

THE WYOMING ARAPAHO SUN DANCE: AN EXPRESSION OF TRIBAL IDENTITY
FOR OKLAHOMA ARAPAHOS

by

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Introduction

This report is primarily a description of the Arapaho Sun Dance and is based on observations and field notes made during a trip to Ethete, Wyoming the week of July 7-13, 1969. The trip was made for two reasons: (1) to get better acquainted with Oklahoma Arapahoes, many of whom go to Wyoming to attend the Sun Dance every summer; and (2) to assess the importance of the traditional Arapaho ceremonial life, now largely in the hands of Wyoming Arapahoes, as an expression of tribal identity for Oklahoma Arapahoes.

In gathering information for the Oral History Project I have been impressed by the fact that the Arapahoes of Oklahoma, numbering about 1500 persons, have few visible expressions of their identity as Arapahoes. The Arapaho language is known and understood by most of the older people, but is rarely spoken today. The Arapahoes are incorporated with the Cheyennes under provisions of the Oklahoma Indian Welfare Act of 1936 as the "Cheyenne-Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma." Under the present constitution and by-laws, eligible persons are enrolled as Cheyenne-Arapahoes, and not distinguished further by tribe. Public ceremonies