

size of a raven's quill at the base, and tapering to a point which is sufficiently large to permit a small thread; it is from one to 1-1/2 inches in length, white, smooth, hard and thin. These are worn in the same manner in which the beads are; and furnish the men with their favorite ornament for the nose. One of these shells is passed horizontally through the cartilage of the nose and serves frequently as a kind of ring to prevent the string which suspends other ornaments at the same part from chaffing and fretting the flesh."

Another favorite practice with dentalium shell was carving it with lines or designs. Since the shell was quite fragile, it was difficult to inscribe designs upon; any person who had the talent to do so could greatly increase the value of the shell and also win recognition from his friends. Figure 108 shows a close-up of a piece of carved dentalium found at Chishucks on the Wilson River.

Trade Goods

In historic times the Indians wagered white trade goods as a medium of exchange in their gambling activities. Probably the most common trade goods wagered was the glass bead, introduced into the Pacific Northwest sometime in the 1700's. These beads appealed to the natives because they were attractively colored and shiny and could be strung and worn on the body, much the same as the dentalium shell.

Blue beads were generally the most highly prized by the Chinooks and the Tillamooks, a fact recorded by Lewis and Clark. "The favorite ornament of both sexes is the common coarse blue and white beads which the men wear tightly wound around their wrists and ankles many times until they obtain the width of three or more inches. They also wear them in large rolls loosely around the neck, or pendulous from the cartilage of the nose or rims of the ears, which are perforated for the purpose. The women wear them in a similar manner except in the nose, which they never perforate."



Fig. 107. Dentalium shell necklace.



Fig. 108. Close-up of carved dentalium shell.

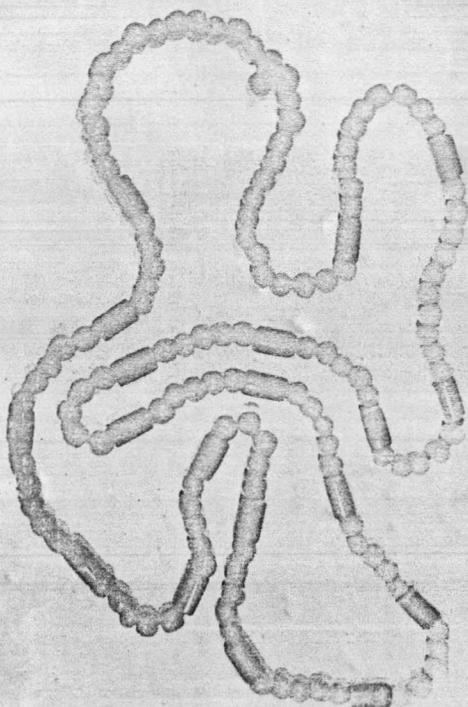


Fig. 109. Blue trade beads referred to by Lewis and Clark as "Chief beads."

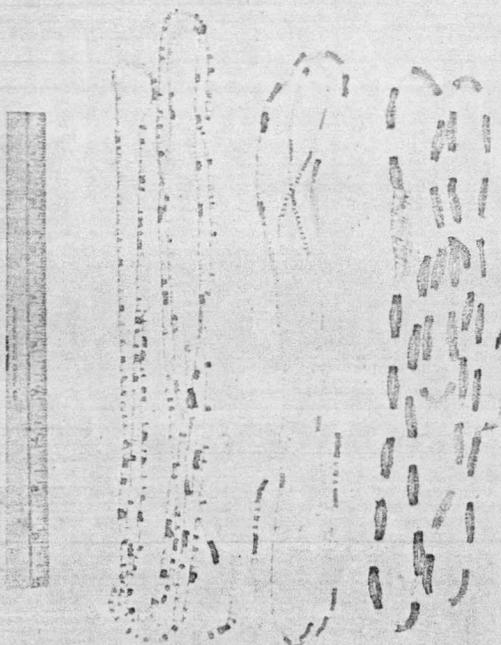


Fig. 110. Small glass beads, commonly called "seed beads."

These blue beads were known as the "tiacomoshack" or chief beads. This word was coined by the Chinooks—"tia" meaning superior or chief-like and "kamosuk" meaning bead. It did not mean that only chiefs could wear these, but that the blue beads were superior to all others. Why the local Indians chose this color is not clear. Color symbolism was important to many tribes and was generally related to some spiritual belief. Black beads were usually for death, red for war, and white for peace. Perhaps the blue beads were attractive to the Tillamooks because this was the color of the sea, the home of the salmon spirits.

Figure 109 shows a string of large blue trade beads intermixed with cylindrically shaped red beads with a yellow interior. They were given to Mrs. Kate Farley of Garibaldi around 1910. Speaking of the Tillamook squaws, Mrs. Farley said, "In the old days the squaws would come to my house and ask for milk and bread, which I gladly gave. In return, they would insist on my taking one of their trinkets, which was usually some beads or a basket."

Another popular bead in the Tillamook area was the very small "seed beads," so named because they resembled tiny plant seeds, some of which can scarcely be seen by the naked eye (Fig. 110). Because of the tiny openings in these beads, it was somewhat difficult for the whites to string them. The Indians, however, solved this problem by using elk sinew, a tough, slender material that could even serve as a needle to pick up the tiny beads.

Beads were traded in two ways, either by weight or length. Seed beads were usually sold by the pound, while the larger blue beads were sold by the fathom, a six-foot length of strung beads. This fathom length of trading was popular at the trading post in Astoria, which went through a series of ownerships: the Pacific Fur Company, 1811 to 1813, then the North West Company till 1821, when the latter merged with the Hudson's Bay Company.

A second popular trade item was buttons. These were prized by the Tillamooks, not for garment fasteners but for ornamental bangles on necklaces, robes, and blankets. They were generally made of metal, either stamped into shape or soldered together.