

Lenape Beadwork

This is a two panel list about Lenape beadwork. The main purpose of this list is to present images of various types of beadwork, and since many styles of beadwork had no special Lenape names no names are given. Included with this list are portions of a dissertation by a Delaware tribal member who made a study of early beadwork. It includes not only the type of beadwork done with trade beads brought to this country by the Europeans but also decoration done with native materials available to the Lenape.

As with other lists this one will begin with some of the earliest known beads made and used by the Lenape and those are wampum beads. We're fairly certain that there were other types of beads made from seeds but to the best of our knowledge these did not survive the damp Eastern Woodland soil. The same is true of things made of wood, leather, and quills and they also were not preserved well in the acidic soil.

The eighteenth century Delawares developed new decorative techniques using beads which were trade items. These often replaced quillwork and other ornamentation. The beadwork found on skirts and leggings of the Delaware is considered typical of the Woodlands as a whole although each tribe developed their own patterns. The application in geometric and floral designs was an eighteenth century development. The technique appears to be well developed by at least the mid-1700's for the Delaware.

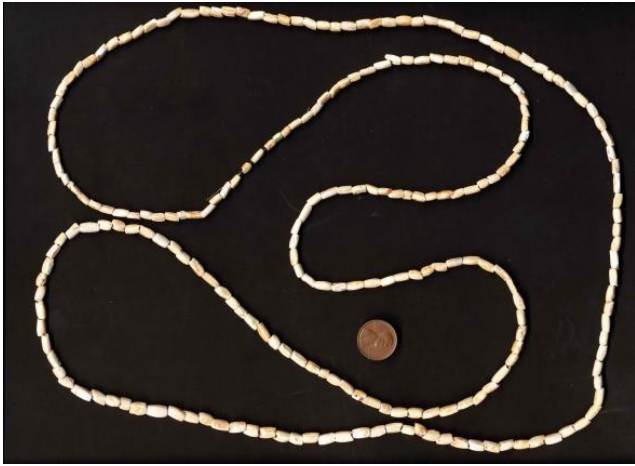
The following description of Lenape beadwork was written by Delaware tribal member Denise Neil-Binion:

On the North American continent, beads made of natural materials had long been used as a means of personal adornment. Native Americans were making, wearing, and trading beads at least eight thousand years prior to European contact. Archeological evidence shows that Woodlands people from the Early and Middle Archaic periods (8000-3000 BCE) wore beads and pendants created from natural materials such as shell, teeth, stones, bones, and pearls.

Imported glass beads were introduced to the indigenous groups of North America at the time of initial European contact, but tribes such as the Delaware, had adorned their clothing and accessories with a variety of beads for generations. For the Indians that occupied the northeast region of what would become the United States, the most important bead produced was wampum. Wampum was the small, cylindrical, centrally drilled beads of white and purple, made primarily of the quahog clamshell. These beads were strung on leather thongs or woven into belts with sinew thread.

(this write up continues after the image section of this list)

Wampum beads



Pre-contact Wampum Beads



These pre-contact wampum beads are about 0.3 inches long, or 0.7 cm.



This is from a string of mixed types of wampum beads.



Wampum Bead Necklace



These small wampum beads are each about 0.3 inches long, or 0.8 cm.

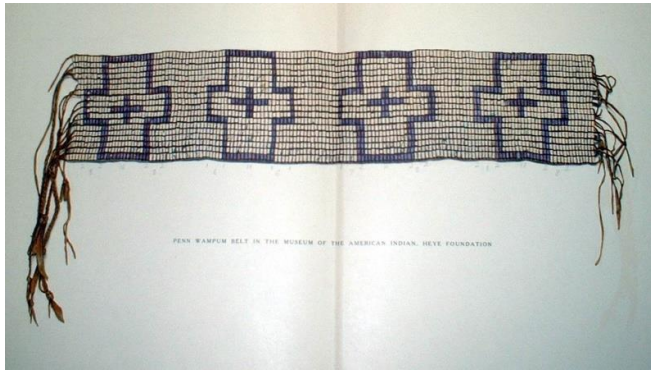


Depicted are Lenape man and woman with a male child in the attire typically worn by the Delaware tribe. All three are wearing ornaments of various kinds, including jewelry, headbands, belts and feathers. The adults are carrying long pipes, and both males carry bows and, in the case of the man, a quiver full of arrows. They are all barefoot.

The description of the clothing in the article with the drawing describes the man as wearing a breechcloth but the artist mistakenly drew it in the form of skirt.



Beads were sometimes made from other types of shells like the small shells used in the earrings worn by Jacques, a Munsee Delaware, drawn in Holland in 1645.



Wampum Treaty Belt

This was one of the belts the Lenape gave to William Penn about 1683.



Wampum Belt for wearing

Nora Thompson Dean



Wampum Beads on Deerskin Dress

Mary Louise Watters

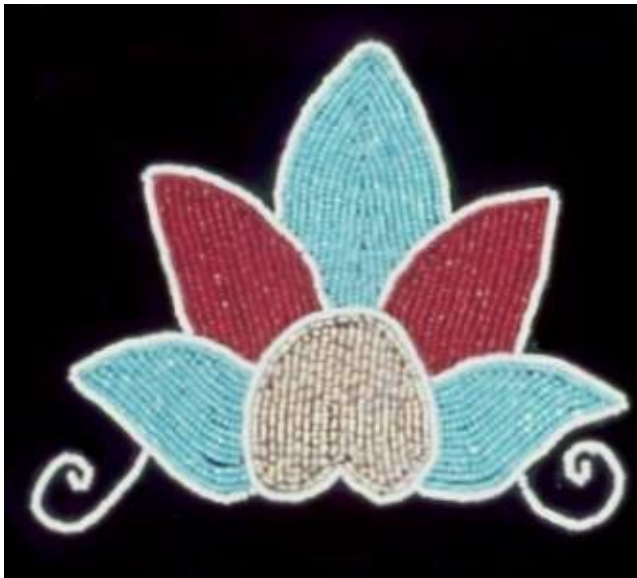
Beadwork on clothes



Beaded Breechcloth

NMAI 2/6529, undated

This breechcloth is decorated with beadwork and also with ribbonwork down the edges.



Beadwork on Woman's Wrap-around Skirt

This beadwork design was appliquéd on to a woman's skirt. The same design was repeated multiple times around the bottom of the skirt.



Beadwork on Woman's Wrap-around Skirt

This beadwork design was appliquéd on to a woman's skirt. The same design was repeated multiple times around the bottom of the skirt.



Man's Beaded Hunting Coat

This hunting coat was decorated with beadwork and was made about 1850.



Beadwork on a man's deerskin coat, about 1850.

Another man's deerskin hunting coat elaborately decorated with beadwork.



Man's Beaded Vest



Beadwork on Woman's Legging

This woman's cloth legging is decorated with beadwork with little diamond design similar to what would have been done in ribbonwork. It was more common to decorate the leggings with ribbonwork. This was made about 1970.



Beadwork on man's leggings

These are Delaware man's leggings decorated with beadwork in floral or leaf designs.



Early example of beadwork on moccasin cuffs.

These early Delaware moccasins are decorated with small white beads.



Delaware moccasins made about 1930. The toe is decorated with beadwork and the cuffs have a beaded edge around them. The cuffs are also decorated with ribbonwork.



Moccasins

These moccasins were made for a Delaware man and have beadwork on the toe as well as around the edge of the cuffs. The cuffs are also decorated with ribbonwork. Made about 2018.



Moccasins with beadwork on the cuffs.
They were made by Lillie Davis.

Beaded Accessories



Bias weave beadwork



Bias weave beadwork
Nora Dean about 1974



Lucy Parks Blalock displays a beaded strip.

On a trip east we stopped at the State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg. Lucy was taken to the stacks and shown some Delaware things. One thing they said was "Here is a beadwork strip made by Lucy Parks." Lucy was shocked and said, "That's me!" She said she probably made it in her teens.



These are split necklaces done on a loom.

Nora and Louise Dean about 1983.



Small beaded bag made of deerskin and decorated with floral beadwork.



Rope-style net beadwork choker



Net beadwork made as a choker.
made about 1965



Beaded pouch on woolen stroud
cloth with calico lining
dated 1832. about 8 inches tall
NMAI 24/4153



Beaded Sash

loom beadwork done on yarn warp.

Nora and Louise Dean 1975



Beaded deerskin bag with
wampum bead fringe

made by Nora Thompson Dean
in 1970's



Bandoleer Bag

made by Delaware artist Joe Baker in 2012



Tulip Purse

made by Pom-mah-pun-aqua about 1920

Beadwork on the panels and large beads on the fringes of this purse for the women.

Lenape Beadwork article, continued:

Wampum, is not mentioned again until the seventeenth century when colonizers such as the Dutch lawyer and commentator Adriaen van der Donck described the production of wampum.

“They strike off the thin parts of those shells and preserve the pillars or standards, which they grind smooth and even and reduce the same according to their thickness, and drill a hole through every piece and

string the same on strings" (figure 4). Van der Donck also wrote that wampum was strung and worn around the neck, wrists, and head, as well as using it to decorate clothing. He specifically noted that the lower borders of women's skirts were tastefully decorated with wampum. In the 1650s, Peter Lindström recorded that Delaware Valley Indians greased their hair with bear fat so that, "it shines so that one can see one's reflection in it." Then "the locks they bind up with braids and ribbons..... On the ends of their hair they string money (wampum) and tie a knot to (it)."

It was the fur trade that led to the wide spread use of European trade goods and the eventual predominance of using glass beads as a method of decorative embellishment among Native Americans. As early as 1675, traders began to exchange glass beads for animal pelts. These beads were commonly referred to as pony beads, possibly because they were transported by trader's horses. The process of manufacturing glass beads had been further refined making it possible to produce beads two millimeters and smaller in diameter. Because of their small size these beads were commonly referred to as seed beads, and when they became available in quantity, the adornment of clothing and other objects created by Native Americans underwent significant change.

First used for stringing necklaces, glass beads were most widely available in black, white, and blue. Before Native American beadworkers used seed beads to create elaborately beaded bags, they used limited amounts of pony beads in combination with quillwork. An interesting example of this can be seen in a Delaware shoulder bag from the late eighteenth century.



In this bag, the artist created geometric designs in quillwork on a hide pouch, but the strap is embellished with pony beads. The bag is also decorated with red-dyed hair inserted into metal cones. The use of metal cones was also important. Not only were movement and sound important to Native Americans, the reflectivity of metallic objects was associated with the brightness of the color white and its relationship to spiritual well-being. Interestingly, the use of red-dyed hair (and later red yarn) and metal cones remained a decorative embellishment on many Delaware bandolier bags throughout the nineteenth century.

As seed beads became more available, beadworkers took advantage of their aesthetic properties using them exclusively as their decorative material of choice. Delaware beadwork of the early nineteenth century used floral motifs as well as other design elements, but the quantity of beads, abstract designs, and vibrant color palette used in the Prairie style were not yet developed. The transition to the use of seed beads and the incorporation of floral designs can be seen in an example of an early nineteenth-century coat created by a Delaware or Shawnee beadworker. The artist embroidered floral designs onto a hide coat accented with fringe. The cuffs, hemline, waistline, and collar of the coat are decorated with simple, repeating floral patterns in blue, light blue, yellow, red, green, and black beads with some designs outlined with a row of white beads. The restrained design is an excellent example of early use of seed beads.

In another example of a beaded coat dated to 1840-1860, the beadworker has again limited the number of beads used to decorate the coat; Abstract floral motifs in blue, light blue, pink, and burgundy are repeated around the bottom edge of the coat; these designs are no longer open curvilinear forms, but instead they are fully formed floral designs which continued to be implemented by beadworkers throughout the nineteenth century.

The Delaware Indians and the Development of Prairie-Style Beadwork
Denise Neil-Binion
University of New Mexico in Albuquerque
May, 2013

This list compiled by
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