

Book Review

Oral History of the Yavapai. Edited by Mike Harrison, John Williams, Sigrid Khera, and Carolina Butler. Gilbert, Arizona: Acacia Publishing Inc. 2012. iv + 414 pp.

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In 1974 Mike Harrison and John Williams, both of the Ft. McDowell Yavapai Nation, reached out to the non-Yavapai community to write Yavapai history from their own eyes. Thirty-eight years later, published posthumously, their efforts have culminated in their own book: the result of oral history interviews of the two men, conducted by Sigrid Khera, then of Arizona State University. Upon her death in 1984, Khera left her tapes, notes and an unpublished manuscript with Carolina Butler, who originally brought Harrison, Williams and Khera together. For this volume, Butler has edited Khera's manuscript, especially the ethnographic portions, and given background information including Indian Claims Commission reports and maps.

Butler's editing and additions, together with Khera's original manuscript including background information comprise four out of five sections of this book. Despite that fact, Part V: "Oral History of the Yavapai" encompasses two thirds of the work, which truly fulfills the promise of its title. From the Yavapai oral tradition of creation to the stories of daily life from the authors, this book gives any reader a deep understanding of the breadth of Yavapai history and culture. This is a work where personal history reveals parable. At the same time, it is the story of two men: the oral history presented reveals the Yavapai histories through that of Williams and Harrison, and at times understanding which man speaks is difficult. Williams revealed to Khera that some in the Yavapai community challenged his understanding of the past. Williams said:

“You see, he didn’t believe that I know it. So I asked him to come along. Maybe now he believes me that I am saying the right things” (26). He certainly did.