and the Indians listen to them. It is 'business' pure and simple with the trader."⁶

Estimating the number of settler-traders who decided to supplement their income with Navajo silver, hides, wool, and blankets is difficult. The period between 1880 and 1900 saw a great deal of turmoil caused by Indian warfare, boundary changes, grazing disputes, mining strikes, poor farming conditions, and problems in legal jurisdiction. The list of new and defunct trading posts shifted with the times, but to give a rough idea of numbers, in an approximately thirty-five-mile stretch along the San Juan from below Bluff, Utah, to where the Four Corners meet, records indicate at least seven stores operated in 1885.⁷ Another section of river heavily endowed with traders was the Aztec-Farmington-Jewett area, where farmers and townspeople opened posts to serve the Navajos and Utes. One trader from this location complained that on "the north bank of the San Juan River every few miles there is a trading store which depends on the Navajo for support."⁸

Yet the increased demand for trade and subsequent increase in contact also brought an escalation of conflict. Take, for instance, the seemingly harmless ferry that brought customers from the south side of the river to the north side. Many of the posts had them, since each store was usually located in a strategic crossing place to capture a natural flow of traffic. The posts owned and operated the boats with the idea of alleviating the barrier of the river and depositing the customers at the store's front door. This practice was in direct defiance of the Navajo agents, who attempted to control trade. The posts also indirectly encouraged more conflict by wooing the Navajo off their reservation and into the arms of unscrupulous traders, gamblers, and settlers.

The plight of Agent E. H. Plummer in 1893 gives an interesting view of problems associated with ferries and trade. The initial spark occurred on April 5, at the store of James F. and William W. Daugherty, the former having already spent a turbulent six years on the San Juan. The ferry, which ran on a cable across the river, was commandeered by two Navajos who wanted to take it to the south shore. William Daugherty feared the boat would be swamped through mismanagement and so called for the Navajos to come back. They refused. He then fired two shots in front of the craft, forcing them to return, but in a short while they reappeared with a group of thirty warriors to back up their demand for \$200 in exchange for not burning the Daugherty store. Since the five white men at the post were heavily outnumbered, they paid the money and sent for the agent. A few days later one of the Navajos, encouraged by some alcohol, decided to burn the crib that supported the cable on the far bank and then threatened to kill William Hyde. By the time Plummer arrived, tempers were heated on both sides so that only the threat of cavalry calmed the Navajos. Eventually the two guilty Indians surrendered and went to Fort Defiance to stand trial in the tribal Court of Indian Offense.⁹

The incident prompted a series of letters between Plummer and the Com-

missioner of Indian Affairs that brings into focus the controversy surrounding trading posts on the San Juan. The agent pointed out that the ferries were used to haul wool across the river, serving as magnets to the Indian population. He recommended that ferries run by trading posts either be licensed or forbidden to operate, depending on the owner's reliability. Those licensed posts would carry government goods sold at cost plus transportation and clerk hire; the wool, hides, and so forth bought from the Indians would be sold by the agent or clerk in charge; and the traders who carried \$3,000 worth of goods would be bonded at \$10,000 and receive a salary of \$2,000 per year. This plan, therefore, allowed substantial savings for the Indians.¹⁰

Acting Indian Commissioner M. Armstrong did not like the idea. He felt that the ferries were not detrimental to peace and the Navajos' welfare because the Indians should have "the widest latitude in bartering and trading" and should be able to bring their produce and articles to the nearest town to sell. Plummer responded that he was not suggesting the Navajos' freedom be curtailed, but that he wanted to foster the development of "responsible, reliable, worthy traders" and avoid the "unlicensed, unlimited and unregulated" commerce that encouraged "illegal traffic, too much freedom to unauthorized roaming over the country north of the river for illegitimate purposes, ready access to gamblers who infest the north bank of the river at this season of the year, when the Indians have money from the sale of wool or other products." Plummer then explained that he knew of Indians who left the reservation with money, pony, rifle, and goods but returned shortly afterward with only a gee string, having fallen into the clutches of the professional gambler. He concluded by saying:

The theory of Indians having the widest latitude in bartering and trading is excellent or would be if all traders were honest or the Indians competent to protect themselves and understand their rights in trading. But where a trader offers a drink of intoxicating liquor for every sack of wool brought to his store or allows his ferry to be used for transporting liquor, while blankets worth from ten to forty dollars are bought by traders for from two to ten dollars; silver belts worth fifty dollars pawned for fifteen to twenty dollars are sold when opportunity offers; while the reservation is surrounded by traders and gamblers who are reaping profits of thousands of dollars annually at the expense of poor, half starving, ignorant Indians, I must continue to believe that a somewhat more limited regulated freedom in trading facilities would be more beneficial.¹¹

Thus the agent had a far different and probably more realistic perception of the problem than did the Commissioner in Washington.

At least one licensed trader, H. C. Adams of Fruitland, New Mexico, agreed with Plummer's views. After complaining about the incessant roam-

ing of the Navajos, the “tin horn gamblers who rob with impunity,” the whiskey sales that led to depredations, and the lawless element in the border towns, he pointed his finger at the trading posts and ferries that encouraged this type of activity “for the illegal purpose of taking the Indians from the reservation.” He believed them indirectly responsible for the damage done by Navajos north of the river and, in particular, for the death of a trader named Welsh. Adams closed his letter by encouraging the Indian Department to take strong measures against the ferries and trading posts along the river.¹² Ironically, six months later Adams lost his footing on his own ferry and drowned in the San Juan, leaving a store full of pawn to be redeemed by his Navajo customers.¹³

Yet these problems were not just those of the Indian agents; the traders had some difficulties too. With Navajos roaming off the reservation during the 1880s and 90s, there was apt to be trouble, and while the posts were not the only reason for the Indians to travel, they were a contributing factor. An estimated 10,000 Navajos were beyond the reservation boundaries in just one year.¹⁴

In 1886, James F. Daugherty, trader and postmaster in Riverview (Aneth), Utah, complained of Navajos and Utes wandering over settlers’ property, taking livestock and creating a nuisance.¹⁵ A little over a year later, he and eighteen other “Citizens of McElmo [Canyon]” sent a protest about Navajos stealing horses and then selling them back to the settlers at five dollars a piece. The petition had signatures of at least seven traders.¹⁶ Eight months later, Daugherty again complained that he had lost twenty-three horses and had received none of them back and that since his arrival in 1880 there had been at least six white men killed and no punishment given to the Navajo. This was one factor that encouraged the two Daugherty brothers to withdraw from their trading post in July 1893.¹⁷

They were not alone; many of the traders faced severe problems during the 1890s, as part of the general economic depression throughout the United States. There were also other factors, such as extremes in weather creating poor harvests, overproduction of wool blankets, and valuables pawned to such an extent that little was left to exchange. The Indians were starving, unemployed, and calling on the government for assistance, so the traders did the only logical thing—withdraw from their business and went on to other endeavors.¹⁸ By 1895, only the Four Corners Trading Post, owned by Owen E. Noland, was still in operation, the others having closed down, and even Noland did little bartering because the Navajos had little to sell.¹⁹ The trading business revived a few years later as the economy improved, but for many of the old traders in the peripheral areas the slump was too much to handle and they remained out of the business.

Another problem that has often been connected with the Indian trade and white men was liquor—and the northern Navajo frontier in the last decades of the nineteenth century was no exception. Starting in 1877 agents began complaining on a regular basis about the sale of large quantities of whiskey in

the settlements bordering the reservation and demanding that stronger measures be taken to curb this trade.²⁰ The 1880s and 90s was a turbulent period when gambling, drinking, and carousing inflamed an already difficult situation.

The problem was widespread and serious. For instance, Agent F. T. Bennett stated that the most damaging evil for the Navajo was whiskey. Pointing out that there were traders at numerous locations, from forty to one hundred miles off the reservation, where "whiskey of the vilest description" was sold, he went on to say that this was a direct violation of the law, an incentive for crime, and a factor in impoverishing the Navajos. Also in several councils he held, the chiefs and headmen urged strict control of this traffic, saying, "We have no rivers, streams or lakes of whiskey; why does not the Great Father at Washington, who can do anything he pleases, put a stop to this trade and keep white men from bringing or selling whiskey to us?"²¹

But the problem persisted. One trader who sold liquor encouraged a shooting conflict between cowboys of the Carlisle cattle company and the Navajos, mentioned in the preceding chapter.²² Newspapers told of incidents such as the one found in the *Durango Herald* of October 31, 1890, in which two women, returning home from Durango, were overtaken by several intoxicated Indians who surrounded the wagon, attempted to take some supplies, and badly frightened them.²³ At the same time, talk of an uprising was whispered about because of friction with the Indians and the fact that "ammunition can be bought everywhere and whiskey or ginger nearly everywhere."²⁴ Even into the 1900s, there was a trading post on the Little Colorado where "the proprietor sells the Indians whiskey, gambles with them and uses every means possible to defraud and degrade them."²⁵

But perhaps one of the most illuminating examples of the extent of use of liquor and gambling on the Navajo Reservation is provided by William T. Shelton, supervisor at the Shiprock Agency in 1903. Speaking of this time, he told of a thirty-five-mile trip he made to Farmington, during which he met "eighteen drunken Indians" coming from Durango. There were also those selling liquor to other Navajos and, to make matters worse, gambling was extensively practiced by almost everyone. He noted that "fifteen or twenty, and sometimes more, would congregate at each of the trading posts during the day and waste their time and money gambling. At some of the posts the traders kept a 'tin horn' gambler at their store for the purpose of getting a crowd together and beating them out of their money."²⁶

By the end of the second year (1904-5), Shelton claimed to have put a lid on this activity by gaining the "cooperation of the older and more influential Indians, convincing them that gambling was bad business and detrimental to the best interests of the reservation." For battle trophies from the war against gambling, he collected more than three bushels of playing cards. As for the whiskey traffic, he slowed it by assigning an apprehended first-time offender ten days of work at the agency, a second offender twenty days, with an additional ten days for each additional infraction. In the next ten years

there were only eleven drinkers brought in for punishment, leading Shelton to boast, "I doubt if there is a community in the United States more free from whiskey, drinking and gambling than this reservation."²⁷ While this seems idealistic, Shelton's control was something that had not been possible until the agency was established to help patrol the liquor traffic on the northern boundaries of the reservation.

Control of alcohol sales in the 1880s and 90s had no such force. Liquor was provided from two primary sources. Most vendors were Mexicans operating out of their communities in New Mexico below the Southern Ute Reservation.²⁸ Part of this contact was brought about by the Navajos going off their lands to sell wool, where they met Mexicans who made their living by gambling and furnishing whiskey.²⁹ This created a particularly difficult problem when it came time to convict them in a court of law. For example, Agent Plummer reported on June 5, 1894, that whiskey was being sold at certain places in New Mexico but that jury members of Mexican ancestry were slow to find their fellow countrymen guilty. Since an Indian's testimony was not acceptable in court, and since deputy marshals and other law enforcement officers were paid for arresting people, not convicting them, Plummer suggested that a special agent concerned solely with liquor traffic be assigned to the reservation.³⁰

But if the Navajo trade was strong, the Southern Ute trade was even stronger. Surrounded by "a mixed population some of which are of the worst element in the country," the Utes lived on the borders of villages where bootleg alcohol was produced.³¹ One agent claimed that the Mexicans who lived near the Indians had no "visible means of support, deriving a livelihood from them [Utes] by gambling, bootlegging whiskey, etc." and that a lot of the bothersome "crime and theft can be traced to Mexican origin."³² Although no definite proof has been found, it seems likely that the trade spread from the Utes, who also served as middlemen to the Navajos on the northern boundary. This assumption is based on the constant interaction between these groups during this period.

A second source of liquor for the Navajo was the border towns in Colorado. While some residents feared the effects of alcohol on the Indians, making them "like wild beasts . . . who would some day cause a massacre," there were those vendors who cared only for profit.³³ Durango and Cortez each had their share of peddlers who were successful in selling but difficult to catch.³⁴

The laws enacted to stop this liquor traffic were more specific than those concerned with trading. A peddler faced a \$300 fine and two years' imprisonment if found guilty of providing alcohol to Indians either on or off the reservation.³⁵ Licensed traders were put under special obligation to help curb the sale of liquor since "a drunken Indian is a condensed and intensified savage let loose on the community to commit crimes the blackest in the calendar." If the trader failed to report an offense, his license was revoked and he was removed from the reservation. The ultimate reason for stopping this activi-

ty was that the Indians could not be Christianized and civilized as long as "drunkards, gamblers and whiskey traders" could demoralize and debauch them.³⁶

An agent actually exercised preventive measures in at least one instance, when a trader was queried about his use of liquor. Correspondence noted that this trader used stimulants only when he considered such treatment necessary and that his character was of a high quality, as was his family's reputation. Nevertheless, the rules were clear: he had no choice but to leave the reservation, since it was difficult to "discriminate between intoxication produced by the use of liquor when considered necessary and produced otherwise."³⁷ Another would-be trader was identified as using alcohol "very moderately"; he was told to abstain totally in order to receive his license.

Although the laws were both strict and specific, the problem of enforcing them was tremendous. Indian agents, special agents, the military, and civilians all took part at one time or another, but the record of convictions does not reflect the extent of the trade. An example of law enforcement problems is found on the Southern Ute Reservation in 1887. Special Agent M. Armstrong started on the trail of whiskey peddlers who operated along the San Juan. According to railroad workers, Indians were getting liquor from a gang of Mexicans, who left the alcohol in old dugouts beside the railroad tracks. Upon entering some of these huts, Armstrong found evidence, in the form of recently emptied bottles strewn about the floor. Armstrong determined that some of the whiskey was supplied from Durango, some from Pagosa Springs, and some from the Mexican settlements nearby. Further investigation showed that liquor was smuggled in boxes marked hardware, but this plan was foiled by suspicious railroad workers. Often, the selling was done at night, with the goods left unattended at a prearranged location, making it difficult to tie people, places, and sales into a unified court case that resulted in conviction.³⁸

On one occasion, the law was too late to protect a bootlegger from his own reward. In April 1888 a white man mounted on a burro came onto the Navajo Reservation from Ute lands. He sold liquor to two Navajos—one twelve, the other twenty-four years of age—and then got into an argument that resulted in his death. His body was thrown into the San Juan. Indians notified the agent, who dispatched eleven Navajo police to bring the two Indians to the agency, but this action was frustrated, his men returning after a confrontation with more than 100 Navajos. This group protected the murderers, who felt they had performed a service by getting rid of the whiskey peddler. White people gave further encouragement by telling the Navajos that they had done a good thing and should not be punished. The guilty parties were never brought to justice.³⁹

On a more positive note, one of the better-coordinated efforts of trade along the San Juan and Little Colorado rivers was that of the Mormons. While their record is not unblemished, they recognized early in their frontier experience that trade was both profitable and, if handled properly, a means to main-

rain friendly relations with Indians. As early as 1854, a group from Springville, Utah, launched a trading expedition south of the San Juan. Desiring to barter with the Navajos for livestock, blankets, and silver jewelry, the Mormons visited the Indians but found them initially hostile. An exaggerated report said the Navajos had just a few days before “killed, boiled and eaten a white man,” and though they conducted some trade, the party returned to friendly territory after a short time.⁴⁰ But even in this difficult situation, the leader of the group realized that “trade is the best letter of introduction a white man can take among Indians.”

Peaceful practices of exchange between the Mormons and the Navajos were based on policies established by Brigham Young and a foundation laid by explorer-traders like Jacob Hamblin and Thales Haskell.⁴¹ As early as 1873, the Navajo agent reported a heavy trade in woven blankets with the Mormons in Utah, while soon after settlements started spreading south along the Little Colorado.⁴² But during the period from the 1870s to mid-1880s, one of the most frequently recurring concerns felt by outsiders about Mormon trade was that the Mormons were conspiring to unite the Navajos, Utes, and Paiutes against the U.S. government. No doubt the Mountain Meadows Massacre in 1857 gave an air of credibility to later rumors. Certainly the heavy trade of arms and ammunition at the Elk Mountain Mission in 1855 helped encourage these beliefs, as did a reported meeting of Navajos, Utes, and Paiutes in the Navajo Mountain area in 1859. At this gathering, Mormons gave shirts, beads, and powder to encourage friendly relations among the three tribes for the purpose of furthering Mormon goals of defense. It is difficult to determine exactly how serious this attempt to unify was; in any case, it was ineffective because of growing Ute and Navajo hostility in the 1860s.⁴³

That guns were important to both Mormons and Navajos during the 1870s and 80s cannot be doubted. One of the best examples of this is provided by Don Maguire, a freelance trader who made several expeditions into the Southwest, one of which took him to the settlements on the Little Colorado in 1878–79. He had with him a large number of government muskets, carbines, pistols, and ammunition—much of which he sold to Lot Smith, a Mormon leader, and others. The Saints purchased the weapons, for \$600, because they believed themselves in constant danger from Navajos and Apaches. Maguire charged three times what he had paid for the weapons. Soon after this, a group of Hopis appeared and purchased 10 rifles, 5 carbines, 5 pistols, and 1,000 rounds of ammunition.⁴⁴

Maguire then traveled to Moenkopi, where he rented the home of licensed Mormon trader Ben Hawley and proceeded to sell the rest of the firearms. Hawley’s usual fare consisted of such innocuous items as tobacco, calico, shirts, shoes, trousers, paint, and beads, so one wonders how he justified opening up his store to sell weapons when it was expressly forbidden by government regulation. Maguire stayed there four days, raking in 55 pounds of silver jewelry, 150 blankets, 31 spurs, and 50 other objects of Navajo manufacture, for

40 rifles, 17 pistols, 1,500 rounds of ammunition, and the usual knives, beads, paint, and cloth. After the exchanges were completed, he entertained all those present with two meals of mutton, potatoes, and bread, then waited for his guests to depart before moving north. His bartered items were eventually sold in New York City for a good profit.⁴⁵

While this was not Mormon trading in its purest sense, this episode certainly occurred with the approval of local Mormons. Perhaps it also helped keep alive the fear that Mormons were supplying weapons to the Indians. Again in 1881, reports started to filter into Washington of a Mormon conspiracy in which Navajos, Utes, and Paiutes living in Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah were "freely furnished with arms and provisions by Mormons who are affiliating with the Indians and giving them all the whiskey they want." Tentatively, an outbreak was expected in the spring.⁴⁶

Navajo Agent Galen Eastman investigated and reported that one of his most reliable headmen from the northwestern part of the reservation felt that all was quiet, that no arms or whiskey were being sold, and that there was no discontent. Eastman then turned the tables on Thomas F. Hopkins, author of the letter that prompted the investigation, saying that he was fomenting trouble to get what he wanted. The agent suggested that he could visit Hopkins and his associates and thus find the real trouble. While Eastman agreed that an illegal trade did exist along the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad and in St. Johns, Arizona, he exonerated the Mormons by stating, "While I am not an admirer of Mormonism, yet so far as my observation goes, they are peacefully inclined and are friendly with all Indians and treat them kindly and for these reasons their stock is safe and their leaders assure me they never permit their people to sell whiskey and arms to them, and I believe they do not to any considerable extent."⁴⁷ Hopkins, a person described as controlling eastern capital in mining businesses in Maricopa County, Arizona, created no further trouble. His apparent ploy to harass the Mormons and expand his operations failed.

Another problem occurred when gentile traders attempted to take over in the absence of Mormon traders. C. L. Christensen, a settler in the Moenkopi area, told how he returned home in 1885 from an extended trip and found the old fort taken over by gentiles who had converted it into a trade center backed by the Spiegelberg Brothers of Albuquerque. Representing these wool buyers, the traders united in an attempt to incite Hopis and Navajos against the Mormons and threatened to hang Christensen if he did not stop influencing the Indians. This influence included counseling them "to quit lying, stealing, card playing, riding Mormon, American or Indian horses that did not belong to them, and last and worst of all, adultery . . . as a number of these refined gentlemen depend upon the young girls and women for gratification of the lusts of the flesh."⁴⁸ From an economic standpoint, these traders were interested in reaping the same type of profit that Christensen reported a couple of weeks later when he went to Winslow, Arizona, and loaded 1,762 pounds of

wool at a dollar a pound onto the Atlantic and Pacific Railroad for the Sam Dutlinhuffer and Company Wool Merchants of Moenkopi.⁴⁹ Money was made by both factions involved in the trading business.

At the same time the Mormons were developing trade along the Little Colorado, another group was building its posts in the new community of Bluff, Utah. Founded in 1880, this town soon became involved in trade with Navajos and Utes on both an individual and group basis. Also, shortly after the main body of Mormons went through the Hole-in-the-Rock, they were joined by William Hyde, a Mormon merchant from Salt Lake City who opened a trading post in Montezuma Creek eighteen miles above Bluff.

While Hyde's business flourished—growing into at least two other posts in the Four Corners area—his experience serves as an interesting illustration of the diversity of the life of a trader. For instance, his sixteen-year-old daughter, Parfenia, established the first district school in the fall of 1880.⁵⁰ She was also involved in a one-sided love affair when a young Ute warrior named Sanop's Boy threatened William Hyde with death if he did not turn over his daughter for marriage. Apparently the Indian was pacified, since no war broke out, and Parfenia soon married Amasa Barton, another Mormon trader and business partner to Hyde.⁵¹

By February 1881, Montezuma Creek had seven families with room for four times that number. Survival depended as much on home industry and farming as on trading, so Hyde built an irrigation wheel sixteen feet in diameter with a twelve-foot reach that lifted 23,000 gallons of water an hour into the ditches.⁵² The wheel remained in operation for three years before being washed down the San Juan on June 8, 1884, in a flood that took much of the Aneth and Montezuma Creek communities with it. The disaster closed out Hyde's operation on this part of the river, but with his post at Peak City, Colorado, and another further down the San Juan, the Hyde and Barton Trading Company continued to prosper.⁵³

It is also interesting to note that Hyde, like the Mormons on the Little Colorado, was not free from accusations of conspiracy. In 1884, two miners by the name of Samuel T. Walcott and James McNally were killed while traveling near Navajo Mountain. Hyde's trading post below Bluff operated a ferry, so news of the surrounding area funneled in to this point. He received word of the murder ten days before the incident became public knowledge, as his daughter told another trader. Henry L. Mitchell also got word of this news and wrote to a friend of Walcott, an armchair investigator named Fred Fickey, living in Baltimore, Maryland. Fickey concluded with Mitchell's help that Walcott had been more afraid of the Mormons than the Indians, that Hyde was the "prime actor or originator of the affair," and that the Indians would confirm this fact.⁵⁴ A subsequent investigation by the agent, Navajo police, and the military exonerated Hyde, placing the blame on four Navajos who visited Walcott's camp to trade.

Yet violence also struck Mormon trading posts. Amasa Barton ran a store

and ferry at Rincon, a natural crossing place eight miles below Bluff. Described as a "tidy, orderly, thrifty, resourceful, honest and all around good citizen," Barton was a Mormon in good standing when in 1885 he requested permission to establish this post away from the confines of Bluff City proper.⁵⁵ Bishop Jens Nielson was not anxious to grant this favor, which was contrary to advice given by church authorities, so he left the final decision to Barton, who located his store in a place that served both Indians and local stockmen.⁵⁶

On June 9, 1887, two Indians visited the post, one of whom had earlier pawned a string of beads, which he now wanted back for two dollars less. An argument ensued, and as the trader stooped to go under the counter, the Indians slipped a rope around his neck and pinioned his arms, so that he fell to the floor. One Indian drew his pistol and shot Barton in the head, then accidentally placed a round in his partner's chest. Another shot was fired into Barton's skull, while the wounded Navajo ran outside the store and died. William Hyde's wife and daughter were present, but Barton warned them to stay away until the Indians departed, the survivor carrying his dead friend to the ferry and then crossing the river. Soon the survivor returned with other Navajos; they demanded the key to the store, from which they removed \$400 worth of goods. Barton died on June 16, just a few days after sixty Navajos visited Bluff to confront the fifteen Mormon families living there. A threat by the settlers to introduce soldiers into the conflict induced the Indians to restore amicable relations.⁵⁷ This incident was the exception and not the rule in Mormon-Navajo trade relations.

Perhaps the most successful Mormon group bartering venture on the northern boundary of the reservation was that of the San Juan or Bluff Co-op. Organized on April 29, 1882, this enterprise stayed in operation until January 21, 1920, at which time it was sold to an individual. The first board was composed of influential men in the Mormon hierarchy of Bluff: Platte D. Lyman, president; Bishop Jens Nielson, vice president; Charles E. Walton, Kumen Jones, and Hyrum Perkins, directors; and Joseph H. Lyman, salesman.⁵⁸ In five months this venture had paid a 10 percent dividend, which in one year increased to 25 percent.⁵⁹

At first a small amount of freight was hauled from Escalante over the Hole-in-the-Rock Trail to Bluff and its trading posts.⁶⁰ But it did not take long to form business connections with southwestern Colorado, as the co-op moved merchandise by way of Navajo Springs, Mancos, Durango, and Alamosa. Shipping time took only ten days round-trip and provided necessary employment for the men of Bluff in between their farm responsibilities. Many of these freighters were also stockholders in the company. The trade with Colorado provided a side benefit evident on wash days when the children's underwear, which was made out of flour sacks stamped "Pride of Durango," was hung out to dry.⁶¹

As for the actual trading at the Co-op, the business transactions were similar to those of most posts. The owners hired a young man to operate a

ferry on the river. They purchased blankets, pelts, silver, and wool, the latter often being washed, carded, spun, and dyed with roots and bark, then knitted into stockings or woven into cloth. One visitor described the interior of the store as having an "L-shaped counter [which] allowed them [Indians] a space about eight by twelve feet, and in this narrow area they jostled each other, smoking and laughing and giggling with the clerk in their high keyed lingo for higher prices on their wares."⁶²

There was also a log warehouse in which raw wool was stored. An amusing story concerning this building involved a Ute named Mike Moenkopi, who came occasionally to trade for necessities. The wool he brought for payment was often the same amount found missing in the warehouse, having been removed from an unchinked crack between the logs. Versions of the tale differ as to how Mike was caught, but one account tells of a carefully laid wolf trap that clamped hold of his hand on the far side of the wall. The captors released the Indian after a little physical punishment.⁶³

By the late 1890s and early 1900s, trading posts along the San Juan were meeting the needs of the Navajos, who were increasingly dependent on the economic system of the white man. The heyday of the trader was yet to come, but the perceived need for manufactured goods existed. An example of this growing dependence was provided by a Navajo named Left Handed when he first entered a trading post in the 1880s:

When we got there the door was open and that was the store. Lots of things were in that house. On the shelves lay bundles of red flannel and white cloth and dishes, and from the ceiling hung buckets of different sizes and scarfs of all colors. Everything was new to me. I stood and looked thinking, "What wonderful things they are." Old Man Thankful started trading. He bought a roll of black leather, a bundle of white cloth and a bundle of red flannel. . . . He also bought a bucket and bracelet which my mother had asked for and a scarf and a black hat for my father.⁶⁴

The trading posts were heavily dependent upon wool blankets and furs. Over-hunting of deer became a serious problem, especially as the reservation became more clearly defined, the Utes and Navajos more closely watched, and the game wardens stricter in enforcing hunting laws. Large numbers of deer were killed for the hide trade, while infuriated citizens sent letters and petitions to state governors, Indian agents, and the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, demanding a halt to the slaughter. By 1890 this phenomenon was occurring throughout the western states to such an extent that the Bureau of Indian Affairs sent a letter to the agents, directing them to counsel their tribal members as to the game laws. In short, the regulation said that the right to hunt off the reservation was recognized but gave only the privilege of killing "game as may be necessary to supply the needs of the Indians and that the

slaughter of wild animals in vast numbers for hides only . . . is as much a violation of the treaty as an absolute prohibition on the part of the United States against the exercise of such privilege would be. . . . In view of the settlement of the country and consequent disappearance of the game, the time has long since gone by when the Indians can live by the chase."⁶⁵ And yet the price of hides offered a practical way to get money. In 1878, for instance, the Indians sold buckskins in large volume to traders who shipped them to the railroad at a rate of \$1,000 a ton.⁶⁶ In 1890, trading posts on the San Juan offered fifty cents a hide with the Navajos taking advantage of the opportunity.⁶⁷

Another way to earn money was through the sale of wool and blankets. A common practice used to avoid freighting problems in a roadless wilderness was the sheep drive in which Navajos herded their livestock to an area opposite the post and there sheared them. A boat then crossed the river and picked up the large seven-to-nine-foot-long sacks of wool, which the Navajos accompanied to the post. There, the trader paid the Indians—the amount was between fifteen and seventeen dollars a sack in 1890—and encouraged them to spend most of their money in the store, thus keeping the cash close to home for the trader. They then stored some of the wool for sale in the cold winter months when the Navajos needed it for weaving; blankets were sold to the trader for between four and seven dollars.⁶⁸ This trade in woven goods continued to expand so that by 1914 it provided a \$700,000 income for the reservation.⁶⁹

One of the most important principles involved in trading during this and subsequent periods was that of pawn. Ideally, an Indian could bring anything of value—blankets, silver, guns, and so forth—and leave it at a post to be redeemed later for cash. While this practice could benefit both parties, much depended on the character of the trader and the flow of the economy. The government tried to ensure that "only a proper person engaged in such trade."⁷⁰ A number of posts encouraged competition to keep costs low on the reservation, since it was forbidden to form a monopoly to establish uniform prices to the disadvantage of the Navajos.⁷¹ As late as 1905, a government report insisted that the "best source of competition is the approach of white towns to the reservation boundary and the opening of reservation tracts to white occupancy. . . . Nevertheless, since the licensed trader is nearest the Indians, he continues to have some advantage over an outsider in making sales and collecting debts and his personal influence and example still go a good way with our red brother."⁷²

Traders also encouraged some of the Indians to move toward a wage economy. During the 1890s and early 1900s one Navajo, Old Mexican, had many such opportunities as he lived and worked around the Aneth-Shiprock area. One of his primary sources of income was freighting, usually to either Cortez or Mancos. For a three-day round trip to Cortez, the trader paid him ten dollars, and for a trip to Mancos, twelve.⁷³ Posts also hired Navajos to act as guides across the reservation, to attend exhibition dances in Durango and other cities, to promote the Shiprock Agency Fairs started in 1909, to con-

struct roads and irrigation ditches, and to help find and excavate Anasazi ruins in the Four Corners area. The most famous traders to hire Navajos for excavations were John and Richard Wetherill.⁷⁴

It is difficult to estimate how many Navajos were attracted to a single post along the San Juan during the period 1870 to 1910, since so much depended on economic, political, and social events. Perhaps the best indication comes from a report by Colonel George W. Hunter, who traveled through the northern part of the reservation in 1908 to study the conditions and temperament of the Navajo shortly after the explosive Bai-alil-le affair.⁷⁵ Hunter held a large council at the Wetherill post in Oljato; from this meeting and the information garnered from the traders, he determined that a total of 1,512 Navajos, Utes, and Paiutes lived in approximately a sixty-mile radius.⁷⁶ How many of these frequented the Oljato post on a regular basis was not known, but one of Hunter's officers visited Bluff at the same time and reported that 950 adult Navajos had traded there during the year and that about half of these had homes within a sixty-mile radius.⁷⁷

By 1910 certain changes either had occurred or were starting to occur that caused a shift in the old trading practices. Although some of the changes were gradual and imperceptible, others were easily identified. For example, the government built the first of a series of bridges across the San Juan, Colorado, and Little Colorado rivers, eliminating the need for ferries while opening up the northern part of the reservation to increased vehicular traffic. The first bridge was under construction in 1909 near the Shiprock Agency School, followed by bridges at Mexican Hat (1909), Tanner's Crossing (1910), and Lee's Ferry (1925).⁷⁸

There existed now more trading posts on the reservation than ever before. A report issued in 1936 stated that of the forty-nine posts visited on Navajo lands, eleven had been established before 1900 and thirty-eight had been introduced since that time. An additional thirty were not visited and so could not provide data.⁷⁹ There was also a tightening of control and more interest expressed in development by the Bureau of Indian Affairs through agents like William T. Shelton, working out of Shiprock. Agency police, trade fairs, agricultural projects, Christian missions, and boarding schools all helped to change the strength and quality of the old-time magnetism that drew Navajos to the borders to trade.

Thus by 1910, law, order, education, and control were established at an unprecedented rate, making impractical and undesirable the more free wheeling days of the 1870s and 80s. This is not to suggest that all was calm, but only that the old ways were fading. This set the stage for a new era—the heyday of the trading post—starting in the early 1900s.

The experience of the early trading posts on the northern Navajo frontier was dynamic. The ebb and flow of the institution rose and fell with the general American economy as well as local events. Mormons and gentiles both operated stores successfully, creating an atmosphere of competition for business.

The Navajos, on the other hand, were introduced to desirable goods from the general economy, which encouraged a greater dependence on these products. Liquor sales, gambling, and sales of arms and ammunition created special problems that did not subside until the establishment of a local governing agency at Shiprock in 1903 and the careful demarcation of reservation boundaries, the topic of the next chapter.