

Lenape Funeral Customs

by Nora Thompson Dean

Introduction

The following paper is an eyewitness participant account of the funeral customs among my Lenape (Delaware Indian) people in north-eastern Oklahoma. The funerals and feasts discussed in this paper begin with my early recollections, about 1911, and come up to the present day. Throughout the years the customs have remained, for the most part, unchanged, at least until the mid-1960's. Now, with new laws governing us, with our people scattered all over this country by such things as the Indian Relocation Act, and the need to move elsewhere to find good jobs, it is increasingly difficult to follow all of the traditions, especially since most of them date back to times when we lived in villages. The present-day funerals vary in the number of traditional ways that they can be carried out.

The Lenape language, in which I think, is unlike English in that Lenape uses one word for the words "he" or "she." In writing this paper I will, therefore, use the term "he" instead of writing "he or she" each time. The customs given, unless otherwise stated, are the same for a man or a woman. I also wish to note that I have made no attempt to compare what I have witnessed and describe in this paper with any of the historic accounts of Lenape funerals written by earlier observers or reporters. Such comparisons might serve only to confuse the reader.

We Lenape people hold our departed people in mind for a long time. It is not uncommon to hear someone whose first language was Lenape say "This is my mother's" even though the mother had died years before. I remember sadly the day one Lenape man came to my home and, with tears welling up in the corners of his eyes, asked me if I thought he was crazy? I asked him what gave him such a foolish idea, and he told me that he had just come from the Indian hospital where the white doctor, who treated him told him that since his brother had been dead for almost two years, and he still grieved over him from time to time, he should consider seeing a psychiatrist about this abnormal behavior! I hope this paper will not only show our customs, but also some cultural differences that will enable non-Lenape readers to understand us better.

A number of our younger people have commented to me at the wakes, that it is sad that they have no account of what is proper to do at such a time. This paper is the result of several earlier drafts done with this need in mind. I would like to express my thanks to Jim Rementer for his help in collating, and for the transcriptions of Lenape words. Now, with this expanded paper, I say to our younger people:

It is for you, the younger Lenape people,

that this account was written. You are the heirs of a long line of tradition, and it is you who will determine whether these are carried on to your heirs.

When a woman is in her sixties or seventies, or even in her late fifties, she starts making preparations to leave this world. She begins by making her traditional clothing: skirt, leggings, blouse, and moccasins--everything that she intends to wear when she leaves this world. She tells the young people and those who might be left behind, her survivors, what she wants done when she departs this world. After this clothing is made, she should wear it to a dance or ceremonial at least once or twice, and then put it away in storage for that time when the Creator calls her from this life. This clothing is supposed to be hand-stitched, not sewn on a machine.

A man usually wants his moccasins and Indian shirt, and he has his relatives or someone else prepare his clothing when he gets to a certain age, the fifties or sixties, or somewhere along there.

It is said that a Lenape's personality changes when he somehow senses that his life is getting short. He gets a little irritable and tries to make people angry. This is so people will dislike him when his time comes and they will not grieve so over him.

The *lénapeokàni sèkèlén̄ja* (the "spirit fingers," the small white semicircles at the base of the fingernails) are also closely watched because when they begin to fade, it is a sign of extreme illness or impending death. In very rare cases there is a white mist that surrounds a person when he is about to leave this earth. When this white mist is seen, the dying person is known to be an extremely good person, one who has lived close to the Creator and followed His ways.

When the *lénapeokàn* (the soul) separates from the body forever, we say that the heart stops, and that is what we Lenape people call death. It is said that just prior to death, the *lénapeokàn* could leave the body and travel around visiting places and people. The old *mèteṇuwàk* (medicine men) were sometimes able to see this soul at the time of separation, and would cause it to return to the body so that the person could live on a while longer. When death finally occurs we are told not to cry, but crying is a thing of nature. We always cry, especially if that person was close to us.

As soon as a person dies, a window in the room where the person died is opened just a little, and left open so that the soul can get in and out to do its last minute preparations before it leaves this earthly life. If a person should die with his eyes open, whoever is with him will close them; although it is our belief that when a person dies like this he is not really ready to leave this earth. The dead person's face is then covered with a black handkerchief, or any color the person might have said he wanted at some time during his

life. All the pictures and mirrors in the house are then covered with sheets or cloth. The clothing of the deceased is gathered together and the survivors, either the spouse or the children, can pick out what they want to keep. The remaining clothing is then gathered into two bundles and tobacco is put on each of the bundles in preparation for their being taken to the cemetery.

When the Lenape women hear that someone has died, most of them start to *kohòke* (to pound corn with a mortar and pestle). Dried hominy is always on hand and ready to be pounded, and with this they make two or three *lénahpòna* (a type of corn bread). These *lénahpòna* corn breads were usually cooked outside in a Dutch oven. If three such *lénahpòna* were made, they would keep two and take the other one to the funeral feast. ① Sometimes beans or currants were baked into these breads. The bread was handled very carefully, and no salt was ever put into it; in fact, we never put salt in any funeral feast food. The children were made to be quiet and were told not to make any noise, especially if they were close to the deceased person.

When a Lenape's life is ended, the family appoints four workers, two men and two women, to perform certain tasks until the body is buried and the feast is over, at which time their tasks are ended. The women workers cook the food, and the men get wood and help lift heavy things such as kettles. The cooking was done outdoors, as it should be yet. Such a worker has to be physically fit, and he should be a non-relative of the deceased, and preferably younger.

Years ago the women workers washed and dressed the body, and washed and combed the hair if it was a woman who died. If the deceased was a man, the men workers took charge and washed and dressed the body, and washed and combed the hair. Grease or hair dressing was not put on the hair of a deceased person. At such time the cloth covering the face is set aside.

When the family selects such workers, they must choose someone the deceased liked, because there have been instances when a worker was one whom the deceased did not like, and such a worker had a hard time getting the moccasins and clothing on the dead person. On such an occasion, the other worker took over and tried, and the things went on with ease. This is one reason why we believe that the deceased knows things and is capable of acting after he leaves this earthly life.

The family also appointed a speaker. In the old days this was the chief's duty, but in more recent times it is an elderly wise man of the tribe. The speaker must be a non-relative, and he must be a good man who lives morally. The speaker conducts all the of oral ceremonies, and his "pay" consists of several yards of white cloth.

The family also appoints a person of the same sex as the decedent to sit at the head of the body. This person is usually the best friend of the deceased, but under no circumstances may this be a relative. The person so selected must not leave his assigned post at the head of the casket;

however, if it is necessary to leave, someone else must sit in that place until the friend returns.

While the women workers are cooking and cleaning the home of the deceased the two men workers are busy making a coffin and the grave marker. Nowadays they make only the marker because commercially made coffins are used.

The body, having been washed and dressed, used to be placed outside on a porch, or in a tent, on new boards as long and as wide as the body, and the head was oriented to the east. The boards were raised about the height of an ordinary chair so as not to touch the ground. At the present time, the body is laid out in the decedent's home or in a funeral home. The local funeral homes allow us to have our all-night wake there.

The burial takes place as soon as possible after a person dies. We do not believe in embalming; it is strictly taboo for Lenape people. ② The reason for this is that we believe the blood itself is a soul even though separate from the main soul or *lénapeokàn*; we, therefore, want to take this blood soul with us into the ground.

The wake is usually one night long. In some instances, however, the weather or some other condition causes a delay and it might then be two nights long. The wake is usually held at the decedent's home, and there is food prepared by the workers for the midnight meal for anyone who might be there. The wake can start at any time in the late afternoon, or whenever a person feels like going.

All the people who since the death have congregated at the house, and who have viewed the body, now go into the house, usually at sundown, and begin the vigil. In times past *Chipahkwinalitìn* (the Moccasin Game) was played all night long during this time, but it is no longer played. As far as I know, the last Moccasin Game was played at the funeral of my grandfather, Billie Wilson, in 1894. (See Appendix: The Moccasin Game p. 71).

At midnight, every person present, except the one who sits at the head of the body, is called outside and a rifle is fired. (Nowadays this practice is discontinued because of laws about firearms.) Then everyone gathers where the body is, and the speaker prays for the departed person and for the bereaved family and relatives.

The face of the deceased is then painted with *olàmàn* (red Indian paint) so that when he stands before the Creator he will be recognized as a true Lenape. The paint for a woman is two small spots, one on each cheek about the size of a quarter, and sometimes in the part of the hair about two inches long. The paint for a man consists of three little lines from the outer side of the eye back almost to the hairline. The painting is done by the speaker unless the departed person had requested that some special person should paint him.

The cloth can now be put back over the face of the deceased if desired, and the casket may be closed if the family desires it. Now those present can eat the midnight meal prepared by the workers. The wake then continues on throughout the

night.

Under no circumstances should cedar be burned during the wake, or at any part of the funeral. This is to be done only after the people at the funeral have arrived at home.

In the morning when the sky begins to turn gray in the east, one of the men workers goes out and once again fires the rifle. Anyone who might have fallen asleep, such as the children, is awakened for this.

Every Lenape has to be buried before noon, and the women workers start serving the breakfast to the people who are there as soon as daylight comes. They then start gathering up the food to take to the cemetery and make preparations as steadily as they can in order to get through by noon. While they are getting ready to take the body away, the women workers are cooking. The family of the deceased has provided some animal to butcher, usually a hog or steer, and with this they feed the friends at the funeral feast.

After everyone has eaten, the body of the dead person is placed on a vehicle of some kind. The speaker takes the lead, the bereaved follow him, friends and kinsmen next, and the vehicle with the body is at the end -- the last one in the procession. Regardless of what takes place, no one is ever permitted to look back when they are on their way. It is said that the spirit walks behind, and if someone should look back the spirit will fall behind. When the cortege leaves the home, one person should remain behind.

The grave is not dug until the body arrives at the cemetery. The men workers and friends of the deceased take turns digging the grave, but under no circumstances is a relative supposed to disturb the earth, or dig, or cover up the grave. Children are strictly warned not to play with the soil. After the grave is dug, the body is placed over it on poles placed across the open grave as supports for the casket. The deceased is always placed with his head towards the east. ③

The speaker takes his place at the head of the grave and begins talking to those gathered. Speaking in Lenape he says:

Our kinsman is going away now. He is going into the hands of Kishelēmukōng who will watch over him. We must all carry on in this life to our best abilities, speaking kindly to one another, and living peacefully.

He goes on with his talk for a while, and then he prays for the bereaved and the deceased, pleading with our Creator to accept him into His keeping. Shaking hands with the bereaved and those near him he then sits down.

The friend who sat by the body all night now steps forward and sits down in a squatting position at the head of the deceased and addresses him thus:

My friend, now we are at the parting. Go with a free mind. Think of us no more.

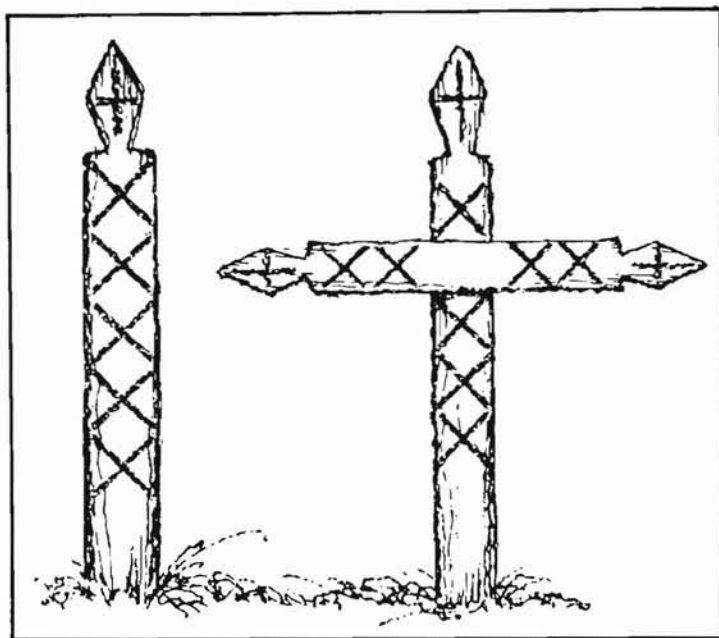


Fig. 1. Grave marker or Kikinhikan, male at left and female at right. Drawn by Charles Waterhouse, in Weslager (1972:442).

Someday, when Kishelēmukōng tells us, we will be with you again, but do not think of us now. Go on in peace.

At this time the people go and view the body for the last time. Starting on the east end they go around the entire grave, the mound of earth and all, going in a counter-clock-wise direction. The best friend of the spouse leads him around the grave, and then takes him a little ways towards the east and turns him loose, after which the spouse can go sit wherever he wants. This is done only in the case of a married person losing a spouse.

In certain circumstances, some people should not attend funerals. A person who is sick should not attend, because it is said it will weaken him even more. A person who was disliked by the decedent should not attend, as the spirit of the deceased might cause him to become paralyzed or have a stroke. If a woman who is pregnant should attend the funeral, she must never look at the body because this could cause her child, when born, to have eyes that close spasmodically throughout life. Children also are not permitted to view the body because it is said to weaken their eyes.

Anyone attending a Lenape funeral, the bereaved family or anyone, doesn't dress up, but wears the common clothing that the deceased had seen them wear in life. We do not wear finery to a funeral because we think that such clothing is for gaiety and happiness.

At some point, a notch is cut into the end of the coffin near the head. It is only a small notch, but it serves as a means by which the soul can come to and leave the body. Just before closing the casket, this notch is painted with the olāmān (red Indian paint).

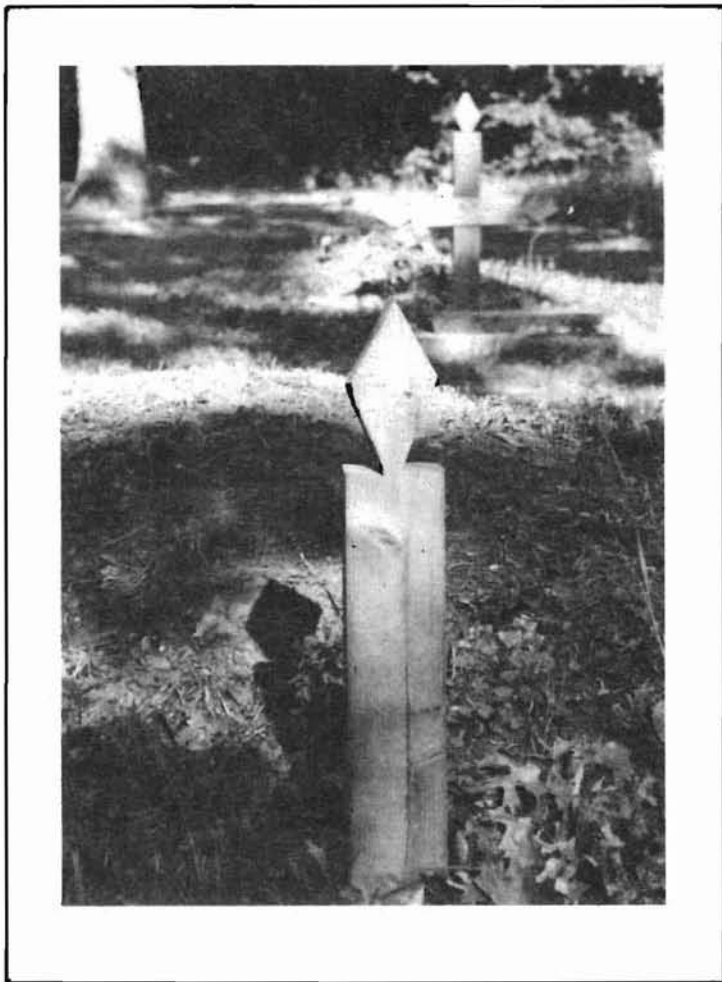


Fig. 2. *Kikinhikàn*: the wooden marker for a man's grave. Such markers are not replaced when they rot away. Note the woman's marker in the background.

The casket containing the body is lowered into the grave and the workers place a set of the dead person's clothing in the grave on top of the box. This bundle contains a complete set of the everyday clothing of the deceased. Men workers and friends of the deceased fill in the grave, taking care that all of the soil that was taken out is put back and mounded over the grave. As the grave is being filled, the *kikinhikàn* (the grave marker) is placed at the head of the grave. For a man this consists of a straight board with a diamond cut at the top. For a woman it is a cross with a diamond at the top and on the ends of the cross piece (see Figures 1-3).⁽⁴⁾

When the grave marker is in place, the speaker or one of the men workers paints the *kikinhikàn* with *olàmàn*. This must be done by someone who knows what he is doing--it must be properly painted. We feel that the way it is painted is much like a modern-day highway; if it is improperly marked, we will get lost. (see Fig. 2 showing *kikinhikàn*.)

The workers now spread two canvas sheets at the head of the grave. If there are other graves lo-

cated there, then at the nearest available space. These serve as "tables" for the *tahkwiphòtin* or funeral feast.

The food that has been prepared for this feast must be handled very carefully by both the women workers and by the friends who bring it. Salt is never added to feast food as it is said that the salt ruins the taste for those who have departed. The food must be handled in a clean, prayerful manner. A menstruating woman, or a woman who lives an immoral life, should not handle feast food. She must be a virtuous, clean woman. The food furnished by the family for the friends to eat is put on one of the canvas sheets; on the other sheet is placed the food brought by the friends for the family and relatives to eat. It is important that only the relatives, including closely related in-laws of the deceased, eat at one place, and that the non-relative friends eat at the other.

Before anyone begins eating, the widow, a daughter, or a close relative of the deceased fills six large pans with the choicest pieces of food selected from those brought by the friends. These large pans of food are prepared for the four workers, the speaker, and the best friend of the deceased. The best friend will "eat" for the deceased.

Before eating, the speaker again prays. Then the six people for whom the pans were prepared begin to eat. These six are seated at the friends' table because they are all non-relatives of the deceased. The food that was cooked by the workers goes on the friends' table, because they cooked the food for the family of the deceased. After the feast is all over with, these six people take home what has been given to them, pans and all.

Using dry sticks, a small fire is now made at the head of the grave. This fire can be made by either the spouse or one of the men workers. This is done before everyone leaves the cemetery, and also for the next three evenings just before sundown, making a total of four fires. It is said that the deceased takes the fire with him to keep warm.

The two bundles of clothing which had belonged to the deceased are now given by a relative, one to each worker. If the dead person was a man, the clothing is given to the two men workers with tobacco. If it was a woman who died, the clothing goes to the two women workers, also with tobacco. Even if the worker doesn't really want the clothing, it should be kept for a while, and something from the bundle should be worn at least once. These bundles are sometimes placed behind the location where the workers will sit at the feast, and will be given to them just after the feast is finished.

The speaker tells everyone:

Don't hurry off or rush home, or wherever it is you are going to go. Linger around for a while. Be good to each other, be friendly! You don't know when you too will be called away to where the Creator is.

After the funeral, when everyone goes home, they cleanse the house of the deceased with cedar smoke made by burning the red cedar leaves on hot coals, and they also purify themselves with this cedar smoke. Upon arriving home everyone who attended the funeral should use cedar smoke to cleanse himself and everything he had on at the funeral. ⑤ Not only is cedar burned within the home of the dead person, it should be taken one time around the house. The things the deceased left behind, things the family might wish to preserve as keepsakes or heirlooms, should also be smoked with the cedar smoke. The only proper time to use the cedar is when you cleanse your body and house. Cedar is never to be used at the cemetery. The cedar should be Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*).

Three days after a person's death, the close relatives are supposed to wash and comb their hair, preferably before sun-up. Those who have lost a relative through death should not sleep in the dark; they should have a dim light at all times when asleep, and this should be done for at least a year.

In the past it was customary for the chief of the tribe to stay with the family of the deceased for a few days, to comfort and advise them. He was to do anything he could to help this family in their time of sorrow.

After someone has died, the rest of the family isn't supposed to go anywhere for one full year. They never leave the home place. At least one person, the spouse, child, or parent, must be at the house for one year. That is the year of mourning. If a woman loses her husband, a relative of her husband is supposed to take her hair down and comb it, and it is to be left loose for one full year, although it can be tied back. (The usual hairstyle for a married woman was with the end of the hair turned up to form a bagwig.)

A deerhide string should also be tied on the wrist of anyone close to the deceased. It can be on either wrist but it must not be taken off; instead it is left to come off of its own accord.

It is said that our real soul, the *lénapeokàn*, goes to where the Creator lives. The Milky Way is the path along which it travels. But before the soul gets to where the Creator is, there is a bridge to cross. This bridge is guarded by all of the dead dogs. If a person has ever mistreated or abused a dog in any way, that dog will tell the others and they will not let that person's soul across. This is one reason why Lenape people are taught to treat dogs well.

It is said that where the Creator lives is like here on earth, but everything is easy, and there are no annoyances such as we find here. It is *welték lehélexeokàn*, "a wonderful life."

Sometimes a Lenape is reincarnated; not everyone of course, but sometimes one does come back. The older people pay special attention to the earlobes of a newborn baby, looking for an indentation which makes them seem like they had been pierced before. They will watch such a person all during childhood to see if it is really true.



Fig. 3. *Kikinhikan*: the wooden marker for a woman's grave. At the time of burial these markers are daubed with *olaman* as seen in Fig. 1.

While on the subject of reincarnation, it should be told that we are awaiting the return of our folk hero, *Wèhixamukès*. Our old people would all say, *Behawènàch naka Wèhixamukèsà*, "we will wait for *Wèhixamukès*." When he knew he was about to die he said to the Lenape living in his time:

Dèlamàlsi xunìti nèwìkawsi òk xu làpi ba ènda sòmìhkwèkwe yuki Weòpsichik. Xu knènaihèmo èli ènda wèskahpia dèmèlènja kwèti nàxking, òk nèwèkahèsin pilsit skixkwe. "I feel that soon my life will end, but I will come again when these White people do you dastardly ways or mistreat you. You will know me, because when I am born one of the fingers on my hand will be off and my mother will be a virgin."

It is said that when *Wèhixamukès* returns, he will help us, and he will rejuvenate the Lenape tribe. So even in our stories we discuss reincarnation.

If a person has lived a sinful life, he will go where the *Mahtantu* (the evil spirit) lives, and there he will be tormented by all types of insects. When the *Mahtantu* gets tired of tormenting this sinful person he will turn him into an insect: a gnat, mosquito, or any type of insect that would annoy or sting. He will then turn this insect loose on earth so he will attack the living and make them mad, and they will do something bad in their anger. That is what the *Mahtantu* wants,

and that is the way he wins people over.

When the year of mourning is over, some people have a memorial feast; but once these annual feasts are started, they must be held every year as long as the person holding the feast is living. The descendants of the person who started the feast are not obliged to carry on if they do not wish to do so. These annual feasts are called Wihunge. When a person wants to Wihunge, he notifies people a week or so beforehand. The family holding the feast will start cooking in the morning, and they will cook everything the decedent had liked. In the eveningtime the food is placed in large dishpans which are tied up with tea-towels and hung outside, sometimes on a clothesline. The person having the feast prays and tells the Creator why this is being done; that it is for those who have gone on.

The following morning, the floor having been scrubbed clean, a spread is put down and these same pans of food are placed on the spread along with plates and flatware for the person or persons who had been asked to come. Again, the person holding the feast will pray and tell why this is being done. Those present will then eat the food. In fact, the invited guest or guests are eating for the departed, as was done at the funeral feast. When they have finished, they take whatever food is left home with them. Once again, it must be a non-relative who eats for the departed at this feast, and it is better to have someone who is younger than the dead person would have been. There are no workers at the memorial feasts; the work is done by the family of the home.

In addition to the annual memorial feast, there are other times that a person might hold a Wihunge. Sometimes this is done if the departed keeps coming into some relative's dreams. If these dreams are persistent, it is said that the departed person is trying to tell you something, and therefore, a feast is held. Unlike the annual feasts, however, these do not have to be repeated every year.

Lately, there have been Munsee people* mixed with the Lenape here in Oklahoma, and they have their own ways. They say that this spirit which we call the *l'énapeokàn* remains here for twelve days, so they have a feast at the decedent's home twelve days after that person's death. This, however, is only for the Munsee people, not the Lenape, although we might be asked to attend their feasts.

The Lenape people have another custom that we follow. After the one year of mourning is over, we make preparations for a surviving spouse. Cedar is burned and this surviving spouse is "smoked" with the pure cedar smoke and prayed for. He or she is

then qualified to go and again participate in social events. Then, too, the relatives of the deceased may furnish new clothing to this spouse "from the skin out." If this is done, it means that this spouse is no longer in their family, and he is free or eligible to go and pick whomever he chooses should he wish to remarry. If the family does not clothe this spouse, it means that they would still like to keep him or her within the family.

This then completes the account of what is done at a traditional funeral among the Lenape people. There are, however, a number of corrections that must be made concerning the Lenape attitude or belief concerning death and the departed. Many have already been given in this paper, but there are a few more instances to be mentioned at this time.

When a person prepares to go somewhere he should not be taking his clothes on and off. If he does so, it implies that when he dies he will be trying to come to this world to change. Or, if a person starts something, some project, for example, he must try to finish it. If it is left unfinished, then when that person dies he will be trying to come back to finish what he started during his lifetime, and he will annoy the living. They will hear noises and feel his spirit around

A person should not eat or drink outside after dark without first placing a small bit of the food, which he bites off, on the ground for the departed. Likewise, the person should take a small mouthful of the drink and spit it on the ground.

When a person has his hair cut, or removes hairs from a comb, the hair should be kept and, as soon as possible, it should be burned. When it is burned, he should tell the Grandfather Fire, "I give it to you." It is said that the Grandfather Fire will give the hair back to the person when he dies.

If a person goes to a dance or attends the Big House ceremony and uses the *olàmàn* (red Indian paint) on his face it should be washed off before going to sleep. If it is left on the face, the spirits of the departed might think he has come to join them and they might try to take this person into the world of the departed.

A person who has washed his hair should not go to bed without greasing the hair. No hair dressing is put on the hair of a departed person, and if a living person does not use some type of dressing, it is said the deceased people will gather around this person's bed and say, "Oh, he is already here [in the spirit world]; he has come to join us!" This will cause the person to sicken or die.

The Lenape name of a person who is deceased should not be said after about two o'clock in the afternoon, but it is all right to say it during the morning. If said in the afternoon, or during the night, it is said it will disturb that person's spirit.

Now the account has been given. It is a sad thing to have to write about, but it is something each of us must face in his own time. We can only pray that at such times of sorrow, *Kishel'mukdng* will pity and help.

* The Unami-speaking people who formerly inhabited most of southern New Jersey and adjacent portions of Pennsylvania and Delaware distinguish themselves, as Lenape or Delaware, from the Munsee speaking people who formerly occupied northern New Jersey and adjacent parts of Pennsylvania and New York State. See Hunter 1978: Kraft 1978:1-6 and Kraft in this publication.

SUMMARY OF EVENTS AT A LENAPE FUNERAL

Events enclosed in brackets [] were discontinued prior to 1911.

Events enclosed in parentheses () were discontinued prior to 1965.

A person in mid-life begins to make preparations to leave this world.

At the time of death, a handkerchief is placed over the face of the deceased.

In the home all the mirrors and photographs are covered with cloths.

A window is opened in the home and left open, even a little bit.

The family gathers the clothing of the deceased and puts it in two bundles.

The family appoints four workers, a speaker, and a person to sit at the head of the coffin.

(The workers of the same sex as the dead person prepare the body.)

The women workers cook and clean the house.

(The men workers build the coffin.)

The men workers make the grave marker.

[The body is placed outside on the porch or in a tent.]

People begin arriving for the wake.

[The Moccasin Game is played during the wake.]

(A rifle is fired at midnight.)

The speaker prays at midnight.

The speaker or some appointed person paints the face of the deceased.

The cloth is put back on the face of the deceased if the family so desires.

The casket is closed if the family so desires.

Mourners at the wake eat a midnight meal.

The wake continues throughout the night.

(At dawn the rifle is fired again.)

The mourners eat breakfast at first light of day.

Women workers are busy now cooking for the funeral feast.

The body is taken to the cemetery.

(The grave is dug after the body and the mourners arrive at the cemetery.)

The casket is placed over the grave on poles, and the head is to the east.

The speaker addresses the mourners.

The person who sat at the head of the deceased all night now addresses him or her.

The notch cut in the head of the casket is painted with Indian paint.

The best friend leads the spouse toward the east.

The casket is lowered into the grave.

A set of clothing is put on top of the casket.

The grave is filled in.

When the grave is nearly filled, the marker is put in place at the head of the grave.

The grave marker is painted with Indian paint.

The funeral feast is held at the head of the grave.

A close relative prepares pans of food for the workers, the speaker, and best friend.

The speaker prays before everyone eats.

Everyone now eats.

The two bundles of clothing are given to the workers.

A small fire is made at the head of the grave.

The mourners go to their homes and burn cedar.

The house of the deceased is smoked with cedar.

For the next three nights a small fire is made at the head of the grave at sunset.

Three days after death the close relatives wash their hair.

Deerhide strings are placed on the wrists of the relatives of the deceased.

One year later cedar is burned for the surviving spouse and relatives, and the year of mourning is over.

Endnotes:

1. Among the traditional Lenape people the English word "feast" has come to be used exclusively for a funeral or memorial feast, and it is a shocking thing to hear "feast" used for any other big dinner or banquet.
2. There is nothing I can think of to show how opposed the Lenape are to embalming than to give the following quote from a paper by one of my students. In telling about my mother he said:

"The reader...should now be able to understand why, when Sarah Thompson heard that blood had been drained from a deceased white neighbor and thrown into Hogshooter Creek, she fainted." Delaware Culture: The Structure of its Configurations by Jay Miller, unpublished ms.
3. Among the traditional Lenape people, a dog is always buried with his head to the north and his face and legs pointing east.
4. The grave markers which are made of wood are left to disintegrate and go back to the earth. They are never replaced, nor are they treated with paint or varnish to keep them from rotting.
5. Anyone who has viewed the body, even if he does not attend the funeral, should use red cedar to purify himself on his arrival at his home. It is especially important that a person use cedar before going to visit anyone who is ill. It is said that he will matapama (he will cause him to have a relapse) by looking at him.

LENAPE WORDS USED IN THE TEXT

For the key to pronunciation, see the accompanying article, Remembrances of Our Big House Church, also by Nora Thompson Dean.

ba - I come

behawě̀nàch - we will wait for him

Chipahkwinalìtin - the Moccasin Game (a game of chance played only at funeral wakes)

dělamàlsi - the way I feel

děmēlě̀nǵa - I am missing a finger

ě̀li - because

kikinhikàn - a grave marker

Kishelēmukòng - Our Creator

knēnaihēmo - you will all know me

kohòke - to pound corn in a mortar and pestle

kwě̀ti - one

lāpi - again

lěnahpǵna - corn bread made from dried, pounded, and sifted corn

lěnapeokàn - soul

lěnapeokànì sèkě̀lě̀nǵa - 'the spirit fingers', the small white area at the base of the fingernails.

Mahtantu - the Evil Spirit

matapama - he causes him to have a relapse by looking at him

mēteìnuwāk - a medicine man

naka - that deceased one

nāxking - on my hand

nēwèkahě̀sin - the one who is my mother

nēwikawsi - the end of my life

òk - and

olàmàn - Indian paint, red in color

pilsit skixkwe - a virgin

sòmhkwèkwe (with ènda) - when they do you das-tardly: when they mistreat you

tahkwiphòtin - the funeral feast

Wèhixamukès - a Lenape folk hero

wěltě̀k lehēlexeokàn - a wonderful life

Weòpsichik - Whites

wěskahpia (with ènda) - when I am born

wihunge - a memorial feast

xu - future marker-, indicates future tense

xunìti - soon

yuki - these

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