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MOCCASINS INTO SLIPPERS: TRADITIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY WOODLANDS INDIAN TEXTILES

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Towards the middle of the nineteenth-century a swift and dramatic transformation occurred in textiles and other kinds of art made by Woodlands Indians in northeastern North America. This transformation was accomplished in part by a wholesale replacement of indigenous materials with Euro-American manufactures-- cloth for hide, glass beads for porcupine quills and silk ribbon for paint. It also encompassed the introduction of entirely new object types and the substitution of a new vocabulary of floral imagery for older iconographic traditions.

It is not, of course, coincidental that this change in iconography and materials occurred simultaneously with the rapid growth of the tourist trade in the northeast. Although Native Americans had begun to make innovative types of souvenir items for Euro-American consumers in the eighteenth century, or perhaps even the seventeenth, the tourist trade assumed much greater economic importance in most areas after about 1820. (Phillips 1989) Following the defeats of the British-Native military alliances in the American Revolution and the War of 1812, Indian lands in the northeast were suddenly opened up to European settlement. Deprived of their traditional subsistence base, Native people turned increasingly to the production of commercial items in order to survive.

Tourism in the northeast grew in tandem with the pace of settlement. By far the most important site was Niagara Falls, and Iroquois peoples living nearby began early to sell a wide range of items to the travellers who were attracted there.¹ By the mid-century these items included beaded and embroidered domestic ornaments and clothing accessories as well as decorative splint-woven baskets and birchbark containers. The objects were made not only by Iroquois, but also by Micmac, Maleseet, Huron, and Abenaki people living from maritime Canada to western New York state. They were circulated throughout a wide area by efficient intertribal trading networks that had been in existence for many centuries. These networks also ensured that new artistic ideas spread quickly throughout the northeast, bringing about an overall similarity of object types in the region. (King 1985)

The first sustained publication and discussion of the new textile and garment types occurs in Lewis Henry Morgan's classic work, the *League of the Iroquois* of 1851. The plates clearly illustrate the abruptness of the transition between older and newer types, depicting both the traditional forms of linear-patterned, quill-embroidered moccasins (Fig. 1) and the more innovative garments decorated with the translucent glass beads and floral patterns dear to Victorian taste. (Fig. 2) Within a decade or so of Morgan's publication, however, the Iroquois had almost completely given up production of the older types of textiles.²

The intellectual challenge presented by objects such as these was eloquently expressed by Morgan himself:

The fabrics of a people unlock their social history. They speak a language which is silent, but yet more eloquent than the written page. As memorials of former times, they commune directly with the beholder, opening the unwritten history of the period they represent, and clothing it with perpetual freshness. (1962: 351)

This paper will trace several object types through a series of transformations of both form and meaning worked on them during the nineteenth century. Some of the changes resulted from adaptations of Native and Euro-American prototypes; others occurred when the objects were contextualized by their

users. The objects to be examined are beaded and embroidered hats, bags and moccasins. All were popular items in the tourist trade. It is an over-simplification, however, to call these textiles 'tourist art,' for very similar items were also used by Native people. By tracking the histories of these object types as they travel across cultural boundaries we can begin to explore the "social history" that, as Morgan wrote, is locked within these "fabrics of a people."

From Gus-to'-weh to Glengarry

Morgan chose the image of an Iroquois chief's headdress, a gus-to'-weh, to adorn the covers and title page of his great work. (Fig. 3) Although regarded as traditional by Morgan, the gus-to'-weh had by 1850 already undergone a series of transformations in media and form. European cloth and trade-silver headbands only became available, of course, after the advent of the fur trade. Although our knowledge of pre-fur trade headgear is very poor, a rare headdress in the McCord museum may give an indication of earlier forms. It is made of the whole headskin of a deer, bordered by a hide band which widens into a semi-circular projection in the centre. Above the projection rises a red disc that represents the sun, regarded as the greatest manito or spirit by most Woodlands peoples.³

During the second half of the nineteenth century further modifications were made to the gus-to'-weh headdress type. (Fig. 4) The top edge of the headband became scalloped, drawing perhaps on both the McCord prototype and the Victorian fashion for scalloped borders. These bands were covered with the heavy, raised beadwork and simplified floral motifs typical of Iroquois work during this period. Although such floral motifs are generally assumed to be devoid of specific symbolic meaning, close examination often reveals significant elements of the earlier iconography. The red beaded disc enclosed within a five-pointed star reminiscent of the American-flag is very similar in placement and effect to the sawtooth-edged red stroud sun on the McCord headdress. Although a small stem placed to one side transforms this star/sun into a flower, the echoes of an older, sacred symbolism are too loud to be ignored.

Morgan had described the gus-to'-weh in detail in the context of his discussion of Iroquois dance costume, explaining that its most significant element was the large eagle feather specially mounted on the top so that it rotated with the movements of the dance. He calls this feather, "the characteristic of the Iroquois headdress." (emphasis mine) (1962: 264) During the second half of the nineteenth century the gus-to'-weh became a standard element of formal dress for Huron and Iroquois men and is commonly seen in late-nineteenth century photographs. (Fig. 11) The gus-to'-weh was also made for the souvenir trade, but when sold commercially the hats normally lacked the centrally important Native signifier of eagle feather.

Two anecdotes recorded in the catalogues of museum collections suggest the imaginative uses to which some of these hats were put when they went into circulation in Europe and America. In the 1870s Ottawa Indians near Grand Rapids, Michigan, for example, presented a local white man with a hat of the Iroquois gus-to'-weh type as a prize in a skating contest.⁴ Several variations on the gus-to'-weh were also current during the mid-nineteenth century. One variant had a tall cloth crown which flopped over to one side. A hat of this type, now in the Leeds City Museum, was recently discovered at the bottom of a trunk containing an Nigerian robe and other exotic garments that had been used early in this century to costume the Three Kings in annual Christmas pageants.⁵

Hat forms illustrate particularly well the nature of the inter-cultural object exchanges that took place in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Dahlem Museum in Berlin owns a hat that may be a prototype for a second transformational sequence.⁶ The hat is a very rare example of painted hide headgear stylistically attributable to the eastern Cree and probably dating to the eighteenth century. It is constructed of four rounded triangular hide sections sewn together into a cap form, painted and edged with a band of quillwork finely woven into geometric designs. Similarly constructed cloth caps are known from the eastern Cree peoples of Quebec and the Maritimes.

One type of cap made for the nineteenth-century tourist trade in the by the Micmac, Maliseet and Iroquois is constructed accorded to a similar pattern. An example in the York Castle Museum displays typical, extravagantly beaded floral designs.¹ (Fig. 5) It is not clear whether the tourists who bought caps such as these intended them for use. A fashion existed at the time for men's smoking caps modelled after the pillbox shape of the Oriental fez and often decorated with floral embroidery. The Native American examples are particularly heavy and dense, and there is no direct evidence that they were worn. It appears more likely that these items were regarded as exotic trophies, or 'markers' of touristic experiences in MacCannell's phrase (1976: 41)

The York collection of English textiles also preserves an object which perhaps represents the ultimate recontextualization of an Iroquois souvenir hat. (Fig. 6) It is a pelmet, or shelf valance, made from the four component panels of a beaded cap. It is clear from the manner in which the pelmet is lined and edged with elegant curtain fringe that the transformation from hat to pelmet was accomplished once the object had reached England. While it was not uncommon for tourists to buy beaded panels that had not yet been sewn into moccasins or bags, it is rare to find such clear evidence of the Victorian interior decorator's imagination at work.

A third type of hat, the beaded Glengarry bonnet, was perhaps the most popular type of Native-made hat sold in the tourist trade. (Fig. 7) It illustrates yet another type of inter-cultural configuration. Here the overall form is derived from a European rather than a Native prototype, one made familiar by military uniforms worn by British soldiers in Canada. By dressing her sons up in Scottish costume in the 1850s, Queen Victoria started a fashion for Glengarrys in Britain and the colonies. I know of no evidence, however, that either the white purchasers of beaded Glengarrys or Native makers ever wore them. They, too, were probably objects of display. As such we might regard them as effigies of hats-- or hats raised to a higher power by the exotic flavour of the glittering beadwork that covers them.

Moccasin into Slipper

Among the earliest Woodlands peoples to seek an accommodation with Euro-American culture were the Huron of Lorette, on the outskirts of Quebec City. This community had arrived at the Catholic missions in Quebec as refugees at the end of the seventeenth century. They were converted to Christianity and the women were taught a variety of arts by the Ursuline nuns, including the art of embroidery. Huron material culture was transformed not only by this teaching but also, undoubtedly, by exposure to the artistic styles of neighboring Quebec Cree-speaking peoples like the Montagnais. The original styles of Huron moccasins would have had full ankle cuffs and the vamps and bands were probably decorated with woven porcupine quillwork and quill embroidery in geometric patterns.

By the late eighteenth century the Huron were producing moccasins and other items exquisitely embroidered in dyed moosehair for sale to travellers and army officers stationed in the region. They continued to produce these items until the late nineteenth-century, and much of their production was sent to Niagara Falls for sale. It is possible to study in Huron work more than in any other single textile tradition a gradual stylistic development which transformed highly stylized floral motifs related to the skin painting traditions of the eastern subarctic, into a more naturalistic floral style, more in keeping with Victorian canons of ornament. The earlier style is exemplified by a pair of moccasins collected by a Swiss traveller in 1826. (Fig. 8) These moccasins also illustrate the subtle alterations in cut which occurred under the impact of European influence. The deep cuff flaps, practical for travel and bad weather have been replaced by a flat ankle panel embroidered in imitation of the vanished cuff.

More radical transformations than these also occurred in response to new ideas and demands from consumers. These changes, together with the later, more naturalistic style of floral embroidery, are illustrated by an elegant pair of Huron-made slippers in the Victoria and Albert Museum. (Fig. 9) But perhaps the most remarkable example of inter-cultural exchange in the area of footwear is

a pair of moosehair-embroidered Huron boots in Exeter. (Fig. 10) The maker has carefully studied a pair of lady's boots and transformed them into moccasins-- or has she transformed a pair of moccasins into boots? Stamped leather designs and holes for the bootlaces have been meticulously outlined in embroidery, but the ornament on the toes and large red dotted borders have an ancient lineage in indigenous subarctic textile traditions.

A photograph taken at Lorette toward the end of the nineteenth century illustrates the inter-cultural nature of Native costume in that period more fully. (Fig. 11) A late-nineteenth century style of flower-decorated moccasin is worn by most of the men, but the woman seated at the right wears a pair of European boots similar to the pair imitated in hide and moosehair some decades earlier. The group portrait demonstrates that individual wearers, like individual artists, configured the elements of Native and Euro-American dress in many different ways. For dress occasions, however, Indians throughout the Woodlands maintained a distinctive form of costume that both insisted on continuities with the past and accepted the currency of the modern.

From Bandolier to Handbag

The dress accessories sold to tourists in the greatest numbers were beaded bags and purses. These also present the most striking contrast to earlier Native prototypes. Decorated pouches and shoulder bags were an important article of male ceremonial dress in the Woodlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Men's pouches partook of the sacred; they held personal medicines and important accoutrements of hunting and warfare and were embellished with quilled and painted designs that represented or symbolized the owners' visionary experiences of personal guardian spirits.

The smaller bags that Native women began to make during the second quarter of the nineteenth century were entirely new in type. (Fig. 2) In size and shape they replicated popular patterns for the flared and flapped chatelaine bags and reticules published in Victorian ladies' magazines during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. (Fig. 12) (Foster 1982: 46-52) The most common type was made of dark- coloured velvet embroidered in multicoloured or translucent white glass beads in flower and leaf motifs. Native-made bags are so similar to their Victorian prototypes that many still go unrecognized in European and American costume collections.

Other Native-made bags, however, display quite different styles of beadwork that resemble more closely the northeastern Algonkian linear and 'double-curve' designs analysed by Speck early in this century. (1914) This style, which can probably be attributed to the Maliseet, is particularly interesting because of the iconographic continuities it displays with earlier northeastern Algonkian art. A recurrent beadwork motif represents the all-powerful sun, and it is often accompanied by patterns of curving lines suggestive of vegetation. This motif complex occurs in the sacred, ritual art of the eastern subarctic. It is also seen on an early nineteenth-century quill-decorated Algonquin man's neck pouch that was probably used to hold medicine.⁹

Bead-embroidered bags also present a contrast with the hats discussed previously because they were certainly made to be used by both Natives and non-Natives. Their closeness to European prototypes and the European fashion for the exotic in dress accessories made them valued accessories to a Euro-American woman's dress. Examples in museum collections still sometimes have small articles inside as well as other signs of use. Nineteenth-century photographs of Native people also provide evidence that beaded bags formed part of Native formal dress. (Fig. 13)

Two differences are observable in Native and non-Native uses of these bags, however. When worn by Native people, the bags were attached to a cross-shoulder strap in the fashion of the earlier eighteenth-century bandolier bags. More importantly, photographs show that the bags were used by both men and women. (Fig. 14) This appears initially to be a small point, but its significance is great. An insistence on a proper definition of gender roles was fundamental to the program of directed assimilation to which Woodlands Indians were subjected in the nineteenth century.

Missionaries and teachers sought to transform Native women into submissive Victorian homebodies, demurely dressed in long skirts and adept at feminine pursuits such as needlework. For the Victorians, beaded bags were quintessential female items. As the term 'chatelaine' indicates, such bags, worn at the waist or held by short handles on the wrist, were signifiers of the feminine role as custodian of the home. Indeed, an important signification of all Native-made textiles during this period was the evidence they were held to provide of the capacity of Native people to accept civilization. Morgan says this no less than four times in the course of his discussion of Native material culture. "In the fabrics of the modern Iroquois," he writes, "there is much to inspire confidence in their teachableness in the useful arts. When their minds are unfolded by education, and their attention is attracted by habit to agricultural pursuits...this gifted race will be reclaimed, and raised, eventually, to citizenship among ourselves." (1962: 392)

The Native man's use of a shoulder bag to carry fire-making equipment, personal medicines and ammunition was closely associated with the male role as defined for a way of life that was under attack from assimilationists. For this reason, the continuing inclusion of shoulder bags in a late nineteenth-century Native male costume might have conveyed negative significations to Victorian observers. The resolution of the apparent contradiction was achieved by 'sanitizing' the shoulder bag iconographically by replacing the older 'pagan' imagery with floral designs. The bags worn by nineteenth-century Native men, then, represents a compromise with the program of acculturation rather than a complete concession, for the form of the bag retains a strong memory of an older way of life.

The Significations of Floral Imagery

The wholesale adoption by Native artists throughout the Woodlands of floral ornamentation in bags as well as in other artistic genres was, as has been noted, an entirely new departure in Woodlands art. Floral imagery, it can be argued, is the central problem of nineteenth century Woodlands art and it needs to be the subject of a detailed analysis that I can here only summarize. (Phillips 1990) With the adoption of an official government policy of directed assimilation after the Civil War, efforts to convert Native Americans to Christianity, Victorian gender and social roles, and to sedentary agriculturalism intensified.¹⁰ Vital to this program was the suppression of all vestiges, including visual representations, of native spirituality.

The wearing by Native people of floral designs, together with a variety of (apparently) decorative geometric patterns, can be read as a way of signing their rejection of the pagan and warlike past in favour of an acceptably civilized and Christian mode of living. Floral motifs, I have also concluded, were, more specifically, signifiers of fragility, passivity and femininity in nineteenth-century Victorian culture. When worn by Native Americans floral motifs thus further signed their conversion from political independence and active military confrontation to peacefulness and dependency. Finally, the associations of floral designs with ethnic folk clothing probably signified the transformation of Native Americans from their former existence outside the American polity to a minority ethnic group within it.

Inter-cultural Art and "Social History"

The kinds of objects sold in the nineteenth-century tourist trade cannot be fully understood in terms of isolated stylistic or iconographic sequences. They must be reinserted into the larger processes of domination, resistance and adaptation. The brief analysis presented here, together with the larger study of which it is a part, suggest that a complex process of exchange was at work during the nineteenth century rather than the top-down model that is usually assumed by the term 'acculturation.'⁵

Textiles made by Woodlands Indians for the tourist trade acted as an important visual channel for cross-cultural communication. This channel was formed both by the flow of artistic prototypes from Euro-Americans to Native artists and users and by the counter-flow from Native producer to Euro-American consumer of souvenir objects that had been transformed in significant ways. In a remarkable number of cases, furthermore, Native artists successfully used tourist art forms as vehicles for the expression of cultural and artistic continuity with inherited traditions. This active manipulation of form and use by Native consumers is parallel to that of Euro-American consumers who used some objects interchangeably with the Euro-American prototypes and adapted others to uses as domestic ornaments, exotic dress-up accessories, 'markers' of touristic experiences, and trophies of the colonial ordering of the world with which they identified themselves.

This analysis, then, suggests that nineteenth-century Woodlands textiles might more appropriately be termed 'inter-cultural' than 'acculturated.' Studies of present-day tourist art support such a concept. Jules-Rosette, for example, has described the relationship between artist, critic and audience in the African tourist art system as "a circle of exchange," and has further described this system as "a process of double reflection between the artist and the audience." (1984: 16)

In addressing the situation of Woodlands Native peoples during the nineteenth-century, however, it is important to attend to the historical circumstances different from those facing present-day third or fourth world peoples. During the nineteenth-century formerly independent Woodlands nations had to face not just the pressures of modernization, but a choice between extermination or total assimilation. In these circumstances, the vast commercial production and successful marketing of embroidered, beaded and other items in our museums should be regarded not as a cultural sell-out, but as an important strategy that helped to ensure the survival of distinctive Native identities.

The insistence on the active role of Native artists and consumers is not intended as a denial of the reality of the domination and repression experienced by Native communities during the period when these objects were being produced. It is intended, rather, as a recognition, long overdue, of a heroic struggle for economic survival, of an attendant struggle to make meaning under conditions of devastating loss. The much derided 'tourist arts' are an affirmation of distinctive cultural identity which have been part of the history of textile production among fourth world artists all over the world.

Art-making by colonized people who produce works for consumption by a market outside of their own societies has often appeared to sympathetic Western observers to be exploitative and riddled with serious contradictions, particularly in terms of the artist's necessary freedom to create. How can so violent a process, we ask, produce 'true' art? Despite the undeniable fact that the inter-cultural art of Native Americans has often been of extraordinary technical and aesthetic quality, objects made for the tourist trade by nineteenth-century Woodlands Indians have typically been regarded as unworthy of serious scholarly consideration. As craft, as women's art and as tourist art, the inter-cultural products of nineteenth-century Woodlands Indians have been placed in triple jeopardy as part of a history of Native American art.

The accusation of inauthenticity which results from the acculturation framework is particularly dangerous. It implies that the objects made for sale and home use were not 'really' Indian, that the makers were not 'real' Native people. This, of course, is not possible. If proof is needed it is abundantly supplied by the events at the Oka, Akwesasne and Kahnawake reservations in Ontario and New York this summer, for these sites of late-twentieth century resistance and renewal were three of the most important centres of production of tourist arts during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Just as a people's culture cannot be 'lost' but can only undergo change, so, too, aesthetic expression cannot be more or less 'real' but can only reflect and give form to changing experiences

of the world. Indeed, the direction of much modern scholarship has been to explore in an increasingly refined manner the ways in which Amerindian art forms do indeed order the experiences of contradiction, conflict, and repression that their makers have lived. This is the special creative power of artists that caused Morgan to say of the Iroquois objects we have been contemplating that they "commune directly with the beholder, opening the unwritten history of the period they represent, and clothing it with perpetual freshness."

NOTES

1. See Gordon 1984 for an exhaustive study of the beaded souvenirs known as 'whimsies' and detailed information about the tourist trade at the Falls. McKinsey 1985 analyses the symbolic significance of the Falls in American literary and intellectual history together with specific Indian associations with this symbolism.
2. The analysis of museum collections shows that travellers in the 1830s and 1840s bought quill and moosehair-embroidered moccasins while souvenir hunters from the 1850s on acquired moccasins made of commercially-tanned hide, with velvet vamps and cuffs richly embroidered in floral beadwork.
3. McCord Museum, McGill University M182.
4. Public Museum of Grand Rapids, Michigan 140952. The hat was given to Frank Hodges by Indians in Lamont, Michigan in 1866.
5. Personal communication from Veronica Johnston, Curator of Ethnology at the Leeds City Museum, who gave the hat to the Museum after discovering it among her family possessions. (May 1990)
6. Museum fur Volkerkunde, Berlin IV B 8607
7. See Whitehead 1988: 23-25 for detailed discussions of several related cap types attributable to Maritimes peoples.
8. Sturtevant (1990) has usefully distinguished a form of 'special occasion dress' that replaced earlier ceremonial costumes and was worn in the northeast by members of diplomatic delegations, for formal family portraits, and for various kinds of staged performances.
9. Museum fur Volkerkunde, Vienna 11981, collected by Johann Georg Schwarz between 1820 and 1867.
10. For a discussion of American assimilationist policies see Hoxie 1984 and for parallel Canadian policies see Miller 1989

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LIST OF FIGURES

1. Iroquois moccasins collected at Niagara Falls, 1832 of the type illustrated by Morgan. Bern Historisches Museum Po 74.410.20
2. Ga-ya-ah, or Work Bag from Morgan 1851.
3. Gos-to-weh or Head dress from Morgan 1851.
4. Mohawk hat, collected in Canada. Museum of the American Indian, New York 1/ 1738
5. Iroquois hat, York Castle Museum, England (no number)
6. Pelmet made from Iroquois beaded panels, York Castle Museum 284.43
7. Iroquois Glengarry bonnet, Leeds City Museum F95.1959
8. Huron moccasins collected by Adolf Gerber in 1826, Bern Historisches Museum Can 12ab.
9. Huron Lady's Slippers, Victoria and Albert Museum T10+a-1929
10. Huron boot-moccasins, Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, England
11. Indians at Lorette, Quebec. Notman Photographic Archives, Montreal MP 223
12. Lady's reticule, English, second half of the 19th century, Platt Hall Gallery of English Costume, Manchester City Art Galleries
13. Ojibwa woman at Muncey Town, Ontario 1907, Museum of the American Indian 3009
14. Oneida Chief John Danford, 1907, Museum of the American Indian 2642

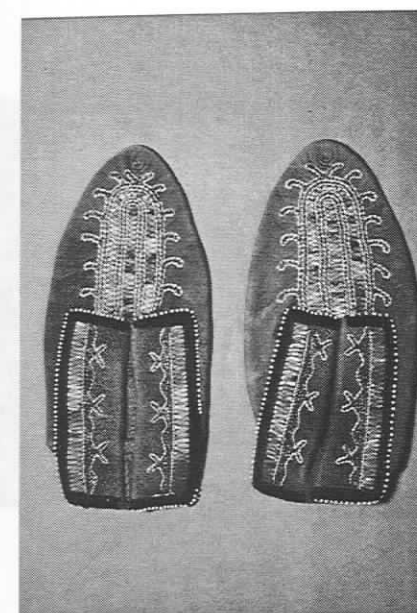


Fig. 1



GĀ-YĀ-AH or WORK BAG.

Fig. 2



GOS-TO-WEH or HEAD DRESS.

Fig. 3

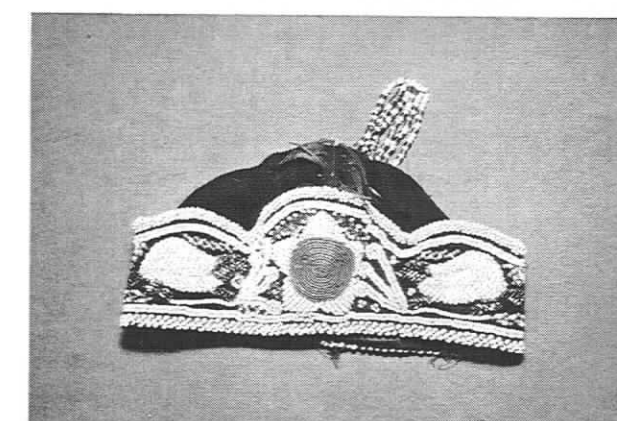


Fig. 4

Fig. 5

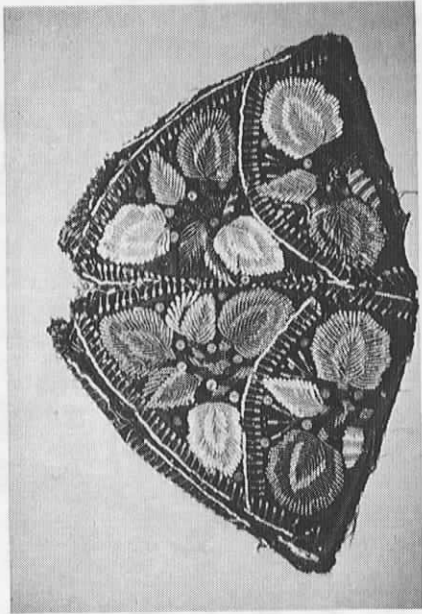


Fig. 6

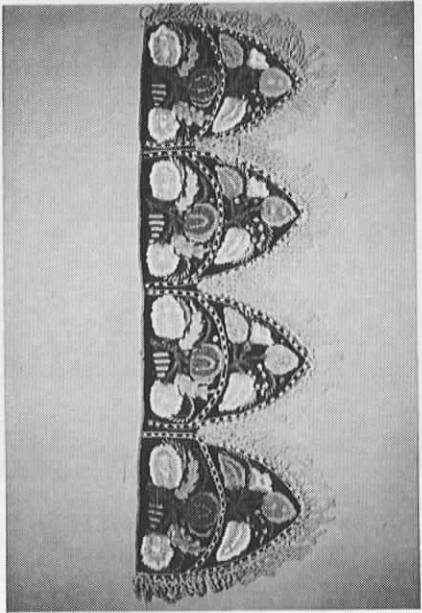


Fig. 7

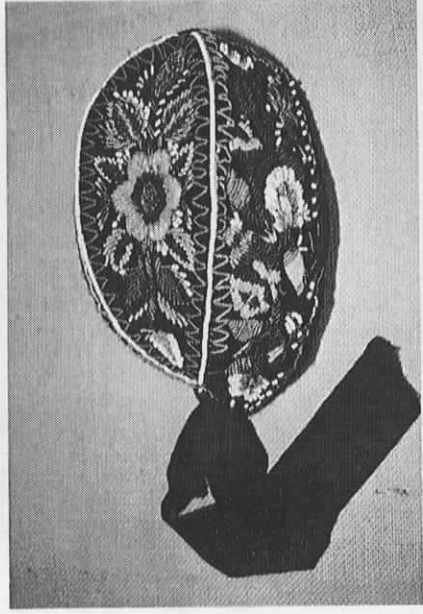


Fig. 8

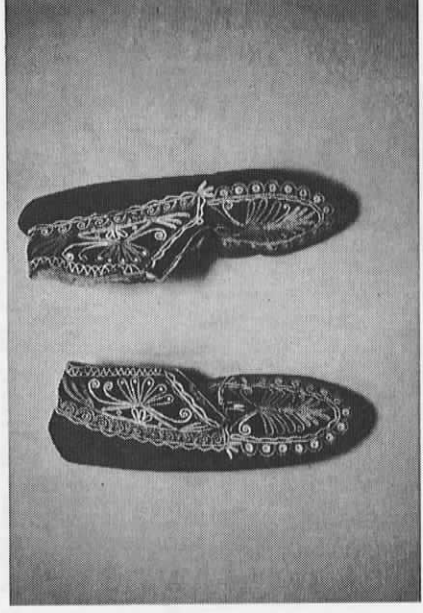


Fig. 9

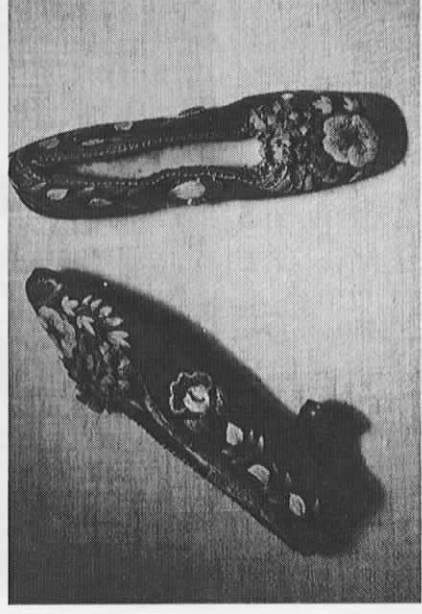


Fig. 10

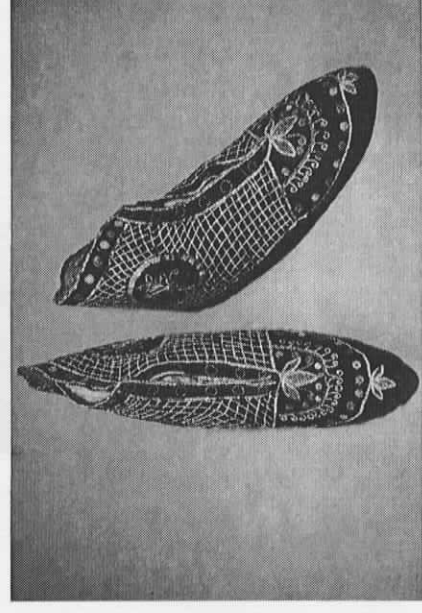


Fig. 11

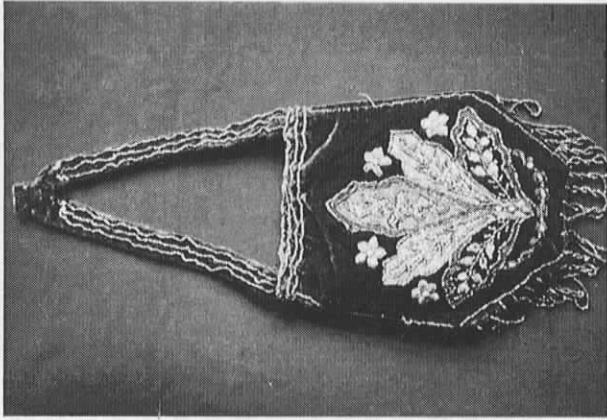


Fig. 12

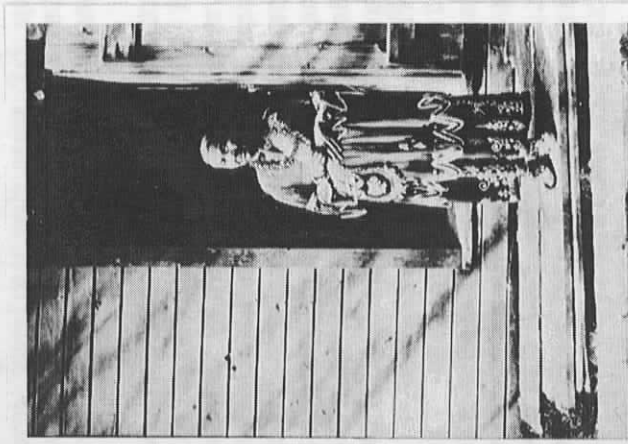


Fig. 13

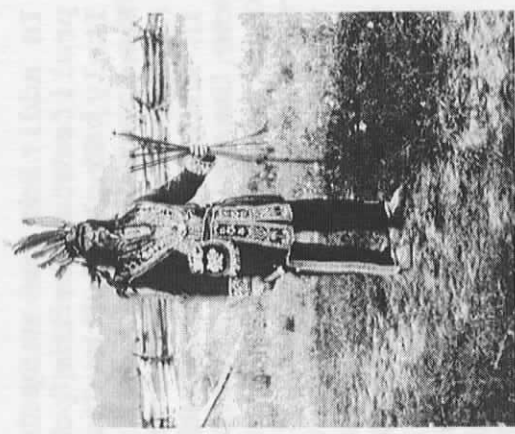


Fig. 14