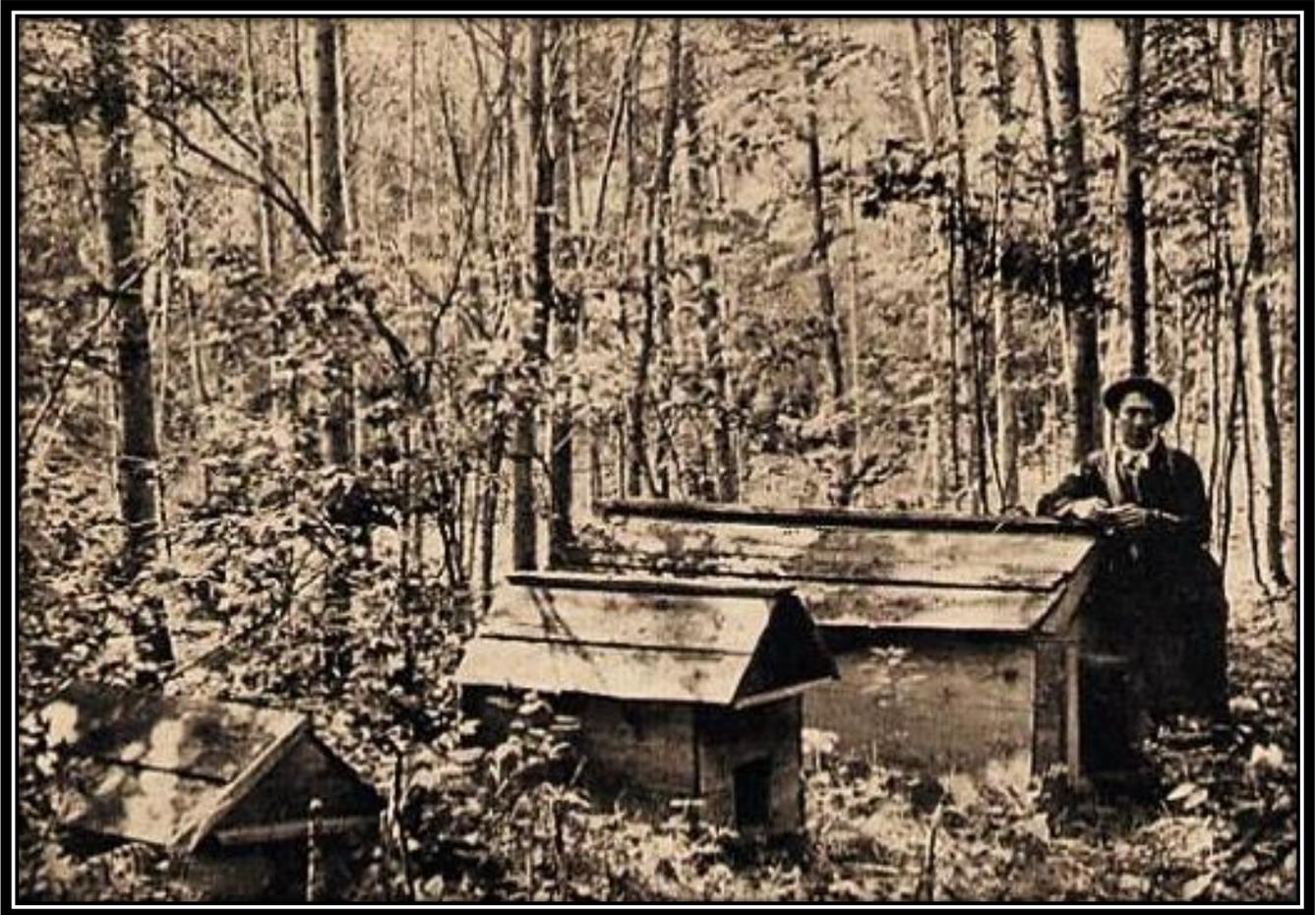


MENOMINEE RANGE MEMORIES 3: CHIPPEWA MEDICINE DANCE AT CHICAGOAN LAKE IN 1884

By William J. Cummings, Menominee Range Historical Foundation Historian



Postmarked October 23, 1908, this is a halftone postcard view of the Indian Burying Ground at Chicagoan Lake near Crystal Falls, Mich. According to Ojibwa funeral customs, upon death the corpse was washed, groomed, dressed in fine clothing, and wrapped in birchbark before burial in a shallow grave. Following death, the soul of the deceased was believed to journey westward for four days to an afterlife in the sky. *[William J. Cummings]*

The contemporary newspapers did occasionally record some of the Native American traditions and celebrations which provide excellent insight into some of their customs.

Escanaba's *The Iron Port* reprinted an item from Iron Mountain's *The Menominee Range* in its June 9, 1883 edition, noting: The Chippewas, 300 strong, held their annual pow-wow at Chicagoan lake last week. – Menominee Range.

Perhaps the most impressive account of Native American ceremonies appeared in the December 20, 1884 issue of *The Florence Mining News*, in which the reporter, who was in attendance, recounted the event as follows:

A MEDICINE DANCE.

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The Chippewas Indulge in Their Semi-Annual Medicine Dance at Lake Chicagoan – Over one Hundred Bucks Participate in the wild Ceremony – Experiences of a Mining News Man, who was Present – Whisky, Dancing and Whooping the Principal Features – An Interesting Chapter Descriptive of a Chippewa Medicine Dance.

The Chippewa tribe of Indians celebrated their semi-annual "Medicine" dance at Lake Chicagoan for three days commencing on Saturday, November 29. The Chippewas, who were once powerful, have dwindled to insignificance, the braves numbering very little over one hundred. The present chief, Muscosowano, lives near Lac Vieux Desert and members of the tribe came to attend the great conclave of red men for a radius of one hundred miles. By far the greater number were from the Indian settlements at Bad Water, Lake Chicagoan, Lac Vieux Desert, Eagle Lake and on the Wisconsin river. The representatives of what will soon be a "lost race," presented

A STRIKING APPEARANCE

as they gathered to the tune of an unmusical tom-tom and their own guttural but timely "hiyah! hiyah! hiyah!" Many were gaudily painted and wore feathers and beads as in the palmy days of stake-burning and scalping. Special attention had been given the few white men who had married into the tribe and it looked as though an effort had been made to conceal their Caucasian blood by a thick covering of brown paint relieved here and there by stripes of a more brilliant hue. The Chippewas

HAVE BEEN AT PEACE

with the pale faces since January 29, 1855, as is shown by the treaty which is signed by Franklin Pierce, then president of the United States. At each conclave or medicine dance this treaty is brought forth and read so as to keep fresh in the minds of the tribe every provision and promise. At this "meet" a MINING NEWS representative, and a friend were the only persons present who could read English. The reporter, by request, read the treaty which was in turn translated to the Indians by an illiterate white acquisition to the tribe by marriage. About one hundred braves, squaws and papooses were in attendance. The affair is said to be of a religious character. Prayers are offered

TO THE GREAT SPIRIT

by the braves and everything used in the dance is blessed by the medicine man, who they call "Tegauninnie" for short, after which "singing" and "dancing" are indulged in by all for two or three hours. Those of the tribe attending the medicine dance are obliged to bring some kind of root to be presented to the medicine man, which is also blessed by him. While the medicine dance proper is going on none of the participants are allowed to partake of any intoxicating liquor. On Monday evening the medicine dance was finished and then a series of "war dances" was entered upon and the secret meetings were held. By the kindness of Chief Peter Muscosowano, of Lac Vieux Desert, ruler of the tribe, the representative of this paper and a friend were admitted to

THE SECRET SESSION.

This seemed to be a general jubilee for the chief, medicine man and the older ones of the four different delegations, and lasted for about five hours. At the beginning of the fandango, the chief addressed those present for some time, after which the "dancing" commenced. The dance consisted of a series of successive jumps

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straight up and down and the dancer ceased when he lost his breath. The most outlandish contortionist was the most envied. The secret lodge was at one end of the camp or long teepee, blankets being stretched across so that the dance could not be seen by those not admitted. "Music" was furnished for the dance by four braves, three having tin cans filled with bullets which they rattled keeping good time, while the other pounded with a crooked stick upon a tom-tom, shaped like an old fashioned dasher churn, being hollow, and having the skin of a deer stretched over each end. While this inspiring noise was being furnished the remainder of the secret club engaged in dancing in a circle about the fire,

SINGING AND YELLING.

These dances lasted about five minutes and were followed by intervals of quiet. A committee of three passed around the "fire-water" of which they had a number of jugs and also a few bottles of alcohol. This was kept up until about three o'clock in the morning when all were full enough of "corn juice" to go to bed. This festival was gotten up at no little expense of time and money. To raise funds the Indian "sets" (pawns) his horse, watch, sleigh or in fact anything but his squaw for money to carry on the affair. The meeting house used for this occasion was built from poles, one end being put in the ground and brought over to make an arch which was covered with woven flags,

BIRCH BARK AND DEER SKINS.

The structure was sixty-five feet long by about twenty-five feet wide and had holes left at the top to allow the smoke to escape from the six fires that were kept continually burning. The sleeping apartments were at each side of the tent, all lying with their feet toward the fire. The dance was ended on Tuesday morning. After dancing what they call a farewell dance they all left for their

different homes at Lac Vieux Desert, Bad Water and Chicagoan Lake. They meet again next July at Lac Vieux Desert. The sight was a most interesting one to the MINING NEWS man, but when they would get a little wild, he could not help thinking of the Crystal Falls man who attended one of their dances and was chased home, narrowly escaping the drunken reds, who followed him as rapidly as possible with drawn knives.