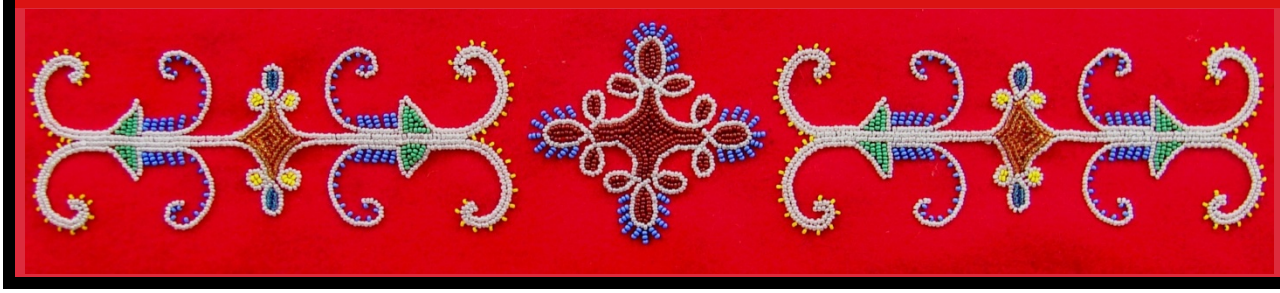
Wabanaki Beadwork 1850-2000 Part 5

by

Frederick Matthew Wiseman



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Wabanaki Revival Styles

Wabanaki
Late 20th century.

Early Revival

After collectors, museums and then scholars became interested in the 19th century Wabanaki beadwork styles, Indigenous people of New England and the Canadian Maritimes began researching and re-interpreting their own historical styles in the third quarter of the 20th century -- as published in scholarly books such as such as Ruth Holmes Whitehead's classic Elitekey: Micmac Material Culture from 1600 AD to the present (Whitehead, 1980: 15-29), and Gaby Pelletier's Micmac and Maliseet Decorative Traditions (Pelletier, 1977:19-32). That these are interpretations rather than definitive copies is demonstrated by example of the central motif in a 1980's Passamaquoddy loom-beaded panel, which was based on the embroidered beadwork gathering symbol published by Frank Speck (2001). However, the original has a tiny "33" like scroll to one side, while the revival example has "3" and "31" flanking the scroll design, perhaps commemorating a birthday.

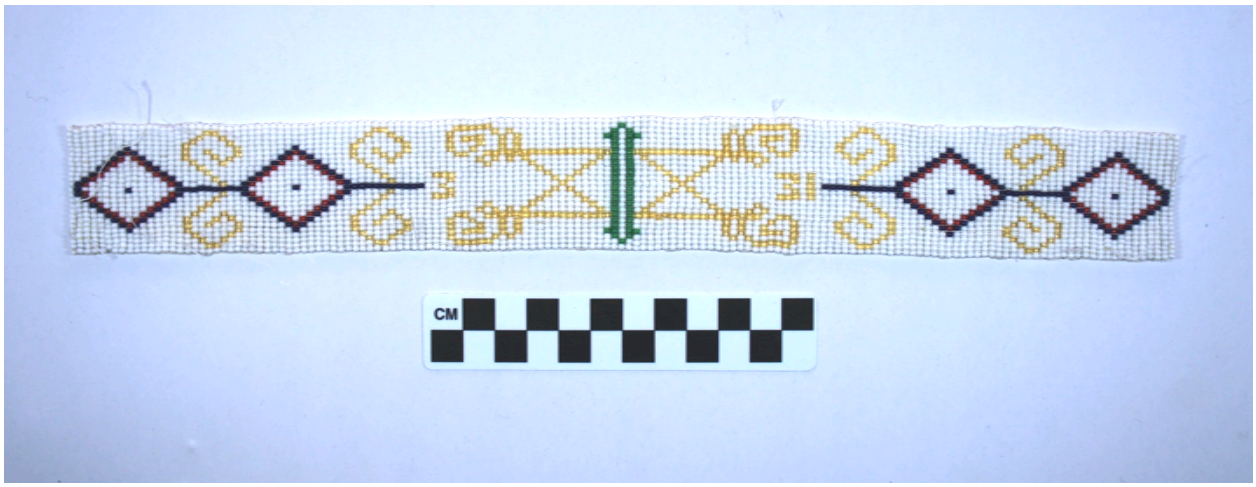

Figure 49. Loomed Headband in the Early Wabanaki Revival Style
Never mounted
Passamaquoddy, ca. 1980's

Also, many objects dating to this period tend to be beaded on velvet, which was easily obtainable in local fabric stores. Also typical of the early Wabanaki Revival of the 1980's is a headdress band with polychrome beads embroidered on velvet in a loose interpretation of a double scroll design.

Figure 50. Detail, turkey and snow goose headdress Headband" in the Early Wabanaki Revival Style Abenaki/Mohawk bead worker. 1989

Academic Phase, 1995-

By the 1990's the precision with which the designs were copied increased dramatically, as well as a more scholarly approach to the materials derived from increasingly detailed photographs from museum and private collections. In addition, replicas of ancient trade cloth, some woven on original ancient looms (so are they copies or continuations??) became available to the Indian craft trade, as well as better copies of early "greasy" bead colors used in the 19th century. These materials were incorporated into the product of the later phase of the Wabanaki Revival to produce more 'authentic", even academic examples to be used in ceremonies such as that of the reconstituted Wabanaki Confederacy. However, they can sometimes be seen as not entirely right, as in the beadwork "fill" in the leaves in Figure 52, which are not beaded in the distinctive linear way of the "Wabanaki leaf" but rather have a more random approach to bead filling. These items rarely used the expensive replica silk ribbon for the edge binding, substituting more sturdy modern material, to allow them to be used in ceremony.

Figure 51. Detail, Beaded red trade wool ceremonial sash with 14-0 seed bead double scrolls copied from a Micmac source.
Abenaki/Mohawk bead worker. 1999

Figure 52. Detail, Beaded navy trade wool ceremonial cap copied from a supposed Micmac source, but probably Maliseet/Passamaquoddy.
2004

Figure 53. Wabanaki revival doll, , NH Native bead worker, 2005

Adaptive/modern Phase, 2000-

By the 2000's the copying phase was augmented by a conscious choice to move beyond tradition to interpret the older designs in new ways, a tradition pioneered in the region by Iroquois fashion designers such as Tammy Beauvais. This led to the use of lighter weight, more comfortable materials such as acrylics in place of the hot and heavy trade wool. It also permitted personal inspiration and adaptation of traditional designs to be applied to the beading designs. The coat in Figure 54, made from lightweight synthetic navy material, accessorized by red wool panels, has double scroll designs that are not exact copies of any particular double scroll from documentary source, but were chosen by the artist to express cultural exuberance.

Figure 54. Modern variant of the Wabanaki revival Style Abenaki, 2000.

Miscellaneous Abenaki Beadwork Types

Mid-late 19th century.

This section contains a potpourri of Vermont and New Hampshire beaded items that do not fit the typology developed in this paper, but they are presented here to round out the sample so new research may someday fit them into an improved more detailed style analysis.

Figure 55. Beaded Panel/Pocket/Tea cozy??
late 19th century
Abenaki, White Mountains, NH

An enigmatic bag-like item has a definite provenance from being sold at the Laurent "Indian Trading Post" in the Intervale, NH, but has a unique design and form. Indeed Bergevin notes that "Figure 54 may not be Native at all; it has elements that are so European I would not feel comfortable calling it Native made. (Bergevin e-mail, June 10, 2012). Perhaps NH Native entrepreneurs purchased non native things and re sold them. The same may be the case with Figure 55, because the style seems too coarse and the design is unique. The added cut cloth fringe is a hint of its use (well after creation) as "Indian Regalia." However, the small white bead outlining is seen occasionally on other items that have a good Wabanaki stylistic attribution. As usual "more research needs to be done."

Figure 56. Velvet Man's vest with large, coarse beadwork floral designs (sunflowers?) and appended animal-tanned leather fringe.
Swanton, VT. Mid 19th century

The long loomed watch chain was designed to hang a small women's watch from the neck. It would never be thought of as being native except for the original collector's attribution as "St. Alban's Indian."

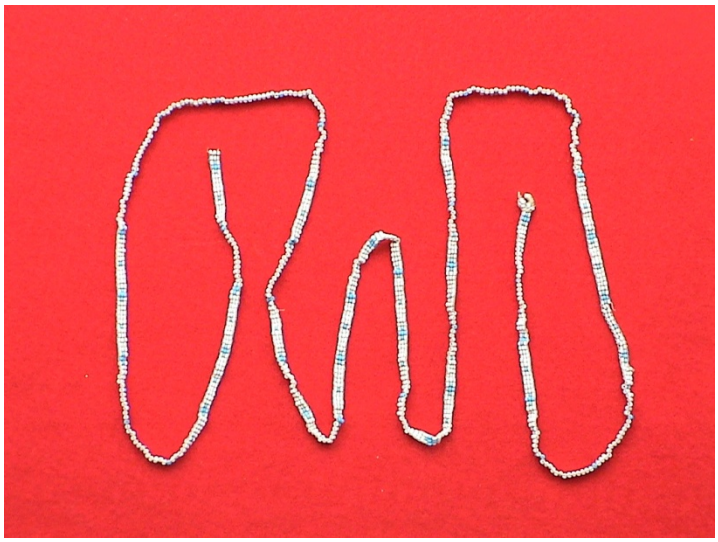

Figure 57. Loomed seed bead watch chain.
Blue glass and faceted metal 11/0 beads.
Ca. 1920-1930
Gladys Nokes Collection, Swanton, VT.

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