

PERRY, SAMUEL

INTERVIEW

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W. T. Holland.

"The Bread Dance"  
As told by Samuel Perry,  
Full Blood Shawnee, Tulsa.

In the fall of the year after the harvest there would be a gathering of all the families of the tribes, Shawnee, at their camping ground or central meeting place they had for such festivals. The families would bring vegetables and fruits and such other necessary things as were needed when camping out. When all had met, the Chief of the tribe would call them together. He then would choose ten young men who were known as good hunters and would send them out to get the game which was to be used at the feast. This consisted of wild game, of course, and in the early days included buffalo and at all times, turkey, prairie chicken, rabbits, quail, and anything they could find in that locality. I might say, they always brought in the game. When they returned, the Chief called all to order. Then he would bless the game, with prayers of thanksgiving, and would order it prepared for the feast that was to follow later.

The preparation of the food was all done by the women, of course. When it was announced that the food was prepared, the Chief would order it all placed in the center of the ground upon sheets spread out

for that purpose. After which all would gather around it, some sitting on logs placed in a circle around the table, and others on the ground, within the circle of those sitting on the logs, until all were seated. The Chief would again talk, or as we now say, preach a thanksgiving sermon, on the goodness of the Great Spirit, and on the many blessings received through the year. This speech would be followed by his blessings upon the food.

Then would be heard the muffled beat of the drums, first low, and gradually getting louder. (this would be in the afternoon, usually.) The people would begin to stir from their seats, move back from their former positions, lines would begin to form; dancing would begin single file, around the food, which was placed in the center. The drums would throb and the dancers swing to the rhythm of the drum beat; this would continue until about night, when they would be called to rest by the Chief.

The people would again be seated as before. The women then would gather up the food in baskets and would pass among the people, distributing it until all were satisfied. After all had eaten and rested, the drums

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would again sound. This was the signal for the dance to begin again. Then the lines would form, dancing and singing begin, and this continued until morning for those who were not exhausted before. The next morning, they would gather up their belongings, and would return to their homes, having had a good time socially, and shown their appreciations to the Great Spirit in the way of thanksgiving for their well-being.