

## GRASS DANCE

The Grass Dance was originated by the Omaha Tribe in Nebraska. It is one of the oldest styles of dance. The history of the dance is that of being a ceremonial dance.

In the Northern tribes it is believed that a special group of dancers gave the blessings of the grounds. In the Southern tribes it is considered a warrior dance where the dancers wore the scalps of enemies as a part of their regalia to celebrate the victory of battle. The Penobscot Nation has a couple of young men that dance this style with honor and pride.

The dancers would dance to flatten the prairie grass for preparations for a village or to prepare a place for ceremonies. These dancers used to tie prairie grass to themselves to represent a cleansing spirit to prepare an area that was going to be used.

The contemporary grass dancers have ribbons, yarn and tassels that made up the fringe on the outfit to represent the prairie grass of the Western Plains. With the swaying movements of the dancer, the fringe simulates the movements of the tall prairie grass swaying in the wind. Also on the regalia is matching beadwork, a roach with eagle feathers on his head and bells on his ankles.

The dance is said to represent the balance of life. The dancer performs each movement on the right and left side of his body. The steps in this dance must match that of the drum beat. The dance step consists of high stepping and constant bouncing on either foot. The dancer moves his head and shoulders to the beat of the drum and the result is a constant movement of his regalia and body from head to toe. Balance and flexibility are a must to perform this dance.

Every tribe has their own origin legends of the different dance styles that are performed during this particular dance. The most well known origin legend of the Grass Dance comes from the Northern Plains.

*A young man was born without the full use of his legs. He longed to run, dance, and play with the other children. His parents consulted a Medicine Man and asked if he could help the young man in some way. The Medicine Man advised him to fast and seek a vision on the prairie. The young man left the village and did as he was instructed. As he sat in the hot summer sun on the prairie fasting and praying, the long swaying prairie grass mesmerized him. Soon he saw himself dancing in a similar manner. He went back to the village and the medicine Man interpreted his vision. The boy asked his mother to help him make an outfit to dance utilizing the long prairie grass. He showed his father how he would dance and a song was made for him. A celebration was held and he showed the village his style of dance, which was eventually called the grass dance.*



