

Tlingit Folks Revive Traditional Dances

By JUNE ALLEN

The Tlingit village of Saxman is located five miles south of Ketchikan on Revillagigedo Island, the rainiest part of Alaska.

The residents of the small Indian town, along with many other of the Southeastern Alaska Indians, are reviving the old dances of their people to preserve the culture of their grandfathers.

The Saxman Dancers, with 30 members ranging from 100 years old to a little two-year-old with his own specially designed blanket and costumes, perform twice a year at the Alaska Native Brotherhood hall.

The proceeds from the dances are used to improve the building, which, like many in Southeastern, juts out over the water on pilings.

Narrator of the dances is Joe Williams, also the mayor of the town, who retells the stories that go with the totem

poles in Saxman park. The famous Lincoln totem, now preserved at the Juneau museum, came from Tongass Village, the original home of the Saxman residents.

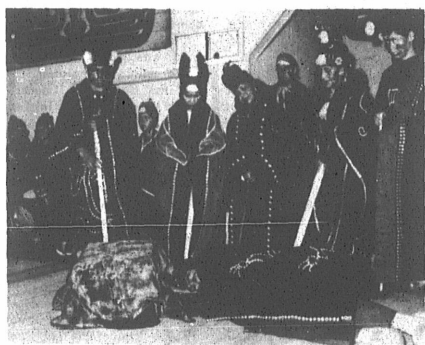
Saxman neighbors as well as fascinated residents from nearby Ketchikan look forward to the dances which are always different at each presentation.

The dancers perform the Dance of the Seagulls, the Beaver Dance, Memorial Dances, the Oyster Totem Dance and many others, including the dance of the children performed to "while away the long, windy, rainy nights" of Southeastern Alaska.

These proud descendants of the fierce Tlingit clans who roamed the coasts of Alaska not too many years ago, include the laughter, the sorrow, joy and pain in the historical tableaux of their dances.



GRIZZLY BEAR DANCER—Dancer Joe Denny here wears the headdress of the Grizzly Bear clan although he himself is of the Beaver clan. The Dennys are an old and numerous family in Saxman. Leader and narrator of the Dancers is Joe Williams who is also mayor of the village. Also still living in the village is Mrs. Alice Harris, 86, who was one of the original 200, or more Tlingits who left the old village on Tongass Island and settled in the new village of Saxman in 1894.



THE SAXMAN DANCERS are shown in the lament of the Oyster Totem, the tale of a chief's nephew who disregarded the old man's advice and put his hand into the shell, only to be caught and drowned by the incoming tide as his family wept. The Saxman Dancers include dances of joy, despair and history in their programs. They perform their own stylized Tlingit dances as well as the moving dances of the Haidas and the lively dances of the Tsimshians, neighboring tribes.



THE OLDEST AND THE YOUNGEST of the Saxman Dancers are "Grandma" Bessie Denny, 100, and little Dale Denny, her grandson, 2. "Grandma" Denny sang a song telling the story of the few years she has left and what she must do before she goes. She has taught the younger people of Saxman the old dances and the tales of the totem poles in the village park.