



# Fact Sheet No. 6

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## George Ceepeekous: The Man Who Could Not Stop Dancing

Ever since George Ceepeekous was a small boy, he participated in pow wows always dancing the Prairie Chicken Dance. In 1991, at the age of 71, Mr. Ceepeekous decided he would stop dancing. That summer, his family sponsored a special Grass Dance competition and a giveaway in his honour at the annual Kawacatoose pow wow. He had hung up his moccasins for good.

Later that year, Mr. Ceepeekous contacted the Royal Saskatchewan Museum and asked if the RSM would buy his dance outfit. He didn't want to sell it off in bits and pieces, he wanted it to stay together as a unit. The Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation provided the funding to purchase the outfit.



Mr. George Ceepeekous, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College Pow wow, 1991 (Leader-Post photo by Don Healy)

Early in 1992, Mr. Ceepeekous called the RSM. He had been to a pow wow during the winter and had discovered that he could not stop dancing. From the very moment he heard the drum being played, he had to get up and dance. His wife, Stella, was in the process of making him a new outfit but it would not be complete in time for the SIFC pow wow in April. Could he borrow some items from his old dance outfit until his wife had completed his new one? The RSM said, yes.

A month later, he returned the borrowed items and proudly described how he had danced his way to first place and a trophy. Mr. Ceepeekous continued to dance, wearing his new outfit, until 2003. When he passed on to the Spirit World in 2004, his family decided that his new outfit and his trophies should be kept with his previous outfit at the RSM.

This exhibit honours Mr. Ceepeekous and his dedication to his culture and traditions.

## The Prairie Chicken Dance

One tradition holds that the Dance began when a young man on a vision quest watched a Prairie Chicken dance. Some say it represents the start of new life in the spring.



The young George Ceepeekous, Piapot Pow wow, 1920s

The Prairie Chicken Dance was once a sacred dance, and to dance it a man had to join the appropriate society. Mr. Ceepeekous was six years old when his parents initiated him into the Prairie Chicken Dance. They gave

away everything they owned at the ceremony. Mr. Ceepeekous remembers they didn't even have any blankets left; that night, his father covered him with a coat when he went to bed.



Prairie Chicken Dancers participating in a round dance (Sask. Archives Board R-A8474)

Over the years, the pow wow and its dances have become more secularized. Very few men continued dancing the Prairie Chicken Dance, and Mr. Ceepeekous was one of those few. However, today, more and more young men are learning this dance, following in Mr. Ceepeekous's foot steps.

## The Dance Outfit

Mr. Ceepeekous's dance outfit harkens back to the days when styles were much simpler than today's Men's Traditional or Men's Fancy Feather Dance outfits which have huge feather bustles and lots of beadwork. The focus then was to dance out the story of hunting or to imitate a bird or animal for spiritual or healing purposes.

The Prairie Chicken Dance outfit consists of pants and shirt with beaded rondels and chicken plumes attached. The sleeves of his shirt are held in place with garters and beaded cuffs. The dancer wears decorated dance aprons both front and back, rather than a large bustle, and a wide beaded belt with beaded side drops. On his head, he wears a roach and a beaded band with side drops; both enhance his movements as he dances. Around his ankles, the dancer wears garters, fringe, and heavy copper bells which ring loudly as he dances.

The dancer might hold an eagle feather fan or a hoop of sweet grass as he dances.

## George Ceepeekous—the Non-Stop Dancer

Mr. Ceepeekous had a reputation as the first dancer up and the last one to sit down. After the dancing had ended for the night, he would stay up talking with everyone until the wee small hours of the morning. But no matter how late he had gone to bed, he would be back at the pow wow grounds in time for Grand Entry.

He won numerous prizes and trophies over the years, and was acknowledged as one of the best Prairie Chicken Dancers on the pow wow circuit. That he was often asked to bring in the Eagle Staff in Grand Entry indicates how highly respected he was as both a dancer and an individual.



Grand champion trophy, Carry-the-Kettle Pow wow, 2001

