The Ghost Dance:

Ethnohistory and Revitalization

Alice Beck Kehoe

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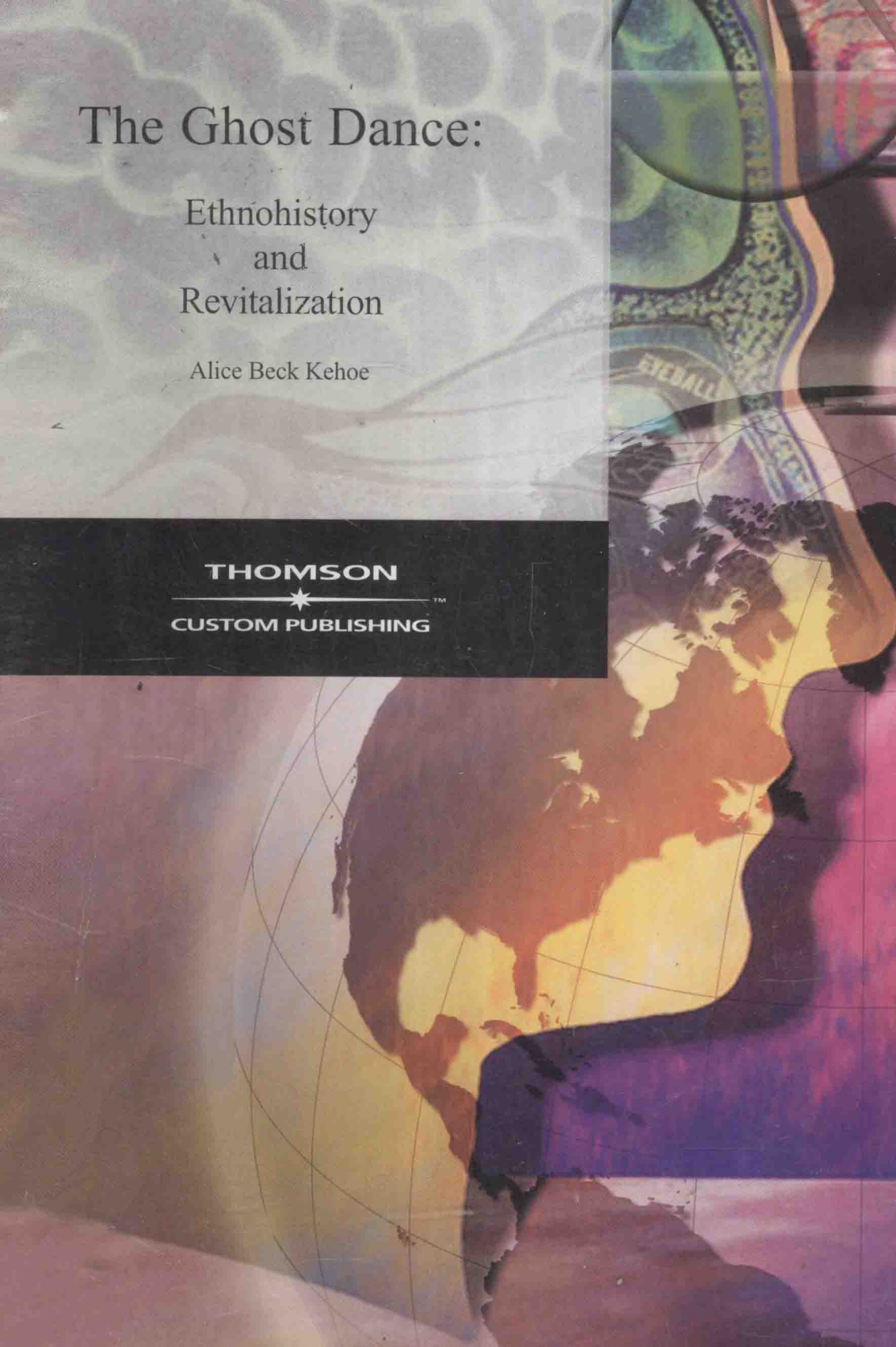

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ALICE BECK KEHOE
Marquette University

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ISBN 0-030-02852-3

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Foreword

ABOUT THE SERIES

These case studies in cultural anthropology are designed to bring to students, in beginning and intermediate courses in the social sciences, insights into the richness and complexity of human life as it is lived in different places. They are written by men and women who have lived in the societies they write about and who are professionally trained as observers and interpreters of human behavior. The authors are also teachers, and in writing their books they have kept the students who will read them foremost in their minds. We believe that when an understanding of ways of life very different from one's own is gained, abstractions and generalizations about social structure, cultural values, subsistence techniques, and the other universal categories of human social behavior become meaningful.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alice Beck Kehoe was born in New York City on September 18, 1934 and grew up in the suburbs of Washington, D.C., and New York. In junior high school, she became interested in anthropology and archaeology, and her first employment, during the summer she was sixteen, was as a clerk-typist in the American Museum of Natural History's Department of Anthropology. She worked at the Museum again the next summer, assisting curators in a variety of tasks, and for the next four years as a student assistant while studying anthropology at Barnard College in New York. Graduating from Barnard in 1956, Kehoe went to Browning, Montana, on the Blackfeet Reservation as assistant at the Museum of the Plains Indian. She married the young director of the Museum, Thomas F. Kehoe, and the following year, after he had completed his master's thesis at the University of Washington, they both enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Harvard University.

In 1959, Thomas Kehoe was appointed first Provincial Archaeologist for the province of Saskatchewan in central Canada. The Kehoes moved to Regina, and Alice assisted Thomas in his archaeological research. By 1961, the Kehoes were ready to submit proposals for their doctoral dissertations to the faculty at Harvard. Thomas proposed to excavate the major prehistoric site of Gull Lake in southwestern Saskatchewan; Alice, to excavate the first successful fur trade post, in east-central Saskatchewan. Her proposal was rejected on the grounds that she had to do work independent of her husband—not

just several hundred miles distant, but outside the field of archaeology. Alice was thus forced to change the focus of her graduate study from archaeology to ethnology, and she began to search for a suitable topic of research among the Indians of Saskatchewan. By the fortunate circumstances she describes in Chapter 10, she discovered that the Ghost Dance religion taught by the Paiute prophet Jack Wilson had been accepted by one small community of Dakota outside Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. This New Tidings religion became the topic of Kehoe's doctoral dissertation, which was completed in 1964.

Kehoe published a summary of her research in the scholarly journal *Plains Anthropologist*, anticipating it would cause a stir among anthropologists, many of whom accepted the sociologist Bernard Barber's 1941 claim that the Ghost Dance religion had died in the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. Few seemed to see the new research as a challenge to existing theory, and Kehoe became interested in critically examining social science to understand why some theories become popular.

Since 1968 (after teaching for three years at the University of Nebraska), Kehoe has been a professor of anthropology at Marquette University, teaching three undergraduate courses every semester. She has continued both ethnographic and archaeological research on Northwestern Plains Indians and also publishes critiques of anthropological theory. Her 1981 textbook, *North American Indians: A Comprehensive Account*, is widely used. One focus of Kehoe's work has been to view American Indians not as examples or models of supposed evolutionary stages or types, but as people engaged in the universal struggle for life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

THIS CASE STUDY

This case study is a departure from the format established for the series. It is not a descriptive analysis of an entire way of life but rather a focused analysis of some aspect of it. In this case the focus is the Ghost Dance and other related messianic movements that were a most significant aspect of American Indian life during the closing phases of the nineteenth century and the beginning decades of the twentieth.

The Ghost Dance and its companion movements still reverberate today in Native American communities. In our own fieldwork with the Menominee, and through their network, with Chippewa, Winnebago, and Potowatami, we encountered the Dream Dance and the Peyote Church. Both of these religions are today's expressions of movements similar in many respects to the Ghost Dance and in some ways affected directly by it. Though in their present form these religions are institutionalized and stable, they include in their ideologies much that reflects the adaptations made by Native American populations in order to survive in the face of the forces of destruction that swept through the Plains in the final spasms of occupation and exploitation by whites.

Alice Kehoe has devoted her professional life to the study of Native American peoples and their cultures. Not long ago most American anthro-

pologists did fieldwork with American Indians. In fact, American anthropology is in many respects a child of Native America. True, at times the stepchild has been rejected, in fact disowned by its parents, but the relationship cannot be denied. Many characteristics of our field are traceable to this relationship.

Today most young anthropologists do their fieldwork abroad, or, paradoxically, in the United States, but not with Indians. This is not because the work is finished. Native Americans are as active as ever as they continue the never-ending battle to preserve their identity and at the same time live and work in a complex, dynamic, modern society that is in many respects antithetical to Native American world views and that still labors with the burden of racism. But the "anthros" have mostly gone away, at least as students of American Indian life. They have come back, in some cases, as helpers.

Alice Kehoe, like us, came into anthropology when there was still a deep commitment to understanding the multifaceted native American cultures that once dominated the landscape of North America, and their adaptations to the disastrous impact of our culture, politics, and economy upon them. We have always hoped that this understanding could help make Indian–white relations better and even influence governmental policy.

This case study is a contribution in that direction. It is divided into two parts. The first is a fascinating account of the Ghost Dance and related events and personages. The second is a survey of attempts by social scientists, including anthropologists, to develop appropriate theory for the analysis of such processes. Some readers may find one part more interesting or useful than the other, but together they represent a balanced and serious attempt to understand the Ghost Dance as a reaction to conquest, defeat, and deprivation. This balance should be particularly important to student readers.

GEORGE AND LOUISE SPINDLER
Series Editors
Calistoga, California

In Deep Appreciation:
Robert Goodvoice
Florence and Joe Douquette
Sam Buffalo

Preface

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

On the first day of January 1889, a man in Nevada received a commission from God. People were pushing each other around, competing for resources they should be sharing. God appointed the man in Nevada to tell all the people to put away the things of war, to stop their quarrels, to work, to be good, to love one another, to dance in great circles together. People in Nevada, and for many thousands of miles beyond, eagerly listened to this gospel message. Pilgrims came by the hundreds to sit at the prophet's feet. Some came as skeptics: They usually left impressed by the prophet's power. By the summer of 1890, many described the prophet as a Christ; there were others who suspected the preaching of the gospel was a cover for plotting rebellion against the United States government. When, in December 1890, first the famous chief Sitting Bull and then a couple hundred other Sioux Indians, including women and children, were killed by United States officers, citizens in the eastern United States demanded to know whether there was in fact a plotted rebellion, or were the Indians victims of incompetent, trigger-happy agents and soldiers.

Out of the investigations of an experienced anthropologist, James Mooney, came the answer, not as a simple report but as a thick study in American Indian history—ethnohistory—and in comparative religions. Mooney's classic monograph is a landmark of anthropological research and a model. Above all, it forces readers to understand that American Indians are humans whose motives are as complex, and whose actions and events are as complicated, as those of any other group of persons in our world. Mooney gives no simple answers or pseudoscientific explanations. He presents instead a wonderfully rich description of many historical happenings and many religions, Christianity included. The thoughtful reader is rewarded by the kind of knowledge we find in the greatest works of literature, a deepening of our understanding of what it is to be human.

In the first part of this book, I put Mooney's study of the Nevada prophet, Jack Wilson, and the tragic killings of 1890 in two perspectives. First, I present Mooney's findings on the events in Nevada in 1889. This is followed by fuller descriptions of the culture of the prophet, who was a Paiute Indian, and of the Lakota Sioux sufferings that culminated in the massacre that outraged the civilized world. To contrast with this well-known event, I describe a small community of Sioux in Canada, once refugees from the Minnesota Indian wars, who accepted Jack Wilson's gospel and practiced it into the 1960s. Then

we go to a twentieth-century Lakota evangelist, Nick Black Elk, who has become a prophet for thousands of Americans and Europeans today seeking religious guidance. The last chapter in Part 1 chronicles the 1973 revolt of Indians against the United States government, taking place at the site of the 1890 massacre. American Indians are very much part of the contemporary United States.

The second part of this book concerns efforts to analyze historical events such as those described in the preceding chapters. We want to figure out why people behave as they have, what they are likely to do, what we can do to secure our personal goals. Can we predict human behavior? Can we influence events? Our society hopes we are in the process of discovering cause-and-effect relationships that will enable us to improve our society. Social scientists are employed to come up with observations, codify them, and manipulate them to test possible links betraying cause and effect. What many citizens do not realize is that social scientists' conclusions are used to develop and justify social policies that affect millions of us. We had better know something about social science, because it claims to know something about us, and what it claims to know becomes part of the ongoing regulation of our lives.

Anthropologists are one kind of social scientist, the kind that insists that comparing different societies—their beliefs and ways of life—can be the key to a better understanding of ourselves as well as others. Part 2 of this book brings in anthropologists' studies of other American Indian societies and the explanations of events derived from these studies. I show how anthropologists produce models of behavior from observations. The model developed by the contemporary anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace from his study of another Indian prophet, the New York Iroquois Handsome Lake, seems to fit many cases, including that of Jack Wilson, the Paiute in Nevada. Wallace focused on religious change, but his model also describes how political beliefs and organization, economic systems, and social customs change. From what seems like an esoteric topic, Indian prophets of a century or two ago, anthropologists have drawn models of human behavior that give insight into contemporary events of American life, from superpower summit meetings to the successes, and fading out, of rock music groups.

This book could have used examples more familiar to most American students than American Indian religious and political events. It could have used the Grateful Dead and its prophet Jerry Garcia, or Bob Dylan, or Bruce Springsteen. It uses, instead, Jack Wilson and Handsome Lake and Black Elk and the AIM leaders of the 1970s, not because anthropologists study only exotic peoples, but because we cannot ignore these Americans, whose ancestors watched Columbus step on the shore of a continent discovered many thousands of years earlier. By using examples from American Indian history, up to the recent events of the 1970s, this book will add to students' knowledge of present-day America. These examples are not exotic: They are of fellow Americans, and of their efforts to live decent lives in their native country.

Acknowledgments

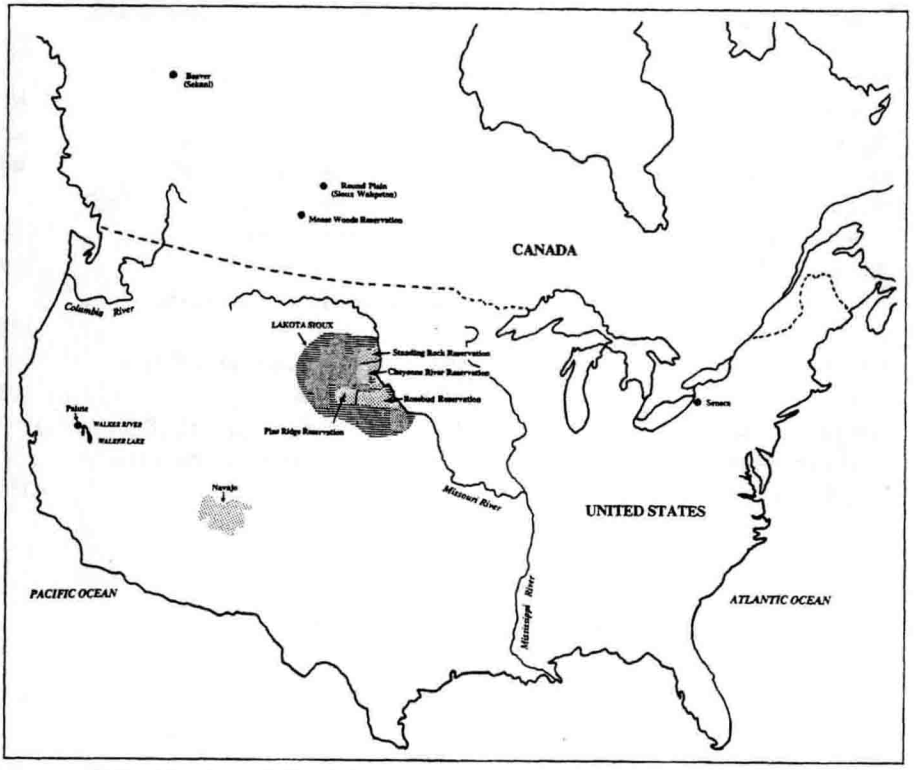
This book exists only because Joe and Florence Douquette, Robert Goodvoice, and Henry Two Bears trusted me to honor that which is *wakan*. My debt to them goes far beyond gratitude for data that earned me my graduate degree; their examples of leading clean, honest lives in the face of unending adversities are inspirational.

The research, dating 1961–1964, used in this book was materially assisted by Mabel Richards; Piakwutch, Arthur Brown, and Winona Frank of Poundmaker's and Little Pine Reserves; Hector Obey and, in 1973, Max and Wayne Goodwill of Standing Buffalo Reserve; Charlie Red Hawk of Moose Woods (White Cap) Reserve; and Allan R. Turner, then Provincial Archivist of Saskatchewan. In 1973, I returned to Round Plain and talked with Sam Buffalo. In 1984, I went back to ask permission to use the material in this book. With Mr. Two Bears deceased since 1965, Robert Goodvoice and Sam Buffalo both incapacitated by the afflictions of old age, and the Douquettes having moved to Joe's Cree reserve, I talked with Band Chief Cy Standing of Sioux Wahpeton, who agreed that it no longer seemed necessary to keep the information on New Tidings confidential.

George and Louise Spindler remained interested in this material over many years of developing the case studies series, and I am most grateful to them for this sustained consideration and for their support once the publisher agreed to this deviation from the standard format of the series. Gale Miller of Marquette University has been most helpful in developing the chapters on social science. Adrian Heidenreich generously gave me a copy of his master's thesis on the Ghost Dance, James Howard showed me a copy of his monograph on the Canadian Dakota several years before it was published, and Michael Hittman discussed his research on Mason Valley before his dissertation became available. JoAllyn Archambault of the Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, has been invaluable in critically reading the sections on the Lakota—extending a guiding hand through the morass of polemics on AIM—though I alone take responsibility for my statements. The comments of manuscript reviewers John Moore and Alan Marshall were helpful in focusing the structure of the book.

I also thank my professors at Harvard, J. O. Brew who pushed me into ethnography, and Evon Z. Vogt who was the best dissertation chair any student could want. It is true that I resented, at the time, Jo's extreme caution in developing my dissertation topic, but I now am truly grateful to him for opening a new road for my life. It helps, too, that once I had that degree in hand, in 1964, I did excavate the site of François' House.

Finally, as always, I acknowledge my husband's partnership, and our sons' good-humored forbearance in all our projects.



Map: Locations of North American Indian peoples described in this book.

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PART ONE | Ethnohistory

Figure 1. Jack Wilson (Wovoka). Photographed in Mason Valley, Nevada, by anthropologist James Mooney, 1891.

1/The Ghost Dance Religion

New Year's Day, 1892. Nevada.

A wagon jounces over a maze of cattle trails crisscrossing a snowy valley floor. In the wagon, James Mooney, from the Smithsonian Institution in faraway Washington, D.C., is looking for the Indian messiah, Wovoka, blamed for riling up the Sioux, nearly three hundred of whom now lie buried by Wounded Knee Creek in South Dakota. The men in the wagon see a man with a gun over his shoulder walking in the distance.

"I believe that's Jack now!" exclaims one of Mooney's guides. "Jack Wilson," he calls to the messiah, whose Paiute name is Wovoka. Mooney's other guide, Charley Sheep, Wovoka's uncle, shouts to his nephew in the Paiute language. The hunter comes over to the wagon.

"I saw that he was a young man," Mooney recorded, "a dark full-blood, compactly built, and taller than the Paiute generally, being nearly 6 feet in height. He was well dressed in white man's clothes, with the broad-brimmed white felt hat common in the west, secured on his head by means of a beaded ribbon under the chin. . . . He wore a good pair of boots. His hair was cut off square on a line below the base of the ears, after the manner of his tribe. His countenance was open and expressive of firmness and decision" (Mooney [1896] 1973:768–769).

That evening, James Mooney formally interviewed Jack Wilson in his home, a circular lodge ten feet in diameter, built of bundles of tule reeds tied to a pole frame. In the middle of the lodge, a bright fire of sagebrush stalks sent sparks flying out of the wide smoke hole. Several other Paiutes were with Jack, his wife, baby, and little son when Mooney arrived with a guide and an interpreter. Mooney noticed that although all the Paiutes dressed in "white man's" clothes, they preferred to live in traditional wickiups. Only Paiute baskets furnished Jack Wilson's home; no beds, no storage trunks, no pots or pans, nothing of alien manufacture except the hunting gun and knife lay in the wickiup, though the family could have bought the invaders' goods. Jack had steady employment as a ranch laborer, and from his wages he could have constructed a cabin and lived in it, sitting on chairs and eating bread and beef from metal utensils. Instead, Jack and Mary, his wife, wanted to follow the ways of their people as well as they could in a valley overrun with Euro-American settlement. The couple hunted, fished, and gathered pine nuts and other seeds and wild plants. They practiced their Paiute religion