
Holbrook Indian School is located on 320 acres of land outside Holbrook, Arizona, just south of the Navajo Indian Reservation.¹ Land for the mission was acquired by the Arizona Conference Corporation of Seventh-day Adventists in
1945. The first parcel of 210 acres was purchased March 14, 1945 for $8,875; the second parcel of 110 acres was purchased April 20, 1945 for $1,500. Providentially the land is located over an aquifer, so the school has never had a problem obtaining water.

Whereas Marvin and Gwen Walter had originally conceived of their work as conducting welfare ministry, ministering to people’s medical needs, holding branch Sabbath Schools, and such, it soon became evident that the Navajo people in the Holbrook area needed a school. On its earliest letterhead the name is given as “Holbrook Seventh-day Adventist Navajo Mission,” which focuses attention on Navajos and on various forms of mission outreach. Both parts of this formula would change over time as the mission expanded to include students from many tribes (not only Navajos), and as the institution came to focus primarily on education (shifting the focus from other forms of outreach).

In 1951 the Pacific Union Recorder used the term “Holbrook Indian School.” For whatever reason, during its first five years of operation the new school was not listed in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook (1946-1951). The name has subsequently gone through considerable fluctuation, but is once again most commonly called “Holbrook Indian School,” as in 1951.

Marvin Walter was the first director of Holbrook Navajo Mission. Although the school was founded in 1945, existing correspondence shows that Marvin and Gwen Walter were already living in the Holbrook area in 1941 but considered their location temporary because it was not actually on the reservation. In September 1942 the Walter family moved to Dilkon, approximately thirty-five miles north of Holbrook as the crow flies, and farther by road. They would have stayed in Dilkon, but the tribe abruptly forced them to leave. In January 1943 their letters were sent from Indian Wells, fifteen miles east of Dilkon. The family would remain in Indian Wells until March 1945. In April 1945 the address changed back to Holbrook, and at this point land was purchased and a permanent mission established.

Marvin served as director of Holbrook Navajo Mission only two years, until the summer of 1948 when a doctor told him he would have to leave because of ill health. John Gilchrest, an assistant, attempted to keep the school open for the fall 1948 term but it closed for spring semester 1949. In the fall of 1949 the school reopened, this time with Frank Daugherty as director, and for the next seventeen years the work thrived under his leadership. To date, Holbrook Indian School has had a total of eighteen directors, including Gilchrest.

From 1946 through 1971 Holbrook was a primary school. The first secondary graduation occurred in 1972, and since then the mean average number of academy students graduating per year has been five. In 1992 and 1998 no graduation occurred. In 1982, 1985, 2006, and 2011, however, there were ten or more academy graduates. The largest class to date was that of 2011, with 12 students graduating.


With respect to finances, in 1990 the Pacific Union Conference contributed 27% of Holbrook’s budget, another 2% came from the North American Division, and the rest was from private donations. As of 2018 the Pacific Union percentage has gone down slightly to 20%, with the rest coming from individual donors. In 2011 the Pacific Union allocated over half the money it had reserved for mission projects to Holbrook (Holbrook 55.6%, Calexico 24.8%, Monument Valley [now closed] 12.7%, and 6.8% for other projects). Thus, assuming these numbers are representative, the Pacific Union invests half of its mission project giving to Holbrook, which receives one-fifth of its operating budget from the Pacific Union. Private donations still provide a major share of Holbrook’s financial needs.

In terms of student activities, in 2011 Holbrook students renovated a home for a needy family in the community. A pottery program also provides students the opportunity to learn to make beautiful art objects which they sell to bring in money to either keep or use for tuition.

SOURCES

_____.”TCE and HIS Students Impact Holbrook Community.” Pacific Union Recorder, August 2010.
_____.”Middle School Students Makeover Holbrook Home.” Pacific Union Recorder, July 2011.
_____.”TCE and HIS students make over Route 66 motel.” Pacific Union Recorder, July 2012.
_____.”Holbrook Students Attend Mud Madness Triathlon.” Pacific Union Recorder, January 2013.
_____.”Holbrook Senior Receives Gates Millennium Scholarship.” Pacific Union Recorder, June 2013.
_____.”Two Ordained at Arizona Camp Meeting.” Pacific Union Recorder, August 2013.
“$100 Camp Challenge Yields Nearly 100 Baptisms.” Pacific Union Recorder, November 2014.
Walter, Marvin and Gwen. A file of correspondence consisting of approximately 130 documents, comprising more than 400 pages. Archives and Statistics at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. www.adventistarchives.org.

NOTES

1. The town of Holbrook, founded 1881 or 1882, is not on the Navajo Reservation but lies about 20 miles south by the closest route. To the west on highway 180 (Interstate 40) Winslow is about 30 miles from Holbrook, Flagstaff about 90. To the east Gallup is about 95 miles. To the south on highway 77 it’s a little under 30 miles to Snowflake, a little under 50 to Show Low. These are small towns. To the north lies the Navajo Reservation, but without immediate access to major travel corridors. The basic orientation of Holbrook is westward.

2. Pacific Union Recorder, October 22, 1951, 15.


4. The name also appears as Gilchrist or Gilcrease.


