

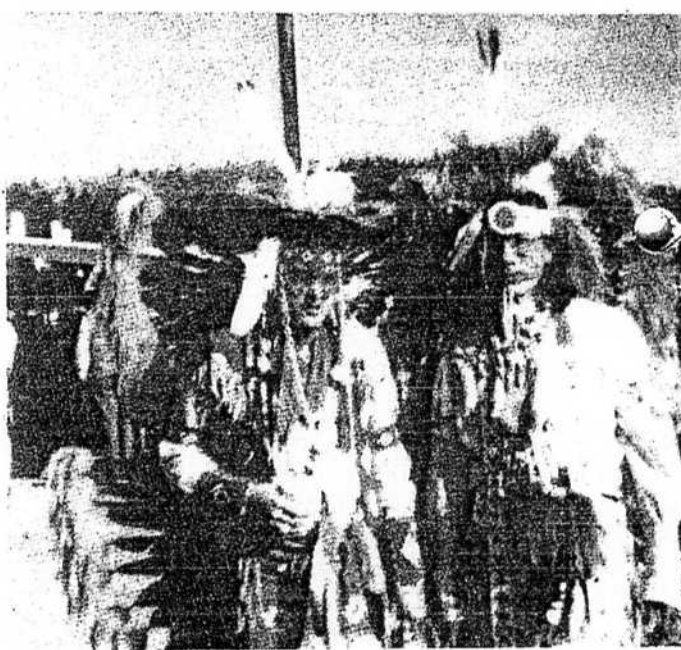
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# SIoux STYLE NORTHERN FANCY DANCE

by Chris Roberts

Illustration - Bill Brewer



Duane Eagleman — Sioux      Chico Her Many Horses — Sioux  
Lame Deer, July 4, 1972

Much has been written in recent years on the Oklahoma Indian, his costume and his dancing style. Excellent articles have also been written about the Northern "Grass Dancer", however these are now dated and as all dance outfits are ever changing it is appropriate that we look at the new innovations and the general overview of one of these contemporary styles in order to update those interested.

The northern style that has most markedly changed in recent years is the Sioux Style Fancy Dance, feathers dancer, or as Ronnie Theisz referred to the style in 1968, the "Pan-Lakota" style. Then it was written that this style was common with Rosebud and Pine Ridge Sioux. Since then the contemporary updated style has spread throughout the North and many dancers are adopting variations of it. "Pan-Lakota" dancers can be observed at celebrations in Washington, Idaho, Montana, North and South Dakota, Wyoming and Western Canada. In this article I will adopt Theisz's terminology and refer to this basic Sioux style as "Pan-Lakota."

Just as in Oklahoma, there is a "new look" for the 1973 Pan-Lakota Dancer. It is believed by this author that Oklahoma fashions spread north and it is these adaptations of Oklahoma fashion that gives this style its characteristic "new look." The most striking changes up north are in bustles, hair styles, length of "furs" (Angora Goat Hair anklets), shirt patterns and colors, rocker spreaders and the dance style. As in Oklahoma, the champion dancers and those aspiring to be champions, are the first to adopt the "new look" and the style thus spreads.

In this article I will attempt to give the reader a complete enough view of this style so that you get a good idea of what is happening up North. I will point out the updates where they occur and the similarities

to the past where they occur. I do not intend that this be an infallible source of study, but merely point out my observations. It is very difficult for one person to completely analyze a particular style. Each dancer has his own variation and there are no cut and dried RULES of costume construction. If the reader will bear this in mind and realize that it is difficult to extract visual information from written text, then we are on common ground.

## I HEAD AND FACE

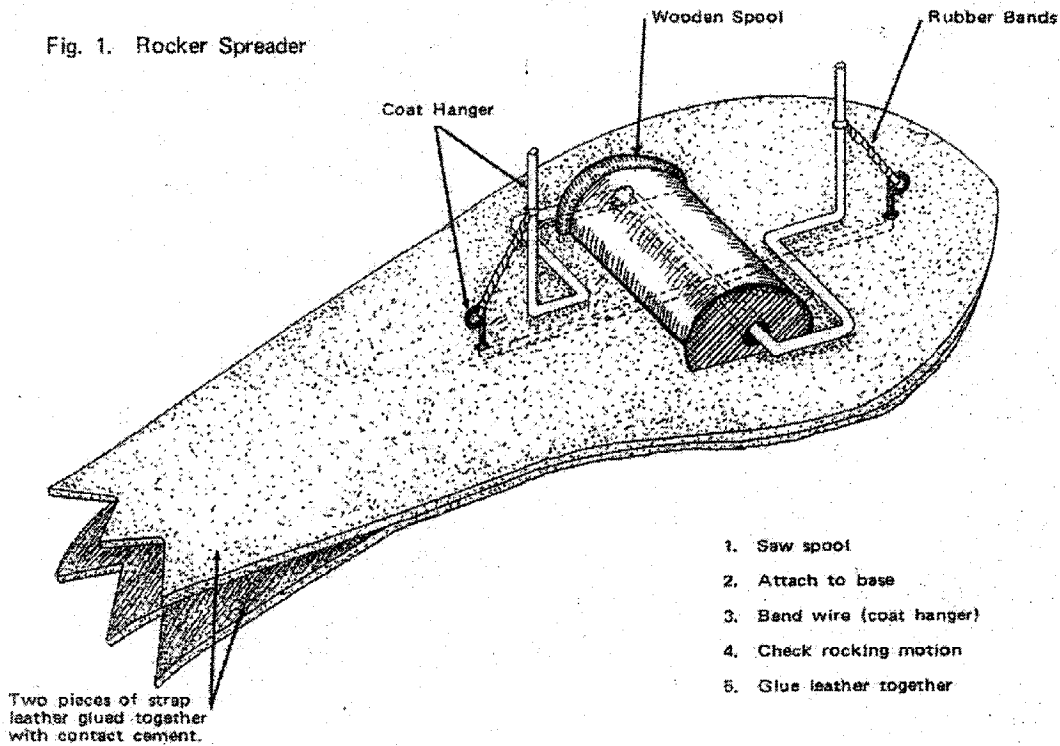
### Headress:

The Pan-Lakota dancer is not dressed until he is wearing his porcupine "headress", the Indian name for hair roach. In some costume styles the "headress" is the only remaining article still worn which represents the original "Omaha" or "Grass Dance." The headress tends to be longer than what was observed in 1968, (Theisz 1968) most of the time extending over the neck bustle center. Deer hair dyed in coordination to the basic costume colors has been observed but white and red are still the most common colors of outer deer hair on the headress.

### Rocker:

The second most noted item of headgear is the rocker spreader. Fig. 1 will go into the construction of a popular northern rocker. The Dancer is striving for his feathers to have a fast teeter totter effect. (Smith and Kroha *AICC* Vol. 6 No. 5) The spreader itself is usually leather or metal and is sometimes beaded to match the rest of the beadwork.

Fig. 1. Rocker Spreader



#### Feathers:

The feathers in the rocker are unique. The dancer prefers three basic styles of rocker feather. All of them are usually the outside or next to outside eagle tail feather. The feathers are usually A, trimmed but left plain and undecorated. B, decorated with bustle matching hackles at the base with the feather tip left natural, or in the fancier styles, C, both the base and the tip decorated. The base as mentioned in B, and the tip decorated with shapes of mystic tape (see Fig. 2) and painted with hot dayglo colors, pink predominately, or left white. This adds the necessary weight too, to get the feather to move easier in a fast rocking motion. These feathers are usually worn with the outside edge to the rear.

#### Headband Drops:

The fourth items of a dancer's headgear is the headband and the headband drops. Commonly the headband is loom beaded matching a loomed harness in design and color, however, excellent outfits are sometimes appliqued beaded. The headband is fairly wide, 1½ in. to 1¾ in., (see Photos Nos. 1, 2, 3, 5) and usually has a beaded medallion in the center or at the temples. Headband drops are very characteristic of Pan-Lakotas and more than one set is commonly worn. I will note some of the many variations of drops here. 1. One of the

most common is the ½ in. wide loom beaded drop of matching beadwork. This extends below the shoulder and usually has hackle and fluffy decorations attached at the ends. In addition to this most popular drop the dancer wears one or two other styles. 2. Strung larger beads extending to the waist and ending with the same hackle bunches. 3. Strung together plastic curtain rings and 4. scarves which are tapered and squeezed together with tape or tubular beads have also been observed. Some dancers also have bead eye loops below their eyes, this can help disguise eyeglasses but most dancers wear wire rims and this fad is catching on and could possibly become part of the outfit. It should be noted that the harness type of headband worn by Grass Dancers was not observed. (see Fig. 3)

#### Hairstyle:

The hairstyles of the dancers are similar to the Oklahoma styles mentioned by Smith and Kroha in the May AICC. Three basic styles being observed. 1. The use of a wig either left long or braided traditionally. 2. The use of a half wig, hair strung on a central cord in the same fashion as porcupine hair is strung. This wiglet is worn with hair loose. 3. The wearing of natural hair in medium length in keeping with current hair fashion. (continued on next page)

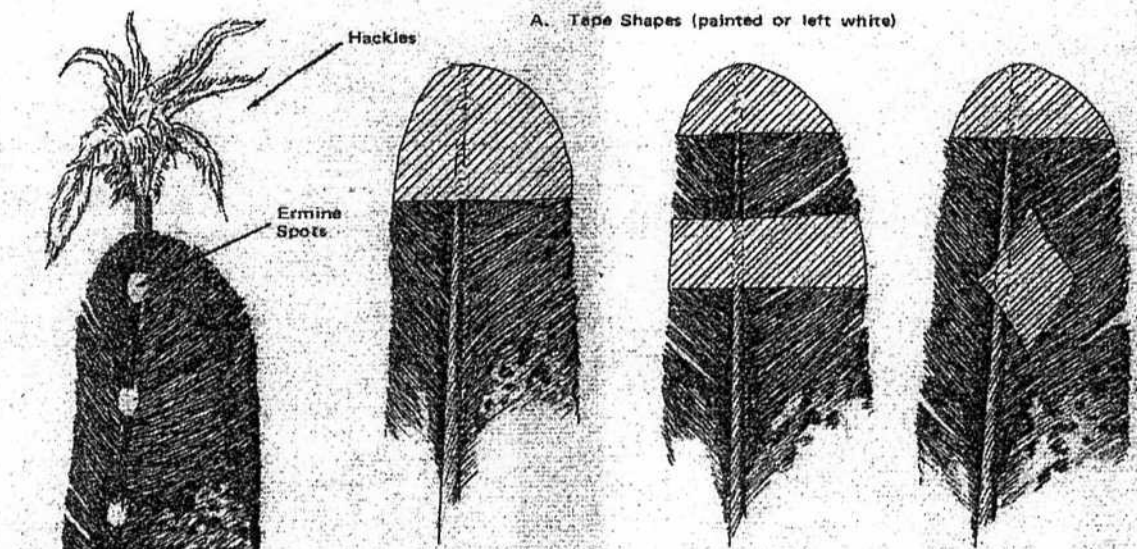


Fig. 2. Rocker Feathers

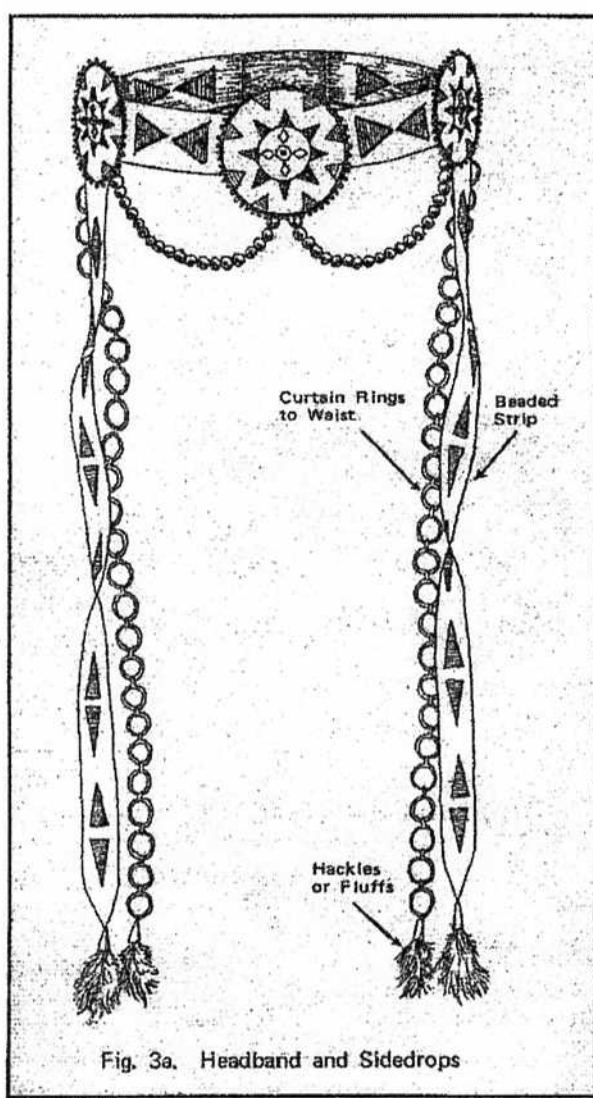


Fig. 3a. Headband and Sidedrops

Face Paint:

One of the most striking Pan-Lakota head decorations is the widespread use of face paint. In contrast when no face paint was observed in 1968, the dancers today are taking to wearing either white or brilliant day-glo colors beneath their eyes and on their cheeks in tapering bands, and in triangular shapes on their chins. The colors observed in use were white, hot pink, red, hot orange, hot green and purple being most common. Sometimes two contrasting colors are used in conjunction with each other.

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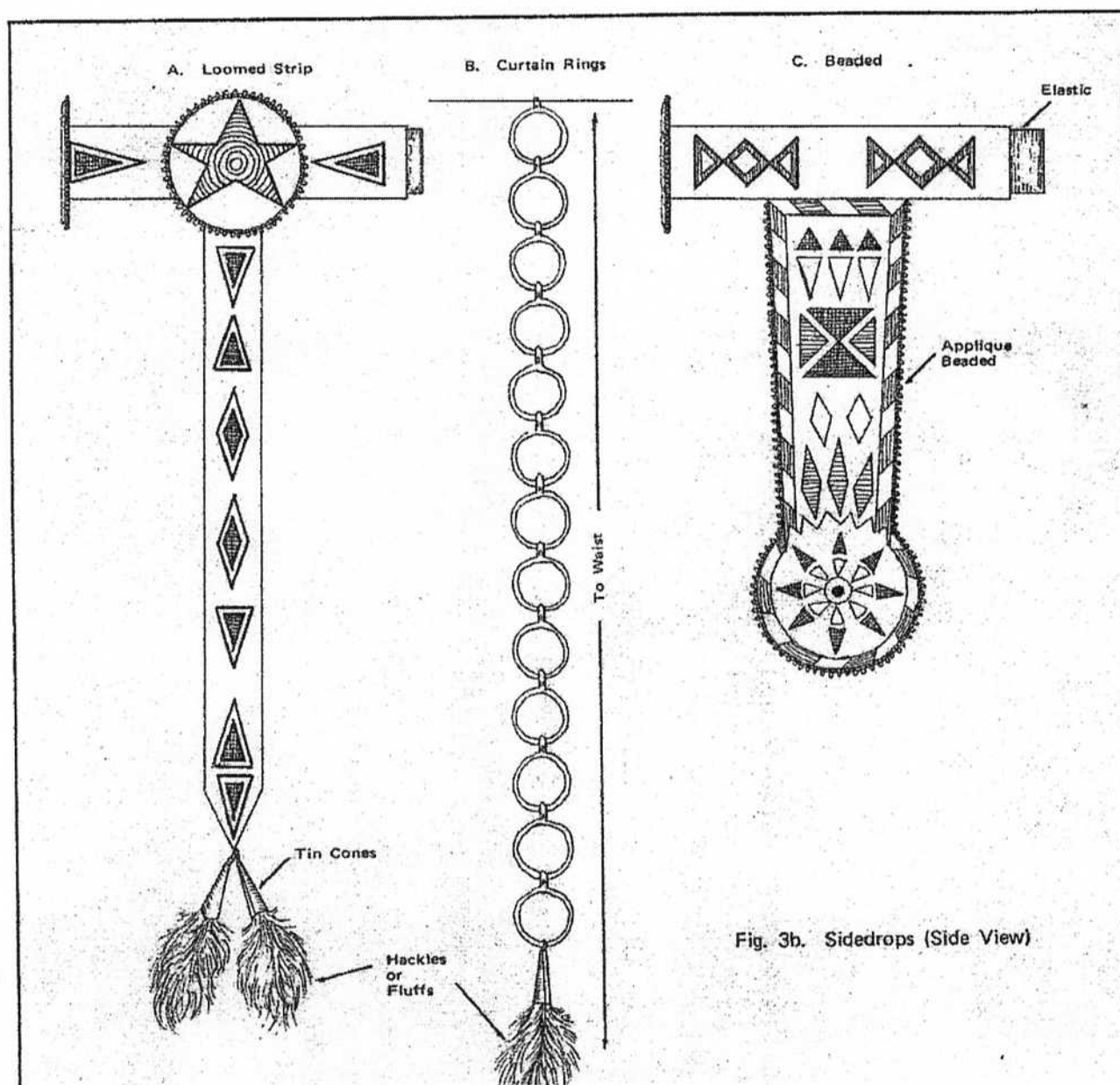
Photo No. 2, Pan-Lakota



Photo No. 3, Pan-Lakota



Photo No. 4, Two Pan-Lakota Dancers



### Scalp Feathers:

The final characteristic of the dancers head and face decoration is the use of scalp feathers. These are primarily the same as covered in *AICC* Vol. 5 No. 5, May 1971. The use of trimmed and decorated natural feathers, much the same as the Oklahoma dancer, is widespread. Another style of scalp feather decoration is the use of clusters or bunches of bustle matching hackles as scalp feathers. (see Photos Nos. 1, 4) These are usually attached to the headress tie string or the headband.

### Neckgear:

The current neckwear of the Pan-Lakota Dancer is the modern choker. The construction of which is covered in *AICC* Vol. 4 No. 2 Feb. 1970. In contrast to the 1968 article, beaded ties were not observed, but dancers do continue to wear their shirt collars open at the neck. Some scarves were observed as neckwear in conjunction with the choker, but these served also as neck bustle ties.

## II CHEST AND TORSO

### Shirt:

In this section I will cover what the Pan-Lakota dancer primarily wears from the neck to the waist. The

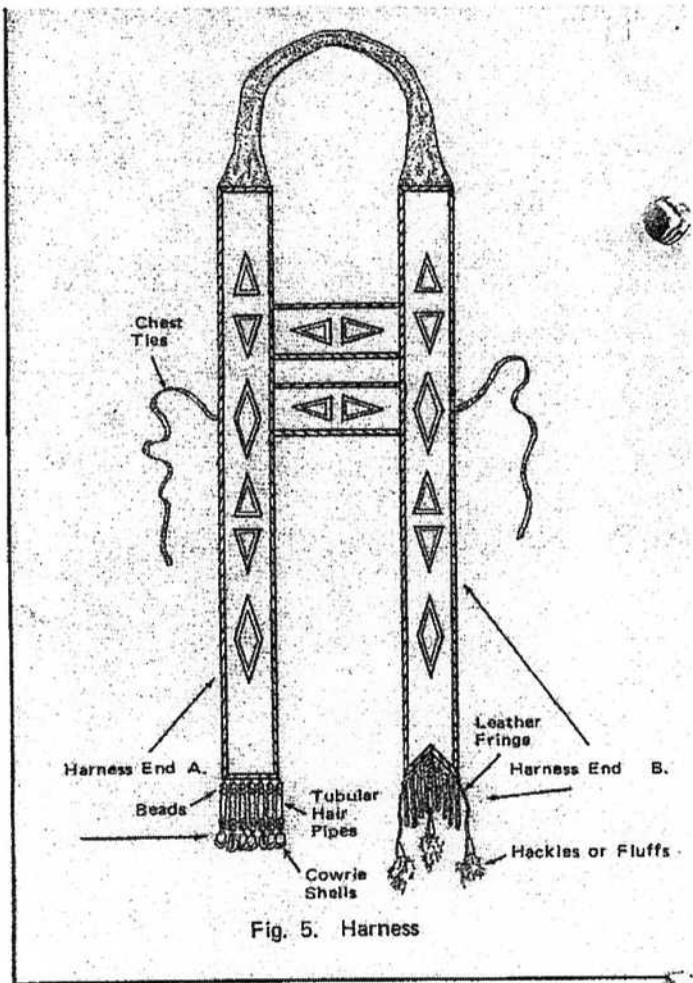
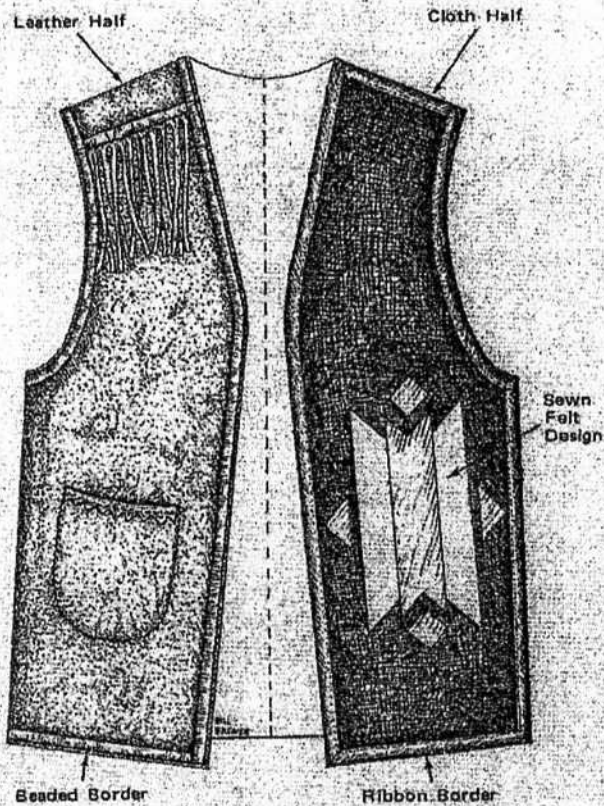


Fig. 5. Harness

most outstanding feature, other than the long Northern harness is the widespread use of "wild, mod" shirts. The Oklahoma ribbon shirt has some prevalence in the North, but the northerner basically has his own style. One hardly ever sees a dancer bare-chested or wearing a T-Shirt. The cooler temperatures at night probably play a large part in this observation. Most dancers wear bold, modern print shirts which highlight their beadwork and bustles. (see Photos Nos. 1, 3, 4, 5) These shirts have large bloused sleeves and the large pointed collars. This author found that *Simplicity Pattern No. 8711* is excellent for these shirts. Colors and prints are up to personal tastes, with florals, paisleys, and prints being most common. Many shirts are devoid of the characteristic Oklahoma ribbon decoration.

### Vest:

In 1968 Theisz observed "that generally a small cloth or buckskin vest is worn by the dancer." In 1972, vests are still worn but one could not say that this was general. Maybe one out of six dancers wears a vest. My observations will be noted here since they are still used. Two styles exist, cloth and leather. The leather vest can be constructed of either Indian tanned or commercial tanned leather. It is short and snug and has leather fringes across the shoulders, on the back and chest. These vests are totally devoid of chainette fringe. Some vests



Photo No. 5, Two Pan-Lakotas,



Photo No. 6, Pan-Lakota from Bismark N.D.



Photo No. 7, Pan-Lakota Bustles, Rear View

have additional decoration of lazy stitched bands along the edges. (see Fig. 4) The cloth vest is usually constructed of wool cloth or felt and is decorated with geometric felt patterns. It should be noted that the dancers wearing felt vests had matching cloth aprons and side drops in coordination with each other and their beadwork. This author observed an occasional brocaded suit vest and one full beaded one.

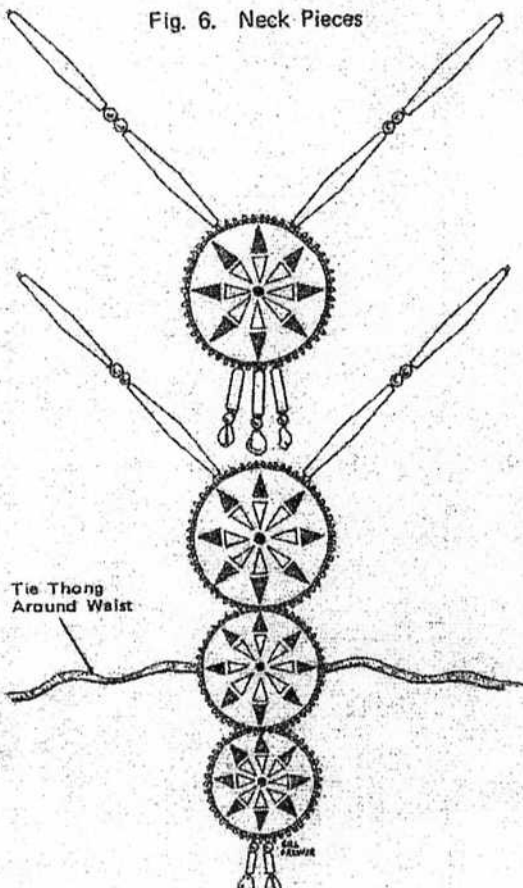
#### Harness and Beadwork:

The most outstanding decoration of the Pan-Lakota dancer is the long beaded harness with matching arm-bands, cuffs, belt, sidedrops and kneebands. (see Photos Nos. 4, 5) Three styles of beadwork were observed for the harness with loomwork generally predominate. Many excellent applied and lazy stitched sets were observed but in far less number. All the designs were geometric, usually Sioux in nature. The harness was held together in most cases with two beaded crosspieces, one at the chest the other at the waist. The ends of the harness at the knees had some form of decoration such as fringe or hackle dangles. (Fig. 5) The harness ends were generally chevron shaped with the aforementioned tassel and dangle decorations. Armbands, belt and kneebands on the better outfits matched in color and design of a Sioux nature. Some of the armbands worn had additional decoration of hot colored scarves or ribbons attached with the use of a beaded medallion. (see Photos Nos. 5, 7) A smaller harness was sometimes worn in conjunction with, and underneath the larger harness, but this was by no means common. The belt sometimes had leather "dangle" decorations attached, the construction of which will be covered in the section on aprons. Many dancers wore a small lightweight breast-plate, and sometimes a large one, but this in no way served as a replacement for the harness. (see Photos Nos. 2, 6)

#### Neckpieces:

One other chest decoration worn by the dancer is the Medallion Necklace. (see Photos Nos. 1, 2) and (Fig. 6). Though not worn by all dancers it can be said that the use of this chestpiece is widespread and definitely characteristic. The necklace is the same as the Oklahoma style in construction and is formed of anywhere from one large medallion to five smaller tapering ones sewn together and worn around the neck with a necklace constructed in the same manner as the modern

Fig. 6. Neck Pieces



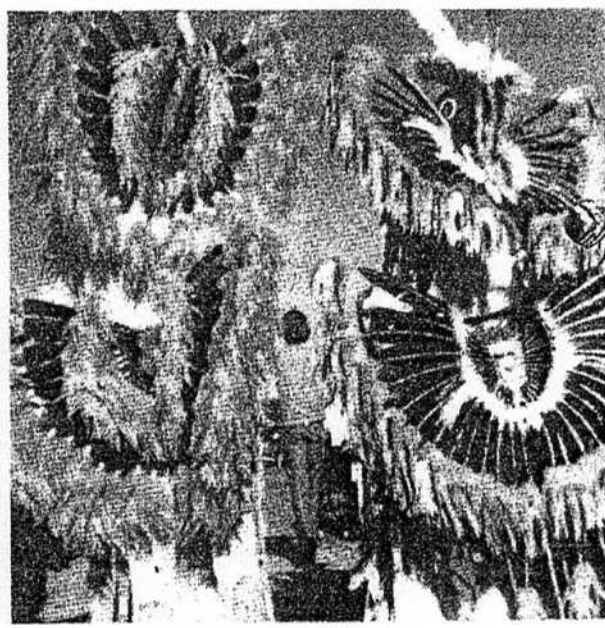
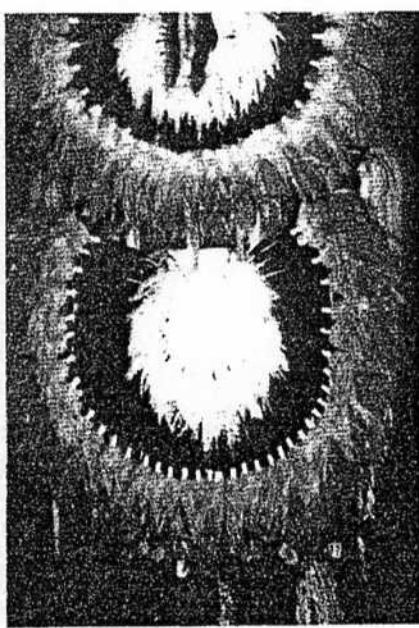
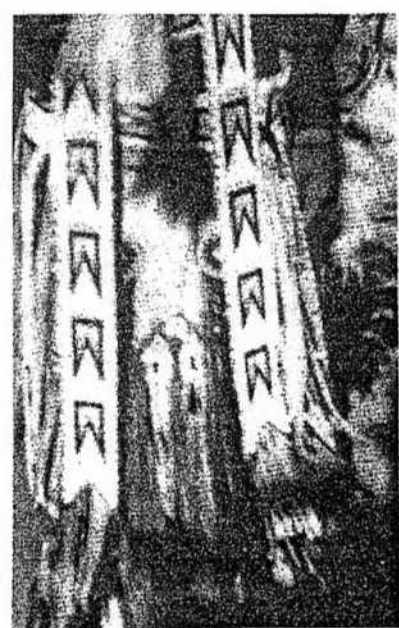


Photo No. 8, Pan-Lakota, Leg View,

Photo No. 9, Pan-Lakota Bustles, Rear View,

Photo No. 10.

choker. The beadwork matches in colors and has been seen extending to the waist of the dancer.

### III LEGS AND FEET

#### Bells:

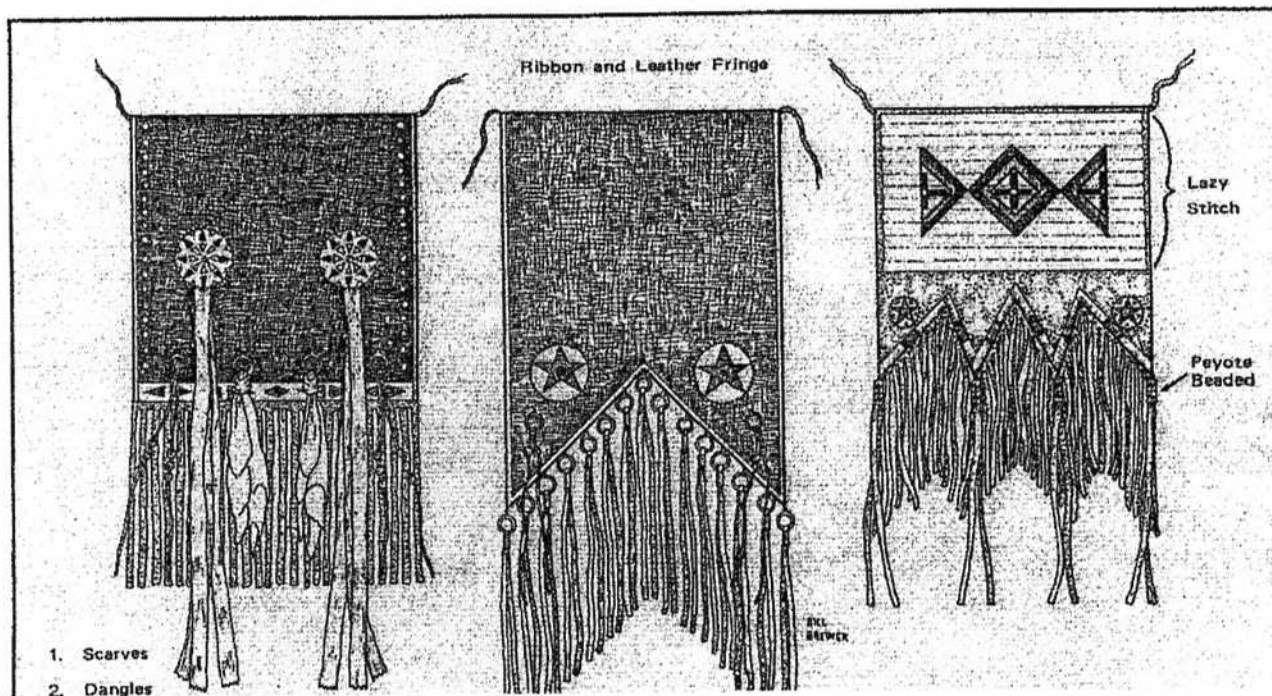
Sheep bells are the predominate bells used by the Pan-Lakota Dancer. In 1968 it was observed that the dancers wore their bells at their ankles. This is not true today. The dancer wears his leather mounted and sheepskin padded bells at the knees either above or below his kneebands. These copper bells are sometimes painted with the same hot colors used in the face and leg paint. Florescent colors are the most popular, and some of the dancers are attaching dangle decorations between their bells on the leather.

#### Kneebands:

Most dancers wear some form of kneebands above or below the bells depending on the dancers preference and comfort. Variations are observed in the kneebands, but generally they are constructed of beaded bands matching their harness mounted on buckskin or leather with eight to ten inch leather fringe hanging over the "furs." (see Photos Nos. 4, 7, 8) In addition to the fringe many sets of kneebands also have scarves, dangles of hackle and fluff and ribbons attached to their kneebands as added decoration.

#### Furs:

The most noticeable leg adornment is the long, from knee to over the ankles, angora anklets that the dancers wear. All dancers wore their "Furs" as they





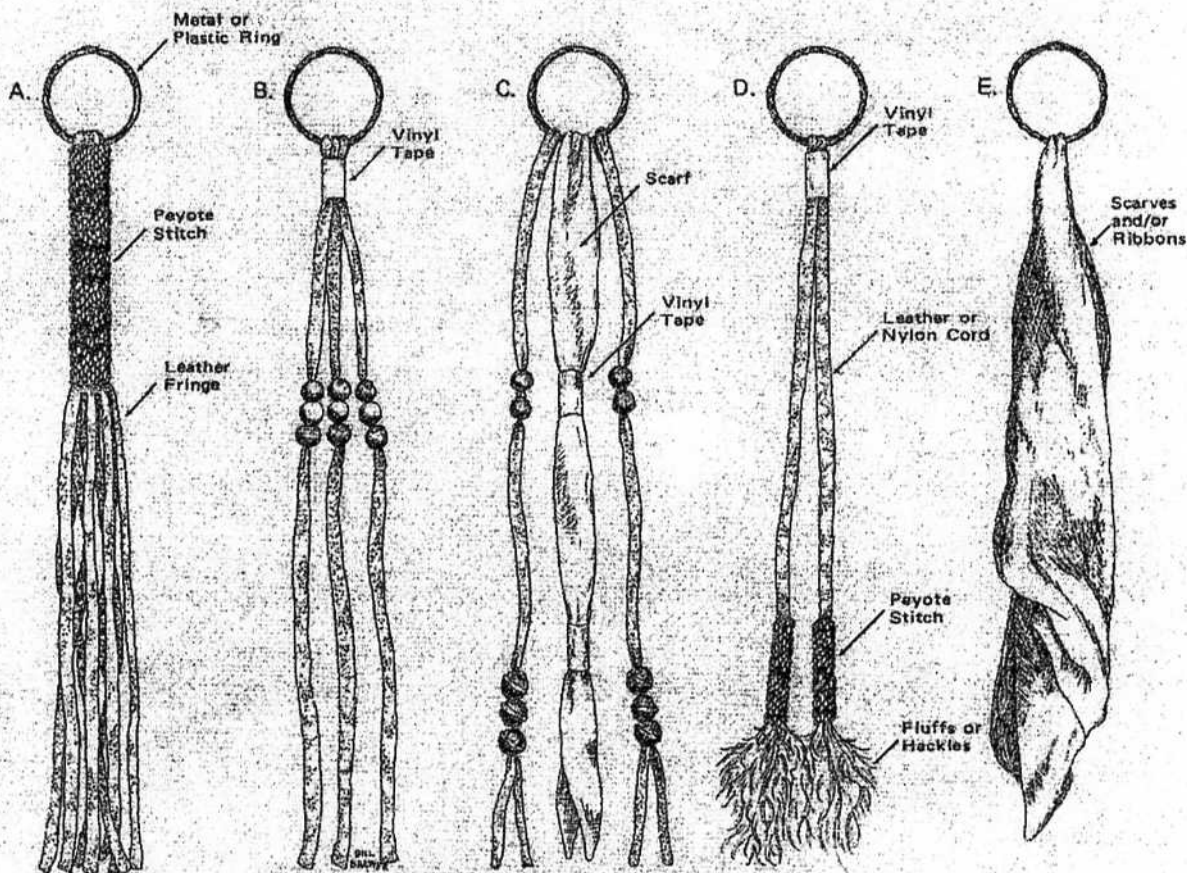


Fig. 8. Dangles

are referred to in the north. These furs extend over the moccasins and the shortened variety observed in Oklahoma has not extended to the North as of this writing.

#### Moccasins:

Most dancers wear moccasins, and these tend to be of the full beaded Sioux style with rawhide soles on the better outfits. However it is interesting to note that when the dance floor is rocky or wet, the dancers change into tennis shoes or deck shoes and one can even notice full beaded pairs of these.

#### Paint:

An interesting observation is the use of paint on the dancers legs. This seems to be a matter of personal preference as painted legs were not common to all dancers. Dancers are primarily using "hot colors" on their thighs usually matching their face paint. Washable poster paints and grease paint are the most common used. (see Photos Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6).

#### Overview:

In an overview of this section concerning the adornment of the lower extremities, one can justifiably state that the Pan-Lakota dancer strives to accentuate

motion in his dancing. In order to do this he uses many costume pieces that will increase the effect of motion from the knees down and will use many items to do this. The use of large furs, lots of fringe, ribbon, scarves and dangles and should be used but care should be taken not to over do this effect.

#### IV APRONS AND SIDEDROPS

##### Aprons:

One of the most interesting aspects and recent changes in Pan-Lakota costume style appears in the aprons. This section will cover the two basic styles of the characteristics of each and their construction. Aprons are constructed of either leather or cloth, with the leather ones most predominate.

The leather aprons are usually constructed of Indian tanned hide (first choice) or commercial hide (second choice). The front aprons are usually fairly heavily decorated. In contrast to 1968 observations the rear aprons are not heavily decorated. The cut of the front apron varies according to the dancers preference. Some designs can be seen in Fig. 7. The most outstanding feature of the front apron is the long leather fringe extending from the bottom edge of the apron to below

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the knee. No fringe was observed on the apron sides. (see Photos Nos. 2, 4, 8) In addition to the fringe, scarves and or ribbons are attached with the use of metal or plastic curtain rings and various dangles and medallions are also attached. Most aprons have either loom beaded or lazy stitched beaded borders and some fine aprons observed had full lazy stitched beaded fronts. (see Photos Nos. 5, 7). Even though beadwork on the aprons is beautiful and adds to the outfit, it should be noted that it is not mandatory. In construction of their aprons, dancers will use natural buckskin, yellow ochre, or natural tanned colored leather with contrasting dark brown leather dangles attached to rings. (see Fig. 7 and Photos). The rear leather aprons were not observed having fringe but some were decorated with scarves and dangles. These rear aprons are generally left plain, possibly due to the fact that they are hidden by, and would interfere with the bustles. The fancy ribbon rear apron characteristic of the Northern Grass Dancer was not observed.

The second type of apron is usually constructed out of velveteen, felt, or wool cloth. These aprons are not as highly decorated as the leather variety. When beadwork was on the cloth apron it was usually in the form of appliqued floral patterns or medallions. The common decoration was a ribbon border and leather fringe attached to the bottom edge. Dangles were also added. Several cloth aprons observed had felt geometric patterns sewn on matching the patterns on their vests and sidedrops. Chainette fringe was infrequently noticed on cloth aprons, but the ribbon clouts mentioned by Theisz in 1968 were not observed.

#### Sidedrops:

All the dancers had some form of sidedrops or tabs as they are sometimes referred to. Most of these were in the form of beaded strips matching the rest of their beadwork in design and method used. These sidedrops come in various forms but the basic types were in the form of one wide rectangular piece extending to the knees, pennant shaped, or tie shaped, or two narrow strips. If beadwork was not present then the dancers wore some form of leather or cloth in the same shape as the beaded ones. The sidedrops are also constructed of leather, felt, or velveteen. They are decorated with fringe, dangles, beaded medallions or felt designs if the sidedrop is cloth. Occasionally a dancer could be seen wearing both a narrow and wide set of beaded sidedrops.

#### Dangles:

For lack of a better name the following outfit decorations will be referred to as "dangles." These dangles are in wide use on the outfit and are basically constructed from plastic or metal curtain rings, leather strips, various size beads, and scarves. The most common

form is to take a metal or plastic curtain ring and attach three or four thin strips (4/16 to 1/4 in. wide) of contrasting leather such as dark brown or yellow ochre or natural to the ring. Then the strips are decorated with large Crow, Pony, or tile beads. Ribbons can be added to the rings and the top two to three inches of these strips can be covered with wrap or gourd stitched beadwork. These dangles are attached primarily to the aprons, kneebands, sidedrops and belt. Variations can be made by substituting beaded medallions for the rings or adding ribbons, and, or hot colored scarves, tapered with the use of mystic or vinyl tape or tubular beads. (see Fig. 8 and all Photos)

## V BUSTLES AND TRAILERS

#### Bustles:

As the "new look" in Oklahoma is characterized by the neck and back bustles, so it is true with the Pan-Lakota Dancer. These dancers are adopting the "wild, hot colored" hackle bustles of the South. The construction of these bustles is covered in *AICC* Sept. 1970 issue with updates covered in *AICC* May 1972 issue. Dancers can be seen with one of two styles of bustles currently in vogue. A, the hackle bustle and B, decorated eagle feather bustles.

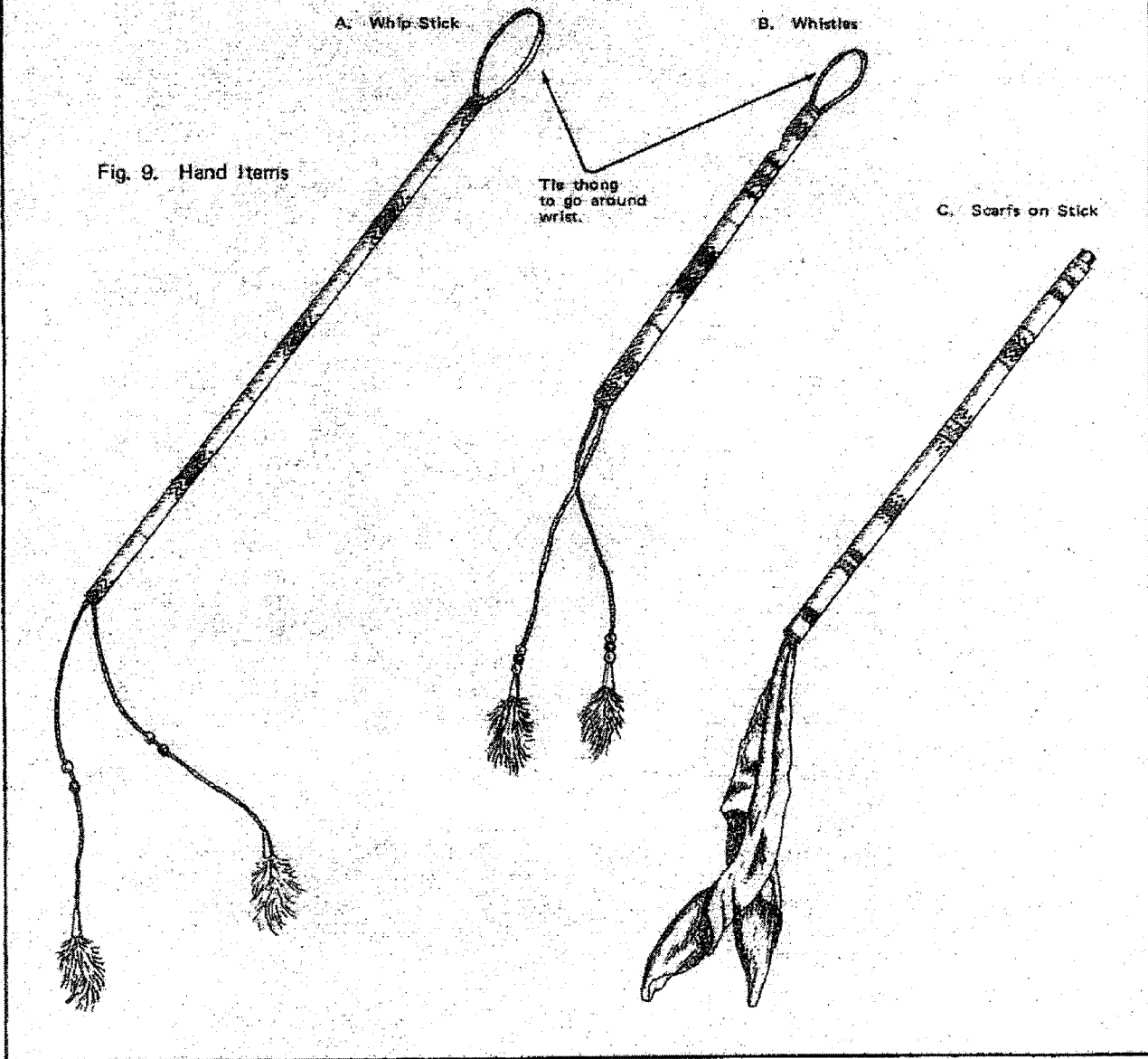
The construction and style of the hackle bustle is essentially identical to the Oklahoma version. It should be noted that hardly any fluffies were used in the construction of these bustles. The long "Hot" seven to eight inch saddle hackles were predominate. Since eagle feathers are scarce, but still preferred, the feather bases used were white or black trimmed turkey wing spikes.

An interesting deviation from the Oklahoma style can be seen in the mounting of the Pan-Lakota neck bustle. This particular method could be attributed to the northern dancers love of head and shoulder movement. The dancers, in mounting their neck bustles to the base eliminated three point fixation and the stabilizing beaded medallion. With the elimination of the center medallion the bustles had much freer movement seeming to float with the dancers movement. Dancers could be observed before a contest checking the movement of their neck bustles for freedom. When these dancers danced slow they would sway and rock their shoulders giving the bustles a slow flapping, floating, shimmering effect that is characteristically Northern. (see Photos Nos. 10, 9, 7, 4, 5. Note absence of the medallion.)

#### Eagle Bustles:

The eagle feather bustles were basically the same in construction, however less hackles were used in order that the feathers are not hidden by hackles. And in the case of eagle bustles the center medallion of the neck bustle was left in place.

Fig. 9. Hand Items



#### Trailers:

As in the aprons and sidedrops, dancers incorporate either cloth or leather in the construction of their bustle trailers. The cloth trailers coordinate with the bustles in color combinations and are constructed with felt, flannel, or wool broadcloth. They are decorated with medallions, dangles or feather and or hackle drops. Leather trailers are usually worn in conjunction with leather aprons and are decorated in much the same way as the aprons or cloth trailers with the addition of fringe at the bottom edge.

### VI HAND ITEMS

#### Whip Sticks:

The Pan-Lakota Dancer's costume is incomplete without an object in each hand to dance with. There

are about five different items these dancers prefer. The first in preference, is the dancers "whip stick." (see Fig 9) This is usually a twelve to fourteen inch tapered fiberglass rod, commonly cut from a fishing-pole, covered with leather, and sometimes wrapped or gourd stitched. The narrow end has ribbons or hackle dangles, or fluffs extending loosely from it, much in the same manner as a riding quirt, hence the name whip stick. The stick is held in the dancers' hand and has a thong around the wrist to keep the dancer from losing it when he whips it rapidly back and forth while dancing or uses the stick to accentuate a fancy "stop."

#### Whistles:

Dancers also like to dance with a whistle. These are usually metal or wood ones about eight to twelve

(continued on page 19)

## INDIAN PHOTOGRAPH CALENDAR AVAILABLE

Harold Moore of St. Francis Mission tells us that he has a calendar available which includes old Indian photos, Indian prayers and historical events listed on each month's calendar. And you can't beat the price - it's free! Request it as follows: "Little Sioux", St. Francis Mission, St. Francis, SD 57572. Any donations that you care to make to help defray the cost of printing and mailing the calendar will be most welcome.

## WOUNDED KNEE: THEN AND NOW

This exhibit went on view at the Museum of the American Indian (New York City) on March 11. The exhibit of approximately 25 photographs is presented in response to current events at Wounded Knee, S.D., to illustrate the historical connection with the last major armed battle between Indians and whites in 1890 at that site and the continuing Indian frustration in America. Fifteen photographs taken in 1890 at Wounded Knee are from the archives of the museum; ten were taken in 1973 at the same location. The exhibit will run through April 30.

## UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN WANTS AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

The University of Michigan is actively looking for American Indian students. The University has hired a Native American Admissions Counselor, an Academic Counselor, and a Native American Advocate to support this recruitment program. American Indian applicants receive special consideration. Minority students who are residents of Michigan are eligible for financial aid. Both out-of-state and in-state American Indians are also eligible to participate in the University's American Indian Scholarship Fund.

Some of the projects that American Indian students are currently working on include a Native American Studies program, American Indian student lounge and cultural living unit, a work-study program, a newsletter "The Native American Advocate" and an American Indian Awareness Conference.

## CHEROKEES FORMING ASSOCIATION

A new tribe is forming - Pacific West Cherokee Association. If interested, write PWC Council of Seven, Box 9267, Sacramento, Ca 95816.

## INDIAN INMATES NEED LIBRARY

The Indian inmates at the Sierra Conservation Center are trying to start a library with books on Indian culture, history and literature. If you have something to contribute, contact Harry Wilder, 428 Paradise Rd., Modesto, Ca 95351.

inches in length. They are decorated with paint, colored tape, or in much the same way as the whip stick. The dancers will sometimes substitute the whistle for the second whip stick. Dancers also sometimes have tin whistles or eagle bone whistles hanging around their necks.

## Other Items:

Dancers are also fond of flat and loose fans, or small beaded bags which also have the practical purpose of holding the dancer's valuables. Scarves are sometimes carried in the dancers hands in addition to the aforementioned items. It should be noted that this author did not notice any hoops or mirror boards popular with the Northern Grass Dancer.

## FINAL COMMENTS

In this article on the current Fancy Sioux Costume, referred to as Pan-Lakota, some mention should be made of the dance style. Since it is impossible to put into words what one has to observe in action, I will just mention some of the more outstanding characteristics of style. The dancers have an overall shaggy appearance which gives the style of dancing an emphasis on motion. The bustles and fringe emphasize a swaying willowy motion. A dancer flows with a loose-hipped movement, and the shoulders are frequently shifted and gently rocked to increase the neck bustle movement. The slow dance steps are larger than normal, and when a "fast and fancy" song is struck up there is an explosion of motion and color on the dance floor. Emphasis is on foot and body movement and many dancers, dance "low and fancy" with spins and flourishes and fast "Crow Hop" if the song calls for it.

In closing, let me stress again, that the serious student should use this information as a guide to be used in conjunction with actual observation. This article is not intended to be an infallible source of information, but only a detailed introduction to one of the greatest ways of "dancing Indian."

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