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Introduction

The Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian in Santa Fe, Santa County, New Mexico was listed in the National Register of Historic Places on December 18, 1990. The nomination identifies the significance of the museum under National Register Criteria A, B, and C in the areas of Architecture and Ethnic Heritage: Native American. The nomination also identifies as significant the museum's association with Mary Cabot Wheelwright, William Penhallow Henderson, and Hastiín Klah. The original nomination provides extensive documentation on the role of the Navajo medicine man Hastiín Klah and his collaboration with Mary Cabot Wheelwright and architect William Penhallow Henderson in the conceptualization, design, and construction of the Wheelwright Museum. Biographical evidence is provided substantiating the significance of Klah's life, his role within the Navajo community as a medicine man, and his achievements as a weaver and a sand painter. The nomination describes Klah's fall from a horse, which resulted in his career as a medicine man. A medicine man performed the Wind Chant over him, and he eventually recovered. In the process Klah memorized the prayers and procedures of the ceremony. His family determined that he was destined to be a medicine man himself and devoted its resources to support his training. The nomination adds that "he was also learning to weave along with his sister and nieces."

This additional documentation provides information on the gender status of Hastiín Klah and how this shaped his role in founding the Wheelwright Museum. This documentation supports Criterion A in the area of Ethnic Heritage: Native American and Criterion B because of the museum's association with Hastiín Klah. It provides new evidence regarding his alternative gender status, a social role that is a distinct feature of Native American heritage. Finally, this additional background expands the significance of the Wheelwright Museum as a site where the story of an extraordinary individual in Native American history and the tradition he represents can be told.

Additional Information

The unusual nature of Klah's dual career as a medicine man and a weaver is not addressed in the original National Register documentation. In Navajo culture the performance of healing ceremonies is nearly always a role for men, while only women wove blankets. The fact that Klah was trained in the occupations of both men and women is directly related to a special status he occupied, a distinct social and religious role that has been characterized as an alternative or third gender. This additional documentation amplifies Klah's third party gender in his life and work at the Wheelwright Museum, which has been the subject of recent scholarship.

This aspect of Klah's identity was first reported in the anthropological literature as early as the 1930s (Hill 1935; Reichard 1944a), but the subject has been seriously studied only in the past twenty-five years, and much of this research has been published since the certification of the 1990 nomination. This research includes biographical studies of Klah's life and re-evaluations of his contributions in relation to the role he occupied (Roscoe 1987b; 1988a; 1988b; 1998), as well as comprehensive surveys that have

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documented diverse but comparable roles throughout North America (Williams 1986, Roscoe 1987a, 1991, 1998; Lang 1998). The information presented here not only augments Klah's historical significance, it adds new significance to the museum as an historical site with a special link to the story of Native American gender diversity.

The source of the account of Klah's horse-riding accident cited in the 1990 nomination is Franc Newcomb's biography (1964). The full passage includes the following explanation of how Klah was able to pursue both men's and women's occupations:

It was during this period of invalidism that Klah was discovered to be a hermaphrodite. This accident of birth placed him in a very special category among his family and his contemporaries. The Navahos believed him to be honored by the gods and to possess unusual mental capacity combining both male and female attributes. He was expected to master all the knowledge, skill, and leadership of a man and also all of the skills, ability, and intuition of a woman. Klah during his lifetime lived up to these expectations in every way (1964: 97).

The Navajo term for possessing both male and female attributes is *nádleeḥ*, a word that can be used in reference to a physically hermaphroditic or intersexed individual or animal, but has much broader application as well that cuts across categories distinct in Western terminology. It denotes a social role for individuals who engage in cross- or mixed-sex occupations and who combine the temperaments of both men and women along with traits unique to their status. The term *nádleeḥ* is most often applied to males, but it is sometimes applied to females who cross or combine men's and women's activities. (The term *dilbaa'*, "warrior girl," is also used [Thomas 160]). In mythological accounts, the relativized form, *nádleeḥí*, is used in reference to various spirit beings with the meaning "the one who is changing" or "the one who changes time and again" in the sense of returning cyclically to a previous state (Haile 1978: 166; Young and Morgan 1980: 525; Thomas 1978: 166; Epple 1991).

Although some *nádleeḥ* may have been intersexed, in Klah's case it is unlikely that such a condition would not have been noticed earlier in his childhood. (Reichard reported an account that claims Klah was emasculated as a child, but the event is placed in a period before Klah was born [Reichard [1974: 141]). The missionary and anthropologist Berard Haile, who saw Klah undressed during a sweat lodge ceremony, is reported to have said that he was anatomically normal (Roscoe 1998: 255).

Because the usage of the term by Navajo people does not correspond to any single English category, translations of *nádleeḥ* are often conflicting and inappropriate, and they have varied over time, reflecting changing Western understandings and judgments of sexuality and gender roles. In the early twentieth century, anthropologists began using psychiatric and medical terms to describe *nádleeḥ*, such as "transvestite," "homosexual," and "transsexual" (see Haile 1950: 137-38). More recently, the relevance of terms like "gay" and "lesbian" has been debated. Thomas reports that in reservation settings, contemporary *nádleeḥ* make a distinction between themselves and Navajo who identify as gay and lesbian, but this distinction is often not made by Navajo living in urban settings, who have had extensive exposure to Anglo-American sexual identities (1997: 163). More recently, a consensus has developed

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that *nádleeh* status represents a gender role distinct from that of both men and women; it has been termed a “third gender” or an “alternative gender”; while Navajo females who combine or cross men’s and women’s social roles represent a fourth gender (Thomas 1997, Epple 1997, Roscoe 1998). The term “two spirit” has emerged as the preferred way of referring generally to diverse genders across Native American societies.

A wide range of evidence exists from more than a century of ethnographic research regarding the *nádleeh* status, including the observations of non-Navajo and accounts from Navajo cultural experts (for a full listing of source materials see “Tribal Index of Alternative Gender Roles and Sexuality” in Roscoe 1998). As in Klah’s case, a disposition to be *nádleeh* typically became apparent to the individual and his/her family in childhood. Male *nádleeh* specialized in women’s activities including farming, herding sheep, gathering food, weaving, knitting, basketry, pottery, and leatherwork. Some, like Klah, became *hataalii*, “singers” or medicine men. For all these reasons, families welcomed a *nádleeh* in their midst. Children with *nádleeh* tendencies were given special care and encouragement. According to Hill, “As they grew older and assumed the character of *nadle* [sic], this solicitude and respect increased, not only on the part of their families but from the community as a whole” (1935: 274).

Nádleeh were often given responsibility for managing family property and acting as the head of the household. They supervised agricultural as well as domestic work. When they combined men’s and women’s occupations, they were often among the wealthier members of the tribe. In pre-reservation times individuals with *nádleeh* tendencies consistently received religious training. In fact, as Thomas suggests, *nádleeh* status was viewed by traditional Navajo more as a sacred occupational position than a secular social role (1997: 165).

Before the reservation period, *nádleeh* often signaled their gender status by distinctive styles of dress. Matthews, writing in the 1890s, reported that *nádleeh* dressed as women (1897: 217). Others reported that they wore either men’s or women’s clothing (Reichard 1969: 150). Some *nádleeh*, such as “Charlie the Weaver,” photographed by James Mooney in 1893 (see Roessel 1980: 95, 96, 152, 207) and A. C. Vroman in 1895 (Seaver Center for Western History Research, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, neg. no. V-714), appear to have alternated between a unique style of dress, neither that of men nor women, and women’s dress. Kinábahí, photographed by anthropologist Willard Hill in the 1930s, routinely dressed as a woman (Hill 1935; see also James 1937: 85-86.). According to Haile, “the *nádleeh* who retains male dress and the one who prefers female dress are not differentiated in name” (1978: 164).

Hastín Klah is not reported to have crossed-dressed, except possibly on a ceremonial occasions. According to Reichard, “He dressed in men’s clothes at least in recent years and there was nothing feminine about him unless an indescribable gentleness be so called. The reasons the Navajo called him ‘one-who-has-been-changed’ [i.e., *nádleeh*] were chiefly that he wove blankets and was not interested in women” (1944: 23).

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Most *nádleeh* formed relationships with members of their own sex, although some married women. One Navajo told Hill, “If they marry men, it is just like two men working together” (Hill 1935: 276). However, because *nádleeh* were viewed as occupying a distinct gender, their relationships with men were not viewed as homosexual. Regarding Klah, there is little evidence concerning his personal relationships. Reichard, Newcomb, and Wheelwright were clearly protective of his reputation at a time when homosexuality and gender variation were highly stigmatized in Anglo-American society. However, Navajo tradition does not remember Klah as being celibate. One medicine man has reported that Klah had sexual relations with men throughout his life, while descendants of his relatives believe that he may have been married to a woman when he was a young man (Bruce Bernstein, pers. comm., 18 November 1987).

In the 1930s, Hill recorded comments from a variety of elders that underscore the respect traditionally accorded to *nádleeh*:

If there were no *nadle*, the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left, the horses, sheep, and Navaho would all go. They are leaders just like President Roosevelt.

A *nadle* around the hogan will bring good luck and riches.

You must respect a *nadle*. They are, somehow, sacred and holy (Hill 1935: 274; see also Haile 1978: 162).

The presence of multiple gender roles in Navajo society is deeply connected to the spiritual outlook of the Navajo people. Sacred mythology relates the origin of the four genders (Thomas in Nibley and Martin 2010), and in a key episode of the Navajo origin myth (*alnaashii adeesdeelgi*, “where the people moved opposite each other”), one or more *nádleeh* play a central role when the men and women decide to live apart. In Haile’s version, the men ask a *nádleeh* to join them, and the *nádleeh* confidently lists all the female skills he can offer:

“I myself plant, I myself make mill stones, that’s settled,” he said. “I myself make baking stones. I make pots myself and earthen bowls; gourds I plant myself. I make water jugs,” he said, “and stirring sticks and brooms,” he said” (Haile 1981: 19; see also Zolbrod 1984: 60-1, 354).

The *nádleeh* serves as an adviser and a mediator, eventually facilitating a reconciliation between the men and women. Traditional *nádleeh* performed a similar function by serving as go-betweens in arranging marriages and affairs (Hill 1935: 275).

Yet another mythological tradition concerning *nádleeh* status involves the deity known as Begochíidín. Kenneth Luckert has argued that Begochíidín is among the oldest gods of the Navajo (1975: 169, 176-77; see also Haile 1978: 161). He has power over game animals and hunters, but he is also a trickster. As such, he is pansexual, and many of the stories about him are quite bawdy. Luckert believes that a

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change in the character of Begochíí́ín occurred when the ancestors of the Navajo shifted from hunting and gathering to a combination of horticulture and herding following their arrival in the Four Corners region (placed between 1000 and 1400 C.E.) Begochíí́ín came to be credited not only with the creation of game animals but domestic animals as well, and with providing the first seeds. He is the inventor of pottery and identified as the first *nádleeh*.

That the figure of Begochíí́ín held special significance for Klah is suggested by the prominent role this deity plays in two myths told by him—the story associated with the Hail Chant and the Navajo emergence myth. As Klah describes him, “His hair was shining and little rays of light shone and sparkled from him” (Klah 1942: 112). Begochíí́ín was fair-skinned, with red or yellow hair and blue eyes, and dressed as a woman (Klah 1942: 39; Klah 1951: 1; Reichard 1983: 387). Others have described him as an old man, or as a boy who turns into a man, or as alternating between old and young—much as the term *nádleehí*, or “the one who is changing,” suggests (for a full listing of sources see Roscoe 1998, Table 3.1).

These mythological accounts involving *nádleeh* resonate with core beliefs in the Navajo worldview, which emphasize interconnection, change, motion, and cyclical processes. This emphasis on motion and change characterizes all of Navajo language, philosophy, and art (Epple 1997; Witherspoon 1977). Gender is attributed to everything, but the interconnectedness of everything means that maleness and femaleness are properties of every object and every being. In myths and in sandpaintings, male and female gods are typically portrayed as a symmetrical pair; both are always present; one cannot exist in the absence of the other. *Nádleeh*, in this regard, merely represent that special case in which these qualities occur within a single being rather than through a pairing of two. From this perspective, it might be better to describe Navajo culture as having a dynamic gender system rather than multiple genders in the sense of fixed categories (Epple 1997; 1998).

As one of Hill’s informants explained, “A boy may act like a girl until he is eighteen or twenty-five; then he may turn into a man or he may not. Girls do the same thing” (1935: 273). In fact, certain religious observances provide all Navajos with a chance to assume a different gender position. During the Yeibichai ceremony, for example, the mask of the female Yé’ii god is held before the face of each initiate, who looks through the triangular eyes of the mask. Together these two triangles form a diamond—the symbol of Changing Woman, the Navajo Earth Mother. What the initiates learn to see is a female view of the world (Matthews 1902: 119; Haile 1996: 55; Witherspoon 1994: 367-70).

For traditional Navajo people, the mythological and ceremonial associations of *nádhleeh* mean that this is not a subject for everyday conversation, and they are often reluctant to discuss it outside the family or tribe. According to Thomas, “The majority of traditional Navajo families almost never speak the word *nádhleeh* because of an appreciation for the power inherent in speech and careful usage of the word in appropriate context and by appropriate individuals” (1997: 159). This reluctance to discuss a role imbued with sacred meaning, combined with the influence of Western culture, is one reason that the traditional role of *nádhleeh* “is not widely known by young Navajos who would fit into these categories” (Thomas 1997:162).

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Whether young Navajo have access to historical information about Hastín Klah as a *nádhleeh* can have significant implications for themselves, their families and communities, and for those who work with Native American youth as educators, counselors, and health providers. The 2010 film *Two Spirits* relates the story of a young Navajo named Fred Martinez, Jr. as a teenager in Cortez, Colorado, Fred expressed many of the mix-gender traits and temperament typical of a *nádhleeh* (Nibley and Martin). In the film his mother recalls, “He’s the kind of person so willing to give what he has. If he seen somebody, a boy that has a shoe that’s not good... ‘I got lots of shoes, I got lots of shirts. Let me give this to them.’ He would give it to them.” Fred wore makeup and often used female names. His mother supported him, but living off the reservation he had no access to traditional extended family support systems or mentoring. Nor did school officials intervene when he was subjected to bullying. When his mother told him there was a Navajo term for boys like him, *nádhleeh*, Fred embraced it enthusiastically. But tragically, as the film relates, he was murdered in 2001 by a young Anglo man in a violent hate crime.

Klah’s status as a traditional *nádhleeh* was the basis for his unique achievements. It influenced his artistic and cultural contributions in significant ways:

Medicine man

Whereas most medicine men learned one or two ceremonies in a lifetime, Klah mastered eight (Faris 1990: 87). The decision of his family to pool resources in support of his extensive training under different medicine men was based not only on his evident aptitude and interest in learning complex chants and procedures, but on the determination that he was *nádhleeh*. This distinct temperament and its resonance with Navajo mythology meant that he brought special talents to the practice of traditional healing. Since he did not form his own family, and with the resources of his extended kin, he was free to specialize in the study of religious traditions and to master a large body of ceremonies.

This, in turn, enabled Klah to become a synthesizer of Navajo traditions and beliefs. His familiarity with so many ceremonies led him to seek the continuity of his tribe’s decentralized system of knowledge. In explaining these ceremonies to Mary Cabot Wheelwright, he compared them to a group of trees, rather than a single tree with branches (MS 1-1-128: 37). As Reichard wrote, “After hours of thought and discussion scattered through a lifetime he had come to the conclusion that the ultimate in Navajo attainment was ‘universal harmony,’ a state of being with no tangibility. This is a notion of oneness and in it all elements in the universe are submerged” (1944: 24). Reichard observed, “He rationalized many phases of religion and was much more aware of consistency in our sense than any other Navaho I ever met” (1983: 142). The ceremonies Klah mastered are also consistent with the traditional expectations for a *nádhleeh*. They were all cultural or peace chants—distinct from ceremonies associated with warfare (Newcomb 1964: 108).

Master Weaver

Klah’s *nádhleeh* status was also a precondition for his training in the women’s art of weaving and his rise to master weaver. Here again his unique standing allowed him to develop his skills to a high level.

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Whereas women's work at the loom was frequently interrupted by other tasks essential to their roles as mothers and wives, Klah was able to invest significant time and resources to his craft. He was able to revive traditional weaving techniques in advance of the renaissance in Navajo weaving that has transformed it from a craft into a fine art, which has become an important source of income for many Navajo.

Above all, Klah's most significant and controversial innovation—his large-scale tapestries with sacred designs—was only possible because of his ability to combine his skills in the women's art of weaving with the knowledge acquired as a medicine man. He produced these tapestries despite significant opposition from many Navajo, though he believed he could protect himself and his family from the spiritual dangers inherent in such a project. This underscores his confidence in his own powers, which had been bestowed through his *nádhleeh* status and knowledge as a medicine man.

Cultural ambassador

Steeped in the traditions and history of his people, Klah nonetheless formed lasting friendships with Anglo-Americans. These friendships enabled him to travel to white urban centers where he could observe American society in much greater depth than the majority of his contemporaries. In his interactions with Anglo-Americans he explored the differences between Navajo philosophy and Western culture and religion. Klah clearly saw himself as a teacher, offering insights to the Americans he encountered drawn from a Navajo worldview. In all these ways, he functioned as a go-between, a cultural ambassador between two very different worlds, which in his own lifetime had been in violent conflict. This pattern as well has deep resonance with the social and mythical expectations for a *nádhleeh*.

Klah's deepest friendships were with women—Franc Newcomb and Mary Cabot Wheelwright. These relationships, between an Indian man and white women at a time when America was still racially segregated, would have been much more difficult to form were he not a “bachelor” who “was not interested in women.”

Diverse gender roles and identities were once widespread in Native American societies. They have been documented in every region, among every type of social organization, and in every major language group of North America. The features of these “two-spirit” roles varied significantly between tribes as did the status they held. In some tribal communities, like the Navajo, such individuals could achieve wide respect and prominence as artists, healers, medicine people, warriors, and leaders. The Zuni *lhamana* We'wha excelled in pottery and weaving (a men's occupation at Zuni), formed a lasting friendship with the early anthropologist Mathilda Coxe Stevenson, and travelled to Washington, D.C., calling on President Grover Cleveland in 1886. The Crow *boté* Ohchiish was known for his skills in leatherwork and beading. He made the largest tipi in Crow memory, the lodge of Chief Iron Bull, and in 1876 he joined the Battle of the Rosebud and killed an enemy, earning his name which means Finds-Them-and-Kills-Them.

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Mary Wheelwright’s description of Klah reveals a deeply reflective man who, in the course of a lifetime, had drawn profound insights from his tribe’s beliefs and traditions:

I grew to respect and love him for his real goodness, generosity—and holiness, for there is no other word for it. He never had married, having spent twenty-five years studying not only the ceremonies he gave, but all the medicine lore of the tribe. He helped at least eight of his nieces and nephews with money and goods. . . . When I knew him he never kept anything for himself. It was hard to see him almost in rags at his ceremonies, but what was given him he seldom kept, passing it on to someone who needed it. . . .

Our civilization and miracles he took simply without much wonder, as his mind was occupied with his religion and helping his people. It was wonderful to travel with him, as he knew the ceremonial names and legends of all the mountains, rivers and places, and the uses and associations of plants and stones. Everything was the outward form of the spirit world that was very real to him (in Klah 1942: 11-13).

The life of Hastín Klah exemplifies the extent to which individuals who mixed genders can succeed in a society where gender is viewed as dynamic and conditional. His *nádleeh* status is an important aspect of Klah’s art and a critical component in understanding his overall contributions to the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian.

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