

Holiday Celebrations

Oral histories remember Christmas and Indian New Year

From the CTUIR Cultural Resources Protection Program

Christmas

Sápqičt (Umatilla)

Kísmes (Cayuse Nez Perce/Walla Walla)

Many activities took place in the month of December. In addition to hunting and preparing for winter, Christmas was celebrated in contemporary times at several different locations on the reservation. Elders have memories of celebrating the Christmas season at Tutuilla Presbyterian Church, St. Andrews Catholic Mission, at the Tillicum Grange Hall and at the "Barn" and later, the Quonset Hut, to which the following oral histories attest:

Tutuilla Church: "They'd come to Christmas at Tutuilla. The girls would sing and they were really talented! They taught 'em how to sing at this school right up here. They'd come from McKay. Yeah, used to go to all the talent shows."

St. Andrews Church: "They used to have a longhouse up by St. Andrews. Used to be right alongside the road there, on the south side of the road. There used to be a bunch of buildings there and the longhouse used to be right alongside the road there. They used to have their activities there; meetings, and dinners, Christmas, Easter... Thanksgiving... and they used to have dances and socials there, or, not war dances, but like square dances. They had a piano in there, and they had some pretty good times there!"

Tillicum Grange Hall: "You know, they let the Indian school use their facility. Uh to do whatever, like at Christmas time and Halloween time, you know, to have parties and stuff like that. Because it was a big place, you know, about as big as the longhouse at that time. It had kitchen facilities and all of that, so it, it was quite a place. And they had a stage, you know. And it was a good place for us to have our Christmas play and stuff like that. We used it to for practice as well, you know. We'd get to practicing for the Christmas play."

The "Barn" / Quonset Hut: "Yeah, we'd go to all the doings. We go to the Quonset Hut, Christmas and have the odd celebration but seem like when I was growing up seems like a few people at the Quonset hut but, lots of people at the legion hall. Be packed. They came up when they were young men for Christmas Powwow, then met woman and all stayed."

"They referred to it as 'the barn.' It was this great big white building, that's kind of like, when you're going up to the cemetery, it was right there. And that's where the community things were held before the Quonset hut was built. And it was huge. I could see why they called it the barn. I don't know who gave it the name, the barn. But they had Christmas and the community gatherings were there. Dances. There was a lot of modern dances then. They had bands. Yeah, big band era."

"In those early 40's, Mission has always been, as I can remember, has always been sort of the heart of the reservation community. It's where all the major activi-



Celebrations were held at the old quonset hut. Check out the old style head dress of the dancer in the center of the top photo.



ties took place. In a sense, I guess you would say it was a seat of government. There used to, there was a barn; actually, a barn that was converted for use by the tribes for recreation. And that's the same place that they held the General Council and that barn is where, the barn used to be where the landfill office is now [when located behind BIA]. And that's where they held all their major celebrations. In particular, the winter dances, which used to be, extend over at least two weeks during Christmas and into the New Year they celebrated there."

Another elder recalled harder times during the season:

"I didn't go to school until after December/Christmas because we had to survive and hunting and fishing and



getting our foods dry and everything for the winter. And it's like when they had all the tough times, we never did know it was tough times because everything we lived off was natural things - deer, elk, fish and you know, they dried it and took care of it. Only thing we knew about the depression was gas. Because they'd give you stamps, gas stamps, to get gas with, you know."

New Year

Cá'at anwíčt (Umatilla/Walla Walla)

Núyee (Cayuse Nez Perce)

Indian New Year, which coincides with the winter solstice, was celebrated combining religious and ceremonial events.

According to anthropologist Theodore Stern, who lived with the Halfmoon family on the Umatilla Reservation on and off for 30 years, "Indian New Year traditionally marked the beginning of the year at the winter solstice with a gathering, *paic'a'sa*, at which

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Holidays

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people danced and worshiped."

Oral history indicates it was an important time of year.

According to Thomas Morning Owl of the CTUIR Language Program:

"In the teachings that I was given about the New Years, there are two different times that could be observed. One would be on the shortest day of the year and also the one that would count on the moon, *páysni álxayx*. In that time when that happens, it's a very holy time. And when the *wáasat* would be carried on all night to greet that new year, the people would dress up in the best that they had and they would sing. They would put the paint on their faces, paint themselves. Well everybody would paint in their own way. Each person had their own. We don't do that anymore. That was for the new years on the moon time, on the big moon, *nč'í álxayx*. We have to remember those things that are given to us. Some of those teachings go way back."

When the Christian era came, they would go to other places where it was carried on, knowing that they used to have it here. Indian New Year is still celebrated at the tribal longhouse today and initiates the year of food gathering.

According to Fermoore Craig Sr.

"It was told that when the sun turns around that first day of winter is the shortest day and the days after that, then the days get longer and the Indian people start looking towards spring to the roots that are coming back and to know that

spring is coming. They say that the roots are starting to get themselves ready, start waking up, and start getting ready for that day when the women go to gather them. Some would say, some kind of put to air, 'I'm going to gather roots this year.' You're putting that to air and kind of making a promise to springtime."

"That night, at midnight, all Indian food. No coffee, no potato salad, no pies, nothing. Just all Indian food. All the roots, all the berries are put out and we drink water. No 'white man' food in there. Nothing modern. In that, we're letting the Creator know that we haven't forgotten where we come from and who gave the foods to us."



This holiday photo shows girls on one side, boys on the other.

Nixyaawii Celebration Committee welcomes everyone to the

Christmas Celebration

AT MISSION LONGHOUSE



December 25, 2014

12:00 Christmas Lunch at Mission Longhouse

December 26, 2014

Rejoinings can be arranged during the day, please contact Linda Jones at (541) 429-7289

6:00pm Grand Entry

Gifts for Prizes | All Categories 1st - 3rd Place

December 27, 2014

6:00pm Grand Entry

Pendleton Blankets for Prizes | All Categories 1st - 3rd Place

Vendor Spots Available contact Rachel Matamoros at (541) 429-7485 # No Food Vendors #

Any Questions contact Babette Cowapoo at (541) 989-3303

Categories

Golden Age Men & Women (55+)

Adult Men & Women (18-54)

Teen Boys & Girls (13-17)

Junior Boys & Girls (7-12)

Tiny Tots (6 & Under)

CUJ

Next CUJ: Jan. 8

News deadline: Dec. 30

Ad deadline: Dec. 23

December Activities for Tribal Elders



Dec. 5 - Senior Elders' meeting at 10 a.m. at the Senior Center. Agenda: Christmas dinner; 2015 elections (4 positions with 2-year terms to be held at Christmas Dinner Dec. 17.)

Dec. 15 - CTUIR elders will be on travel to the Nixyaawii Trail Blazers game in Portland. Charter bus will transport some elders, some will drive their own vehicles.

Dec. 17 - Christmas Dinner at Wildhorse Resort & Casino, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Questions? Call Theda Scott at 541-429-7388; or Kathleen Peterson at 541-429-7314 or cell 541-310-7647.