Historic Fort Omaha and the Chief Standing Bear Memorial

The U.S. Army began construction of Fort Omaha in 1868. The Fort’s initial purpose was to guard the important pioneer settlement at the junction of the Union Pacific Railroad and the Missouri River. Fort Omaha later became headquarters for diverse military units, such as Battery C of the 3rd U.S. Artillery from Fort Kearney, the Army Signal Corps, the Observation Balloon Corps during World War I, and the 7th Corps and 7th Service Command from the 1920s to 1940s. After World War II, the Navy took over Fort Omaha as a Reserve Training Center. Sections of the Fort are still used by U.S. Marine Corps Reserve units today.

Metropolitan Community College received the deed to this 70-acre site in 1975. Through extensive renovation, Fort Omaha became the College’s first permanent campus. Fort Omaha is on the National Register of Historic Places, and the terms of MCC’s deed require that the parade ground be maintained as an open field and that the exteriors of brick buildings cannot be changed. The College has preserved Fort Omaha’s historic look while creating a campus environment suitable for a progressive community college. The Douglas County Historical Society now operates the Fort Omaha home of General George Crook, commander of the U.S. Army Department of the Platte from 1875 to 1882, as the General Crook House Museum. The Crook House is open 1–4 p.m. today. Admission is free; a donation of $5 is suggested.

Fort Omaha has also played a role in Native American history in Nebraska. In 1863, the great Winnebago Chief Little Priest and other Ho-Chunk warriors enlisted in a U.S. Army Cavalry Regiment based at Fort Omaha. Company A, Fort Omaha scouts, Nebraska volunteers, Chief Little Priest and his warriors distinguished themselves in many battles during the Indian Wars of the 1860s.

Ponca Chief Standing Bear was detained in the Fort Omaha guard house during his 1879 trial, which resulted in a court decision that established Native Americans as human beings with civil rights under U.S. law. Historians believe that 29 other Poncas also resided in tents on the Fort Omaha parade ground during Chief Standing Bear’s trial. Visit the memorial to Chief Standing Bear, located east of the parade ground flagpole.

Evaluations

Your evaluation of today’s powwow helps us to improve for the future and communicate the value of the Fort Omaha Intertribal Powwow to financial sponsors. Fill out a paper evaluation or be interviewed by a powwow volunteer. All forms of the survey provide you the option of being in a drawing for a powwow T-shirt.
Honoring grandmothers

The powwow committee selected "honoring grandmothers" as the 2014 theme because grandmothers are the givers of life. All audience members are encouraged to bring their grandmothers into the arena for a special song. Each family is encouraged to honor its grandmother(s) on this day in the way deemed most appropriate by family members. The powwow committee will have limited small gift items available for the first 100 grandmothers.

The powwow committee recognizes, Fleurde mayo, a Mayan and member of the International Council of 11 Indigenous Grandmothers, for her wisdom we share about grandmothers: "We are here because of a vision, the ancestors, the spirit of the grandmothers, have told us to teach all of the children of the world all that we know for generations to come.

The princess crown was created and donated by AlexAndrea Pasquayak from Saddle Lake, Alberta. Canada. She created the crown to honor her grandmother, Brenda Aldrich, of the Omaha Native community. Pasquayak is an enrolled member of the Isanti people of Sainte-Nebra. She was raised by her aunt Ursula Aldrich Young Bear.

La Lake, Alberta, Canada. She is a third-generation header, taking on the style of beadwork she learned at a young age from aunt Ursula Aldrich Young Bear.

Intertribal Powwow dance styles

Fancy Dance

Originating in the 1950s to attract and please powwow visitors, the dance is flashy and colorful and requires stamina, strength and coordination. It is usually performed by young men. Fancy Dance movement is faster than any other dance.

Men's Traditional Dance

The Men's Traditional Dance simulates the warrior preparing for battle. Part of this dance is the Crow Hop or Sneak-Up Dance. A dancer will crouch close to the ground and stand up at different times during the dance. At times during the dance, the drum uses heavy strokes that deject the sound of gunfire.

Grass Dance

The Grass Dance is believed to have originated with the Omaha Tribe. All stories point to this dance as ceremonial. In the South, some believe it was connected to a warrior society and that scalps were tied to the dancers' clothing to celebrate victory in battle. Northern tribes believe it to be a blessing ceremony for new ground. The dancers trample the grass in preparation for a village; grass is tied to the dancer. As the dancer moves, the fringes attached to his outfit sway as if to simulate the natural movement of tall prairie grass.

Jingle Dance

Known also as the Beating Dance, this dance originated with the Ojibwe in the Great Lakes region. The dress itself is said to have originated to heal a medicine man's granddaughter. The colorful dress is covered with rolled-up snuff can lids attached with bright-colored ribbons. The jingles are close enough together to hit one another, creating a near-musical, happy sound much like rain. Dancers perform simple zigzag steps — no high stepping or fancy footwork — and make the jingles sway.

Women's Traditional Dance

Traditional women dancers are looked on with reverence as the elegant presence at a powwow. This dance exemplifies dignity, grace and modesty. The women can move in several ways. Some move in a bounce style, originated by the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota of the north. Some zigzag or side step in a circle around the arena, always with a bounce movement. The dress is elegant yet simple. Women carry an eagle feather fan that they raise in the air as the songs indicate, with an honor for the men and the drum.

Fancy Shawl Dance

Imitating the movements of the butterfly, this dance is a relative newcomer to the powwow circuit, starting in the 1950s and ‘60s. The intricate foot movement and spinning of the fringe on the shawl and colors of the dancer’s outfit. Light fabric is used to give the appearance that the dancer is floating on air — and to prevent the dancer from overheating. Many Fancy Shawl dancers do not wear leggings but calf-high moccasins. The shawl is the most important part of the outfit and must stretch from hand to hand when the dancer’s arms are outstretched.

Source: Pow wow 2005, Indian Country Today by David Meltzer

Powwow protocol

When you attend a powwow, it is important to remember that you are an observer of ancient ceremonies and traditions that have survived every possible adversity.

Here are things you need to know for proper behavior:

- Under no circumstances are alcohol or drugs allowed on powwow grounds.
- Once the dance arena has been blessed with sage and prayer, it becomes spiritual ground. Do not walk across the arena and do not allow your children to run into the arena. The beaches around the powwow arena are designated for dancers only.
- Do not take pictures at random — either still shots or video. If there is a particular dance you want to photograph, ask permission. Some dances are sacred and are never to be photographed. If you see a dancer who is especially striking, ask if you may take a picture after he or she leaves the arena.
- A dancer’s clothing is regalia, not a costume. It is a prized possession. Some regalia has been handed down through the generations and is priceless. The regalia is handmade, usually by the dancer, friends and family. Every article has special meaning, and it takes years to collect items until the regalia is complete. Do not ever touch a dancer’s regalia without permission. The regalia is an expression of spirit and has been prayed over and blessed. Honor it, the person wearing it and the living history it represents.
- Finally, put aside the Hollywood image of what an Indian looks like. Native Americans come in all sizes, shapes and colors. From a milky skinned, blue-eyed blond or a green-eyed redhead to the dark brown and black, they are all Native Americans in their heritage, blood and heart.

Source: The Powwow Trail: Understanding and Enjoying the Native American Powwow by Julia White

Purchase a powwow T-shirt in the raffle ticket booth. Garan Coons, Oglala Lakota/Navajo dancer, singer, flute player, storyteller and graphic artist created the design. Coons used traditional designs, circles and the medicine wheel. The dancer in the design is his brother, Gentry St. Cyr, a grass dancer. Coons said, “Because the grass dance originated from the Omaha people, I thought it would be fitting to use an original dance style from the Omaha people at the Fort Omaha Intertribal Powwow.”

Visit the Study and Live in Rosebud, South Dakota, table to learn about an opportunity to study Lakota contemporary and historical culture and earn college credit during summer 2015 on the Rosebud Indian Reservation.

Thank you to MCC’s Emergency Medical Technician program that is providing first aid and emergency services today. Visit personnel at the ambulance to learn about EMT and paramedic courses offered at various locations and times throughout the year.

Thanks to MCC Police Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 76 for sponsoring the Tiny Tots activity.