

The Goose Society Dance represented the next to the top in the scale of Mandan Woman Societies, being exceeded only by the White Buffalo Cow Society. In the case of the Hidatsa it appears that there was no other society composed of older women and that for a time after these women died out, there was no society for them.

At the present time there is but one Goose Society made up of the members of both the Hidatsa and Mandan tribes whereas in former years, even at Fishhook, each tribe held its own dances with its attendants male singers. The present members are:

Singers Bears Arm, the First Creator and leader  
Sitting Owl  
Crows Heart.

Bears Arm bought his rights from Poor Wolf, a former singer and titular head of the singers, who in turn bought his from Bear Goes Out. Thus we see that though the offices of the Goose Society are in reality separate from the other corn medicines but that a man owning part of the medicine finding a chance bought up other rites related to corn and agriculture rather than to see it die out. Thus Moves Slowly owned the holy robe of the Corn but he also bought the right to be one of the singers from a father so that he actually became titular head of the Corn Bites. He attained that position by purchase of a right here and there until he was looked to as holder of most of the rites to do with corn. When others were on the warfare for glory, he spent his time preparing for feasts, gathering the necessary robes and goods and learning the necessary songs and rites. He rose to a place of first importance in the tribe in that way and his judgment of tribal policies was freely asked by younger men of the tribe.

Bears Arm bought his rights to be the head man of the singers from Poor Wolf. Poor Wolf's position as a medicine man of the Awaxawi division of the Hidatsa was identical to that of Moves Slowly of the Mandans. He never devoted much time to the pursuit of the enemies but instead gave many ceremonies and eventually bought many medicine bundles. He, like Moves Slowly set out to buy many of the various rites dealing with corn and the gardens. It had been the custom for many generations for the Mandan Corn Medicines of Good Furred Robe, his brothers to be owned by a single man. A Mandan named Kills owned both the Robe and the skulls. He had two songs, each by a different wife and both wanted to buy his medicines. To Black Porcupine he sold the Medicine Robe with the map of the world and to his other son the three Human Skulls, and since the songs were somewhat identical, only in a few cases special songs for the skulls or to the robe, the ceremony was identical. In time one son moved to the Big Village and there was a tendency for one village to look to the owner of the skulls since he lived in the village, while the Robe was in the Nuptadi village.

Red Bird, a Mandan, owned the three skulls. He had a daughter named Corn Woman, a name he had given her from his medicine bundle. He had a series of bad luck in which his children had all died except this daughter. When his last son died he felt badly and said that his skulls were no longer able to bring him good luck and that he was going to put them away on a hill and that they could go back where they came from. This all took place at Fishhook.

Corn Silk's husband an Hidatsa Waterbuster asked to put on a feast and buy the bundle and it was sold to him. When he grew old, instead of selling the bundle to his own son, he let it go to Poor Wolf, a half brother, who was at that time buying up rights in many ceremonies, particularly those connected with corn. Such is the history of the singers and the related rites of the Goose Ceremony.

Women in buying into the society band together as a group and buy according to clan, a daughter buying from her mother or some other older woman whom she calls mother. Since the

number going in is greater than those selling out due to death, some women take two or more as daughters and in that way the society is usually large at the time the society is bought. A 'mother' gets the goose-head to be worn around the 'daughter's' head in the dance while the younger women prepare food and goods which they give for the transfer of the ownership and for instructions in the traditions, songs, and dances of the society. The group selling out then can buy in the next society above.

It is the custom of the two tribes to meet whenever a feast is prepared for them by someone not belonging to the society. It is the custom that a person will say that he or she wants the Geese to dance so that the fields will get plenty of rain through the summer, or when dry that the rains will come if the women dance; or that if the crops are good, the women will be invited in to dance. In rarer instances, a person may pledge to have the dance so as to insure plenty of buffalo or success in warfare, or even that if a child recovers from an illness that they will invite in the old women to dance. It was believed that if a person promised to give the dance in the spring, that the rains would not be slow coming. Much has been made of the fact that I promised the dance this spring and that we have had an usually rainy spring.

A person wishing to give the dance goes to the head woman or the head singers who represents the First Creator and makes his wish known. A date is set. Formerly the women themselves danced without anyone assuming the obligation of preparing a feast, such dancing to be done about the time the first geese appeared from the south in early spring. At such time, they would first meet in the lodge of one of the members sing and dance inside and then go out into the village and dance four times and four different places in the village. They always knew that there would be someone who would have food ready for them and they would be called into different lodges of young men or women desiring to become prominent. At such places they would be given robes, headdresses, dresses, moccasins, and other goods. During the spring dances, they would travel to the other villages of the Mandans, Hidatsa, Awatixa, and Awaxawi to dance and there receive gifts. People believed that if these old women did not receive an abundance of gifts, the gods connected with rain would be disappointed and therefore little rain would come and the crops would suffer of drought. In those days it was believed that in each woman there was a corn spirit and that during the dances, the corn would come up. People could see the rows of corn on the cob situated at the back of some old woman's mouth; when the corn had gone back down, she would spit out blood showing that the tissues of her throat had been broken when the corn came up.

In giving the ceremony to the Geese, a person was expected to have robes and other goods for each of the women and the singers; also two robes to be taken away by the old women who prepared the incense and cleansed the giver and the members of the society. The society met at the lodge of one of the members. First Creator was expected to scout about and see if the offerings and food was adequate for the gods to come. Then he howled four times as a signal that everything was complete. (The meaning of each act of the ceremony and of the songs will appear in my other notes) The women sat in a circle beginning at the left of the door, looking out. The singers at the right with the head woman next the last of the singers, her sacred pipe before her. The giver walked up to the pipe and lifted it and the fresh cottonwood branch and buffalo meat done up in a cloth as a signal that he wanted them to go through with the ceremony and that he was willing that it should be done at once. The women danced in the lodge. Then they came out dancing in four places as they approached the giver's lodge where the ceremony proper was to be held. After certain dances inside, in all the dances outside the women went around in a circle to the left, led by the head woman, in this case Mrs. White Duck.

Inside the giver's lodge a regular order of events was held with the giver first receiving the cottonwood branch from the head of the women and a prayer for luck for him, then additional songs after which another prayer from the leader while he held the wooden pipe of the Geese Women, after which the giver carried the pipe to the First Creator who light it and offered it first to the giver and then the other singers.

The ashes from the pipe being sacred, they were removed and held in the hand and offered to the four directions then a sweeping motion as of scattering them. The women dance and then the goods were divided, provision for giving the share to those absent. Places were left for those absent but when their places were vacant two times they would say that she would surely die very soon. For that reason, they always made it a habit to be present. When the society sold out formerly, Mrs. Foolish Bear was at Buford and for that reason feels that she still belongs, even though those with whom she bought in are sold out and it is felt proper that she should attend. Each person brings her own dishes and equipment to eat with and to help carry the balance of the food back home in. all the food is divided up and what is not eaten there is taken back.

Each woman wears a goose head; the faces are painted red on the cheeks. The pipe is a large wooden one and is used only in the ceremonies and light but once. The drums are of the familiar hand type, made of a thin hewn strip of the willow used in the bullboat with a buffalo calf hide stretched over it; the hide is painted red has eight goose tracks around a central circle which is green, the tracks black and a straight line dividing them into 3-5 which is the Missouri River in the case of Crows Heart's drum which belonged to Long Tail, later Hollis Montclair; while the drum used by Bears Arm, formerly by Poor Wolf who secured it of Otter (iticuka) and the daughter of Tpagawia of Lewis and Clark time, made in 1868, has a red drum with a green circle in the center and six black geese tracks as in the inclosed drawing.

In giving the ceremony, a person can call on those of his own tribe to help get together the goods. People also help by offering things when the ceremony is in progress so that the clan of the giver is exalted.