

**Elitekey**

**Micmac Material Culture  
from 1600 A.D. to the  
Present**

**Ruth Holmes Whitehead  
The Nova Scotia Museum  
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*Halifax*

Photographs by Ron Merrick

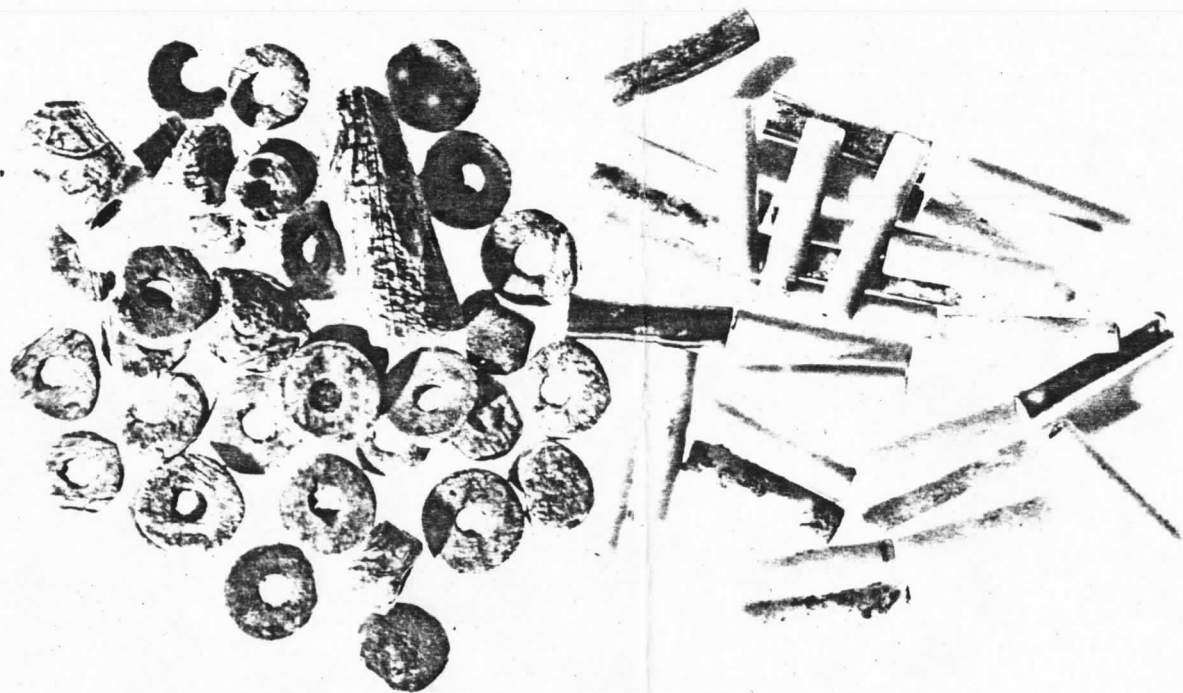


Figure 6  
Shell beads, made from variety of molluscs, together with cylindrical trade beads of blue and white glass, from a very early seventeenth-century site near Avonport, N.S.

charcoal, and ground white shell.<sup>10</sup> The blue and violet colour-sources remain a mystery, although berries may have been used, or an ink-like substance made from the common Dog Whelk (*Nucella lapillus*).

*It caused me some surprise to see  
That people who did not have dyes  
With which to write or draw could make  
Varied designs with so much skill;  
Yet lines with artistry they traced  
On skins which they themselves prepare  
And coloured with the juice of fruit . . . .*<sup>11</sup>

In the 1600's, painted designs included realistic and geometric motifs, parallel lines and broken chevrons, and "lace-like patterns" which may have been the double-curve motif later used in beadwork.

Costumes and accessories were further embellished with

beads and other ornaments made of native copper, stone, bone, teeth, claws, seeds and shell. Copper was cold-hammered into flat sheets, which were then rolled into cylindrical beads. Animal teeth and claws, pieces of worked bone, even ducks' feet were sewn over clothing or strung as necklaces. Stone was worked into pendants. Both tubular and disc-shaped beads were made, from the shells of conchs, whelks, and other common molluscs. The most prized of these shell beads were made from a bivalve, *Venus mercenaria*, which provided the well-known purple and white wampum. Although this shell occurs in Nova Scotia, the Micmacs in the early seventeenth century obtained most of this type of wampum ready-made from other tribes.<sup>12</sup> The Micmacs may also have practised fur or skin appliqué on leather. Feathers were incorporated into ornaments and there is a seventeenth-century mention of bird's wings being worn on either side of the head.<sup>13</sup>