



Navajo Health Foundation / Sage Memorial Hospital
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Ganado History

The beginnings of human history at Ganado are lost in the past, but it is probable that early hunters of big game, mammoths and extinct bison, roamed through the Pueblo Colorado Valley, for their dart points have been found in neighboring areas and the bones of their quarry can be found nearby. As the big game disappeared, the people resorted to less dramatic pursuits. For several thousand years a way of life called the Archaic prevailed and it was based on hunting smaller game and gathering wild plants.



The beginnings of agriculture came in late Archaic; corn may have been introduced as early as 1800 BC, but its potential to support a new way of life was realized very slowly. In the early centuries of the first millennium AD the evolution of the Anasazi culture was well underway. Villages from the "Basketmaker" period of the Anasazi culture are known from various places up and down the valley. These small pithouse settlements grew into little adobe pueblos. At Kinlichee, the ruin from which the region has long received its name, one kiva was built about 1087 and construction continued well into the following century. Wide Reeds, the major ruin at Ganado, was built toward the end of the Anasazi occupation, about 1276. By 1300 the Anasazi were gone.

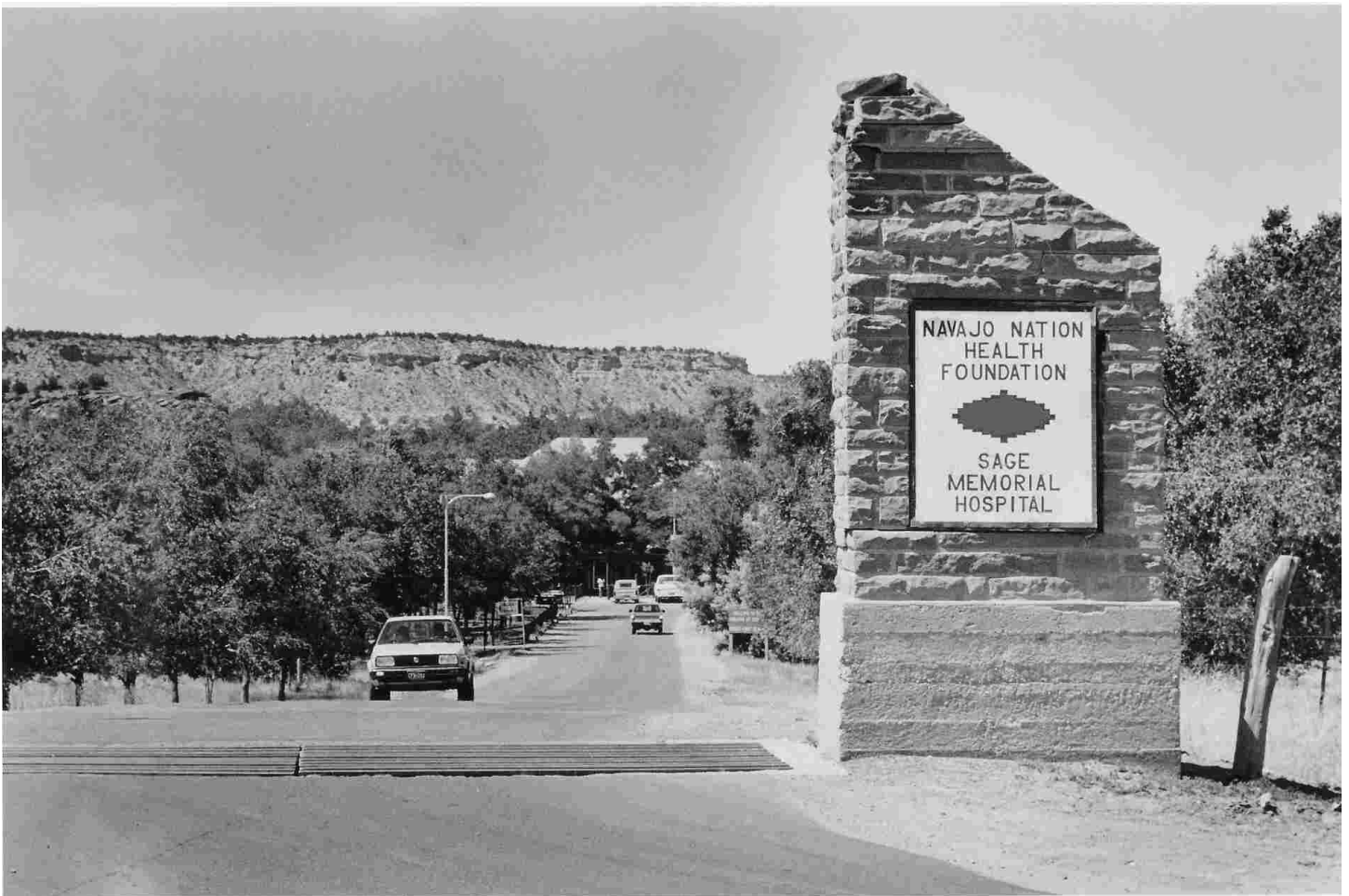
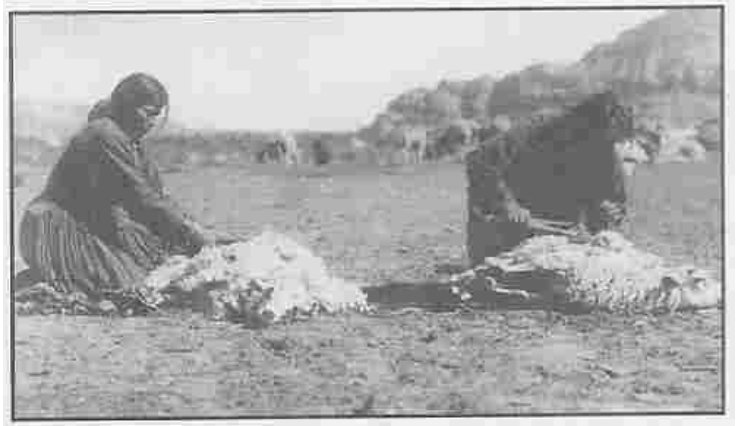


The arrival of the first Navajo settlers has not been dated, but they may have been living in such a favorable spot as early as 1400. Archeological evidence of Navajo settlement has not been identified until the mid-1700's. Tradition attributes much of the building of this period to Jilhaal, a controversial figure who is remembered as a great warrior, perhaps a singer and certainly a disturber of the status quo. Most probably he introduced some of the Puebloan ideas associated with the cultural florescence of the Dinetah, a region far to the east on the headwaters of the San Juan River where refugees from Spanish rule in New Mexico had found freedom among the Navajos. Navajo fortifications to the south and north are places associated with Jilhaal, as is a small site almost completely destroyed by erosion just below Wide Reeds.



Spanish travelers passed this way in the 1770's and a place called Cumaa on their maps may record the Zuni name for Ganado at that time. A Mexican army camped near Kinlichee in 1839 was successfully attacked by Navajos who drove off 40 of their horses. Ganado Mucho, remembered by Navajos as Totsohnii Hastiin, had risen to prominence as leader by the 1850's. The frequent passage of campaigning armies during these last years of warfare made living at Wide Reeds dangerous, but away from the main trail there were Navajo farms and sheep were grazed in the valleys and on the mesas. Not only did the army from Fort Defiance bring destruction to this fertile spot, but Apaches from the south as well. In 1863 Ganado was proposed as the site for Fort Canby, Kit Carson's headquarters, but he decided to work out the ruins of Fort Defiance, abandoned early in the Civil War. Following the final Navajo defeat and exile at Fort Sumner, peace allowed early resettlement of the valley and from here Ganado Mucho tried to oversee the affairs of all the western Navajos, traveling as far as the Mormon towns in Utah to maintain good relations between the tribe and advancing white settlers. Peace attracted whites to his own community. They came first as settlers, but accepted the fact that they were in Navajo country and turned to trading for their livelihood. In 1878 the killing, under the leadership of Ganado Mucho's sons, of several alleged witches who had threatened the peace, brought an end to all danger of renewed warfare. Following this episode, Lorenzo Hubbell left his trading business near Ganado Lake and bought a post below Wide Reeds to become for many years thereafter the leading trader of the entire region. It was he who gave Ganado its official name, in honor of his friend Ganado Mucho. Many Horses succeeded his father as the local headman of the community in the 1890's and continued his father's close relations with Hubbell.

In 1901, with Hubbell's encouragement, the Presbyterian Church established a mission nearby. Rev. Charles Bierkemper was the first missionary, but it was later under the direction of Dr. Clarence Salsbury that the mission grew into a major educational and medical institution for the Navajos. Many graduates of the mission school became leaders in the tribe, but the first to exert Ganado's influence at the tribal level was Howard Gorman, an employee of the mission who in 1933 was elected president of the Returned Students Association, an organization that was active in Navajo politics during the stormy years of stock reduction. The community organized as a chapter before 1930, building the first chapter house near the Hubbell Trading Post.



SMH Entrance (circa 1970)

In recent years (beginning with the 60's) there have been dramatic changes. As the public school grew, the government school was closed and the mission school declined in enrollment, being eventually replaced by the College of Ganado. The mission hospital, with Project Hope as interim operator, became a community-owned facility. New businesses, improved housing and the development of public utilities have given the community a village at its center. The old Hubbell Trading Post has become a national historic site. The paving of the roads where once were mere trails has brought increased communication.



Poncel Hall - Current

Note: This synopsis was authored by **David Brugge**, Anthropologist and former member of NHF/SMH Board of Directors. *All photographs courtesy of the Navajo Health Foundation / Sage Memorial Hospital Archives, circa 1917 - 1919*