

DELAWARE BURIAL CUSTOMS ESPECIALLY FOR WIDOW OF DECEASED

Now then, I will tell about some the burial, customs among the Delaware people. Take for example, when a woman loses her husband, well they appointed what they call four workers -- two men and two women -- and these workers would take care of all the necessary details. That was before the present day undertakers, they washed and dressed the body and prepare it for burial and they'd do all the cooking and prepare the food that was to be served during the time they stayed up with the deceased one, and he was taken to the place of burial. And an old man -- any old man -- was appointed in the tribe to talk to the deceased person. They would tell him that, "You are now in another land or place, and you must no longer bother us or think of us. Go on in your world in your way." Then they would place the deceased one's clothing, some of them, inside the coffin. And then they would then bury the person and the widow was led around the grave by some of her family. They went counter-clockwise when they took her around this grave, they led her towards the east. That was done by the members of his family instead of her family. And that was in the way of telling her that now this family is through with you. A sort of divorce, I, guess it could be called. She was then told that you can get married to whom you wish to be married to from this time on. And then a feast was held by the graveside. Long ago, they had two places to eat. One for the relatives and the other table was for the -- not a table, it was spread on the ground, was for the friends of the deceased. And after they got home, of course, they then smoked themselves with cedar. And they smoked the entire house with cedar smoke. And all the people who were there at the time the person passed away, they had their head's washed by the mourners on the third day after the burial. And as is the custom with my family, why they had a feast, oh, in about seven days. But I believe with the Munsee's Clan it was twelve days. They had a feast for the deceased person at the home where he passed away, and no one was permitted to leave this home completely empty. Someone must be at this house at all times for one year. And whoever the mourner was, if it was a daughter, son or wife, they were not permitted to indulge in any social dancing for one year. That was strictly against the rules, to dance before the year was up when a person lost a member of their family.

Katherine: (Now who were the mourners? Were they chosen?)

Nora: No. That's just the family of the deceased person.

Katherine: (And the ones that were smoked--were just the ones--)

Nora: Who were there at the time when he died, and all members of the family were smoked with cedar.