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History of Yukon first nations art

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Chapter Four-Beaded & Floral Designs

Beaded period

While it is obvious that Yukon First Nations have created beadwork for over a hundred years, it is not clear where the designs came from. How did this tradition start? I have often heard from various non-First Nations people that missionaries taught the people floral bead designs. While this is the case for the First Nations people further to the east and south in Canada, I discovered that there were no missionary bead teaching activities in the Yukon. In fact in some areas of the Yukon, First Nations people may have been creating floral bead designs before the coming of missionaries in the area. Beads were commonly used in the south-central Yukon by the 1840s and most probably earlier in the north of the Yukon. At first the large Russian beads were used to replace the silverberry seeds on the breastband fringes of tunics and later the smaller beads replaced the porcupine embroidery on the breastbands. Beads were well known and readily available in the 1860's and it is this time period that saw the start of adoption of floral designs in the Yukon.

I identify Fort Yukon in Alaska as a focal point in tracing the history of floral bead work in the Yukon. Fort Yukon is not in the Yukon but in present day Alaska. None of the engravings and drawings of Athapaskan First Nations people in the Fort Yukon area before the 1860's show any floral designs. In the drawings and photographs from the 1870s and onwards there is a predominant amount of floral bead work present. One of the first examples of floral bead work in the Fort Yukon area is an engraving by Whymper from 1867 and shows a beaded firebag. You can see the image on page 57 of Kate Duncan's *Northern Athapaskan Art*.

The first missionaries in the area arrived in Fort Yukon in 1861. This was the Christian Missionary Society's Rev. William West Kirkby. From that point on the area had a steady presence of missionaries. For the first couple of decades it seems highly unlikely that these unwed male missionaries were teaching floral bead designs! I believe that the floral designs were introduced indirectly by the people who were supplying the beads. Fort Yukon was established in 1848 and trading in such items as beads had gone on for thirteen years before the first missionaries arrived on the scene. I will come back to the role of the trading forts in the Yukon later in this section.

The Yukon Beaded Period starts in the 1860s in the Fort Yukon area and carries on until World War Two. The Beaded Period makes its presence first in the north of the Yukon Territory and a later appearance is made in the south. I feel that the Beaded Period is one of the most artistically expressive periods of the Yukon First Nations people. When beads became available the creator of the image or design had a sudden choice of color and surface quality (shiny to matte). Quills could be dyed but there was a limited choice in color. Black and white colors were used as these are the natural color of the quill. Other colors included varieties of reds and blues. These were colors that people could create from earth or plant dyes. The dyed quills were very bright and beautiful at first but would fade over time. The arrival of beads must have meant less work, increased choice and more durability.

In the coming sections I will give an overview of the regional floral beaded styles. Later I will examine beaded birds, mammals and fish in Chapter Five-Figurative Art. I will be using the following breakdown of floral design factors: main or central flower designs, leaf & secondary flower designs, stem work, and background. The main flower design is often the center or focus point of the overall design. See examples in figure # 103 for various main flower patterns. The first on the left is a flower pattern that is known as the "Annie Ned" pattern. This is a Southern Tutchone floral design. The next is a common four-petal with center bud design often thought of as a rosette. In Kate Duncan's *A Special Gift: The*

Kutchin Beadwork Tradition, she identifies a wider pedaled motif for the Kutchin (Gwich'in) as 'dog paw' based on the tracks that the Gwich'in say dogs make. There may be more pedals as seen in the next example. This is a five pedal flower design but the pedals overlap. The last is a Kaska main flower design, a more complex flower pattern. The Gwich'in commonly made complex main flower designs.

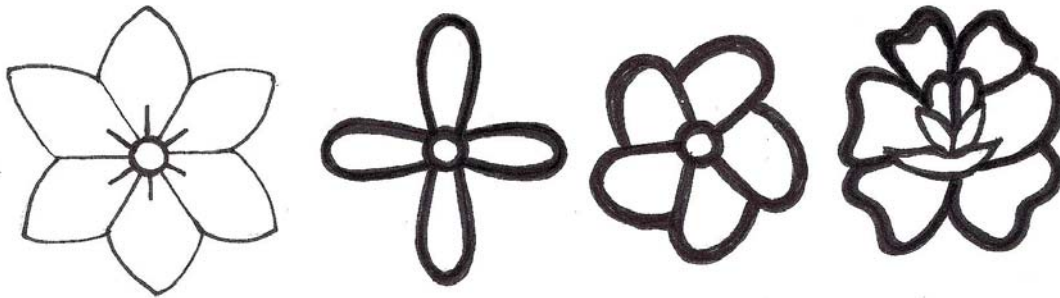


Figure # 103. Various Yukon First Nations main flower bead designs. UvK drawing.

There is an unlimited variety of main flower designs from simple to complex, but not all floral designs are created around a main flower. The main flowers designs often have stem works coming out of the main flower and it is on those stem works that various secondary flowers and/or leafs are attached to fill out the overall design. There are various styles of stem works. See figure # 104 for five examples of stem designs.

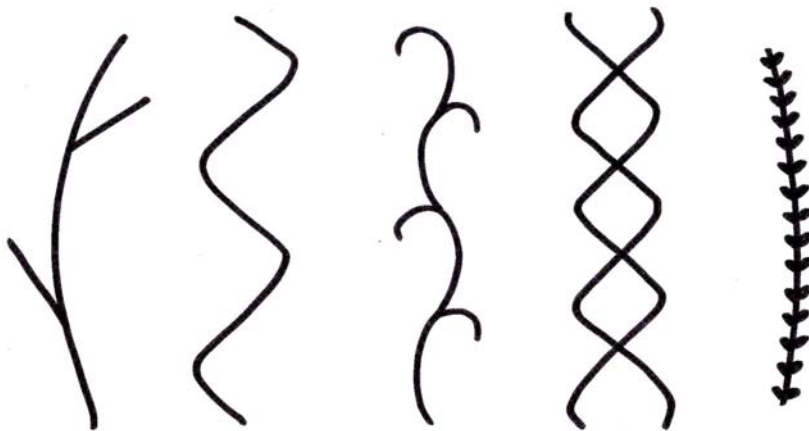


Figure # 104. Various Yukon First Nations floral stem designs. UvK drawing.

The first stem on the left is a simple common stem. It can head off in any direction and sometimes has other stems coming off of it. It does not have a repeating pattern like the following stems. The next stem example I call the zigzag stem but it is also known as the "S" stem pattern. This pattern is used often by Yukon First Nations and not only in bead work as I illustrated in Chapter Two-Geometric & Decorative Arts. The next is a "Y" stem pattern. This stem pattern starts with a short curved stem and then a new stem starts at the top curve of that stem. The next stem shown can be thought of as an "X" or double zigzag pattern. The last stem shown is one with a series of bead outcrops along the shaft. Duncan states that this is identified by the Kutchin as "mice running". In my casual conversations with Athapaskan beaders in Fairbanks, Alaska, I was told this pattern was "grouse tracks". The leaves and secondary flowers were attached to the stem. In figure # 105 is a series of four leaf patterns that would be attached to the stem works.

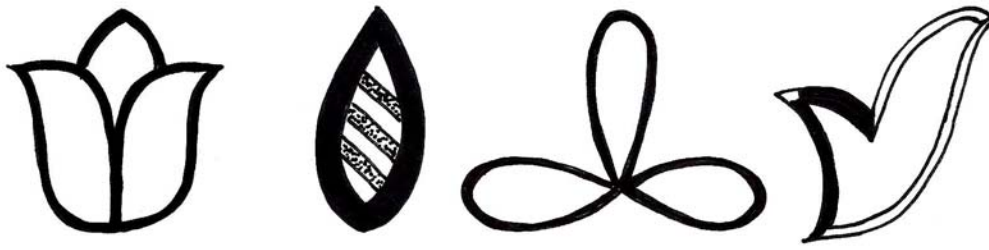


Figure # 105. Various Yukon First Nations floral leaf designs. UvK drawing.

Duncan identifies the motif on the left as a split-bell design. The next leaf is a simple leaf design with an added pattern in the middle. There are variations to the simple leaves, like showing a bent, a rounded appearance or outcrops. The next is a cloverleaf design that the Kutchin (Gwich'in) identify as ptarmigan foot (Carney & Duncan 1997: 32). The Kutchin descriptions for these motifs seem to be limited to the Gwich'in. Other groups may identify the designs differently. I think of this motif as a 3-petal or clubs design. There are other patterns that look like hearts, diamonds and spades. They may very well have their origins from playing cards. Some beaders adopted patterns from various sources. For example, the old T. Eaton's catalogue which was first published in 1884 and by the Klondike Gold Rush, if not before, was available to people throughout the Yukon. These patterns could be seen on the catalogue's products such as dresses, curtains, table cloths and so forth. One of the traits of Athapaskan beaders is their fondness for adopting new patterns. The last leaf design is a simple Upper Yukon type of leaf pattern. The Inland Tlingit leaf patterns of this type are often more complex than the one above.

Overall the basic motifs: flowers, leaves and stems, can be combined in various patterns making up any possible combination of design. There may be only a few flowers or leaves with or without stems with a large amount of the background showing or the background could be mostly covered with flowers, leaves and stems. The flower and leaf designs vary from simple to complex. Added to this mix is the choice of colours. An example of the central flower, stem, and leaf motifs combined can be seen in the next drawing, figure # 106. This drawing is based on a sled bag that is in the Milwaukee Public Museum. It was collected by Brigadier General Henry Mitchell at Fort Egbert in Alaska. That fort is situated in Han territory. You can see a photograph of the bag in Kate Duncan's *Northern Athapaskan Art* on page 141.

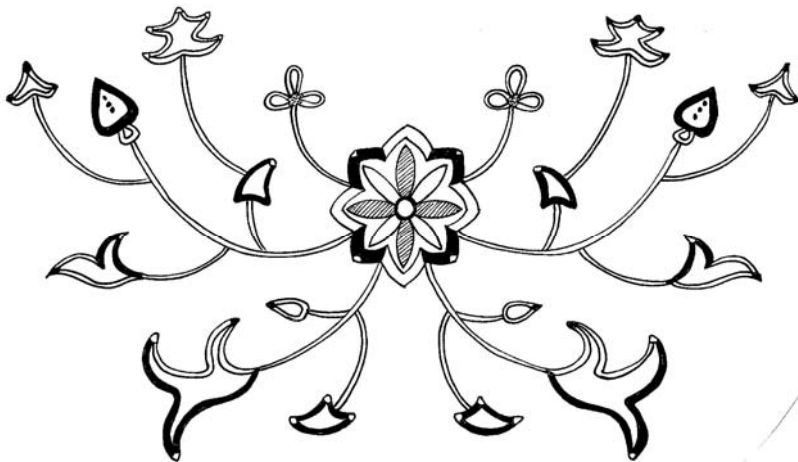


Figure # 106. Example of combination of main flower, stem and leaf design. Based on Han sled bag cover floral bead design. UvK drawing.

In the above example there is the main flower at the center with common stem work extending out. There is a variety of leaf designs at the ends of all the stems and one pair functioning as a joint for another stem. There is a lot of the background hide showing and while the main flower is solid in design, the centers of the leaf designs have a negative space that shows the background. Around the end of the flap is a fabric breastband that is also beaded. The pattern around the edge is using a series of four pedal flower motifs and a variation of the “X” pattern stem work. See figure # 107 below for my drawing of the center section of the design.

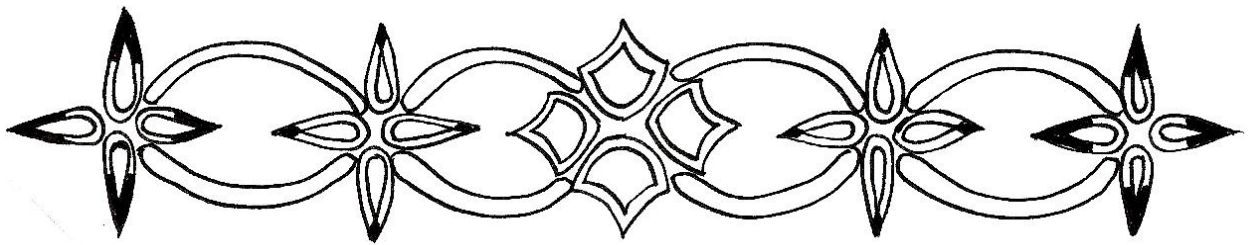


Figure # 107. Example of trim flower and stem design. Based on Han sled bag cover floral bead design. UvK drawing.

It is this breakdown of floral motifs that I use to analyse designs from different regions in the Yukon. There are five distinct floral bead styles in the Yukon region but I only show four of the areas the different styles were practiced on the map in figure # 108. The fifth style was the Mountain Dene style and the Mountain Dene integrated into Northern Tutchone and Kaska communities so are not shown on the map.

I will start off with the Gwich'in style [A] as they were the first people to create floral beadwork. The designs have their roots in the already established floral bead designs from up the Mackenzie River. At Fort Yukon there is a major floral design change that occurs up the Yukon River and Tanana Rivers away from Fort Yukon. For the Yukon River area I will call this the upper Yukon River style [B]. Since the events that caused the changes for the upper Yukon River style are the same for the Tanana River, their beading style is almost identical in structure. Duncan classes the two groups together as the 'The Yukon-Tanana Region'. The upper Yukon River style includes the Han, Northern and Southern Tutchone, Yukon Kaska, Tagish and Tanana. It is here I also add the Mountain Dene style. While not formally recognized in the Yukon, the Mountain Dene have been living in and out of the eastern Yukon for centuries and in the last century a number of Mountain Dene families settled in the eastern and later central Yukon. The other two styles are the Inland Tlingit [C] and the Tahltan [D] at the very south of the Yukon. I have noticed that four of the regional floral bead styles are situated around river systems. These river systems are all connected with trade routes. Refer to the map in figure # 108 for the river systems: The Gwich'in with the (1) Mackenzie and (2) Porcupine Rivers; the Han, Northern & Southern Tutchone, Kaska, and Tagish with the (3) Yukon River. In the Yukon River drainage these main rivers; the (8) Stewart, (7) White and (9) Pelly Rivers all flow into the Yukon River and these areas all worked in the upper Yukon River style. The (4) Tanana River also flows into the Yukon River downriver from Fort Yukon. The Inland Tlingit style was connected with the (5) Taku and Tulsequah Rivers and the Tahltan style with the (6) Stikine River. On this map I also pointed out for reference sake the (11) Peel River which starts into the northeastern Yukon and flows into the Mackenzie River and the (10) Copper River in the southeastern mainland Alaska. The Peel River was an area that was occupied by both the Gwich'in and Northern Tutchone. The Copper River is the homeland of the Ahtna people.

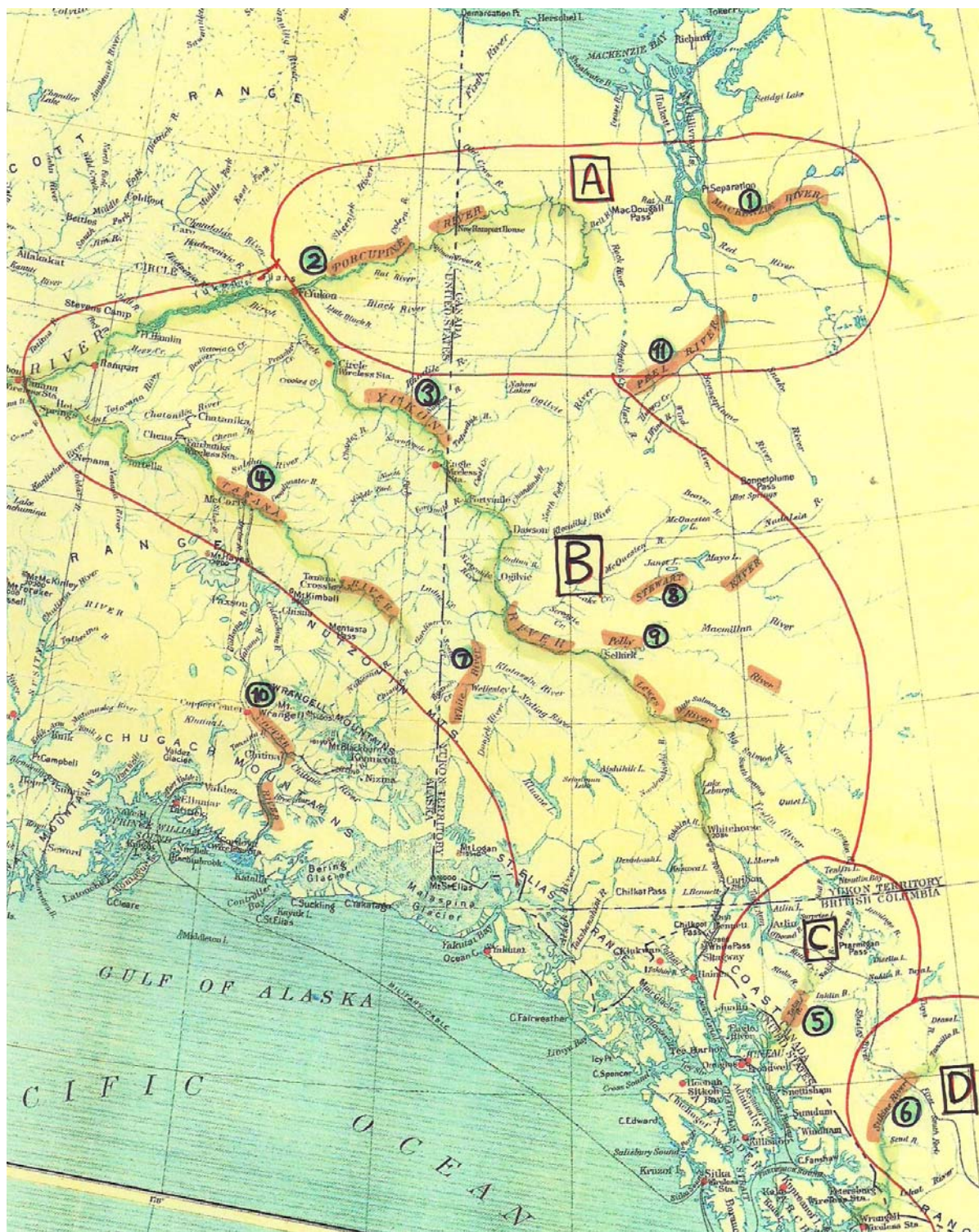


Figure # 108. River systems that are related to the development of beading styles in the Yukon.

Gwich'in bead designs

The Gwich'in people are famous in the Yukon for their bead work and they are the earliest Yukon First Nations people to use beaded floral designs. The Gwich'in style is basically the same as the bead styles from further up the Mackenzie River. When you look at

the bead work from the different groups of people all along the Mackenzie River you will see the same basic floral design building blocks. They use large complex and colourful central and secondary flowers and leaves. They use very little stem work and cover most to all of the background. In the Yukon the Gwich'in are the only people that make beadwork this way. The southern Elders refer to the Gwich'in style as the "Old Crow" style since the only Gwich'in community in the Yukon is Old Crow, on the banks of the Porcupine River. This is what Duncan says in *A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition* on page 29:

Kutchin floral beadwork belongs to the Great Slave Lake-Mackenzie River style region...The beadwork designs of each of the groups are similar enough to warrant classification together. (Carney & Duncan 1997: 29)

The reason that the Mackenzie River, the Porcupine River and Fort Yukon had the same style was the route that the Hudson Bay Company took for trading purposes. The bead style was established along the southern area of the Mackenzie River-Slave Lake area and as the Hudson Bay Company established trading posts and forts further down the Mackenzie River the bead style was copied. The Hudson Bay Company used many Métis and Indian workers. When they established a new post, the wives of these workers settled and the local women were able to copy the bead style. This is what Duncan says in *A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition* in page 26:

Floral beadwork was first produced among Athapaskan speakers by those around Great Slave Lake, but art quickly diffused north and west. The large beads known at Fort McPherson came from Russia and were traded in from Kutchin living farther west, but seed beads and floral designs arrived there with the Hudson's Bay Company and women married to Hudson's Bay men. When Loucheux women married Hudson's Bay men, they worked alongside, sharing ideas and learning from other Company wives who had moved to the area with their husbands. (Duncan Carney & Duncan 1997: 26)

The Hudson's Bay worker's First Nations and Métis wives themselves did learn from the missionary schools that both the Anglican and Catholic Churches established in the upper Mackenzie River-Slave Lakes areas. For example, the Grey Nuns arrived in Fort Chipewyan in 1849 to establish a residential school. In the coming decades they opened more schools further north and down the Mackenzie River.

The Hudson Bay was interested in expanding its fur trade so was actively exploring. In an effort to seek out the distant tribes to the west of the Mackenzie River the Hudson Bay Company established the Peel River Post on the Peel River at the junction of the Mackenzie River in 1840. This post later became Fort McPherson. Using the Peel River Post as a base the Hudson Bay Company travelled to the west and after a number of unsuccessful explorations finally discovered the "Youcon" (Yukon) River in 1845. See the 1834 map in figure # 109 of the Mackenzie River and the dates of the establishment of trading posts and forts. Note that those forts with the (NWC) behind them were established by the Northwest Company, the main competitor to the Hudson Bay Company. The two companies merged in 1821 and kept the Hudson Bay Company name. You can see the establishment of forts from the late 1700s into the early 1800s steadily moving north down the Mackenzie River. Notice that on this 1834 map it leaves the whole of the interior of the Yukon and Alaska blank as it was still unexplored.

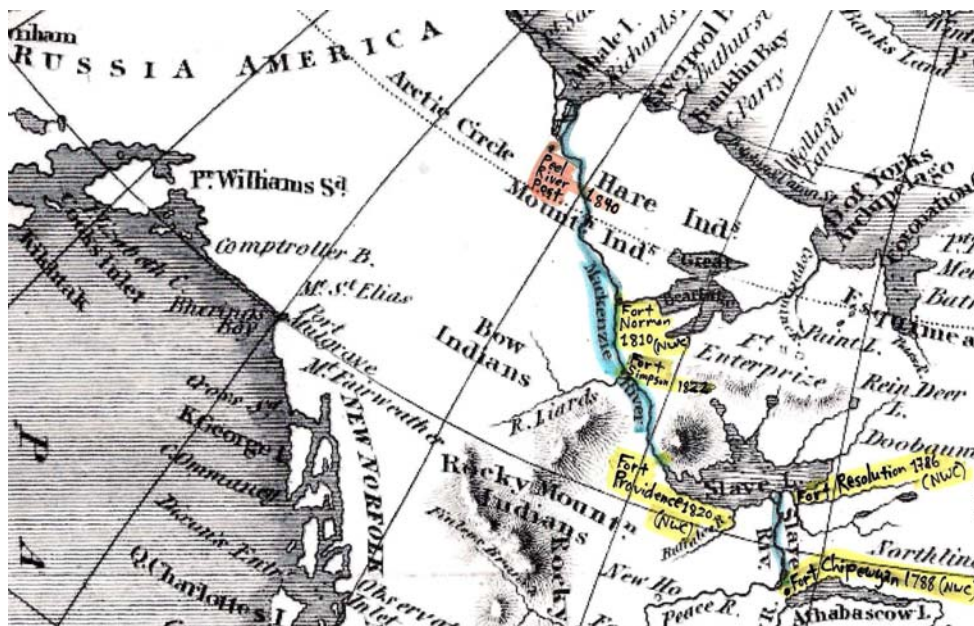


Figure # 109. Mackenzie River and establishment of main trading Forts up until 1840.

You may note in the next map that there is not a river linking the Mackenzie and Porcupine Rivers, so an overland route had to be discovered through the Richardson Mountains. The local First Nations guides were less than willing to allow the Hudson Bay Company to disrupt their own established trading routes, so the Hudson Bay Company had to finally use guides that were from further up the Mackenzie River. These guides had no interest in the trade situation in the area. A pass was found through the Richardson Mountains and they discovered the Yukon River. The new fur trading areas were successful.

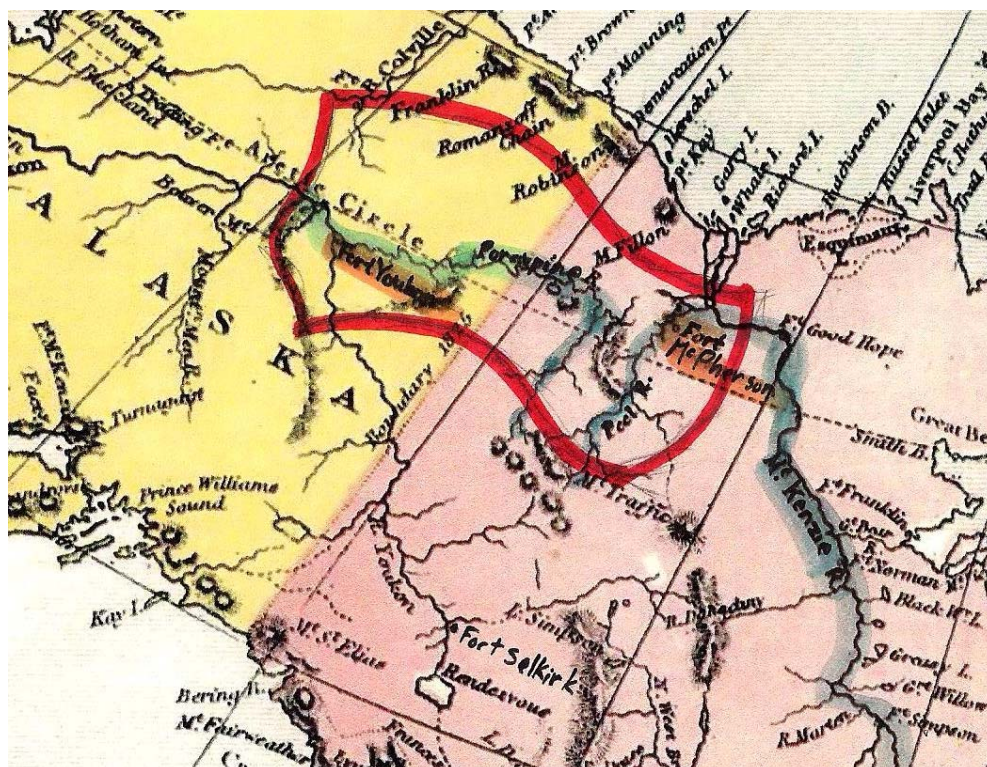


Figure # 110. Gwich'in traditional territory. 1878 map.

Because of the required infrastructure Fort Yukon was not established until 1848. Now that a trade route existed from Fort McPherson to Fort Yukon there was a steady flow of Hudson Bay workers moving up and down the Porcupine River. All along the river the women were exposed to the floral designs from the Hudson Bay workers and the families they brought with them. These floral designs had their source from the upper Mackenzie River and that style became firmly implanted into the northern Yukon. See figure # 110 of an 1878 map that shows the Gwich'in traditional territory as well as Fort McPherson and Fort Yukon.

Next I will examine some examples of Gwich'in floral bead designs. Figure # 111 shows a wall pocket that was collected by H.A. Conroy in 1911. It is presently in the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It was collected from the Gwich'in on the Mackenzie River.



Figure # 111 Mackenzie River Gwich'in wall pocket. Collected 1911. VI-H-13 CMC.

The working surface is mostly filled with beads. Only small areas of the background show through. The background colour for this wall pocket is black. This is a common colour for wall pockets, sled bags and baby belts. The distinctive feature of Gwich'in beading is the use of flower and leaf designs with minimal stem work. The flowers and leaves dominate the picture area and are quite elaborate, using many colors and twisting and turning pedals and leaves. In this wall pocket there are three sets of flower groups, two at the bottom part and one set at the top. In the next figure, # 112 is a wall pocket collected by H.A. Conroy in 1911 from the Gwich'in on the Mackenzie River. It states in the museum notes that this wall

pocket was made around 1900. It has a different design: three small pockets at the top and a large one at the bottom. The beads are on black fabric but the pockets are part of a red fabric background. I point this out because Duncan states:

Hide, black velvet or velveteen, and more recently, felt, are the grounds used by the Kutchin beadworker. Velvet has been popular since sometime in the nineteenth century. Although red wool has been beaded on by neighbouring upper Yukon groups for years, no one had heard of Kutchin women ever beading on red. Black wool, which is common in the neighbouring upper Yukon area as well as among the Cree and to a lesser extent on Great Slave Lake, has rarely been used by the Kutchin. (Carney & Duncan 1997: 37)

The example below supports Duncan's observations that the Gwich'in did not bead on red material but did use it in their work. The bottom of the wall pocket has a floral design that is symmetrical and each side is made up of a main flower and has a 'mouse walking' stem work connecting to four secondary flowers. There are five other tertiary leaf/berry/bud motifs connected to the overall design. The design is weighted at the bottom, that is, the bead work is on the bottom one-third of the section. I believe this is done for an aesthetic effect.



Figure # 112. Mackenzie River Gwich'in wall pocket. Collected 1911. VI-H-1 CMC.

Duncan writes about the difference between the eastern and western Gwich'in floral designs. Turn-of-the-century Loucheux (Fort McPherson) work is more similar to that produced around Great Slave Lake, while beadwork from the western Kutchin shows a tendency towards simplification and regularization. Even in the twentieth century there is still

a closer link between eastern Kutchin and Great Slave work. (Carney & Duncan 1997: Page 29)

This makes sense as there was more direct contact up and down the Mackenzie River with the origins of the missionary school beading tradition. The route from Fort McPherson to Fort Yukon required an overland route for part of the way and there were no trading posts between the two forts except the logistics transfer aid station of Lapierre House, which was prohibited from trading. So while the western Gwich'in were seeing examples of the Great Slave Lake beading style passing through their territory with the Hudson's Bay Company workers, they did not have the more direct contact that the Fort McPherson Gwich'in had with the Great Slave Lake style. In Barbara Hail and Kate Duncan's *Out of the North*, Duncan writes about the Gestalt Visual Perception Theory:

Students of visual perception group their observations under a broad principle they believe to be universal, the "law of the good gestalt." "Gestalt" refers to perceptual totality, and "good gestalt" to the most easily perceived mental order or structure of that totality. The "good gestalt," then, is the simplest one, because "any stimulus pattern tends to be seen in such a way that the resulting structure is as simple as the given conditions permit. (Arnheim 1974:53). When ambiguous stimuli are presented, the brain chooses the least complex alternative by simplifying and regularizing the visual pattern, particularly by making it symmetrical, by leveling (dropping off information), and by sharpening (enhancing or exaggerating information). (Hail & Duncan 1989: 75-76)

Since Fort McPherson was an established trading post and the Gwich'in in the area had continuous contact with the Mackenzie River beading style they would have been able to copy it more closely. The Gwich'in along the Porcupine River would have only been able to see the beadwork in passing and thus their copies would have been simpler. This explains why the western Gwich'in floral bead designs were slightly simpler than the eastern Gwich'in style. It would be the western style that the Yukon Gwich'in created. In the following figure, # 113 is an Athapaskan baby belt from the Canadian Museum of Civilization. It was obtained by the Canadian Museum of Civilization with no providence but the Museum has identified this belt as Gwich'in.



Figure # 113. Gwich'in baby belt. VI-I-82, CMC

Based on the gestalt theory this would be a western style Gwich'in baby belt. When you compare the floral designs to the previous floral designs in figures # 111 & 112 you can see the baby belt's floral designs are slightly simpler. Below in figure # 114 is a comparison between a detail of floral design from the baby belt and wall pocket.



Figure # 114. Comparison of Gwich'in baby belt (left) and wall pocket floral design (right). VI-I-82 & VI-H-13 CMC

In the baby belt there are less colour variations and less secondary flowers and leaf motifs. The baby belt motifs are more spread out leaving bigger gaps with more of the background showing and not compacted like the wall pocket floral design. There is more notable use of stem work in the baby belt which allows filling the space. Based on the Gestalt Theory the baby belt would fall into the western Gwich'in floral style.

The gestalt theory plays an even bigger role when you examine the floral bead designs from the upper Yukon River, as I will do in the next section. If you want to learn more about Gwich'in floral bead designs I would recommend Kate Duncan's *A Special Gift: The Kutchin Beadwork Tradition*. It gives much more detail and information about Gwich'in floral designs.

Upper Yukon River floral style

I believe that the upper Yukon River style originated from the upper Yukon River First Nations (Han and Northern Tutchone) when they travelled to Fort Yukon and saw the floral designs that were already becoming established there. As part of their trade network the upper Yukon River people travelled to Fort Yukon to trade. Dall records that both the Han and the Northern Tutchone visited Fort Yukon from the Upper Yukon in 1867. These upper Yukon people were even more removed than the western Gwich'in as there were no Hudson's Bay traders, workers or families passing through their territory. They would only have been able to observe the floral beadwork for a short time while at the Fort Yukon trading post. This would have also included any Cree or Métis Hudson's Bay Company workers at Fort Yukon. This is another example of the gestalt theory at work where the upper Yukon beading style is overall simpler than the Gwich'in beading style.

I will add here that the Hudson's Bay Company did establish Fort Selkirk at the junction of the Yukon and Pelly Rivers in 1848 but this fort was pillaged and destroyed without loss of life by the Chilkat Tlingits in 1852. There were also earlier posts at Pelly Banks and Francis Lake and both failed before the pillaging of Fort Selkirk. There were often no women present at the fort until the very end when there were two wives of workers. One wife and worker was Indian and possibly the other was too. The artistic impact to the area was negligible. The influence for the Han and Northern Tutchone came from Fort Yukon. The Hudson's Bay Company operated Fort Yukon from 1848 until 1869. The United States bought Alaska in 1867 and in 1869 Fort Yukon was confirmed to be in American Territory. The Hudson's Bay Company had to cease operations and move their operation into Canadian territory. They moved up the Porcupine River and further away from the Han and Northern Tutchone but by this time the floral beading tradition was starting to be established for the

Gwich'in and was just beginning to take root in the upper Yukon River. I have not come across any documentation of how and when exactly the Han and Northern Tutchone started creating floral beadwork.

The earliest evidence of beadwork I have seen from the upper Yukon area is a photograph taken during the Schwatka 1883 exploration from Haines Alaska to down the Yukon River. This photograph was taken in Fort Selkirk and shows a number of First Nations men in canoes. See figure # 115 and # 116 for details of the photograph. In the left image of figure # 116 a man is holding a paddle and it appears he has a beaded firebag hanging around his neck. The front man in the right hand canoe in figure # 115 appears to be wearing a possibly beaded bandoleer or the strap for a bag. They are in fact wearing a mixture of clothing. The standing man in the left photograph appears to have lines running down the front of his trousers and this may be the traditional hide trousers with the porcupine embroidery running down the front. The front man in the canoe in the right photograph is wearing a western shirt that has a series of pinstripes running down the shirt. The man behind him may also be wearing a firebag.



Figure # 115. First Nation men in canoes at Fort Selkirk 1883. Lt. Frederick Schwatka collection, 94/102 #19, YA.



Figure # 116. Details of First Nation men in canoes at Fort Selkirk 1883. Lt. Frederick Schwatka collection, 94/102 #19, YA.

This photograph shows that at least by 1883 there are beaded firebags in use in the upper Yukon River area. Schwatka does not describe any bead work or even the native clothing but as we can see in the photograph, western clothing. He does sometimes mention those “tattered and filthy beyond measure” western traded clothing (*Along Alaska’s Great River*, page 228). Schwatka does write about the beads he saw when he examined an abandoned trading post just on the United States side of the Alaska-Yukon border:

The Indians evidently must have surmised that the trader would return, as they respected the condition in which he left the building, in a manner most creditable to their honesty, no one entered or disturbed in since he left. They evidently care little for beads as ornaments, for I saw none of them wearing that much coveted Indian adornment, while great quantities were scattered around the trader’s floor, having been trampled into the ground. At no place on the river did I find such an eagerness for beads as characterizes the American Indians of milder climes, but nowhere did I see such total disregard for them as was shown here. (Schwatka 1885: 259-260)

On the one hand Schwatka states that he is impressed with the Indians’ honesty by leaving the cabin untouched and on the other hand he states that the Indians do not care for the beads since they left them *untouched* on the cabin floor. The beads were left on the cabin floor because the First Nations people did not enter the cabin so would have not been able to touch the beads. I do not think Schwatka paid any attention to the clothing worn by First Nations people except western clothing that was traded into the area. His photographer took photographs of First Nations people who appear to be wearing beaded items such as firebags and possibly bandoleers. See figure # 117 for an engraving from Schwatka’s book *Along Alaska’s Great River* on page 253. It shows a Han man at Johnny’s Village which is on the Canadian side of the Alaskan border. It is from a time before Schwatka arrived at the abandoned trading post. You can see the Han fisherman wearing what appears to be a beaded strap, possibly for a firebag. I therefore dismiss his claim that upper Yukon First Nations people had a total disregard for beads since he had already seen people wearing articles with beadwork.

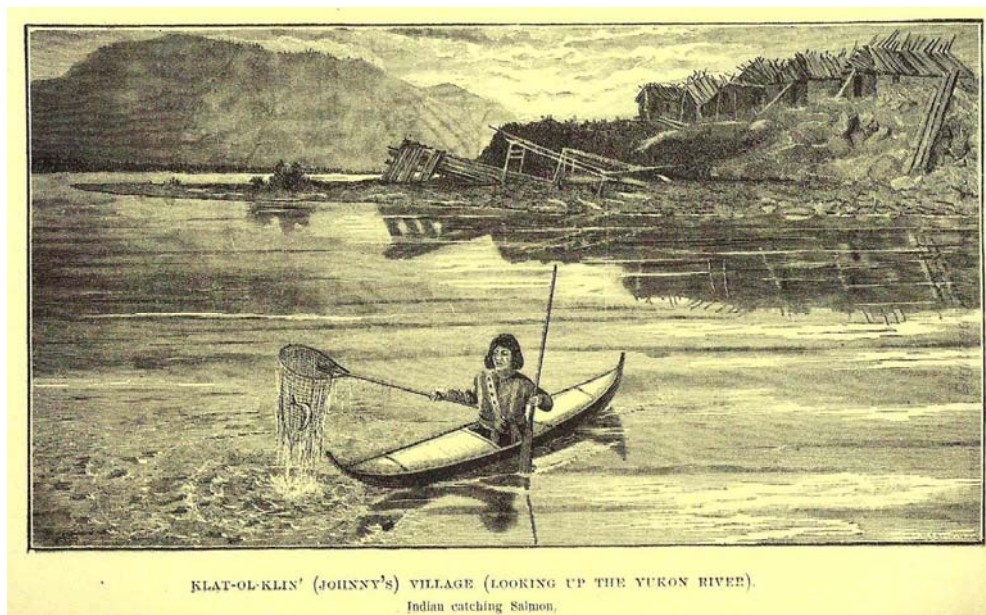


Figure # 117. Han fisherman with beaded strap. Page 253, *Along Alaska’s Great River*.

With the sale of Alaska from Russia to the United States and the Russian American Company becoming the Alaska Commercial Company, a series of American trading posts opened after heading up the Yukon River from Fort Yukon. One such post was Fort Reliance in 1874. While the Alaska Commercial Company started out in the fur trade it later moved more toward supplying prospectors and miners. By 1888 the prospecting/mining camp of Fortymile was firmly established and became the 'headquarters' of the prospectors and miners in the area. Their only concern was the search for gold. The Canadian government launched an exploration expedition in 1887 headed by geologist George Dawson. While Dawson has been given the title of Father of Canadian Anthropology for his research into Canada's Native people it seems he did little such research in the Yukon. As a geologist in the Yukon he was mostly concerned about the upkeep of Canadian law and mapping of land. I found no useful reference material from Dawson's exploration.

In the 1890s white people started to collect artifacts directly from upper Yukon First Nations people. It seems the first person to do so was Charles Hall, who collected from 1894 to 1901. There was one earlier artifact that is listed as being from the western subarctic at the Glenbow Museum, a beaded gun case, AC 236. It was collected by Colonel William D. Antrobus of the Northwest Mounted Police and purchased by the museum in 1968. In Duncan's *Northern Athapaskan Art* she lists it as a Yukon-Tanana Region style collected in 1886. If so this would be the earliest beaded artifact collected from the Yukon-Tanana region. It leaves me with a question: how did Colonel William D. Antrobus collect the artifact when all his service was in Alberta and Saskatchewan? The bead work also looks Tagish-Inland Tlingit, as there is a lot of the background showing. The designs are like the scroll type patterns that the Tlingit used and not the floral style of Athapaskan bead work. Since this gun case was collected in Canada I think this is a Tagish or Inland Tlingit gun case. Colonel William D. Antrobus was dismissed from the Northwest Mounted Police in 1891 for falsifying documents, stealing, ordering his quartermaster to make false entries in the post ledger and drunkenness. All this leads me to question the provenance of this gun case. See figure # 118 of the gun case and two details of the bead work. As you will see later with other examples of gun cases, they all followed mostly the same pattern: a beaded band at the top, another beaded band at the top third and a beaded area at the bottom. It is often finished with a double split tab at the muzzle end.



Figure # 118 Western subarctic gun case collected by Colonel William D. Antrobus. AC 236, Glenbow Museum.

The designs are beaded on a brown coloured fabric. Later in this section I will be examining Inland Tlingit beading styles and you will be able to see the similarities. In the next section I will examine a series of beaded floral designs from the upper Yukon River region so that you can also become familiar with the upper Yukon River region style.

Han bead designs

The first group of the Upper Yukon Style that I will discuss is the Han bead styles from the Dawson City area. The Han, like most of the groups from the Yukon, have two styles. This is a result of being influenced by the groups neighbouring them. The one style is an upper Yukon River style while the other has Gwich'in influences. Since the Han were neighbours to the Gwich'in this only makes sense. In the following example, figure # 119, is a gun case at the Dawson City Museum that is done in the upper Yukon River style. The bead work is largely based on the stem work that connects a series of simple four or five petal flowers. Between the flowers along the stem are a couple of smaller stems and leaf-like motifs. There are also a couple of leaves coming out of the stems themselves. The tip is shaped in the common double tab design.



Figure # 119, Han gun case and both ends of the case. 1983.16.10, DCM.

The beadwork is on the hide itself and a lot of the background is showing. Some of the flowers and leaf designs have more detail while others have simpler designs. With the stem work connecting the various floral/leaf motifs, we have the main ingredients of the typical upper Yukon River style.

In figure # 120 we can see the hide bag with the same combination of stem work connecting various flowers and leaf designs. There is a lot of the hide showing, just as on the gun case. This bag is on display at the Dawson City Museum. It is a common example of many of the bag flap designs from the upper Yukon River (and Tanana River). The design has a central six-petal white flower with a series of thin stems coming out of the flower at four points. These stems branch off into other stems and the resulting twelve stems all end with either leaf-, floral- or berry motifs. They are all beaded solid without negative space. The colors are mostly singular around the edge while the other colors occupy the center area. Note its similarity to the example in figure # 106 on page 133.



Figure # 120, bead design on bag. DCM.

As I mentioned earlier, the Han are influenced by the upper Yukon beading style as well as the Gwich'in. The following example in # 121 is Chief Isaac's "Chief's Coat" that was shown in figure # 87 on page 117 in the previous chapter. This image shows the top back of the coat with an elaborate floral design that covers a lot of the area. The central design appears to be solid and derives from the western Gwich'in beading style. It does not look at all like the central floral design seen in the bag in figure # 120. When we look at the bead work along the edge of the opening of the coat in figure # 122 the work appears to be more in the upper Yukon River style. The stem is running the length of the coat with a series of four pedal flowers and smaller stems growing out of the main stem that lead to what appears to be "forget-me-not" flowers. There are also simple green leaves growing out of the stem. This bead design is in the upper Yukon beading style.



Figure # 121, Detail of back of Chief Isaac's coat. Han bead design with Gwich'in influence. DCM



Figure # 122, Detail of Chief Isaac's coat. Upper Yukon River beading style. DCM

Another example of the Gwich'in beading influence on the upper Yukon beading style can be seen in this pair of Han mitts in figure # 123. There is less use of stems and the floral designs cover a large part of the area that has the beads on it. Again, this design is different from the bag in figure # 120.



Figure # 123, Han bead design on mitts. DCM

The next group of bead work is from the Northern Tutchone people. The Northern Tutchone style is typically in the upper Yukon River beading style and is the only group that seems to have consistent bead designs over their whole territory. The Southern Tutchone, being closer to the Tlingits, had a slightly different style. Nevertheless, the Southern Tutchone style still had the ingredients of the upper Yukon River style but they only differed in the details.

Northern Tutchone bead designs

Northern Tutchone bead work is the same as the Han upper Yukon River style with the exception of using more outcrops or “grouse tracks” in the stem work. I will examine some examples and you will see that there is a lot of use of stem work, fewer flower and leaf motifs and no clustering of floral motifs. This allows for a lot of the background to show. In figure # 124 is a photograph of Alice Hager and Mary Hager in Mayo in 1937. Both women are wearing baby belts, quite nicely illustrating how these belts are used. Note the added detail to the stem work and the complex flower designs. On the baby belt to the right the stem work is coming out of the flower and divides into three stems at the end of the belt. Each stem ends with a leaf design. For the baby belt on the left it appears as if the stem work is itself one of the main elements. The stem work comes out of the bottom of a central flower and goes in opposite directions to a(another?) flower, being the main connecting design of that unit. That pattern is repeated around the baby belt. In addition this belt has a series of tassels coming out of the bottom edge.



Figure # 124. Alice and Mary Hager, Mayo, 1937. Claude Tidd coll., 7504, YA.

A more recent baby belt shown in figure # 125 was made by Ms. Annie McGinty from Pelly Crossing. This belt was made in 1967 and was gifted to the Glenbow Museum in 1992. Although recently made, the bead style is similar to the older style. There is a central

flower with stems leading to two other flowers. As with the Hager sisters' baby belts, there are a series of small beaded outcrops along its length. As mentioned earlier, the Gwich'in identify these stem outcrops as mouse tracks and the Athapaskans in Fairbanks identify these as grouse tracks. The flowers are treated differently from Southern Tutchone and Tagish people, with green leaves peaking from behind the petals. The treatment of the flowers is more complex with numerous color changes.

The design is placed on a black fabric with a red fabric strip along the edges. There is a series of yellow beads bordering the red trim, maybe a distant reference to the repeating dot motif. This work also includes a wide range of colors including four different blues. There seems to be a bit of freedom to the color use in this work, maybe making the belt colorful for the baby it is intended to carry.



Figure # 125, Annie McGinty's baby belt. AC 539, Glenbow Museum.

Kaska bead designs

The Kaska stretch from the central Yukon down into northern British Columbia and the bead styles differ clearly at each end. Based on the more recent Kaska beading I have seen I feel that the Ross River and Upper Laird/Watson Lake area Kaska created mostly, but not always, beadwork that was very close to the Northern Tutchone style. The Northern Tutchone and Kaska people were living in the Ross River area at the beginning of the 20th century. Sometime later the Tutchone moved more permanently away to the Big and Little Salmon River areas. The style changes further south into northern British Columbia where the Kaska bead styles show more influence from the Sekani and maybe the Slave people. Below in figure # 126 is a pair of mitts that belongs to Kaska Elder Mida Donnessey from the village of Upper Laird in the southern Yukon. Donnessey stated that the mitts were very old but did not know when they were made. She did say (in 2002) that they were at least sixty years old, maybe older. It would have meant that the mitts were made at the latest in the 1940s. When you examine the floral design at the top of the gloves you can see that they follow the upper Yukon River style. There is a central main four pedal flower that has stem work coming out of the bottom. The stems have a series of outcrops on them and leaf motifs. This is quite typical of the upper Yukon bead designs. The bottom part has a five pedal main flower on the glove on the left and a four pedal main flower on the right. There was a beaded design going around the flowers but most of the beads are missing. These may have been stem motifs.



Figure # 126 Kaska beaded mitts, 1940s or before. Mida Donnessey collection.

When I examined other Kaska bead work in Northern British Columbia I noted a minor style change. On the following bag the bead work is slightly different. It was collected by James Teit in 1915 from the Dease Lake-Telegraph Creek area. Teit had spent three months of 1915 in the Dease Lake-Telegraph Creek area researching the Tahltan and Kaska people. The north end of Dease Lake, Porter Landing, was a Kaska village at that time while the south end of Dease Lake and Telegraph Creek are within the Tahltan traditional territory. The museum notes state that this bag may not be Kaska but traded in to the Kaska. To me it appears more Kaska than the following bag that is listed as Kaska. See the two photographs in figure # 127 for the Kaska bag that may have been traded in and see the two photographs in figure # 128 for a bag listed as Kaska but appears Tahltan to me.



Figure # 127. Kaska bag and detail. 1915, VI-H-32 CMC.

On the flap of the bag in figure # 127 is a series of three and four pedal flower/leaf motifs connected by stem work that appears to be quite disorganized. This is in contrast to the organized four pedal flower motifs that are uniformly spaced along the stem that is placed on the strap. The bead work on the strap is typical upper Yukon style while the beading on the bag's flap is not. This may be consistent with the Gestalt Theory: the beader of this bag may have seen the upper Yukon River bead designs and remembered the easier stem-four pedal flower pattern, but did not remember exactly the more complex design that was used on the bag's flap. It could be argued that the bead designs were copied from the upper Yukon River style but with the flap flower/leaf and stem work mixed up in accordance with the Gestalt Theory. Or the design on the flap was seen from another neighbouring group and the two different beading styles were added to the one bag. Because the Kaska's bead designs are influenced by the various neighbouring groups I would agree that this bag is Kaska.



Figure # 128. Kaska bag and detail. 1915, VI-H-8 CMC.

The bag in figure # 128 was also collected by Teit around the same time and place. If this bag is indeed Kaska then it is a copy of the Tahltan style, using the same broad geometric patterns. Because of the scarcity of other Kaska geometric beaded designs it could be argued that this bag was traded to the Kaska from the Tahltan. When you see the examples of Tahltan bead work later in this chapter you will notice the bold geometric bead style that is unique to the Tahltan.

See figure # 129 for an example of a Kaska moccasin. The short tongue beaded area was common in the southern Yukon and northern British Columbia. These were also collected at the same time by Teit. The bead design on the moccasin consists of a central flower at the end of a stem with leaves coming off the stem as well as from behind the main flower. This floral design may be a copy of a basic flower from nature, or a design that the

beader had seen in a catalogue or book. It could further be a combination of a more northern Kaska bead style with styles of other groups.



Figure # 129. Kaska moccasins. 1915. VI-H-4a,b CMC

From this brief survey of Kaska work I could not identify a definite Kaska beading style. All the examples I have shown are from the early twentieth century and there are very little Kaska artifacts collected before that time. The most I can say is that the Yukon Kaska worked in a modified upper Yukon River style.

Mountain Dene style

As I have mentioned earlier the Mountain Dene are not a formally recognized First Nations group of people in the Yukon. In fact most Yukoners have no idea that there are many Mountain Dene families living in the Yukon! The Mountain Dene lived in the area roughly between the Mackenzie River and the Mackenzie Mountains which borders the Yukon and the Northwest Territories. Many of the people used to move back and forth across the now political border but in the early twentieth century many families settled on the Yukon side of the border. This may have had something to do with the 1921 and 1922 signing of Treaty 11 in which the First Nations people of the Northwest Territories ceded their territory for payment and protection of hunting rights. People outside the treaty could not collect treaty payments. Perhaps this made a number of the Mountain Dene return permanently to the Northwest Territories and no longer travel to the Yukon. But some did permanently settle on the Yukon side of the border at Keele Mountain. I learned from Kathlene Suza, a Mountain Dene woman living in Ross River, that sometime before the building of the Canol Road by the United States Army in 1942-1944 the Mountain Dene left Keele Mountain and settled in Sheldon Lake. In the 1950s families of Mountain Dene moved on to settle in other Yukon communities. Some families moved from Sheldon Lake in 1952 to Ross River. Other families travelled down the MacMillan River and settled in Pelly Crossing and yet other families travelled down the Hess River to settle at first in Lansing and then later in Mayo. (Suza, personal communication, 2011)

There has been no effort to collect Yukon Mountain Dene artifacts. Fortunately, some artifacts have shown up. In the Canadian Museum of Civilization there is a set of Mackenzie River styled decorated dog saddle packs that were found in an abandoned cabin upstream from Kalzas River in 1965. This is in the heart of Northern Tutchone territory about half way between Pelly Crossing and Mayo. Obviously this Mackenzie River beading style did not

belong anywhere near the area it was found. But as mentioned above, the Mountain Dene settled in the area and brought their Mackenzie River beading style with them. Because the dog saddle packs were found in Northern Tutchone territory they are listed as such. In fact, they are Yukon Mountain Dene saddle packs. See figure # 130 for photographs of the Mountain Dene dog blankets.



Figure # 130. Mountain Dene dog blankets. VI-Q-53, CMC

There is a photograph from Yukon Archives of a dog blanket in use. See figure # 131 of a dog wearing a blanket in Dawson City. There is no further information but the beading style looks very much like the dog blankets in figure # 130.

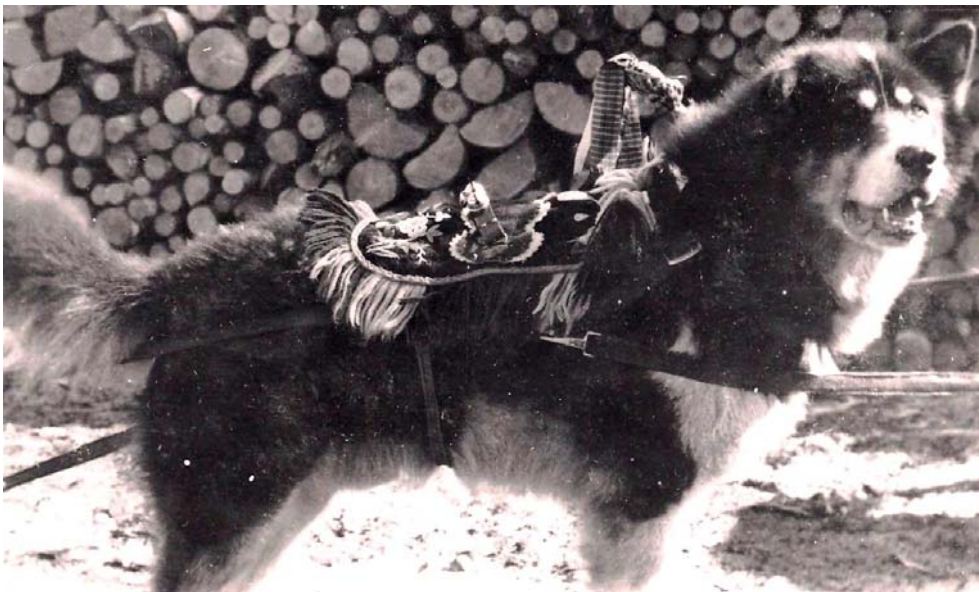


Figure # 131. Beaded dog blanket. Photograph from Dawson City. 995.345.1.75, DCM&HS.

On an added note about dog blankets in Ross River, Ted Charlie, a Kaska man from Ross River, told me that he remembers seeing dog team blankets and they were a source of pride for the owners of the team and the makers of the blankets. They were quite common until the social upheaval that occurred in Ross River with the opening of the Faro mining operations in 1965. After this point, Ross River people began selling many of their cultural treasures to obtain money. This continued until there were pretty well no more items to sell. Those who did not sell their artifacts later lost them through various means. One of the last dog team blanket sets was lost when the shed they were being stored in burnt down.

There are active Mountain Dene artists, for example Elder Amos Dick in Ross River, who still carve. Artwork created by any member of at least the Dick, Suza and Joe families from Ross River, Pelly Crossing and Mayo should be considered Yukon Mountain Dene art.

Southern Tutchone bead styles

While the Southern Tutchone beading style has all the ingredients of the upper Yukon River beading style there is a move toward simplicity. The changes in style from the Northern Tutchone beading style are greater with the Southern Tutchone than with the northern Kaska people. That is why I discussed the Kaska style after the Northern Tutchone. The Southern Tutchone flowers and leaves are connected by stem work but there is notably less stem work which often lacks the 'grouse tracks'. The flowers and leaves are not as detailed as the upper Yukon River Northern Tutchone and Han beading styles. The reason can possibly be found again in the Gestalt Theory and the close connections with the Tlingit beading styles. The Tlingit beading style uses less stem work and simpler flower and leaf designs. In fact, the Tlingit's use of flowers is limited when compared to the rest of the Yukon, as you will see later in this section.

In figure # 132 is a Southern Tutchone cartridge belt. All the female Elders I showed this image to state that they had seen or made these belts and some were still making them. The strap is worn around the neck and the buckle is worn in the back. The flap in the front is to protect the cartridges. The wearer lifts the flap to retrieve the shells.

This cartridge belt is in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection and was collected by D.D. Cairnes in 1911 at the Taylor and Drury store in Whitehorse. The belt is reported to be made in Hootalinqua, approximately 80 kilometers north of Whitehorse. Hootalinqua is in the northern part of Southern Tutchone territory bordering Northern Tutchone lands. The floral designs on this belt look a bit like the Tagish designs. There are some leaf petals that are solid but most have a negative space in the center of the leaf. The stem work is simple and connects the various beaded motifs.



Figure # 132, Southern Tutchone rifle cartridge belt from Hootalinqua. VI-Q-7, CMC.

Next are two examples of bead work that are done in the Southern Tutchone style but were made by the coastal Tlingit lady, Mrs. Jim Boss. The octopus bag on the left is more in the Southern Tutchone style with some use of stem work. The various flower and leaf motifs have split colours which is not so common for the coastal Tlingits. The octopus bag on the right has a Tlingit flavor by using more scroll type floral motifs. All the scroll type motifs are beaded solid without the common negative space that the Tlingits use. Mrs. Jim Boss was originally from the Coast. Mrs. Marge Jackson said that Mrs. Jim Boss was from Juneau and married Jim Boss from Lake Lebarge. Did she already work in this style or did she adopt the Southern Tutchone beading style? Note that both have the same design in a prominent location on the bags. The octopus bags in figure # 133 have a large central motif beaded at the central top. While most octopus bags have a central motif this one appears as a figure of some sort with a head, arms, wings and legs. When I inquired with Elders about it they did not know what it was. See my drawing of the figure in # 134.



Figure # 133, Mrs. Jim Boss octopus bag. 72.1.65, MacBride Museum

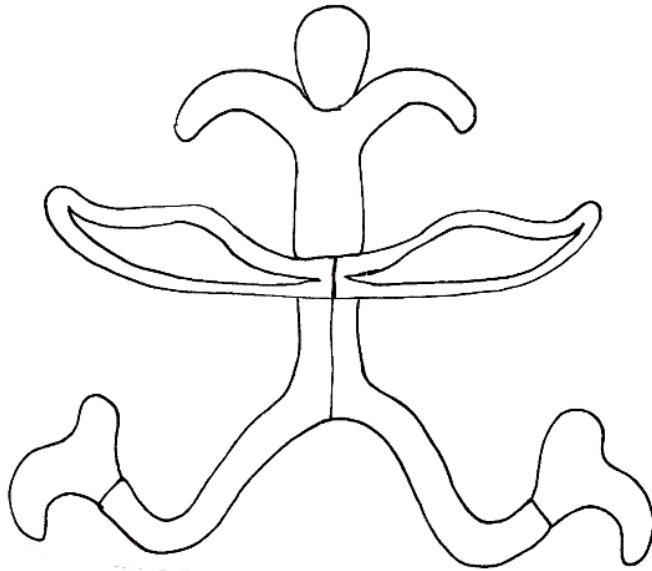


Figure # 134, Mrs. Jim Boss' central motif on her octopus bags. UvK drawing.

The museum notes state that the Southern Tutchone women made these bags to trade to the Tlingits as they were in high demand on the coast. In the photographs taken around Whitehorse of First Nations dances and events in the 1940s there are many examples of octopus bags. The octopus bags themselves seemed to have been adopted about the same time or shortly after floral bead designs were adopted. Octopus bags are said to have developed from First Nations people from the eastern part of North America using animal furs that still had the legs on. They eventually evolved into the present bags. In Barbara Hail and Kate Duncan's *Out of the North*, they describe the movement of the octopus bag from eastern Canada-United States to the west coast. They state that the coastal Tlingits first started making octopus bags in the 1870s and were very common by the 1890s. The writers also mention that the octopus bags were never popular with the Athapaskans. While overall this may be true, it is not the case for the southern Yukon. While I cannot say when the first octopus bags were made in the southern Yukon there is enough evidence to show they were in common use in the early twentieth century. See the photographs in figures # 326 on page 311 and # 333 on page 318 for other examples of Octopus bags. Octopus bags were also called dance aprons which were used for dance while others were used as fire bags. In the photographs listed above you can see them used in dances.

In figure # 135 is a pair of mitts from the Kluane Museum of Natural History in Burwash which is Southern Tutchone territory but the bead work is closer to the Northern Tutchone style. There is no information on these mitts other than that they are part of the museum's collection and are old. As you can see in the design, the motifs are small simple flowers or leaf designs at the end of the stems. The stems have small beaded outcrops coming out along the shaft. On the side of the mitt is a bigger star-like motif with a series of stems coming out of the corners.



Figure # 135, Southern Tutchone mitts. 982.15A, KMNH.

There are many other mitts in the Kluane Museum of Natural History. See another example in figure # 136.



Figure # 136, Southern Tutchone mitts. KMNH.

This pair has even more an upper Yukon appearance. Since the Burwash Southern Tutchone are the westernmost Yukon group and north of all the Southern Tutchone, they were further away from Tlingit influences. They had contacts with the Northern Tutchone and Tanana and maybe those groups had more influence on the Burwash Southern Tutchone than the further south Southern Tutchone, who had more influence from the Tlingit. The bead design on the mitts uses a lot of stem work to cover the hand area of the mitt which is different than the Gwich'in style that uses very little stem work. The top part of the mitt has a central flower and stems coming off it with secondary flower and leaf motifs.

As you can see there was a difference from the northwestern Southern Tutchone who were away from the Yukon River and the main Tlingit trading routes and the south and eastern Southern Tutchone who had more contact with the Tlingits via the trading routes. The Tlingit influence is seen most with the Tagish people who had the strongest ties with the Tlingits.

Tagish bead designs

The Tagish bead designs are a cross between the Southern Tutchone and the Inland Tlingit bead styles. The resemblance to the two groups most likely comes from trading middlemen between the Coastal Tlingits and interior First Nations people. The Tagish will often make the floral designs solid or they will add additional designs within the leaf or petal. In figure # 137 we can see two different pairs of moccasins from the Tagish people. Both are in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection. The example on the left was collected by D.D. Cairnes from Lake Bennett in the summer of 1911. The pair on the left appears to be a stylized design, not looking like a flower at all. This is more of a Tlingit trait. The design is beaded on a black background. The floral design is solid, yet there are color changes which you would expect in an Inland Tlingit design. The next pair is listed as Inland Tlingit but was collected from Carcross during the same summer as the previous pair. This pair of moccasins was made by Annie, the wife of a Chief at Taku Arm. She later lived in Carcross. The Museum information card states that Annie was the mother of Dawson Charlie. In Cruikshank's *Reading Voice's* on page 130 there is a family tree and it shows Annie listed as Kooyáy, a Tagish woman. So this is the case of a Tagish woman married to a Tlingit man. Based on that, these are Tagish moccasins.



Figure # 137. Left; Tagish moccasins. VI-P-2ab. Right; Tagish moccasins made by Annie (Kooyáy). VI-J-2ab. Both CMC.

Annie's design appears to be a stylized flower with stem and leaf motifs coming off the stem on a green background. Annie has added a row of various colored beads to line the inside of the floral designs. Also, the color changes do not all happen at the point of a direction change but flow around with the design. There is a color change on the stem between the lower leaf design and the upper flower design. The information states: "Dr. Cairnes claims that the star design on this specimen is peculiar to the Crow "Tribe." Cairnes is referring to the Crow moiety or clan of the Tagish people. There are other examples of variations of this type of floral 'star' design on other Tagish and Southern Tutchone works. To conclude, the left moccasin appears to be more Tlingit while the right pair of moccasins appears to be a combination of Tlingit and Southern Tutchone beading styles.

Another example of Tagish bead work can be seen in figure # 138. This is a wall pocket made by Mrs. Tagish Jim. Many wall pockets, octopus bags and bag flaps have a central floral motif where the beaded stems radiate from. Other items, such as dance shirts, sometimes have this same format.



Figure # 138. Wall pocket made by Ms. Tagish Jim. 72.1.65a, MacBride Museum.

In each panel the central motif and the series of floral designs are at the end of the stems. In the top panel (which is not a pocket and does not open) there is a flower where the petals curl back into themselves. In the center panel there is a unique floral design that has a series of waves with a spade-like motif in its center. The waves look like the wave-like shapes on Annie's moccasins in figure # 137. The bottom panel has stars in the upper corner. Note the solid flowers, leaves and color splitting which was often used by the Tutchone. There is no use of outcrops from the stem work. While the Southern Tutchone sometimes included outcrops on the stems it appears that the Tagish never did.

In the next example in figure # 139 is details of the Tagish hide pull overcoat from figure # 82B in the previous chapter on page 113.



Figure # 139. Details of Tagish beadwork on hide jacket. VI-P-19, CMC.

The beadwork on the jacket is more Southern Tutchone in nature. The main structure of the bead design in both examples is the stem work. On the right is a panel below the neck of the coat that has a series of double stem works running the length of the panel. The leaf motifs have split colours with an inside negative space. The back view shows a small central flower with stem works coming out of each side and spreading outwards. There are a series of leaf and flower motifs along the stems. The outside five pedal flowers are slightly larger than the central flower. I think that the overall stem design is the important focus as opposed to the central flower, which is almost not noticeable.

A last Tagish bead work example is an octopus bag. This octopus bag was collected by D.D. Cairnes from the Taku Arm of Tagish Lake in the summer of 1911. See figure # 140. This bag was made by Annie of the Crow Moiety of the Tagish people which very well may be the same Annie that made the moccasins I discussed in figure # 137. It is described as a beaded fire bag and is different from the others by having a faded red flannelette that appears tan coloured. The museum artifact catalogue card states:

Cairnes' notes read: "Big wall pocket made by Annie. Design supposed to be peculiar to Crow "tribe". "Crow" Indians supposed to have come originally from head of Taku River and Taku Inlet better referred to as Taku Arm of Tagish Lake".

The notes carry on with this piece of interesting information:

This fire bag or wall pocket in form has a strong resemblance to Ojibwa fire bags. The style may not be indigenous but effected by examples seen carried and used by traders. Note: above description taken from notes by H. Burnham of the Royal Ontario Museum.

H. Burnham may be correct, but there are many photographs of coastal Tlingits wearing octopus bags from the late 1800s, well before this bag was collected. What makes this bag different and what may have made H. Burnham think that the style is not indigenous, is the bead design. The top of the octopus bag has a similar star type pattern as on Annie's moccasins in figure # 137, but the rest of the beadwork is quite unique. It does not seem to be in line with either the Tutchone or Tlingit bead designs. It appears to be more Tahltan. As you will see later in this section the Tahltan used large bold geometric designs, much like the octopus bag made by Annie. There are many historical links between the Tahltan and the Tagish. Some of the Tagish people were Tahltan who moved from the Telegraph Creek area into the Tagish traditional territory a long time ago. Also, the Tagish and Tahltan languages are very close. Maybe H. Burnham is correct but I am inclined to think that she may have been influenced by seeing or working with the Tahltan. This octopus bag has five legs instead of the traditional four.



Figure # 140. Annie's octopus bag, from Tagish Lake. VI-P-3, CMC.

The Tagish beading style appears to be a combination of the Southern Tutchone and Tlingit bead styles. Sometimes, the beader favors one style over the other. Other times, as we see from the octopus bag above, she creates a unique design. At this point I move on to the Inland Tlingit beading style.

Inland Tlingit bead designs

During the Geometric Period the Inland Tlingit created a totally different visual imagery from the Tlingits on the coast but in the Floral Period there is a strong connection of both beading styles. The Tlingit foliate beading style originated on the coast and moved to the interior to the Inland Tlingit because of the strong links they had with coastal Tlingits. Unlike the requirement of large cedar and very skilled artists to create other coastal Tlingit art, which the Inland Tlingit did not have, every Inland Tlingit woman had the materials and skills to create the coastal Tlingit beading style. Kate Duncan in her *Northern Athapaskan Art* explains the origins of the coastal Tlingit beading style:

The developed foliate scroll motif that appears in Tlingit beadwork in the 1880s is unmistakably visually similar to cartouche floral forms that became popular on Northwest Coast engraved silver bracelets slightly earlier. Such forms have no evolutionary roots in the established two-dimensional formline system of the coast. On brackets, cartouche foliate forms appear alone or with an eagle, in a combination familiar on bank notes and letter heads of the period. A standard Victorian motif, cartouche-type foliage was also common in any number of other places at that time—on furniture, sewing machines, china, and product labels, to name a few. (Duncan 1989: 177)

Duncan goes on to explain the reasons for the Tlingits to adopt the scroll-like motifs as their main beading style:

The attitudes of the Tlingit people towards the neighboring Athapaskans suggest an explanation for the sudden appearance of a Tlingit foliate style. Despite their ties through trade, the Tlingit considered the Athapaskans inferior. But they admired their bead work. The Tlingit woman who wanted to produce floral beadwork but within a tradition culturally her own had available in the bracelet designs a floral style both unlike Athapaskan work and already established (albeit briefly) in her culture. In developing a beaded version, she could produce foliate work that was clearly Tlingit. (Duncan 1989: 177)

While I agree with Duncan that the Tlingits adopted their beading style from the scroll foliate they saw, I do not agree that they purposely decided not to copy the Athapaskan bead styles because they felt superior to the Athapaskans. The Tlingits had no problems in trading in Athapaskan hide clothing, bone tools and shaman pendants which they valued highly. They even adopted the geometric motifs they saw in the tunic breastbands into their baskets. Even today when I am visiting Alaska and meet Tlingits they are always proud of their links with the interior, telling me of their connections with us. Given the time line of the introduction of floral designs into the upper Yukon River region from Fort Yukon, starting at the earliest in the late 1860s, it would only give twenty years for the beading tradition to reach the Southern Tutchone and Tagish people by the 1880s. With the coastal Tlingit style starting in the 1880s, there would have been more access to the already established bracelet floral designs. Because of the availability of the scroll foliate motifs it would have been the most available to copy. I also have to mention that the coastal Tlingits adopted some of the interior floral design at the same time. While not the main floral style, some beaders did produce work that appears to have had links to the upper Yukon River floral style. When you examine older photographs of Tlingit gatherings there are sometimes examples of upper

Yukon River style beaded designs. See figure #141 and # 142 for some examples of floral type bead designs on Tlingit clothing.



Alaska State Library - Historical Collections

Figure # 141. Last Potlatch, Sitka circa 1894. ASL-P93-51.

The title of this photograph is “Last Potlatch” and was taken in Sitka about 1894. Take note of the man standing at the left of the photograph who is wearing a beaded dance shirt. The “V” breastband is reminiscent of the earlier hide tunics traded from the interior. Along the breastband and around the bottom is a floral type of beadwork. You can see along the bottom a large multi-petaled flower motif. There is stem work leading off that flower to leaf motifs. Along the breastband is a series of leaf motifs that are connected by a stem. These are the two most common places beads were applied to dance shirts. Beside him is a man sitting and has what appears to be a Hudson Bay blanket wrapped around him. In quite a few potlatch photographs there is a man wearing some type of blanket wrapped around him. See figures # 326 on page 311, # 333 on page 318 and # 427 on page 392 for other examples of blanket use. The fourth man from the left also appears to be wearing a dance shirt with a deep “V”, much like the earlier mentioned dance shirt. The man on the right is holding a ceremonial dance paddle. He has a bird on his dance shirt and flower bead designs at the bottom. I also want to point out that he is wearing the interior style hide trousers. I can see two button blankets in the photograph.



Figure # 142. Cow-Dik-Ney and Cluch. 1906. ASL-P226-054.

In the above photograph are Cow-Dik-Ney and Cluch in a portrait studio. The photograph is copyrighted for 1906. Cow-Dik-Ney is wearing what appears to be a hide dance shirt with a geometric breastband pattern that often appears on Tlingit, Inland Tlingit and sometimes Tutchone breastbands. See figures # 68 on page 101 and # 70 on page 102 for other examples of the breast band pattern. The bottom of the tunic has floral bead designs that have an appearance of scroll foliate but I can also see flowers and stem work. The bead work appears to be a combination of an interior and scroll type design. Note that the tunic that Cow-Dik-Ney is wearing has a straight bottom and not pointed like most other hide tunics. I would guess that this tunic is a cross between the older hide tunics and newer dance shirts. The dance shirt that Cluch is wearing is made of fabric and has large 8-petal flowers with stem works that connect a series of scroll type leaf motifs.

These are just some examples of the coastal Tlingits using flowers and stem work in their beaded designs. This makes me suggest that there was some interior influence in the bead design since the silver bracelet scroll work had a lack of flowers and stem work.

When we examine the Tlingit scroll type of bead work you will find that the scroll leaf motif would have two or three rows of beads to create the leaf pattern. It is less common to have more than three rows. Tlingit bead work also often had a color change at the junction points of major directional changes, i.e. the bead pattern line is now pointed in a different direction. Once in a while there is an additional color used to line the inside of the pattern. You can see this clearly in the following bead work on a small octopus bag in figure # 143. This octopus bag is from the Canadian Museum of Civilization and is listed as Inland Tlingit. The artifact was collected from a dealer, D.C. Ewing, in 1975.



Figure # 143 Inland Tlingit bag. VI-J-98. CMC

The next example is beadwork on an Inland Tlingit gun case that is also in the Canadian Museum of Civilization collection. See figure # 144. This gun case was collected by Clement Lewis at Teslin Lake and arrived at the museum in 1912. Note in these examples that there is a color change at the joints, but mostly one color throughout the individual leaf design. At the opening of the gun case are additional silver beads on the top facing part of the blue. In the design at the tip of the gun case are two petals that are solid. The row widths in these designs vary from two to three.



Figure # 144, floral designs on Inland Tlingit gun case. VI-J-31, CMC.

See figure # 69 on page 102 in the previous chapter for another example of this Inland Tlingit beading style.

The next examples of Inland Tlingit bead designs are made of solid bead work in bold geometric patterns. This style does not seem to have been adopted by the Southern Tutchone, Tagish or coastal Tlingits. I think there are possibly two reasons for the solid beaded style. One is the influence from the geometric spruce root basket designs of the Inland Tlingit and the bold geometric breastband patterns in the tunics. The other is the influence from the geometric Tahltan styles. The Tahltan did have villages on Teslin Lake and reportedly as far north as the basin of the Big Salmon River, possibly even further. In *My Old People Say* Teslin Village and Johnson Crossings are listed as possible early Tahltan villages. Even though there were many raids and wars against each other, there would also have been trade and intermarriage and the exchange of slaves to keep the peace. After all, the Tlingits also often had raids amongst themselves; between different clans and houses. They would later resolve their issues and start trading amongst themselves again. The interaction between the Tlingits and Tahltan may have resulted in the Inland Tlingit picking up and adopting some of the Tahltan beading styles that covered all or most of the area that was to be beaded. Other times the Tahltan did leave negative spaces of coloured cloth but they were part of the overall bold geometric design. This style of Tahltan beading uses many curvy, geometric shapes and the Inland Tlingit solid beading style tends to be sharper edged. The other area in the Yukon that employs the fully beaded style is the Gwich'in in the far north but the distance is too great to have been an influence.

In figure # 145 is a pair of moccasins that was collected by Clement Lewis at Teslin Lake and arrived at the Canadian Museum of Civilization in 1912. They have a geometric design and are somewhat like the repeating-cone motif I mentioned earlier when I discussed geometric motifs.



Figure # 145, geometric beaded motif on Inland Tlingit moccasins. VI-J-3 a-b, CMC.

The next solid beaded geometric example is a tent wall pocket in figure # 146. This wall pocket was collected at the same time and place as the moccasins above. This wall pocket has a series of geometric vertical bands filled with chevrons, zigzags and triangles. There is an eye attached at the top to hang the pocket.



Figure # 146, geometric beaded motif on Inland Tlingit wall pocket. VI-J-18, CMC.

As in other cases, the Inland Tlingit bead style was influenced by the neighbours. The Inland Tlingit have three main beading styles, the scroll foliate style from the coast, the geometric style possibly from their own culture and other interior people and a floral style that has roots in the upper Yukon River area. While here I did not show any Inland Tlingit examples with influence from the upper Yukon River, you can see the style on Inland Tlingit Jim Fox's jacket in figure # 89 on page 119. Another example is on the dance shirt of the man standing to the left at the bottom in figure # 101 on page 129. I will also point out various beading styles in potlatch photographs that will be shown in Chapter Eight-Art of the Potlatch & Death.

Tahltan bead designs

The Tahltan have a unique beading style that is not done elsewhere in at least northwestern North America. It is a strong bold style and is quickly recognizable. Why do the Tahltan have such an unequalled beading style? They did make a small amount of floral designs but these were over-shadowed by the geometric designs. As a starting point I will refer to what Kate Duncan in *Northern Athapaskan Art* writes:

As in other western regions, there is several design types, with two used together on about a third of the examples. A preference for nonrepresentational forms-for geometric or curvilinear-abstract shapes-is unique to Tahltan work. (Duncan 1989: 163)

And:

There is a clear relationship between many of the motifs on classic Tahltan firebags and knife sheaths and those on Tlingit spruce root baskets from the same period (fig. 9.7). Although both Emmons and Teit were very familiar with the material culture from both coastal and interior British Columbia, neither mentions these ties in his writing. (see, however, information from Teit's field notes in fig.9.6) Emmons (1911:48-49) states that the Tahltan do not make baskets themselves, but that they own Tlingit spruce root ones. (Duncan 1989: 163)

Duncan builds a good case about the relationship of the Tlingit baskets and Tahltan geometric bead designs. The only point I would add is that the Tahltan were mostly away from the areas of bead-working traditions, such as the upper Yukon and Laird River systems. When beads arrived in their area, they, like the other Athapaskans, simply replaced the porcupine quills with beads in order to make the geometric breastband patterns. While Duncan states that the Tahltan learned the porcupine embroidery from the Kaska based on Teit's research, it cannot be said with certainty how long ago that occurred. For example, there are still Tlingit Elders on the coast who say that their basket and Raven's tail weaving designs come from the interior. These porcupine embroidered breastbands were firmly established before beads arrived in the area. Maybe the tradition of creating geometric motifs on clothing carried on after the arrival of beads. Duncan states that most Tahltan motifs are unique, so they are not direct copies from anywhere else. In this case the motifs of the Tlingit baskets only would have provided additional inspirations to an already artistic establishment. As for the lesser floral bead designs the Tahltan created, Duncan writes:

When stylized floral motifs occur on Tahltan beadwork, they play a minor role in the design as a whole and tend to be very simple (for example an almond-shaped leaf). It is significant that most of the stylized floral examples collected from the Tahltan come from Cassiar, the Tahltan post closest to the Yukon-Tanana region where stylized motifs dominate. (Duncan 1989: 163)

On an added note of interest Duncan writes about the floral bead work:

Tahltan collections include a large body of beadwork that may be termed "classic-Tahltan," a small group of pieces in a floral style that appears to be instrumental in the development of the Tlingit-Inland Tlingit beadwork style (see chapter 10), and some beaded items that are stylistically Tlingit and were probably traded from the coast. (Duncan 1989: 161)

I will next examine some examples of the Tahltan beading style. The first is a shot pouch in figure # 147 that was collected by James Teit in 1912.



Figure # 147, Tahltan geometric beaded shot bag. 1912. VI-O-3 CMC.

This bag (which is also examined in *Northern Athapaskan Art* on page 162) has an almost fully beaded front on hide with a zigzag pattern at the bottom and a repeating diamond motif on top. The Tahltan bags are often separated into sections, in this case three with the hide showing at the bottom. The strap is undecorated. The only notable comment I will make is that this bag uses more white in its design than most other Tahltan bags. When you see the next shot bag in figure # 148, also collected by Teit but in 1915, you will notice more use of red.

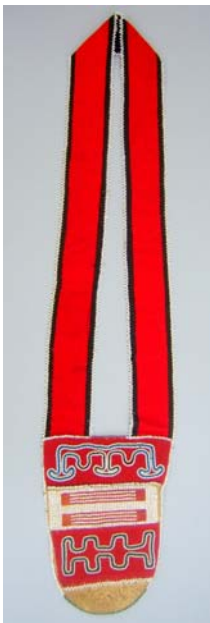


Figure # 148, Tahltan geometric beaded shot bag. 1915. VI-O-2 CMC.

This bag (likewise in *Northern Athapaskan Art* on page 162) has also three sections with the hide showing on the bottom. While the Tahltan mostly applied the geometric designs to shot and octopus bags as well as to knife sheaths, they often applied the floral designs to

belts, straps and octopus bags. Note the curved geometric patterns that are unique to the Tahltan. Below in figure # 149 is a cartridge belt. This belt was collected by George Emmons in 1906 from the Upper Stikine River, which is Tahltan territory. The two straps coming off the belt have come apart. They would be joined and go around the neck. At the base of the straps is a cover on the area where the cartridges are stored and protected. This belt still had two live cartridges in the bullets holders!



Figure # 149, Tahltan geometric beaded on cartridge belt. 1906. 42, Burke Museum.

The bead work on this belt is an example of a more floral/geometric style created by the Tahltan. On the strap the geometric motifs are connected by a stem. Along the belt are curved geometric patterns and some stem work. There is a three pedal floral motif as part of the design. All the beading is on red cloth as is much of the Tahltan work.

The isolation of the Tahltan up the Stikine River resulted in a unique style of beading from the whole region. It stands out by its boldness and cannot be confused with any other beading style in northwestern North America.

Closing comments

The spread of bead work in the Yukon started in Fort McPherson in the 1840s with the Mackenzie River style and then spread to the west to Fort Yukon by the 1860s. As it spread west the style became slightly simpler. A major change in beading styles occurred at Fort Yukon. This beading style change, a much simpler version, spread up the Yukon River (and Tanana River) until reaching the Lake Lebarge areas close to the headwaters of the Yukon River by the 1880s. At about that time there were two other styles emerging, the Tlingit style spreading inland along the Taku River and the unique Tahltan style in the upper Stikine River area. During this whole process the styles blended slightly from group to group. Many of the groups beaded in a couple of different styles depending on the influences of the neighbouring groups. Marriages and trading between groups was the force that resulted in adopting new patterns and styles.

The Beaded Period style was to last until World War Two at which time the Alaska Highway was built and an increase of the tourist trade took place. This resulted in the reduction of the unique group styles and a blending of almost all south-central Yukon beading styles. There was also a simplification of bead work as now works were made for the tourist trade instead of family. I will discuss these events more in Chapter Eleven-Trade Art & Current Period.