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Charles E. Hanson, Jr. . . . . Editor

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## FROM THE EDITOR

We extend our best wishes to everyone for a happy 1990! The past year was an exciting one for both staff and visitors. With everyone's help the new wing was completed and opened on schedule. Visitor response has been most enthusiastic and we feel that the museum is fulfilling its purpose to the highest degree in its thirty-five year history. Please do come see us in 1990.

\* \* \* \*

The Denver Public Library, 3840 York Street, Denver, CO 80205 invites entries for the 1990 Caroline Bancroft History Prize which must be non-fiction, dealing with the history of the American West, at least 100 pages and published in 1989. Entries must be postmarked by March 31, 1990.

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Chadron Fur Trade Days and Buckskinner Rendezvous will be held July 6 through 8, 1990, write us for details.

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SAVE TIME AND MONEY — SEND YOUR NEW ADDRESS WHEN YOU MOVE!

## POUND BEADS, PONY BEADS

By Charles E. Hanson, Jr.

The so-called "pony bead" is an important item in the story of Native American beadwork after our Colonial period, and it was naturally an important commodity in the fur trade.

In many cultural areas, notably the Western Plains and the northern Athapaskan regions, the early contact beadwork was done with "pony beads" 3.5 mm or larger in diameter and then the later and real flowering of the craft was based upon "seed





Original paper package of black pound beads, middle 19th century. Package is 9 1/8 inches long, 3 1/2 inches wide and 2 3/8 inches high, wrapped in doubled paper. Weight approximately 2 3/4 pounds. Museum of the Fur Trade Collections.

beads" which had a maximum diameter of slightly over 2 mm. As a result beadwork is often identified either as "pre-seed bead" material or as material from the "seed bead" era.

This has led to a fairly popular misconception that the bead industry first produced pony beads and then shifted over to making seed beads. In other words the two types of beads could be dated simply by their form. Actually seed beads were being made just as early as pony beads, but their use in earlier times was very limited in certain areas. The "seed bead period" apparently began in the 1830s for the southern Cheyennes because the small posts built for them on the South Platte River 1835-37 had large quantities of seed beads, barleycorn beads and agate beads but practically no pony beads were included in inventories or found on the two sites which were investigated.<sup>1</sup> The western Sioux began to use seed beads in earnest in the 1840s.<sup>2</sup> The "seed bead period" among the Blackfeet began about the middle 1870s.<sup>3</sup> In the Athapaskan regions it began about 1890.<sup>4</sup>

As far as manufacturing techniques were concerned, beads of both sizes could be made in any operation of drawing the glass tubes from which all such beads were made. The tubes were naturally much smaller in the center than they were near the end.

We have not been able to document historically the term "pony bead." Countless writers have repeated the story that it was so-called because it was brought in by pony pack trains. The traders themselves never used this term. They were business men and they identified the two types by the way they were packed and purchased. "Seed bead" was used then for a small bead which came in bunches. The cheap larger beads came as masses in packages, were purchased by the pound and universally called "pound beads." In those places depending upon pack train supply all kinds of beads — seed, pony, fancy necklace, pigeon-egg, etc. — came by the same method of transportation. In his *Handbook* W. G. N. van der Sleen makes the broad statement, "In the bead-trade most of the drawn beads are called 'pound beads,' as they are generally sold by weight and not by number."<sup>5</sup>

At this moment we do not know the answer, but "pony bead" was not an identifying term in the fur trade. Actually it may be of quite recent origin as a name devised by hobbyists interested in Indian culture. A review of Indian goods dealer catalogs from the period 1900 to World War I showed listings for seed beads and necklace beads but no mention of pony beads. A "Pawnee Bill" (Oklahoma) bead card of the 1930s showed Italian seed beads only, but a card of 1955 does include three sample beads with the notation, "Pony Beads, assorted colors."

Fifty years ago John C. Ewers found that the older Blackfeet used the term "real beads" for the pound beads they had once used so extensively in their earliest beadwork.<sup>6</sup> It is certainly within the realm of possibility that some other tribe did use the name "pony bead" for the same thing but no proof has emerged so far.

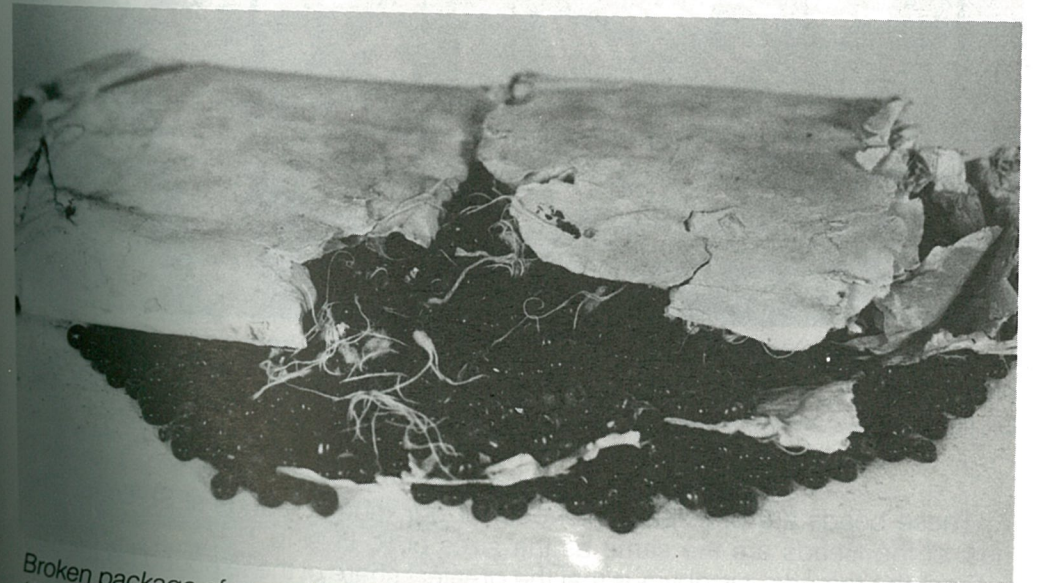
The pound bead was used for beadwork, and it enjoyed great popularity as the art of beadwork decoration developed in mid-America. An invoice of a shipment to the Hudson's Bay Company's great port of entry at York Factory in 1821 included 282 pounds of assorted pound beads.<sup>7</sup> An invoice to the same place in 1829 listed large quantities of common round pound beads in black, light blue, green, red and white.<sup>8</sup>

The American Fur Company was not far behind. Fort Union received 15 pounds of "large milk white pound beads in 1831."<sup>9</sup> In February 1833 the Company bought from Geisse & Korkhaus in New York City:

1200 lbs.	Blue pound beads	No. 3
500 "	" "	No. 2
100 "	Black "	No. 3
100 "	" "	No. 4 <sup>10</sup>

In 1836 the Company bead orders went directly to Alessandro Bartolla in Venice:

3,000 Pounds	Sky Blue pound beads	as per Sample No. 3
3,000 "	Chalk White "	" " " " No. 3
1,000 "	" "	" " " " No. 4
200 "	" "	" " " " No. 5



Broken package of pound beads, middle 19th century, showing mass of loose black beads interspersed with many beads loosely strung on fine threads of varying lengths. Museum of the Fur Trade Collections.





Sioux Indian powder horn and bag decorated with pony beadwork. Collected by Lieutenant G.K. Warren on the Blue Water battlefield, Nebraska, in 1855. Photograph courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

"These beads are principally intended for our mutual friends at St. Louis...The nos. of the Beads are the same as the sizes of R. Hyslop."<sup>11</sup>  
 From the remarks it is obvious that the greatest share of these pound beads was going up the Missouri to the Chouteau posts.  
 In 1835 the Superintendency for Indians at St. Louis estimated that traders had sold the Indians 4,500 pounds of blue and white pound beads and 25 pounds

of fine seed beads during the year.<sup>12</sup> This gives a good idea of the relative popularity of the two kinds of beads among the western Indians in the 1830s.

Another example of the demand for pound beads in the field is the shipment from Fort Pierre of 125 pounds of blue beads and 127 pounds of white beads to outfit the White River Post for the Brule Sioux in northern Nebraska during the winter of 1838-9. These were pound beads; seed beads had not yet entered the Sioux trade at that time.<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. Office of Indian Affairs responded to the Indians' desires in ordering gifts and annuity payments for its charges. A proposal submitted by the well-known New York importing firm of Geisse & Korkhaus in December 1839 included:

- Common pound beads, small sizes, 30¢ per lb. — white, red, black, yellow, green.
- Fine beads or moccasin beads — ruby pink, alabaster white, purple, fine blue, etc., 75¢ per lb.
- Seed beads or fine garnishing beads according to color from 5 to 16 cents per bunch of 12 small branches.<sup>14</sup>

Beadwork fashions were gradually changing in the West. An outfit purchased of Robert Campbell (St. Louis) by William Sublette in the spring of 1843 contained "8 bunches blue seed beads, 18 bunches white seed beads, 36 lbs. Blue and White pound beads, 16 bunches white agate beads, 16 bunches blue agate beads."<sup>15</sup>

The pound bead still held its own on the Upper Missouri and the Canadian interior. The large orders of beads included in the Hudson's Bay Northern Department's Outfit for 1858 (York Factory) included 1600 bunches of white and assorted colors of seed beads and 80 pounds of common pound beads in black, dark blue and red.<sup>16</sup>

The 1864 inventory of Robert Campbell's Indian supply business in St. Louis listed pound beads by the keg in blue, orange, white, green, black, rose and carnelian.<sup>17</sup> The last trading firm at Fort Union in 1867 listed in its inventory "10 dozen Pound Beads @ 1.56." These were apparently packages of pound beads.<sup>18</sup>

After this time pound bead shipments gradually evaporated as the demand retreated farther into the Northwest (as we noted at the beginning of this article). Today the great interest in living history and the attendant craftwork activities have given the pound bead/pony bead new interest and attention.

NOTES

1. Guy L. Peterson, *Four Forts of the South Platte*. Fort Meyer, VA. 1982. 28, 55-59.
2. Carrie A. Lyford, *Quill and Beadwork of the Western Sioux*. Lawrence, KS. 1940. 56.
3. John C. Ewers, *Blackfoot Crafts*. Lawrence, KS. 1945. 38.
4. Kate C. Duncan, *Northern Athapaskan Art, A Beadwork Tradition*. Seattle. 1989. 16.
5. W. G. N. van der Sleen, *Handbook on Beads*. Liege, Belgium. 1967. 25.
6. Ewers. 33-34.
7. *Hudson's Bay Company Records*, Reel 369. Series I, A24/41. Dominion Archives, Ottawa, Canada.
8. *Ibid.* Reel 375.
9. *Chouteau Accounts*, V-1. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
10. *American Fur Company Papers*; Vol. II, Orders Outward. New York Historical Society, New York.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Office of Indian Affairs Miscellaneous Files*. National Archives, Washington, D.C.
13. *Chouteau—Maffitt Collection*, Winter 1838. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
14. *Office of Indian Affairs Miscellaneous Files*.
15. *Sublette Papers*. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
16. *Hudson's Bay Company Records*. Reel 380.
17. *Campbell Papers*. Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis.
18. Gregory, Brugier and Geoway, *Fort Union, Papers, 1863-1877*. Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.