

TRADITIONAL DANCE BUSTLES

Written & Photographed
by C. Scott Evans

The "Traditional" dance and dress style has now spread from the north to all areas of the country. The pan-Indian "Traditional" or "Northern Traditional" outfit is readily recognized by the basic element of the dance bustle. The "U" shape or "Swing" bustle has become the standard traditional bustle at Pow Wows all across America.

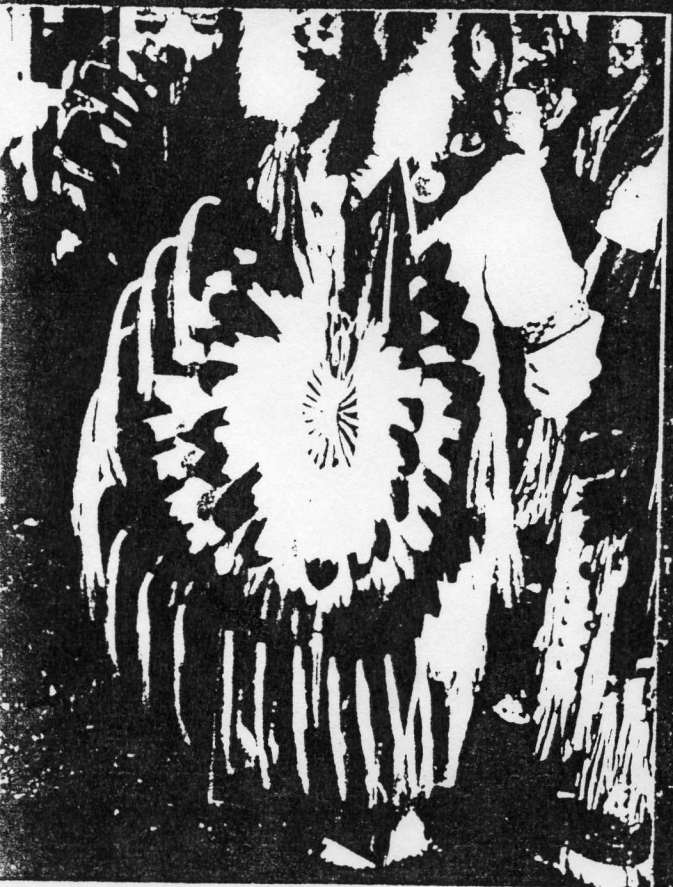
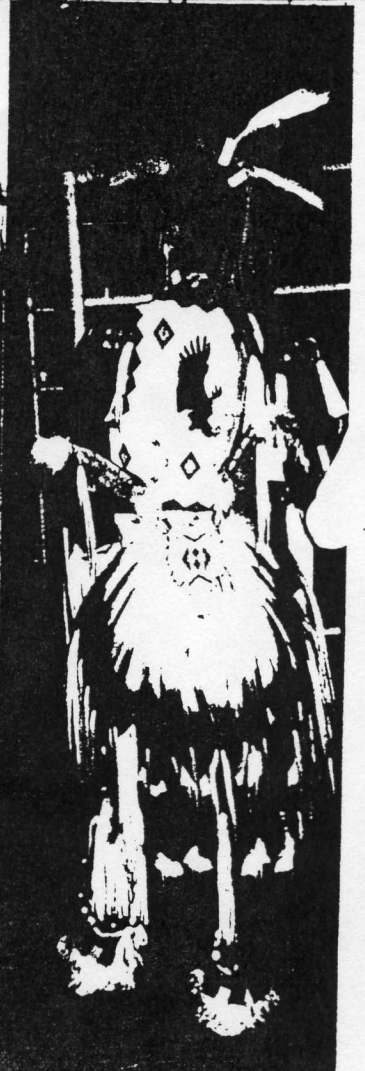
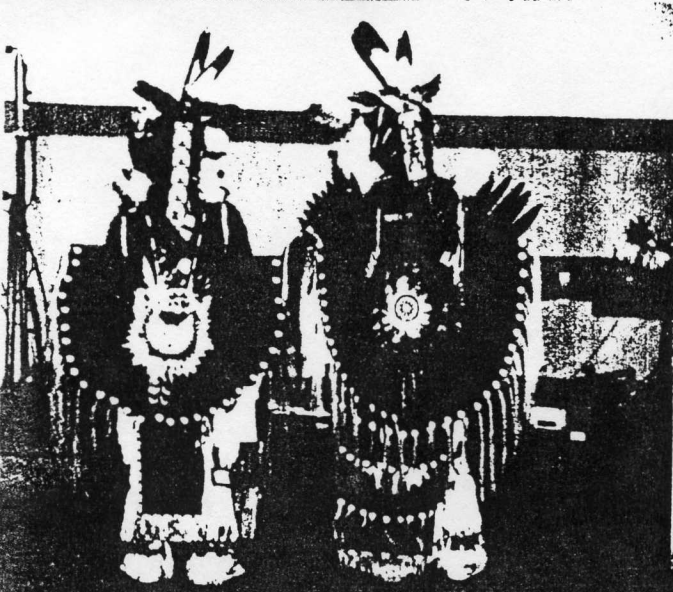
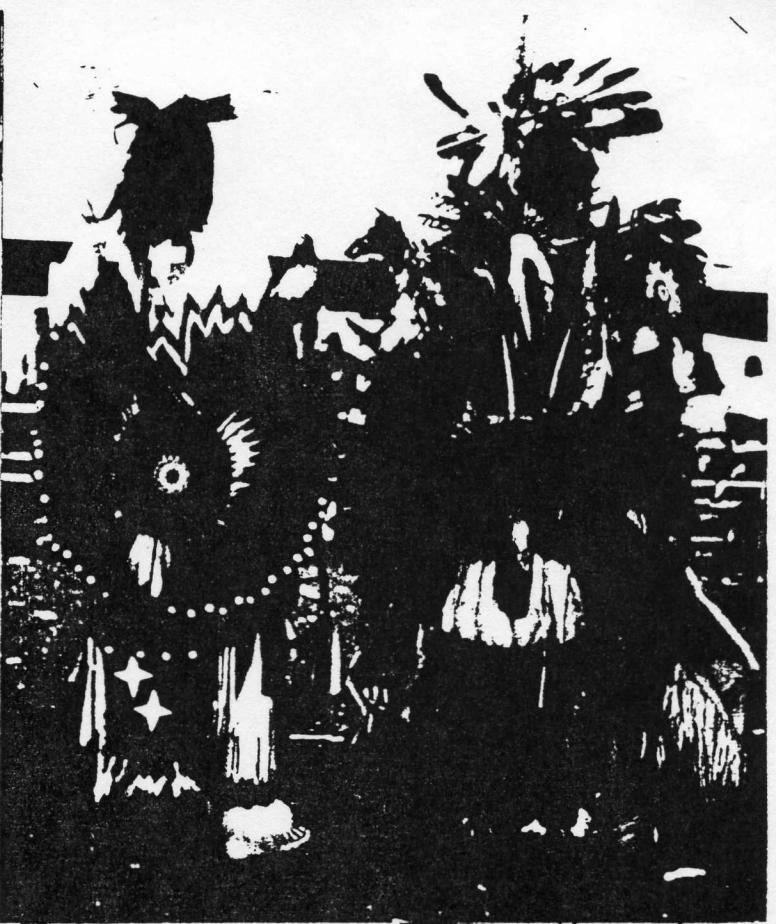
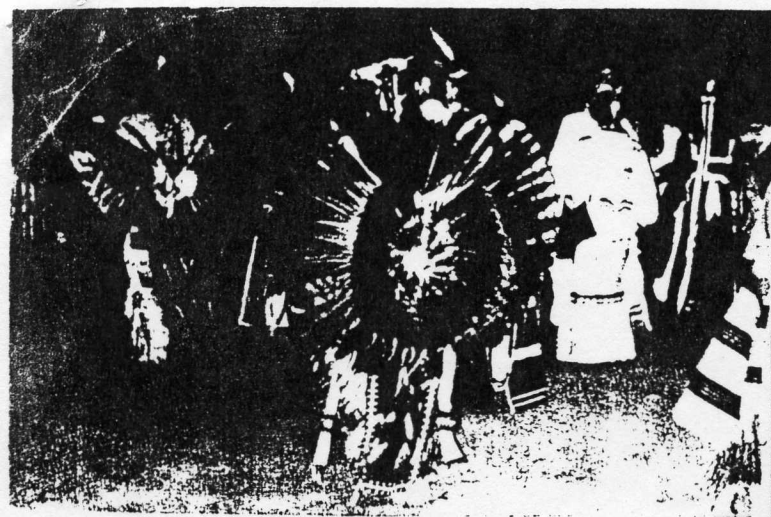
The materials used in the traditional bustle construction vary a great deal from dancer to dancer. Some dancers have renewed the bustle symbolism of their forefathers. However, many dancers construct their bustles with readily available materials to enable them to dance traditional. Regardless, the bustle gives the dancer a sense of traditional ways and ideals, yet allows him to express individuality.

Typically, the "U" shaped bustle consists of two spikes or uprights, a primary row of feathers (the "U"), and a bustle trailer or trailers. All three principal parts are attached to a rawhide, fiberglass or wood base.

The feathers for the "U" are mostly wing and tail feathers, and excellent examples of brown or black turkey spike traditional bustles can be seen. Typically, the "U" feathers are left in their natural state and decorations added. Feather tips can be left undecorated, or leather spots (nickle or dime size), horsehair, and/or small white fluffs can be attached. The two spikes are typically spike feathers or they can be fur wrapped shafts. The spikes are decorated with feather clusters, plumes, ribbon, bells, horsehair, and/or sweetgrass braids.

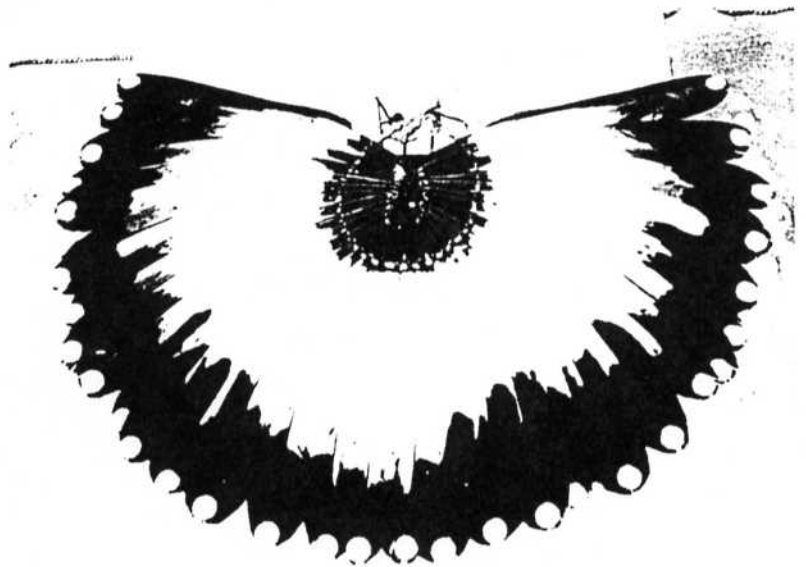
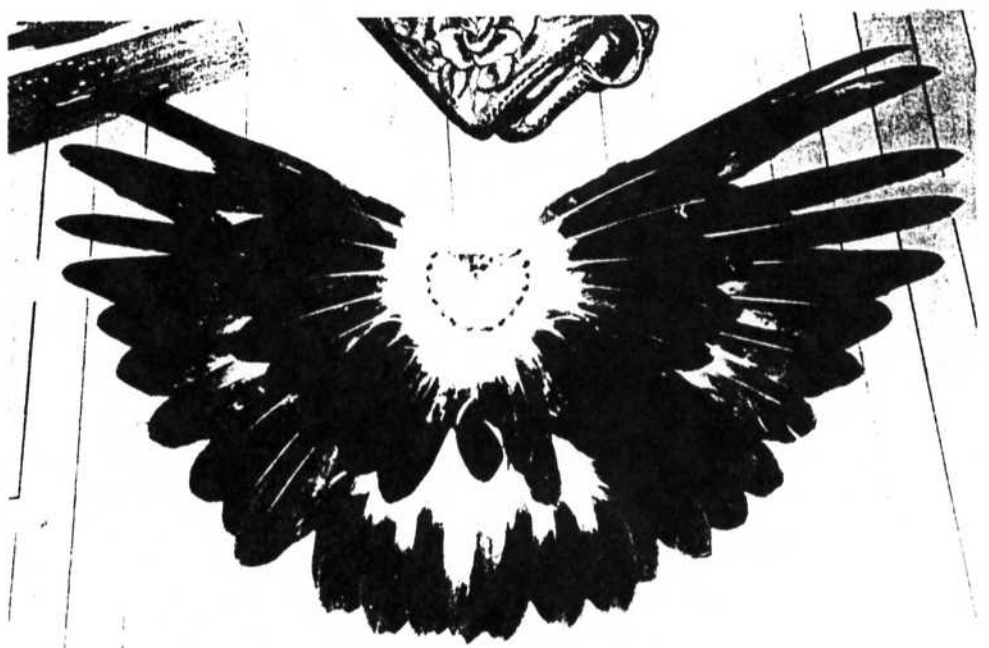
PHOTOS - Opposite page

(top left) Double bustle. Large wing feathers with tail feather center bustle. Worn by Tony Shawnee, ABC Powwow 1986. *(top right)* Cricket Shields (left) and Pete Moore at Crow Fair 1985. Note the variations in trailer decorations as well as the variety of rosette or center decorations. *(middle left)* C. Scott Evans (left) and John Butler at 1986 Houston Inter-tribal. *(bottom left)* Double "U" tail feather bustle; Crow Fair 1985. *(lower center)* Single "U" bustle with double trailers. *(lower right)* Terry Larvie wears a bustle whose construction is the same but without the noticeable "U". Trailers are of selvedge trade cloth.



(right) Double "U" wing feather bustle without a trailer.

(below) A "life like" wing feather bustle with a single, fully decorated trailer of tail feathers. The feather spikes are quilled and topped with fluffs and ribbon hangings.



A simple "U" bustle. Note the shoestring lacing at the mid-base of the feathers.

Bustle trailers are often made of red and blue tradecloth, felt, wool or even ribbonwork. Some traditional dancers have no "drops" or trailers. These bustles will probably some day receive drops. Decorations for the trailers vary from fringe & ribbon edges to beaded medallions. Wing feathers are often attached in two or three rows for trailer decorations.

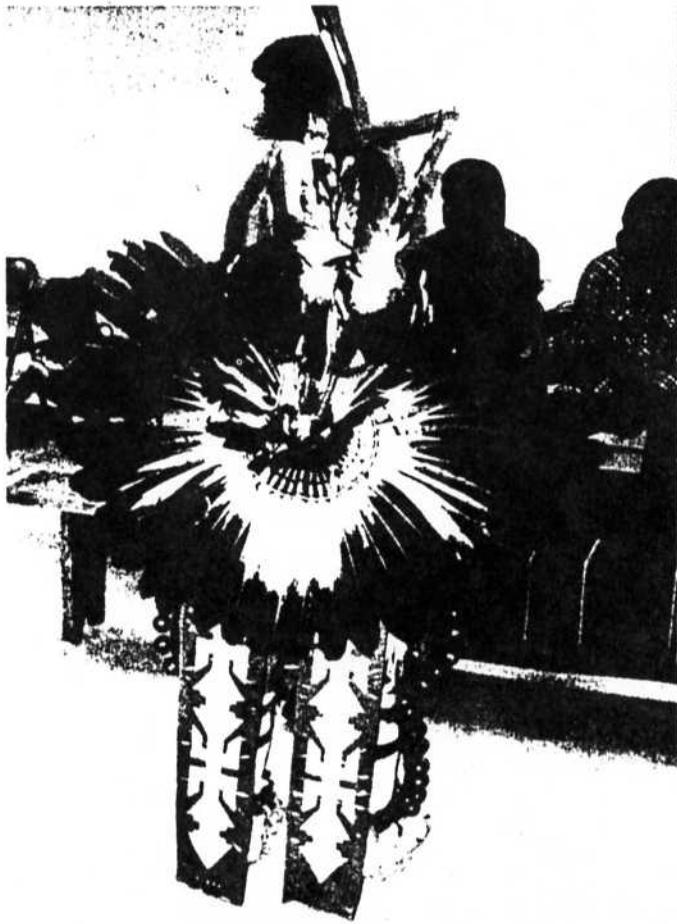
Traditional bustle centers are typically decorated with quill or beaded medallions, beaded pieces of all descriptions, single feathers, silver conchos, ribbons or even small rows of feathers. The center of the "U" is sometimes left plain revealing the base material. "Double Bustles" or

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"Double "U"s" are sometimes worn and occasionally a dancer might have a row or two of "Rosette" feathers in the center of the bustle. The bustle is tied to the body by anything from shoestrings (the most typical), to Hudson Bay sashes.

The major difference between modern traditional bustles and fancy bustles is the presence of the additional wire (coathangers) in the bustle base for the spikes. The spike wire sticks up through the base and the spike feather ends are cut off to enable sliding of the feather onto the wire. (The coat-hanger wire may be wrapped with tape to keep the spikes from turning and to get a snug fit.)

Joe Blalock of Oklahoma wears a wing bustle with fur decorated spikes and a ribbonwork double trailer.



Another hint in traditional bustle construction is to use Elmer's Glue in feather tip decoration. Elmers does not dry too brittle and can be removed from the feathers.

Traditional bustles, like fancy dance bustles, are made to break-down for easy transportation and storage. The spikes pull off, the "U" collapses, and the trailers fold up for quick dis-assembly.

The construction materials of modern traditional dance bustles are typically a matter of preference and ideas. Over the years Whispering Wind Magazine has presented many fine

A simple "U" bustle with double trailers of selvedge edge trade cloth.



A pause between songs to discuss bustles at the 1986 Denver Powwow. Note the loop decoration hanging from the bustle spikes on the dancer on the left.

photographic examples of modern traditional bustles in Pow Wow reports. Tasteful selection of traditional bustle construction materials is a must and should not be taken lightly. The men who dance in this manner are upholding American Indian heritage and tradition.

REFERENCES

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A single "U" shared bustle constructed by Scott Evans from materials listed in this article. Photo is courtesy of Crazy Crow Trading Post.

CONSTRUCTING A TRADITIONAL DANCE BUSTLE

by Rex Reddick