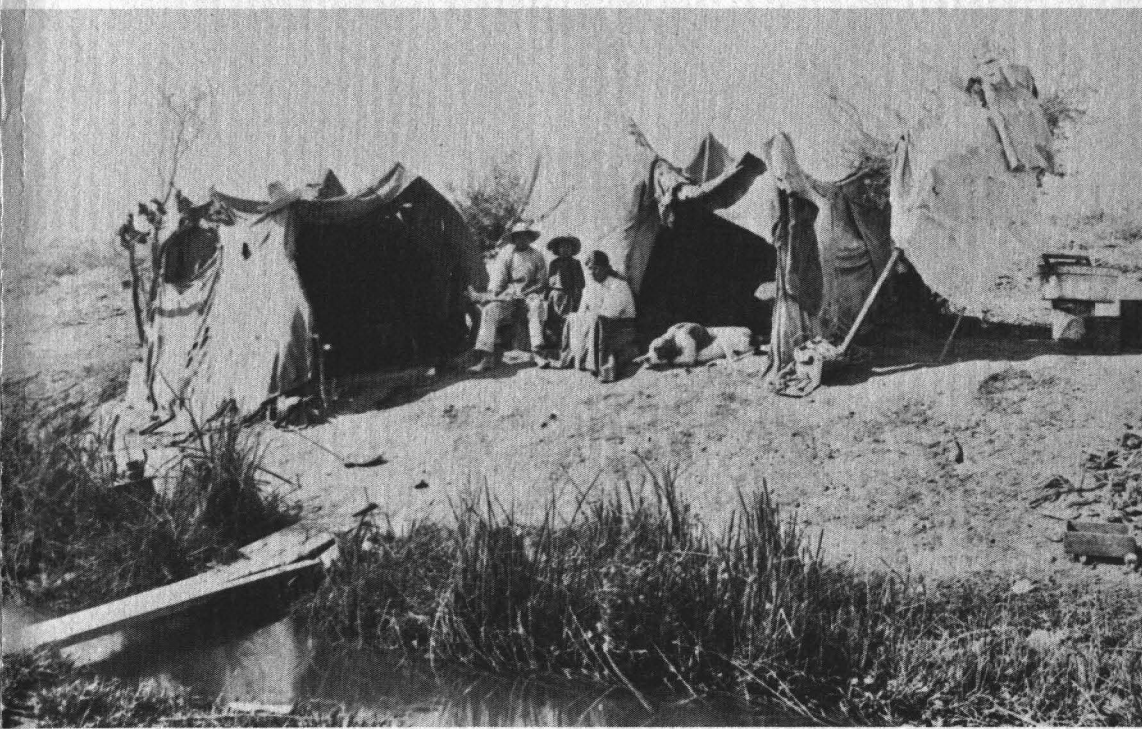


# Nevada Historical Society Quarterly



Summer • 1978

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The *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* publishes articles, interpretive essays, and documents which deal with the history of Nevada and of the Great Basin area. Particularly welcome are manuscripts which examine the political, economic, cultural, and constitutional aspects of the history of this region. Material submitted for publication should be sent to the *N.H.S. Quarterly*, 1555 E. Flamingo, 253, Las Vegas, Nevada 89109. Footnotes should be placed at the end of the manuscript, which should be typed double spaced. The evaluation process will take approximately six to ten weeks.

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# **The People Write Their History: The Inter-Tribal Council Project**

by Mary Rusco

*Nuwuvi: A Southern Paiute History.* (Reno: Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, 1976. 177 pp., maps, plates, notes, bibliography, appendices). *Newe: A Western Shoshone History.* (Reno: Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, 1976. 143 pp., maps, plates, notes, bibliography, appendices). *Numa: A Northern Paiute History.* (Reno: Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, 1976. 132 pp., maps, plates, notes, bibliography). Each volume is available from the ITC, 98 Colony Road, Reno 89512 for \$6.00.

WRITING HISTORY is a process of selecting, ordering, and usually interpreting accounts of the facts and events from a people's past. A few years ago the rising consciousness of ethnic identity and pride in this country led many of our schools to create new programs of ethnic studies. As part of this movement demands were heard from many ethnic groups for new histories and for the opportunity to tell their own story. When *Nuwuvi* was published by the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada early in 1976, it was announced as the first of a series of four histories "dealing with native Nevadans."<sup>1</sup> That this series can be considered part of the movement of rising ethnic awareness is evident from its brief introduction:

Since the arrival of the white man, Native American children have been taught the ways and accomplishments of the newcomers. Schools have presented our past from a foreign point of view . . . This history . . . will present the past of southern Nevada from the Nuwuvi point of view. Our elders have preserved much of the past by telling and retelling the events which have shaped our lives. No history can attain complete objectivity; it can only present a point of view, a particular way to talk and think about the events of the past. All events have more than one interpretation. *This is ours.*<sup>2</sup>

A fair evaluation of these books mandates that this purpose be understood and remembered. The books were written to fill a gap on the Nevada history bookshelf. They had to be written, according to the authors, not because all historians are racist or insensitive to "Indian life and culture" but to tell the story of a people's past as it is understood and remembered by themselves.

From this strictly limited point of view they can only be regarded as successful. They are among the first and have few competitors. But it would not be fair to leave it at that. They are not the only accounts of Nevada Indian history and culture, and they deserve to be evaluated in terms of their general quality and contribution to the history of Nevada and the West. Accordingly, I have set about to evaluate these short volumes on the following points: (1) quality of organization and presentation of material, including illustrations, documentation and scholarship; (2) how they inter-

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pret their past and how this differs from other historical accounts of the same events. Because they are part of a more extensive project, I will then briefly describe and comment on the History Project of the Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada.

Readers attuned to the tradition of individual scholarship are immediately struck by the blank space on the title page where the name of the author usually appears. No one is credited with authorship of *Nuwuvi* although the supervision of the History Project directors, Norman Rambeau and later Winona Holmes, is acknowledged. Editorial and technical assistance by the staff of the American West Center, University of Utah, are acknowledged and a long list of tribal members is singled out for "special thanks." This is also true for the other two volumes, except that authorship of specific sections of *Newe* is credited to Holmes, Larry Piffero, Mary Lou Moyle, Lillie Pete, Delores Conklin, Robert J. Eben and Michael Red Kane, all project staff or tribal members, and Beverly Crum, Richard Hart and Nancy Nagle, of the University of Utah; and Eben, Randy Emm and Dorothy Nez are credited with authorship of *Numa*. Since their names do not appear on the title page, it seems appropriate to cite the volumes as the work of Inter-Tribal Council (ITC). Clearly the authors intend to emphasize tribal collaboration over individual contribution.

Illustrations, including frontispieces for *Nuwuvi*, are by Dorothy Nez, and covers are by Ben Aleck. Maps are credited to several individuals. Photographs, which have been collected from many sources, are well-captioned, and include the names of many subjects. These captions justify the inclusion of several photographs which appear in other books, and are a major contribution of the History Project. The maps are included in the table of contents for each volume, but the lack of a similar list of plates is an annoying omission. The volumes are nonetheless well-illustrated.

Organization of the three volumes is chronological and similar topics are covered in each. Chapters of *Nuwuvi* are alternated with myths and legends originally collected by John Wesley Powell from Numic-speaking informants.<sup>3</sup> The other volumes each include one traditional tale. Numic words are used in chapter headings and throughout.

The systematic collection of photographs and information about them is part of an effort to record the oral history of Nevada Indians. In addition interviews (some in Numic) have been taped and transcribed. Government records and archives of major western libraries as well as basic historical and ethnological works were consulted.

The introduction to *Nuwuvi* promised a new interpretation. This was provided in two ways: in different versions of the same story and in the emphasis given to different events and actors. Most Nevada histories begin with a section on the culture of native groups and accounts of Indian-white relations during the exploration and settlement of the Great Basin by Spanish and Anglo-Americans. After 1900 native Nevadans are tacitly assumed to have been assimilated into the population. Even references to Indians' special status as members of an ethnic minority are presented from the view of the "majority."

These books differ in that the history of Numic people is not assumed to end with the establishment and settlement of reservations. From half to three-fourths of each book is devoted to accounts of tribal history after the beginning of the reservation. It is in these sections that a great deal of what is presented is otherwise unavailable except in the original records or as part of the oral tradition.

An example is the brief section in *Newe* on the Carlin Farms, an early reservation. It was established by Agent C. E. Bateman in 1875 on land then being farmed by Western Shoshone, and two years later was formally set aside as a reservation by an Executive Order on May 10, 1877. The reservation was short-lived. Four years after it was first established, the President issued a new order revoking the 1877 one, probably in response to protests from whites in Carlin and Elko. In contrast, the major work on the history of northeastern Nevada has one reference to the Carlin Farms:

Shortly after establishment of Duck Valley Reserve, Carlin Farms were set aside by Executive Order of May 10, 1877. The farms, located near Carlin, Nevada, contained 521 acres . . . .

By 1878 the agent in charge described Carlin Farms as: “. . . having advanced so rapidly as to surprise their most optimistic friends. Indians were industrious and energetic and extremely interested in becoming independent farmers. During the year a large quantity of agricultural implements, including a thresher and a cleaner, has been given out and this gave incentive to Indian's efforts. Their crops were larger this year than last, but due to exaggerated estimate given by the agent last year, statistics did not show the fact. In 1878 300 Indians at Carlin Farms engaged in agriculture.”

Reports of Indian agents frequently gave greatly exaggerated and untruthful accounts of conditions; the more cheerful and optimistic the report, the more secure the job of the agent became. The great success of Carlin Farms' report by agents illustrated the injustices inflicted upon Indians by the white man. After 20 months of operation, Carlin Farms Reservation was revoked January 16, 1879 and the land Indians had developed was sold to white people . . . .<sup>4</sup>

The account by Patterson, Ulph, and Goodwin is certainly favorable in tone to this early venture into subsistence farming by the *Newe*. The ITC section provides, however, many more specific details, including nearly one hundred names of individuals.<sup>5</sup>

Frustratingly brief as these books are, they offer more information on the current legal status of tribal groups and organizations than is readily available. A case in point is the curious and complicated legal status of the Cedar City Paiutes. This group is living on land purchased in 1925 and technically, at least, owned by the Church of the Latter-day Saints. Government plans to set aside trust land for them were never implemented, although for a short time after 1925, an agency was located in Cedar City to serve the Cedar City and Indian Peaks Paiute bands. After the agency was removed in the early 1930s, the Cedar City Paiutes were apparently overlooked by the government, and in 1953 they were not included when the special trust status of other Numic-speaking bands in

Utah was terminated. It was only some time later, when, according to Mayme Arni, tribal operations officer, of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, "someone in the Washington office was checking . . . and noted that the names of the Cedar City Paiutes were not on the terminated roll. At that time the BIA began services again . . ."<sup>6</sup>

Although the different status of the Cedar City Paiutes has been recognized, an historical explanation has not appeared in print until this work, even though Cedar City Paiutes were among the subjects of a study which attempted to measure the effects of termination and other factors by comparing members of the Cedar City and Indian Peaks bands in Cedar City with the Kaibab Paiutes.<sup>7</sup>

Sections of the books dealing with the pre-reservation period have much less to offer concerning the results of new research. The brief account of Escalante's journey into what is now southern Nevada cites the translation of the diary by Herbert E. Bolton. Five pages of *Nuwuvi* are devoted to the entries summarized by Bolton in forty-three pages in his lengthy introduction and summary of the diary.<sup>8</sup> The ITC version differs from Bolton's mainly by focusing entirely on Escalante's description of encounters with Numic people and in a shift of emphasis. The generosity of the Nuwuvi who supplied Escalante's party with food more than once is pointed out, and the "timidity" and reluctance of their ancestors to serve as guides are attributed to strategy.<sup>9</sup> Both are supported by entries in the diary, but do not receive the same attention from Bolton.

Considerable attention is given in *Numa* to accounts of hostile encounters with Anglo-Americans in the pre-reservation period. Most contacts between Anglo-Americans and Indians in the Great Basin were apparently friendly, or at least neutral. In the more densely populated areas inhabited by the Numa there was a disproportionate amount of violence. Among the best known incidents are the Walker-Bonneville party's attacks on Numa near the Humboldt Lakes. Primary sources are first-hand accounts by Stephen Meeks, Zenas Leonard, and George Nidever; all but Meeks' were written after the events. Washington Irving described the events, basing his version on Bonneville's notes.<sup>10</sup>

These versions differ widely on many critical details, such as the numbers killed, what and how much provocation there was, and Walker's own attitude and behavior. The Inter-Tribal Council interpretation is not the only one to judge Walker severely.<sup>11</sup> In the absence of reliable primary accounts, however, there is no sound basis on which to make a choice between alternate interpretations.

On the other hand, the Inter-Tribal Council's interpretation is not the only one which can be called biased. In a note referring to the Nidever account of the incidents, Ellison comments:

The Indians referred to were the Paiute or Digger Indians, who belonged to the Shoshonean stock. They were a degraded and pitiable people, dwelling in the desolate waste to the west. They were inferior in stature, and nearly always in a condition bordering on starvation. They subsisted in large part on ants, other insects, and vermin, and also upon roots, on which account they were called Root Diggers. They had no horses, and were armed

only with bow and arrow. They were usually friendly to the whites, perhaps through fear. They were harmless through incapacity to do much harm; but they were annoying through their disposition to theft.<sup>12</sup>

This example of ethnocentric or racist bias, which cannot be justified as scholarship, is part of the reason the Inter-Tribal Council gives for writing the histories. Lacking an extant oral tradition or new written sources for information on the Walker-Bonneville party attacks, the Inter-Tribal Council version of the events as unprovoked massacre lacks a solid foundation. Considered in the context of comments like the one quoted above, the rhetoric is understandable.

I do not know whether any passed-down accounts of the fur trapper/explorer period have been preserved. Apparently nothing in the interviews taped by the Inter-Tribal Council was relevant to this period. Later events have apparently been preserved through the telling. It is in the recording of this on tapes that the History Project has undoubtedly made its greatest contribution to the existing body of knowledge. An example is in the chapter on the Pyramid Lake War in *Numa*. This section begins with references to contemporary newspaper accounts and government documents, the sources tapped by Miller and Egan.<sup>13</sup> Most of what the Inter-Tribal Council account has to say about the battle and its aftermath is based on recent interviews.<sup>14</sup> The account is lively and well-written, and it would be interesting to see if the History Project interviews contain information which would justify a major reinterpretation and whether a more intensive interview program directed to this and other specific topics would be feasible. A defect in these books is that they attempt to cover too much. Their scholarship would undoubtedly be improved by the selection of specific, limited problems for future research.

The Inter-Tribal Council History Project, funded by grants from the Donner Foundation and the Research and Cultural Development Section of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has collected significant data on the history of native Nevadans. These books, a series of maps, small local interpretive exhibits and some slide-illustrated lectures have been among its accomplishments. It is hoped we will hear more from them in the future.

## Notes

1. Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Nuwuvi: A Southern Paiute History*, p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
4. Edna B. Patterson, Louise A. Ulph and Victor Goodwin, *Nevada's Northeast Frontier*, Western Printing and Publishing Company, Sparks, 1969, pp. 47-48.
5. Inter-Tribal Council of Nevada, *Newe: A Western Shoshone History*, pp. 59-68.
6. Statement of Mayme Arni quoted in *Nuwuvi*, p. 132.
7. Douglas C. Braithwaite, "Developing Political Power in Two Southern Paiute Communities," in *Native American Politics: Power Relationships in the Western Great Basin Today*, Ruth M. Houghton, ed. (Reno, Nev., Bureau of Governmental Research, 1973), pp. 1-7.
8. Herbert E. Bolton, *Pageant in the Wilderness: The Story of the Escalante Expedition to the Interior Region, 1776*, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1950.
9. *Nuwuvi*, pp. 24-26.
10. Statement by Meek in the *Jonesborough, Tenn. Sentinel*, March 8, 1837, summarized by Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of the Pacific States of North America*, Vol. XX: *Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888*; Zenas Leonard, *The Adventures of Zenas Leonard, Furtrader*, edited by John C. Ewers, University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1969; William Henry Ellison, *The Life and Adventures of George Nidever (1802-1883)*, edited by William Henry Ellison, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1937; Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A. in the Rocky Mountains and the Far West*.
11. Irving's version is highly critical of Walker, although Leonard and Nidever are not.
12. Ellison, p. 103, note 74.
13. William C. Miller, "The Pyramid Lake Indian War of 1860, Part I" in *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly*, I(1): 37-53, and *Part II*, I(2): 98-113, Ferol Egan, *Sand in a Whirlwind: The Paiute Indian War of 1860*, Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.
14. Inter-Tribal Council, *Numa*, pp. 25-36.