



It is more than a
monument. It is a
center of healing.



Hwééldi,

BY BEN MOFFETT

A contingent of straight-talking speakers and an insightful audience of more than 1,000 people—mostly ancestral Navajo stakeholders in Bosque Redondo’s tragic history—gathered on the banks of the Pecos River near Fort Sumner on June 4, 2005 to formally open New Mexico’s newest state memorial.

The World Must Know

As the ceremony progressed, a consensus sentiment seemed to emerge: the Bosque Redondo Memorial tells a bitter story but it is appropriate and appreciated. And it will enable people the world over to learn and benefit from the catastrophic events that took place here almost 150 years ago.

Two Navajo Nation speakers, President Joe Shirley, Jr., and Council Speaker Lawrence T. Morgan, were alternately



the Place of Suffering

LEFT SIDEBAR: *Navajo brothers*,
ca. 1863-1868, Neg. No. MNM28303,
courtesy Museum of New Mexico.

UPPER LEFT: *Fort Sumner*,
New Mexico, ca. 1866, Neg. No.
MNM28533, courtesy Museum of
New Mexico.

UPPER RIGHT: *Counting Navajo*
captives, 1866, Neg. No. MNM28534,
U.S. Army Signal Corps Collections in
the Museum of New Mexico.

RIGHT: Bosque Redondo Memorial
dedication ceremony on June 4, 2005.
Photo by Blair Clark.



solemn and strident as they recounted events from the beginning of the Long Walk to the end of the tribe's imprisonment (1863–1868).

"The story needs to be told," Shirley said, "to serve as a reminder of the genocide and the holocaust that were perpetrated on a nation.

"The cost was too much," he added. "We were almost obliterated from the face of the earth. Thousands of our children, grandchildren, parents, grandparents, and medicine people died here at the hands of those who believed 'the only good Indian is a dead Indian.'

"This place can never be celebrated," Shirley said. "Hatred was born here. As long as there is hatred in the land, we must forever keep vigilant that it does not consume us again."

But "the world must know," the Navajo president concluded. "It is befitting that a monument has been erected here at Fort Sumner, Hwééldi, the place of suffering. On behalf of the Navajo Nation, I want to express appreciation to Governor Richardson and the leadership of the State of New Mexico for all they have done, for all they are doing, and will do, to help us to continue to be a people."

Our Relatives Are Here

Council Speaker Morgan acknowledged that "Navajos are divided" about the memorial's existence because "traditional teaching doesn't memorialize the dead." And he equated the Bosque Redondo to a "slaughterhouse" more than a gravesite—a place where roughly a third of the Navajo and Mescalero Apache population of about 9,000 died during the Long Walk and subsequent confinement.

Morgan noted, however, "hundreds of thousands of visitors will walk away with a better understanding. The memorial tells our story and that is what is important."

Ellyn Bigrope, representing the Mescalero Apache tribe, noted, "the Mescalero Apaches are a proud and forgiving people who do not like to dwell on past misfortunes," and said the memorial represents "a new dawning."

Nowhere was the sentiment of approval of the memorial more powerfully evident than during an impromptu and indelible moment that took place during the remarks of New Mexico's senior senator, Pete Domenici.

Nicole Walker, a Window Rock grandmother, arrived at the ceremony late, concluding her personal re-enactment of the last leg of the historic Long Walk, a journey that she began at 3:00 A.M.



Cheyenne Lyberty Antonio (*left*), who recited the Pledge of Allegiance in Navajo and Spanish at the Bosque Redondo Memorial Grand Opening, standing with Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr. (*right*). Photo by Blair Clark.

Wrapped in a traditional blanket and followed by a small procession, including a youngster carrying a Navajo Nation flag, she entered the courtyard, uttering soul-wrenching cries of anguish.

Domenici immediately yielded the microphone to Walker, who delivered a short message in English and Navajo. "I know our relatives are here," she cried out. "We're going to be okay. This is a good day. Navajos should be proud," a reference to the tribe's resilience and success upon their return to Navajoland. Approving shouts and applause greeted her brief statement.

Walker later told the *Albuquerque Journal* that she had recreated a portion of the Long Walk to honor her ancestors, whose sacrifices she was told of as a child. "When I was growing up, I heard many stories," she said. "You even dream about the people crying."

As she entered the cottonwood grove, she said she felt the spirits. "I was carrying their suffering," she said. "I was thinking about their sacrifice."

"Let's hope in the future that the Navajo people have happiness," said Domenici, visibly touched, when he returned to the lectern, "to make up for the sadness that happened here.

"New Mexico's Native Americans have overcome insurmountable hardship in the past and in the present," Domenici said. "This memorial recalls the sadness of the past but also the remarkable vitality and spirit of the future.



The Bosque Redondo Memorial includes a 6,345-square-foot building and grounds that incorporate cultural symbols such as circular patterns and cardinal directions. Photo by Eliza Wells Smith.

“I believe this is an appropriate celebration that glorifies the determination of the Navajos to persevere despite deplorable treatment and conditions.”

Spirit of Place

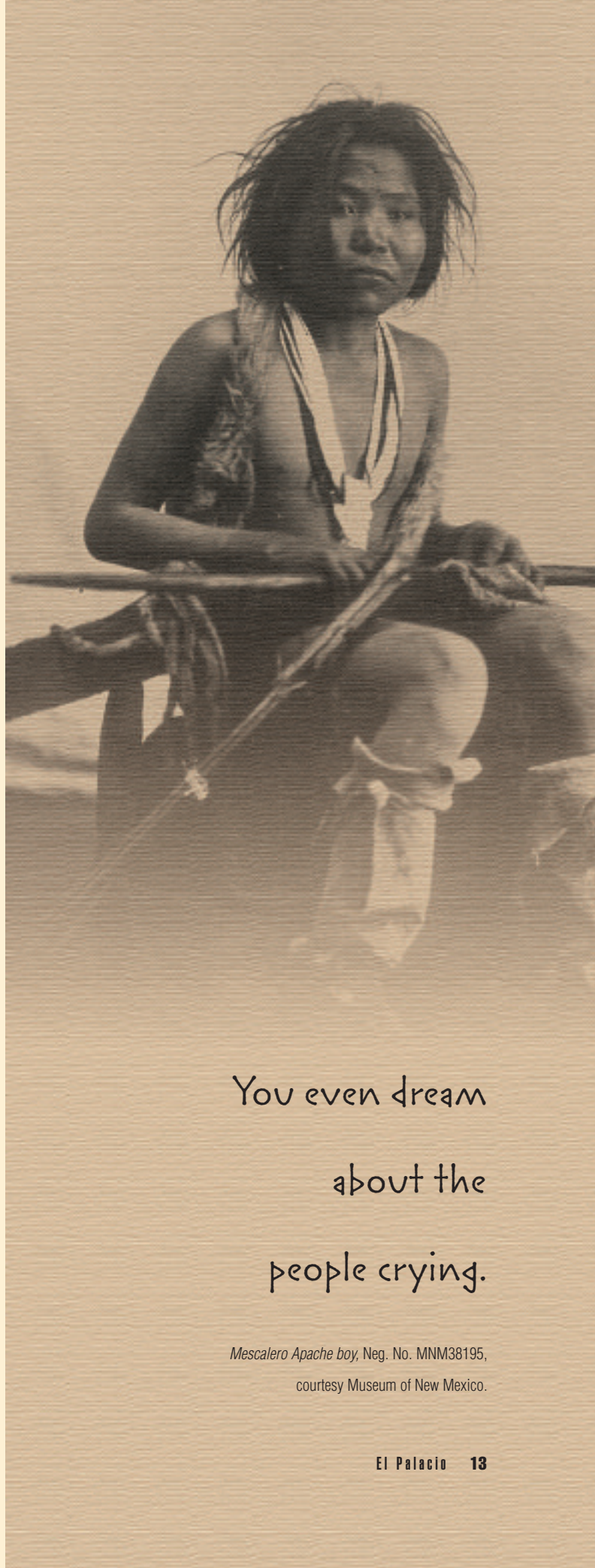
New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman told the audience, “as Americans we cannot afford to forget the chapters of our history that are convenient to forget.” He also noted, “in the United States everyone is entitled to their own opinions but not their own facts.”

Getting the “facts” right, or “telling the true story” in the words of the memorial’s Navajo architect, David N. Sloan, was crucial to the memorial’s acceptance. “When I was interviewed for the job they [Mescalero Apache and Navajo leaders] asked that I design a memorial that tells their stories respectfully, and tells the truth,” Sloan said.

The Albuquerque architect worked to create a design in the structure and landscaping that instilled a “spirit of place” into the memorial. And the work of Discovery Exhibits, Santa Fe, tells the historic story in words as blunt as those used by the keynote speakers.

“These exhibits tell the story of what happened to thousands of Navajo and Mescalero Apache people at a place called Bosque Redondo,” reads an introductory panel. “It is a story of conflict, suffering, and death. It is also a story of strength, survival, and new beginnings.”

If there was consternation, it was at the tardiness of the



You even dream
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people crying.

Mescalero Apache boy, Neg. No. MNM38195,
courtesy Museum of New Mexico.



No longer is Bosque

Redondo invisible.

*Captive Navajo girls, 1866, Neg. No. MNM38197,
courtesy Museum of New Mexico.*



An interior dome features an oculus window that looks to the sky and the elements. Photo by Eliza Wells Smith.

recognition, which Richardson noted. “This monument, and it is a beautiful monument, is long overdue,” the governor said. “It is more than a museum. It is a center of healing.”

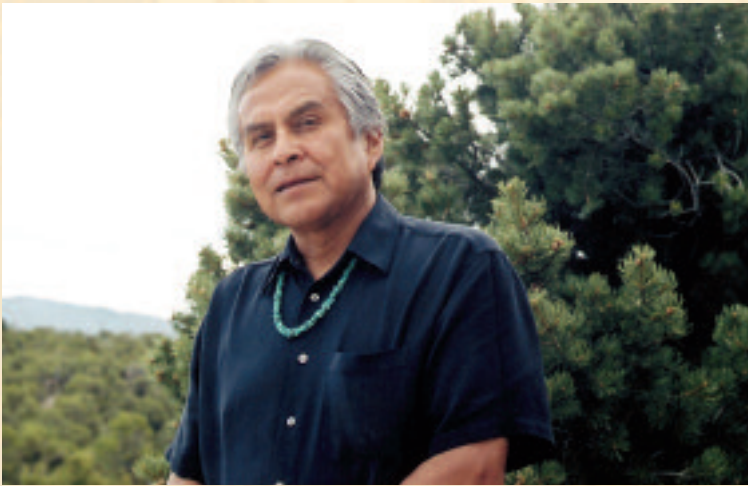
Agreement came from longtime State Senator Ben Altamirano, who championed funding at the state level and a state senate colleague, John Pinto, a Navajo. Altamirano, senate president pro tempore, lamented “the long delay between conception and reality of the monument.”

Pinto, chairman of the Indian and Cultural Affairs Committee, noting that Navajos have done their part to “defeat the enemy” in American wars, said it takes “everyone, working together” to get the job done.

Restoring Respect and Healing

The memorial was conceived in 1967 by planners of the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of June 1, 1868 that freed the Navajo and established the Navajo Nation of today. But the memorial languished until State House and Senate Memorials in 1992 and 1993 spurred the efforts along. On June 14, 2002 the New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs signed an agreement with President Kelsey Begaye of the Navajo Nation and President Sarah Misquez of the Mescalero reservation authorizing construction.

The memorial received both state and federal funding, including an initial \$2 million by the U.S. Department of Defense and \$500,000 in in-kind contributions by the Village of Fort Sumner. “The memorial would never have happened without the strong support of the local community and of our principal stakeholders,” said Scott Smith, Fort Sumner State Monument manager, acknowledging Bosque Redondo’s friends group, headed



Bosque Redondo Memorial architect David N. Sloan. Photo by Eliza Wells Smith.



A gently curving arbor awaits its landscape plantings. Photo by Eliza Wells Smith.

by its president, John McMillan.

The state appropriated \$500,000 in 2002 and committed another \$300,000 in 2004.

The same U.S. military that initially herded the Navajo from the Four Corners area to Bosque Redondo authorized the federal dollars. And the Office of the Secretary, U.S. Department of Defense, offered a dedication of the memorial, read by Senator Bingaman:

“The United States Department of Defense hereby designates The Bosque Redondo Memorial on this day, June 4, 2005, to commemorate the Navajo and Mescalero Apache People who were interned here from 1863 to 1868.

“This Memorial pays tribute to the native population’s ability to rebound from suffering and establish the strong, living communities that have long been a major influence in the State of New Mexico and in these United States.

“This building faces the rising sun of the winter solstice, signaling rebirth. May this Memorial contribute to the healing process of the trauma, suffering, and hardships endured by the Navajo and Mescalero Apache people and forge a new understand of their strengths as Americans.

“In spite of a history of oppression, the American Indian continues to defend this great country, their home, within the armed forces of the United States. Many tribes, including the Navajo, utilized their language as a code to help defeat the enemy during WWII.

“We take great pride today in honoring and restoring a respect and healing process to these great citizens of this United States of America, for united we stand, divided

we fall. The American Indian defends with dignity and pride for his mother country.”

A Site of Conscience

The memorial now stands as a “site of conscience,” in the words of State Monuments Director José Cisneros, who has compared it with other sites where great atrocities were committed. “Bosque Redondo stands alongside the Bataan Death March, the Cherokee Trail of Tears, and the relocation of Japanese-Americans during World War II in terms of human tragedy. Yet unlike those events, which were well documented and memorialized, there had been little done to honor the dead, celebrate the renewal of the survivors, consecrate the sacred ground where the tragedy occurred, or simply tell the story of the Long Walk and Bosque Redondo.”

No longer is Bosque Redondo invisible. “I see visitors from all over the world coming here to learn about the proud and strong people who suffered and endured at Bosque Redondo,” said host and master of ceremonies Dr. Stuart A. Ashman, Cabinet Secretary of the State of New Mexico Department of Cultural Affairs. “We begin to teach future generations not only about the history of the Mescalero Apache and the Navajo and how they suffered and endured, but about their values and talents and how they enrich our lives.”

Governor Richardson pointed out, “This is only the first phase. There will be a Phase II.”

“Phase I goes a long way toward fulfilling our commitment to commemoration and healing, but the job is not complete,” Ashman said, promising to finish off the project with a large hall housing a permanent Long Walk exhibit. ■