

Midnight Ceremony

At midnight there is a ceremony. Water is brought in from outside. Prayers are made. Cedar is thrown on the fire. James Silverhorn goes outside and blows his eagle bone whistle. Water is passed around and people drink, etc.

The drum went around $1\frac{1}{2}$ times before the midnight ceremony. James had started it earlier, and it went all the way around (though the Comanches were not there yet), he sang again, and passed it on, and by the time it reached George, it was midnight so James called for the drum. He sang the four Midnight Water Songs. A bucket of water was passed in from outside and set down just east of the fire. It stayed there during the pay prayers, etc. Just before midnight, George, who was the main one tending the fire, brushed the coals up to the side of the altar, and arranged them into a crescent, following the shape of the altar. Stray coals that fell away and ashes were carefully swept back into place with a short-handled broom. New wood was brought in and carefully stacked at the east side of the fire. The wood was placed down in two stacks, the pieces in each stack lined up, and their ends--the burning ends--interlocking like the rails of a rail fence. A great wave of heat went up from the stirred up coals which were swept into the crescent, and the live coals glowed unevenly, topped here and there with gray ash, and waves of heat shimmering. With this arrangement the whole fireplace resembled a bird--the glowing coals in crescent shape forming the wings, the coals closer to the burning sticks forming the body, and the sticks themselves, extending east from the fire constituting the spread-out tail feathers. As the coals glowed and changed color and seemed to quiver with the movement of the fire, it was easy to visualize the bird moving, as if alive. George used two long sticks for his "sculpturing" of the coals, pushing and raking the coals with them, and occasionally using them as tongs to lift coals into position. While he was getting the coals into crescent shape, he would shove and pile them up and use one of his long sticks to level off the heap, and also to crush whole sticks up into smaller coals. When the crescent-shape had been achieved, he took one of his sticks and made a series of longitudinal impressions on each side, as if to indicate wing feathers. When he had finished shaping the coals with the long sticks, he took the broom and swept up any ashes or other residue which might have fallen outside, so that the outline of the bird was clear and distinct.

After the water was brought in, James talked and prayed in Kiowa, making signs and gestures, and getting very emotional. Several times, when he prayed, he wept. He smoked a cornshuck cigarette while he prayed. Then he asked Charlie High to pray and put cedar in the fire. Charlie prayed in Apache. Before the water was passed around, George poured a little bit of it on the ground just east of the fire. The water was in a white enamel bucket, probably 2-gallon size, with dime store decals decorating it. One decal was a butterfly, and another was an Indian by his tipi, and I don't remember the rest. Toward the end of all this--I don't know if the water was going around or not--James took his eagle bone whistle and went outside. Soon we could hear him blow it. He blew it on each side of the tipi, and then came back in. At this time he told John and I that from then on we were free to leave, without asking permission, any time we wanted to. Another part of the midnight ceremony consisted of his taking all the fans from his box and smoking them in cedar smoke. He had several fans with him. Before they were passed around and put into use, he laid them on the small Mexican serape he had by his side. Charlie High and Tom Bitseedy had brought cups to drink with, dipping water out of the bucket and drinking and then pouring the remainder over their hands. Tom loaned John and I his silver cup, and then I let Sarah and Evelyn use it, but the rest of the men just lifted the bucket and drank out of that.