

STRAIGHT DANCE CLOTHES: GETTING THEM ON

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Though many are aware of the items that comprise the "Straight Dance Suit" and may have spent several months making and collecting these items, when it comes down to the moment of getting these clothes on then the quandry begins.

"What's first?"
"Where do you pin this?"
"How is this folded?"

In answer to these questions, here are some of the secrets as to how items are worn, attached, pinned and folded in producing the very "neat, pressed and formal" look of a straight dancer.

Not unlike other sets of Indian attire, how these clothes are worn does make a difference. Many of the wives, mothers, grandmothers and aunts who have either sewn suits of ribbonwork or watch at war dances for years and years make sure their men wear their "clothes" just so. They see to it that their scarfs, shirts and ribbons are cleaned and pressed. Often these women will fuss over their men to make last minute adjustments on head-dresses, scarfs, feathers, etc. They help to tie items on and assist with face paint. If the leggings are hiked up too high or if the clout is not hanging just right, the women suggest the adjustment.

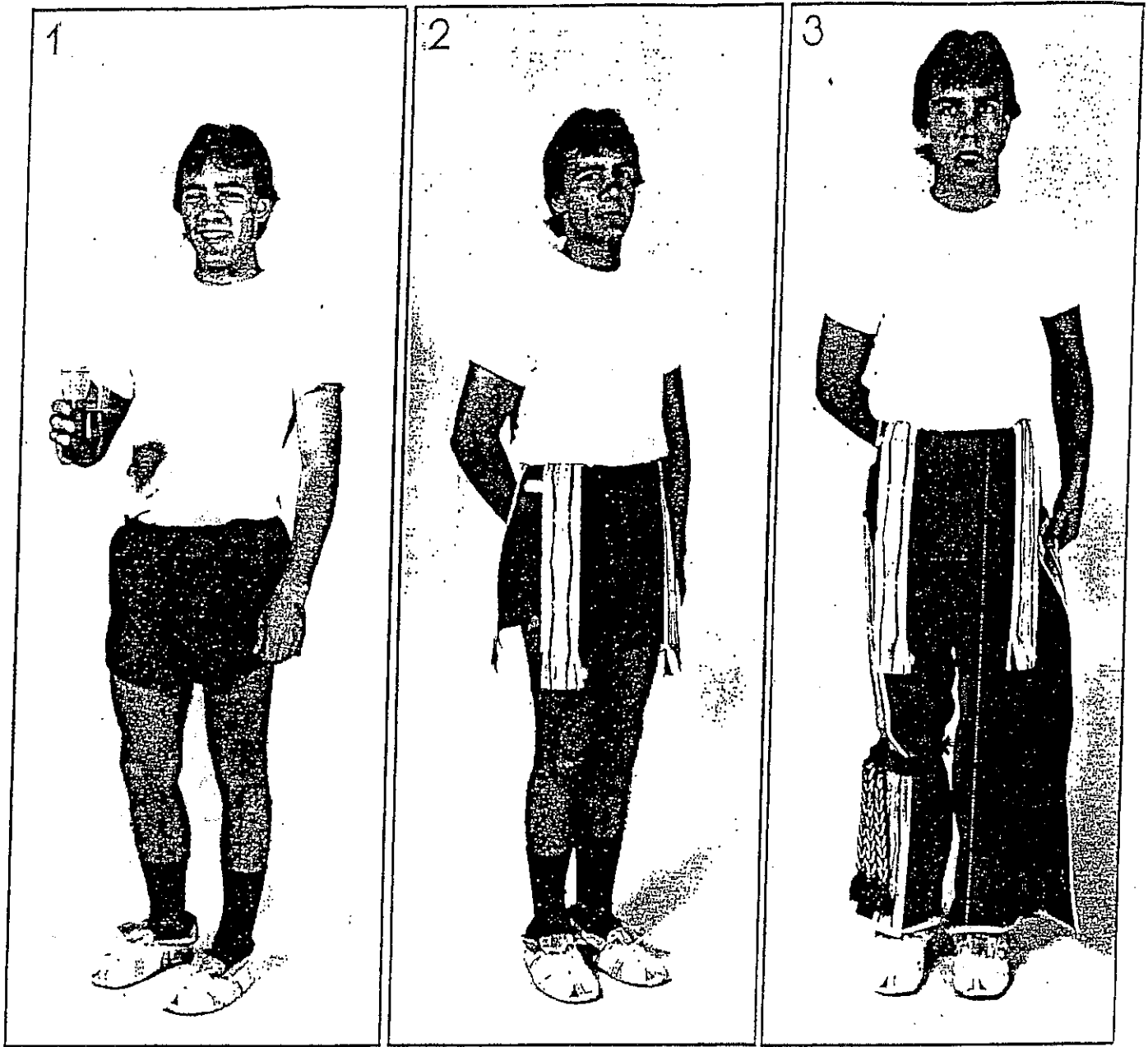


All this attention to detail is necessary as the finest ribbon suit, yarn work and beadwork will look second-class if it is not worn properly. Also, attention to proper attire parallels philosophically the formal protocol of the Inlonshka and Hethuska, the requirements made of the dancer and the meaning of the dance.

Since items worn by various individuals from the many tribes whose men straight dance at war dances or pow-wows in Oklahoma vary widely, the instructions given in this discussion will be directed towards the set of clothes worn by the majority of the dancers at the Osage Inlonshkas. The sequence of 15 photos presented here should give the reader a fair impression of the order in which items of regalia are placed on the dancer. A few comments about aspects illustrated in each photo now follow.

PHOTO 1: BASICS

A cool toast to wearing this broadcloth suit in the heat of Oklahoma and we are on our way. Trunks, T-shirt and socks are the BASICS. Since the trucks are covered up, some dancers deem them optional and just wear their shorts. Modesty of the magazine prevents illustrating this option; however, if the shorts do show as the dancer bends during the center beats of the song due to short leggings or shirt it is rather tacky. Dark or



red socks are a nice touch as they match the cloth of the suit. The T-shirt helps to soak up the sweat to prevent some of the moisture from getting to the ribbon shirt, otter dragger and other items worn on the upper body.

Moccasins are put on first as it is rather difficult to bend over completely to tie them on after the bells and belt are on.

Another basic, passed on by several veteran straight dancers, is a visit to the restroom somewhere before Photo 2 as it is obviously somewhat troublesome at the stage of Photo 13.

PHOTO 2: BREECHCLOUT

The breechclout is second. Buckle a belt around the waist and then slip the breechclout over the belt, under the legs and over the belt in back. Then straighten the clout. To get the clout to lay perfectly straight, be sure that a portion of the ribbonwork remains folded under the belt both in the front and in the back. The importance of this hint can not be stressed enough.

PHOTOS 3 & 4: LEGGINGS & GARTERS

For dancing, the leggings are worn "backwards" as the legging flaps decorated with ribbonwork are folded forward so that the ribbon design shows when the bells

are strapped on at the knees. Each legging is pulled on and then attached to the breechclout belt via the legging ties provided.

FIGURES 1, 2, & 3 illustrate three common legging tie set-ups. The tie or ties are simply an 8-10" length of broadcloth sewn to the legging on the ribbonwork side just inside the ribbonwork flap. The location is very important to insure proper legging fit. If it is out of place, the ribbon strips of the legging will end up too far to the inside of the leg. The ties of Figure 1 and 2 are knotted about the breechclout belt to hold the leggings up. If the set-up in Figure 3 is used the belt and leggings are put on first and then the breechclout.

Once the leggings are on and tied in place, the ribbon flaps are folded over and positioned to run at a slight diagonal from the front part of the leg at the ankle to the side at the waist. The breechclout ribbonwork should not overlap the legging ribbonwork. This position is maintained by attaching the yarn garters just below the knee and with a safety pin at the top, Photo 4. **DO NOT OMIT THIS PIN!**

The yarn garters are usually dimensioned to wrap around the leg once; the four tabs hang to the outside of the leg and the 4 ply braided ties that hold the garters up tie on the inside of the leg. Figure 4 illustrates this arrangement. The four tabs should

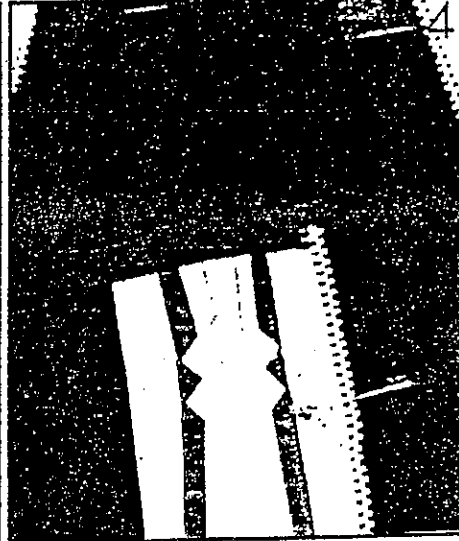


FIGURE 4

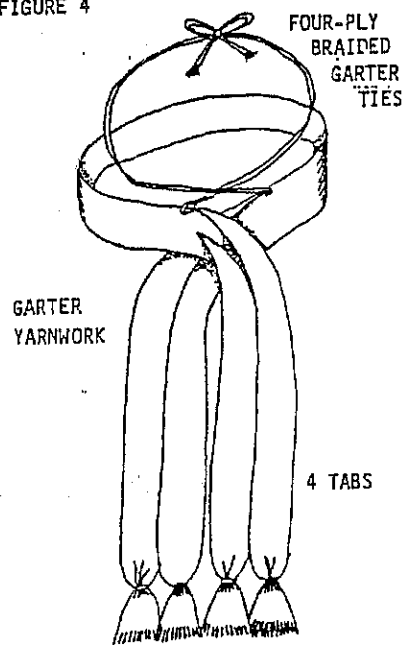


FIGURE 2

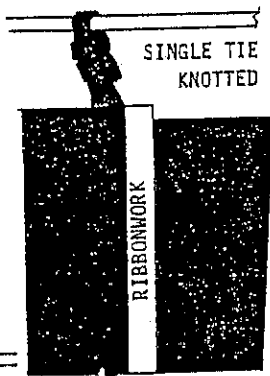


FIGURE 1

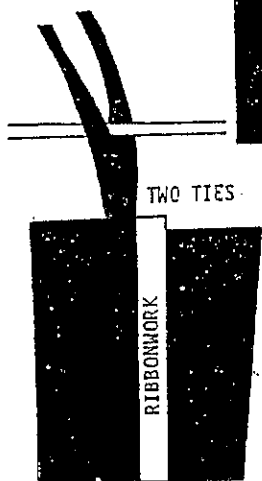
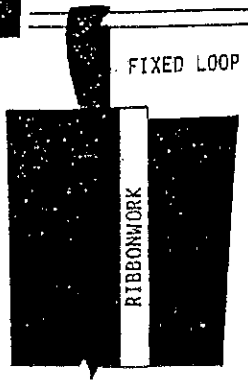


FIGURE 3



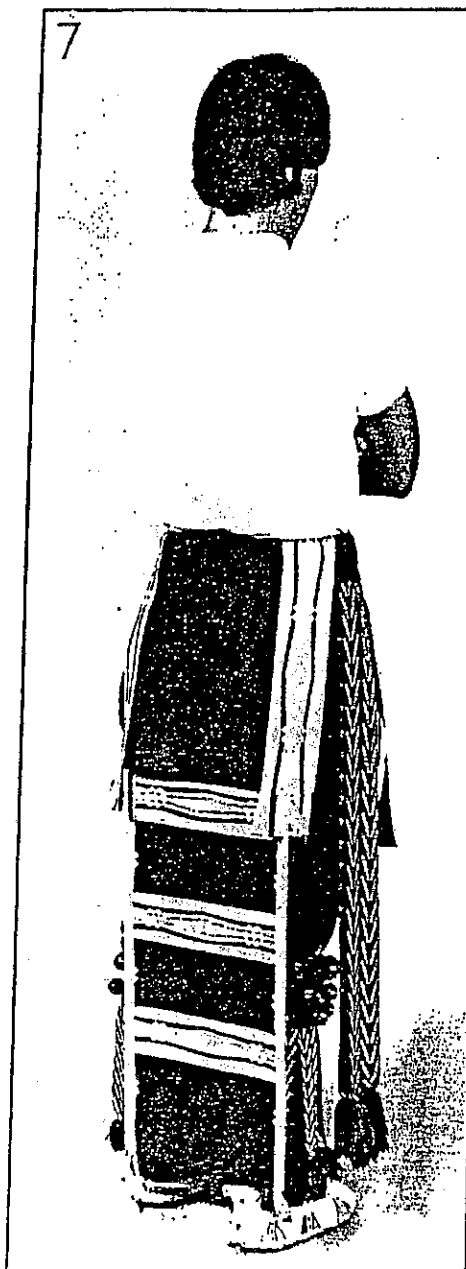
lay flat to the side of the ribbonwork. If they are worn properly, the yarn garters will hang evenly at the bottom. The article "Yarnwork Details" in the Nov. 1978 issue of Moccasin Tracks provides additional details about yarn garters and side tabs.

PHOTO 5: BELLS

Whether the bells worn are brass or the more prevalent 1-1/2" nickel plated steel sleigh bells, they are tied or buckled on after the garters. If the bells are riveted to a narrow piece of strap leather that wraps around the leg about 2-3/4 times, they are positioned so that the leather ties at each end of the long strap wind up on the inside of the leg. If the bells are attached to a rectangular piece of strap leather in a double row, they are also buckled at the inside of the leg.

The yarn garters may have to be straightened again after tying on the bells. After the bells are tied on more than once as if they are too tight, it is total misery and total embarrassment if they fall down because they were tied loosely.

Warning: the yarn garters do not cover all the ribbonwork in the knee area to protect it from the bell straps. To avoid extra wear on this piece of art, use rivet type bells only. To avoid stains use only mineral oil to darken the strap leather for the bells.



PHOTOS 6 & 7: DANCE TRAILER & YARNWORK

The dance trailer and side yarnwork are usually placed on the same belt or heavy shoe lace and secured about the waist. Photo 6 shows the dance trailer worn over the breechclout and Photo 7 shows the trailer worn under the breechclout. Either method is acceptable. Again, the trailer is adjusted to hang straight and centered. The side yarnwork should be positioned more towards the back of the hip than the hip's center. The side view of the dancer in action with slightly bent posture exposes the legging ribbonwork, the garters and the side yarnwork.

PHOTO 8: SHIRT

Though there are several nuances regarding shirt material, construction and ribbons, length is extremely important. Nothing looks worse than a straight dancer with a short shirt. It's like a woman in a black cocktail dress with her slip showing. The shirt should hang an inch to two inches below the crotch! Not much of the clout should show. If more than 7 inches of clout is exposed either the shirt is too short or the clout is too long.

Buttons at the neck and cuffs (or hook & eye and snaps) aid a proper fit and quickness of dressing. Safety pins are used if the buttons are missing. This is usually the case if the shirt was finished two hours before the dance and which will not get put on for the next three

years.

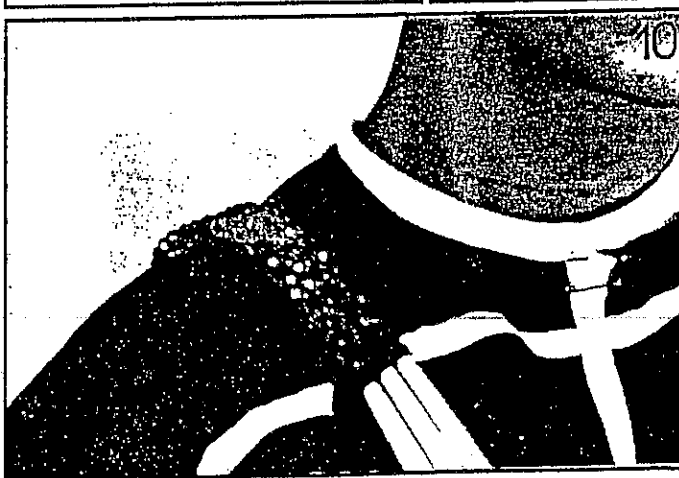
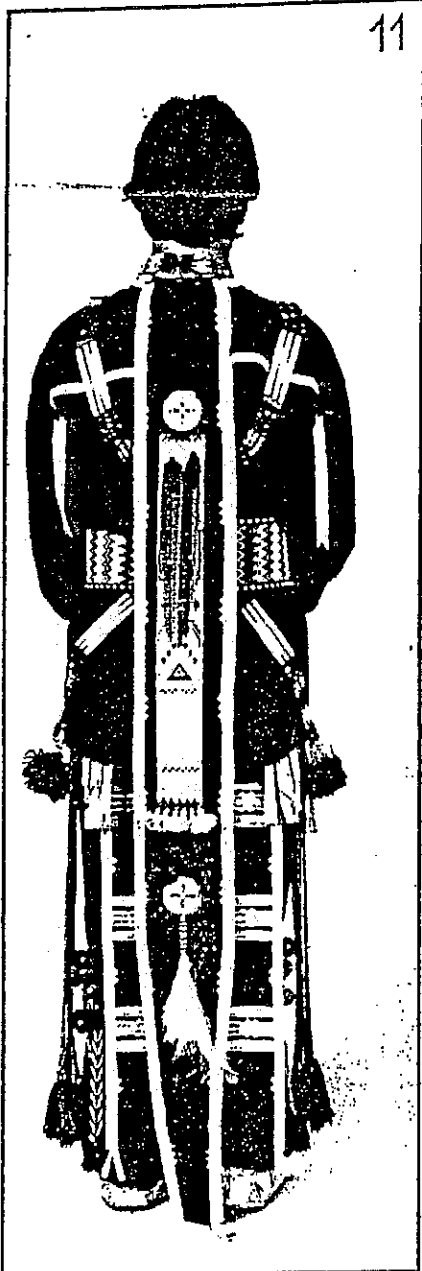
PHOTOS 9 & 10: BANDOLIERS & BELT

The bead and hairpipe bandoliers are slipped on next and then the belt is buckled in place. Sometimes the bandolier bead strings are worn outside the belt in the front or outside the belt in the back - but never both. The belt is buckled in front and then the belt is slid around so that the buckles appear at the back.

Once the belt is on, the bandoliers are untwisted and adjusted to hang off the shoulder at the same position. They are pinned in place with a medium sized safety pin, see photo 10. Without this pin the bead strings would continually fall off the shoulder and it would be impossible to dance.

PHOTO 11: OTTER DRAGGER

After the bandoliers are in place, the otter dragger or set of hairplates are tied about the neck. Thin leather ties, or small shoe laces are not recommended as otter dragger ties. The weight of the dragger over a several hour period will cause those ties to cut into the neck. A heavier athletic shoe lace or other strip of material will serve the purpose better. The ends of these ties can be tucked inside with the T-shirt. The dragger should not touch the ground when standing erect as it should not drag while in dancing



posture (the dragger did not fit our model).

PHOTO 12: CHOKER

In addition to adding a decorative traditional piece to the neck area, the choker does hide the other dragger ties. For these reasons it is not optional.

PHOTOS 13 & 14: SCARFS & ARMBANDS

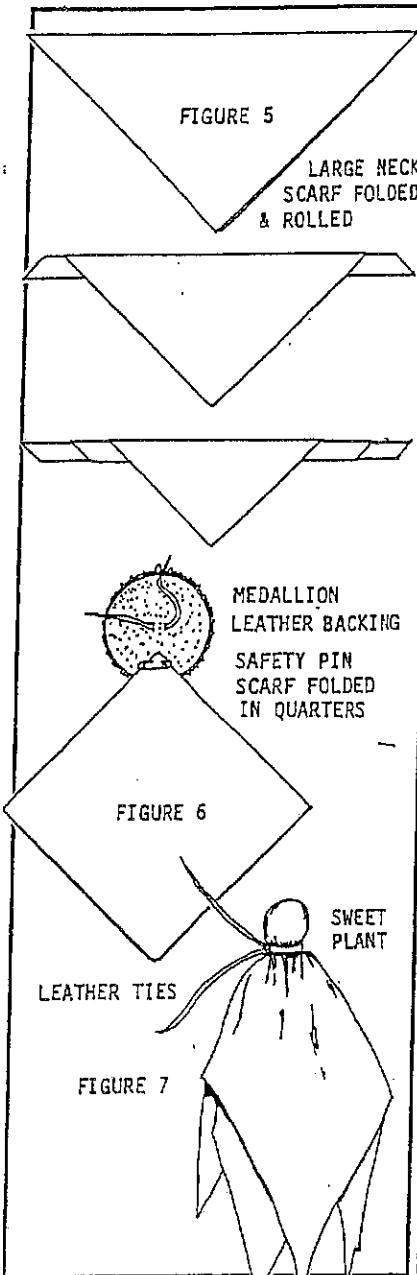
The large square (about 30") scarf is folded into a triangle and then perhaps folded two or three more times as in Figure 5 before it is placed about the neck. Making sure the peaks match and that it is centered in the back is another detail of consideration.

The scarf is held about the neck with a tie slide of German silver. One tendency is to slide this piece up too high on the scarf.

Armbands could be slipped on last especially if they are over an inch and a quarter wide as it is difficult to tie on the headdress with wide armbands on. Armbands are worn below the biceps and above the elbow - not on top of the bicep or above the bicep.

The wide and long piece (1-3/8" wide, 30 inches long) of rayon satin ribbon folded over each armband is worn at the back of the arm. The ribbon is pinned in place with a small safety pin from the back, see Photo 14. The smaller (12-14" square) scarfs are attached to the bandolier bead strings just off the top of the shoulder. These scarfs are tied too low if a fair portion will be covered up by the other dragger.

These are two basic ways of wearing these scarfs: pinned to a medallion Figure 6 or with a bunch of sweet plant knotted in the center Figure 7 and photo 14. If the medallion (or German silver concho) is



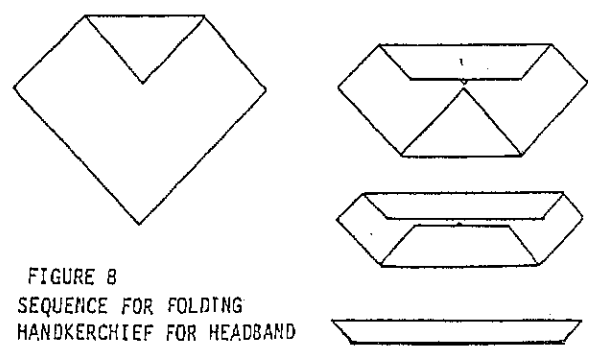
used, the material of the scarf usually has enough body to lie flat and not droop. DO NOT combine both methods. Also, a small bunch of feathers can be worn in place of the scarf; see "Feathers for Bead-Strings" in the June, 1980 issue of Moccasin Tracks for details.

PHOTO 15: LAST ITEMS

The last items are the headband (which is optional), the roach with its feather holder (spreader), a feather and scalp feathers. Prior to donning these items, face paint (witch paint at the eyes) is put on. The headband, usually not worn with long hair worn in traditional style, is a regular white handkerchief. Figure 8 indicates how to appropriately fold a handkerchief to form a headband. This headband is knotted at the forehead with a square knot. It is critical that the headband be worn parallel to the ground.

"Scalp feathers" are usually sewn to a small medallion or knotted to the ties of the medallion and the ties are in turn tied to the front roach string - right or left. This medallion is pushed up on the roach string until it touches the roach. In this way the crown of the head projects the feathers out so that they do not flop in the face of the dancer.

One of the very last things that a dancer does is to tie on his headdress making sure that it is centered



and not too far forward. About 4 fingers back of the hairline is a good guide line. See Moccasin Tracks, March 1982 for a short discussion of the proper placement of the secondary ties in wearing a roach.

The last thing to do is to grab a fan and cane on the way to the dance floor. It is always a good policy to wrap the beaded handle of the fan with a handkerchief to keep the moisture from the beads and fringe.

