

NOTES TO THE NATION

The Grayhorse District I'n-Lon-Schka starts Thursday. The new Drumkeeper will be paying for the drum at 2:00 PM. They only allow about 30 minutes to take pictures so if you wish to do that you need to be there early. If you live here and participate in the dances that's probably all you need to know. The rest of what I will say is for our out-of-state Osages to whom this may be informational.

The Grayhorse Osages got the dance from the Poncas somewhere around 1884. The other districts, Pawhuska and Hominy, got the dance shortly before that from the Kaws. The name I'n-Lon-Schka means "playground of the oldest son". It is a man's dance but the women dance under the arbor but on the outside of the circle of men. The dancers circle the drum counter-clockwise as is customary for the Hunka Division. This may be reason some people will mistakenly call it a war dance.

The new Drumkeeper at Grayhorse is Joel Wynn, who is son of Kelly and Richard Wynn and the grandson of Shirley Blackbird Howell, also of Skiatook. The drum was passed to Joel last year by Bates Shaw, the previous Drumkeeper. This year Joel will "pay for the drum" with a time honored ceremony of giving gifts to his committee, Bates Shaw and other honored people. .

Paying for the drum happens on Thursday afternoon. It is a colorful event that happens only when a new Drumkeeper comes in. Since it is not held every year and is on a work day, many people have never seen it. Drumkeepers usually keep the drum about 4 years. But it can be less or sometimes much longer- I think one man kept it 17 years or so. One of the things given away will be "wedding coats" together with the full Osage woman's dance clothes. The "wedding coats" derive from a time in the early 1800's when a delegation of Osage leaders went to Washington. While they were there they admired the military coats worn by the U. S. officers. Coats were given to the Osage men as gifts but they were too small for the men so when they came home they gave them to their wives and daughters. So the story goes that one chief's daughter was going to get married and he had her wear one of the coats during the wedding. The name has stuck and this is what the coats are always called now. These are made usually by the families paying for the drum or donated by relatives that have received them previously. The coats are highly decorated with gold braid and embroidery. The variation is endless and can take a great many hours to make.. This includes one finished in the last few days by Julia Neff Mushrush. I got to see it and it is beautiful. It is dark blue with red panels decorated with many types of gold braid. She even made the epaulettes with a clever idea that you will have to see yourself. These coats have two yarns belts (worth \$500 to \$700 each), a broadcloth skirt with ribbonwork, full sets of brooches, moccasins, a woman's blouse, Osage bead necklace and the wide ribbons down the back. They are usually worn by young unmarried women who come into the arbor fully clothed and are lead to someone who is receiving this as a gift. They undress in front of the recipient and fold the clothes and tie them in a bundle. Of course, they also have clothes under all that so you can see why they hurry in the hot summer weather. I understand the Wynn's will give away 9 coats with the woman's clothing included with each one. Also, 40 or more Pendleton blankets and about as many woman's dance shawls.

Picture taking is not allowed under the arbor so if you want pictures you have to get them before they get there. That is one reason that the Drumkeepers procession will start some distance from the arbor.

You can see this is a very expensive process and it takes the help of a large committee (40 to 100 people) and a large helpful family. Each district has it's own committee and their own rules which are nearly the same but not exactly the same. Bruce Cass is the new Pawhuska Drumkeeper. He will be paying for the drum this year also. His family has been working for a year to get ready just as the Wynns have. My sister's son Billy Proctor is the Drumkeeper at Hominy. He paid off two years ago.

They will have a short dance Thursday afternoon after giving away the coats and then dance at 8:00 PM. They will dance in the afternoons and at night on Friday and Saturday and on Sunday they will begin in the afternoon and dance until 8 or 9 PM which will conclude the Grayhorse dance. All the districts will be there represented by 100's of dancers.

There have been some changes over the years. When I was a very young man, I remember you could watch a person dance all the way around the drum. Now you can only watch a person for a short distance before they are obscured by the numerous dancers filling the arbor. *That is a good change.* When I was a kid I heard my grandmother say "you know her, she is the only Osage that looks at people when she dances". I'd never thought about that before- no one ever tells you that you don't look into the audience when you dance. I guess everyone learned by observation that you never did that. When you are in the dance you are part of the whole. You do nothing to draw attention to yourself. Now you will see people looking into the spectators, I guess to see if anyone is watching them. Sometimes one will even wave at someone. *That's a bad change.*

On Saturday the committee dinner is held for committee members of the three districts. Preparation for this dinner began a month or more in advance with the cooks meeting to cut meat and freezing it. The Grayhorse committee will line up on the wall and shake hands with everyone from the other districts. They will feed around 400 people. Each district will have a dinner and each has their own rules but usually the dinner is for committee members only. A lot of work goes into this and most is done by the cooks. Hominy has 22 cooks. I don't know how many Grayhorse has.

When the dancing starts most of the songs that are sung came with the drum from the Poncas and Kaws or are songs made by Osages, mostly long ago. Many have no words, just familiar vocals in a pattern that makes a unique song memorized by the singers. Many do have some words in them and a story that goes with the song. Like a song that may repeat something meaning "*the drum*" – *the story might be that the drum is what brings us together and sets us apart from other people. Without the drum we would scatter and be lost in the world.* But the words would not actually be in the song. Other songs might be saying "a rowdy Sioux came into my camp, now his head is on a pole", "you said you were my friend, you turned on us, what happens you brought on yourself", "they wore grey robes" (about a society so old no one knows what they were), "they fought near yellow cliffs", "I took great delight in taking that man's life", "he was a good man, now he's in the spirit world", etc. Then on Saturday night a familiar set of fast songs are sung that everyone enjoys, then after that the "trot" songs that are a syncopated blend of words and rhythm favored by many dancers.

On Sunday the individual songs will be sung. Everyone's finest blankets will be brought out and families will dance on relatives songs. They will give away. It reminds us of who is related to whom and honors our ancestors.

Someday in the near future one of these Drumkeepers will pass the drum to another. They will say something like "Grandfather needs a home, can you take him and care for him?" If he accepts the task he will be caring for the heartbeat of the Osage traditional life. When the drum sounds each year it signals to our Nation and other Nations that the traditional life of the Osage is alive and growing.

There has always been another family willing to take the responsibility when a Drumkeeper is ready to step down. For over a 100 years the drums have passed from family to family like a never ending relay race into the future, carrying the traditions of our people forward intact and strong. They say you should take nothing away or add anything. Leave it as it is, it has served us well.

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I am attaching some photos. The man in the blue vest is Joel Wynn. The next photo is Head Committeeman of the Hominy district, Harry Red Eagle, and my nephew, Billy Proctor, Drumkeeper at Hominy. A photo of Billy giving the former Drumkeeper, Lance Goodfox, a horse. Then two photos of Drumkeepers from some years ago and the last photo is Billy Proctors wife and daughter, my sister Rise Proctor and six young ladies who are related to Billy in their wedding coats that were given away shortly thereafter.