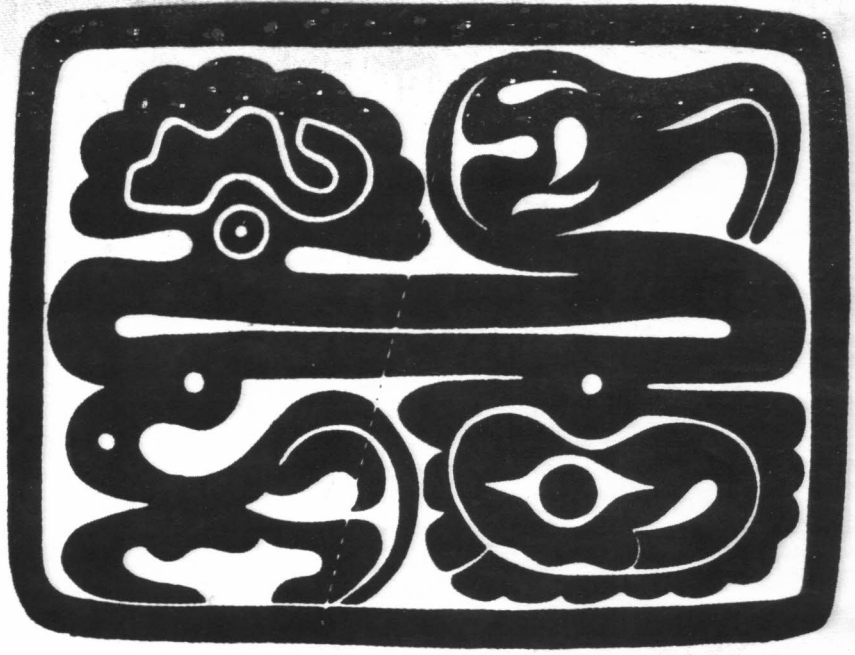


Most recently on display in the art gallery at the Illinois State Museum was an exhibition entitled **Beads: Their Use by Upper Great Lakes Indians**. The exhibit explored the use of beads by the Upper Great Lakes Indians with over a hundred items on display. Beginning with the prehistoric residents, 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, and culminating in the modern, historic reservation period, beads and bead-like objects used for personal adornment were shown, and their probable relationship to the temporal culture explored.

The exhibition was assembled by the joint efforts of the Grand Rapids Public Museum and the Cranbrook Academy of Art/Museum, with financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Michigan Council for the Arts, and the Grand Rapids Museum Association. Following the initial showing at the Grand Rapids Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the fall of 1977, it has been on display at nine various regional museums. It is currently on display at the Lakeview Center for the Arts and Sciences in Peoria.

The entire assemblage has been comprised of items from several museums. Included in the more than 120 objects in the exhibit are three of the sample bead cards from the Illinois State Museum's Frost Trade Bead Collection (see *THE LIVING MUSEUM*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, pp. 434-436), and three pieces of Chippewa beadwork from the reservation period.

The Upper Great Lakes region includes the drainages of the Lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron. This territory was inhabited by about a dozen Indian tribes during the early 17th century including Chippewa (Ojibwa), Eastern Sioux, Saux and Fox, Huron, Illini, Iroquois, Kickapoo, Menomini, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Winnebago. Of these, the Chippewa were the largest and most important tribe in the area and still, today, inhabit the northern regions with reservations in Canada, Wisconsin and Minnesota.



Engraved Adena tablet on hard, dark brown shale. One of 12 in existence, the tablet was broken and only the right portion was found. The remainder was constructed by studying other tablets.

BEADS

Upper Great Lakes Indians

by Judi Johnson

There is little early prehistoric evidence for the use of bead-like objects, yet beginning about 6,000 years ago, burials reveal copper and shell bead necklaces, and single- and double-holed stone gorgets (pendants). By 1,000 B.C., perforated human and bear teeth, and wolf and lynx phalanges (toe bones) were added to the bead-like objects used for necklaces. Although there is no evidence that they were used, because of preservation factors, it is highly likely, based on historic evidence, that wood, large seeds and nuts were also used as beads by early residents.

When Columbus appeared in the New World, one of the items he brought with him was Venetian glass trade beads. Ever

since, these have been highly valued by Native Americans. The first trade beads were large and often single beads were used as pendants or strung as necklaces. These first glass beads were brought into the Upper Great Lakes by the early explorers and traders in the 16th century: some as gifts to cement friendship and some in trade for furs. Later missionaries used glass beads as rewards in converting the American Indians.

Later, smaller "pony" beads, suitable for sewing, and the very small "seed" beads were highly valued by the American Indians. These beads became an important part of the fur trade for they were compact, light weight and easy to transport during travel. The



decorative skills the Indian women had developed for use with porcupine quills were quickly adapted for use with both the pony and seed beads.

New techniques and designs were developed exclusively for use with glass trade beads. With the advent of trade cloth, bead embroidery took on new dimensions. Supplied with fine metal needles and silk or linen thread, and freed from the demands of sewing on leather, bead embroidery soared to previously unknown heights near the end of the last century. Garments were lavishly covered with colorful stylistic floral designs on a beaded background or set against rich bronze or black velvet, the favored cloth among the Eastern and Upper Great Lakes Indians during the 19th century.

Both loomed work and finger weaving were highly developed arts which further illustrate the Indians' talents in adapting materials to technique. Designs used with loomed beadwork and fingerweaving are strictly geometric. Because of the difficulties presented when trying to incorporate curved lines into a medium of horizontal and vertical ones, attempts at rounded design elements follow the "step" or diagonal to create the rounded illusion.

Around the beginning of this century, as increased transportation created a tourist's market, the Indians began making items exclusively for sale. They began to incorporate traditional designs and techniques in these salable items, responding to what they felt the White Man regarded as "Indian." Examples of this work can be seen in such items as beaded pendant necklaces and beaded bracelets, beaded women's dress belts, beaded jewelry or trinket boxes, and other Non-native articles of apparel.

Subsequent issues of *The Living Museum* will continue to explore the use of beads by other American Indian peoples.



Suggested/Further reading:

- Grand Rapids Public Museum and the Cranbrook Academy of Art/Museum
 1977 Beads: Their Use by Upper Great Lakes Indians. *Grand Rapids Public Museum Publication* Number 3. Grand Rapids, Michigan. (Exhibition catalog.)
- Johnson, Judi
 1976 American Indian Beadwork. *The Explorer*, Volume 18, Number 4, pp. 23-29.
 1977 The Frost Trade Bead Collection. *The Living Museum*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 1, pp. 434-436.
 The Manufacture of Glass Beads. *The Living Museum*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 2, pp. 448-450.
- Orchard, William C.
 1929 Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians. *Contributions from the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation*, Vol. XI.
- Quimby, George Irving
 1960 *Indian Life in the Upper Great Lakes: 11,000 B.C. to A.D. 1800*. The University of Chicago Press.

From the Frost trade bead collection.