

BEADS FROM OLD FORT LARIMER

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BEADS FROM OLD FORT LARAMIE

Among the most interesting artifacts found at Fort Laramie were hundreds of beads of many sizes, colors and varieties. These had been deposited in the basement of the adobe portion of the Sutler's Store, which was erected in 1851. Many were lost during the progress of the work, due to their smallness in size, but a sufficient number were recovered which, I feel, give us a representative type collection.

Mr. Arthur Woodward, Director of History and Anthropology at the Los Angeles County Museum in Los Angeles, California, has been of great assistance and I am very grateful for the time he spent identifying these bead types. There is very little written data available concerning beads reaching this part of the country and I am at a loss to do a great deal more, at the present time, than to list the types found at Fort Laramie. In doing so I wish to stress the fact that the dates given are not absolute and must be taken as more or less approximate until more definite information can be had. The following is a list of the types found:

<u>Type</u>	<u>Period</u>
Glass tube, metallic paint inside	After 1835 thru 1900
Small, round crystal-clear, and short bugle coated with metallic lustre inside	1835 - 1900
Small cornaline d'Alleppe seed bead, translucent red exterior	1850 - 1900

Large blue beads	1840 - 1890 (General Period for this type.)
Faceted blue and green beads	1850 - 1880
Light blue opaque faceted beads	" "
Translucent amber and blue faceted beads	1850 - 1870
Round blue beads	" "
Translucent green faceted beads	" "
Black translucent seed beads, medium size	1850 - 1860
Blue translucent seed beads, medium size	" "
White seed beads, medium size	" "
Opaque white bugle beads	1830 - 1860
Mixture, small seed and fine French seed beads, pink	1840 - 1860
French seed beads, cornaline d'Alleppe type	" "
Small translucent red barrel-shaped beads	1800 - 1860
Black barrel-shaped beads	" "
Yellow opaque beads	1860's
Light blue, opaque fine seed beads	1840 - 1855
French seed beads, light green	" "
" " " opaque yellow	" "
" " " white	" "
" " " blue	" "
" " " ruby red	" "
" " " green translucent	" "
" " " opaque black	" "

French seed beads, dark blue	1840 - 1855
" " " pink, white and blue strung on sinow cord	" "
Light green seed beads	" "
Opaque yellow seed beads	" "
Translucent amber and yellow seed beads	" "
Fragment of dentalia shell from Coast of Northern Oregon or British Columbia	Probably after 1840
Small ovate barrel shaped beads, opaque white	Early 19th. also late 18th. centuries.
White barrel shaped beads	Late 18th. century, also 1820 - 1830
Small round brass beads	Came in quite early.

It would be most difficult to attempt to explain the significance of each type bead found in such a place as an abandoned cellar. If they had been found in smaller quantities it might be fitting to offer the explanation that they had been lost through the wide cracks between the flooring, but this probably was not generally the case. Legend has it that at one time a bead case in the post trader's store was overturned and beads of all types, sizes and varieties went rolling across the plank floor. This might very well account for the bulk of the beads found and also indicate which beads were the more popular, the less popular types being in the case when it was overturned. This is only a suggestion however. Some of the types of which only three or four were found could have been dropped from the garment of some Indian, trapper or perhaps a lady customer

in the store building.

Mr. Woodward pointed out that the bulk of glass beads which came to this country in the 16th., 17th., 18th. and early 19th. centuries were from the glass-making establishments in Venice, Italy and that these bead factories, in common with all the manufactories of Europe, were at that time home industries. The earliest beads copied the old beads found in Egypt and Mesopotamia, etc. They were hand-made. Beads made in Venice took on different trade names and in time the names were to become associated with certain types of beads regardless of size. Beads were shipped out from those countries in certain masses. This term is used today in the bead trade. The Czecho-Slovakians in the 19th. century also entered in the bead trade and exported great quantities to all parts of the world.

The French seed bead was found in great quantities at Fort Laramie and Mr. Woodward's conception is that the French imported and used these fine seed beads in greater quantities than almost any other nation. Beads of this type were imported into England during the 17th. century for probable use in the manufacture of knickknacks, purses, pictures, etc. The use of the beads died out apparently and was revived during the early part of the 19th. century ranging from about 1810 to 1840. Mr. Woodward places the probable dates of 1840 - 1855 on the French seed beads at

Fort Laramie and is not inclined to believe that they were ever too popular with the Indian bead workers in general because of their smallness in size. More of the small French seed beads were found at Fort Laramie than any other type and the reason of this may be an overstock due to their unpopularity. It is entirely possible that they were discarded. The medium sized beads of 1850 - 1860 were apparently more popular, however, the dates are not absolute.

French seed beads are exceptionally small. Some are not much larger than the head of an ordinary straight pin. Some are unusually round while others show a slight flattening. Some are highly lustrous and others dull. They were made in many colors including pinks, white, buff, blues, black, greens, ruby red, and yellow. The small cornaline d'Alleppe type with a red exterior was found in great numbers. The medium sized seed bead and the fine seed bead were also made in a variety of colors. The larger cornaline d'Alleppe type with translucent red exterior of 1850 - 1860 may have been very popular and likewise the black translucent, blue translucent and white. The last three types date from approximately 1850 - 1860, generally a few years later than the smaller seed bead. This type approximates an eighth-inch diameter and is generally flattened and uneven. Blue and pink French seed beads of an exceptionally small type were found on a sinew cord. When the string was first removed from the dirt the cord had a certain quality of elasticity like that of a rubber band. Microscopic examination revealed a

flattening of some of the beads. They probably either were worn flat by constant rubbing or set down while still in a semi-molten state. The former explanation seems to be the most plausible. Three colors of beads were found on the string: pink, light blue, and dark blue. The dark blues and a few pinks were the only ones which appeared to be flat. This suggests that the dark blues and pinks had been restrung along with the light blues and pinks of normal shape. There is some reason for this flattening but I am unable to explain it definitely.

Glass tubing with metallic paint inside, which probably appeared during the latter part of the 19th. century was found in very small quantities. Inasmuch as these appeared quite late they evidently were post-military and probably were lost from some garment, purse, or other decorated article. All eight pieces were hexagonal and measured slightly more than one-eighth inch in diameter.

One small fragment of shell bead, *Dentalium Indianorum*, common along the Coast of British Columbia or Northern Oregon, in some way reached the cellar of the Cutler's Store. According to my informant the shells were originally traded by the Indians of the Pacific Coast, near the mouth of the Columbia River to tribes of the interior and thence to other tribes of the Plains. It seems quite probable that this particular piece of shell could have been traded and dropped by some Indian hanging around the

establishment or it may have been dropped by a trader or trapper who had by chance become its possessor. Such shells probably were never handled by the post trader. However, it is said that the traders imported these shells and that at one time a bead manufacturer in New York made up a quantity of spurious dentalia out of pink and white plastic which were fair duplicates of the natural shells but were not accepted by the Indians. This one tiny fragment found at Fort Laramie measured one-eighth inch in diameter and one-quarter inch in length.

Two small round brass beads were screened out and Mr. Woodward stated that these came in quite early so I presume that items of this sort were also dropped on the floor and eventually rolled down through the cracks. It may be that some of the workmen who dug the old basement might have dropped such items. Both beads were practically true spheres and were hollow inside. Both approximated a quarter-inch diameter, however, one was slightly larger than the other. They could have been cast with holes for stringing, however the hole in one bead was unevenly cut. It appeared to have been forced through after casting. The edges were jagged and rough and so much pressure had apparently been placed on the tiny ball that it had begun to split. My imagination leads me to wonder if these tiny objects were originally intended for beads.

...very few black barrel-shaped beads of the 1890's - 1900's

might very well have been dropped, also white barrel-shaped beads of the late 18th. century and the 1820's - 1830's, or they may have been holdovers and dropped during a later period. Both types could have been carried in stock by the post trader.

The blacks take on hues of purple when held to light. They are generally about one-eighth inch in diameter and approximately three-eighths of an inch in length.

The whites are not true whites but tend toward a dirty white, and an occasional blend of sea-shell pink and buff. Although they are of the same general shape and character as are the blacks one is occasionally found which is round and bulky. An occasional crackle type is found among the whites. Just what caused this crackling is unknown. It may have been the result of expansion while the bead was cooling. It may have been a result of sloppiness in technique of the individual artisan or the rolling of the bead after the glass had hardened too much. It appears that both whites and blacks were rolled on little spindles and some of the beads lend the appearance of kneaded bread-dough in the manner in which it lays over. It is thought that certain prehistoric Indian tribes of the Southeastern United States produced this crackling intentionally in the manufacture of pottery. When firing the expansion of the paste was not the same as the expansion of the slip on the outside of the vessel and a crackling was produced.

One small opaque, white ovate barrel-shaped bead was found, seemingly, of a much finer and more delicate character than the blacks and whites just discussed. It was less than a quarter-inch in length and one-eighth inch in diameter. The same technique seemed to have been used in its manufacture. Mr Woodward places a general dating of late 18th. and early 19th. centuries on this type. A few small, translucent red barrel-shaped beads with a general dating of 1800 - 1860 were found. These were of the same general type and size as the small opaque white ovate barrel-shaped beads.

A few faceted beads were found and they seem to fall in the later period from 1850 - 1870 and 1850 - 1880. Apparently this type was a later development or at least later appearing at Fort Laramie. They appear in shades of opaque blue, translucent amber and green. They approximate a quarter-inch diameter. Round blue beads of medium size fall into this same general period. The period for large round beads seems to be from about 1840 - 1890 which is the general period for the type.

The beads found in the Cutler's Store represent a period from the late 18th. century until the early 1900's and since information is so scattered it is difficult to say exactly which types were imported by the post trader, and those which were dropped from garments. It is logical to assume, however, that types found in greater quantities were more likely the ones handled by

the store. Mr. Woodward points out that it might be safe to assume that the beads found at the Sutler's Store site at Fort Laramie or any other trading post sites were those which were imported from Italy.

Most of the types available at Fort Laramie have probably been encountered. Very few were found at the Officers' Quarters D site. Probably only scattered examples will be found in subsequent excavations, however, Old Fort John, the original Fur Trading Post, may produce types not yet encountered in the event examination of this nucleus of the archaeology and history of Fort Laramie is ever made possible.