

**MONOGRAPH
ON THE
HISTORICAL AND PRESENT USE OF
NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE
IN THE ORDER OF THE ARROW (OA)**

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**This is NOT an official Document of the
Order of the Arrow or the Boy Scouts of America.
Members of the GIED are volunteers who study and write about
the inductions processes of the Order of the Arrow
for the benefit of the Scouting Movement.**

Note: There are numerous terms that all mean “descendant of those living in what is now the mainland US before European settlement”. Native Americans, Indians, American Indians, First Americans, Indigenous Americans, Indigenous Peoples, Tribal Indigenous Peoples, First Tribes, and other terms. Different individuals prefer different terms. Even among descendants, there is no consistency. They often avoid the issue by referring to their tribal name instead. We were unable to find any single term with which no one finds fault. For example, some feel “Americans” properly refers to the entire New World. “Native” means all born in the US according to the Constitution. “Indigenous” and “Aboriginal” can apply outside the US. “First” ignores earlier cultures. “Indians” could mean living in India. And so forth.

We arbitrarily selected the term “Native Americans” to use throughout this document rather than confuse by switching back and forth among multiple terms. When talking about the past, we sometimes use the terminology of the day for clarity.

INTRODUCTION

Exploration of Native American customs is of genuine value to those learning such history and practices, even among those who do not have Native American ancestry in their own families. It is also of true value to the Nations to share those customs that they are willing to share, when accepted respectfully, particularly as a means of promoting concern for Native Americans, their history, and their cultures. Although the Order has

invested real work to avoid inappropriate practices, initiating significant changes to its programs, the Order still maintains some objectionable practices.

It is the purpose of this monograph to review the Order's history with Native American lore and detail potential issues remaining to be addressed.

The Order of the Arrow has utilized Native American lore in several ways across its programs since its founding. Today, those lodge members performing our ceremonies and those involved in Native American dance and crafts are often different Arrowmen. These affinity groups within the Order were not always distinct from each other. Understanding those historical changes in each subprogram is necessary for making the best policy improvements for our members in the future.

Historically, there were many cases of inappropriate use of Native American lore by current standards. Despite improvements, there are still issues that exist today. The worst is the unacceptable misuse of religious practices, as well as false claims of special relationships with the Delaware Nation.

Our perspective is supportive of Native American tribes, individuals, and culture. Which means opposition to any stated or implied false claims of being or association with Native Americans, and any inappropriate use of their religious symbols. But also support for continuing to teach about Native American culture in the OA and BSA.

There are seven OA programs each treated separately in this paper. First, we present a summary of each program's history and issues, followed by a summary conclusion. For those who want more detail, a detailed dive into the same seven programs is presented, followed by a detailed conclusion. We end with our overall perspective.

SUMMARY

1. Native American Dance / Outfits / Song / Drum practices in the Order are today based on current Native American powwow practices and typically have constant input from Native American experts. It would be a needless loss to eliminate these programs when they teach history and culture under the supervision of Native American partners. The respect for others' cultures taught by our investigation of Native American culture is an attitude worth encouraging in young people, and it should continue to whatever extent Native American authorities will allow.

2. Historical Reenactments and Living History are not common but are valuable programs. They are not typically controversial and tend to be built on a desire for accuracy and an intention to teach.

3. Native American Culture Wilderness Skills and Practices are BSA programs that teach wilderness skills, sometimes with an emphasis on their Native American roots. They are successful programs that are similarly not controversial, based on truth, and exceptionally useful in the context of Scouting programs.

4. Logos and Chief's Headdresses are symbols used by the Order. Our logos have changed to be related to archery but not explicitly Native American archers, eliminating any objections. The use of the Chief's bonnets has been discontinued and is only a historical curiosity on display in our national museum.

5. Arrow of Light (Crossing Over) Ceremonies are the “graduation ceremony” from Cub Scouts into Scouts BSA. The OA had no inherent role in the process; it was just for color and pageantry, using American Indian outfits. The Order recently forbid this practice.

6. Tapout / Callout Ceremonies have never had nationally specified scripts, so local lodges sometimes inappropriately included religious traditions. Callouts are inherently public. Such ceremonies are being phased out for reasons unrelated to their Native American lore.

7. Membership Ceremonies use nationally required scripts. Since the early years of the Order they contained a shaman and a legend falsely claiming a relationship to the Delaware Nation. In 2014 a new fake Delaware legend with a vision quest was added. These are all specific objectionable issues that can and should be fixed. Indian lore helps to convey a sense of the elemental which supports the “tests” of the Ordeal and Brotherhood, particularly if the outfits are of genuine appearance rather than the “playing Indian” Hollywood approach used in years past. Current rules for ceremonial outfits are functional, and allow Indian outfits if properly vetted. Although helpful, Native American outfits are not necessary. Likewise, the ceremony texts do not need to have explicit references to Indian lore to be functional, and some American Indian words confuse rather than explain. Respect for the candidate is far more important than a desire to construct a fictionalized Native American scene. We have the opportunity to reduce any sense of cultural misappropriation by addressing the ceremonial text by stripping out or replacing inappropriate material.

SUMMARY CONCLUSION

Partnerships between local lodges and Native Americans have increased as the Order matured, and there are processes in place to assure that their cultures are not misrepresented. But our ceremonial texts continue to have significant issues which must be fixed.

DETAILED HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

1. Native American Dance / Outfits / Song / Drum

Native American craft practices in our early days were based on children's books like Ben Hunt's Indian Crafts and Lore. Slowly over time, Arrowmen began to attend Native American powwows and switched their emphasis toward what they learned there, and to more genuine representations of Native American life and crafts.

Current OA study and involvement with Native American culture are largely based on contemporary Native American powwow practices. In most lodges, there is input from experts in those practices. Our objective should be partnerships with Native Americans, to the benefit of all.

The study of these cultures is a tremendously valuable pursuit that should remain available to those who take an interest and should be sustained. It would be a shame to eliminate these programs which teach history and culture under appropriate supervision. A minority of Arrowmen have an interest in getting deeply involved and thereby keeping it alive, but nearly all enjoy learning about it and appreciate it as an essential element of the work of the Order.

Conclusion: Retain this program element, but continue to have lodges partner with Native Americans.

2. Historical Reenactments and Living History

Historical reenactments typically reenact battles where they actually occurred. BSA involvement consists of attending events run by others. Living history is a type of historical reenactment that involves a particular culture rather than an event and seeks to give observers and participants a sense of stepping back in time. They are sometimes sponsored by the BSA. These programs are not common in the BSA but are valuable. It would be absurd to allow historical reenactments and living history about revolutionary war folks, mountain men, pioneers, civil war soldiers, and pirates, but not about Native Americans. Which would result from a total ban of Native American culture in the BSA.

Conclusion: These programs should be continued and encouraged.

3. Native American Lore Wilderness Skills and Practices

There are BSA programs that teach wilderness skills, sometimes with an emphasis on their Native American roots. These sometimes involve the Order. They include both

Merit Badge and non-Merit Badge instruction. In some cases, training for adult Scouters as well as Scouts.

Conclusion: These programs should be continued and encouraged.

4. Native American Lore in Our Logo and in our National Chief's Headdress

Our logo was once a profile of a Native American chief in a headdress. A second version was more stylized, circular, and nicknamed “the MGM Indian”. It was officially replaced in 1998 by a stylized arrowhead, taken from the sash we all wear. It began to relate our iconography to archery, but not explicitly to Native American archers, to eliminate any objection to the logo and continue the process of adopting a more mature attitude toward our Native American friends.

This change was appropriate as the Order of the Arrow centers on character development, with Native American lore being in a supportive role. It is and always has been a mistaken notion that we are primarily Native American hobbyists, although some members adopt the interest. Worse still was the implication drawn by those old logos that we are a Native American organization, so it is well that the change was made.

Use of the National Chief's (and later also the Vice Chief's) headdresses used to be an important ritual for new national officers. The headdresses include genuine golden eagle feathers, which were afforded to the Order by suitable authorities. But the headdresses are no longer used and today are just a historical curiosity in the museum at Philmont.

Conclusion: Both of these issues have been resolved by the elimination of the offending symbols.

5. Arrow of Light (Crossing Over) Ceremonies

These ceremonies are the “graduation ceremony” from Cub Scouts into Scouts BSA. A symbolic bridge is physically crossed by the Cubs who are welcomed on the other side by representatives of the troop they are joining. The award that indicates that they graduated from Cub Scouts is called “The Arrow of Light”. Order of the Arrow members in Native American outfits were sometimes invited to assist. But the Order had no inherent role so it confused the meaning of the ceremony. The use of Native American outfits was just for color and pageantry and tended to be out of place with no real value in teaching Native American lore. The Order recently forbid this practice.

Conclusion: Any issues have already been resolved by the elimination of the practice.

6. Native American Lore in Tapout / Callout Ceremonies

Tapout ceremonies were in use in the Order roughly for its first 50 years. The purpose of that ceremony was to publicly recognize those elected by the members of their units to also become members of the Order. When Order elections and inductions were held in summer camp, which was common in the early years, the tapout ceremony would be held as a part of a camp-wide campfire, whether as its own ceremony, or part of a customary campfire. In the '50s through the '70s, Ordeals were held more frequently outside of summer camp, with tapouts typically being held instead at annual camporees. In either case, the unit members would be present and those selected would be taken out of the crowd and brought forward to the front.

There have never been nationally specified tapout (or callout) ceremonies. Each lodge was encouraged to create its own unique ceremony. The term “tapout” refers to the act of tapping each candidate on the shoulder three times, representing the three parts of the Scout Oath.

Because the ceremonies were developed locally, the tapout and callout were fertile ground for unintentional inappropriate use of Native American culture. There were even some cases of lodges using Native American spiritual symbols and practices, such as prayer pipes (commonly mistakenly called “peace pipes”) and tributes to the four directions. “Indian dancing” was a common feature. Lodges commonly had “Indian dance teams” and this was an opportunity for them to show their outfits and dance publicly. It was colorful and popular.

In the 1970s and 1980's the tapping of candidates on the shoulder was eliminated, and the tapout ceremony was renamed the “callout” ceremony to bar physicality from the process.

During the same period, more lodges asked for input from Native Americans and started a slow process of improvement. Callout ceremonies were stripped of Native American religious material. Lodges continued to have “dance teams”, but expert advice was integrated into their programs.

More recently, the callout ceremony has begun to disappear. It does not appear to have been in reaction to concerns about Native American lore, but rather a desire to honor those elected immediately after the election results are counted at the unit meeting, instead of at a later time and place.

Conclusion: Many lodge tapout and callout ceremonies had serious issues in the long past, significantly improved over a period from 50 to 30 years ago, and are now being

phased out. Although once popular, they are an inherent source of issues. So absent detailed national standards and scripts, callout ceremonies should be forbidden.

7. Native American Lore in Our Membership Ceremonies

Our current legends are contrived, obviously so, and in numerous ways. They contradict history and each other. They lack clear examples for Scouts to follow. They do not achieve their aims, which are to make the ceremonies memorable and teach suitable lessons to those being honored.

To wit, consider Uncas, a genuine historical figure (c. 1588 – c. 1683). Uncas was not a Delaware. He was a Mohegan chief who was involved in alliances with the English settlers, which seems inconsistent with his living “years ago, in the dim ages, in the valley of the Delaware” as our legend states. His father was not Delaware either and was not named Chingachgook.

To solve this conundrum it has been suggested that the Uncas in our legends is not the historical Uncas but one of fiction, not based on the historical one. We know from Dr. Goodman that Uncas and Chingachgook came from Cooper's book The Last of the Mohicans. That book declares that they were Mohican leaders, which is a different tribe than the Mohegan; perhaps a mistake on Cooper's part. It depicts the father and son living among the Delaware and the story follows interactions with other tribes and European settlers, all clearly inconsistent with the words of our legends, and no evidence of two different historical figures with the same name from the northeast during the same era, from two tribes with similar names. The fabrication of this third Uncas for our Order increases the sense of falsehood. Three: the historical Mohegan Uncas, Cooper's fictionalized Mohican Uncas who lived among the Delaware, and our fictional Delaware Uncas who supposedly lived in the dim ages of the past.

Of additional concern should be the lessons taught by our legends. Neither of our present ceremonial legends present actions for members to properly emulate. New members should be setting the example in their units, not traveling far and wide like Uncas does. Brotherhood members should be more concerned with the more immediate goal of setting an example of cheerful service in the Order for their fellow Scouts, and for the rest of their lives, not the larger and less achievable goal of working for world peace, worthy an aim as that might be, as our 2014 Brotherhood legend suggests.

Both legends deal with international relations and warfare, which is not what our Order is about. We have needed to resolve these problems for generations.

As was typical in camp stories in the first 50 years of Scouting in the US, both legends center around an “Indian war”. Recounting historical battles is appropriate. But creating

imaginary Native American wars is offensive to real Native Americans, and teaches nothing worthwhile to our youth. We should find suitable substitutes that achieve more germane goals.

Consider that Dr. Goodman's story of Billy Clark declares that the principles of the Order were derived from an incident that occurred in a real camp among real Scouts before the Order was created. The claim in our legends that the Order's principles of Brotherhood, Cheerfulness, and Service are derived from a preexisting Native American organization is not defensible when we learn the real facts, and presents an opportunity to express greater respect not only for our history but for the Native Americans that we so admire.

Our original legend was developed by the founders from an Old English legend and converted to reference the Delaware Tribe, the Delaware river valley, and Chingachgook and Uncas. This falsification may have been acceptable by the standards of the day but certainly isn't now.

Goodman himself disclosed to one of us that he believed that the inclusion of this flawed legend was the biggest mistake made in the founding of the Order. He said they intended it to be believable, but even at the time he made this revelation, he recognized that our youth were not as naive as those in 1916 when the legend was written.

More distressing still, the 2014 Brotherhood's legend implies that the Delaware were just as warlike as the other tribes and disavows the idea that the Delaware were innocent, just defending themselves. That makes the visits to villages by Chingachgook and Uncas in the Ordeal's legend nothing but military recruiting, devoid of the higher purpose originally intended. In other words, the new Brotherhood legend has stripped the original Ordeal legend of its ethical message. We used to claim that the "real enemy" was indifference on the part of the Lenape, rather than the other tribes, but now we have muddled and undermined that message.

The Brotherhood legend claims that our Order's origin was a Native American vision quest, which is a ritual held sacred in many of their cultures.

It is impossible to justify the use of a Native American religious figure like Meteu, the Lenape word for "Medicine Man", in our ceremonies. It is no more acceptable than using the religious vestments of any other religion more familiar to Americans. This shamanic role of Meteu has existed since early in our history. In recent years, to address this issue, we have emphasized Meteu as more of a physician and a wise elder, rather than a spiritual leader, but that is hard to believe, given the image we learn when we study genuine Native American tribes. Although well-intentioned, since Native

Americans traditionally believed that physical and spiritual healing were not separate, this implausible explanation is still offensive.

Our earliest ceremonial outfits consisted of black robes. Neither our founder nor co-founder had much knowledge of Native American lore. Over the following ten years or so, as the Order spread to additional BSA Councils, Native American outfits were adopted, typically Plains Indian headdresses with an unfortunate “Hollywood” look. In some cases, the OA replaced the council's similar camp honor society, typically also using a Native American motif. An early publication of the National Lodge of the Order of the Arrow suggested that the wearing of such headdresses should be standardized for all lodges. Today, though, we consider that inappropriate and encourage Native American outfits specific to a selected tribe and period, with the guidance of tribal authorities and scholars.

The ceremony texts do not need to have explicit references to Indian lore to be functional, and some of the Native American words we use confuse rather than explain. Respect for the candidate is far more important than a desire to construct a fictionalized Native American scene. We have the opportunity to reduce any sense of cultural misappropriation by stripping out inappropriate material from the ceremonial text.

Conclusion: Both fake Delaware legends should be eliminated. They could be replaced with true legends of our founding that provide more relevant examples for candidates. Meteu needs to be renamed to reflect that he is no longer regarded as a shamanic figure. If the ceremonial officers are to wear Native American outfits, they should look ancient and authentic, not grandiose, contrived, and fabricated in the style of Hollywood westerns. Native American words that aid understanding should be retained but those that do not should be replaced.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

The Order of the Arrow has always held Native Americans and their rich and fascinating cultures, heritage, and histories in the highest regard. But we have not always done the best possible job expressing that admiration.

As detailed above, the GIED ardently recommends that the Order take steps to remove or replace objectionable practices. Yet demonstrate its further commitment to promoting the study of Native American history and cultures, but only in a respectful way.

We are grateful for your time and attention, and invite you to visit with us at Elangomat.org

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