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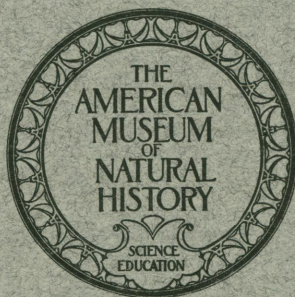
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VOLUME XXIX, PART II

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SYMBOLISM IN PENOBSCOT ART

BY FRANK G. SPECK



BY ORDER OF THE TRUSTEES  
OF  
THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY  
NEW YORK CITY  
1927



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#### VOLUME XXIX

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## INTRODUCTION

The decorative designs of the Penobscot of Maine afford an interesting illustration of how art motives, existing over a wide area, have become modified into a local type and then pass through several stages of symbolic interpretation. Outwardly, the design content of Penobscot art shows at least two categories. The first is the group of curve motives which has been previously treated very generally in a paper published by the Geological Survey of Canada.<sup>1</sup> These curve motives, which are obviously aboriginal, correspond in their fundamentals with designs occurring in painting on skin garments, and in beadwork, and embroidery among the Montagnais and Naskapi of the Labrador Peninsula, and some of the Cree and Ojibway of the Hudson Bay region. The second group comprises the much more widely diffused realistic floral figures which pervade the art of the whole northern forest area. A modern European origin has been suspected for these and announced by several writers.<sup>2</sup> The whole question, however, now deserves more attention, in view of the accumulation of material and the better opportunity of tracing the antiquity and the distribution of the motives.

Accordingly, the author proposes to revive the discussion and to present additional material, from still unpublished Penobscot notes, bearing on the subject along the lines pursued in the report previously referred to.

## TYPES OF DESIGN

Penobscot art is rich in the elaboration of a few elementary motives employed ostensibly for mere decoration, but carrying a realistic plant interpretation and symbolism. The decorative designs of this tribe are only part of a series shared alike, according to investigations made thus far, by the neighboring Micmac, Malecite, and Passamaquoddy, and the more distant Montagnais and Naskapi, and, even in some general features, by the Iroquois and eastern Ojibway. Some few objects with identical figures have been collected from the Cree, Winnebago, and even the Blackfoot, and again, in the Mississippi Valley area among the Central Algonkian. On the whole, however, the decorative designs of the Northeastern Algonkian, from the Penobscot east to the Micmac, are in stylistic

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<sup>1</sup>Speck, Frank G., "The Double-Curve Motive in Northeastern Algonkian Art" (*Memoir 42, Geological Survey of Canada*. Ottawa, 1914.)

<sup>2</sup>Most of them, however, are inclined to express themselves with reserve on the question of origin and history of the floral designs in the east. Wissler, whose interest in design derivations has always been keen, recorded his opinion of the double-curve and floral designs of the northeast, as arising from freehand work upon birchbark and skins; art processes to which he concedes a native, not a European derivation, *The American Indian* (New York, 1917), 85-87.

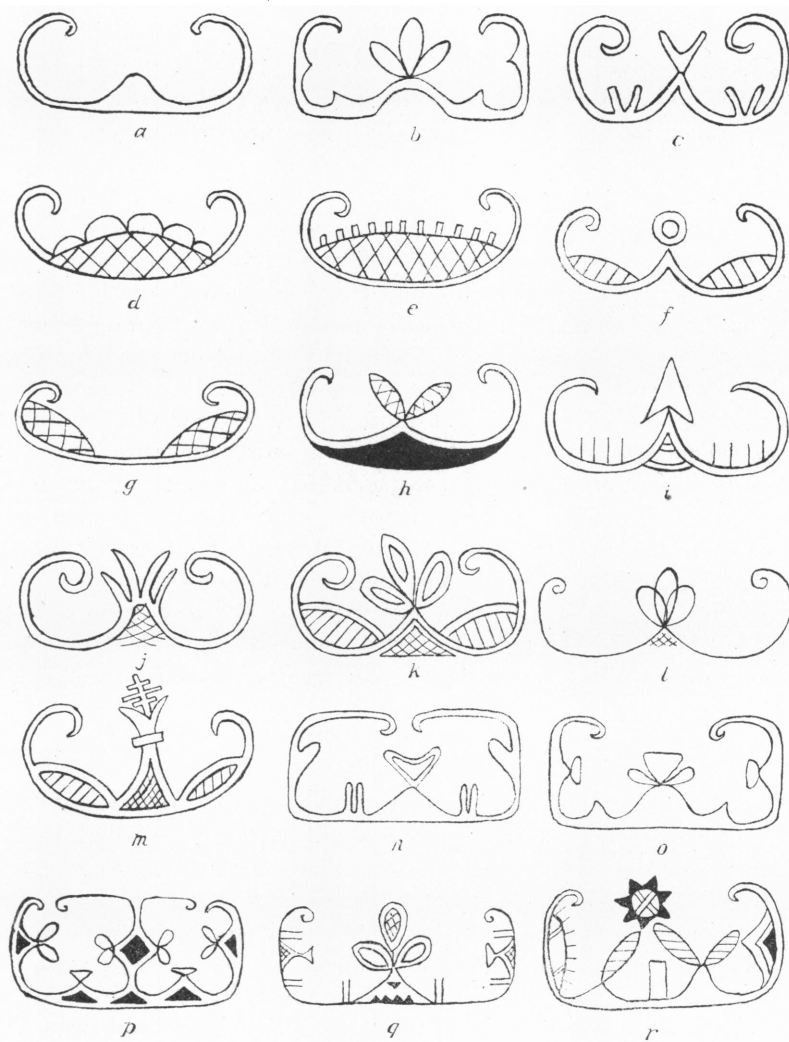


Fig. 1. Penobscot Curve Designs sketched from Specimens. *a, n*, Beaded figures from woman's cap; *b, o, p*, Beaded figures from collar-cape; *c*, Beaded figure from woman's leggings; *e, h, r*, Etched designs from birchbark basket; *d, f, g, i, j, k, m*, Etched figures from birchbark basket; *l*, Etched figure from stone pipe bowl; *q*, Carved figure from cradleboard.

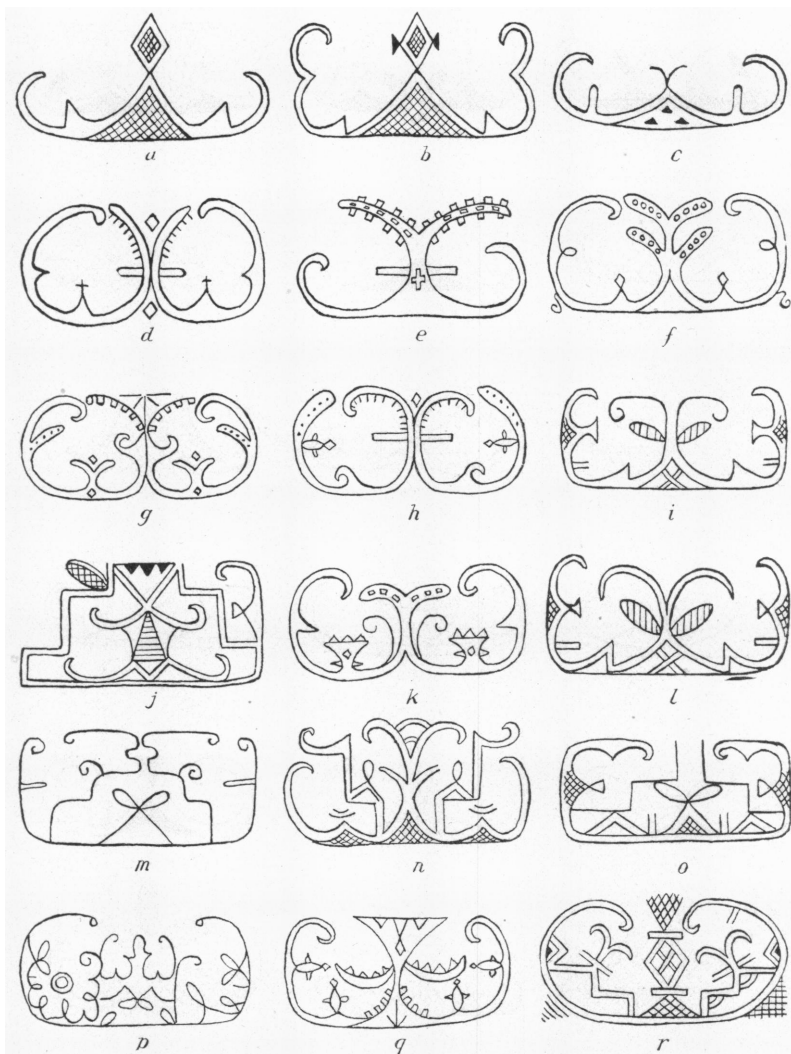


Fig. 2. Penobscot Curve Designs sketched from Specimens. *a-c, i, j, l, o, n, r*, Carved figures from cradleboard (Fig. 17); *d-h, k, q*, Beaded figures from side pouch and collar ornament; *m*, Beaded figure from collar-cape; *p*, Beaded figure from ornament.

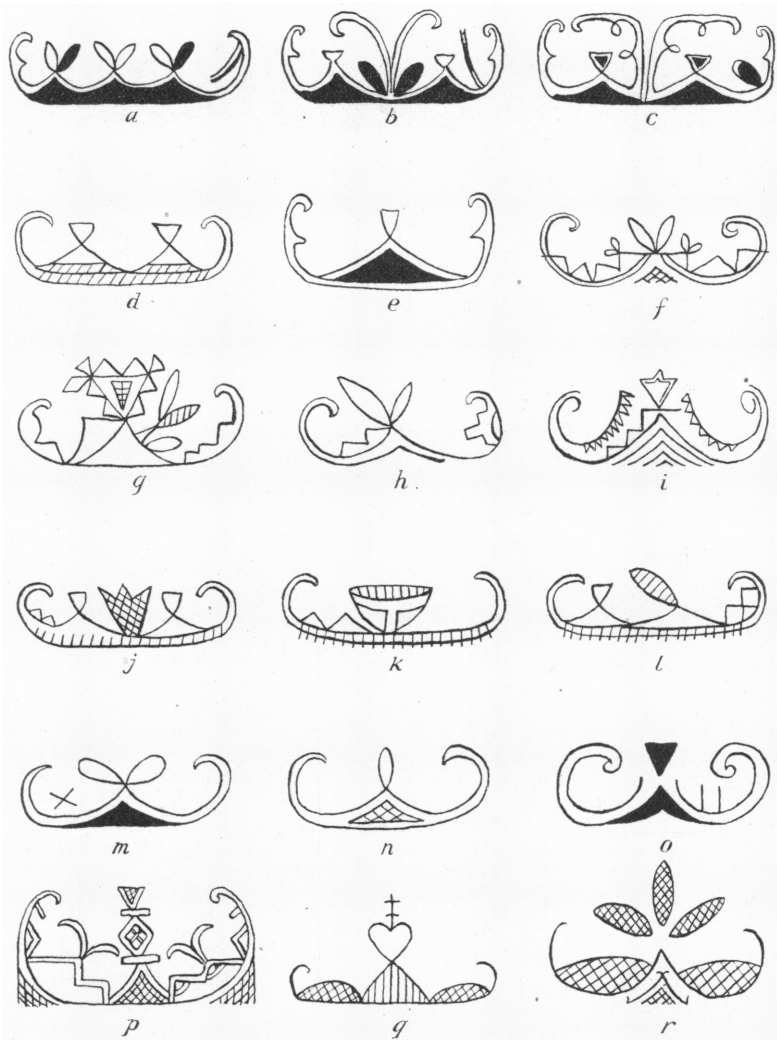


Fig. 3. Penobscot Curve Designs sketched from Specimens. *a-c, e*, Beaded figures from hair ornament; *d, f, g-l*, Carved figures from powder horn; *m-o*, Carved figures from basket gauges; *p*, Carved figure from cradleboard; *q-r*, Etched figure from birchbark pack basket.

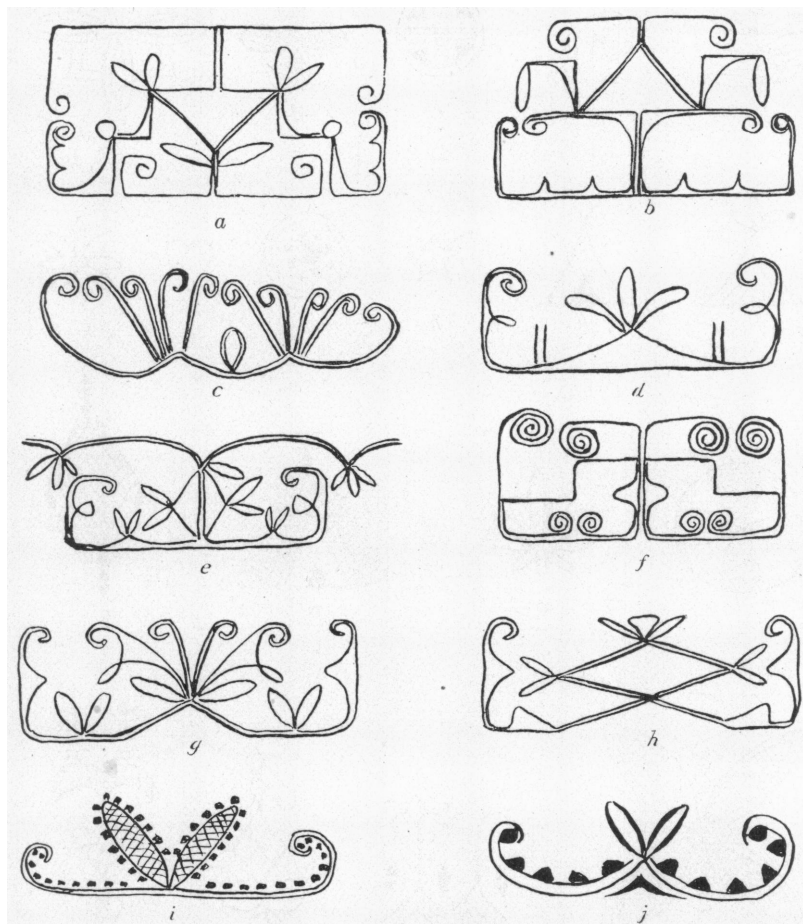


Fig. 4. Penobscot Curve Designs sketched from Specimens. *a-c, f*, Beaded figures from red cloth cap; *d-e*, Beaded figures from red cloth laps for coat; *g-h*, Beaded figures from cape-collar, originally coat borders; *i-j*, Carved figures from powder horn.





Fig. 5. Penobscot Design Ornament Units sketched from Specimens. *d, e, p*, Figures carved on wood and etched on bark representing conventional "willow leaves"; *c, i, l*, Figures carved on bone gaming dice, "suns"; *a, b, m*, Figures carved on wooden utensils, "trees"; *f, g, n, o*, Figures carved on basket gauges, "wigwams"; *h, k*, Figures carved on basket gauges, "stars"; *q-s*, Conventional ornaments carved on basket gauges.

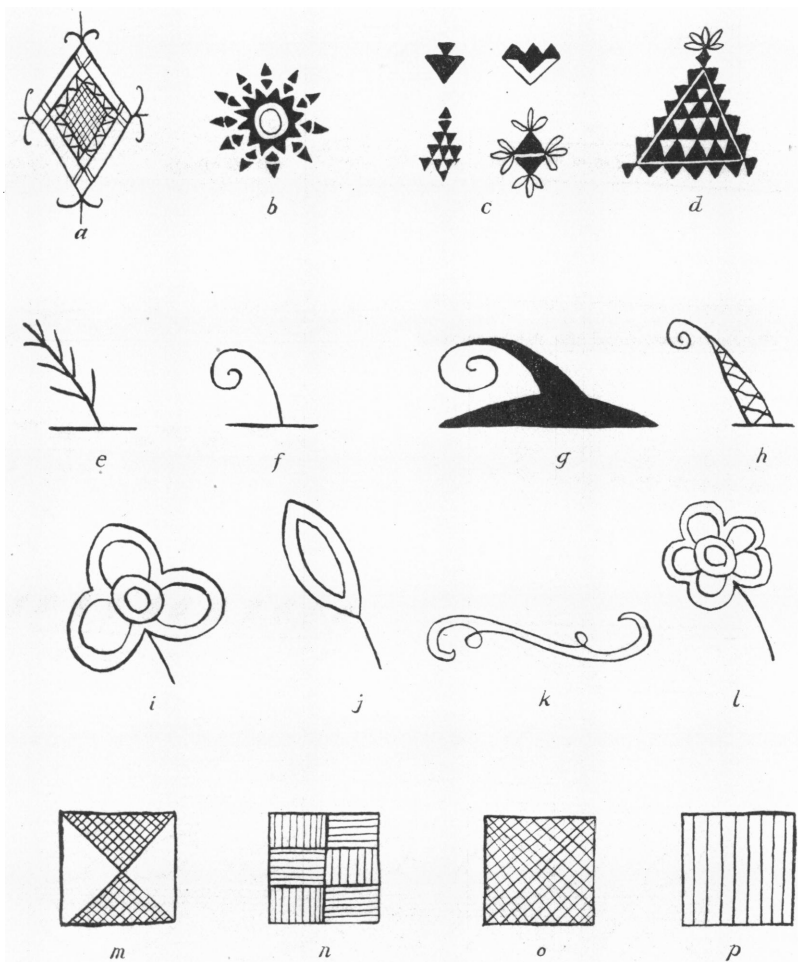


Fig. 6. Penobscot Design Units sketched from Specimens. *a, d*, Figures etched on birchbark and carved on wood, "wigwams"; *b*, Carved surface figure, "star"; *c*, Conventional carved ornament units; *e-h*, Figures etched on birchbark baskets, "trees"; *i-l*, Figures etched on birchbark and worked in beads, "flowers"; *m-p*, Surface techniques in wood carving.

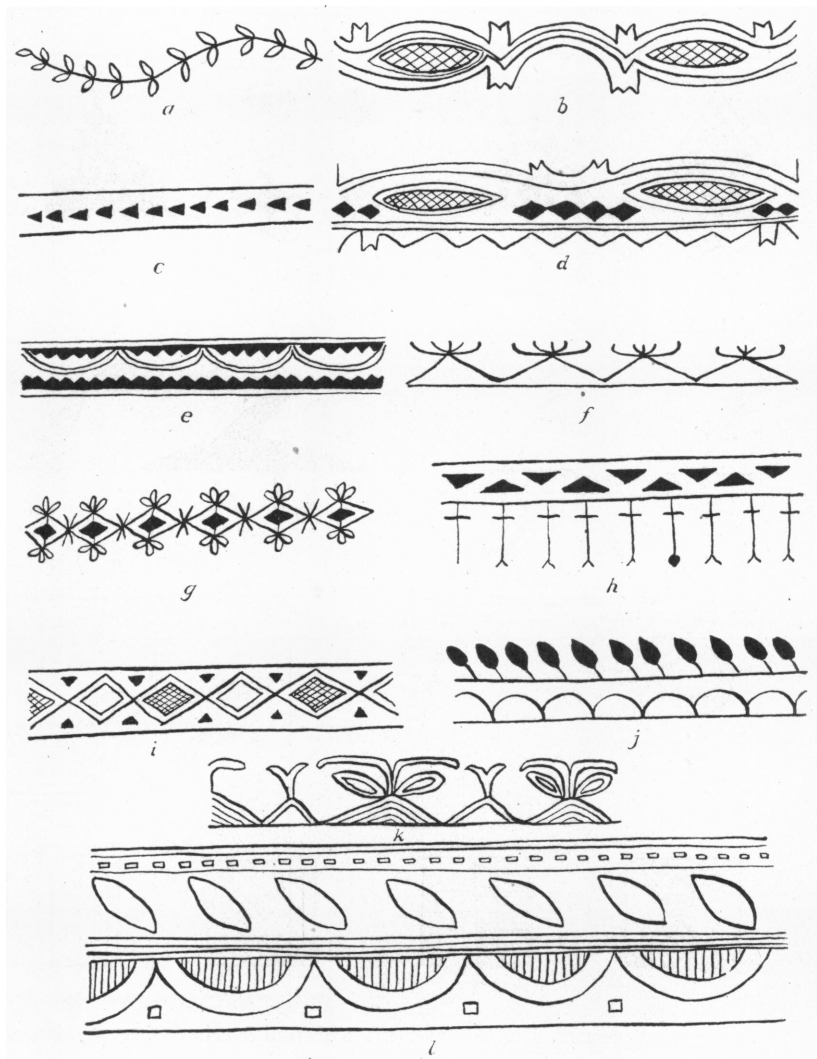


Fig. 7. Penobscot Linear Designs sketched from Specimens. *a, c, f, g, i*, Linear figures carved on basket gauges; *b, d*, Open carved work from cradle-board (Fig. 17); *h*, Carved figure from wooden box; *j, k, l*, Etched figures from birchbark baskets.

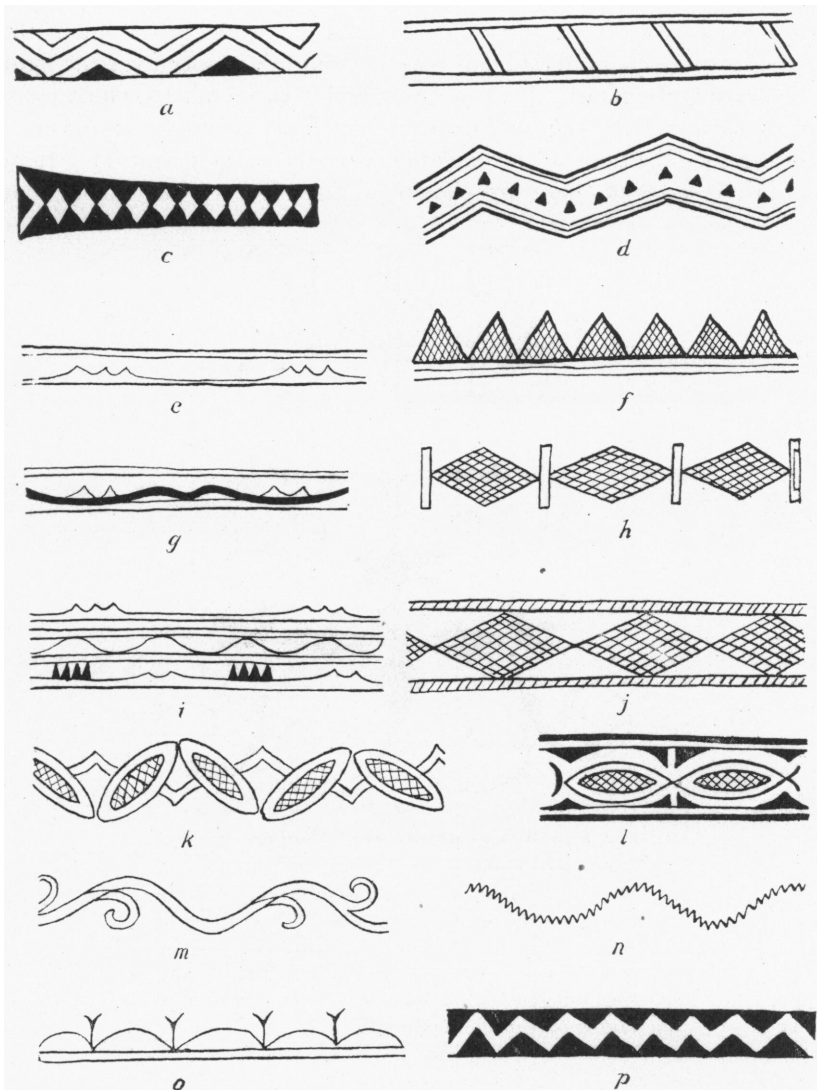


Fig. 8. Penobscot Linear Designs sketched from Specimens. *a, b, c, f, h, j, o, p*, Carved figures from basket gauges and powder horn; *d, k, l*, Carved figures from cradleboard (Fig. 17); *e, g, i*, Lines and points in ribbon work on garments; *m, n*, Etched figures from birchbark baskets.

form exclusively characteristic of the area. Nothing in the life of these tribes is more characteristic, as may be seen in a glance over the figures illustrating my paper. These are the double-curve figures which consist of two symmetrical opposed incurves which are themselves subject to a host of modifications in the enclosed space or on the periphery. Representative series of these are shown in Figs. 1-4. The realistic floral

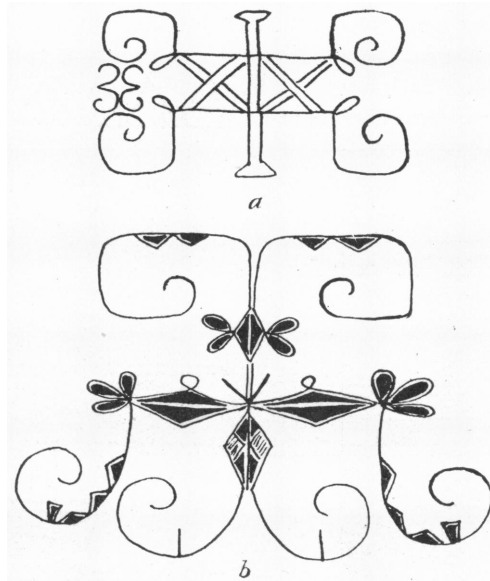


Fig. 9. Double-Curve Designs from a Penobscot Collar-Cape shown in Fig. 25. *a*, Denoting union of tribes assembled for a ceremony; *b*, Denoting central place of mourning in ceremony over a dead chief, the installation of the new chief, the tribes of the Wabanaki group and their officers, from a collar-cape worn by the chief taking part in the ceremony.

figures of Penobscot art are clearly of modern origin, since they occur almost solely on objects made within the last fifty years. The colors and forms are those general to the northern and eastern parts of the continent.

Then there are the diamond-triangle categories, also greatly varied, but recognizably distinct in whatever form they appear, either as carved surface decorations or as borders. Related to them are the ellipse figures



combined with the former, or used as ornamental fillers on larger areas decorated with the double-curve figures. And lastly, come a few non-descript motives, most of which are, however, consistent with either of the foregoing series, at least in their composition. To show the range of ornamental figures in Penobscot art objectively, the different classes are grouped separately in the accompanying illustrations. (Figs. 5 to 9).

As has been remarked, the designs of the whole northeastern region are practically homologous; yet, until each tribe has been investigated independently it is not safe to assume that the same concepts are applied to them in each case. In form they vary dimensionally. A brief field inquiry into Malecite and Micmac art suggests this.

#### DECORATIVE TECHNIQUES

Before discussing the significance of design, the question of technique in the northeast needs some attention. Decorative techniques naturally follow certain lines determined more or less by the object to be decorated

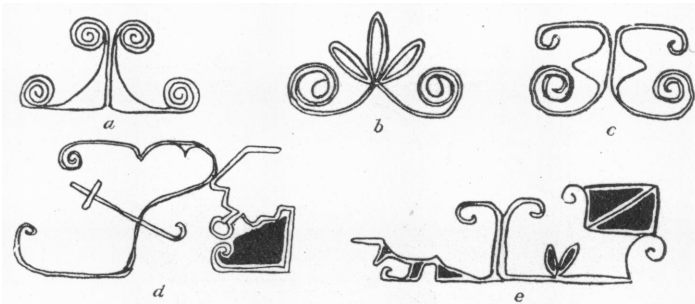


Fig. 10. Penobscot Curve Designs sketched from Specimens.  
a-c, Beaded figures from red cloth; d-e, Beaded figures from red cloth lapels.

and by the materials available. The typical double-curve designs, for instance, occur mostly upon garments and personal paraphernalia, formerly of caribou and mooseskin, and later of deerskin, embroidered with moose hair or perhaps even porcupine quills, and subsequently of red or black broadcloth ornamented with white beadwork and ribbon appliqué. The realistic flower figures, seemingly of later development, also predominate upon the cloth articles of later manufacture. Specifically, they embrace the following: headdress bands, pointed women's caps, men's cape-collars, coats, leggings, wristbands, hair ornaments, armbands, belts, bandoliers, pouches, skirts, and moccasins. An inter-

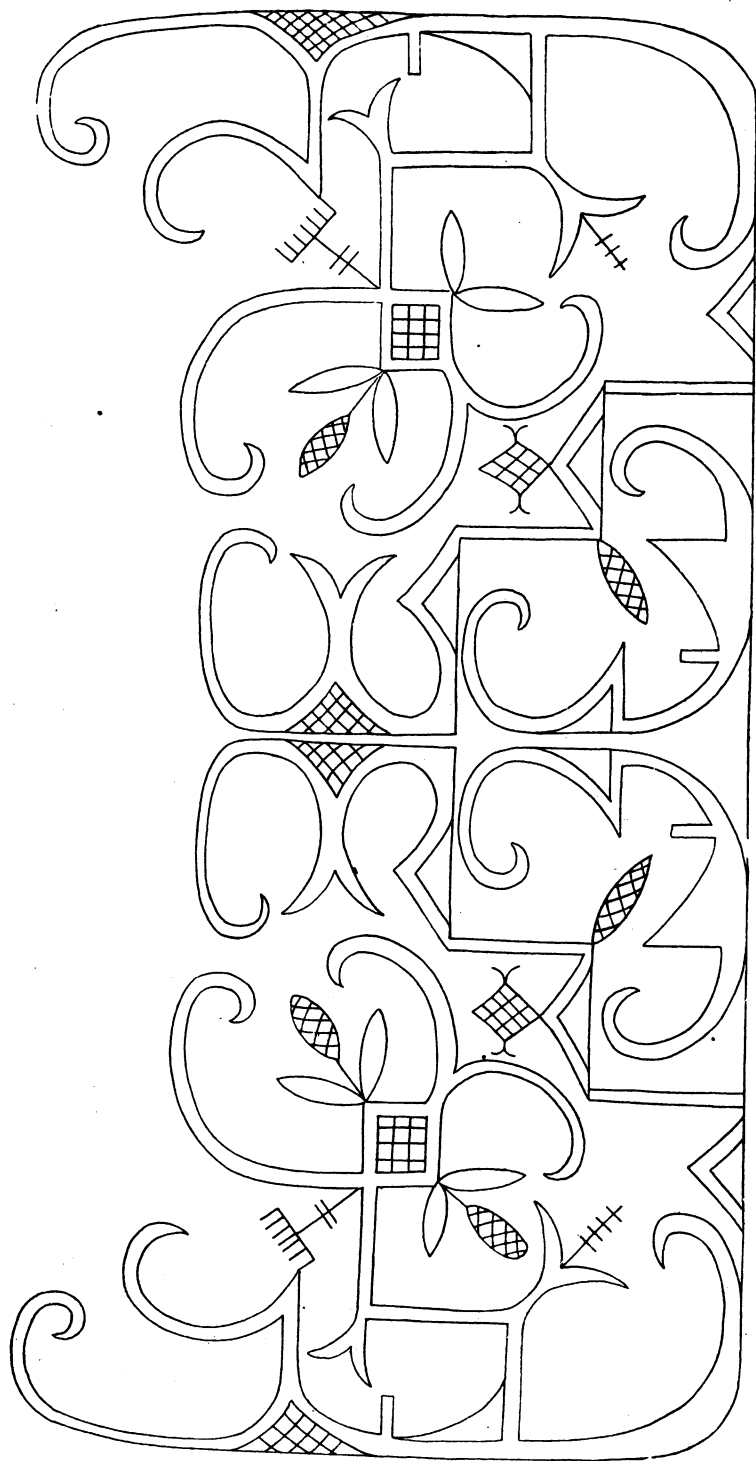


Fig. 11. Penobscot Curve Design with Highly Elaborated Interior Ornaments, Carved on Wooden Cradleboard (Fig. 7).

esting substitution for quilled or moose hair border designs is to be found in the ribbon appliqué. In this art device geometric ornamentations are as common as in other parts of eastern North America.

That the Wabanaki tribes by the end of the eighteenth century had largely passed out of the era of leather clothing into that of cloth is shown by the predominance of cloth garments in Penobscot collections. But the original design patterns and the old fields of ornamentation, coat collars, lapels, cuffs and facings, leggings, and the like, were carried over in the beadwork and ribbon techniques which then replaced those previously employed.

*Incising and Carving.* In carvings on wood and extensively in incising on birchbark, the double-curve is found together with geometrical figures, triangles, diamonds, and composites. In addition, realistic animal likenesses appear frequently in incisings on bark. In correspondence with the observation noted, it may be remarked that realistic flower designs are usually lacking in this field of ornamentation. Birchbark canoes, bark vessels, baskets, dishes, and other objects of this highly adaptable material are richly ornamented with incised double-curves. Wooden implements in general, such as basket splint-cutters or gauges, knife handles, cradleboards, and boxes have similar decorations. In a similar category fall powder horns, horn dance-rattles, and articles of soft stone, such as pipes. On all these the double-curves and curved and geometrical motives (see Figs. 12 to 20) occur in profusion, bearing witness to a fully evolved aesthetic impulse in the area. The double-curve figures take arbitrary positions, side by side, top to top, bottom to bottom, single or in groups, as can be seen in the illustrations (Figs. 12, 13, 20, 22-30, 35-41).

*Birchbark Incising.* Birchbark incisings were highly characteristic of former Penobscot art. They are made by heating bark that has been peeled in winter-time and then wetting it until it has softened. Then it can be readily scraped down to the lighter under layer with a knife edge. A rich dark red color is given to the bark by applying a hot rag saturated with a dye made by boiling alder bark. The designs appear in the lighter color of the under bark while the dark outer bark serves as the background. In the bark etchings of the Montagnais and the other peoples above the St. Lawrence the opposite process is found. Here all the

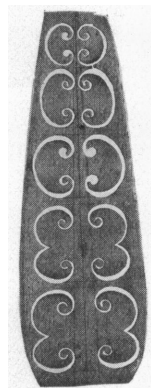


Fig 12. Birchbark Stencil for decorating Canoe Paddle, Malecite. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

dark part is scraped away, leaving the design in the dark substance and the background light. Greasing when all is done greatly improves the appearance of the work. The double curves appear to great advantage

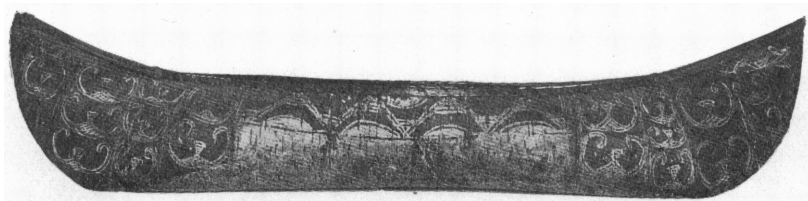


Fig. 13. Model of Birchbark Canoe with Curve Decorations, Penobscot. Courtesy of Peabody Museum, Salem.



Fig. 14. Penobscot Birchbark Baskets and Wooden Box (lower row, left hand figure) decorated with Curve and Angular Designs.

on the dark surface (Figs. 13, 14, 15). Besides the curve and angle figures, representations of moons, crescents, wigwams, trees, and game animals are numerous on some specimens.

*Wood Carving.* In wood carving, as well as in incising on bark, stone, or bone, the operator, using a sharp pointed knife, starts with the



Fig. 15 (50-7374). Sides and Bottom of a Penobscot Birchbark Kettle.

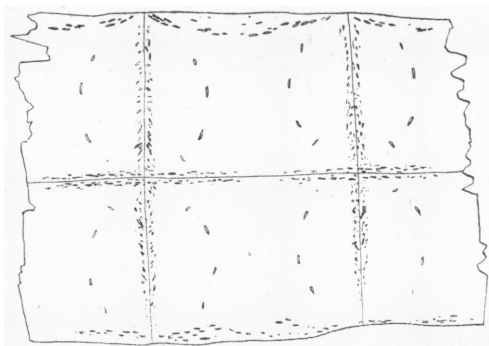


Fig. 16. Bitten Birchbark Pattern Suggestion, produced by folding a Thin Sheet of Birchbark and indenting it with Teeth. When the layer is opened symmetrical curved figures are shown. The Penobscot now only remember this as a form of amusement for children. (See page 77.)



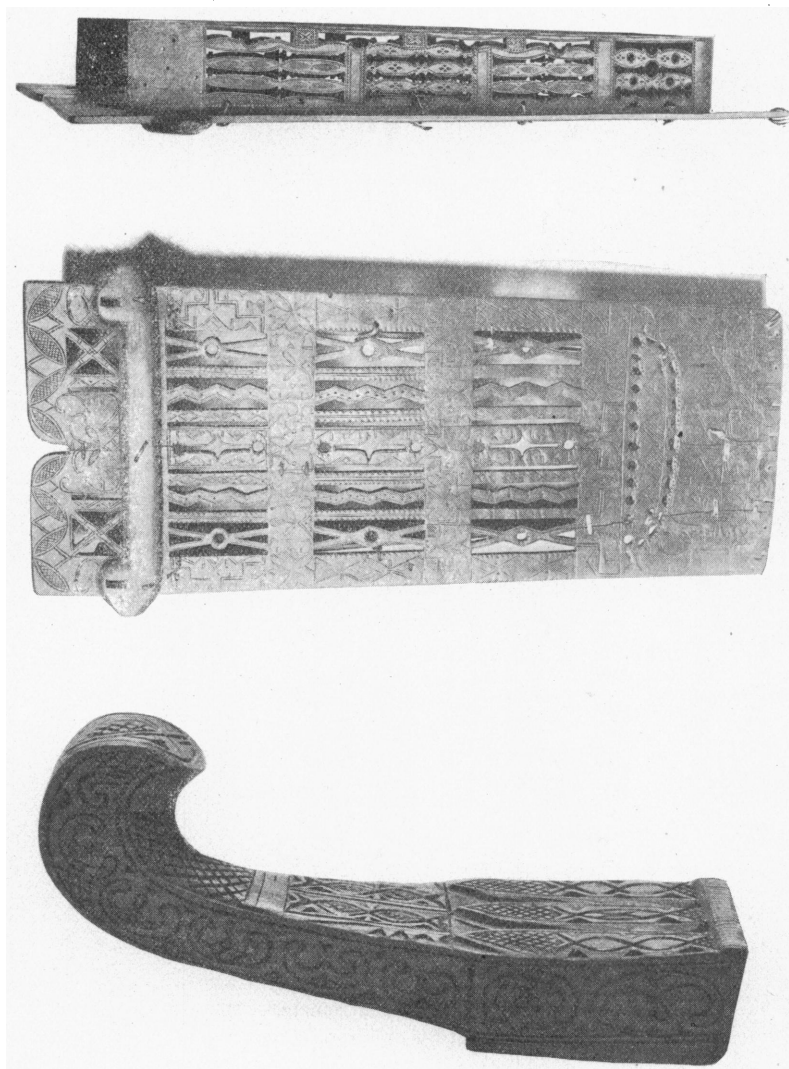


Fig. 17. Elaborately Carved Basket Gauge and Cradleboard, Penobscot. The designs on the cradleboard carved in openwork zigzags, triangles, and double-curve figures are protective in function and also denote the father's affection for the child to insure its health and long life. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.



Fig. 18. Penobscot Carved Basket Splint Cutters or Gauges, ornamented with Curve Designs, Triangles, Zigzags, Diamonds, and Open-Work.\* The double hearts in the next to the last specimen in the lower row represent "joy and sadness." Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

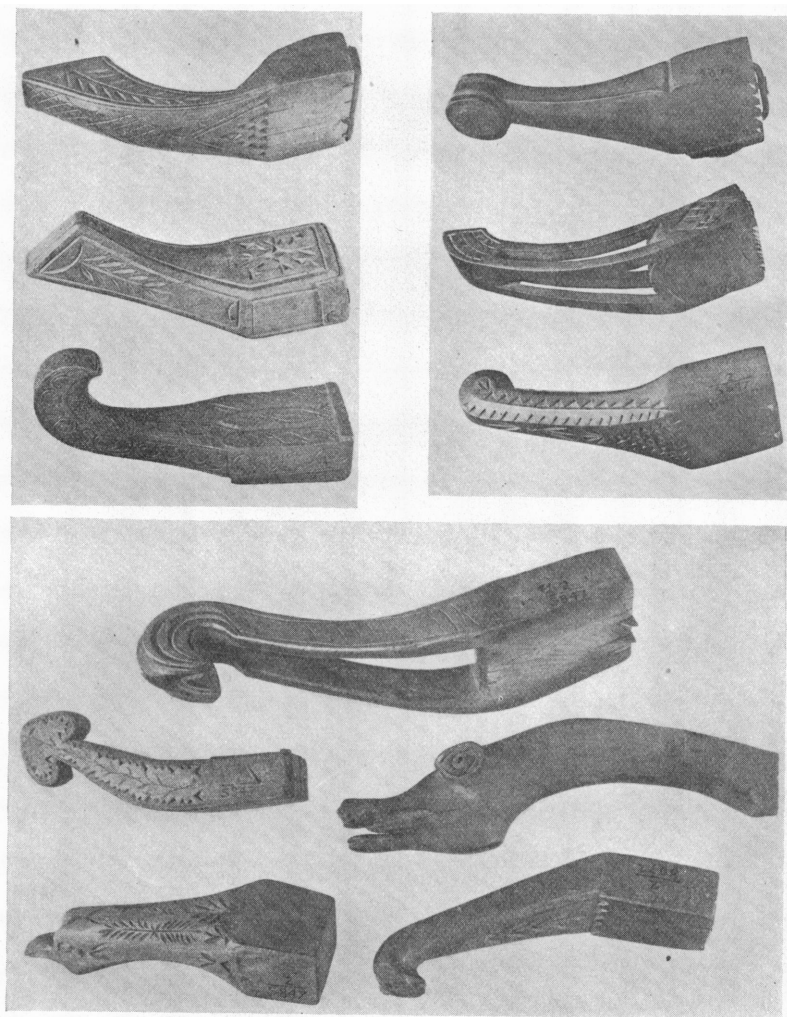


Fig. 19. Penobscot Carved Basket-Splint Cutters or Gauges ornamented with Animal Heads, (otter, eagle, and mythical beast) Curved Floral and Triangle Patterns. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

border, or perhaps with a central design piece. Then he covers the rest of the space with designs, in series, or with separate units. Examples are shown in Figs. 17, 18, 19. According entirely to fancy (which, by

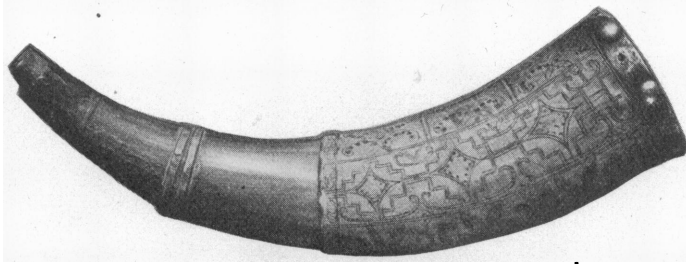


Fig. 20 (50.1-7612). Penobscot Powder Horn with Curve Designs.

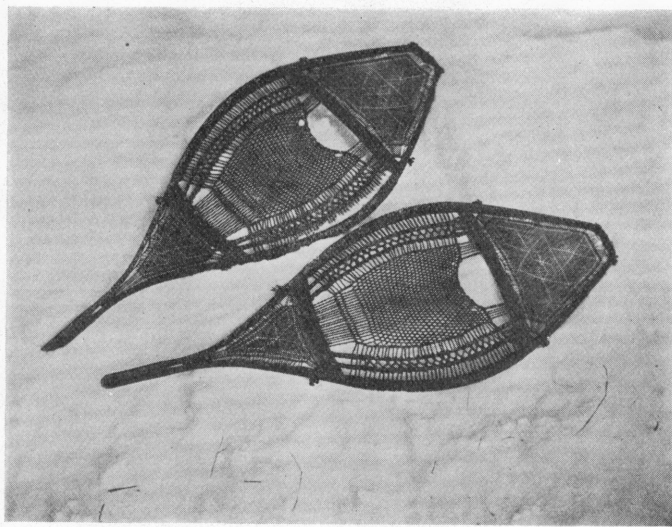


Fig. 21. Penobscot Snowshoes of an Old and Obsolete Type with Protective Openwork Designs at the Toe and Heel. The square-end type has not been made in this region for some generations. It corresponds with the type found originally north of the upper St. Lawrence. The specimens are unique in their technical workmanship.

contrast, the Montagnais would explain as prompted by his "soul-spirit"), the workman modifies the ornaments in the enclosed space in the double curves until he is satisfied. In consequence of much freedom of taste the modifications of the elementary principles are numerous, yet many are

repeated by different artists, showing that there is a tendency, through the restrictions of imitation, to develop a set of designs which have become stylistic within the tribe. The Penobscot figures, for instance,



Fig. 22. Deerskin Tobacco Pouch Decorated with Curve Designs in Moose Hair Embroidery in White and Red, Malecite. Tobacco is regarded by the Malecite as a strong medicine whose effect is augmented by the plant representations. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

can, after some acquaintance, be distinguished generally from those in Micmac ornamentation. The best we can now do is to assemble them as illustrating the Penobscot tradition in art, and comment on the ideas associated with them in the minds of their makers and others.



*Moose Hair Embroidery.* Historically, the moose hair embroidery technique has been extinct with the Penobscot for more than a generation. We have only a few old specimens from which to judge; yet, the technique is similar in all respects to that of the Huron and Malecite, where it still survives.<sup>1</sup> Only one authentic Penobscot specimen of moose hair embroidery is known, a pipestem. From three to five dyed moose hairs are sewed directly to the buckskin, with the whip-stitch, forming outlines of floral designs. The figures, according to Alice Swanson represent vines, balsam-fir trees, and stumps, and the zigzag edgings are identical with those of the Huron of Lorette. The Penobscot workmanship is, however, a little finer and more compact and the designs somewhat smaller. The Malecite bag (Fig. 22) illustrates the technique among the Wabanaki:

*Porcupine Quill Embroidery.* Embroidery with porcupine quills was not extensively practised by the Penobscot, from all that can now be learned. The moose hair technique apparently replaced it as a form of ornamentation. Pipestems were, however, commonly decorated with a quill wrapping in varied colors. In a pipe in the collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, each quill encircles the stem once, the turned ends abutting one another in the center of the under side. The quills had their barbed points trimmed off before being used and were kept in bundles. When needed, they were wet in the mouth and flattened by being drawn between the thumb and a flat round-edged piece of moose bone. A sort of false embroidery is produced on the upper side by interlaying quills perpendicularly to the wrapping. This is a device common in America, especially in the northern regions, occurring on the spruce root wrapped borders of bark vessels. The Penobscot technique based upon this specimen has been described in detail and discussed in relation to others by Orchard.<sup>2</sup>

Bark vessels, according to old Penobscot informants, are said to have been ornamented with quill mosaics like those still made by the Micmac and Ojibway. No specimens, however, have come to light from the Penobscot. We learn that, in the process, holes were made in the bark with an awl and the ends of the quills pressed into them. By placing the quills close together solid areas were covered with designs. Stars, animal heads, and the like, are said to have been pictured in quillwork.

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<sup>1</sup>The author has previously discussed this art in "Huron Moose Hair Embroidery" (*American Anthropologist*, N.S. vol. 13, pp. 1-14, 1911.)

<sup>2</sup>Orchard, William C., "The Technique of Porcupine-quill Decoration among the North American Indians." (*Contributions from the Museum of the American Indian*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1916.)

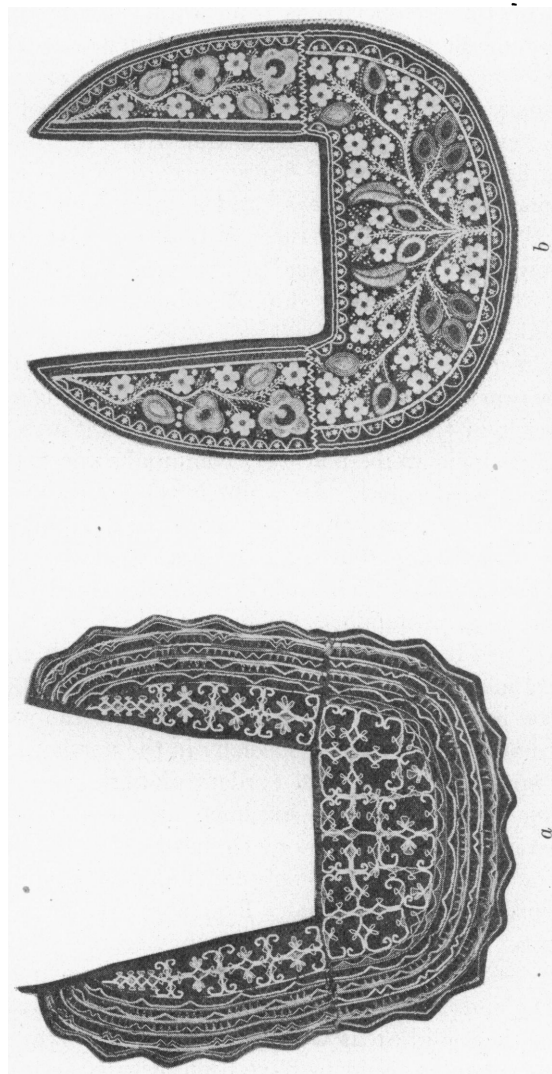


Fig. 23. Collar-Capes of Cloth worn by Penobscot Chiefs. *a*, Of red cloth, with beaded curve designs symbolizing the tribe, its members, and officials; *b*, With protective realistic floral designs, of a more modern period of art than the curve patterns. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

*Ribbon Appliqué and Painted Decoration.* Soon after the European contact, ribbon appliqué developed into a very popular form of decoration in the northeast, as well as in the central regions. Whether its precursor was porcupine quill embroidery or painted figures would be difficult to determine at this time, though the evidence is strong in favor of the painted design origin. That painted decoration did find a place

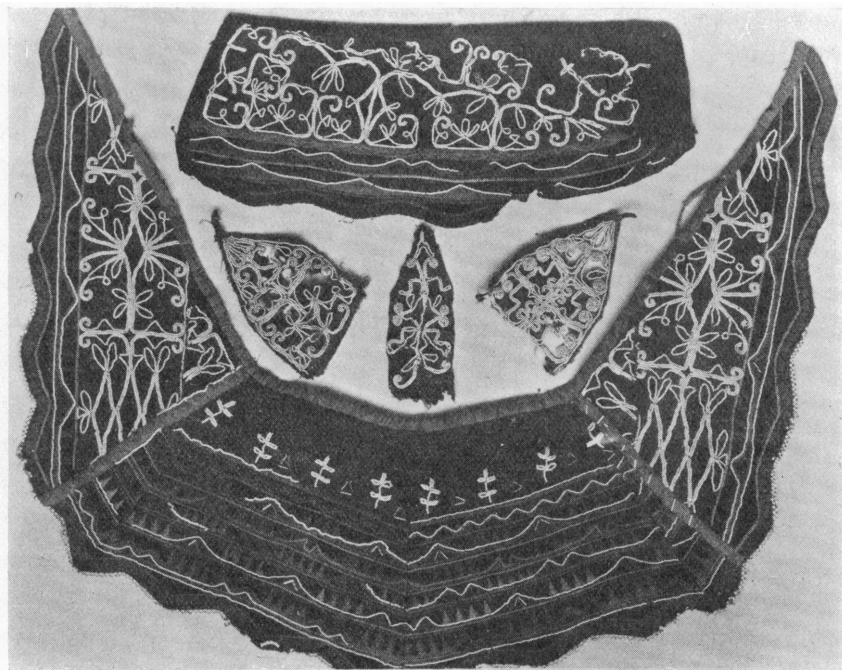


Fig. 24. Penobscot Collar-Cape of Red and Black Cloth with White Line Beadwork and Ribbon Appliqué. Upper Center, Portion of Coat Lapel of Red Cloth and White Beadwork. Lower pieces, Portions of Red Cloth Cap with White Line Beadwork.

in Penobscot art is shown by the existence of one actual specimen. The Penobscot painted mooseskin coat shown in Fig. 34a has a zigzag design in red on the facings and hem in a form almost identical with that of the Naskapi. While the illustration does not show the garment to best advantage, it is sufficiently detailed to reveal the character of the painted border and the manner of its application. This garment was the property of Frank Loring, a prominent Penobscot Indian and was made

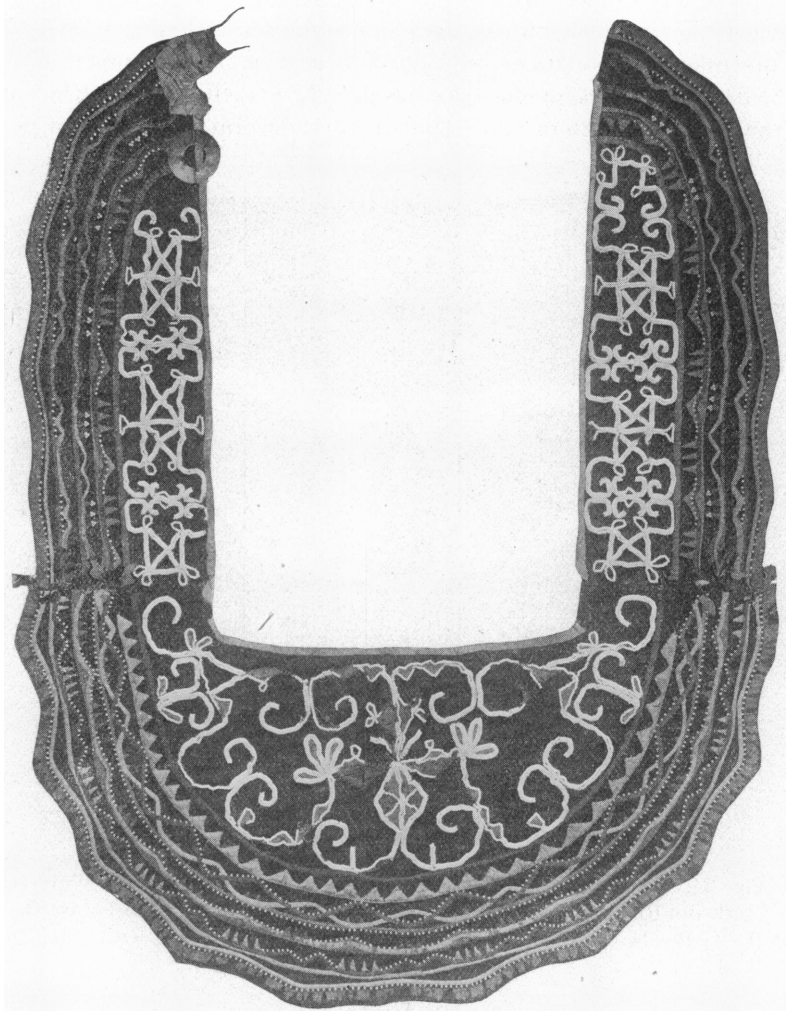


Fig. 25. Penobscot Chief's Collar-Cape of Red Cloth and White Béad work and Ribbon Appliqué with Place and Mourning Symbolism, see figure 10 for detail. Courtesy of National Museum of Canada.

some forty years ago. The coat is a most interesting object to the student of distribution problems. Furnishing a link in a lost series, it definitely establishes a culture connection in antiquity between the Penobscot and the tribes of Labrador, adding to the numerous traits that bespeak either an old Algonkian property in the north or the spread



Fig. 26. Saul Neptune, A Penobscot Chief of the Last Century wearing Beaded Cloth Collar-Cape with Wampum Collar and Breast Piece. The costume is that of the head chief of the tribe in full council-ceremonial dress.

of later practices from the Labrador Peninsula to the Wabanaki area, after the location of these people in their home south of the St. Lawrence.

Incidentally it is worth noting that the Penobscot are regarded among the adjacent tribes as excellent wood carvers. Their work manifests care and skill, the intrinsic merit of their designs and their technique apparently entitling them to rank among the best native wood carvers in the north. Compared with the adjacent tribes the Penobscot are

quite profuse in artistic decorations. It is indeed rather unusual to find tools and other wooden objects among the Penobscot which have not some ornamentation, either purely aesthetic or combined with utility in the form of cross-hatching or series of triangles which serve to make the hand-hold firmer.

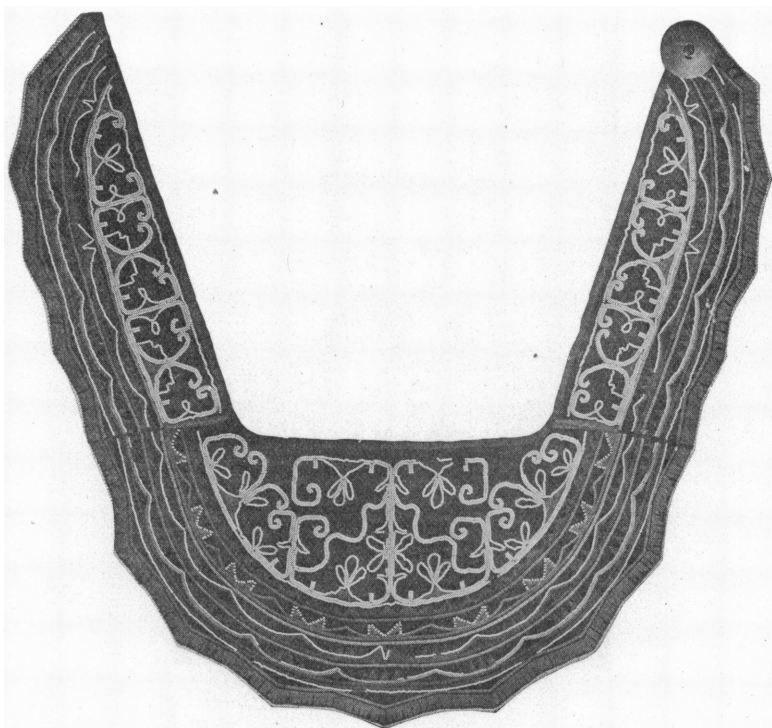


Fig. 27. Chief's Collar-Cape of Red Cloth with Symbolical Figures in White Beadwork and Ribbon Appliqué, Malecite. Courtesy of National Museum of Canada.

For the sake of those who may not be acquainted with conditions among the eastern Indians, it might be well to remark here that a change has taken place in the artistic life of these tribes. Whereas, prior to a period dating back only some thirty years, the aesthetic impulses of these Indians expressed themselves in the production of beautiful bead and ribbon work designs. Now since there is hardly any beadwork done in the village, they find artistic expression in the construction and designing of splint and sweetgrass baskets. But in the latter case the impulse

is largely pecuniary—their production has become an industry. No longer do the handsome products of the natural imagination and patient, skilful fingers remain in the home to beautify the environment in dress furnishings, or personal articles. They are exported in carloads for the souvenir trade.

The subject of design interpretation and design naming will now be considered.

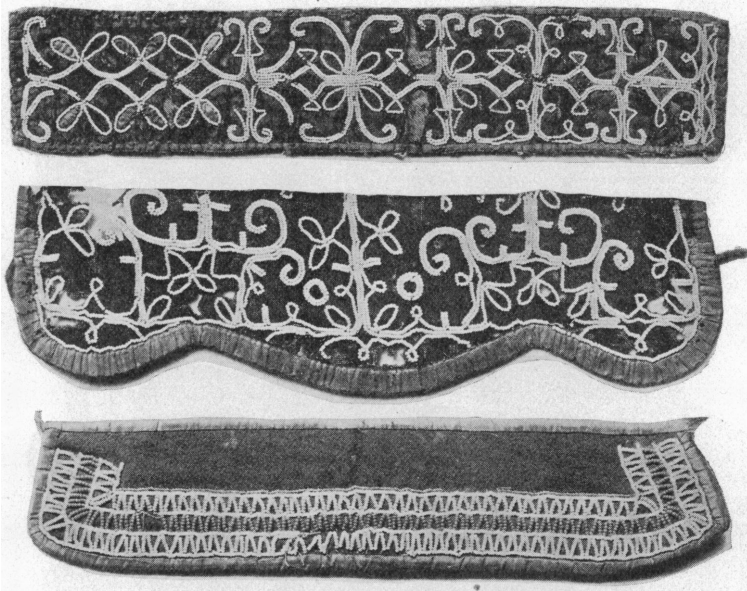


Fig. 28. Penobscot Cloth Ornaments with Curve and Zigzag Designs symbolizing Medicinal Plants. *a*, Woman's hair ornament; *b*, *c*, Cuffs. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

#### DESIGN INTERPRETATION

The native concept of idea-symbolism as an association of the curve patterns comes out in the Penobscot term *elawikhazik* applied to them which means "writings, markings." The stem *wik'*, occurs in the designation for "book, letter," (*wikhigan*). More specifically a curve pattern may be denoted as *amndlwe'te*, "curve," or *beswdsawesk' w*, "flower."

A realistic plant symbolism appears to have once been the ruling motive associated with the double-curve designs. Geographical and landscape representations, however, are not lacking among them, in



Fig. 29. Chief's Embroidered Black Cloth Coat, with Symbolic Curve Designs in White Beads and Ribbons, Miemac (?). Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.



combinations with the plant and tree forms. The interpretations, however, as may be imagined from the complexity and somewhat random nature of the curve interiors, are by no means rigid or even general. Each artist, after starting the decorations with the conventional double curves, fell back upon his own ingenuity in filling the space with what looked to him like a specific plant or what seemed to him like some idea. Aesthetic promptings seem not to have been overlooked. While no hint of such an attitude can be reported from Penobscot sources, it may be remarked, for comparison, that the Montagnais and Naskapi would attribute design suggestion to dreams. As one Penobscot informant remarked, however, "the idea of a design comes into the mind by itself and if you do not make it, you lose it, and it never comes back again"—which seems comparable in an obscure sense with what is characteristic of the Labrador peoples.

In consequence of the individual play of fancy it is hard to get interpretations for designs except from those who have created them. Nevertheless, through all the freedom of style, a number of conventionalities are maintained which give a homogeneous tone to the designs and make them decidedly distinctive. Such, for example, are the cross-hatched ovals and triangles, the spreading curves, the hump in the middle of the curves with its central embellishments, the ornamentations midway, on opposite vertical sides, and those flanking the central elevation, and the peculiar little parallel lines so often seen in the two last-mentioned places. By thus assembling the common peculiarities which run through most of the designs in one tribe, we may hope to obtain a basis for a comparative study. The determination of any particular group of designs may, however, remain to be decided mainly by the eye, since the designs appear to vary as much in the same tribe as they do between tribes in proximity to one another.

As regards function, a significant and interesting feature characterizes the Penobscot designs; which, so far as the writer is aware, is unparalleled in other tribes outside of the northeastern area in general. The plant representations are, or were, before the decadence of native views, prophylactic fetishes, associated with the protective and curative properties of the medicinal herbs which are so important to these Indians in the treatment of disease. While it would be too presumptuous to assert, from present-day sources, that the designs were deliberately placed upon objects for the definite purpose of invoking magic protection, it seems clear, nevertheless, from all that has been learned, that originally this view prevailed. An interesting association in the name of "medicine"



**Fig. 30 (50.1-1446). Black Cloth Coat with White Beaded Curve and Ribbon Designs, Micmac.**



Fig. 31 *a-c* (50.1-7231, 50.1-7229, 50.1-7230). Men's Cloth Coats with Zigzag, Triangle, and Curve Designs in Ribbon and Beadwork, Malecite.

and "leaves" bears out the idea of relationship. "Medicine" is *nābi'zun* and leaf is *nibi's*. Leaf symbolism is present in the floral decorative figures. By carefully analyzing the information received from the older people the writer gradually became aware of the medicinal protective function underlying their art. Much of this value has, however, been lost to the tribe in the culture change which has swept over the last generation. The opportunity to record it was seized just in time.

The predominating aim in Penobscot art has, in recent times, been simply decorative—a situation seemingly true of symbolic representation in general. The efflorescence of the designs, their varied form, and numerical abundance on all possible articles indicate that the aesthetic decorative motive has come to eclipse the medicine-protective idea. The change has accompanied the increase in realistic floral portrayal which is characteristic of the more modern art in beadwork. The modern designs have developed into uniformity with those of the Iroquois, Ojibway, and others of the central group. The evidences, after some acquaintance with conditions in the field, seem to warrant the suggestion that, of the two ideas, one is the older; the exuberant aesthetic productions having grown out of an older symbolism expressed in simpler outlines. It seems evident that beadwork was, like its art predecessors, a magico-religious practice, the sense of which appears in the many Algonkian terms for beads. In its superlative form, the wampum bead stands for deep religious association.

A series of typical curve designs from all the accessible specimens in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History collected by Mr. G. A. Paul, Mr. W. C. Orchard and the writer, in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, the Peabody Museum, Salem Mass., the National Museum, of Canada, and others in the possession of the Indians themselves have been sketched. Figs. 1-11 show a number of double-curve designs for a few of which interpretations were obtainable. Yet, most unfortunately, the majority are unknown because their originators have long been dead. The general cumulative opinion expressed by the Indians now is that collectively they are ornamental effects varied according to fancy, many standing for "plants which are good as medicines."

Figs. 1 to 4 are mostly unexplained, Figs. 5d, e, p, and 1b has willow leaves, Figs. 1j, k, h, some herbs, Fig. 1r, a wigwam in the center in a valley between two forested hills with the sun overhead, with day and night on the left and right. This is an admirable example of the typical Algonkian pictograph. While most of the outlines remain



Fig. 32. Penobscot Chief in Cloth Coat, Leggings, and Hunter's Cap ornamented with Curve Designs. The cap has ears at the top and symbolizes the owl. It enables the hunter to approach the moose.

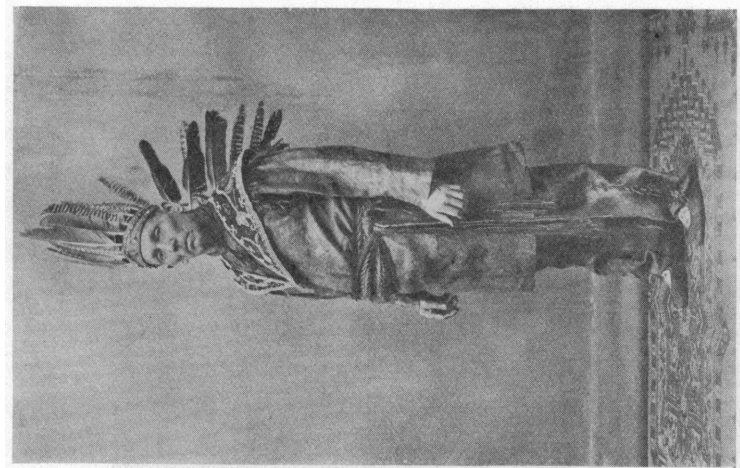


Fig. 33. Penobscot Chief (the same individual as shown in Fig. 32) in Moosleskin Coat and Leggings with Beaded Collar. The leather garments are of the older undecorated type.

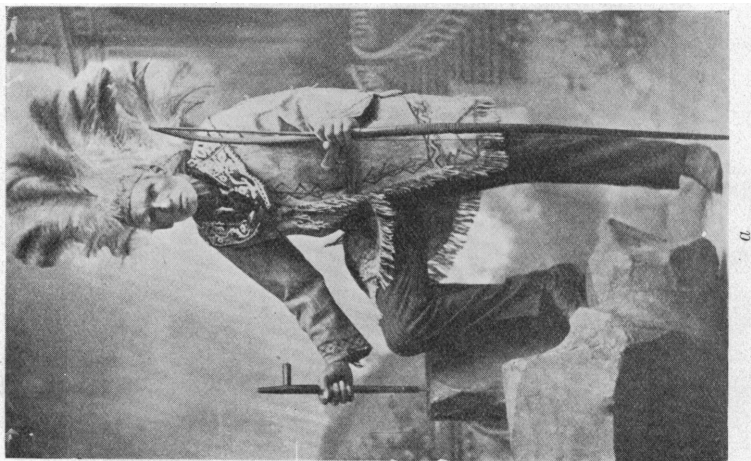


Fig. 34. Penobscot Chiefs showing the Use of Protective Floral Designs in Beadwork on Cloth Collar-Capes and Ornaments. At left, "Big Thunder" wearing old mooseskin coat, with painted design on facing cuffs and border. (Photo by A. F. Orr).

unexplained, Figs. 2e, f, g, h represent lycopodium (?), the rest on this plate being artistic complexes. In the next, (Figs. 3-4), none has been explained, though willow leaves and vine tendrils and wigwams and hills occur in them. In Fig. 11 is shown a single design by far the most complex and elaborate encountered in the double-curve series, though no interpretation was assigned to it.

The border and line designs (Figs. 7-8) are composed of the zigzag, ever present in the art of the eastern tribes, triangle, curve, and oval. They are interesting because, while having an appearance totally different from the preceding series, they are at bottom composed of the same elements. No particular representations are aimed at in them as a whole. The units have the usual leaf and blossom names.

The independent ornaments and design fillers (Figs. 5 and 6) convey more meaning. As will be seen from the list below them, celestial phenomena, stars and sun, willow leaves, trees, flowers and wigwams are numerous. Fortunately in this series, a number could be inquired into from the makers who had nothing else in view, they stated, than mere decoration. In looking over specimens quite a few figures in the collections, manifestly recently borrowed imitations, have been disregarded. All of the above, however, with a few possible exceptions, are considered old and native after a careful sifting out.

*Political Symbolism.* With the floral symbolism in mind as a fundamental concept not only in Penobscot art but established in the Labradorean region as well, we now come to consider a totally different aspect of symbolism associated with the rich and consistent curve forms. Newell Lion, the last representative of the older regime among the Penobscot, expounded a remarkable phase of symbolism. It developed that political conceptions were associated with the curvilinear patterns, in which the ovals and curves, instead of depicting leaves, blossoms, and stems, served as representations of political and social units, officers, and individuals. His information, when once comprehended, was of such importance in the history of native art development that his interpretation was tested by consulting with Sarah Saul, Cecile Barker, Clara Neptune, and some old women then living (1908-12), who, like himself, had witnessed the former ceremonies of inauguration and installation of chiefs following the procedure instituted by the Wabanaki confederacy on the political pattern of the Iroquois, with whom the Wabanaki tribes were, until about 1876, affiliated in a political league.

There remained, in consequence, little doubt but that a new and peculiar symbolism in ornamentation was developing over and around

the curve floral ornaments evoked by the growth of the Iroquoian political idea among the Wabanaki. This stage of development in art can hardly be thought of as antedating the completion of negotiatory relationships between the five Wabanaki divisions and the Iroquois (Mohawk of Caughnawaga) about the beginning of the eighteenth century. The writer has discussed the important feature of political life among the eastern Indians in a separate report.<sup>1</sup>

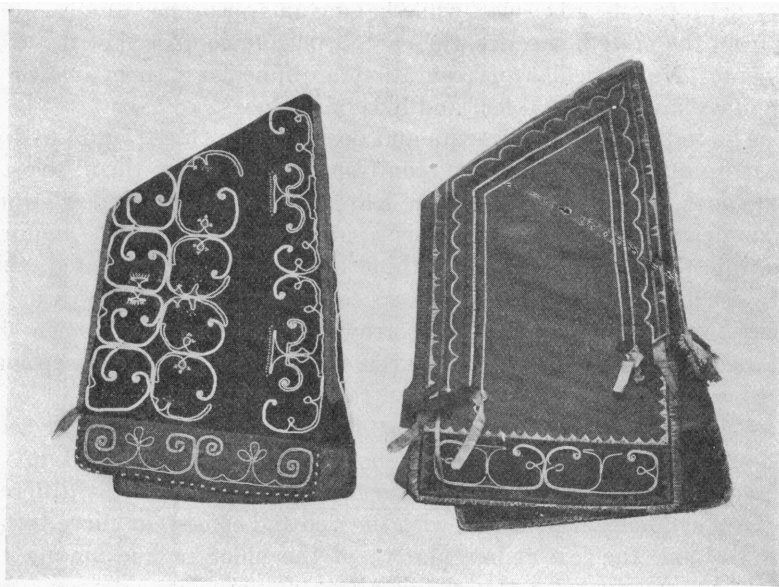


Fig. 35. Women's Cloth Caps (Black and Red) decorated with Curve Designs in White Beadwork and Ribbon Appliqué, Micmac. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

Unfortunately, not many authentic Penobscot specimens of the beaded cloth collars, which it seems chiefly exhibit the political design values, could be obtained for explanation. The several brought to hand were understood in respect to their general meaning by the informants. But, since these specimens were of unknown age and ownership, the much needed specific details of meaning and interpretation could not be given. If the names of the chiefs and tribal officers, who owned each

<sup>1</sup>Speck, Frank G., "The Eastern Algonkian Wabanaki Confederacy" (*American Anthropologist*, N.S., vol. 17, pp. 492-508, 1915).



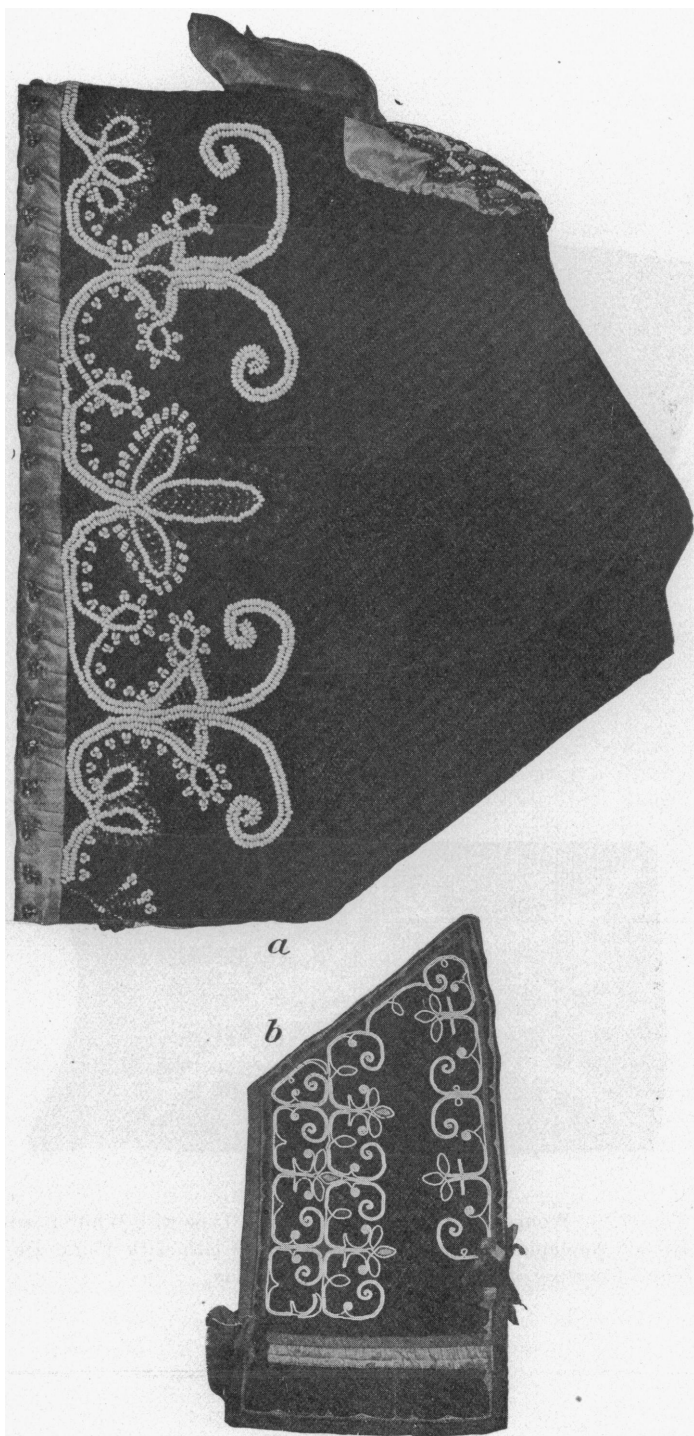


Fig. 36. Woman's Cloth Caps with Curve Designs in White Beadwork and Ribbon Appliqué, Micmac. Courtesy of National Museum of Canada.

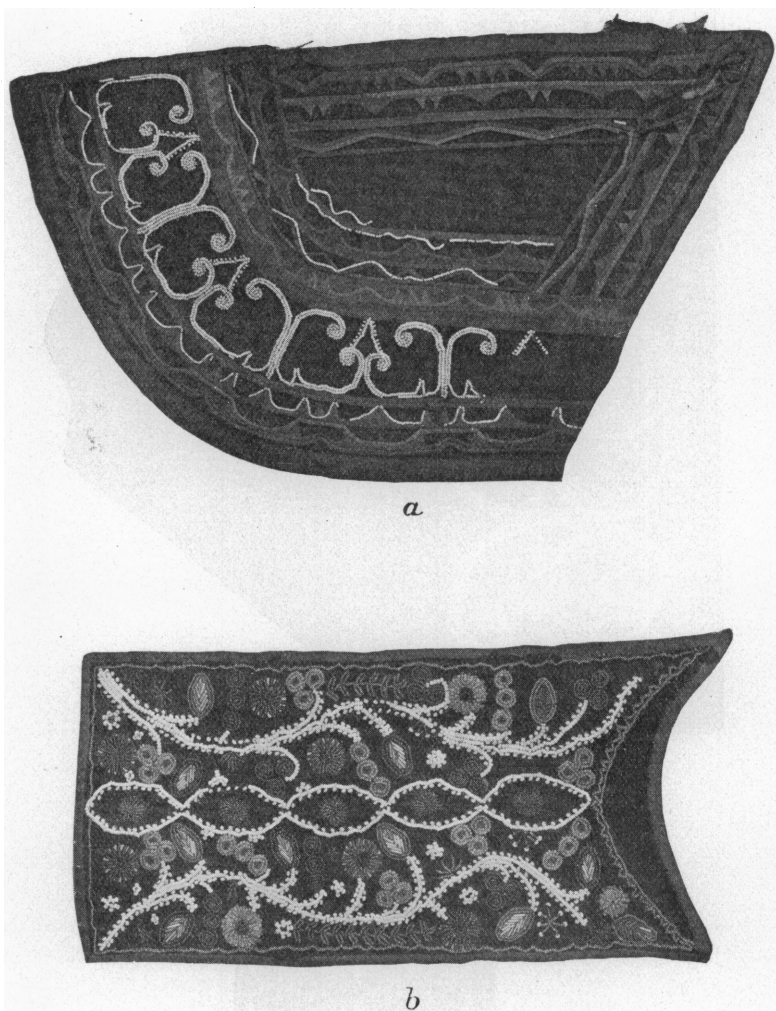


Fig. 37. *a*, Woman's Cloth Cap of Penobscot Type with White Beadwork and Ribbon Appliqué; *b*, Beaded Neckpiece on Cloth with Floral Designs, Malecite. Courtesy of National Museum of Canada.

of the specimens figured, could have been learned, this aspect of the design problem could have been worked out in detail. The results of our conferences then can only be presented in general terms. The author is of the opinion, however, that in these cases, as in many others, the understanding of particular conventional constructions in art required a considerable play of imagination.

Let us take the type case which was briefly discussed in an earlier study.<sup>1</sup>

This example of symbolism (Fig. 25, the design re-drawn in Fig. 9) represents that stage of the ceremony preceding the actual election, during which time the mourning is still observed for the deceased chief as the darkened spaces indicate. The cape itself may be divided into three areas, the outer area, with a purely decorative ribbon appliqué, the whole inner circumference, including the long ends, embroidered with a maze of scrolls and double-curves, and the lower central area in which may be seen double-curve enclosures, within which are a number of mirror ornaments and a diamond-shaped figure, the whole filled in between the lines of white beadwork with a dark ribbon interior. Among the New England Algonkians black served to designate death and mourning, a native feature of symbolism antedating European contact.

To particularize further let us examine this specimen (Fig. 25). The outline (Fig. 9b) is sketched roughly from the central area of this red cloth collar-cape, decorated with white line beadwork, worn formerly by chiefs during the ceremony of installation. In this one the diamond central figure is filled in solidly with black ribbon, representing the place of mourning vacated by the chief who has recently died, in fact the council house. The sweeping arms of the curves at the flanks symbolize the bonds which embrace the people of the tribe. At their ends the oval figures, likewise filled in with black ribbon, denote the lesser headmen, also in mourning. It might be recalled that these ovals in their floral capacity stand for leaves, generally those of the willow. The triangles appearing within the sweep of the curves are the "wigwams" of the tribe. The whole pattern-complex, in short, becomes a political landscape, so to speak. Again, Fig. 9a portrays the tribal ties of unity showing forth in the curves joined by the oblique bars. We cannot dismiss the impression that the general character of the ideas so symbolized is very closely in accord with the symbolism of Iroquois wampum belts, leaving little doubt of their

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<sup>1</sup>"The Double-Curve Motive in Northeastern Algonkian Art," *ibid.*, Fig. 5ab.

derivation, though the outline form of representation seems distinctive enough to the Penobscot, since the carriers are the usual floral curve motives. Newell Lion, who gave these interpretations, drew them from the most vivid recollections of his younger days when the installation ceremonies were carried on seriously, and by men to whom the political values borne on their regalia were of real importance.

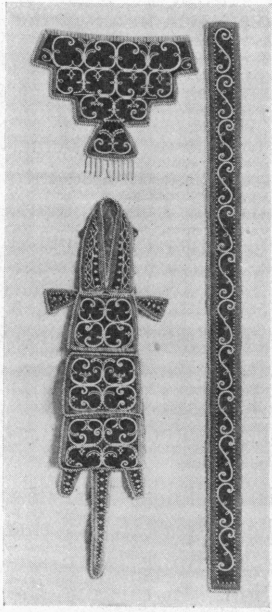


Fig. 38. Beaded Belt Strip, Ornament, and Tobacco Pouch of Red Cloth in Form of Otter, Miemac. Courtesy of Peabody Museum, Salem.

The tree symbol in decorative ornamentation of the Iroquois has been treated in an article by A. C. Parker.<sup>1</sup> It becomes clear that the curved designs in Iroquois art are prominent symbols of the confederacy of the Six Nations. This idea is paralleled very strikingly by the curved symbol among the Wabanaki. Both represent the unity of a political group. In the case of the Penobscot, we have the group represented as a single tribe, while in Iroquois, it represents the league of tribes. The whole field of design in Wabanaki and Iroquois has a basic uniformity in view of the prevalence of curves. (The curves turned outward in Iroquois are symbols of living chiefs; those turned inward represent dead chiefs.) The common outline curve patterns, it may be suggested, were probably originally plant representations among the Northern Algonkian in general, while the stimulus to symbolize them with political values was an Iroquois conception that spread to the Algonkian south of the St. Lawrence, after the foundation of the Wabanaki alliance about 1700. The development of this type of

thought among the Penobscot may be attributed to the eastward migration of Iroquois wampum ceremonials since the mnemonic, ideographic values of wampum and the ceremonial beaded designs on the cape-collars worn by chiefs at installation ceremonies are similar. It may be significant to note in this connection, that among the Labrador tribes, who reside beyond the sphere of Iroquois influence, the curve

<sup>1</sup>Parker, A. C., "Certain Iroquois Tree Myths and Symbols" (*American Anthropologist*, N.S., vol. 14, pp. 608-620, 1912.)

figures bear a generic floral pattern name, "flowers," often also "trees," whereas the Penobscot regard them chiefly as "writings," not forgetting, of course, that they are "flowers," as well.

Finally, this development may possibly turn out to be peculiar to the Penobscot. A most significant piece of testimony to show that the St. Francis Abnaki held similar ideas of symbolism with a political bearing is brought out in Abnaki specimens of white beadwork in curved designs on dark cloth in the McCord Museum, McGill University. They formed part of a chief's regalia worn, so the information states, upon the last occasion when the Abnaki and the Iroquois held a treaty, the designs in white on a black ground color symbolizing amity. Iroquois political pressure may not have been as deeply impressed upon the Malecite and Micmac to have caused the same results in symbolic development as far east as New Brunswick. Yet, this question is open to investigation and may still be answered. It will be necessary that confidence be developed with the Micmac chiefs in Cape Breton, where the ceremonies of the now long-dissolved Wabanaki confederacy are still loyally observed. It is incidentally becoming more and more apparent that the eastern Indians are notably disinclined to communicate information to the white man concerning their esoteric life.

We now come to one of the most interesting types of ornament, interesting in view of wide distribution and simple form,—to the zigzags and triangles. In Penobscot they bear the name *pətagwigan-si'z ak*, "little (round) wigwams." The purely descriptive terms *beka'gigak* and *kwəkwawikh azik* "straight markings or writings" are employed in designating the sharply angular ones from the straight parallel series. When appearing in wood carving, the figures are termed *ala'k<sup>w</sup> sigan*, "cutting, carving." This, however, does not refer to form.

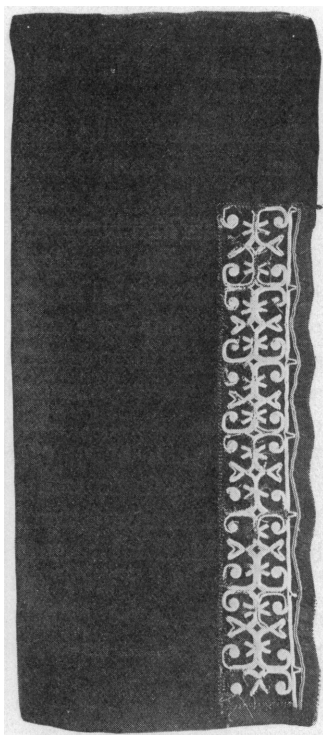


Fig. 39. Woman's Legging of Red Cloth with Curve Designs in White Beadwork, Penobscot. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

These zigzag and triangle figures are commonly used in beadwork in wampum work, ribbon appliqué and sometimes in wood carving. They serve as borders, though in many cases the whole decorated surface is covered with superimposed rows of the lines with toothed or zigzag edges, alternating with rows of straight lines.

So characteristic are these series and apparently so fundamental to all decoration in the Wabanaki area, that it might almost seem warrantable to rate them with the same importance, for this culture area, as the spurred lines and concentric circles have been regarded in Eskimo ornamentation. Fig. 8 presents examples of these decorated lines from specimens in various Penobscot collections. Similar series, differing only slightly in proportion, come to view in a survey of the art of the Montagnais and Naskapi. Among the latter as well, this type of ornamentation has a specific designation and may be regarded here as being just as fundamental as it is in the Wabanaki area. In view of its occurrence in similar form on both sides of the St. Lawrence, I feel that we should regard these ornament motives as of a very old Algonkian origin, antedating the separation of the northeastern divisions in their several migrations eastward. They have likewise survived tenaciously in Central Algonkian art, being executed in quillwork, bead, and ribbon-work throughout this as well as in Iroquois and Delaware decoration. In Penobscot interpretation there seems to be no profound or fixed symbolism. Most informants refer to them as "wigwams", others as, "points" and "zigzags", as has been noted in the native names given above. They are evidently so basic to decoration in this region that they pass for face value as devices that are ornamental rather than symbolical in purpose.

The political value of the triangle is strongly indicated by its frequent use in the designing of wampum belts, where, with the squared cross, it stands as a symbol of the tribe. When appearing in series on wampum strips these emblems represent the "wigwams" of the tribes embraced in the Wabanaki confederacy. Several examples of wampum belt designs and their interpretation are shown in Fig. 44. These are taken from my previously published paper on the political life of the Wabanaki;<sup>1</sup> they are reproduced again to show how consistently the traditional patterns are employed in their many different capacities.

A comparison between the Iroquois and Wabanaki reaction to the representation of political ideas in decorative art, shows that the Iroquois,

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<sup>1</sup>Speck, F. G., "The Functions of Wampum among the Eastern Algonkian" (*Memoirs, American Anthropological Association*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1919).

notwithstanding a most progressive culture spirit in general, failed to seize upon the field afforded by design patterns for the portrayal of political symbols, whereas the Wabanaki peoples did so. This is interesting as an indication, perhaps, of a more deeply imaginative spirit possessed by the generally less civilized Algonkian.

The barred and cross-hatched areas (Fig. 5, 6, 7, 8), almost universal among Eskimo and Algonkian, for surface filling, stand out as highly in Penobscot art as does the zigzag. That these zigzag and cross-hatched designs also go back into prehistoric times in this region is shown by the finding of an incised stone blade in a grave at Ellsworth, Maine. The object, which is figured in one of Willoughby's reports<sup>1</sup> has a linear pattern quite similar to some in the Penobscot border series.

*Modern Floral Figures.* The actual flower figures have no definite interpretation, they are called simply flowers, buds, stems, or leaves, according to their shape (Fig. 6 i-l). Several specimens of this mode of ornamentation are shown in Figs. 23b, 34b, 37b, 42, 43. Color plays no particular symbolic part. Pure ornamentation seems to form the underlying motive in their production. A remarkable similitude underlies the beadwork flower designs of the Northern and Eastern Algonkian and Iroquois which, I am convinced, must have had an older prototype in at least some parts of the Algonkian area in moose hair or quilled designs. This is exemplified not only in Penobscot and Malecite art, where traces of the moose hair and quillwork flower figures survive despite their being superseded by beadwork, but also in the case of the Huron and Iroquois. We have, moreover, mention of the same in older literature, referring to the Narragansett. The idea that some forms of realistic floral designs were not native to certain of the eastern tribes, is possibly untenable, especially since most of the flower figures recur in the composition of the double-curve designs. Nothing could be more typical or indigenous. There is no doubt, however, but that the floral and leaf designs were greatly developed, after the period of European contact, when once the idea of separating them from the curved figures and using them as units had dawned.

*Realistic Figures.* Realistic animal figures are not uncommon in decorations, but they hardly contribute enough that is characteristic to deserve reproduction. An owl's figure, a deer or moose head, a bear, beaver, eagle or kingfisher and the like are favorite themes.

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<sup>1</sup>Willoughby, C. C., "Prehistoric Burial Places in Maine" (Peabody Museum, vol. 1, no. 6, pp. 1-52, 1898), Figs. 9, 12.

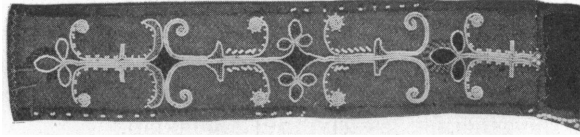


Fig. 40 (50.1-7462). Micmac Examples of Curve Designs showing Variation from Penobscot Types.

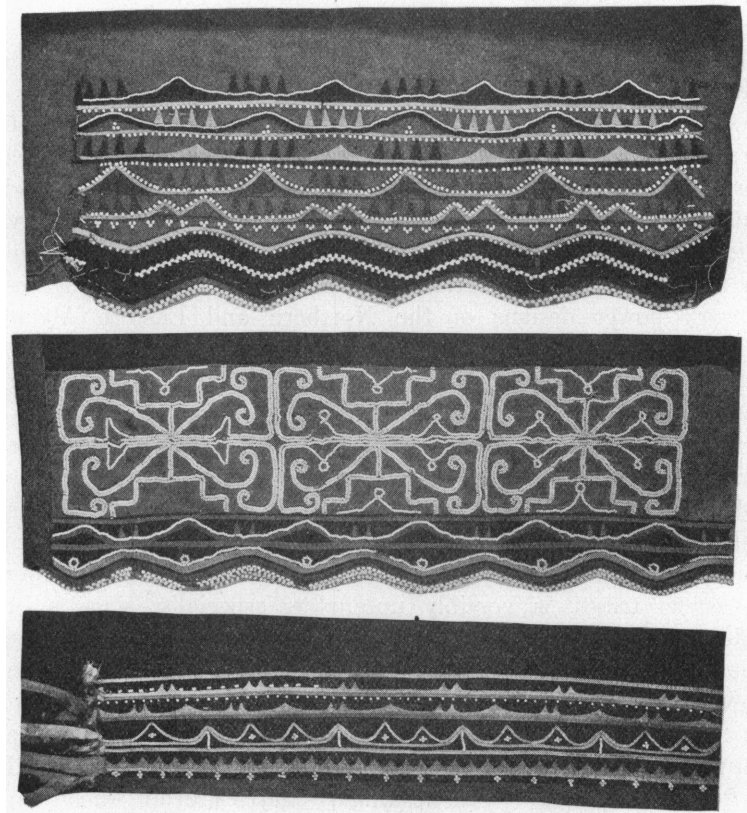


Fig. 41 (50.1-1440, 1439ab, 1445). Penobscot Legging Borders, White Beadwork on Red and Black Cloth, with Curve and Angle Figures.



The occurrence of pictographic representations (similar to the pictographs of the Central Algonkian and the Eskimo) is of noteworthy significance, though not a great many have come to light among the



Fig. 42 (50.2-1320). Mooseskin Coat with Beaded Floral Designs, and Curved Lines, Malecite-Penobscot.

Penobscot. Some of the elemental figures are found to correspond rather closely to those of the Ojibway; for instance, Figs. 5 and 6, the tree sun and stars and wigwam in the woods.

## CARVINGS IN THE ROUND

The life forms and figures carved in relief should not be entirely overlooked. They are abundant and fairly well executed by Penobscot artists. They are worked out on implement handles, pipes, clubs, and miscellaneous utilitarian or decorative objects. This field of indus-



Fig. 43. Penobscot Footwear of Various Types. The moccasins in the upper row are decorated with realistic floral designs. Originally these designs were conceived of as being protective in function and intended to react upon the plant world amidst which one walks; later, they became purely ornamental in nature. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

try has, however, been noticeably commercialized in the last thirty years. Then there are the various carving devices, chiefly designed for improving the grips of implement handles, without any attempt at realism, yet resulting in highly ornamental effects. Examples of carvings in the round, both realistic and formal, taken from different kinds of specimens in various museum collections, are shown in Figs. 18, 19.

## BITING PATTERNS IN BIRCHBARK

The theory of the technical origin of the floral design, in general, is an engaging one, at this stage of our survey. Here, as elsewhere among the Northeastern Algonkian, the practice of folding strips of thin transparent birchbark two or three times over, and then biting the layers between the teeth is quite prevalent. (Fig. 16.) This produces a series of indented impressions which appear very clearly when the strip of birchbark is spread out, and emerge as symmetrical outlines at once suggesting floral patterns. The dotted lines are recognized as leaves, blossoms, tendrils, and stems and closely resemble the double-curve figures—so much so, that if the latter have not been actually derived from them they may safely be regarded as historically related to them.

The Montagnais, Naskapi, Cree, and Ojibway women deliberately employ this as one method for deriving ideas for patterns in beadwork, silk embroidery, and birchbark etching. The Labrador bands attribute the results to the dominance of their "soul-spirits" in the production of the intricate figures. That a similar practice was involved in the growth of art ornamentation in the Wabanaki area can hardly be doubted. Here, therefore, is our most logical suggestion of the technical influence in the development of floral figures in the decorative art of the Algonkian of the northeast. Its fundamental value can be appreciated in view of the culture importance of birchbark in the original Algonkian ethnic setting. Spier, in reviewing the author's monograph on Northeastern art arrives at a similar theoretical conclusion by inferential reasoning.<sup>1</sup>

Among the Penobscot we lack the definite oral testimony and practice that would assist in tracing the curved floral figures to such patterns. The Penobscot consider the biting of birchbark figures as a game. The children and old people find amusement in it, calling it *alaleskwàdi.ge* "cutting bark with the teeth." Especially adept were some of the old women who had but two or three corresponding front teeth in their jaws. By twisting and twining the folded bark from side to side, while biting it, the most surprising outlines were produced. Not so long ago the boys and girls passed their evenings in the village playing a game in which they divided into sides to see which party could produce the prettiest designs. This phase has now passed, but children still find a pastime in pattern-biting. A specimen of the process is shown in Fig. 16.

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<sup>1</sup>Spier, Leslie, Review of "The Double Curve Motive in Northeastern Algonkian Art" (*ibid.*) in *American Anthropologist*, N.S. vol. 17, pp. 344-346, 1915.

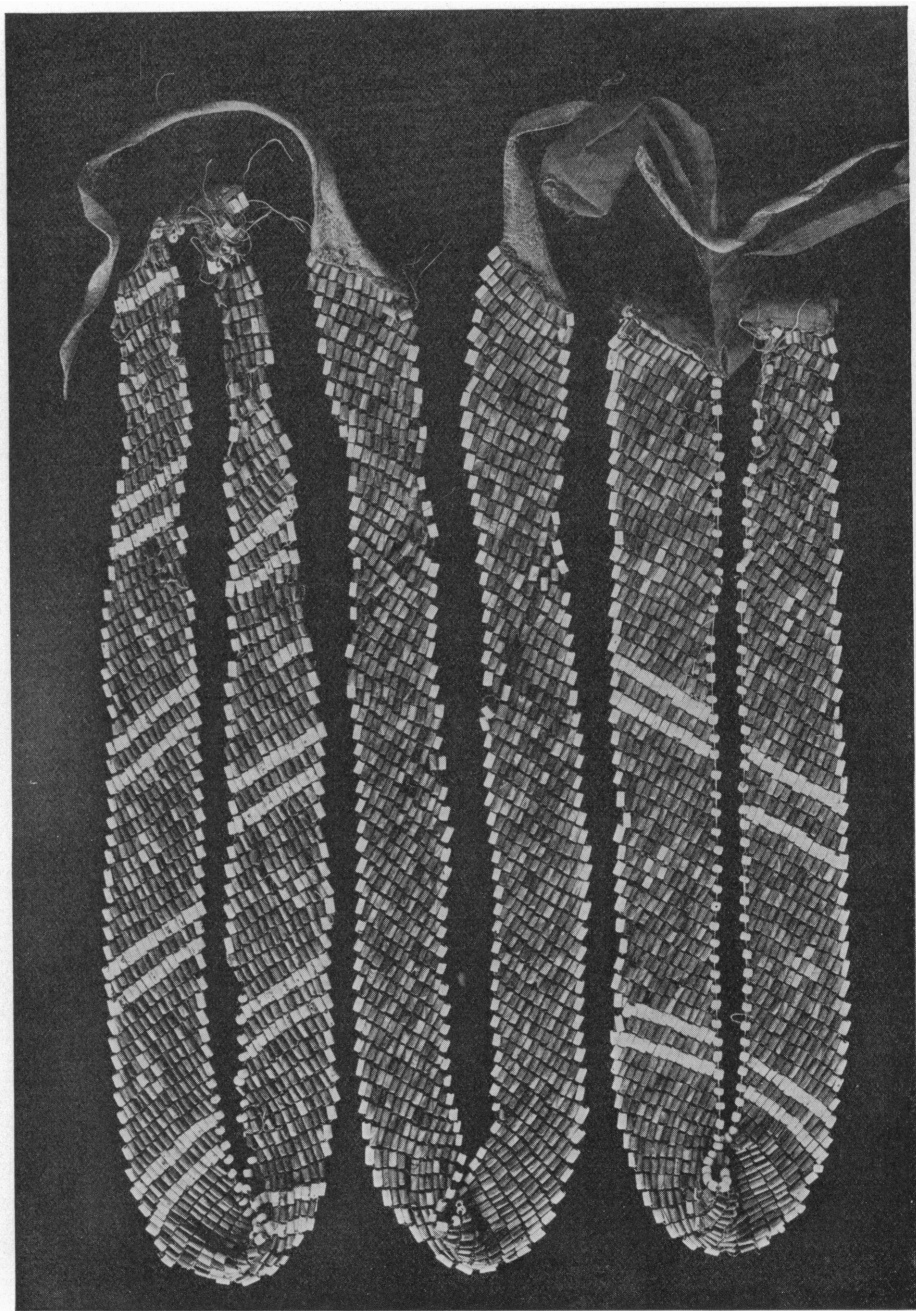


Fig. 44. Penobscot Wampum Collars. They formed part of a chief's regalia and served as memorials of treaties with other tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy. Courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

## CONCLUSION

To epitomize the symbolic characteristics of Penobscot art it may be said that the designs occurring on clothing, coats, capes, hats, leggings, and moccasins, were at an earlier period regarded as protective fetishes by the wearer. Similar patterns on birchbark utensils, canoes and in, woodwork had an analogous prophylactic function with respect to the objects upon which they were executed. The idea expressed by the few who typified the older culture life during the author's early investigations seems to have been that the *floral kingdom is capable of beneficial influence on a large scale in human affairs and that wearing the design is one method of acquiring it.*

A similar concept, though more spiritually elaborate, pervades the floral art of the tribes of the Labrador region—a fact now definitely ascertained. Hence, in addition to the historical and technical evidences which link the floral art figures of both branches of the Northeastern Algonkian and tend to establish an old and native provenience for northern floral art, we may now include a partially analogous psychological aspect. It seems common to both areas. The inference of a basic native origin and a common source becomes plainer. This is the major contribution of my essay. Now only the dream origin of the curves, the plant and animal designs, remains to be reported from some of the still uninvestigated Wabanaki tribes to make the inference of antiquity and common origin a proved fact. But the dream and wish motive in art, which is of underlying importance among the Montagnais and Naskapi is not known among the Penobscot, and any past knowledge of it can now scarcely be hoped for from this particular tribe. When the magical function of designs, floral or graphic, comes under treatment the feeling generally prevails among ethnologists that protective motives are wanting in America. In such terms Boas<sup>1</sup> voices an opinion in reference to the occurrence of protective magical motives in aboriginal designs as we seem to find them in the Northeast. He emphasizes the infrequency of the same in the New World. There seems, indeed, to be good reason, for the present at least, for hesitation in drawing definite conclusions on the above point, until we have gone farther in collecting and studying the material to come from some of the hitherto little-known areas. The cultures of northeastern North America still seem to harbor some surprises for the investigator.

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<sup>1</sup>Boas, Franz, "America and the Old World" (*Proceedings, XXI International Congress of Americanists, Goteborg, 1924*, p. 27).

And finally in its later stages of development, and since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Penobscot art ornamentation, through Iroquoian influence acquired an additional political symbolism. This passed out of memory with the collapse of the Wabanaki confederacy two generations ago and seems to have reached its lowest ebb with the acquisition of modern floral designs, which now retain little or nothing of the earlier therapeutic symbolic association.







