NPS Form 10-900
(Oct. 1990)

OMB No. 10024-0018

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x' in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name St. Christopher's Episcopal Mission

other name/site number St. Christopher's Mission to the Navajo

2. Location

street & town State Highway 163 ☐ not for publication

city or town Bluff ☒ vicinity

state Utah code UT county San Juan code 037 zip code 87401

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☒ statewide ☐ locally. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title SHPO Date 7/30/02

Utah Division of State History, Office of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. (☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

☑ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined eligible for the National Register
☐ See continuation sheet.
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.
☐ removed from the National Register.
☐ other, (explain:) _____

for Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Daniel J. Vivian 11/18/02

St. Christopher's Episcopal Mission
Name of Property

Bluff vicinity, San Juan County, Utah
City, County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ public-local
- ☒ private
- ☐ public-State
- ☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(check only one box)

- ☐ district
- ☒ building(s)
- ☐ site
- ☐ structure
- ☐ object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
3	8	buildings
0	0	sites
0		structures
		objects
3	8	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility, church school, church-related residence

Current Function
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility, church school, church-related residence

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS:
Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival
OTHER: vernacular

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation	STONE: sandstone
walls	STONE: sandstone
roof	ASPHALT rolled roofing
other	WOOD: log vigas

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

8. Description

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

☒ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

☒ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

☒ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.

☐ **B** removed from its original location.

☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.

☐ **D** a cemetery.

☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

☐ **F** a commemorative property.

☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION

ETHNIC HERITAGE/NATIVE AMERICAN

HEALTH/MEDICINE

EDUCATION

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1943-1952

Significant Dates

1943, 1944, 1951

Significant Persons

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Rev. H. Baxter Liebler

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Builders: Rev. H. Baxter Liebler and various Navajo volunteers and mission staff

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

☒See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☒ Other Name of repository:

Episcopal Diocese of Utah

☒ See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. 8 acres

UTM References
(Place additional boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	1/2	6/3/1/7/6/0	4/1/2/7/3/2/0
2	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /
3	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /
4	/	/ / / / /	/ / / / / /

Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property.)
The boundaries include the area immediately encircling the group of buildings that comprise the historic mission complex. Although the entire mission holdings include 165.5 acres(E 1/2 of the SE 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of Sect. 20; the W 1/2 of the SWt 1/4 of the SW 1/4 of Sect. 21; Lot 4 and the NW 1/4 of the NW 1/4 of Sect. 28; and lots 1, 2, and 5 of Sect. 29, T40S, R22E, Salt Lake Meridian), most of this is open desert land used for grazing sheep.

Property Tax No. 40522E209000, 40522E216000, 40522E290000, 40522E283000

Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)
The boundaries are those that were historically and continue to be associated with the property.

☐See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Geraldean Meyer and J. Cory Jensen (Utah SHPO Staff)

organization _____ date May 23, 2002

street & number 170 Lower Evergreen Drive telephone 435/645-7490

city or town Park City state UT zip code 84098

Additional Documentation
Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets
Maps A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
Photographs: Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.
Additional items: (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner
name/title The Episcopal Church in Navajoland/Right Reverend Steven T. Plummer, Bishop

street & number PO Box 40 telephone 435/672-2396

city or town Bluff state UT zip code 84512

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.).*

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Narrative Description

The St. Christopher's Mission complex is located two miles east of the town of Bluff, on state highway 163, in southeastern Utah. Part of a 165-acre tract of desert land bounded by the San Juan River to the south and wind-eroded sandstone bluffs to the north, the historic building complex comprises approximately eight acres. The complex consists of three contributing and eight noncontributing buildings along with various small structures. Across the river, just to the south, is the Navajo reservation. Also located outside the property is a cemetery and a narrow suspension footbridge, still in use, that was built to allow the Navajo children to cross the San Juan River to attend school at the mission.

Mission House

The primary historic building, the mission house, was constructed c.1943-c.1951. It is located at the far north end of the property and is constructed of local red sandstone in a coursed rubble pattern. The stone for all the buildings was quarried from the bluffs north of the mission. The common room, or central portion, is the remains of an earlier stone house[1] (date unknown, late-19th or early-20th century). Two wings project to the south on either side of this portion, forming a U-court plan. The west wing (1943) consists of cells that were used by the staff for sleeping quarters and the east wing was partitioned off to serve as a chapel and a temporary clinic until separate buildings could be constructed for these uses. The east wing burned down in 1950 and was immediately rebuilt, being completed in 1951. Constructed in a very simple vernacular Mission style, each of the exterior entryways from the courtyard into the individual rooms features an arched opening. The windows on the outward facing walls are multi-light wooden casements in rectangular openings.

The building features fairly shallow-pitched shed roofs over each of the sections. These are sheathed with boards and covered with asphalt rolled roofing. The entire roof system is supported by structural vigas that project from the stone walls just below the roofline. The common room at the rear of the court is of the same stone construction and has a stone fireplace and chimney that extends above the roof. This rear section has received three additions (dates unknown, but probably not long after the original construction). The first addition is of stone with a shed roof of a slightly flatter pitch than the original portion. This addition extended the rear (north) of the building approximately three feet. To this was added a log addition, which served as a dining room. This extends back another eight feet approximately and is constructed of round logs joined in a saddle-notch fashion; the floor consists of stone slabs. Another addition (c.1963 and remodeled c.1980s) was added to the northwest of the other additions to house a kitchen. This is a fairly large addition of stone construction with a wide, flat-pitched gable roof.

Other Contributing Buildings

The second historic building is the schoolhouse, which is located directly east of the mission house. The mission started the school in 1944 in an old Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) shack that they borrowed from

[1] H. Baxter Liebler, *Boil My Heart for Me*, (New York: Exposition Press, 1969), p.41. "The Story of St. Christopher's Mission." As told by Father H. Baxter Liebler. Tape transcript, Reel-to-Reel 45, Special Collections & Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University, 1959. This building is described variously as being either a house or an unfinished trading post.

the government and had trucked to the mission; this has since been removed from the site. The existing coursed-rubble stone structure was constructed as a replacement in 1951-52. The building is approximately 20 x 60 feet, with seven arched openings on the front and ten windows at the rear. The walls are red sandstone quarried from the bluffs, similar to the mission house. Like the mission house, the school was designed in a vernacular Mission style with a shallow-pitched roof and wide eaves, with vigas projecting just under the roofline. The round-arched windows are open down to ground level and the original French doors have been filled in with plywood and horizontal aluminum sliding windows; this appears to be the only exterior alteration to the building. The rear windows have smaller square openings. The centrally placed entrance vestibule projects outward approximately six feet from the primary structure and has built-in planter boxes on either side. The building is now used as the winter chapel.

The third contributing building is the hospital/clinic, which is located south of the main mission house at the front of the complex. Like the previous buildings, this too is built of coursed-rubble sandstone. The mission offered medical services 1943, using the common room and then the east wing of the mission house. The hospital and clinic building was started in 1951 and the walls were up and roof on by at least 1954, possibly earlier.[2] Because unskilled Navajo labor was employed in its construction and the only money available for materials was through donations,[3] the building proceeded slowly, finally being completed in 1956 (although, according to sources, it was in use prior to its completion). This building was described as having "four patient rooms with two beds in each, an examination room, dispensary, nurse's room, laboratory and utility space."[4] The construction, like most of the other buildings is Mission style. The flat roof is of dimensioned lumber and sits over pine-planks on log vigas. Like the other two buildings described, the exterior of the original structure has changed little since its construction. However, there has been an addition of a greenhouse to the south end of the building. The angular addition is twice the height of the clinic and has a geometrical appearance with a steeply pitched overshot shed roof and angled, glazed wall. Although the walls consist mostly of glazing, there are stone knee-walls on the sides. The stone is of a larger size and redder color than the clinic portion. At this time the building is boarded up and not in use and plans are, as costs permit, to remove it and restore the original appearance of the building.

Noncontributing Buildings and Structures

In addition to the historic buildings in the mission complex there are eight additional buildings and structures, several of which are only a few years from being considered eligible. The earliest is a staff-housing unit located northeast of the hospital/clinic, which is similar to the three historic buildings. It is of coursed-rubble stone construction and is designed in the Mission style with six arched openings that serve as recessed entryways to the apartments. The rear windows have square openings and metal multiple pane casements. The roof is flat

[2] H. Baxter Liebler, "Summary Self Survey Report, St. Christopher's Mission School, Bluff, Utah," unpublished, typed manuscript, 1954, p.12.

[3] In a fairly recent, undated letter, Joan Liebler explained the mission's need for donations, "...it should be noted that the Domestic Missions Board of the Episcopal Church did not share Father Liebler's enlightened views on evangelization. They took a very strict view of the conduct of an Indian after conversion. Therefore Father Liebler did not feel justified in asking for financial support from the Church." The mission was thus incorporated as a non-profit organization. Ironically, Liebler was later asked to describe his work at the mission at a meeting in Virginia and many of his ideas were approved by the church and put into practice in other missions.

[4] Liebler, "Summary Self Survey Report," p.5.

and has vigas projecting from the stone walls. The building was constructed soon after the hospital was completed in the mid-1950s (the exact date is not known). It was used as additional housing for staff and also for storage. The exterior has not been altered. Currently, the building is used as rental housing.

There are two other houses on the grounds. One, located directly north of the hospital/clinic, was used for the doctor and additional staff. It was constructed in 1958 and is a large, rambling Ranch house, constructed entirely of coursed-rubble sandstone. It is currently used as a vicarage. The other house, located to the west of the building group, was used as a vicarage and is now a residential rental. It dates from c.1960 and is a Ranch house with asbestos-shingle siding and sandstone slab chimney and panel detail.

A number of contemporary-style buildings were constructed on the grounds in the 1970s and 1980s (exact construction dates could not be found for most of these buildings). The building farthest east in the complex is a community center, which is in use by the mission for special activities and workshops. This building is square with a flat roof and is covered in plywood siding; it dates from the late 1970s. Also on the grounds, almost abutting the staff-housing unit at the southeast corner is a hexagonal building with a flat roof, plywood siding and large glazed panels. This building was constructed in the c.1970s and is used as the mission office. The most obvious building, and situated in the center of the complex, is a summer chapel. Somewhat resembling a tall, abstract teepee, the chapel was constructed in the mid 1960s[5] of cedar shakes and aluminum siding and replaced the original log cruciform chapel that was built in 1946 and destroyed by an arson-caused fire in 1964. Just to the east of this is a smaller octagonal building that is used as a sacristy and also more recently as a mission museum and gift shop. It is constructed of long un-coursed ashlar sandstone blocks and was probably built concurrently with the chapel (date unknown). Also on the grounds is a mobile home used as the current Priest's residence.

There are a few small structures[6] in the site that are worth mentioning. The original bell from when the mission was founded is supported under a small juniper-post campanile that sits just north of the sacristy (the bell came from a Pennsylvania Railroad locomotive).[7] Located between the summer chapel and the main mission house is a small monument where Father Liebler's body is interred. The monument consists of the stone alter and statue of the Virgin Mary, both salvaged from the original chapel; a pole and wire fence surrounds the grassy monument area.[8] A wood-frame outhouse, probably dating from the 1930s, was moved to the site in the late c.1940s[9] and is located at the front (south end) of the property in an open parking/camping area. Near the outhouse are what appear to be three small stone and concrete ovens set into the ground. To the north of the outhouse, across the parking circle, is an artesian well that remains a regular source of water for the local Navajo population.

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[5] Groundbreaking for the chapel was in April 1965 and it was dedicated 25 July 1968.
[6] The structures are for the most part too small to count as either contributing or noncontributing and are only mentioned to provide a better description of the site.
[7] Liebler, *Boil My Heart For Me*, p.52.
[8] This area is the site of the original chapel that was destroyed by fire; Father Liebler is buried in the area of the north transept.
[9] Ibid., p.52.

The large site is fairly open and is terminated on the north by a high, wind-carved sandstone ridge, which adds to the austere beauty of the site. Except for Father Liebler's burial site, none of the complex has any lawn or pavement as the sandy hardpan forms a rather flat and maintenance-free surface. Several mature, deciduous trees are scattered throughout the site, providing much needed shade. The mission staff planted the trees when they first settled here to provide shade from the harsh southern Utah sun. The site is set off the road approximately 150 feet and a wood pole and wire fence surrounds the complex of buildings. Separating the complex from the highway is a ditch and a wide sandy area overgrown with deciduous trees. Fields and open land are located both east and west of the complex. The entire site retains a very natural and historic appearance, seeing little change in the past two decades.

Narrative Statement of Significance

St. Christopher's Mission, located just east of the town of Bluff, Utah, between a high sandstone bluff on the north and the San Juan River on the south, was established in 1943 with the construction of the Mission House and is significant under Criteria A and B. Under Criterion A, the mission is significant as the only Episcopal mission complex covering the 3000 square mile "Utah Strip" of the Navajo reservation. When Father H. Baxter Liebler established the mission in 1943, the conditions in which the Navajo lived in this region were probably the most primitive of any culture in the entire continental United States. Father Liebler was a countering influence that changed these conditions as he introduced education, hygiene, and medical care to this people. Under Criterion B, the mission is significant for its association with Father Liebler, who relinquished his parish in Connecticut in order to establish a mission in one of the most isolated regions of the country. Intrigued since boyhood by the American Indian culture, Father Liebler felt that his religious calling would best be applied in this traditional setting. Instead of insisting the Navajos learn only Anglo culture and worship traditions, Liebler learned Navajo customs and rudimentary language skills and blended the two, becoming more unified with the Navajo people he served. Because of his methods he was befriended and trusted by the people and spent the remainder of his life on or near the reservation. Liebler employed Navajo and other unskilled help in the construction of the earlier buildings of the complex, which are designed in the Mission style (albeit a vernacular interpretation). The mission is unique in Utah as the only historic Episcopal mission to the Native Americans and is an important contributing historic resource in the region.

History of Bluff, Utah

Bluff City was founded in 1880 by a group of Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or LDS Church) pioneers who traveled the arduous "Hole-in-the-Rock" Trail (National Register listed 1982) to establish a community on the San Juan River in southeastern Utah. The settlers stopped in what is now Bluff (Bluff Historic District National Register listed 1995) because they were too exhausted to travel the twenty more miles to their intended destination. The settlement of Bluff was laid out in typical Mormon grid fashion, based on church-founder Joseph Smith's Plat of the City of Zion, with the church, school, and co-operative store in the center, surrounded by agricultural fields. Due to the powerful floods of the San Juan River, however, attempts to establish an agricultural base were repeatedly frustrated. Because of this, the settlers turned to raising livestock, which eventually became the primary industry in San Juan County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bluff's transition to a livestock economy ensured the success of the town during the first half of the century. By the middle of the 20th century Bluff had endured declines in population and agricultural activity, and boom-and-bust cycles associated with prospecting, mining, and oil development. Today tourism has become a driving force in the local economy.

St. Christopher's Mission

Establishment of the Mission

H. Baxter Liebler, an Episcopal priest from Old Greenwich Connecticut, came to Bluff in 1943 to establish a mission to the Navajos, which he named St. Christopher's Mission.[10] It is located on 165.5 acres of desert land three miles east of Bluff. The southern boundary of the property ends at the highway, across which is the boundary of the Navajo Reservation; the northern part of the mission expands into the red rock bluffs behind the mission. When Father Liebler arrived in Bluff, there were no missions, no schools, and no medical or hospital facilities for the Navajos living in the barren and remote Utah section of the reservation. Less then one hundred miles of road served 75,000 Navajos scattered across an expanse the size of West Virginia. Mormon settlers, the only people besides the Navajo who lived in the area, made minor attempts to proselytize the Navajos but otherwise led separate lives.

In these somewhat primitive economic and political conditions, Father Liebler arrived and created a mission on the frontier. No doctor or dentist apparently served the town of Bluff in the early 1940s. The one room schoolhouse in town faced the prospect of closing for lack of a teacher. People nearby had access to one single phone in a town that was little more than a simple cluster of dwellings around a gas station and grocery store. Coming from a heavily populated east-coast community, Father Liebler could not have found more dissimilar conditions in which to establish the mission. The first thing Father Liebler and those whom assisted him did when they arrived at the future site of the mission was to plant a garden. It became a symbol of two things, first to show that they were self-sufficient and second to show their determination to stay. They also built a stone church alter, which Father Liebler felt symbolized their desire to unify with the people and the land.

Five other volunteers arrived at Bluff with Father Liebler. They lived in tents for the better part of a year while they worked on the construction of the mission house. They had no architectural advice, but starting with the remains of an old house/trading post they, along with some Navajo helpers, erected the mission building. By the end of the first year the mission was becoming well established, for they had secured a well as a source of water, Father Liebler had become fairly fluent in the Navajo language, and they were now able to provide basic medical assistance to the Navajos.

The first volunteers to join the mission were Helen Sturges, a trained social worker who also acted as teacher at the mission, Brother Michael, Esther Bacon, a nurse, and Catherine Lucas who was "handy with throwing rocks around and doing physical work."[11] Father Liebler's wife Francis also came, but later retired to Florida. Soon after, Brother Juniper arrived. A few years later arrived Catherine Pickett, who would spend the next twenty years working in the medical clinic, and Joan Eskell, who served as secretary for the mission and would later become Father Liebler's second wife.[12]

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[10] St. Christopher is the patron saint of Earthly travelers.

[11] Utah State Historical Society and California State University, Fullerton Oral History Project Southeastern Utah Project. St. Christopher's Mission, Bluff, Utah O.H. 782-B O.H.-00,261 USHS Lib The Reverend Father H. Baxter Liebler, Interviewed by Daniel B. Kelly, June 27, 1972, Page 18.

[12] Father Liebler's first wife, Francis, never divorced him although she left the mission for Florida c.1945 and lived there until she died in the c. early 1970s. Following her death, Liebler married Joan Eskell; this enabled her to care for him without the possibility of scandal.

Education

The school was started a year after the mission was established. For several years the school was held in a portable shack that was moved to the site. The children squatted on the floor and magazines were used both for desks and textbooks. The idea for the school came from the Navajos themselves. Father Liebler described the school as follows:

> "St. Christopher's Mission is the only school in the area the size of Long Island for 1,500 Navajos living in the central part of the Utah strip of the Navajo Reservation. It is here that many Navajos are learning to speak their first words of English, to understand simple arithmetic, to read and write in their own language. Entire families come to school shy and hesitant, but eager for education. The aim of the school is to educate a few individuals to become leaders and intelligent workers for the Navajo people."
>
> "The school has been held in a three room stone building since 1952 that houses the classes, school equipment, a library, and sound movie pictures projector used for weekly programs for Navajos and white schools of Bluff. The stone building is approximately 20 x 60 with large blackboards and good light from seven French doors and ten windows. It could be divided into four rooms, and has shelves for a fair sized library. The roof is supported by vigas and is well insulated. Artesian well water is piped to the school and there are coal stoves in each room so that school lunches may eventually be served in the school building. Outdoor toilet facilities are still in use, and the children use the mission shower." [13]

The school averaged from thirty to forty students annually. Daily lunches were provided and in the afternoon children were taught the crafts of silversmithing, weaving, and beadwork. Delousing was a weekly program at the school, with materials and instructions for delousing in the hogans. The care of hair, hands, and nose was taught, and prevention of tuberculosis (the number one cause of death among the Navajos during this time) and diarrhea, danger from flies, care of baby's milk, cooling by evaporation, and other matters practical to hogan living were emphasized.

The mission awarded scholarships to special children to provide an opportunity for higher education. After the age of fourteen the children were encouraged to attend federally funded schools for more advanced education. There was a great language problem as English was not well known to this group of Navajos in 1943, so the mission provided the children the opportunity to learn to read and write in English before they advanced to the federal schools. After several years the school building was no longer needed because the state began providing public school service, so it put in use as the winter chapel for the mission.

Health

Medical assistance to the Navajos began with the founding of the mission in July of 1943. Navajo patronage of

[13] H. Baxter Liebler, "Summary Self Survey Report", pp.1-2.

the clinic increased gradually as their confidence in modern medical practices grew. Most of the Navajos of the area had never seen a real doctor. By contemporary standards, however, the clinic was still quite primitive. During the first six years a corner cupboard in the common room of the main mission house served as a clinic. In June of 1949, Catherine Pickett joined the staff as the first full time clinic worker. Prior to this date any member of the staff who could find the time did what they could for the sick Navajos who sought medical attention.

In May 1950, a room in the east wing of the mission house became the official clinic. Tragically, seven weeks later a fire totally destroyed this wing; the clinic and all medical supplies were lost. This wing was quickly rebuilt, but subsequently, construction began on a separate hospital/clinic building in 1951. This building took shape slowly because its construction relied on donations from church members and it was not completed until 1956. However, it was actually put into use once the roof was put on approximately two years earlier.

The clinic averaged nearly three hundred outpatients a month and the hospital beds were always occupied. During the years that the mission ran the hospital, there are estimates of five hundred Navajo births at the clinic. "The patients come from a very wide-spread area, many traveling as much as 40 miles by truck or wagon. Those who come from the south side of the San Juan River must either forge [sic] the river on foot or by horse, or go many miles around to the bridge. Patients come to the clinic regularly from as far as Aneth, Utah, in the east, and as far west as Monument Valley, Utah."[14] Liebler and his staff would also often travel throughout the region in a donated WWII-surplus jeep providing spiritual and medical attention to the isolated Navajo families.

St. Christopher's Mission was the first medical facility to treat tuberculosis among the Navajos in Utah. At the time, the disease was in epidemic proportions. When necessary the mission assisted the Indian Service with immunizations. Minor eye, ear, nose and throat problems were treated; measles and pneumonia cases were also commonly treated. In 1974, Father Liebler was honored by the State of Utah with its Award of Merit "for long, dedicated service devoted to providing health services to the Navajo Indian community of Utah."[15]

Much more that just providing Christian spiritual direction for the Navajo in the Utah section of the reservation, Father Liebler established practices that were necessary for the health maintenance and educational instruction of this people. The nearest community of any size to this portion of Navajoland was Monticello, Utah, fifty miles to the north and most of the people had never visited the city nor were they accustomed to the mainstream culture, such as it was in this isolated section of the state.

Father H. Baxter Liebler

Harold Baxter Liebler was born in Brooklyn, New York, November 26, 1889. His family moved to New York City some years later and around 1903 they moved to Connecticut. Liebler attended Adelphi Academy and Horace Mann Elementary and High School. He received his B.A. in 1911 from Columbia College, and

[14] Ibid., p.9.
[15] H. Baxter Liebler, *Boil My Heart for Me*, afterward.

graduated from Nashotah House (a theological school) in 1914. Liebler received his B.D. in 1915, and was ordained a deacon February 24, 1914. He became a priest of the Episcopal Church October 4, 1914.

His first assignment was rectorship of St. Matthias' Church, Waukesha, Wisconsin. Returning to the East he served as curate in St. Luke's Chapel of Trinity Parish, New York, slightly more then a year, and in 1918 became Rector of St. Paul's Church, Riverside, Connecticut. In 1925 he became priest in charge and later Rector of the Old Greenwich parish, St. Savior's, which he continued to serve for a total of 25 years.

> "A boyhood interest in the American Indian developed into what was first a purely academic interest along more scientific lines, and after a vacation trip through the Southwest there began to dawn upon him a sense of vocation to do Indian work. A number of such vacation expeditions, searching for a tribe or group as yet untouched by any missionary activity, ended in 1942 when, with a pack burro and a pony he surveyed the Navajo Reservation in southern Utah. Appealing to the Bishop of the Missionary District of Utah for permission to establish a volunteer mission at or near Bluff, Utah which should be staffed by unpaid volunteers and supported independently, he received the blessing of Dr. Moulton and in 1943 founded St. Christopher's Mission."[16]

St. Christopher's Mission was unique among Indian missions at that period of history. Because Father Liebler believed in "complete respect for, not mere toleration for, but a respect for the Navajo religion."[17] He believed that religion, education, and healing should go together. "Navajo religion is essentially a healing religion. Therefore we not only did not discourage participation in Navajo ceremonies and rituals, but even participated at times."[18] The popular belief at that time was to try and "take the Indian out of the Indian"[19] They were discouraged from speaking in their native tongues at the Federal Indian Schools and the hair of the boys was cut short.

Father Liebler grew his hair long and wore it tied in back like many Navajo men still wear their hair today. The Navajo name for Father Liebler was "The One With Long Hair Who Drags His Robe Around," or "Long Hair" for short. In Liebler's book about the mission, *Boil My Heart For Me*, Mark Maryboy, (a Navajo whom attended the mission school and is currently a county commissioner in San Juan County) in a forward quote wrote, "Father Liebler was called "Long Hair" by my people. As we watched him in church, we heard him talk and sing in the Navajo language, which we understood clearly. He was one of the kindest men I have ever known."[20]

Because of the remoteness of the mission and the uniqueness of the purpose, Liebler was constantly seeking donations of money and equipment to improve the facilities and provide greater service to the Navajo people. By acquiring Navajo and other volunteers and putting all his staff to work laboring in the construction of

[16] Biographical Data Request, H. Baxter Liebler, Episcopal Diocese of Utah Archives, 25 November 1959.
[17] "The Story of St. Christopher's Mission," as told by Father H. Baxter Liebler, Tape transcript, Reel-to-Reel 45, Special Collections & Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University, 1959.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.
[20] H. Baxter Liebler, *Boil My Heart for Me*, p.V.

buildings, he was able to assemble a basic mission complex to meet these requirements. What could have taken perhaps five to ten years to construct, took nearly twenty because of the lack of resources and funding. Nevertheless, Liebler persevered and found ways to make due with the conditions at hand, completing a complex that benefited the local Navajo greatly.

Along with trying to construct and maintain the complex of buildings that make up the mission, Liebler had to concentrate his energy on his priestly duties of providing spiritual welfare to the surrounding Navajo population. This meant often traveling for days at a time to satellite missions at Montezuma Creek and Monument Valley and to remote Navajo families. He adjusted his schedule frequently to meet the needs of the families to which he attended. The conception of time for the Navajo was different from that of mainstream America and Liebler and his staff had to adjust to this way of living. Along with his travels around the region he held his weekly church meetings at the chapel and also performed marriages and family counseling. He also held annual Christmas celebrations where many of the families would camp at the site; eat meals provided by the mission and receive donated gifts of toys and clothing.

Father H. Baxter Liebler officially retired from St. Christopher's Mission in 1966. However, he did not officially "retire" from his service. He moved to Monument Valley and continued serving there for another sixteen years until his death in November 1982. At the graveside service, approximately 300 mourners followed the procession to his burial spot on the grounds of the mission – the site of the original chapel that had burned down nearly two decades earlier. The stone alter and the "Madonna of the Navajo" that were saved from the original chapel that burned now overlook the grave site.

The mission complex, while still in use, does not play the primary role it once used to. The various services provided by the mission were eventually taken over by tribal, federal, and state government offices, leaving the mission to perform ecclesiastical services. The site is much quieter now than it was when Father Liebler oversaw the complex. St. Christopher's Mission is now part of The Episcopal Church In Navajoland, a diocese that belongs to and is managed by the Navajos.

Architecture

The architectural style implemented in the early buildings of the mission is not entirely unique, but in its context it is somewhat unique for Utah. The early buildings (the main mission house, the school, the hospital/clinic, and the later staff housing) were designed in a simple, vernacular version of the Mission style. However, for the most part, this style was only popular from c.1905 up to the early 1930s, and was never that common in the state.[21] The significance lies partly in the late implementation of the Mission style, which Liebler and his staff chose as a symbol for the church. From the 1943-51 mission house, to the 1951-56 hospital/clinic (and even the later, c.1956 staff-housing unit), there are no other known Mission-style buildings in Utah that were built this late in the century.

[21] There are only 68 recorded examples of the Mission style in the Utah SHPO database; of those only approximately 20 retain their architectural integrity.

It is interesting that the Mission style would be chosen, since most other historic Episcopal Church buildings in Utah were constructed in a Gothic style. The Spanish missions that were established in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the southwestern United States and up through California never made it as far north as Utah, although expeditions were carried out here. The architecture of these missions implemented the Spanish Colonial and other related Spanish styles. One possibility for Liebler's choice of the Mission style was that his background was "high church" or Anglo-Catholic and was therefore inclined to Catholic style and practice.[22] The Mission and other Spanish styles became quite popular for all types of buildings beginning in the latter decades of the 19th century (this in spite of two wars in that decade in which Spain was the enemy of the United States).[23] Most of the examples in Utah are small, residential buildings, although there are a few larger commercial examples.

Probably the most prominent reason for Father Liebler's choice was the simplicity of design. Because Liebler himself, along with whomever he could coax to help, would be constructing the mission buildings, ease of assembly and availability of materials was the guiding principle. Stone was by far the most available material and primarily required only a strong back to lift and position. Since the blocks were randomly sized and not precisely fashioned, masons could be trained quickly. Reference is made of two Navajo stonemasons by name, Tom Mustache and Shoodi. In an undated interview, Liebler explains the learning process of those he hired to construct the various buildings: "...the majority of the actual manual work on it [the hospital] were Navahoe [sic] Indians. Some of them had never... laid one stone upon another.... None of them had ever worked in cement...and yet some of them have become rather expert plasterers, carpenters, cabinet makers, as a result of the work that we have been able to give them...."[24]

Perhaps Liebler also felt that the simple square forms and round arches would blend in better with the desert landscape and sandstone bluffs as well. Liebler describes the clinic building as "...a low flat building which blends in with the scenery. It is not an eyesore. It seems really to belong there because, of course, the stone from which it is built is the stone that nature has exposed there."[25] Prior to deciding to use stone, the mission staff experimented with adobe bricks, a common building material throughout the state during the settlement era. But when it became obvious that making the bricks would be quite labor intensive, Liebler meditatively pronounced, "Centuries ago, God made mud into rock for us and tons of it lie here waiting for us to use."[26] When they started to gather red sandstone rocks a local pointed out the fact that the red sandstone would disintegrate as quickly as would a pile of salt and that they should use the white sandstone.[27]

The historic buildings of St. Christopher's Mission appear as though they have been here much longer than fifty or sixty years. They still retain their architectural integrity, contributing a unique chapter to the history of San Juan County in southeastern Utah.

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[22] This information was provided by Ian Corbett, current vicar at St. Christopher's.
[23] Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1986), pp. 106-110.
[24] The Hospital Built by Faith," as told by Father H. Baxter Liebler, (Tape transcript, Reel-to-Reel 165, Special Collections & Archives, Merrill Library, Utah State University, 1959), p.5.
[25] Ibid., p.5.
[26] Liebler, *Boil My Heart For Me*, p.41.
[27] Ibid., p.42.

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Utah State Historical Society and California State University, Fullerton Oral History Project Southeastern Utah Project. St. Christopher's Mission, Bluff, Utah, O.H. 782-B O.H.-00,261 USHS Lib. The Reverend Father H. Baxter Liebler, Interviewed by Daniel B. Kelly June 27th, 1972.

Common Label Information:
1. St. Christopher's Mission
2. Bluff, San Juan County, Utah
3. Photographer: Cory Jensen
4. Date: February 2002
5. Negative on file at Utah SHPO.

Photo No. 1:
6. South & east elevations of the mission house. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 2:
6. North & east elevations of mission house rear additions. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 3:
6. East elevation of mission house rear additions. Camera facing west.

Photo No. 4:
6. West elevation of mission house. Camera facing northeast.

Photo No. 5:
6. Center court detail of mission house. Camera facing north.

Photo No. 6:
6. Court wall detail of mission house. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 7:
6. Interior of mission house center section. Camera facing south.

Photo No. 8:
6. Interior of mission house center section. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 9:
6. Interior of mission house rear section. Camera facing northeast.

Photo No. 10:
6. South elevation of school building. Camera facing north.

Photo No. 11:
6. South & east elevations of school building. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 12:
6. North & east elevations of school building. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 13:
6. South & east elevations of clinic building. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 14:
6. North & east elevations of clinic building. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 15:
6. North & east elevations of staff housing & mission office buildings. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 16:
6. South & west elevations of staff housing & mission office buildings. Camera facing northeast.

Photo No. 17:
6. South & east elevations of vicarage. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 18:
6. North & east elevations of priest's residence. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 19:
6. South & east elevations of caretaker's residence. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 20:
6. South & east elevations of summer chapel & sacristy. Camera facing southwest.

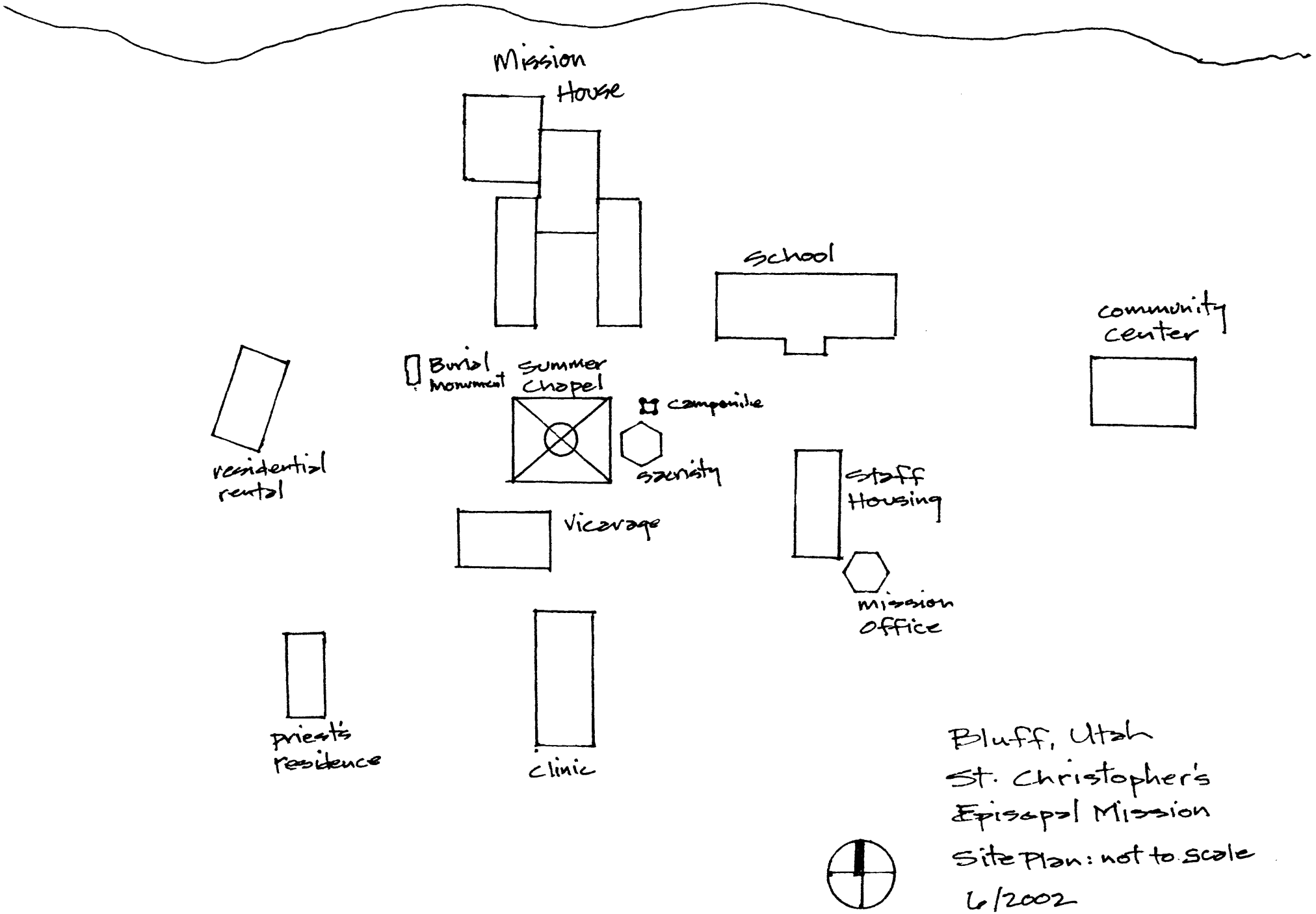
Photo No. 21:
6. North elevations of campanile. Camera facing south.

Photo No. 22:
6. Father Liebler's burial site with alter and statue of Virgin. Camera facing southwest.

Photo No. 23:
6. South & west elevations of community center. Camera facing northeast.

Photo No. 24:
6. South elevation of mission office. Camera facing northwest.

Photo No. 25:
6. Stone oven. Camera facing northeast.


Mission House
School
community center
Burial monument
summer chapel
campanile
sacristy
residential rental
staff Housing
Vicarage
mission office
priest's residence
clinic
Bluff, Utah
St. Christopher's Episcopal Mission
Site Plan: not to scale
6/2002

Mission

P. 4

20593

Construction of Mission House c. 1943

20593

Father Liebler's mission at Bluff, Utah during construction

St. Christopher's Mission

4x5

6846 Interior of original chapel that burned down

The High Altar,
St. Christopher's Mission,
Bluff, Utah

Courtesy: The Mission

Used in "The People of Utah" (1976)

6846

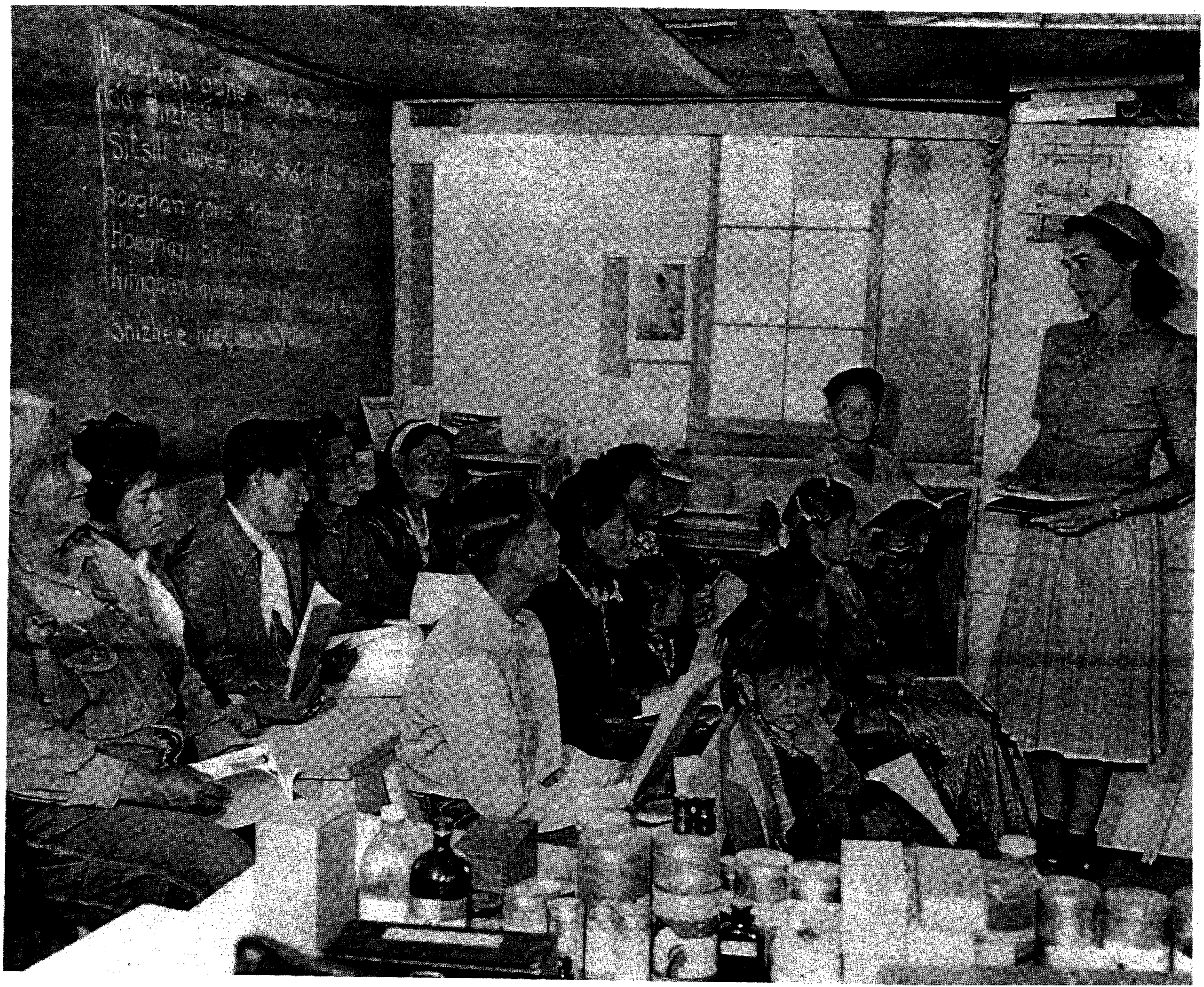
4x5

NEGATIVE AVAILABLE

DB

6848 Helen Sturges teaching Navajo children, 1944

1.5



Helen Sturges has pupils from 6 to 75 years old. A lesson in Navaho appears on the blackboard showing the many accented letter found in that very difficult language.
Old schoolhouse, 1944 at the St. Christopher's Mission, Bluff, Utah.
Photo by: Geo.W.Thompson, Albuquerque, N.M.

Courtesy: St. Christopher's Mission.

6848

4×5

NEGATIVE AVAILABLE

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P. 1

6833 Father H. Baxter Liebler, 1948
2nd from left

Left to right: Rev. Joseph Hogben, Rev. H. Baxter Liebler, Rt. Rev. Stephen C. Clark, Sixth Episcopal Bishop of Utah, Rev. William H. Wolfe. At St. Elizabeth's Mission, Whiterocks, ~~1947.~~ May 21, 1948.
Courtesy: James Beless.

[redacted] 6833

4 x 5

NEGATIVE AVAILABLE

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