

A Message from Garcia
The History and Culture of the Spirit Lake Dakota
 By Louis Garcia © 6/18/08

Message 38 Ticketless Society

A new social society was established on most of the Seven Council Fire reservations circa 1900. The name of this new organization was called Ticketless, a name referring to ration tickets.

Rationing supplies is not a new idea among Indians. When food was scarce, they had a rule – everyone eats or no one eats. There were no stores or relief agencies, no food meant no food. If the situation turned fatal as was the case when the bison disappeared, so it was. On the Chandler – Pohrt Winter Count for the year 1836 is recorded as the “year when the Sisseton’s Starved to death”.

When the Indians settled on reservations, the United States Government established a rationing system. Each head of family was given a ration ticket sized about two by three inches (One Feather). On the printed ticket was written in pen the number of people in a particular family and a place to punch when rations were received. The people were admonished not to loose the ticket. Some wore them around their neck suspended on a thong; others made a little pouch to keep them in. In nearly every collection of historic Plains Indian artwork are little flat, beaded bags that contain a ration ticket.

This system of rationing continues today in the government surplus commodity program, as well as civic, and church backed food banks. The head of the family fills out the required paperwork and is issued a ‘ticket’ if they are deemed eligible to receive the rations or as they are called today ‘comods’. Now as in the past some of the food is sold to purchase ‘non-essential’ items such as auto supplies, alcohol, and candy. One hears old stories of food supplies thrown away because their preparation was unknown to the recipient. I remember in the 1980’s bulgur was given out at the Spirit Lake commodity program. It was thrown away, or sold for animal feed because its use was unknown.

In 1867 a treaty was signed in Washington, D.C. establishing two reservations for the Sisseton and Wahpeton Dakota. One was located at Lake Traverse (Sisseton, SD) and other at Devils Lake (Spirit Lake) ND. Sometime later it was discovered the Cut-head band of Yanktonai Dakota owned the Spirit Lake area and they too were included as residents of the reservation. Section eight of the “Treaty with the Sioux – Sisseton and Wahpeton bands -1867” (Kappler 1971:(2) 956-959) reads:

“All expenditures under the provisions of the treaty shall be made for agricultural improvement and civilization of the members of said bands authorized to locate upon the respective reservations as here before specified, in such manner as may be directed by law; but no goods, provisions, groceries, or other articles – except materials for the erection of houses and other articles to facilitate the operations of agriculture – shall be issued to Indians or Mixed-bloods on either

reservation, unless it be in payment for labor performed or produce delivered: provided, that when persons located on either reservation by reason of age, sickness, or deformity, are unable to labor, the Agent may issue clothing and subsistence from such supplies as may be provided for said bands”.

As with any people some are more ambitious than others. The progressive Yanktonai on the Spirit Lake Reservation, formed themselves into a group which separated from the ration system. They raised enough through agricultural pursuits to feed and clothe their families without government assistance. The one thing they did not give up was their culture.

On the ninth of September 1979 while visiting with Mrs. Dennis (Susie) Cavanaugh she told me her parents [Blackfox] were members of the Ticketless Society headquartered in the Crow Hill District of the Spirit Lake Reservation. She said that Mrs. John Guy (Emma) Adams grandparents were also members [Takes Wood}. A man by the name of Two Children was the leader of the society.

The bi-laws were that as a member you could not accept government help. You had to be self-sufficient. If you gave something away, you were not expected to receive a return gift. If you did receive back a gift then you could not keep it but give it immediately to someone else.

“I was a little girl and I gave [through my parents] a visiting Ojibway man a horse. This visitor gave me a beautiful floral beaded dancing outfit. My parents told me to give it away, so I handed out items as I walked back to my place in the dancing circle, but I kept the belt. I didn’t want to give it up, but my grandmother took it from me and gave it away with some cloth to a visitor” Mrs. Cavanaugh said.

When the Ticketless Society met, they simply danced in place as the songs were rendered. Most of the songs were honor songs, followed by the customary giveaways. Naturally a feast was served as well as speeches by the leaders postulating their ticketless ideas.

On March 9, 1980 Tom and Julia Siyaka told me more information. The No Tickets met near the Episcopal Church at Crow Hill. The children of Takes Wood, Pemmican and his sister Hits Many had two large log homes with a porch built between them. This is where the No Tickets met. They didn’t dance but stood in place and moved in time to the hard – soft drum beat. No dance clothes were worn. They always had nice food at their gatherings.

Ticketless

June 8, 1908

Subject:

Introduction of new dance
called "Penny Dance" on
the Sioux reservation,
regarded as objectionable.

The Honorable, The Secretary of the Interior.

Sir:

I have the honor to enclose herewith a communication dated March 10, last, from John Strait, an Indian of the Devils Lake reservation, North Dakota, with reference to a new dance introduced on that reservation by certain Indians which is known as the penny dance, or ticketless dance, the later meaning those to whom free rations had been discontinued. I also enclose a communication dated March 22, last, from Miss M.C. Collins, missionary of the Congregational church on the Standing Rock reservation with reference to the same dance which she, Miss Collins, states has been introduced on the Sioux reservations and which is very detrimental to the Indians, and in her opinion should be prohibited. Miss Collins also states that Rev. Mr. Delorio, [sic] who is the Protestant Episcopal missionary on the Standing Rock reservation, together with Wakutamani and Weasel Bear, who are very progressive Indians, have requested her to report this fact to the proper authorities.

In this connection I desire to submit that, while recognizing at the same time, as their friend, feel everything tending to retard their progress should be discouraged and even prohibited.....

With kind regards, I am

Yours very sincerely

James McLaughlin (McLaughlin Papers 28: 508-509).

Return letter to Mary Collins:

Miss M. C. Collins

June 8, 1908

Little Eagle, SD

Dear Miss Collins:

".....As to the penny or No Ticket dance recently introduced on the Sioux reservation, I know the evil that might result from such among a people in the transition stage of the Sioux, and while regarding the Lakotas as a very superior tribe, at the same time know them to be very excitable and easily carried away and enthused by any new fad, no matter how absurd, so long as it approximates pleasures they enjoyed unrestrained in their old freedom.

I have stated my views regarding this new dance very clearly in my endorsement's and, while believing that the Indians should be allowed to amuse themselves in a reasonable manner, I at the same time, as their friend, feel that everything standing to retard their progress should be discouraged and even prohibited....."(James McLaughlin Papers 28: 513-514).

Teton Sioux Music

“The three following songs are known at Standing Rock as songs of the Ticketless Society. The term “society” is here a misnomer, being applied by the Sioux to those who were first dropped from a list of those receiving rations and accordingly had no “ration tickets”. Such Indians were supposed to be able to provide for themselves, and for that reason were expected to show unlimited generosity toward their friends. This designation was used only four or five years and was in the nature of a jest, but many songs of the Ticketless Society are still remembered by the Sioux” (Densmore 1918:512 - 513).

“The first of these songs was undoubtedly sung as a praise song in honor of Little Helper, who was expected to be inspired to still greater generosity by its words” (Densmore 1918: 513).

Song # 235, Catalog 645 [10,577B broken cylinder]

“You Have Relied Upon Me”

Sung by Holy Faced Bear - Mato Ite Wakan.

Recorded at Sisseton, SD

Oókate canna	In dances and feasts
Waciŋmayeyapi	You relied upon me
Keyapi	You have said
Bdiheiciya waon	So I have taken fresh courage
Wowacinyena	Little Helper
Heya	said
Canna	and
Tanyan	All is well.

Song # 236, Catalog 644 [missing cylinder]

“I Have Been Helping”

Sung by Holy Faced Bear

Recorded at Sisseton, SD

Ate	Father
Heyaya	has advised me
Iwahomaya	by words
Eca	so
Ohonkeśni	the weak ones
Wawokiya waon	I have been helping.

[Father is referring to the Indian Agent, just as the Grandfather is the President of the United States.]

Song # 237, Catalog 678 [10,581B]

“Song of the Ticketless Society”

Sung by Twin (Cekpa)

Recorded at Sisseton, SD

NO WORDS
Only vocables.

Now we have two questions: if U.S. Indian Inspector James McLaughlin says the “penny and ticketless dance” are one and the same, [1] is there a mix-up here?
[2]Why was the government against this society?

According to Indian tradition, the Penny Dance is completely different. Two leaders were selected, one named Leader of the Festivities, and the other Camping Director. Each were given a round fringed pouch in which to keep pennies, hence the name of the dance. These two men were in charge of the 4th of July celebration. The funds they collected through out the year were used to purchase food and services for the festivities. At the conclusion of their duties, each leader would dance to his honor song in the dancing arena, circling the perimeter, using straight toe-heel steps, followed by his family. The words to the song mentioned him by name, while keeping a slow steady drum beat. After the first verse the singers sped up using a hard soft beat, at which time the leader and his family would form a circle and dance sideways, performing a traditional Round Dance. A giveaway followed this dance in which the leaders thanked the people for selecting them for this esteemed position. For a similar description of the Penny Dance see Songs and Dances of the Lakota.

The government seems to against the giveaway, not the idea of self-sufficiency. In Indian society of long ago, everyone was on an equal financial footing. Therefore everything was shared. In the giveaway the rich gave to the poor. Besides when they were nomadic, they could not possible carry accumulated items, so they gave it away, and gained prestige.

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Kun-tah-soo.

Glossary

- Blackfox, Albert Șuŋġinasapa (Șuŋġina = fox; Sapa = black).
DLS # 1161, 1860 – 1933. A member of the Crow
Hill Ticketless Society.
- Camping Director Oetitancan or Vice President of the 4th of July.
- Crow Hill A hill in Section 25, Lallie Township, Benson
County, North Dakota. Named KaŋġiPaha or Raven
Hill for thousands of ravens which were found dead
among the trees one fall. This western voting
district was originally the home of the Yanktonai
Dakota, when they first settled the reservation.
- Fourth of July Celebration Bdokecoka Woskate (Bdoke = summer; Coka =
middle; Woškate = celebration). This event replaced
The Sun Dance after this religious ceremony was
outlawed by the government in 1882.
- Leader of the Festivities Tiyoti (Ti = to dwell or live; Yo = within; Ti =
dwell) the Tent of Tents or Dwelling within the
Camp. The President of the Fourth of July
Celebration.
- Penny Dance Mazaša Wacipi (Maza = metal; Șa = red; Wacipi =
dance). The giveaway dance for the officers of the
4th of July celebration.

Ticketless Society

Kan'sucona Okodakiciye
 Kanta is the Dakota word for plum.
 Kantasu means plum seeds (pits).
 Miniĥuha kansu means paper plum seeds.
 The "plum seed" was the name of a dice game played by the women. The marked seeds (pits) would be tossed in a bowl, and a score counted (Schoolcraft 1857). "Paper plum seed" was the name given to playing cards when they were first introduced. Kansu was the name given to 'Ration Tickets' because they were like playing cards as to size and texture (Iapi Oaye 1890). (Kan [ta]su = ration ticket; Cona = without, none; Okodakiciye = organization, society; Okiye = to help; Koda = friend; Kici = each other [Friends helping each other]).

Takes Wood

Cañiçu (Çaņ = wood, Içu = he or she takes)
 DLS # 784, 1816 – 1897. Member of the Crow Hill No Ticket Society.

Two Children

Cinca Nompa (Cinca = child; Nompa = two).
 This man is officially enrolled in the tribe as Heĥakaitewakan or Holy Faced Elk (Heĥaka = male Elk; Ite = face; Wakan = holy, sacred). DLS # 364, 1848 – 1918. He was a dance hall owner, and leader of the No Ticket Society. His father was Scarlet Shield the Yanktonai chief at Crow Hill district.
