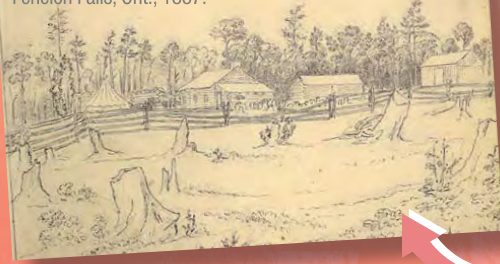


INDIGENOUS EXHIBITION

First Nations and Métis people have been sharing their culture at fairs for a long time. Non-Indigenous people often talked and wrote about them in racist terms. But many Indigenous people took pride in showing their ways so others could learn.

Drawing by Anne Langton of her brother's farm near what is now Fenelon Falls, Ont., 1837.



Farms and farming didn't just happen. Sometimes the government made treaties with First Nations to get land for settlers who wanted to farm. For Indigenous people, treaties were agreements to share the land, not give it up. Other times newcomers just started clearing land and building with no thought to the First Peoples living there.

Many fairs in the early to mid-1900s had so-called "Indian village" displays. Organizers often asked First Nations participants to do things that weren't part of their culture or stage false shows in which they pretended to attack settlers. (In fact, many inexperienced settlers would have died if they hadn't learned from Indigenous neighbours.) Other exhibitions showed "ancient" Indigenous items that wrongly suggested these cultures were dying out.

Some church authorities and Indian agents – government officials who controlled First Nations communities – wanted to encourage farming. They set up fairs in hopes of replacing ceremonies such as the sacred Sun Dance, which the federal government banned in 1895.



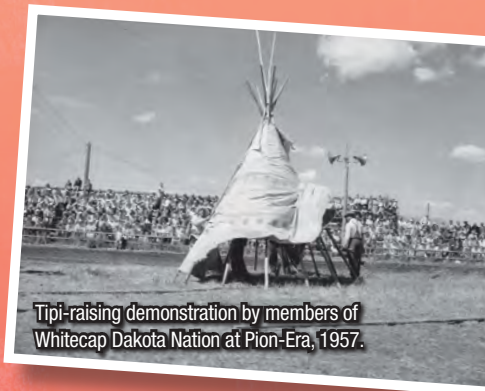
Attendees at a Sun Dance in what is now Saskatchewan, 1895.



William Littlecrow, Bob Royal, Malvina Eagle, Thelma Eagle and Eva Hawk at Pion-Era, 1955.



Chief Harry Littlecrow of Whitecap Dakota Nation delivers opening speech at Pion-Era, 1957.



Tipi-raising demonstration by members of Whitecap Dakota Nation at Pion-Era, 1957.

SHARING COMMUNITY

In 1955, some people concerned that Saskatchewan was losing touch with its farming heritage decided to start an agricultural exhibition. They focused on old farm machinery and how farm families used to live. Saskatoon's Western Development Museum, which organized the show, also invited the nearby Whitecap Dakota Nation. (The museum had to write to the federal Department of Indian Affairs to get permission from the Indian agent for the Whitecap Dakota people to come to Saskatoon for the week.) From the start, the Whitecap Dakota chose how to represent their way of life. They set up a tipi, danced in beautiful regalia and showed their impressive skills in everything from bareback riding to trapping, trick roping and hay production. Pion-Era celebrations became an important part of summer for the Whitecap Dakota. Thousands of visitors to the fair got to meet First Nations people, see their culture and even learn a bit of their language. The Whitecap Dakota were not just following the organizers' wishes — they were participating the way they wanted to, something their people remember with pride to this day.