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THE GRANT COLLECTION
of
NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN ART



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CONTENTS

List of Illustrations.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Chapter I - Major Jasper Grant :	
Historical Background to the Grant Collection.	
Includes a little on the life of Major Jasper Grant and his family while stationed in Canada; The white man's contact with the Indian way of life in the early 19th century; How the collection of American Indian Art began; The difficulty in identifying the exact tribe to have made any particular item.....	6
Chapter I - Footnotes.....	12
Chapter 2 - The Woodlands Indians : From Religion to Design.	
The Great Lakes area before the coming of the white man; Indian spirits - Manitos - and their importance; The three parallel worlds of the Indian mythic universe; Textile Design as a means of remaining in spiritual harmony with natural and supernatural life.....	13
Chapter 2 - Footnotes.....	18
Chapter 3 - The Indian Cabinet : an examination of the Techniques, Designs and Materials of selected items from the Grant Collection.....	19
The items studied are the following :	
Three Sashes.....	21
Two Garter Pendants.....	25
A Woven Bag.....	31
Two Pouches.....	35
A Pair of Moccasins.....	44
A Knee Fringe and Hair Ornament....	47
Wompum Beads.....	51
Burden Straps.....	55
Shirt and Leggings.....	58
Chapter 3 - Footnotes.....	60
Chapter 4 - Conclusion.....	61
Appendix.....	63
Bibliography.....	64

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<u>fig. no.</u>	<u>Illustrations Captions</u>	<u>page no.</u>
I	Map of Great Lakes Region. ¹	8
2	Farewell Address by the Ottawa, Chippewa (Ojibwa) and Potawatomi Indians to Major Jasper Grant on his leaving Fort Malden, at Amherstburg, in 1809. NLI. ²	16
3	Three Sashes using Finger Braiding Technique. left to right : 3a, 3b, 3c. MMI. ³	20
4	Detail of Sash 3b, showing sections sewn together and 'V' or Arrow Pattern. MMI.	20
5	Diagram of Braiding Technique. ⁴	22
6	Diagram of Braiding Pattern. ⁴	22
7	Detail of Sash 3c, showing Lightning Design using Interlocking Method. MMI.	24
8	Garter Pendants - each of the two is one of a pair. left to right : 8a, 8b. MMI.	26
9	Detail of Garter Pendants 8a and 8b, showing Ribbon Applique. MMI.	28
10	Woven Bag, showing one side of bag, 10a, and reverse side of bag, 10b. MMI.	30
11	Diagram of Twining Technique. ⁵	32
12	Diagram of Twining Design. ⁵	32
13	Red River Metis Pouch, showing bands of Porcupine Quillwork. MMI	34
14	Swampy Cree/Chippewa Pouch, showing woven Quill Panels and Quill Applique. MMI.	36
15	Diagrams of Quillwork, showing Two Threads, One Quill, 15a, and Two Threads, Two Quills, 15b. ⁶	37
16	Midewiwin-style Pouch, showing front of pouch, 16a, and back of pouch, 16b. MMI.	39
17	Detail of front of Midewiwin-style Pouch, 16a, showing Thunderbird and Smaller Birds Design. MMI	40

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS (Contd.)

<u>fig. no.</u>	<u>Illustrations Cap ions</u>	<u>page no.</u>
I8	Moccasins, showing Floral Quillwork and Stroud under Cuff. NMI.	43
I9	Moccasins, Black-dyed, Tanned Deerskin. One-piece Construction with Porcupine Quillwork. NMI.	43
20	Knee Fringe. NMI.	46
2I	Chippewa Indian Deputation, showing Knee Fringes. ¹	46
22	Diagram of Quillwork, showing Two Threads with Diamond Technique. ⁶	48
23	Hair Ornament. NMI.	48
24	Wampum Beads. NMI.	50
25	Wampum Belt, 25a. Detail of Wampum Belt, 25b. NMI.	52
26	Two Burden Straps, left to right : 26a, 26b. NMI.	54
27	Shirt and Leggings. NMI.	57

abbreviations/Footnotes :

- I - From Feest, Native Arts of North America. (1980) pages 6 & II9.
- 2 - NLI. = National Library of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin.
- 3 - NMI. = National Museum of Ireland, Merrion Row, Dublin.
- 4 - From Turner, Finger Weaving : Indian Braiding. (1973) pgs. 30 & 34
- 5 - From Hunt, Indians of North America. (1973) pages IO4 & IO5.
- 6 - From Koch, Dress Clothing of Plains Indians. page 36.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of a sample selection of textile items included in the Grant Collection of North American Indian Art, which is housed in the National Museum of Ireland, Merrion Row, Dublin. This Collection, which is part of the Ethnographical Collection, is very significant because it contains rare examples of well-preserved textiles which display a variety of impressive traditional designs and techniques.

The artifacts in the Collection are all made by the Woodlands Indians who lived around the Great Lakes of Canada, where Major Jasper Grant was posted for the nine year period between 1800 and 1809. The Major's grandson, one Robert Ussher, presented a treasure trove of Indian Art amassed by his grandfather, and now called the Grant Collection, to the National Museum in 1902.

In Chapter I of this work, I outline the historical background to the collecting activities of Major Jasper Grant. In Chapter 2, I discuss the vital and all-embracing influence that the religious beliefs of the Woodlands Indians had on the designs of the artifacts that they produced. In Chapter 3, I concentrate on ten categories of textile interest from the Collection, examining them in terms of the techniques, designs and materials they embody. As some of the items have similar features, I have chosen to focus on different techniques and uses of materials in each artifact. All measurements are in centimetres and height or length precedes width in spacial descriptions. In Chapter 4, I sum up and conclude my examination of this sample of items from the Grant Collection. In the Appendix, I provide a transcription of the farewell address to Grant, a photocopy of the original of which is presented as Fig. 2 (p. 16).

CHAPTER I

MAJOR JASPER GRANT :
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO
THE GRANT COLLECTION.

In the summer of 1800, Major Jasper Grant, accompanied by his wife, Isabella, and his infant son, Jasper, sailed for the port of St. John to rejoin his regiment. Isabella's mother had tried to persuade her to stay at home in Ireland, but she was determined to go with her husband to Canada. Grant, a man in his late thirties, was a seasoned field officer who had served in the British Army in Ireland, and also in the West Indies. His most recent campaign against the French possessions of Barbados and Santo Domingo had resulted in a disastrous loss of life from yellow fever and Grant was one of only eight officers in the regiment to survive. It was for this reason that Grant was pleased to be posted to Canada, as the healthier climate there made it possible for his wife and child to accompany him and for the family to enjoy good living conditions.

Grant and his family spent only two years, however, in St. John and Quebec. From 1802 to 1803 he was the commanding officer at Fort George, near the Niagara Falls, and he was posted there a second time in 1805 for a further year. In 1806 he was transferred west to the garrison of Fort Malden at Amherstburg, on the American/Canadian border. Across from Amherstburg was Detroit, the major post on the Western Frontier of British North America. Grant remained at Amherstburg until his departure from Canada in 1809.

As a younger son of Anglo-Irish, landed gentry, Jasper Grant had followed family tradition in entering the army. His eldest brother, Thomas, inherited the family estate at Kilmurry in Cork, and his other brother, Alexander, became a Church of Ireland minister. Throughout his life, Jasper kept in touch with his brothers and remained very close to them both. It is through his letters to them from Canada that we can appreciate today Jasper's experiences and impressions of early 19th. century North America as he himself described them. It was to his brother Alexander, the clergyman, that Jasper wrote of the native Indians. Not all of these letters remain with us, unfortunately, but those that have survived give us great insight into the lives and activities of the Great Lakes Indians of the period. They

FIG. I : MAP OF THE GREAT LAKES REGION



also, intrestingly, throw some light on the attitudes that motivated both Isabella and Jasper Grant's collecting activities.

Although very few of Isabella Odell Grant's letters have survived, there is reason to believe that she may have taken an even greater interest in the Indian way of life than her husband did. She had grown up in a somewhat more cosmopolitan and artistic environment than Grant, having spent much of her childhood on the European continent with her restless, cultivated mother. Isabella's mother had strong literary and artistic intrests. She was a friend of Lady Hamilton, and her letters to Isabella in Canada, for example, contain references to the artists Angelica Kauffman and Canova. The Indian Cabinet (as the Collection was then called) is not specifically mentioned in Jasper Grant's own will. This omission, combined with the fact that Isabella did mention it in her will, leaving the objects to her daughters rather than her sons, suggests the possibility that the Collection may have been a special interest of her own.¹

The late 18th. century and early 19th. century enthusiasm for collecting natural history specimens is well documented. Travellers who went to the New World and other exotic places often returned with all kinds of creatures and objects to show to the people back home and many of these collections included ethnographic items. Jasper Grant was a man of his time. He was very interested in all that went on around him, particularly in the native people who lived in his vicinity and in those who came to visit that area. He also loved to gather and post home plant and animal specimens, on one occasion, for example, sending a black squirrel to his nephew, Tommy, in Ireland. With the squirrel he also sent a box of other natural history items including...

...some beautiful birds of this country, preserved so that the plumage is perfect, and some feathers, which I will thank you to give Sandy, particularly the jay's and the mallard's. The birds are for Tommy and Sally. The skins with bills are the famous wood duck of Canada. I have some very handsome Indian shoes called macausons for Sally but I am afraid of sending them by Lee as they may be taken.²

This passage from one of Grant's letters offers insight into the range of items he was capable of collecting. As a matter of interest, the squirrel did survive the long journey to Ireland, and it is also worth noting that, while he had no qualms about sending a live animal and valued animal specimens, he held on to the moccasins for safety's sake. He clearly rated such Indian-made objects somewhat more highly than natural specimens as he was reluctant to risk their being captured, along with his courier, Lee, in a possible encounter with the French on the homeward journey.

The region surrounding Fort George had been settled in the late 18th. century by the six Indian nations of the Koquois. There were also Ojibwa bands in the area and many other peoples gathered at the Grand River for the annual distribution of gifts. There is very little documentation surviving to give us a good description of the native tribes in this location, however, despite the fact that the Grants spent a total of two years at Fort George. The Major's letters from Amherstburg, on the other hand, are very informative, and the Fort there was a centre of activity for native peoples from far and wide.

During the summer gatherings in the Amherstburg region, there was a great mixing of ethnic groups, and while Grant was there, from 1806 to 1809, the activities of the great Indian leader, Tecumseh, stimulated further movement of a great variety of tribes. Tecumseh tried to unite the Indian peoples of the central woodlands in a common cause against the intrusion of white settlement. He and his brother, the prophet Tenskwatawa, were active in the vicinity of the Fort and Grant must have met Tecumseh when the Chief and his followers attended a council with Lieutenant Governor Gore at Amherstburg in 1808. Lists which Grant copied and kept amongst his papers show the numbers of Indians visiting the Fort in the years 1803 to 1806, as well as their tribal inter-connections.³ In 1806, the year of his arrival, 4,443 Indians visited the Fort. The most numerous were the Chippewa (Ojibwa), followed in decreasing order of numbers by Shawnees, Ottawas, Potawatomis, Wyandots, Munsie Delaware, Mingoes, Nanticokes, Delawares,

Mappissaques, Cherokees, Miamis, Foxes and Mohawks. Local groups of Potawatomis, Ottawas and Ojibwas, whose Chiefs delivered the farewell address to Grant, presumably had particularly steady contacts with him. Also permanently settled nearby was a band of Wyandots, a sub-group of the Huron tribe.

Besides acquiring items from these Indians, who were conveniently in contact with Fort Malden at Amherstburg, Grant possibly collected some objects through fur traders and through other army officers who were in communication with groups of Cree, Metis and even Athabaskan peoples living north and west of the Great Lakes area. Bearing in mind the quantity and variety of his sources, as well as his relatively unsystematic method of amassing and describing the items in his treasure trove, it is not surprising that identification of the precise tribal origin of the Collection's artifacts can be very difficult. Further complications, involving the geographical and sociological changes which the Indians were subject to at the time, also serve to blur the trail between the artifact and its maker. That is to say, by the beginning of the 19th. century, the dispossession and dislocation of Indians, caused by European colonisation and trade, was such that many Eastern Woodlands people, like the Delaware, were forced to leave their homelands and seek refuge among Iroquoian and other Great Lakes Indians living further west. Intermarriage between these different tribes and increased exposure to each other's art forms must have resulted in many exchanges of artistic traditions; and designs and techniques, which at one time would have been clearly identifiable with a particular tribe, were no longer good indicators of an object's origin. Finally, there is one other factor which has contributed to the difficulty of linking artifacts to their sources and that is the practise of gift giving, which was very much part of the Indian way of life in peace times. When giving gifts, most tribes preferred to part with items which were not of their own making. So, much of the material collected from a band of Indians, and considered to be their own production, may, in fact, ironically, have consisted of gifts they received on some previous occasion from quite another tribe.

CHAPTER I : Footnotes

- I From Ruth B. Philips, Patterns of Power
(Catalogue) p. 20
- 2 From a letter written by Jasper Grant, Quebec,
to his brother, Thomas, dated 1st. July 1805.
National Library of Ireland, Ussher Papers,
MS IOI78.
- 3 Indian Documents I794-I807.
National Library of Ireland, Ussher Papers,
MS IOI78.

CHAPTER 2

THE WOODLANDS INDIANS :
FROM RELIGION TO DESIGN.

In the 18th and early 19th centuries, the Great Lakes region, which was part of the North American Woodlands, was a vast tapestry of lakes, rivers, mountains, lowlands and forests. (see Fig. I, p. 8) The forests were full of many different types of trees, such as, elm, oak and birch, and a great variety of animals made their homes in this environment. Before Europeans came to settle in this area, the Indians led a solitary existence which was very close to nature. To their way of thinking, supernatural beings lurked in the forests, in the very heart of the natural world itself. Spirits lived in the flowers, the animals, the birds, the sky and the stars. These spirits were called Manitos. An inanimate object could also have a Manito but, if this was considered to be the case, it was thought of as a being rather than a thing. Belief in the presence of these spirits made the relationship between the Indian and the land a very personal one. Daily survival depended on the individual's ability to remain in harmony with the Manitos because they controlled the animals that provided food, the healing properties of plants, and the favourable weather conditions that made hunting and farming possible.¹

The activities of the Manitos and their varying degrees of power in the Indian universe were revealed to the individual through myths. These myths explained the basic structure of things and provided knowledge as to how life's forces might be interpreted and controlled. The Indian belief was that the universe was made up of three parallel worlds. The earth was at the centre, a large island on a great lake. Below this lake lay the underworld, which was dominated by underwater panthers. These Manitos were composite beings with horned heads, the bodies of powerful cats, and long, scaled, dragon-like tails. They controlled the healing medicines that grew in the earth and they were associated with sorcerers who gained their powers from the underworld Manitos. Dangerous storms arose on the lake when these panthers swirled their long tails, overturning canoes and drowning travellers.

Above the earth and beyond the sky lay the upper world. This was dominated by equally powerful Manitos, the Thunderbirds, who took the form of large, eagle-like creatures. Thunder and lightning were created by the flashing of their eyes and the flapping of their wings, bringing the rain that made the earth fertile. These spirits could bestow many good fortunes on human beings, including success in war.


Much of this religious imagery and structure can be seen reflected in North American Indian art, in terms of the motifs used, the layout of designs, and the inclusion of natural and man-made Manito-associated items in composite artifacts. To point out some examples of this, which will be developed more fully in relation to each item as it is studied in Chapter 3, the Midewiwin-style Pouch (Fig. 16, p.39) displays a Thunderbird motif, while the Woven Bag (Fig. 10, p.30) has a layered design which parallels the three-layered Indian universe. It becomes clear that the meaning of the visual imagery depends not only on the interpretation of individual motifs, but also on the way these motifs are placed in relation to one another. This is especially true of objects which were used to open the way to communication with the spirit world. The 'medicine bundle' or decorated Woven Bag already mentioned (Fig. 10, p.30), is an excellent example of such an object, because in order to establish spiritual communication, it was necessary to create items that correctly and harmoniously responded to the universal order. The Knee Fringe (Fig. 20, p.45) illustrates the practice of incorporating natural Manito-associated objects into an artifact. It has 44 eagle feathers in its composition, which may have been intended to honour the Manito by imitation, or to deflect his anger from the wearer when engaged in an eagle hunt.



Furthermore, in order to survive in a world filled with dangerous supernatural powers, it was necessary to have a guardian spirit. Each individual achieved this quest for a personal Manito through fasting and bodily deprivation. This


Address of the Ottawa, Chippewas & Patewatomie
to Colonel Grant on his leaving Amherstburg —
20th August 1800. — Upon 16 Strings of White Wampum —
of Father.


Since you have been here we have always found
you kind & friendly to us on all occasions and we cannot
allow you to leave us without expressing our regret
at the loss of such a good commanding officer, —


We pray the Great Spirit to smooth the watery
way for you & to conduct you and your family
in safety over the Great Waters where we wish
you may find your Relations & friends in prosperity
& peace. —


Dondagany  or Belle

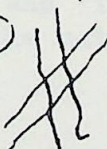
Wabimiskoukie 
Aigouminai 


Teshquiguin 


Aishauut 

Kainawattka 

Ogance 

Lawalwa 

Tshikie on
Buffaloe 

Kanitaukijik 



fasting would be carried out until such time as the individual received the blessing of a vision. The Manito in the vision then became the guardian spirit of the recipient for life. So as to ensure the continuing presence of the personal Manito, many motifs of the guardian spirit were woven into and embroidered onto the Indian's clothing and personal possessions. It seems most likely that the design on the above mentioned Midewiwin-style pouch (Fig. 16, p. 39) was inspired by a dream-vision experienced by a Woodlands Indian. While the Thunderbird depicted could be seen as a more universal image, there are other motifs worked into the material which suggest a personal and particular experience of the spiritual world.

The occasion on which the farewell address (Fig. 2, p. 16) delivered to Grant, mentioned in Chapter I (p. II) and developed in Chapter 3 (p. 50) in relation to the gifts that accompanied it, is one which illustrates some very interesting and fundamental differences between the Indian and European perception of life. While Grant ultimately relied on paper and ink to communicate and record the event, the Indians depended on the spoken word, bolstered by their highly meaningful artifacts, whose designs, motifs and materials embodied what they wished to say graphically, symbolically and texturally.

As Dr. Ruth Phillips puts it....

....the dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural that underlies the European world view is alien to the traditional Indian way of thinking. The supernatural was immanent in all features of the natural world, and all events that occurred in the cosmos were due to the will of some animate being.....And in the collection (Grant) made were to be found works of art diagramming these cosmic structures and fixing the locations of spirit powers in the universe.²

CHAPTER 2 : Footnotes

- I From Cottie Burland, in Mythology of the Americas
1970.
- 2 From Ruth B. Phillips in Patterns of Power
1984. p. 24

CHAPTER 3

THE INDIAN CABINET :
an examination of
THE TECHNIQUES, DESIGNS AND MATERIALS
of selected items from
THE GRANT COLLECTION.

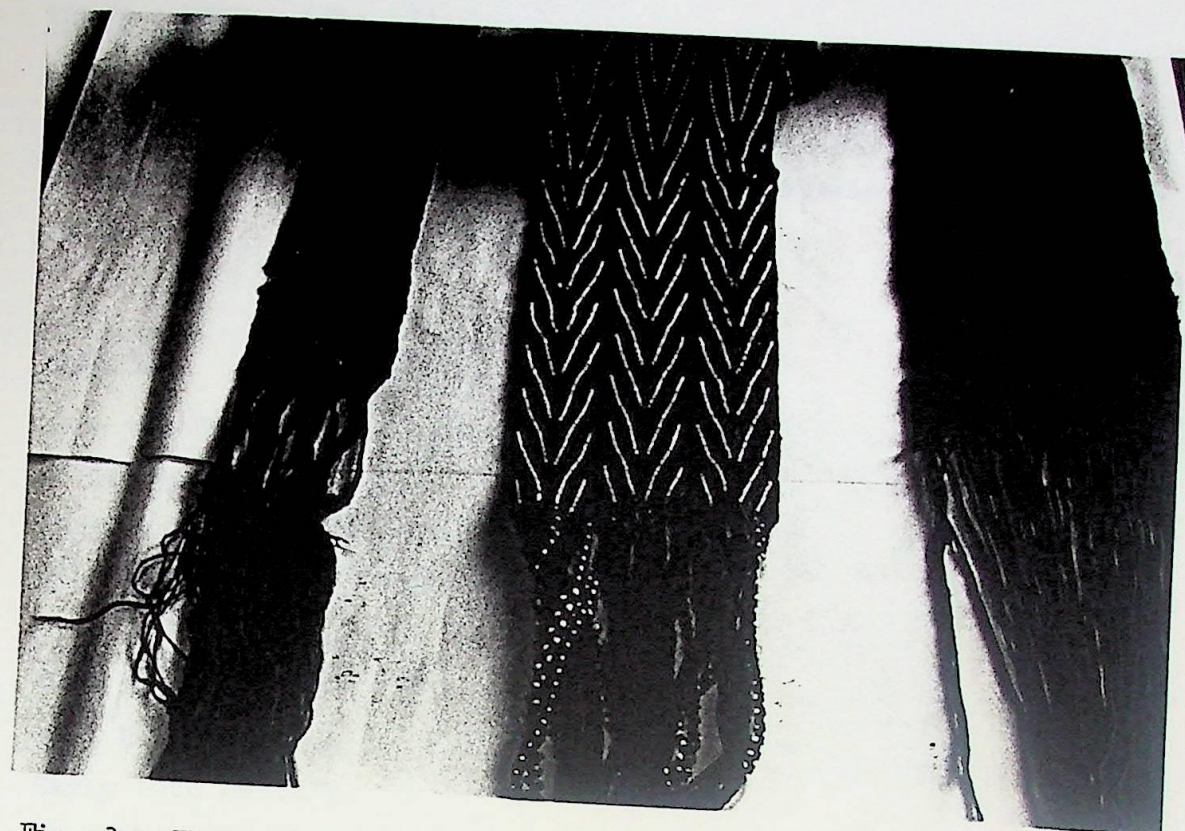


Fig. 3 : THREE SASHES, 3a, 3b, and 3c,
using Finger Braiding Techniques.



Fig. 4 : DETAIL of Sash 3b,
showing sections sewn together and 'V' or Arrow Pattern.

THREE SASHES (Fig. 3)

I have grouped together three sashes from the Grant Collection under the one heading, in order to better examine and contrast examples of the same artifact, similar in technique but different in design.

SASH 3a NMI I902 311_I (Fig. 3)

From the Great Lakes Area.

Collected 1800-1809.

Deep rose and maroon wool yarn,

White glass beads woven into borders.

70.5 x 9₂

SASH 3b NMI I902 514 (Fig. 3)

From Lorette Huron

Early 19th century.

Dark blue, green and red wool yarn,

White glass beads braided in three sections
and sewn together.

82 x 16

SASH 3c NMI I902 310 (Fig. 3)

From the Great Lakes Area.

Collected 1800-1809.

Deep rose and blue wool yarn,

Green yarn on one edge.

95 x 17

Woodlands Indians were adept at a variety of finger weaving techniques. The techniques used in these sashes was called braiding. Relatively narrow sashes were woven in a single section, but wide sashes were often woven in several sections and then sewn together, as is the case with Sash 3b, illustrated in detail in Fig. 4.

It is likely that the wide woven sash was adapted from the European regional dress worn by settlers. The Indian sash was not only worn around the waist, but also wrapped around the

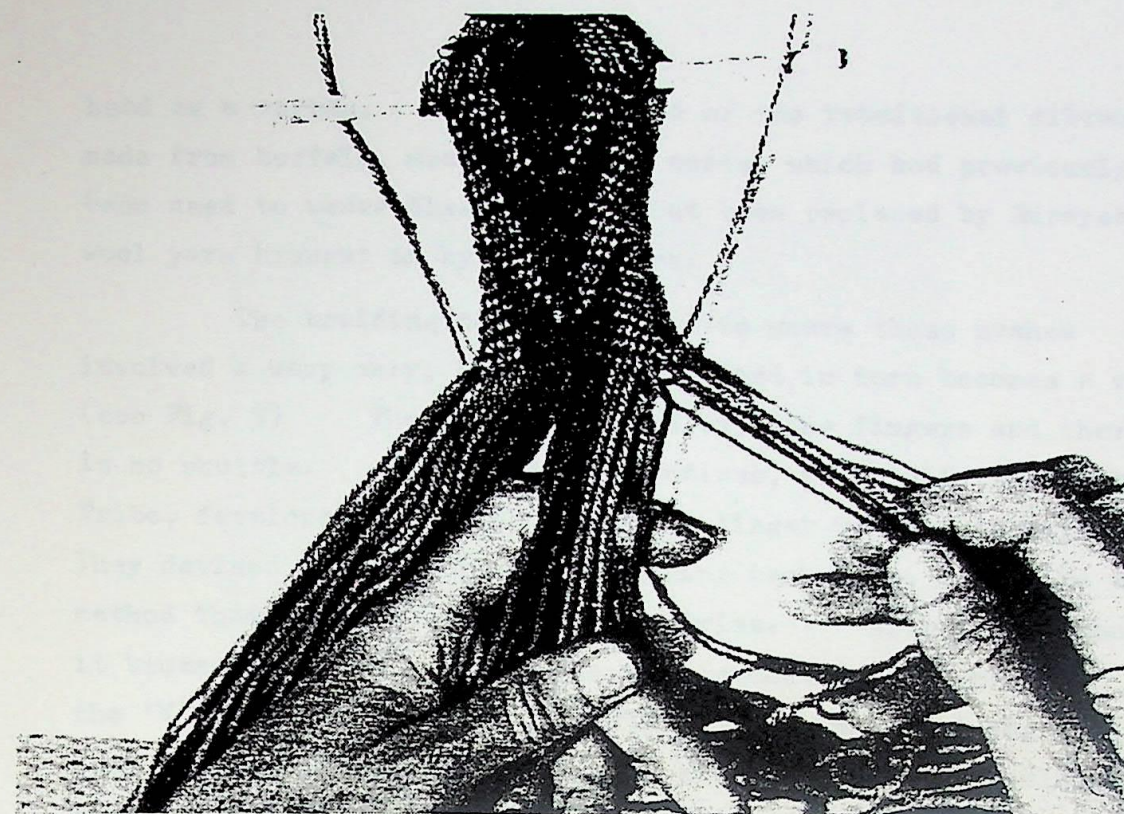


Fig. 5 : DIAGRAM of Braiding Technique.

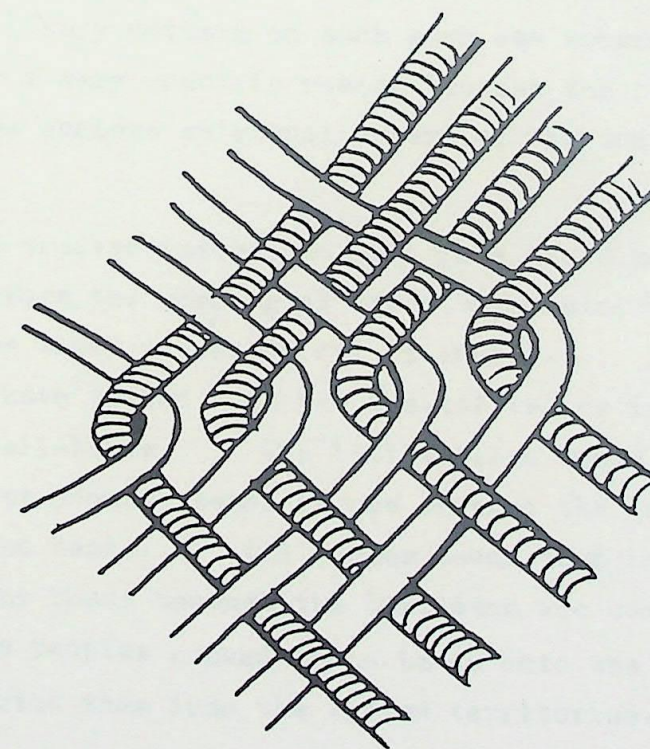


Fig. 6 : DIAGRAM of Braiding Pattern.

head as a turban. By 1800, most of the traditional fibres made from buffalo, moose or bison coats, which had previously been used to weave these sashes, had been replaced by European wool yarn brought in by the traders.

The braiding technique used to weave these sashes involved a warp only, because each strand in turn becomes a weft. (see Fig. 5) The shed is formed with the fingers and there is no shuttle. The Woodlands Indians, especially the Ojibwa Tribe, developed a number of complex finger weaving techniques. They devised a two-colour interlocking technique, much like a method that is used in making tapestries. With this technique it became possible to weave many new geometric designs, such as, the 'V' or Arrow pattern. (see Fig. 6) The lightning design used in Sash 3c (Fig. 3) is a good example of this interlocking method and is woven from left to right. Sash 3c may be seen in detail in Fig. 7.

Other geometric motifs on the sashes were woven using glass beads. They resemble the zigzag and wavy lines found in traditional native finger woven bags, and in woven and embroidered ouillwork. Every pattern on each sash was woven and worn by the Indian for a very specific reason because the patterns represented the various spiritual powers of the supernatural world.

White traders introduced the glass beads used in the sashes, but before the coming of these Europeans, the Indians would have made their own beads out of shells. The Woodlands Indians would have traded with the Coastal Tribes in order to acquire some shell-beads. The little glass beads used in Sash 3a were the most popular beads in use amongst the Indians and were called seed beads. The larger beads used in Sash 3b were called pony beads because the Europeans who came to do trade with the native peoples packed these beads onto the backs of the ponies who carried them into the Indian territories.



Fig. 7 : DETAIL of Sash 3c, showing Lightning Design
using Interlocking Method.

GARTER PENDANTS (Fig. 8)

Each of the two illustrated Garter Pendants, both 8a and 8b, are taken from a complete and identical pair contained in the Grant Collection. 8a and 8b are very similar in that they have been made with some of the same materials and they differ mainly in terms of colour and design.

GARTER PENDANT 8a NMI I902 3I6-3I7 (Fig. 8)

Red and green wool yarn,
 White glass beads,
 Red stroud,
 Pink, dark blue, light blue and white grosgrain silk ribbon,
 Metal cones,
 Red-dyed animal hair,
 White, blue, red and black porcupine quills,
 Commercial thread.

45.5 x 10.5

GARTER PENDANT 8b NMI I902 3I8-3I9 (Fig. 8)

Deep rose and green wool yarn,
 Blue stroud,
 Pink, yellow, blue, green and light blue grosgrain silk ribbon,
 White, red and black porcupine quills,
 Natural vegetable fibres.

47 x 12

Garters, which were worn for purely decorative purposes, were tied on below the knee so that the ornate panel of quillwork or ribbon applique, as the case may be, was folded over at the top and prominently displayed. These two examples of garters from the Grant Collection show the density of design and the richness of texture and material that characterised Indian taste in the early 10th. century Great Lakes region.

The fact that natural fibres were used for sewing in the example of the garter illustrated as 8b, indicates that 8b is



Fig. 8 : GARTER PENDANTS - each of the two is one of a pair.
left to right : 8a and 8b.

probably older than 8a, which employs commercial thread for the same purpose. The import of such new materials as thread, wool yarn, ribbon and stroud by the white traders certainly expanded the range of colour and texture of the Indian textiles, but it did not affect or alter the choice and style of the patterns depicted. For example, it can be seen that the ribbon appliqué designs in 8a and 8b (Fig. 9) are the same basic geometric motifs that are worked into the woven section of the garters (Fig. 8), and that are to be found in much traditional woven and embroidered ouillwork. (see Figs I3 and I7)

The stroud, onto which the ribbon was appliquéd, was once part of a large, coarse blanket. Such blankets were traded to the Indians who would either wear them, or cut them up to use in various items like clothing, bags, moccasins and these decorative garters. These woolen blankets were made in Stroudwater, Gloucestershire, in England, especially for trade with American Indians. The woven cloth, rather than the yarn, was dyed either a scarlet red or a dark navy blue. It is interesting to note that these blankets, while being dyed in the factories, were used as blotters to soak up excess dye exuding from higher quality fabrics undergoing the process. Because of its colour, stroud could, in fact, be the material used in making uniforms for British army regiments. Certainly the fact that it was used as a blotter cloth explains its coarseness and its unevenly spread dye. Furthermore, since the dyeing in those early days of industry was not always colourfast, the strouding (as it was also called) was often used as a source of dye by the Indians. They would extract the dye by washing the blanket and use it to colour their porcupine quills.

The tin shaped cones used in these garters are called tinklers and they were used a great deal for decorative purposes as the Indians loved tin or any form of metal. They did not believe gold or silver to be any more valuable than other metals considered of lesser worth by Europeans.

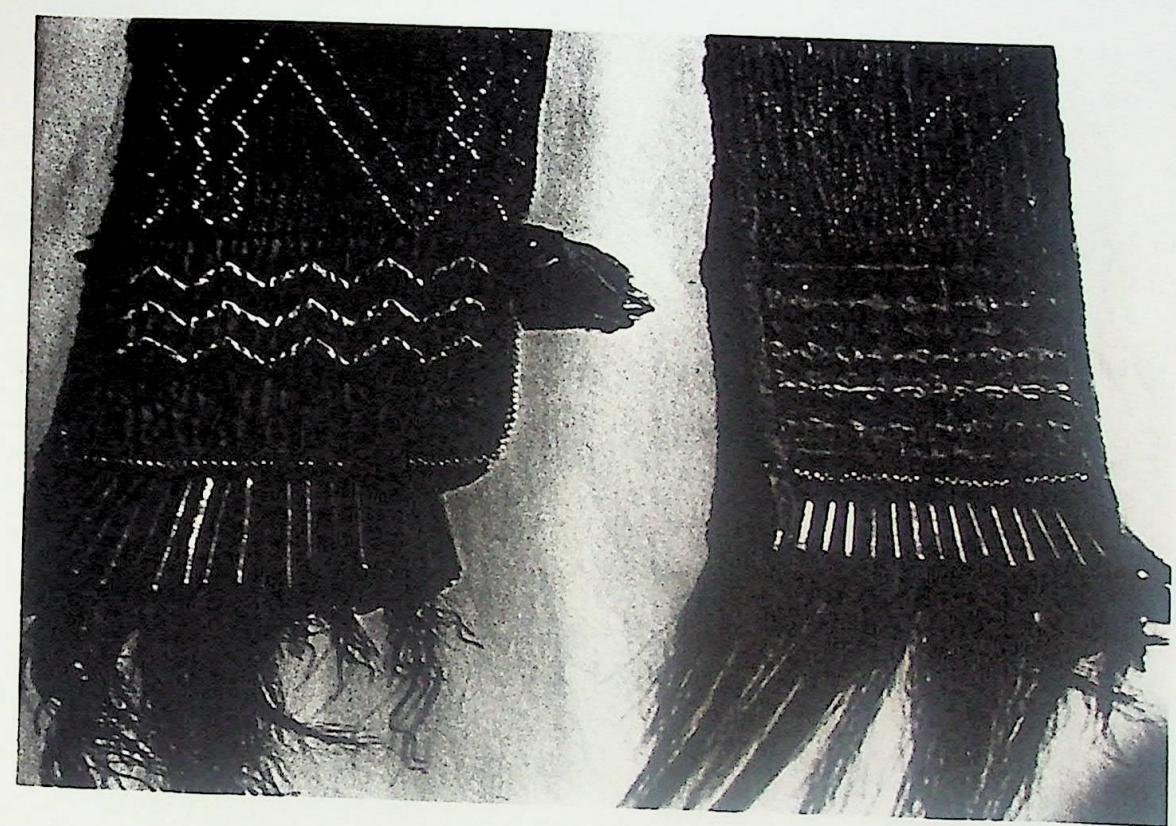


Fig. 9 : DETAIL of Garter Pendants : 8a and 8b,
showing Ribbon Applique.

The beads used in these garters are seed beads and are very simply woven into the fabric. Straight lines, as opposed to curvilinear forms must be regarded as the result of technical limitations. Instances of realistic motifs in woven beadwork are rare and late, as there was no suitable weaving equipment.

Fig. 10



10a : one side of WOVEN BAG.



10b : reverse side of WOVEN BAG.

WOVEN BAG NMI 1902 328 (Fig. 10)

From the vicinity of Lakes Erie and Ontario.

Collected about 1800.

Nettlestalk fibre,

Black animal hair,

Red and yellow wool yarn,

Brown pigment.

46 x 36

This bag was finger woven by a different technique to that used to make the sashes and garters already discussed. This technique is called twining and is one of the simplest methods of finger weaving. A cord is passed around the outside of two vertical stakes and the strands to be woven are hung from the cord, so that this bag was woven whole around the entire top at the one time. The twined work was done by deviding the warp yarn at each round of weaving. The bag is warp faced and spaced weft, which means the weft is not set close together. (see Fig. 11)

To weave the actual design on the bag, in this case the Thunderbirds (Fig. 10a) or the Underwater Panthers (Fig. 10b), is somewhat more complicated. The warp and weft are nettlestalk fibre which has a natural colour. To work the design into this background, the animal hair - which was probably derived from buffalo or moose, being black - is introduced. Spaced alternate-pair weft twining (see Fig. 12) is employed, in which paired warps of contrasting colour, switch positions to form dark/light contrasts in the designs. The motifs on this bag are framed down both sides with narrow red and yellow borders of wool.

This type of bag was made by the Central Great Lakes peoples : the Ottawa, Ojibwa, Potawatomi, Menomini, Winnebago, Sauk and Fox. Plain or striped bags were made for storage, while bags with images of Manitos and motifs symbolizing their powers, were used as medicine bundles, as is the case with this

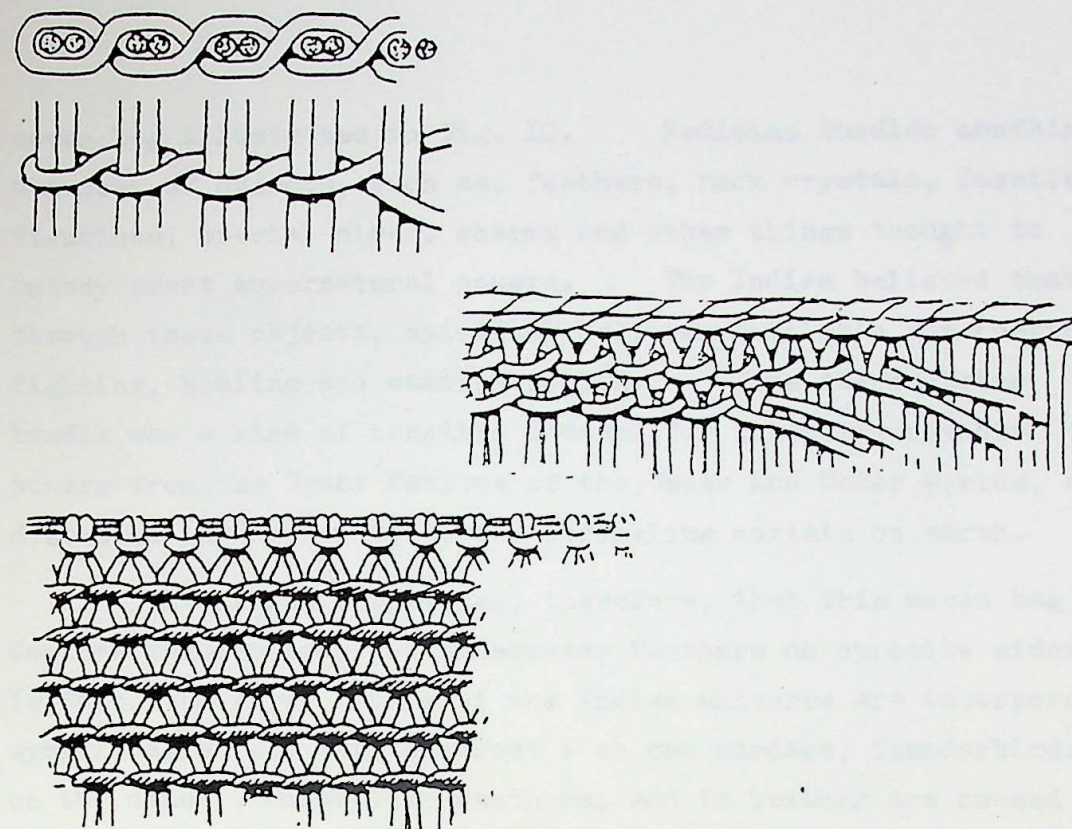


Fig. II : DIAGRAMS of Twining Technique.

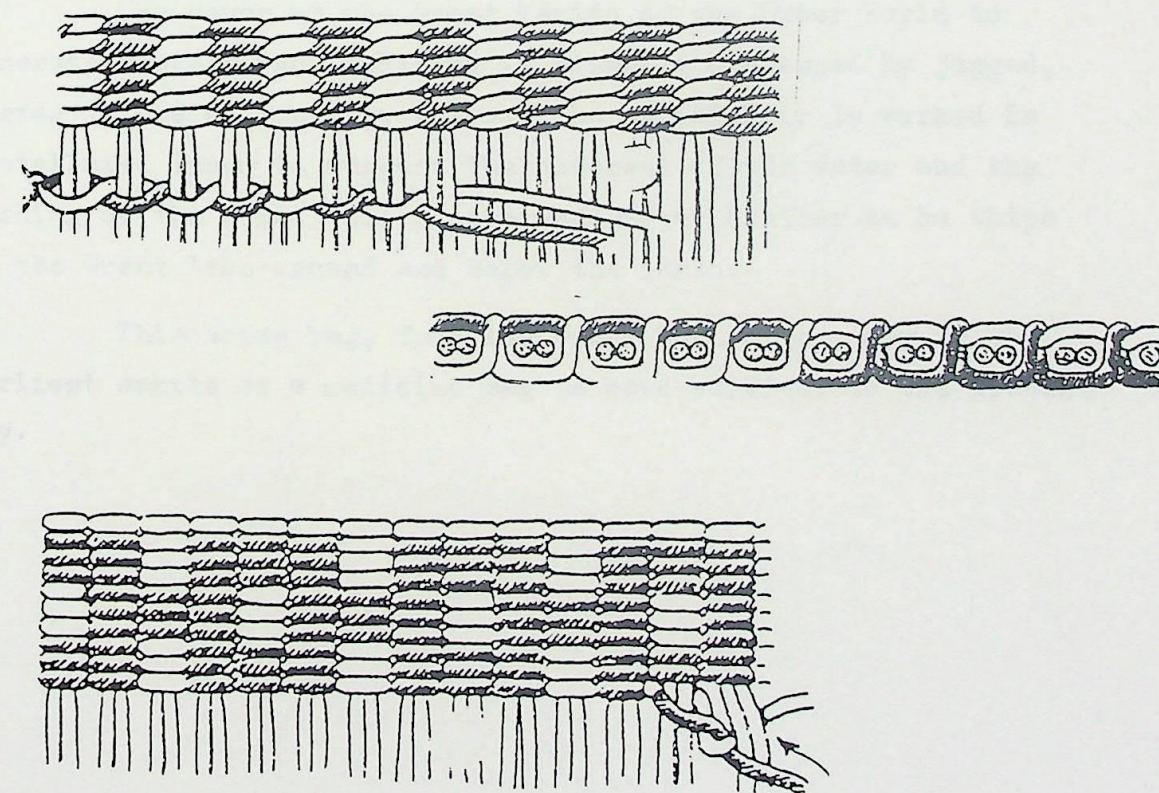


Fig. I2 : DIAGRAMS of Twining Design.

woven bag illustrated in Fig. 10. Medicine bundles contained a number of objects, such as, feathers, rock crystals, fossils, figurines, special pipes, charms and other things thought to embody great supernatural powers. The Indian believed that, through these objects, spiritual help was available for hunting, fighting, healing and casting spells. Thus the medicine bundle was a kind of tangible channel for conveying psychic powers from the Great Manitos of the Upper and Under Worlds, as discussed in Chapter 2, to the struggling mortals on earth.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this woven bag depicts Thunderbirds and Underwater Panthers on opposite sides. In fact, the three levels of the Indian universe are incorporated symbolically into this artifact : on one surface, Thunderbirds, on the other , Underwater Panthers, and in between are housed the magical objects which have been granted to human beings for use on earth. This woven bag is a three-dimensional model of supernatural forces, arranged in perfect balance and order.

The power of the Great Manito of the Upper World to generate thunder and lightning is visually expressed by jagged, zigzag lines of weaving, whereas the animal hair is worked in castellated lines to suggest the movement of the water and the lashing of the great tail of the Underwater Panther as he whips up the Great Lake around and below the earth.

This woven bag, from the Grant Collection, may be the earliest sample of a medicine bag to have survived to the present day.



Fig. I3 : RED RIVER METIS POUCH,
left to right : showing front of item, I6a,
and back of item, I6b.

RED RIVER METIS POUCH NMI I902 320 (Fig. I3)

From Red River Metis-Cree.

Collected 1800-1809.

Blue stroud,

Blue, white, and pink silk ribbon,

Blue, white, red, yellow and black woven porcupine quillwork,

Backed with hide,

Ravelled red wool threads,

Opaque white and translucent blue beads,

Vegetable fibre thread,

Black woolen cloth.

Partition inside pouch.

24 x 16.4

This type of pouch, made by the Red River Metis, was traded to and used by other groups of native peoples and by fur traders, as well as by the Metis themselves. So Grant could have acquired this example (Fig. I3) in the Amherstburg region. This pouch, and several others in the Collection, are undoubtedly of the style used by Indians of the Red River Settlement in Manitoba (see Fig. I) who had gotten the idea for the design from a pouch made by Canadian sub-Arctic peoples, including the Swampy Cree and Chippewa. (Fig. I4) But the Metis used trade cloth for the body of the pouch instead of hide, and added woolen tassels and glass beads.

The Red River Metis pouch uses many different techniques and materials, but the quillwork panels seem to be its focal point. Early quillwork often took the form of designs worked in triangles, and Indians also liked to place quillwork on a black background. Until about 1870 the quills were dyed naturally, but after this date commercial dyes were used, giving a more garish effect. The Indian woman usually did the quillwork. She would dye the quills red with tamarack bark, yellow with black willow, brown with pink or rotten wood, or just leave them in their natural black or white state.

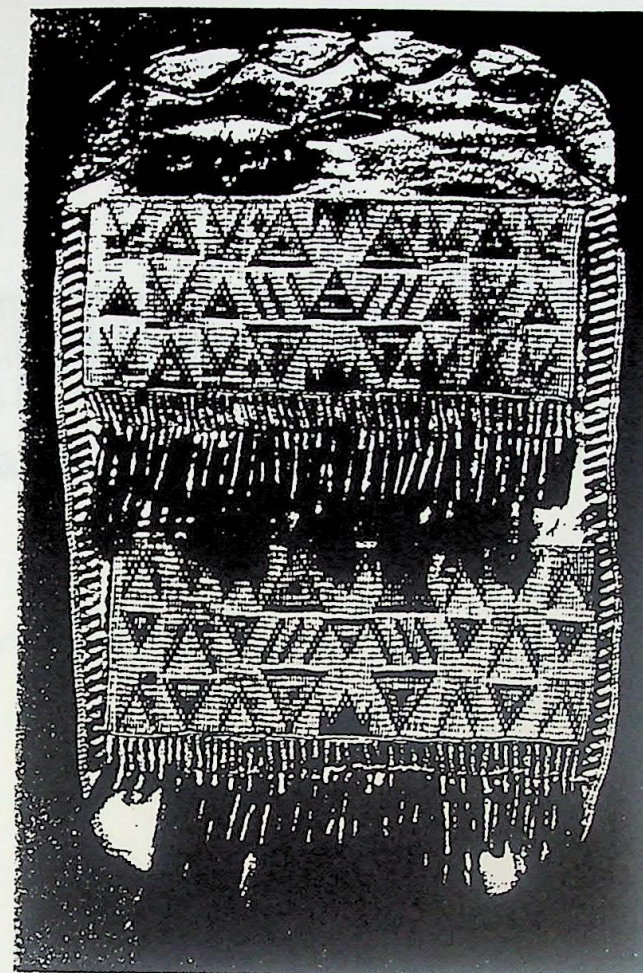
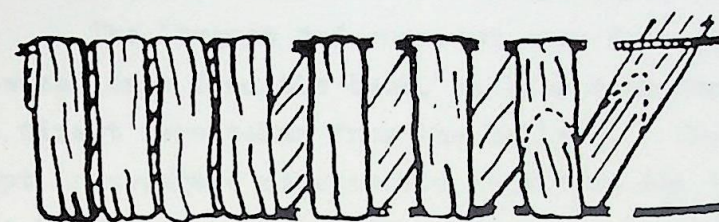
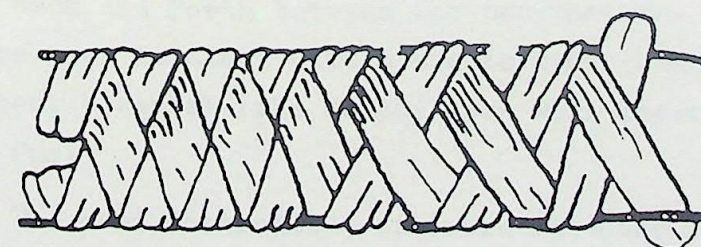


Fig. 14 : SWAMPY CREE/CHIPPEWA POUCH,
showing Woven Quill Panels and Quill Applique.

Fig. 15 : DIAGRAMS of Quillwork.



I5a : showing Two Threads, One Quill.



I5b : showing Two Threads, Two Quills.

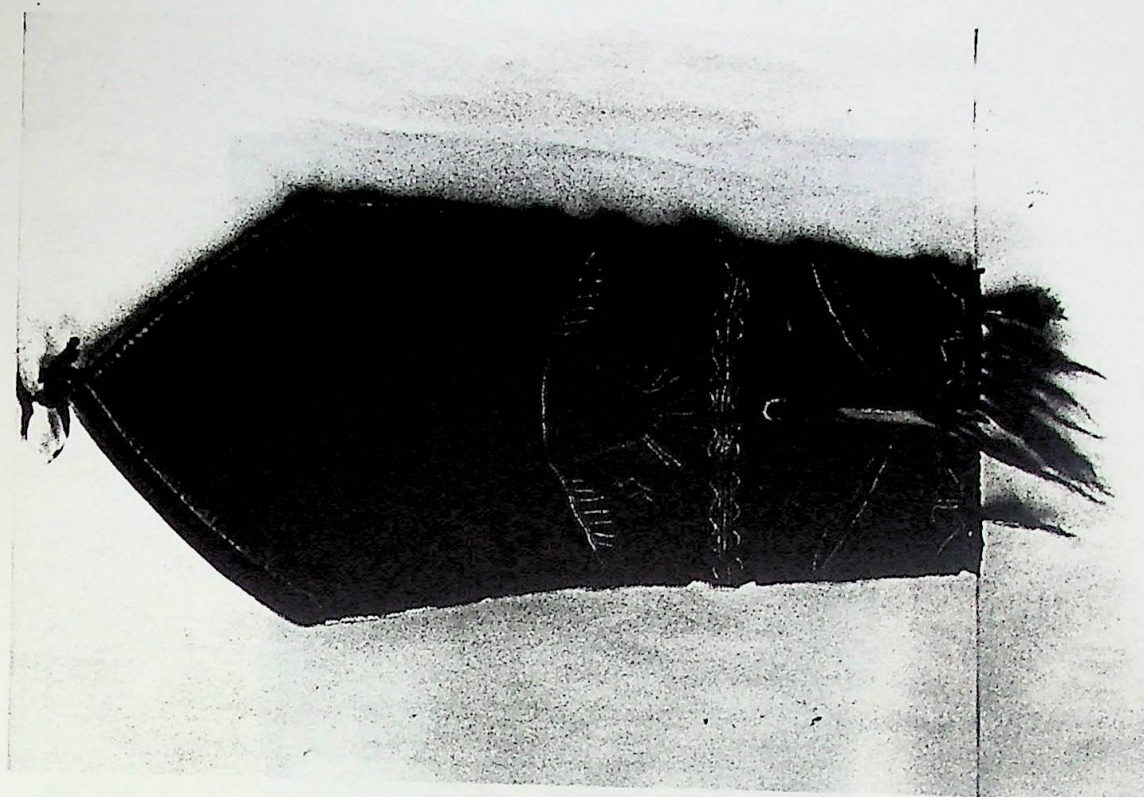
Blue was the hardest colour to acquire and was rare amongst many tribes before trade blankets were introduced and dye extracted from them, although larkspur could have been the source of the blue in this pouch.

Quills were usually gotten from porcupines. However, the quills of birds, especially those of gulls, were occasionally used. In this pouch, all the quills were taken from porcupines, which were very plentiful in the Woodlands around the Great Lakes. Four sizes of quill were found on the porcupine and these were graded. The largest and coarsest came from the tail, the medium-sized ones from the back, smaller ones came from the neck, and the finest were taken from the belly. The various sizes were kept in separate receptacles made from the bladder of an elk or a buffalo. Generally, after being dyed and sorted by size, the quills were soaked and flattened with the fingernails. The quillworker used her mouth to hold several quills at the same time. This kept them soft and pliable. They were flattened by drawing them through the teeth as they were removed. The quills were then appliquéd, woven or embroidered onto the hide background.

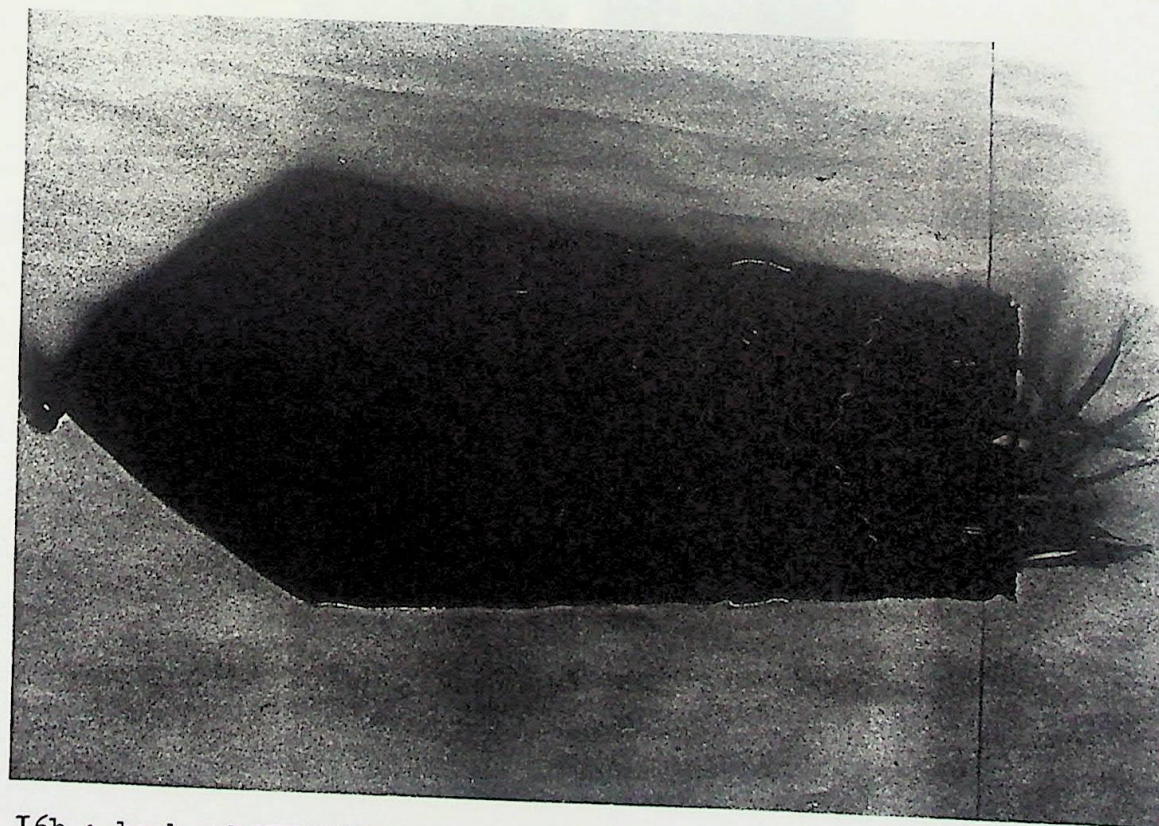
In the case of this example of a Red River Metis pouch, the quillwork is appliquéd on. The stitches do not completely pierce the decorative material, but pass over the flattened quills. The vegetable fibre thread used for this purpose may then be concealed by folding the quill over the stitch. This pouch has geometric patterns of triangles and diamonds, which are created by concerted colour changes within the bands. In this type of work two threads are needed and one or more quills are bent back and forth between the two threads. (see Fig. 15) These were sewn in place with a needle made from the penis bone of a marten, a weasel-like animal more well known for its valuable fur.

The most controlled quillwork was done by the Cree before 1850.

Fig. I6 : MIDWININ-STYLE POUCH



I6a : front of MIDWININ-STYLE POUCH.



I6b : back of MIDWININ-STYLE POUCH.

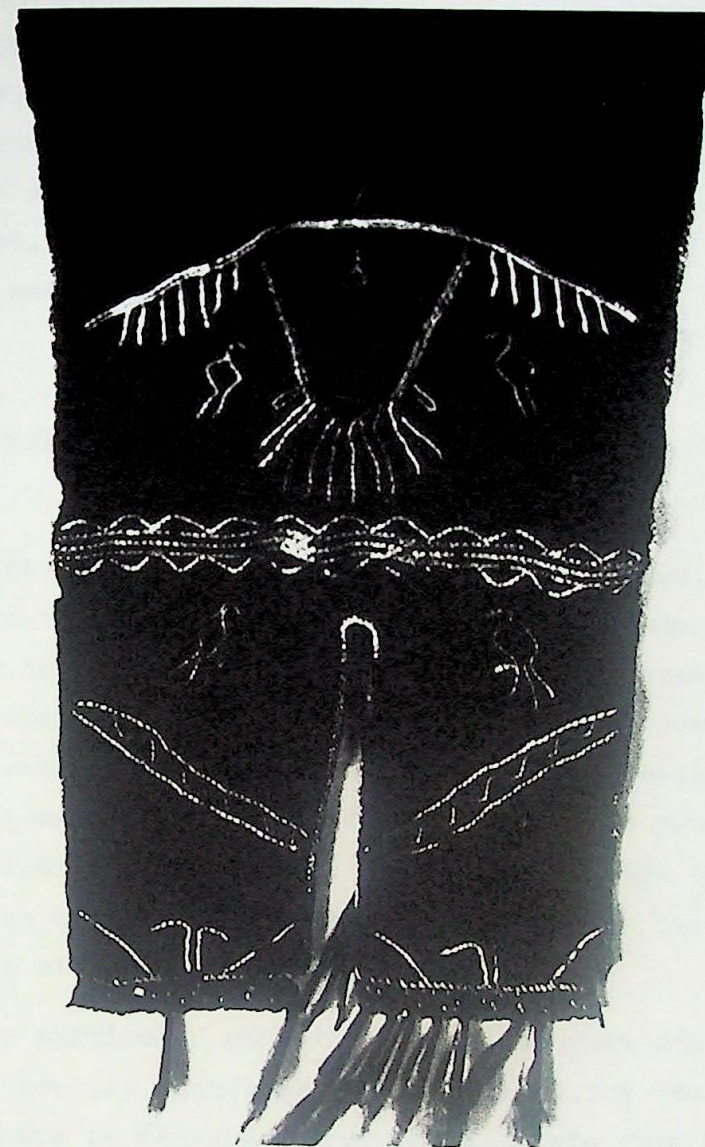


Fig. 17 : DETAIL of front of Midewinin-style pouch (I6a),
showing Thunderbird and Smaller Birds Design.

MIDEWIWIN-STYLE POUCH NMI I902 326 (Fig. I6)

From Ottawa/Eastern Ojibwa.

Collected I800-I809.

Tanned, black-dyed deerskin,

Yellow, blue, red and white porcupine quills in simple line,
zigzag band, and one-quill edging stitches,

Blue and red silk ribbon,

Cotton thread,

Small white and large blue cylindrical glass beads,

Sinew,

Metal cones,

Red-dyed animal hair.

46.5 x 15.3

Pouches were used as containers for tobacco, personal medicines and implements employed in hunting and war. Unlike bags made to contain medicine bundles, however, pouches were worn on the body. Pouches could be said to be portable art. The designs embroidered on them were usually representations of dreams experienced by the owner and wearer of the pouch. So when the Indian went hunting, or to war, he kept this potent representation of his personal communication with the spirits on his person at all times to guard him.

This particular pouch (Fig. I6) was made around the end of the I8th. century when there was a fashion for its type. Its oblong shape is reminiscent of pouches made from other animal skins, such as, otter and muskrat. These skin pouches were widely used by early Ioth. century Indians. The type of pouch illustrated in Fig. I6 was especially associated with members of the Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society, whose function was to heal the sick, prolong life, and instil virtues in the people of the tribe. Although it was a secret society, men and women could become members by payment of a fee.

On the subject of pouches, Edward Walsh, a surgeon in the 40th Regiment and a contemporary of Grant's who made many

notes on life in the Great Lakes region, remarked, with particular reference to the Potawatomi, that....

They believe that every child born has a guardian spirit, which inspires in dreams to acquire good and avoid evil. But every object in nature, even inanimate things, has its manitou and they form their Penates from their skin pouches or belts and these, supposing a spirit attached, they consult as oracles. 3

The embroidery on this pouch looks as fine as if it had been painted on with a brush. On the front of the pouch (Fig. I6a) a Thunderbird is seen spreading its wings over smaller birds. This can be observed even more clearly in the detail of the pouch, illustrated in Fig. I7. Since the Manito is a Thunderbird and is placed above the line, which is called the line of sky domes, it is obvious that we are looking at an image of the Upper World, an image that could only have been seen in a vision or dream. The motif on the reverse side of the pouch (Fig. I6b) is most likely another line of sky domes at the end of which are embroidered trees. The two crescent shapes above are representations of celestial bodies. The true meaning of the imagery on this pouch will never be fully understood as it was known only to the person for whom the pouch was made. Visionary experience amongst Great Lakes Indians was personal and private, because to reveal the precise nature of the vision, took away some of the power it bestowed on the recipient.

We have already seen that a variety of geometric motifs were used in the designs of woven bags (Fig. I0) to symbolize the energies given out by the Manitos and it seems likely that the abstract patterns on this pouch represent the actual experience of the dream, as opposed to its content. The use of abstract patterns was a way of interpreting parts of a dream that were atmospheric, such as, light, movement and sound. This must have presented the embroidering artist with an extremely challenging problem, as not even the person recording the dream visually could be told its true meaning. The artist was expected to depict what was described, without understanding what he or she was working on.

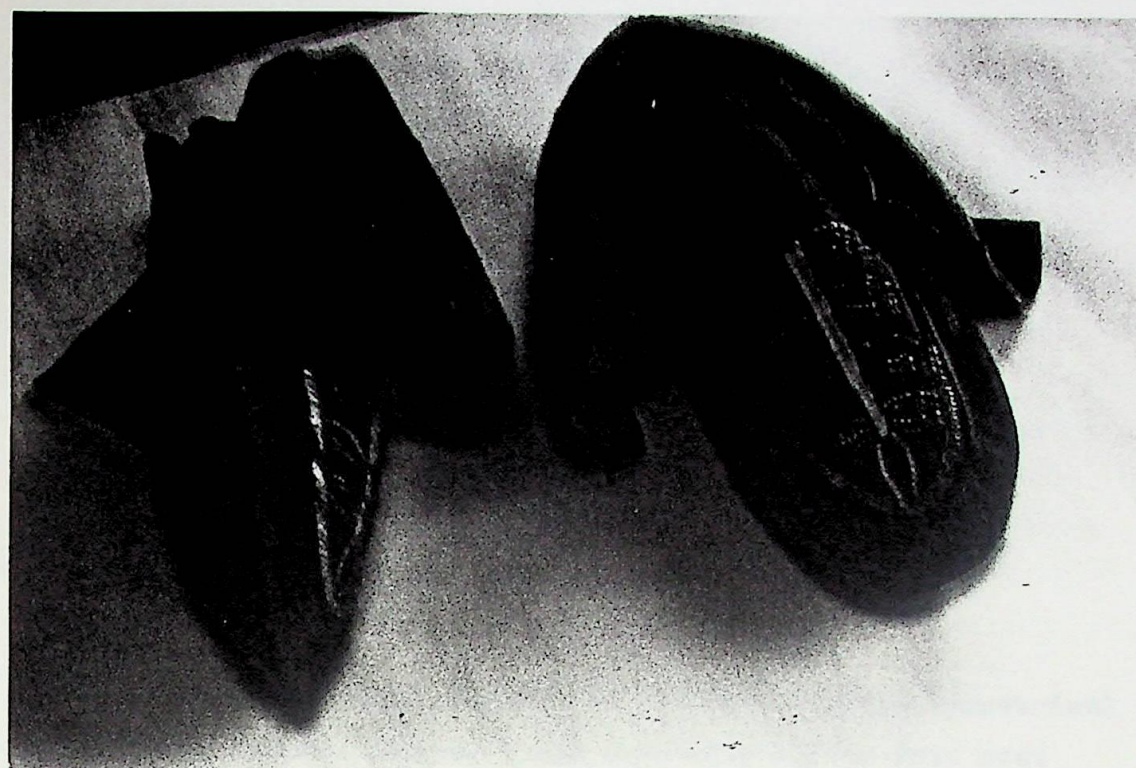


Fig. 18 : MOCCASINS, showing Floral Quillwork and Stroud under Cuff.

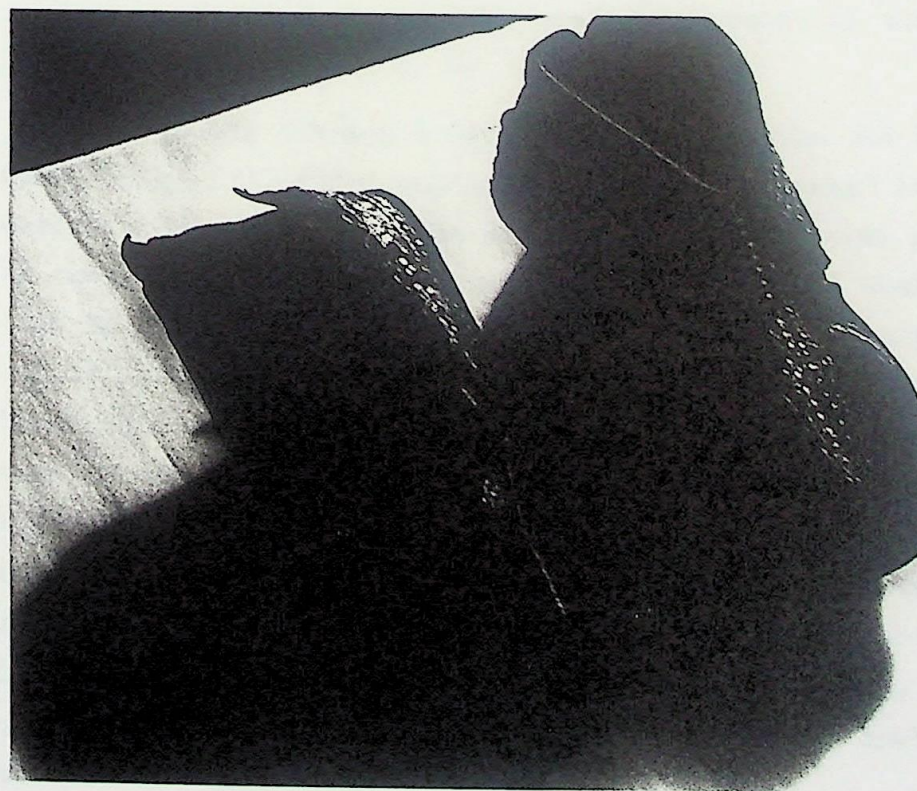


Fig. 19 : MOCCASINS - Black-dyed, Tanned Deerskin.

One-piece Construction with Porcupine Quillwork.

MOCCASINS NMI I902 346 (Fig. 18)

From Cree Indians.

Collected 1800-1809.

Hide,

Inset vamp and added cuffs,

Blue and red woolen strips sewn between cuff and shoe,

Red stroud with notched edge,

Vamp and heel seams embroidered with blue, red and
natural white porcupine quills in simple
line and zigzag band techniques,

Sinew.

In construction, as well as in their rigidly symmetrical and stylized floral designs, these moccasins differ from most Great Lakes examples. (see Fig. 17) The added cloth trim under the cuff is more typical of the style of central and western sub-Arctic peoples, while the floral elements resemble eastern Cree motifs. It is possible that the moccasins were acquired by Grant from a trader who had contacts in the Hudson Bay area. (see Fig. 1, p. 8)

As was already noted in relation to the Red River Metis pouch (Fig. 13), early quillwork was usually worked in triangular designs, but there are some early examples of floral motifs, such as those featuring on these moccasins. Floral designs did come to be widely used by the end of the 19th. century, however, but it is said that this common usage was introduced through European traditions and influences. It seems likely, therefore, that the floral motifs on these early 19th. century moccasins indicate a spiritual relationship between a personal or guardian Manito and the person who wore them. These moccasins are like soft sculptures - it is easy to imagine an Indian padding along leafy woodland trails in them, with their colourfully embroidered quillwork reflecting the natural and supernatural environments that he saw all around him.

Rich dress was valued throughout the Great Lakes area for both general and very specific reasons. The image of the highly decorated Indian Chief is one with which Europeans are very familiar, even to this day. Not only was a display of ornate clothing a glorious boost to the successful hunter and warrior, as well as a source of intimidation to his foes, but also, according to Great Lakes belief, success just was not possible without the presence and assistance of Manitos. And Manitos, especially personal ones, had to be courted and appeased by colourful representations of their earthly forms. The floral Manitos, depicted on these moccasins linked the wearer with the supernatural world and thus gave him some power over his universe.

The hide used in these moccasins was most probably deerskin and it was cut to a traditional pattern. The quillwork was completed before the moccasins were sewn together, and the moccasins were turned inside out for the sewing process and then reversed. The sinew for sewing was obtained from the back tendon of an animal. The woolen strins between cuff and shoe were probably cut from a traded stroud blanket, a common practise already discussed. (see p. 27)



Fig. 20 : KNEE FRINGE.



Fig. 2I : Chippewa Indian Deputation, showing KNEE FRINGES.

KNEE FRINGE NMI I902 340 (Fig. 20)

Ojibwa.

Collected 1800-1809.

Hide,

Thongs,

Yellow, blue, red and orange porcupine quills
in zigzag band stitch,

44 eagle feathers,

Blue pigment.

Contemporary depictions of Great Lakes Indians show a wide range of ornaments worn both as everyday costume and for special ceremonies. Some of these ornaments honoured personal guardian spirits by imitating aspects of the appearance of these Manitos. The eagle was regarded as sacred among Indian tribes both east and west, and its feathers were highly prized for religious reasons as well as for ornamentation. There was an elaborately detailed ritual of prayer and ceremony specially designed to accompany the hunting and capturing of this great bird. Throughout all the tribes, the chief purpose of this ritual was to obtain the help of the gods to induce the eagle to approach the hunter and to turn aside the anger of the eagle spirits at this necessary sacrifice.

The knee fringes worn by the Chippewa in Fig. 21 are similar to the ones collected by Grant. This supports the identification of the Fig. 20 knee fringe as Ojibwa in origin since the Chippewa are a sub-group of the Ojibwa tribe. The dancing staff and costume of the Chippewa delegation here portrayed similarly provide evidence for the identification of other Ojibwa artifacts.

The porcupine quillwork on the band is done using two threads in diamond technique giving a zigzag stitch. (see Fig. 22) The feathers are attached by small straps of hide which are

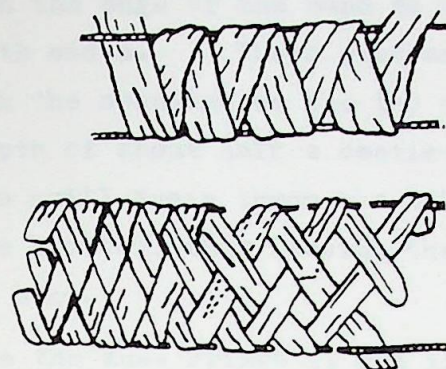


Fig. 22 : DIAGRAM of QUILLWORK,
showing Two Threads with Diamond Technique.

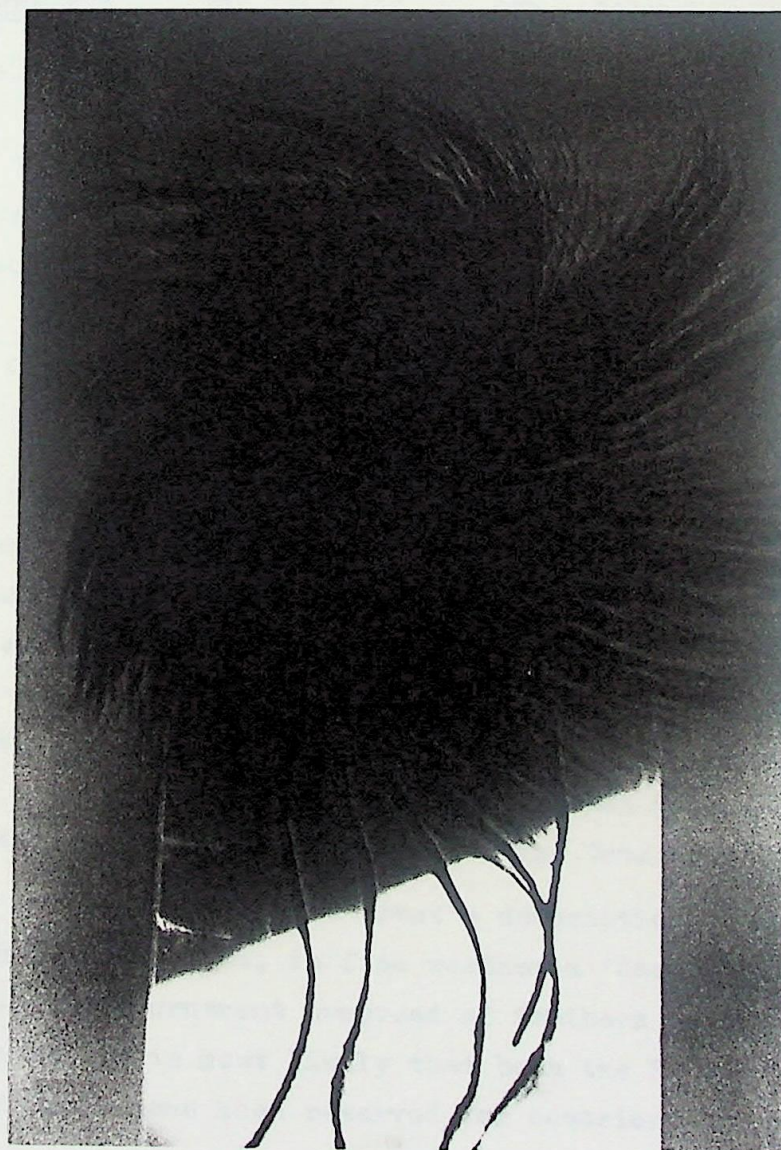


Fig. 23 : HAIR ORNAMENT.

threaded through the edge of the band so that a piece of hide protrudes on both sides. These protruding pieces of hide are then pushed down the openings at the top of the quill on each feather to a depth of about half a centimetre. The hide is taken out of the quill again through a hole made for this purpose, and the ends are knotted, thus leaving the feathers securely attached to the band.

Because the Knee Fringe is not in itself sufficiently complex in textile terms to warrant a complete section, I have decided to include another small ornamental item which, while having some materials in common, is different enough in technical detail to provide an interesting and instructive contrast.

HAIR ORNAMENT NMI I902 337 (Fig. 23)

Red-dyed animal hair,
Sinew,
Hide,
Quill-wrapped thongs,
Red, blue and natural white porcupine quills,
embroidered in simple line and zigzag band stitches,
Nettle cones.

The red-dyed animal hair, which is used in this artifact, has been attached so that it spirals around the central design of porcupine quillwork. The hide thongs that hang down from the main piece, have been wrapped with porcupine quills of different colours and the porcupine quills have been secured by a thread at the back. This is yet another creative quill technique, not already mentioned in relation to the Fouches (Fig.s I3, I4 and I5), the Moccasins (Fig.s I8 and I9), or the Knee Fringe above.

On page 58 I quote Grant's description of Indian dress, in which he notes that, in fine weather a 'Savage' may wear on his head....'...some ornament composed of feathers or skins...'. Nonetheless, it is most likely that both the Knee Fringe and the Hair Ornament would have been reserved for occasions of special ceremonies.

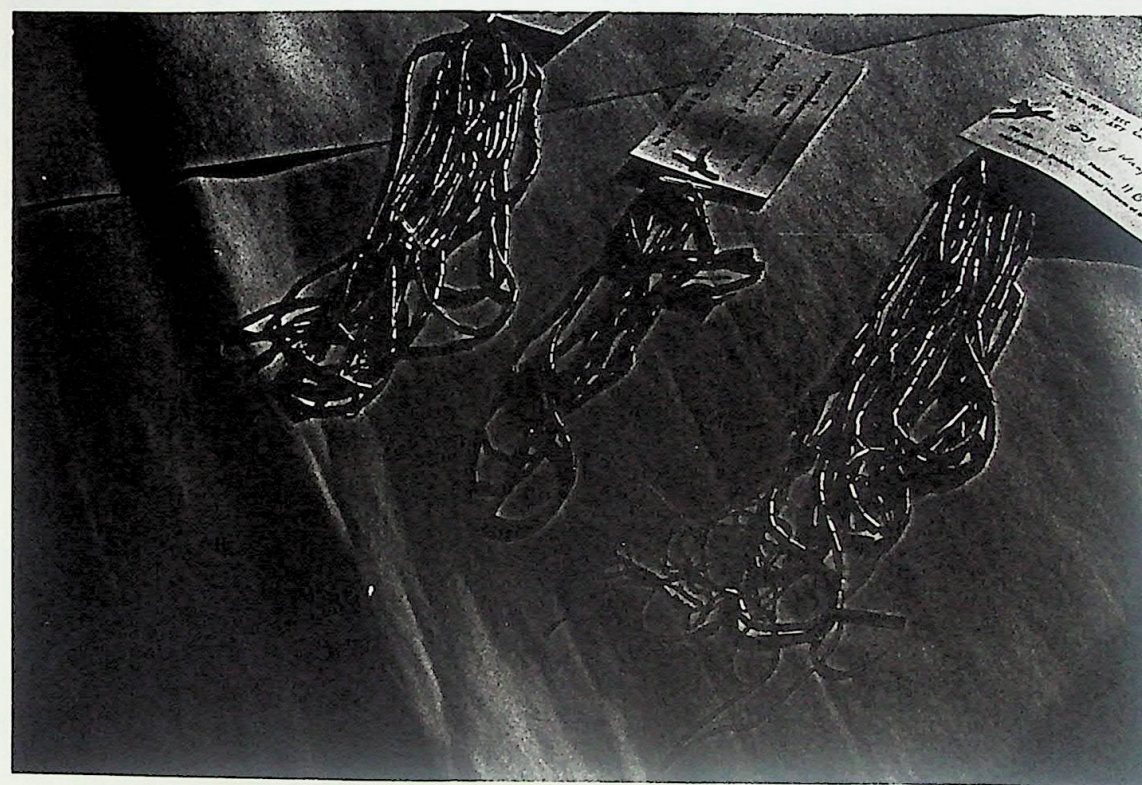


Fig. 24 : WAMPUM BEADS.

WAMPUM BEADS NMI I902 358 (Fig. 24)

Ottawa, Ojibwa, Potawatomi.

Collected 1809.

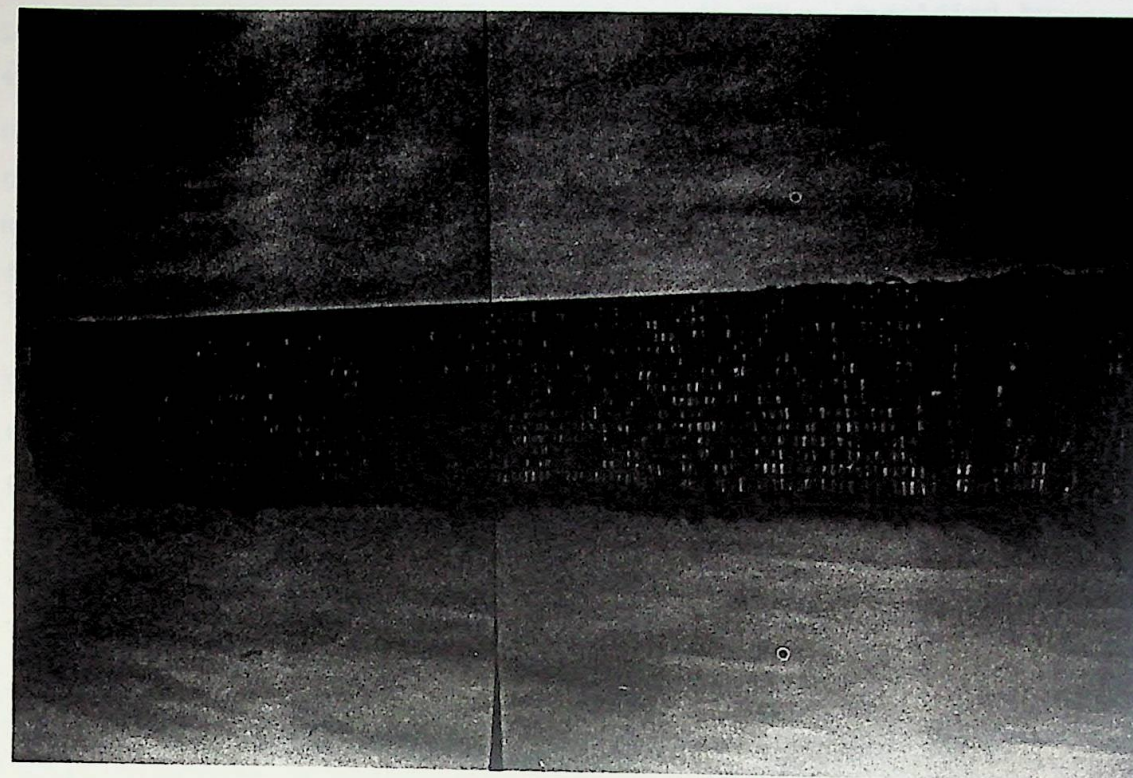
White and purple shell wampum beads strung on three
seperate loops of natural vegetable fibre.

These sixteen strands of wampum were presented to Grant with a farewell address by the local Indian Chiefs on his departure from Amhurstburg. (Fig. 2, p. 16) Scarlet-dyed feathers were also presented to lend extra meaning to the words of the speech and, next to their names, the ten Chiefs inscribed their family totemic marks, stylized animal images that established parallels between the divisions of human society and the divisions of the natural world.

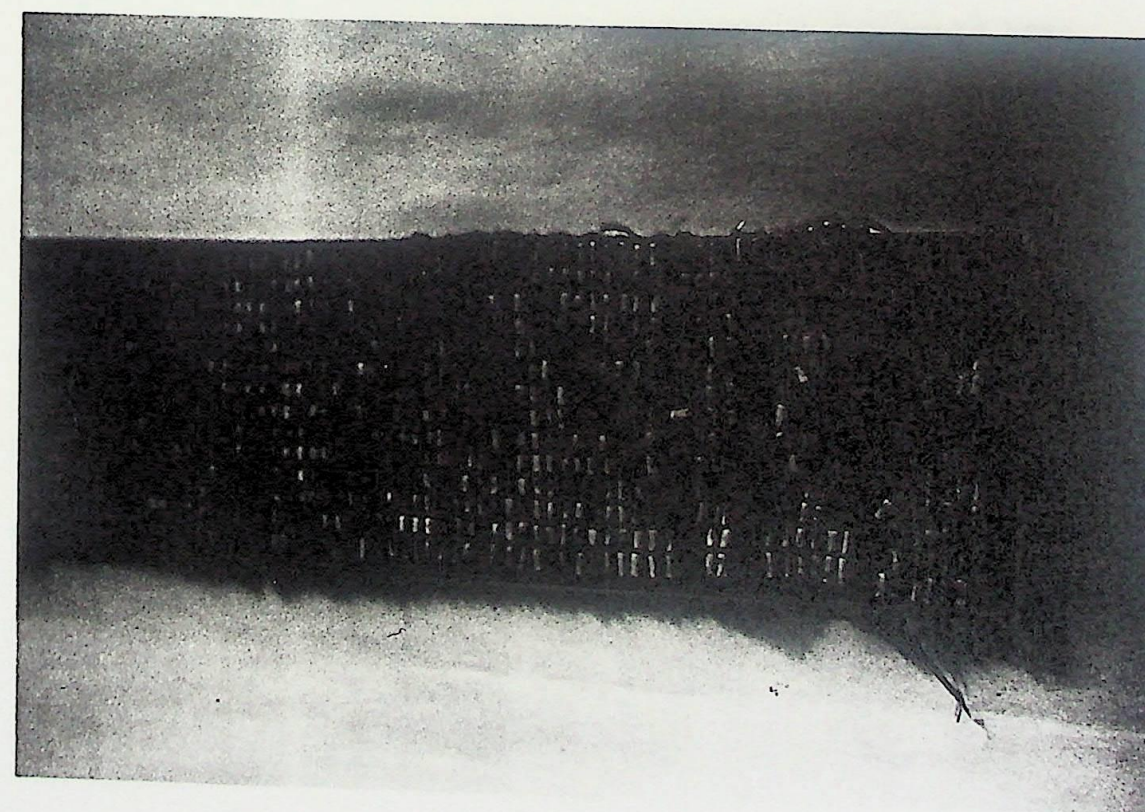
Wampum was the traditional, symbolic means of opening the way to communication between two groups of people. It was also capable of conveying and recording the content of such a communication. Like Grant's paper and ink transcription, the bunched strands of wampum made a permanent record of the event through the meanings which attached to the colours of the beads and their particular arrangement and patterning. The Indians further believed that the wampum could keep the lines of communication open as long as it was carefully preserved to retain the memory of the words spoken over it. Keepers of the wampum were important tribal dignitaries. They kept the store of historic strings and belts (see below) in special wooden boxes. At the great annual tribal gatherings, the collection of wampum was taken out and the stories associated with each item were recited to the people, so that all of them should be acquainted with their tribal history and religion.

The wampum themselves were white and purple tubular beads, painstakingly made from clam shells, the purple bearing almost the same relation to the white as gold does to silver in

Fig. 25 : WAMPUM BELT.



25a : WAMPUM BELT



25b : Detail of WAMPUM BELT.

in the European mind. Particular meaning was specified by the number of beads of one colour, compared with the number of beads of the other colour, as well as by their positioning when combined into an artifact. White beads dominate in the wampum message delivered to Grant and this symbolized the Indians' wish for peace and good will to come his way.

Wampum were not only strung, they were also woven into belts, as was mentioned above. (see Fig. 25) A wampum belt also served as a gift and as a binding symbol of an agreement amongst the tribes of the north-east, and they were of great importance as documentary evidence of such events. As with the strung wampum, the designs were based on the contrast between the white and purple beads and were associated with conventionalized meaning.

The introduction of counterfeit wampum in large quantities by Dutch traders lessened its value. The imitation glass wampum were never really accepted and were used only for decorative purposes. Perhaps it could be said that bogus wampum was about as useful to the Indian for communicating and recording important messages, as a pen without ink would have been to Major Jasper Grant.



Fig. 26 : TWO BURDEN STRAPS, left to right, 26a and 26b.

TWO BURDEN STRAPS

(Fig. 26)

BURDEN STRAP 26a NMI I902 334

Iroquis or Huron.

Collected I800-I809.

Indian hemp,

Glass beads,

Yellow, blue, green-blue, light and deep orange,
and natural white moose hair.

57.5 x 4.8

BURDEN STRAP 26b NMI I902 333

Iroquis or Huron.

Collected I800-I809.

Indian hemp,

White glass beads,

Blue, light and deep orange, yellow, blue-green,
and natural white moose hair.

60.5 x 5.5

Burden straps with designs worked in moose hair are among the most splendid examples of Great Lakes geometric design. The apparent simplicity of the designs is often deceptive. In both these burden straps, the variation of hue in the dyed moose hair creates a subtle modulation of colour which enriches the interest of the overall pattern. In Strap 26b, an optical illusion is created by staggering the design units and contrasting the colour so that the eye perceives two sets of triangles within a triangle. This gives us a rare insight into the creative imagination of the Great Lakes craftswoman. The artist has also varied the design of Strap 26a by doubling the scale of the design units of Strap 26b.

Great Lakes Indians created this remarkable range of geometric designs in woven and false embroidered moose hair. The moosehair was wrapped around the warp threads of the twined strap in a technique known as false embroidery.

The twining technique used in these Burden Straps was compact plain twining. This type of twining is similar to the twining shown in the Woven Bag, (see Fig. 10, p. 30) the difference being that the weft is packed much tighter together, forming a more compact fabric suited to a strap. In false embroidery decorative material, moose hair can be wrapped around the outer wefts, as in this case. Consequently it remains invisible on the inside. If we turned these Burden Straps around to look at the reverse side, we would see plain twined Indian hemp with no moose hair visible. The range of colours in false embroidery was expanded from the traditional black, purple, red and natural colour with the importation of trade blankets, which could be boiled to extract their dye. (see p. 27) Later, aniline dyes provided more possibilities, and the Indian hemp itself was subsequently replaced by cotton twine.

The Burden Straps were commonly used to support cradle boards and other burdens carried on the back. They were worn so that the wider decorated central section was visible across the forehead.

Between twenty and thirty 18th. and early 18th. century Burden Straps survive in modern collections and most are attributed to the Iroquis. A number of documented examples of Huron false embroidery are known, however, which display stepped diagonal lines and triangles similar to those of the two illustrated Grant Collection specimens, 26a and 26b.



Fig. 27 : SHIRT and LEGGINGS.

SHIRT and LEGGINGS NMI I902 308 & 309 (Fig. 27)

From the Great Lakes area.

Collected 1800-1809.

Tanned deerskin,

Red pigment,

Sinew.

This rare costume is typical of the everyday dress of the Great Lakes Indian man before the arrival of the European. No trade materials are used, except in the cutting of the circular and leaf-like perforations ornamenting the shoulders and the triangular flap of the coat. These perforations were probably made with a trade metal punch.

The red pigment used in the decoration on the edges of of these garments is an organically derived material, which might have been obtained from the bark of red orier, dogwood, alder bark or tamerack bark, all of which yielded reds. The seams of the coat are not sewn together but tacked with thongs, and separate strips of hide are attached to the tops of the leggings as ties.

A letter written by Grant to his brother, the Reverend Alexander Grant, or 'the Doctor', as the Major always called him, gives us a good description of this type of clothing, as worn by the Great Lakes Indians.

The ordinary dress of a Savage when hunting consists of a shirt made of deerskin, which the Squaws dress with much skill, and leggings or garters of the same materials, which come three parts up the thigh. A smaller piece of cloth covers the front and rear of their middle: this is called by the Europeans a breech clout. A Savage never wears anything on his head except in fine weather, some ornament composed of feathers or skins, and in extreme cold, a hood made of a piece of blanket. The leather shirt is tied about the middle with a sash, generally composed of worsted, or, among the distant nations, of elm bark, which they work beautifully with moose deer hair or porcupine quills, which they die of all colours. 4

The side seams of the leggings were sewn together leaving a border of about an inch deep, Grant goes on to relate. The Major found this very odd and exclaims...

'...an inch deep, just as if you turned a pair of breeches inside out.'⁵

Tanned deerskin is often called buckskin but it is in reality one and the same thing. Indians usually used the brain method of tanning, which is not tanning in the strict sense of the word, but rather a preparation of the hide. It is done by rubbing or working the brain of the deer into the fresh or soaked hide until it is soft and pliable. Smoke tanning is done by smoking a hide that has been brain tanned. Pitch, a black, sticky substance, which is released from burning pine and fir trees, rises in the smoke and permeates the hide, preventing it from becoming stiff and hard after it has gotten wet.

CHAPTER 3 : Footnotes

- I NMI I902 3II = A National Museum of Ireland reference number. All such reference numbers are placed in the same position in the text, alongside the name and description of the corresponding artifact.
- 2 70. x 9 = A measurement of an artifact. All such measurements are placed in the same position in the text. All measurements are in centimetres, and height or length preceeds width.
- 3 From the unpaginated papers of Edward Walsh (1766-1832), Public Archives of Canada MG19 F10.
Quoted in Ruth B. Phillips' Patterns of Power,
(Catalogue) 1984. p. 26.
- 4 From a letter written by Jasper Grant, Amherstburg, to his brother, Rev. Alexander Grant, dated 20th. January 1807,
National Library of Ireland, Ussher Papers,
MS 10178.
- 5 Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION.

At the time that Jasper and Isabella Grant were collecting the items for their Indian Cabinet, the way of life which had been followed by the Indians for centuries had altered very little. The Great Lakes peoples had a plentiful supply of food, water and wood. They did not have to lead a nomadic life, so they were more or less settled communities. As well as hunting, they farmed, growing corn and gathering wild rice. As a general rule the quantity of artistic production amongst people relates directly to the amount of difficulty they experience in securing a living : in the case of these Indians, for whom food was abundant and relatively easy to obtain, a good deal of time was available for artistic work.

The richness and variety of the items collected by Grant is proof of the high degree of skill attained by the Great Lakes Indian woman. The artifacts also show her imagination : it is rare to find two pieces that are identical, since each artist had her own ways and style of using the traditional motifs and patterns.

I think it is marvellous that we, in Ireland, are privileged to have this rare and well-preserved Collection housed in our National Museum. The great pity is that we do not have the necessary space and atmospheric conditions at the moment to put it on public exhibition. I hope that this will be rectified in the not too distant future because I feel these artifacts would be a great source of inspiration to the people of today. To think that such beautiful work could have been created, initially using all natural materials, and later, with the addition of some trade goods. And, of course, these trade goods were only used selectively to enrich their pre-existing art forms, rather than to transform them.

Edward Walsh, in one of his papers on Indian life, said that he wished to...

...testify that an interesting but unlettered race of red people had existed, before they go hence and be no more seen...(see p. 60, Footnote 3)

There could be no better testimony to a people, their way of life and their culture, than that to be found in the Grant Collection of North American Indian Art.

APPENDIX :

Address of the Ottawas, Chippewas and Potawatomis to Grant.

British,

1809,

Ink on watermarked (crest with bugle and letters CA) laid paper
and red-dyed feathers,

22.7 x 36.7 (full sheet) (The document is written on half of the sheet)

National Library of Ireland MS IOI78 (3)

Transcript :

Address of the Ottawas, Chippewas and Potawatomis to Colonel Grant
on his leaving Amhurstburg, 20th. August 1809 - Upon 16 Strings
of White Wampum.

Father,

Since you have been here we have always found you kind and friendly
to us on all occasions and we cannot allow you to leave us without
expressing our regret at the loss of such a good commanding officer -

We pray that Great Spirit to smooth the Watery way for you
and to conduct you and your family in safety over the Great Waters
where we wish you may find your Relations and friends in prosperity
and peace. -

Wabionishkoubie (mark of)

Dondagany (mark of) or Bell

Aigouminai (mark of)

Teshquuiguin (mark of)

Mainawathka (mark of)

Aishawit (mark of)

Tawalwo (mark of)

Ogance (mark of)

Manitaukijik (mark of)

Pshikie or (mark of) Buffaloe

Inscribed in another hand :

Address of/Red Indians/to Col Grant/1809

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