

## RECORDS MADE OF ANCIENT CEREMONIES OF THE ARIKARA INDIANS

In July, 1924, the Museum made records of some ancient ritualistic ceremonies of the Arikara, a tribe, Caddoan, resident on the upper Missouri River in North Dakota. The Caddoan tribes, of which the Arikara are the most northerly, came originally, many centuries ago, from the Southwest, bringing with them into the central plains many of the features of the culture of their ancient habitat. From ancient time their principle occupation, and all their religious rituals center about the cultivation of corn, which their people have carried with them even into the inhospitable climate of the upper Missouri to which their migration at last brought them.

The purpose of the Museum expedition was to make a scientific record of some of the ancient ceremonies of the Arikara before it shall be quite too late, in order to preserve some knowledge of what their material and intellectual culture was. In old times the various seasonal activities of the cycle of the year was signalized by ceremonial rituals of worship; but in later times, since the Government has reduced the various tribes from the status of free peoples to that of subject peoples, their free activities have been suppressed and their seasonal religious ceremonies forbidden.

The purpose of these ceremonies was to give dramatic presentation of the mysteries of Divine Providence, and to give public expression of thanks to Deity for past blessings, to pray for continuance of these blessings, and to put the participants into full accord with the scheme of Providence in Nature.

The ceremonies recorded by the Museum include the so-called "Sage dance," the Holy Cedar Tree Ceremony, the Mother Corn Ceremony, and the outdoor part of the *Pira-škani* ceremony, which corresponds to the *Hako* of the Pawnee and the *Wawañ* of the Omaha.

A picture was also made of the Arikara form of the game of chance called the "hand game".

The high prairie on the north side of the Missouri twelve miles east of Elbowoods, North Dakota.

A portion of the "Little Bad Lands", the Missouri River, and the rolling plains.

Panorama of the vicinity of the Sacred Lodge and the temporary camp where the ceremonies were conducted;

The Missouri River, the Sacred Lodge, the prairie and the old site a former earth-covered lodge where ceremonies were held fifty years ago.

View of the Sacred Lodge.

Site of the old Sacred Lodge.

Drums used in ceremonies, entrance to Sacred Lodge, and bear skins on the roof.

Temporary camp for the duration of the ceremonies.

Herald on the roof calling out an announcement.

Performance of the "Sage Dance" on the site of the old Sacred Lodge.

[A] The “Sage Dance” is so called because of the use of wild sage (*Artemisia gnaphaloides*) as a symbolic cleansing agent, as hyssop was used in ancient Hebrew ceremonies. The “Sage Dance” is a preliminary ceremony necessary to precede all other public ceremonies as a means of invoking the attention and favor of the Higher Powers, and as a symbolic purification of the people.

[B] In the performance of all public ceremonies in the Sacred Lodge the several mystical fraternities are seated in their respective segments of the lodge circle and distinguished by symbolic painting of the body and decked with regalia proper to their several animal patrons. The Sacred Bundles were hung on the wall above the altar. On the ground before the altar in the celebration of the “Sage Dance” lay an entire untanned, dried ox hide, rolled into a cylinder, which served as a drum on which the singers beat time with willow wands. There was also placed before the altar a pile of wild sage.

[C] Fire is lighted in the fireplace at the center of the lodge. Ceremonial pipe is lighted at the fireplace and smoke is offered to the Higher Powers, then is passed sunwise to all in the circle in turn.

[D] The Master of Ceremonies distributes the wild sage to the leaders of the mystic fraternities. Each leader then makes smoke-offerings and incenses, with pipe smoke, his bundle of wild sage and then divides it, a wisp to each member of his fraternity.

[E] The Herald now announces permission to the populace to assist in the ceremony. At once, all rush in and take their places to witness the ceremonies.

[F] The singers at the altar sing an invocation to the elements, beating time on the roll of hide. The dancers crouch in front of the altar waving the *Artemisia* in time with the singing.

[G] The dancers sing and dance in honor of fire in a close circle about the fireplace.

[H] Spectators are dismissed and leave from the lodge.

[I] The members of the mystic fraternities brush themselves with their wisps of *Artemisia*, which then are collected and placed in a heap again before the altar.

[J] Closing ceremony of smoke offering.

[K] The Master of Ceremonies appoints runners to take up the *Artemisia* and run with it to the river, cast it into the water, and then all bathe in the stream for purification. The community is now properly

prepared to carry on the Holy Cedar Tree and Mother Corn Ceremonies to take place on the following days.

## HOLY CEDAR TREE CEREMONY

[A] The Cedar Tree Ceremony occurs on the day after the “Sage Dance.” The important objects of this ceremony are the Cedar Tree, the symbol of eternal life, and the Standing Rock, the symbol of perpetuity. In the ceremonies connected with the Cedar Tree, pipe smoke offerings are made to the Tree and the Stone, they are decked and painted, and set standing before the entrance of the Sacred Lodge. The idea is that they shall be made partakers with the people in their glad celebration of thanksgiving for the year’s harvest.

[B] Going to consecrate and carry in the Holy Cedar Tree, which has been cut in the Bad Lands and brought to a convenient place near the village, on the prairie. The Missouri River is seen in the background.

[C] The pipe is lighted and smoke is offered to the Four Quarters, to the Chief Above, and to Mother Earth; then the priest and delegates smoke in communion with the Holy Tree. Note the gesture of each smoker blessing himself from the pipe.

[D] The Tree is set up and addressed in song:

We are here.  
We have come for thee.  
We have come to ask a favor of thee.  
We stand at thy feet.

Again the tree is addressed:

Thou shalt be called Tika Waruhti.  
The Creator made thee to have a place in the universe.  
The Cedar is a tree of long life.  
The Creator endowed thee with long-lasting life.

When the tree was about to be taken up and carried to the Sacred Lodge, it was addressed with the words:

Now is the time we shall take thee up.  
We shall have joy today, and thou art joined with us.  
Thou shalt partake of our joy.

[A] The priest makes the final smoke offerings before the Tree. Note the long shadows of evening.

[B] The Tree is now to stand here through the rest of the summer and through the winter, a participant with the people in all their community life. The next spring, as soon as the ice has gone from the Missouri,

the people come together and attach to the branches of the Tree the worn-out moccasins of their children. Then the Tree is brought in procession to the river and placed in the current to be carried past all the old Arikara village sites occupied successively by the tribe during their migration. The message carried by the Tree to all those ghostly village sites is that the tribe still carries on, still is faithful to the ancient rites, and still has hope for the future as testified by the moccasins worn out by the little feet of the coming generation.

- [A] Painting the delegates to carry the Tree. Each is blessed after painting.
- [B] The Tree is carried in procession to the Sacred Lodge.
- [C] The Tree is met by members of the mystic fraternities, dressed in distinctive fraternity regalia. Gifts of horses and goods are brought to the Tree by the populace, who are each blessed by the priest.
- [D] The members of the various mystic fraternities issue in turn from the Sacred Lodge and dance before the Tree, playing about in sportive representation of the animal patrons of the respective fraternities.
- [E] The Tree is carried into the Sacred Lodge and laid before the altar to participate with the people in the indoor ceremonies.
- [F] The leader of the Bear Fraternity paints the Sacred Standing Rock. Smoke is offered to it.
- [G] The Holy Cedar Tree is brought out and set up beside the Standing Rock.
- [H] The Tree is vigorously shaken by four men in dramatic representation of the buffeting of the cedar by the elements from the Four Quarters, but which the cedar triumphantly endures.
- [I] The officiating priest, and after him the leaders of the several mystic fraternities, make smoke offerings before the Tree.
- [J] The several fraternities come out in turn from the Lodge and dance before the Tree, then all come *en masse* to take leave of the Tree.
- [K] Wailing before the Tree.

## MOTHER CORN CEREMONY

[A] This is a very important ritual of public thanksgiving for the year's crop. It was celebrated on when someone expressed his desire to do honor to Mother Corn and to provide the meat for the feast in order that a Sacred Bundle might be opened and all the people might rejoice in this public thanksgiving. It was an honor for anyone to give this feast for the public benefit and enjoyment.

[B] Slaughter of the Devoted Animal on the prairie. Carcass placed in position. The priest consecrates the animal for the offering, brushing the carcass on both sides with a wisp of *Artemisia*.

[C] The priest makes the offering of pipe smoke.

[D] The giver of the feast brings the gun to be purified. The priest, with a wisp of *Artemisia*, purifies the gun and then the feast-giver.

[E] The butcher is purified in the same manner.

[F] The hunter is purified. The knife is purified.

[G] The butcher indicates the cutting to be made in removing the hide. Note that the skinning and cutting up of the carcass are different from the method of white people.

[H] The priest, with the feast-giver, hunter, and butcher, kneels at the rear, or west, of the carcass, sings, and prays.

[A] Cutting the meat into portions. First, the portion to be offered to the Heavenly Powers (the tongue, trachea, heart, and lungs in one piece) is removed and laid to the right-hand side at the south of the carcass.

[B] The priest ties up the offering to the Heavenly Powers so that it can be carried, and lays it upon the shoulders of the feast-giver, who carries it to the Sacred Lodge, followed in procession by the priest, the hunter, and the butcher.

[C] View inside the Sacred Lodge, passing round the Lodge sunwise from the entrance, by the south, the west (where the altar is), the north, to the east again at the entrance. The several mystic fraternities are seen seated at their respective stations in the Lodge.

[D] The offering is brought out to a place between the Lodge entrance, the Standing Rock and the Holy Cedar Tree. Sixteen or more boys (sixteen is a prescribes number), each bearing a willow wand to which meat is attached as an offering, to the elements of the universe. The boys run away and set these wands with their offerings in all directions on the open prairie.

[E] The priest and the feast-giver, with the pipe, make the offering to the Heavenly Powers.

[F] A member of the Awahu band takes up the offering to the Heavenly Powers and carries it home. This is a prerequisite of the Awahu band, the twelfth and last band of the Arikara to reach their present location in the course of the tribal migration.