CHAPTER 7

## SAILIŠ ǰAAN BI'AT'EEHI

The Apache phrase sailiš ǰaan bi'at'eehi means literally, 'Silas John his sayings,' and is the name given by White Mountain Apaches to the religious cult movement started by Silas John Edwards. In 1920 Silas John introduced a set of completely novel ceremonial dances together with a unique system of writing. He attracted numerous followers. By the end of the 1920's his movement had spread throughout the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, and to the San Carlos, Fort McDowell, and Mescalero reservations as well. Only within the last decade has his movement shown signs of dying out.

### Historical Context of Sailiš ǰaan Bi'at'eehi

Although the time that elapsed between the rise and fall of the 'aaǰode' movement (1916-1917) and the emergence of the movement in 1920 headed by Silas John Edwards was very short, it was one in which significant changes occurred on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. While many Apaches continued to make their living during this period much as they had in the previous decade, the government recognized the necessity of introducing better herds of cattle. In 1917, 800 head of grade Hereford were brought from Mexico and driven to Fort Apache. This marked the beginnings of the White Mountain Tribal Herd (White Mountain Apache Tribal Council n.d.:28). Consultants remember the day when the

cattle arrived. In most respects, they recall, the cattle were hardier and tamer than those of previous shipments.

By 1918 it appears that an increasing number of Apaches began to perceive the possible advantages of formal education. New road and building construction projects both on and off the reservation were begun and Apaches who could understand and speak English were being hired. Several Apaches recall that after the end of the 'aayode' movement there was a feeling that the earth would not be destroyed, and that if the people were to survive into the future they would "have to learn and live with the white man."

While Apaches were beginning to adapt more fully to the presence of Anglos, two government employees were making serious attempts to understand the Apache. In 1918 William M. Peterson was replaced by Charles L. Davis, a sympathetic superintendent who soon began to gain the Indians' trust. The second man was a physician, Dr. Fred Loe. Loe's attitudes towards the Apache were considerably different from those of his predecessors. Instead of opposing the medicine men, Loe felt he would be more successful in fighting illness if he enlisted their aid and support. Consequently, he established friendships with the medicine men and tried to learn some of their songs and cures, hoping that they in turn would become eager to learn his techniques. In spite of his efforts, many Apaches remained suspicious and frightened. Numerous individuals were suspicious of pills, believing them to contain poison.

Dr. Loe was also responsible for reducing opposition to Apache drinking. By 1917 several Apache policemen were assigned the task of destroying the five-gallon lard or coal oil cans in which Apaches then made tuɣpai. In 1918 an Anglo man named Gebby was hired to perform the same job. With a large nail stuck through a broom handle he went around from camp to camp punching holes in all the tuɣpai cans he could find. Mrs. Guenther, a friend of Dr. Loe's, noted the latter's opposition to Gebby's work.

> Dr. Loe examined it /tuɣpai/ time and time again. He would have Mr. Gebby bring in samples, and he examined it. And he said he never found but two or three per cent /alcohol content/. He said that for the TB's especially, it was very good food, and he would just as soon they drink it. . . . Tuɣpai never really caused trouble, because they didn't get too drunk on it. He said that the eastern farmers prepare their hog feed the same way, by putting corn into a big barrel until it ferments. You feed it to the pigs, and the pigs were fattened on that. And that's a good deal of the principle of the tuɣpai. It is fermented corn. So after Dr. Loe said that, they cut out stabbing cans and doing things like that (M. Guenther personal communication 1974).

Between 1917 and 1920 Reverend Guenther also influenced more Apaches on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. After the 'aaɣode' movement came to an end most of the members of his congregation returned. In 1918 Reverend M. J. Weyhausen was sent to assist Guenther in the latter's school, which now had an enrollment of forty pupils (Centennial Committee 1951:245). This allowed the senior missionary more time to visit the Apaches in their camps. In addition, Reverend Guenther made plans to open a mission station at the agency site in Whiteriver about three miles north of East Fork. A boarding school was established in Whiteriver in 1894, and by 1919 housed several

hundred Apache students. Reverend Guenther, foreseeing that Whiteriver would become a "crossroads" for the reservation, decided to locate a large church within walking distance of the boarding school and the agency.

The efforts of Superintendent Davis, Dr. Loe, and Reverend Guenther were overshadowed by a devastating flu epidemic which swept over the reservation in 1918 and again in 1919. The first wave of the epidemic hit both the San Carlos and Fort Apache reservations during the coldest winter recorded up to that time (Grant 1918-1919:113-126, 3-11).

The first effects of the flu were felt on the San Carlos Reservation where it eventually claimed over 200 lives. Rapidly, it spread north to the Fort Apache Reservation. Having heard that sickness was coming, many White Mountain Apaches fled from their homes. Reverend Guenther (1919) reported that at East Fork "the Indians, having knowledge of the calamity below, were on the alert and with the first alarm scattered like so many quails into the recesses of the mountains, leaving their abodes at night in order to render it more difficult for the spirit of disease to follow them." The first area affected by the flu was East Fork where Reverend Guenther reported ten deaths. From there it quickly spread to North Fork, killing about twenty persons, and then to Cedar Creek where thirteen were infected and ten eventually died. It is not known how many Apaches died in Forestdale, Carrizo, and Cibecue.

By the spring of 1919 the worst of the flu had passed, and the residents of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation enjoyed a spring, summer, and fall relatively free of the dreaded disease. However, the flu came again during the following winter. The exact number of deaths caused by this second wave is not known.

During the crisis, all residents on the reservation tried to keep from contracting the disease. As noted earlier, many Apaches took to the mountains, in most cases seeking out isolated locales where they could wait out the flu. In some cases, several extended families wintered together. For fear of spreading the disease little communication took place between such groups. Often, family groupings who lived close enough to see the smoke of each other's fires had no knowledge of how the flu was affecting their members until gun shots were heard, signaling that someone had died.

Within each group every available method of prevention and cure was used. When the flu arrived, medicine men, too, moved to the mountains with their families and relatives. In groups fortunate enough to have a medicine man, prophylactic measures were taken. Children were blessed with <u>hadntin</u> to protect them from infection. Small wooden crosses were distributed to adults who attached them to their blouses or shirts with strips of buckskin. In addition, medicine men were called upon to provide information about children who had remained behind in boarding schools. A Cibecue woman, for example, asked John Taylay if her son in Whiteriver was well. Taylay looked through a hole in a turquoise bead and informed the woman that her son did not have

the flu. Groups without medicine men could only pray for protection against the disease.

Besides taking steps to prevent infection, the White Mountain Apache attempted cures for persons who were already sick. In many of the groups there were older women who had knowledge of medicinal plants. These women boiled special herbs and shrubs in water and administered the broth to the sick. Often, when children were infected, they were placed under a blanket with a steaming pot of the herbal medicine and made to stay there, inhaling the steam, for extended periods of time. Other children were stripped and made to sit on pots containing medicine; this practice it was believed, would stop diarrhea brought on by the flu.

Groups who had medicine men relied on their 'powers' to cure the infirm. The White Mountain Apache believed there was a close association between the flu and snakes. Consultants explained that snakes are cold and clammy. Persons with flu, while feverish, also feel clammy and at times experience chills. In addition, the loose bowel movements associated with influenza are said to resemble small snakes. According to Apache disease theory, snake-associated diseases were most readily cured by snake-associated cures. Consequently, medicine men would cut a four or five inch section of dried petiole or stem of beargrass and, while uttering appropriate prayers and chants, whittle it into the shape of a snake. The shavings would be used to make a small fire into which the snake figure was inserted. When the snake figure caught fire, the medicine man would blow out the flames

and put the snake, now reduced to charcoal, in his mouth and chew it. He would then spit the charred wood on the patient. This, it was believed, would remove the fever in the same way as the burning snake had been cooled in the medicine man's mouth.

Next, the medicine man would boil some herbs and make a broth for the patient, a cure for diarrhea. The steaming broth would be poured into a vessel on the outside of which the medicine man had drawn four vertical, evenly spaced lines. While the medicine man prayed, the patient would drink from the rim near one line. The vessel was then rotated one and a quarter revolutions and the patient would drink again. This was repeated two more times. Finally, the patient would be put to bed and from dark until midnight the medicine man would sing songs and pray. In addition to this basic formula, some medicine men chewed hot coals and spat the remains on the patient.

Apache consultants who remember the flu epidemic concur that while the medicine men did all in their power to cure the infirm they were often unsuccessful. The medicine men frequently explained their failures by explaining that the epidemic originated among the Anglos, and consequently traditional Apache cures were not always efficacious.

Like the Apache, Anglos living on the reservation attempted to prevent the epidemic from spreading and to provide relief to those already afflicted. As soon as the flu broke out the Lutheran School at East Fork was closed and communal gatherings were discouraged. Similarly, Superintendent Davis closed the day schools but not the boarding schools. As the epidemic progressed Davis dispensed as much

food as was available to him. In addition, he issued two horses to Reverend Guenther and Dr. Loe who were anxious to help the Apaches camped in the hills. During the first wave of the epidemic Guenther, knowing he would soon be coming into contact with diseased individuals, left his family in East Fork so as not to infect them or the East Fork Apaches. He took up residence with Dr. Loe in Whiteriver. Reverend Guenther's autobiography describes his work with Dr. Loe.

> Snow had fallen on unfrozen ground with the result that road and trail conditions were so bad that it was only humane to let our mounts rest on alternate days. The good Doctor's saddle bags were filled with medicines, while my contribution was a roll of building paper tied behind me to the saddle. At each camp we found, the procedure was the same: first insulate the pallet of the sick against the dampness of the ground with several layers of my building paper; and the doctor followed with advice and medicine. Then with an atmosphere of gratitude prevailing there would be willing ears to listen to the Gospel of Him who wished to "forgive all iniquities of our friends, heal all their diseases, redeem their lives from destruction and crown them with loving kindness and tender mercies."
>
> The Indians were scattered so widely in all directions that hardly anyone knew whether his neighbors had gone. Part of every day was spent in looking for families we had not yet found. Dr. Loe is a very conscientious man and we rarely got started on the cold ride homeward before sunset. I remember one evening in particular. We were within half a mile of Whiteriver when we met a man trudging wearily homeward. We asked him if he knew of someone we might have missed, and he mentioned a family hiding out near Bear Springs. Without another word the doctor swung his horse to the right for the two mile climb up the mountain and down again to the spring. When we finally left the camp it was so dark that we let the horses find their way home by instinct (E. E. Guenther 1956:13).

When the epidemic spread from North Fork to Cedar Creek in the winter of 1918-1919, Dr. Loe and Reverend Guenther moved to that community. Because of muddy conditions they were forced to walk from

camp to camp. Besides providing building paper, Reverend Guenther dispensed clothing and food when these commodities were available. During the three and a half months of the initial wave Guenther saw his wife only once, when she rode to Whiteriver to give him a new pair of pants.

During the second wave of the epidemic, in the winter of 1919-1920, Reverend Guenther and his family were living in Whiteriver. When over 300 of the 400 boarding school children in Whiteriver contracted the flu (M. Guenther 1968b:6) the pastor volunteered to work alternating day and night shifts. Eventually Guenther was himself struck down with the flu and was confined to his bed for six weeks. Hearing that some of his close Apache friends were ill he went to their camp hoping to be of some aid. Exposed to the cold wind, the pastor had a relapse and was in bed for six weeks more.

During the flu, Dr. Loe earned the sincere gratitude of some Apaches. Indians who had previously been afraid of the White doctor now extended him respect and thanks. In addition, Reverend Guenther had demonstrated genuine compassion for the White Mountain Apaches; he, too, was rewarded with their respect. Because of the large number of babies who lost their parents during the epidemic the Guenthers opened the first Indian orphanage in the Southwest (Mahoney 1954:3).

Reverend Guenther also won the lifelong friendship of Chief A-1, Alchesay, one of the most influential Apache chiefs. Knowing that Chief Alchesay had "very strong likes and dislikes, and to avoid getting off on the wrong foot with him" Reverend Guenther (1956:58) had little contact with him before the first wave of the epidemic.

One day, while caring for the sick in North Fork in the winter of 1918-1919, the missionary followed a trail about ten miles beyond Whiteriver and found Chief Alchesay deathly ill with the flu. Guenther laid down a pallet of building paper and administered some medicine which he happened to be carrying. The next day Alchesay insisted on seeing Guenther again. Not long thereafter Alchesay was converted to Christianity and he became a frequent guest in the Guenther's home.

Besides suffering from the worst flu epidemic in their history, the Apaches between 1918 and 1920 suspected that more and more individuals were practicing witchcraft. Basso (1969:36), for example, learned from consultants at Cibecue that 'shooting sorcery' was said to have been particularly widespread around 1920. Several other Apaches stated that even after the end of the epidemic they feared visiting with other Apaches to whom they were not related. This can be explained by recalling that the Apache believed that witches tended to belong to phratries other than their victims.

In the decade following 1920 and the rise of the sailiš ǰaan bi'at'eehi movement trends that began around 1917 continued. Some White Mountain Apaches, seeing certain of the advantages provided by formal education began to encourage their children to attend school. Furthermore, because of the efforts of Superintendent Davis during the influenza epidemic, a closer bond was established between the Apaches and Government personnel. In 1922 Fort Apache was abandoned by the United States Army and the facilities were transferred to the Department of the Interior (Wharfield 1965:119).

During this decade relationships between some of the White Mountain Apaches and Lutheran missionaries continued to improve. Beginning in 1923 missionaries moved from Carrizo area to Upper Cibecue and built a church (Centennial Committee 1951:244). However, the real inroads being made by the Lutheran Church were at Whiteriver. The reasons for success were twofold. First, Reverend Guenther had gained the appreciation of the Apaches by his actions during the influenza epidemic. Second, the church now had the official endorsement of the influential Chief Alchesay. When the Whiteriver Lutheran Church was dedicated in 1922 Chief Alchesay and 100 other Apaches were baptized. "After his baptism the chief stepped forward and reminded his people that this was the only church for which he had pressed his thumbprint on paper, and he exhorted them to faithful attendance" (Centennial Committee 1951:247).

While environmental conditions had returned to normal between 1920 and 1930, illness continued to afflict the White Mountain Apache. Tuberculosis and eye diseases persistent(Behn 1929:4), but their frequency was somewhat lower than during the previous decade. In December 1929, another whooping cough epidemic struck the Fort Apache Indian Reservation; however, it was less severe than the one in 1915. This was in part attributable to the increased reliance on Anglo doctors and medicines and to the detailed instructions given by Reverend Guenther to the Apaches on preventing and caring for infected children (E. E. Guenther 1929:7-8). Few other epidemic diseases were reported

until 1933 when a meningitis epidemic claimed many lives (Anonymous 1933:236; 1934:308).

Between 1920 and 1930 drinking increased among the White Mountain Apaches. Many Apache consultants stated that drinking first became a "problem" during the 1920's. This can be explained in part by the fact that more and more Anglos were moving to live in areas adjacent to the Fort Apache Reservation and hard liquor was becoming more accessible. With the rise of drinking came an increase in witchcraft accusations (Basso 1970:92).

## The Sailiš Ɣaan Bi'at'eehi Prophet

The fourth religious cult movement to begin among the White Mountain Apaches was started in 1920 by Silas John Edwards. Fortunately, much is known about Silas John's life. His father's Apache name was yoohn but he was known to Anglos as John, Johnnie, or Johnnie Yuma. Yoohn was born in 1857 and, in November 1882, enlisted in "E" company of the Apache Scouts at the rank of corporal. He was quickly promoted to first sergeant and served as a scout continuously until 1886. After his discharge he married a woman named Ya-to-hay. In 1887 or 1888 a son was born to the couple. His Apache name was Pay-yay or Bahl-yay, but later he became known to Apaches and Anglos alike as Silas John Edwards.

There is evidence to suggest that at some point in his life Silas John's father, Johnnie, spent time in prison. One consultant reported: "Silas' father knew how to make chains, watch fobs, hat bands and belts out of horse hair. He told us he had learned this in

prison. He had also learned how to skin rattlesnakes and make belts. This he taught to his son Silas" (female Anglo consultant). After being released from prison Johnnie began to farm at a location near the present community of East Fork. There he raised crops, kept three horses and two cows, and sold horsehair and snakeskin items to the soldiers at Fort Apache.

Johnnie also was a medicine man of some influence. Although informants disagree on the exact nature of his 'power' several believed that he controlled 'snake' or 'lightning power.' One consultant believes that Johnnie had 'deer power.' It is possible that yoohn had all three.

In several respects Silas John Edwards' life paralleled that of his father. He, too, had close dealings with White people. He, too, served time in prison and engaged in the nontraditional practice of handling live rattlesnakes. Finally, he, too, became an influential medicine man.

Little is known of the early life of Silas John Edwards. Apparently he lived for several years on the San Carlos Indian Reservation and as a youth attended school there. Later, sometime after the turn of the century, his family moved to East Fork and he attended the Fort Apache boarding school. By 1911 Silas had learned to speak the English language reasonably well. Having had some contact with Lutheran missionaries prior to this time he soon became friendly with the Guenthers and expressed interest in learning about the Christian

religion. He also wanted to become the interpreter for the missionaries, a position which had been held for some years by Jack Keyes.

The Guenthers were impressed with Silas John's friendliness and his proficiency in English. In 1911, from July through October, the Guenther's saw Silas John almost daily. On July 23, 1911, Reverend Guenther gave Silas John a small, liberally illustrated Bible history book which Silas John had noticed and wanted very badly.[1] For the next five months he took instructions from Reverend Guenther. A typical entry in Mrs. Guenther's diary (1911) reads as follows:

> August 25, 1911--A little piece of ice left. Edgar quickly got ready for more ice cream, chocolate ice cream this time. Gave Keyes, Silas and Schoenberg some. Ed and Silas went out bee tree hunting. Found two trees. Brought back two 2 quart pails full. Had to leave much behind. Gave Silas supper. Impressed with his thoroughly gentlemanly ways.

In addition to instructing Silas John and enjoying him as a companion, Reverend Guenther used him as an interpreter. Entries in Guenther's diary contain such passages as, "August 5, 1911--Tulpai at Johnson's camp. (Recitation in Catechism with Silas) talked a few words with them, Silas interpreting." In October, when Jack Keyes quit as the official interpreter for the Lutheran missionaries, Silas John willingly took his place. Besides working as an interpreter, he was given the task of teaching Reverend Guenther to speak Apache.

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1. Mrs. Guenther recalls that Silas John was preoccupied with one of the illustrations in this book. Based on the Biblical story found in Numbers (Chapter twenty-one, verses four through nine) it showed Moses holding a cross upon which he had attached a brass serpent. Those nearby who looked at it were preserved from the bites of the numerous snakes which surrounded them.

In November, 1911, an incident occurred which caused a rift between Guenther and Silas John. While the Guenthers were gone to Globe, Silas John was left in charge of their house. Upon returning to East Fork the Guenthers learned that Silas John had used the house to have an affair with a woman. While the friendship between Silas and the Guenthers was soon patched up, the original closeness of their relationship was never recaptured.

In 1912 Silas John began to make a living selling various items to the soldiers at Fort Apache. He learned to tan rattlesnake hides from his father and fashion them into belts and hat bands, and he was frequently seen in the canyons between Whiteriver and Fort Apache collecting baskets of snakes. Consequently, Silas John was looked upon with awe by many who, being fearful of snakes for both practical and religious reasons, sought to avoid contact with them at all costs.

On March 6, 1912, C. W. Crouse conducted the marriage ceremony in which Silas John was wed to an Apache girl named Rose Opah. Within the next ten years Rose gave birth to three children. Meanwhile, Silas John continued to sell rattlesnake skins at Fort Apache and to interpret for Reverend Guenther. By 1915 Silas John had enlisted in the United States Army at Fort Apache, and it is possible that he participated in the campaign against Pancho Villa. Sometime afterwards, he apparently attended the Phoenix Indian School. While the officials at that institution have no record of Silas John's enrollment, Reverend Guenther noted in a mission report (1919) that a former student of the mission at San Carlos, John Edwards, was taking an engineering course

at Phoenix. Similarly, many Apaches agree that Silas John acquired his 'power' in a dream which occurred while he was running away from that school.

In the summer of 1920 Silas John Edwards, who by this time preferred to be called Silas John or Silas Johns, introduced his religious cult among the White Mountain Apaches.[2] His first dance, in which live snakes were employed, was designed to cure the infirm and persons suffering from symptoms of witchcraft and to bless all in attendance. It was held at a site south of East Fork, probably in July. In August, Silas John moved to San Carlos where he had twelve more dances and gained a large following. In late September he returned to the Fort Apache Reservation where he wanted to hold more dances. However, Superintendent Charles L. Davis forbade him from attending dances or holding them. In mid-October Silas John was incarcerated in the agency jail until the snakes went into hibernation for the winter. The superintendent at Whiteriver clearly stated the reason for this action. "I have told Silas and all the Indians here that I do not object to them keeping up to some extent their ancient rites and tribal teachings but that I would not permit any of the young men to start new religions" (Davis 1921).

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2. In 1971 I interviewed Silas John and he stated that he first introduced his new religion in 1916. Shortly thereafter Basso and Anderson (1973:1014) talked to followers of the Silas John religion in San Carlos and were told that the movement began in 1916. Consultants agree that the first snake dance held by Silas was on the Fort Apache Reservation. All my Apache consultants, including several who attended this first dance, agreed that Silas John introduced his religion after the end of the flu epidemic. Similarly mission reports and agency correspondence mentions the beginning of a new religion in 1920. I have accepted the latter date.

For the next twelve years Silas John was almost continually at odds with the authorities. During this time he was convicted of starting a new religion, abusing his wife, holding medicine dances, desertion and illegal cohabitation, and bodily assault with intent to kill. For these crimes he was fined a total of about $70 and spent over ten months in jail. In September of 1930 he was charged with selling liquor to Indians and was sentenced to thirteen months imprisonment at McNeil Island, Steilacoom, Washington. In addition, Silas John was officially forbidden from returning to the San Carlos and Ft. McDowell Indian reservations because of the religious fervor he was stirring up among the Indians.

Despite conflict with federal and civilian authorities Silas John and his disciples spread his religion among many Indians in Arizona and Mescalero, New Mexico. It was quickly taken up by Apaches on the San Carlos Reservation, and Silas John's influence there began to diminish only after he was forbidden to enter the reservation. He also gained a large following among residents on the Fort Apache Reservation, but his sexual activities -- three marriages and repeated accusations of his sleeping with young teenage girls -- caused many to question the validity of his acclaimed connection with the supernatural. Finally, Silas John attracted many fervent followers on the Mescalero and Ft. McDowell reservations and a lesser amount in the Verde Valley.

On February 18, 1933, an event occurred which was to affect Silas John for the rest of his life; his wife was murdered and he was accused of the slaying. Because of a meningitis epidemic Silas John's

trial was postponed until October. On the 14th of that month Silas John was pronounced guilty of first degree murder. He was sentenced to life imprisonment and again transported to the United States Penitentiary at McNeil Island, Washington. Silas John remained in that institution for seventeen years and, because of its distance from Arizona, he received no visitors. However, he was in continual contact with agency personnel, applying three times for parole, constantly professing his innocence.

Today there remains little doubt in the minds of those familiar with the case, that Silas John did not murder his wife. Silas John's wife, Margaret Edwards, had been strangled with her own hair and yucca cords. In addition, her head had been beaten in with two rocks. When officers found her body they also recovered the rocks upon which the initials "SJE" had been traced in her blood. During his trial the evidence against Silas John was presented. He had argued with his wife the day before her murder, at which time she swore she would leave him. Silas John had been drinking the day before and the day of her murder. The two rocks contained his initials. Finally, when arrested, he had blood stains on his hands and clothing (Gardner 1952). However, Silas John maintained that he was innocent. He argued that if he had killed his wife he would not have left his initials behind to betray him. He explained that after being told of his wife's murder he went to where her body was lying and in grief held her in his arms -- thus explaining the blood stains. Even though witnesses who had seen him holding his dead wife testified to that effect, he was found guilty and imprisoned.

For the next three years many of those familiar with his case believed him to be innocent but were unable to determine who the murderer was. Even Reverend Guenther, who by 1933 viewed Silas John as his main religious opponent, believed that the medicine man was innocent. Not knowing who the murderer was, Guenther did not come to Silas' defense. In 1936 the identity of the murderer became known. In July a woman was raped and her assailant threatened to murder her just as he had Silas John's wife. Even this evidence did not convince the authorities to release or parole Silas John.

In 1950 the White Mountain Apache Tribal Council recommended unanimously that Silas John be paroled, stating that they would care for him so the government would not have to pay for his support. In 1952 he was transferred to a minimum security prison in Wickenburg, Arizona, where he received numerous visitors. The mystery writer Erle Stanley Gardner, who began looking into Silas John's case, reported that in the first four or five months of his stay at Wickenburg he received more than 200 visitors (Gardner 1952:74). On August 1, 1955 Silas John was paroled from prison and allowed to return to the Apaches.

Silas John's religious movement continued throughout his twenty-one years in prison and he remained its leader. In his absence Silas John's disciples held regular Sunday meetings and performed ceremonies taught them by the medicine man prior to his imprisonment. After his release he avoided further trouble. He also remarried. For the next ten years Silas John held occasional healing ceremonies, but in the mid-1960's he staged his one and only major "snake dance" since

returning from prison. This ceremonial was held near Geronimo's Cave a few miles east of East Fork.

In 1970 Silas John's health started to fail, and the following year he was taken to Phoenix and eventually placed in an American Indian rest home in Laveen, Arizona. Since that time he has expressed a desire to return to East Fork where he wants to live and die. Because of a broken hip, respiratory ailments, deafness, and general weakness he has not been allowed to return to the reservation. Silas John stated to me that if he could go home he would get well, but would no longer practice as a medicine man. "I am old now. I used to sing all night long, but not now. Now I'm old and I can't sing because my voice is too low."

According to a 1942 census, Silas John Edwards was born on April 15, 1887. He founded his new religion when he was twenty-three. He was sentenced to life imprisonment at the age of forty-six. He was sixty-eight when he was paroled, and he is presently /1976/ eighty-nine years old.

## Sailiš J̌aan Bi'at'eehi

The religious cult movement started by Silas John Edwards does not have a specific name, although his teachings are called sailiš ǰaan bi'at'eehi ('Silas John his sayings' or 'philosophy'). His movement began in the summer of 1920 and is only now showing signs of decline.

When asked the question, "Where did Silas John get his power?" several consultants reported hearsay accounts. They stated that Silas

John was at the Phoenix Indian School when he decided to return to the reservation. He and another man left on foot. After traveling for several days, the pair became hungry and thirsty and, when Silas John could stand it no longer, he killed a snake and ate it. Because of that he had a dream, and the 'power' of the snake came to him together with words from naaye'nezɣane.

However, according to Silas John and one of his disciples, his 'power' came to him in a different fashion. In 1904 he apprenticed himself to a medicine man with 'lightning power.' The medicine man foretold that Silas John would have a vision and through it would receive a 'power' and prayers.

From 1904 until 1916 Silas learned all he could about 'lightning power' but held no ceremonies. Then, in 1916 he had a vision which occurred in several segments. In the first, Silas John started to follow the trail to Black River crossing, a place where travelers could ford the river and cross over onto the San Carlos Reservation. Yet somehow, he ended up on a new trail. Just as he was about to cross the Black River he noticed that a storm was gathering force. Soon there was lightning. Silas John took shelter under a rock to wait until the storm had passed. While under the rock he heard a drum and music -- it was a song. After remounting his horse he set out across the river, but when he reached the middle of the stream he realized that a great wall of water was coming upon him. There was no escape. The water picked Silas John and his horse up and carried them downstream. At this time, he noticed two snakes -- downstream a

very large black snake facing east and upstream a very large yellow snake facing west. Silas John continued to be swept downstream, but then was lifted out of the torrent by twelve snakes which went around his head singing. This segment of the vision was over.

In the next segment Silas John was carried to a place of "beginnings" where naaye'nezɣane was born, where the earth was made, and where time began. It was a white mountain with a black cloud over it. From the cloud a supernatural being emerged and came to Silas John informing him that he would become a prophet and a leader on earth. This being also taught him prayers. Thus ended the second segment of the vision.

Then Silas John experienced the third segment of his vision. While he was walking down a trail in Firebox Canyon, near East Fork, four times rocks and trees began to fall, shaken by earthquakes. He later encountered people and told them of the event, but they had no knowledge of the quakes. From high in the sky Silas John heard a voice saying that in four years he would begin to work among his own people. He would represent the thirty-two supernatural 'powers.' Naaye'nezɣane would guide him and he would work with him. With hadntin and prayers he would be 'holy' and oppose evil forces like witchcraft.

With the completion of his vision Silas John became a prophet, but it was not until four years later, as his vision had directed, that he began to work among the Apaches. Silas John held his first 'snake dance,' called tl'iiš begoǰitaɣ, in July of 1920. The dance took place near a low hill a few miles south of East Fork in Seven Mile Canyon.

Before the ceremony Silas John instructed twelve young men to collect snakes. He told them not to be afraid because, having blessed them by making crosses of hadntin on their hands, they would be protected. Silas John also showed them how to use forked sticks to pin down the reptiles and how to pick them up behind their heads. Sprinkling hadntin as he went, Silas John led the twelve young men following him to a location where they could find snakes. After two days the men had collected eighteen snakes -- the majority of which were rattlesnakes.

As soon as a snake was captured it was placed in a burden basket partially filled with hadntin. The basket was then covered with a piece of canvas to keep the reptiles from crawling out. After the second day, word of the upcoming dance spread throughout the eastern portion of the Fort Apache Reservation. Before the participants arrived at the designated site, Silas John set in the ground four posts about eight feet high. Each was painted a different color: black, white, yellow and blue representing the four directions. When Silas John made these posts he sang songs from his vision.

As stated earlier, the ceremony was to have a dual purpose. Silas John was to cure the infirm and those suffering from witchcraft, and to bless all those in attendance so they would not get sick. While Silas John reported he was able to cure any illness, many Apaches took this to mean that his 'snake power' would be especially effective against snake-associated ailments and witchcraft. The types of

diseases commonly treated by snake medicine men were the flu, arthritis, rheumatism, running skin sores, and, in certain cases, tuberculosis.

Besides these ailments, Silas John claimed the ability to neutralize the effects of witchcraft. Sicknesses resulting from witchcraft were characterized by the sudden onset of severe abdominal or other kinds of pains, and by paralysis in the extremities. 'Bear,' 'lightning,' and 'snake' ceremonies were recognized as effective against witchcraft as was the possession of turquoise beads, hadntin, and eagle feathers (Basso 1969:38-39).

After the infirm and curious had gathered the ceremony began. From dark until about midnight Silas sang thirty-two sacred songs that told of the 'power' which came from snake as well as Silas John's connection with it. At midnight Silas John and many of the people rested. Singing commenced again about three in the morning and lasted until sunrise. Up to this point the ceremony had followed along traditional lines.

In the morning Silas John's own 'snake dance' began. Previously, Silas John had trained nine girls and nine boys to dance with the snakes. When the ceremony started, the dancers were kept in a brush and canvas shelter located on one side of the dance area. Inside, Silas John blessed the dancers one by one with hadntin and told them not to be afraid. He then handed each of them a snake telling them to hold it behind its head and near its tail. After gentling the snakes within the enclosure, during which time Silas John chanted, the

dancers left the shelter. All persons who were ill lined up facing Silas John who walked before them sprinkling them with hadntin and praying for them. He passed in front of each person and asked them what their trouble was. Then, applying hadntin to the location of the ailment, he took one snake at a time from the dancers and placed these on the spot.[3] For example, one man complained of a stiff knee. Silas John made a cross of hadntin on the joint and then took a large rattlesnake and wrapped it around. He then removed the snake, gave it back to a girl dancer, and moved on to the next patient. When all the people had been treated Silas John and the dancers retired to the brush enclosure and placed the snakes back in baskets. Healthy individuals were encouraged to enter the space between the four painted posts where Silas John prayed for them. At some point in the ceremony Silas John revealed to the people his new name. This was yaak'os bilataa goleĺnee which translates roughly to mean 'forming beyond the clouds,' perhaps a reference to one of his visions.

Silas John's snake dance caused a great stir among the Apache, and when the superintendent of the Fort Apache Reservation heard of it he had Silas John arrested. He was charged with starting a new religion and holding a snake dance. He was fined $25.00 (Davis 1920).

Shortly after his release Silas John left the reservation and moved to the San Carlos Reservation where he held twelve snake dances.

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3. While Silas John's 'snake dance' was unique in many ways, this had been done before. Regan (1930:320) in 1901 witnessed a ceremony in which a medicine man rubbed a harmless snake on the affected parts of a patient. This was accompanied by singing.

All of these dances were held on Sunday, which Silas John insisted was the most convenient time since many persons wishing to be present had jobs and could not attend during the week. Conversely, many consultants stated Sundays were deliberately selected by Silas John because that was the day the Lutheran missionaries held their services.

At San Carlos Silas John attracted a sizeable crowd. He informed them his religion did not require that he speak from the Bible. Holding up a cross on which was drawn the figure of a snake, he said this was the image they should follow. He is also reported to have said that "the Indians were too uneducated to read the Bible: therefore, not necessary to have the Bible" (Symons 1921).

In place of the Bible, Silas John introduced the cross and the prayers he had received from his vision. Later he described his prayers and his system for writing them.

> There were 62 prayers. They came to me in rays from above. At the same time I was instructed. He /God/ was advising me and telling me what to do, at the same time teaching me chants. They were presented to me--one by one. All of these and the writing were given to me at one time in one dream. . . .
>
> God made it /the writing/, but it came down to our earth. I liken this to what has happened in the religions we have now. On the center of the earth, when it first began, when the earth was first made, there was absolutely nothing on this world. There was no written language. So it was in 1904 that I became aware of the writing; it was then that I heard about it from God (Basso and Anderson 1973:1014).

The writing system which Silas John devised, involved a set of graphic symbols that functioned as mnemonic devices for recalling the words of the prayers as well as important ritual gestures. Basso and Anderson

(1973:1014, 1020) have provided a copy of one of these prayers, a 'prayer for life,' as well as a loose translation.


1. ni??ayolzaana? -- when the earth was first created


2. ?iiyaa? ?ayolzaana? -- when the sky was first created


3. daitsee dagoyaana? ni? ?iɣdiiže? -- in the beginning, when all was started in the center of the earth


4. yoosn bihadndin -- God's sacred pollen (Take a pinch of sacred pollen in the right hand and place a small amount on each item of the ritual paraphernalia.)


5. hadndin ?iɣna?aahi -- a cross of sacred pollen


6. hadndin hidaahi -- living sacred pollen


7. hadndin ?iɣna?aahi diiyo nadiyooɣ -- a cross of sacred pollen breathing in four directions (Take a pinch of sacred pollen in the right hand and place a small amount on each arm of the ceremonial cross that marks the eastern corner of the holy ground.)


8. yoosn bihadndin ?ilna?aahi hidaahi -- God's cross of living sacred pollen.


9. šii šihadndinihi -- My own, my sacred pollen (Face toward the east, extend fully the right arm, fold the left arm across the chest, and bow the head. After remaining in this position for a few moments, drop the left arm and trace the sign of a cross on one's chest.)


10. šii ši?okaahi -- my own, my prayer


11. šilagan hadaaže? diigo bihadaa? istiigo -- like four rays, power is flowing forth from the tips of my fingers silagan hadaaze? biha?dit?iigo -- power from the tips of my fingers bring forth light


12. dašizo? beišgaaɣ č?idii -- now it is known that I go forth with power


13. nagostsan biɣalataže? -- On the surface of the world


14. nagowaahi nagoscoodi nagoɣdiihi behe?gozine -- sinful things are occurring, bad things are occurring, sickness and evil are occurring, together with harmful knowledge


15. diiže? biɣhadaagoyaa -- in four directions, these things are dispersed and fade away (Take a pinch of sacred pollen in the right hand and place a small amount on each arm of the cross that marks the eastern corner of the holy ground.)

16. bitl?anabąąže yoosn biyi? siziihi -- following this, God came to live with man

17. yoosn binadidzooɣhi -- the breath of God

18. yoosn bihadndin -- God's sacred pollen (Take a pinch of sacred pollen in the right hand and trace four circles in the air directly over the ritual paraphernalia.)

19. yoosn -- God Himself

20. hadndin hidaahi -- living sacred pollen

Silas John inscribed his prayers on pieces of tanned buckskin and began to teach the prayer system to selected individuals. These became his twelve 'disciples' at San Carlos. Once they had learned the prayers, the 'disciples' were permitted to conduct services at "holy grounds."

In September, 1920, Silas John returned to the Fort Apache Reservation, apparently at the invitation of Chief Alchesay. Despite the fact that he was met by Superintendent Davis, who warned him not to hold any more snake dances, Silas John held another ceremonial at the site of the initial one. The basic pattern of this dance was much the same as that of the first and all subsequent snake dances. Silas John blessed the hands of twelve boys and had them gather snakes of all kinds. This particular ceremonial was held for a girl who was apparently suffering from tuberculosis. The night before Silas John taught the people who had gathered to dance in a new way. The dancers faced in opposite directions, a man looking inside towards the fire and a woman next to him facing away from it, their shoulders touching. After dancing for a while in this manner they reversed their positions. Many Apaches thought this dance was entirely new, while others believed

that it was a very traditional form that had once been used "way back before."

In the morning the snake dance began. Silas John sang four songs in an enclosure and prayed for the dancers, blessing the hands of the twelve boys and twelve girls. Then he handed them snakes. After dancing in the enclosure for a short period of time the dancers were led outside and circled the entire crowd. Then they proceeded to the middle of the dance area and the spectators formed a circle around them. The girl suffering from tuberculosis was also in the middle of the circle. Next, the dancers formed the figure of a cross and danced towards the four cardinal directions. Silas John then indicated it was time for all those who were ill to line up. He prayed for these people with hadntin and applied snakes to their infirmities.

In October, Superintendent Davis had Silas John arrested for refusing to abide by the order to cease holding dances and refrain from attending ceremonials. Silas John was kept in jail until cold weather came and the snakes went into hibernation. In February of 1921, Silas John returned again to the San Carlos Reservation. He was immediately escorted back to the Fort Apache Reservation with orders not to return for one year because of the effects of his teachings. Shortly thereafter, he was arrested for making tuɣpai and beating his wife.

In the spring and early summer of 1921 Silas John appeared to have given up his religious cult ideology and turned towards Christian belief. Throughout May and June of that year Silas John was in close contact with Reverend Guenther who was attempting to convince Silas

John that he had been misled by the devil and was having an evil influence on the Indians. On June 4, Silas John wrote a letter to Manuel Victor, one of his disciples at San Carlos, informing him that another letter he had written on May 10 was indeed his and that the Apaches should read the Bible and obey it. Silas John also urged Victor to seek out the local Lutheran missionary once a week for Bible study. In July, Reverend Guenther accompanied Silas John to the San Carlos Reservation where Silas John told the Apaches that he had been teaching them the devil's words and that they should obey the Bible and listen to the Lutheran missionaries.

Silas John's "reconversion" was short-lived. Left unguarded, for the next several months he did everything he could to have his religion legalized. In San Carlos a petition was drawn up and sent to the superintendent there. The petition claimed that the regular Sunday meetings being held at the "Prayer Grounds" were for the purpose of teaching the Apaches "of our Creator and the life of Jesus Christ, and that each one must worship only two highest beings" (Anonymous 1921). The petition went on to say that prior to such meetings the Apaches had lived under the influence of their traditional religion and medicine men, but that the missionaries were unable to stop this. The prayer meetings, however, did put an end to such beliefs. In addition to giving up the traditional beliefs, those who attended had stopped drinking tuɣpai, stealing, and fighting. The petition was signed by over fifteen San Carlos Apaches.

Meanwhile, Silas John hired an attorney from Globe, Clifford C. Faires, to plead his case. The attorney wrote the superintendents of both Apache reservations asking that Silas John be allowed religious freedom. Superintendent Davis answered Faires' letter giving him a short history of the Silas John movement, emphasizing the potential dangers of allowing such a religion to continue, and noting that the Silas John religion was anti-Christian and was having a pernicious influence on the Apaches. The lawyer soon agreed to drop Silas John's case.

Silas John continued to hold snake dances on both the San Carlos and Fort Apache Indian reservation. In early September he held three dances on the northern reservation. Then he moved south. One particularly well-attended series of dances took place near the location called gaage dus'kunne' ('crow's nest') not far from Old San Carlos. Here, people from Camp Verde, Mescalero, and both Arizona Apache reservations gathered to be cured and to watch the much publicized snake medicine man at work. The dances were held on Sundays and between 500 and 600 Indians were in attendance. Silas John made a large cross from plywood, the vertical piece about five feet high. On this was painted a large serpent with its tail at the bottom and its head just below the point at which the crosspiece was attached. Snakes were also painted on both sides of the crosspiece. The borders and the snakes were painted with bright red and green colors and, according to one eyewitness, "it was a beautiful thing to look at"

(male Anglo consultant). To the crosspiece Silas John also attached twelve large eagle feathers.

Silas John had the hundreds of people in attendance form a long line which stretched nearly a quarter of a mile. The line slowly moved past Silas John. He held the cross in his hand with the eagle feathers dangling from the crosspiece, and, as the people filed by, the feathers touched their foreheads and were drawn over their hair and heads. Thus, the infirm and the well alike passed under the cross receiving treatment and blessing from the medicine man.

During these meetings a confrontation occurred between Silas John and the Lutheran pastor at San Carlos, Reverend Alfred Uplegger. A Lutheran Apache invited Uplegger to attend, and he was allowed to talk to the people. Uplegger did not condemn any of Silas John's teachings, but firmly believed that by presenting the words of the Bible, the Holy Spirit would direct the Apaches to choose the Christian religion as the correct and only one. Reverend Uplegger (1921) recorded that at these meetings many hymns were sung and through an interpreter he spoke to the crowd. After Uplegger had finished and had left, Silas John held his ceremonies.

The ceremonies at gaage dus'kunne' were held throughout the latter part of September and into October. Meanwhile, on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, Reverend Guenther had recently returned home from a visit to the East. After hearing about the activities of Silas John he analyzed the latter's earlier renunciation of his teachings.

> It hurts me to admit that I have been disillusioned concerning Silas since my last report. Previous to my going East I had an ardent helper in Silas who was apparently trying as hard as his courage permitted him to set his people aright in their mistaken views that he had implanted. He then taught his people only from manuscripts that had been prepared for him, and wrote letters to those on the lower reservation confessing his false doctrines. It now appears that he was compelled to do so only by his fear of my exposing his entire miserable past that he had been forced to confess to me. I had hardly gone when he introduced idols on every valley on my field with an accompanying snake dance (E. E. Guenther 1921).

Guenther was forced to conclude, as had Uplegger, that Silas John's activities were polarizing the Apaches into two groups, those who favored Christianity and those who followed Silas John.[4]

The next year was one of uncertainty for Silas John. Superintendents on both reservations were trying to jail him on a variety of charges including most prominently, illegal religious practices and illicit sexual activities, including rape. In the midst of his troubles Silas John appeared again to have returned to the teachings of the Bible. He took adult instruction from missionary Reverend E. Arnold Sitz, and on May 30, 1922, Silas John, his wife, and children were baptized.

Within a year of his baptism Silas John divorced his wife and remarried. He also turned to his own religious beliefs and practices. For the next several years he avoided holding large snake dances which might anger the superintendents. At the same time, he taught his

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4. Several Apache individuals asked to be baptized by the Lutherans on the same spots Silas John had been conducting his snake dances.

prayer system to selected 'disciples' from various tribal groups living on different reservations. These individuals and their helpers formed "holy ground" committees, which, by 1932, had official positions of president, assistant president, secretary, treasurer, assistant treasurer, official member, and delegates (E. E. Guenther 1922; Nelson 1932). The committees held services every Sunday at "holy grounds," curing the sick and praying for the continued good health of the well.

Silas John also began to teach preventive rituals to the headmen of family clusters. He gave each of them certain items of ritual paraphernalia and instructed them how to make use of the new equipment. The main item was a cross made from wood with snakes painted on it. The snakes were painted on the portion of the vertical piece below the crosspiece. The large eagle feathers were attached to the top portion and crosspiece. Mrs. Guenther reported that some crosses were decorated with snake skins, but because Silas John had blessed them they were no longer considered dangerous. Silas John also provided headmen with small, rectangular pieces of buckskin. These measured about eighteen inches across and were painted with snake figures. A piece of turquoise was attached to the middle of the buckskin and eagle feathers were tied to the borders.

The basic ritual involving these items was intended to confer protection. At dawn the family cluster headman would rise and, as the sun broke over the horizon, unwrap the paraphernalia prepared by Silas John. Then, placing the cross to the east he would hang the buckskin on it and summon everyone to participate in a morning service. The

headman would pray and sing to the cross. Then he would take hadntin and make a cross on the cheeks and foreheads of the children, especially those who were attending school. The ritual was designed to protect the children against disease, witchcraft, and harm from Anglos. The children would carry the hadntin markings to school, and sometimes, when teachers would attempt to wipe them off, the students would cry. Uncertain of what to do, the teachers requested advice from the superintendent at Whiteriver. Unaware that Silas John was behind the practice, the superintendent ruled that since this was part of traditional Apache religion the hadntin markings should not be removed.

In addition to these morning rituals, any individual who wanted protection from disease or witchcraft could purchase certain articles from Silas John. The most common of these was a small buckskin bag of hadntin which was worn on the inside of the shirt or blouse. Silas John also made small crosses from wood which had been struck by lightning. These were about one and a half to two inches high, the crosspiece transecting the vertical piece midway. The crosses were notched on all four ends and were painted with snake designs in red or yellow, black, white, and blue or green. A small, downy eagle feather was placed in the middle of the cross. These crosses were only worn by men.

The years between 1925 and 1933 were difficult ones for Silas John. He was frequently in trouble with the authorities. On August 10, 1924, Silas John was forbidden to set foot on the San Carlos Reservation again. From then on, every time he was found there he was

jailed or escorted back to the Fort Apache Reservation. In 1929 he was also forbidden to enter the reservation at Mescalero, New Mexico. A White missionary in the Verde Valley and several Apache soldiers at Fort Huachuca also complained of Silas John's disruptive influence.

During this period Silas John's influence was expanded in some areas and diminishing in others. By 1928 his religion had spread to the Ft. McDowell Indian Reservation in Arizona and to the Mescalero Indian Reservation in New Mexico. In addition to setting up "holy grounds" and committees on these reservations, he supplied individuals with ritual paraphernalia with which to cure diseases and provide protection against illness and witchcraft. Particularly important were crosses (Opler 1941:233, 302; 1969:190-191), small ones for personal use and larger ones for public rituals. Because Silas John was not allowed to visit the Mescalero Reservation much of his religious business was carried on by mail. Letters typically began with the salutation "Dear brother in Christ," and members wrote Silas John to seek his approval on "holy grounds" activities or to ask for his help. Many people wrote to ask Silas John to pray for sick relatives. One person asked for a small personal cross. Still another wrote wanting to know if it was permissible to fix a "wheel" on the top of the cross used at the "holy grounds." In addition, the "holy grounds" committee at Mescalero went to Oklahoma in 1932 and staged a curing ceremony for a sick child using a sand painting Silas John had taught them.[5]

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5. Silas John not only provided his 'disciples' with his written prayers, but also with pieces of tanned buckskin upon which

At Fort McDowell the situation was much the same. The "holy grounds" committee was well organized and ceremonies were held every Sunday. In 1932 committee members boasted of two Salt River Pima converts.

While Silas John's popularity was on the rise among the Mescalero and Fort McDowell Indians it was declining at San Carlos due to intensive work by Lutheran missionaries and the fact that Silas John himself was not allowed to work there. Meanwhile, on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, although many Apaches still turned to Silas John for help, his popularity began to decline.

Silas John did not hold any snake dances on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation between 1925 and 1933, but he did hold private curing ceremonies. These rituals varied according to the ailment in question. For example, one man came to Silas John because he was frightened that witchcraft had been used against him. Silas John sang for the man and told him to return to his camp in Cibecue and look around the outside of his wickiup. If he found a shell close by it would indicate that spell sorcery had been used against him and he would be restored to health shortly thereafter. The man found the shell and recovered.

On another occasion a man was bitten on the forehead by a black widow spider. That evening, when the victim was experiencing acute

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were drawn pictures of snakes and other figures. These were used in praying at "holy grounds." In addition he taught some of his disciples to make sand paintings which were used in curing ceremonies.

stomach cramps, nausea, and delirium, Silas John was consulted by a close associate. Silas John informed the messenger to tell the victim that all would be well, and that he would come to heal him in the morning. The next day Silas John arrived, sang several songs for the patient, and placed hadntin on the bite. A few days later the man regained good health.

Silas John also cured persons who had been bitten by snakes, especially rattlesnakes. The usual method involved making a cross of hadntin on the wound and drawing a circle of hadntin around the area at some distance from the bite area towards which the swelling was progressing. It was believed that no swelling would occur beyond this circle. This was the traditional Apache treatment for snakebite. On one occasion, however, Silas John blessed the bite with hadntin and then cut into the skin and sucked out the poison.

Nonetheless, dissatisfaction with Silas John began to grow on the Fort Apache Reservation. Mounting opposition came from Lutheran Apaches. The following incident, which occurred at Whiteriver, is illustrative of their attitude. A number of pickup trucks pulled into the fairgrounds one Sunday afternoon. Several people from San Carlos got out, including twelve women dressed in white dresses. Each was given a large cross decorated with snake designs and eagle feathers. The women then lined up two abreast and began to dance behind a spokesman. Suddenly, this man shouted to the crowd, telling all to kneel down because Silas John was coming. The men took off their hats and the women began to kneel. Then a young boy who was attending the East

Fork Lutheran mission school said, "We are not going to kneel down for you. You're not God." A few snickers were heard from the crowd. The boy became bolder. "We only have one God and we only kneel down to one God. And you can't make us kneel down. You're not God" (female Anglo consultant). The women straightened up, and the White Mountain Apaches began to laugh and talk about the San Carlos people. The ritual ended immediately. Many Lutheran and non-Lutheran Apaches condemned Silas John because of his extra-marital sexual activities. Still others suspected him of being a witch, but would not say so openly fearing that he might use his 'power' and stop their hearts.

Silas John was publicly criticized for other reasons. Several individuals from North Fork, Carrizo, and Cibecue accused him of causing droughts. Because snakes prefer dusty areas and crawl in the dust the Apaches recognized a connection between them and the absence of moisture. Consequently, it was held that medicine men with 'snake power' could manipulate rain. However, these Apaches claimed that Silas John's 'snake dances' had a reverse effect and caused drought. At one time Silas conducted a rainmaking ceremony, but it failed. Not long thereafter a North Fork medicine man, A-2, performed a ceremony and rain began to fall.

Finally, there were some Apaches from Carrizo and Cibecue who felt that Silas John's 'power' was impotent in these areas. This is illustrated by an event which occurred in 1922 or 1923. A ceremony was in progress at Carrizo, and while most of the Apaches in attendance were from Carrizo or Cibecue a few people from other communities were

also on hand. About mid-morning a large rattlesnake crawled out of a pile of brush. A young man from Canyon Day or East Fork stepped up, saying that he had collected snakes for Silas John and had no fear. He threw his hat on the snake and reached underneath it to grasp the snake. He was bitten on the back of his hand. An eyewitness described what happened next.

> And all the old timers, men and women, and all, got scared. They got after him, they got after him right there, and they put him in the shade of a tree near the sand there, near the river. And they talked a lot to him, and a lot of them bawled him out. "We don't care who Silas Johns is or who. These snakes belong to us, they're the same as these dziɣt'aadn, hillbillys /'mountain people'/. And your snakes out there, ɣaanabaaha /'many travel together'/[6] territory, they're yours. That's your people. You belong there; the snakes belong there. And these snakes here belong here, and you got no business at all to fool with what we are -- hillbillys" (male Apache consultant).

There was an old blind medicine man from Cibecue at the ceremony who, after admonishing the young man, put a circle of hadntin around his swelling arm, and prayed and cured him with a seashell.

On February 18, 1933, Silas John Edward's wife was found murdered, and in October Silas John was declared guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was not paroled until 1955. During his imprisonment his religion continued. "Holy grounds" committees continued to hold Sunday meetings and special curing ceremonies. When he was released from Wickenburg, Silas John discovered that his imprisonment had resulted in a loss of some of his followers as noted by Goodwin

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6. This term refers to the Apaches living in Cedar Creek, Canyon Day, East Fork, Whiteriver and elsewhere on the east end of the reservation (Goodwin 1942:575; Opler 1973:25-27).

(1938:35). Between 1955 and 1965 he held no snake dances but continued to conduct private ceremonies for all who came to the "holy grounds."

By the 1960's it had become obvious to Silas John and most Apaches that his religion was starting to decline. Many of his original disciples and "holy grounds" committee members had died, and replacements from among the ranks of younger Apaches were difficult to recruit. One important supporter was Silas John's new wife. She learned some of Silas John's songs and assisted him in both private and public ceremonies.

Meanwhile, the Lutherans worked hard to prevent a revival of Silas John's religion. While Silas John was in prison, the Lutheran Church continued to grow and remained the largest church of the Fort Apache Reservation. Many Apache Lutherans opposed Silas John's teachings.

By the mid 1960's numerous religious denominations had been allowed on the Fort Apache Reservation and Silas John was no longer afraid to practice his religion in the open. He announced plans to hold an elaborate 'snake dance.' The dance would include a curing ceremony held for a sick girl, but it would also confer a blessing on everyone in attendance and cure those persons who were sick. The dance ground was located near Geronimo's Cave, about six miles east of East Fork.

Silas John blessed the sick girl with <u>hadntin</u>, sang, and prayed for her. Then the snake dance began and lasted for several days. Four large crosses were placed on the dance ground and a small enclosure was

constructed some distance away. On each of the crosses, which stood about five or six feet high, a hoop was hung: one blue, one yellow, one black, one white. Eagle feathers and turquoise beads were attached to the hoops. The snakes, all of which were nonpoisonous, were kept in an enclosure.

In the morning, after an all night social dance, the ceremony began. Silas John sang in the enclosure and blessed the hands of the four young men and the four girls who would dance with the snakes and hoops. Then Silas John's wife came out of the enclosure with a snake and approached the infirm Apaches who had lined up. She crossed in front of this line four times and then returned to the enclosure. Then the dancers moved out of the enclosure and Silas John took his position with a group of singers located near the line of sick people. The young girls went to the crosses and removed the hoops; each youth carried a snake. Then they, too, formed a line. In front of the dancers was a man who carried a four foot cross decorated with eagle feathers. Next came a youth with a snake, a girl with a hoop, and so on. The dancers moved in a line, then stopped and separated. Two girls faced each other, holding out their hoops until they touched, forming an arch. The young men carrying snakes did the same. Then all those who were ill walked beneath the four arches formed by hoops and snakes. This was done to cure them. In the afternoon Silas John retired to the enclosure where anyone who so desired could come to him and be blessed or cured. At one point, Silas John stepped out of the enclosure and was met by several men who took off their hats and bowed

out of respect. Silas John had a kind word for everyone and shook their hands.

The atmosphere of the snake dance was one of friendliness. Several Anglos who attended were surprised that the Apaches went out of their way to try to explain what was happening and to make them feel that the ceremony was for them too. Silas John blessed one white-haired Anglo man, saying that he would live to be ninety-nine or 100 years old.

However, the snake dance was not a total success. Several consultants recalled that while Silas John was good natured and friendly, he seemed to be troubled. Drunk Apaches were in attendance and some of them visited Silas John in the enclosure. Afterwards, Silas John told one Apache family that "the Apache children today have no respect for the old ways and neither do many of the older people. They drink too much and they fight."

Shortly after this Silas John stopped holding public ceremonies, leaving members of his "holy grounds" committees to conduct Sunday morning services and curing ceremonies. However, Silas John did continue to hold private ceremonies for individual Apaches. By the early 1970's Silas John's memory, according to several Apaches, was beginning to fail. In addition, Silas John admitted he was no longer able to sing the arduous series of chants he once could. He was confined to a nursing home in Laveen, Arizona, troubled with respiratory ailments, a broken hip, blindness, and deafness. There he has remained until the present /1976/.

Nevertheless, Silas John has maintained one characteristic which has won him respect from all Apaches, including those who do not follow his religion. He has never held a grudge against anyone or any group of people. He is known as a friendly man who speaks well of all. Even of his twenty-one years in prison Silas John does not complain. On one occasion, however, he mentioned the ordeal to some of his close friends. Silas John was staying with an Apache couple in Whiteriver who owned a pet parakeet. He asked the couple to release the bird since "it reminded him too much of the time when he was caged up" (female Apache consultant).

# CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSION

In this study I have worked toward two distinct but related ends -- to provide an ethnohistory of the White Mountain Apaches between 1880 and 1930, and to determine whether four Apache religious cult movements are consistent with general hypotheses that have been advanced to account for this type of phenomena. The first of these goals has been achieved, and this chapter will deal primarily with the second.

In Chapter 1, I noted that in the record of White Mountain Apache history there exists a hiatus which spans the years between 1880 and 1930. Nevertheless, this was an important transitional period during which the Indians experienced intense acculturation pressures and major cultural changes. This was also the period when the four religious cult movements occurred. In the last four chapters of this study I have provided an ethnohistory of the Apaches for this period. By utilizing both documentary and ethnographic information I have attempted to show how contact with Anglos affected the Apaches' lives and how they reacted to it.

Taken as a whole this ethnohistory raises questions about certain conclusions which have previously been drawn concerning culture change among the White Mountain Apache. Authors such as Everett

(1971:46-52) have suggested that because of their relative isolation, Apaches living on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation underwent less severe acculturation pressures than Indians residing on the San Carlos Reservation. The data presented in the preceding chapters indicates that such was not the case. Military defeat, economic change, disease, land loss, forced education, missionization, and the prohibition of certain traditional customs and practices were felt in equal measure on both reservations.

It must be noted, however, that while this ethnohistory supercedes other treatments it is not complete. In the future, documents will undoubtedly turn up and shed new light on the findings presented here. In addition, many Apaches alive today have information about their own history which has not, and probably never will, appear in print. It is my hope that as new materials become available on White Mountain Apache culture between 1880 and 1930 they can be used to expand or correct what I have accomplished here.

The other goal which I set out to achieve in this dissertation was to determine whether the four Apache religious cult movements are consistent with selected general hypotheses concerning these phenomena. In Chapter 2, I defined a religious cult movement as consisting of a group of individuals oriented toward a common belief in the supernatural that is not typical of the traditional religious system, and which, motivated and directed by this belief, pursues a particular goal or set of goals. All four Apache movements -- na'ilde', dayodiya', 'aayode', and sailiš ǰaan bi'at'eehi -- correspond to this definition.

In the study of religious cult movements certain questions have been of overwhelming concern to anthropologists. These have to do with: 1, why such movements arise?; 2, how similarities and differences among them can be explained?; and 3, why some movements persist while others do not? In Chapter 2 hypotheses derived from the work of Linton, Wallace, Aberle, La Barre, and others were presented to deal with these questions.

In answer to the first question it was suggested that religious cult movements arise in response to stress. Stress was defined as a condition that results when all or part of a social system is threatened with serious damage. Stress arises when the physical, social, or cultural existence of a society is placed in jeopardy. However, it was also hypothesized that, while such movements do result from stress, they arise only after more traditional sacred or secular responses have proven ineffectual.

In answer to the question concerning the similarities and differences among movements, it was hypothesized that the form a movement takes is reflected in the type of stress producing it. Thus, movements arising because of similar stress conditions are more alike in form than those arising in response to different types of stress.

Finally, it was suggested that those movements which succeed in reducing the level of stress tend to persist. On the other hand, those which provide little or no relief do not.

Based on the data presented in Chapters 4-7, it is clear that these general hypotheses do provide useful interpretive principles for

understanding the four White Mountain Apache religious cult movements. Immediately prior to the rise of na'ilde' in 1880 the Apaches suffered acute stress. Following several bloody military campaigns they were placed on reservations. Prohibited from roaming freely over a wide expanse, their traditional subsistence pursuits became impossible. Constantly under the fear of aggression by Anglos the Apaches attempted to adapt to an alien economic system, but crop destruction, water shortages, inexperience, and corruption among the agents made their existence precarious and difficult. Even after they were allowed to return to their homeland the White Mountain Apaches were constantly beset by disease and encroachment. To make matters worse Diablo and Eskiole, two prominent chiefs to whom many Apaches turned for leadership and guidance, had been killed. By the fall of 1880 the Apaches could see no solution to the predicament in which they found themselves.

Then na'ilde' began. The prophecy of Noch-ay-del-klinne not only reflected the stress being felt but provided what seemed to be a reasonable solution to it. Noch-ay-del-klinne proclaimed the ability to raise Diablo from the dead. Under his leadership the Whites would be removed from the Apaches' land and the Indians would regain exclusive control of it. After being reunited with their dead relatives they would live in peace. There would be abundant food. There would be no disease.

Within a year the Apaches became increasingly dissatisfied with how the movement was progressing. After investing considerable time, energy, and resources in na'ilde' the participants began to

demand results. Noch-ay-del-klinne was able to satisfy them only temporarily by contacting three dead leaders. Not long thereafter the prophet was killed, and when he failed to come back to life the movement ended. The Apaches' situation had not improved.

The second White Mountain Apache religious cult movement arose in 1903, also after a period of stress. By this time open hostilities between the Anglos and Apaches were over. However, the Apaches were still faced with the threat of starvation. Floods, droughts, and other problems hampered agricultural endeavors, and corruption among Anglo officials hindered efforts at cattle raising. Apaches attempting to return to traditional hunting and gathering activities could make only a meager living. Many were forced to seek employment off the reservation. In addition, disease continued to ravage the Apaches, and encroachment onto their land persisted. To make matters worse, Anglos, for the first time, initiated various programs designed to change the Apaches' culture. Forced education, missionization, and prohibition of tu'pai drinking were all efforts to Anglicize and Christianize the Apaches.

Traditional Apache institutions were unable to successfully deal with these forms of stress. Unable to drive the Whites out, the Apaches tried to cope with their presence but with little success. Medicine men were often powerless to effect cures for the newly introduced diseases. The efforts of medicine men and grandparents to halt forced education were futile.

It was at this point in time that dayodiya' arose. Daslahdn and subsequent medicine men proclaimed that the believers would be raised up into the sky in a cloud. An earthquake or great flood would then destroy the evil people on earth -- especially the Anglos. The followers would then be set back on earth where there would be plenty of food and no illness. Medicine men insisted that the participants dress in white clothing and carry hadntin. Many were also told to adopt new names. All of these elements symbolized the traditional Apache culture as it existed prior to White contact. The Apaches who used these were united by their common definitions and emotional attitudes toward them and consequently toward Apache culture (cf Spicer 1971:795-796).

Dayodiya' proved to be a failure. Instead of conditions improving, the overall situation during the movement worsened. Not only was starvation more likely and forced education more widespread, but also many of the participants had spent many of their meager resources on the movement with little in return. With the untimely deaths of several of the movement's prophets dayodiya' ceased.

Between the end of dayodiya' in 1907 and the rise of 'aayode' in 1916 the Apaches continued to live under great stress. While starvation was no longer imminent, disease took many lives. Several epidemics swept across the reservation killing hundreds of people. In addition, forced education, missionization, and prohibition of native practices continued. Also during this period four natural events --

Halley's Comet, a meteor shower, an earthquake, and a flood -- terrified the Apaches.

Against such stress the Apaches had no defense. Medicine men were unable to stop the epidemics or to cure many of the infirm; neither were they able to combat the educational system. Their prestige and authority were also suffering from competition with Lutheran missionaries.

Since the stresses which led to 'aayode' were very similar to those which produced dayodiya' the form of the two movements was almost identical. The doctrine proclaimed by the prophets as well as the symbolic elements used were the same except for one significant exception. In 'aayode' the believers were to eventually live, not on the rejuvenated earth, but in a new world. The Apaches interpreted the natural events which occurred before the later movement as proof that the earth would be destroyed. Like its precursors 'aayode' failed. It did not succeed in relieving stress.

By the time of the fourth White Mountain Apache religious cult movement many of the stresses of the previous period had been reduced. However, new ones had been added. By 1920 Apaches had improved relations with the government and had made adjustments to education and missionization. But for two winters in succession a devastating flu epidemic spread throughout the reservation, resulting in hundreds of deaths. At the same time the frequency of witchcraft accusations rose sharply.

There seemed to be no way of handling the stress. Neither the power of the Anglo doctors and missionaries nor that of the medicine men could prevent another epidemic or cure those who were sick. Similarly, little could be done to relieve the heightened anxieties connected with witchcraft.

In 1920 the Silas John movement began and provided working solutions to some stress conditions. Silas John proclaimed the ability to cure the infirm, to reverse the effects of witchcraft, and to bless all who attended his ceremonials. His snake dances were particularly well suited to curing masses of people at one time, and thus were particularly useful in providing protection against epidemics.

In spite of Silas John's imprisonment for twenty-one years the movement he started persisted. His promises had been kept. He cured large numbers of people. He offered relief for many witchcraft victims, and he gave assurance to all that their general condition would improve. Finally, Silas John provided a new unity for many Apaches. Belief and reliance on him crosscut many traditional kinship and residential boundaries and joined the people in a common cause.

In summary, data on the four White Mountain Apache religious cult movements appear to be consistent with principles set forth in the hypotheses proposed by Linton, Wallace, Aberle, and La Barre. In retrospect it is difficult to see what changes could be made in these hypotheses to improve them. Though not predictive, they are explanatory and have demonstrable cross-cultural applicability. They also

have far-reaching implications for the ethnohistoric study of religious cult movements.

It is not uncommon for the ethnohistorian to locate descriptions of cult movements and still have little information on the conditions that produced them. However, by analyzing the doctrine of a movement it may be possible to speculate about the nature of such conditions. If, for example, it has been prophesied that there will be no more sickness, it may be assumed that prior to the start of the movement disease was prevalent and perhaps uncontrollable. On the other hand, occasionally, the ethnohistorian is able to locate much data on the historical context of a religious cult movement and yet be unable to decide which condition or conditions led to stress. Once again, by analyzing the form of the movement he may be able to make such a determination.

While the general hypotheses discussed in this study are very useful for the reasons just cited, there are many questions about the nature of religious cult movements and about the four Apache movements which remain to be answered. None of the hypotheses, for example, explains why movements arise when they do. From the data presented, it is clear that between 1870 and 1930 the White Mountain Apaches underwent stress and that traditional responses to this stress provided little relief. Yet, why was it in 1880, 1903, 1916, and 1920 that cult movements arose?

Our data suggest that prior to each movement the Apaches had undergone increasing stress. However, movements arose only after the

advent of a particularly disruptive event or events. Na'ilde' arose during a severe winter when food supplies were exhausted. This was only months after the death of Diablo. Dayodiya' began not long after a serious drought had destroyed crops and during a time when Anglos were threatening to stop issuing rations. The 'aayode' movement began in 1916 within a year and a half of the devastating whooping cough epidemic and within five months of the worst flood in Apache history. Finally, the Silas John movement began less than six months after the end of the great flu epidemic.

Although these data are not conclusive they do suggest that the timing of the four movements was not fortuitous. Apparently, the Apaches were able to cope with stress up to a certain point. But when unprecedented events occurred that dramatically heightened the stress, cult movements began.

Another question about the nature of religious cult movements which has not been directly answered in this study has to do with what Wallace (1956:268) calls their "processual structure." He has postulated that movements arise after periods of stress and "cultural distortion." "Cultural distortion" results when members of a society are so deeply affected by stress that they are driven to excessive drinking, intragroup violence, apathy, or socially unacceptable sexual behavior (Wallace 1956:269). The data presented in this study are not consistent with this hypothesis. Little or no information has come to light which suggests that prior to the first two Apache movements "cultural distortion" had occurred.

Besides raising questions about the nature of religious cult movements in general, the data presented in this study reveal certain regularities specific to the White Mountain Apache movements. This, of course, is only to be expected, since any movement takes place in a particular cultural setting.

First, three of the four Apache movements arose in isolated areas of the Fort Apache Indian Reservation. Na'ilde' and dayodiya' began in Cibecue while 'aayode' developed in Turkey Creek. Yet, the Silas John movement first appeared in East Fork and Seven Mile, areas in which Anglos had concentrated their efforts for some time. Consequently, it is unclear whether there was a direct connection between the location and the beginning of these movements.

Second, it is clear that all of the prophets involved in the Apache religious cult movements were medicine men. Furthermore, it appears that all of these individuals possessed the most potent forms of supernatural 'power' -- 'lightning' or 'snake' -- which are typically acquired in dreams. In addition, it seems that in the Apache case, only medicine men whose 'power' had sought them out were in a position to proclaim doctrines which differed significantly from traditional religious forms. Having high respect for the authority of these medicine men, together with the 'powers' they controlled, it is not surprising that many Apaches believed the prophecies. The Apaches felt that it was the supernatural acting through medicine men, and not the medicine men themselves, which offered a solution to their pressing needs and problems. One elderly Apache summarized it this way:

"if you just went out and told everybody that this world was going to end they would say you were crazy. But God, he tells things to 'heavy weight' medicine men and we believe them."

Two interesting questions about Apache religious cult movements arise from these observations. One has to do with the rise to prominence of cult leaders. During the period when the four movements took place, it is safe to assume that there were many other medicine men who possessed 'lightning' or 'snake power.' However, these individuals never started cult movements. Why this was so is not known and probably never will be. In the course of my field work, although I inquired repeatedly into this matter, I learned very little. Apache consultants could only conclude that the supernatural "sought out" some medicine men while ignoring others. My consultants did not know on what basis 'powers' made their selection. Surely, a psychological study of the cult leaders would be revealing in this regard, but such a study would be almost impossible to make. Many of the prophets died years ago and today are remembered only vaguely.

The second question having to do with religious cult leaders involves their differential ability to unite the Apaches. Noch-ay-del-klinne and Silas John were able to transcend kinship and residential boundaries, but the other prophets restricted their activities to much smaller areas. As was stated earlier, Noch-ay-del-klinne attracted followers not only from Cibecue, his own home, but also from Fort Apache, San Carlos, and other areas as well. Silas John attracted followers from San Carlos, Fort McDowell, and Mescalero as well as from

his own area. The extent of Silas John's influence was also illustrated by the fact that certain Apaches in North Fork, Carrizo, and Cibecue made deliberate efforts to discredit him. They did this by claiming that his dances caused droughts and that his 'power' was impotent.

An explanation of these differences among medicine men is not possible. Both Noch-ay-del-klinne and Silas John were extremely influential, but whether their charismatic abilities were recognized prior to the movements or emerged because of them is not known.

There is one other regularity among the four White Mountain Apache religious cult movements. This has to do with the reactions of the participants to the movements themselves. In Chapter 3 it was suggested that Apache religious activity had a distinctly pragmatic character. If a power, medicine man, or ceremony failed to produce expected results it was abandoned in favor of a different one. The Apaches applied this same principle to participation in religious cult movements. After allowing what they considered sufficient time for the prophecies to be fulfilled, the participants lost confidence in them and began to search for the alternative solutions. It is important to note, however, that at no time was the basic validity of the religious system questioned. The Apaches attributed the failure of the movements to deception by t'ciidnnant'an ('chief of the ghosts'), fear on the part of participants, and the illicit sexual behavior of medicine men. It seems clear, then, that while the religious cult movements deviated

significantly from traditional religious practices, the participants applied to these novel forms the same basic principles which characterized participation in the established religious system.

In summary, the data on the Apache religious cult movements are consistent with existing hypotheses about this phenomenon. Consequently, several important questions about them have been answered. However, this study has raised equally important questions -- as yet unanswered -- about the nature of religious cults in general and the Western Apache cases in particular.

# APPENDIX A

## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The Western Apache words and phrases included in this dissertation are written in accordance with the phonetic orthography given below (after Basso 1970:xiii).

Vowels

a, as in English father

e, as in English met

i, as in English bead

o, as in English mow

u, as in English boot

ɔ, as in English claw

y, glide

Vowel nasalization is indicated by a subscript apostrophe, for example a̧.

Consonants

b, voiced bilabial stop

t, voiceless alveolar stop

d, voiced alveolar stop

k, voiceless velar stop

g, voiced velar stop

n, voiced alveolar nasal

m, voiced bilabial nasal

č, voiceless alveopalatal affricative

ǰ, voiced alveopalatal affricative

ɣ, voiced velar fricative

Consonants

s, voiceless alveolar fricative

z, voiced alveolar fricative

š, voiceless alveopalatal fricative

ž, voiced alveopalatal fricative

h, voiceless glottal fricative

l, voiced alveolar lateral

ɬ, voiceless alveolar lateral (usually spirantal)

w, voiceless bilabial semivowel

', the glottal stop

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