

# SAHAYKWISA

b. c. 1850

d. c. 1895

## TRANSGENDER NATIVE AMERICAN

**She often told people she had been turned into a man by white man's magic.**

Sahaykwisa was a female Mohave Indian shaman (a healer with supernatural powers), who specialized in the treatment of venereal diseases. Scholars have limited information about her life. She was a gender-nonconforming lesbian, or hwame (a female who chooses to live as a male), and often told people she had been turned into a man by white man's magic. Sahaykwisa was also a hunter and an industrious farmer—jobs typically performed by men.

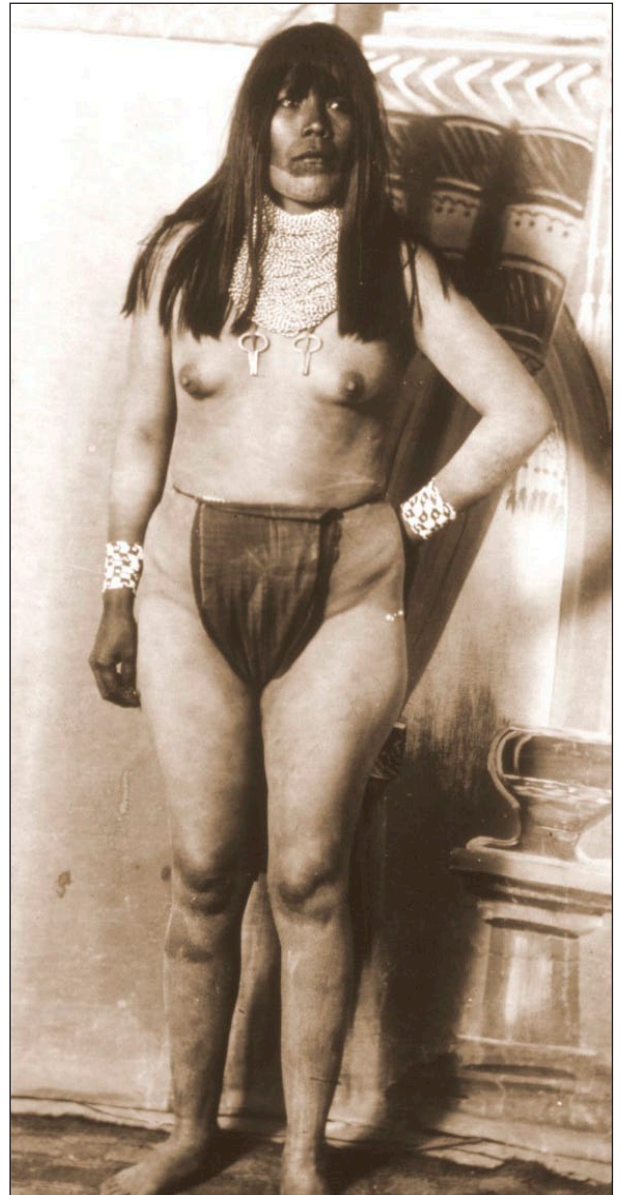
She is known to have been relatively prosperous, a good provider who romanced many wives. She also courted a married woman, which was commonplace among the

Mohave. While it seems most people accepted her sexuality, she was routinely questioned about her gender.

As rumors of her affairs circulated, Sahaykwisa faced frequent ridicule and humiliation for her masculine appearance. The women she married were often subject to mockery and rejection from men.

Sahaykwisa may have posed a threat to males in her tribe. She was the victim of a brutal rape by the former husband of one of her wives. After the episode, she is said to have carried on affairs with men and fallen into alcoholism and depression. She was eventually accused of being a witch and murdered. Accounts tell of her drowning in the Colorado River.

Her story has been used to examine the lives gays and lesbians in early America, most notably in Native American tribes where transgender and homosexual individuals were in some cases accepted. Although there are many accounts of gender-nonconforming indigenous people who lived openly and even happily, it seems Sahaykwisa suffered tragic consequences for simply being herself.



REPRESENTATIVE PHOTO OF  
A TRANSGENDER QUECHAN WOMAN

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