

A [sample entry](#) from the

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“nature” in keeping with humanity’s own relationship to inner and outer realities.

Roxanne Kamayani Gupta

Further Reading

Gupta, Roxanne Kamayani. *A Yoga of Indian Classical Dance: The Yogini’s Mirror*. Rochester Vermont: Inner Traditions, 2000.

Marglin, Frederiqu Apffel. *Wives of the God-King*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Vatsyayan, Kapila. *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1983.

See *also*: Dance; Ghost Dance; Hinduism; India; Lakota Sun Dance; Planetary Dance; Prakriti; Tantra; Tantrism in the West; Yoga and Ecology.

Indian Guides

The Indian Guides is a youth program sponsored by the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Through activities themed around “Indian Lore,” the program aims to use young people’s interest in the “romance,” “beauty,” and “color” of Native American cultures to provide occasions for fathers and sons and fathers and daughters to work together on costumes, rituals, and related projects. The YMCA works from a traditionally non-denominational Protestant religious orientation, and the Indian Guides add to that base a generic nature-based “spirituality” thought to be common in American Indian cultures.

The first “tribe” of Indian Guides was created by Harold S. Keltner, a leader in the YMCA of St. Louis, Missouri. Based on his experiences in Canada, Keltner brought a Canadian “Ojibway,” Joe Friday, to address a father and son banquet in 1925, and Keltner saw immediately that the interest of the boys and men present could be the basis for a movement involving fathers more directly in the social, physical, and moral development of their sons. The movement began as a very loosely organized, decentralized program emphasizing the autonomy of the local “tribe” and, eventually, the groups of tribes called “nations.” By 1925, however, the movement had spread to enough YMCA offices that the National Council became an official sponsor of the program. A few years later, the official name of the program became “The Father and Son ‘Y’ Indian Guides.” Eventually girls were admitted to the movement (“Indian Princesses”) and, even later, the “Y” created “Indian Braves and Indian Maidens” as programs for mother-and-son and mother-and daughter-pairs. In 1988 a manual entitled *Friends Always* (the motto of the program) consolidated the program materials of the four separate programs.

From the outset, the movement acknowledged the

important work of Ernest Thompson Seton (1860–1946), the artist, naturalist, and writer who created his own youth movement based on Indian Lore (the “Woodcraft Indians,” 1903) and who was one of the small group of founders of the Boy Scouts of America in 1910. Seton drew upon the Darwinist ideas of the age and his knowledge of the Native Americans of North America to provide both concrete instruction in “Indian Ways” (e.g., from his 1903 book *Two Little Savages* to his 1937 *The Gospel of the Redman*) and a general philosophy of nature-based spirituality.

“Y” leaders have always emphasized to the fathers and mothers that the use of Indian Lore in the program is a means to the end of parents’ greater involvement in their children’s lives. Changing public sensibilities about Native American cultures in the late twentieth century – spurred in no small part by Native American civil rights and political social movement organizations, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) – brought negative publicity to the uses of “Indian Lore” by mainly white youth organizations and sports teams. By 1990 the National Advisory Committee was attempting to promote more “responsible” use of the “native American theme” in the movement, and a 1991 initiative with the Smithsonian Institution’s planned National Museum of the American Indian signaled a new sensibility about the theme. Responding to public criticism, the national office of the YMCA of the USA decided in late 2001 to revise and rename (as “Friends Forever”) the program, eliminating all references to Indian Lore. The new program material will eliminate references to the “Great Spirit” and substitute the “Creator.” The heavily decentralized nature of the Y-USA, with local YMCAs enjoying considerable autonomy, means that some “tribes” and “nations” might resist this plan.

The religious or spiritual content of the Y-Indian Guides program has always been slight and rather inconsequential. The program, though, brought thousands of children and parents together as part of the larger historical effort by which mainly white, middle-class youth-workers and children attempted to use their own, somewhat limited understanding of Native American nature-based religion to revitalize and energize their own, more conventionally Protestant understanding of how to lead a religious life.

Jay Mechling

Further Reading

Deloria, Philip J. *Playing Indian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

The Father and Son “Y” Indian Guides. New York: Association Press, 1946.

See *also*: Indigenous Religions and Cultural Borrowing; Religious Environmentalist Paradigm; Scouting.