

LOUISA WADE WETHERILL was born in a small mining town in Nevada in 1877. When she was two years old, her family moved to the town of Mancos in southwestern Colorado. There she grew up and married rancher and explorer John Wetherill. In 1900, Louisa, John, and their two small children left Mancos and moved to a trading post among the Navajos in northwestern New Mexico. In 1906, the Wetherills moved to an isolated area in southeastern Utah where they established their Oljato trading post. Among their neighbors was Wolfkiller, a man Louisa quickly came to know and respect. For more than forty years she devoted herself to studying Navajo culture and became an advocate for recording their ancient customs. Her Navajo friends called her *Asthon Sosi*, Slim Woman.

HARVEY LEAKE began tracing the trail of his great-grandparents, Louisa and John Wetherill, more than twenty-five years ago in libraries, archives, and family papers, and by listening to the recollections of the family elders. He assists in the interpretation of historical documents and photographs for the Wetherill archive at the Anasazi Heritage Center in Dolores, Colorado. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering from Arizona State University and a Master of Arts degree in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary.

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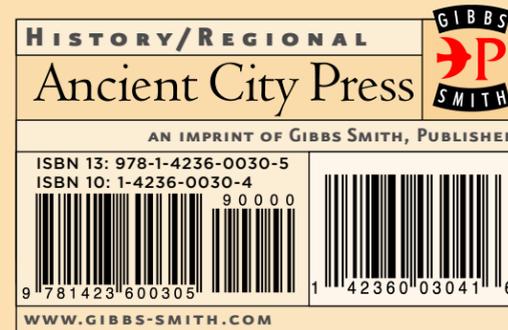
WOLFKILLER

"If Mrs. Wetherill could be persuaded to write on the mythology of the Navajos, and also on their present-day psychology . . . she would render an invaluable service. She not only knows their language; she knows their minds."

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, AFTER VISITING THE TRADING POST IN 1913

"The ancient world and the American present meet in [Louisa Wetherill's] personality as perhaps in no other personality alive."

JOHN COLLIER, WHO LATER BECAME U.S. COMMISSIONER OF INDIAN AFFAIRS



WETHERILL

WOLFKILLER

AS RECORDED BY
LOUISA WADE WETHERILL

COMPILED BY
HARVEY LEAKE

WOLFKILLER

WISDOM FROM A
NINETEENTH-CENTURY
NAVAJO
SHEPHERD

\$14.95 U.S.

WOLFKILLER

WISDOM FROM A NINETEENTH-CENTURY
NAVAJO SHEPHERD

Wolfkiller is the remarkable life story of a Navajo herdsman and plant-gatherer who lived in the Monument Valley region of Navajo country, along the Utah/Arizona border, from about 1855 until 1926. Raised by his grandfather and mother, Wolfkiller learned the ancient wisdom of his people. He grew up seeing the beauty in nature and discovering how to face the wind, storms, cold, and even death with optimism and courage. Through his embrace of the natural world, he developed both a rare depth of character and an understanding of human relations that guided him through times of adversity.

Wolfkiller's story was recorded and translated by pioneer trader Louisa Wade Wetherill, who met him after moving to his community in the early twentieth century. After listening to Wolfkiller describe the wisdom of the elders he had learned as a child and by observing his respect for all of life, Louisa proposed that these lessons be preserved for the benefit of future generations.

Photographs of Wolfkiller and the Wetherills and other historical images are included throughout the book to help illustrate the mode of life, types of personalities, and environment in which Wolfkiller's story took place.



That evening, after we put the sheep into the corral and returned to the hogan, I showed the plant to him and asked him if he would tell us about it. He looked at it and said that even though it was small and grew flat to the ground and out of sight, it was important for food and medicine. When the people were hungry and the rain did not fall to make the corn grow, the people were compelled to learn what plants they could eat. That is when they learned about this plant.

“There is a story about it, and I will tell it to you now if you would like to hear it,” said Grandfather.

I told him that I was so glad he was going to tell us another story because there were still so many things I wanted to learn about.

THE PLANT WITH THE BLUE FLOWERS

Dragonfly (*tániil'ái*) was flying around one day, hunting water, when the Spirit of Hunger came to him and frightened him. The dragonfly fainted. When he came to, he saw an awful thing in front of him. It was so thin that it was just a lot of bones with wings. Its eyes were very large, as there was no face for them to rest in. “I wonder what he is,” thought the dragonfly.

Then the Spirit of Hunger shook his head from side to side.

The dragonfly became worried. “He can catch my thoughts without my speaking them. I wonder how he does it.”

Again, the Spirit of Hunger shook his head.

“I wonder if he is the Spirit of Death,” the dragonfly thought.

Again, the Spirit of Hunger shook his head.

“He must be the Spirit of Hunger,” the dragonfly concluded. “He is so thin—just a spine and some eyes and wings.”

Then the Spirit of Hunger spoke. “Yes, my friend, I am Hunger.”

“Have you come to kill me?” asked the dragonfly.

“No, I have not come to kill you. I am just wandering around aimlessly, hunting for a victim. You seem to be able to take care of yourself and get plenty to eat. I am looking for someone who is too lazy to work and is always thinking there is nothing to do. This person is a nuisance to the people about him and he should be gotten rid of. You are so happy and busy. You do not have time to get hungry.”

Then they went their ways. The dragonfly went to hunt water, and the Spirit of Hunger went to hunt someone who was too lazy to work.

Dragonfly met bat (*jaa'abani*) and told him of his meeting with the Spirit of Hunger. “Let’s go and see if we can find him,” said the bat. “I would like to see him.”

They were flying along, hunting for the Spirit of Hunger and for water at the same time, when they saw an old woman sitting alone. She had spread out her robe and was sitting on it. They thought they would have a little fun, so they slipped up behind her and touched her. She did not look back to see who they were, but just ran away and left her robe. It turned into this plant with the blue flowers. The foolish old woman helped the people by leaving her robe. So every act counts for something and has a purpose in it.



When Wolfkiller asked about a plant with blue flowers, his grandfather told him a story about an old woman who jumped up when she was startled and left her robe lying on the ground.

Marriage

When spring came, my people said it was time for me to be married. I told them I did not want to live too far away from them, as I wanted my grandfather to teach me more about the plants and ceremonies. They said they would be glad to have me stay near them. At a nearby hogan was a girl of marriageable age. She was a member of a clan into which I could marry. My grandfather and uncle went there to ask for the girl. When they came back, they had made all the arrangements for our wedding. It would be in a month.



The young women had their own social circles. These women are wearing velveteen blouses, multilayered skirts of calico, and beads of turquoise, white shell, and coral.