



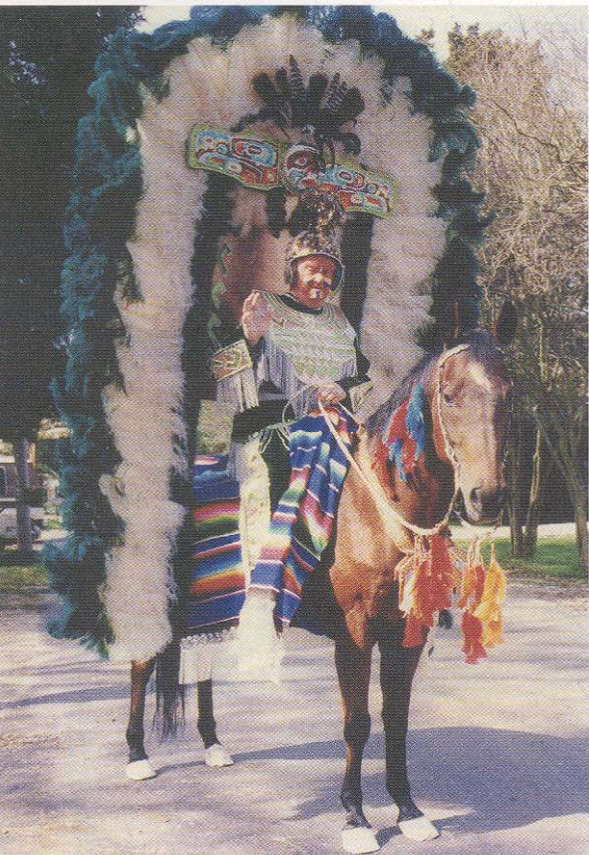
Brenda Adams Collection



Gary Michael Smith

Pride and Precision

THE LEGACY OF SHELTON ADAMS LIVES ON / BY DEAN M. SHAPIRO



Brenda Adams Collection

Chief Shelton Adams sits ready to lead his Jefferson Indians in a Carnival parade.

IN 1958, THE LATE SHELTON ADAMS, who lived in Marrero at the time, founded a group of horseback riders to accompany the Mardi Gras parades on the West Bank. But these were not just any ordinary riders: they had a very unique theme. Bare-chested with faces and bodies painted at first, then later wearing suits of elaborate designs, the Jefferson Indians made their entrance into the pantheon of hallowed Carnival traditions.

Adams passed away on January 17, 2010, at the age of 77, but his wife of 32 years, Brenda Adams, keeps his legacy alive with fond memories and a collection of colorful artifacts and photographs from Adams's half-century as chief of the Jefferson Indians. The attic of the house the couple shared in St. Helena Parish, west of Kentwood, contains a colorful, eye-popping array of feathered, beaded, and sequined costumes Adams wore in hundreds of Carnival parades, along with elaborate headdresses and hats (with buffalo horns, eagle wings, and totem symbols) and other paraphernalia depicting Native American culture and traditions.

The walls of the Adams home are lined with photographs, both color and black and white, of Adams in full regalia on horseback or in other poses such as sitting in front of a teepee with other tribe members. Some of the photos show Adams with celebrities like Bob Hope, bandleader/comedian Phil Harris, and renowned trumpeter and big band leader Harry James. Dozens of plaques and trophies complement the photos.

"My husband absolutely lived for Mardi Gras," Brenda Adams says. "That club meant everything to him. Shelton led the Jefferson Indians Horse Mounted Unit Club for 52 years and this club has never wavered. A lot of horse clubs start up and after a few years they are gone, but not Shelton's. He was determined to make his club last."

A stickler for discipline and order within the club, Adams had no tolerance for members who drank, used profanity, or treated their horses cruelly. He never hesitated to pull someone out of a parade if he observed him being intoxicated. He also volunteered with the West Bank Animal Shelter in Marrero, showing people how to take proper care of their horses. According to his wife, "He gave riding lessons to anyone who wanted to learn."

Adams drew up the Jefferson Parish ordinances that pertain to individuals and stables that own or board horses, and he helped parish humane officers enforce those ordinances