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In Pursuit of Dancing the Indian Way: Part III

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WHISPERING WIND

50¢

AMERICAN INDIAN:
PAST & PRESENT

Magazine



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SAKAN

Our thanks this month to Mr. Jim McLean of Baton Rouge, Louisiana for his article on modern scalp feathers. To Joe Kazumura, staff photographer, for the photos of Straight Dancers accompanying Mr. McLean's article.

Thanks to Mr. Kugee Supernaw of Skiatook, Oklahoma for pointing out an error in our December, 1972 issue in an article by Rex Reddick entitled, "Cutting Your Straight Dance Clothes".

Thanks to Mark Thiel for the last of his series entitled "In Pursuit of Dancing the Indian Way". We hope our readers have enjoyed Mr. Thiel's manuscript and we look forward to hearing some readers' comments.

KIOWA-APACHE BLACK FOOT
Our Cover: Kiowa Black Leggings Society Dancers; Grand Prairie Powwow, Grand Prairie, Texas. Photo by Dick Madaus.

photo credits P.5, Ralph Rivera, Houston Texas. Photo by Dick Madaus.
P.6 Photos by Joe Kazumura. P.9, Photos by Jim McLean. P.11, Photos by Dick Madaus.

The University of California, School of Public Health is now recruiting Native American Professionals as students for a Master of Public Health Degree Program for September 1973. A 21 month Health Administration and Planning Program and Hospital Administration are offered. Requirements are a Bachelor's Degree from college.

Students can select health administration or the program in hospital administration with stipends for living expenses available.

Other programs are open to qualified students in other areas such as environmental health, health education, public health nursing administration, nutrition, epidemiology, (continued on page 14..)

LeSHOWMAR INDIAN TRADING POST WISHES TO THANK ALL FOR THE WONDERFUL RESPONSE TO HIS RECENT AD IN THIS MAGAZINE AND WISHES ALL A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR.

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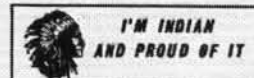
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WHISPERING WIND Magazine

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IN PURSUIT OF DANCING

photos by dick madaus



grand prairie, texas, 1971



driftwood, texas 1971

THE INDIAN WAY

PART III

by Mark Thiel

Throughout the United States today, there are many non-Indians who dance on a variety of levels. There are children who jump around campfires at summer camps. There are people who enjoy playing with beadcraft kits and "cut and paste" war bonnet kits. Others have developed a degree of expertise in Native American art forms. For some, interests go beyond this; they have become interested in the intangible aspects of the culture.

Non-Indian interest in arts and crafts serves as a flexible family, recreation, and social program. It provides a variety of individual and group activities; singing, dancing, craft collecting, costume making,

travelling, camping and meeting new people. The serious hobbyists are interested in quality and accuracy of either past or present styles of dancing and costuming. Not having tribal loyalties, hobbyists interests range to many tribes, but predominate in the plains region where Native American identity is strongest. The "feathers" style offers bold freedom of movement. The Oklahoma straight dance style offers graceful controlled movement. Native American artistic expression is heavily influenced by the natural environment of this land. Above all, it offers natural beauty and aesthetic pleasure to non-Indians.

"This interest...grows and soon you

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realize that this is not just something you do, but is a real part of you. What has occupied evenings after school work soon begins to grab your thoughts 24 hours a day. You'll be at work or school and be singing Indian songs all day and in your spare time be drawing beadwork designs. This interest develops over the years and a number of things affect this development; the people already having the interest, the Indian spirit of friendship and acceptance that is shown by everyone dancing, and the travelling around the country to attend powwows and dances. There are many other factors that generate the interest in the American Indian, all of which combine and produce a state of mind always thinking and being Indian."

Non-Indian dancers often state that their interest in Native arts, crafts, and dancing is contributing to the preservation and promotion of this aspect of Indian culture. A number feel that if it were not for the hobbyist, many Indians would not be dancing today; and state that non-Indians have encouraged some Native Americans to dance. One hobbyist states, "I've been to some Indian sponsored dances and if it weren't for the non-Indian dancing, the dance would have been a flop." Another states that by wearing his best dance clothes he was encouraging Indians to do likewise. In the area of crafts, one states, "By enthusiasts wanting top quality products and willing to pay the price, quality workmanship is encouraged." He continued, "There is not a Cheyenne woman left who will bead an entire tipi. There are those who don't care. We hope that some Cheyenne woman will...we provide an opportunity for what a Cheyenne tipi should look like."

Some prominent figures at many dances are the white traders, who, because of their financial means, are relatively large merchants. Their wares may range from beads, broadcloth, bells, feathers, moccasins, beadwork, silverwork, to recordings of Indian music. A portion of their goods are items that are difficult to buy elsewhere, such as craftwork from distant tribes and materials that otherwise can only be purchased from Indian craft companies. They contribute to the enrichment of the material aspect of the social dance by making numerous items readily available to dancers and powwow goers.

Being a trader is an aprofession. Some are primarily interested in providing a service to customers and making a profit is secondary. At the other extreme are the dealers of imported tourist merchandise whose only objective is making a profit. One trader used a

price mark up to cover his travelling expenses only. If he was acquainted with a customer and knew he was of modest means, he often lowered the price. One trader stated that to help out a craftswoman, he bought a number of pairs of Cheyenne infants' moccasins at \$7.00 per pair and was reselling them at \$8.00 per pair. Another trader provides a pawn service with generous terms for needy Indians.

Native Americans have responded to this outside interest in their arts and customs in a variety of ways. Many appreciate serious interest shown by sensitive non-Indians. They have non-Indian friends and attend each others powwows. Among a number of traditionalists there is a desire to teach social dances, values, and ways that can be helpful to others. "The Indian has a great deal to offer, so many things that are so valuable; enormous knowledge of the universe...how to bring out inefficiency of the mind..."

One traditionalist told an experience about a blonde haired boy. She taught him to make his own beadwork and costuming. He learned to become a good dancer and to dance with hoops. "He did things the old way," by storing his dance clothes in parflitches. When he needed feathers to make a bustle, he found a dead eagle by a roadside. As a result of these observations, she came to suspect that he was a reincarnated traditional Indian and became somewhat afraid of him.

Some Indians strongly disapprove of non-Indians dancing their dances. They see hobbyists as "taking everything away." There is resentment in seeing well to do whites buying gorgeous costumes while poor Indians have costumes with inferior appearance. They resent hobbyists "pirating away" their songs with the aid of tape recorders. One Native American stated that collectors are constantly asking Indians with antique crafts

About the Author

Mark Thiel is a student majoring in sociology and anthropology at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point.

His interests in Indian dancing and culture originated in childhood and were stimulated by the Boy Scout movement and the Order of the Arrow. Through a friend of the late Ben Hunt, Mr. Thiel was introduced to the powwow circuit and began learning about the way of life of Wisconsin Indian people.

Presently Mr. Thiel is active in the Indian student organization in Stevens Point and is concentrating his studies in Indian culture. His manuscript, *IN PURSUIT OF DANCING THE INDIAN WAY*, was written for a course on Indian cultural change and for solving questions that the author had encountered in his associating with Indian people.

"IN PURSUIT OF DANCING THE INDIAN WAY"

to sell, and rich collectors buy up the old Native American relics and keep them out of the hands of the Native People who are too poor to buy. They see it as wrong for non-Indians to appear as Indians in parades and other public gatherings. As one phrased it, "It (Indian dress) doesn't look good on a white skin!"

The quality of "Indian dances" practiced by the various youth camping organizations range from grossly inaccurate to approximations of actual dances. Consider these observations by a Native American. "I once had the unpleasant experience of viewing some Boy Scouts performing an "authentic" Indian dance. They were painted up more horribly than some creatures in a spook movie. Their dance was composed of cripple-like gyrations...around an enormous fire accompanied by a screaming banshee pounding on a drum. This ugliness was disrespectful to Indian culture. I'm aware that all Indian dance teams aren't like the one I just described but a good number of them fall into a similar category.


"There are some who are quite skillful and aesthetically pleasant in their presentation. I once witnessed another group of Boy Scouts singing the Iroquois Green Corn Song. They did a nice job. But somehow it bothered me. They had no real feeling of what that ceremony means. It might be analogous to performing the Catholic Mass or some Jewish ceremony to a group of paying agnostics in Central Park during their lunch break..."

A number of Native Americans feel that dances sponsored by hobbyists lack the quality of true Indian dances. Some state that they have experienced lack of friendliness

and generosity at hobbyist dances. One noted that in holding a "give away", they give presents only within their group of friends and they do not give out as much. In the "Indian way", you are especially generous to strangers and distant visitors. Another comments, "I think these activities are entertaining to the public. Whether these activities develop an awareness and appreciation of Indian culture I don't really know, but I tend to doubt it. Usually these hobbyists perform dances, sing songs, and explain a little about the style of clothing and that's it. There is no explanation of the Native People's values, life styles, problems they face and other factors that go into being Indian. Again, their efforts are just entertaining." Another adds that hobbyist groups can be useful in educating the public about problems facing Indians. "Today they need public support and favorable legislation to help solve their problems. "If they want to be Indian, they should go all the way!"

The pursuit of the study of Indian social dances is one of many Indian solutions to the needs of people from the dominant society. It began as a reaction against the quality of American life and it continues to offer a diversion away from the conformity and tensions of this industrial society. This dancing provides a way "back to nature": offering aesthetic natural beauty, color, self expression, craftsmanship, recreation, leisure, camping, traveling, and meeting people of different ways of life. Generally it's acceptance is found among people who are craft and outdoor oriented.

Singing, dancing, crafts, and clothes are a highly visible portion of the Native American identity. As a result of ethics of generosity and tolerance towards others, a number of traditionalists have been willing to learn life. There are also those who view non-Indian dancers as a threat to their identity. It appears that these people have a limited number of identity factors (i.e., Native religion, language) in their lives. Dancing may be one of the only identifiably and distinctly Indian activities that they retain. They view non-Indians as stealing their self-image. They appear to equate loss of distinctiveness with loss of culture and identity.

Native American culture continues to provide a readily available source of solutions. Up to the present, impressive changes have been wrought in American life by the Native teachers. It is only reasonable to assume that these changes will continue. 

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7 Powwow sponsored by the Indian American Students Association at Wichita St. University; M.E.F.S.E.O. Center, Wichita, Kansas.

7-8 2nd Annual Baltimore Indian Hobbyist Powwow. Loch Raven High School. For more info: C. Marchesi; 3505 Foster Ave. Baltimore, Maryland 21224. Scottsdale All Indian Powwow. Scottsdale, Arizona. Wm. Pewo, Jr.; 3939 Cienega Center Plaza, Scottsdale, Arizona 85251.

Mothers' Day Dance. Perry, Oklahoma. Armory.

Open House. Gray, Agency, Mont.

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(continue from page 2)

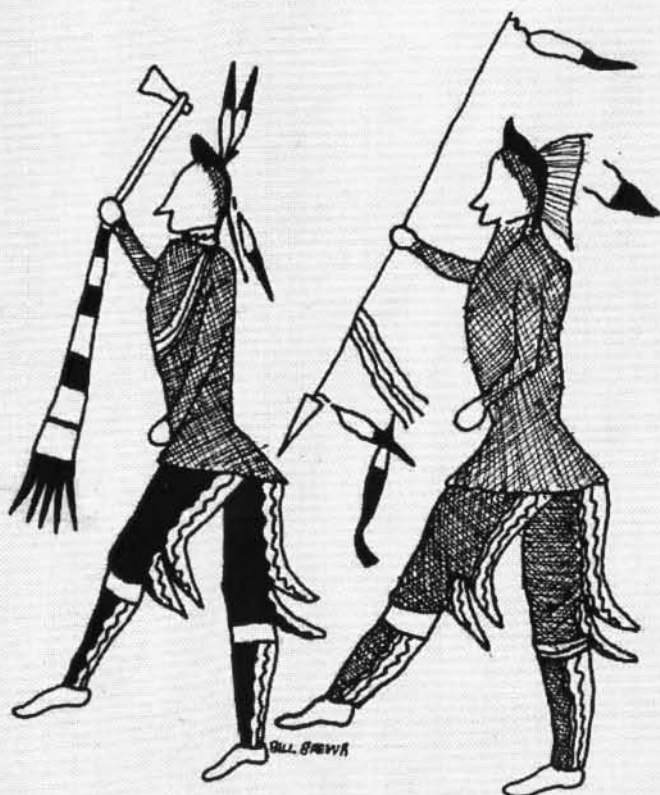
the measurement sciences and the bio-medical laboratory sciences.

For more information, interested Native Americans may write: Elaine Walbroek; School of Public Health; University of California; Berkeley, California 94720.

The Museum of the American Indian announces the availability of sets of 35mm color slides documenting the current traveling exhibition **NAKED CLAY: 3000 YEARS OF UNADORNED POTTERY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN**. The show presents 90 ceramics selected from the collections of the Museum of the American Indian to demonstrate the artistic variety and sensitivity of the Amerindian potter when fashioning utilitarian objects for daily use. Covering 3000 years and all regions of the Americas, this emphasizes the skill of the artist working without the use of the potters wheel.

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