

SIoux INDIANS
dancing for
PRESIDENT COOLIDGE



AUGUST 17, 1927
PINE RIDGE
SOUTH DAKOTA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY
GRAVES

FIRECLOUD'S Omaha *OR* Grass Dance COSTUME

Part Two

by James H. Howard

A very fine example of the crow belt or kaⁿgiha mignaka accompanies the Fire-cloud costume. It consists of five basic elements which are disassembled when the ornament is stored. These are:

A netted yarn sash, a buckskin pillow or base with two projecting arrows or spikes, an eagle feather "tail", a pair of cloth and feather trailers and the crow belt feather disk.

The netted sash is 240 cm. in length and has a maximum width of 14 cm. at the center. It is done in five colors of commercial yarn. Only 90 cm. of its length, the central portion, is netted. This section is sewed off at either end to prevent it from unraveling. The remaining yarn is then gathered into a rope of three-strand braid for another 30 cm. on either end. The end of this braid is then knotted and 42 cm. of loose yarn ends are left at either end of the sash. The arrangement of the colors in the central netted section is as follows: From the outside there is a 1 cm. band of light orange, then a 1.5 cm. band of maroon, 3.3 cm. of light blue, and in the center 3.5 cm. of dark blue, to which a slightly lighter blue has been added on one side. The sash is interesting as few examples of native finger weaving or netting are known from the Teton Dakota. The usual sash used with Teton crow belts of this period is the machine woven Hudson's Bay Company sash, most of which were made in Manchester, England.

The pillow or base for the crow belt consists of a piece of hide which was half tanned; i.e., it is softer than rawhide so that it is somewhat flexible, but the tanning has not been carried so far as to produce buckskin. The piece, originally a long rectangular shape, has been folded twice so that there are three thicknesses at the center and two at the top and bottom. The whole measures 14 cm. in height by 24 cm. maximum width. A section measuring 7.2 cm. from top to bottom between two of the folds was been laced off with a buckskin thong through holes punched through the two thicknesses of hide. This has then been stuffed with blanket lint and then tied off at either end with additional buckskin thongs. On either side of this top part, slits have been cut into this pillow near the top and the two spikes have been inserted into the pillow deep enough so that they

stand erect. These are held firmly in place by sewing them to the pillow with cotton string. Each of the spikes consists of three golden eagle wing pointer feathers. On either side there are two measuring 47 cm. in length and a third measuring 34.5 cm. The two longer pointers on either side are tied close together at both top and bottom and a quilled rawhide strip 35 cm. long and 8 mm. wide is attached to the upper length. These strips are decorated with wrapped quillwork in red, light green and yellow quills.

At the tops of the spikes bunches of red rooster hackles and cerise colored ribbons have been tied with white and yellow cotton string, the ends of which stick out from the tops of the spikes as further decoration. Pieces of mallard duck head skin 8 cm. in length, with iridescent green feathers, have been wrapped and sewn in place at the top of the spikes covering the wrappings which fasten the hackles and ribbons in place. As further ornament on either spike, there are lengths of ordinary cotton string to which copper "hawk bells" have been knotted at intervals of 2 to 2.5 cm. These are fastened to the spike at top and bottom only on the right side, but on the left one the string is looped once around the quilled rawhide strip 10 cm. from the top in addition.

Bunches of striped screech owl wing and tail feathers 2.5 cm. in length are bound around the bases of both spikes to complete the decoration. These owl feathers, 22 on either side, have been prepared much like bustle feathers in that the web has been stripped from the quill on one or both sides and the quill itself has been shaved thin on the underside to produce the "fluttering" effect so admired by the Teton. Small chicken feather fluffies, dyed red, tip each of these owl feathers. The bases have been cut off diagonally and the ends bent back and thrust inside the hollow quill. These loops have then been used to thread bunches of 11 feathers each together, as for a bustle, but the bunches have been tied upright around the base of each spike so as to stand erect.

Returning to the pillow section of the base, we note that beginning 7 cm. from the top on either side the hide has been chamfered so that the bottom of the base is only 16 cm. wide. There is a doubled buckskin thong, the ends of which are 11.5 cm. in length, attached through



holes in the base 2.3 cm. from the top center of the pillow portion. Paired holes, probably for the attachment of the crow belt feather disk occur 7 cm., 7.8 cm., and 8.6 cm. from the top of the base. Three buckskin thongs 15-17 cm. in length are spaced at the bottom of the base for attaching the eagle feather tail.

The entire base piece was apparently attached to the netted sash by threading the sash through the opening between the back fold of the hide and the remainder of the base. This back fold, which extends only 10.8 cm. of the way up the back, or about 3/4 of the height of the base is secured by two buckskin thongs threaded through the pillow. With the sash threaded through the channel thus formed, the spikes project from the wearer's back at about a 45° angle and tend to move back and forth rather freely, again producing the waving, fluttering effect so admired by the Teton in their Omaha dance costumes.

The eagle feather tail piece consists of a trapezoidal piece of folded rawhide measuring, as folded, 10.2 cm. in height and 17.3 cm. in width at the bottom but tapering to only 14 cm. in width at the top. Ten holes have been cut at the point of folding at the bottom and in these 10 black and white golden eagle tail feathers have been inserted and sewn in place with sinew thread. The feathers are magnificent examples of their kind, probably from a large female bird, and have an average length of 35 cm. A doubled cotton string "bridle" 5.5 cm. from the folded rawhide base helps to space and restrain these feathers. Two quilled rawhide strips, each 30 cm. in length and 6 mm. wide are sewn to the upper surface of the tail near the center, using sinew thread. These cover most of the exposed length of the tail feathers. A row of seven short, dark, eagle body feathers, each 12.5 cm. in length, are sewn so as to cover the rawhide base of the tail and the join of the tail feathers and the rawhide. A row of 8 downy eagle breath feathers 11 cm. in length and also sewn down with sinew is fastened beneath these so as to partially cover about 8 cm. of the base of the tail feathers. The rawhide base of this tail piece has been sewn flat using a buckskin thong lacing at the sides and bottom and two vertical rows of cotton string near the middle. Three buckskin thongs 7-12 cm. in length are spaced along the top of the piece for attachment to the corresponding thongs at the lower edge of the base piece. Thus attached, this eagle tail also has considerable freedom to move back and forth with the movements of the dancer.

The cloth and feather trailers consist of two pieces of black woolen material, each measuring (with the top folded over) 70.5 cm. in length and roughly 16 cm. in width. At the top of each a hardwood twig or dowel with grooves cut around each end has been wrapped in one end of the cloth and sewn in place with ornamental stitching in white cotton thread. Three buckskin thongs, some single and some double, are attached at this point as well, two at the edges and one at top center of each piece. These are of sufficient length to permit attachment to the netted sash.

Five rows of eagle feathers are attached to each of these trailers. Each feather is attached at its upper end, either with a parfleche loop sewn to the feather or by the "self loop" already described, produced by cutting off the bottom of the quill diagonally and bending the end back into the hollow quill. The top row on the trailers consists of three feathers on the right-hand side, but only two on the left. These are black and white golden eagle tail feathers with an average length of 36 cm. The bases of each of these are provided with sewn on rawhide loops, all of which seem to have come from a cut up parfleche, as they still show signs of blue paint. Downy eagle breath feathers are attached at the base of each feather. The base has then been wrapped with a piece of red strouding 4.5 cm. in length with a spiral wrapping of white string. This row of eagle feathers is attached 2 to 2.5 cm. from the top of the trailer, the feathers neatly spaced.

The second row down consists of six stripped eagle wing feathers with the central quill completely removed 4.5 to 8 cm. above the self loop base, leaving only the fluttering web sections which were stripped from the quill before these were cut off. These delicate creations range from 30 to 33 cm. in length and are attached with white cotton string 4.5 cm. below the top of the trailer.

The third row down consists of four eagle tail feathers on each trailer. They are prepared like those on the top row, except for the fact that only one has the spiral wrapping of white cotton string over the red strouding base. These feathers also have pink fluffy feather attached at the tips. They average 35 cm. in length. This row is attached 17 cm. from the top of the trailer. On the back side of each trailer, where this row of feathers is attached, there is fastened a wooden rod which serves to keep the trailers hanging straight and the feathers spaced. This feature occurs with the next two rows as well.

The fourth row consists of four black and white eagle tail feathers for each trailer. Five of these are equipped with rawhide loops and red strouding wrappings, while three are adorned with self-loop attachment. One, the inside feather on the right side, has the spiral string wrapping over the strouding. The other four wrapped feathers have a spiral wrapping of black thread and an extra length of stroud 1.5 cm. in length has been left at either end of the wrapping and cut into a fringe. A buckskin thong, of no apparent utility, has been knotted around the wrapping of the outside feather on the left side. This row of feathers averages 32 cm. in length, though all show some evidence of having been trimmed a bit at the tips, probably to conceal wear. The row is attached 38.5 cm. from the top of the trailers.

The fifth and bottom row consists of four black and white eagle feathers to each trailer. They are attached 61 cm. from the top of the trailer and average 35 cm. in length. All are unornamented and attached by self-loops of feather quills. The bottom of the cloth base for these trailers, as can be seen, does not extend to the end or beyond the tips of the fea-

thers in the bottom row. This seems to be an old time feature and is not seen in modern bustles. Another feature of an old time nature is the wood rod stiffeners used in connection with the bottom three rows of feathers on each trailer. Each trailer is also equipped with a single buckskin thong, located on the inner edge of each trailer 28 cm. from the top, permitting the two trailers to be tied together when in use.

The final component of the Fire-cloud crow belt is the feather disk. This is generally similar to the shoulder bustle which it matches in color and construction technique. The central element of this disk, however, is a plain German silver concho 6.3 cm. in diameter and with a "dish" of about 9 mm. from edge to center. A brass loop has been welded to the back, through which a buckskin thong has been threaded for use in pulling the layers of feathers making up the ornament into place.

The 12 feather circles in this piece are composed as follows, working from front to back:

12 golden eagle wing feathers, originally black and white, now dyed orange, 18 cm. in length. Web is split from quill on both sides. Red dyed fluffies glued to feather tips. No bridle string present.

Five domestic goose feathers dyed variously blue, yellow, orange and green. Two have printed legends, "Buy hardware at SHAVERS" and ". . . be tickled". Web is split from quill on one side only. Average length is 24 cm. No bridle string present.

Twelve eagle or hawk feathers dyed orange. No tips remain on any of these, apparently by design. Web is split from quill on one side only. Average length is 18 cm. A linen thread bridle string passes through each feather 3.5 cm. from its base.

Ten Cooper's hawk tail feathers dyed purple, averaging 18.5 cm. in length. Web is stripped from both sides of quill. A linen thread bridle is present 4 cm. from the base of the feathers. Apparently this was in place before the feathers were dyed, as it is also dyed purple.

Eight Cooper's hawk wing feathers dyed purple, averaging 24 cm. in length. Web is stripped from both sides of quill. Red fluffies are glued to the tips of the feathers.

Nine golden eagle wing feathers dyed orange. These average 20.5 cm. in length. Red dyed fluffies are glued to tips. Bridle of black thread 2 cm. from base. Web is stripped from both sides of quill.

Ten screech owl wing feathers dyed purple. Web is stripped from one side of quill only. Average length of feathers is 22 cm. No bridle string present.

Twelve marsh hawk (?) tail feathers dyed purple. Web is stripped from quill on one side only. Red fluffies glued at tips. Average length of feathers is 25 cm. Bridle or spacing string of black thread is 4.5 cm. from base of feathers.

Twelve Cooper's hawk tail feathers dyed orange. Web stripped from quill on one side only. Blue fluffies were once glued to feather tips but now all are missing. Average length

of feathers 25 cm. Bridle string of red thread is 5 cm. from base.

Twelve marsh hawk tail feathers dyed orange. Web is stripped from quill on both sides. Average length is 22 cm. Red fluffies are glued to tips. A bridle string is 4.5 cm. from the base.

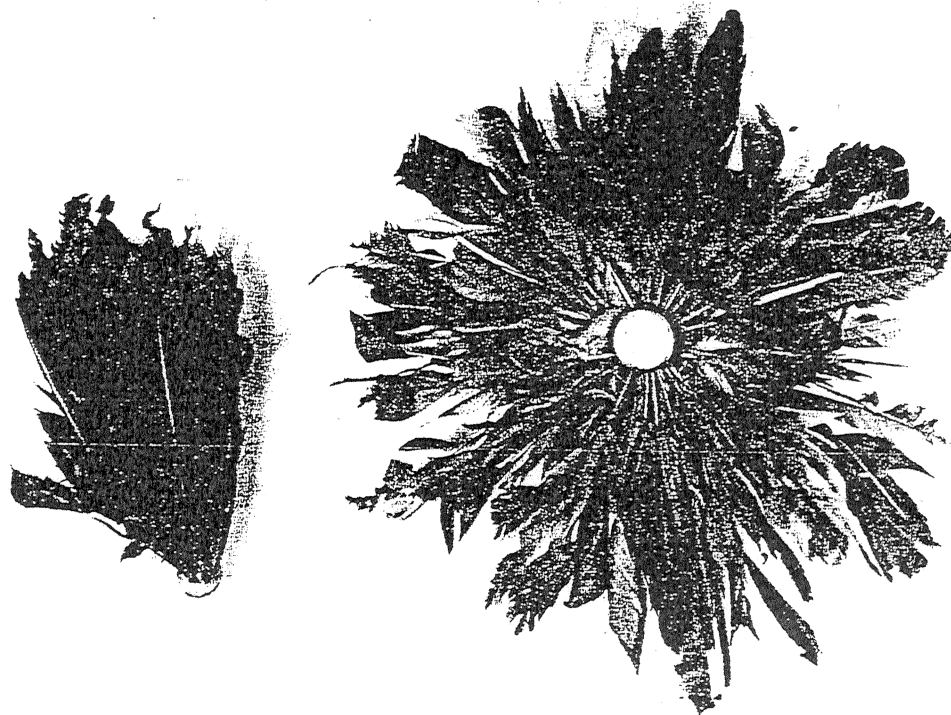
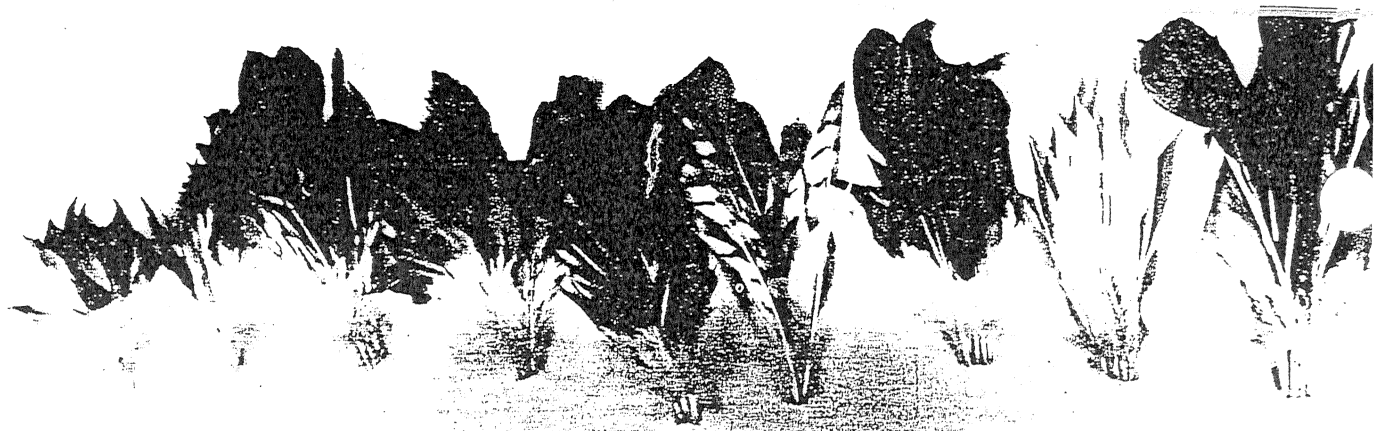
Eight hawk wing "pointer" feathers dyed purple. The web is stripped from both sides of the quill and the quill shaved thin. Red fluffies are glued to the feather tips. The average length is 30 cm. A bridle of black thread is 7 cm. from the base.

Nine domestic turkey wing feathers dyed orange. Web has been stripped from both sides of quill and quill has been shaved thin. The tips of all feathers are missing, apparently by intent. Remaining portions of feathers average 19 cm. in length. A bridle string of black thread is 7 cm. from the base.

A thick rawhide disk with two center perforations serves to keep the various circles of feathers making up the disk in place when the buckskin thong is pulled taut and tied. This rawhide disk is 4 cm. in diameter.

The crow belt is assembled as follows: The yarn sash is threaded through the channel provided at the back of the base. The eagle feather tail is then tied to the bottom of the base by means of the three buckskin thongs present on both articles. The trailers are then tied to the netted sash by the thongs provided at their tops and are also tied to one another on the inner edges at both the top and 28 cm. down from the top by means of additional thongs on the inner edges. They are tied so that the eagle feather tail rests above the inside edges of the tops of both trailers. The crow belt feather disk is then attached to the base by





threading the ends of the buckskin thongs thru two of the holes in the base and, after pulling them tight so as to expand the ornament, tying them together on the opposite side. By means of the netted sash, the entire piece is then tied to the dancer's waist.

With both the Omaha and Ponca tribes, from whom the Teton Dakota borrowed this style of ornament, the crow belt is said to symbolize a battlefield after the conflict. The fluttering feathers on the trailers represent the dropping of feathers from the birds fighting over the dead bodies. The two spikes or shafts had a double significance, representing both the stark bodies and also the fatal arrows standing in the lifeless enemy. The eagle was associated with war and with the destructive powers of thunder and the attendant storms, while the wolf tail and the stuffed crow skin (seen in older Omaha and Ponca versions of the ornament but not in the Dakota version) as well as the owl were often seen on the field after a hunt or battle and thus were connected with death in the minds of the Indians. (Fletcher and La Flesche, 1911: 441-442; also, statements of Charlie Springer and Walter Hamilton, Omaha; and Robert Little-dance and Peter Le Clair, Ponca.)

It is interesting to note that in the Fire-cloud specimen and in other old Teton crow belts the stuffed crow skin and the wolf or coyote tail, presumably present on all ornaments of this type at the time the Teton adopted the "Omaha" or Grass dance from the Omaha and/or Ponca, are absent. It seems likely that in this case the Teton borrowed the form of the ornament but did not borrow the underlying meaning attached to it by the Omaha and Ponca. Ralph Linton long ago noted that in the diffusion of items from one society to another, material culture objects and the techniques for manufacturing them are more easily transmitted than philosophical concepts or emotional associations which the lending society may have in regard to such objects (Linton, 1936: 338-339). The Teton Dakota form of the crow belt as illustrated by the Fire-cloud specimen, provides an excellent case in point. The Teton have retained the more striking features of the ornament, but the crow skin and coyote tail have been sloughed off as meaningless appurtenances since the Dakota did not know of their symbolism. In their name for the ornament, however, kaⁿgiha mignaka (literally crow sl^uttered-in ((the belt))) the Teton preserve a

linguistic memory of the crow skin element, though it no longer figures in the actual construction of the ornament.

The shoulder bustle, called uⁿhčéla kagápi or "peyote cactus shaped" by the Lakota because of the shape of its center rosette, is worn at the level of the neck on the dancer's back. Customarily this item is made to match the feather disk worn with the crow belt or bustle.

The Fire-cloud specimen is composed of 14 circles or layers of split feathers deriving from both wild and domesticated birds. Its construction is fairly typical of early Teton shoulder bustles, which is to say that the featherwork shows a level of expertise rarely seen on present day Sioux bustles.

The center of the bustle is a small trade mirror 47 mm. in diameter. This has a metal rim around its edge and a cardboard back. To its back a rawhide disk the same size as the mirror has been sewn with sinew thread by drilling holes in the metal rim at four places. This rawhide disk has two perforations near its center through which a buckskin thong is passed. The two ends of this thong are then passed through the center of each of the 14 circles of feathers making up the bustle. Small red dyed hackle feathers were thrust between the center mirror and its rawhide backing, but only the bases of these are now present.

Each of the 14 circles of feathers in the bustle is composed of approximately 11 feathers, the ends of which have been shaved off on the under side. This shaved end is then doubled back upon itself and inserted into the hollow quill so as to form a loop. A cotton string has then been threaded through these loops and the ends tied so as to form a circle or rosette. In all of the circles except the first and third, the feathers have been spaced by means of a "bridle" string, a thread passing through the quill of each feather a short distance above its base. This also prevents the feathers from twisting laterally. All of the feathers making up the bustle have been split and shaved so as to produce the wild "fluttering" effect so beloved by the Teton. Feathers treated in this manner move with the slightest breeze or motion of the wearer, like the leaves of an aspen. The most common method of preparing feathers in this way is to carefully split off the feather from the central quill on either side, beginning at the upper end of the feather just below the point where the end of the feather begins to taper toward the point. A sharp knife or razor blade is used for this work, which is extremely exacting. After the web of the feather has been separated from the central quill, the quill itself is shaved down on the under (concave) side, leaving just enough of the central pith and upper (convex) side to prevent the feather from breaking. In preparing the circles under (concave) sides of the individual feathers are always outward.

The various circles in Fire-cloud's shoulder bustle are composed as follows, working from the front or mirror toward the back:

10 Cooper's hawk (Accipiter cooperii) tail feathers dyed orange. They are split down one side only, and there is no "bridle" or spacing string with this circle. Red dyed chicken feather fluffies are glued at the tips. Feathers average 17 cm. in length.

Screech owl (Otus asio) wing feathers dyed orange, split down one side only. "Bridle" of heavy cotton thread 3 cm. from base of feathers. Red dyed chicken feathers glued to tips. Feathers average 17 cm. in length.

Eleven Marsh hawk (Circus cyaneus hudsonius) tail feathers dyed orange, split down one side only. No bridle string; red dyed chicken feather fluffies glued at tips. Feathers average 17 cm. in length.

Eight Screech owl wing feathers dyed purple. Web is split from both sides of feathers. Bridle of black cotton thread 3 cm. from feather base. Tips of all feathers are missing. Feathers average 18 cm. in length.

Eleven Screech owl feathers dyed purple. Treatment same as above except tip of one feather is still present. Length same as above.

Twelve Marsh hawk tail feathers dyed orange. Web is split from quill on one side only. Tips of all feathers are missing. Bridle string of linen thread is about 3.5 cm. from base of feathers, which average 20 cm. in length.

Eleven Marsh hawk tail feathers dyed orange. Web is split from both sides of quill. Red dyed chicken feather fluffies are glued to tips of feathers. The feathers average 25 cm. in length.

A mixture of hawk wing and tail feathers, nine in all, dyed purple. Bridle is 4 cm. from base of feathers. Web is stripped from both sides of quill and the quill itself has been shaved so that it is very narrow. Red dyed chicken feather fluffies are glued to the tips of the feathers, which average 30 cm. in length.

The next two circles are the same as the above, except the first circle is eight feathers, and the second circle is ten feathers.

Fifteen domestic goose feathers which have been dyed (commercially) red, light blue and green. Though of "white" origin, these feathers have been prepared in the Indian fashion, with the web stripped from both sides of the quill. The tips of all of these feathers are absent, apparently by design. These feathers are of the type distributed by haberdashers and other merchants in the 1920's and 1930's and some have "snappy" sayings printed on them in black ink. These include: "Tickled to see you," "It tickles," "O You Cake Eater," "O you Baby Chicken," "I Want a B. . . (remainder missing)," "A Flapper Tickler" and one with the legend "Compliments of Clothes Shop, Chamberlain Bridge".

This last identifies the source of these feathers. Chamberlain, South Dakota, Pop. 1912 (1950 census) is located on the Missouri River in Brule County, South Dakota. It is the site of a bridge across the Missouri (the pattern of which was sometimes copied by the Lakota as a beadwork design) and the major trading center for



Sandy Rhodes posed in Firecloud's costume

Indians on both the Lower Brule and Crow Creek reservations. The feathers average 30 cm. in length.

The next circle is composed of 15 similar feathers, but these are stripped on one side only, and the tips remain. Some of these feathers are dyed yellow.

The next circle is composed of eight extremely large Great horned owl (Bobo virginianus) wing feathers dyed orange. They have been stripped down both sides. Only one retains its tip, and there is no fluffy glued to it. The feathers average 30 cm. in length.

The final circle is composed of golden eagle (Aquila chrysaetos) wing feathers, eleven in number, one of them black and white, the others dark brown. The feathers have been exquisitely stripped from both sides and the central quill is delicately shaved so that they tremble at the slightest touch. Remains of a red fluffy attached with old time Indian gypsum cement are present on one feather, and patches of the cement on the tips of two others. The feathers average 31 cm. in length.

A rawhide "keeper" disk 4.5 cm. in diameter with a pair of perforations near its center completes the ornament. The two ends of the buckskin thong noted earlier are threaded through the two perforations. By pulling up the ends of these thongs and tying them, the circles of feathers are distended and held firm-

ly in place. By untying the knot and loosening the thongs, the circles can be collapsed for storage, a trait which was neatly adapted to the nomadic way of life of the old time Teton. It is interesting to note that present day bustles made by these people often cannot be collapsed in this manner, and are carried to powwows in huge cardboard boxes.

As with the roach headdress, a faint aroma of old time Indian perfume lingers, probably the seeds of the Cogswellia daucifolia.

This completes the inventory of Fire-cloud's costume. The reader will note that there are neither moccasins nor bells, both of which were almost certainly worn by Fire-cloud with the costume. We would guess that Fire-cloud's bells were stored separately and thus were not acquired by Williamson with the remainder of the costume. As for the moccasins, we would suppose that Fire-cloud wore them at his funeral. Waná yuštánpí. Hehéčetu velò.

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