



Washtub dancing at Kokrines, near Ruby.

# POTLATCH

Potlatches are very important to the Native people. These ceremonies vary from village to village.

It takes one to two years to get prepared for a potlatch. When one of your relatives dies and you get help

from someone, you at the time of a potlatch pay back whoever gave you help. This you do by giving something you made, either a pair of moccasins, mittens, or boots. The one who gets the most is the person who cleaned and dressed the dead person. He or she is given a complete set of clothes, from the underclothes to the fur clothing.

The potlatch lasts for three or four days. Each evening there is singing and washtub dancing. Here all the new songs are sung that were made for the people that the potlatch is being given for. All the songs that have been sung for years and years are once again sung, and each night there is a little potlatch.

The women in preparing for the potlatch do a lot of work. First, they have to tan moose hides, beaver hides, wolf, wolverine, otter, lynx, mink, and marten, as they will have need for all these. They make boots, parkas, mittens, caps, moccasins, and slippers, plus buying blankets, scarves, and a lot of calico material.

The last night of the potlatch is the big one. The main person who is giving the potlatch comes first with a wolf or wolverine skin tied to a bolt of calico. As the main person is undoing the calico, all the women get hold of the material and make a circle all around the hall. They start singing and dancing. Then all the gifts are distributed. Just about everyone in the village gets a gift, plus the visitors that are there from the other villages.

About the first part of November the men folk go out hunting for bear. These the men get in the dens where they are pretty dangerous to kill. The hunters kill about twenty bears each fall. They also go out for moose and caribou. All these are put away for the potlatch as well as the nice dried fish strips put away during the summer and the berries and dried meat. All this food is saved for the last night of the big potlatch.