



What is a Moqui?

Around 1150 A.D. a number of Native American tribes moved into the Four Corners region, possibly causing the resident Anasazi to move out roughly between 1200 and 1300 A.D. Southern Utes, Paiutes, and Hopi called those Anasazi the muukwitsi, meaning the dead, or the dead ones. The Utes told how they would only see their Anasazi neighbors sporadically because the Anasazi appeared like phantoms only in the distance and would disappear into the pinyon when a Ute approached. The term Moqui, perhaps a variation of that Ute/Paiute pronunciation (mawkwi), seems to have entered general usage following the Dominguez-Escalante expedition of 1776 that depended heavily upon the Utes and Paiutes for guides. A century later, the Utes and Paiutes around the area referred to the ancient ones whose ruins were left as Moquis.

As another parallel point of interest, Father Escalante never came through the area that the first settlers a hundred years later called Potato Valley; but early inhabitants were advised to call the place Escalante by a government explorer, Almon H. Thompson. (Thompson had already called the small river flowing through the valley the Escalante River in 1872.) Also adding to the folklore of the location is that it is one of the very few towns in Utah found and settled by the pioneers themselves and not directed by the territorial leader, Brigham Young.

It was most likely those first settlers to the valley in 1875-76 who called the storehouses tucked into rock ledges and crevices Moqui houses and started the story of the small, scrawny people who lived in such houses.

Sometime soon after Escalante High School started with just a ninth grade in 1921, the Moqui was chosen as the school mascot. Because of the mixed up history of what and who a Moqui is, the mascot has taken on many varied faces and forms. Periodically news sportswriters contact Escalante High School asking why EHS has not changed its mascot to something more politically and culturally correct. There is a perfectly logical answer: It is safe to say that the Moqui Indians of Escalante High School rode unicorns when they went to hunt dragons.