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COVER: Fire bag, French halfbreed, Ft. Simpson. Black felted wool; beads in pink, medium blue, yellow, light blue, white, orange, bronze metallic and silver metallic. Collected by Emma Shaw Colcleugh between 1888 and 1897. Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University.

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FROM THE EDITOR

In this issue we bring you a discussion of Metis influences on the beadwork and embroidery of the sub-Arctic region by Dr. Kate Corbin Duncan. She has done extensive research on this subject and many of her conclusions will have parallels in the study of floral beadwork in the Great Lakes region and Northwestern United States.

Since this issue is late, we take this means of extending best wishes to our readers for the holidays and reminding them that a gift membership in the Museum of the Fur Trade will be an inexpensive means of bringing a year of pleasant reading to the friend who has everything else.

THE METIS AND PRODUCTION OF EMBROIDERY IN THE SUBARCTIC

By Kate Corbin Duncan

A now indeterminate portion of the central Subarctic Athabaskan and Cree have not, for generations, been full-blooded Indian, but rather mixed bloods or Metis.¹ The repeated references in early accounts to the Metis as the wearers of elaborate embroidery coupled with scattered reports of the Metis as the producers of floral embroidery, indicate that they have continued to be significant in the history of this major art form of the Subarctic.

Across the Subarctic, contact history from its beginning involved Euro-

Native intermarriage. In the Red River region so many French voyageurs affiliated with Native women that the Metis community became an ethnic entity in itself. The Cree-Metis around Lake Winnipeg were for a time politically as well as culturally integrated with Red River as their focal community.

Among the Athabascans the Metis of Great Slave Lake and Lake Athabasca were for the most part French-Metis with affiliations at Red River. Further west, and north of Fort Simpson, the Athabaskan Metis came of Scots-English European heritage (Slobodin 1966:12-14) partly the result of the Hudson's Bay Company policy of encouraging alliances between its personnel and Native women. Factors married to Natives were generally happier to remain in the Subarctic for long periods than were those non-Native wives with European ties and cultural preferences.

The French Metis are described in innumerable 19th century journals and travelers' reports. In them their life is characterized as a pragmatic blend of two cultures - the subsistence adaptation of the Indian and certain aspects of French culture, the most often mentioned being Catholicism and a love of finery and frivolity.

Scots and English Metis usually impressed observers, who, significantly, often derived from the British Isles themselves, as of a different temperament than the French Metis, and in their eyes more admirable in tastes and restraint. One 1908 visitor in the Great Slave Lake region commented that when a Frenchman marries and Indian he "reverts to her scale of civilization. When a Scot takes a native wife he draws her up to his" (Cameron 1910:6).

A less biased observer, a Hudson's Bay official with years of experience in the Subarctic, compared several types of Metis as follows:

The French Metis are a happy group, singing through the day, careless and free, feasting and fasting, very religious and devout. The English Metis are progressive, providing well for the family, giving the children a good education, sending the sons to college if possible, some of whom return as graduates of Oxford or Cambridge university. The Scotch Metis are serious, sturdy and good workers; the father is master of his house and the children must not only learn the English language but must be of the father's religion. (McLean 1924: 399).

From the beginnings of the fur trade in the Subarctic the Metis were the cultural brokers, both the product and the agents of cultural contact and change. They were the early porters and canoe men in the fur trade, involved from the first in wage employment. Their children were the first students of the mission schools, the first to become literate. A tendency developed early for the Metis women and children to stay in the post year-round, whereas full-blood families visited only at intervals. It was the Metis who were the first acculturated and the most strongly, who led others in becoming urbanized and commercialized.

Anthropological sources indicate clearly that Metis and Indian have been perceived as different by both groups for many years, and that through the course of time some mixed-bloods have preferred to follow the customs of the Indians and be recognized as Indians and others to follow those of the whites and be recognized as half-breeds. From both the 19th and 20th centuries there are reports that the Metis kept themselves apart from both Indian and white, although emulating the latter, and were objects of prejudice from both groups

(Dawson 1881: 147; Slobodin 1964, 1966).

Early sources make it clear that since at least 1840 the Metis have been known for and characterized by their flamboyant and elaborately embroidered clothing. Throughout journals, travelers' accounts and ethnographies runs a thread of comment on the colorfully "garnished" half-breed. The artist, Paul Kane, after attending a wedding at Fort Edmonton in 1848 contrasted the visitors' finery, describing wedding guests as:

Indians, whose chief ornament consisted in the paint on their faces, voyageurs with bright sashes and neatly ornamented moccasins, half-breeds glittering in every ornament they could lay their hands on. (Kane 1925: 263).

The half breeds' dogs were also gay:

...gaudily decorated with saddle cloths of various colours, fringed and embroidered in the most fantastic manner with innumerable small bells and feathers. (Kane 1925: 141).

Kane sketched the painted carioles and embroidered dog saddles.

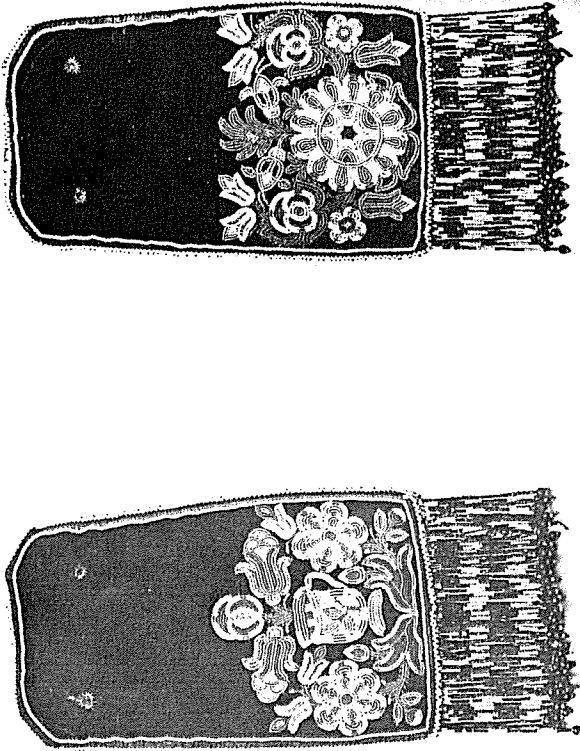
Another visitor to the subarctic, Patrick Tylter, drawing on his own observations as well as publications available to him in the 1850's, discussed Metis finery in detail:

Being fond of gaudy show, and restrained by no Parisian code of fashion, the half-breeds dress in light blue cloth capotes, fastened round the waist with bright scarlet or parti-coloured worsted sashes. Very broad and conspicuous belts of the same colour, ornamented sometimes with white beads, cross their breasts and backs, to which they append powder-horns and shot-pouches. Leggings of variously coloured cloths, all more or less ornamented by the women with beads or silk thread according to taste, clothe their legs. Moccasins, garnished with porcupine quills, dyed red, blue, and yellow, defend their feet, while their heads are decked with hats, caps, bonnets and nightcaps, or nature's own covering, all of which are covered profusely with tinsel hat-cords, gold and silver tinsel tassels, ribbons of every hue in the rainbow, and a good many more that the rainbow never displayed. (Tylter, 1854: 314)

Complementing information comes in a description of a Metis ball at Carlton House, published in 1865 in the Journal of the travel adventurers, Milton and Cheadle.

The men appeared in gaudy array, with beaded firebag, gay sash, blue or scarlet leggings, girt below the knee with beaded garters, and moccasins elaborately embroidered; the women in short, bright-coloured skirts showing the richly embroidered leggings, and white moccasins of cariboo-skin, beautifully worked with flowery patterns in beads, silk and moosehair. (Milton and Cheadle 1865: 67)

It is clear, then, that the Metis were known for their love of embroidery. Thayer (1942) first pointed out their connection with floral embroidery, their reputation as the "the flower beadwork people" who introduced floral designs to the Eastern Sioux. In the Subarctic the Metis were also the impetus for floral



Views of both sides of fire bag, half-breed, St. Peter, Red River, Manitoba. Collected by Emma Shaw Colcleugh between 1887 and 1897.
 Black velvet background. Bead colors: pink, yellow, green, dark translucent green, light orange, metallic bronze faceted, translucent white-gray, orange, white, light medium and dark blues. Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University.

work. Exact relationships are yet far from clear, but affinities of floral style in the Great Slave Lake/Mackenzie River region among the Athabascans with work from the Cree (Cree-Metis) of the Lake Winnipeg area, coupled with scattered written comments, indicate that it was the Metis embroiderer who stimulated floral bead and silk work in the eastern Athabaskan region.

As early as 1851 (231) Richardson noted that among the "Chepewyan tribes" (the eastern Athabaskan groups to him) beads were not particularly popular and were purchased primarily by the wives of voyageurs or half breeds. In 1867 William Dall met a group of highly acculturated Kutchin along the Birch River near Fort Yukon in Alaska. In his diary and corresponding field notes he comments on the quantity of English goods in their possession. In his published version, *Alaska and Its Resources*, he adds: "They had an abundance of the fine beadwork in which the French Canadians delight, and which those women who frequent the forts learn to excel in." (Dall 1870: 101)

Later in the century a traveler in the north, Caspar Whitney, commented directly that silkwork was "recent" and "confined entirely to half breeds" reporting:

French half-breeds are largely responsible for flower pattern bead embroidery, which is the vogue all over

the northern part of this country. (Whitney 1896:60)

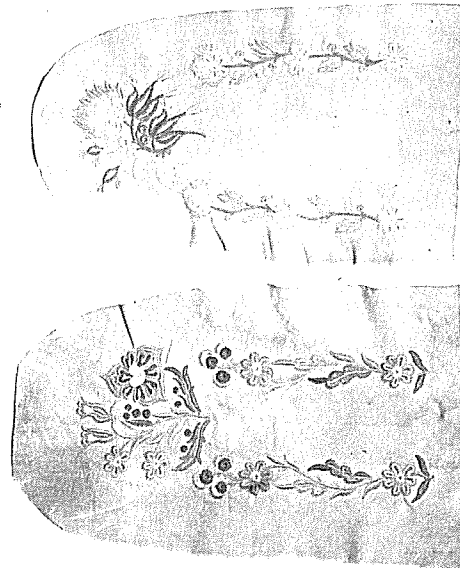
About the same time Russell (1898:172) used the term "Metis art," implying floral embroidery, in describing a pair of floral silkwork moccasins he had collected.²

Among the Cree themselves informants from the eastern regions disclaimed any antiquity to floral designs when Skinner worked with them early in the 20th Century (Skinner 1911:56). Further west the Plains Cree attributed their floral patterns to the half-breed influence. (Mandelbaum 1940: 219)

The ethnographies on Athabaskan groups usually avoid discussion of the Metis element among the group. Osgood, however, in his monograph on the natives about Great Bear Lake, cites the Metis as a major force in the arts.

There has been considerable production of art work by the metis population of the Mackenzie. It takes the form of silk work on moccasins, gloves, mittens, and other articles of dress, of painted and tasseled snowshoes, of elaborately decorated carioles, of carved wooden whip handles with whorles and varied designs, of carved drawknife handles with animals heads at the ends, of tuppies (dog-blankets) elaborately embroidered with silk or wool on stroud, of standing irons on dog collars, decorated with the tails of fur-bearing animals or with woolen tassels, and of ingeniously designed hat bands. (Osgood 1931: 65)

Many factors in conjunction explain the Metis emphasis on European style embroidery. A love of ornamented clothing was well established on the North American continent before European contact. The French voyageur brought with him a passion for finery, too, as well as a passing acquaintance with floral



Two embroidered caribou skin slipper patterns, collected by Emma Shaw Colcleugh in the late 1880's from "Red River Indians, Old Fort Garry, Manitoba." Haffenreffer Museum of Anthropology, Brown University.

design on clothing. Due to his lower class origins it is unlikely that he would have worn a floral brocade coat but he was surely aware that they were the height of fashion for those of the upper class in Europe. The Scots and English who dominated the workforce of the Hudson's Bay Company had a similar although more restrained fashion heritage. With all came a legacy of needlework as an appropriate feminine occupation, especially for the cultured woman, and of finely ornamented clothing as the mark of a man of stature. The native aesthetic also encompassed both of these ideas.

Simultaneously there came with these men strong religious fervor, in the case of the French it was for Roman Catholicism, for the English the Anglican church and for the Scots the Anglican or United (Wesleyan) church. In addition there was a healthy respect for education and a desire to improve one's family. Therefore, the half-breed child was far more apt to receive schooling than full-blood. Successful education and religious training required steady school and church attendance, so the Metis wife usually lived permanently at the post. She and the children did not accompany the husband into the bush for each hunting and trapping expedition.

In the post schools, in Canada mostly run by nuns, occasionally by an Anglican minister's wife, the girls were taught, as were all young ladies of the day, domestic arts including needlework or "fancy work." As "post Indians" they no doubt had more time to embroider, to develop skill and to produce a quantity of items. They observed the work of other embroiderers more often than did the bush woman whose contact with other women during most of the year was very limited. Peer competition encouraged an artisan to aspire to high standards and to produce work as fine as her neighbors.

Early in the 20th century J. Alden Mason noticed the superiority of Metis embroidery in the Great Slave Lake/Mackenzie River region and commented:

In practically every line the work done by half-blood women and by native girls in the mission schools is far superior to purely native work. Bead and silkwork are the principal methods of decoration employed. In both, floral designs are the only ones used and the better work is not done by the "bush" Indians. Porcupine quillwork is doubtless an art of indigenous origin. Nevertheless the best work is done by half-breeds. (Mason 1914: 27-28)

There were more occasions requiring newly decorated clothing for the family residing at the post. The "bush" woman might visit two to three times a year. The Metis was on hand throughout the year for balls, weddings, church attendance and other festive events.

The woman residing at the post had ready access throughout the year to beads and floss too, and likely, because of her husband's involvement with the Hudson's Bay Company, more credit with which to purchase them.

Although the governmental recognition of who is and is not a Metis has varied over time, particularly in Canada,³ what is important when examining Subarctic bead and silk embroidery is that the woman producing it was more apt to be of some degree of mixed blood. Thus, sources support the belief expressed by some scholars, particularly Ted Brasser (1975, 1976), that much floral embroidery from the Subarctic was Metis made. However, since Metis is a term which has continued to be used loosely, to identify that close group which called themselves Metis and were organized politically for a time during the third quarter of the 19th century in the Lake Winnipeg region, but also to include

anyone with any proportion of Native-European heritage, in the Subarctic, the term must be used with care. To class great bodies of Subarctic embroidery as simply Metis is to confuse the Red River Metis community with great numbers of other people with varying or no affiliation with it, and to deny the presence of many distinctive regional floral styles. A compounded tribal-Metis (i.e. Cree-Metis) or regional-Metis (i.e. Great Slave Lake-Metis) attribution is the most accurate when one is sure that the maker was of mixed blood. Since much knowledge is usually unavailable, Subarctic work should and must continue to be attributed by tribe or place of collection, keeping in mind the possible Metis factor.

NOTES

1. Metis is the northern, French-derived equivalent of terms such as "mestizo" used in the Southwest and "creole" as it was used in Alaska.
2. Russell's collection, a part of which is illustrated in his book, and much of which is described therein, is now at the University of Iowa.
3. Today the Canadian government recognizes a male non-Indian-female Indian alliance as non-Indian. Both are registered as non-Indian and have the rights of all Canadian citizens. Both members of an Indian male-non-Indian female alliance are considered to be Indian and are eligible for certain social services available only to Indians, but are denied certain other privileges.

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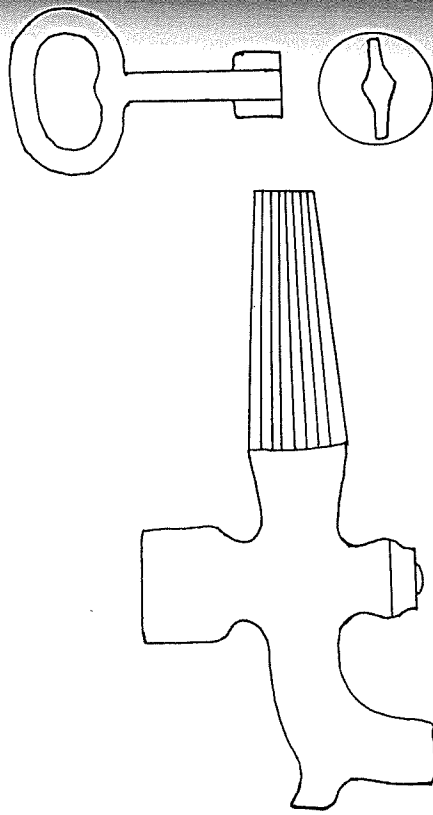
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BRASS COCKS FOR LIQUOR KEGS

By Charles Hanson, Jr.



Left: American brass cock for keg.

Right: Brass key and top view of collar.

When fur traders dispensed liquor from kegs, they made use of the common brass cocks or spigots manufactured for the purpose. These cocks were widely used in eighteenth-century England and they were also being cast in America before 1800. They came in a variety of patterns but the type used in the fur trade was generally made with a thick projection on the spout to receive

blows of a hammer, a long tapered shank with longitudinal flutes to facilitate driving the cock into a hole in the keg, and a brass collar over the valve with an oddly shaped hole for a removable key of corresponding shape.

In the trading post the brass cock was driven tightly into the keg which was then set horizontally on a shelf near the counter. The clerk in charge kept the key and thus controlled the dispensing of the liquor. A number of cocks and detached valve collars have been found at Grand Portage and one was recovered in underwater operations at Fort Charlotte on Pigeon River.¹ Two brass cocks were inventoried at Fort Union on the Missouri in 1832.²

In 1819 David Meriwether was asked to buy some corn from the Omaha Indians to feed the troops of the Yellowstone Expedition. He arranged a trade of two ten gallon kegs of whiskey for a pile of over twenty sacks of corn. He had inserted a brass faucet in each keg, keeping the keys in his pocket. As soon as the Indians had packed the corn on ponies and dispatched them to Council Bluffs under the care of several Indian boys, Meriwether gave the Indians the keys and showed them how to use them.³

The spout orifice for liquor cocks ranged from three-eighths to one half inch. The complete specimens from Grand Portage were from 5/4 to 5/8 inches long. The collars from Grand Portage exhibit some unusual styles of openings for keys - a diamond shape was most common but there are also openings in the form of a rectangle, a "Christmas tree" and something resembling the club pip on playing cards. The Fort Charlotte specimen has a diamond-shaped opening. Nineteenth-century American brass cocks were made in various sizes, often with integral collar fitted with a cover plate cut for the key.

Details of an American specimen in the museum's collections are shown in the accompanying illustration, including a sketch of the key. Needless to say, the keys are much scarcer today than the cocks themselves. During my recent trip to the Fourth North American Fur Trade Conference I noted one exhibit of these artifacts with the collars erroneously identified as keys but no keys were actually shown.

NOTES

1. See interim reports by Alan Woolworth on archaeological investigations at Grand Portage and **Voices From the Rapids**, by Robert Wheeler, Walter Kenyon, Alan Woolworth and Douglas Birk, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, 1975.
2. Erwin Thompson, **Fort Union Trading Post, Historic Structures Report.** National Park Service, Washington, D.C. 1968. 134.
3. David Meriwether, **My Life in the Mountains and on the Plains.** University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, 1965. 51-53.

COLLECTION CORNER -

THE SAMOVAR IN ALASKA

Pictured here is a complete Russian samovar outfit collected in Alaska. The samovar itself is a water boiler with a tubular charcoal stove running through the center, its top cover can be lifted off. Above the top is a hollow crown piece to hold the teakettle. A drip bowl with claw feet catches any leakage from the spout. At the right are two other accessories. One is a chimney extension, with wooden handle, to aid starting the charcoal fire. It is then lifted off and the crown piece put on. The small cap with top knob is placed in the chimney to extinguish the fire. The brass tray protected the furniture and made the whole outfit portable.

Ordinarily very strong tea was brewed in the teapot and used to partly fill the