

# HOPI

## Scenes of Everyday Life



MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA

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by Robert Breunig and Michael Lomatuway'ma

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Emry Kopta and Tom Pavatea in front of Pavatea's Trading Post



# THE PHOTOGRAPHS OF EMRY KOPTA

"Kopti" was the name they called him. His life, like the lives of so many others, was transformed by a single visit to the Hopi mesas. Returning to Los Angeles after an initial trip to the Hopi villages in 1912 in the company of fellow artists Lon Megargee and William Leigh, Emry Kopta packed his belongings and moved to First Mesa. There, he set up a studio in the small stone building that was the home and store of Hopi trader Tom Pavatea. For the next decade, he would work and live in the newly developing settlement of Polacca.

Emry Kopta was a sculptor, and in his studio he created detailed and sensitive terra cotta images of the Hopi people he knew. He also rendered busts of Dr. Jesse Walter Fewkes and Walter Hough, early anthropologists working in the region.

Kopta's years of residence at Polacca gave him an intimate view of Hopi life—a view that he recorded with both his artwork and his camera.

There were many photographers at the Hopi mesas in Kopta's era and earlier. Drawn by the drama of the Snake Dance and the various kachina dances, Edward Curtis, Adam Clark Vroman, and Joe Mora all recorded the rich ceremonial life of the Hopi. Kopta also recorded the ceremonies. But his day-in, day-out experiences at Polacca on a year-round basis gave him a deeper view of Hopi culture. Thus, more than the others, he left us a picture of what seemed commonplace at the time—scenes of everyday life. These photographs show us how the Hopi lived in the early decades of this century. We see an ancient culture already in the midst of change as new tools, clothing, and methods of work made their way to the mesas.

Today, there are Hopi men and women who still remember "Kopti." Their remembrances capture the impressions of the children they were at the time. All remember, for example, that he had a wooden leg and walked with a stiff gait.

Several remarked on how they would know he was in the village because he often sang kachina songs as he walked along. One recalled him as a determined, emotional, and headstrong man. A champion of Indian rights, he evidently bumped heads with the Indian Service officials determined to assimilate the Hopi into Anglo society. Agent Daniel wrote in 1922, "Emry Kopta, an itinerant artist, has been a disturbing element among the Hopis at Polacca. He has been eliminated, having left the reservation June 15, 1922." Daniel also recommended that "no permit should be issued to artists and literary people for longer than ninety days, subject to renewal."

On a trip to Phoenix in 1922, Kopta met Anna Phelps, a teacher at the Indian School. They were married in Flagstaff and in a second ceremony at Polacca, where they were married in the Hopi way by the Pavatea family. After their wedding, they settled in Phoenix, where Kopta continued his career as a sculptor. One of his most notable achievements was the decorative Art-Deco blocks that adorn the Arizona Biltmore in Phoenix. Kopta died in 1953, and Anna later donated his photographs to the Museum of the American Indian in New York and to the Museum of Northern Arizona. To the New York institution, she sent the ceremonial photographs—believing that they were too sensitive for repository in Arizona. The Museum of Northern Arizona received the photographs showing the daily life of the Hopi.

# AN AGRARIAN ECONOMY

## Hopi Agriculture

Agriculture has been one of the mainstays of the Pueblo Indians for over fifteen hundred years. One of the Pueblo peoples, the Hopi, have been farming in the high, arid mesa country of northern Arizona for many generations. Although the principal food crops were (and are) corn, beans, and squash, the Hopi supplemented this diet until fairly recently with wild plant foods and hunting.

Cultivating in Hopi country was not easy. Precipitation was very low—ranging from ten to thirteen inches a year, depending on elevation. Moisture came in the form of winter snows or rain and short, heavy, sporadic, and often violent summer thunderstorms. The growing season in Hopi country was relatively short—ranging from 155 to 170 days a year. Therefore, late

or early frosts could threaten crops. In addition, strong spring winds, hail, insects, rodents (especially rabbits), and crows all posed dangers to the plants.

Successful farming in this environment required a sophisticated knowledge of the land, the plants, and the climate. Hopi farmers employed a variety of strategies to maximize their chances for success.

One strategy was to plant in a variety of locations using different farming methods. These included floodwater farming, sand dune (or dry) farming, and spring irrigation. Floodwater farming took advantage of water that fell over a large area before flowing through washes, or arroyos, concentrating large amounts of moisture in certain locations.







*Left:* This man, standing between wagon tracks, is probably preparing to plant some seeds. To plant corn, men traditionally started from the south side of the field and worked north—and from west to east. This was custom: “Once someone did it north to south but was stopped,” said one observer. The man is wearing the light, loose cotton clothing that was the style in those earlier days.

*Above:* The *sooya*, or greasewood digging stick, was a basic Hopi farming tool. Seeds for planting were carried in a bag called a *tukpu*.

*Inset:* This man is tending to a squash plant, possibly checking for cutworms. The stone slab behind the plant forms a windbreak.

*Right:* This closeup of the windbreak shows the individual care that was essential in ensuring a healthy and productive harvest.







Dry farms, planted in the dunes at the sides of the Hopi mesas, relied upon the moisture-retaining abilities of the area's sandy soils. Winter moisture from snow was held in these soils well into spring—nourishing the young plants until summer storms came.

Springs formed by water seeping from sandstone formations were located near the bottom of the mesas. Water from good springs could be used to irrigate small garden plots built up behind rock walls on the slopes of the mesa.

By using these different methods to optimize his chances for success, the Hopi farmer was betting that the given environmental characteristics of any particular year would enable crops to grow in at least several of these locations.

Farmers also planted crops at a variety of times. The first corn seeds were planted in mid-April to produce corn crops for the late July Going-Home ceremony. The bulk of the crops were planted, however, from mid-May through late June. If a late frost ruined the early crops, the Hopi simply replanted. Early planting was a hedge against an early autumn frost. A late frost and an early frost in the same year could, of course, spell disaster.

*Above, Opposite:* The plants in this photograph are growing in one of three types of Hopi cornfields. This field is a dry farm. Therefore, the only water used to nourish these plants will come directly from rainfall. The windbreaks seen above are made of sticks of dried rabbit brush, *sivaapi*, placed in the ground to slow the drifting of the sand and to protect the green shoots of young plants from the wind. Today, these picturesque breaks have been replaced (in many cases) with tin cans, pieces of plastic, and, in at least one field, used acoustical tile.

*Above:* This is another Hopi dry farm located in a sand depression. Rainfall from a summer storm will collect here and nourish the nearby corn plants.

*Left Inset:* "This man is a good farmer—he has no weeds" is how one Hopi man described this scene. The corn on the stalk is ripe and ready for picking.

*Right:* This field is below Walpi at First Mesa. The corn plants are located on an alluvial fan—an area where runoff water from the mesa tops slows and spreads out over a wide area.













*Above:* This structure is called a *kiisi*, or shade. It was erected near a cornfield to serve as a daytime shade from the hot sun. Since crows often attack the crops in their later stages of growth, someone must remain on hand to keep watch.

*Left:* The Hopi practiced irrigation on a small scale at gardens located below springs. This is an irrigated garden at Hotevilla. Here, women grew onions, chilis, beans, corn, coxcomb, and sunflowers in small, individually owned plots. Water from a spring-fed pool is poured into an irrigation ditch that flows into the garden. The ditch is dammed up next to the plot to be watered, thus diverting the water into the garden while another person watches the plot and shouts up a command to stop when it is well watered. Different clan groups use the garden on different days. Individuals line up to use the garden on a "first come" basis. If the water at a spring should become depleted, irrigation stops until the pool is recharged. Traditionally, the springs were cleaned annually by the villagers under the supervision of certain *kachinas*.

*Left Inset:* The woman in this picture is using a large pottery canteen (*wikoro*) to irrigate her garden, which is on the slope of a hill near a spring. The sandstone rock wall retains the soil in her garden plot. These gardens belong to different matrilineages within the village and are tended by the women. Today, similar gardens are still watered at the village of Hotevilla although metal and plastic buckets have replaced the *wikoro*.





*Kanelkiki, or sheep's pens*

## Livestock

In addition to their agricultural labor, Hopi men tended the livestock introduced by the Spanish in the 1600s. Sheep were most plentiful, but the Hopi also raised cattle, goats, burros, horses, pigs, and chickens on or near the mesas.

The sheep were penned in stone enclosures called *kanelkiki*, or sheep's pens. These structures usually were located near the villages to protect the animals from coyotes and (in the old days) raiding Navajos.

In the past, sheep supplied both meat and wool for woven blankets, dresses, and belts. The ever-resourceful Hopi even used the brain of the sheep to cure the *piiki* stones used to cook the Hopi wafer bread.

By the 1930s, serious soil erosion problems caused primarily by overgrazing in the fragile high desert country of the Colorado Plateau created ever-deepening washes in run-off areas. The federal government forced the Hopi and their Navajo neighbors to reduce their flocks drastically in an effort to mitigate the problem. Today, few Hopi raise sheep, relying on the nearby Navajos and local supermarkets to supply them with mutton.



These sheep





probably are being driven from stone corrals located over the side of the mesa to a trail that will lead to pasture areas.

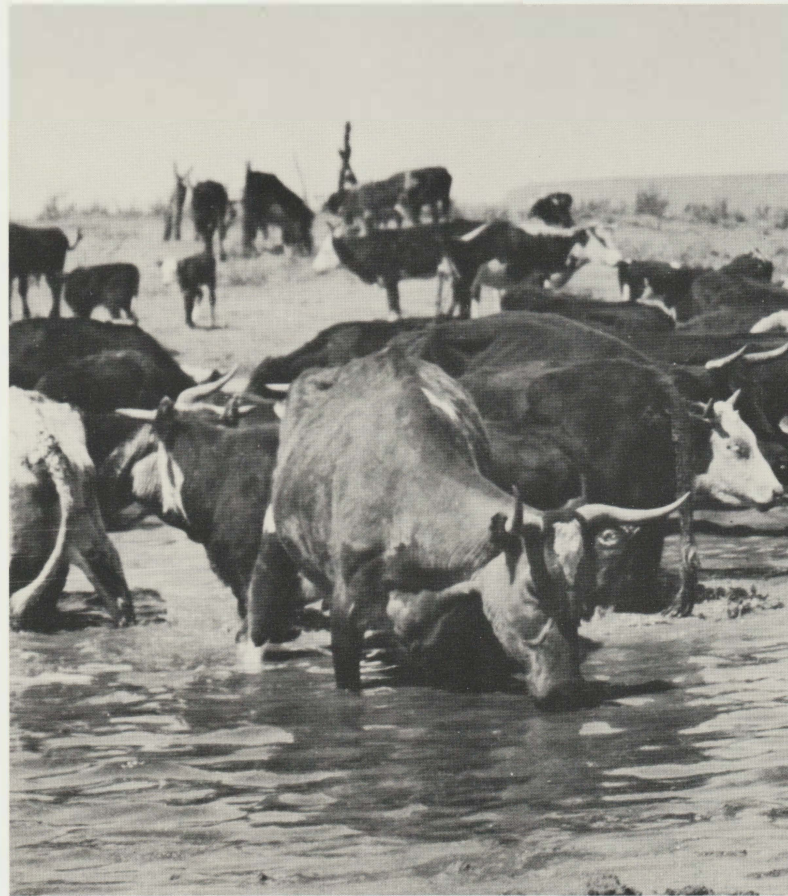




*Above:* Burros like this one were once ubiquitous at the Hopi mesas. On the back of the burro is a *ho'apu*, a wicker basket made of squawbrush. A hobble (in the man's left hand) was used to restrict the burro's movement during grazing.

*Above, Opposite:* Goats, like sheep, were penned in stone enclosures near the villages.

*Right:* Cattle and horses were important additions to the Hopi agrarian lifestyle after their introduction by the Spanish in the seventeenth century.









## Harvesting and Processing

After the first frost of autumn, the corn plants stopped growing. The corn then was allowed to dry on the stalk until harvested in mid-to-late October. At that point, the corn was removed from the husk and stacked to dry in the open air during the warm, sunny days of October. The dried corn then was stacked in special storage areas inside the houses for future use.

In years past, the Hopi traditionally kept at least a year's supply of corn on hand to protect the people from drought and famine. Blue corn (along with white corn) was the primary staple crop—forming the basis for dozens of dishes. When the corn was needed, Hopi women knocked the kernels off the cob by using the butt of a second dried corn cob in a downward motion. Then, they ground the kernels on a *mata*, or grinding stone.

Beans and squash were other important staples grown in the Hopi mesa country—as were peaches and apricots, which were harvested and dried each fall on the roof tops or on flat expanses of open slick rock near the villages. The peaches were prepared by cutting the fruit open and removing the pit. After it had dehydrated in the open air, it was removed to small storehouses, or “peach houses,” located near the drying areas. Today, a few such peach houses can still be seen—although most have been converted to secondary homes or sleeping sheds.







Preparing peaches for open-air drying was a time-consuming (and frequently backbreaking) process.









*Upper Left:* A First Mesa couple prepares peaches to dry on a Sichomovi rooftop.

*Above Center:* Dried blue corn, *sakwapqa'ö*, has been stacked up at the end of this room. Some say that it took a special skill to stack this corn so that it did not fall over. On top of the stack of corn are two baskets—one a Hopi sifter basket, the other, containing chili peppers, a Navajo or Paiute basket. The metal colander contains pears. Also on top of the corn stack is a pair of wooden carders—used to straighten wool.

*Above:* The process for drying peaches shown above has changed little over the years.



*Left:* This harvest scene shows Hotevilla (Hotvela) at Third Mesa. The corn is stacked on the rooftops to dry in the October sun for several weeks. In this photograph, we see separate stacks of white and blue corn. The corn is turned every two or three days so that it will dry thoroughly before it is taken to special inside storage areas. On the corner of the house in the right foreground are two *wikoros*, clay canteens. Next to the burro that is feeding alone is an old-fashioned pole ladder.









*Above:* This home, probably at Kiqöts-movi, shows the evidence of an abundant harvest. Hanging from the front of the house are bunches of string beans. Near the door are watermelons, which are buried in the sandy soil for long-term storage. In front of the house is an abundance of coxcomb used to dye *piiki* a red color.

*Above, Opposite:* This picture, also taken at harvest time, shows chili peppers drying on the front of the house and recently harvested corn—some of it still in husks—stacked on the ground. Different varieties of corn are mixed together. Many Anglo tools and hardware goods could be found at Hopi villages by the 1920s. Here, we see a washboard, metal buckets, a boiler, and a broom. The interesting mix of handcrafted and manufactured utility wares continues at the Hopi mesas today.

*Below, Opposite:* The various types of corn made a colorful display during the October drying process.







Hopi child with kachina doll (*tihu*)



# A VILLAGE LIFESTYLE

Traditional Hopi villages were full of activity since both men and women had many domestic and ceremonial responsibilities. Most duties were divided strictly between the sexes.

The men, for example, did most of the agricultural labor and conducted the major religious ceremonies. Long ago, the men also tended stock and hunted the game animals that were once plentiful in the region. They also did all of the weaving.

The women processed and prepared food, took primary responsibility for the young, acted in support roles for the ceremonies, and made pottery or basketry. Women spent a great deal of time grinding and preparing corn and other foods. Hopi corn came in many varieties. Blue, white, red, yellow, purple, and spotted corn was prepared in a multitude of ways—including roasting, boiling, and the preparation of various ground corn dishes. Long ago, or even more recently if burros were unavailable, the women also walked to the springs below the mesas to fill their large canteens with water. These heavy loads then were hauled to the mesa tops, where the women emptied the canteens into water storage jars. To relieve the burden of their labor, women often worked together, providing each other with mutual support. The singing of corn grinding songs or gossip often passed the time.

The land and the houses were owned by various clan groups and were passed down from generation to generation through the female line since Hopi society is matrilineal. This meant that an individual, male or female, belonged to the clan and lineage of his or her mother. Upon marriage, the men went to live with the families

of their wives but always remained members of their own lineages, for lineage membership was acquired at birth.

The houses were built contiguous to each other, with members of the same matrilineage living in room blocks adjacent to each other. Rooms consisted of living and sleeping areas plus corn grinding and storage rooms. Villages were built around central plazas that formed the heart of the community. Kivas (semi-subterranean chambers) were located at various places in the villages. These ceremonial structures also were social centers for the men.

Traditionally, village life was controlled by a religious hierarchy consisting of the priests of various ceremonial societies and a village chief, who was considered the spiritual “father” of the village. Women also had important social and political roles, for each clan had a clan “mother” who resided at a clan house where the important totemic and religious objects of the clan were stored. Women also controlled the use of clan property.

Children had a relatively free childhood but, over time, became progressively more involved in Hopi life through a series of initiations and ceremonies that increased their responsibilities as they matured. Hopi culture was passed on by example, training, and through oral history. Throughout the year (but particularly in the month of December), the children heard clan legends and folk tales rich in meaning and symbolism.

For the traditional Hopi, life was hard—but the days of unending labor were enriched by elaborate and profound ceremonies and a rich oral tradition.









*Above, Opposite:* A village plaza is shown during a break in a ceremonial event—probably a kachina dance. This is a typical Hopi scene at such times, with the children playing in the plaza while the adults patiently wait for the dance to start again. Today, the plaza would be ringed with lawn chairs and benches to provide seating. It was common for the younger children to wear little or no clothes in the old days.

*Below, Opposite:* Here, a young girl's "burden" is a puppy. Her mother and older sisters used the same method to carry more traditional burdens.

*Above:* These little girls have just received their *tithu* (kachina dolls) at what was probably the Niman, or Going-Home, ceremony in mid-July. Only girls receive kachina dolls at such times. Boys receive bows and arrows, rattles, or lightning sticks. It has often been said that kachina dolls are not toys but "objects of religious instruction," but this interpretation is not entirely correct. Kachina dolls *are* gifts to Hopi girls from the kachinas. They are given along with a prayer for the health, well-being, and fertility of that child—but they also were meant to be played with.





*Above:* This family is whitewashing the exterior of their home with white clay.

*Above, Opposite:* This picture dramatically demonstrates just how precious rain used to be for the Hopi. Water that could be collected anywhere was treasured—and never wasted. It was, in fact, the need for water that formed the basis of Hopi ceremonialism. In some areas, the men carved deep cisterns out of the sandstone rock on the mesa tops to catch the runoff from storms. Several of these are visible today on the outskirts of Old Oraibi.

*Below, Opposite:* In the early part of this century, much of daily life took place out of doors. Here, a man and woman are working on the “balcony” of a two-story house. On the roof of the house are three large pots. These pots had a variety of usages—including storing water, dehydrating ground corn, storing food, and baking and boiling food. Worn-out ceramic pots often were recycled by knocking the bottoms out of them and using them as chimneys, as seen here with the two pot chimneys on the balcony level next to the ladder.









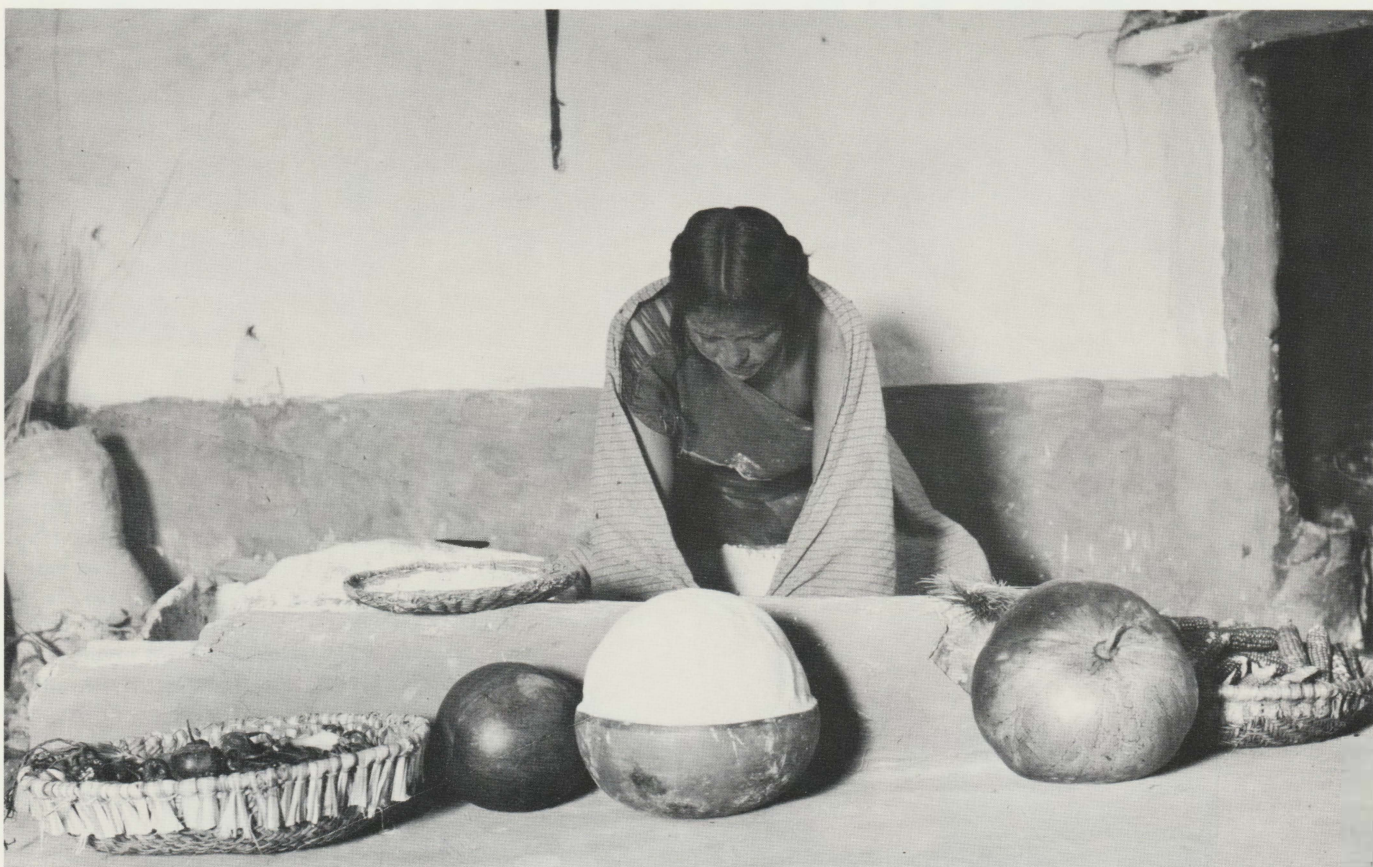
*Above:* Until fairly recently, Hopi men and women often carried heavy loads for long distances when burros and horses were unavailable.

*Above Left, Opposite:* Handicrafts were an important part of the Hopi's world. Here, a man spins yarn in a centuries-old process used around the world.

*Above Right, Opposite:* This man is whitewashing a white woven or braided cotton belt called a *wukokwewa*, or large belt. The whitewashing is kaolin, or white clay. This process will make the belt a pure white. Other white garments, such as wedding robes and kilts, received the same treatment. These belts are worn by Hopi brides as part of their wedding outfit; they also are worn by certain kachinas as part of their ceremonial dress.

*Below, Opposite: "Ngumanta,"* grinding corn, used to be the daily ritual of Hopi women. To be married, a young woman had to demonstrate her skill at this task. Corn grinding traditionally took place in the early morning and evening hours. This young woman is kneeling at a *matapsö*—or corn grinding bin. To her right is a coarse grinding stone where most of the meal is ground. After all of the meal has been ground several times on the coarse stone, it is placed in a kettle or ceramic pot, where it is heated to dehydrate it. (Note the kettle sitting in the fireplace.) After this dehydration, the meal is reground two or three times on the fine grinding stone (the one she is using here) until it becomes finely ground flour. It then is packed down tightly in a bowl for storage.







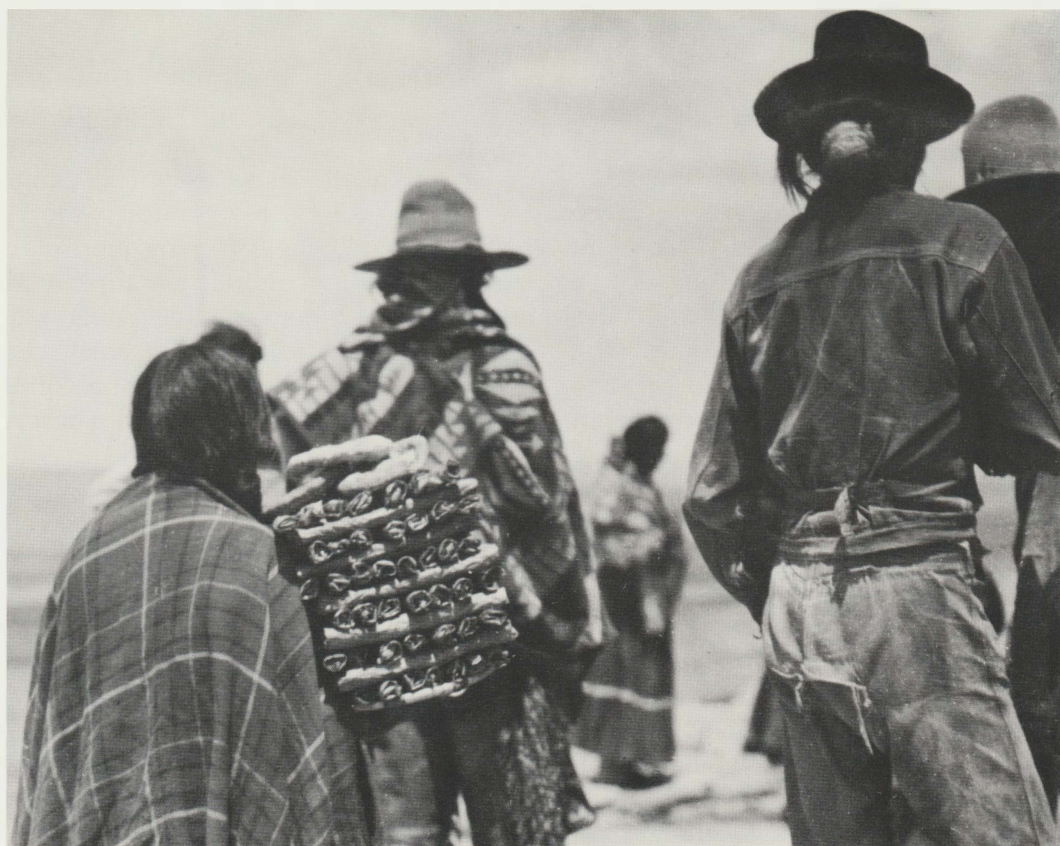


*Above:* Much has been made in recent years of the conflict between Hopi and Navajo. Yet, as can be seen in many of the old photographs (and still today), Navajos often visited with the Hopi to trade and to attend their ceremonial dances. This Navajo woman and her child are at Walpi on First Mesa. On an occasion such as a dance, Navajos living nearby would come to take in the event. Those who lived farther away arrived the day before the public performance, bringing mutton to trade for *piiki* bread or flour.

*Above, Opposite:* Navajo woman and child. The photograph probably was taken by Kopta during a ceremonial event.

*Below, Opposite:* This woman is carrying a stack of *piiki*, a bread that the Hopi women make from a corn meal batter and ashes. It is cooked in thin sheets over a hot stove and then rolled into a wafer. *Piiki* bread is often given away by kachinas at ceremonial events, and it may be that this woman is taking her load to to a kiva or to the place where the kachinas rest between dances.







# THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE

The photographic images of Emory Kopta reproduced here have given us a set of small windows into the Hopi world in the early part of this century. They also have given us an insight into a world that was then, and is today, undergoing rapid change. Life on the Hopi mesas has changed a great deal indeed since the early 1920s.

Today, almost all of the villages—or parts of them—have electricity and running water. Paved roads connect all of the villages and the major cities and towns of northern Arizona. The agricultural economy has given way to wage work and salaried occupations, and today far less land is under cultivation than even a decade ago. Traditional foods are still eaten, but they are being displaced by foods from grocery stores located in far away towns and now on the reservation itself. On ceremonial days, however, the old foods are still served along with new favorites.

Schools are becoming important educational, social, and civic centers within the various villages, and one community now controls its own school. After decades of effort, the Hopi soon will have a high school so that Hopi children do not have to leave home for their high school years.

The political life of the Hopi also is undergoing rapid change. Although a few villages still have village chiefs and a religious hierarchy, a relatively new tribal government seems to gain

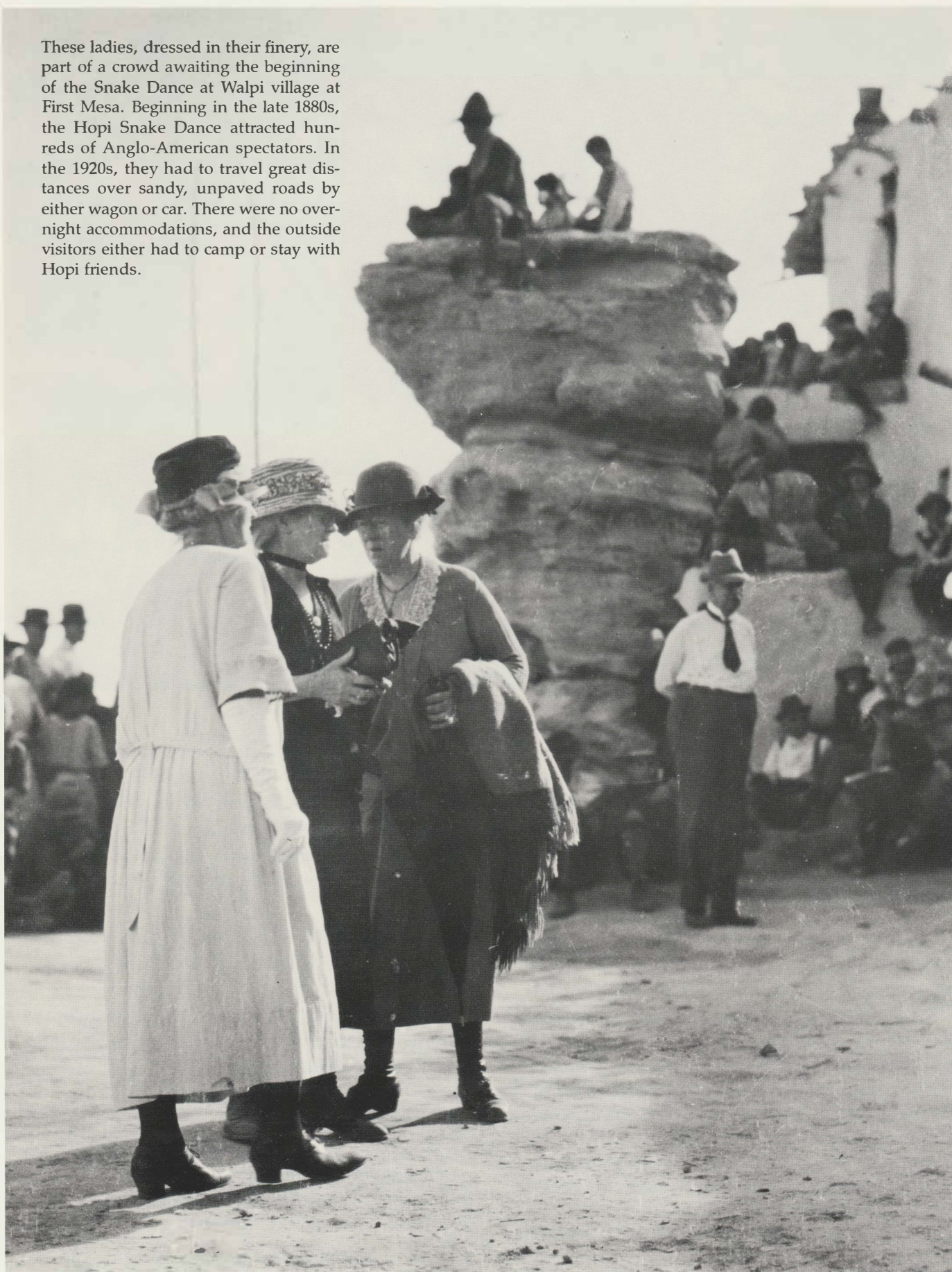
in strength and authority with each passing year. Although decried and regretted by some (and accepted by most), it is a new fact of Hopi life. Where in 1920 there was only a set of independent villages, there exists today an active tribal-wide political process.

Modern homes, often containing single nuclear families, are springing up away from the old villages. Today, some of the old villages seem empty and lifeless except at ceremonial times when their life revives for a short time. In the last decade, new tribal government buildings, a civic center, motel, restaurant, museum, jail, and health center have arisen on the mesas. Television, radio, tape recorders, tape decks, and microwave receivers are ubiquitous. Indeed, superficially, life on the Hopi reservation today looks very much like life in the American mainstream. But underneath that surface remains a solid core of Hopi tradition. The ceremonial and religious life of the Hopi remains a dominating theme in their culture even though many ceremonies have lapsed or been shortened in this century. Religious events are in preparation or in progress throughout the year, and other facets of life are still worked around the ceremonial.

Almost certainly, Hopi life will continue to evolve, but there are clear indications that it will remain distinctively Hopi for a long time to come.



These ladies, dressed in their finery, are part of a crowd awaiting the beginning of the Snake Dance at Walpi village at First Mesa. Beginning in the late 1880s, the Hopi Snake Dance attracted hundreds of Anglo-American spectators. In the 1920s, they had to travel great distances over sandy, unpaved roads by either wagon or car. There were no overnight accommodations, and the outside visitors either had to camp or stay with Hopi friends.







## A Note from the Authors

Emry and Anna Kopta continued to visit the Hopi mesas after their marriage in 1922. While most of these photographs date to Kopta's years of residency at Polacca, it is clear that some were taken after 1922—possibly even into the 1940s. Almost all of the photographs in the Kopta collection are undated, and it was beyond the scope of this project to date individual photographic images.

With this volume, we present a portion of Kopta's photographs, which have been treated as ethnographic documents for interpretation. Michael Lomatuway'ma and I have shown and discussed them with a variety of Hopi people. Their comments were incorporated into a text written by the two of us. We hope that this technique of photographic interpretation will prove valuable and stimulating, and we encourage others to try this approach, for from the people come fascinating insights into the culture.

Front Cover: These ladies are heading toward the plaza at the village of Songoopavi (Shungopovi). Judging from their attire, it is possible that they are going to a ceremonial event. Only one, however, is fully dressed in the traditional Hopi clothing; she is the woman with the black wool cape.

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