

The Plains Indian Powwow: Cultural Integration in Manitoba and Saskatchewan

by SAMUEL W. CORRIGAN¹

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente une description détaillée des assemblées "powwow", les événements importants d'intégration culturelle des indiens de l'ouest contemporains. On examine les fonctions des activités telles que les dons, les danses, et les rencontres des indiens des diverses tribus. L'auteur suggère que ces assemblées offrent beaucoup de matières d'études comparatives, en particulier en ce qui concerne les indiens de la côte du Nord-Ouest et les gens de la Nouvelle-Guinée.

The Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico defines *powwow* as, variously, "a medicine-man; the conjuring of a medicine-man over a patient; a dance, feast, or noisy celebration preceding a council, expedition, or hunt; a council; or a conference" (Hodge 1910:303). However, the powwow with which I shall deal in this paper is merely a gathering of Indian people for singing and dancing, and has no religious or magical significance in itself, although ceremonials such as sun and rain dances may take place in conjunction with powwows, but spatially and temporally separate from them. These events have been noted briefly

¹ I am grateful to Dr. G. I. Jones, Mrs. Toby Ornstein, Mr. John Goodwill, and the members of Professor M. Fortes' research seminar at the University of Cambridge for their helpful criticism of an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to acknowledge the generous assistance of Professor H. B. Hawthorn, who supported field research in Manitoba in 1964 and 1965, and the University of Cambridge, the University of Manitoba and the Canada Council, all of which provided grants to support field research in Saskatchewan during 1966, 1967 and 1968. I would like to thank Miss Pearl Bellegarde, Mr. Clifford Goodwill and particularly my research assistant, Mr. Jerry Goodwill, for their invaluable assistance during field research.

in the literature: Howard (1955) has discussed their significance in Oklahoma as examples of "pan-Indian" intertribalism and Kurath (1957) has described them for the American states of the Great Lakes region, but the topic has been otherwise neglected.²

The area that I am concerned with here is the prairie region of Manitoba and Saskatchewan. This region includes more than twenty thousand Indian people living largely on several dozen reserves scattered over a wide geographic area. There are indeed numerous powwows in the United States, and for many people the border is virtually non-existent as far as powwows are concerned. But there are some differences between the Canadian and American powwows, and I shall confine this paper to the Canadian ones with which I am more familiar.³

It is possible to distinguish three basic types of powwow. During the winter months when transportation is difficult, Indian bands may hold purely private powwows on reserves or in towns near reserves, intended only for members of the band or bands hosting the affair. Normally people gather in a band hall or a school; the local singers and dancers attend, food is served, either to the singers and dancers alone or to all attending, and the powwow lasts five to six hours. Of this type there are two versions — the standard one, which is specifically designed to raise money to finance a large public powwow during the summer months, and the honouring powwow, financially sponsored by an individual or family to honour someone in particular, which also usually raises some money for the summer powwow. The difference between these is largely one of finance: both are organized by a powwow "committee", but the honouring powwow normally involves the production of a meal by the sponsors and usually includes the presentation of a number of gifts by them ("donations") to individuals and the powwow committee.

² After this paper was completed I discovered Kurath's book on festivals held by Indians in the Michigan area (1966). This work presents a summary of various types of Indian gatherings including powwows of the sort described here, with useful notes on choreography and music as well as numerous illustrations.

³ The common terms for the annual events which I discuss here are "celebration" and "powwow". As the latter is frequently used by Canadian Indians to distinguish their events from those of American bands, I will use it here exclusively.

The second type of powwow is again organized by the committee, but is normally sponsored by some outside body. It is a public show designed to demonstrate Indian dancing to a largely non-Indian audience. These shows are put on for various events, ranging from annual festivals in towns and cities to the opening of a new highway. The committee usually receives a flat fee for organization and this may be distributed among the participants. These shows may last up to half an hour and are always a tremendous entertainment with non-Indian audiences, particularly children. They do not involve any donations and are usually restricted to a master of ceremonies, singers and dancers. Indians from other areas do not normally attend.

There is a third type of powwow with which I am most concerned in this paper, the annual summer powwow. These are large affairs generally held on reserve land during July and August. They attract Indian visitors from other bands, usually resident within a radius of four hundred miles (something less than half a day of travel in this region) and non-Indian visitors, both holidaying and resident in the immediate area. Total attendance may reach up to eight thousand people.

A powwow involves considerable organization and preparation. It is an institutionalized event at which dancers wear specific, readily identifiable dancing costumes of considerable monetary and symbolic value, and at which the dancing is at certain times restricted to regular dancers who possess these outfits. The singers are specific individuals, generally a group of men who practise together and are known as a singing group. There is a master of ceremonies who announces the type of dancing which will be done and supervises the program of donations. The affair is carefully planned in advance and is sponsored, either by a powwow committee or by some individual or group who undertakes to support it financially.

From now on I shall be concerned only with annual summer powwows from a structural point of view, largely overlooking their musical aspects.⁴ I shall describe them in general terms,

⁴ Alan Merriam provides a detailed description and analysis of the music of one tribal group with basically Plains style music (1967).

citing examples where necessary, and then discuss some of their more significant functions.

The Background of Powwow:

The powwow which I will describe here is a modern phenomenon, one which has certainly developed at least partly in response to the numerous social and economic pressures of the Euro-Canadian society. Although this particular response constitutes one type of Indian revitalization movement, the form and concept of powwow are not new. There are numerous indications in the early literature of periodic gatherings of Plains Indian bands which included powwow, and many aspects of modern powwow dancing can be attributed to the nineteenth century (Howard 1951). Some aspects indeed are modern; one form of dancing, for example, *kahomani*,⁵ in which couples shuffle around a circle to a slow double beat, was certainly developed in this century and brought to Canadian bands from the USA within the past forty years.⁶ This is an immensely popular form, partly because it permits mixed couples to participate, but also because it does not require any special dancing costume or skill as a dancer. It goes almost without saying that most of the songs with words for this dance belong to a somewhat romantic *genre*; as well, they are no longer limited to Indian languages, but may occur in English or in a combination of English and an Indian language. They are in effect contemporary love songs.

During the 1940's and the early 1950's, a number of bands in the United States began to stage annual Indian celebrations, often in conjunction with such events as rodeos or sports competitions, with Indian dancing and singing in the evenings only.

⁵ *Kahomani* is a Dakota term meaning roughly "turn around" or "spin". The form is also known by many other names, such as "owl dance", "round dance", and "circle dance", all of which are used interchangeably and jointly at powwows.

⁶ Indeed, *kahomani* is still spreading, having been introduced to the northern parts of Saskatchewan in the past fifteen years. As can be imagined, the reaction of northern Indians, among whom there is little or no dancing, upon first hearing the hypnotic double beat music, and seeing and then being invited to join in the dancing at *kahomani* time, is almost always wildly enthusiastic.

Feder (1964) has outlined the fairly recent development of a similar form, the "forty-nine" dance.

This spread to Canada in the 1950's when several bands began to hold summer celebrations. These are now so popular that thirteen were held in southern Saskatchewan alone during 1967 and 1968, with several more, including some very large powwows, in the northern part of the province as well. These are now firmly established events which will probably continue to develop and grow in the years ahead.

The Physical Setting:

Powwows are generally held on large, flat open recreation grounds, four to five hundred yards square. These are normally fenced in or else hedged by natural barriers such as rivers or lakes, and have only one or two entrances. In the centre of this area is a large tent, the "big-top", usually about fifty yards long and consisting of one or more canvas tents or awnings. It is lighted by electricity and has a raised announcer's stand at the centre of one end. This stand is equipped with a public address system. The powwow itself takes place under this central tent. Very often a series of rough wooden stands is erected inside, along both sides of the big-top, providing seating space for several hundred visitors.

Fairly close to the big-top are one or more small wooden shelters serving as shops, selling soft drinks, ice cream and such light snacks as hot dogs and hamburgers. The area immediately between the shop and the big-top is lighted as well, as is the area near the main entrance to the grounds. Here are stationed a number of ticket sellers charging admission to non-Indians, and police checking cars for alcohol. Cars are driven right into the grounds and parked either in circles surrounding the big-top, or by the tents of the owners.

The campers, who with few exceptions are all Indians, erect their tents in the form of a rough circle around the edge of the camp ground. Tents are separated by only a few yards — and in some cases only a few feet — of space, and in some of the more favoured sections of the camp ground may form two or three lines. Pits for fires are dug at one end of the tents, and cars are parked immediately in front of them. Close kinsmen tend

to travel and camp together, so that one frequently finds large sections of the camp circle occupied by people from the same band. The number of tents at a particular powwow varies considerably, but as a rough yardstick, fifty tents are considered a small powwow and two hundred tents a large powwow. It should be noted that not all of the tents in the camp circle belong to visitors from other bands. Frequently members of the host band move down to the camp ground for convenience during the powwow, particularly if they live some distance from the camp and lack any means of transportation.

Virtually every powwow includes some tipis erected in the camp circle, usually by the committee, but occasionally by private owners. These are fairly large structures, ranging up to twelve or fifteen feet in height and a good eight feet in base width, built of rough poles and heavy canvas. Many powwow committees own these and there is a constant exchange of them among powwows with committees renting additional tipis as tourist attractions and extra accommodation. They are frequently used to house special visitors or persons without tents, usually upon payment of a small rental fee. There is a considerable amount of prestige value attached to gaily painted tipis; the general feeling is that a powwow should try to obtain as many "Indian" looking items as possible, such as tipis, to attract tourists.

The People of a Powwow:

I have already noted that these large summer powwows require a great deal of organization. What generally happens is that a group of band members get together and decide that they want to have a powwow. They select a committee from among themselves and generally allocate organizational tasks to one another, with one person responsible for obtaining the big-top and tipis, another in charge of publicity — generally through radio and television commercial announcements — another handling arrangements for electric power to the campsite, police duties, the purchase and distribution of food allowances and so on.

Before discussing these specific tasks further it would be wise to outline the method of selection of a committee. At the end

of a summer powwow the interested members of the band meet at the campsite for an "election". This consists of one person calling out a name, and that person joining the committee for the following year. More often than not, however, the name is that of a child, frequently an infant; in such cases the responsible parent or guardian assumes the tasks of committee member.⁷ A man can withdraw from a committee, but this is rare, occurring only in exceptional circumstances. Normally all men and women "elected" in this manner serve. Alternatively the powwow may be organized by a recreation club of some sort, often a group responsible for other matters as well, but generally the selection procedure is the same: all interested persons nominated serve on the organizing body.⁸ There is, as it happens, considerable prestige in being on a committee; one gains a reputation as a worker for powwow, and possesses some authority during the actual event. It requires hard work — the most active members may labour seventy or eighty hours a week just before and during the event — and a willingness to take the blame if the powwow should fail financially. It also requires a certain financial standing, for to be on a committee, either in one's own name or in the name of a kinsman, requires the donation of a large number of gifts plus the time to work for the powwow. The contribution made by each committee member will be quite obvious to the assembled visitors at the event, both through the physical organization of the campsite and the donations made.

Although the duties of the committee are generally divided among themselves, sometimes others may be asked to serve as paid assistants. This is particularly true if the committee decides to run a shop at the camp ground (in which case it may stay open 24 hours a day), or to maintain its own police force.

⁷ By naming a child rather than an adult to a committee, the responsible parent or guardian can then donate in honour of the child, rather than on his own behalf, and thus bring prestige to both the child and himself.

⁸ This method of "election" is common for voluntary associations among Indians of the region. It has the great advantage of including all interested persons while ensuring that there will not be any "losers" in elections. Equivalent to this is the common practice of giving everybody the same rank; thus a committee may consist of a dozen vice-presidents and one treasurer, the latter distinguished in part because of banking regulations requiring a "signature".

This police force can be a critical part of the powwow arrangements. Made up of a number of young men representing the committee, often including members of other bands,⁹ this force is distinguished from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police by the term "Indian police" and is charged with the maintenance of order in the campground. Groups of such police patrol the camp during the evening and at night, making sure that liquor is kept out of the grounds (if the powwow is held on reserve land where liquor is illegal) or under control (i.e., in tents, if that is legal for the particular camp),¹⁰ seeing that intoxicated persons are kept out of the way, and investigating and stopping disturbances of any sort. Visitors to powwow tend to hold Indian police in much greater respect than they do the RCMP. This is partly because the Indian police concentrate on preventing trouble by such means as persuading drunks to stay in their cars or tents and checking cars entering the grounds for alcohol, rather than waiting for trouble to start and then arresting offenders. Their presence in the camp is itself a deterrent to trouble-makers, although they can call upon the R.C.M.P., who are either on the grounds or available nearby, for assistance when necessary.

It is obvious that singers are essential to a powwow. I have already noted that the term implies a group of men who are accustomed to singing together and who practise regularly. It can include women as well, although this is not yet common in Canada. The women do not use the drum at all when singing, but sit near the men and join in at certain points in the songs. Powwow committees are always anxious to obtain as many singers as possible and particularly try to attract certain popular groups noted for the quality of their dance music. Anywhere from five to fifteen groups appear at each powwow; they receive payment from the committee, based upon the amount they sing and the quality of their singing, up to a total of two or three hundred dollars divided among all groups. Each group consists of from four to six men

⁹ It is considered much easier for a man to arrest or otherwise deal with a troublemaker if the two are from different bands. Thus, it is desirable to have several bands represented on the police force.

¹⁰ Indian reserves in Canada operate under a local option system with regard to alcohol. Most reserves are "dry", and it is illegal to possess liquor on them. If a powwow is held off a reserve, however, it is normally legal to have liquor in tents, as they constitute dwellings.

and has its own orchestral bass drum. They are placed inside the big-top, spaced evenly around the edge of the dancing circle, and alternate singing.

Equally important to powwow are the dancers. Probably not more than one out of every ten men is a regular dancer, for it requires some skill and a fair amount of expense. The standard form of dancing has been described by one writer as consisting "essentially, of solo dances performed *en masse*, accompanied by a group of singers at a large drum" (Howard 1955:216), but the dances are nonetheless relatively stylized. In order to attract as many good dancers as possible, committees sponsor dancing competitions with large prizes for winners. This has resulted in the good dancers attending as many powwows as possible during the summer, choosing the powwows they visit partly on the basis of the amount of prize money to be distributed. And it can be rewarding: one twelve year old girl won \$100 plus a smaller amount in elimination event prizes in one week in 1968, for example, while a twenty-seven year old man won \$175 plus the elimination prizes at two powwows the same summer. Compare this with the \$370 annual per capita income of their band!¹¹

There are also special forms of dancing at some powwows: a few individuals are capable of performing certain show dances involving dancing with ropes or hoops, or such uncommon types as Eagle dances. Should any of those men be present they will almost certainly be invited to perform and will receive fees from the committee, and often donations from others, for doing so.

Women dance as well as men, although the style is quite different and of a type which makes it easier for more women to dance. Indian costumes are worn, but can be restricted to moccasins and a shawl if necessary. It would, however, be unthinkable for any woman to dance without some sort of Indian item, such as a long-fringed shawl or a beaded necklace. Competitions are held for women as well.

¹¹ The fact that singers are often paid and dancers are not reflects only the difficulty of obtaining good singing groups. Dancing offers more prestige for individuals than singing; hence more men prefer to become dancers than singers. The latter are thus frequently in short supply. In addition, dancers have the opportunity of competing for cash prizes, but contests for singers are very rare, being difficult to stage.

There is a considerable amount of prestige involved in good dancing; the young man who can show unusual ability at a powwow receives the quite open admiration of the spectators and a reputation as a good dancer extending far beyond his own band. In recent years this prestige value has contributed to a new development, the teaching of children to dance. Now children as young as three years old are provided with dancing costumes similar to, but less elaborate than, adult costumes, and they dance regularly with adults, as well as in their own competition class. Not infrequently, if a particularly small child shows talent and has a complete dancing outfit, adults at a powwow will contribute small sums — as donations — with requests for a demonstration solo dance. It is obvious that prestige accrues not only to the children but to their families as well.

A key individual at a powwow is the master of ceremonies, a person without whom no Indian function in this region can operate successfully. There are only a few of these persons in the area, and they receive high pay for their talents, usually at least \$25 per day. Their job is obvious: to control the dancing and singing aspects of the powwow, and to act as clearing houses for all public donations.

Donations:

Two types of donations are common at powwows, public donations made by members of the committees, and private, individual donations. Donations by members of the committee and their immediate kinsmen are given during the afternoon dancing period, either as honours to powwow workers — such as infant members of the committee — or as memorial tributes to deceased kinsmen. The donations are always given to visitors from other areas. Normally a donation consists of a blanket plus some small item such as a shirt, towels, pillow cases or a small amount of cash (from \$2 to \$5). It may, however, be an unusual and expensive gift such as an eagle feather bonnet or an electrical appliance. The most favoured donation items are those with an Indian connotation, such as pieces of beadwork or moccasins. A particular favourite is the "star blanket", a hand made patchwork quilt with a multi-coloured star pattern on one side, greatly valued as a

specifically "Indian" item. These are difficult to obtain as the demand always outstrips the supply, and ordinary wool blankets are usually given instead.

The procedure of donations is simple: an honour song is sung and the donor and his kinsmen dance very briefly.¹² The donor then stands at the front of the tent by the master of ceremonies, who calls out a list of donees. Each donee steps up to the donor as his or her name is called, shakes his hand, receives his gift and returns to his place in the audience. There are often blank donations as well: the announcer may call out a gift of, say, five dollars for anyone from a particular band or area, the first such person stepping up receiving the gift.

I have already noted that many people are known as regular powwow visitors; their choice of powwow is often made on the basis of the likelihood of receiving donations. For example, if two powwows are to be held on one weekend and six families from one band may attend one or the other, one family may choose a powwow on the grounds that the other five will attend the alternative. The one family — as the only representatives of their band — would stand a better chance of receiving gifts than the five. It is important to note here that people do not know in advance that they will receive gifts, nor do the donors know in advance just whom they will give to. It is, rather, almost a random selection. A group of men and women on the powwow committee, or connected with it, will plan to give certain items at the powwow. When the donation period arrives they will make up a list of donees from among the visitors at the powwow.

The ideal of donations is that they go to "poor families" to "help them out a bit". The gift is not supposed to be made with any thought of a return in mind, but is rather a public expression of an individual's generosity. In fact, however, the creation of a social bond through a powwow donation tends to lead to a return;

¹² There are only a limited number of honour songs. The same song may — and normally does — apply to a number of people, with the name of the particular individual inserted in the appropriate spot of the song. Densmore gives several Teton Dakota honour songs collected in the USA in the early part of this century, one of which illustrates the concept (1918:499): (In Dakota, my translation.) "Tell me when the committee is collecting, (*name of person*) said; soon I will help."

people frequently say "well, I've received so much from X, I want to do something for him; this year I'll give him something" and so on. There is no planned one to one relationship, no expected reciprocity. But donations create and later strengthen social bonds, creating and maintaining a possibly exploitable tie such that one can, in cases where an individual has given more than once to someone, predict a future return, probably in the form of a gift, but possibly just in services or hospitality. The gift itself is merely an expression of a social tie which can be built up and exploited in later years.

The amount of donations given by a person or family — and it is usually appropriate to speak of a family, for many people in the household contribute — is both an indication of their prestige and a means of attaining prestige. To have much prestige, a person must have a "good heart"; to have that they must be generous, ready at any time to give a visitor any material item which they might possess and he might admire. The giving of these items with no explicit hope of a return, particularly when given to somebody who would be completely unable to make a return, is generosity and an essential part of the prestige system. Thus the amount that a man gives in relation to what he has, and the people to whom he gives — whether poor, distant in residence and unlikely to be able to reciprocate, or wealthy, nearby and quite likely to be useful — are critical to his prestige. Let me give but one example of donations. When "X" 's son was named secretary of his powwow committee, he decided, along with his wife, to donate in his son's honour. The combined cash income of him and his wife at the time was less than \$3000 per annum. Yet they purchased, over time and at special sales whenever possible, twenty-six blankets, valued at between \$4 and \$5 each, plus towels, pillowcases and about a yard of dress material to go with each blanket. He also gave away \$100 in cash in a series of donations to a number of individuals, and he bought a feather bonnet for \$15 at the powwow for a further donation. When his son was honoured in song, one of "X" 's grandmothers, visiting from the USA, gave him \$20 to donate as he saw fit; another kinsman from the USA gave his son \$20 and his wife \$10 to mark the occasion. The total cost of the direct donations by "X" and his wife was in excess of \$300, fully 10% of their

annual income. Their prestige was high; their donations were greater than most. The pattern is illustrative of the range and amount of gifts given to sustain prestige.¹³

At any time during the powwow, but particularly during the afternoon and evening sessions, "private" donations may be made. Any person attending a powwow is at liberty to give anything to anybody, and numerous donations are made and announced. Examples of these are the case of a woman who gave \$5 to a group of singers to honour her husband and son who had just danced in a contest for which the singers had sung, and the woman who gave \$5 to some singers — who were also kinsmen — visiting from the band of which she had originally been a member. Frequently, donations of this type are made to groups, although individuals can be and often are chosen. The mechanics of the gift are similar to those of the public donation: the donor tells the master of ceremonies, gives him the item and then waits for his announcement over the public address system and for the donee to step forward and shake his hand. On occasion individuals wish to give something which they do not actually have with them at the time. In such cases the announcement is made anyway, with the rider that the item is not physically present but will be sent to the donee or given to him at a later date. Often the gift to a group is not divisible, for example a blanket or a piece of beadwork. In these cases it is expected that the gift will be auctioned or otherwise sold and the proceeds then divided among the donees. The public sale of these items is a common feature of powwow. Finally, at any time during the powwow, but particularly during the evening dancing sessions, donations may be made by anyone — but usually by visitors — to the committee responsible for the powwow, specifically to encourage them to continue their efforts in future years.

The Chronology of Powwow:

Throughout prairie Canada and the USA there is a series of specific powwow seasons and overlapping powwow circuits. I

¹³ The money to purchase items for donations is not put out at one time. Rather the items are purchased in a series of lots over the winter preceding the powwow, at special sales whenever possible, and as cash becomes available. Similarly, the cash for donations is accumulated over a period of time.

am concerned here with a season of only two months, July and August, probably the shortest of all powwow seasons on the continent, and a circuit extending from the north-western tip of the Saskatchewan prairies down into North Dakota below Manitoba, covering a distance in that direction of more than six hundred miles. There is at least one powwow on each weekend during those two months in this circuit.

As all the older, better established powwows occupy the same weekend each year, a new powwow must use extra publicity or announce particularly large competition prizes and other financial rewards to visitors if it is to attract enough people to warrant the committee continuing it in future years. Powwows wax and wane in popularity; some years a particular powwow may be popular, but in others it may be outclassed by new ones. This is a risk which members of committees must be prepared to take when they plan their powwow. Nonetheless, this circuit normally has substantially the same number of powwows each year, although they may vary in size and place from year to year.

Powwows generally start on Thursday and end on Sunday, although there has been a trend in recent years towards a Friday-Monday period to better accommodate working people who would be unable to camp on Thursday. The first day is termed "camping day" and is the time when the first tents are erected in the circle. Although some people camp as late as Sunday (often just for the day), most camps are established on Friday or Saturday. The camp begins to break up on the final evening of the powwow and is completely gone by the following morning. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday the timetable of the powwow generally runs as follows:

7:30 - 9:00 a.m. Breakfast at tents and the distribution of "rations". Rations are a food allowance given by the committee to each family camping at the powwow. They consist of certain staples: bread, tinned meats, flour and some vegetables, costing between one and two dollars per family per day, although they may include such delicacies as sides of deer or moose meat or special varieties of fish in some areas.

8:30 a.m. Flag raising ceremony. The Canadian flag is raised over the campsite to the accompaniment of a song, often in memory of a deceased veteran.

late morning. Some dancing and singing occurs on a limited scale. It is usually ill attended.

12:30 - 1:00 p.m. Lunch break.

1:00 - 6:00 p.m. This is the time of general powwow and donations, the period when members of the committee present gifts to visitors.

6:00 - 7:00 p.m. Supper break period, often begun with a flag lowering ceremony, again featuring a song.

7:00 - 11:30 p.m. This is the time of major dancing, featuring a standard style of dance and competition dancing, plus any extra events which might be possible, such as special dances by individuals. As dancing is a stated aim of powwows, a series of competitions is held, with cash prizes and elimination events culminating in a final contest on the last night of the powwow. Dancers often pick and choose among powwows on the basis of the possibility of winning a contest and the amount of prizes offered. Prizes in each of the two adult events — men's and women's — may range from \$10 for third or fourth place up to \$150 for first place. Four or five judges are named, usually representing a cross-section of the audience by tribes and geographic areas. The competition dances normally involve the best singers and the dancing is generally faster and more elaborate than the non-competition dancing.

12:00 a.m. Anywhere between 11:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m. the groups of singers take their drums and retire for the night. Gradually many of the older people leave, along with all the non-Indian visitors, and the *kahomani* period starts.

I have already noted the immense popularity of *kahomani*; this is partly because it is an important aspect of the summer courtship rituals of Indians of this region. From about midnight

on, the teenagers and young adults, all wrapped in blankets, take over the central area of the powwow ground and promenade around the big-top in groups of two to six looking for partners of the opposite sex. This is a period of informal courtship, a major mating period for the participants. It may last until eight or nine in the morning and is frequently the start of sexual relationships continued over long periods of time.

Part of the importance of *kahomani* time lies in its "pan-Indian" identity, for it is a purely intertribal affair. Connubial relationships are established — and communication in general maintained — on the basis of being Indian and young, rather than being, say, a Dakota Indian visitor at a Cree powwow, as is often the case with adult relationships. Indeed, the language used in many of the songs as well as in most interpersonal relationships is English. Few of the young participants have much speaking fluency in any of the four major Indian languages of the circuit, although many understand one or more of the languages and many of the songs are in those languages.¹⁴ Instead, identity for these young people tends to be based on bands (i.e., residence) more than on tribal groups.

Just as there are favourite dancers, so there are favourite singers, individuals of no small prestige because of their knowledge of a variety of songs or their singing ability. Often this includes members of the regular singing groups as well. For the young people much of the prestige of being a singer stems from being able to sing *kahomani* songs, for these, frequently humorous, are far and away the most popular variety.¹⁵

¹⁴ The four main languages of the region are Cree, Ojibwa, Assiniboine and Eastern Dakota. Two dialects of both Cree and Ojibwa are spoken, Plains and Woodland. Normally the master of ceremonies uses both English and, to a lesser extent, the language of the band hosting the affair during the periods of regular powwow dancing and donations. There is no master of ceremonies for *kahomani*, however.

¹⁵ Here are two typical examples of *kahomani* songs, both recorded in Saskatchewan in 1967.

- a) (In English.) "Dearie, I don't care where you go or what you do, honey; for you're not the only one on this reservation."
- b) (In Dakota, my translation.) "Dearie, I love you. Here I am in the jail up north. Don't be broken-hearted; soon I'll have lots of friends (here)."

Kahomani songs are phrased in the verbal forms of women, and are presumed to express the thoughts of women, although in fact *kahomani* singers are men.

Powwow Finance:

Powwows are relatively "big business" involving several thousand dollars in a community effort. An examination of their finances is thus essential.

There are several sources of income for a powwow, the most important of which is either the "gate", at which non-Indian visitors are charged an admission fee, or the donations of cash and saleable items to the committee for the sponsorship of the powwow, depending upon whether it is a large or small event. A very large affair may take in more than \$5000 at the gate, while smaller powwows may receive few non-Indian visitors and thus very little at the gate. These small powwows rely instead on a fund built up over the previous year by donations. In many bands the cash donations of all of the winter powwows go to this fund. In others, the committee singers and dancers go from house to house on Sunday afternoons, visiting three or four houses each weekend, singing for the residents and receiving donations for the fund.¹⁶ There are other sources of income as well. For several years prior to 1968, for example, the federal government provided assistance in the form of cash grants, as powwows were considered an important activity in the country's centennial celebrations. These grants ranged up to \$3000 in value. Then too, the committee either operates a small shop at the campsite or else leases the rights to such a shop to an individual. The result, either way, will be at least \$200 income.

The principal expenditure of the powwow committee will be the food allowance, the "rations" distributed to each family camping. These cost between one and two dollars per day per family, even when the groceries are purchased at wholesale prices.

There is a variety of other expenses, for the rental of the big-top, for publicity, for salaries to some workers and for power

¹⁶ Occasionally powwow fund raising runs into resistance and people stop attending the winter powwows. This is often overcome by having the singers visit houses to sing for the residents. In such cases it is considered obligatory to donate; generally people are glad to do so as long as it doesn't happen too frequently. Donations can be of any amount, no matter how small; people are glad to give because the resulting summer powwow can bring prestige to the entire band.

to the camp ground. As well, there are the prizes for dancing competitions and payments to singers, and if the committee sponsors a sports day, prizes for athletics also.

The Functions of Powwow:

There are a great many functions of powwow, but the most important are certainly the two related functions of a prestige system and cultural integration. For both of these it is important to understand something of the background of the bands of the region.

The bands of this circuit are centred on some forty-one reserves in Saskatchewan alone, and are scattered over an area several hundred miles square. They range in population from fewer than forty to about one thousand, with anywhere up to 25% of band members absent from their reserves, many of them resident in cities and towns. In the past several decades three major trends have been evident in this area. They are, firstly, the vast increase in communication among Indian bands and between Indians and non-Indians, due in part to better transport, and the access to such media as radio, television and newspapers; secondly, the recent and now very rapid trend to closing down reserve schools and sending children either to large multiracial residential schools or to integrated Indian/non-Indian schools in towns near reserves, together with a great increase in technical training programs for adult Indians; and thirdly, the decrease in the use of Indian languages in favour of English, and the decrease of tribal identities in favour of band — or regional — identities. All of these trends have contributed to and been a part of the general acculturation process, a feature of which is the rapid disappearance of beliefs and practices particular to individual bands and tribal groups.

Powwow functions as an integrative mechanism in two ways: it draws together people of different bands in a form which is based on the practices of many different bands and tribal groups; it is also an affair vastly different from anything in the non-Indian culture of the region. At powwows the former distinctions among tribal groups are rapidly disappearing, while those between Indians and non-Indians are being increasingly emphasized.

A summer powwow, to be successful, must attract visitors from as many bands as possible; in two surveys of powwows in 1968, for example, there were visitors at one powwow from twenty-four bands and six tribal groups, and at another from eleven different bands and seven tribal groups. Because of this intertribal composition the language used is generally, of necessity, English, with all the consequences which this entails. The distinctions among tribal groups disappear further during the *kahomani* period when tribal membership becomes virtually irrelevant in the face of the intense courtship practices of the young.¹⁷

At the same time, these powwows are specifically Indian affairs to which non-Indians are invited as paying guests only. This is important; they are invited to attend largely to help finance the powwows; but the powwows themselves are put on by Indians for Indians. Several minor points help to emphasize the Indian nature of these events. For example, the goods most valued for donations are items of Indian significance, such as star blankets and beadwork. Again, some committees discourage the wearing of such non-Indian items as glasses and watches by dancers. There is, in short, a very conscious effort to underline the differences between Indians and non-Indians, and to encourage purely Indian aspects of powwows.

Parallel to these movements there has been the development of what have been termed "pan-Indian" practices, such as the peyote religion and the move towards political activity through attempts at resurrecting the memories of past Indian leaders.

Now such items as dancing costumes reflect the influence of many tribal groups; one can no longer easily determine a person's tribal affiliation or even his geographic area by such things as beadwork design or costume adornment. Even the songs which a group might sing are part of the culture of Indians of the region rather than specific bands or tribal groups.

The prestige function of powwow is closely related to this integrative function, for the prestige system is now pan-Indian rather than just limited to specific bands or tribal groups. It is

¹⁷ This intertribalism is also encouraged by the increasing incidence of tribal intermarriage, at least some of which probably has its origin in powwow courtship.

based on three factors; donations, singing and dancing, and general powwow success.

Formerly the prestige systems of the tribal groups of this area were based on war and hunting, and to some extent these things are still valued. But now powwow provides several means of gaining and maintaining prestige. I have already noted that donations are a key factor in this; a man climbs a social ladder by donating to his local powwow committee and/or by giving away at a summer powwow. Donations are always announced publicly; honour songs are sung and donors must dance and be seen by the audience. It is important to note too that prestige accrues not just to the individual donor, but also to the committee organizing the powwow and the band which hosts it; the more donations made, the greater will be their prestige, for recipients of donations will discuss them when they return to their homes.¹⁸ This is one criterion used by the Indians of the region in determining the quality of particular powwows. Other criteria are the quality and quantity of rations given at a powwow, and the suitability and amenities of the physical campsite. All these things count in the prestige system.

I should note a further aspect of donations: they are intertribal. I said earlier that they are made by hosts to visitors, and are somewhat random. These donations create and support bonds between people of many different tribes and bands, between people whose only common feature is the social status of "Indian" in a largely non-Indian region. The integrative function of donations is thus clear: they are a major means of drawing people together as representatives of bands rather than tribal groups, oblivious to provincial or national residence. The bonds established by donations can be used when necessary; what matters is that the donor and donee interact as Indians who have exchanged, or given and received, donations at Indian functions, more than as Indians of particular tribal affiliations or languages.

Why do men dance and sing? Primarily, I think, because of the considerable prestige which is accorded the dancer and singer.

¹⁸ It is worth noting that the person who receives a gift gains some prestige as well. Thus three people can be involved in a donation, the donor, the person whom he honours by making the donation, and the donee.

Powwow permits a man to dress in an expensive and elaborate — and, not least, “Indian” — costume, and to dance to the best of his ability in front of thousands of people, some of whom will watch him and approve of his skill. The good dancer receives not only prize money but adulation; if he is a young man his chances of successful courtship will be greatly enhanced; certainly he will establish a reputation as an able dancer throughout the whole of his circuit. Similarly, good singers are known and discussed; they are frequently idolized by the young and respected by the old. The group or individual capable of singing a large number and variety of *kahomani* songs, for example, can be certain of attracting much attention. Not everybody can dance or sing properly; both are hard work, requiring much effort and practice, but both are rewarding in terms of prestige. The vanity motive is strong, not least because powwow provides the opportunity for international success, but also because powwow is the one pan-Indian activity in which prestige is gauged. Dancing and singing are the most obvious and convenient ways of attaining prestige by doing something “Indian” as an individual. (This prestige, incidentally, can be extended to the non-Indian world as well; good dancers and singers can attain prestige in their local areas through demonstrations to non-Indians of what are considered interesting “Indian” things.)

Some of the other functions of powwow can be noted here briefly.

- 1) Powwow has definite recreational value. For most Indians, powwow is fun; it is a major means of relaxation.

- 2) Powwow facilitates the maintenance of kin ties. When these bands and reserves were initially established, tribal groups were broken up and scattered. But powwows attract visitors from far away and from across borders. Some people discover kinsmen from other bands at powwows, in many cases kinsmen whom they did not previously know existed. People commonly look for kinsmen from other areas; it is frequently the only time they meet. The value of this, both for the creation and extension of social bonds and as an integrative mechanism among widely scattered bands, is obvious.

3) There are economic functions to powwows. Specifically powwows provide employment and cash in the form of prizes and fees.¹⁹ Most Indian money comes from the non-Indian world and is distributed among non-Indians; Indian bands are not, by and large, wealth generating units themselves. Powwow is one important means of distributing this "imported" wealth among Indians, within the bands. The extent of economic exchange at powwows is great; I noted one example of a family giving away some 10% of their annual income and although this is probably greater than most, a substantial portion of incomes does go on gift-giving. In short, powwows are both major financial operations in themselves, much valued by the business communities near the bands which sponsor them, and are at the same time institutionalized fabrics within which there is considerable economic exchange.²⁰

4) Powwows are potentially important political events. At the moment powwows provide opportunities for Indian leaders from many bands and areas to meet informally and consider issues relevant to Indians in general. It is normal for the leading Indian political figures to attend several powwows each year. Indeed, many of these men are themselves important figures on local powwow committees. Although powwows have not yet been specifically used as political meetings, they are recognized as outstanding Indian events, and could well become important foci of pan-Indian political movements.

Conclusion:

The foregoing is essentially a lengthy description of a topic which merits extended analysis. Unfortunately it has not hitherto been described in the literature, and the necessity of description

¹⁹ There is another economic aspect of powwow: I know a number of men who have quit jobs to attend powwows during the summer months. As powwows coincide with the principal employment season for Indians of this region, this is a serious economic step. It infuriates many non-Indians, particularly those who employ Indians for manual labour at low wages and who have difficulty obtaining workers.

²⁰ Gift exchange among the Plains Indians is not entirely new. McClintock (1937:15) describes presentations at intertribal gatherings hosted by the Blackfoot in the 1890's.

here has precluded any proper analysis at this time. Some suggestions are possible, however.

The anthropological data on the northwest coast of North America occupies a special niche in this field, not least because of the detailed descriptions and widely varying analyses of the potlatch (see Boas 1966; Drucker and Heizer 1967; McFeat 1966). So too the gift exchange systems and cargo cults of Melanesia and New Guinea have been extensively discussed (Salisbury 1962; Uberoi 1962; Worsley 1957). In the plains material we have data on gift exchange, on prestige systems, and on revitalization movements. A single example from the literature can serve to illustrate the immense possibilities for comparative research and analysis. Suttles (1963) has suggested that the Coast Salish of northwestern North America maintained a network of intervillage ties through such mechanisms as marriage, kinship and gift exchange at potlatches. There are still intergroup gatherings today, for religious ceremonials in the winter and sports competitions in the summer, pan-Indian activities of growing importance to the Indian groups of the area. Suttles (1963:524) refers to the possible "formation of neo-Indian cultures" among these contemporary people when he notes "the continuing and perhaps growing strength of the multi-village community" bound by ties and activities of the type noted above.

A number of questions are immediately possible. Why, for example, have both the Plains and Northwest coast Indians begun the development of integrative structures of this sort, apparently since the Second World War? The northwest coast development is perhaps not unusual, representing a continuation in different form of intergroup activities such as the potlatch, as well as being an elaboration of activities associated with the potlatch. But what were the extent and nature of intergroup activities, and particularly integrative structures, on the plains in the nineteenth century, a point which has never been described in detail? Further, these movements appear to have developed in Canada in recent years without the direct encouragement of the government. Now in New Guinea some intergroup activities are occurring in the context of colonial politics. How are these related to other forms of intergroup activity, such as gift exchange systems and cargo cults?

There are a number of questions on the topic of wealth as well. It has always been maintained that the potlatch reached its full development only with the injection of vast amounts of European wealth. Certainly the recent availability of such items as cars and the present extensive social assistance programs of the government have assisted the growth of the plains powwow. To what extent are these important on the northwest coast after the long period of depression of the 1930's and 1940's? New Guinea is now receiving new forms and great amounts of European wealth (a point discussed by Salisbury 1962, and Belshaw 1965), such that some comparative analysis could be possible.

A considerable amount of further description would certainly be desirable, particularly of contemporary cultures, but we already possess sufficient data to permit some comparative analysis of integrative structures and their development, gift exchange systems and political/nationalist movements by minority groups in these areas. It might even be worthwhile to consider the possibilities of the development of such mechanisms in other parts of the world where they are substantially unknown, such as the growing urban areas of West Africa and the peasant agricultural communities of Latin America. It is to be hoped that such research will be undertaken.

Brandon University

REFERENCES

- BELSHAW, C. S.
1965 Traditional exchange and modern markets. Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall.
- BOAS, FRANZ
1966 Kwakiutl ethnography. Edited by H. Godere. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- DENSMORE, F.
1918 Teton Sioux music. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 61.
- DRUCKER, P., and R. F. HEIZER
1967 To make my name good: a reexamination of the Southern Kwakiutl Potlatch. London, Cambridge University Press.

- FEDER, N.
1964 Origin of the Oklahoma Forty-nine dance. *Ethnomusicology* 8:290-4.
- HODGE, F. W., ed.
1910 Handbook of American Indians north of Mexico. Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin 30:11.
- HOWARD, J. H.
1951 Notes on the Dakota Grass dance. *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7:82-5.
1955 Pan-Indian culture of Oklahoma. *Scientific Monthly* 81:215-20.
- KURATH, G. P.
1957 Pan-Indianism in Great Lakes tribal festivals. *Journal of American Folklore* 70:179-82.
1966 Michigan Indian festivals. Ann Arbor, Ann Arbor Publishers.
- McCLINTOCK, W.
1937 Dances of the Blackfoot Indians. Southwest Museum Leaflet 7.
- McFEAT, T., ed.
1966 Indians of the North Pacific coast. Toronto, McClelland and Stewart.
- MERRIAM, A. P.
1967 Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians. Chicago, Aldine Publishing Company.
- SALISBURY, R. F.
1962 From stone to steel. Melbourne, Melbourne University Press.
- SUTTLES, WAYNE
1963 The persistence of intervillage ties among the Coast Salish. *Ethnology* 2:512-25.
- UBEROI, J. P. S.
1962 Politics of the Kula Ring. Manchester, Manchester University Press.
- WORSLEY, P.
1957 The trumpet shall sound. London, Macgibbon and Kee.