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INDIAN KAROOK

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Myron Anderson interviewed Supt. Byron Sharp when he visited Chemawa and the following is the result:

In the latter part of spring, or early summer, the Yuma Indians hold their primitive tribal ceremony in commemoration of the dead. This annual observance of "Karook" is as old as time itself. If you ask the Yuma when it started they will tell you, "It started when people began dying, and that in the spring following they held a 'big cry' in their memory."

Some days before the Karook is held couriers are sent to the Mojaves and Walapois in the north and to the Cocopahs on the Mexican border, inviting them as friendly tribes to share in the solemn rites.

Days before the first day of the ceremony, Indians with their entire families begin to arrive on the camp grounds on the California side of the Colorado, opposite the city of Yuma. They come walking, on weather-beaten burros, sleek desert ponies, and all modes of travel up to and including the latest models of the best makes of automobiles. Numbers of tribesmen that were reached by letter arrive by train. The first evening, or real beginning of this ceremony, is spent in clearing the plaza and making announcements which are for the betterment and well-being of the great assemblage.

Early the second day the relatives of the dead begin making the wooden images typifying relatives that have gone to the "happy hunting grounds" since the last "Karook." These images are carved from wood to resemble as nearly as possible the deceased persons. After the men have finished the images the women dress them. This dress varies according to the wealth of the deceased. The finest silk handkerchiefs, rich brocades, and the rarest beadwork are used even if the family of the deceased go in want for months following. After the figures are completed relatives carry them to a cache on the Colorado river bank where they are secreted until the appointed time.

The mourning house is built in the center of the plaza. It is constructed of arrow weeds and the interior is decked with feathered headdresses and elaborate bead work.

Shortly after sunrise on the third day the mourners gather in the plaza and at the bidding of the chiefs break into an "unending series of wails and lamentations." The din keeps on unabated and when one mourner drops from exhaustion another quickly fills the vacancy. Many of the women work themselves into a hysterical frenzy, and tears flow freely in their unabated ardor.

From time to time a high-pitched yell will pierce the air and stimulate their energies. As the sun reaches its zenith a rattle made of dry deer hoofs is brought out and a number of mourners equal to the number of deaths during the year form a solemn procession in front of the hut.

The wailing slowly dies away to a low chant and at an appointed signal they start with measured steps toward the river bank. After a few moments they reappear, each bearing an image.

The chief and sub-chief of the tribe lead the parade. They are always decked up in eagle feathers, bead work and gaudy colors. On reaching the center of the plaza they halt while those coming from the mourner's house meet them. Here the chief murmurs a series of incantations, after which the entire crowd join the "grand march" from which they break into dancing. Their gyrations are as well timed and precise as the most trained dancers and the images swing up and down in perfect rhythm. As they continue, married women of the tribe follow, throwing corn and small grain over the heads of the mourners. This throwing of the corn is symbolic of hail and is intended to dispel evil spirits. As the mourners advance they frequently pull garments from their bodies, also patterns of dress goods and innumerable other things that are fastened to their persons, and throw them away. They are quickly snatched up by the crowd. The Cocopahs are the most eager to get these cast-away gifts, as they are very poor. They are also visitors and the Yumas stand back somewhat and allow them to get a leading share of the gifts.

After completing the circle around the mourning house they enter it and leave the images on the central altar, where they are covered with the finest blankets which can be secured, and except for a few guards,

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