



# **Chiricahua Apache Women and Children: Safekeepers of the Heritage (Elma Dill Russell Spencer Series in the West and Southwest)**

*Ms. H. Henrietta Stockel*

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White Painted Woman appears in ancient myths of the Chiricahua Apaches as the virgin mother of the people and the origin of women's ceremonies. Such Chiricahua myths and traditions have closely prescribed the roles of women in relation to their husbands and children, to relatives and extended families, and to the band or tribe. One of those roles is to safeguard and hand on to the next generation the lore and customs of the people. In this way, Chiricahua women have served as safekeepers of a heritage that is now endangered. For more than a decade, H. Henrietta Stockel has moved with remarkable freedom and intimacy among the Chiricahuas, especially in the women's friendship circles. With their permission and even blessing, she has observed and recorded aspects of their traditional culture that otherwise might be lost to history. Chiricahua Apache Women and Children, written in a familiar, personal style, focuses on the duties and experiences of historical Chiricahua Apache women and the significant influences they have exerted within the family and the tribe at large. After beginning with a look at creation myths, Stockel turns to family patterns and roles. She describes in detail the puberty ceremony she has repeatedly witnessed, a ceremony little known by those outside the band. Stockel looks also at the alternative lifestyle, also culturally prescribed, of four women warriors. She concludes with Mildred Cleghorn, a contemporary "woman warrior" who was chairperson of the Fort Sill Chiricahua/Warm Springs Apache Tribe in Oklahoma for nearly twenty years and who was also Stockel's close friend and "Apache mother." Beautifully complemented with thirty-two black-and-white illustrations of women, children, and family life, Chiricahua Apache Women and Children offers a vivid glimpse into traditional Chiricahua Apache women's lifestyles.

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