

Ee'hanii': Commemorating the Navajo Treaty of 1868

Written by By Dee Velasco For the Sun
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150 years later

A presentation of the Navajo Treaty of 1868 was given at the El Morro Theatre, July 20, presented by the Miss Navajo Council, Inc., the Octavia Fellin Public Library, and support from numerous community volunteers.

A short documentary was shown on the Treaty of 1868, establishing the “Navajo Indian Reservation.” In 1868, the Navajo became the only native nation to use a treaty to escape removal and return to their home.

This treaty was written on paper taken from an army ledger book where article two is the crucial portion that defines the Navajo reservation.

According to Navajo history, the Navajo defended their land against Mexican and New Mexican slave traders and livestock raiders. In 1848, the U.S. Army arrived, and between 1863 and 1866, the army marched about 11,500 Diné people 400 miles to a desolate reservation at Bosque Redondo in New Mexico. This was known as “The Long Walk”.

THE LONG WALK

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The march was difficult and pushed many Navajos to their breaking point, including death. The distance itself was cruel and they did not receive any aid from the soldiers. Many began the walk exhausted and malnourished, others were not properly clothed and not prepared for such a long journey. Neither sympathy nor remorse were given to the Navajos. They were never informed as to where they were going, why they were being relocated, and how long it would take to get there.

On hand sharing her ancestors part in this ordeal was Sunny Dooley, Diné, who gave a moving emotional speech titled "That Hweedli Chill." The word "hweedli" itself was a mispronunciation of the English word "court day."

Dooley says that white men would come into the Bosque Redondo camp on a regular basis and say, "court day court day," and somehow the Navajo interpreted this as hweedli.

On her father's side, her great-great-great-great grandfather, went on the Long Walk and came back, while on her mother's side of the Salt Water Clan, four great-grandmothers ago was a Spanish slave. She ran away from being a slave and her husband at the time ran away from Kit Carson at Canyon De Chelly.

"This was my own poem that I wrote in 1995. It means a lot to me," she said. "I really believe that stories have a lot of strength, and the more we tell our story, we re-strengthen them – the children, the young people. Because if we're just silent about something that was traumatic, it can be repeated. If kids know from where their ancestors came from, then they know their resilient and should not be weak and move forward."

Although no Diné youth were on hand, the audience was made up of a mixture of older Diné and Anglo onlookers who were left mesmerized by this compelling presentation.

Orchestrating the media presentation was Anne Price, youth services director of the Octavia Fellin Children's Branch library. Along with several community members of the Miss Navajo Council, Price recorded the voices of many children and did the final edit for viewing.

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"So many people were involved in this project," she said. "We had a few older elementary and middle school kids that read, but we also had a lot of community members that were just interested in the project that came in to read ... mostly female interest."

Praising the effort of all those who contributed to this presentation was Tammie Moe, director of Octavia Fellin Public Library, who is Price's supervisor. She even noted the hard work of the middle school children who read parts, which contained older Navajo dialect. Additional help came from older Navajo community members in correctly articulating these difficult words that were used during the Treaty of 1868.

"It was a very cool event and I really would like to give thanks to those who helped out in this production, especially Anne Price." Moe said. "Price has worked on this for weeks and I couldn't believe how great it turned out, especially the kids who read the parts, some of it was pretty hard as some I know were of old Dine' language."

During the presentation, several Navajo ancestral songs were sung by Marilyn Help-Hood, Diné, to educate those who wanted to know more the stories that came out of the Treaty of 1868.

"We've been doing workshops and presentations talking about traditional Navajo stories like 'The Two Twins,'" she said. "As well as 'White Shell Woman' workshops to promote the cultural aspect of our culture, especially the preservation of our language. That was our main emphasis for trying to promote this for our youth."

For more information contact the Octavia Fellin Public Library at (505) 863-1291 or visit www.galluplibrary.com

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