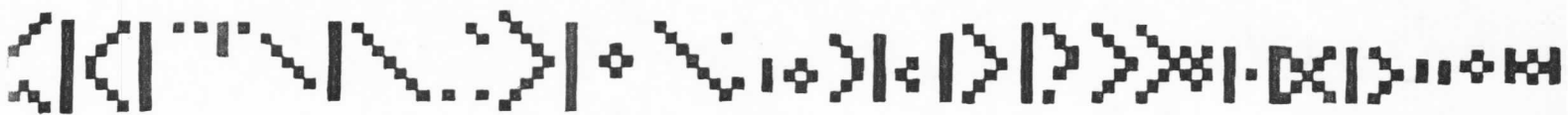


Micmac Quillwork

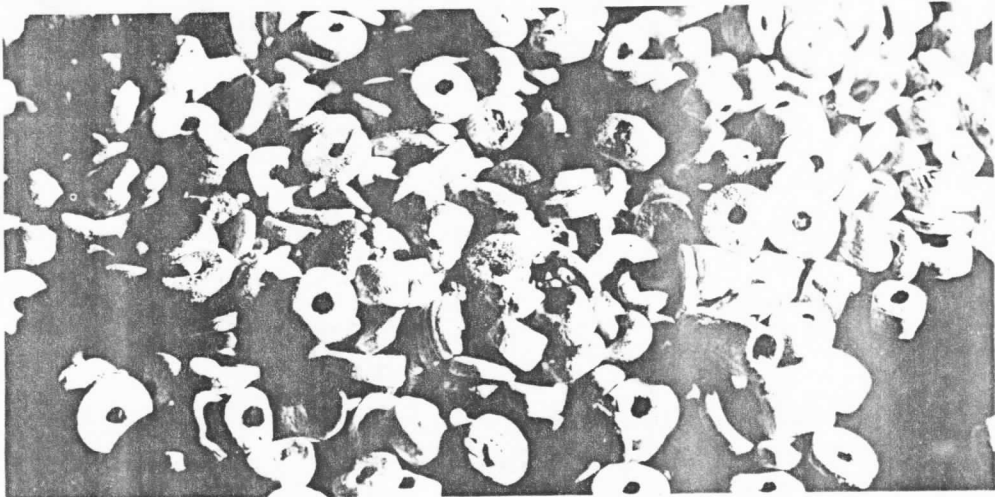
Micmac Indian Techniques of Porcupine Quill Decoration: 1600-1950

Ruth Holmes Whitehead

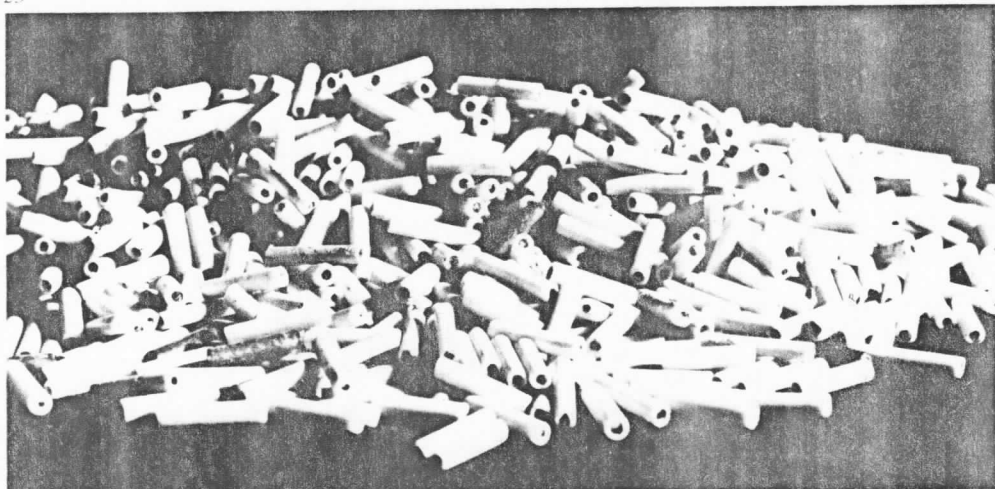


With an Appendix on Quilled-Bark Conservation, by Deborah Jewett
Atlantic Conservation Centre, The Canadian Conservation Institute

The Nova Scotia Museum
Halifax, 1982



23



24



25

in the woods a grave built in the form of a box, containing a quantity of skins and beaver and of moose, some arrows, bows, *wampum*, *beadwork*, and other trinkets.⁷⁹

Lack of the highly-prized trade-metal in this grave is suggestive of an early date for the beadwork in this burial, as the same author⁸⁰ records contemporary grave goods as including guns, kettles, lead and powder. Beads were obviously an extremely popular trade item.

As to the types of trade beads available, LeClerc⁸¹ knew two women who treasured jet beads from an unthreaded rosary. In the 1680's, 'Venice beads' are mentioned in an inventory of trade goods in Québec.⁸² The Abenaki chapel of St. François de Sales in 1684 had an altar covered with collars of '...Bugle beads and strings of porcelain [*wampum*] and articles worked with glass beads and porcupine quills.'⁸³ All of these French-introduced beads would presumably have been obtainable by the Micmac.

The Nova Scotia Museum collection⁸⁴ formerly included a number of the older forms of trade beads, described as '6 oval to semiglobular, dark purplish blue; 4 oval, greenish blue; 1 oval, opaque white; 1 disk-shaped, opaque white'.

An excavation of a seventeenth-century burial near Pictou, N.S., recovered 112 glass trade beads, spherical, dark blue in colour, and 1/16" in diameter; a large amount of very dark blue ovoid beads, approximately 1/8" in length, and strung on a 2-ply fibrous thread, were also found. A third type was of a translucent ice-green colour, and spherical.⁸⁵

The burial also included several ovoid, dark purple beads, half the size of the larger blue ones and decorated with lengthwise or diagonal opaque white stripes. There were minute dark purple ovoid beads, less than 1/16" in diameter; and there was *wampum*.⁸⁶

23. A group of approximately 2,000 shell beads from a seventeenth-century burial near Avonport, N.S.; made from *Busyon*, *Venus mercenaria*, and the common mussel shell.

24. 'Beads or quills made of white and blue glass', from a seventeenth-century burial near Avonport. There, 1069 white beads and 34 blue ones were found mixed with the shell beads shown in Figure 34.

25. Beads similar to those from the Pictou site were found in a third Micmac burial of the same period, near Northport, N.S.

When J. Russell Harper excavated the Portland Point site at the St. John River mouth in 1955, he found five glass beads on what appears to have been Fort Latour, a French fur-trading post which was destroyed in 1645. He also uncovered an Indian burial, which he theorized might have been that of a Mirimachi River Micmac; he felt the grave dated from within a quarter of a century of Fort Latour's destruction. The contents of this grave are of great interest, as they included 284 specimens of a spherical glass bead, coral red with a colourless core, 1/4" in diameter; 38 spherical glass beads, black with 6 applied white longitudinal stripes and a white line at each 1/4"; one spherical glass bead, black with 13 applied white longitudinal stripes and a white line at each end surrounding the core, 1/2" in diameter. There were 23 specimens of white *wampum* of native manufacture. These beads and *wampum* were strung on two sinew threads knotted at each end. Also in the grave were 18 spherical black glass beads, with a transversely ribbed surface, ranging in diameter from 3/16" to 1/4" and strung on sinew with a knot at each end.⁸⁷

Trade beads were gaily coloured, they could be recycled, and they were infinitely easier to work with than were porcupine quills. Other trade items besides beads, however, were being incorporated into Micmac ornamentation. 'Coloured sewing thread'⁸⁸ appears in a Québec trade inventory, and may have been the medium used to work the crosses of 'red and blue stuff', seen by Bishop St. Valier⁸⁹ on the costumes of pregnant women — having replaced those noticed by LeClerc, done with quill stitchery.

Many quillworkers must have been attracted by the novelty of ribbons, buttons, embroidery thread, gold braid, lace and jewelry. The Portland Point contact-period burial previously mentioned yielded a 'decorative copper chain of 125 links; each link is composed of a tube formed from 8 turns of coiled wire; clasp is made up of two figure 8's, one at each end of the chain; overall L. 17".⁹⁰

They also pierce their ears, to which they attach certain pieces of beadwork, with little bells, *sols-marquez*, *derniers*, and other trifles of that sort, which serve them as earrings.⁹¹

42. LeClercq, 1691/1910:89.
43. *Novascotian*, Halifax, 30 June 1851.
44. Denys, 1672/1908:423.
45. Denys, 1672/1908:448.
46. LeClercq, 1691/1914:126.
47. This 'case' could possibly have been a type of folded wallet of bark. One such was seen by Gamaliel Smethurst in 1765: 'Sometime before, there had been a French smuggling vessel upon the coast, on board of which was an artful priest, who had told the Indians, that the Pope had received a letter from Jesus Christ; copies of which his Holiness had been so good as to send to them by him, for which they must pay him thirty pounds of beaver (worth about seven pounds sterling) for each copy; and if they would follow the orders in that letter, a French fleet would come at such a time, and drive the English from their country: in expectation of meeting this fleet the Indians were collected.' The conditions in the letter were '... that the Indians should refrain, such a limited time, from drinking rum or cyder, (the strong liquors the English could furnish them with); they had liberty to drink claret or brandy (what the smuggler was loaded with); and that they should not let the English read one of these letters. I saw one of them hanging to a ribbon, round the neck of a chief, guarded with eight or ten folds of bark — the Indian would have parted with his life as soon as with this paper.' (Smethurst, 1774:47)
48. LeClercq, 1691/1910:96.
49. Adney, Chapelle, 1964:68.
50. Akins, 1895:15.
51. Sauer, 1968:37.
52. Sauer, 1968:37.
53. Sauer, 1968:37.
54. Sauer, 1968:34.
55. Sauer, 1968:269-70.
56. Sauer's seemingly excellent reasons for placing this colony in 'the Annapolis lowland on the Bay of Fundy' are detailed in his book *Sixteenth Century North America*, p.50-51. Morison (1971:229), on the other hand, places this colony at Ingonish, Cape Breton Island.
57. Sauer, 1968:277.
58. Sauer, 1968:50. Emphasis added.
59. Wallis, Wallis, 1955:10.
60. Sauer, 1968:277.
61. Brown, 1869:35.
62. Brown, 1869:35.
63. Brown, 1869:36-37.
64. Wampum consisted of flat circular shell beads, with a central hole for stringing. Wampum found in Nova Scotia includes those made with *Venus mercenaria*, *Buscyon*, and with a variety of common mussel. (See Ganong, 1910:414-415)
65. Lescarbot, 1609/1928:212.
66. Lescarbot, 1609/1928:143.
67. JR III:73.
68. Denys, 1672/1908:414-415.
69. Denys, 1672/1908:414, 478.
70. LeClercq, 1691/1910:222.
71. Lescarbot, 1609/1928:213.
72. Lescarbot, 1609/1928:112.
73. LeClercq, 1691/1910:88, 99, 151.
74. LeClercq, 1691/1910:98-99.
75. LeClercq, 1691/1910:301.
76. LeClercq, 1691/1910:270.
77. JR III:131.
78. LeClercq, 1691/1910:301.
79. LeClercq, 1691/1910:302-303.
80. LeClercq, 1691/1910:300-302.
81. LeClercq, 1691/1910:230-231.
82. Bailey, 1937:50.
83. Bailey, 1937:151.
84. NSM Accession Books, Vol. V, Item 7952.
85. According to J. Russell Harper (1957:15), who described this excavation, 'A suggestion has been advanced that originally these may have been of red glass and undergone a colour change as a result of chemical action...'
86. Harper, 1957:15.
87. Harper, 1956:31-32.
88. Bailey, 1937:49.
89. St. Valier, 1688; in Ganong, 1910:190.
90. Harper, 1956:32.
91. LeClercq, 1691/1910:99.
92. Lescarbot, 1609/1928:100.
93. Bailey, 1937:49.
94. By the 1850's, the Micmac are recorded as quilling cloth caps, coats, and the cloth vamps and cuffs to their moccasins; but this required an entirely new approach (See Chapter 3). None of the old leather-decorating techniques were used; instead, they employed adaptations of bark-insertion. The quill-ends are inserted *through the cloth* into holes in a backing of birch-bark. Other techniques presumably had to be abandoned with their skins.
95. Harper, 1956:34.
96. Harper, 1956:46.
97. JR II: 75-77.
98. LeClercq, 1691/1910:93.
99. Anonymous letter, Aug. 19/1749; in Akins, 1895:15.
100. Robinson, Rispin, 1774/1947:52.
101. Bailey, 1937:10.
102. Denys, 1672/1908:418.
103. Dièreville, 1710/1934:167.
104. For discussion of these aspects of Micmac art, see Chapter 8.
105. Personal communication, November 1977.
106. Bailey, 1937:55.
107. Bailey, 1937:75.
108. Bailey, 1937:75.
109. JR I: 177. Emphasis added.
110. JR III: 105, 109.
111. Bailey, 1937: 74, 66.
112. LeClercq, 1691/1910:254.
113. Denys, 1672/1908:446.
114. Denys, 1672/1908:449.
115. Bailey, 1937:74, 66.
116. Denys, 1672/1908:444.
117. Denys, 1672/1908:444.
118. LeClercq, 1691/1910:225-256.
119. Bailey, 1937:113.
120. LeClercq, 1691/1910:249.
121. These suicidal tendencies were also shared by the men, to some extent, although LeClercq stresses more 'the mania of our Gaspesian women' (1691/1910:249).