

Osage Ceremonial Garments



Osage woman wearing ribbonwork blanket, Gray Horse, Oklahoma, 1911.

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Osage dancers, late 19th c.

Osage

Europeans first encountered the Osage in 1673 in their villages along the Osage River in southwestern Missouri. The Osage believe they settled in that location hundreds of years ago, after migrating from the banks of the Ohio River. At the time they were first encountered in present-day Missouri, the Osage were a typical prairie tribe. They lived in permanent villages, and their subsistence activities included hunting, gathering, and farming. In the 1800s, the tribe was relocated to reservations, first in Kansas and later in Oklahoma. Today, there are about 10,000 Americans who identify themselves as Osage. Many have remained in Oklahoma and have the same kinds of jobs and lifestyles as other Oklahomans. Osage traditions have endured through arts and crafts and through a variety of social and ceremonial activities such as community dances and feasts. Many of the Osage items on display in the Museum are related to these activities.

Ribbonwork and Beadwork

After obtaining colored beads, yarn, and cloth from European traders, Osage women became artists in making garments from these new materials. Wearing-blankets of broadcloth, trimmed with silk and satin ribbons, became common. Beadwork



Josephine Pryor Hamilton, Osage artist in ribbon appliqué, Pawhuska, Oklahoma, ca. 1930.

replaced quillwork on skin items such as moccasins. Arm bands, sashes, and other accessories were woven of beads and colored yarn or thread. These ribbonwork and beaded items are the kinds of garments that have been worn at Osage dances and other festivities for the past 100 years.

Skin Garments

Prior to introduction of European materials, the Osage made clothing of deerskin and other prepared hides, often trimmed with dyed porcupine quills. Sashes were made of twisted strands of plant fibers, fur, and buffalo hair, and



Osage warriors dressed in early traditional style, early 19th c.



Ed Red Eagle, Sr., dressed for Osage ceremonial dance, 1987. Bells on leather bands, like those on display, are worn around the knees during the dance.

animal claws and bones were used to make other accessories. The early 20th-century Osage dress on display represents a combination of the earlier style of skin garment with beadwork that was introduced after European contact.

Resources

- Callahan, Alice Ann. *The Osage Ceremonial Dance In-Lon-Schka*. University of Oklahoma Press, 1990.
- Davis, Mary B. *Native America in the Twentieth Century*. Garland Publishing, 1996.
- DeMallie, Raymond J. *Handbook of North American Indians*, Vol. 13, *Plains*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001.
- Osage Tribe's Official Homepage [www.osagetribe.com].
- Wilson, Terry P. *The Osage*. Indians of North America Series. Chelsea House Publishers, 1988

Credits

Map from DeMallie (p. ix). Photos are from Callahan (Red Eagle, Sr., p. 132); DeMallie (Cover image, p. 480; Dancers, p. 489); and Wilson (Warriors, p. 20; Hamilton, p. 91).