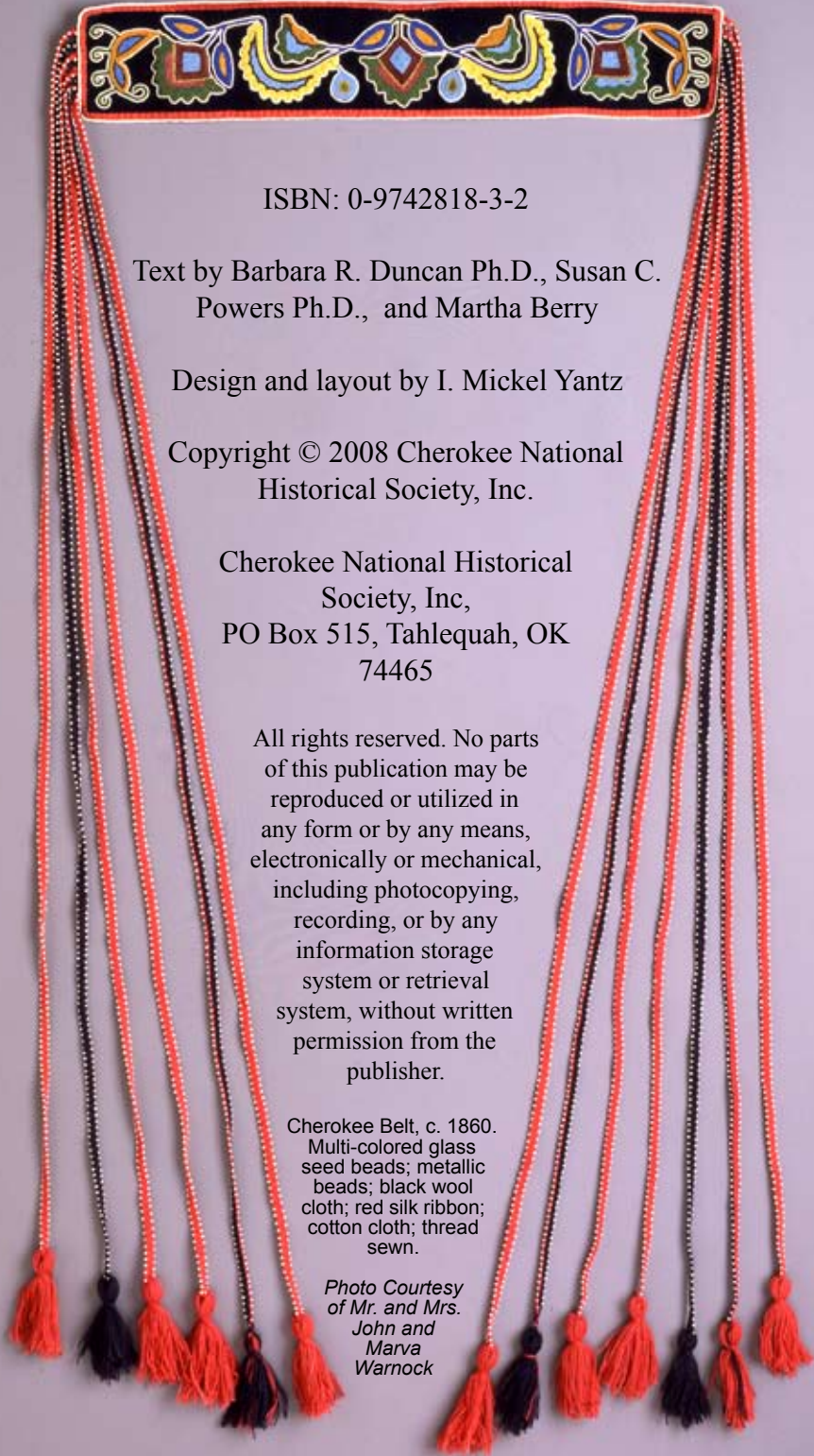


BEADWORK STORYTELLERS

a Visual Language



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ISBN: 0-9742818-3-2

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Cherokee Belt, c. 1860.
Multi-colored glass
seed beads; metallic
beads; black wool
cloth; red silk ribbon;
cotton cloth; thread
sewn.

*Photo Courtesy
of Mr. and Mrs.
John and
Marva
Warnock*

Beadwork Storytellers, a Visual Language

**Barbara R. Duncan Ph.D., Susan C. Powers Ph.D.
and Martha Berry**



"Our Fires Still Burn," beaded bandolier bag by Martha Berry, completed 2002.

Photo by Dave Berry

Published by Cherokee Heritage Press, 2008

Cherokee Beadwork

by Barbara R. Duncan, Ph.D.

Cherokee people have created designs with beads and other materials for millennia. Beads, adela, have been part of an array of adornment that has included gorgets of stone and shell; featherwork; the bones of animals, birds, snakes, fish, and shells of turtles; mica; woven materials; semi-precious gems; painted leather; quillwork; tattoos; and more. Materials were obtained from the southern Appalachians, the original homeland of the Cherokees, and from trade. As long as ten thousand years ago, trade networks extended to the Great Lakes, the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic coast, and the Mississippi River. After 1540, Cherokees traded with the Spanish, French, and English, who brought beads from Venice, north Africa, and parts of Europe.

Today we think of beads as the small, brightly colored seed beads from Czechoslovakia and faceted beads from Japan that cover moccasins, powwow regalia, and the bills of ball caps. Or we might think of beads in the legend of trading Manhattan for \$24 worth of beads—a story from elementary school textbooks that seems intended to show the foolishness of American Indians, but that resonates more and more with the dissonances of two cultures: one tries to make the best possible deal, while the other tries to exchange gifts and share the bounty of the earth. Cherokee beadwork artists continue to work with twenty-first century materials and patterns, while some look to the past for information and inspiration.

“The Indian nations are agreed in the custom of thus adorning themselves with beads of various sizes and colours; sometimes wrought in garters, sashes, necklaces, and in strings round their wrists; and so from the crown of their heads sometimes to the cartilage of the nose. And they doat [sic] on them so





Image courtesy of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science. All rights reserved, Image Archives, Denver Museum of Nature and Science

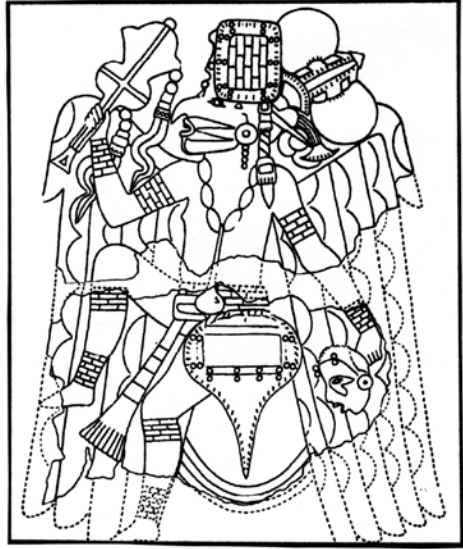


Creek applique beaded garters. Red Velvet with navy blue cut away braid, applied with white seed beads. Courtesy of Creek Council House Museum. Photo by Dave Berry



much as to make them their current money in all payments to this day.” (2005:201) So James Adair described the southeastern American Indians, including the Cherokees, with whom he lived from about 1735-1770.

During the 18th century, Cherokees continued to use beads made from the materials that they had gathered and traded for centuries. But as they began trade relationships with the English, French, and Spanish to obtain guns, ammunition, cloth, and tools, they also traded for glass beads made in Europe. Cherokee men and women sewed these onto moccasins, leggings, clothing, and bags in patterns that may have resembled quillwork. White beads (about a modern size 10) were sewed in single lines to create geometric patterns, to outline silk ribbon appliqué, and to decorate edges.



Pre-contact Mound Builder human effigy carving wearing pointed side pouch, belt with long tassels and beaded arm and leg bands.

Cherokees already had thread, needles, and beads. Cherokee women had spun and woven both mulberry and hemp fibers for millennia; DeSoto’s chroniclers observed in 1540 that Cherokees spun a thread as fine as linen thread. Two centuries later, Henry Timberlake observed that both Cherokee men and women were expert at sewing. According to Dr. Lynn Sullivan, Curator of the McClung Museum at the University of Tennessee, nearly every Cherokee household in the Mississippian period manufactured shell beads, leaving the chips and sherds for archaeologists to unearth centuries later.

Beads in black and white were woven together using fingerweaving techniques (in particular, weft-twining with two ply wool thread) to create sashes made of solid rows of beads that look, to the modern eye, as if they have been loomed. One of these sashes can be seen draped around Ostenaco’s neck in the portrait painted in London in 1762, “Syacust Ukah” by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Another such weft-twined sash of black and white beads is clearly identified as Cherokee and was used as a strap for a powder horn during this same time period. (Power, 2007: 66)

This technique is different from the technique of fingerweaving with beads, which was practiced for centuries to create garters, belts, and sashes. During the 1700s, glass beads began replacing shell beads in this tradition. Red and blue wool yarn made by unraveling trade cloth was woven obliquely with white beads incorporated in geometric patterns. This technique strings beads onto the strands being woven, placing them to create patterns. This is different from creating belts and then sewing beads onto the surface of the fabric for decoration.

Cherokees during this time period still used beads and gorgets made of shell, as well as using freshwater pearls. Around their necks they wore strands of trade beads that included black and white rattlesnake beads, blue padres, chevrons of blue and red, or green and red, cobalt blue beads, red whitehearts, and beads of red, turquoise, white, and blue. These “trade beads” were traded to people in Africa, the Caribbean, and throughout America, but the Cherokees had some preferences that distinguished them from other tribes; the favorite Cherokee colors were red and blue, possibly because of their symbolic meanings.

One of the most unusual pieces to survive from this period is a beaded garter said to have been given from Atakullakulla to Rev. Martin in 1758. This blue and white strip designed with interlocking crosses appears to have been made on a loom, which would have been very unusual for this period; it may have been created using the weft twining technique, but its threads are too fragile to examine. Its beads are very small, equivalent to a size 16 bead today, and it is only ten beads wide.



Courtesy of the Division of Anthropology, American Museum of Natural History. Catalog number 50/859 AB

Beads of wampum were exchanged at important diplomatic meetings, treaties, and during visits to other tribes and groups. Wampum was made from the shell of the quahog clam, which makes a purple and white variegated beads. Belts made of wampum represented agreements between nations regarding war, peace, and trade.

Between the 18th and 19th centuries, Cherokee material culture changed, including styles of clothing, decoration, and jewelry—all involving beadwork. Many changes were caused by acculturation, but other changes were doubtless stylistic developments by Cherokee artists, inspired by their own ideas and those of other cultures. Beadwork changed from single lines of white beads to scrolls, panels and abstract flowers and leaves of brightly colored, smaller seed beads. One pair of Cherokee moccasins from about 1830 seems transitional: wide silk ribbon is outlined with a single row of white beads on the moccasin flaps, while abstract flower designs made with panels of beads in solid colors are sewn onto the front of the moccasins. (Power, 2007:105) The style of fingerweaving that incorporated beads also changed, from oblique weaving to a



style that incorporated both single and double weaving while using beads. Seed beads were available in the 1700s, and were occasionally used, but after 1800, they became the bead of choice.

As beads were applied to moccasins and bags, the designs, colors, and techniques of beadwork changed. Instead of single lines of beads, designs of flowers and scrolls are made with solid panels of beads outlined in contrasting colors. Several pairs of beaded Cherokee moccasins in this style are held by the National Museum of the American Indian.

Also at this time, the small pouch or bag that was carried in the 1700s became larger, more elaborately beaded, and decorated with tassels. The closing flap became triangular. An example of this is the bag created by Sam Houston for Andrew Jackson, also held by NMAI. Portraits of Cherokee men in the McKenney and Hall folios show examples of elaborate sashes with fingerweaving with beads incorporated.

After Removal, the Cherokee beadwork changed once again. Among the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, examples are difficult to find from this time period. After the beginning of the twentieth century, however, with the advent of tourism, Cherokee women began creating necklaces, earrings, and beaded belts.

Today Cherokee artists create beaded designs for sale and for their own use. People make earrings and necklaces out of beads for sale. They also make elaborate powwow regalia worn by both men and women dancers. Some people use “peyote stitch” to bead the handles of feather fans. Other people bead tiny baby moccasins to celebrate a new family member. People continue to adorn their clothing, including ball caps, lanyards worn to hold identification cards at work, lighters, needle cases, and key chains.

One of the beadwork items made today is the rosette; these are attached to powwow regalia or worn singly as a bolo. This modern version of the gorget evokes the round silver gorgets worn during the 1700s, which



Southeastern beaded bandolier bag
by Julie Perkins, Cherokee

Photo Courtesy of Julie Perkins

were created by Cherokee silversmiths, and were also given by the British and colonists as gifts to Cherokee delegations signing treaties for trade and for military alliances. These silver gorgets were engraved with the names or initials of colonies: Virginia and South Carolina, for example. Some were decorated with drawings of birds and animals. These silver gorgets were taking the place of the shell gorgets that had been worn for a thousand years, elaborately carved with figures from myths and legends: the uktena, the water spider who brought the fire; the dancing warrior. More than a millennia of Cherokee design continues—from shell gorgets to beaded rosettes. Today's Cherokee artists who are inspired by those of the past strengthen these traditions as they move into the future.

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Cherokee Moccasins, 1825 to 1850. One piece front seam moccasins with black silk covering the seam. Vamps are bead decorated in abstract designs in pink, yellow, turquoise, green and gold beads. Integral ankle cuffs are decorated with black silk, edged in red silk.

Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. John and Marva Warnock



Beads of the Native American Southeast

Susan Powers

Through millennia of art-making in the Southeast region of North America, beads were formed by shaping and drilling a variety of natural materials, such as shell, bones, stone, clay, copper, wood, and even berries, into an extensive range of forms. From small, round spheres to disk, barrel, tubular, and button shapes, beads were created in massive quantities. At times, individual bead-makers sculpted jasper and other stone to make exceptionally beautiful effigy beads representing humans, animals and composite figures. Often, these beads circulated hundreds of miles from their site of creation indicating an understanding of the effigy bead's significance and purpose across a broad region. In other instances, bead-makers were organized in "bead factories" where they created vast quantities of beads that ultimately would be used by young and old, male and female in the numerous cultures occupying the area. The portability of such beads made them ideal for use as signals of status, wealth, and prestige, as well as for trade and exchange in networks that extended across broad reaches of the North American continent.

Many early beads were integrated into surface designs on clothing and accessories where the aesthetic components of vivid color and appealing texture were richly expressed in ceremonial ensembles and objects of ritual and display. While beads and beaded objects were used by young and old alike, the greatest quantities and those made of the most exotic materials were linked with powerful, high-ranking chieftom leaders, such as the Lady of Cofitachequi. The importance of regional bead use is further underscored by being associated with supernatural figures described in mythology, including the Falcon Impersonator, Bead Spitter, and Serpent Dancer. The concept of beads extended even to the sacred landscape where the earth was sculpted as a series of mounds, referred to as "The String of Beads" or "String of Pearls" (created at present-day Ashland, Kentucky).



Southeastern beaded bandolier bag by David Mott.

Photo courtesy of David Mott

Glass trade beads, brought to the Southeast in the sixteenth century by European explorers and later by traders, added bold new colors to the regional palette. The ancient, labor-intensive beads were largely replaced by these glistening glass orbs along with Stroud and calico cloth, silk ribbons and steel needles. However, rather than replacing the role of beads, the new media actually facilitated an incredible expansion of creativity; at once embracing the in-depth bead-making



Painting of Seminole warriors of the 2nd Seminole War, 1835-42, by acclaimed British artist Richard Hook. Hook's paintings include images of actual artifacts to give the viewer a real feel for how these men, and their clothing and accessories, would have looked.

Artwork by Richard Hook, from Men-At-Arms #288, American Indians of the Southeast, © Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com



tradition, while adding vibrant new life to it. Bead artists of the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole and numerous other Native American groups in the Southeast created beautiful, intricate beaded objects from these new supplies – colorful finger-woven belts accented with beads, men’s beaded bandolier bags worn for occasions of cultural and historic importance, and archival beaded belts for cementing treaties and alliances with non-Indians - represent some of the most outstanding examples.

Art historian David Penney (1992) asserts the “Sashes and shoulder bags produced by Creek and Cherokee women prior to the Removal era of the 1830s exploited the creative possibilities of seed bead embroidery with a freedom and exuberance unmatched elsewhere in the East. Southeastern women made shoulder bags (as decorative accessories to dress clothing) with oversized, triangular flaps and extra-wide shoulder straps, all elegantly embroidered with colorful, curvilinear patterns” (97). Floral designs were rare in the prehistoric Southeast; however, regional designs in the Historic period retained the earlier curvilinear and abstract elements in patterns inspired by nature (Power 2007, 99).



Replica of beaded garter, Cherokee, c. 1758, a gift from Old Hop or Attacullaculla to Reverend Martin.

Replica by Richard Saunooke, Eastern Band of Cherokee. Photo by Dave Berry

While Southeastern beadwork extant reveals an identifiable regional “Southeastern style,” each individual group created exceptional designs unique to it. As an example, “[t]he diversity of innovative bead designs gives an exciting dimension to the distinctive nineteenth century Cherokee bead style, placing beadwork among the most important art forms in Cherokee art history” (Power 2007, 105). Beads from the Native American Southeast mirror the social, political, economic and religious concerns through time. Despite treaties, wars and relocation, the history of the Native American Southeast reveals a strong and continuing evolution of bead art – at once traditional and innovative.

Bead artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are adding new dimension to tradition through revitalizing and embracing historic designs and re-learning the exemplary bead history of the region. Today’s bead artists research remarkable objects of the past in museum and private collections around the world, giving new voice to the “old style” beadwork and new life to an important historic art tradition through their own contemporary works of art.

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Cherokee beaded buckskin suit including shirt and pants, c.1820 to 1840.



*Museum of the American West, Autry National Center; 94.6.1.
Photo by Susan Einstein, Los Angeles, CA.*



The Rise, Loss and Revival of Traditional Cherokee Beadwork

Martha Berry, Cherokee Beadwork Artist



Beaded Bandolier bag
by Jerry Ingram,
Choctaw/Cherokee
Photo by Jerry Ingram

“Formerly the Stomp dancing tribes of the Southeast, now resident in Oklahoma, wore ceremonial dress in the dance. For the men this might consist of a handkerchief, otterskin, or finger-woven sash turban with a silver headband worn over it and an ostrich plume or eagle feather in the back; a fancy shirt and ruffled coat of cloth; the Southeastern style triangular flap shoulder pouch with its decorated shoulder strap; a finger-woven yarn sash with large end tassels, worn over the shirt and coat; a decorated breechcloth; and buckskin or cloth leggings with finger-woven or beadwork kneebands. Moccasins were of the soft-soled Woodland type, either puckered to a single seam up the top of the foot, or with an inset tongue. These moccasins had large ankle flaps, either plain or decorated. . . . This colorful garb, sad to say, has passed away. One hopes that a revival of interest may some day bring back the old styles.”

- James H. Howard, The Compleat Stomp Dancer

It was in the mid-1980s when I first became interested in Cherokee history and Cherokee beadwork. It was a chaotic time in my life, one that sent me searching for my Cherokee ancestors, for a way to connect with them and for a time-filler for my approaching empty nest years. Had you told me then that this trail would lead here, I would have laughed. If nothing else, I have learned never to underestimate your ancestors . . . and to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

When I began to read and study Cherokee history, I compared that history to my own family history. Suddenly, those events made sense and came to life for me. More than anything else, it spawned in me a great craving to know my female Cherokee ancestors. All had passed on before I was born, and I felt a need to connect with them. I wanted to know what they believed in, what they dismissed as foolish, what made them giggle, what made them cry, what made them angry, what made them blush.

These are things impossible to know of those who have passed on, of course. So, I decided the next, best thing was to do something they had done. I somehow felt if I could design and create things like they had, in the same way, making all of the hundreds of little decisions along the way, it would show me what they had been like. It would help me to make the connection I so craved.

I have been comfortable with a needle and thread most of my life. My non-Indian grandmother taught me to embroider at age five, bonding us in a sweet and personal way. I thought, perhaps, I could use a needle and thread to create that same bond with my Cherokee grandmothers.

So, I set about to learn Cherokee beadwork. At the hobby shop, I loaded up

on beading supplies and a tall stack of how-to-do-Native-American-beadwork books, and headed home, confident I was on the right road.

Please understand, I am not a scholar. Fortunately, however, I never stopped studying Cherokee history. From time to time, I came across a photograph of a Cherokee or Southeastern Woodlands beaded artifact. Occasionally I would see a portrait of a Southeastern chief wearing beadwork. None of the work in the photographs or the portraits looked anything like the projects in my how-to books from the hobby shop.

It began to dawn on me there was a difference . . . a vast difference . . . between the beadwork of the Plains nations and the beadwork of my ancestors. Like most people my age, I thought all Native people dressed like Lakotas or Kiowas or Comanches – images with which I was so familiar.

Although I have always been an admirer of Plains-style beadwork, I wanted to do the beadwork my ancestors produced and wore, the people of what later became the southeastern United States. Those tribes included the Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole and several smaller tribes. I vowed I would find this work and I would master it, no matter what it took.

I began collecting the occasional photographs of Cherokee and other Southeastern beadwork I ran across in my history studies. Finally, I summoned all my courage and wrote to the large and famous museums back east, asking for photographs of Cherokee beadwork, and of Cherokees wearing beadwork.



"Little Feet's Purse," small beaded Cherokee purse by Martha Berry.
Photo by Dave Berry

The responses were wonderful. All of the photos I received of Cherokee beadwork were of artifacts made before the Removal, commonly known as the Trail of Tears, and that beadwork was clearly the old Southeastern style. None of the pre-Removal beadwork was Plains style. However, all of the photographs of Cherokees wearing beadwork dated later than 1920, and in every one of those photos the Cherokees were wearing Plains beadwork.

What happened between the Removal and the early twentieth century? Why had we abandoned our distinctive beadwork? And, how would I learn to do this work if there were no artifacts to examine, no internet yet, and no classes or how-to books to instruct me?

I began to construct Cherokee-style appliqué beadwork working only with



photographs. Over the next few years, and with the help of a grant to spend three weeks studying Southeastern beadwork at the Smithsonian Institution, this is what I learned:

When Europeans first touched the soil of the American continents, the indigenous people they encountered were not strangers to beads. They had long used beads for adornment, trade and recording history in storytelling belts. Beads of metal, stone, shell, seeds and other materials were treasured, many of them skillfully and artfully made.

Although the first contact between Europeans and Native Americans occurred late in the 1400s, the Cherokee's first contact came in 1541. By the mid-1600s Southeastern tribes were incorporating European goods into their daily lives. Among other things, these new goods included wool stroud cloth, cotton and linen fabrics, silk ribbon, steel needles and thread made of cotton, linen or silk. And, of course, tiny, brightly colored, pieces of glass. That is when the Southeastern tribes began their love affair with glass beads and revolutionized their beaded art.



Seminole, red applique beaded bandolier bag. A gift from Seminole Chief Billy Bowlegs to Commander Anthony Breath, Commander of the U.S. Navy steamer the U.S.S. Colonel Clay, October 29, 1849. Said to have been made by "Mrs. Bowlegs."

Catalogue No. 380668, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institute

Although a few passages in those how-to books I had purchased said the Southeastern peoples created beadwork, they always claimed we had used European materials to copy European designs and objects. Yes, we embraced the bold color and texture of what for us were state-of-the-art materials, but we merged those materials with ancient design and construction traditions. In so doing, we created an exquisite and unique art form that embraced both the latest technology and the oldest traditions of our people.

Few examples of the early Southeastern beadwork still exist. Because this work was created so much earlier than its Plains counterpart, only a few pieces with really reliable provenance remain. When our beadwork was being collected, much of it was shipped back to Europe with little thought given to carefully recording who had created it or even which tribe. So, although Southeastern Woodlands beadwork is so distinctive the average adult can be easily taught to recognize it, assigning specific tribal attribution without good provenance is a tricky business.



Cherokee bandolier bag.

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Museum Photo 41-62-10/23538 T1674

By the time of the American Revolution through the end of the 1700s, Southeastern appliqué beadwork was maturing as an art form. It had its own unique traditions and style trends, and the beaders were honing their skills to the master level.

Around the year 1800, the Golden Age of Cherokee and Southeastern appliqué beadwork began. It is interesting to note that this date coincides with the arrival of the first missionaries and the establishment of the first missionary school in the Cherokee Nation. In her book *North American Indian Jewelry and Adornment*, Lois Sherr Dubin discusses the influence of the missionaries on Cherokee beadwork traditions:

“An elder of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee relates that after contact, beadwork enabled cultural survival: ‘It was a visual language that kept beliefs alive.’ Attempting to suppress Native culture, colonists destroyed the Cherokee’s wampum belts – the repositories of their sacred and historical knowledge. Cherokee teachings continued, however, though presented in acceptable Western forms. ‘When we worked with flowers, as well as other images, the beliefs were kept alive. In the flowers were messages and telegrams . . . One bead color touching another meant something . . . The spiritual teachings still circulated.’”

Not only did the ancient teachings “speak” through the floral motifs, but symbols commonly found on pre-Contact Southeastern pottery graced the majority of Southeastern appliqué beaded sashes made prior to the Removal.

This Golden Age of Southeastern beadwork continued until the late 1830s. Then, it stopped almost as suddenly as if it had hit a brick wall. Why? The Removal.

Although it is true that the Florida Seminole people carried on the Southeastern beading and clothing traditions up until the late 1800s, the majority of the Southeastern people stopped producing it by 1840. The Removal left our people exhausted in body, mind and spirit.





Choctaw Sash, 1825-1850

Photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. John and Marva Warnock



Left: Traditional stamped pottery with carved paddle by Joel Queen, Eastern Band of Cherokee; Right: Detail of Sash seen above.

Pottery photo by Mickel Yantz/CHC;

Sash photo courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. John and Marva Warnock.

Arriving in Indian Territory, the Cherokee had no time to rest, but were forced to hack new lives out of the wilderness. They built homes and barns, put in crops, erected fences for livestock, etc. Census statistics reveal that, for the first decade following the arrival of the Cherokee in their new home, their low birth rate and high infant mortality rate combined to leave them with an extremely low population of children aged 1 to 10.

Despairing and exhausted, our people were poor, unimaginably poor by our twenty-first century standards. Also, we had left our trading partners and trading habits behind. Purchasing those beautiful fabrics, brightly colored glass beads and silk ribbon was unthinkable when our peoples' most pressing needs were filling their children's bellies and keeping a roof over their heads. So, they used what was at hand and what they could afford. Gradually, they took on more and more Anglo influence in their dress and accessories.

Beginning in the 1870s, several fairs in what would become northeastern Oklahoma brought local Native people together to compete in all sorts of categories. There were many prizes given for needlework. These included prizes for crocheting, knitting, darning, embroidery, making all sorts of Anglo clothing, rugs, pillow shams, sofa cushions, aprons, etc. There were no prizes

given for beadwork.

In 1903, representatives from the Worlds Fair in St. Louis requested needlework from the girls at the Cherokee Female Seminary to be included in the American Indian display. However, there were only “very few girls skilled in beadwork” at that time. A 1906 Female Seminary pamphlet reported that a portion of each girl’s Saturday morning was spent receiving instruction and practice in “embroidery, plain and fancy knitting, cutting, fitting, and sewing machine work.”

With the beginning of the twentieth century came Oklahoma statehood. On a larger scale, the images of Native Americans being circulated around the country and the world, were of Plains people wearing Plains beadwork. That beadwork style, which proliferated during the Reservation period following the American Civil War, was now seen in Wild West shows and in illustrations for books and magazine articles.

When the great powwow culture began to grow, its roots were in the ceremonies of the Plains nations. Consequently, the regalia that evolved with the powwow movement also had roots in the Plains. Images of powwow dancers, in Plains



Cherokee applique beaded mantle fragment. The mantle was carried and worn on the Trail of Tears and is still in the possession of the descendents of the original owner.

Photo courtesy of the Cherokee Nation



beaded regalia, are probably the most commonly recognized by all Americans, Native Americans included.

Influenced by portrayals in motion pictures and television of Native people wearing Plains clothing, it is understandable why most baby boomers don't recognize Southeastern beadwork and clothing. Unfortunately, that includes many descendants of the Southeastern tribes.

Additionally, few descendants of the Southeastern tribes have ever seen a Southeastern beaded artifact. Many of our artifacts are in Europe, some are in museums in the eastern United States and a sprinkling exist in museums scattered across the country – one here, perhaps two or three there.

That is why this book was written. It, and the Cherokee Heritage Center exhibit "Beadwork Storytellers, A Visual Language," bring the artifacts and their stories to where most of the Southeastern descendants live. We hope to build an understanding and appreciation of our ancestors' unique and exquisite beadwork. We have brought many artifacts here, including pieces from Scotland that have not been on this continent in two centuries. Also in the exhibit are a portion of a beaded mantle that is the only one of its kind and which has never been exhibited before; and a small two-sided Cherokee purse that has never been exhibited. We hope you enjoy visiting these treasures.

The revival . . .

You might ask why it is important to revive an art form that was so completely abandoned by our nineteenth century ancestors. Aside from the fact that our beadwork is beautiful and expressive, it is important to an understanding of the time in which it was created.



One of my favorite characteristics of the Cherokee people, then and now, is our ability to survive and adapt. Were it not for that, we would not be here and certainly would not be trying to preserve our culture.

Few cultural objects in our history better illustrate this trait

Cherokee beaded and embroidered coat

Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute, Negative No. T224524

than our beadwork. When our ancestors saw those sparkling, brightly colored glass beads, they loved them. They incorporated them into styles and motifs that had been traditions among the Southeastern people since long before Christopher Columbus ever set sail. Our beadwork, given its merging of ancient design and construction with then-modern materials, is a visual metaphor for the time in which it was made. At a time when we were merging our blood, our tools, our living structures, our family structures, our governmental structures and our religious beliefs, our beadwork illustrated these rapid changes to Cherokee culture and our ability to survive and adapt.



Small beaded purse,
Cherokee style.

Beadwork was important to our ancestors, too. From the very beginning, glass beadwork was used in diplomacy.

Catalogue No. E6938-0, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institute.

The very oldest known piece of post-contact Cherokee beadwork is a beaded strip. Some refer to it as a garter, and it may well be. But, it is also a miniature story telling belt. The maker used very tiny blue, white and a few red beads to create a beautiful piece of beadwork. It is said to have been a gift from Old Hop and Attakullakulla to the Reverend Martin, in 1758.

One of the most famous, or some would say infamous, pieces of Cherokee beadwork is a bandolier bag in the National Museum of the American Indian collection. It is a beautifully made piece, using a combination of appliqué beadwork and silk embroidery. Under the pouch flap is the following embroidered inscription:

*To: Gen'l Jackson
From: Sam Houston*

That's right, it was a gift presented to then-general Andrew Jackson, from Sam Houston. It was almost certainly made by a Cherokee, possibly a member of Sam Houston's adopted Cherokee family. It was given to Jackson before he became President of the United States, and before he orchestrated the Trail of Tears.

One of my favorite stories of Southeastern beadwork used in a diplomatic exchange is that of a bandolier bag made by one of Billie Bowlegs' wives.



It was given to U.S. Navy Commander Anthony Breath in October 1849.

It was a time of very difficult relations between the U.S. and the Seminole people. There had already been wars between them and things were always at a boiling point. It would have taken very little to provoke all-out war. As often happens in such cases, trouble came.

There were murders of non-Indians inside U.S. territory. Five Seminole warriors were accused of the crime and quickly fled deep into the Florida swamps of their people. Billie Bowlegs, a wise and respected Seminole chief, realized that war would be inevitable if the U.S. sent troops into the area to track down these accused murderers.

Bowlegs' solution was to volunteer to take a group of his best men, track down the warriors and bring them back to face trial. He and his men were able to find them and, in the struggle that ensued, two of the accused were taken captive by Bowlegs, one was killed and two escaped.

To transfer the prisoners, Bowlegs set up a meeting with his friend Commander Anthony Breath, aboard Breath's steamer the U.S.S. Colonel Clay. At this meeting, Bowlegs gave Breath the two prisoners, the hand of the one who was killed, and to salve the loss of the two who escaped, a beautiful red beaded bandolier bag.

Another example of beadwork used in diplomacy is a bandolier bag still in the possession of the descendants of Cherokee Chief Daniel Ross Hicks. The bag was a gift to him from Delaware Chief Journey Cake, c. 1820.

So, we know that beadwork was valued enough by our ancestors to honor leaders of other tribes, governments and religions,



Navy blue bandolier bag, floral, applique beaded and embroidered.

This bandolier bag was almost certainly made by a Cherokee, and is an example of beadwork used in diplomacy. On the pouch, under the flap, is the following inscription: To Gen'l Jackson, From Sam Houston.

*Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute
Negative No. T179690B*

*Courtesy, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institute
Negative No. T179690A*

and even to help prevent a war. Knowing that, we begin to understand the importance of the revival of this art form.

However, at the end of the twentieth century, traditional Southeastern beadwork was almost a lost art. At that time there were only about a dozen people who had mastered the art form, and only half of them were descendants of the tribes of the Southeast. Only two were Cherokee Nation citizens.

Ironically, the people working hardest to preserve and perpetuate our traditional clothing, accessories and material culture in the late twentieth century were non-Indian reenactors. Meticulous researchers, members of the Southeastern Culture Society have been very generous with their knowledge of, and living history experience with, the pre-Removal cultures of the tribes that once inhabited the southeastern United States. For that we are very grateful.

Today, among the descendants of the Southeastern tribes, a revival has begun. On August 14, 2003, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation Chad Smith was inaugurated for his second term of office. He wore a Cherokee hunting jacket and carried a beaded bandolier bag in the traditional style. As far as we know, it was the first time in more than 160 years that a Cherokee chief had been installed in office wearing traditional Cherokee beadwork. It was a great day for the revival of this art form.



Photograph of Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chadwick "Corntassel" Smith, taken during inauguration for his second term of office, August 2003.

Photo by Will Chavez/Cherokee Phoenix

To continue this revival movement we must grow three things: we must grow beaders, we must grow collectors and we must grow brokers (museums and galleries). Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, both the Cherokee Nation and the Muscogee (Creek) Nation have been offering classes in traditional Southeastern beadwork in their museums in Oklahoma. As news of this revival began to spread, collectors became interested. Here is the story of one such collector and twelve student beaders:

~ g c u l s b c (Everyone Is Important):



The Cherokee Beadwork Revival Project – 2007

In October 2006, Robin Flint Ballenger sat down for a chat in my booth at the very first Cherokee Art Market, in Tulsa. Robin is CEO of Flintco, the largest American Indian contractor in the world. She is a prominent citizen of Tulsa and very active in the arts community there.

Robin is also a Cherokee, and she is the single largest patron of the revival of traditional Cherokee beadwork. She suggested that I ask my next class to make a sampler. She thought that a table runner would be a perfect vehicle for this piece, which was to be representative of the current state of Cherokee beadwork. She wanted the work of novice beaders as well as more experienced beaders. She wanted them to be given the opportunity to take the materials and be as creative as possible within the relatively strict confines of authentic Cherokee sash style.

The class took place at the Cherokee Heritage Center, Tahlequah, OK, on February 9 and 10, 2007. As luck, or providence, would have it, there were exactly as many students as there were sections on the sampler. The beaders were all excited to be asked to be a part of history and to take part in the sampler project. To sweeten the pot, Robin had agreed to pay each beader for their section, to allow the piece to be exhibited in museums from time to time, and to donate it to a museum when she has finished with it. Although the students were excited about the payment, they were more excited to know that their beadwork and signatures would be displayed and be donated to a museum. In short, they want to go down in history.

We settled on a piece similar to a traditional Cherokee beaded sash, only much larger. The piece measures approximately 111" x 10" x 3/8". It is made of authentic nineteenth century materials including scarlet wool saved-edge stroud, cotton calico lining and 100 percent silk ribbon edging. We chose all pearl colored European glass seed beads because that was part of the strict Cherokee beaded sash tradition.

The eleven sections were beaded by twelve people (one section was shared by a mother/daughter team). There was an age range of sixty years, with the youngest beader aged 14. All, save one brave soul, were women. There were two pairs of mothers and daughters. Some live in cities, some live in tiny Cherokee communities. One student had driven more than five hours to take the course in Tahlequah. Three of the students were taking

Cherokee Beadwork Revival Project 2007, owned by Robin Ballenger

Photo by Dave Berry





Photograph of Martha Berry's students small Cherokee purses, taken at Philbrook Art Museum, Tulsa, August 2007.

Photo by Dave Berry

their third class with me, two were taking their second, and the rest had no experience with Cherokee beading techniques or nineteenth century materials.

About a week following the class, I shipped each student a piece of wool stroud with the basic design drawn on it, a piece of cotton lining to be signed in permanent ink, one hank of beads, and instructions with illustrations of the techniques we had covered in class. Remarkably, each section is quite unique, and all of the work is good. Even the novice beaders went all out to produce a beautiful piece of work, and many even included a rather difficult technique (two-bead line stitch) that is unique to Southeastern beaded sashes. About a month later, all of the sections had been completed and returned to me. I was responsible for layout and assembly of all the sections, and photographing the finished piece.

Our lone male beader, Wade Blevins, helped Robin and me come up with an appropriate title for the piece. We decided on /g c u l s b c (Everyone Is Important), pronounced NeeGAHD UhlSGAYduh. We chose that title because that was Robin's vision for the piece.

I find it difficult to express my pride in these budding beaders. It brings the sort of warmth that reminds me of watching my daughters at their dance recitals. On one hand, I am amazed at the students' beautiful work. On the other hand, I long ago became accustomed to watching Cherokee people accomplish amazing things. These beaders have done just that.

All of us would like to thank Robin Ballenger for her vision and her generosity. Although she does not bead, she is a pivotal part of the twenty-first century revival of traditional Cherokee beadwork.



The beaders and their communities are:

Joan Johnson, Dewey, OK

Karen and Tara Rabon Comingdeer (mother/daughter), Stilwell, OK

Shari L. Kamp, Jay, OK

Joanne Norman Keith, Woodward, OK

Jamie L. Wooley, Tulsa, OK

Charlene Drowning Bear, Park Hill, OK

Tonia S. Giger, Tahlequah, OK

P. Wade Blevins, Jay, OK

Elizabeth Ann Blackwell, Pryor, OK (mother of Kathy J. Robinson)

Kathy J. Robinson, Big Cabin, OK (daughter of Elizabeth Ann Blackwell)

Lisa Rutherford, Tahlequah, OK

Class coordinator for the Cherokee Heritage Center: Tonia Weavel, Education Director. Instructor, Project Designer and Coordinator: Martha Berry, Tyler, TX

Several of these students have since entered their beadwork in art contests and some have won awards. Additionally, three of them, Karen Comingdeer, Tonia Giger and Lisa Rutherford, all employees of the Cherokee Nation, have organized Beadwork 101. This group consists of fellow employees who meet weekly, during their lunch hours, to discuss and practice traditional Cherokee beadwork.

Have you seen this beadwork . . .

One of the most exciting things to come out of this revival is the discovery of several important beaded artifacts. One such artifact, a portion of a beaded mantle (blanket) is quite intriguing. We know, from early writings, that such beaded mantles existed, but no one had ever found an example of an artifact.

A couple of years ago, as part of the gathering of information for the Cherokee art book, Lisa Rutherford became aware of a small piece of beadwork, about 9" x 12", that was described as a portion of a beaded blanket. When she sent me photos of the object, along with provenance, I knew that we had found the first evidence of a genuine Cherokee beaded mantle.

On the Trail of Tears, this particular mantle was carried by the Ratler family, with two young daughters and a nine-year-old orphaned boy whom they had taken in. One of the daughters, a baby girl named Ca-ty, died along the trail. The mantle had been decorated for the elder male, Tah-yah-naw-hun-le. He survived the Removal



Small, two-sided applique beaded Cherokee purse, c. 1820s.

Photo courtesy of Rennard Strickland

and, when he arrived in the Honey Creek river bottom area, became known as the “Leader of Dances.” He lived a good and productive life, and the beaded mantle was cut into pieces and divided up among his family members when he passed on.

The descendents of Tah-yah-naw-hun-le were told to keep their mantle remnants in secret, never telling anyone of their existence. It was one of his direct descendents who brought this artifact to the attention of the Cherokee Nation. No other pieces similar to this remnant have been found among Tah-yah-naw-hun-le’s other descendents. The “secret” promise would have been a typical warning at a time when many people worked hard to hide their Native ancestry.



Cherokee purse, pre 1840, made by a female student at the Moravian Mission School, located on James Vann plantation, Georgia. Leather purse with applied seed beads and looped beaded fringe.

Courtesy of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Chief Vann House State Historic Site

Another delightful discovery has been the small Cherokee beaded purses. Although many Cherokee families have beaded purses that have been handed down for generations, all examples that I had seen of such purses were actually made by Great Lakes beaders. That is, until about two years ago. At that time, we became aware of a small purse in the collection of the Chief Vann House State Historic Site in Georgia. This little purse was beaded by a student at a Cherokee mission school on the Vann plantation before the Removal. This artifact was distinctly different from the Great Lakes purses.

Shortly thereafter, we discovered that a respected Cherokee law scholar and art collector owned a small Cherokee purse, beaded on two sides and dated to the 1820s. The materials, the construction and the beading techniques used to



produce this little red purse are very Southeastern.

These artifacts had always been there, but no one knew they might be important. They are.

If you are a Southeastern tribal descendant, please check your attics and keep your eyes open for such beaded artifacts. Photos and descriptions of traditional Southeastern beadwork can be found throughout this booklet. If you know of a piece of traditional Southeastern beadwork, please contact us. We will keep your identity private, and we will not urge you to sell the beadwork. We only want to be aware of it, and to have photographs and a description and history of it. These hidden artifacts are very important to the study and understanding of our beadwork. If you find one, please contact:

Martha Berry
berrybeadwork@hotmail.com
or
Lisa Rutherford
lisa-rutherford@cherokee.org

Conclusion

Well, there you have it. The beadwork journey has been both a very private one and a very public one for me. At the beginning, I never imagined all of the assistance and encouragement that I would receive from Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chad Smith and his staff, the Cherokee Heritage Center, the Cherokee National Historical Society, the Southeastern Culture Society, and many friends, curators, artists, collectors, students and master beadworkers. Without them, I would still be at the beginning of the path.

As the revival of Cherokee and Southeastern beadwork grows, we learn new things all the time and occasionally discover precious artifacts. My greatest hope is that, as you read this book, some piece of information in it will already be obsolete.



Beaded bandolier bag, a gift to Cherokee Chief Daniel Ross Hicks, from Delaware Chief Journey Cake, c. 1820. This bag is made in the Delaware style with a wide strap, smaller pouch and the background is fully beaded. The bag is owned by descendants of Chief Hicks.

Photo by Dave Berry

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Restored photograph
of Redbird Smith and
Creek Sam wearing
Cherokee beaded outfits

*Photo courtesy of Paul W.
Eichling,
restored by Dave Berry*



Glossary of Terms

BANDOLIER BAGS

- Sometimes referred to as shoulder bags or shot pouches
- Used to carry personal smoking supplies, personal charms and personal medicine
- Long strap hung over one shoulder with the pouch resting on the opposite hip
- Characterized by the triangular flap on the pouch, a uniquely Southeastern feature and a carry-over from the pouches worn by warriors/priests of the Mound Builders (the ancestors of the Southeastern tribes)
- Ornately beaded bandolier bags were used in diplomatic gift exchanges
- Motifs on each end of the strap were different, but beaded in the same colors
- Materials were red or navy wool stroud cloth, cotton or linen linings, silk ribbon, glass seed beads
- Background material was left exposed and incorporated into the overall design of the bag
- Beading techniques included two-needle appliqué and two-bead edging
- Strap ends were rounded, or had two, three or four long points

SASHES

- Long beaded straps that hung on one shoulder and across the chest and back
- Incorporated two-bead line stitch, unique to Southeastern beadwork and only used on sashes
- Whereas other types of Southeastern beadwork used a wide variety of colors and motifs, sash beaders typically adhered to a very limited set of colors and motifs, and most often used only white or off-white beads
- Nineteenth century sash beaders typically used pre-Contact Mound Builder pottery motifs to bead their sashes
- The most prominent motif, by far, is the double connected spiral, or snake, which is also very common in pre-Contact pottery
- Materials were red or navy wool stroud cloth, cotton (and occasionally leather) lining, silk ribbon, glass seed beads
- Beading techniques included two-bead line stitch (almost always and often exclusively), two-needle appliqué and two-bead edging

BELTS

- Two styles prevalent: appliqué beaded and finger woven with beads interwoven
- Applique beaded belts often used stylized floral motifs
- Beaded motifs often outlined in white beads
- Characterized by long ties with tassels on the ends
- Materials in appliqué beaded belts were red or navy stroud or velvet, silk ribbon, cotton lining, glass seed beads
- Beading techniques included two needle appliqué and two-bead edging
- Long ties were usually finger woven with beads woven into the edges

PURSES

- Two styles that we know of: leather purse with drawstring closure, and wool purse with flap closure, both in classic tear drop shape
- Handles of wool purses made of twisted strands of beads
- Materials for wool purses were wool stroud, silk ribbon, glass seed beads
- Materials for leather purses were leather, glass beads, leather thong for drawstrings
- Beading techniques included two-needle appliqué and two-bead edging
- Both leather and wool purses characterized by long looped beaded fringe

MOCCASINS

- Southeastern moccasins were made in three styles: high cuffed with leather ties wrapping around the ankles; turn down cuffs sometimes with ribbon ties; and standing arched cuffs
- Everyday moccasins were quickly made and undecorated
- Moccasins for special occasions were decorated with beadwork either sewn directly onto the leather, or beadwork done on a wool or silk “saddle” that was then sewn onto the moccasin
- Southeastern moccasins characterized by a single, slightly gathered seam, up the center of the top of the foot, and made out of one piece of leather
- Beading techniques included two-needle appliqué, return stitch, and two-bead edging

Acknowledgements



Bandolier Bag by Jay McGirt, Creek and Seminole
Photo by Dave Berry



Southeastern High cuffed moccasins with applique beaded "saddles," by Martha Berry
Photo by Dave Berry



Bandolier Bag by Brian Zepeda, Seminole
Photo courtesy of Brian Zepeda

Exhibition Guest Curator Martha Berry
Robin Ballenger
Barbara R. Duncan Ph.D.
Susan C. Power Ph.D.
Dave Berry
Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chad Smith and his staff
Cherokee Nation Enterprises
Richard and Hilary Hook
American Museum of Natural History
Roger Amerman
Autry National Center
Linda Bitley, Georgia Department of Natural Resources
Christina Burke
Brian Pollard and Will Chavez, Cherokee Phoenix
Julia Coates
Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Paul Eichling
Jay Hannah
Jerry Ingram
Neil Curtis and Michael Craig, Marischal Museum, University of Aberdeen, Scotland
Anna Mitchell
David Mott
Muscogee (Creek) Nation
Clinton Nagy
National Museum of the American Indian
Osprey Publishing, Ltd., United Kingdom
Peabody Museum, Harvard University
Julie Perkins
Douglas Rodgers
Lisa Rutherford
Smithsonian Institution, Department of Anthropology
Members of the Southeastern Culture Society
Rennard Strickland
John and Marva Warnock
Brian Zepeda





Cherokee, Creek or
Choctaw garter and
sash.

Left: Woven Garter
with white glass
beads interwoven.

Right: Applique
beaded sash, white
glass beads on navy
stroud with red fabric
inlays. Sash motifs
are those commonly
used by pre-Removal
Southeastern sash
beaders, and reflect
scroll motifs on
pre-contact Mound
Builder pottery found
throughout the
Southeast.