

Impressive Klukwan Tlingit Dancers Create Fine Interest in Audiences Here

By WALLY OLSON

The Tlingit dancers of Klukwan, Alaska under the direction of Steve Hotch, gave the people of Interior Alaska an opportunity to not only view the traditional dances, but many other insights into the Tlingit culture.

More than fifty people from the small village—young and old—drove to Fairbanks to perform on June 10-11 at Alaskaland.

In addition to the dances, the people brought with them many works of art, and traditional costumes which have never left the village before. Among these items was a large mask which was not actually used in the dance, but which provided story background for one of the dances.

Several of the dancers wore the famous Chilkat blankets, and among those present was a woman who is still able to weave these beautiful robes. Many of the older women wore the ornate button blankets.

The group performed a variety of dances including such diverse numbers as a Welcome Dance and a War Dance. The young people enacted a curing ceremony showing the doctor, or medicine man, dancing and praying over an ill person. The climax came as the young shaman removed a bird wing from the patient and then the healthy young man joined in the dance.

For those who have watched the Athabascans of the interior of Alaska dance, the program presented a wonderful opportunity to study the diffusion of culture.

The Lower Tanana people, from the Nenana-Minto area, use a dancing stick and drum which are quite similar to those used by the Tlingits. But more provocative is the close similarity between the dances of the Upper Tanana people from Northway-Tetlin and the Tlingit dances.

They also use the dance stick and drum, but even their costumes, dance steps, and rhythm resemble very closely those of their neighbors to the south. It has long been thought that the affluent cultures of Southeastern Alaska spread their influence northwesterly into the interior of the State.

It was evident in viewing the performance of the Klukwan dancers that some of aspects of their dancing were adopted by the inland people, and were absorbed in a modified form by the people far into the interior.

There is always a tendency to assume that in the distant past people so widely separated were isolated from each other and developed independently of each other. However, these dances performed in the heartland of the interior Athabascans, indicates that the exchange of ideas and communication was going on long before the arrival of the white man.

This was the first time that the Klukwan dancers have come to Fairbanks and many people hope that in the future—possibly at Eskimo Olympics or the Winter Potlatch—that arrangements can be made for them to return. On this trip, Mr. Hotch planned and directed the entire trip as a cooperative effort of the Klukwan people.

He mentioned that the expenses for food and housing were real problems and maybe next time assistance can be given to the dancers.

For those who wish to broaden their knowledge of the past and the culture heritage of Alaska, it would be a treat to have the group return.



KLUKWAN TLINGIT DANCERS—Tlingit Indian dancers from Klukwan revealed provocative dance routines at the Civic Center Auditorium at Alaskaland last week to interested audiences. One of the most interested was the University of Alaska anthropologist, Wally Olson, who wrote today's accompanying article. Anthropologist

Olson believes that the Athabascan Indian dances of Interior Alaska may be related to the Tlingit dances. Pictured from left to right: Steve Hotch, dance leader; Victor Hotch, dance instructor; Dick Hotch, committeeman; and Johnny Willard, dance instructor.

—Jessen's Daily Photo by STU ROTHMAN