

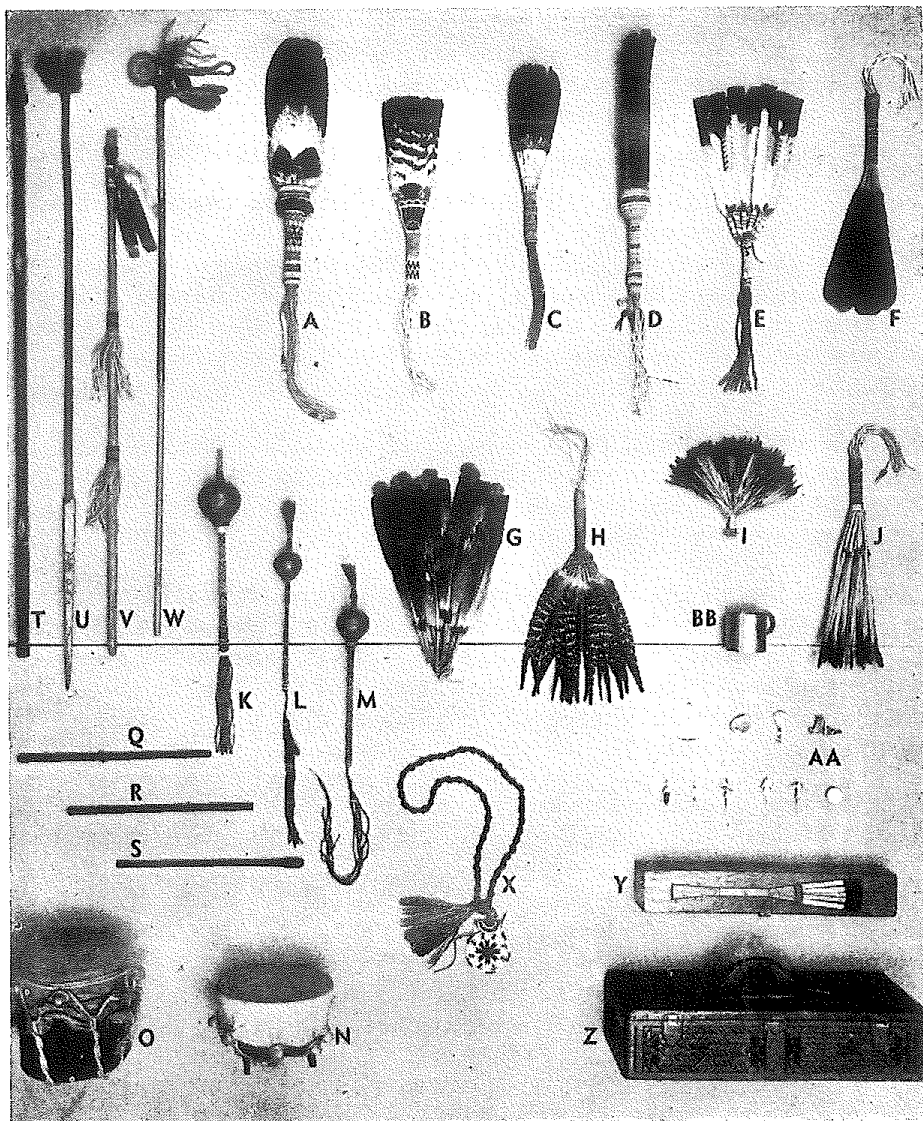
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

RICHARD G. CONN, CURATOR

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS, EDITOR



THE PEYOTE CULT: RITUAL EQUIPMENT

LEAFLET 106

2nd Printing, June 1957

DECEMBER, 1950

1. INTRODUCTION. This leaflet describes the principal and most characteristic objects used by individuals in ceremonies of the Peyote Cult, a modern Indian religion widespread in much of the Middle West and West. It does not include descriptions of objects used only by officials during the services. For information about the cult, its history and services see Leaflet 105.

2. WHEN OBJECTS ARE USED. The major rite of the cult is an all-night prayer and song service in the course of which the rattles, fans, drums and other things noted in this leaflet are used. A typical service is described in Leaflet 105.

3. SEX OF MAKERS. All of the ceremonial objects described in this leaflet are made by men, though beadwork—much used on peyote objects—is normally done only by women.

4. CHANGES IN EQUIPMENT. The Peyote Cult is a relatively new and loosely bound informal organization. Therefore the ritual equipment is not definitely standardized. The objects described are now in general use, but new types appear and old ones drop out of use; new designs and methods of applying them appear and disappear. Certain men become highly expert in making the various ritual objects, and their products are sold widely not only in their own tribes but also elsewhere. Well made fans, etc. are in great demand. This tends to standardize equipment.

5. FANS of several types, each with subdivisions, are used in peyote rites. They do not serve as a means of cooling by stirring the air but are symbols of birds, the messengers between God and Man. They are used to make symbolic gestures which vary greatly among the tribes.

Most fans fall in one of two classes: 1, fans with feathers firmly fixed to handle, either flat (A, B) or in a round bunch (C, D); 2, fans with a movable cluster of feathers (E, F, G, H, I, J) each inserted in a skin socket. The sockets are sewn individually to the top of the handle loosely enough to allow a considerable degree of individual and group motion. Type 2 sometimes has no handle (G).

Handles are usually—but not invariably (H)—covered with fine net beadwork worked into many-colored elaborate designs symbolizing the color visions seen during cult services. A long tassel made of many strands of twisted skin, sometimes commercial cord, often hangs from the butt. Often Catholic medals are tied to these strands (D). Sections of the vanes on some feathers may be cut away and the portions of exposed shaft covered with net beadwork (E). Some feather edges are cut into serrations (E); others are trimmed to long slender shapes. Tiny bits of feathers are often attached to the butts or tips of the main plumes. Some modern fan handles are made in two parts joined with a screw-in socket unit from a jointed fish pole (D).

Feathers range in number from 4 to 10 large ones (G) to 50 or 60 very small ones (I). Eagle (A, E, G), water turkey or snake bird (F), and fly catcher (J) appear to be the most favored feathers. Others most commonly used are: prairie chicken (H), hawk of various kinds (B), pheasant, magpie

(D), grouse, and flicker (I). Macaw plumes, red or blue (D), are used when they can be obtained from zoos or bird stores. Combinations are frequently seen.

6. RATTLES (K, L, M) are made of small, approximately round gourds, 2-4 inches in diameter, attached to very slender wood handles 8-10 inches long. 20-30 small pebbles are in the gourd. The handle passes through the gourd and a tuft of horse hair, often dyed, is attached to its upper end. A tassel like that used on the fans is on the handle butt. Handles are usually covered in whole (K) or part (L) with net beadwork like that on the fan handles. Some handles are decorated by wrapping closely with a long string of beads. Some are plain or carved (M). Engraved or painted designs connected with the cult may appear on the gourds (M). The rattle is held vertically and shaken with an up and down motion.

7. DRUMS are made of 3-legged cast iron kettles with the bail ears filed off (N). Sometimes earthenware crocks are used (O). The kettle is half filled with water into which 10-12 live coals—sometimes herb perfumes—are thrown. The Kiowa say the drum represents thunder; the water in it, rain; and the coals, lightning. A water soaked buckskin head is stretched over the kettle mouth. 7 marbles are put under the cover around the rim outside to serve as lugs on which is caught the tie rope or thong which holds the head tightly stretched. The tie is a complicated one which when complete outlines a 7-point star. The lug marbles are the points of the star outlined by the thong on the sides and bottom of the kettle. When observed from the bottom of the drum the whole design is apparent. It is regarded by some as a symbol of the Peyote button, by others, of the morning star. The cord is tightened with horn picks.

8. DRUM STICKS (Q, R, S) are wood rods without padded heads. They are 12-14 inches long, some plain (S), some slightly (Q) to elaborately (R) carved in shallow relief, usually with complex geometric line designs. Only one drum stick is used.

9. LEADER'S STAFF. (T, U, V, W). The leader carries a slim wooden staff about 3 feet long. It may be round (V) or sided (T), carved with cult symbols, often from Christianity (U), or trimmed with 3 small bands of net beadwork (V). Some Kiowa staffs have white coloring rubbed into the fine lines of relief carving in geometric designs (T). There is often a tuft of horse hair at the top. One staff (Comanche) has a group of tiny replicas of the fan, rattle and other ritual objects tied to the top (W). Some staffs pull out or unscrew in the center.

10. MESCAL BEAN NECKLACE. (X). The red-brown seeds of the mescal plant are pierced with a hot wire and strung to make necklaces worn by peyote service officials and sometimes by individual members during the ceremony. Often a small, flat, round beaded bag for carrying a large peyote button is suspended from the necklace.

11. BOXES (Y, Z) are made to carry individuals' sets of equipment, fans, rattles and the like. They are often, if not usually, commercial cedar wood lidded boxes with brass hinges and lock clasp. They are large enough to hold rattle, fan, feathers and other small pieces of equipment. The boxes are carved, painted, or both, with designs related to peyotism. Here as elsewhere in peyote cult art a long-tailed, sharp-winged bird, the water turkey, is a favorite subject.

12. SILVER JEWELRY (AA) is not ritual equipment but is mentioned here because it is often worn by peyote cult members as a means of recognition and as a symbol of belief in the cult and its teachings. The custom appears to be one of 20th century origin. Full details are given in reference 2.

The jewelry includes stick pins, tie or neck cloth clasps, earrings, rings and occasionally other objects. These are made in the form of birds, tipis, peyote buttons, fans, rattles, drums and other equipment alone or in many combinations. Designs, symbols of cult beliefs, are engraved or stamped on the metal.

The pieces are small, light and usually simple and clear cut in design. They are made by men silversmiths belonging to Oklahoma tribes—occasionally elsewhere—for use by cult members and have never been produced for sale like Navaho silver jewelry.

A recent development, apparently not extensive, is the making of silver cups (BB) engraved with peyote symbols. A design from one of these cups is printed on the cover of Leaflet 105. Only one pair of these cups, of Cheyenne make, has been seen, and it is presumed—lacking definite information—that someone had a new idea of using a special cup for the water drinking parts of the peyote service instead of an ordinary one of tin or china.

13. COSTUME. No special costumes are worn during peyote services. There is, however, a desire to wear skin clothing of old Indian types, shirts and leggings for the men and long dresses for the women. This is in line with the policy of the cult of stressing Indian as opposed to White culture.

In Oklahoma, at least, it is considered desirable to wear blankets of trade cloth which are half red and half blue whenever possible.

Under most circumstances participants in peyote rites wear clothing of White manufacture. Moccasins are still widely worn by at least older Indians, and a feather or two on men's hats are usually seen.

Compiled by Willena D. Cartwright from the following sources, and from examination of museum collections:

DENVER ART MUSEUM

1. A Cheyenne Peyote Fan—F. H. Douglas. *Material Culture Note* 12, 1939.
2. Metal Jewelry of the Peyote Cult—F. H. Douglas and Alice Marriott. *Material Culture Note* 17, 1942.

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

3. A Kiowa Mescal Rattle—James Mooney. *Old Series*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1892.

YALE UNIVERSITY

4. The Peyote Cult—Weston La Barre. *Publications in Anthropology* 19, 1938.

VIKING FUND

5. Peyote Music—David P. McAllester. *Publications in Anthropology* 13, New York, 1949.

Thanks are due to Alice Marriott and Omer C. Stewart for assistance in preparing this leaflet.