

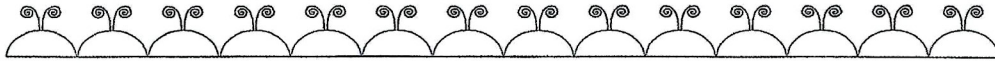
CHERISHED CURIOSITY

THE SOUVENIR BEADED BAG

in Historic Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Art

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2012



DESIGN MOTIFS

Some Observations on Design Motifs

Implicit in the thinking of many Native peoples is that objects have an inherent spirit or soul associated with them. When considering Northeast Woodland beaded bags, do we view them solely as inanimate art objects made to be sold as souvenirs, or do they contain within them something more—perhaps the protective spirit or essence of the plants and other sacred designs depicted on their surface? Iroquois art objects are often seen in isolation but the designs on beaded bags had a specific meaning to the artists who created them.

In general, motifs function as signs of social and cultural identity. Those motifs which are placed deliberately on articles of clothing and accessories visually communicate information about the group to which the wearer belongs, as well as information about the wearer as an individual. Such information as tribal affiliation, group membership, status, gender, age, sacred power, dream symbols, and artistic expertise may be communicated, often simultaneously, by means of design elements. Therefore, any motif that

occurs in strategic and conspicuous positions on clothing and accessories may be considered to be a sign; that is, a non-verbal means to communicate individual and group identity (Oberholtzer 1998).

There is always a risk in assigning a specific meaning to an old motif, but some designs appear over and over again and are likely rooted in the culture of the Northeast Woodland people. Notwithstanding, our appreciation of the beaded souvenir bag can be enhanced with a basic understanding of the iconography that appears on them.

The meaning of the visual imagery depends not only on the interpretation of the individual motifs but also on the way these motifs are placed in relation to each other. This is especially true of works of art which were used to facilitate communications with the spirit world—for in order to establish paths of communication it was necessary to create artifacts that correctly and harmoniously replicated the universal order (Phillips 1984:25).

Double-Curve Motif

The root of the double-curve motif is clouded in antiquity. The basic form was comprised of two opposing spiral or scroll designs that either turned inward or outward (fig. 2.1). The motif appeared throughout the decorative arts of the Indian nations from the northeast. In the Canadian Maritimes, it has been preserved in prehistoric Mi'kmaq rock art and was first described in the writings of Marc Lescarbot, a French author, poet and lawyer, in 1606–1607. The Reverend Silas Rand, who produced the Micmac/English dictionary in the 1800s, reported that his informants could not recall the origins of the design or what it meant. Though its original meaning is lost among the Wabanaki, in some applications it could be a graphic representation of the fiddlehead fern that grew abundantly in the Northeast. High in vitamins A and C, the fern would have had a rejuvenating effect on those who survived the winter on a sparse diet, deficient of ascorbic acid, and as such it would be regarded as a healing or sacred plant.

In 1957, Ruth and Wilson Wallis published a monograph on their work with the Maliseet for the National Museum of Canada. They wrote that the ancient occupation of collecting fiddleheads was an “enduring and relevant pursuit that had survived among them.”

The tightly curled heads of ferns, as they formed in the month of May, were the first spring greens for these Indians. Malicite say they taught the whites to eat fiddleheads, and now they pick and truck them to commercial canneries in New Brunswick and Quebec. The fern must be picked at the right moment, when still curled, “as tight as a fiddlehead” (Wallis and Wallis 1957:17).

In his treatise on the double-curve motif among the Penobscot, Frank Speck wrote extensively on the topic.

There seems, however, to have been in the past, if not now, judging from surviving ideas, a slight tendency for the women to connect the figures

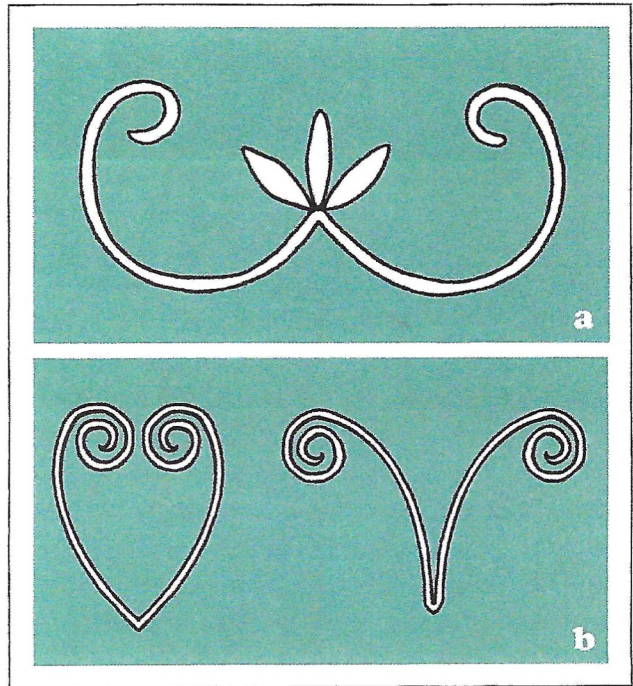


FIG. 2.1. (a) – stylized Wabanaki double-curve-motif with a characteristic mound or pedestal at the center; (b)—stylized Haudenosaunee double-curve motifs as seen on beaded bags. The form often has the bottom of the curve stems coming together at the base point.

with medicinal plants, as though there might have been some feeling of protective magic underlying their use as decorations upon personal property (Speck 1914:4).

In addition to its possible use as a healing or sacred plant, Speck goes on to say that it had a political function as well.

The primary significance of the double-curve and scroll figures among the Penobscot was a sort of political symbolism. The double-curve represented the bonds uniting the different members of the chief's family, the subdivisions of the tribe, or the officers of the council. This symbolism has, however, been totally forgotten except by a few of the older people (Speck 1914:4-5).

In a February 8, 1943, letter from the archaeologist George Quimby to Frank Speck, in the collection of the American Philosophical Society Library, Quimby expressed his belief that

the double-curve motif occurred in prehistoric Hopewell art. So this design likely originated in antiquity. It appears in the decorative arts of both the Haudenosaunee and the Wabanaki, and Speck observed that in the art of the Iroquois,

[t]he greater portion, however, exhibits the curves turning outward instead of inward.... Regarding the symbolism of the curved figures it is reported that they are primarily a representation of celestial, geographical and mythical phenomena (Speck 1914:8).

Among the Haudenosaunee, Arthur Parker,³¹ describes the use of the double-curve to represent phenomena such as the world tree or celestial tree. It sometimes symbolized the horns of a living chief if they turned outward, or a dead one if they turned inward (Parker 1911:48).

Speck believed that the double-curve motif originated with the northern Algonkian and was later adopted by the Haudenosaunee.

Evidence is well established to show the wide distribution in former times of the Algonkian double-curve decorative figure as far south as southern New England and the Middle Atlantic slope. An inference not to be slighted follows: that Iroquois and Huron art motives and techniques were acquired from Algonkian predecessors in the northeast, or, to put it in another way, that Iroquois migration may have resulted in the imposition of the general art style of the northern area upon that of the newcomers in that area. That this explanation was the true one the author sensed with equal conviction in 1925, after carrying on field investigations of the distribution of art types among Canadian tribes (Speck:1945:62).

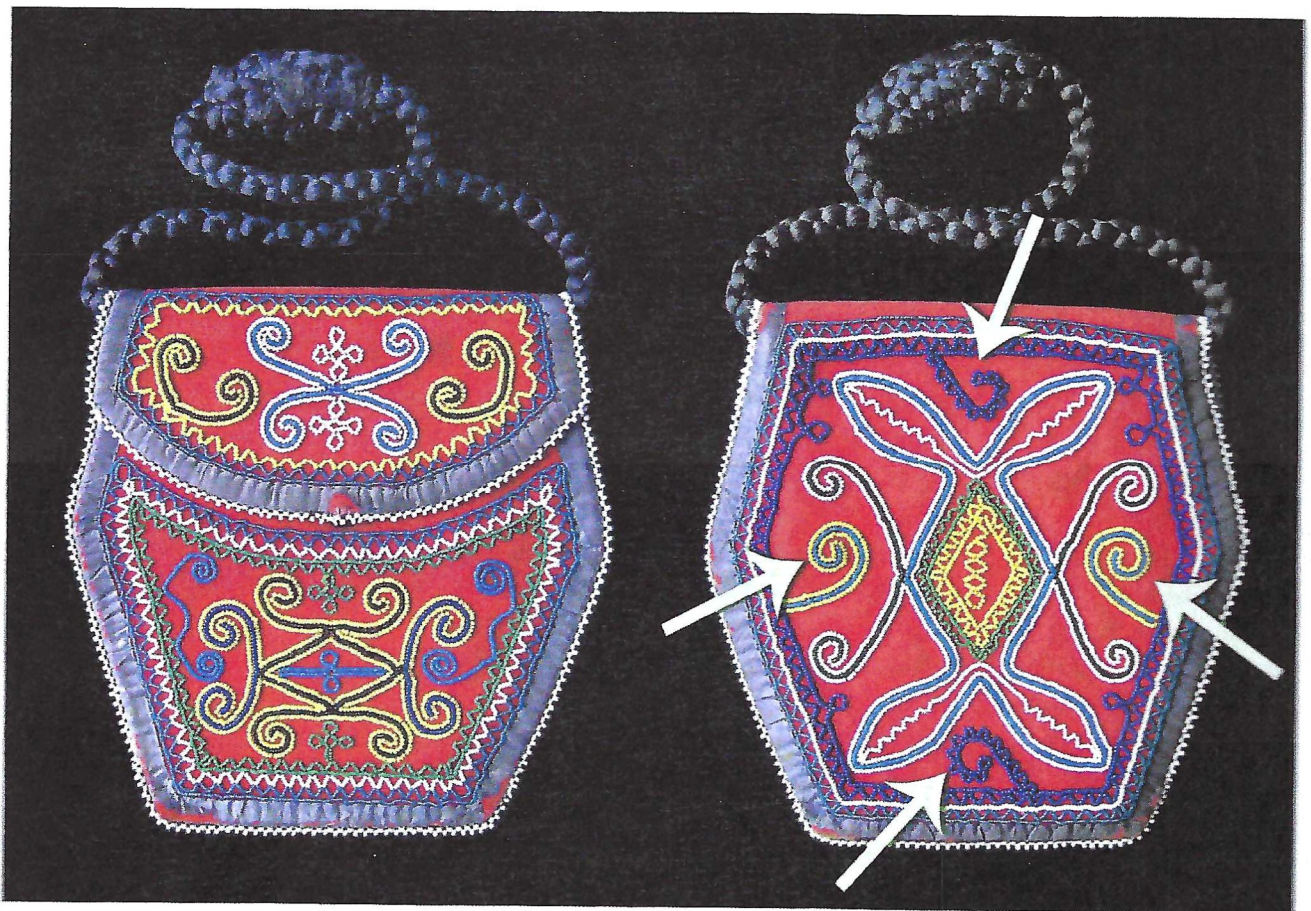


FIG. 2.2. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. First quarter of the nineteenth century. 6.2 inches high by 6.2 inches wide. The bag illustrates the use of the single scroll or spiral motif as a stand-alone design element. This feature is often found on early Haudenosaunee beaded bags.

Although the double-curve motif appears with some frequency on nineteenth-century articles of Wabanaki attire such as coats, collars, yokes, cuffs and hoods, it occurs infrequently on their souvenir beaded bags. When it does, it's usually an indication of an older piece and the form most often has the curves turning inward. There is generally a characteristic mound or pedestal at the center of the design (fig. 2.1a).

The form is more frequently encountered on early Haudenosaunee souvenir bags where it generally has the curves coming together at the base point. The shape sometimes evokes a stylized, opened crowned heart (fig. 2.1b). Among the souvenir bags produced by the Indian Nations from the Northeast, the Iroquois are almost exclusive in their use of the scroll or spiral motif as a stand-alone design element (fig. 2.2). Parker says it was occasionally used this way by the Iroquois as a border design (Parker 1912:616).

Some contemporary Mohawk beadworkers refer to the double curve as “loops” or “domes.” Historically, the Onondaga called the double-curve design a tendril and the Tuscarora referred to the scroll figures as violets and saw them as signs of good luck. To the Mohawks of Deseronto, they represented “fern heads.”

Celestial Dome Motif

Certain symbols are conspicuous in historic Haudenosaunee souvenir beadwork and they no doubt have deep cultural significance. The celestial dome, for instance, is prominent in the decorative arts of the Iroquois, especially on clothing, and the double-curve motif is, on occasion, combined with this design. The double-curve motif sometimes represented the celestial tree from the Haudenosaunee creation story (fig. 2.3a), either planted on the earth or above the sky dome (Parker 1912:613) (See: SIDEBAR #5). From time to time the celestial tree appears as a trefoil motif where the medial scroll or spiral unfolds from the center of the tree (fig. 2.3b). Although most often encountered on articles of clothing (fig. 4.6), the sky dome is sometimes seen on beaded bags (fig. 2.4).

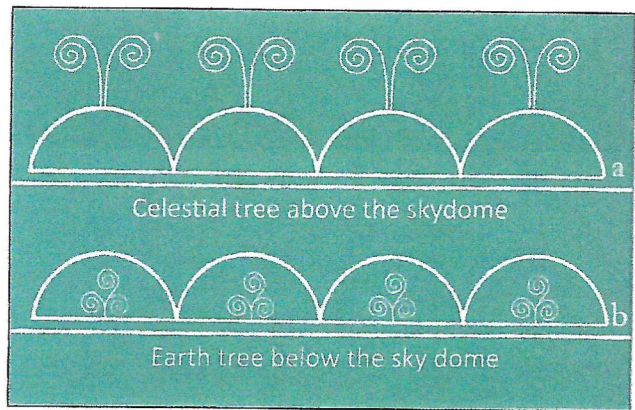


FIG. 2.3. An illustration of the double curve motif used to represent (a)—the celestial tree above the sky dome, or (b)—the earth tree planted below it.



FIG. 2.4. Beaded bag, possibly Seneca. Glass beads, black velvet fabric, silk ribbon edge binding. 7 inches high by 6.5 inches wide. Circa 1830. The undulating celestial dome motif along the perimeter of this bag is more often encountered on clothing. This is an uncommon application of the design on a beaded bag. Inside the skydome is a tri-lobed motif that may be a representation of the earth-tree from the Haudenosaunee creation story. It's very similar to a border design on a skirt in the Rochester Museum and Science Center (no. 70.89.61) attributed to the Seneca beadworker Caroline Parker.

SIDEBAR #5

The Haudenosaunee Creation Story

There are some forty recorded versions of the Creation Story, (the earliest dating back to 1632), and although they vary somewhat in their details, the essential story is the same; the universe was comprised of two worlds. The earth realm was covered with water and inhabited with aquatic creatures, and was dark and devoid of sun, moon and stars. Above the great sky dome of this world was the domicile of the spirits – the sky world. In one version, the great chief of that world became ill and dreamt that if a large, fruit-bearing tree was uprooted, he would be cured. The tree was dislodged, revealing the aquatic world below. His pregnant daughter was instructed to enter that realm and charged to bring light into it. At that moment, the animals of the earth realm saw a bright light falling towards them. As "Sky Woman" descended, the waterbirds tried to slow down her fall with their wings, while the aquatic animals looked for a suitable place for her to land. After many failed attempts by different creatures, a muskrat successfully brought up some earth from far below the water's surface and placed it upon the turtle's back. Upon doing so, the turtle began to grow until it became the great island known as North America. It was upon "turtle island" that Sky Woman landed. Not long after she came to rest upon this dark world, she gave

birth to twin boys. The firstborn was known as the good twin and he went about the world creating all the beauty that we see in it. The second twin was born by pushing his way through his mother's side, killing her in the process. He was known as the bad or mischievous twin because he went about undoing all the good work that his brother had created. The disconsolate good twin first brought light into the world by creating the "earth tree," on the top of which was affixed a great ball of light that he made from his deceased mother's face. He also created the moon and stars from her breasts. At last, he became exasperated with his brother's mischievous work and challenged him to combat. After many days of fighting, the good twin triumphed over his wicked brother and banished him to a dark cave where he still lives today.

In the 1827 account of the Creation Story that Tuscarora artist David Cusick related, "[t]he last words from the bad mind were, that he would have equal power over the souls of mankind after death" (Cusick 1827:5). The moral of the story underlies Iroquois thought that every individual has both good and bad intentions. Each of us is fighting an internal battle between the forces that are competing to dominate our spirits. To quote the old parable about the struggle between the two internal wolves – anger, greed, envy, arrogance, false pride, superiority, etc. and peace, love, joy, hope, humility, kindness, compassion, generosity, etc.—"the one that flourishes is the one you feed."

Another important modification of the sky-dome and celestial-tree combination is that which represents the sky-dome with the celestial tree upon it and the earth tree within the dome below and resting upon a long intersection of an oval (possibly representing the turtle) and sending its long leaves or branches upward to the sky-arch (Parker 1912:612).

Two examples of the sky dome are found along the edge of a skirt in the collection of New York State Museum.³² They are very similar to the design along the margin of the bag in figure 2.4. The

linear bead strings along the perimeter of similar designs represent the earth and the trefoil motif inside the domes represents the earth tree (Parker 1912:613–615).

Diamond Motif

The diamond motif is also an ancient design. It is seen on many early souvenir bags and is also found on moosehair decorated burden straps, quill decorated moccasins, older wampum belts and occasionally on prehistoric pottery. On some early wampum belts, such as the Six Nations

Peace Belt and the Oneida Tribal Belt,³³ the diamonds have been described as the council fires of the six Haudenosaunee nations. On other belts, the hexagonal shape (which is the profile or contour of many early Iroquois bags) has the same meaning. Conceivably, there was a shared symbolism on pieces from this period.

Sun/Circle and Four-Direction Motif

The circle motif is prevalent on many early souvenir bags and this design is open to more than one interpretation. There's a widespread belief in Native artistic traditions that the circle symbolizes the unity and cycle of life. In historic Haudenosaunee art, it almost universally represents the sun, which was regarded as the most esteemed and sublime spirit – the great solar provider of life. It is often depicted with an equal-armed cross at its center (fig. 2.5).

The equal-armed or four-directional cross is often seen in the decorative arts of both the Iroquois people as well as those from the Great Lakes and there may be a shared symbolism in their designs.

Symbolizing the four cardinal directions, it is a motif associated with the earth, the central layer of the universe. Locating the central axis of the cosmos was an important preliminary act to all communication with the spirits. Along this central axis lay the openings into the sky world and the underworld which permitted contact with the manitos dwelling above and below. When making an offering of tobacco to a spirit, the sacred pipe was raised to the four directions, an act which described a cross at whose center was the human being....[Crosses] are often juxtaposed with circles—a motif which may possibly represent the openings into the upper and underworlds (Phillips 1984:27).

Ted Brassler notes that the four-directional cross is associated with the cosmic world view of the Northeast Woodland people.

Although it was the symbol of the Soul-Spirit, the Four World-Directions, and several other regional interpretations, the cross essentially

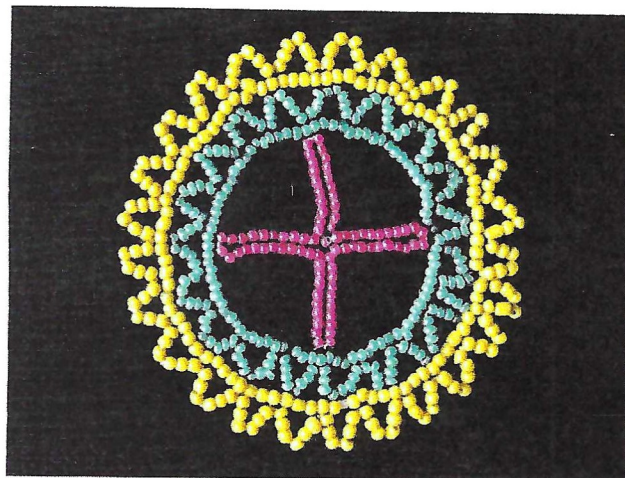


FIG. 2.5. A design motif often seen on early Haudenosaunee beaded bags that illustrates a four-directional cross inside a sun or circle motif.

symbolized the omnipresent God—the Great Spirit—not in his remote and inactive position at the top of the cosmological pantheon but as the Earthmaker. His representative, the Sun, is indicated by the circle at the center of the cross... (Brasser 1976:23).

A reference to the importance and sacred nature of the number four is suggested in the writings of Jabez Backus Hyde, a teacher to the Seneca at the Buffalo Creek reservation in 1811.

As far as I have been able to discern, these Indians are not idolators.... They speak of God as existing or made known in four persons or sounds; whether they have reference to the name Nau-Wen-Ne-U, or his creating or governing the four elements, or something else I could never satisfy myself. They address these four existences, persons or sounds, without any name, as the Great incomprehensible God, the Creator and Governor of all things (Severance 1904:242).

Tri-Lobed Strawberry Motif

Although depictions of strawberries are, on rare occasions, found on early Haudenosaunee beaded bags, the tri-lobed strawberry-leaf motif is more often encountered (fig. 2.6). Here it is prominent on the flap and in the lower corners of the bag.

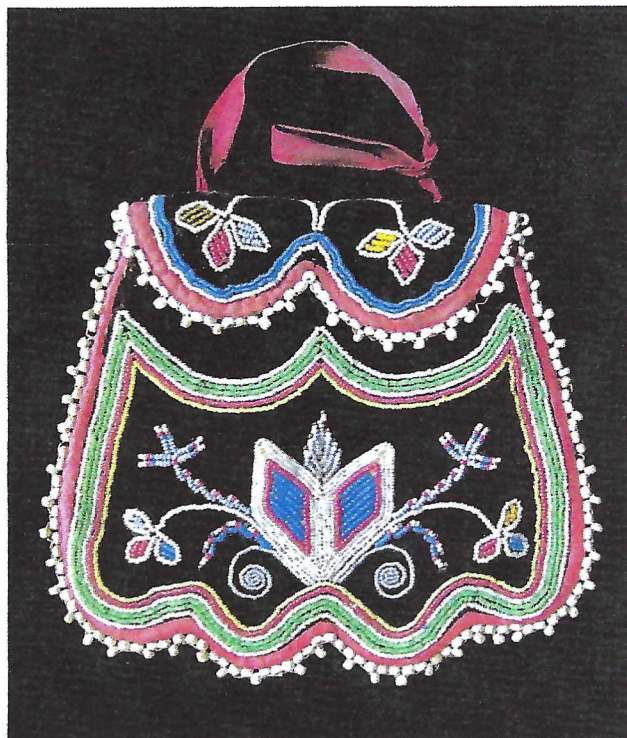
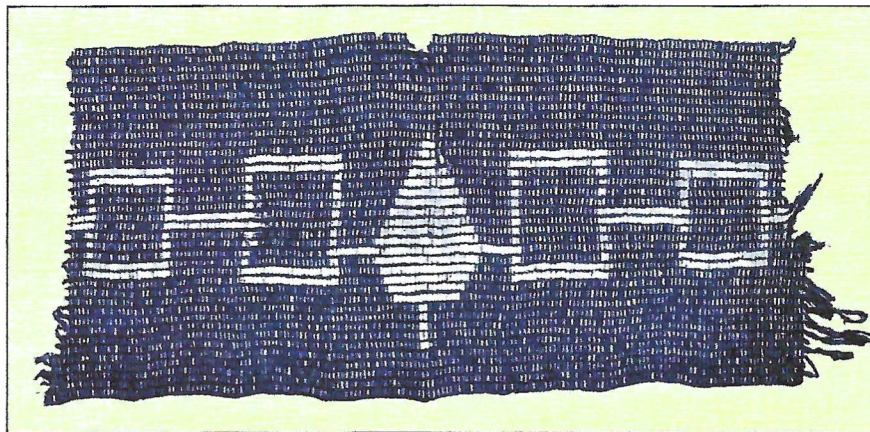


FIG. 2.6. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type, possibly Seneca. Glass beads, black velvet fabric and silk ribbon edge binding. 5.6 inches high by 6.6 inches wide. Circa 1840s. The tri-lobed strawberry motif is visible on the flap and in the lower corners of the bag.

Among the Iroquois, strawberries are an important part of the Gaiwiio, the “good word” or the gospel of the prophet Handsome Lake. As the first seasonal berry to blossom, it holds cultural, spiritual and medicinal significance for Iroquois people. It’s a link to the Sky World and some believe the importance of strawberries stems from Handsome Lake’s first revelations during strawberry season and afterwards.

The sacred quality of strawberries is certainly older than Handsome Lake. The earliest of the wild strawberries are

FIG. 2.7. An illustration of the Hiawatha wampum belt, considered the formative record of the League of the Haudenosaunee. The central motif symbolically represents the Onondaga, the heart of the league.



traditionally believed to have medicinal value and are searched out and devoured. Strawberries are said to sprout along the road to heaven, and... [i]n all probability, the fact that Handsome Lake’s angels spoke to him of strawberries reflects the influence of the strawberry season on the content of his dream, and his subsequent endorsement of the Strawberry Festival probably emphasized a custom already old (Wallace [1969] 1972:13).

Heart Motif

Another old design among the Iroquois is the heart motif. It first appeared as a metaphor on the Hiawatha (wampum) Belt,³⁴ which is considered the formative record of the League of the Haudenosaunee (fig. 2.7). Each of the four squares represents the Mohawk, Seneca, Cayuga and the Oneida. The central motif on the belt symbolically represents the Onondaga, the heart of the Haudenosaunee nation. If the heart or any of its constituent parts is harmed, all five Nations were affected.

[It] also means that the heart of the Five Nations is single in its loyalty to the Great Peace, that the Great Peace is lodged in the heart (meaning the Onondaga...) and that the Council Fire is to burn there for the Five Nations (Clarke 1929:56).

The original meaning of the heart motif on souvenir bags is still clouded in mystery although one possibility is that it might be related to the significance attributed to some silver brooches.

The heart shaped brooch has been called the national badge of the Iroquois because of its popularity among them. It is found in both single and double forms, often surmounted by a crown. The design is thought to have come to North America from Scotland, where it was a popular love token and betrothal symbol. The "Luckenbooth" brooch, as it was known in Scotland, may have been introduced by British-trained silversmiths such as Robert Cruickshank or James Hanna. Another possibility is that the Indians requested the brooch after seeing it worn by Scottish traders and settlers (Fredrickson and Gibb 1980:53).

The earliest Luckenbooth³⁵ brooches made in the shape of a heart were manufactured in Europe as early as the seventeenth century. "They were mostly used as luck tokens, or betrothal gifts, and the choice of the heart shape . . . is sufficiently obvious (Parker 1910:354)." Many were later made by Iroquois silversmiths who found their inspiration in European models, and historically, the Iroquois continued fabricating them until at least the 1860s.

Any brooch pinned to the garment of a child was regarded by the Scotch as an efficient charm against witches. . . . When the Iroquois silversmiths copied the Scotch patterns they left off many things that were common in the original patterns and interpreted the design as their own education, environment, or customs dictated. . . . (Parker 1911:285).

The use of silver brooches as charms to ward off evil spirits was an early component of Native peoples' traditional beliefs.

Silver was a gift from the underworld with a natural luminosity—a quality much revered by native people. They believed that the luminosity, especially in ornaments of personal adornment, constituted a power that reflected or blocked evil spirits and radiated the good powers of the sun and moon in the Upper World. Reflective silver ornaments were placed at strategic locations on

the body by adults and children, the living, and the dead. Luminosity represented knowledge and wisdom and gave life to inanimate objects. Iroquois ceremonial masks have reflective surfaces at the eyes to give them life and the Naskapi word for mirror translates as "see soul metal" (Hamilton 1995:49).

Sherry Brydon suggests that the origin of the heart motif on Iroquois bags may be related to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

For more than four hundred years, many Haudenosaunee have found faith in Roman Catholic teachings, and Catholic devotional images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Immaculate Heart of Mary treat the physical heart as a symbol of spirituality and reverence. . . . Artists often included their spirituality in their work, whether it was intended for personal use or for trade; it could be part of the ephemeral act of creating the object itself, or subject to restrained and sometimes elusive representations, or the inspiration for richly symbolic designs (Brydon 2011:113).

Graven images of Christ, with a flaming heart, are often depicted in Christian art and sometimes they are surrounded by a crown of thorns. The devotion paid to this image, for all practical purposes, is today exclusively a component of Roman Catholic dogma, but prior to the Protestant Reformation, the Sacred Heart of Jesus was venerated by all Christians.

Outside the Mohawk missions in upstate New York and in the Montreal area, which were highly influenced by Roman Catholicism, other Christian denominations joined the effort of proselytizing the Haudenosaunee.

The Quakers were not the only Christian group working among the Iroquois in the nineteenth century. . . . In addition to the Quakers, other Protestants with missionaries on Iroquois Reservations included the Episcopalians, Baptist, Methodist, and the New York Missionary Society, an interdenominational Protestant group (Graymont 2005:82).

Of all the Christian groups outside of Roman Catholicism, the Methodists were the most likely to embrace the Heart of Jesus and their sway was most influential among the Seneca from the Tonawanda Reservation.³⁶

An early work concerning the Sacred Heart was published in 1643—Thomas Goodwin's short treatise, *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth*—and was later abridged by John Wesley, the founder of the Methodists, and reprinted in 1819. Wesley had proposed to become a missionary to the Indians but failed in this endeavor. Some twelve years later, while listening to a reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Epistle of the Romans, he experienced what he said was "the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ" and he felt his "heart strangely warmed."

During the early-to mid-nineteenth century, some Iroquois artists featured a heart motif in the designs of their beaded bags (fig. 3.35). The heart, as the principal life organ, was also considered the center of all spiritual activity and in communities that had a strong Christian influence, it could be a symbol of the artists' devotion to the Christian faith.

The majority of bags that incorporate a heart were likely made by the Seneca from western New York. It's possible that those who embraced John Wesley's Methodism were guided in their design choices by their devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Another source of inspiration for this design may have been the Valentine holiday. As early as 1797, *The Young Man's Valentine Writer* was published and it was full of sentimental verses for the young lover who was unable to compose his own. Paper valentines, many of which were decorated with a flaming heart that was similar to those on images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, became so popular in the early nineteenth century that they were assembled in factories. Some of these Valentine cards depicted Niagara Falls in the center of the heart.

Whether the associations attributed to the heart-shaped brooches or to images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus had any relation to the heart motif on souvenir bags is still an unanswered question. Niagara Falls was a popular honeymoon destination and these bags may simply have been made to appeal to those who were newly betrothed or as a charming gift for a loved one.

The time-honored double-curve, diamond, heart, sun/circle and four directional motifs were often used in combination with one another. In all probability, some designs relate to a particular dream experience known only to the beadworker, enhancing its transcendent nature to the maker. Since revealing the precise meaning of a vision was to forfeit some of the powers it conferred, our understanding of the significance of many traditional designs may forever be clouded in mystery.



THE CLASSIC PERIOD OF SOUVENIR BAGS (C. 1800–1840S)

Early Classic Period (c. 1800–mid-to-late-1820s)

In the century before the introduction of the souvenir purse, Iroquois bags that were made on animal hide and for personal use were ornamented almost exclusively with dyed and flattened porcupine quills; beads were added just as an embellishment. Quills were used to decorate moccasins, pouches, clothing and a host of other items. Native women were ingenious in creating bags with imaginative designs that contained geometrical, curvilinear, and representational animal and human forms. For both men and women, these pouches were an essential article since their traditional apparel had no pockets. Surface decorations sometimes represented a guardian spirit, whose design was derived from a dream or visionary experience. These early pouches were used primarily to carry sacred medicines, ritual objects, tobacco, and articles for hunting, warfare or personal effects. Sherry Brydon points out that Iroquois moccasins “decorated exclusively in the linear style of beadwork still strictly followed quillwork design sensibilities. Double curves,

spirals, circles and wavy lines easily made the transition from quill work to beadwork.”³⁷ This is true of early souvenir bags as well. Although a few pre-1830 examples with embryonic floral decorations exist, it’s not until the post-1830 period that stylistic and representational floral designs became prevalent on beaded bags.

Exactly when the Haudenosaunee began producing souvenir beadwork is debatable. Certainly it did not begin until after the end of the Revolutionary War (1783) and at least two documented souvenir bags from the first quarter of the nineteenth century exist, suggesting that this style is much earlier than originally suspected.

Early leather bags that were embellished exclusively with seed beads are rare (fig. 3.1). This particular example is totally decorated with white beads. It has an intriguing, six-point star-like pattern on the back with silk inlays. It also has a silk lining, edge binding, and it once had a silk ribbon strap. Ted Brassler attributes it to the Seneca and ascribes a circa 1800 origin to this piece.³⁸ It’s stylistically similar to a Seneca headdress that is illustrated in *Iroquois Crafts*, which dates to the same period (Lyford 1945:72). This combination



FIG. 3.1. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type, beaded on animal hide (both sides shown). Glass beads (all white), silk ribbon inlays, silk ribbon edge trim, silk lining and traces of a silk ribbon carrying strap. 6.3 inches high by 6.8 inches wide. Circa 1800.

of construction materials suggests it may be a transitional piece, from bags made on animal hide and decorated with quills, to those that would soon be made on cloth and decorated with beads.

The bags in figure 3.2 are generally referred to as puzzle pouches. Their name comes from the split thongs that ingeniously extend from the top to form a puzzle-lock that kept the bag closed.

Though little has been published about them, they appear to have been popular in places where the French first established their missions. Speck pictures two in his monograph on the Iroquois. One is decorated with moosehair on black buckskin; the other with porcupine quills and it's fringed with beads. They both appear to be quite early and possibly from the last quarter of the eighteenth century (Speck [1945] 1982:6). The Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, has a dated example with an old note that reads: "Procured by R.C. Baldwin of the Western Indians in 1834." Their pouch has a turtle motif on one side and a central sun motif on the other. Both Haudenosaunee and Algonquian speaking groups in the northeast were making these bags and their use may have spread as far west as the

Great Lakes. The design on the example in figure 3.2a has a Delaware influence although the undulating design along the perimeter is similar to the celestial dome motif on the bag in figure 2.4. The Delaware were guests of the Oneidas in the early 1700s, and after the Revolutionary War some of them removed to the Six Nations Reserve in Canada where this bag might have originated.

Puzzle pouches date back to the late eighteenth century. They may have been inspired by the miser or stocking purses that were popular in England and France as early as the mid-eighteenth century. Similar to the puzzle pouches, miser purses were used to hold coins that were inserted into a central, slotted opening. The coins were then held secure by rings that were slid down over the outside of the purse, to guard against the coins falling through the slit. Some scholars consider them a revival of the medieval practice of carrying coins in the extremities of an old sock. Like the puzzle pouches, the design ensured that coins were secure and difficult to lose.

The surface of the bag in figure 3.2d is decorated with porcelain white and translucent blue

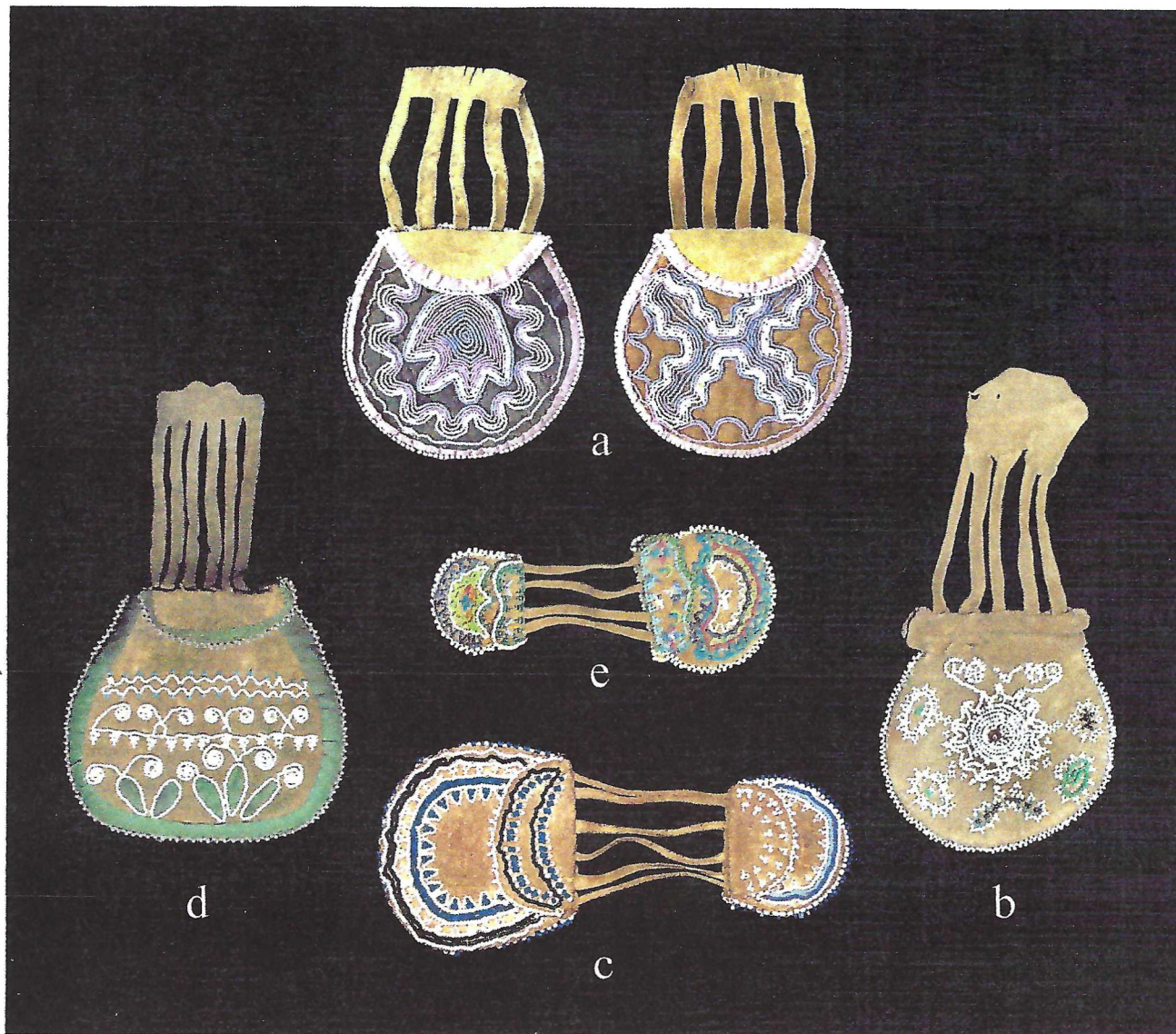


FIG. 3.2. A group of early beaded bags on animal hide. These are generally referred to as puzzle pouches. (a) – both sides shown; possibly Delaware. Glass beads (white, pink and grey), and a silk ribbon edge binding, 4 inches wide. Early nineteenth century. (b) – possibly Haudenosaunee. Glass beads, mostly white with a scattering of red, green, black and blue, 3.4 inches wide. Pre-1830. (c) – double pouch, possibly Haudenosaunee. Glass beads (blue, green and white). The larger pouch is 3.2 inches wide, the smaller one is 2.2 inches wide. First half of the nineteenth century. (d) – possibly Haudenosaunee, glass beads (blue and white), silk edge binding and silk inlays. 4.2 inches wide. Early nineteenth century. (e) – double pouch, possibly Haudenosaunee. Glass beads. The larger one is 2.1 inches wide, the smaller one is 1.5 inches wide. Circa 1830. Possibly made for a doll.

beads and is edged with a green silk ribbon. It also has silk ribbon inlays. On some early Iroquois beaded bags the overall field of decoration is monochromatic with the designs created in all white or nearly all white beadwork, in a characteristically linear fashion. Beaded on the front of this pouch is a row of inverted triangles; on

the reverse the triangles are beaded along the left and right margins of the pouch. The example in the Berkshire Museum cited earlier has similar triangles along the perimeter. The anthropologist Frank Speck describes a comparable motif on a Wabanaki wampum belt from the same period that he said represented the tribal wigwams

of the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Maliseet and Mi'kmaq (Speck 1915:501). Of course this is no assurance that the triangles on the puzzle pouches had the same connotation. Other designs, such as the diamond, sun, four-directional cross and double-curve motifs are found on both late-eighteenth century hide pouches and early-nineteenth century souvenir bags and these designs may have a shared sensibility. It's not likely their significance changed just because the medium they were applied to did. Some early souvenir bags have these same beaded triangles and this could be diagnostic of Iroquois work (fig. 3.3). Considering that two parallel bead strings along the perimeter of a design represent the earth (Parker 1912:613), the triangles on this piece could be literally interpreted as tribal wigwams sitting on terra firma, or more broadly they could represent a village or a Nation.

The example in figure 3.2b, acquired from a Massachusetts estate, is mostly decorated with white beads. It also has a limited use of green, red, and black beads. It came with an old, handwritten note that reads: "My grandfather bought this when he was peddling wooden ware out west among the Indians of an Indian girl." In the early nineteenth century, "out west" was likely a reference to the Niagara frontier. The central sun-like feature on one side of this pouch could be a representation of the celestial or world tree from the Haudenosaunee creation story.

The double puzzle pouches in figure 3.2c and 3.2e are unusual in that their design is more like the miser pouches described above that were made to hang over a belt. The diminutive size of the pouch in figure 3.2e suggests that it may have been made for a doll and the beading style and dating of this bag is a little later than the others. Figure 3.2c also has the beaded triangles on both sides of the bag. Although puzzle pouches were almost exclusively beaded on hide, bags that were made for the souvenir trade were usually beaded on cloth.

A general feature of the most elementary souvenir bags is their well-organized and logically constructed designs. The artistic flexibility that beads offered facilitated the development of

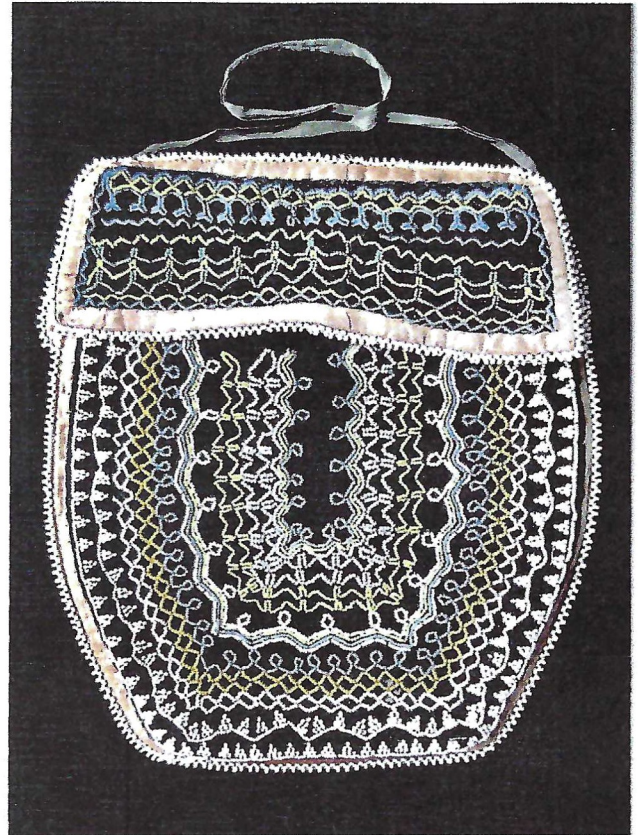


FIG. 3.3. Beaded bag, Northeast Woodland type, likely Haudenosaunee. Glass beads, black velvet fabric and silk ribbon edge binding. 7.6 inches high by 6.8 inches wide. Circa 1830s. Similar to a bag in the Rochester Museum and Science Center, Rochester, NY (#C268) that is attributed to the Seneca of Buffalo Creek.

curvilinear designs and you can see this newfound freedom on early pieces. The overall field of decoration is sometimes done in just one color and like earlier examples that were decorated with porcupine quills, souvenir bags from this period generally have large areas of negative space (fig. 3.4). The bead sizes on some of the earliest souvenir bags are somewhat larger than those seen on purses that were produced after the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825. This particular example is likely from the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The New York State Museum in Albany has a well-documented souvenir bag in their collection that they acquired in 1964 (fig. 3.5). It was originally purchased in 1807 by Dennis Doyle, a New York City merchant. He procured



FIG. 3.4. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type (both sides shown). Glass beads (all white), black wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 7.35 inches high by 6.5 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century.

the bag in Albany while there as a guest of Robert Fulton for the inaugural launch of Fulton's steamboat, the *Clermont*. Doyle was the uncle of Mrs. Charles M. Purdy, of Marlborough, Massachusetts, whose name was inscribed on an old note inside the bag, where she identified it as having been acquired from an Indian by Doyle. Mrs. Purdy's granddaughter subsequently obtained it from her grandmother and upon the granddaughter's death, a friend donated it to the museum. This early piece is made in the classic Haudenosaunee hexagonal shape. This same profile is woven into the design of several early wampum belts where each side of the form signified a territory of the Six Nations in the League of the Iroquois. This could be why the shape was selected for

the bags and why it's so prevalent on early Iroquois examples.

When this piece was donated to the museum in 1964, no research had been done on souvenir beadwork. This may account for the Mahikan (?) attribution.³⁹ That this assignment was made without evidence for its actual origin is supported by the museum's attribution which contains the question mark. This means whoever recorded the tribal affiliation wasn't sure who made it and was offering a best guess.

There is a remote possibility that the bag was acquired from a Mahican but that doesn't necessarily mean it was made by one. Sometime after 1784, a band of Mahicans from Stockbridge, Massachusetts (sometimes called the Stockbridge Indians), was gifted a parcel of land by the Oneidas.



FIG. 3.5. Beaded bag, Hausenosaunee type (both sides shown). Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 6.5 inches high by 6 inches wide. Purchased from an Indian in Albany, New York, by Dennis Doyle in 1807. Copyright of the New York State Museum, Albany, NY, catalog no. E-50500. Used with permission.

It was located in present day Madison County, New York, on what was originally Oneida land. By 1792, the Mahicans had built a schoolhouse and were planning a spinners. From 1797 to 1801, four Mahican girls were taken to Philadelphia by the Quakers and instructed in the art of spinning cloth. Upon their return, one of them, Mary Doxeter, opened a spinning school on the reservation and by 1815 there were some 60 girls receiving instruction in the art. At some point, she went to live with the Onondagas where she established another spinning school (Eddy 1819:274). Doxeter became well respected among both the Mahican and Oneidas and occasionally transacted legal business for them in Albany.

Furthermore, there was an ongoing interaction between the Stockbridge Indians and the Seneca of western New York through the Quakers. In March of 1787, the Quaker Committee of Friends in Philadelphia voted "to assist and encourage any suitable friends who may feel their mind drawn to go into this country... of the Seneca Nation of Indians... for the purpose of instructing them." A year later, in March 1798, three young Quaker missionaries—Halliday Jackson, Joel

Swayne, and Henry Simmons (who had already lived among the Oneida and Stockbridge)—volunteered to "spend some time" among the Seneca (Wallace [1969] 1972:221).

So even at this early date the Mahicans were learning hand-crafting skills from the Quakers and had a channel through them to the Seneca. Considering the proximity of the Oneida/Stockbridge reservation to Albany, and that Mary Doxeter was conducting business for the tribe there during the same period that the Doyle bag was collected, it is possible that this purse originated from them. It is also possible that the Mahican acted as agents for the Seneca and sold it in Albany on their behalf. Further, it could have been a Seneca bag that was sold or traded to a Mahican who then sold it to Doyle. If the bag is Mahican, it's the only example known to the author of a souvenir bag attributed to them. The hexagonal shape and the design motifs are more typical of bags attributed to the Seneca.

The linearity of the design on the Doyle bag is similar to those seen on eighteenth-century animal hide bags that were decorated with porcupine quills. This bag also incorporates alternating



FIG. 3.6. Beaded bag, Hausenosaunee type, Seneca or Tuscarora (both sides shown). Glass beads, black wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 6.8 inches high by 6.4 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. An early bag with a central sun and equal-armed cross motif. An old, handwritten note that came with the bag indicated it was collected at Niagara Falls around 1794. See text for more information.

bands of beads around a central heart motif. The sun, with an equal-armed cross on the flap, and the diamond motifs on the other side, are traditional symbols that are generally seen on early bags attributed to the Western New York Haudenosaunee. The Doyle bag has no areas that are solidly filled with beads (a characteristic of early nineteenth century pieces) and it has more negative space between the designs than is customarily seen on later pieces. These are features that are diagnostic of the earliest nineteenth-century souvenir bags.

The design of the bag in figure 3.6 is also very linear. The central sun with an equal-armed cross, the zigzag lines along the perimeter and the diamond motifs on the reverse are similar to those on the Doyle bag. Made in the classic Haudenosaunee hexagonal shape, it came with an old, handwritten note that reads as follows: "This bag was given to me in August, 1919 by Miss Blake of Cape May—She is 88 years old and said the bag

was brought from Niagara Falls 125 years ago by a relative—It was made by Indian women—Grace May Lissenden."

If Miss Blake's recollection was accurate, it would date this piece to 1794, which would be noteworthy for this style of bag. Stylistically, it's comparable to the Doyle bag and like the Doyle bag it does not incorporate any areas of solid bead fill. The similarity between the two suggests they are from the same time period.

Another bag in this incipient nineteenth-century style is beaded on animal hide and it has a sun motif inside a central diamond (fig. 3.7). Souvenir bags on hide are extremely rare and this piece, which has a silk lining, is from the early souvenir period. Throughout the history of the souvenir beaded bag, Haudenosaunee artists were experimenting with the form, structure and materials of their craft. One reason so few souvenir bags were beaded on leather is because it was a more difficult material to work with. The diminishing



FIG. 3.7. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, deer hide, silk ribbon edge binding and silk lining. 5.9 inches high by 6.4 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. A rare, early souvenir bag beaded on animal hide. The bag is similar to one in the Southwest Museum that is attributed to the Tuscarora (See: Brant 1990:73).

availability of deer hide and the broadening accessibility of textiles, which was a more agreeable work medium, was no doubt a contributing factor as well.

A fine, early bag with a well-organized and logically constructed linear design is illustrated in figure 3.8. It has a large central sun motif with a four-directional cross in the center, similar to the one in figure 3.6, and the design, in greasy blue colored beads, appears on both sides.

Occasionally, early bags are found in which the design elements are arranged to resemble the gnarled faces seen on Iroquois masks.

[The masks] were carved in response to particular dreams. They are portraits carved in wood of several types of mythological beings whom the old Iroquois say only a little while ago inhabited the rocky regions at the rim of the earth or wondered about in the forest. The Seneca term for "mask" ... is face. ... [T]he Faces of the Forest have also claimed to possess the power to control sickness. They have instructed dreamers to carve

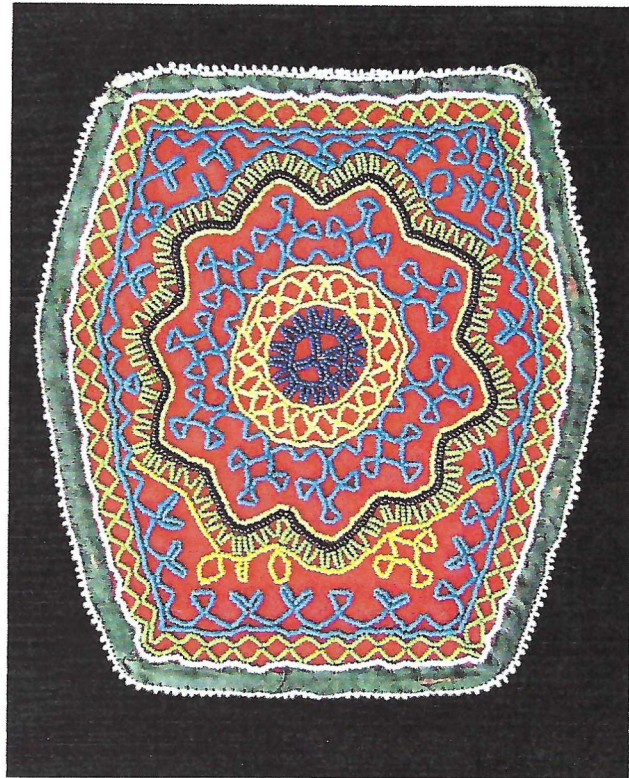


FIG. 3.8. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 6.3 inches high by 5.7 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. An early bag with a central sun and equal-armed cross motif.

likenesses in the form of masks, promising that whenever anyone makes ready the feast, invokes their help while burning tobacco, and sings the curing songs, supernatural power to cure disease will be conferred on human beings who wear the masks (Fenton 1987:27).

If a "Face" came to someone in a dream, they were obliged to either make a mask or engage someone skilled in carving to make one for them. Historically, images of mythological beings adorned more than just masks.

Masquettes, we know, are kept as charms, as talismans, and may be called upon to substitute for the larger forms. Faces may be expected to occur in other media—in pottery, pictographs, stone, and bone. Quite obviously, I am anticipating what may be discovered by stating what one may expect to find. The dialogue between present



FIG. 3.9. Three beaded bags, Haudenosaunee type, possibly Seneca. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. (a) – 5.12 inches high by 6.25 inches wide. An early bag with a design suggestive of the whistling mask or blowing spirit masks from the Society of Faces. The decorations on this unusual bag were beaded onto a single piece of broadcloth which was then folded over and sewn together at the sides. The design flows continuously from one side to the other and is beaded across the bottom. This is a very rare construction method. Usually bags are beaded onto two separate pieces of fabric that are then sewn together on three sides. Circa 1830. (b) – 6.9 inches high by 6.3 inches wide. Circa 1822. The design on this bag also evokes an image of a face or a mask. The beaded design around the eyes is suggestive of the metal inlays seen on some Haudenosaunee masks. The bag is illustrated with the top or opening of the bag at the bottom of the image. When viewed this way the face or mask is more obvious, suggesting that this could have been intended as a self-directed design, meant to be viewed from the wearers' perspective or otherwise hidden from view. (c) – 6.3 inches high by 5.7 inches wide. The design on this bag is suggestive of the protruding-tongue masks from the Society of Faces (See: Fenton 1987:38–39). The bag is illustrated with the top or opening of the bag at the bottom of the image. When viewed this way the face or mask is more obvious, suggesting that this could also have been intended as a self-directed design. 1800–1820.

and past is reciprocal: one illuminates the other, as Father Lafitau perceived 250 years ago (Fenton 1991:66).⁴⁰

A small number of early bags appear to have the likeness of a face covertly embroidered into the design (fig. 3.9). In all likelihood they are Seneca, the most traditional Nation among the Haudenosaunee, but it is unknown if this is one of the other forms that Fenton alludes to or whether an actual relationship exists between the designs on these bags and the Society of Faces.⁴¹

The purse in figure 3.9b is stylistically similar to the Doyle bag (fig. 3.5) and the Lissenden example (fig. 3.6) and it has the familiar motifs seen on the early souvenir bags worked into the likeness of a “Face.” A separation along the edge of this bag revealed a piece of an old newspaper on the inside, between the lining and the bag face that was used to stiffen it during construction. The newspaper fragment was from an 1822 edition. Paper backings or stiffeners were often used between the lining and the fabric face of souvenir bags because the fabrics they were

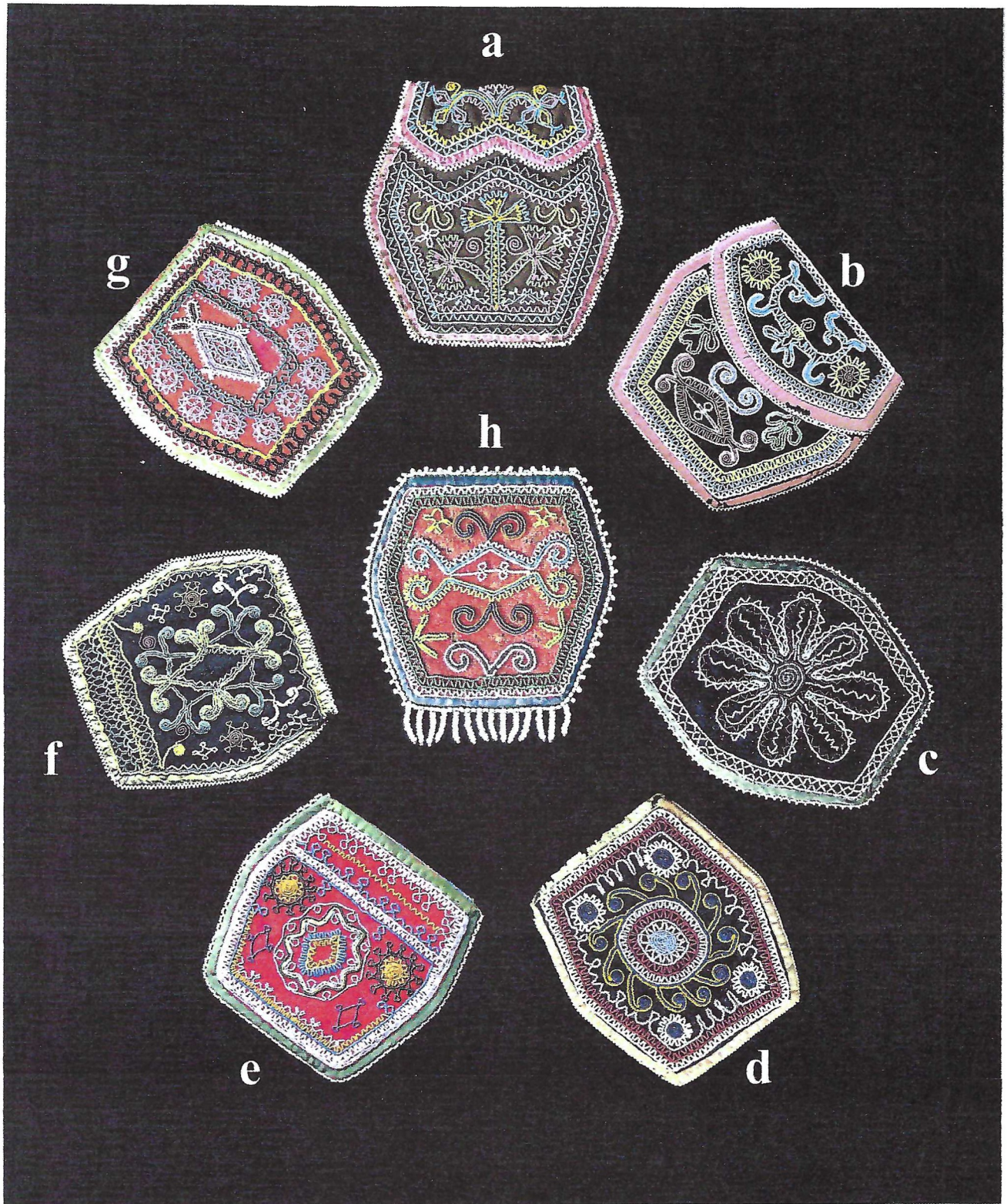


FIG. 3.10. A group of beaded bags, Haudenosaunee hexagonal type. All are beaded on wool broadcloth and have a silk ribbon edge binding. Typically 7 inches high by 6.5 inches wide. From approximately 1800–1830.



FIG. 3.11. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type (both sides shown). 7 inches high by 6 inches wide by 2 inches thick. First quarter of the nineteenth century. An early drawstring reticule with a central sun with equal-armed cross motif on one side and an abstract, four-directional design on the other. The extended top is made of silk and there is a 2-inch wide gusset made from the same material.

beaded on could not support the weight of a heavy layer of beads.

Figure 3.10 illustrates more examples of pre-1830 Haudenosaunee bags. The fundamental characteristics of the earliest souvenir bags is that they were often hexagonal in shape (although a smaller number were U-shaped), and they had intricate, curvilinear and geometric designs that were well-organized and logically constructed. These designs included large areas of negative space. The decorations often incorporated traditional symbols like the double-curve, heart, diamond, sun with equal-armed cross, and a host of other organic motifs (fig. 3.11). Bags from this period had few design elements that were solidly beaded. For the most part, the beads were sewn onto a wool broadcloth that was either red or black. Occasionally, bags from this period are found that were beaded on black velvet and a small number were beaded on silk (fig. 1.7a). The edge binding was almost always silk ribbon and usually in green, red, or blue, although other colors were sometimes used. As a

rule, a two-bead edging was sewn along the outside of the bag and there are variations of this stitch as well, though the variant in figure 3.12 is perhaps the most common.

The use of silk ribbon as an edge trim on early souvenir bags may have been occasioned by events in France. "Large stocks of ribbons were dumped on the Indian market when the French Revolution [1789–1799] enforced in France a rigid simplicity of dress" (Brasser 1976: 38). Franklin Allen points out that during the period from 1841 to 1846, "there was a noticeable falling off in the demand for silk goods" (Allen 1904:32). These dates coincide with the rapid decline in the use of silk edging on beaded bags and with the introduction of the Niagara floral-style (discussed in Chapter 4), which more often than not used a cotton ribbon/hem tape as the edge binding.

An early bag with a simple though elegant four-directional motif is illustrated in figure 3.13. It is made in the style that dates from the first quarter

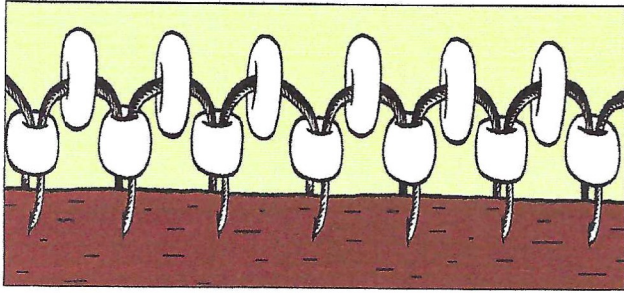


FIG. 3.12. An illustration depicting a technique called two-bead or zippered edging. This beading technique is found along the edge of many early Seneca or Tuscarora bags. Though there are variations to this technique, this variant is perhaps the most common.

of the nineteenth century and it incorporates several design elements that were common on early period bags, such as the sun symbol, diamond, and double-curve motifs. The ambiguous design on the flap is intriguing and other bags from this period often include these abstruse designs.

There were numerous flap variations on souvenir bags during the classic period. Some had a functional flap that would fold over the top, to secure the contents, as in figure 3.13. On others, there was no actual flap, though one was suggested in the design (fig. 3.14 and 3.22). Some bags had flaps on both sides that were non-functional

and seemingly there just as ornamentation (fig. 3.15). Access to the inside was through an opening along the top. Still others had no flap at all and lacked any suggestion of one in the design (fig. 3.10 c, d, e, f, g, h, and 3.16). Some old bags are found with non-functional flaps that were sewn down so they couldn't be lifted. It has been conjectured that souvenir bags had non-functional flaps because their makers were copying examples they saw in ladies periodicals without fully understanding their function. This notion seems unlikely as there are examples of late eighteenth century porcupine quill decorated bags on animal hide that were made for personal use that had these non-functional flaps⁴² and this practice went on well into the nineteenth century, long after their makers would have seen disparate examples and recognized their function. There is likely some other reason why they were constructed this way. The wide variety of flap designs suggests that this was just a form of artistic or stylistic expression, to make an artist's work distinctive from those of her contemporaries rather than a functional device.

A very unusual bag with a three-point flap is illustrated in figure 3.17. Dating from the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the bag's flap



FIG. 3.13. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type (both sides shown). Glass beads, black velvet fabric, silk ribbon edge binding. 6 inches high by 6.6 inches wide. A beaded bag with a functional flap. First quarter of the nineteenth century.

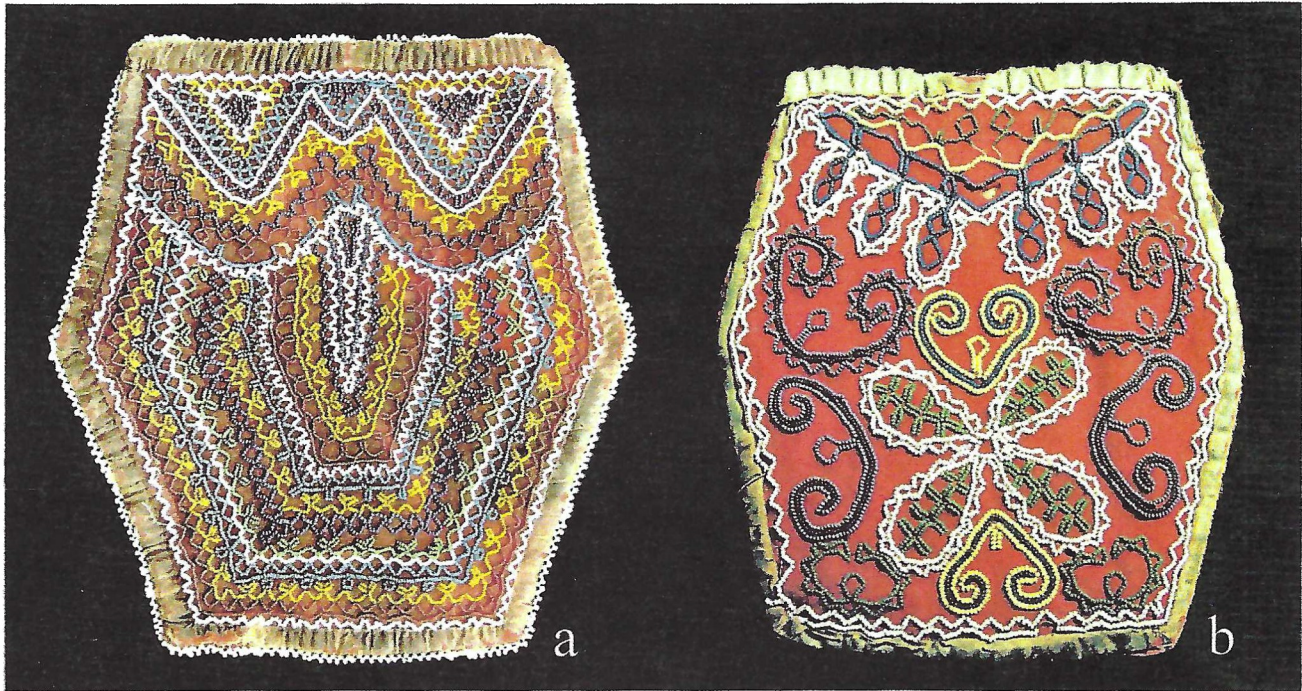


FIG. 3.14. Beaded bags, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. (a) – 7.6 inches high by 7.2 inches wide. 1830s. The beaded design at the top suggests a scalloped flap. (b) – approximately 7 inches high by 5.5 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. The maker of this bag also added a design at the top suggestive of a flap with fringe. The double-curve motifs are in the form of an opened crown heart as illustrated in figure 2.1b. (b) – from the collection of Naomi Smith. Used with permission.



FIG. 3.15. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, black wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 7.3 inches high by 7.9 inches wide. 1825–1830. Some Haudenosaunee bags, such as this example, had flaps on both sides that were non-functional and possibly there simply as ornamentation.

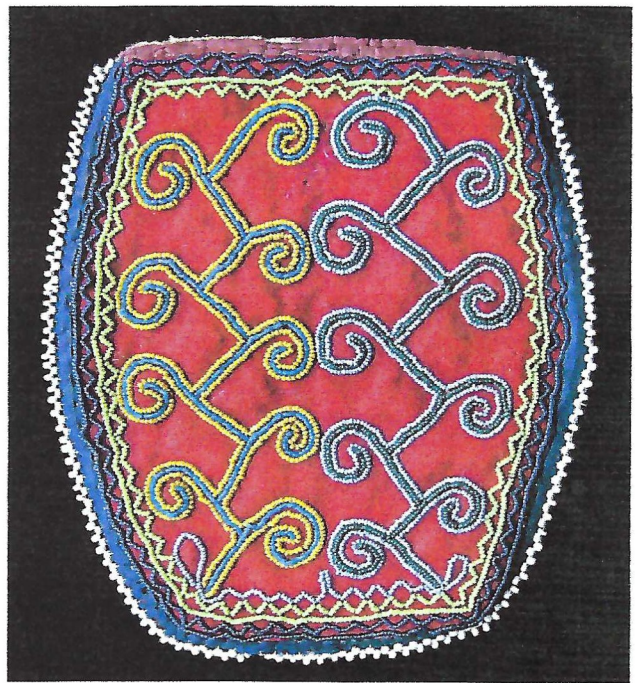


FIG. 3.16. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 6.6 inches high by 5.8 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. Some bags had no flaps at all nor were any suggested in the design.

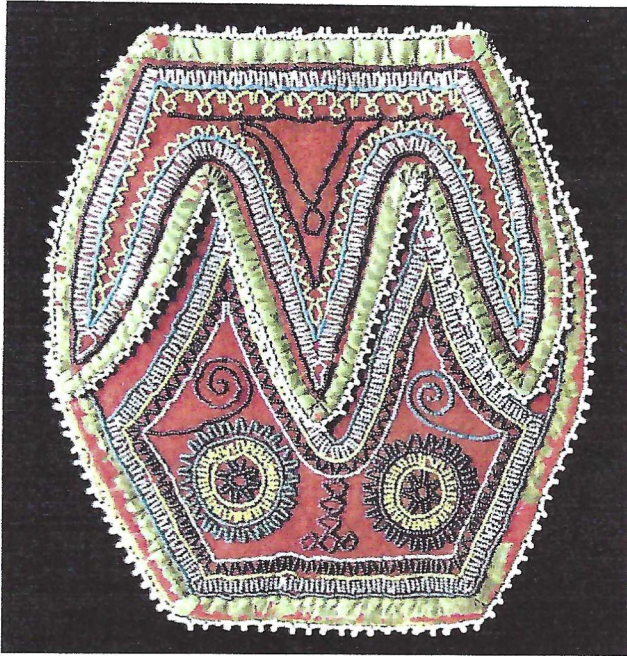


FIG. 3.17. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads, red wool broadcloth, silk ribbon edge binding. 7.125 inches high by 6.5 inches wide. First quarter of the nineteenth century. Some bags had unusual flap designs like this example with a three-point, functional flap. The reverse side is figure 1.8f.



FIG. 3.18. Beaded bag, Haudenosaunee type, possibly Seneca. Glass beads, black velvet fabric, silk ribbon edge binding and a balsam fir motif on the flap. Approximately 6 inches high by 6 inches wide. Early to mid-1840s. An unusual three-point, non-functional flap design on this mid-nineteenth century bag. From the collection of Naomi Smith. Used with permission.

is functional and it is stylistically similar to the example in figure 3.18 that is from the 1840s. Additionally, on some souvenir bags, the flaps concealed a small slit or hidden pocket beneath them.

Late Classic Period (mid-to-late 1820s—1840s)

The beaded bags that the Haudenosaunee produced for the souvenir trade are distinctive and they changed stylistically over time. These changes occurred gradually but, as a general rule, distinguishable style refinements can be categorized and placed into broad time frames. There are two classic periods when the hexagonal bags were produced: pre-1830 and post-1830. The gray line of demarcation between the two occurs sometime after the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825. This event not only brought more tourists to the Falls but it likely spurred competition between

Native beadworkers as well. As time progressed, their work matured and by 1830, examples with highly developed compositions are found. The complexity of designs on bags produced after the official opening of Erie Canal suggests that as tourism flourished at Niagara Falls, so did the designs on bags. By 1830, the use of finer beads allowed for more intricate and technical designs. Bags from this period are found with some of the smallest seed beads that the Bohemian bead factories were producing. The bag in figure 3.19e and 3.20b, for example is embellished with mostly size 20/0 and 22/0 (.046 & .040 inch diameter) beads. Since their primary function was as an exchange commodity, the ultimate end for the artists was to make their bags more attractive and desirable to a potential patron.

In appreciation for their support of the American cause during the War of 1812, the Tuscarora were granted the immutable right to sell their beadwork on Goat Island.

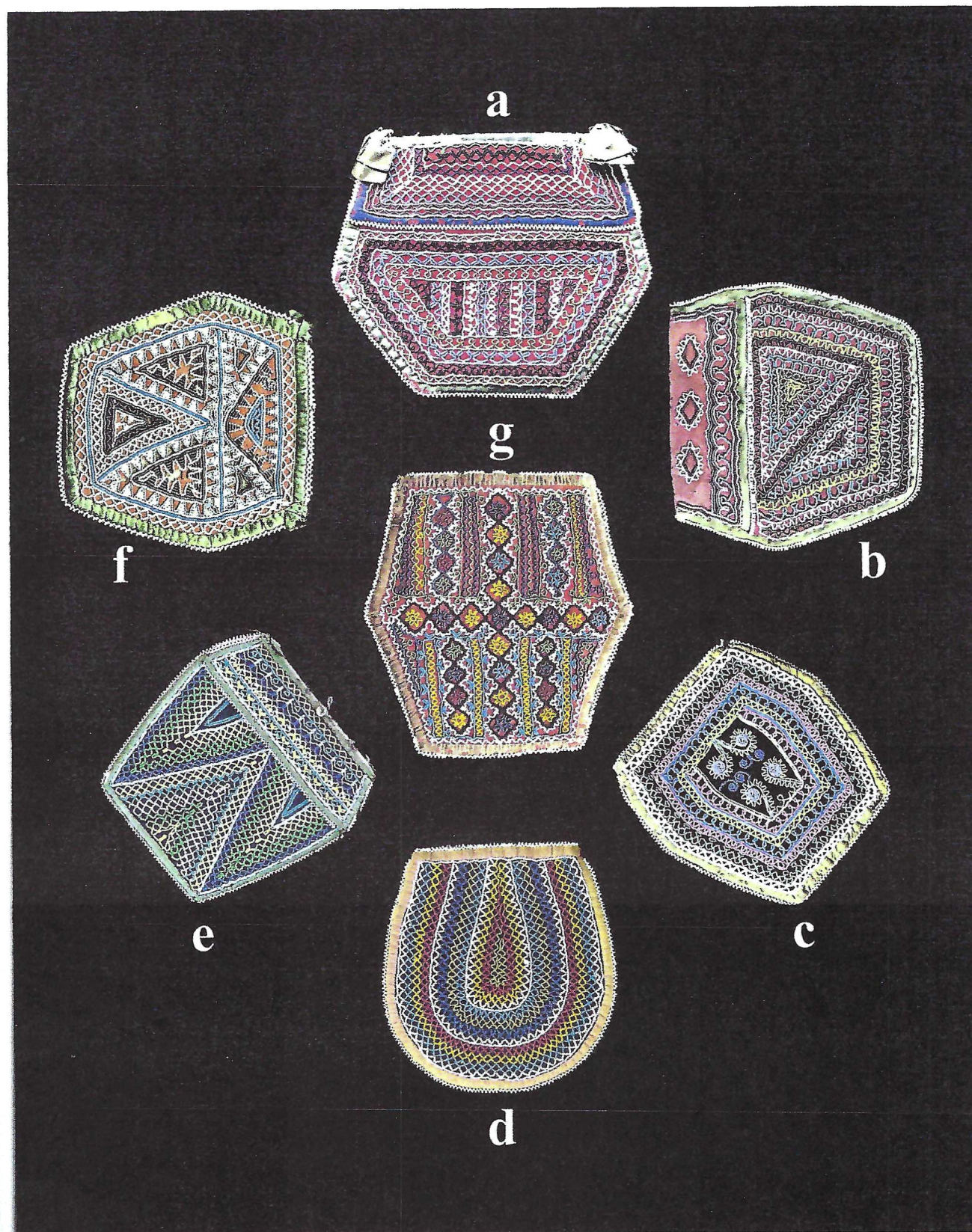


FIG. 3.19. A group of beaded bags from approximately 1830 to the 1840s. Haudenosaunee type. Glass beads; some are beaded on wool broadcloth, some on velvet. All have a silk ribbon edge binding. (a) – 6.9 inches high by 8.5 inches wide. (f) – from the collection of Richard Green and dated 1842 on the inside. Used with permission.