MOVING HISTORY: 
THE EVOLUTION OF THE POWWOW

By Dennis Zotigh

Edited by
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Dedicated
To the late
Shifra Silberman
my friend
and
one of the many who dedicated her life to understanding
the Native American Culture
The purpose of this article is to educate and promote an understanding and awareness of Native American Powwows. It is my hope that through this article, many negative stereotypes will be dismissed concerning one vital part of Native American culture.

American Indian cultures tend to be discussed and studied primarily in historical contexts. In this text, I will address the subject of Powwows not only in a historical evolution, but also as they occur in our present era.

To understand the Powwow is to live it. This is the only way the true story can be told. From a Native American point of view, cultural information is not normally made public. Instead its dissemination has been very limited. It has been distributed by word of mouth through stories and legends. In asking for information, particularly from the Northern Plains tribes, the traditional process involves going through ceremonies in order to receive this information properly. In the past, if knowledgeable elders did not observe a worthy individual or foresaw their knowledge capable of being misused, they did not reveal this valuable knowledge. Thus, in many cases, this information has been lost forever. Because of this custom, Native Americans are missing many vital links with their past.

Indian children suffer the most because they are currently faced with an identity crisis of epic proportions. For those who have chosen to follow the Indian way of life, they face a never-ending struggle. The heritage of Native American preservation is being fought on every forefront. It is a clear reality that all measures have to be taken, not only to preserve Native American culture, but to ensure that what is currently obtainable is disseminated in its entirety to its rightful heirs.

The information contained in this text has been compiled through the careful research of many currently available articles and books. I have also visited with many Native sources whom I believe to be knowledgeable in diverse areas. Together, I have interpreted this information, with the power of prayer, to form what I believe to be the true Native American Inter-tribal Powwow.

As a contemporary Native American, I have strived to live in harmony with both the Indian and non-Indian worlds. In respect to other Native Americans, I must apologize if I have revealed anything that is sacred, particularly if it pertains to Powwow regalia, songs, or dances not of version of how to interpret the Powwow. My personal interpretation of compiled resources is sincerely expressed with regards to my own lifetime of experience following the Powwow trail.

To the non-Indian, I wish to share with you my beautiful culture that I am extremely proud of. In the past, there have been too many misunderstandings between the Indian and non-Indian. I truly believe that if we can understand one another better, we will be taking one step closer to building harmony on this, our Mother Earth.
I would like to acknowledge the following individuals, whose words I have passed on through this writing. These people were generous enough to open their homes, break bread with me, and share their knowledge of the Indian way, both of the past and the present. Through their efforts I have learned to dance, sing, perform, and appreciate why, when, what, where, and how it will survive. While traveling the Powwow circuit many of these people have extended their open palms to willingly exchange ideas toward making the Powwow unified and harmonious – the way The Great Spirit intended.

A THOUSAND AH’HO’S TO THE FOLLOWING!

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Sincerely,

Dennis Zotigh
HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The term “Powwow,” according to Harcourt Brace dictionary, “comes from the Algoquian Indian word “pau wau, “meaning he dreams.” A Powwow was originally an Indian medicine man or priest, who was presumed to have learned his art from his dreams. The “Pau wau” may have originally had religious significance, but today’s Powwow does not present itself as a religious event. However, isolated songs, activities and articles worn by the dancers have actual spiritual significance. Modern Powwows are social events that are generally open to the public.

It is recognized that the concept of the Powwow originated among the Plains Indians who inhabited the Great Plains from the southern Prairies of Canada to the lower plains of Texas. All Native Americans have a rich history of songs and dances that were unique to their individual region and tribe.

Each summer, most Plains tribes held ceremonies in which all the bands, clans, and kinsmen would gather to renew inter-tribal alliances. The summer season was chosen because subsistence was plentiful and weather conditions permitted maximum mobility. These ceremonies were often the social highlights of the four seasons. Variations of ceremonial, sacred, and social dances integrated the individual, communal, warrior, and religious societies.

Many Plains tribes formed inter-tribal alliances. These bonds strengthened, from goodwill exchange visits to annual ceremonies. Early ceremonies were very strict. Chiefs, clan leaders, and holy men dictated the protocol involved in ceremonies. Ownership of dances and song belonged to individuals, tribes, clans, and/or families. Through inter-tribal alliances, the authority or ownership extended beyond intra-tribal boundaries, once ceremonial songs, dances, and their significance were exchanged. These exchanges created a foundation for the inception of the Inter-tribal Powwow. To the Plains Indian, culture was centered around war, buffalo, and later the horse. Individual or tribal prestige was measured in military accomplishments, number of horses owned, and ability to provide for other family and tribal members. The Plains Indian culture reached its peak in the early nineteenth century.

As the influx of European settlements began to dominate the Eastern, Western, and Southern seaboards, the attitudes of Plains Indians dramatically changed. The free spirit of a culture was gradually enclosed in boundaries of barbed wire. Forts, wagon trains, and later railroads paved the way for greater numbers of white settlements on the Plains. The buffalo herds were exterminated by the Anglo-American corporate interests. Tribes were reduced by disease, famine, and to a lesser extent, United States governmental policies and military actions. Many Plains tribes staged a series of desperate stands to defend their way of life. With the great buffalo herds gone, the horses annexed or annihilated, and warrior tendencies discouraged, the incentive for many ceremonies were lost.
From every direction, Federal Indian policy dictated the gradual breakdown for Native American traditions. Most tribal gatherings continued in their entirety until the United States forced reservation concentration and acculturation through the Indian Removal Act of 1830. This act encouraged the further deterioration of Plains Indian culture by removing tribes from their original homelands to reservations selected by the United States Government. Many reservations bordered those of removed traditional enemies. The once nomadic hunters and warriors of the Plains were confined to a portion of their original territories. As a direct result, some tribes no longer had access to their ancestral ceremonial grounds.

Dancing among the Plains Indian was seen as a threat to the restructuring process by the non-Indian. As a result, reservation agents and missionaries tried to halt ceremonies that they felt would enhance the spirit of the Indian. Government soldiers were often called in to forcibly enforce the agents wishes.

In 1830, the first federal Indian school was established on the Yakima Reservation, in what is now the state of Washington. This school was in the forefront of other schools where cultural exchange would take place. Within thirty years, reeducation became a priority of federal Indian policy. This further perpetuated the deterioration of native Indian adolescents were punished for any exhibition that related to their innate cultural upbringing.

In 1845, the renowned painter George Catlin took the first Indian showmen to Europe. They were a group of nine Ojibway. During a British inaugural performance of a “Red Indian” dance, the royal crowd seemed unimpressed until it was announced that a War Dance was taking place. Immediately the crowd sprung to their feet. At the close of dances, the crowd commenced with a round of applause. This exchange set the European attitude that placed all Indian dancing under the umbrella title “War Dances.” Traditional Indian dancing, if it was to be taken off the reservation, would have to be glamorized in order to appeal to a wide non-Indian audience. Indian showmen would also have a decisive impact on changing the context of Plains Indian dances in years to come.

The General Allotment Act (or Dawes Act) was passed in 1887. This act intended to break up the reservation system established fifty-seven years earlier. The provisions set by the Dawes act allowed the government to abolish selected reservations and allot individual tribal members forty to one hundred and sixty acres of land. In addition, the act intended to assimilate the Plains warriors into farming. Only a portion of the Plains Indians was affected by the General Allotment act. The majority of Plains Indian reservations, outside Indian Territory (later Oklahoma) stayed intact. Among the southern Plains Indians, the Dawes Act Escalated inter-tribal exchange and entry into mainstream America when compared to the reservation bound Indians of the Northern Plains.

Many tribes, particularly in the eastern one-third of the United States, lost most of their tribal identity. Of the approximately six hundred and fifty indigenous languages and dialects spoken in Northern America, one hundred and fifty fell out of use by the end of
the allotment. Language is the nucleus of each tribal culture. Its demise had a catastrophic effect on tribal identity.

Plains Indian culture went through radical change in the nineteenth century. Many variables have contributed to the loss of the Plains Indian culture, as well as its acceptance by other Native Americans. The concurrent culture an perpetuation by non-Plains Indians, in reference to Plains Indians song and dance, has set the stage for an inter-tribal movement of Indian identity called….Powwow.

INDIAN DANCE REGALIA

Indian traditional clothing depended on materials that were available in a region. The Plains Indians manufactured their clothing from the tanned hides of animals. Among them were the antelope, deer, elk, bear, coyote, puma, wolf, and the buffalo. From these large skins robes, shirts, dresses, skirts, leggings, moccasins, a variety of head coverings, and many other garments were made.

To accentuate and decorate clothing, skins from smaller animals were used. The animal skins that predominated included otter, beaver, mink, weasel, rabbit, skunk, and fox. The structure, cut and manner in which clothing was worn conformed to clan and band standards. Visiting or enemy tribes could be recognized by what they wore.

Everyday clothing was very plain and functional. For ceremonies, finer more elaborate regalia were used. The painting of hides was used to highlight tribal affiliation, individual honors, and ornament. Hide planting was also an artistic and spiritual expression. Often on the Plains, a recognized artist within the tribe was asked to paint designs for another individual. This was done to insure good luck and to make sure symbols were attained and received properly. Designs and patterns became indigenous to tribal, clan, and band identity.

Paint was secured by the variety of methods. Each color had a significance which varied among the various tribes. Ash, mixed with grease, was the easiest black to obtain. Black traditionally was associated with death, but was often used in battle as a protective symbol. Red was make from earth, berries, bark, and roots. Its meaning generally represented blood, life, energy, and power. White symbolized light, birth, and purity. It was found in clays and chalk. Mixed with grease it could be applied to bring color to natural skins. On the Southern Plains, green was also used in decorating regalia. It was derived from copper ore.

These colors were also used in face painting. Face painting was significant according to tribal affiliation, clan membership, families, and individuals. How designs and colors were interpreted varied and could have altogether different meanings between Plains tribes.
Leather fringe was used to decorate ceremonial clothing. As time progressed its length increased, particularly in reference to woman’s clothing. The Southern Plains brought fringe ornamentation to its greatest degree of development by incorporating thin rolled fringe throughout regalia. Human and horse hair was also worn as fringe or in combination with leather fringe.

Often shells, elk teeth, hooves, claws, bone, and porcupine quills were added to further accentuate regalia. Quill work became a refined process on the Northern Plains, but was virtually non-existent on the Southern Plains. Bone hairpipes were used unilaterally across the Plains. The most noticeable of the hairpipe articles was the breastplate. In the Northern Plains men wore horizontal, wide breastplates that covered their chests. These breastplates were sturdy enough to withstand a blow from a war club. Woman wore extremely long breastplates which extended from their neck to below the knee.

The Southern Plains Indians also wore breastplates, but they were shorter to some degree. The men of the Southern Plains wore breastplates which extended to only the middle of the chest. Women did not originally wear the breastplates until the 1800s in the southern Plains. When it was introduced, it was altered in length and back extensions were added. Hairbone was made of thin, shaved, and drilled buffalo bone. It was also made from conch shells.

With the coming of the first European traders, new raw materials were introduced to the Native American. They slowly filtered into the Plains through direct trade with Indians and non-Indians. The introduction of manufactured goods created a “new look” across the Plains. Cloth, beads, and metal changed the value system of the Indians and could be readily exchanged for hides.

Cloth was readily accepted among the Plains tribes for many reasons. Cloth colors appealed to the Plains nations. It was less cumbersome than hides and was cooler in warmer weather. It could be easily cleaned and was easier to sew. With the introduction of lace and ribbons, sewing patterns began their evolution. Ribbons and lace complimented and sometimes replaced leather fringe. Woolens were some of the earliest cloth traded with the Plains Indians. They were especially valuable for winter clothing. Light weight woolen broadcloth became a staple garment for trade and ceremonial use. As early expeditions came in contact with the Indians, woolens from England were being produced for the sole purpose of Indian trade and consumption.

Indians of the Plains, to different degrees, manufactured beads and beadwork. The archaic raw materials used for beads included bones, shells, claws, seeds, and stone. These early materials produced a larger and irregular bead. Their colors were also limited.

One of the earliest documented pieces of beadwork as a powder horn sash which was made from commercial glass beads. This powder horn sash was among the first beadwork which was recorded because it was given to General Montgomery in 1791. With smaller more uniform and colorful glass beads, the Plains Indians began to bead
everything they had. Popular early beads were manufactured in Italy and
Czechoslovakia.

To bead on a variety of objects, different styles of beadwork were developed and refined.
In order to sew directly onto hides and cloth, the lazy, overlaid, applique, and edgework
stitches were developed. Beading on any type of cylinder involved the use of wrap
around, gourd, peyote, and double needle stitches. The loom was later invented to
produce beadwork that was free standing. It could be mounted on a variety of materials.
Patterns and designs were indicative of tribal affiliation.

Since pre-Columbian times copper has been used for making ornaments by Native
Americans. Plains Indians never refined the art of melting and casting metals. Instead,
they pounded, cut, and later imprinted metal ornaments. The art of metal working began
development around 1700 with the introduction of brass wire to the Plains. Brass tacks,
hairplates, bells, armbands, jingles, jewelry, and buttons soon became staple ornaments
on Plains Indian clothing.

Because European money had little or no value to the Plains Indians, it was pounded into
thin circles, used as hairplates, and fashioned into buttons for decorations. As explorers
and traders sought to gain a favorable relationship with the warlike Plains Indians, they
began to import large quantities of silver. With metal ornaments from whatever
resources were available. Empty barrels, horsetacking cooking utensils, and other broken
or discarded metals were highly valued. The ingenuity of the Indian put all metal to use
in every facet of their lives.

Ceremonial clothing quickly became brighter and more elaborate as synthetic goods
encroached across the prairie lands. Other fabricated materials that were prized in
ornamentation were mirrors, sequins, bells, scarves, blankets, and buttons. With more
durable and colorful alternatives available, a new vogue of dance clothing emerged.

Feathers were used to a great extent by most Plains nations. Each bird was associated
with unique attributes. Wearing the feathers gave the owner the spiritual strength which
was associated with a particular bird. Hawks and other birds of prey symbolized courage,
superior hunting skills, and warfare. Owls were associated with wisdom and proficient
night vision. Because woodpeckers were quick and evasive, their feathers were worn for
protection. Other feathers which were used for primary and secondary ornamentation
included crow, magpie, yellow hammer, roadrunner, goose, duck, turkey, and parrot.
After the introduction of the pheasant in the late 1800s, the use of its feathers also
became widespread.

All animals were retrieved in a ceremonial manner. In many instances, a bird could be
captured, selected feathers removed, and then released. If an animal’s life was sacrificed,
its spirit was prayed for. Gratitude was acknowledged to the Great Spirit for providing
the body of a creature and its use. It is important to clarify that life is considered sacred
by American Indians. Killing needlessly or for sport was not a part of Plains Indian
culture.
Plains Indians conceived all birds to be inferior to the eagle. The eagle was a messenger between the two legged creatures and the Great Spirit. Eagle feathers, bones, claws, beaks, and plumes possess great power. Therefore, they were worn into battle, as well as for ceremony.

In the late 1800s, William F. Cody established “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show.” Capitalizing on a Wild West theme, Cody portrayed the Plains Indian from a romanticized point of view. He glamorized his hired Indians by having them wear full war paint, buckskins, and feathered regalia. This romanticized view of the Indian was also promoted throughout the United States on the Indian head nickel. From the era of the many Wild West shows to the present, the eagle-feathered bonnet and the term “Indian” have become synonymous.

Traditionally, eagle feathered war bonnets were not worn by the majority of Native American tribes. As a direct result of the circulation of Wild West shows and the Indian head nickel, many tribes today have adopted the war bonnet. By wearing the war bonnet, Indians are recognized by non-Indians as being “authentic.”

THE INTER-TRIBAL POWWOW

The dominant society has long had many misconceptions concerning Native Americans, particularly in the area of dance and music. Until recently, American Indians were never afforded the opportunity to tell their own story. What was told to the American public was generally material written, produced, and featured by non-Indians. Prominent authors, film makers, and policy-makers portrayed Native Americans as unintelligent, savage, and blood thirsty. The music and dance of the American Indian reflected these negative attitudes in their productions.

Because of these negative attitudes, Indian music and dance were oppressed and discouraged. In the early 1900s, Plains Indian dances faced a decline as the spirit of the Plains Indian had been broken. The extinction of many dance rituals and ceremonies prevailed during this period.

This status quo continued until 1914 when World War I began. Of the more than eight thousand Native Americans who enlisted for military service, six thousand were volunteers. This high degree of patriotism served as a catalyst for the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. For the first time, all Natives of the United States were considered full citizens and allowed to vote.

In a renaissance of ancient warrior societies, celebrations began to re-emerge to honor modern warriors as veterans. Tribal elders, who served as cultural custodians during Indian suppressions, were approached for their advice, knowledge, and endorsements in conducting ceremonies for Indian servicemen. As a result, new procedures, combined
with ancient tradition, were developed to fit the times. The American flag, a symbol of both unity and patriotism, acquired a prominent position at Native American gatherings.

The revival of Native American pride continued during World War II and the Korean Conflict. This revival of pride resulted in an evolution of Plains Indian singing and dancing. Taking into account that Indians no longer lived like their ancestors, new songs and organizations were instituted to commemorate contemporary events.

Members of Indian tribes, who were once mortal enemies, fought side by side to defend the United States. When they came home most laid their tribal differences aside and joined together to be honored with a common drum beat. Although still immensely proud of their tribal affiliations, the idea of collective “Indianness” was rooted.

The twentieth century witnessed new opportunities in the usage of transportation and communication. Taking advantage of these new assets, cultural exchanges escalated Northern and Southern Plains philosophical interactions. Inter-tribal customs began to assimilate new inter-tribal ideas. Although each Plains tribe retained their identity to a primary extent, the mutual desire to be associated with the term “Indian” gained momentum.

Increased mobility of Indian dance troupes from the Plains allowed them to perform in areas where other Native Americans were searching for a source of Indian identity. Encouraged by the interest shown towards Plains Indian culture by non-Indian audiences, tribes in the far corners of North America adopted Plains Indian Regalia, dance, and music. The Gallup Inter-Tribal Ceremonial in New Mexico was one of the foremost events of this nature.

The first legitimate “Inter-tribal Powwow” was the Ponca Powwow. It began around 1879 in northern Indian Territory. Indian Territory was truly inter-tribal. Sixty-seven tribes were removed from their original homelands and placed in what was to become the state of Oklahoma. At the Ponca Powwow, many tribal members traveled as far as one hundred miles to participate in inter-tribal singing and dancing. Tribes included the Omaha, Kaw, Osage, Pawnee, Otoe, Iowa, and Missouria. The “Heluska” or Straight dance dominated the early Ponca Powwows.

Around 1920, the Plains tribes of southwestern Oklahoma held their first Inter-tribal Powwow at Dietrich Lake. The Cheyenne, Arapaho, Comanche, and Kiowa were in attendance. The Southern Cheyenne were originally a Northern Plains culture (via the woodlands of the Great Lakes region). Through their contacts, they were instrumental in bringing the Fancy war Dance to this Powwow. It was adopted by the Kiowa, who called it the “Ohoma Dance” because of its origins with the Omaha tribe. Dancing during this period was very ceremonial and ritualistic throughout the Plains. Strict protocol was followed in all Dance arenas.

Plains Indian woman danced at a less conspicuous proximity to Plains Indian men. Usually the women danced on the outer perimeter of a Dance Circle. Their dance style
was generally limited to dancing in place, or near their seats. Occasionally, a particular dance addressed individual females, who were either virgins, clan leaders, or had encountered the enemy in battle. Also, special women’s societies and sororities were allowed to dance in the Dance Arena. Women had their distinct dance style and songs to accompany them.

In the 1950s and 60s Indian policy provided grants for Indians to seek employment away from their reservations in an urban atmosphere. This aid sent many Plains Indians into multicultural environments for the first time. While in these urban settings, Plains Indians worked along side a variety of other Native Americans. Because many urban Indians did not share the same cultural experiences, their need to identify their mutual “Indianness” fostered conformity. Thus the cultivation of the Inter-tribal Powwow phenomena branched in many directions, in the large cities.

The contemporary “Inter-Tribal Powwow” is a gathering of many tribes which come together for the purpose of singing, dancing, feasting, selling and trading arts and crafts, and upholding traditional customs. Inter-tribal Powwows inspire cultural and personal pride in Native Americans. They also revitalize their innate spirit. This evidence is easily discerned by a first-time visitor.

The most revolutionary period in the evolution of the Inter-tribal Powwow occurred during the early 1960’s. The Inter-tribal Powwow gained popularity wherever there were concentrations of Indians. The Powwow movement began to branch out into remote corners of Indian country. Tribes, who were not originally Powwow Indians, began to produce their own powwows. Adaptation allowed tribes to create their own style of protocol, Dance Arenas, and regalia. In the middle of a Powwow, the indigenous tribes would inject their own intra-tribal ceremonies. In Alaska, Powwows include exhibition Potlatch Dances. In Southern California – Bird Dances; in New York – the Longhouse Dances; and in Florida – Stomp Dances from the “Busk” ceremony.

For the most part, Indian Powwows are not commercial. Most are held for the enjoyment of their participants. Inter-tribal Powwows are also known as “Doings, Dances, Traditional Powwows, Fair Powwows, Contest Powwows, Tribal Celebrations, Memorials, and Benefits.”

Native American Powwows are rarely advertised in the general public media. Instead, participants learn of their locations through the “moccasin telegraph.” This is an Indian expression used to describe various forms of information transmission/distribution including word of mouth, fliers, Native American newspapers, mailed invitations, and announcements during Powwows.

In the 1950s, the positions of dance and song leaders were instituted. They were to be called the “Head Dancer” and “Head Singers.” In addition, the traditional Camp Crier was replaced with a position of the Master of Ceremonies. These initial honorary positions were amended to include a Host Drum, Arena Directors (who replaced the
traditional “Whip Men”) Little Boy and Girl Head Dancers, and a Powwow Princess. Together these positions comprise the “Head Staff.”

Not only is it the duty of the “Head Staff” to assist the sponsoring organization in their specialized areas, the “Head Staff” also serves as a drawing card when advertising to Powwow. Each of the adult “Head Staff” members is chosen because of their knowledge of songs, dances and the arena protocol. This recent custom of selecting a “Head Staff” originated in the Southern Plains where it has branched out to include even more positions. Recently, this custom has slowly made its way to the Northern Plains, where the “Head Staff” attracts supporters from the many reservations and reserves. Powwow fliers are given to the “Head Staff” well in advance of the Powwow and it is their responsibility to distribute the fliers. These Powwow fliers usually include the following information: the name and home of the “head Staff”, sponsoring organizations, dates, times of the particular events, and location.

The duties of the “Head Staff” are as follows:

**MASTER OF CEREMONIES** – This position is commonly referred to as the M. C. and entails the most difficult responsibilities of the entire “Head Staff.” An announcer must know all aspects of the Powwow and regional characteristics. He/she must work closely with the Powwow committee and be able to convey their wishes. The M.C. must come to the Speaker’s Stand before all other participants arrive to encourage everyone to assemble. At the same time, he/she sets the spirit for the Powwow arena. The M.C. provides continuity so that the Powwow agenda does not become stagnant. Even when the M.C. is not speaking into the microphone, he/she must plan the next series of events that will take place. With insightful commentary, clear explanations, and a good sense of humor, the M.C. adheres to traditional Indian procedures. If problems should occur, the M.C. is usually the first one to be confronted. He/she is usually adept at handling situations in a diplomatic manner. In more recent times, the M.C. bridges that gap of understanding between the Indians and non-Indians who are in attendance. He/she describes and communicates what is taking place in the Powwow arena.

**HEAD SINGERS AND HOST DRUMS** – Without singers, there would not be a Powwow. A well-rounded Powwow should include both Northern and Southern Plains Singers to accommodate both styles of dancing.

A southern term for the music conductor is the “Head Singer.” Today, a “Head Singer’s” repertoire of music can include over three hundred different songs. At a moment’s notice a “Head Singer” must be able to select an appropriate song for each specific event, which takes place at a Powwow. Southern singers are familiar with the extensive genre of southern songs. A well-respected singer is usually well supported by various singers when he is chosen as the “Head Singer.” For this reason only one “Head Singer” is necessary for the “Head Staff.” If asked to be the “Head Singer” at a Powwow far from home, the “Head singer” usually brings a few singers that are familiar with his style. Other local Southern singers will join the Drum circle at random. A southern “Head singer” traditionally positions his drum in the center of the dance Arena. You can find
him seated directly facing the master of Ceremonies, so they will be able to visually communicate with one another throughout the Powwow.

The “Host Drum” is a Northern Plains term used to identify singers who have been chosen as the principal singing group at a Powwow. It is their duty to render the majority of appropriate songs needed for each occasion. Individuals of a Northern Plains Drum Group generally understand the same native languages used in their songs. Their members usually come from the same region or tribe and have sung together for many years.

Drum Groups have names associated with their region, tribe, or historical past. Some examples are: Chiniki Lake Singers, the Mandaree Singers, and the Badland Singers. It is common for many Northern Plains Drum Groups to be at the same Powwow simultaneously. Each Drum Group has a style which distinguishes them from other groups. Each year, popular Drum Groups compose new songs to add to their repertoire. These songs are associated with the Drum Group that composed the songs and are the property of that individual Drum Group.

Northern Drum Groups position themselves around the inner perimeter of the Dance Arena. The “Host” Northern Drum Group is located in front of the Powwow Announcer’s/M.C.’s speaker Stand. The “Lead Singer” of each Northern plains Drum faces the arena in contrast to the “Southern Head Singer” who faces the M.C. this is important because the “Lead Singer” needs to be the first to see a ceremonial whistle blown. (This ceremonial whistle will be explained in detail later in this text.) the “Lead Singer” of each Northern Plains Drum Group is responsible for making sure that appropriate songs are chosen. Northern and Southern “Lead Singers” are usually blessed with superior voices. They begin or start each song and monitor the number of times that each verse is sung.

**HEAD MAN AND HEAD WOMAN DANCERS** – The primary intent of establishing these positions differs from its practical application today. Originally the individuals chosen to be “Head dancers” were well respected and knowledgeable. They became an extension of the sponsoring Powwow committee. They were approached well in advance of a Powwow by a representative of the sponsoring Powwow committee. The committee representative went to the home of the potential “Head Dancer” and extended a personal invitation. Upon acceptance, this individual would be a co-host and share the committee’s responsibilities as hosts for the Powwow.

These responsibilities included the privilege of greeting the other participants as they arrived. The “Head Dancer” often fed other dancers and visitors or donated food which would be distributed as rations to those who were camping. Once the Powwow began, the “Head Dancer” included as many participants as possible. To accomplish this, he/she would designate different individuals to lead each of the dances. This was not because he/she could not lead, but was due to his/her desire to actively involve guests.
Presently, this position has been extended to include dancers in the following categories: Men’s Fancy, Straight, Traditional, and Grass Dance and Woman’s Northern Fancy Shawl, Jingle dress, Northern Traditional, and Southern Buckskin/Cloth. The Senior, Junior, teens, and Tiny Tots (both male and female) may also have representatives among the “Head Staff.” These positions are honorary positions. Ideally the “Head Dancers” should be familiar with a wide variety of inter-tribal dances, customs, and protocol.

This protocol includes setting the direction that the dance will follow. The majority of dance Arenas have their participants dancing in a clockwise circle. This is an old tradition called “following the sun. However, a Northern Traditional “Head Dancer” may dance counter clockwise. The counter clockwise dancing follows the Sioux belief that the “male two-legged creatures were created to balance the earth.” In turn, any Male Northern Dancers may follow the lead of the “Head Dancer” by dancing on the outer circle, while the woman and men of the southern persuasion will dance on the inside of the circle in a clockwise fashion.

In the event that a “Head Dancer” must be absent from the arena, he/she should designate another knowledgeable peer temporarily to fulfill his/her responsibilities. If a “Head Dancer” is unfamiliar with a particular dance or physically unable to participate, he/she must appoint someone to lead the dance. The reason for choosing numerous and popular dancers, who reside at great distances, is to attract as many participants from a wide variety of areas to attend to Powwow.

**ARENA DIRECTOR** – The title of Arena director stems from the ancient “Whip Men.” The “Whip Men” positions were created in the hierarchy of Plains dance societies. Before there were “Head Dancers,” the “Whip Men” were the first to rise and solicit other dancers to follow suit. “Whip Men” carried ceremonial whips. When the dancers did not respond to the invitations to Dance, the “Whip Men” used their whips to gain the dancer’s attention. The whip was generally used on the legs.

The “Whip Men” were in charge inside the Dance Arena. When a dancer approached the arena, it was up the “Whip Men’s” discretion as to where they would be seated. It was also proper to ask the “Whip Men’s” permission to leave the arena before a dance was completed. Today, “Whip Men” can still be seen among the Sioux, Cree, Ponca, Osage, Comanche, and Kiowa Tribes.

The Arena Director is the direct descendent of the “Whip Man” or “Driver.” He, too, is in charge of overseeing the Dance Arena, yet his title is more demanding. He must be in the arena before the Powwow begins to organize and line up the dancers for the Grand Entry. (The Grand Entry will be explained in detail later in this text.) While the Master of Ceremonies verbally gives directions, it is the Arena Director who must physically perform the jobs needed to keep order in the arena. He must know how to implement Powwow protocol. Often at larger gatherings, both a Northern and Southern Arena Director are chosen to keep up with the demands of the Northern and Southern participants and their etiquette.
**THE POWWOW PRINCESS** - Few warrior societies in the Southern Plains selected an individual female or females to enter the dance circle. These designated princesses held this title for life. If they were too old to uphold the honor, the incumbent princess could pass the position to someone within the same lineage. During their reign, they would be the only females allowed in the dance Arena with male dancers.

Today, the Indian Princess has assumed a role much like the pageant queen, Traditional princesses were at the forefront of the contemporary title holders. Later schools, reservations, urban areas, and organizations began to initiate pageants in order to select a visible representative for their organization. National titles came into prominence with the inception of this Miss Indian America title, which began around 1954 in Sheridan, Wyoming.

This pageant was the result of the need to bring national attention to a prominent and worthy Indian woman as a good will ambassador who could help to eliminate some of the misconceptions and stereotypes that surrounded the Native American population.

Today, Powwow Princesses are chosen to represent Powwows of all types and sizes. Their responsibility is to represent the Powwow and its sponsors throughout the year by traveling to different Indian celebrations and events. The princess possesses beauty, creates interest and generates goodwill at other Powwows, while serving as a constant reminder of the Powwow she represents.

The Powwow Princess is usually expected to position herself in a visible location within the Powwow Dancing Arena and to make a welcoming speech to all who have come to attend the Powwow. A “Giveaway” and/or feast customarily takes place in order to acknowledge the honor that has been bestowed upon her. An outgoing princess presents the incoming princess with a crown and a banner. There is a current trend towards allowing younger girls to vie for these princess titles.

**INDIAN POWWOW MUSIC**

The drum is the single most important element of a Powwow. Many Native Americans believe that it is a gift from the Great Spirit. The sound of thunder is evoked from the drum’s spirit. This spirit or heart beat is alive within the drum because it was originally made from two spirits that were useful to the Indian. The base is made from a hollowed out tree trunk or by bending wood panels into a circle or eight-sided frame. Wood was essential to Native Americans. It was used for firewood, tools, shelters, and weapons. Raw hides were stretched and tied over the drum to create drum heads. In addition the animal, whose hide is used, provided subsistence, shelter, and clothing.

Drum making is a process that is done ceremoniously. To begin preparation, the drum maker must have good intentions, thoughts, and a positive frame of mind. If these measures are not adhered to, the finished product will reflect the negative forces by the frame or hide splitting or its tone being too low or too high. If such drum is put to use, its negative spirit can cause bad feelings among the group of singers sitting around this
A drum. If these procedures are adhered to properly, the drum will take on its own identity, emanate good feelings to the singers, and be treated like a human being and an extension of the family. Indian elders have proclaimed that the drum possesses great strength and spirit. “A drum’s spirit can make you happy when you are sad and even uplift you both physically and spiritually.”

A special Drumkeeper is often appointed to care for a drum’s body and spirit. In caring for a drum, it should be kept away from extreme heat, cold, and dampness. It should be kept off the ground when resting. Many Drumkeepers have a carpet or blanket that lies beneath the drum.

Special drumstands are constructed and used to keep the drum propped up when in use. These drumstands are sometimes made of two by fours which are cut to fit into a U shape. By intersecting two of these U shaped units, the four sides of the drum can be tied and balanced to the resulting drumstand. Traditionally, drumstands were four highly decorated stakes that were placed in the ground with the tops slightly bent. The number four was used to represent the four directions. The average diameter of a drum depends on its regional origin. In the Southern Plains, a Powwow drum’s diameter measures from twenty-four to forty inches in circumference. A large southern drum can accommodate up to twelve singers. A Northern Plains Powwow drum is usually smaller. Its diameter ranges from twenty to thirty inches, and can accommodate up to ten singers.

Today, drum frames are made from commercial base drums, barrels, wash tubs, and bent plywood. The rawhide, for drumheads, is found at slaughter houses and commercial hide dealers. Some drums are still created in the traditional style mentioned earlier. Often a design is painted on the face of the drum. The primary design generally identifies the name of the group of singers. The other side usually has a spiritual design or is left plain. Before a Powwow both sides are checked to determine which side will produce the right tone needed. A drum’s hide will tighten with exposure to the sun. If a drum is tuned correctly, it will make singing less strenuous. A drum that has a very high or low pitch is difficult to harmonize with. If a commercial band bass drum is used, it can be tuned by tightening or loosening screws. Commercial base drums are blessed before put to use in the Powwow Arena.

Drumsticks used to beat a drum vary according to tribal identity. General tendencies also distinguish Northern and Southern drumstick styles. Drumsticks in the South are kept by individual singers in a drum bag. They are longer than the drumsticks found in the Northern Plains, because there are more singers who sit around the southern drum. Dogwood and oak provided strength and springiness to early Southern Plains drumsticks. With the coming of man-made materials, drumstick “blanks” are replacing traditional drumstick materials. These blanks are covered with padding at each end. Leather is sewn over the head and handle. Many times they are decorated with plastic tape, threadwork, and fringe in order to distinguish them from other singer’s drumsticks.

One norm that is observed in the South, but not found in the North is the use of a Leaning or Holding Stick.” This is used by southern singers to keep their bodies upright while
singing. They balance the top of the “Leaning stick” with their left hand under or near their chin, while the bottom of this “Leaning Stick” rests on their left leg or chair. These “leaning Sticks” can be made of curved wood or a shorter drumstick can also be used. Northern drumsticks belong to individuals, but are more commonly kept in a bag by a drumstick carrier and belong to a whole Drum Group.

Northern drumsticks tend to be shorter than their Southern counterparts. A Northern drumstick averages approximately twenty inches in length. Its base is often fiberglass. The head can be made from fake fur, carpet, leather, or friction tape. The handle can be made of both leather and tape. A finger loop of thin rope or twine is sometimes added near the top of the handle to keep it from sliding when being used. Many singers, both from the Northern and Southern Plains, like to have a certain balance or “feel” to their favorite drumsticks.

To the untrained ear, Indian music, especially Powwow songs, may all sound the same. In truth, Powwow songs and singers have their own standards of excellence. Like other art forms, both diligence and training is required to produce a well-rounded singer. The majority of Powwow singers have never had formal training in music theory, performance, or composition. Their ability to learn, memorize, and repeat songs comes from an innate ability and from exposure to Powwow singing. An accomplished singer can listen to a song a few times and then become familiar enough with the song to harmonize with other singers.

In previous times, great preparation of both mind and spirit was prevalent before approaching the drum to sing. Today, Powwows and drum competitions have become more numerous and more frequent. These factors have contributed and fostered negative motives which infiltrate the once sacred Drum Circle. When approaching the Drum circle, it is important to leave behind grudges and negative feelings. Entering with a positive and humble frame of mind is desirable. These are part of established drum etiquette that is understood and adhered to by the singers.

The drum is always recognized during a Powwow with water, tobacco, material, and monetary donations. A Lead Singer who follows traditional philosophy will disseminate these gifts equally, by passing these items to his left, in a clockwise manner. By doing so, he is showing his appreciation to all who contributed their talent and utmost respect to the spirit of the drum.

Plains Indian music can be categorized into three varieties: songs that are comprised of vocables, songs that are composed with words, and songs in a combination of both words and vocables. Vocables are syllables without meaning, such as “HAY YAH, YO HE YAY.” When put into a series of verses with pattern and order, these vocables make up a complete song that is recognizable and intelligible to the trained ear. Word songs and songs with a combination of words and vocables, tell of specific events.

All Powwow songs commemorate a thought, place, person, group of people, event, or object. The origins of many Traditional songs have been lost. Formerly, War Dance
Songs of the Plains were actually a series of different songs that surrounded a battle or raid. This series included songs such as Prayer Songs sung for power and safety, War Journey Songs, Death Songs, Victory Songs, Scalp Dance Songs, and songs which recounted the actual battle or raid. Today, announcers may refer to this all-encompassing genre of songs, as any of the following: War Dance, Grass, Omaha, Wolf, Hot-dance, Sneak-up, Ruffle, or Inter-tribal songs.

New songs are composed yearly throughout Indian country. This tendency is more prevalent in the Northern Plains region than in the Southern region. Although Southern Singers have a rich supply of songs, there has been a recent shift towards obtaining new songs from their Northern neighbors. Only since the early seventies has this practice gained popular acceptance in the south. As songs are exchanged, diffused, and disseminated from their origins, their structure and content are often altered or transformed to fit regional styles of singing. A popular Northern trend is to compose abbreviated and repetitious word songs. Often these recent compositions contain incomplete sentences. They seem to encourage the dancers to “dance, dance, dance” with different vocal strategies, rather than tell a story of bravery and honor as in the past. A good representation of this is illustrated in the following example:

Wi-cha Wa-ci Wa-ci-pi-doh
Wi-cha Wa-ci Wa-ci-pi-dooh
Wi-cha Wa-ci Wa-ci-pi-doh
Wi-cha Wa-ci Wa-ci-pi-dooh
Wi-cha Wa-ci-wah
Wa-ci Wa-ci-pi-doh- yeaah…

Wa-ci-pi-doh (pronounced wah-shi-pee-doh) is a word that encourages the dancers to dance. This comes from the Nakota dialect of the Sioux language.

Powwow song structure contains a lead, Second/Introductory Lead, Primary verse, Secondary verse, and a Tail. The introductory lead phrase is sung by one man. He starts the song with high sequential notes to establish pitch. All of the singers join in the

Second/Introductory lead before it is completed. This is called “the second.” Proceeding, they all sing the chorus of the Primary verse, and then repeat the chorus, forming the Secondary verse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C*</th>
<th>C#</th>
<th>STOP</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEAD</td>
<td>SECOND/ INTRODUCTORY LEAD</td>
<td>PRIMARY VERSE</td>
<td>SECONDARY VERSE</td>
<td>END SONG</td>
<td>TAIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“1 man”</td>
<td>“all”</td>
<td>“all”</td>
<td>“all”</td>
<td>“all”</td>
<td>“all”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A, B, C*, AND C# comprise one “PUSH UP” (NORTHERN PLAINS)
A, B, C* AND C# comprise one “START” (SOUTHERN PLAINS)

Hard emphasis beats called Honor Beats are used in both Northern Plains style songs and Southern Plains style songs. However, they occur at different places within the song. In the Southern Plains songs these Honor Beats are located between the **Primary** and **Secondary Verses**. (See * for location), and are limited to three in number. Originally the Ponca tribe called these Honor beats “gosh-gah” beats. Honor Beats were followed by words. Another dynamic present in the Southern Plains style songs is an increase of the tempo at the beginning of the **Secondary/Introductory** Lead section.

In the Northern Plains, these Honor Beats are located three-fourths of the way through the C# **Secondary Verse** section. Northern Honor Beats are used to change the tempo within the song. The number of these honor Beats can range from three to twelve beats.

There are two different terms that you will hear the Master of Ceremonies using at a Powwow as he addresses the various Drums. They are “**Push Ups,”** and “**Starts.”** These terms refer to the main body of the song minus the tail section. (SEE ABOVE DIAGRAM FOR LOCATION.)

At a Powwow, Southern Plains Drums will normally sing Four **Starts** for a War Dance/Inter-tribal Songs and **Three Starts** for a Contest Song. The same southern Drum Group will usually be allowed to sing a set of two through four songs before the next Drum group sings. The Northern Plains Drum Group will normally sing **Six Push Ups** for an Inter-tribal song and **Four Push ups** for a contest Song. Southern Drum Groups are moving toward singing the same number of **Starts** for Contest Songs as the Northern Plains Drum Groups. Therefore, a Northern and Southern Drum Group would each sing either Four Push Ups or Four Starts for a contest Song. This adaptation is being made to ensure that the dancers will be contesting to the same number of verses within a given song. This adaptation is thus establishing an “international standard.”

At the end of a song, the **Secondary Verse** is repeated. This is called a Tail and is comparable to the encore or coda of contemporary music. Contest Songs normally do not have **Tails** unless they are “Northern Traditional” Songs. A” Northern Traditional” Song is not a recent composition and usually belongs to a tribe or society of the Northern Plains. Many times the M.C. will request that all participants and spectators stand and remove their head coverings during a traditional contest. This is done to honor the Traditional song, not the dance itself or dancers. During an Inter-tribal Northern Song,
the singers may sing beyond the TAIL and repeat the entire song. This repeat may occur several times before the song finally ends. There is usually an increase in tempo and scale at this time.

When singing Powwow songs, the general format is to start on a high note and gradually descend to a lower set of notes. Each note has a specific relationship to the other notes within the song. Together these notes form the melody. Women can harmonize with the melody singing one octave higher than the men. Men from the Northern Plains generally begin their songs in a high “falsetto” voice, whereas, men from the Southern Plains begin singing with a lower, bass or guttural voice.

TRADITIONAL POWWOW RITUALS

WHISTLES AND WHISTLE MEN

On the occasion that a significantly powerful song is rendered by a Drum Group, a “Whistle” may be blown. This woodwind instrument has always been used casually by most Male Fancy Dancers in the Southern Plains Powwow Arena. However it has not been used for the same purposes that the Northern Plains “Whistle Men” use it for.

In the Northern Plains there is a deeper and more significant meaning attached to these whistles. A designated “Whistle Man” or “Whistle Carrier” will blow his whistle, over the heads of the singers four times, to the four directions. The singers must honor the “Whistle Carrier” by repeating four Push Ups, as a continuation of the song. A “Whistle Man” can also blow his whistle on a Drum after a contest is completed to continue the spirit of the Drum through the song. After honoring the Drum with his whistle, a “Whistle Man” will present a gift to the singers. This is called “Feeding the Whistle.” On occasions, a Drum might be left unattended by the singers. When this occurs and a “Whistle Carrier’s” request is not immediately fulfilled, a fine will be imposed on the Drum. If an event is immediately scheduled, a responsible “Whistle Carrier” will use his discretion and not blow his whistle, but rather wait for a more appropriate time.

“Whistle Carriers” belong to both Grass Dance Societies, and “Whistle Men’s Societies.” Many men have received a whistle in the sacred Sun Dance ceremony, but their eagle whistles are used for religious purposes not associated with the Powwow Arena. This is a very controversial issue. To be a “Whistle Carrier” involves great responsibility and sacrifice. “Whistle Men” are given this right by other “Whistle Carriers.” A potential “Whistle Msn” is observed for his merit. Generosity, unselfishness, and service toward others are among a few of the attributes that are being examined. When initiating a new “Whistle Man,” four songs are sung in sequence. They are followed by a “Giveaway” and Feast. (The “Giveaway” will be explained in detail, later.) The sponsoring “Whistle Man” then instructs the new “Whistle Man” on how to live a respectable life and explains in detail all of the responsibilities involved with this new status. The whistle that is carried by the “Whistle Man” is made from the wing bone of an eagle, but in the
Powwow Arena a substitute whistle is often used. Some are designed in the shape of loons or other water birds.

There are other occasions similar to the Whistle ritual that will cause the Drum to repeat a song. On the Southern Plains a Straight Dancer, who is a Tail Dancer at his tribal dance grounds, (discussed later in text under the Straight Dancer’s section,) may approach the Drum and raise has beaded staff over the Drum. The Drum in turn will honor this gesture by repeating the song. In the far Northeast, among the Six Nations Tribes, Traditional Male Dancers have been observed laying their eagle fans on the Drum and then lifting it high into the air. The Drum will respond by singing a chorus of four verses, in the same way the Whistle ritual would evoke a drum to respond.

**FEATHER PICK UP**

The eagle feather is honored with the utmost respect in the Powwow Arena. Eagles represent the Thunderbird spirit who is a messenger between the Great Spirit and man. A person who uses the body parts of an eagle does so with reverence.

Traditionally, an eagle feather had to be earned in battle or by performing a brave deed. These feathers were symbols of status and displayed on war bonnets, staffs, and calumets (or, peace pipes). How a feather was cut, positioned, or painted gave a visual account of how the feather was earned. Today, eagle feathers are distributed when a person receives an Indian name, formally enters the Dance Arena for the first time, and when an individual brings honor to himself, family and nation.

Customarily, Plains Indian men received eagle feathers and Plains Indian women received eagle plumes. Today, this tradition has been diffused. Both men and women handle eagle feathers and plumes. In conjunction, other parts of the eagle are worn by men. They include the claws, bones, and head.

Eagle feathers are passed down from generation to generation. In addition, a federal program has been set up by the Department of the Interior for the distribution of eagles that are killed on power lines, on roads and in zoos to Native Americans for religious purposes.

When by accident, an eagle feather is dropped at a Powwow by a dancer, an Arena Director or veteran will stand by and guard it. Upon the completion of the song, the arena will be cleared and one of three ceremonies will be observed. In the South, a veteran will offer a prayer, then pick up the feather while counseling the person who dropped the feather on how to care for it. In the North, four veterans and a Drum are selected to retrieve a feather. If possible a Traditional Drum is used. The dancers dance clockwise to six Push Ups. The first two Push Ups are Veterans Songs (also called “Brave Man’s” Songs) and the remaining four Push Ups are “charging the Feather” songs. At the end of the six verses, an Indian veteran who has been wounded in combat will pick up the feather, return it to its owner, and then publicly recite a war story. In the Northwest, when the first feather is dropped at a Powwow, a combat veteran will gather
all the Men Traditional Dancers in two rows. They will all charge the feather four times, thus taking care of further feathers that may drop. If one drops later in the Powwow, they retrieve it using the less formal Southern method because the full ceremony has already taken place. A feather lying on the ground symbolizes a fallen warrior. A combat veteran who retrieves the feather is actually picking up a fallen comrade. Other beliefs regarding a dropped feather refer to the feather as a protector and its touching the ground as analogous to the dropping of the American flag on the ground. Another belief is that a fallen eagle feather is treated like an enemy. Once the feather has touched the ground, the impurities of the earth prepare it and harm the person who has dropped it. Therefore, it is necessary to “Capture the Enemy in the form of a Feather” and say a prayer in hopes of transforming the feather’s power into a positive force. The owner of the fallen feather then gives the veteran and the singers who have sung the songs a gift. This gift to the singers is for the songs that were delivered. The gift to the veteran is for the retrieval of the feather and the combat service he has performed on behalf of his people. It is said that the gifts that are yielded often reflect how much respect the individual has for the eagle feather. During this ceremony it is respectful for all onlookers to stand and remove all head coverings.

THE GIVAWAY

During the course of a Powwow, the program is often interrupted to honor a “Giveaway” or “Special.” Before the “Giveaway” or distribution of gifts, the families and supporters of an honoree will request a Drum to sing a “Special” Song, on their behalf. These “Special” songs include Veterans’, Chiefs’, Warriors”, tribal, clan, family, individual, “Honor”, and “Giveaway” Songs.

The tradition of the “Giveaway” is an ancient practice. Leaders and chiefs reinforced their status by distributing personal wealth among others. In essence, he was paying for or honoring his position with gift giving. Worthy gifts included horses, weapons, clothing, blankets, and food. Today, the “Special” and “Giveaway” are important parts of the overall Powwow.

A “Giveaway” begins by having the honoree lead a processional around the arena as his/her song is sung. In the South, it is common for both one War Dance and one Gourd dance “Special” to be sung. If this is the case, the honoree will simply request a “One and One.” Immediately after the song or songs are concluded, the participants in the processional will line up and present the honoree with a monetary donation and hand shake. It is customary for an honoree not to brag about his/herself. Therefore, a speaker who is acquainted with the honoree, will address the Powwow audience on the honoree’s behalf. At this time, the speaker will introduce the honoree, list some of his/her accomplishments and explain the reason for the “Giveaway.” When he is finished speaking, he will call the Head Staff, visitors, and participants to come up and receive gifts. Other gifts such as cloth, food, blankets, shawls, and coins will be placed on the ground inside the arena. Any visitor is allowed to come and pick up these gifts and should acknowledge this gesture by shaking hands with the honoree. In some Northern Plains Powwows, a Circle Dance; i.e., Kohomeni or Round Dance, is then requested. All
gift recipients participate and acknowledge their gifts by lifting them during the honor beats of the song. At the end of the “Giveaway”, all the monetary gifts collected at the processional are placed on the Drum that rendered the “Special” Song or songs.

Unwritten protocol that influences a “Giveaway” include never giving to a close relative, never give what you would not be honored to receive, and in the spirit of giving, you should “till it hurts.” Other occasions for a “Giveaway” occur during a naming ceremony, when honoring a leaving or returning serviceman, a memorial for the deceased; after mourning, a family or individual must pay their way into the arena, and when someone dances in the arena for the first time. It has been observed both in Canada and Oklahoma that families have held impromptu “Giveaways” when a child accidentally wandered into the arena and started dancing. Even though they were not prepared, this was done to honor the child’s first steps into the Powwow. At almost all Powwows the Powwow sponsors will wait until the last day to have their “Giveaway.” It is then that they publicly show their gratitude to the “Head Staff,” supporters, and visitors by having their “Special.”

CONTESTS

The competitive nature of Native Americans has prevailed throughout history. These characteristics were profoundly displayed in footraces, wrestling matches, stickball games, and arrow and lance throwing contests. All these physical competitions involved athletic training in order to excel. Spiritual paints and amulets were worn to gain advantages as well as protect them from negative forces. Today, this ageless spirit of competition has asserted itself in the form of dance and singing competitions. Plains warrior societies dictated a male dominated social order.

In Powwow dancing, the most contemporary of male dances is he Fancy Feather Dance. It is only natural that the first Indian dance contest highlighted the most modern of male dances. The first Men’s Fancy Dance contest was hosted in 1925 at the Haskell Indian Institute, in Lawrence, Kansas. Soon after, the “World’s Fancy Dance Championship” was established in Ponca city, Oklahoma. In the early 1930’s, the dance contest phenomenon began to manifest on the Northern Plains. In the earlier Northern contests, all adult make dancers competed against one another in one division. Omaha and Ponca songs were used for the earliest of these contests.

Special categories, such as the Grass dance or “Heluska”/Straight dance, did not have individual competition categories because their style of dance had both social and religious purposes. As contest and prize monies expanded, specific divided categories determined by dance style, age, and sex affiliation developed. Simple rules such as keeping time with the beat of the drum, stopping at the last beat and not losing a major regalia article enhanced the roots of the Powwow contest. Plains Indians lived by the honor system and would disqualify themselves if any infraction of these rules was broken. Judges and sometimes the audience, who were familiar with the individual dances, determined the winner in the early dance competitions.
Dance competition has become highly complex since the mid 1920s. They are now the focal point of almost all major Inter-tribal Powwows. Sponsoring a contest serves as a drawing card for Powwows and helps dancers defray their traveling costs as well as determining who are the best dancers. As in most athletic events, dance preparation has become an art. Physical stamina, dedication, showmanship, knowledge of songs, and an outstanding dance outfit are the key ingredients needed to produce a champion dancer.

The contest phenomenon has not had an entirely positive effect on the Native American. Ascending cash prizes seem to spoil the harmonious foundations established by Traditional Dances. The harmonious relationships within the dance Circle have been threatened due to the highly competitive stakes involved in competition dancing.

Dance styles and regalia have developed new “looks,” which deviate almost completely from their original patterns. This is due in part to two factors. Dance champions are innovators. The style of outfits they wear and the new dance techniques that they incorporate are imitated by other dancers who desire to win contests. Also, many times contest judges are selected who do not have a sufficient background on the dance they are judging. Their experience compels them to choose flashier, less traditional dance styles. These same judges frequently choose established champions (for the sake of not looking incompetent as judges,) who are dance innovators. Other dancers observe dance winners and incorporate that winner’s dance style and regalia. This is done in the hopes of the other dancer being equally as effective in future contests.

In the mid 1970s, a new system of judging and tabulating was developed at the United Tribes Indian Celebration in Bismarck, North Dakota. “United Tribes” is recognized as a final meeting place for champions at the end of the Powwow season and a proving ground for new Powwow techniques. The system that was born there is called the “International Point System.”

In the “Point System,” dancers receive points for participating in Grand Entries each day of the Powwow, random “Participation dances” and “Go Rounds,” which are preliminaries and final contests held during each session of a Powwow. The “Point System” has been adopted, to a large extent, by most Contest Powwows across North America. It is through the “Point Systems” that a competitor, regardless of background, will have an overall understanding of what to expect wherever he/she competes. Most “Point Systems” will begin at the first session of dancing. A classic “Point System” will resemble the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reward</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20 points – Grand Entry</td>
<td>Awarded at each afternoon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 points – Participation Dances</td>
<td>and evening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 points – 2nd place</td>
<td>dance session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 points – 3rd place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 points – 4th place</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At many larger gatherings, an un-biased certified public accountant and computer system are used to tabulate accumulated points. The dancer with the highest accumulated number of points at the end of a contest Powwow wins. And odd number of judges are selected to reduce the chances of a tie. The number of judges in one contest can range from three to eleven. With eleven judges, there is less likelihood of bias toward any competitor. In the event of a tie, a “run off,” in which the tied dancers compete at the same time, takes place. The run off is executed before the winners are announced. New rules that coincide with the “Point System” include:

1. A registration deadline.
2. Registration limited to one category.
3. A complete outfit needed to compete.
4. Contestants must register and/or accept prize monies in full outfit.
5. Contestant’s number must be visible during actual contest.
6. An understanding that the decision of the judges is final.

Drum competitions are also popular at Powwows. Many Traditional Drum Groups who believe a drum should not be a part of Powwow competition, will forego the Drum Contest. In this case, they will be compensated by the Powwow committee with monetary donations called “Day Money.” Fifteen minutes before a scheduled Grand Entry, a “Drum Roll Call” takes place. Regardless if a Drum competes or not, they are expected to be set up by this time. If they do not answer the “Drum Roll Call” by beating their drum loudly, when their Drum is called, they will not be eligible for any “Day Money” or contest prize money. Drums that register for competition are judged on the following criteria:

1. Whether or not an appropriate song is rendered (dependent on the dance category.)
2. Whether or not an established number of verses are sung. If the “Point System” is used, the number of verses that a song is limited to is:
   a. Four Starts or Push Ups for the Grand Entry songs
   b. Four Starts or Push Ups for Dance Contest Songs
   c. Six Starts or Push Ups for Inter-tribal Songs
3. Whether or not all the singers are singing and beating in unison.
4. Whether or not any of the singers overbeats at the end of a song.
5. Whether or not the singers immediately start a song when requested.
6. Whether or not there are at least six singers present while being judged.

Special favoritism will be rewarded for both a beautiful song and how well a Drum is able to harmonize. Today, many Drums use amplifier systems which allow even mediocre Drum Groups the luxury of sounding powerful. This is the reason Drum judges are expected to stand immediately behind the singers to observe their true qualities. Some Contest Powwows do not allow a singing group to bring their personal public
address system. Instead they provide cordless microphones that are hooked up to the central speakers to insure fairness to all Drum competitors.

**DAILY SEQUENCE OF EVENTS**

An outdoor Contest Powwow requires a great deal of preparation before the actual dancing begins. Before the participants arrive, the Powwow Arena is blessed, which encourages a positive spirit to be present throughout the Powwow. All regions have their own manner for carrying out this ceremony. Once an arena has gone through “Proper Ceremony,” all who enter the arena treat this enclosed area with respect. As the participants arrive they are greeted by the Host Committee. Any questions concerning the Powwow are answered at this time. Powwows that allow camping usually have what is called “camping day.” This is a day to set up camp before the actual Powwow begins.

On the morning of each Powwow day, flags are raised in the arena and a Tribal Flag Song is sung. Veterans are in charge of handling the flags. Many Powwows today raise the American Flag, the Union Jack (Canadian Flag,) the state or provincial flag, and a tribal flag. These flags represent treaties between the native peoples and the government and the servicemen/warriors, who have fought in defense of their land and people. The morning offers a time for the vendors to set up and for contest registration to begin. Around twelve thirty p.m. all of the committee members and the M.C. prepare for the Grand Entry. The Grand Entry or Processional is a fairly modern practice that has resulted from contests. The Master of Ceremonies encourages all of the participants to line up and for all the Drums to set up, warm up their voices and adjust their public address systems. When ready, Drum Roll Call takes place. The Arena Directors line up all of the participants outside the arena entrance and clear the arena. Number Recorders position themselves around the arena in order to record the number that each contestant wears on his/her outfit. When all contestants and Grand Entry participants are lined up and ready, the Arena Directors give the “go ahead” signal to the Master of Ceremonies. The Master of Ceremonies asks spectators to stand up and remove their hats to honor the flag/”colors” that will be presented. The “Host Drum” begins their Grand Entry Song and the Flag Bearers enter the arena.

There are two types of flags that lead the Processional. The Indian flag is represented by an Eagle Staff. The owner of this Eagle Staff designates someone to carry it in. Eagle Staffs represent a chief, society, family or tribe. Several Eagle Staffs can be honored to lead the Grand Entry. The Native American flag is equivalent to the American or Canadian flag. It is also shown the same degree of respect. National, state/provincial, tribal, and other appropriate flags are carried in at the same time. These Flag Bearers are normally veterans, but can also be elders or individual representatives of the flag. Following the Flag Bearers are the following persons in this order: The “Head Staff,” the Host Veterans Organization, Powwow Committee representatives, VIP’s, Princesses, Golden Age Men’s contestants, Men’s Traditional Dance contestants….down the list of contestants.
Each Drum group will have a chance to sing six “Push Ups” or “Starts” before passing the grand Entry Song to the next Drum. The Master of Ceremonies will encourage the Drums to “pick up the beat;” which means to keep the same cadence as the Drum that was singing previously. Starting with the first Drum and moving in a clockwise pattern, each Drum takes their turn, (this is referred to as “around the horn,”) until all contestants have entered the arena. The Arena Director will then signal the Master of Ceremonies that all contestants are in the arena. The Master of Ceremonies will inform the last Drum that is singing and the singers will finish their song and stop. The Flag Bearers stop, facing the Master of Ceremonies. All other participants stop and face the inside of the arena but leave a space cleared between the Flag Bearers and the Speaker’s Stand. All remain standing as an Indian Flag Song is administered. The Flag Song is the equivalent to the American and Canadian National anthems. An invocation is then delivered, usually by a well-respected elder. At some Powwows, the Lord’s Prayer in Indian sign language is yielded in place of the invocation.

After the invocation or Lord’s Prayer, the Color Guard, which consists of Flag Bearers, exit the arena and the spectators are allowed to sit down. Next, introductions of the VIPs “Head Staff,” and Princesses are announced. The M.C. will immediately follow the introductions with one of five dances and/or songs. Any one of the four dances chosen involves all of the participants. The possibilities are as follows:

1. A series of Round Dances or War Mother’s Songs. The Round Dance is also called Kohomeni, Circle Dance, or the Owl Dance. It is performed by facing the center of the arena in a large circle. All of the dancers circle to the left while, keeping time with the Drum. There are several regional styles of footwork used in this dance. “War Mothers’ Songs are also called Soldier Dances. The dance is patriotic in nature. It developed after World War I to honor veterans of foreign wars. War Mothers’ Songs belong to American War Mother’s Auxiliaries. The beat is the same as the Round Dance but should be danced by keeping time with every other beat. Thus, a more reverent expression is rendered.

2. Sneak-Up Song. This dance is also called the Scout Dance, Shake Dance and Stomp Dance. The Sneak-up was a Man’s Battle Re-enactment Dance. In the first part of this dance, the dancer kneels on one knee and scouts for signs or tracks of the enemy. (Originally bells were kept silent, however today dancers shake their bells). The second part follows with a quick burst of dancing signifying an encounter with the enemy. The first round of the accompanying song is broken into two parts. The rapid drumbeat or ruffle, signals the first part of the song. The second part follows with an even cadence. Each round is sung four times, with a repeat verse in the fourth round. Today all dancers participate in this dance. Dancers should always dance forward symbolizing non-retreat.

3. Crow Hop. This dance is very similar to the Southern Plains “Trot” and “Horse Stealing” Dance. In the North it is often referred to as a “Slide” or “Shuffle” Dance. The source of this dance can be traced to the Crow Nation, which currently resides is southeastern Montana. Crow singers contributed a quick
double beat to these songs. Tribes who have adopted the Crow Hop accompany it with a staggered beat. Either way, the dancers keep time by hopping to the hard prominent beats.

4. War Dance Starting Song. This is a Southern Plains custom that signals the beginning of the War Dance portion of the Program. This practice was initiated by the early Omaha and Ponca “Heluska” War Dance Societies. It is used both in the Powwow and ceremonial Dance Arenas. The “Starting” Song is a “blessing” composition, that is observed by not dancing while it is being sung.

5. Memorial Song. The Memorial Song honors all those who have passed on to the Spirit World. All the dancers in the arena observe this occasion by standing motionless as the song is sung.

Once one or all of these are completed a series of Inter-tribal War Dances will take place. These Inter-tribals serve as a “warm-up” or prelude to the Contest Dancing. Following the first series of Inter-tribals, Contests, Participation Dances, and “Giveaways,” the social Dances will begin. The order in which they fall will differ everyday. In the North, there are both afternoon and evening dance sessions. At some northern Powwows, the evening session will end with a Grand Exit led by Indian flags. Upon completion, the evening session is over until the next Grand Entry.

At the end of a Contest Powwow the winners will be announced and awards dispersed. Because it is an Indian gathering, a Closing Song and/or benediction will be sung as a Final Ending. This is always done regardless of the length of the Powwow.

THE POWWOW CIRCUIT

From the late 1980s to the present, Powwow participants are traveling farther and in greater frequency than ever before. Powwows take place throughout the year, wherever there is a sufficient Indian population. The Powwow movement reaches its peak between Memorial Day and Labor Day. During this time frame, the Powwow Trail is alive, throughout the United States and Canada.

The Powwow circuit can be compared to a professional Rodeo circuit. Its participants travel weekend to weekend and stay in tents, trailers, motels, or are put up in other Powwow participants’ homes. In between Powwows, its participant’s train, repair outfits, and attend spiritual meetings, while traveling thousands of miles.

There are many Powwow circuits within the Powwow realm. In each circuit you can see the same participants weekend after weekend. These participants compete, support, and follow one another. Some circuits, particularly in the Plains, are larger than others. In the larger circuits competition is greater. In general, prize money is higher on the Canadian and Northern Plains circuits than in the Southern Plains circuit. The reasoning behind the lower prize money offered in the Southern Plains centers around the idea that there is a shorter distance to travel between Powwows. There is a dense population of
Powwow participants in a smaller area. As a result, there are enough participants in the Southern Plains circuit to make several coinciding Powwows successful.

Powwow Participants are no longer traveling only in their own circuits, but rather are beginning to travel greater distances into other circuits, therefore, making inter-tribal exchange very common. For those who follow the big money, the same contestants could very well compete against each other in Washington, Oklahoma, New York, and Saskatchewan, all in one month. Contesting is a hit and miss situation. Most who follow the Powwow trail are satisfied if they break even at the end of “the season.” They hit the Powwow season each year because they enjoy it. To many “It is a way of life!”

PROTOCOL TO GUIDE THE FIRST TIME VISITOR

Powwows are an Indian event and are usually not directed toward non-Indians or tourists. Both are welcome as visitors, but are reminded that the Dance Arena is sacred. Therefore, a visitor is expected to be on his/her best behavior.

Do not expect a Powwow to start exactly at the time it is advertised. Most Powwows run on “Indian Time.” That means that they will begin when everything is ready. Visitors are allowed to dance during Inter-tribal Songs and other Social Dances, but should not be in the arena when dances are not taking place.

It is polite to ask permission from the dancers and singers before you take a picture. This is especially true when the dancers are away from the arena and are visiting or resting. Flash photography is especially discouraged during the contests, as it can distract a contestant from their intense concentration.

Powwows provide Native Americans an opportunity to enjoy their Indianness. It is a unique time for sharing pride in a heritage that is alive and thriving amidst a national “melting pot.” While peering into the Powwow world, enjoy yourself. If things are going slow in the arena, sample some delicious Indian food and/or walk around and visit the various arts/crafts booths. Other participants will probably be doing the same thing. This is an ideal time to take pictures and strike up a conversation. Powwows are a kaleidoscope of culture mixed with both complexity and simplicity.

INDIVIDUAL DANCER STYLES

The Powwow has prompted considerable changes to indigenous styles of dance and regalia. Even styles, which are deemed “Traditional”, show a remarkable difference from the pre-reservation era. Of particular concern are the inter-tribal styles which change annually. In this area, the belief that brighter, bigger, and fancier seems to emulate current trends. Tribally identified styles seem less eminent to succumb to radical change.

Powwow Dances and regalia standards are set primarily by those who compete. When an unknown participant wears regalia that is authentically traditional, but not commonly or
currently seen in the Powwow Arena, they are perceived with bewilderment. Some recent examples are:

- A Grass Dancer who danced through a large, fur wrapped hoop.
- A Southern Straight Dancer who wore a turban.
- A Northern Traditional Dancer who danced with rattles. These are all elements associated with each particular dance, but have gained little head way in being accepted as a norm.

Most Powwow Dances have a rich history. But two of the most popular dances, the Men’s and Women’s Fancy Dance, were created during this century. Indian dancing and regalia are not static and will continue to evolve. It is almost certain that old styles of regalia and dance will be resurrected and contemporary developments will manifest to fit the times.

In order to analyze the individual dance styles of the Powwow, a category by category description will follow; beginning with the earliest dance expression and proceeding to the most contemporary.

SOUTHERN MEN’S STRAIGHT DANCE

History

The Straight Dance has its roots among the societies of male warriors known as the “Helushka.” Chiefs and warriors of the Omaha, Ponca, Pawnee, Otoe, Kaw, and Iowa tribes comprised its membership. The “rights” to have this society are referred to as being “Given the Drum.” To receive a Drum involves a heavy responsibility. The Drum was given to the Osage and Quapaw tribes in the 1880’s, by the Ponca and Kaw tribes. A Ponca legend tells that he “Helushka” ritual was revealed to them by an old buffalo bull, in a time when men and animals could communicate. The Otoe version, of the same legend, tells that a grizzly bear is the animal that revealed the “Helushka” to their tribe.

The term Straight Dance is an English term used to denote the Osages, who danced “straight up and down.” Another English description calls it the Gentlemen’s Dance because of the stately posture exhibited by the dancers.

Each tribe that participates in the Straight Dance has a word for “Helushka” in their dialect. This is evident when a particular tribesman sings a tribal song. He will refer to the society in his language. Some examples include: Hae-lhu-ska, (Omaha,) Inlonska or Elonska, (Osage,) and Irushka,(Pawnee.)

Songs were made to commemorate all aspects of the “Helushka” culture and ceremony. Chiefs and warriors had their own songs that were sung at “Helushka” Dances. “Helushka” Dances lasted four days and took place in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Each day a different set of songs within a series would be sung. The reason
“Helushka” Dances took four days was because it took four days of preparation and dance before the warriors went to war.

Protocol played an important role in “Helushka” ceremonies. Officers of the old “Helushka” society who carried out this protocol include: the Lead-Pipe Keeper, Messenger, and two Spoon Carriers-Servers of the feast. Today, since the Plains wars have ceased, the “Helushka” has opened its societies to committees comprised of non-warriors and/or contemporary office holders.

The regalia of the Straight Dancer is complex and conforms to tribal standards. Many articles worn by the Straight dancer have to be earned and denote status. The longest plume that was found under an eagle’s tail was reserved for a chief. Grizzly claw necklaces were worn by warrior leaders of the Bear Clan. Dance Sticks or Staffs were carried only by Tail Dancers or former Tail Dancers.

The most basic of regalia articles worn by warriors was the leather or buckskin breechcloth. The breechcloth was originally the loincloth made in “G-string” style. A “G-string” was a strip of leather folded between the legs and held in place with a string or belt. The string was then tied around the waist, to hold up the G-string. The excess leather would hang over the anterior and posterior. Cloth aprons have replaced the leather and buckskin loincloths of former times. A long front apron and back trailer apron was/is used in conjunction with the smaller aprons for ceremonial use. Clan or tribal affiliation could be determined according to how these were worn. An example of this is whether or not a dancer wore his trailer with a smaller back apron or whether the trailer apron was worn in front or in back of the smaller apron. This practice has ceased in favor of a more inter-tribal style of dress. When beads were introduced, connecting floral patterns adorned “Helushka” aprons. This practice is not as frequently observed because these beaded designs have given way to an influx of individual tribal ribbonwork designs and patterns.

The distinct feature that separates Straight Dance regalia from other male outfits is the use of the long otter hide worn down the back of a dancer. The origin of the “Otter” stems from the “No-theng-gah-ho” or Dog Soldier Society. Dog Soldier wore a strap down their backs. The more decorated the traps were signified how powerful a “No-theng-gah-ho” was perceived to be. Hairplates and otter skins replaced these decorated straps. The “Otter” was used because it signified wealth since the otter was considered a clever and very hard animal to obtain.

The porcupine roach came from the Northern Plains. At one time the roach was considered to be a warrior’s head piece. In the 1800s, different “Helushka” members began wearing turbans and otter caps with or without a roach in the middle. Braided hair and mohawks were popular hair styles. The roach was not only made of porcupine guard hair and deer tail hair, but special roaches were also assembled from the turkey beard hair and were black and red in color. This type of roach is normally shorter in overall length than a typical porcupine hair roach.
The bandoliers that are now made of glass beads and hairpipe bone were formally made of strung deer hoofs or “dew claws.” How the bandolier was positioned signified where the dancer was from. An example is if the bandolier was tucked under the belt in the front only, versus bandoliers that were tucked in the back also. This was important in Elonska ceremonies because it indicated to a Whip Man where he should seat the dancer, as he approached the Dance Arena entrance.

Today many southern tribes, from Florida to Southern California, participate in the Straight Dance. The Comanche, Kiowa, and Kiowa-Apache tribes have a distinct style of Straight Dance outfit that distinguishes them from other “Helushka” Straight Dancers.

These differences include the use of a black fringed shawl, which was/is wrapped around the waist. The Straight Dancers from these three tribes also wrapped/wrap their braids with otter strips that were/are generally loom beaded with short fringe hanging off the bottoms. These braid ties were/are positioned at the top of the otter wrap, were the base of the braid originates. Some Straight Dancers from these three tribes have chosen to conform to the “Heluska” style of “clothing.” Most of the other southern American Indian tribes, who now participate in Straight Dancing, also duplicate the clothing style belonging to the “Helushka.”

REGALIA

Each tribe and individual has their own way of wearing their Straight Dance clothes. Most Straight Dancers take pride in the appearance of their outfits, even down the smallest of details.

Oklahoma Straight Dancers wear one or two black and white eagle feathers on tip of their heads. One is the most prevalent. Rarely, if ever are these feathers decorated. If they are decorated they are usually painted red or yellow. These colors signify a wounded warrior or clan identification. German silver “Spreaders” house the base of the feather. This contrasts with the past, when spreaders were forged out of animal bones. Otter caps are occasionally worn by the Straight Dancer, but the wearer has to have the “right” to wear them. Chief appointed warriors and chief clan members, were the only men that were allowed to wear the otter cap in the “Helushka” society.

Porcupine “Head Roaches” and, to a lesser extent, Turkey Beard “Roaches” are worn on top of the head. The “roach” is the first article a Straight Dancer receives when he enters the Dance Arena for the first time. The dancer in turn pays for this right. This ceremony is called “Roaching.”

Scalp Feathers are worn off the side of the head. The old custom of wearing Scalp Feathers, dictated that they had to be earned according to tribal qualifications. How they were worn and decorated reflected status, tribal, and/or clan affiliation. The modern interpretation of the Scalp Feather defines them as important decorations needed for a complete outfit. Two highly decorated feathers are usually worn. However, as many as five feathers have been observed. Other substitutes include decorated eagle plums, short
metal hairplates, rhinestones chains, and a combination of both decorated feather and twisted fringe “Drops.” Scalp Feathers and their substitutes can be tied directly to the hair or a “Roach String” underneath the base of the “roach.”

When a Roach is worn, “Helushka” Style dancers tie a folded handkerchief headband around the head. The corners are tied together in the center of the forehead. Face painting is optional and is used sparingly. Straight Dancers from Southeastern Oklahoma put red rouge on their cheeks and ear lobes. This paint is made from natural earth pigments and is applied to protect the wearer from any evil forces in the Dance Arena. The wearing of earrings is an ancient male custom. Today many Straight Dancers wear long German silver earrings. Each earring has one or two stamped strands, approximately one to seven inches in length.

A beaded or ribbon worked vest and/or long sleeve Ribbon Shirt cover the upper torso. Silver stamped armbands are worn above the elbow. A small, beaded or silver medallion anchors several strips of ribbon, which hung behind the arm. Beaded cuffs are sometimes worn over the wrists. Medium length buckskin fringe is strung and hung off each cuff. Around the neck a bone and glass bead choker is tied. Below the choker, a heavy string holds the “Otter” or hairplates secure. The long back trailer formally served as a foundation display for a buffalo bull’s tail, which represented the authority or power inherent to a war leader. The tail was hung off the bottom of the trailer. Modern trailers are decorated with the following: silver conchos, hairplates, Eagle plums, discs, feathers, ribbon work, mirrors, beadwork, and broad-cloth fringe. These items can be mounted on the “Otter,” ‘broadcloth or a leather strap. A scarf is commonly folded and then wrapped around the neck to cover the neck ties of the “Otter” or Hairplate “Drag.” The corners of the scarf meet in front and are held together by beaded or German silver “Scarf Slides.”

In the early 1800s the hairplates drug on the ground. Today’s “Otter” or hairplate “Drag’s” length extends one to three inches above the ground.

On occasion, some dancers will wear a bone breastplate and/or metal pectoral necklace. Both of these items are fashioned according to the wearer’s preference. Bandoliers are worn over each shoulder and are held in place with safety pins hidden under the shoulder of the shirt or vest. The lower sides of the bandoliers are placed over or under the belt, according to tribal tradition. Some southwestern Oklahoma Straight Dancers use mescal beans and hollow metal beads to make a single bandolier. They usually wear it over the left shoulder. Scarfs or small loose feather bundles are tied to the back half of the bandoliers. These ornaments are tied to the back half of the bandolier string approximately four finger lengths from the top of the shoulder.

The scarf can be prepared in two ways. The first way is to place a small amount of Indian perfume, (various types of sage and flowers,) in the center of a handkerchief. Using a leather string, a bundle is created approximately one to one and one half inches in circumference. The second way is to fold a handkerchief into four quarters. The top of the handkerchief is pinned to a beaded medallion. When feather bundles are used, they resemble miniature loose fans. As few as six or as many as twenty feathers can be
used, depending on the widths and types of feathers. These bundles are mounted on a metal or beaded medallions with ties.

A beaded or concho belt is tied around the waist. Typical designs seen on these belts are family or personal designs. Many Straight Dancers also have a loom beaded panel attached to the back of the “Otter Trailer.” This loom beaded panel will usually match the family or personal design found on the belt. Straight Dancers wear both broadcloth and buckskin leggings. Broadcloth leggings have beaded or ribbonwork panels down the sides. Among some “Helushka” tribes, red broadcloth is reserved for the oldest son. Osage broadcloth leggings are put on backward and the decorated panel is folded to expose the design. The fold is then safety pinned, at or below the knee, to keep the end of the flap constantly even with the end of the legging.

Buckskin and a few leather leggings are also worn. Buckskin leggings can be made either Ponca, Kiowa, and/or Comanche style. Ponca leggings resemble Sioux style leggings. They are fringed all the way up the sides. Beaded panels can be added or the leggings can be painted horizontally with stripes, (denoting the mark of the Prairie Grizzly bear.) Kiowa and Comanche leggings are often dyed yellow. A flap ending in a “V” or “U” shape characterizes the top side of Kiowa and Comanche leggings. This flap is usually “Lazy Stitch” beaded, edged, and decorated with silver metal studs. The lower half is adorned with either fringed/rolled or flat buckskin fringes. Both cloth and buckskin leggings are divided into left and right sides. They are tied or looped over a thin belt-string worn around the waist.

Finger-woven “Yarn Drops” hang from the outside hip of the Straight Dancer. Each side of the dancer should have two “Double Drops” hanging to the end of the leggings. The top of each “Side Drop” is attached to the same belt that holds the apron set. These “Yarn Drops” usually compliment the rest of the colors worn of the Straight Dancer’s regalia. The yarn designs are woven in a “V” or chevron pattern intermixed with small “Pony” beads. Each bead is said to represent a prayer. Finger-woven “Drops” are sometimes substituted with loom beaded “Droops.” Some Kiowa, Comanche, and Kiowa-Apache Straight dancers wear a sash that is fringed and “Gourd Stitch’ beaded, under their black shawls.

Straight Dancers also wear a matching finger-woven set of garters which are also called “Leg Drops.” A leather strap reinforces the garter to keep it in place. Garters look like a strip of yarn that is split in half at both ends. The four ends of the garter are overlapped one on top of the other. The ends hang directly behind the legging ribbonwork, approximately even with the end of the legging. Four loom-beaded strips, tied to a strap, can be substituted for the garters.

Brass or sleigh bells are wrapped over the garters, directly below the knee. One, two, or three rows of bells can be worn. Some dancers are choosing dew claws as a replacement for bells.
Moccasins representing tribal backgrounds are the footwear used to Straight Dance in. If tribal moccasins cannot be found a suitable alternative is Cheyenne made fully beaded moccasins. It is important to emphasize that only authentic Indian moccasins are worn because of the importance placed on traditional regalia.

Feathered fans are carried by Straight Dancers. In former times a man carrying an eagle wing fan was considered “up in society,” or prestigious. Today loose and stiff feathered fans from numerous birds are used. Most dancers today carry a Dance Stick or Staff. Again in former times, this Staff was reserved for Tail Dancers and former Tail Dancers. Mirror Boards are often used as a replacement. Mirror Boards are made of painted or stained wood. One large mirror or up to six smaller mirrors, are embedded into the wooden base. The base is carved into many different symbols and/or shapes. Brass tacks are used to decorate the base surrounding the mirrors.

CONTEST DANCING

Dignity and a smooth style inspire the motion of the Straight Dancer. When the Drum starts each dancer begins with a deliberate attitude that is expressed until the end of the song. In the middle of the song when the three “gosh-gah” beats are emphasized, some Straight Dancers send out “War Yells.” Others get their Staffs or Mirror Boards low to the ground, as if to point out the track of an enemy.

Most dancers try to tell a story with distinct and abstract actions within their choreography. However, because the dance also involves dignified and fluid movements, the story line is somewhat constrained in actual exhibition. (You will never see mock fighting or explicit battle re-enactments.)

Judges pay particular attention to the dancer’s bells coinciding with each drum beat. Each dancer’s smooth style should remain evident throughout the entire song. The dancer’s concentration and attitude are taken into consideration. When the dancers line up to have their numbers written down, the judges look to see how well each dancer has assembled his regalia in order to achieve the handsome overall appearance.

Songs that are sung for contest belong to the tribes that observe the “Helushka” ceremony. These are normally “word” songs, directed toward male events. Some songs are literally interpreted as “Warriors stand up and dance,” “The warrior who made the enemy cry for mercy,” and “The warrior who encountered the Appaloosa horse for the first time.” If a tie occurs, a song with a sudden ending is often sung to “break the tie.” A knowledge of songs is necessary in order to stop at the last beat of the song.

SOUTHERN WOMEN’S TRADITIONAL DANCE

HISTORY
The Plains Indian Culture centered around the constant search for the buffalo. If the hunters over extended their hunting boundaries, conflict and battles resulted with their enemies. Spiritual guidance and thanksgiving were expressed for success in both hunting and war. Upon a successful hunt, the women of the Plains put their excellent skills to use, producing food, shelter, and clothing. All of these traits played an important role in the development of Indian women’s dances.

Many women of the Plains held special status that allowed them to enter the Ceremonial Dance Circle with the men. Some were Medicine Women, matriarchal leaders, religious helpers, and “Princesses.” In addition, female clans and societies were allowed to dance with men during special times of the year. When warriors returned home from a successful battle, the women would be waiting at the edge of camp to welcome the warriors. Loud victory yells or “Lu-Lu’s” would evoke the pride these women felt for the successful battle and the return of their companions. War trophies would then be mounted and displayed on long lances for the entire camp to see. In long lines and circles, the women would dance with these trophies in a dance known as the Scalp Dance. During special occasions, such as the Victory Dance, women were allowed to dance in a male Warrior’s Circle. If a woman was on her monthly cycle, she would be kept away from the Warrior’s Circle and especially any War Medicine. War Medicine included the drum. Women on their monthly cycle were believed to extinguish any power associated with War Medicine. Many women still do not partake in dancing or ceremonials during their monthly cycles.

Until World War I, most women were not allowed into the Dance Arena with the men during a Warrior’s Dance. They would dance, in place by their seats, behind the Dance Arena. With a world war that involved so many Indian warriors, auxiliaries of women’s service organizations began to dance as a unit, in the Men’s Dance Arena. These women danced in a solemn and united walk to show their pride and support for their beloved warriors. At the same time, women warriors were beginning to be honored in increasing numbers. In the Powwow Arena these women warriors danced individually in front of a gathered group of supporters during the “Giveaway.” These women set a precedent for allowing women to participate in the Powwow Arena.

Indian women’s ceremonial clothing has always conformed to tribal standards. The tanning and preparation of a buckskin dress is now becoming a dying art. Only fifty Southern Buckskin Dresses are seen at any one time, even at the largest of Indian Powwows. Cloth dresses are much more affordable and common. The contemporary Southern Women’s Traditional Dance has been divided into two separate categories for contest purposes. Both categories dance the same style. However, the general consensus reveals that a woman wearing a buckskin dress will have a definite advantage over a woman dancing in a cloth dress. The basis for this belief is that a buckskin dress produces superior movement to a cloth dress, due to the long fringe that hangs from the sleeves. Another consideration centers around the fact that the cost and preparation involved in making a buckskin dress exceeds that of a cloth dress.
Today cloth and buckskin dresses are far more elaborate than ever before. The dance still retains the solemn attributes of the dignity portrayed by Indian women.

REGALIA

Each tribe takes pride in their own tribal identity. This is evident when preparing tribal regalia. Tribal patterns, designs, symbols, and colors are followed in clothing preparation. Some tribal items that are worn today have become inter-tribal.

Plumes are the basic head ornament worn by the female dancers. If it is worn down the left, it signifies that the dancer is married. If is worn down the right side, it indicates that the woman is single. Today single eagle feathers are also worn by women. In the Scalp Dance, women who are chiefs’ descendants are even allowed to wear war bonnets. This is a recent custom that began when young women began wearing beaded princess crowns. This carried over to allow women to wear the eagle feathers “straight up,” with or without a crown. Some tribal regulations stipulate that only a warrior, who counted coup could wear an eagle feather in this position. The headbands can be substituted for beaded crowns. This is done particularly among the Kiowas.

The Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache, and Comanche women sometimes wear otter caps. Only the daughter or sister of a chief is allowed to wear these caps. Currently women are wearing “straight up” eagle feathers and eagle plumes down either or both sides of the head. This practice is very recent and is Northern Plains in origin. When feathers and plumes are worn in this manner, they are held in place with clipped and tied rosettes or barrettes.

Women generally braid their hair while in their dance clothes. The braid starts behind their ear, in contrast to the man’s braid which covers the ear. Women used to braid their hair covering their ears, but this is becoming less frequent. Generally the braid will begin behind the ear and continue to the end of the hair, though it can also be braided only partially and then left hanging naturally at the ends. If the hair is very short, hair extensions can be added onto the natural hair. Hair can be wrapped with buckskin, ribbon, yarn, or beadwork. Wrapping the hair with otter “wraps” is a modern trend that stems from the Northern Plains tribes. Consequently, the Southern Cheyenne women have worn their hair like this for many years. This is due to the fact that they were once a Northern tribe and still have many relatives residing in the Northern Plains. French braiding has also become a very popular trend. In keeping with Southern tradition, a woman will tie her braid ties with the top half above the collar line. Braid ties can be made of beads, shells, bones, or German silver. Hair can also be combed and left natural or braided into one braid hanging down the back.

Earrings of double stranded, long German silver are worn by many Southern Traditional Dancers. Long beaded and rosette earrings are another option.

A choker, made of either bones and glass beads or loom beadwork, is worn around the neck. A beaded necklace or long scarf and tie slide are also worn in addition to the choker.
Southern Women’s Buckskins are made in two pieces. The outline cut of the skirt and top are determined by the buckskin designer. Fringe for the sleeves is cut vertically up and down the buckskin, (from the head to tail.) This allows the buckskin to stretch naturally: giving the greatest length out of the skin. It takes approximately five hides to make a woman’s dress. This depends on the size of the individual and the diameter of the skins. Both commercial and Indian tanned skins are used. Each dancer tries to get a buckskin with their own tribal cut and beaded designs. Because buckskins are hard to obtain, many women now purchase buckskins from neighboring tribes. Buckskins can be decorated with cut, seed, and aurora borealis beads, fringe, tassels, shells, and tin cones. The lower half is assembled first. A torso slip is usually sewn onto the bottom to keep it from falling and to cover the torso section of the body. The upper half is slipped over the head and fitted evenly. A belt made of leather and conchos or loom beadwork is placed around the waist. It is put right above the buckskin tabs. From six to ten tabs are sewn onto the buckskin, located below the waist.

The belt is fastened in the front. Four accessories accompany the belt. They are: the drag, pouch, “strike a light” bag, awl bag, and knife sheath. Each of these accessories had a functional purpose. The drag resembles a long calvary sword that was split into sections. It was originally used to whip horses while riding, as well as carry articles such as wood. Early drags were made of leather and split at the end. This allowed the wearer to tie bundles in place. In time, metal “headstalls” and bridles were introduced to make the drag. The drag was positioned next to the bags, to sharpen the knife and awl. The “strike a light bag,” carried flint, striker, and moss which was used to start a fire. All four articles were used in the daily life of the Plains Indian woman. Today most are non-functional, but they serve as decorative reminders of the past. The order and position that they are placed on the waist depends on the tribal teachings of the wearer.

Each woman tries to wear moccasins and leggings representative of their tribal background. Kiowas and Comanches have one piece yellow or natural buckskin/legging moccasins. Cheyenne and Arapahos have two piece heavily beaded leggings and moccasins. Ponca and Osage leggings are made of broadcloth and the moccasins are both fully and partially beaded. Formerly, Oklahoma tribes wore only moccasins, especially in the summer months.

Throughout Southern Powwows you will see a mixture of cloth dresses from tribes across North America. Each tribe has vastly different ways of constructing cloth dresses. Among the Ponca, Otoe, Osage, and Pawnee tribes two piece long sleeve dresses are worn. The blouses are cut according to tribal patterns. Satin and other lightweight bright materials are used to make these blouses. The bottom of the blouses are usually left out over the skirt. Skirts are one piece wrap arounds. Beaded, applique, and distinct ribbonwork are used to decorate the skirt. Accessories can include: multistrand neck beads, bone and bead wrap around necklaces, German Silver buttons, washer broaches, large back ribbons, large German Silver broaches, medallion necklaces. Peace and metal necklaces, chokers, finger-women belts, and rhinestone pins.
Kiowa, Comanche, Kiowa-Apache, Southern Cheyenne, and Southern Arapahos wear a one piece dress. These dresses are called “Wing Dresses” because they are split on the underside of the arm in a wing shape. Wing Dress sleeves extend three fourths of the way down the wearer’s arm. Southern Cheyenne and Southern Arapahos also wear one piece, long sleeve dresses. Dresses can be made from various materials but broadcloth is the most prized. All of these tribes wear a belt, drop and three bags. Wing Dresses can be left plain or can be decorated with cowrie shells, dentalium shells, or elk’s teeth. Recently, ribbonwork and feltwork have been added to these dresses. A short wrap around apron is tied around the waist under the belt. Fringe can be hung from the apron. It is considered “in bad taste” if the fringe falls longer than the bottom of the dress.

The Southern tribes, the Removed-Woodland tribes, and the Five Civilized Tribes can all be seen in their own tribal clothes at Powwows. Though they are intensely proud of their particular cultures, many have adopted the Northeastern Oklahoma and Southeastern Oklahoma style of dress.

Among the universal items used by all Southern Traditional Women Dancers are the loose or stiff fans, beaded purses, and shawls that are carried on the lower arm. Bone and glass bead breastplates are also universal but used to a lesser extent.

CONTEST DANCING

Gracefulness and perfect timing characterize the Southern Buckskin and Cloth categories. Each dancer displays her own interpretation of a graceful walking step. Each dancer bows or honors the three “gosh-gah” beats in the middle of the song. In previous times, it was said that a prayer was being offered during this portion of the dance.

Because all the competitors are doing the same basic step, individuals will apply their unique illusions to catch the judges attention. Some of the dancer’s “undisclosed techniques” include: dancing on the outside of the arena where the judges are located, unique weaving dance patterns, deliberately dancing at a slower pace and then hesitating before the “gosh-gah” beats, and toe-hold, toe-hold steps; a popular trend that is used in the Northern Plains. This contrasts the Southern “flat foot-hold step.”

It is important that a dancer look both controlled and relaxed at the same time. A dancer who dances in a mechanical or stiff manner creates an awkward feeling, just as the dancer who does not dance with good posture, or who does not control her movements looks sloppy. Shawl and purse motion should coordinate with each drum beat. The Buckskin Dancer’s fringe should move smoothly and with fluidity. The fringe on the hand carried shawl should also sway back and forth in a smooth manner.

Judges pay close attention to the beginning of the dance in order to see if the dancer begins on the correct beat. That means a dancer should be in the up/hold position on the second beat, (every other beat.) On the first beat the dancer should be in the down/step position. A dancer who starts on the wrong beat will be out of step. To the trained eye this is very distracting and extremely noticeable. Another important thing to be aware of
is when the dancer begins the tracking or bowing section of the song. There is an exact
time to bow and an exact time to resume the upright position.

A dignified posture, throughout the song is ideal. To examine posture, judges check to
see if the head or feather moves straight up and down. Most competitors turn in toward
the Drum at the end of the song. Whether or not this is judged is weighed according to
each of the individual judges’ decision. A striking outfit plays an important role when
the judges are taking numbers. Slow and medium War Dance Songs are sung for women
in both the Cloth and Buckskin Dance division. This allows the dancers to showcase
their graceful and dignified movements.

NORTHERN WOMEN’S TRADITIONAL DANCE

HISTORY

Dancing has always played a significant role in the social and ceremonial order of the
Northern Plains culture. Women in the Plains Indian culture have always participated as
dancers. Indian women’s societies, where dance was an integral part of the actual
ceremony, pre-date written history. The elders of each tribe can attest to old societies
involving native women that are still remembered but no longer exist.

Among Men’s Warrior Society Dances few if any women were allowed to participate.
Those who could participate were women who had been in actual combat. These women
warriors were rare exceptions to the rule. The actual role of non-warrior women was
confined to cooking, singing, and spectating. If a woman was compelled to dance, she
did so reverently in place, outside the Warriors’ Circle. During the Victory or Scalp
Dance, women were allowed to dance in a representative capacity, on behalf of a warrior
relative or spouse.

When the Plains Indian Wars came to a halt, the backbone of Plains culture changed.
Many societies and dances lost their purpose or were discouraged by non-Indian
reservation agents. The Omaha dance was one type of dance that survived the early
reservation era.

In the 1920s, with a rejuvenation of returning warriors from World War II, Sioux women
danced beside their veterans in a display of honor and pride. This feeling of inclusion
carried over into the Dance Circle. At first the women would dance in clockwise
direction outside the circle of men dancers. At the end of a song, they would turn and
dance the tail portion of the song, facing the center. This stationary style of dancing
involved “bobbing” up and down in one place. Over a series of years, the Sioux and
Assiniboine women began dancing either stationary, on the outer edge of the Dance
Arena, or in a graceful walk-amongst the men. This stationary style of dancing has since
become an inter-tribal expression of Northern Women’s Traditional Dancing. The Plains
Cree often refer to this stationary dance as “Sioux or Assiniboine Style Dancing.”
In pre-history, every article of Plains women’s clothing was functional. Women were responsible for making their personal clothing and the clothing of their immediate families. Hide tanning was a skill that Plains Indian women developed into an art form. Several processes were applied to achieve a desired effect on a hide. Brain tanning, smoking, chewing, and stretching affected the durability, color and softness of a hide.

Dakota Sioux women originally wore a one-piece leather dress cut from two big hides. The neck was cut where the animal’s neck would have been. At the bottom of the dress, the two buckskin leg panels were sewn together. The tail of the animal in the bottom center of the dress was cut off. It could still be identified by a slight outcrop. The sleeves were made by sewing the arms of the hide together. This left the sleeve shorter on top with two longer panels hanging underneath both the right and left sides. Fringe was added to ceremonial garments. At first, these garments were decorated by painting designs on the surface. Then, hand-tooled bone, beads, and elk’s teeth were sewn to the dress. Quillwork followed and became a highly refined art form. Early inter-tribal trading afforded the luxury of seashells to be added to already existing objects.

With European encroachment, trade cloth, beads, metal, and sewing utensils were introduced. Beadworking became a specialty art of the Northern Plains women. Beads were sewn onto practically every leather object. The designs varied, but were limited in color and also limited within tribal boundaries. Dakota women often beaded their personal identification or crest in the center of the yoke which is an upper torso garment. Today this yoke is a separate piece from the rest of the dress. A beaded dwelling pattern was usually found on the sides. Ceremonial moccasins and leggings of the Sioux were/are constructed as two separate pieces. The beadwork design on the moccasin and leggings usually complimented the rest of the buckskin.

Belts were worn around the waist. They were made with stained, wide leather and conchos or metal tacks are attached. Original Dakota womens’ belts did not have a Belt “Trailer/Drag”. A knife sheath and small pouch were originally tied to the belt. Later the awl case/bag was added to the set.

The long front breastplate originated among the Sioux women. A legend of how this breastplate began is interpreted in the following way: At one time a band of Dakota were starving. While out looking for game, an old man encountered a pitiful looking deer. The old man felt sorry for this deer, and decided to spare its life. He did this because he could see that the deer was also starving. In return for its life, the pitiful looking deer revealed the hiding place of a whole herd of hearty deer. Through this discovery, this Dakota Band was able to overcome the famine. The Dakota from then on, carved the bones of the deer to construct breastplates in honor of the deer that saved their band. The bones of the original breastplates were elaborately covered. These breastplates did not originally include beads in their construction.

Long braid ties of dentalium shells were prized and worn to decorate women’s braids. Sioux women originally did not wear eaglefeathers in their hair, nor carry eagle feather fans. Most often women wore robes and blankets around the shoulders to occupy their
arms. In the early 1900s some Dakota women carried white scarfs. If they waved these scarfs, they were saying, “Thank you for honoring my family and I,” upon which they would “Giveaway.”

Today there are many influences that can be traced back to the Northwest, Plateau, and Great Lakes Woodland tribes. Many of these practices have been adopted by their tribes and have since become inter-tribally “Northern”. Indian women are currently taking great liberties and extending their boundaries of self-expression. They are combining inter-tribal influences while innovating their own styles of dance and regalia.

REGALIA

Traditionally the regalia of Northern Plains Traditional Dancers conformed to tribal guidelines. This was especially true of women who lived or originated in the Northern United States and Southern Prairie provinces. It does not apply to many women outside the Northern realm, who have adopted particular styles. Thus, the Northern Women’s regalia will be described both in contemporary and in traditional terms.

The contemporary Women’s Traditional Dancer wears both eagle feathers and eagle plumes. If a woman wears two eagle feathers “straight up” in her hair, it generally indicates that she is married. These feathers and plumes can be mounted or supported by rosettes and barrettes. Round abalone or mother of pearl shells and porcupine quillwork are commonly used in their creation. Some women of the Northwest wear beaded and woven hats. Still, other women choose to wear beaded crowns and headbands. Some women paint dots on their hair or use red paint pigment on the part in the hairlines. The symbols of the paint differs from tribe to tribe.

Most women braid their hair in two braids. The women of the Woodlands often put their hair in a back bundle or braid one back braid. If one long braid is worn, it is usually accompanied by a long beaded braid tie. If two braids are worn, they are usually wrapped with otter or mink. Braid ties are made of shells, beadwork, quillwork, bones, and dentalium shells. Earrings are made of beads, quills, cut antlers, and heart or disc shaped shells. Chokers, scarfs, bone loop necklaces, and rosettes are worn around the neck.

Buckskins are both elaborately and partially beaded. Some buckskins have a trade cloth yoke and buckskin fringe hanging off the sleeves. Buckskin sleeve fringe can be short or extend to the bottom of the buckskin. Buckskins can be decorated with the following: quillwork, cowrie and dentalium shells, crow beaded dangles, elk’s teeth, hairpipe, tin cones, and pony beads. Some women wear beaded capes or beaded suspenders over the plain buckskin tops. Cloth dresses are made of wool, velvet, or brocade trade cloth. Colors that seem to be popular are red, green, and black. However, blue seems to be the most predominate color of all. Ribbon, dentalium shells and cowrie shells, beadwork, sequins, tin cones, and elks’ teeth are all used to decorate Northern Cloth Dresses. Both wing and long sleeve dresses are worn. It is also common for a dancer to wear a long sleeve shirt under the buckskin yoke.
Belts are fastened around the waist and then tied in the front. They are constructed of wide “strap leather”, conches, metal tacks and beadwork panels. If a “drop” is worn, it can be formed from the same material used for the belt. It is generally positioned on the front right side. If a pouch, knife sheath, awl bag, and/or strike a light bag are worn, they are generally placed in the back.

Long breastplates cover the front of a dancer from her neck to the bottom of her dress. Modern breastplates have multicolored rows of beads in between spacers, along with hairpipe bone. One recent addition to the breastplate is a beaded panel that matches the rest of an elaborate beadwork set. At the bottom of the breastplate are dangles constructed of hairpipe bone, beads, coins, cowrie shells, and thimbles.

Full and partially beaded legging and moccasin sets are worn. These moccasin and legging sets can be comprised of one or two separate pieces. Tin cones, leather fringe, and fluffs can adorn the leggings and moccasins. Beaded cuffs can be worn but these are optional.

Most dancers carry an eagle fan, beaded purse, and fringed shawl while they dance. Some also include a handkerchief, scarf, and/or Dream Catcher.

**CONTEST DANCING**

Dignity, grace, and modesty characterize the Northern Women’s Traditional Dance. Rarely will a Traditional Dancer display any extremely flamboyant dance movements. During the Graceful Walk, Stationary Dances, and Circle Dances, the fringe, body, and foot movement should be in direct harmony with the Drum. Even though the Northern Traditional and Southern Traditional Women use a similar graceful walking step, there is a subtle difference to the trained eye. The Southern Woman’s step is more continuous and fluid, whereas the Northern Traditional has a pause in the up beat that is definite and noticeable.

The women raise their fans into the air to acknowledge the Honor Beats in a song. Some dancers move the fan from side to side while others keep time in a circular motion. This gesture represents “Catching the Spirit of the Drum”, or “Honoring All Those Who Have Passed onto the Spirit World.”

During a contest, strategic placement is very important to the Women’s Northern Traditional Dancer. This is taken into consideration particularly in the Stationary Dance portion. An “ideal” location to dance would be near the drum that is rendering the song, or where there is a high concentration of judges.

Each dancer expresses an individual style representative of a distinct region and tribal background. This background is judged accordingly both in regalia and dance movements.
Songs specifically composed for Female Traditional Dancers are preferred. Women in this category can be asked to dance to a Straight/Traditional Song that can be used for the Graceful Walk and Stationary Dances. A Kohomeni or Northern Round Dance Song can also be requested to fulfill the Circle/Round Dance portion of the contest. Thus, three songs are usually rendered in the Northern Women’s Traditional Dance category.

**MEN’S TRADITIONAL DANCE**

**HISTORY**

All tribes currently have or have had dances that are traditional to their particular tribe or region. The tribes which resided on the Northern Plains are no exception. The Men’s Traditional Dance had its roots with the old time Sioux.

After a successful war or raid, warriors gave an account of their battle story. In addition to an oral account, the warriors would form a circle and mimic the events that took place. The essence of the war story was recounted and displayed in the Old Time/Old Style Sioux dancing. Old Time Sioux dancing was very dignified.

The regalia of a warrior was very simple. It normally consisted of a loincloth and moccasins. Protective face and body paint was worn in addition to personal weapons which were actual articles used in battle. In ceremonials, more elaborate clothing was worn. Ceremonial men’s clothing conformed to societal constraints. A combination of war and ceremonial regalia make up what today would be considered authentic traditional regalia. Individuals could not wear articles which they had not earned or received permission to obtain and wear. Certain dance articles were worn to show status, accomplishments, clan membership, or were passed down from other family members. Two examples of articles that fit into this category were the buffalo bull’s tail, which signified a war leader, and eagle feathers, which were earned for battle achievements.

One of the most significant articles that was adopted by the Sioux tribe was the use of a bustle. The bustle was a cluster of feathers worn on the lower back. The Omaha were responsible for bringing the “Crow” Bustle, which was made of crow feathers, to the Sioux tribe. The Sioux modified the Crow Bustle and made their cluster of feathers into a circle. Eagle, owl, hawk, and crow feathers were used, along with eagle plumes to make these round bustles. Additional feathers, mounted on leather, hung from the bustle. These were called trailers. Also a smaller neck bustle was added.

The classic old time Sioux dancer, that is recognized today, transpired in the late 1800s. By this time, non-Indian manufactured goods had become an integral part of the Sioux dance regalia. Among these goods were trade cloth, ribbons, beads, sleigh bells, and mirrors. In the 1920s colored “long johns” and western long sleeve shirts infiltrated the Old Time Sioux dance regalia. In the 1930s, neighbors of the Sioux tribe began wearing regalia which also conformed to the old time Sioux style regalia. However, each tribe
continued to wear beadwork patterns and other articles that identified their tribal background.

As raw goods became harder to obtain, many Indians had to substitute goods that were readily available. Yarn was substituted for handmade hairpipe bone. These were used to make breastplates, chokers, and bandoleers.

When contest dancing became popular, it was decided that the Northern Style Dancers should have their own category of dance and no longer have to compete against Southern Straight Dancers. This occurred in a location that was considered to be a “crossroads” between the Southern and Northern Powwow participants. This initiative took place at a Powwow entitled All Indian Days, which was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1968. The Northern Traditional Dancer and the Southern Straight Dancers, have since competed in their own categories.

Today, the Traditional Dance has evolved to a sophisticated level of excellence. Regalia and dance steps are much more complex. This complexity has opened itself up to modern innovations as young prizewinners and non-Northern Plains Indians interject their personal interpretations of traditional dancing. The Northern Plains tribes that still adorn the basic buckskin suits and moccasins are the true Traditional Dancers of the Northern Plains.

REGALIA

Today Men’s Traditional Dancers have options open to them depending on their individual interpretation of what “traditional” regalia entails. Headpieces are varied. The original Sioux warrior’s headdress was the porcupine roach and it still remains prevalent today. The roach is fastened with a braided “scalp lock” of hair. This hair is inserted through a hole, in the center of the roach. The roach scalp locks are anchored with a stick or dowel that is commonly beaded, or adorned with a feather. Plumes are sometimes added to the end. Extending from the bottom of the roach are panels comprised of quillwork. Originally this decorative mounting was used for the buffalo bull’s tail. This quilled mounting is also called a “Wah-peg-naka.” In pre-reservation times, eagle feathers that were earned in battle were worn on top of the “Wah-peg-naka,” behind the warrior’s head. On top of the roach, two eagle feathers are representative of two warriors or war honors. These rotate inside of a spinner. These two feathers can be painted red if the wearer has been wounded. Porcupine quillwork, plumes, fur, and round “tabs” are used to decorate these feathers. Scalp feathers, shells, medallions, DreamCatchers, feathered shades, or eagle plumes mounded on porcupine wheels sit directly below the roach. These shades were originally designed as an ornament to minimize direct eye contact.

War bonnets, buffalo headpieces, and horned ermine headdresses are still seen on Northern Plains reservations, particularly during “Giveaways” and parades. Wolf, coyote, and bobcat heads are increasing in popularity. Hidatsa Dog Society and Plains Cree Crow feathered headdresses are the newest headpieces to re-surface in Traditional
Dance regalia. These two headpieces are similar in design and resemble a large feathered helmet. They can be made of eighty to one hundred and fifty eagle, hawk, turkey, owl, crow, or magpie feathers.

The hair can be braided, wrapped, left straight, or, following Lakota Sioux style, half wrapped and half straight. If wrapped, trade cloth, otter fur, shells, or buckskin fringe is used, to wrap around the hair. Tribal or personal designs are painted on the face. Designs representing a vision, ritual participation, or family insignia are painted throughout the face with the colors, red, black, yellow, or white. Many male dancers have pierced ears and wear small round shells while dancing. Chokers made of beads or bones are worn with or without a beaded yoke.

A Ribbon Shirt or commercial long sleeve shirt is worn under the outfit. Over the Ribbon Shirt, a long horizontal breastplate made of hairpipe bones and/or brass, silver, or crow beads is used as the most basic chest ornament. Old time crow loop breastplates are used, but to a lesser extent. Bandoleers are worn across the chest and back. Bandoleers are composed of a string of deer claws or otter strips with closely fastened mirrors and ribbon trimmed bindings. A fully beaded vest or even more popular, a fully beaded cape or yoke are accessories currently worn over the breastplate. Contemporary Traditional Dancers also wear eagle feathers on their shoulders mounted to look like wings. These feathers highlight the shoulder movements of a dancer.

A mirrored otter breastplate is an article that was sustained from the old style Sioux regalia. These “Otters” are still in use by many Traditional Dancers today. They are constructed from a full otter hide. The hide, feet, and legs are cut off and the hide is split down the middle. Sixteen to nineteen mirrors are fastened down forming two rows. Mirrors were worn by many Plains tribes because they believed that the reflection of light was impossible for the enemy to capture or hurt. Wearing this mirrored amulet gave the owner these same powers. The “Otter” was trimmed with red or blue ribbon. Porcupine quillwork, cones, and fluffs were attached to the bottom front of the “Otter.” On older specimens, the quillwork extended around the “Otter” include scalps, ribbons, tassels, shells, and sequins.

Belts are made on a base of heavy leather. Loom, “Lazy Stitch,” or Panel beadwork is mounted on top of the leather. Brass tacks, silver studs, and brass and silver conchos can also be mounted into dyed or stained leather. Belts are attached behind the dancer with leather strips, shoestring, or buckles. The belt drops or panels are attached to the belt on each hip and extend down to the knee. These drops are either rectangular or “V” shaped. They are made to match the belt or beadwork. If they are beaded, they can be outlined with flat/shoestring fringe, leather fringe, or vinyl fringe.

Breech cloths and aprons are made out of cloth and leather. A combination of beads, sequins, and ribbons are used to ornament these. Leather aprons can be painted or partially/or fully beaded. Aprons are cut into a variety of shapes and sizes. Heavy fringe of shoe string, leather, or vinyl, trim the edges of the breech cloth.
Leggings are worn beneath the aprons. Leather and cloth leggings are adorned with beaded panels. Leather leggings are heavily fringed along the sides. Mixed in with the fringe are scalps or white ermine skins. A large number of leather leggings are painted with horizontal stripes. Even more common are the anklets made of goat, buffalo, or skunk skin. If anklets are used, beaded leg bands with heavy fringe are also worn below the knee. Heavy sleigh and cow bells are fastened above the anklets or “Goats.” Leg or side bells are sometimes worn if the “Goats” are used. Oklahoma Traditional Dancers are now using deer toes with their leggings, in place of bells.

Arm bands and cuffs are usually made to match the rest of the beadwork. Arm bands usually have long ribbons or scarves hanging down the back. Cuffs are heavily fringed with approximately four to twelve inches of leather or vinyl.

Moccasins are a necessity for the Traditional Dancer. Most dancers prefer fully beaded Sioux style moccasins. A popular design is the split hoof design. It was intended to give the wearer fleetness and sure footedness, like the deer.

Many types of articles are carried in the hands and lower arm. One or more articles can be held in each hand. Eagle wing fans are the most common hand held articles. Beaded pipe and tobacco bags with porcupine quillwork and fringe on the bottom, are prized by the Sioux. Beaded coup sticks with eagle feathers are also very popular among many Traditional Dancers. “Gunstock” clubs, stone war clubs, and tomahawks are carried, but less frequently. Dance Hoops and Medicine Wheels can be wrapped with otter, mink, or buffalo fur. On some Dance Hoops a round piece of leather is laced to the outer edges of the hoop. On the leather an animal or other symbol is painted which represents a significant meaning to the owner. Medicine Wheels have a leather cross extending in four directions. These four directions represent the four stages of life, the four seasons, and the four sacred colors: red, yellow, black and white. If divided in half, it represents the balance between good and evil. A beaded medallion, Porcupine Wheel, Prayer Feather, Medicine Pouch, or protective amulet sits in the center of the Medicine Wheel.

Dream catchers are old objects, that have reappeared in a different capacity. Dreams and visions are very important to the Native American. The Dream Catcher was originally a charm used to ward off bad dreams and allow good dreams to pass through the hole in the center of the webbing. There are two kinds of Dream Catchers used in the Powwow Arena: the original Spider Web and the contemporary woven Dream Catcher. Both styles of Dream Catchers are believed to have the power to keep evil form penetrating through. Contemporary Dream Catchers are made of sinew. Spider webs are woven solidly with yarn.

Small shields are the most recent articles worn and carried by the Traditional Dancer. These shields symbolize protection and display symbols of meaning to the owner. In the pre-reservation era, eagle feathers that were earned in battle were displayed on the shield or hoop. Other objects that are now tied around the edges are scalps, trade cloth, animal skins, and ribbons.
The single bustle and trailer are the most visible combination worn by Traditional Dancers. The old time Sioux “round” bustle has given accommodation to the larger, contemporary “U” shaped bustle which is made entirely of eagle feathers. Wooden dowels are now used to extend the natural length of the primary feathers or “spike” feathers. Modern traditional bustles are combined with Trailers to extend almost the full length of a dancer's body. In addition, the dowel extensions are covered with yarnwork, tape, and featherwork to camouflage the wooden dowels. Horse hair, goat fur, round leather tabs, sequins, cloth, plastic, and metallic fringe are all used to decorate the ends of the eagle feathers. Bustles are mounted on backboards which are made of leather, metal, wood, or plexi-glass. To hold the top of the “U” shape, extended spikes or “uprights” are constructed. Uprights feature eagle feathers, with plumes at the tips. Other construction materials can be a combination of: smaller feathers, horse hair, fur, quilled strips, beadwork, hawk bells, ribbons, and/or leather fringe.

Trailers are made in one or two panels. They can be attached directly to the backboard or worn separately around the waist. They are made of trade cloth or leather. Modern examples are decorated with rows of eagle feathers, ribbonwork, and beadwork. Leather fringe is sometimes hung off the bottoms.

CONTEST DANCING

Dignity and body motion portray the essence of the Traditional Dancer. Constantly rotating head feathers, strong shoulder movements and a consistent rhythmic “bounce” give the Traditional Dancer an overall coordinated appearance. During the Honor Beats, dancers will often raise their hand held eagle feathers to catch the Drum’s spirit and to honor the Drum. A Traditional Dancer often choreographs movements that coincide with a storyline. The storyline is general, therefore every movement is not necessarily significant. Some movements are inspired by the feeling of the song and drum beat. Often Traditional Dancers will give an “Akisa” or series of shouts. The “Akisa” accomplishes three things: it draws the judge's attention during a contest, it helps the dancer gain momentum, and encourages his fellow dancers to dance with greater enthusiasm.

There are unspoken rules that govern the Traditional Dance. This is a dignified style of dancing, therefore, remembering not to get “too” fancy is important. A dancer should never dance in a complete circle. This symbolizes the idea that the warrior should always keep the enemy in sight. During the Sneak-up Songs, a dancer should never dance backwards, particularly during the “verse endings”. If a dancer were to dance backward, this would symbolize retreating from the enemy.

Knowledgeable judges look for all the qualities mentioned above. Stopping before the last beat of the drum or after the last beat of the drum are both grounds for disqualification. Moderation in dance and traditional appearance should take precedence over dancing too “fancy” or dressing according to “flashy” contemporary trends.
THE GRASS DANCE

HISTORY

This dance is the oldest of the Warrior Society Dances that is still in popular use in the Powwow Arena. The Grass Dance is the basis for the Powwow. It is also the basis for other Men’s Dances which are still seen today. The origin of the Grass Dance is religious in nature. Since it belongs to specific Grass Dance Societies, ceremonies involving the Sacred Pipe, Drum, and Dog Feast are incorporated. (I choose not to expound on the ceremonial portion of the Grass Dance, because the knowledge of this dance must be attained in a proper manner.)

The Woodland Tribes incorporate the Grass Dance as part of their culture dating back to pre-history. The Omaha, who currently reside in Nebraska, are popularly given credit for its diffusion. Previously, the Omaha “Heluska” Warriors Society had a hierarchy of warriors who comprised its members. Officers in this society wore dance bustles called “Crow Belts”. These bustles or “Crow Belts” were made principally of feathers from the crow and birds of prey. The bustles had trailers, which were strips of material or leather that hung from the bustle, which extended to their heels. The “Crow Belts” were considered sacred and therefore reserved for use by only a select few. The warrior members who were not designated to wear the “Crow Bustle”, wore tufts of grass behind their belts. Hence, this is how the term “Grass Dance” originated.

The society and how to use the bustle was given/traded to the Sioux. The Sioux called it the “Omaha Dance” and built special Earth Lodges to hold their Omaha Dance Ceremonies. The Sioux in turn taught it to their allies, the Cheyenne and Assiniboines. In later years, its “rights” were given to the Plains Cree tribe, who called it the “Dakota Sioux Dance”. As the Grass Dance spread across the Northern Plains it became a Warrior’s Dance. Some societies of Grass Dancers were sent into the Plains to prepare the grounds for the sacred “Sundace”, by flattening the tall buffalo grass and spear grass. Other societies used this dance as a victory celebration for successful battles and raids. Today the Grass Dance is known by many names including: The Omaha Dance, Sioux Dance, Hot Dance, Wolf Dance, Ribbon Dance, Fringe Dance, Dakota Dance, Yarn Dance, Free-Style Dance and War Dance.

REGALIA

Two types of spreaders adorn the top of a Grass Dancer. (A spreader being that article which spreads the porcupine head piece or roach that is worn by the dancer). The first type of spreader consists of a pair of plumed antennas made from eagle plumes or colorful fluffs. These are attached to the roach spreader with piano, guitar, or automobile choke wire. It moves freely in the wind or gracefully with the dancers head movements.

The second spreader has two eagle tail feathers attached to a spinner. (A spinner is a devise that allows these feathers to spin around instead of just moving from front to back). The spinner can be made of hollow bones, antlers, carved wood, beaded tubing,
and/or rawhide bent into a cylinder. The feathers are attached to the cylinders with bent wire attached to a base support, a fishing swivel, or a ball bearing chainette. These two types of spreaders serve as an anchor to hold the “roach” on top of the dancer’s head. A roach is a warrior headdress made by stringing porcupine guard hair, (i.e. hair retrieved from the neck of a porcupine,) onto a fabricated yarn or hair base. The longer guard hair is accentuated with dyed white tailed deer tail hair, rimmed around both the inside and outside of the base. In earlier days, the roach was also made from horsehair, moose bristles, and skunk tail hair. It is attached to the head by one of three methods. A scalp lock can be inserted through the spreader and secured with a wooden peg. Another method is to have three straps attached from a roach base to the headband. The third method is to attach leather or shoe strings from the back and top of the spreader. These strings tie under the dancer’s neck, below the jaw bone (two strings from the back and two from the front).

Grass Dancers of the first half of the century wore black underwear or “long johns”. Short chainette fringe was sewn down the back shoulders and knees. Aprons or loincloths covered both the front and back midsection. The back apron was adorned with ribbon sewn in a “V” shape. The ends of the ribbons hung loose from a foot to two feet in length. This practice conditioned some patrons to label the Grass Dance as Ribbon or Fringe Dancing. Often card insignias such as hearts, spades, and diamonds were beaded onto the dancers regalia according to the dancers preference. Today the basic clothing of a Grass Dancer’s top is made from a modified Ribbon Shirt cut at the elbow, a commercially made shirt, or a T-shirt with a fringe cape covering it.

The bottoms are made from dress trousers, sweat bottoms or custom-made dance leggings. Both tops and bottoms are heavily laden with chain fringe, cloth strips, leather strips, and yarn fringe. Yarn fringe is preferred because it sways most like wind swept prairie grass. Other accessories sewn directly to the tops and bottoms are ribbon work, beaded rosettes, beaded strips, fluffs, cones, and curtain ring dangles.

Long matching beadwork is the norm for the Grass Dance Outfit. It starts with a beaded roach spreader. A beaded headband can be customized in many ways. The three bands anchoring the roach to it can be beaded; medallions can be placed on the front and sides; small beaded dangles over the eye area; larger beaded chains under the eyes; headband drops on the sides made of loom beadwork; and large beaded chains and curtain ring dangles.

Chokers are made from tubular bones and beads or beaded strips on a scarf. Often a beaded yoke or medallions are hung from the choker. Over the shoulders are two wide trips of beadwork called the harness or suspenders. The harness length extends between the knee and the ankles. Beaded strips, (the same width as the harness), are tacked on the two harness strips, horizontally across the chest.

A matching belt with side drops, either loom, beaded or lazy stitched are positioned around the waist. Arm bands and cuffs complete the matching portion of a beaded set. Moccasins befitting the dancers tribal identity are preferred. However, a trend to use
hard soled fully or partially beaded shoes that compliment the rest of the beadedwork is
becoming more practical and popular.

Headgear varies. In this category, there are a lot of Whistle men, therefore, some
dancers carry a whistle. Other hand ornaments may include: fans, scarfs, Dream Catchers,
coup sticks, mirror boards, and fur wrapped hoops.

CONTEST DANCING

Flexibility and limberness characterize the Grass Dancer. A champion Grass Dancer is
ambidextrous. He can make a complicated series of movements look effortless, then
repeat it in the same sequence both backwards and forwards.

While dancing, the dancer portrays a warrior as he searches for a site in the prairie to hold
a ceremony. Once the site is symbolically located, he will proceed to lay down the tall
buffalo grass, first with one foot and then the other. In time, these movements will
resemble prairie grass swaying in the wind. During the Honor Beats, a stylized
interpretation by the dancers takes prominence; in accordance with the hard beats. Dance
judges pay particular attention to a Grass Dancer’s, Honor Beats interpretations,
ambidextrous execution, fluid movements, endurance at the end of the last song, and
signature ending at the last beat form the Drum.

In the Northern Plains, it is common for Grass Dancers to dance to three contest songs.
The songs that are sung often include a slow Grass Dance Song, a slightly peppy Grass
Dance Song, and a Crow Hop.

JINGLE DRESS DANCE

HISTORY

Dreams and visions are important for guiding the future in Native American philosophy.
The consequence of a dream or vision might cause a war expedition to be postponed until
a more favorable time. Whole religions and societies have been initiated because of
dreams.

The Jingle Dress Dance is an example of a dance which evolved from a dream or vision.
There are two versions which trace the origin of the Jingle Dress. One version is told by
the Canadian Ojibway and the other is told by the United States Chippewa. There are
similarities between these two versions, and this is probably due to the fact that they
inhabit the same Great Lakes region and come from the same language stock.

The Ojibway version tells of an elderly grandfather who had a favorite granddaughter
that he loved very much. His granddaughter became very ill. He offered prayers to the
Great Spirit to heal his granddaughter. Through a dream or vision, the Great Spirit spoke
to the grandfather and told him “to make a dress that was both pleasing to the ears, as
well as the eyes.” The grandfather was given instructions for constructing this special “Medicine” Dress. The grandfather was assured that once the granddaughter put on this “Medicine” Dress and danced in it, she would be healed. It was further instructed that only the granddaughter could wear this “Medicine” Dress. This dress was to be well respected and properly cared for. Furthermore, a feast was to be held, honoring the healing power that was given to this dress by the Great Spirit. After all the preparations were made and rendered, the granddaughter was healed.

The Ojibway “Medicine” Dress originally had jingles made from bird bones. Because of an apprehension that a mis-constructed dress might produce grave results, bird bone jingles were discontinued. Many women still rely on their Jingle Dress for medicinal purposes. To the Land of the Lakes Ojibway, the Jingle Dress is still considered a “Medicine” Dress. Feasts are still held in honor of these dresses and great respect is shown for the dress’s sacredness.

The Chippewa of Minnesota relate a story of how the dress came to them. It is said that, A Holy or Medicine Man was the first to see this dress. In a dream, four women appeared to this Medicine Man wearing special dresses that he had never seen before. These women told the man how to assemble these special dresses. The dresses were to be constructed with metal cones, which would produce a beautiful sound. After awakening, the Holy Man and his wife made these special dresses according to the instructions. He presented them to four women at a dance and accompanied them with the songs he remembered from the dream.

The Ojibway also have four women called, “Ogichidaakwewag”, (pronounced oh-gich-daw-kwag); who are involved with the Drum Dance ceremony. The Ogichidaakwewag are a clan of women warriors. They lead the Ceremonial Dances concerning their portion of the Drum ceremony. Each woman represents a cardinal direction. In some Chippewa ceremonies, the four women each have assistants which are sometimes referred to as “Substitutes”. The Ogichidaakwewag have their own special Drum established. This Drum is called a “Women’s Drum”, although the inner circle contains a group of male singers. The women dance to songs, which are referred to as “Squaw Dance Songs”. When their songs are sung, the Ogichidaakwewag enter the arena in a specified order, beginning with their leader. After the Introductory Songs have been sung, other female Jingle Dress Dancers are then allowed to enter the arena to dance. The Introduction Songs are never sung in the Powwow Arena!

The Chippewa and Ojibway originally used this dance during ceremonies. In 1924, the Chippewa from the White Earth Reservation introduced this dance to the Dakota Sioux, who lived on the Fort Totten and Sisseton Reservations. The Dakota women added sequins, small bells, shells, elk teeth, ribbons, and Dakota beadwork to their Jingle Dresses. The jingles were made from baking powder and tobacco “snuff” lids. The Jingle Dresses remained popular among the Dakota Sioux until the early 1950s. The Sauk and Fox also had a type of Jingle Dress during this period. Their jingles were made of sewing thimbles. The dresses of this era were made primarily of black velvet cloth.
Cotton cloth of varied colors were used by the Sioux. Those who wore the Jingle Dress after the 1950s, in the Powwow were rare.

In the mid 1980s a major revival of the Jingle Dress took place. Tribes who had never seen them before are now beginning to wear them.

REGALIA

Many Jingle Dress Dancers wear plumes and eagle feathers in their hair. This was not originally a common practice. Hair styles vary considerably. Older Jingle Dressers’ put their hair up above their necks and hold them in place with an anchored barrette. Many dancers are opting towards the single braid worn down the back of the neck. The remainder of the dancers wear two braids. A combination of large disc shells, beaded braid ties, beaded barrettes, leather fringe, and whole or strips of wrapped otter hide can be used to tie onto the braids. Many varieties of earrings are worn, but they are not compulsory on a Jingle outfit.

Around the neck beaded and bone chokers, necklaces, and scarves are worn. Some opt to leave the neck area bare. Wearing a long scarf folded in a triangle with the longest point hanging down back is the most common of these styles. A tie ring made of beads, quills, or metal is acquired to keep the ends together.

The traditional dark velvet and cotton material is making way for a mixture of bright colored materials. Sleeves are ideally two thirds of the wearer’s arm length. Long sleeve dresses are sometimes worn, but they are not preferred. Modern alterations have inserted a full body and lower body front and back flap. These flaps can be lifted up in order to keep the dancer from sitting on her cones. Bias tape, ric-rac, and/or ribbons are sewn on the dress, to highlight the rows of jingles. There can be as many as ten rows of jingles on a dress, depending on the dancer’s height. The customary horizontal ”V” and “U” shaped jingle rows can now be seen in a variety of patterns. Other recent additions to the Jingle Dress are beaded cuffs, fully beaded or sequined capes, fringed shoulders and bottoms, and embroidered or applique designs. The Jingle Dresses can be zipped, buttoned, clipped, or snapped down the back.

The jingles or cones are constructed by cutting and bending tobacco can lids; specifically Copenhagen lids. Other metals used are sheet metal, tin cans, and canning lids. A three forth to two-inch piece of ribbon or bias tape, knotted at the bottom is inserted through the top of the cone. The cones are tacked down one half to one and one half inches apart. It takes a minimum of two hundred cans to make a Jingle Dress.

Stained, wide leather belts are used by the Jingle Dress Dancers. Conchos and tacks are used to accentuate these belts. Still others wear beaded belts, but to a much lesser extent. Ojibway or Chippewa boots, (i.e., one-piece moccasins and leggings) are worn in the Woodlands region. Another alternative of choice is the full beaded or sequined two piece Sioux style moccasin and legging sets.
Eagle wing or tail fans are now used by most dancers in one of the hands. On the other hand purses, Dream Catchers, dance wheels, and scarves are held.

CONTEST DANCING

Concentrated harmonious rhythm is used to describe the diligence of the Jingle Dress Dance. Because many of the dresses that are worn are “Medicine” Dresses, the harmony and spirit of the dress, body, and Drum must be synchronized. This harmony is visible when all of the cones flow back and forth in unison with the beat of the Drum. Dancers that dance too fancy and change rhythm and motion too often, can be easily detected by the sporadic motion of their cones. Listening to a Jingle Dress in harmony will sound pleasing to the ear and carry a distinctive cadence. In contrast, a dress out of harmony will not keep rhythm with the beat of the drum and will sound like constant raindrops hitting on a tin roof.

Dancers should dance forward, whether straight or weaving in and out. True Traditional Jingle Dress Dancers do not dance backward. Many dancers hold their waist while dancing. During the Drum’s Honor Beats the dancers lift their fans to “Catch the Spirit of the Drum.” There are two distinctive types of footwork that can be seen with this style of dancing. The first style would accompany the Traditional or Straight Song. This footwork resembles a shuffling of the feet forward and backward. The second style would accompany the Squaw Dance Song, which has become known as a Slide or Shuffle song. This step traditionally requires the dancer to slide the left foot over to the left and then slide the right foot over to the left foot. That is why it is popularly referred to as a slide step. Currently this step has been modernized into a more contemporary twisting shuffle. This new style demands that the dancer twist the feet in unison right and left while moving sideways. As this dance is evolving in the late 1980s and early 90s, the fancier and flashier style is becoming more popular with the judges even though it is not the Traditional Jingle Dress step. We are in the middle of a tremendous evolutionary shift in this particular dance category.

Because this is a traditional form of dancing, knowledgeable judges look for dancers exhibiting harmonious diligence and rhythm. It is important to emphasize that Jingle Dress and Fancy Shawl Dancing are two separate categories. Fancy foot and body motion should not take precedence over a smooth dancer exhibiting reverence, diligence, and harmony.

There are only certain songs that should accompany the Jingle Dress Dancer. Theses songs fall into two categories: the Straight or Traditional Jingle Dress Songs, in contrast to the Squaw Dance Songs, which are accompanied by a lively Round Dance beat.
MEN'S FANCY DANCE

HISTORY

Oklahoma is the original home of the Men’s Fancy Dance. Individual interpretation and innovation play important roles in this style of dancing. Many dramatic changes have occurred in the Fancy Dance category since its inception.

The Fancy Dance evolved from the Omaha Grass Dance Society. The Ponca tribe, which is a close southern relative of the Omaha tribe, emerged with a distinct fancy style of dancing around 1920. This style of dance and regalia broke traditions of earlier "Heluska" or traditional Ponca/Omaha dance boundaries. Most noticeable was the fancy footwork. The basic head and upper body movements retained their traditional flavor, while fast, intricate footwork was developed and refined. In the early 1920s the Fancy Dance was seen at the Dietrich Lake Fair among the Kiowa and Southern Cheyenne.

Omaha regalia took a turn toward innovation. The popular “Crow” Bustles of the Omaha tribe were lengthened to produce a large circular bustle. This was first worn on the lower back. Very soon colored, fluffy plumes were added to the ends of the primary feathers. The back bustle was then complimented with matching large arm bustles and a neck bustle. The popular beaded strips, found over the shoulders of a buckskin shirt, were modified into a short pair of beaded suspenders, which were worn vertically over the chest. Long colored tights and skull caps were also part of the traditional outfit. Bulky head bustles were made from stripped quills and fluffs. They resembled a Las Vegas showgirl’s headpiece. Inside the head bustle, two or three feathers were mounted on a rocker to accentuate head movement with a teeter-totter effect.

Small vests and aprons dominated the regalia of the early Fancy Dancer. Loud sleigh bells were worn down the sides of the legs, below the knee and around the ankles. Only the moccasins seemed to identify the tribal identity of the early Fancy Dancer. Small angora or goat anklets summed up the Fancy Dance outfit of this era.

Like Veteran’s Songs that were composed during World War I, War Dance Songs were composed to fit the times. They tested the skill of the Fancy Dancer. These songs helped to characterize the fast Fancy Dance tempo. An abrupt ending to songs was introduced. This ending is sometimes called a “trick” ending.

By the 1950s, dance competitions were very popular. Many Oklahoma tribes adopted the Fancy Dance as they became involved with Powwows. This was especially true in urban areas. Oklahoma Fancy Dancers danced straight up while occasionally twisting and bending their upper torso. Pride was taken to maintain a coordinated head and foot movement in time with the beat of the Drum.

In the 1960s, matching capes and aprons replaced small, floral patterned vests and aprons. Medium sized breastplates were common. Large cowbells were replacing sleigh bells, due to the dancer’s preference. Feathered arm bustles disappeared and were
replaced by simple beaded armbands. About half of the Fancy Dancers wore the large feathered head bustles, while the other half were leaning toward the less bulky porcupine head roach. Round bustles were replaced by butterfly “Swing” bustles and later “U-shaped” bustles. Adornment of the bustles changed from stripped, primary feathers with fluffs, to plain eagle bustles. Later eagle bustles tipped with plumes and briefly ostrich feathers appeared. Finally the use of colored hackles, which are dyed rooster tail feathers, developed.

In the late 1950s, dancers shed their long died underwear in favor of bare legs and torsos. The reasoning behind this change was, “With less restriction, more body freedom could take place.” This same reasoning took place in pre-Columbus times as warriors stripped to their breechcloths to prepare for battle.

Mesquakie, meaning Fox Tribe of Iowa, have danced the Peace Pipe Dance for many generations. This dance is a counterpart to the Plains Fancy Dance and was used for dance competitions. They wore a one and two piece bustle made of cut and dyed horsehair tied to stripped quills. Originally, a Woodland tribe, the Mesquakie, have had friendly contacts with both Northern and Southern Plains tribes since the post-reservation era. They were seen among the Sioux doing the Fancy Dance in the late 1950s.

The Northern Plains adopted the Fancy Dance in the 1950s. Both dance and regalia led to the development of a unique sub-dance culture apart from the Grass Dance. Because the Northern Plains was the home of the Grass Dancer, modified Grass Dance steps were acquired while wearing the Fancy Dance outfit. Northern Fancy Dancers encountered the tail end of the Southern shift to the porcupine head roach, which they were already familiar with. They never adopted feathered head bustles that were still in use in the South. Many early Northern Fancy Dancers wore “breed” or half leggings made of cloth and leather. This was later replaced by knee length angora leggings called “Goats or Furs.” Everything that was Northern, concerning Fancy Dance regalia, tended to be longer and bulkier than its Southern counterpart.

While the Southern Dancers favored the shirtless look, Northern Fancy Dancers kept their shirts on. This was due largely to the cold nights that accompanied the Northern Powwows. Face and body paint were becoming a typical Southern Plains norm, while in the North only face painting had wide appeal. The reasoning behind this was that body paints would be obstructed by the shirts, long aprons, and belt drops that were worn in the North.

The Northern dance style conformed to the Grass Dance Songs. Grass Dance songs were long and medium paced. When a Northern Fancy Dancer danced, torso, leg, arm, and bustle movement were emphasized. As the Drum reached the Honor Beats, Northern Dancers often highlighted these beats with knee bends, splits, leg pauses, and modified “jumping jacks.” Later Russian kicks were added to the Northern Dance repertoire after a Winnebago Fancy Dancer returned from a dance tour to Russia! Tricky pauses were added to recently composed Grass Dance Songs.
Training to be a champion Northern Fancy Dancer requires frequent long distance running to gain endurance and private dancing to gain continuity in the varied footwork. In the winter or during the off season, ice hockey and basketball help to keep dancers physically fit for dancing. This is also a time when many dancers travel on dance tours.

Southern Contest Songs are shorter in composition than the Northern Grass Dance Songs. The tempo has continued to increase in speed, requiring less body motion, while emphasizing syncopated leg and head rhythms. Acrobatics were introduced in the mid 1960s. These acrobatics included cartwheels, splits, and back-flips. When training for Southern Fancy Contest Dancing, long distance running, jumping rope, and private dancing are all excellent ways of training, but sprints are especially useful to gain the speed necessary to endure the quick tempo of the Southern style.

In 1972 the Northern look was introduced to the Southern Plains, by Mesquakie dancers. Furthermore Northern Fancy Dancers inspired the Southern Plains Fancy Dancers when they came South to serve in the “Head Dancer” capacity. Almost immediately young Southern dancers adopted a modified “look,” along with movements of the Northern Plains dancers.

In the late 1970s Northern and Southern style dancers began to compete with each other on a somewhat regular basis. Today both Northern and Southern style dancers have acclimated to Northern and Southern styles of the Men’s Fancy Dance.

REGALIA

In the recent past, Fancy Dancers have worn regalia indicative of Northern and Southern Plains dance style. Today these styles have merged. Regional tribal identifying characteristics have disappeared and the resultant inter-tribal Fancy Dance outfit has combined elements of Northern and Southern flavor.

Fancy Dancers wear two vertical eagle feathers in their porcupine head roaches. These two head feathers accentuate the head movement of the dancer and can be mounted in two different manners: a “rocker” and a “spinner.” “Rockers” keep time with the beat of the drum by allowing the feather to move back and forth in a teeter-totter effect. They are most efficient for indoor arenas or when there is little or no wind. “Spinners” allow the two feathers to spin in a circular motion, in breezy or windy weather. Many dancers have a set of “rocker” and “spinner” feathers to use as conditions warrant. Black and white tail feathers from an immature eagle, are preferred by the Fancy Dancer. They can be decorated with plumes, hackles, plastic/reflector tape, horsehair, quills, paint, and angora hair. Many dancers prefer to leave their feathers plain because the natural feather possesses innate beauty.

Long “roaches” are prized by the Fancy Dancer. Front guard hair on a well-constructed “roach” is seven to eight inches in length and is thickly and evenly distributed. Complimenting deer hair is ideally dyed to match the dancers bustles. Overall length of a prototype “roach” is approximately twenty-two inches.
The beadwork of champion Fancy Dancers is usually matched sets. A typical set will include the following: headband with side drops, beaded yoke, knee-length harness and cross piece, cuffs, moccasins, choker, belt and side drops, arm and leg bands, and rosettes. Fully beaded or sequined capes and aprons are also very common. Fancy dancers usually own different colored cloth ribbon shirts, as well as different colored capes and aprons. These can be interchanged each day to give the dancer a slightly different “look.” Some dancers even change between each dance session. The capes and aprons are fringed with medium to long: shoestring/flat fringe, chainette fringe, yarn, leather, vinyl, or ribbons.

Knee to ankle length “Angoras” or “Goats” are worn on the lower leg. Four to ten brass or nickel plated sheep bells are worn above or below these “Goats.”

Bustles are made with either eagle feathers, turkey primary feathers, or spikes. They can be decorated with: hackles, plumes, secondary eagle plumes/feathers, yarn, tape, sequins, colored thread, or paint. The ends are often adorned with long horse hair, shoestring/flat fringe, metallic objects, plastic, and/or cloth ribbons. Many dancers own two sets of bustles so they can alternate bustles. This is done for a variety of reasons: to change the dancers “look” and to save the wear and tear that one bustle would have to endure. And still another reason is due to the fact that some bustles can be designed to endure inclement weather better than others. Fancy Dancers are now leaning toward reflective, white, or florescent colors because they show up better in enclosed arenas, on stage, or outside where lighting is limited.

Loose and stiff tail feathered fans are carried by Fancy Dancers. Other items that are hand carried by the dancer include: Dream Catchers, beaded or fur wrapped wheels, scarves, and whistles.

Predominating the handgear are matching coup or “Whip Sticks.” “Whip Sticks” originated from two sources. In the warrior societies there were designated “Whip Men” who were responsible for encouraging the dancers to dance, the whips were used to gain a dancer’s attention. Whips were also used to get a horse to respond. The Fancy Dancer carries a “Whip Stick” that is approximately twelve inches in length, usually with feathers or plumed dangles hanging from the ends.

Recent additions to the Fancy Dancer’s outfit are colored kneepads and surfing shoes. Both are useful in the varied terrain that dancers encounter when dancing.

CONTEST DANCING

Endurance and speed are traits of an efficient Fancy Dancer. The degree of difficulty in the dancer’s routine and the flamboyant execution of personal style are important elements considered by the dancing judges. Each dancer has his own signature style and collection of choreography that he is able to produce to accompany the speed and mood of the contest song.
Most contestants begin a contest by trying to catch the eye of the judges. This is executed by staying low to the ground while the song is at its slowest tempo. Russian kicks, knee walks, leaps, cartwheels, and shuffling around an anchored arm or bent leg, are all eye-catching dance movements. Exaggerated body movements and intricate leg movements are exhibited in the middle of the song. “Honor Beats” of the Drum are complimented with more Russian kicks, push-ups, knee walks, above ground pirouettes, and spins. As the rhythm speeds up attention is drawn to head and foot coordination. Many dancers resort to spinning to give the facade of maximum movement while executing minimum effort. An abrupt ending, at the exact time that a song finishes, is the most important feature of Fancy Dancing. Failure to do so, normally results in disqualification. Popular finishes include the splits and leg spreads with the arms in the air.

Judges look for beautiful outfits, showmanship, choreography, and a combination of regalia and body movements that coordinate with the Drum’s and mood and rhythm.

Contestants may dance to as many as six songs in succession. Contest Song genre includes: A Ruffle or Squat Dance Song, a Sneak-up Song, a Trick or Stop Dance Song, a Crow Hop, a Grass Dance Song, and a slow, medium, or fast “Straight” Song.

FANCY SHAWL DANCE

HISTORY

The Women’s Fancy Shawl Dance is the most contemporary of all the Powwow dances. Its origin can be traced to the area of Cannon Ball, North Dakota. In the mid 1950s Dakota women of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation began exhibiting a style of dance referred to as “North Dakota Style Dancing.”

Up to that time, a few women had experimented with Fancy Feather regalia to express their abundant enthusiasm. Women who danced in male feathers were met with harsh criticism. The momentum of this North Dakota style of dancing allowed it to prosper and develop into one of the most popular categories on the Powwow circuit today.

Middle aged women were the first to bring this dance into the arena. At first, they had no particular style of outfit to go along with this dance. As it began to evolve, shawls were added to enhance the beauty of the dance. Younger women became the innovators as this dance spread up and down Sioux country.

Until the early 1970s this dance was considered a Northern style of dance. It was introduced to the Southern Plains by an Oklahoma Sauk and Fox family that traveled both the Northern and Southern Powwow circuits.

In the mid 1970s unfringed dance blankets were interjected into the Fancy Shawl regalia by the Assiniboine Shawl Dancers of Montana. These dance blankets were folded so that
the top one-third of the blanket lay over the shoulders exposing ribbonwork patterns that complemented the dancer’s beadwork. These unfringed blankets remained popular until the late 1970s when shawls again regained dominance. Beaded capes became a part of Shawl Dance regalia in the early 70s. The first capes had beadwork patterns that identified the tribe of the wearer, but matched the rest of the beadwork. In the mid-80s fully beaded vests with back capes became the fashionable trend. They are still popular at the present time.

REGALIA

An upright eagle tail feather or a cluster of eagle plumes adorn the head of the Fancy Shawl Dancer. Additional horizontal plumes of feathers grace the sides of the head. Barrettes and medallions can be clipped or tied onto the back and sides of the hair to keep the feathers, plumes, and hair secured. The hair is parted in order to be braided or wrapped. Many dancers now French braid their hair in different patterns. In a contest, a Shawl Dancer braids their hair. Hair can be cross-wrapped with ribbon or leather strips or wrapped with otter, mink, or fake fur to extend the braid. This fur typically extends from the shoulder to the knees. Beaded braid ties and/or round or heart shaped shells are tied over the fur wraps which cover the braided hair. In keeping with the Northern Plains style, the beaded ties are tied at shoulder level or below. Matching, beaded, painted, or shell earrings can be worn to accentuate the outfit.

Because women do most of the beadwork and sewing it is very common to see a Shawl Dancer with many different sets of matching regalia. A typical set of matching dancing regalia usually consists of the following: capes, leggings, barrettes, fur wraps, vests, chokers, medallions, cuffs, braid ties, harnesses, moccasins, rosettes, belts, and matching earrings. Other items that may be substituted for beadwork are: sequins, ribbonwork, leatherwork, feltwork, needlepoint, and painted sets. Sets can be constructed on both leather and canvas. Shoestring/flat fringe, ribbons, chainette fringe, leather, and vinyl fringe are used to add motion to the edges of the cape. The capes and leggings are fastened with leather straps, hooks and eyelets, zippers, and garters.

Belts are often beaded. Due to the number of outfits that a dancer may possess, belts are sometimes constructed of heavy leather and silver or brass conchos. This makes the same belt interchangeable.

Dresses with long sleeves are both one and two pieces. Many are commercially manufactured dresses, skirts, and blouses and still others are custom made. Often designs which match or complement the women’s beadwork are sewn onto the skirts, shirts, and dresses. Assorted cloths are used to construct these dresses.

Shawls are constructed from medium textured cloth. A shawl’s overall length and width depend on the dancer’s size. Shawls are usually one basic color. Additional color is added by: applique, beadwork, ribbonwork, leatherwork, and painting. Shawls are fringed with shoestring/flat fringe, ribbons, chainette fringe, and vinyl fringe. The color of the shawl and fringe usually enhance the matching Shawl Dance outfit.
CONTEST DANCING

A combination of gracefulness, agility, and endurance are qualities of a well-rounded Fancy Shawl Dancer. Champion Shawl Dancers are also ambidextrous. Shawl, head, and foot coordination should harmonize with the drum beat. Each dancer has her own finesse when contesting. Good Shawl Dancers change tempo in their choreography as the drum tempo changes. At this time no woman has been observed bouncing low to the ground like their male counterparts. This is probably due to the confinement of wearing a skirt and the modesty characterized by Indian women. However, as innovation plays such an important role in this dance, many new movements will transpire during its evolutionary process.

The shawl is draped over the back and is often pinned under the cape for security. The hands grasp the ends of the shawl at elbow’s length. The elbows and hands combine to maneuver the shawl to obtain maximum shawl movement.

Judges watch for graceful dance execution, fluid and continuous movements, original choreography, endurance, ambidexterity, head, shawl, and foot coordination, and a knowledge of the songs. These songs include: medium to fast War, Women’s, and Grass Dance Songs, Crow Hops, and Trick or Stop Songs.

THE GOURD DANCE

HISTORY

The Gourd Dance is a dance that many tribes participate in today. The Cheyenne, Ponca, and Kiowa have unique interpretations concerning the introduction of this dance to their particular tribe. However, the Kiowa version or legend will be the version discussed in this text. To the Kiowa tribe of Oklahoma, the Gourd Society was/is known as the “Tdien-pei-gah,” (pronounced tdin-pay gah). The Tdien-pei-gah originated in Montana before 1700. A legend of its origin is today called the “Red Wolf Legend.”

While on a war journey, a Kiowa warrior was separated from the rest of his comrades. Because he had been away from his people so long, he ran out of provisions. After many days without food or water, he began to give up hope of ever seeing his people again. While nearing his final moment of despair, he heard singing beyond a nearby hill. As he climbed the hill he hoped that the singer could lead him back in the direction of his people. When he reached the top of the hill, he peered over and saw a tall, lean Red Wolf standing on its hind legs, singing beautiful songs. In the wolf’s paw was a gourd, which was used to keep time with each song. As dusk approached, the warrior was mesmerized as he listened to the wolf’s songs. At the end of each song, the wolf would howl and shake his rattle. At dawn the Red Wolf turned to the warrior and said, “Take this dance and these songs to your people. As long as they cherish their tribal ways, this dance and these songs will be with them.” To this day the Kiowa honor the Red Wolf at the end of each song by shaking their rattles and rendering a wolf howl.
When the Kiowa entered the Southern Plains, around 1750, the Tdien-pei-gah had become a society of warriors, hunters, protectors and police. It was their duty to respond to approaching buffalo herds and regulate the hunt.

Tdien-pei-gah actually means “skunk berries.” A famous battle against the combined forces of the Cheyenne and Arapaho was fought on terrain containing many skunk berry bushes. After four days of battle the bushes were red with the blood of the enemy. From that point on, the skunk berries became the symbol of the Tdien-pei-gah Society.

The Tdien-pei-gah Society was closely associated with the sacred Ten Grandmother Medicine Bundles. The Tdien-pei-gah held their annual celebration in conjunction with the annual Sun Dance each summer. By 1892, the Kiowa were banned from holding all tribal ceremonies. The Tdien-pei-gah continued to hold their dances in secret, until 1938.

In 1957 the Kiowa Gourd Clan was officially organized and the Tdien-pei-gah Dance was revived. In the 1960s the Kiowas Gourd Clan separated into two branches. The second branch became known as the Kiowa Tiah-peh Society. The Tiah-peh Society further branched off to become two societies, the Tiah-peh Society of Oklahoma, and the Tiah-peh Society of Carnegie, (Oklahoma.) Today all three gourd societies hold their annual celebrations around the Fourth of July, at the same approximate time as the original Kiowa Sun Dance and Tdie-pei-gah Ceremonials.

The original ceremonial clothing of the Gourd Dance Society consisted of the finest Kiowa clothing a member had. The headsmen were allowed to wear either war bonnets or otter caps. Buckskin shirts, leggings, and moccasins were the primary articles worn. A black shawl and/or a small white sheet was/were wrapped around the waist. A rattle made of dew claws or rawhide fashioned into the shape of a gourd was anchored to a wooden handle. When the rawhide gourd was used, pebbles from an anthill were placed within the gourd to produce the sound.

REGALIA

Today as Kiowa Gourd Clan members are preparing for their annual celebration, the Headmen advise them to wear their finest clothing. “No hats or boots are to be worn because this is not a cowboy dance. If a clan member does not have traditional Kiowa clothes he should wear nice trousers, shirt, and at least moccasins.

Other articles that are worn by the contemporary Gourd Dancer are a string of mescal beads and a string of silver beads. These beads should be draped over the left shoulder; crossing the heart, and be bound together at the right hip. Around the waist should be a beaded and fringed sash. This sash should be tied on the right side of the hip. A red and blue broadcloth blanket can be draped over both shoulders or over the right shoulder and held or tied on the left side. If the blanket is tied over the right shoulder, the red side should hang over the chest in the day and the blue side should hang over the chest at night.
Colorful gourds made of German silver, milk cans, salt or peppershakers, baking powder cans, and/or natural gourds are used. Carved wood, cut and seed beads, rolled fringe, horsehair, and assorted feathers are used to decorate the gourd shaker. Stiff and loose fans, made from a variety of feathers, are carried in the opposite hand.

If traditional Kiowa clothes are worn, otter caps or a roach can be worn. Another alternative is to hang a scalp “drop,” made from feathers or silver links, from a tied scalp hair lock on top of the head. If a dancer has long hair it can either be braided or wrapped in the traditional Kiowa style, using otter skins and braid ties.

THE DANCE

Dignity is the characteristic used to describe proper Gourd Dancing. The Gourd Dance traditionally begins with the Starting song. During the Opening Song only the four Headmen may dance. The songs that follow are among the oldest of the society songs and are open to participation by the rest of the dancers. In the evening, the Brush Dance takes place. The four Headsmen lead in the dance. They are followed by the rest of the male membership. Behind the dancers are a group of singers holding a drum. In the Brush Dance the dancers lead the drum into the center of the arena. Behind the singers are the women supporters who are the actual brush holders. They carry in branches of brush or leaves.

The women are never allowed to start dancing before the men. Because this is a Warrior’s Dance, women are never allowed to walk in front of the male Gourd Dancers. The only time a woman is allowed to be amongst the male dancers is if she is honoring someone. At that time she will dance behind the honoree, inside the arena. In the past, women danced in their places outside of the arena. Today women are allowed to dance within the outskirts of the dance arena.

When the Gourd Song starts, the seated dancers begin to shake their gourds in tempo with the drum. As the beat of the drum increases, usually during the second verse, the dancers rise and dance in place. Each dancer keeps time with a coordinated slight bending of the knees while shaking their gourd side to side with each drumbeat. When the beat changes, each dancer takes a few steps toward the arena. Throughout the Gourd Dance each dancer is allowed to move freely within the Dance Arena. At the end of each song the wolf howl is imitated by the men of the Drum. The dancers pause for a moment after the wolf howl is rendered but do not sit down. Another song follows immediately and the dancers resume their dancing. At the beginning of each song the dancing is more calm and reverent. As the song continues the enthusiasm escalates and the dancing becomes more passionate. At the end of each set of songs the dancers will return to their seats and there will be a short break in the dancing.

Some unique features of the Kiowa Gourd Dance Celebration, which takes place during the Fourth of July, are the bugle and bugler, sash, and rope which were attained as war trophies during battle. Whip Men and Warrior Staffs are used in the arena because of
traditional protocol. Sate-tien-day, more commonly referred to as Chief Satanta, retrieved a bugle during battle and learned to play the charge and retreat song. This confused the calvary and Sate-tien-day’s efforts are still recognized today with the presence of the bugler and the other war trophies as part of the celebration. These things are not typical of a Gourd Dance that would take place at an average Powwow. In fact the Gourd Dance is secular in nature and is not seen at all Powwows throughout the Nation.

CONCLUSION

Indian people have always passed their rich traditions, from one generation to another, by word of mouth. Listening and practicing these traditions is an art that feeds the inner spirit. It is through the adherence to this process, that Native Americans will remain strong.
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PERIODICALS


RECORDS


MISCELLANEOUS RESOURCES


