The Ojibwa are one of a number of groups of Algonquian-speaking American Indian peoples who have lived in the Great Lakes area from before the time of first European contact. Their oral histories tell of prior migrations throughout what is now Canada and the northern United States, in keeping with their semi-nomadic life-style. In historic times, groups of Ojibwa are known to have migrated from Sault Sainte Marie westward along both shores of Lake Superior, through northern Ontario, Michigan, and Wisconsin, and into Minnesota, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and North Dakota. Movements of families and individuals from one area to another have continued to take place up to the present. These movements have paralleled, and perhaps fostered, a fluidity in other aspects of Ojibwa culture. Ojibwa artistic traditions have been characterized by flexibility. Early forms and concepts have been retained, sometimes with modifications, while new materials and ideas have been incorporated within the context of the culture.

From early times, trade was widespread in North America, leading to cross-influences between the arts of different peoples. Both raw materials and crafts were exchanged as gifts or trade items among Indian people. In the 17th century, European traders began to play a significant role in the Great Lakes region, making use of existing trade networks. Kettles, tools, beads, ribbons, yarns and other manufactured goods were traded for furs, which had wide markets in Europe. The fur trade remained important until the mid-19th century,
when non-Indian logging and farming interests brought about the beginning of the reservation period. This period brought intense pressures toward assimilation, often the result of deliberate government policies. Despite these pressures, however, native cultural and artistic traditions were handed down. At the same time, aspects of the non-Indian culture were absorbed. In the arts, there continued to be an adaptation of materials and forms of non-Indian origin to the artistic purposes of Indian craftspeople.

Among North American Indians, as in other tribal societies, the arts have frequently been integrated with other aspects of life. In early times, handmade objects were used for all every day purposes. Artistic content came about through their design and decoration, some of which was deeply symbolic. While factory-made goods have replaced handmade crafts for most kinds of ordinary objects, there have been several areas where traditional arts have remained a part of Ojibwa life. These include the making of ceremonial objects, dance outfits, and special clothing and accessories. Among the ceremonial arts made today are pipes, pipebags, drums, and other religious objects. Pipes are used for offering tobacco, both in individual prayer and in many kinds of gatherings. Pipe bags are generally made of deerskin or moosehide, and are usually decorated with beadwork (Fig. 6). Drums associated with religious Drum Dances have beaded coverings.

In some areas ceremonial dances are held seasonally. In addition, social gatherings or powwows, which feature native music and dance, are widely held in the spring, summer and fall. Dance outfits have been a focus for handmade crafts, particularly beadwork, for many people today. The outfits are derived from earlier clothing worn for traditional dances and other special occasions. Men's dance outfits are usually heavily beaded; women often wear jingle or ribbon dresses and beaded accessories. Children's dance outfits are similar in form to those of adults and may be extremely complex. Partial outfits or simple accessories are also worn by some people. Objects used in dance outfits are handed down in families, made by friends or relatives, made by the dancer, traded or bought. While both men and women do beadwork and related arts, the outfits are often made by women for their husbands. The dances are occasions to bring together and display arts in tra-
ditional media, which often have strong personal meaning and associations. Articles of clothing such as jackets, moccasins, mittens, and purses are sometimes made of deerskin and are beaded. Beaded belt buckles, pendants, jewelry, keychains, cigarette holders and other accessories are commonly owned by Indian people.

The foregoing are examples of contemporary continuation of the cultural role of the arts as part of life rather than as distinct from it. While traditional arts have generally been functional, however, they have often served primarily aesthetic purposes. Examples may be seen in the heavily beaded bandolier or shoulder bags that were extremely popular and widely made between the mid-19th century and the 1930s. These bags were worn crossways over each shoulder in ceremonies and dances. Sometimes used for carrying pipes and tobacco, they began to be made without true pockets in the late 19th century. The function of the latter type, like that of the dance aprons (Fig. 5) and other parts of the outfit, was to adorn the body and create beauty. Similarly, in objects which have served functional purposes, such as pipe bags, the aesthetic qualities of the pieces have gone far beyond their practical uses (Fig. 6). The artistic decoration of utilitarian objects, such as bags, cradleboards, and other items is seen among the earliest surviving examples. Thus, the aesthetic dimension has supplemented that of function in traditional Ojibwa crafts.

The Ojibwa are famous today for their beadwork, which has been a major artistic focus for them. Glass beadwork in the Great Lakes area was related to early quillwork and other uses of natural materials. The development of crafts in these media exemplifies the living and flexible nature of Ojibwa traditions. Decoration of objects with porcupine and bird quills goes back to pre-contact times. Examples before the 18th century are rare; customs of burying clothing with the deceased leave a great deal unknown about early designs (Armour 1977:16). Existing collections, however, include a number of 18th and early 19th-century quilled bags, cradleboard covers, moccasins and other accessories made by Ojibwa and closely related peoples in the Great Lakes area (Figs. 1 and 3; Brasser 1976: Nos. 32, 54, 59, 60, 67, 80; Flint 1973: Nos. 3, 9, 17). The porcupine quill decorations were often complex, embodying a number of weaving, plaiting, netting and appliqué techniques. Some wo-
ven and plaited designs covered entire surfaces; buckskin, often blackened through dyeing or smoking, frequently formed a background for appliqués (Fig. 3; Brasser 1976: Nos. 59, 60, 67, 80, 88; Flint 1973: Nos. 3, 17; Thayer 1942:42–45).

In addition to quills, beads of natural materials such as copper (Quimby 1966:40–43), wood, seeds, shells, stones, and animal claws and teeth were used from early times in the Great Lakes region, for jewelry and on fringes or borders of clothing and bags. Animal parts often had spiritual meaning, signifying a dream involving the animal (Aubid 1984). Shell beads, or wampum, were woven in bands on the east coast; shell appliqué on animal skins may also have been an antecedent for appliquéd glass beadwork in that area (Brasser 1976:41).

Glass beads were introduced into the Great Lakes region through European trade during the early 17th century. They were made in Venice, where glasswork had been a specialty since the Renaissance, and came in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours, either opaque or translucent. The first trade beads were large and sometimes multicoloured; they were used primarily for jewelry and for border ornaments on animal skin objects. By the early 19th century, tiny seed beads and small cut beads were available. These lent themselves to the complex forms of woven and appliquéd beadwork that developed over the last two centuries.

Beadwork techniques have paralleled some of those used earlier in quillwork. Woven quillwork was done on a bow loom in which sinew warp threads were strung between the ends of a bowed stick; the warps were interwoven with quills (Odle 1973:xxxii–xxxvii). A bow loom was also used for early loom beadwork (Armour 1977:13); a rectangular box type later became popular. In both types, the warp threads are interwoven with wefts consisting of strung beads. The wefts catch a warp thread between each bead, creating a smooth surface. Loom beadwork lends itself to the creation of geometric patterns because of the interweaving of warps and wefts (Fig. 2).

For appliqué work, quills were inserted into the surface of the background material, usually deerskin or moosehide. Several types of appliquéd beadwork exist. Ojibwa beadworkers usually have used a spot stitch, in which the beads are strung on a thread and laid out so that the thread follows the design. The thread is then stitched to the surface between every two or
both woven and appliquéd beadwork have been frequently made to cover entire surfaces, as on the bandolier bags, popular in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Fig. 2) and in contemporary beaded pendants and belt buckles. Often solidly beaded panels are set off against deerskin or moosehide backgrounds in pipebags and pouches. Appliqued beadwork is also frequently done on deerskin and moosehide (Fig. 6). These skins, often hand-tanned, continue to be widely used by Ojibwa craftspeople for making pipe bags, purses, mittens, and moccasins.

In the 19th century wool and velvet began to be frequently substituted for skins in bags and clothing (Figs. 2, 4, 5). Black velvet has been a popular background material since the late 19th century for beaded dance aprons, vests, moccasin cuffs and vamps, panels on deerskin pouches, and other articles (Fig. 5). The use of black backgrounds for appliqués has been seen to go back to the designing of early quillwork (Fig. 3; Thayer 1942:42–45). Thus the materials and techniques used for contemporary beadwork relate aesthetically to the previous native utilizations of natural materials.

By the beginning of the 20th century, beads had largely replaced quills in the Ojibwa decoration of clothing, bags, and pouches. Quills continued to be used, however, on birchbark containers and in jewelry and small accessories. Woodland Indian birch and quillwork goes back at least as far as the late 17th century, when a quilled box was collected by Jesuit missionaries in the Huron territory of Canada (Musée de l’Homme, Paris: No. 34.33.245; Maurer 1977: No. 70). The craft was given impetus by the tourist trade in the eastern Woodlands and Great Lakes area during the 19th and 20th centuries. Like other kinds of tourist items, quilled pieces have been made by the Ojibwa both for sale to non-Indians and for native use. Varied patterns, sometimes intricate in detail, have been created using a number of appliqué techniques. The natural and dyed quills have been laid flat along the birchbark surface, inserted upright and trimmed to a short stubble, or worked into three dimensional forms such as tiny coils (Garte 1984: Nos. 16–35). In recent times birch and quillwork has been a major Ojibwa art form in Ontario and parts of Michigan. In Minnesota, the art had been thought to be dying out; however, it seems to be
undergoing a revitalization. Several contemporary craftspeople from the Leech Lake reservation and elsewhere have been working in this medium (Garte 1984:15). Plaited quill panels are also made for accessories such as belt buckles and pendants. Appliqued or strung quills are frequently used today in combination with beadwork in pendants, belt buckles, necklaces, and earrings. Quill wrapping of wooden objects such as pipe stems and dance sticks preceded their beaded decoration, and is found in some contemporary examples (Garte 1984: No. 180).

Designs in Ojibwa quillwork and beadwork, like those of other crafts show continuity as well as change. Compositions in Ojibwa quillwork and beadwork have been both symmetrical and asymmetrical since early times. Sometimes these two formats are deliberately juxtaposed, as in panels on opposite sides of pipe bags or on the front and back dance aprons (Fig. 5; Garte 1984: Nos. 146–147). Ojibwa bandolier bags of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries are frequently characterized by asymmetrical right and left sides of the bandolier (Fig. 2). A quilled 18th century Ojibwa shoulder bag with a similar asymmetrical treatment of the strap indicates early roots for this practice (Fig. 1).

Motifs used in Ojibwa quillwork and beadwork may be roughly classified as those based on animal or human forms, geometric patterns, abstract curvilinear designs, and floral motifs. Animal and human forms traditionally have had spiritual meaning, often referring to dream experiences, though they have also been used decoratively, particularly in 20th-century work. Bird and animal representations are seen in a number of 18th-century Ojibwa quilled pouches and other objects (Fig. 1; Brasser 1976: Nos. 35, 54, 80). While such representations are much less common in 19th-century beadwork, they are incorporated with other forms on some 19th-century beaded bandolier bags and pouches (Flint 1973: No. 224; Minnesota Historical Society Cat.: No. 10,000.152). Bird and animal designs are also depicted on some 19th century garters and other accessories (Flint 1973: Nos. 238, 240). In the 20th century, birds and animals have been commonly portrayed on Ojibwa birch and quill boxes and sometimes on beaded pendants, belt buckles, and clothing (Garte 1984: Nos. 24, 28, 29, 128). The decorative animal representations retain a sense of relationship with animal life that has been inherent in the culture through-
out its history. Animal, human, and bird images continue to have spiritual significance when used in relation to religious experiences.

Geometric and other abstract designs were widely employed in early Ojibwa and other Great Lakes Indian quillwork, sometimes together with animal representations (Fig. 1). They have continued to appear in 19th and 20th-century beadwork, particularly in loom-woven pieces (Fig. 2). Some of the contemporary Ojibwa geometric designs show Dakota influences; however, the early Dakota and Ojibwa designs were similar, and a number of the geometric designs used by the Ojibwas today, such as the otter-tail pattern, come from their own artistic traditions.

The geometric motifs often symbolize aspects of nature. The well-known otter-tail or otter-track pattern, for example, consists of a series of diamonds interspersed with long lozenges. It is said to represent the movements of an otter as it runs and slides along the ice (Fairbanks 1980; Coleman 1947:3). A triangle with vertical double lines extended from the bottom signifies a pine tree, while a series of triangles has been said to represent a path through the woods; other geometric motifs are associated with rabbit tracks, a butterfly, a crab’s foot, and a feather (Coleman 1947:4–6). Representations of heavenly and atmospheric phenomena like the sun, stars, lightening, a rainbow, and the four winds often have a spiritual meaning (Coleman 1947:6–12; Densmore 1979:82–83). Thus the abstract patterns which formed a major part of Ojibwa arts in pre-contact times are not merely decorative, but have references to the surrounding environment and its spiritual associations. In this sense they relate both to the early animal designs and the floral designs which developed after European contact and for which the Ojibwa are best known.

The origins of floral designs have been subject to debate among scholars. Ted Brasser (1976:42) suggests that they originated with European-influenced realistic decorations and became more abstract as they spread to areas removed from direct European contact. Others see the development of floral designs as a synthesis of pre-contact, abstract curvilinear motifs and ideas suggested by European decorations (Conn 1979:78–79; Maurer 1977:87; Densmore 1979:186–188). Existing evidence would suggest that the floral motifs grew out of a
variety of sources.

Two sources of European influence on Woodland Indian floral imagery were the embroidery taught at French Catholic mission schools in Québec during the 17th century, and the floral quillwork and beadwork developed by the Red River Métis of the northwestern Woodlands in the early 19th century (Brasser 1976:42, 48; Conn 1979:78–81; Johnson 1967:1, 3–4). The embroidery taught to Huron, Iroquois, and other Indian girls in the 17th-century mission schools led to a highly elaborate and realistic style of floral moosehair embroidery and quillwork. The Métis, descended from European, Ojibwa, Cree, Dakota, and other Indian groups, developed a composite culture in the 19th century. Their early 19th century quillwork and beadwork were characterized by delicate, semi-realistic patterns. Both the styles that evolved under missionary influences in Québec and among the Métis, however, were distinctive and appear to account only partially for the floral imagery that spread throughout the Woodland region and into much of North American (Johnson 1967:1).

Abstract curvilinear designs existed in early examples of Woodland Indian arts. Double-curve motifs, consisting of various types of opposed symmetrical curvilinear forms, are thought to go back to pre-contact times in Woodland Indian decoration (Conn 1979:79). The quill box at the Musée de l’Homme-Paris (Cat. No. 34.33.245; Maurer 1977: No. 70), collected in Huron territory during the late 17th century, displays a trifoil double-curve design. The early curvilinear designs were probably associated with a variety of concepts besides those of plant representations. Examples of 18th and 19th-century quillwork and beadwork, however, support the idea of a development from abstract curvilinear forms to floral patterns.

Abstract double-curve motifs have been used continuously in Ojibwa decorations, though Speck (1914:13) found them to be more common in the arts of other Algonquian peoples. An 18th-century Ojibwa quilled bag at the Detroit Art Institute (Cat. No. 81.62; Flint 1973: No. 17) combines simple double-curve designs with geometric patterns (Fig. 3). Tri-foil motifs are seen on an Ojibwa beaded shoulder bag from the same period at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin (Cat. No. 1954.1545; Flint 1973: No. 82) and on an etched birchbark container made at Grand Portage, Minnesota some-
time in the 1930s (Garte 1984: No. 5). Such motifs are said by Ojibwa experts to be known as “old time” or traditional designs (Fairbanks 1980, 1984).

The appearance of simplified floral designs in the Great Lakes area dates from at least as early as the 18th century, as seen on a Potawatomi quilled bag from that period, now at the Milwaukee Public Museum (Cat. No. III-G-828; Flint 1973: No. 3). A motif very similar to that on the Potawatomi bag appears on another Grand Portage Ojibwa etched birchbark container, made in the 1930s (Garte 1984: No. 4).

Ojibwa experts interviewed in the first half of the 19th century (Densmore 1979:186; Coleman 1947:7–8) are reported to have indicated a development of the wild rose design, a traditional Ojibwa representation, from a pattern of four symmetrically arranged circles. Simplified four-petal floral motifs appear together with trifoil designs on the Ojibwa shoulder bag at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, mentioned above. The bag was made about 1830. A four-sided symmetrical design, incorporating double-curve patterns and suggestive of floral forms, is seen in a beaded Minnesota Ojibwa purse made around 1845 (Fig. 4). Simple four-petalled flower designs appear in a number of late 19th and early 20th-century pieces (Garte 1984: Nos. 124, 125, 147, 148, 154).

A rare Ojibwa quilled doeskin moccasin, made in Minnesota about 1860, shows a fantail arrangement of five simple petal-like shapes (Minnesota Historical Society Cat. No. 110; Garte 1984: No. 110). A similar form, incorporating double curves as well as the five petal-like shapes, is seen on a contemporary pair of moccasins from Grand Portage (Garte 1984: No. 115). The design is said by the artist to be known as being very traditional (James 1984). A beaded Ojibwa tobacco pouch, dated about 1860, displays a symmetrical double-curve composition of flower and leaf forms (Minnesota Historical Society Cat. No. 9119; Garte 1984: No. 82). Double-curve compositions of floral motifs can be seen in much 19th-century beadwork (Fig. 5; Garte 1984: Nos. 96, 97, 121, 135, 146, 147).

In the late 19th century, complex arrangements of overlapping and freely designed plant forms became widespread in Ojibwa beadwork (Densmore 1979:186–187; Coleman 1947:90–117). It is generally believed that this development was inspired by the example of European and American floral dec-
orations found widely in embroidery, fabric arts, and other decorative crafts. Some of the designs, are, in fact, similar to European patterns. A late 19th-century Ojibwa bandolier bag at the Minnesota Historical Society (Cat. No. 10,000.714; Anderson 1982: front cover) has the overlapping floral motifs which resemble those of the manufactured fabric with which it is lined. The Ojibwa beadwork, however, retains a sense of two-dimensional design related to earlier compositions, which differentiates it from the American fabric.

The Venetian factories, which produced glass beads in a variety of subtle and often muted colours, began to go out of business after 1910. Since then, most beads have come from Czechoslovakia, where they are made in intense, spectral hues. Contemporary beadworkers sometimes prefer the softer tones and save old beads for contemporary work. Others have found aesthetic uses for the brighter colours. In recent work, a variety of symmetrical, asymmetrical, simple, complex, delicate and bold compositions may be seen. As in the past, the artists' individual sensibilities are expressed through variations on basic ideas that have been handed down (Figs. 5 and 6).

Whatever their origins, once floral designs came into widespread use, they were adapted to the needs and ways of thinking of the culture. Plants shown in beadwork include those of the artist's immediate surroundings, and real leaves and flowers often have been used as patterns (Coleman 1947:8, 112–113). Some contemporary Ojibwa beadworkers sketch from nature and have expressed the feeling that a sensitivity to plant life is embodied in the floral images. The following excerpts from statements by Ojibwa craftspeople, Ellen McIntire Olson and Duane Goodwin, illustrate these perceptions:

The thing that impressed me most was color. Later the shapes. When you see something vining, like honeysuckle or grapes, sometimes it lies in beautiful ways. Even the weeds, the grasses, have a certain way of bending, shadowing (Olson, quoted in Aschenmacher 1982:6–7).

I spend a lot of time in the woods, observing the various flowers and leaves and growth in Northern Minnesota here ... A lot of the colors are vibrant. I draw at different times throughout the seasons; sometimes I relate the seasonal colors to whatever beadwork project I have going on. In my beadwork, you've noticed, there's a lot of floral design. That comes from having a special caring feeling for flowers, natural essence in nature (Goodwin, quoted in Garte 1983:11).
It is sometimes thought that the development and widespread use of floral designs marks the disappearance of traditional religious practices, previously reflected in animal and geometric imagery. This view does not appear to be borne out by the uses of objects that are decorated with floral beadwork. The 19th century and early 20th-century beaded bandolier bags, for which Ojibwa and other Great Lakes Indian people were famous, showed predominantly floral forms. These bags were worn at Mide ceremonies, as well as at social dances. Similarly, dance outfits, worn both at ceremonial and social dances, are usually decorated with floral beadwork. Beaded designs on Dream Drums sometimes include floral motifs (Grand Rapids Public Museum 1977:74; Johnson 1967:4). Contemporary pipe bags, used in relation to personal prayer and community pipe ceremonies, are frequently beaded with floral appliqués (Fig. 6). At the same time, because the floral images do not usually have strong spiritual connotations in themselves, they have lent themselves to freer use than the earlier bird, animal, and human representations (Johnson 1967:6). The popularity of the floral designs, as they developed, may have been partly due to this quality.

The combinations of continuity and change in Ojibwa artistic traditions indicate that they have not been static, but have incorporated feelings and ideas current in each time period. Ojibwa beadwork and quillwork are living art forms which have retained their role in the affirmation of a cultural heritage.

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FIGURE 1

Bandolier Bag, Ojibwa, collected in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, c. 1880, h. 42 in. Loom beaded pouch and strap with appliqued beadwork on wool panel. The bag was probably a gift or trade item. Minnesota Historical Society Museum Collections. Cat. No. 8618.15. Photographed by Ken Moran.

Handbag, Minnesota Ojibwa. c. 1845, h. 6 in. Beadwork on wool cloth. Minnesota Historical Society Museum Collections. Cat. No. 8212.35. Photograph by Paul Malcolm.
