

# Culture and Traditions in the American Midwest

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# United Tribes Powwow

This text is from "America's Story from America's Library" by the Library of Congress.

## United Tribes Powwow

### A Local Legacy

Powwows are a way for Indian tribes to preserve their culture and hand down traditions. They are Indian ceremonies or social gatherings that include dance competitions and music. The United Tribes Powwow in Bismarck, North Dakota, has been held every year since 1969. The United Tribes are the five tribes in North Dakota: the Spirit Lake, the Sisseton – Wahpeton Sioux, the Standing Rock Sioux, the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, and the Three Affiliated Tribes of Fort Berthold. Performers wear colorful outfits of their tribe.

More than 1,500 traditional dancers perform to more than 40 drum groups at the United Tribes Powwow. Women might perform the fancy shawl dance. Dancers wear beautifully decorated shawls as they do kicks and twirls. This dance is challenging because it requires fast movements. Male dancers might perform the grass dance. A grass dancer wears an outfit with long strands of fabric hanging off it. He would also wear a roach, a kind of headdress with two feathers that rock or twirl as he dances.

There is also an Indian Art Expo and Market at the powwow where Indian artists gather to show their traditional work, such as pottery, jewelry, beadwork, and paintings.



*Photograph of a woman performing the fancy shawl dance*

# Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Medora

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## Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Medora

### A Local Legacy

When you think of cowboys, do you think of cattle drives, rodeos, horses and -- poetry? Although poetry is not usually associated with cowboys, in the 19th century, when cowboys worked on cattle drives in the West, they would sit around the campfire at night and entertain each other. They sang songs, told stories -- and recited poetry. Cowboy poetry is usually about the work they do and their connection with the land and animals. Some poems even tell a story. They can be funny, sweet, or sad.

There are still cowboy poets today. Since 1987, cowboy poets have met at the Dakota Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Medora, North Dakota. The 50 or so participants who gather together every year keep the tradition of cowboy poetry alive.

# Iowa State Fair

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## Iowa State Fair

### A Local Legacy

Iowa is a state of farms. It is one of the leading producers of food in America, and its annual state fair celebrates Iowa's important contributions to the nation's well being.

Since 1854, people from every corner of the state have flocked to Des Moines for the annual Iowa State Fair every August. The fair is the state's largest event, attracting nearly 1 million visitors a year -- not only from Iowa but also from all over the Midwest. The fair's primary purpose is to celebrate Iowa's livelihood -- farming. There are livestock shows, including exhibitions of dairy and beef cattle, sheep, hogs, horses and poultry. The fair also provides a place for farmers to meet and discuss innovations, equipment, and successes. There is also a place where visitors can hold the baby animals.

In addition to animals, there are many other activities at the fair. Some people show off their cooking skills or compete in a talent show. In the cultural center, the fair hosts the state's largest arts show, featuring photography, sculpture, and painting.

# Tabor Czech Days

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## Tabor Czech Days

### A Local Legacy

Are there any food recipes that your family has passed down from one generation to another? If you are Italian, that might be a recipe for a delicious spaghetti sauce. Irish? Maybe your grandmother had a secret recipe for soda bread. African American? Perhaps there is a special way of making greens.



Chmee2, Wikimedia Commons

*Photograph of kolaches*

If you are Czech, there is probably a great recipe for kolaches (pronounced koh-lah-chus) in your family. This is a bun-shaped pastry traditionally served at weddings. Recipes for kolaches are protected family secrets, passed down through generations, because every Czech wants to make the most delicious kolaches. A kolache can be filled with all kinds of things: apricots, cherries, prunes, sweetened cottage cheese, poppy seeds, cabbage, sausage ... or anything else that a kolaches maker thinks would taste good! What kind of kolache would you make?

Tabor, South Dakota, celebrates its heritage every year with a festival called Czech Days. Around 1869, settlers came from Czechoslovakia to form this small South Dakota community. During Czech Days, Tabor is filled with the sound of polka music and the wonderful smell of freshly baked kolaches.

# Cleveland Irish Culture Festival

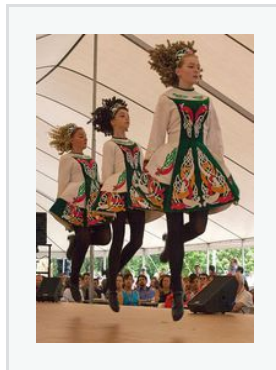
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## Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival

### A Local Legacy

Have you ever heard of Irish step-dancing? If you have, it's probably thanks to the high-spirited Irish dance show "Riverdance." This form of Irish dance was relatively unknown outside of Ireland until the 1990s, when this show made it popular around the world.

Each summer, the traditions of Ireland are celebrated in Cleveland at the annual Cleveland Irish Cultural Festival. This celebration of the region's Irish heritage features the best in Irish entertainment from Ireland, Canada, and the United States on nine stages. The girls in this photo are doing a traditional Irish folk dance in authentic costume. Other highlights include Irish plays, pipe bands, and an Irish feis.



*Photograph of Irish dancers*

A feis is an Irish dance competition. There are different types of Irish dance. In addition to step dancing, there is ceili dancing. Both dances have fast footwork and kicks, all done while the upper body is kept rigidly straight. Step dancing emphasizes a close form and posture with legs kept together, no high kicks, little or no turning and no traveling. Ceili dancing emphasizes dancing on the toes, extension of leg and foot, long reach and the quick movements seen in the step dances.

# A Celebration of Nebraska Mexican Heritage

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## A Celebration of Nebraska Mexican Heritage

### A Local Legacy

What traditions does your family have that you'd want to pass along to others? It could be a recipe for a dish you really like to eat, or an activity that you do every year with your relatives.

Between 1900 and 1930, thousands of Mexicans arrived in Midwestern states such as Nebraska. Many came to find jobs in the United States and seek a better life. During the 1990s, the Nebraska State Historical Society started the Mexican American Traditions in Nebraska project to help collect and preserve the history of Mexican Americans in the state. As part of the project, Mexican American volunteers interviewed traditional artists, musicians, and older community members about their history, culture, and traditions.

One example was a woman from Scottsbluff, Nebraska, who told how her father, who was ill and unable to get out of bed, was still able to teach her traditional dances. Her father had a vertical board placed against his feet, and he "sounded out" the steps. His daughter would repeat the steps until they sounded right. Once she learned the dances, her father asked her to promise to teach others. She formed a dance group and she made dresses in the style of her father's birthplace in Mexico. Now many people are able to share in this tradition.