

There is hill below Heart River near Birds' Bill Butte called Without Hair Butte and on the east side of the Missouri right across from it was another hill by the same name. These hills were so named because there was no grass on them. Once a young Mandan was on top of the west one fasting. He had fasted for several days and each day a party of young girls came across the river in his dreams and danced just below him at the foot of the hill. They danced in a circle and he noticed just how they dressed and fixed up their hair. When they finished the dance, they would go back across the river.

He fasted on top of this hill as long as he could and went home. He did not know what their coming there dancing meant so he made a feast of cotn and dried meat and invited the old men in and told them what he had seen. He asked them for an explanation of the strange dream. He told them that the girls wore a dozen grass stems braided together around their head and that there was an eagle feather fitted into it; also that one of the girls wore a necklace of bear's claws. One of them wore a shell from the Missouri.

The old men studied a long time and then one of them said, "I know what they are for; these girls are wearing the green grass snake around their twisted of grass so when you get up the dance, let the girls wear grass braided in three strands instead of the snake. Since one of the girls wore a shell from the river you will call the society the River Society."

Another old man said, "This whole thing means you are to go out on the warpath and kill a Sioux to bring in a scalp. When you get back with the scalp, you must get up the dance and all the young girls of the society will dance and make the camp lively. Then whenever anyone else brings in a scalp, these River Women will dance,"

He went on the warpath and brought in the scalp; then he called the young girls between the ages of 16 and 21 together. He showed them how to dance and told them what the dance meant, he fixed up their clothing, paraphernalia, painted their faces, and put on the dance just as he had dreamt that it would be given.

After that, the River Women came and danced whenever a scalp was brought into camp. At Fishhook and in old times there were around 60 girls in the society but the only time they met was when a scalp had been brought in, the society began with the Mandans and the Hidatsa bought the right to hold it from them while they were in the old villages at the Knife R. giving much property in order to have the right to dance; in this way both tribes could have the dance. If the Mandas had actually sold the dance to the H. they would have lost the dance to the tribe, a society will sell outright to its own tribe but only the right to perform to another while stilling holding its own performance in the tribe.

There were three or four men to do the singing for the girls. In the beginning the man getting up the dance had seen a man doing the singing for the girls so when he got up the dance, four men offered to sing. When they got old, younger men bought the right to do the singing from them.

After these girls have belonged to this society a few years, a younger bunch would unite to buy the society. Those who get the offices have to pay extra for the right to wear the shells and necklace. At the transfer, there is a feast after which the new members dance for the tribe. They must dance once at the Sacred Cedar.