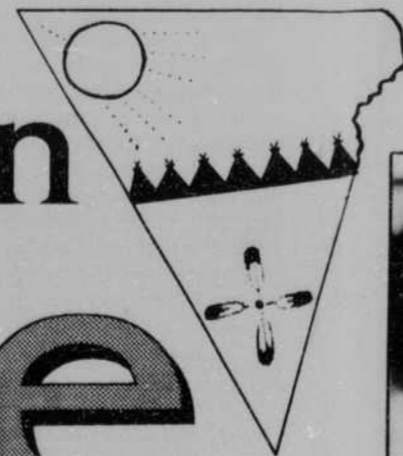


# The Tradition of Dance



As one of the oldest cultural traditions in the Midwest, and perhaps the most colorful, the American Indian Pow-Wow celebration combines the spirit of a time-honored ceremonial tradition with the excitement of a weekend family reunion.

And a family reunion it was at the Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux reservation in northeast South Dakota, when tribal members, other American Indians and non-Indians gathered to sing, dance and relax with old friends.

This year's Pow-Wow, Wacipi in Dakota Sioux language, was July 6-8 on the reservation Ceremonial Grounds, and marked 123 years for the annual celebration.

Traditional Indian singers, drum groups and dancers--from under 6 years-old to over 50--competed for prize money totaling more than \$20,000. Softball tournaments and bingo added a contemporary flavor to catch a spectator's wandering interests between dance sessions.

The Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux Wacipi dates back to the formation of the Lake Traverse Reservation as defined by the Treaty of 1867.

According to the program notes, the Wacipi was originally a celebration of the seasonal renewal of life. In the Dakota Sioux tradition, the Wacipi

was a prayer to Wakan-Tanka--the Great Spirit or Grandfather. Families also held religious naming and honoring ceremonies, as they often do today.

The graceful pageantry was never lost to the weekend heat. A Grand Entry of dancers and flag bearers opened each session of dancing, and an invocation song blessed the gathering. By following the eagle staff and dancing clockwise, or sunwise, the competitors show the crowd that they are ready to perform.

Men and women Wacipi dancers blend tradition and legend with the energy of contemporary styles and movements.

Men's traditional dance re-enacts a war party's return to the village, when they would "dance out" the story of a battle or when hunters would dance their story of tracking prey.

The Omaha Tribe started the men's grass dance in the 1860s. Colorful fringe has replaced the grasses originally tucked into a dancer's belt, but many still wear the hair roach, crow-belt and eagle-bone whistle, which were emblems of the Omaha society.

The men's and women's fancy dances are the newest of the dances, having begun in the early 1900s in Oklahoma. Elaborate feathered outfits, often with masks and headpieces,

and fast footwork distinguish the men and boys from other male dancers. The fancy shawl with beaded moccasins and leggings adorn the women.

According to one legend, the women jingle dress dancers, who now decorate their knee-length dresses with hundreds of metal cones made from chewing tobacco lids, inherited their dance from a holy man's dream. Beginning from Mille Lacs, Minn., the traditional jingle dress spread throughout the Chippewa/Ojibway territories and made its way to the Lakota and Dakota tribes in the late 1920s.

From the powerful grace and rhythms of the dancers to the frybread and Indian tacos, the relaxed atmosphere almost defied the near 100 degree heat under a searing South Dakota sun. Only a sudden, late evening thunderstorm temporarily broke the circle of dancers, drummers and spectators from the celebration of a unique cultural way of life.

The Lincoln Indian Center will host a pow-wow for youths aged three to nine years old Aug. 3-5, and an open pow-wow Sept. 28-30. The Rosebud, S.D., pow-wow is scheduled for Aug. 24-26, and the Pine Ridge, S.D., pow-wow meets in early August.

Story and photos by Robin Trimarchi



Clockwise from above left:  
 ● The symbol of the Pow-Wow, shaped in the boundary of the reservation.  
 ● Miss Sisseton Wahpeton Sioux 1990, Susan Fleury of rural Wilmont, Minn.  
 ● Number 905, Joe Reed, and son Gerald, both from Wahpeton, N.D., catch the shade of their truck between dance sessions. Fancy dancer Quinton Saunsoci of Macy, Neb.  
 ● Colette Redday of Long Hollow District, S.D., patiently awaits burgers and hot dogs while Maria Renville and Glenn Wilson, also of Long Hollow District, feed family and friends.  
 ● Dance competitors "introduce" themselves to the crowd during the Grand Entry.  
 ● Women's Fancy dancer Sherry Bird of Brookings, S.D.  
 ● A singer and drum member, Perry Bobtail Bear of Eagle Butte, S.D. also led the Grand Entry with the Eagle Staff.

