

# DENVER ART MUSEUM

100 W. 14th Ave. Parkway, Denver, Colorado 80204

## DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

NORMAN FEDER, *Curator*

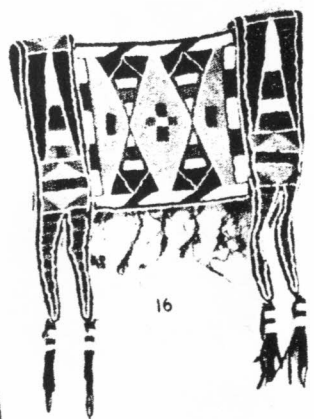
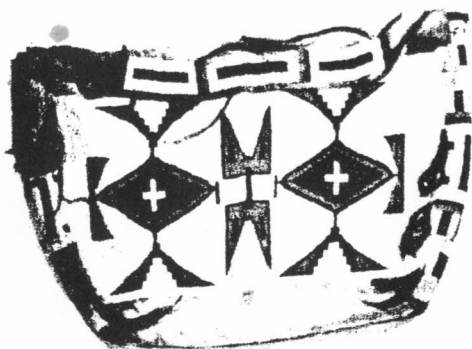


### MAIN TYPES OF SEWN BEADWORK

LEAFLET 118-119

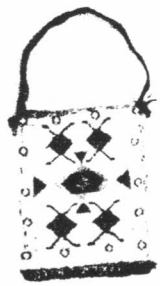
DOUGLAS, F.H.

MAY, 1953

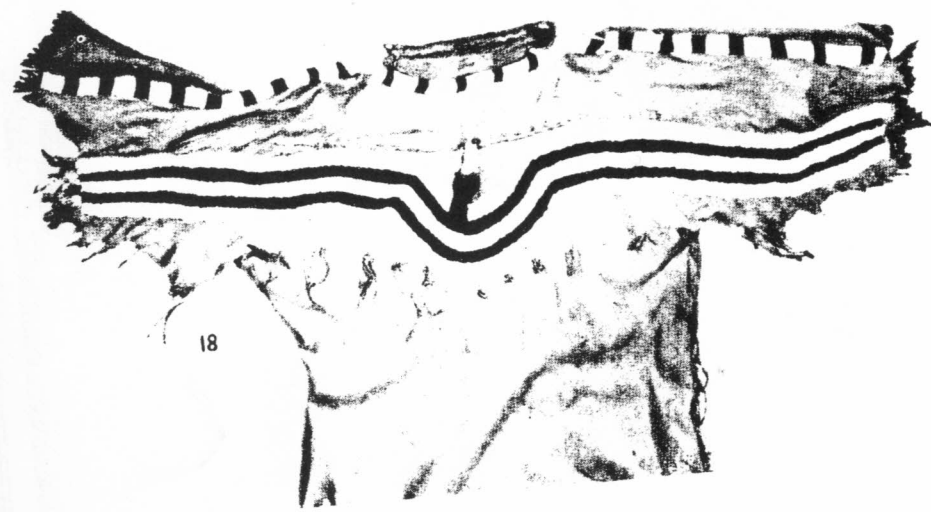


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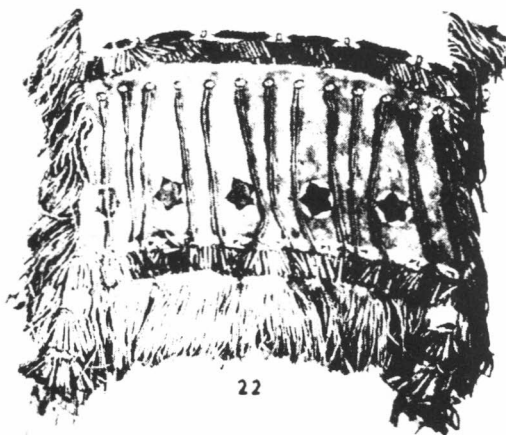
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**1. INTRODUCTORY.** This leaflet describes the main types of sewn beadwork done by the Indians of the United States. Leaflet 117 gives more information about the historical background of the art. See also leaflets 73-74 and 120 for additional facts.

**2. BACKGROUND SUMMARY.** Beadwork began about 1675 in the East and 1800 in the West. It is limited to the northern half of the United States and much of Canada, with a few slight exceptions in the Southeast, Southern Plains and Southwest. The major area is that of aboriginal porcupine quill-work, and beadwork was greatly influenced in technic and design by the older art. All beads used in beadwork are of commercial glass imported from Europe except for some of Japanese make after World War I.

In the main area the designs were angular geometric except for 2 areas of curving design in the Northeast. Two types of patterns were introduced from Europe, the double-curve and floral, and these spread widely from coast to coast through influence of the fur trade, trans-continental highways and railroads, and government removal of tribes. Oriental rug designs affected Sioux beadwork in the 1860's and have been used ever since.

Background for the Southern type is given under the pertinent sections to follow.

**3. BEAD AND STITCH TYPES.** "Pony" type: coarse beads about 3/32 inch in diameter and usually white or blue. "Cut" type, tiny beads with facets (sometimes not) in many colors. "Seed" type, the ordinary bead used today. In size between the other two and in all colors. (See Leaflet 73-74).

There were two stitch types; "spot" or "overlay" which produced a smooth surface; and "lazy" which produced a ridged or coarsely corrugated surface.

## NORTHEAST

**4. NEW ENGLAND.** Line patterns, almost always in white beads and without background, are the rule here. The designs are variants of the double curve in endless degrees of complexity (1). Practically all surviving work is on cloth, black, red or dark blue. Some work (2) was done in the later 1800's which shows crowded all-over floral designs producing a raised, encrusted effect on cloth something like that of gold thread embroidery on court coats and the like. The main producers are Penobscot and Passamaquoddy.

**5. IROQUOIS.** White beaded lines in delicately curving lacy patterns characterize this work (3). It appears on fine black, dark blue or scarlet cloth. There are no backgrounds. The design elements are small and less complex than those of New England. A later type of the mid to late 1800's is completely different, with coarse, raised floral designs in large "pony" beads (4). The effect is bad mid-Victorian and the work was done for the Niagara Falls tourist trade. A variant of this (5) uses small beads sewn flat. Usually each leaf or fruit has two shades of one color.

**6. GREAT LAKES: OLD STYLE.** White bead patterns in straight or angling lines arranged to make long narrow bands—often several parallel—of zig-zags, diamonds, lozenges, chain effects and the like without background (6). The very scant use of curves is notable. Rarely colors other than white were used.

This style began early, perhaps by 1700, and lasted in force until the flower designs became important in the mid-1800's. The old designs are still sometimes used for borders. For tribes see the following section. A variant (7) produced solid all over work using the same sorts of simple line designs.

**7. GREAT LAKES: FLORAL.** Large, complex and many-colored plant and flower designs on a white background mark this style (8). Other background colors are rarely used. The technic is the "spot" stitch which produces a smooth mosaic-like effect. The design layout is very curving and often somewhat asymmetrical. The degree of realism varies from extreme to slight. Combinations such as oranges or grapes on plants with maple or ivy leaves occur. This style began somewhere in the mid-1800's, or somewhat earlier, was at its height in the 1880's and 1890's, and still is done to a slight extent. Ojibwa, Eastern Sioux, Menomini, Sauk, Fox, Potawatomi and Winnebago all produced variants of this style, but the Ojibwa are the main producers.

A simpler variant is found in older Ojibwa and Eastern Sioux work (9). This has the flower designs on black velvet but without background. This work is finer in detail and less "streamlined" than the other.

## SOUTHEAST

**8. SCROLL STYLE.** 45 to 50 belts (10) and pouches survive which show a kind of beadwork done in the Southeast in a period about 1800-1860, perhaps longer at each end. These designs, done with white "pony" beads, are adaptations of the scroll designs engraved on the ancient pottery of the Southeast. This is apparently the only type of beadwork design not derived from quill-work or European influences.

**9. FLORAL STYLE (11).** On a few dozen small bags with shoulder straps surviving from the early 1800's a rather simple non-distinctive floral style is found. There is no background and details are very simplified. The style was entirely introduced from Europe in the late 1700's. The shape of the small square bags with very large V-shaped flaps indicates the type better than the beading. Another type has no flap, but the front lip of the opening about an inch lower than the back one. Most of the great southeastern tribes seem to have made these bags: Creek, Cherokee, Seminole and others.

**10. DELAWARE-SHAWNEE FLORAL.** Though not really southeastern this work is related and may be placed here. It may be recognized by a smooth colored background, usually divided into two darkish colors (often red and blue) on which appear very simplified leaf and flower forms, also frequently divided into 2 colors contrasting with the background (red on blue, etc.). Sometimes the background is omitted (12). This work is usually done with cut beads. (See section 3.)

## PLAINS

**11. SOUTHEASTERN FLORAL (13).** Large staring plant and flower designs without background are standard for such Oklahoma tribes as Ponca, Omaha, Osage, Oto and Iowa. Like the northern "spot" stitch used, these designs came down from the Great Lakes as a result of government removals. The

style is basically simplified Great Lakes floral (section 9) without the backgrounds.

**12. SOUTHERN (14).** Typical of this region is the scantiness of beadwork. It is limited to narrow edging bands, small isolated rosettes and other simple units. The exceptions are Kiowa cradles and a few small bags completely covered with elaborate beading. These exceptions are a late development possibly due to contact with such central Plains tribes as Cheyenne and Arapaho who were moved into Oklahoma in the late 1800's.

**13. CENTRAL (15).** Large areas of beadwork in the ridged "lazy" stitch indicates this style. On backgrounds, usually but not always white, appear, in older work, simple squares, tall triangles, bands and the like. On later work the designs are rather "spidery," spread-out combinations of lines and simple geometric forms in many colors. The Sioux are the main producers but much Cheyenne, Arapaho and the Ute work is basically similar. (See paragraph 8, Leaflet 117, for history.)

**14. NORTHERN: CROW STYLE. (16).** Simple geometric forms, usually on solid backgrounds, done with the smooth "spot" stitch in rather pale colors (rose, blue, mauve, grey-green). White is hardly used except for outlining. Red wool cloth is frequently incorporated into the beadwork. The Crow and perhaps some neighbors (Shoshone, Bannock) once used this style, now largely abandoned in favor of floral designs.

**15. NORTHERN: CHECKER BOARD STYLE. (17).** Designs made up in considerable part of small repeated squares or oblongs mark this style. It is done with the "spot" stitch and used to cover large areas. The background is usually, but not always, white. This work is done by Blackfoot, Assiniboin, Sarcee and Plains Cree. This use of checker board designs should not be confused with that of the Mescalero Apache (see section 19).

**16. NORTHERN: WAVY STRIPED STYLE. (18).** On women's dresses of the older style once used by Blackfoot, Nez Perce, Flathead and various tribes of eastern Washington (Yakima, Umatilla, etc.) the combined bodice and sleeves are covered with long horizontal parallel stripes in two or more colors. The bands rise to a curve at the shoulder and fall to one at the breastbone. "Pony" beads lasted much longer in this region than elsewhere, up until the 1890's at least and possibly longer. Elsewhere they went out of use in the 1860's. (They were called "pony" beads because they were brought in on pack ponies).

**17. NORTHERN: FLORAL STYLE. (19).** Quite generally on the northern Plains appear several varieties of floral designs. These seem to be tribal variations but knowledge is too scant to permit a statement here. In general these designs tend to a somewhat rigid bilaterally symmetrical layout; and to a simplification and "streamlining" of the units, both details contrasting with the flowing, somewhat asymmetrical and realistic floral designs of the Great Lakes. Little white spurs or projections along plant stems are quite common. The "spot" stitch is used. One common type is Shoshone with plant forms done in coarse glittering translucent beads.

## SOUTHWEST

**18. JICARILLA APACHE. (20).** These people were close to the Plains and the Utes (Rocky Mountains) and therefore made beadwork more than any other Southwestern group. They used the "lazy" stitch. Most generally seen are legging and man's shirt strips with big simple stepped truncated triangles usually in one color on a white ground. This is the basic style once general on the Plains (except southern). Women's capes had a variant of the northern wavy striped style (section 16), an indication of the north-south trade and influence route through the Rockies.

**19. MESCALERO APACHE. (21).** Beadwork was scant in this tribe and was limited to narrow edgings and the use of small single or repeated units. A checker board unit in several colors is the most distinctive design (see section 15). The units are isolated and there is no background. These people and the Western Apache (next section) used tin jinglers more than beads to decorate clothing. The Chiricahua Apache worked in about the same style (22).

**20. WESTERN APACHE. (23).** Beadwork of these bands was even scantier than that of the Mescalero. The checker board is lacking and only simple edgings or small units were used on clothing. Painting was preferred as a means of decorating skin clothing.

Black beads were much used by all Apache. Elsewhere this color is an indication of origin among Midwest or Plains tribes of the Algonkian language family.

## ELSEWHERE

**21.** No other Southwestern people or no California tribes made sewn beadwork (excluding Indian school work and the inevitable chance exception), but see Leaflet 120 for Colorado River bead netting; north California woven beadwork; and other types of netting, weaving and use of beads in braided wool fabrics.

Text by F. H. Douglas based on examination of the great collections. The following references are useful:

1. Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians—W. C. Orchard. Contributions, Vol. 11, Museum of the American Indian, New York, 1929.
2. Ethnology of the Gros Ventre—A. L. Kroeber. Anthropological Papers, 1:4, American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1908.
3. Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux—Carrie A. Lyford. Indian Handicraft Pamphlet 1, U. S. Indian Service, 1940.
4. Articles on Beadwork—B. W. Thayer. Minnesota Archaeologist, 8:2, Minneapolis, April, 1942.
5. Iroquois Crafts—Carrie A. Lyford. Indian Handicrafts Pamphlet 6, U. S. Indian Service, 1945.
6. Ojibwa Crafts—Carrie A. Lyford. Indian Handicrafts Pamphlet 5, U. S. Indian Service, 1943.
7. Decorative Designs of the Ojibwa of Northern Minnesota—Sister Bernard Coleman. Anthropological Series, 12, Catholic University of America, Washington, 1947.
8. The Double-Curve Motive in Northeastern Algonkian Art—F. G. Speck. Memoir 42, Canada Geological Survey, 1914.
9. Indians of the Southeastern United States—John R. Swanton. Bulletin 137, Bureau of American Ethnology, Washington, 1946.

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