

## LENAPE DANCES

It is a beautiful night. Somewhere in the Lenape homeland there is a large gathering of people who have come together for a ceremonial. It took place during the day, and now the sun has set. The moon is rising.



*Moonrise over the ocean in Lenapehokink*

Inside the dance area the attendants have brought in the fire. People are sitting around visiting and waiting. Soon the deep, resonant sound of the water drum begins. A steady beat is followed by the singing of the drummer. He is singing a song for the women to come out and dance. On either side of him sit other singers. They have gourd rattles and they too sing along. The world is a wonderful place, the year is 1494, and the world of the Lenape and other Native people is about to suffer a drastic change. Five hundred years later the songs and dances are still being done.



*Singers at a Lenape Stomp Dance in Oklahoma in 1960*

The scene we set above could have taken place almost anywhere in the eastern part of the United States from New York on south, perhaps as far as the Gulf of Mexico. To this day many of the old "Social Dance Songs" are remembered, and are still used by some tribes. Here are some of them the Lenape still use:



## Lead Dance

Nikantkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=11885>

The dance, also just called a stomp dance, proceeds in single file, the leader singing in short phrases, echoed by the followers, all being men. Soon the women shell shakers (women wearing groups of turtle shells or small milk cans containing a few pebbles or shot tied to their legs) get in behind the leader and followers so the order is man – woman – man – woman, etc. This Dance is done frequently throughout the evening using different songs.



## Woman Dance

Xkweyòk Naxkuhëmaòk

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=11883>

Woman Dance is a dance for the women only. Since the elders often take the lead it is often held early in the evening. Five different actions may be called for depending on the song being performed:

- 1) The dance moves straight ahead (counterclockwise, as for all Delaware social dances)



around the dance ground, in a series of short steps, and the torso is twisted from side to side (a step called tètëpka);

2) The dancers proceed sideways with a step in which the feet remain parallel but are twisted from side to side;

3) The dance moves straight ahead with a plain, short step;

4) The dance moves sideways with a simple step;

5) The dancers congregate in front of the drummer, dancing backwards and forwards as a group, while singing in chorus "Alèwi kiluna" ("We're the greatest"). None of the other Woman Dance songs have actual words. The dances may be in any order, and are accompanied by the singers using a drum and rattles.



## Bean Dance

Malàxkwsitkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=11882>

The men begin the dance, moving in a "shuffling step" around the dance area. There is no drum accompaniment, and the leader carries a rattle usually made from a gourd. He is the main singer although the men lined up behind him usually help him sing. As soon as the song begins the women enter and dance in any free space between the men.



## Go-Get-Em Dance

Nahēnaltin

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=11886>

When the song begins the women gather in front of the singers facing them and singing along with them. At a certain point usually after the fourth song the main singer says Ho, Ho, Ho, three times quickly as a sign for the men to get in.

The men enter from one side and dance a few circuits, chanting while the songs continue. The men then select from one to five women (so that all will have a chance to dance) and dance them around the fire.

The man is behind, with his hands on their shoulders. Each group whirls about when the song repeats. The water drum and rattle serve as accompaniment.



Quapaw Dance at Quapaw, OK

## Quapaw Dance

Okahpawkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=15964>

The men lead out first, forming a line of pairs. The lead pair carries the drum and rattle and does the singing. The women follow the men out and choose partners, facing them. When the song repeats, the men pass around their female partners to the next pair of women, thus all the men and women meet. Tribal elder Lucy Blalock said the Quapaw tribe in 1928 "gave" this dance to nearby tribes such as the Delaware and the Shawnee.



## Cherokee Dance

Katuhowkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=11884>

The dance begins with women only, but soon the main singer calls for the men to get in. Each man steps in behind a chosen partner, and all hold hands in a long single file. When the song "changes" they all switch hands. The dance continues until the lead woman dancer places her hand on the drum. She may feign this motion several times, thus testing the endurance of the main singer, who must continue without pause until the end. Both drum and rattles are proper accompaniment.

PHOTO WILL BE ADDED LATER

## Raccoon Dance

Nahënëmkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=5355>

This dance begins with men only and they dance in a single line. At a certain point in the song every other man turns so they face each other as they dance. That is when the women go in and dance. Each woman chooses the man she wants to dance with and she starts dancing facing him. The other man keeps dancing and if he doesn't have another woman to dance with him he has to step out. The man and woman dance so one partner dances forward and the other one backward, and when the song changes the couple whirls to switch positions.



## Stirrup Dance

Ehëlamalikenkwkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=18085>

A line of male-female pairs dances around the fire. When the song repeats, the man raises his foot about six inches off the ground, and the woman rests hers upon it. Retaining this position, the couple whirls about. In some cases if the lead couple is older instead of whirling they simply hop forward with her foot on his. When the songs changes again they both return to a normal dance step. Both drum and rattles are accompaniment.

PHOTO WILL BE ADDED LATER

## **Fish Dance**

Namèskan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=15962>

As in the Stirrup Dance, the dancers line up in male-female pairs, but when the song repeats, the partners simply switch places. Both drum and rattles are used.



## **Duck Dance**

Kwikwinkëmëkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=3552>

This is a fun dance for the men and women. There are two men partners side-by-side and there are two women facing them. The two men dance forward and the two women dance backward. In Lucy Blalock's language class someone asked her how to do the dance. She said, "You must listen to the song so that you know what to do. When the song changes the two men partners hold up their hands and hold hands and the women go under their hands and dance forward to the next two men. Each time they change songs you get to dance with different men. Meanwhile as they dance the man are supposed go quack, quack, quack, like a duck when they put their arms up and are holding hands."





### **Alligator Dance**

Shkèhtewkan

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=18087>

A line of men and women, side by side, dance straight around the fire, with drum and rattle accompaniment.

PHOTO WILL BE ADDED LATER

### **Bunch Dance**

Anskan

"gathering up dance"

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=504>

Also called the Morning Dance. This dance is the final performance of the Stomp Dance. In previous times the singer, carrying the drum and often accompanied by another man with a rattle, dances around the fire, surrounded by all the participants, as many as ten deep.

In the present day all of the dancers gather in front of the singers who are seated and sing the song with them.



## Musical Instruments Used by the Lenape



### drum

puhënikàn

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=8905>

The drum the main singer uses is what is called a “water drum.” Long ago these were made from a small hollowed log, with some water in the bottom to create the resonance.

The earliest description we have of the water drum is from the Powhatan Tribe of Virginia in 1612. Their drums “were made of deep wooden platters covered with animal skin. To the corners of the skins were attached walnuts, which were then pulled beneath the platter and tied with a cord.”

In later years the drum was made from crocks, barrels, or three-legged kettles with a drumhide stretched over them. For example, the drum used by the Delawares in 1780 was described as, “The drum which keeps the time is a thin deer-skin stretched across a barrel, or, in lieu of this, a kettle.” Today the preferred drum is a made from no. 6 cast iron kettle.

**drumstick** (shown here resting on top of the drum)

pahkàntikàn

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=15810>



## rattle

shuhënikàn

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=9575>

The other principal musical instrument was the rattle. Among the Delawares rattles could be made of gourds, bark, horn, and turtle shells; however, turtle shell rattles were most often used in ceremonies and not for Social Dances. In addition to using all of these materials, in more recent times Delawares adopted the use of coconut shells for rattles. The rattles used in the dances are usually made from gourds and tend to be undecorated.



## coconut rattle



**cans**, also called **shells**, and by some tribes, **shackles**

kanëtètàk

"little cans"

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=15984>

It is not known when the use of these rattles attached to the legs of some of the women in stomp dances began. There does not seem to be an early reference to them until the time the Delawares were moved into Indian Territory in 1867. It might be at that time they adopted the



use of them from the tribes originally from the southeast who had earlier been moved to Indian territory, now Oklahoma.

Originally they seem to have been made of box turtle shells which had been attached to a leather backing which was then tied to the legs. In more recent times it has been common to substitute small cans for the turtle shells.

The women who wear these get in the Lead Dances behind the leader and the men immediately behind him. The special step the women use helps keep the tempo for the dances.



### **deerhoof leg rattles**

shuhwikahsha

<http://www.talk-lenape.org/detail?id=9578>

There has been a mention in writing that these deer hoof rattles were worn by the man leading the Lead Dances at a stomp dance. There is no evidence that these have been used in more recent times for that purpose and they may have been partly replaced by the women dancers wearing the can rattles.

This type of deer hoof leg rattles was also worn by the men at war dances although at the present day they have been mostly replaced by bells at the modern-day powwows.

## **SOCIAL DANCES OF THE LENAPE**

By Jim Rementer and Doug Donnell

Go here for the full article: [HTTP://DELAWARETRIBE.ORG/BLOG/2013/06/26/SOCIAL-DANCES/](http://delawaretribe.org/blog/2013/06/26/social-dances/)

The full article tells what type of music this is, and how it differs from modern-day pow-wow songs. Dr. Charlotte Heth, a Cherokee and an ethnomusicologist has stated some of the common aspects:

We can generalize fairly easily about the characteristics of Eastern and Southeastern music and dance today:

1. Dances are performed in a counter-clockwise manner, for the most part.
2. Instruments are either worn on the body, held in the hand and shaken, blown, or beaten upon. The primary drum was and is the water drum.
3. Singing is either responsorial with leader-chorus alternation, or is unison chorus after the leader has "lined out" the beginning of the song. Strophic songs with alternating chorus and verse parts are also common.
4. Songs tend to be short, while performances are long, have many repetitions, and/or are arranged in cycles (Heth 1992:174).

### **The Social Dance Songs**

The songs which the water drum accompanied, the "social dance songs," cover an immense area, and the same basic songs are used from tribe to tribe to tribe. At this late date it is very difficult to try to determine a tribal origin for most of these songs. It is made even more difficult as most of these songs have vocables instead of words.

Some songs take the names of foods, such as Bean Dance or Corn Dance. Some are named after animals, like the Raccoon Dance and Duck Dance. Even the Alligator Dance spread as far north as New York and Canada among the Iroquois people, but the exact origin is unknown. We can probably say with a certain degree of safety that alligators did not exist in New York State, so it must have been brought north by one of the Southeastern tribes.

Some of the dances were named for other tribes, such as the Cherokee Dance. This is used very commonly by the Shawnee, Delaware, and Caddo, but it seems not to be known by the Cherokees. Of more recent usage there is the Quapaw Dance, used by the Delaware, Shawnee, and Caddo. Lucy Blalock, a Delaware elder, said that the Quapaw gave this dance to these other tribes in 1928.

Another dance with a peculiar sounding name is the "Go-Get-'Em Dance" in which the women gather in front of the men singers, and sing along with them. After about four songs the men come dancing in and they each get a woman to dance around the fire.

Here is a list that might be the earliest list of dances done by the Delaware and the first column was done by Morgan when the Delawares were still in Kansas in 1859. We have added the additional columns to show later mention of the dances still being done. In some cases the dances appear to be more recent additions. The W. Del are the Delawares near Anadarko, now known as the Delaware Nation. The E. Del is the Delaware Tribe in northeastern Oklahoma as in the columns titled Delaware. The X means that dance is mentioned for that group.

TRIBE-->	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware	Delaware
SOURCE-->	Morgan	Speck	W. Del	E. Del	Nora	Lucy
DATE-->	1859	1935	1975	1977		1994
Alligator Dance	—	—	—	X	X	—
Bean Dance	—	X	—	X	X	X
Bear Dance	X	—	—	—	—	X
Buffalo Dance	X	X	—	—	—	X
Bunch Dance [Morning Dance]	—	—	X	X	X	X
Cherokee Dance	—	X	X	X	X	X
Chicken Dance	X	—	—	X	—	X
Duck Dance	X	—	—	X	X	X
Fish [Gar] Dance	—	—	—	X	X	X
Go-Get-'Em Dance [Horse Dance] [Swing Dance]	X	—	—	X	X	X
Lead [Stomp] Dance	—	—	—	X	X	X
Quapaw Dance	—	—	—	X	X	X
Raccoon Dance	—	—	—	X	X	X
Sheep Dance	—	—	—	X	X	—
Stirrup Dance	—	X	—	X	X	X
War Dance	X	—	X	X	X	X
Woman Dance [Shuffle Dance]	X	X	X	X	X	X

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