“My dream is a mingling of past, present, future”. Extracted from Ralph T. Coe’s (1986:39) presentation of native views on tradition, this dream of Onondaga elder Adelphena Logan expresses the handing down of the past to future generations as an inherent feeling of timeless unity. Although there is an implicit emphasis on “keeping up the old ways” including a persistence of certain cultural elements, this is tempered by an awareness that change is both innate and inevitable. Hence, by considering tradition as it may be manifested in material culture, this sense of timeless unity allows us to identify particular elements that have undergone change, and equally as important, those elements which remain unchanged through time (cf. King 1986). It follows that those elements deemed most important by a specific culture should theoretically be those that are retained despite internal developments and external influences. Therefore, by tracing the origins and developments of particular ethnographic objects, those elements which play key roles in the processes of continuity and change should be revealed. Such an undertaking, however, also reveals the complexity and limitations of both the data and the process. To demonstrate this, the ornately beaded hoods made by the James Bay Cree of the Canadian eastern Subarctic region will be examined (see Figures 1 and 2).1

Recent research has established that close to 30 of these beaded caps, miksa studen (Ellen Smallboy, Moose Factory) or e mitsuits utstudten (Har-
James Bay Cree Beaded Hood

Photos: Courtesy of the Johnson County/Jim Gatchell Memorial Museum, Buffalo, Wyoming.
CATH OBERHOLTZER

riet Matthews, Fort George), dating tentatively from the mid 1800s, are present in a number of museums and private collections in North America and Europe. Although the sparse accompanying documentation places these hoods in the James Bay area from Fort Albany on the west to Fort George (now Chisasibi) on the east during this time period, stronger supporting evidence must be distilled from archival photographs, period paintings, ethnographic and ethnohistoric sources as well as an iconographical analysis of the hoods. Pinpointing the origins of these hoods, tracing their development, and recognizing sources of influence are both problematic and complex, evoking more questions than answers. Nevertheless, sufficient clues can be extracted from the visual and written records to meet this challenge and to present some tentative answers.

The Material Evidence

Descriptions of the extant beaded cloth hoods require adjectives of a superlative nature and even these cannot do justice to the actual hoods. Both aesthetically pleasing and technically superb, these exquisite floral masterpieces produced during the early to mid 1800s exemplify a meticulous and assured craftsmanship that suggests a long-standing artistic tradition. These hoods share certain commonalities in such basic characteristics as form and iconography. All are rectangular in shape with only negligible variations in the length of 50 to 54 centimeters (excluding fringe) and a finished width of approximately 25 centimeters. They are most often made of wool broadcloth although stroud, and more rarely, velvet fabric were also used. The lining was silk or cotton in a number of colours and patterns. Colour choice was predominately black or navy blue, and occasionally red or olive grey. A square or, less-often, a long rectangular strip of fabric is folded and stitched along the top and/or back with the resulting seam covered by braid or ribbon and invariably outlined with beads. The point thus formed is surmounted by a tassel of either stroud fabric cut into strips or silk cord. Along the bottom edge hangs a fringe of slightly larger beads strung on very fine strips of caribou hide with the colours arranged to create horizontal stripes. The ends of the fringe are finished with either wool tassels, or more commonly, beaded loops. Most, if not all, of the decorative beadwork is done in what has become accepted as the traditional Native manner with the tiny seed beads strung on sinew and spot stitched with either sinew or commercial thread.

The majority of the hoods are resplendent with intricately executed floral motifs, while a few feature geometric motifs in a combination of wool

2Sources vary in describing these head coverings as hoods or caps. I am grateful to Regina Flannery for providing the Cree terms which see glosses as 'beaded cap'.


braid and beadwork, and another few suggest an intermediate position with geometrical motifs that are more fluid in nature. A singular example, held in the Museum of Mankind (London, England), has geometric figures executed in silk ribbonwork. The patterns of all types are confined within a triptych of three panels with the central panel being wider than the other two. Significantly, all three types display strikingly similar expressions of serpentine and/or zigzag lines within these panels. In most examples an emphasis is also placed on the corner configuration of the patterns. Without exception, every example is noteworthy for the technical expertise and artistic value with which it was made and decorated. And, although each hood conforms to these common formal qualities, there appear to be no two identical examples. The high number of stylistic conventions used to represent flowers reflect individual skills and aesthetics. A noted tendency towards clusterings of particular motifs present on a number of examples suggests, however, that there may have been some localized group preferences.

Those hoods resplendent with beaded floral patterns have flowers that cascade from a central motif at the top of the head down either side of the face and flow bisymmetrically across the back towards another motif centred there. Eye-catching are the undulating lines that dominate the composition of the patterns. Tiny distinctive leaves opposed along these lines serve to create a delicate foliage. The colours selected are dominated by pinks, pale blues, green, crystal and white while stronger reds and golds are used occasionally as accents but appear most often as elements in the fringe. Many of the flowers, particularly in the central panel, are outlined with white. The red, navy and yellow silk used to create the geometric pattern of the ribbonwork hood is outlined with white thread in a finely-wrought chainstitch. In similar manner, the decorative features of the braidwork ones are outlined with white beads.

Another source of material evidence is to be found in a select number of dolls and miniature hoods. The examples discussed here are particularly appropriate in their careful replication of Cree apparel whether made to depict how things were done in the past or simply to capture the present. In particular are two superb dolls from the Horniman Museum in London, England (catalogued as Horniman 1976.459 and 1976.460). This pair were recently on loan for a Subarctic exhibit at the Museum of Mankind in London and have been illustrated in the publication accompanying the Spirit Sings exhibition (Glenbow-Alberta Institute 1987:77). Although the dolls themselves are of English origin and have been dated to the period 1770-1790, each of the pair demonstrates a different, but presumably traditional ensemble of East Cree women, possibly from that time period. Of particular importance is the hood worn by one doll (Horniman 1976.460). Made of woolen fabric, and the geometrical patterns outlined with beads, this tiny
rectangular example with its tasseled peak is very similar to the full sized ones described in the early accounts of Hudson's Bay Company officers. A very similar doll, sold recently at an auction, wears a slightly more elaborately decorated hood. In a recent publication, the painted illustration of a Cree woman depicts the clothing of the Horniman doll with the hood replaced by that of the auction doll (Johnson 1990: Plate D).

Another pair of dolls, of Eastern Cree heritage and presently residing in the Museum of Mankind in London, are dated to about 1880 (Museum of Mankind 1923.6.194c and d). While their clothing documents certain changes that occurred during the intervening century, it is of interest to note that the female doll (Museum of Mankind 1923.6.194d) wears a traditional rectangular wool cloth hood trimmed with braid and embroidered with silk floss. The peak was surmounted with the familiar tassel. The only bead work is the monochromatic fringe with its typical looped finish. Her male companion wears a round pill box hat beneath the pointed hood of his capote.3 Similarly, The female doll (D.C.90,36) of the pair of Nenenot [Naskapi] dolls collected by Lucien Turner in 1884, and now housed in the collections of the Smithsonian Institution (D.C.90,035 and D.C.90,36) also wears the familiar rectangular cloth hood. Despite the general acceptance of Turner's tribal designation for these dolls according to his 1894 ethnology of the Ungava District (Quebec-Labrador Peninsula), I suspect that a closer examination of his records may reveal that the dolls actually originated closer to James Bay or Hudson Bay.

A small hood (c.10 cm. long and 5 cm. wide) held by the Canadian Museum of Civilization in Ottawa (CMC-III-D-573) was probably collected by Hudson’s Bay Company Factor, Charles Stuart sometime between 1840–1865 in the Moose Factory-Timiskaming area. Its importance rest in its naturalistic floral representation of rose buds in association with the tiny leaves and thorns of the plant. These three elements occur repeatedly, sometimes singly, often together, on a number of fullsize hoods including the abstract one from Berlin. I have speculated elsewhere that the predominance of roses, although present in the biota of the James Bay lowlands, implies rather an icon of the English rose and with it the ideals of British womanhood and signification of love, and as a symbol of Christianity with reference to Christ (Oberholtzer 1991). Thus, by adapting the rose, and indeed, other floral images, a traditional form was able to continue masked as it were with acceptable European iconography.

It is evident from these descriptions that the materials utilized — other than the sinew and caribou strips for stringing the beads — are of European origin. This evidence in turn evokes a number of questions regarding other

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3 A capote is semi-structured blanket cloth coat with attached pointed hood and fastened around the waist with a sash.
aspects of these hoods. Are the form and motifs also of European origin? If not, how can we establish and document those features that may be indigenous and traditional? Can we also isolate particular elements and influences that may have been introduced? Importantly, can we trace the development of the hoods from an earlier style to those collected during the mid-19th century? In an effort to do so we must look at other sources.

**Historic Evidence**

The earliest known recorded mention of hoods in the James Bay region is the notation made by the Englishman, Thomas Gorst in the journal he kept during the voyage to the New World on the Rupert. Having arrived at Rupert’s River in the southeast corner of James Bay on the 29th of September 1670, Gorst observed that, “The women differ not from them [the men] in habit, only that the caps of their coats hang down behind somewhat like a Monkshood whereas the men wear theirs close to their necks”. By inferring that the monks’ hood that Gorst refers to was that worn by members of monastic orders in England at that time, the form would have resembled a peaked hood very similar to those still being made in the James Bay area some two centuries later (see, for example, Milliken 1967:13, 64; Nigg 1959:139).

Further written descriptions of such hoods do not appear until nearly a century later when in 1743 Hudson’s Bay Company officer, James Isham describes the cap worn by a Cree woman as a “peice of Cloth which they sew behind and Reaches over their Shoulder’s, all these garments are worked. full of Beads, porqu’pine Quil’s, and other ornaments . . . ” (Rich 1968) Later, Isham’s successor, Andrew Graham, (Williams 1969) elaborates further in his description of the men’s hoods: “If you take a pillowcase or bag with one end and side open, and place a tassel in the closed angle, you will have an exact representation of the cap. It is usually made of cloth ornamented with beads, in the shape of deer, birds, straight and curved lines, etc.” He adds that the woman’s cap was the same “only more ornamented”. Continued usage of these beaded hoods was observed by several other European authors associated with the early economic and religious concerns of the area. For instance, in his journal entry for August nineteenth 1852 (CMS A-97), the Rev. E.A. Watkins notes that for the church service at Moose Factory,

The men were clothed in much the same way as the poorer classes in England, except that their coats were provided with hoods for use in winter. The women were dressed partly in English style, but many of them had a blanket

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4It should be noted that although Isham was situated at York Factory, his notes on the Cree were comprehensive.
which they threw over their heads, but others wore the peculiar head-dress of the country ornamented with a propition of beads.

That same year, Anglican Bishop David Anderson (1853:123) also noted that the women at Moose Factory “... invariably wear the long cap or hood, falling over their shoulders, and richly ornamented with beads, while the men have, generally, a good capote and embroidered leggings”.

During this time period, this “peculiar head-dress of the country” was still being worn by both sexes of the Indians living in the interior (Inlanders). While visiting at Rupert’s House in the course of his periodic religious rounds, the Rev. John Horden recorded the arrival of three Indian families (Journal. April 24, 1853. CMS A-88). He describes the men (two of whom were conjurers) as “being in full dress” which included

On their heads were blue cloth caps, somewhat similar to those worn by the women, but with three or four large white feathers on the top, and the sides worked with beads in the form of a deer, this cap always being worn while deer hunting.

Further evidence for the wearing of pointed hoods can be gleaned from artistic depictions rendered in the early years of the 19th century. For example, watercolour drawings by native artist William Richards and Swiss-born Peter Rindisbacher provide several appropriate illustrations. In Richards’s pre-1811 winter scene somewhere in the vicinity of Moose Factory, a married woman is shown with a fairly elaborate version of a beaded hood (cf. The Beaver 1983). On the western side of James Bay, Rindisbacher portrays a number of men and children (both Cree and Saulteux) wearing variations of these peaked caps, often surmounted with feathers rather than tassels (cf. The Beaver:33 for an illustration of Rindisbacher’s work). Four decades later in 1852 the English missionary John Horden sketched a Moose Factory woman wearing a floral beaded hood. Archival photographs of Cree women wearing hoods in the Fort Albany area in the 1860s appear to be the last contextual evidence for the James Bay area (cf. Hail and Duncan 1989:181, 182). Parenthetically, the circa 1860 engraving by Emile Petitot of a Slave woman wearing a rectangular hood decorated simply with three strips of fabric or braid may — and I emphasize may — indicate Cree influence in this direction.

**Ethnographic Evidence**

Through the generosity of Dr. Regina Flannery, pertinent portions of her fieldnotes recorded during 1933–1938 provide vital ethnographic information about these beaded hoods on the east coast of James Bay. The following details were provided by five of Dr. Flannery’s informants. I have taken
the liberty to repeat this information nearly verbatim with the addition of approximate dates and comments incorporated from a later letter from Dr. Flannery.

According to Ellen Smallboy who was born at Lake Kesagami circa 1853 and who later lived in Moose Factory, the woman's beaded cap was, “made from a single strip of cloth folded so that the fold would be at the crown of the head, then stitched up the back. The cap had beadwork all around the edge and a fringe of beads, liwehutcigan, hanging from the bottom”. Apparently, Mrs. Smallboy had not witnessed them being worn at feasts and did not mention whether or not she had ever had one herself. Her sister-in-law, Christiana, made a paper model of a cap.

A collaborator at Rupert’s House, Edward Nemegus, was born there circa 1867. As his mother died when he was quite young, he was raised by his grandfather. He remembered “his grandmother wearing her cap when watching beaver nets and at feasts, when his grandfather sang and drummed”. Furthermore, “only married women could wear beaded caps”.

Alice Earless, who was born circa 1875 and raised just south of Fort George, said that after one of the men had located tracks of the caribou and returned to camp to tell about it, that night the old man would sing and drum. The women would wear their beaded caps and dance up and down holding onto a tent pole, and, as she remarked, “Everyone was happy”. If the caribou were located in an area where others were needed to drive them to the hunters, all would be dressed in their cleanest and finest clothing, and a woman who had a beaded cap would wear it. At the feast following a successful hunt, the women, with their beaded caps, danced in place holding onto the tent pole, their backs to the fire in the middle of the wigwam. Mrs. Stevens, Margaret Blackned’s sister’s daughter, who was born and raised inland from Eastmain, noted, “Sometimes (as many as) three women dance, and they laugh at the old man and he sings more”.

Margaret Blackned, born near Fort George circa 1875, and living at Rupert’s House at the time of the interview, when speaking of women’s beaded caps, mentioned that, “The ones who have them are the ones who are better off. All the women who could bead would make one if possible”. It is probable that Margaret Blackned very likely had one herself.

Ethnographic material from other sources alludes to an ancient practice of hunting disguises whereby the skin of an animal including the head — with the ears still attached — was pulled over the hunter’s head and shoulders. Documented evidence for this practice in the eastern Subarctic rests on Regina Flannery’s findings that the Attiwapiskat Cree of Cape Henrietta Barrens did indeed utilize this method (personal communication). Alanson Skinner describes the hooded coats of tanned caribou skin with the hair left on worn by East Cree boys and men as being “… symbolically painted in-
side by outlining on the skin, the eyes and mouth, of the animal, signifying that the garment possessed the powers of speed, endurance, or cunning of the living animal, and was able to convey them to the wearer” (1911:15–17). In Skinner’s accompanying line drawing, the animal’s ears have been supplanted with tassels. He further notes, “this symbolism is confined to the garments of men, and the designs occur on the hood or head coverings only”. There is some dispute as to the veracity of Skinner’s concept that the powers of the animal contained within the skin would be transferred to the wearer. However Adrian Tanner (1979:141) has recorded that among the Mistassini Cree special hooded coats or parkas made of the head skin of caribou or young moose were once worn to give the wearer the animal’s power. Although these parkas are no longer used for hunting but are made only for children now, it is accepted that the wearing of one will increase the child’s later hunting ability. Further afield, Frank Speck (1940:46) describes the Penobscot hunting costume as including a hood that served as some sort of disguise as it is “squared across the top with two ear-like flaps, and comes down narrowly along the sides of the face and hangs well over the neck and shoulders”.

While this second set of data does establish an extended use of hoods, these particular hoods demonstrate a divergent rounded and/or eared form used specifically in hunting which require another line of investigation at some future time. However, a rather cursory comparison of the two sets of data suggests a differential use between men and women, but with a somewhat similar function of propitiating the spirit of the caribou (and beaver) for hunting success.

Antecedents, Analogues, and Speculations

The widespread distribution, extended use, and retention of the rectangular form despite the introduction of ‘foreign’ materials and changing lifestyles attests to an indigenous form. Nevertheless, in an attempt to determine possible aboriginal antecedents for these hoods, we must extrapolate from other sources beginning with the prehistoric visual recordings of Algonquian speakers to the south. The pictographic records of Painted Rock Island in the Lake of the Woods district include a depiction of a figure wearing a pointed hood (Dewdney and Kidd 1962:46). To the southeast, the Peterborough Petroglyphs reveal shaman figures wearing pointed hats, one attached and one separate (Vastokas and Vastokas 1973:66, 136). As well, innumerable birch bark scrolls have figures with pointed heads that may be, in fact, pointed hoods.

Another possible candidate as antecedent (or possible analogue) is the ceremonial hide or robe such as the one attributed to Eastern James Bay and held in the Canadian Museum of Civilization (CMC-III-B-588; dated circa
A number of analogous characteristics and symbolism suggest that this may be a possible antecedent to the peaked hood. Foremost is the robe’s function as a covering for the head, albeit under specific circumstances. Analogies also include the square shape which replicates the hood before sewing, the painted decoration that is divided visually into three panels, defined borders, fringes along the edges and the corner tassels. Brasser’s (1974:96) suggestion that “the cross-design was painted (in the centre of the robe) in honor of both one’s own soul-spirit and those of the animals” when compared with the Cree use of the tassel centred on a hat to represent the spirit or soul (Regina Flannery, personal communication) identifies a further correlation.

Ethnographic information collected by both Adrian Tanner (1984) for the East Cree and Alika Webber (1983) for the Naskapi corroborates Brasser’s conclusions. Based on the evidence garnered from his informants, Tanner has noted regional variations in decorative techniques and composition. Whereas the East Cree in the Fort George (Chisasibi) area most often referred to a painted style of decoration with fringes cut into the edges of the hide, the more southerly Mistassini East Cree tended to use a beaded and ribbon style similar to Montagnais techniques. Further differences can be noted between the Naskapi and east Cree in that the Naskapi shamans wear the caribou hides with the decorated side facing inward and the animal fur facing out (Tanner 1984:101). In contrast, the hides of the James Bay area have all the hair removed and the decorated side is always displayed outward. According to Webber’s (1983:64) conclusions, the wide distribution of these robes in the Quebec-Labrador peninsula as well as the continued — and secretive — use attests to the intrinsic importance of the robes.

Whether or not these painted robes are indeed antecedents to the hoods or merely part of the same iconological tradition is difficult to assess with our limited information at this point. However, it is interesting to note that a number of painted hide coats from this region possess an attached collar (often fringed) that appears to be a vestigial form of a hood. One such coat (Smithsonian Institution, Department of Anthropology 90241) has a collar which served as a hood and “allowed the shaman to envelop his face in darkness, a state in which he would sit for hours waiting for a vision, helping him guide his people to caribou” (Armitage 1991:61). Visually striking is the triangular-shaped porcupine quillwork attached at the neck on the upper back of a Central Cree painted coat from the early 19th century in the National Museum of Ireland (cf. The Spirit Sings 1987:76; Figure 66 for illustration).

No discussion or search for origins, analogues and avenues of influence, can disregard the peaked, or conical, cloth caps worn at one time by members of the Algonquian Wabenaki cluster which includes the Micmac, Male-
cite, Abenaki and Penobscot. Overtly different in form from the hoods of James Bay, these conical caps are, however, decorated with similar techniques of beadwork and ribbonwork. A number of further distinctions can be discerned in the formal qualities of the two hood types. As noted above, the James Bay Cree type is recognized by its rectangular form made from a single strip or square of cloth, tasselled peak, beaded fringe along the bottom edge, a three-panelled (triptych) composition and predominately floral motifs. By way of contrast, the maritime type are conical in form made from two pieces of cloth, are occasionally shaped to reveal the face, seldom have tassels, lack a beaded fringe, and the decorative patterns — rather than contained within a triptych composition — feature a broader border next to the face and a narrower band at centre back. The beaded hoods of this type indicate a preference for the use of double curve motifs.

Origins and development of these peaked caps have also been difficult to determine despite the number of researchers (most notably Gaby Pelletier 1977 and Ruth Holmes Whitehead 1980) who have focussed on this aspect. Much of their work has taken into account the relations of the Jesuits who were of the opinion that prior to the adoption of European hats and caps, these natives had gone bareheaded. Other researchers have accepted Le Jeune's conclusions regarding Montagnais clothing to be indicative of European origins for caps in general. In his relation of 1634, Le Jeune notes that these people go bareheaded "which makes me think that very few of them used hats before their intercourse with our Europeans; nor do they know how to make them, buying them already made, or at least cut, from our French people". However, he also says, "Give them a hood, and a man will wear it as well as a woman; ..." and "One has a red hood, another a green one, and another a gray, — all made, not in the fashion of the Court, but in the way best suited to their convenience". Rather than being contradictory, I wonder if Le Jeune is not actually indicating two different forms of headgear. If this is so, it allows for European styles to be adopted in one quarter and traditional forms to be retained in another. A number of very early references (1609 and 1611) attest to the existence of "lace-like patterns", and women "improving cloth with trim". However, as the earliest descriptive reference to Micmac women wearing these peaked caps dates to 1791, we have no way of knowing when this form was actually adopted. While ribbonwork hoods appear fairly early chronologically, the development of beaded hoods was concurrent with or slightly later than those of James Bay region. In fact, the presence of floral patterns rather than the double curve motif did not occur until late in the 19th century, long after their florescence on the James Bay hoods.

This development in the east coast area does not preclude the possibility that European influence, particularly that of the French traders and
missionaries, moved north and west along the early trade routes to James Bay. Rather, it merely diminishes the likelihood of direct influence and suggests that the rectangular hood form may have arisen from indigenous antecedents.

Summary and Discussion

In summation, the wearing of hoods by both men and women was recorded as early as 1670 in the James Bay area. Although the actual material, shape and ornamentation are unknown, some assumptions can be made. It can, for instance, be assumed with some assurance that hide was the material likely used. Similarly, the widespread distribution of pointed hoods throughout the subarctic and the northeast suggests that this was a universally accepted shape probably in use at the time of European contact. Decoration, if present, would have been a continuance of the painted hide and porcupine quillwork traditions that were the pre-contact methods of ornamentation. By the early 1700s, rectangular hoods for both sexes were made of European trade cloth and decorated with porcupine quills and European beads. This suggests that an existing traditional form became reiterated with the introduction and adaptation of new materials. As the technical advantages and potential for creative expression became apparent, the desirability of these trade goods increased rapidly with a concomitant burgeoning creativity recorded in a concrete manner on the hoods. However, it would appear that the introduction of European materials did not disrupt or replace the use and function of the hoods within the Cree culture.

Based upon the historic evidence alone it would appear that the wearers of the beaded hoods were married women associated with the posts either as the wives of Home Guard Indians or European traders. However, the ethnographic material broadens this continued wearing of hoods to include both men and women of the interior groups. The ethnographic data also establishes the functional importance of the hoods in hunting success. Although catalogue documentation for the floral-patterned hoods held in the Canadian Museum of Civilization describes them as men’s hoods, I would speculate that the floral motifs were more likely represented on the women’s hoods while the men’s were decorated with geometrical and faunal motifs. As always, more evidence is needed to draw conclusive statements: a more exact chronology derived from a number of sources including the introduction and incorporation of specific trade items in particular areas would add greatly to a discussion of the origins and developments of the hoods. Certainly an indepth iconological analysis would provide essential primary information.

It has been thought that as the proselytizing Anglican missionaries increased their efforts to discourage any traditional native expression, partic-
ularly on the west coast, the hoods seem to have rapidly disappeared. This seems rather simplistic in consideration of the complex nature of social and material systems. But, for whatever reason(s), contextual use of the beaded hoods has been discontinued and only the pointed form has been retained in contemporary parkas. Fortunately, these last remaining few exquisite examples have been preserved by being ‘institutionalized’.

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