

October Camporee

by Lee Uwoyeni Billingsley

The sun finally came out after lunch but it still did not warm up in the livestock building where we were set up with our band drum. It had been cold that morning, damp with a misty rain and chilly breeze thru the building. Our drum was set up on the concrete floor with a little electric heater bravely working against the chill. And thru it all, the drum did not lose her voice. She stayed strong despite the weather, as tho she liked being there.



This was a Boy Scout camporee at the Midland county fairgrounds, where vendors and exhibitors gathered to promote scout activities such as rock climbing, and to offer scouting or outdoor gear for sale. We represented the Indian Lore merit badge exhibit. The scout with us was Brandon, who demonstrated various dancing and drumming styles. Brandon is a former scout and current Order of the Arrow lodge chief who makes his own regalia and has done much dancing. He taught

the scouts in a way that they listened. All who sat at it seemed fascinated with our drum. We taught the proper way to approach the drum inside our sacred circle, which was set up with what we had to work with, chairs & twine. Still, this was a mini-powwow experience very few who visited our station knew about. We set up some items on our tables for viewing. The game sticks were popular with the boys, the beading loom with the girls, Brandon's turtle-shell bag with everyone. This was our chance to answer questions and invite people to sit the drum, adults included. All morning was a steady stream of scouts young & old. They hung around the drum until someone left, then got a beater & sat the drum for awhile. I would lead the drum at times while Brandon danced, and then he would lead when he got tired dancing because, well, because he was good at it. Everyone offered tobacco before touching the drum, & were shown how to hold the beater, then how to drum the different styles, Northern and Southern, Crow Hop, 2-step, and others. We explained how the drum was made, its spirit significance to the people, & proper ways to treat the drum, such as not letting it touch the earth. Brandon explained his regalia & demonstrated the different dance steps. Anne was at the tables explaining the items on display. Even tho all the scouts were enthusiastic, some of the scouts were better at drumming than others.

But that last group of six scouts was the absolute best. These guys picked up the different styles right away, and did well enough to try to trick Brandon into a mistake while he danced. We all had Major League fun with this group, a great time.

After lunch of homemade black bean soup and biscuits (thanks to Anne we did not have to eat hot dogs & potato chips) and the sun appearing, the scouts stayed mostly outdoors with activities, & the stream of scouts visiting our indoor station dropped to a trickle. We stayed til 5 pm when no one visited any more, & were the last ones to pack out of the building. A tough day, we were tired from standing all day on a cold concrete floor. Still, we left with the feeling that we made a difference, that many more people are now aware of a native presence around them, and that a native drum is seen as more than a toy or musical instrument.

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