

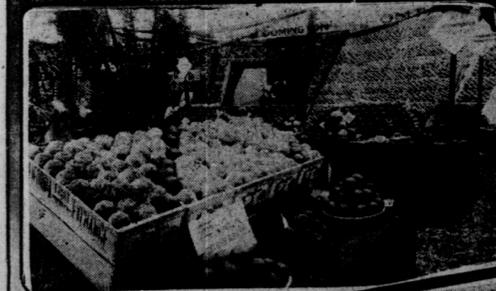
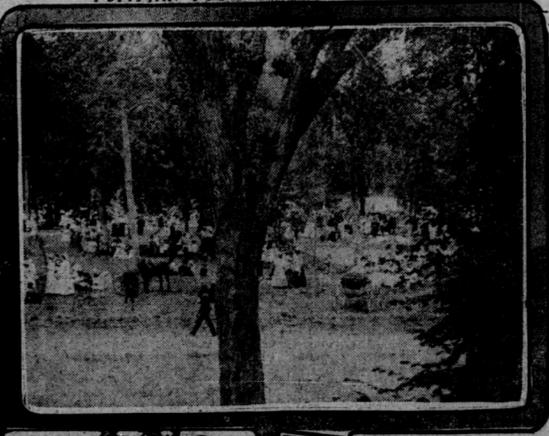
# BACK OF OUR HARVEST FAIRS and FESTIVALS



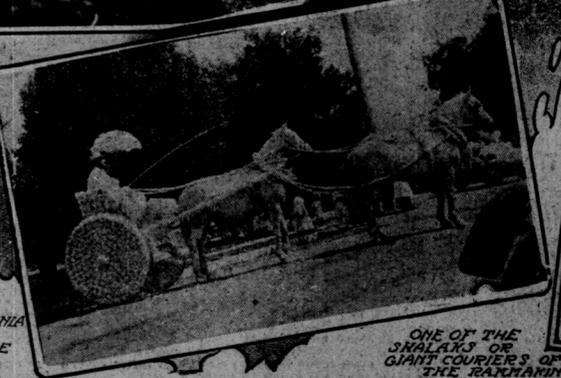
Packer

GENERAL EXHIBITION HALL AT NAVAJO INDIAN FAIR

PICKNICING AT LONGMONT PUMPKIN PIE DAY



GLIMPSE OF A CALIFORNIA CITRUS FAIR



IN A CALIFORNIA FLORAL PARADE

ONE OF THE SHALAKS OR GIANT COURIERS OF THE ROCKIES

By John L. Cowan

It is probable that man's oldest festival is the harvest home. If one would trace this to its origin, he must needs go back to the first farmer, who rejoiced and made merry when he found that the fruits of the field were sufficient for his wants. To follow the development of this primal instinct through the pagan festivities of the great nations of antiquity, and the great religious affairs of medieval Europe, down to the agricultural fairs and floral fiestas of twentieth century America, would be to study in detail the evolution of culture and the development of civilization.

No doubt, seasons of plenty were followed by seasons in which drought, flood and tempest caused the crops to fail, and the joy in an abundant harvest may have been tempered by fear of what another year might bring forth. So the ancient tillers of the soil were made to realize their dependence upon the unseen powers that caused the sun to give its light and heat, that made the clouds to gather and the rains to fall, that made the seed germinate, the plants grow and the crops ripen. Consequently, although the first farmers may have made merry before they began to pray, it is certain that the element of worship was introduced into their harvest festivals very early in the history of agriculture. When men fully realized their entire dependence upon forces of nature over which they had no control, they personified these and then sought to win their favor or avert their wrath by prayers, oblations and sacrifices.

There are harvest festivals of many kinds celebrated in America today; but the element of worship is found only among those of the agricultural tribes of Indians of the southwest. These still retain their old time faith in and fear of the gods of their forefathers. But, if we except the more or less perfunctory observance of Thanksgiving day, there is little in our fairs and harvest festivals to indicate that the American people recognize a god of the harvest at all. Apparently the up to date farmer places his chief reliance upon commercial fertilizers and improved machinery. If his crops fail, he blames it upon the weather; and, if they happen to be good, he attributes it to his own skill and industry.

Nevertheless, the joy of the harvest season is spontaneous and must find expression. The barn dances of the wheat belt, the husking bees of backwoods farming districts, the cake walks and camp meetings of the black belt of the south, the floral fiestas of the Pacific slope, the fete days of the Rocky mountain region and the county fairs of the pie belt (which is now transcontinental), all are manifestations of rejoicing in the abundance of earth's good things. It was the custom of the ancient Jews to place offerings of the first fruits of the harvest upon the altar of the most high. The American way is different; but it has its origin in the same primitive impulse, grounded

not to receive a large, overripe tomato upon (or into) his open countenance. Grand Junction's "peach day," Gunnison's "fish fry" and other special fete days are worthy of mention and description, did space permit.

So the harvest festival is confined to no locality and restricted to no particular season. It is known by many names, and in the majority of cases its true character is so obscured that few would suspect its origin to be identical with that of the offering of the first fruits of the harvest, enjoined upon Moses before the chosen people crossed the river Jordan into the land of promise. In America it is only among certain Indian tribes of the southwest that the original significance of the harvest festival is retained.

These untutored red men still feel their dependence upon the powers of the unseen world. Hence their tribal fiestas are religious rites for the propitiation of the gods that send the rain, that cause the corn to germinate and grow to maturity and that superintend the harvest. Every step in agriculture, from the preparation of the ground to receive the seed to the gathering of the ripened grain, is accompanied or preceded by its appropriate ceremony. The community of Isleta, near Albuquerque, N. M., has its "acequia dance" in May, when the irrigation ditches are opened and cleaned. San Domingo has its "corn dance" in August, when the corn is in tassel. In Taos, in northern New Mexico, the great harvest festival is held September 30. It is renowned for its spectacular tribal dances and for its custom of climbing the greased pole. Upon the top of the pole are tied a live sheep, a live rooster and a basket containing specimens of all the fruits, grains and vegetables grown in the neighborhood. The victor in the pole climbing contest cuts loose the trophies and casts them down to the waiting crowd. Then follow offerings to the gods of the harvest and a feast for all who care to partake of the bounty of the tribespeople. The shalaka dance of the Zuni Indians of western New Mexico and the snake dance of the Hopi of northern Arizona are the most celebrated of Indian ceremonies, and among the most remarkable of the world's religious observances. Like all others of the ceremonial dances of the agricultural tribes, these are dramatized prayers intended to propitiate the gods that give or may withhold the rains, upon which depends the harvest.

It gives one a new conception of the solidarity of the human race to realize the fact that the barbarous rites of the Hopi snake dancers, the country fairs of both east and west, the clambakes of the Cape Cod country, the floral fiestas of the Pacific coast, the colored camp meetings of the south, the ancient Hebrew offering of the first fruits, the great fairs of the middle ages and the harvest festivals of the peasantry of Europe, China and India, all have a common origin—an origin antecedating all religion, all social organization, founded in the natural instinct to rejoice in the possession of enough to remove the fear of hunger. Nevertheless it does seem strange that in Christian America the religious aspect of the fests and fete days of the harvest survives only in certain pagan communities of the far south.

If present plans of the bureau of Indian affairs do not miscarry it is probable that the tribal festivals of the harvest, to which the red men still cling will soon become but a tradition. Three years ago a convention of Indian agents and superintendents was held at Washington, at which the opinion was found to be unanimous that the agricultural fair should be introduced wherever practicable among the Indians. It is said to be the wish of those having charge of the bureau of Indian affairs that the agricultural fair be promoted as a regular institution upon every important Indian reservation.

The first Indian fair was held on the Crow reservation in Montana in 1905. Every year since then the Crow fair has been growing in interest and importance, attracting the favorable attention of all interested in the progress of the Indians toward citizenship. Three years ago the first fair of the Navajos was held at Shiprock agency, near Farmington, N. M. This also proved an unqualified success.

It is believed that the agricultural fair would prove just as useful to the Sioux, Apaches, Pueblos and other tribes as it has proven to the Crows and Navajos. It is hoped that its general introduction among the Indians will not only induce them to devote more attention to farming and stock raising, but also that it will supplant the tribal dances to which the tribes people cling with all the tenacity of fanaticism. The tribal dances are religious observances in honor of the old pagan gods. So long as these endure paganism must continue to exist. But if the agricultural fair can be made to take the place of the tribal dance and other pagan ceremonies, it is hoped that the old gods will soon be forgotten.