

MS-221

The Museum of Northern Arizona
Harold S. Colton Memorial Library
3101 N. Fort Valley Road
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
(928)774-5213 ext. 256

Title

Harrison Begay collection

Dates

1956

Extent

1 framed certificate

Name of Creator(s)

République Française, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale

Biographical History

Harrison Begay (15 Nov 1917 -) was born *Haskay Yahne Yah*, "Warrior Who Walked Up to His Enemy" or "The Wandering Boy" in White Cone, Arizona, on the Navajo Reservation. There is some speculation that Begay was actually born in 1914, but there are no records to substantiate this claim. Begay was born into a family of sheep herders; his mother died when he was 7 and shortly thereafter he was sent to the government boarding school at Fort Wingate, where he heard English spoken for the first time. After running away, he eventually returned to school to study at the Fort Defiance Indian School in New Mexico, and later Tohatchi Indian School. He graduated from high school in 1939 as salutatorian.

After graduation, Begay began to develop his distinctive artistic style at the Santa Fe Indian School under the tutelage of Dorothy Dunn, who taught many other famous Navajo artists. Begay is most well known for his watercolors and silk screen prints and his smoothly-brushed forms placed flat on the picture plane.

In 1940, Begay married Ramona Espinosa; that same year he attended Black Mountain College in Blueridge, North Carolina, to study architecture. A year later he enrolled in Phoenix Junior College in Arizona. He also created murals for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) during the Depression.

Begay enlisted in the army during WWII and served from 1942-1945. He was trained as a radio technician and was stationed in Iceland and Europe and was involved in the Normandy Campaign. In 1945, Begay and his wife divorced and he stayed in Colorado to study under Denver artist, Gerald Curtis Delano. He returned in to Arizona in 1947 and was given space to paint at Clay Lockett's Arts and Crafts Shop in Tucson.

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Over the years, Begay has received worldwide recognition and many awards for his work, including the *Palmes d'Academiqes*, a special commendation from the French government, for his contributions to the arts. He continues to paint today and in 2003 received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Southwestern Association of Indian Artists. His portrait is currently featured in the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of the American Indian.

Scope and Content

This collection consists of one oversized document, framed and under glass, issued by République Française, Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale to Harrison Begay naming him "Officier d'Academie," 4 August, 1956.

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Languages and Scripts of the Materials

French

Custodial History

Given to Clay Locket by Harrison Begay, after which Clay Locket loaned it to the Museum of Northern Arizona for safekeeping. The document was originally accessioned with the Clay Locket collection in 1976.

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The collection has been on permanent loan through Clay Locket since 1976

Related Archival Materials

Works from his 75-year career are in permanent museum collections around the world including the following:

National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum
The Museum of Western Art
Desert Caballeros Western Museum
Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
Great Plains Art Museum
Smithsonian Institute
Philbrook Museum of Art
Southwest Museum, Pasadena
The Museum of Northern Arizona
Gilcrease Museum

Description Control

Finding aid written by Eileen Hogan using *DACS*, 18 October 2010

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Item #	Item Description	Date(s)	Extent	Box/Folder
MS-221-1	"Officier d'Academie" certificate	1956	1 framed document	