Ethnologies

ethnologies

The Dynamism and Transformation of “Tradition”
Factors Affecting the Development of Powwows in Southwestern Ontario

Anna Hoefnagels

Volume 29, numéro 1-2, 2007

Retour à l’ethnographie
Back to Ethnography

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018747ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/018747ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Association Canadienne d'Ethnologie et de Folklore

ISSN

1481-5974 (imprimé)
1708-0401 (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Hoefnagels, A. (2007). The Dynamism and Transformation of “Tradition”: Factors Affecting the Development of Powwows in Southwestern Ontario. *Ethnologies*, *29*(1-2), 107–141. https://doi.org/10.7202/018747ar

Résumé de l'article

Cet article examine les origines de certains powwows du sud-ouest de l’Ontario à partir d’entrevues avec les organisateurs et les participants autant qu’au moyen d’une analyse des médias. L’auteur illustre l’histoire complexe de ces rassemblements et les influences qu’ils ont subies, en éclairant également certaines des difficultés persistantes inhérentes à l’organisation de ces rassemblements. Les nuances du terme « tradition » s’appliquant aux rassemblements culturels contemporains, lesquels se modifient continûment d’année en année, sont également explorées.

The Dynamism and Transformation of "Tradition"

Factors Affecting the Development of Powwows in Southwestern Ontario[1]

Anna Hoefnagels
Carleton University

"Tradition" is a label that is frequently applied to celebrations, practices and activities that include music, dancing, arts, foods, crafts, and other cultural expressions. However, "tradition" is a problematic concept, especially when activities or practices that are considered or labeled "traditional" are newly created or borrowed. As cultural theorist Eric Hobsbawm explains, the term "invented tradition" might be applied to various activities with a comparatively short history.

> The term "invented tradition" is used in a broad, but not imprecise sense. It includes both "traditions" actually invented, constructed and formally instituted and those emerging in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and datable period — a matter of a few years perhaps — and establishing themselves with great rapidity (1983: 1).

Anthropologists, ethnomusicologists and folklorists have explored and problematized the "inventedness" of traditions in various cultures, examining the factors that shape practices that are considered traditional by people in those cultures, while demonstrating the dynamism of

1. Many thanks to all the musicians, dancers, organizers and participants who shared their knowledge and spoke with me about their experiences and thoughts about powwows, powwow music and community life on Anishnabek First Nations in southwestern Ontario. Thanks also to the reviewers for their helpful feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

cultural customs.[2] Powwows, the focus of the current study, are not indigenous to southwestern Ontario, yet they are now firmly established celebrations in most Native communities in this region; in many ways powwows could be considered an "invented tradition." Indeed, when examining powwow practices, meanings and teachings, it is important to recognize that although many similarities exist between powwows throughout North America, it is necessary that "they be understood in local contexts and as products of local histories" (Fowler 2005: 68).

Contemporary powwows in southwestern Ontario share many similarities to powwows throughout the rest of Canada, including a blend of social and ceremonial activities, music, dancing, crafts and arts vendors, and a general renewal of Aboriginal culture and pride. However, the local history of the powwow in this region is uniquely shaped by a series of relations between First Nations people geographically and historically, propelled by various social and political factors. Through an examination of the history and development of First Nations practices at competition powwows[3] in selected Anishnabek[4] communities in southwestern Ontario, this article highlights the variables that contributed to the establishment and development of this "foreign" tradition in this region, and illustrates the complexity and, in some cases, invention, of "tradition." While questions of authenticity often arise in discussions of tradition and cultural practices, this article reinforces the fact that authenticity, like tradition, is a complicated and nuanced concept, one that is rarely considered by the powwow practitioners themselves. Indeed for most of the people with whom I discussed the history and practices of powwows in southwestern Ontario,

---

2. See Briggs 1996; Gilman 2004; Guss 2000; Mould 2005; and Romero 2001, and the collection of articles edited by Phillips and Schochet 2004, among others.
3. There are two main types of powwows in this region, "traditional," and "competition" or "contest." At competition powwows participants compete with one another in specific dance categories, and, in some cases, in musical performances, for cash prizes, in addition to the non-competitive powwow activities (intertribal dancing, social dancing, Specials, etc.). At traditional powwows, there is no competition, rather a focus on cultural renewal and celebration.
4. Anishnabek is a term used by the Ojibway, Potawatomi and Odawa Nations to refer to themselves. In southwestern Ontario many Anishnabek are Ojibway, which is also referred to as Chippewa. As such, the terms Ojibway, Ojibwa and Chippewa are used in this text according to the word choice in the original sources.

their comments focused on their pride in their cultural practices and the importance of the powwow celebration and its meanings; authenticity never arose as a concern to participants, despite the fact that many of the dances, outfits, music and practices are borrowed from distant Native groups.

The powwow histories I examine in this article are those that take place at the Kettle and Stony Point First Nation, near Forest, Walpole Island First Nation (Bkejwanong), near Wallaceburg, and Sarnia First Nation (Aamjiwnaang), in Sarnia. These communities are within a one and a half hour drive from one another and share similar cultures and histories, yet the origins of each community's powwow is different, illustrating the importance of community-based history. Drawing upon interviews with powwow participants and organizers, and a review of relevant print materials, this article examines general trends that influenced the development and transmission of cultural practices that resulted in the formation of these community powwows. This article also examines the role that specific individuals played in the acceptance, promotion and organization of powwows in this region, fostering its acceptance and development, thus demonstrating the ways that individual people effect cultural change. Throughout this article I highlight the complicated and contradictory notion of "tradition," and I argue that powwows in this region of Canada illustrate the continued dynamism and vitality of Aboriginal culture.

Modern Powwows in Southwestern Ontario: Common Trends and Practices

Powwows across North America share many features with one another, including similar music practices, stylized dancing and dance outfits, community and individual identity formation and affirmation, and meaningful exchanges amongst participants and visitors. Throughout the summer months, powwow musicians and dancers travel from one powwow to the next, so that some participants attend a powwow most weekends of the summer. The powwow circuit is a series of powwows in relatively close proximity to one another, that many people attend, knowing that their friends and families will be at the same gatherings. In southwestern Ontario, for example, people can attend powwows within a 300 kilometer radius most weekends, and organizing committees often plan their powwows to avoid conflicting with gatherings at neighbouring communities. In the summer of 2006,

a possible segment of a powwow circuit could start with the Sarnia First Nation 45th Annual Powwow on the weekend of June 24-25, followed by the Munsee-Delaware Traditional Powwow on July 1-2, then the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow on July 8-9, and the Six Nations of the Grand River Powwow on July 22-23, with other powwows interspersed throughout the summer that are likewise within easy driving distance for people living in southwestern Ontario.[5] Since these powwows are close geographically to one another and are held on consecutive or near-consecutive weekends, often the same people attend these events, and some participants serve leadership roles such as arena director, head dancer, head dance judge, and host drum.

As a result of the ongoing sharing and celebrating between members of these communities, many similarities can be found at powwows in this region. For example, at the competition powwows at Sarnia, Walpole Island, and Kettle and Stony Point, common features include the size of the powwow (often between 150-200 registered dancers, 4-10 drum groups, and 1500-2000 attendees at each segment of the powwow) and the intimate and celebratory atmosphere created by the commentary of the masters of ceremonies and the natural outdoor settings. Each powwow is characterized by standardized powwow dances organized by dance category (Women's Traditional, Men's Traditional, Women's Jingle Dress, Men's Grass, Women's Fancy Shawl, and Men's Fancy), in which participants may compete in different age categories for money, as well as occasional exhibition dancing, entertaining audience members. Intertribal dances are also interspersed through the celebration, allowing all people, Native and non-Native, to participate in the inner circle of powwow dancing. Powwows also include Specials, which are ceremonial-type dances and activities to commemorate accomplishments and challenges of members of the community. In some cases Healing Dances are requested to offer prayers for a sick individual, Honour Songs may be performed for students graduating from high school, college or university, and Giveaways may be held to celebrate the naming of a child or to thank people for support during difficult times. It is often during these Specials that focus is on the community members, as much powwow dancing and activities are intertribal and inclusive in nature.

---

5. The Walpole Island Powwow is usually held on the second weekend of July, falling between the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow and the powwow at Six Nations. However, in 2006 the event was cancelled.

The spatial arrangements of powwows reflect the spiritual meanings associated with traditional Anishnabek teachings.[6] For example, the powwow grounds are arranged in a series of concentric circles, with the musicians and master of ceremonies in the center of the dance area, under an arbour of trees and boughs (see Figure 1). In some cases the musicians and master of ceremonies are placed along the perimeter of the dance area, depending on the space available for the powwow and the number of drum groups; the former arrangement has been customary at the Kettle and Stoney Point Powwow as well as the Sarnia Powwow, whereas the gathering at Walpole Island typically has the drums and MC around the perimeter of the dance area. The dance area is the next "circle" of the powwow, which is lined with the audience members, either sitting on bleachers (when provided) or on blankets or lawn chairs that they brought. Often there is some kind of marker to designate the dance area, with organizers using chalk or rope to separate these two "circles." The arts, crafts and food vendors line the audience area, creating another layer to the circles of the powwow. Finally, many powwow participants set up camp beyond the vendor area, creating a final layer to the powwow. The prominence of circular imagery at powwows reflects the cyclical worldview prominent in Anishnabek life and the interrelatedness of the various components of the powwow. Indeed, the combination of individualized dancing, in which people celebrate their Native identity, the audience, which shows the interaction of Natives and non-Natives, the cultural and nourishing sustenance provided by the vendors, and the importance of family are all evident when one closely examines the various "dimensions" or layers of the powwow grounds.

Other features of these powwows that have spiritual significance for participants include the prominent display of flags and eagle staffs, the demarcation of the eastern doorway as the entry point to the dance area, and the use of streamers and ribbons in black, white, red and yellow, illustrating the four colours of humanity and reflecting principles of the medicine wheel.[7] Orating is often done in the Ojibway language, and the master of ceremonies often invokes Anishnabek legends and oral history in the form of stories, lessons and jokes. The dancers' outfits,

6. See Diamond, Cronk and von Rosen (1994: 21-33), and Browner (2002: 95-99), for discussions of circle imagery and meaning.
7. See Diamond, Cronk and von Rosen (1994: 130-132) for a discussion of four-direction imagery and directionality.

referred to as "regalia,"[8] often have symbolic meaning, making use of traditional objects (feathers, beads, animal bone, leather, etc.) and, for some dancers, special colours. Each style of dance has its own history, being introduced at different times into the powwow program. For example, one of the oldest styles of dance is the Men's Traditional, and the movements of the dancers often reflect the connection of this dance to the historic warrior societies from which the powwow celebration evolved in the nineteenth century. Conversely, the Jingle Dress Dance, known for its healing properties, is the newest addition to the powwow celebration, as it was first introduced in Ojibway communities in the 1920s. Since the 1960s the Jingle Dress Dance and outfit has spread beyond the Ojibway nations and is now a standard dance category at contemporary powwows throughout North America. Each dance that is performed at the powwow has its own historic roots and was introduced at different times. Each dance category (Men's Traditional, Women's Traditional, Men's Grass, Women's Jingle, Men's Fancy, Women's Fancy) can be recognized by the dancers' regalia and their movements, and carries historical associations.

Powwows in southwestern Ontario typically have three segments, Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon. Each segment commences with the Grand Entry procession starting at noon or one p.m., and usually at six p.m. for the Saturday evening segment. Grand Entry is often considered the most spectacular activity at the powwow, as all the dancers enter the dance area in their colourful outfits, dancing to the distinctive sound of powwow musicians and the explanatory commentary from the master of ceremonies. The dancers are led by an honour guard comprised of veterans and community leaders, and the dancers enter the dance area in order of age and dance category. Once all the dancers have entered the grounds, the music and dancing stop, and the dancers stand in place while a Flag Song (akin to a national anthem) is sung and the flags are posted. Following this, an elder is called on to give an Invocation, followed by a Veteran's Song in which veterans are commemorated, reflecting the roots of this gathering in war dancing.[9]

---

8. Many participants with whom I spoke indicated their dislike of the term "costume" in reference to their dance clothes, due to the association of this word with playing dress up at Halloween.
9. See Hoefnagels 2001 for a discussion of the links between contemporary powwow practices and historic warrior societies.

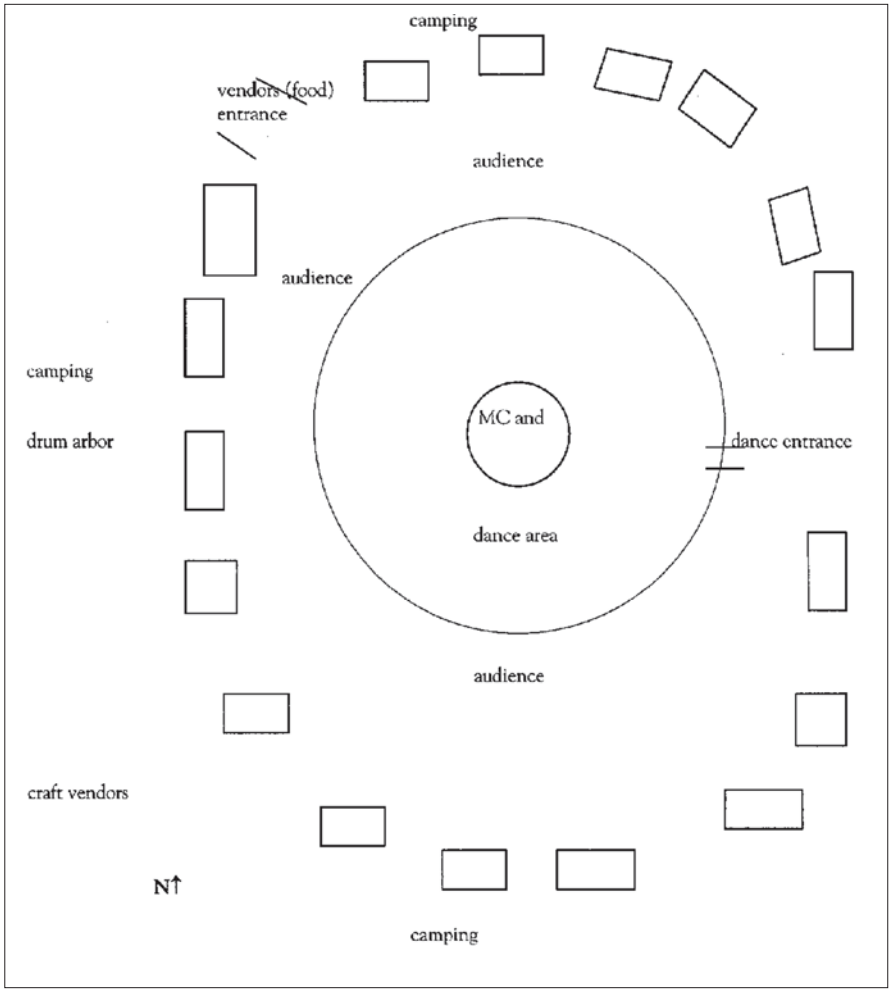

Figure 1. Common Setup at Powwows in Southwestern Ontario.

After these opening ceremonies are completed, the activities progress with registered dancers performing specialized dances and competing with one another for prizes, interspersed with intertribal dances. The powwow activities may include Specials or exhibition dances (such as Hoop Dancing or Haudenosaunee Smoke Dancing), and usually the Saturday afternoon segment draws to a close around five p.m. An hour later, after everyone has had a chance to eat and relax, there is another Grand Entry, and dancing continues until

sundown, at which point the flags and eagle staffs are danced out of the dance area and the "official" activities of the powwow cease for the night. Often powwow drums will remain after the retiring of the eagle staff, and people engage in social dancing until late in the night.

Powwow activities resume on Sunday, with a final Grand Entry and opening activities commencing at noon or one p.m., followed by dancing until four-thirty or five p.m. At this time a Flag Song is performed in preparation for the retiring of the flags and eagle staffs, followed by a Retreat Song, when the veterans and flagbearers holding the flags and eagle staffs exit the dance area, dancing in step to the drum, followed by dancers who have joined in the procession. Next, thanks are given to all participants, volunteers and musicians at the powwow. The powwow's head staff, including the arena director, head judges, master of ceremonies, head dancers and host drum, are called upon to enter the dance area to receive the thanks of the organizing committee, and once all of these people are acknowledged, the dance winners are announced in each dance and age category. After each person is announced she or he shakes hands with everyone standing in line in the dance area, creating a long line of participants snaking around the dance area. Once all winners are announced, the event officially closes with a Victory Dance for all of the winners. After this dance people disband for the weekend, having made plans with one another to meet again at the next powwow. Indeed, throughout the weekend much socializing takes place in all areas of the powwow, reinforcing relationships and a sense of community in participants, and illustrating the powwow as a site for the celebration and persistence of Native culture.

Contemporary Powwows: Precursors in the Plains and Movement East

Powwows in southwestern Ontario are firmly established and regularly occurring gatherings that have local histories and meanings, and although these powwows share many features with one another, specific activities, priorities and narratives reflect the distinctive nature and history of each gathering and the goals of organizers. Even within a limited geographic region, where communities share close ties and relationships with one another, the powwow celebrations are unique, both in their current formation and in their "evolution" and history. Powwows in this region have similar links with historic celebrations and artistic expressions of western First Nation communities that

gradually moved eastward. In this section I outline the common narratives and research that illustrate the historic connections of contemporary powwows with specific dances and cultural practices of the Plains nations while illustrating the trail by which the powwow was brought to southwestern Ontario and beyond. The journey and metamorphoses of the powwow over time clearly illustrate the fluctuation in cultural practices and meaning, demonstrating the fact that "tradition" is constantly evolving and changing to reflect local circumstances and needs at various points in time.

The origins, history and development of the powwow celebration, its dances and meanings are complicated and locally constructed; as such there are various and contrasting narratives that relay the development of this celebration.[10] The academic literature that examines the origins of powwows indicates that these celebrations developed out of various warrior societies of the Omaha and Pawnee Nations which spread throughout the Plains and beyond during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These male societies used music and dance, referred to as War Dancing, to accompany ceremonies, encourage camaraderie, and to reenact scenes from battle (Hungry Wolf 1983: 4). From the Plains, the War Dance spread eastward into various Ojibway communities in Wisconsin and Minnesota, arriving there by the 1840s (Densmore 1910-1913/1972: 142-183; Rynkiewich 1968: 14, 122; Vennum Jr. 1982: 43-64). Influenced by the warrior societies of the neighbouring Dakotas, the primary function of the War Dance for the Ojibway was to "provide an identity-building situation for young men as braves, to integrate the community socially, and to maintain confidence in the old Indian way of life" (Rynkiewich 1968: 122). The Ojibway and Dakota in the northwestern Great Lakes region were historic enemies, often engaging in battle with each other.[11] The adoption of the War Dance and the Plains-style big drum by the Ojibway

10. Two samples of narratives about powwows include Powers (1990: 50-60), and Browner (2002: 19-47); many others also exist, both in print and in oral accounts. For other samples, see Ashworth 1986; Hatton 1986; Huenemann 1992; Hungry Wolf 1983; and Rynkiewich 1968, among others.

11. Frances Densmore indicated the historic tensions between these groups: "The final battles in the hereditary warfare between the Chippewa and the Sioux were fought in central Minnesota. This warfare, which began before the tribes became known to the whites, had its origin at the time of the westward migration of the Chippewa (Ojibwa), who found their progress barred by the Dakota, a Siouan tribe. The conflict continued with intervals of peace until

reflect the change in relationship between these groups, imposed on them by the American government and fostered from within the communities. The negotiation of peace between the Dakota and Ojibway was relayed in oral accounts of the acceptance of the Dakota big drum by the Ojibway. Frances Densmore offers insight into the peace process that included the presentation of the drum.

> It is said that many generations ago the Sioux gave to the Chippewa [Ojibway] a large drum similar to the one used at the present time in the [Drum Presentation] ceremony here considered, taught them the "songs belonging to the drum," and related to them the tradition concerning its origin. It is believed that permanent peace between the two tribes was a result of this presentation of the drum. Following this presentation, in accordance with the instructions that accompanied it, the Chippewa made similar drums, which they afterward gave away, with the proper songs (1910-1913/1972: 143).

The narrative about the adoption of the big drum is maintained through oral history and in Native-produced publications. For example, at a drum-making workshop in 2000 at the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, Steve Teekans, the instructor, presented the teachings around the drum while participants made their drums. The following is a published narrative by Steve Teekens.

> The Ojibway were travelling west into Sioux territory. They began fighting and this warring continued for many generations. While the men spent all their time fighting, the women were left to take care of the men's work as well as caring for the wounded. A young woman noticed that the people in her village were unhappy. She went to the Elders and told them the fighting had to stop, but no one would listen to her, until one day she finally got the Elders to pay attention.
>
> They agreed that she would go out for a fast, and would do so for more than 30 days but less than 40. In the morning, she would lay out tobacco and give thanks to the Creator. After many days, a voice

---

brought to an end by the removal of the Minnesota Sioux by the United States Government.... On August 19, 1825, a treaty was negotiated at Prairie du Chien, Michigan Territory, in which the Chippewa and the Sioux agreed on a line of demarkation [sic] between their territories.... In spite of the agreement, however, the war parties of both tribes continued to range freely across the boundary line. The last great fight took place in the Minnesota Valley, May 27, 1858, near the site of the present town of Shakopee, but minor encounters between warriors of the two tribes are said to have occurred for some years afterward (1910-1913/1972: 60-61).

> came to her from the sky and, as it got closer, she saw that it was a drum. The voice then told her that the men had lost their closeness to Mother Earth and that the drum would bring them the heartbeat from Mother Earth. She was given 32 songs for the women and 32 for the men, and told that the drum has a spirit that was to be respected. The woman packed the drum and returned to her village where she had the community gather around the drum. They immediately felt a close connection to it. The woman told them how the drum came to her, and taught them the 64 songs she had been given (Brown 1999: 27).

Once the big drum and its songs were adopted by the northwestern Great Lakes Ojibway, Plains-style music and dance were performed at their social gatherings. In 1908 Frances Densmore documented the performance of war dancing by the Ojibway at the Red Lake Reservation in Minnesota at the Fourth of July community celebration. Densmore's description is especially interesting, as many parallels can be drawn between the 1908 event and contemporary powwows: the powwow area is carefully prepared for the celebration prior to its beginning; families set up camp; and traders prepare food and set up their displays (1910-1913/1972: 167). Densmore indicates that the entire event was managed by Native organizers, and "... there were no formal exercises and no speeches by white men" (1910-1913/1972: 167). Other similarities between the event described by Densmore and contemporary powwows include: the demarcation of a dance area; a "shelter of boughs" under which the drummers sat and performed in the centre of the dance area; outfits decorated with feathers, shell, bone, beadwork and horsehair, and moccasins decorated with bells and made of animal skins; and the tendency of dancers to carry an object in their hand as they dance. Furthermore, Densmore's description of the dancing itself resonates with some current dance styles, particularly the men's traditional dance (1910-1913/1972: 169-170).

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the warrior societies waned as a result of the reserve system and a decrease in warfare (Ashworth 1986: 163). Indeed, as the War Dance spread from the Dakotas at the end of the nineteenth century, it lost its overt association with the warrior tradition due to the increasingly social function of these dances, in which women and children began to participate. It is at this time that the War Dance gained its status as a primarily social dance and, through ongoing intertribal contact and relations with neighbouring communities, spread beyond the Plains region to the

plateau and into the area of the northern woodlands (Huenemann 1992: 128; Rynkiewich 1968: 12-13).

With the introduction of the Plains-style War Dance and related social activities into Ojibway communities around the Northern Great Lakes region, this powwow-style celebration continued to spread into Ojibway communities further east and south. The proliferation of Plains cultural practices and ideals into other areas of North America resulted not only from intertribal sharing with other Native groups, but also the influence of non-Native fascination with Plains-style images that were promoted in tourist shows and Hollywood films.[12] Traveling productions such as Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show showcased Plains-style music and dance, and fostered an image of the "typical Indian." Indeed, Plains music and images came to be associated with a generalized "Indian" for some Native people as well, as William Powers explains:

> since the turn of the century, Plains music and dance have become symbolic of the American Indian resistance to wholesale adoption of Euro-American culture, and it is partly through these particular cultural forms that Native American values manifest themselves.... At the national level most intertribal music and dance — wherever performed — is essentially Plains in style (Powers 1980: 212-214).

It is not without irony that non-Natives were promoting and consuming commercial Native culture in the form of Wild West Shows and similar staging of Native music and dance. These shows were promoted for non-Native entertainment despite the fact that cultural practices such as dance, music and ceremonies were banned through the Indian Act of Canada from the mid-1880s until 1951.[13] What this meant was that one of the few spaces in which Native people could

12. For example, see Doxtator 1988, Ewers 1964, Francis 1992, Gunther 1950, Pisani 2005, and Sanford 1971.
13. Since 1884 the Canadian Indian Act had been changed repeatedly to ban certain practices and traditions of Native people in an attempt to assimilate them. In 1884 the government outlawed potlatches and the performance of related dances that were part of religious or supernatural rituals, effectively forcing these practices underground (Dickason 1997: 261). In 1885 this ban was expanded to include the Sun Dance ceremony and people were prohibited from wearing traditional dance clothing, even for public shows. In 1914 this ban was again extended to include all types of dancing by Native Americans, and dancers were required to get written approval to publicly perform their traditional dances. Bans on Native dancing were not lifted until changes in the Indian Act in 1951 (Dickason 1997: 305).

celebrate their culture was for non-Native audiences, and not for their own cultural or spiritual purposes. For many Native groups this banning resulted in the loss of language, traditional practices and ceremonies and the related music and dance, and so for some, emulating the "acceptable" image of the Plains Nations for non-Native audiences may have been preferable to an alternative of absolutely no Native culture. Shows for non-Native entertainment were an important precursor to powwows in southwestern Ontario, and despite the banning of cultural practices, it is clear that many people attempted to maintain their own traditions and expressive practices privately.

Nation-Specific Precursors to the Local Powwow and the "Arrival" of Plains Music and Dance

The Plains-style drum, and its accompanying music and dance spread into the Southern Great Lakes region in the 1960s. Prior to the arrival of Plains-style music and dance, nation-specific social dancing and music-making took place in Ojibway communities around the Great Lakes.[14] As early as 1859, non-Native researchers and travelers wrote about the music of the Great Lakes nations, starting with the German scientist and historian J.G. Kohl, in his book *Kitchi-Gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior*. Drawing on his experience visiting communities along the south shore of Lake Superior, Kohl includes various references to Ojibway music and includes translations of some song texts. He also offers a brief description of Ojibway music.

> Their songs consist nearly always of only one verse, and one or two ideas. It is a versified sign, or an exclamation of joy set to words, to which they give length and expression, by repeating it a number of times.... They accompany such songs with music and chorus, or with drum-beating, and a regular strain of the voice (Kohl 1860: 248).

Others who conducted field research amongst the Ojibway of Minnesota and Wisconsin in the early twentieth century, examined their social practices, and also recorded and transcribed both ceremonial and social music.

---

14. The Ojibway also have ceremonial music and dance that is specific to their Midéwiwin or Grand Medicine Society. Various ethnographers have written about Midéwiwin Society music, including Hoffman 1888, 1891; Densmore 1972; and Landes 1968, among others.

The style of music that was performed by the Ojibway prior to the acceptance and spread of Plains-style music is also acknowledged by local powwow musicians and organizers. Glen Williams, longtime powwow organizer and member of the Walpole Island First Nation, spoke about the ongoing performance of traditional Ojibway music in southwestern Ontario communities, despite pressures and prohibitions legislated in the Indian Act of Canada and enforced by the local government agent. The following is an excerpt from an interview with Glen Williams, in which he relayed the history of the Walpole Island Powwow.

> Glen: With the real traditional [music, dance, ceremonies], things have been going on back there [privately in the bush] prior to that for Lord knows how long. For however long Indians were here I guess, that's been going on back there.
>
> Anna: Was the music that was performed back [there] similar to what came to be performed at powwows or was it different?
>
> Glen: No, no, it's different. Back there... it was a lot of social songs that was done here by the Indian people that were here. And those songs were for this particular area and were done in this dialect at the time, which was Chippewa, Odawa, Potawatomi, and the events and the things surrounding the songs, like the content of the songs was for this particular area. And the western influence had not been here at all at that time (Williams 2000).

Nation-specific music can still be found in this region, yet according to Gertrude Kurath, the first scholar of Native music to focus her research on the lower Great Lakes region, by 1950 the influence of other nations spread into Michigan, impacting on music traditions and practices.[15] Kurath provides an overview of the newly adopted powwow traditions in the Great Lakes area, including a description of various dances, dance outfits, and the singing styles of the musicians. Interestingly, Kurath notes that groups in the Wisconsin area "use a large ornamented 'powwow' drum on stakes, set in the middle of the grounds and beaten by four to six singers" (Kurath 1957: 180). This basic description is similar to contemporary music practices at powwows

15. She writes: "The Ottawa can still draw upon tradition, whereas the Methodist Ojibway and Potawatomi are re-creating their dances or learning them from the Ottawa. Both groups have borrowed from the Wisconsin Dells, Great Plains, and Pueblos" (Kurath 1955: 468).

in the Great Lakes region. Conversely, in the Michigan region, performance practice involved the use of a log drum by a single man to provide music. This suggests that at the time of her research, the Plains-style big drum and its accompanying music and practices had not yet been adopted by the Michigan Ojibway. Kurath argues that music and dance practices spread from Oklahoma into the Great Lakes region with varying speed, and she states that in the late 1950s certain communities retained their nation-specific artistic practices while adopting or adapting new cultural practices.

In an interview, Glen Williams addressed the spread of Plains music into the lower Great Lakes region, reiterating the role of the drum in peace negotiations.

> And the western influence probably came over here probably just about the '70s, maybe around there, yeah. I'd say that, maybe '69, '68. And that came from Michigan way coming this way. And that's when we'd seen the big drum.... And of course we knew that, and heard the stories orally, where the big drum had come from, it came from the western tribes, the Sioux, the Cheyenne, and it came through visions, you know, and through the White Buffalo Calf Woman[16] who came down in that particular form from above. And they were told that the drum was the sign of peace to all tribes, to the world or whatever it was at that time, whatever it happened to be. And that the Sioux and the Cheyenne were to take that word out and pass these... they were also taught songs that came with the big drum. And they were to take these songs and teach them to other tribes, and it was a symbol of peace, the drum was. And so that's how it all got started (Williams 2000).

Plains-style powwow practices replaced or complemented existing social activities in Native communities in southwestern Ontario in the 1960s and early 1970s, partly due to the general cultural renaissance of First Nations people during this decade.[17] Powwow aficionado, musician, and master of ceremonies Butch Elliott also commented on the music and dance precursors of powwows in southwestern Ontario, indicating the importance of the powwow for cultural revitalization in these communities.

---

16. White Buffalo Calf Woman is the name of the woman who is credited with fasting to bring peace between the Ojibway and Sioux.
17. For specific examples of Native cultural renaissance and the Canadian public's increasing awareness of Native issues during the 1960s and beyond, see Dickason (1997: 361-411).

> [In] southern Ontario and in through there... there were tribal dances... right up until the late 1800s. And for some reason after that, it took on a different form. It was done more theatrically, as an expression of culture. Because there was always… drums in my community hanging in the store or places, hand drums and different kinds of drums. But I never knew what they were... what it was when we were growing up, playing with a tom-tom or something like that. I mean it's always been with us, but I think we began to look at ourselves and how we should be using that, instead of putting it away, bring it out. And I think that's what happened in the Indian community in the '60s and '70s when people really began to go back to some form of expression. I think that's when the powwows became really meaningful.... I think the powwow, the surge in powwows and dances and getting together has meant a lot in terms of really getting a grasp and a hold of who we are. And I've seen that, I've seen that in my lifetime. Not growing up with it as a child, and then later on finding out that there is this thing called a powwow, or this thing called a drum, and we used it as a very real part of the American Indian Movement and everything that we did.... There was never a powwow at Cape, Cape Croker [when I was young]. But I remember going to one when I was ten years old in 1960, around Serpent River on the north shore [of Lake Superior]. But I don't recall as a child ever going to a powwow like they do today (Elliott 2000).

Clearly nation-specific cultural practice took place in southwestern Ontario communities despite government prohibitions. While these songs, dances and associated teachings continue to be performed and revitalized today, it is important to recognize that local artistic and cultural expressions predated the arrival of borrowed "traditions" in this region in the 1960s and 1970s. However, these borrowed practices did not just appear, rather they were integrated and reshaped to fit with existing celebrations and activities.

Powwows Take Shape in Southwestern Ontario

In terms of large Native social gatherings, the primary and immediate precursors to the powwow in this region included religious camp meetings and Native dance exhibitions akin to the Buffalo Bill and the Wild West Shows that were popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The accounts of Gertrude Kurath reinforce the oral history of music and social gatherings that were the precursors to the modern powwow. For example, she asserts that intertribal gatherings took place in this region in the mid 1850s, with the largest gathering centred around the spring maple syrup camps (Kurath 1955:

466). She also indicated that by 1900 church celebrations were replacing traditional Native gatherings, such that "for two decades the Holy Cross Church at Cross Village has sponsored an August Fair with Indian dances" (Kurath 1955: 467). At the Sarnia First Nation, former Chief of the Band, political activist, Men's Grass Dancer and respected Elder Fred Plain[18] indicated that powwows gradually replaced the annual church camp meetings that had been imposed on the community by the United Church of Canada. Fred stated:

> the actual beginning of the powwow in this community... actually found new life in the mid-'60s. We advertised our powwow here. Now I think this year was the thirty-fifth, so that would take us back to 1965. I recall when the powwow first began.... And the camp meeting was actually the forerunner of the powwow (Plain 2000).

Fred recalled these camp meetings, which lasted from the 1920s when he was a small child until at least the 1950s.

> The religious camp meeting usually was sponsored by the Wesleyan Methodist Church [in the US] and in Canada the United Church. But then the other denominations, particularly the Pentecostals, became very strong. And I recall these camp meetings when I was a little boy, I recall the camp meetings that used to happen every summer.... I used to enjoy going down there because the camp meeting brought all the people from the whole area. They came to the camp meeting, this was their social gathering of the year. And it wasn't just simply for the religious part of it, it was their get-together, it was the social get-together of the families, they hadn't seen each other for a year, and they'd all come together.... I recall going to camp meetings in various parts of Michigan, all over Ontario, southwestern Ontario.... I recall them from the mid-1920s, when I was a little boy, right through the '30s, '40s, '50s, the camp meeting was *the* event.... It was all Christian. It was dominated by the church. They would have their morning services, and they would have afternoon services and then evening services. And it was all geared towards Christianizing the Native people (Plain 2000).

Missionaries began holding camp meetings in this region in 1822 (Graham 1975: 8-9), and they were characterized by Christian prayer and socializing. As late as 1967 ethnomusicologist Gertrude Kurath described the activities of these gatherings, acknowledging variability in their vitality.

---

18. It was with sadness that I learned of Fred's death on July 29, 2006.

> Camp meetings thrive today. In addition to weekly services and indoor revivals in the cold season, large, migratory, out-door camp meetings fill the summer months. Devotees hold revivals at their own settlement and travel to others, a week at each location. They live in tents or private homes. They may travel long distances, from Hannahville Reservation on the Upper Peninsula to Greensky Hill near Charlevoix or the Isabella Reservation near Mount Pleasant, from Sucker Creek on Manitoulin Island or Saugeen Reserve to Walpole Island, reciprocally from Walpole to Isabella. At the settlements that are predominantly Protestant, camp meetings are sometimes on the decline, sometimes on the upswing (Kurath 1966: 48).

Notable is the fact that this description of the camp meetings was published around the same time that annual community powwows in southwestern Ontario were started, or reshaped, from existing gatherings. Fred Plain recounted the transition of community celebration from camp meetings to powwows.

> I recall the first powwow they had here was in the mid-60s... we had a powwow I think in '62 or '63. So they've been going on ever since. And I recall at those powwows.... the people would start coming, and… gradually, the religious camp meeting began to die away. They still have them here and there, but not too often... They still have them... Mount Pleasant, Michigan was one of the key areas for the annual fall camp meeting, and it still is. We have ceremonies up there, our Midéwiwin spiritual ceremonies, we have them in that community. And they have a big powwow at Mount Pleasant, Michigan, but every year, in September, they have their big camp meeting, and that still draws people. But they don't have the camp meeting here on the Sarnia reserve anymore. They used to have them at Kettle Point, Saugeen, Cape Croker, Muncey, Moraviantown. I remember the camp meetings, because we used to go to all of them, Georgina Island, Rama. But there are very few of them that carry on; they've given way to the powwow (Plain 2000).

As precursors to powwows, Church camp meetings functioned as large social gatherings to Christianize those in attendance, yet these gatherings were reshaped or replaced to reflect the changing needs and goals of local participants and organizers.

The first powwow held at Sarnia First Nation took place on August 25, 1962, and consisted of two "performances" of dances, one in the afternoon, the other in the evening. The local newspaper indicated that this was the first "performance of this sort at Sarnia reserve for white people," and a spokesperson stated that "… the purpose in

presenting the Pow-Wow was to preserve Chippewa traditions and culture and to inspire pride by the Chippewas in their own heritage and to educate white people in Indian lore and history" (Anonymous 1962: 9). These sentiments continue to be echoed in modern commentary about powwows. Dance and music performances at early powwows at Sarnia were typically conducted by visitors from Mount Pleasant, Michigan, Toronto, Ontario, or from more distant Nations such as Blackfeet, Tawa and Muskegon. The prominence of visiting performers at early powwows at Sarnia is a trend that is common to many other gatherings in this region, due to the newness of the powwow and the inexperience of local musicians and dancers in powwow traditions at this time.

An interesting detail in the media coverage of the early years of the powwow at Sarnia is that in 1964, the powwow was spread over three days, with the final day, Sunday, September 6 dedicated as a "day of worship," with services conducted by a minister from Mount Pleasant in both Chippewa and English (Barlow 1964: 11). This is the only mention of Christian components to this powwow in its early guises, but this is an important detail considering the links of this celebration with Church camp meetings.

The connection between early powwows and Christian churches is also evident in the development of the powwow at Walpole Island. One of the oldest powwows in this region, this gathering can be traced back to at least 1955, when the Walpole Island Indian Fair took place on August 25-27. According to the local newspaper, *The Wallaceburg News*, this gathering included dance and craft displays, as well as a baby show, beauty contest, baseball games and a midway (Anonymous 1955: 7). The following year the paper referred to this gathering as the second powwow "to be held on the island in as many years," sponsored by Walpole Island's St. John the Baptist Anglican Church (Anonymous 1956: 1). Complementing the information gleaned from local newspapers is the oral history of longtime powwow organizer and Walpole Island resident Glen Williams, who indicated that the community powwow evolved from staged dance performances that were held as fund-raisers for the community Anglican Church.

> My uncle... was involved in the powwow when it was at the church grounds. It really wasn't called a powwow in those days, it was like a performance done by the dance troupe that was here.... My uncle

> somehow became the organizer of that thing every year and what happened was they built a stage out in the field by the church grounds and they did these performances and demonstrated these dances on the stage. In twos and threes and fours and sixes at a time, and this was done as a fund-raiser for the church. All the monies went to the church, everything that was raised, or donations or anything like that. And eventually it evolved to inviting other dancers, like Oneidas from Muncey, and Oneida outside of London, and then we went further.... And then they went on to invite people from Six Nations, what they called the dance troupe at the time and that was mainly a family too that went out and did those things. So we invited them down here and really, we would try here to give them a little bit of gas money, just five or ten dollars for the gas tank just to get them back home and of course we'd have a nice feast with them too. But it was generally, it was really a good time. So that's how the powwow, if you can call it a powwow, it was an organized thing, that's when real organization came to it (Williams 2000).

Public displays of Native dancing in southwestern Ontario first took the form of dance troupes that traveled, and staged performances and demonstrations.[19] The research of Gertrude Kurath corroborated the oral history of contemporary organizers. She described the nature of the dancing of these performances.

> War dancing has for years been a must in shows for the general public. Sometimes it has been mimetic, with old songs. Sometimes it consisted of toe-heel stepping and hopping, to improvised melodies, especially in southerly Michigan. The older, simpler style is giving way to more elaborate, imported steps. In either case the dancing is non-functional and serves for exhibition (Kurath 1966: 34).

Staged dance performances, often for non-Native audiences, were one site where Native dancing was encouraged and fostered. In an interview, Butch Elliott reiterated the importance of these shows in the evolution of powwows.

---

19. In "Pan-Indianism in the Great Lakes Tribal Festivals," Gertrude Kurath commented on the acceptance of powwow music and dance in this region, focusing her analysis on the Iowa and Wisconsin tribes west of Lake Michigan, the Michigan Algonquins between Lakes Michigan and Huron. The only reference made to communities in this region of southwestern Ontario is to the Six Nations reserve east of Lake Huron: "... the pagan Iroquois produce an August pageant; and Christian Iroquois put on Labor Day or October Fairs from Ontario to Nedrow, New York" (1957: 179).

> At one time powwows used to be, I know in Wikwemikong and places like that, they used to be more like shows and stuff. There was stages, they used to dance on stages and stuff like that. And [powwow musician] Tefilo Lucero told me one time that down in the Detroit area, that nobody had regalia. A lot of those folks didn't have regalia at the time, and they rented them (Elliott 2000).

Dance exhibitions, usually for non-Native audiences, were for many years the primary forum for public performances of Native music and dance. Various scholars have commented on the "marketing" of Native North American traditions and expressive culture for non-Native audiences, and these shows have also been an impetus for the perpetuation of Native dancing and music by Native practitioners.[20]

Both church camp meetings and fund-raising events sponsored by the local churches fostered the beginnings of the powwow in this region of Ontario, demonstrating the links between Christian churches and the spread and development of the powwow. Although these church-related activities fostered the development and acceptance of the powwow in these two communities, it is important to recognize that the connection between church-sponsored events and the origins of local powwows is not always evident; this is clear when one looks at the origins and development of the Kettle and Stony Point celebration.

The origins of the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow differ from those at Sarnia and Walpole Island, likely due in part to the fact that it started much later, in 1970.[21] One of many cultural celebrations in this community, the gathering at Kettle and Stony Point can be traced to a princess pageant that was held on the evening of Wednesday, August 12, 1970. In preparation for this event, a cultural committee was formed in July of that year, with a mandate to "encourage revival of Indian customs such as weaving, learning native language and history" (Anonymous 1970: 11). At this event, contestants for the Miss Kettle Point pageant were judged according to their self-made "Indian Costumes," and their ability to give a speech outlining a brief history of the reserve and their comments regarding Indian culture and traditions. Noteworthy is the fact that these women were judged not on their

---

20. See, for example Francis 1992.
21. There may have been precursors to this celebration; however this was the first mention of this celebration in the local media and is also recognized by the organizing committee of 2000 as its first.

beauty but on their skills and cultural knowledge, criteria that continue to dominate the princess pageants at many reserves in southwestern Ontario.[22] At this inaugural event exhibition dancing was performed by Carole Peters and Nelson Shognash of the Walpole Island First Nation while the judges deliberated over the pageant contestants (Anonymous 1970: 1). The inception of this event is significant, as it started as a princess pageant for young women, with dancing as merely a side feature at the one-night event.[23]

Already by the following year the Princess Pageant was extended into a weekend long celebration and expanded to include dance competitions for participants dressed in traditional outfits, judged according to four categories: girls, boys, men and women. The 1971 event was also augmented with the introduction of a baby contest and a "Miss Congeniality" contest for female Native visitors. Following the success of this two-day event, the Kettle Point Culture Club announced that this would become an annual event (Anonymous 1971a: 1-2, Anonymous 1971b: 1, Heal 1971: 4).

A number of changes took place over the following years which influenced the evolution of the Kettle and Stony Point powwow into its current form; some of the highlights from the powwow during the 1970s and 1980s can be extrapolated from local newspapers and conversations with organizers and participants. In the early years of the powwow the number of participants increased, coming from more distant places; the growing popularity of this annual event is reflected in the

---

22. For the 1995-96 Princess Pageant at Kettle and Stony Point, the princess contestants were asked a series of questions and were judged on their dancing. The regulations for being a contestant in this pageant include being a woman between the ages of 15 and 24 and a member of the community (Interview with Candace Wilde, Kettle Point, August 27 1999). Similarly, at Walpole Island in 1999, Miss Weengushk and Miss Junior Weengushk were determined by the contestants' academic performance and their involvement in community affairs.

23. In many ways the first powwow as described in the newspaper resonates with the literature examining the spread of the image of the Plains Indians in "Wild West" and traveling shows. The history of Pauline Johnson as an Indian princess from Six Nations who traveled throughout North America and Europe similarly confirms that these "shows" were the sites at which Native dancing and music were encouraged during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

media reports of the number of people in attendance (e.g. from 1971-1973, between 1000 and 3000 people attended). By 1974 the programming of the event consisted of dance performances on Saturday afternoon, Saturday evening, and Sunday afternoon, the standard schedule for powwows in this region. The powwow also continued to attract dancers from across Canada and the United States. In the 1974 and 1975 press, much more emphasis is placed on the competitive dances for Native participants dressed in regalia, with less focus given to the baby contest, the Miss Congeniality contest and Miss Kettle Point contest. As the central feature of the gatherings, various references to dance indicate changes in performance practices and the introduction of new dance styles into this region. In 1972 the dancing at this event is labeled "War Dancing;" in 1976 the term "Fancy" dance was introduced to indicate a recently adopted style of dance, reinforced in 1977 by the references to Fancy and Traditional dancing. Similarly, the first reference to Jingle and Grass Dancing in 1992 suggests that these dances were adopted in this region at that time; 1992 is also when the first reference to Hoop Dance exhibitions is made. Clearly powwow dance styles were introduced at the Kettle and Stony Point gathering at different times, reflecting the ongoing transformation of this celebration and its various features, shaping the event to reflect changes in the local powwow "tradition."

A notable detail in the development of the powwow at Kettle and Stony Point is that the Princess Pageant was suspended from 1978 until 1994 due to a lack of contestants. This is an especially meaningful development since this powwow's origins were as a Princess Pageant. Interestingly, the number of participants at the powwow has remained about the same since 1973, as the reporters typically indicate that the number of people in attendance is approximately 1500 with 40 or more vendors and 150-200 dancers. This suggests that the powwow has not grown in size substantially, but has maintained its popularity over its thirty-five-year history. The ongoing changes in the Kettle and Stony Point powwow show that this is a dynamic celebration with a unique history effected by certain individuals and circumstances. It is an annual event anticipated by the organizers and participants, and it continues to draw musicians and dancers from across North America.

"Relationships" and the Role of Individuals in the Development of the Powwow

A significant factor in the acceptance of the powwow into the southwestern Ontario region is the relationships and contact that the Ojibway had with powwow practitioners from the west, either through travels to the west, or through the relocation of Western Natives. Various practitioners of Plains-style music and dance relocated into this area, bringing with them their knowledge and skills, facilitating the acceptance of powwows and Plains-style music and dance in the Great Lakes region during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Detroit served as a major meeting place for many Native Americans who relocated there to seek employment. Glen Williams talked about the role of western Natives in the early development of the Walpole Island Powwow.

> Then, of course, there were well over a dozen tribes there [in Detroit], represented and living in the area, so this is how some of those, we found out some of those things, some of the songs, and that there were drums out there, and then when it came to our powwow times, being one of the only ones here, then they knew, out west, they had powwows, but they were too far away from home. And of course they came to the closest one they knew about, it was Walpole. And then they brought the drum and so that's how we came up with singers in those early days. And then when we travelled, we invited drums back over here and said "We can do this for you and we'll help you as much as we can," but to come and teach us, to share with us and that the community needs it over here and that sort of thing (Williams 2000).

Two individuals who were highly influential in the teaching of powwow music in the Great Lakes region are Tefilo Lucero and his nephew Jose Marcus. These Taos Pueblo men from New Mexico traveled extensively throughout the United States learning music and traditions from different Nations, eventually settling in Michigan where they began to teach traditions and songs to local Native men (Butch Elliott 2000; Cronk 1990:17). Tefilo's impact on the early powwow in the Great Lakes region of southwestern Ontario is also recognized by powwow musician Mark Lavallee who credits him as the "man... who revitalized the whole powwow traditions around that area.... He's... the original guy that came up to this area, southwestern Ontario, Michigan and revitalized the powwow and the drum" (Lavallee 2000). Mike Dashner, a powwow dancer from Walpole Island, similarly recounted the impact of Tefilo Lucero and Jose Marcus, in his reflections on learning how to dance to powwow dances and the people who taught and influenced

him (Cronk 1990: 17). Indeed, Tefilo's impact on the development of the powwow is confirmed by the newspaper coverage of the powwows during the early 1970s. For example, in a pre-powwow article in *The Sarnia Observer*, readers are alerted to the fact that "The Tiffelo [sic] Lucero drummers of Detroit will be performing" (MacIntyre 1972: 7), and in the same year a post-powwow article indicated that "One of the acclaimed performers was Teofilo [sic], whose group has sung at many Ontario Powwows. Teofilo [sic], a 67-year-old Indian living in Detroit, led his group of singers through many Indian ceremonial dances" (Anonymous 1972: 11). Tefilo was recognized in the media as the lead singer of an intertribal drum group (MacIntyre 1973: 9), and by local Native people as one of the people who facilitated the acceptance of Plains-style music and dance in this region during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Similarly, his nephew Jose Marcus, who began learning powwow music at the age of five or six, also influenced those people in the Detroit area who were interested in performing powwow music. He taught them songs and actively encouraged people to participate in powwows. In a published article he addressed his involvement in early powwow music in this area, saying: "I taught them [the other men in his group Blue Lake Singers] the Round dances, Ruffle dances, Fancy dances, Ladies dances, Traditional dances, Crow [Hop] dances. I had to teach all them songs to all the guys" (Cronk 1990: 23). Dancer and musician Mike Dashner also commented on the important role of Jose in training local musicians, saying: "Jose Marcus was really the 'mastermind' behind the drum group, because he was the one who had the memory for all the old songs" (Cronk 1990: 17). In addition to training friends, Jose also trained his own children to carry on the tradition of music-making, and Blue Lake Singers continues to perform at powwows in the Great Lakes region.

Ted Lefthand, a Native performer from Oklahoma, is also credited with affecting local powwow practices. He was recognized by the Kettle and Stony Point powwow committee for his participation at their inaugural powwows, and by Butch Elliott for his important contributions to the local powwow scene.

> There were a few people who were from different places like Ted Lefthand who was from Oklahoma, there was a few guys in Michigan that were dancers and that went around to quite a few of the

> powwows.... That was a part of their culture. Ted Lefthand [and others]..., they danced in Oklahoma and that, they have powwows (Elliott 2000).

Butch Elliott has also been heavily involved in the powwow in this region of Ontario. As early as 1972 Butch was involved in organizing cultural events in the Michigan area and performed with other musicians at powwows in southwestern Ontario (Farquhar 1972: 35). As well, Butch has served as an informative master of ceremonies at the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow for a number of years.

An individual from within the local community who is greatly recognized for his contributions to early powwows in this region is Nelson "Sugar Bear" Shoganosh from Walpole Island. An important spiritual leader, Sugar Bear is recognized as one of the founders of the Walpole Island powwow, and he also taught powwow traditions and dancing to people throughout southwestern Ontario. Mike Dashner commented on Sugar Bear's influence, saying: "There was a guy on [Walpole] Island, Nelson Sugarbear junior. He started a dancing club; they were trying to revive the powwow culture" (Cronk 1990: 17). Fred Plain also commented on the role that Sugar Bear played in revitalizing Native dancing and traditions through the powwow.

> I don't know how long Walpole [Island's powwow has] been going, but they had a spiritual leader down there. He's still one of the top spiritual leaders in southern Ontario. His name is Sugar Bear. And where he learned his dancing must have been from spiritual teaching because he is a Midéwiwin teacher. But then he started what he called a powwow down in Walpole Island, and it was titled "Sugar Bear's Powwow." And it got quite popular. Now he's out of that powwow business, he's strictly into Midéwiwin teaching.... I think that's what he feels is probably that the introduction into the spiritual lifestyle and the tradition and the culture of the average people was through the powwow. And once he got that going, then he just let other people take over and he went into solely the spiritual teachings. He travels all over now (Plain 2000).

Sugar Bear's role in establishing the powwow in this region is also evident in the media coverage of the first celebrations at Kettle and Stony Point. In 1970, at the first Kettle Point Princess Pageant (which eventually evolved into the powwow), Sugar Bear and Carole Peters performed "traditional Indian dances" while the pageant judges deliberated (Anonymous 1970: 11). Again in 1971 when competition dancing was introduced into the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow, Sugar

Bear demonstrated traditional dances (Heal 1971: 4), and in 1972 it was advertised in a pre-powwow article that Sugar Bear would be the lead male dancer, paired with Carole Peters as lead female dancer (MacIntyre 1972: 7). The role that Sugar Bear played in early powwows is also evident in his overall success as a dancer in the competitions. Sugar Bear is listed in the local media as the winner of the men's competition at the Kettle and Stony Point Powwow from 1971-1978. In 1978 the writer for *The Forest Standard* noted:

> It was a surprise to no one when Sugar Bear (Nelson) Shognosh of Walpole Island won the main dance prize of the event. He has been considered as one of the best dancers in the area for many years and also has taken a leading part of promotion of the powwow"(Anonymous 1978: 3).

Although Sugar Bear eventually became less involved in powwows in southwestern Ontario, his example as a dancer inspired others to learn how to dance and to teach powwow dancing to their children, and he continues to be a spiritual leader for many people in this region.[24]

Support and the promotion of Native dance were important to the development of the local powwow, as Fred Plain recalled.

> [The start of the powwow] was a community thing. They started, let's see, back in the '50's, they started holding classes in the council chamber, it was a different hall. One big hall was also the council chamber. And once a week they would invite anyone who wanted to come, and learn powwow dancing. They had teachers come in from different areas who were used to it. Particularly probably Midéwiwin, but they came in and they would talk about dancing and then they would get children out there, mostly children out there. And that went on for a few years before they actually started into a powwow, so when they did finally agree on a powwow, they had dancers (Plain 2000).

Through the modeling and teaching of Native music and dance by people such as Jose Marcus, Tefilo Lucero, Ted Lefthand, Sugar Bear Shognash, among others, support for powwows grew from within the Native communities.

---

24. Sugar Bear's role as a spiritual leader was reiterated in his role in the Kettle Point First Nation's second annual Teaching Lodge in the summer of 2000 (running from July 11-14, just a few days following the powwow), with Sugar Bear hosting various sessions of the lodge.

Another factor that impacted on the current manifestation of powwows in southwestern Ontario is the travels that local people undertook in order to learn from other Native groups. Glen Williams and his family contributed to the shape of contemporary gatherings in southwestern Ontario through their travels throughout western Canada and the midwestern United States. The family traveled to attend powwows and learn strategies for hosting such an event, which they then implemented at their own community gathering, as Glen recounted.

> [So] we began to travel, [my wife] and I, mainly in search of... I don't know if we were searching or not, I guess we wanted to gain knowledge I guess. We wanted to learn a lot about other Indian people throughout the US and Canada. So we began to travel out west, we used to travel to Chicago and we'd come into contact with other Indians, some Sioux Indians there in Chicago, and there were Winnebagos, and then there was other Chippewas from Wisconsin and that area who'd come to Chicago, so it was a good gathering point there, to improve our knowledge about different things, celebrations and traditions and what other Indian communities were doing so we could come back and put them into our powwow, in our celebration, our days, our celebration days here. And then eventually we traveled further, the Canadian west. Saskatchewan, not so much Manitoba, but Saskatchewan, Alberta, and then down into Montana, the Dakotas, and then Nebraska and all through that area over there we traveled to learn more and constantly learning. And of course they had their celebrations out there... and we really enjoy ourselves out there at those things. And we really wanted to bring some of those, the things that we could bring, back over here too and have something likewise done here for the enjoyment of our people and so that's how we brought some of these influences over to our community, through our travel (Williams 2000).

By actively seeking knowledge and teaching about the powwow from other nations across Canada and the United States, Glen and his wife were able to incorporate new activities and ideas into their community powwow, shaping it to reflect the teachings they had received in their travels.[25]

Clearly, many individuals contributed to and influenced the development of the powwow in southwestern Ontario Anishnabek communities. Through the sharing of music and dance activities by

25. Their children were also influenced by their travels. Their sons now lead a successful Drum, and, as early as 1975 they won in dance competitions (Anonymous 1975: 21).

Western Natives who had relocated to the region, and the active seeking of knowledge through travels west by local Natives, the early powwows in southwestern Ontario were shaped by the efforts of many individuals. This overview of some of the factors affecting the development of the powwow in this region illustrates how "tradition" is not fixed, but rather actively constructed and meaningful to local people.

Developments and Challenges to Community Powwows

Various factors contributed to the adoption of powwow traditions into southwestern Ontario, and each celebration has its own history and identity. Through interviews with participants and organizers and a review of the coverage of selected powwows in local newspapers, it becomes apparent that the powwow at Sarnia began as an annual celebration in 1961, Walpole Island's powwow began as a community fair showcasing Native dances and crafts in 1955, and the gathering at Kettle and Stony Point began in 1970, as a princess contest. Despite the longevity and vitality of these celebrations, there was resistance to these gatherings from within these communities and various challenges that threatened the vitality of the powwow. Through missionization and residential schooling, many people in this region were taught that their culture was primitive and backwards, an attitude that enabled the assimilation attempts by the government and religious organizations. Religious factionalism continues to plague First Nation communities in southwestern Ontario, not only between members of different congregations, but also between Christian community members and those choosing a traditional way of life.[26] Internal divisions are still evident in communities today, and, as Glen Williams indicated, some Christianized Natives were reluctant to allow "pagan" celebrations such as powwows to take place on their reserve.

> Indians... were taught... through residential schools that we were pagans... that it was devil-worship and stuff like this. And any Indian articles and stuff like that were destroyed, burned, we were not to handle it. And our language was beat out of us... there's a really large

26. Factionalism between the Christians and traditionalists was also discussed in conversations with some local residents who indicated that there are people on the local reserves who believe that a Drum should not be on the reserve because it promotes teachings that counter Christianity. However, it was also indicated that many Christian community members do attend the powwow, offering to help out, but perhaps not participating in the dancing and singing.

> contingency here on Walpole Island, one of the largest from any other communities in Canada we're products of residential schools, maybe some 300 people that were sent to residential schools at one time or another. And that's not to say what they brought back from residential schools, and then it was put on to their children, the influences from that. And so there was that whole blanket, or that cloud, that hung over everybody at Walpole, that it wasn't a good thing, to dance and to sing. And so we were constantly up against this air there. And it was hard to get new people to come out and dance because they were our own people, Indian people, like they teased, you know, "That's devil worship," "What are you going to do that for?"…. To me it was pride, to me and my family. Because we were on the opposite of things, we tried to get [the powwow] rolling.... So anyway, we were battling that all the time, the attitudes, the attitudes and that sort of thing there (Williams 2000).

Despite the indoctrination of Native populations through residential schools and Christian churches, aspects of traditional Native culture survived "in the background,"[27] and by the late 1990s powwows were established annual traditions in which many community members and visitors from other reserves enthusiastically participated. The cultural revival that has been taking place since at least the 1960s in Native communities throughout North America has created a space for practices such as the powwow, and, conversely, the powwow has served as a vehicle for this cultural revival. Within this context of cultural revitalization and renewal, the powwow gained in popularity in southwestern Ontario during the 1960s and 1970s, in part due to the acceptance of Native cultural practices such as the powwow and similar cultural expressions by the government during the twentieth century; Fred Plain comments:

> And [the government] couldn't stop the growth of the powwow. So it's recognized by them as just simply a part of the culture. And there's no way they can stop it and in fact they encourage it now because they tell the Canadian citizens that this is the life, the culture of the Aboriginal people (Plain 2000).

The increasing popularity of the powwow brought various challenges for the organizers and participants of powwows in southwestern Ontario during the 1980s, which ultimately changed the powwow and further

27. According to Glen Williams, although forbidden by the local Indian agent, traditional songs and dances had continued to be performed privately at Walpole Island until the 1950s, when the Indian Act of Canada was change to permit cultural expressions (Interview 12 May 2000).

fostered its acceptance. Oral histories about the powwow in this region highlight its importance to the cultural revitalization of communities. Media coverage of these events primarily addresses the dancing, regalia, arts and music observed and heard, highlighting the pleasure that people derive from this annual gathering, and acknowledging the importance of this celebration to the revitalization and maintenance of traditional culture.

Powwows clearly played an important role in the cultural revitalization that took place in Native communities in southwestern Ontario in the 1960s and 1970s. However, one issue that frequently emerged in conversations about the history of the powwow, that was not addressed in the media, is the changed attitudes towards alcohol consumption at these events during the 1980s. Current protocol at powwows dictates that drugs and alcohol, and people under their influence, are prohibited from entering the powwow grounds; signs are posted for people to see as they enter the powwow grounds, reminders are written in powwow programs and the emcee reiterates this restriction in his commentary throughout the powwow. These prohibitions parallel a new emphasis on social integration and healing. However, in relaying the development of the powwow in local communities, many people referred to the "party" atmosphere of gatherings, partly generated by the consumption of alcohol by participants and visitors during the 1960s and 1970s, into the 1980s, at which time attitudes changed and organizers began promoting powwows as alcohol-free events. Indeed, many community powwows were jeopardized during the 1980s due to the increased consumption of alcohol, the internal divisions in communities, and because of the financial challenges of hosting a powwow.

Accounts about the vulnerability of the powwow in the 1980s indicate some of the key challenges and difficulties with which organizers were confronted while attempting to establish the powwow as an annual celebration in their community. Although various tensions surrounding cultural practices continue to exist in many Native communities today, and raising the money to cover the costs of hosting a powwow remains a challenge for many organizers, the powwow has become an annual celebration on most reserves and urban centres in southwestern Ontario, highlighting the resilience and determination of individuals and communities in keeping their traditional culture alive.

Conclusion

Clearly powwows in southwestern Ontario have changed since their inception in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, and are now established celebrations with specific meanings, associations and importance to people in these and neighbouring communities. While each community's gathering has a particular history, common variables, such as the role of individuals, the overall shape of events and the social contexts in which these gatherings took root, fostered the acceptance of this tradition into Anishnabek communities in southwestern Ontario. The social, cultural and historical forces that impacted on the communities in this region shaped, defined and redefined the powwow celebrations and powwow music and dance practices and meanings over time. The overall movement of the Plains-style music and dance and the powwow generally was facilitated by various factors, shaped by the unique social conditions of these communities and the efforts and contributions of different individuals. The implementation and development of the powwow celebration by these First Nation communities indicates the cultural revitalization and promotion of meaningful artistic expressions that have strengthened Aboriginal people and their culture since at least the 1960s. Furthermore, the development of powwows out of various Church-sponsored events such as camp meetings and fund-raising "Native shows" challenges the assumed oppositional relationship between missionization and "tradition" in Native communities. Links can also be drawn with the general marketing of Native culture during the twentieth century and the interests of community members to encourage "culture" in their activities and celebrations.

Shifts in attitude towards tradition generally, and the powwow specifically, reflect the relationships between individuals and their ideals, and the impact of larger social movements within the Native population in Canada and North America. Powwows in southwestern Ontario are now considered by many to be part of the traditional culture of the Ojibway. However, it is evident from the history of this celebration and the factors that contributed to its acceptance in this region that this celebration is not a long-standing nor fixed "tradition," but rather a meaningful and constantly evolving gathering, deliberately adapted and fostered by Native individuals.

References

Anonymous. 1955. "Indian Craft, Dances, Baby Show Beauty Contest Planned at Walpole." *The Wallaceburg News*, Tuesday, August 9: 7.

———. 1956. "Walpole Island Pow-wow To Hear Tom-tom Boom." *The Wallaceburg News*, Tuesday, August 14: 1.

———.1962. "Pow-Wow To Get Encore." *Sarnia Observer*, Monday, August 27: 9.

———.1970. "Kettle Point Princess Crowned." *Forest Standard*, August 19: 1, 11.

———. 1971a. "Over 3,000 attend Pageant." *Forest Standard,* August 18: 1-2.

———. 1971b. "Princess Pageant." *Forest Standard,* August 11: 1.

———. 1972. "Indian heritage Singers Wow 'Em at Powwow." *Sarnia Observer*, August 14: 11.

———. 1975. "Tina George Crowned In Pow Wow Contest." *Sarnia Observer,* July 15: 21.

———. 1978. "Pow Wow Huge Success." *Forest Standard,* July 12: 3.

Ashworth, Kenneth A. 1986. *The Contemporary Oklahoma Pow-Wow*. Unpublished thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman.

Barlow, Jim. 1964. "'Pow-Wow' Tells Indian Folklore." *Sarnia Observer*, Tuesday, September 11: 11.

Brown, Mitzi. 1999. "On the Pow Wow Trail." *Aboriginal Voices* 6 (1): 26-29.

Briggs, Charles L. 1996. "The Politics of Discursive Authority in Research on the 'Invention of Tradition.'" *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (4): 435-469.

Browner, Tara. 2002. *Heartbeat of the People: Music and Dance of the Northern Pow-Wow*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Cronk, Sam. 1990. *Sound of the Drum: A Resource Guide*. Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre.

Densmore, Frances. 1972 [1910-1913]. *Chippewa Music*. New York: Da Capo Press.

Diamond, Beverley, M. Sam Cronk and Franziska von Rosen. 1994. *Visions of Sound: Musical Instruments of First Nations Communities in Northeastern America*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.

Dickason, Olive. 1997. *Canada's First Nations*. Don Mills: Oxford.

Doxtator, Deborah. 1988. *Fluffs and Feathers*. Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre.

Elliott, Arthur (Butch). 2000. Phone interview by author. October 2.

Ewers, John C. 1964. "The Emergence of the Plains Indian as the Symbol of the North American Indian." *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution, Publication 4613*: 531-544. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Farquahar, Jamie. 1972. "Kettle Point hosts colorful powwow." *London Free Press,* August 14: 35.

Fowler, Loretta. 2005. "Local Contexts of Powwow Ritual." In Clyde Ellis, Luke Eric Lassiter and Gary H. Dunham eds., *Powwow*: 68-82. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Francis, Daniel. 1992. *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture*. Vancouver: Arsenal Press.

Gilman, Lisa. 2004. "The Traditionalization of Women's dancing, Hegemony, and Politics in Malawi." *Journal of Folklore Research* 41 (1): 33-60.

Graham, Elizabeth. 1975. *Medicine Man to Missionary: Missionaries as Agents of Change among the Indians of Southern Ontario, 1784-1867*. Toronto: Peter Martin Associates.

Gunther, Erna. 1950. "The Westward Movement of Some Plains Traits." *American Anthropologist* 52: 175-180.

Guss, David M. 2000. *The Festive State: Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism as Cultural Performance*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hatton, Orin T. 1986. "In the Tradition: Grass Dance Musical Style and Female Pow-wow Singers." *Ethnomusicology* 30(2): 197-222.

Heal, Ed. 1971. "Brave, beauty." *The London Free Press,* August 16: 4.

Henry, Sharon, Laura Wilde and Sam George. 1999. Informal interview with author, 28 October, Kettle Point, Ontario.

Hobsbawm, Eric. 1983. "Introduction: Inventing Traditions." *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hoefnagels, Anna. 2001. "Remembering Canada's Forgotten Soldiers at Contemporary Powwows." *Canadian Journal for Traditional Music/ Revue de musique folklorique canadienne* 28 : 24-32.

Hoffman, Walter James. 1888. "Pictography and Shamanistic Rites of the Ojibwa." *American Anthropologist* 1: 209-229.

——— 1891. "The Midewiwin or 'Grand Medicine Society' of the Ojibway." *Report for the Bureau of American Ethnology*. Washington: Bureau of Ethnology.

Huenemann, Lynn F. 1992. "Northern Plains Dance." *Native American Dance: Ceremonies and Social Traditions*. Washington: National Museum of the American Indian.

Hungry Wolf, Adolf and Beverly. 1983. *Powwow*. Skookumchuck, BC: Good Medicine Books.

Kohl, J.G. 1960. *Kitchi-Gami: Wanderings Round Lake Superior*. London: Chapman and Hall.

Kurath, Gertrude P. 1955. "Ceremonies, Songs and Dances of Michigan Indians." *Michigan History* 29: 466-468.

———. 1957. "Pan-Indianism in Great Lakes Tribal Festivals." *Journal of American Folklore* 70: 179-182.

———. 1966. *Michigan Indian Festivals*. Ann Arbor: Ann Arbor Publishers.

Landes, Ruth. 1968. *Ojibwa Religion and the Midewiwin*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Lavallee, Mark. 2000. Interview by author. Peterborough, June 7.

MacIntyre, Floyd. 1972. "Pow Wow Slated for Kettle Point." *Sarnia Observer,* August 11: 7.

———. 1973. "Lee Wolfe Named 1973 Queen During Kettle Point Pow Wow." *Sarnia Observer,* August 13: 9.

Mould, Tom. 2005. "The Paradox of Traditionalization: Negotiationg the Past in Choctaw Prophetic Discourse." *Journal of Folklore Research* 42 (3): 255-294.

Phillips, Mark Salber and Gordon Schochet, eds. 2004. *Questions of Tradition*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Pisani, Michael V. 2005. *Imagining Native America in Music*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Plain, Fred. 2000. Interview by author. Sarnia, Ontario, July 6.

Powers, William K. 1980. "Plains Indian Music and Dance." *Anthropology on the Great Plains*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Romero, Raul R. 2001. *Debating the Past: Music, Memory and Identity in the Andes*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rynkiewich, Michael Allen. 1968. *Chippewa Pow-wows*. Unpublished thesis, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Sanford, Margaret. 1971. "Pan-Indianism, Acculturation, and the American Ideal." *Plains Anthropologist* 16 (53): 222-227.

Vennum Jr., Thomas. 1982. *The Ojibwa Dance Drum: Its History and Construction*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Folklife Studies.

Wilde, Candace. 1999. Interview by author. Kettle Point, August 27.

Williams, Glen. 2000. Interview by author. Walpole Island, May 12.