



Courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution #154358

Figure 1. A fanciful tulip on an eighteen-inch man's leggings, collected by W. J. Hoffman at Crow Agency in 1891 or 1892, shows early floral design in Crow beadwork.



Courtesy of Verlie Half

Figure 2. Beaded belt (120" x 7") by Verlie Half of Crow Agency

Crow Beadwork

The Resilience of Cultural Values

by Barbara Loeb

The Crow people have graciously provided me with information on beadwork for more than twelve years. More traditional sources of information are problematic. Nineteenth-century explorers rarely talked to Indian women, and leading publications on Crow art focus primarily on style. For example, see William Wildschut and John Ewers, *Crow Beadwork, A Descriptive and Historical Study* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1959) and the special issue of *American Indian Art*, 6 (Winter 1980) devoted to Crow art. Euna Rose He-Does-It of the Crow Culture Committee and Mardell Hogen Plainfeather critiqued this essay, while Mickey Old Coyote and Dale Old Horn, both of the Crow Culture Committee, met with me to discuss the article.



Courtesy of the Bird-In-Ground family

Figure 3. Woman's leggings (30" x 41") by Inez Bird-In-Ground



Undated photograph, MHS Photograph Archives

Myrtle Big Man (center) gives instruction and insights into the intricacies of Crow beading to her family.

When a Crow woman begins a new outfit, she embarks upon a long and costly task that may take two years to complete, even with help from other women in her family. She must purchase many hanks of beads as well as expensive materials such as soft buckskin or, perhaps, fine wool. As she sews she bends close to the material, straining eyes and back, to stitch hundreds upon hundreds of tiny glass beads to the garment. When she is done, she will have devoted intense effort to creating a garment that performs almost no function within the larger, European-based society that presses around her.

Yet, two hundred years after the birth of this art form, Crow women still bead actively. Most Crow families treasure at least one trunkful of finery, and many individuals continue to don their distinctive clothing with pride and grace whenever special Crow events occur (figures 7, 8). They do this in addition to working eight to five, maintaining modern wardrobes, balancing checkbooks, and performing the many other tasks contemporary life requires.

Such dedication to an expensive and labor-intensive traditional art form raises intriguing questions about the ongoing function of beading in Crow life. Out of the search for answers emerges a picture of a form of expression that is both beautiful and fundamentally linked to Crow social structure. Now, as in the past, beadwork acknowledges marriages, plays a critical role in the Crow definition of prosperity, and strengthens the bonds among female relatives. Beadwork lends dignity and color to the many dances and other ceremonial gatherings that punctuate the Crow year; its artistry enhances the singing, drumming, and dancing that are at the heart of Crow culture. When the Crow gather to dance, they enjoy themselves, but they also create a public forum for social, political, and family transactions. At a more profound level, the art form nourishes the rich fabric of Crow society and protects it from total assimilation by western society.

In the early days of High Plains life, most nomadic horse-people decorated their clothing with dyed quills of porcupines. Around 1800 they began

to sew small glass beads to their garments and other personal items. These appealing ornaments were manufactured in the sophisticated glass shops of Venice and reached the West by long and circuitous trade routes that began in Europe and crossed the Atlantic to connect with seaboard commerce in the fledgling United States. A few beads were then carried across the country by early explorers such as Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, while others found their way into trading systems controlled by indigenous people. Some Native American groups of the northern West actually acquired European beads before they ever saw European people.

Early supplies were sparse, but beaders, including the Crow, must have experimented with their new materials immediately, because they were already skilled in the medium when the next wave of explorers reached them in 1831 and 1832. By then, as evidenced in sketches by painters such as George Catlin and Karl Bodmer, beaded clothing had become quite popular, and early beaders extended their scanty supplies cleverly by trimming only shoulder seams and moccasins. A few managed to bead larger surfaces such as belts, preludes for the elaborate garments to come.

Permanent trading posts soon provided women with a steady supply of beads, and Venician glass blowers were beginning to emphasize a tiny product called a seed bead, which they produced in dozens of colors. As a result of these changes, the craftwomen who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century began to refine the art of beading using their ample bead supplies in a rainbow of colors. Within decades the Blackfeet, Crow, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Kiowa, as well as neighboring plateau and Great Basin groups, were evolving distinctive styles and encrusting horse gear, dress yokes, vests, bags, cradle tops, and a whole array of other impressive items with beads.

Beading matured as an art form in times of prosperity for the Crow, just as it did for most other Plains people. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, they had the freedom to travel widely in their own territory and in that of their plateau friends. They had the means to acquire products from Europe and the eastern United States but were not yet affected by the masses of settlers who would arrive later. The horse, introduced from Europe, provided mobility and strength that vastly expanded the world of most native peoples of the northern West and made it possible to transport larger tepees, more possessions, and

greater stores of food. This powerful animal, along with the gun, increased the hunting prowess of Plains men and aided young warriors in their pursuit of prestigious war coups. Traders brought iron kettles, knives, and other convenience items as well as such sought-after commodities as beads, wool, and other art materials. The fur trade, although threatening to overwhelm the women who tanned hides for sale, provided an income that augmented economic prosperity.¹ Overall, life must have been satisfying and invigorating.

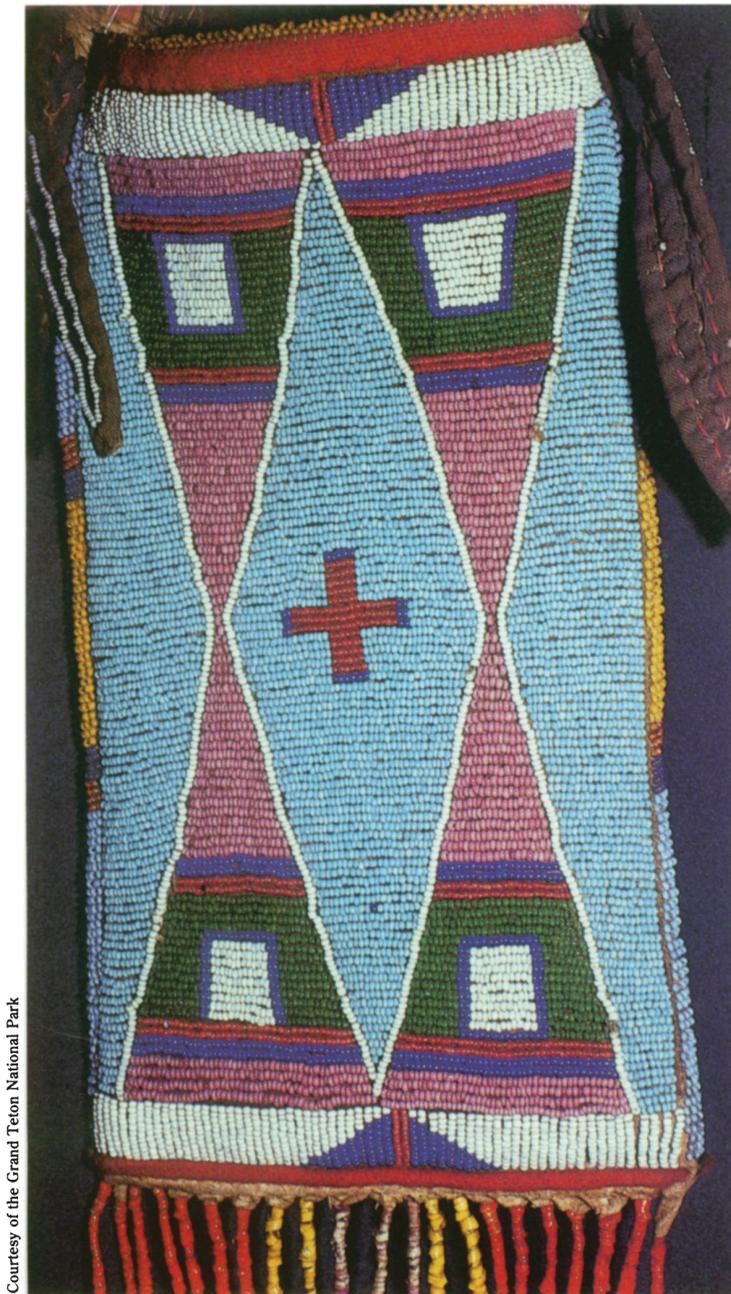
Within this atmosphere of prosperity, the Crow began to wear beading of such compositional excellence that it is still admired as a high point in Plains artistry (figures 4, 5). Because it appears to have been shared with the Nez Perce, Cayuse, and other groups west of the Rocky Mountains, the style is sometimes referred to as transmontane beading, the style that crossed the Rocky Mountains.²

Transmontane design is characterized by large, bold geometric motifs such as diamonds, hourglasses, and giant X-shapes, which beaders made so wide that only one or two fill an entire object, and so tall that most cover the full height of the composition. The artist constructed these bold motifs with smooth, straight sides and outlined them with crisp-looking strands of white beads or wider borders of dark blue. She limited details to simple stripes and occasional floating crosses, but made striking use of the rich assortment of Venician colors that were available to her. Sometimes she included as many as fifteen different bead shades, almost always setting the whole against a background of light blue or pink. The Crow beader often intensified her color scheme further by inserting pieces of vivid red wool cloth obtained from factories in Europe and on the East Coast through trade. Strips of this red wool are visible at the top and bottom edges of the mirror bag in figure 4.

The aesthetic essence of transmontane design goes well beyond its geometric shapes and eye-catching color combinations. Many pieces contain an intriguing optical foreground-background flux, such as those in figure 4, which initially appears to be two hourglasses on a light blue background, but which rapidly transforms itself into a pale blue diamond and two tall triangles on a pink and green ground.

1. Alan Klein, "The Political Economy of Gender: A 19th Century Plains Indian Case Study," *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, eds. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine (Lanham: University Press of America, 1983), 143-74.

2. Barbara Loeb, "Crow and Plateau Beadwork in Black and White: A Study Using Old Photographs," *Crow Indian Art* (Mission, South Dakota: Chandler Institute, 1984), 15-26.



Courtesy of the Grand Teton National Park

Figure 4

A pair of hourglasses forms a colorful pattern for a man's mirror bag (25" x 13") in figure 4, while a single, simple diamond decorates the entire surface of a cradle top collected in Big Horn valley, Montana, in figure 5. Beadwork such as this reflected well-being among Crow people and was often given away as a sign of generosity.



Courtesy of the Denver Art Museum #134

Figure 5

A man's mirror bag (24" x 16"), collected by Robert Lowie in 1907, shows how technique became crisper and sharper with time (figure 6). At Crow Fair in 1980, Bemus Big Hair displays the beaded buckskin vest and trousers given him as a wedding present by his bride's family (figure 7), while Karen Goes-Ahead wears a beaded dress during Crow Fair 1980 that originally was given to her mother, Elvira, in connection with Elvira's marriage into the Bird-In-Ground family in 1964 (figure 8).



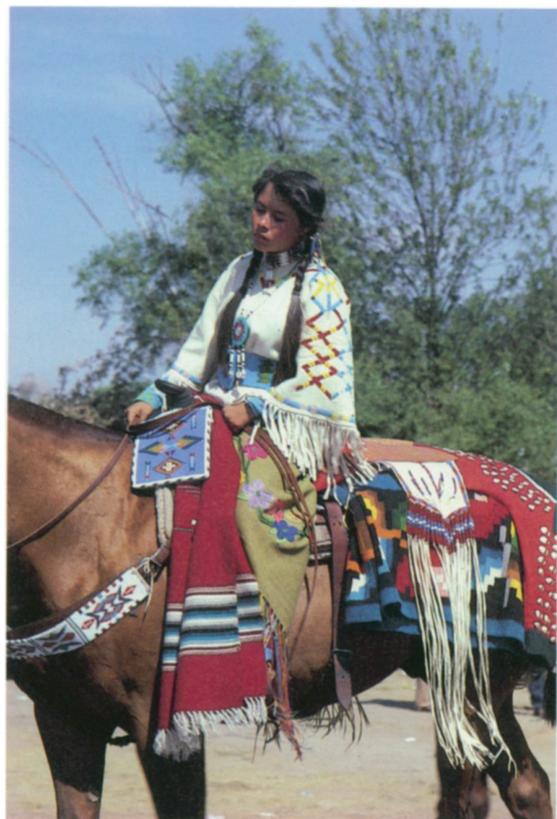
American Museum of Natural History #50/6850

Figure 6



Courtesy of Bemus Big Hair

Figure 7



Courtesy of Karen Goes-Ahead

Figure 8



S. D. Patterson, photographer. MHS Photograph Archives

Lavish beadwork adorns horses and Crow women alike in a parade at Crow Agency on August 30, 1938.

Trusting her practiced eye for proportions, the beader marked from a mental image or sketched patterns freehand. Red marks are still visible under some of these beaded pieces. Next, she stitched in the white outlines or wider blue borders, the skeleton of her composition. To cover the rest of the design field, she worked section by section, perhaps beading the inside of any hourglass first, a less important detail second, and the background third.

Crow women employed a number of sewing methods to execute the designs, but their preferred technique was the overlay stitch which requires two needles—one to string the beads and a second to tack them down. The maker worked strand by strand, sewing each row to the buckskin, and, if she was diligent, taking a small stitch every two or three beads before moving on to the next row. Over the last century, many of these decorated surfaces have warped and buckled, but when new they undoubtedly were tight, smooth, and neat in appearance.

The final product is visually handsome and masterfully executed, as befitting a conscientious but self-confident people who took great care with

their appearance and were proud to be identified as Crow. Beaded art suited life on the plains. Sunshine sparkled against glass bead surfaces, and even in the vastness of the open plains bold designs and bright colors stood out vividly while fringes swung and bells jingled with every step of horse or dancer, a fitting enhancement for people who loved to be on the move.

Prosperity of the early nineteenth century began a tragic shift after the Civil War when outsiders poured onto the plains, bringing disruption and near collapse for native societies. By all expectations, Crow beadworkers should have become too disorganized, too dismayed, or too poor to continue their handsome transmontane style. Instead, the opposite occurred and by the 1890s these creative people were beading more than ever.

The years between 1870 and 1910 were indeed grim. The newcomers not only took land and destroyed buffalo herds but consciously and methodically attempted to erase classic High Plains culture and transform its people into new Europeans. By the 1880s almost every Native American group within the northern West had been confined to a reservation.

Missionaries taught Plains people that their world views were sinful and unchristian and made them ashamed of their clothing, dwellings, and other indigenous customs. The missionary movement made such a painful impression on the Crow that they still talk about it when discussing this part of their history. In 1882, seven years before Montana statehood, the United States government established Courts of Indian Offenses and gave these legislated groups the power to fine or jail anyone who participated in dances, religious ceremonies, or other Native American practices. Court judges were given authority to “solemnize marriages” because the government and general citizenry were appalled that Indian people formed families without formal approval from church or state.³ The government also sent children away to boarding schools where they were isolated from their parents’ teachings. These schools, in place for decades, inflicted swift punishment on students who spoke their native language or acted Indian in other ways. One elderly Crow woman recounts, with a catch of pain still in her voice, the day she had to scrub a floor with a toothbrush for some such childish misdeed.⁴

To begin to grasp the magnitude of these events and policies is to begin to understand the tragic context in which beadwork evolved between 1880 and 1910. Years later Pretty Shield, a Crow woman, still remembered the dreadful feelings of those times. “When the buffalo went away, the hearts of my people fell to the ground and they could not lift them up again.”⁵

As the territories of the northern West moved into statehood and Plains life became increasingly desperate, Crow women refused to surrender or compromise the quality of their art form. They continued to produce handsome compositions with the large, bold shapes, clean white outlines, and pastel backgrounds of the classic transmontane style.

In the hands of some women, technique became even crisper and tighter, and design grew even more elaborate. A mirror bag collected by Plains scholar Robert Lowie in 1907 (figure 6), for example, has very smooth stitching, meticulously straight outlines, and multiples of small blocks of color unlikely to be present on earlier pieces (figure 1). The artist also maximized her color palette by using twelve different tones on the face of the bag while adding four more to the design on the reverse side.

3. On policies of the Court of Indian Offenses, see “Report of Commissioner of Indian Affairs T. J. Morgan, August 27, 1892,” Wilcomb E. Washburn, *The American Indian and the United States, A Documentary History* (New York: Random House, 1973), I: 574-631.

4. Elderly Crow woman, conversation with author, Crow Reservation, 1982.

During the same period, judging from historic photographs, beadwork appears to have increased the sheer amount of their work. This was particularly true for women’s horse gear, which began to appear with much greater frequency in old photographs around 1890.⁶ A complete outfit required a large collar, decorated stirrups, saddle, bridle, and, if possible, a bead-trimmed saddle blanket and crupper. The dressing of even one of these horses was a major undertaking, and resplendency of the outfits, as well as the technical and artistic quality, clearly suggest that even in the face of late nineteenth-century cultural devastation, the transmontane style continued to blossom.

To preserve this art form so successfully, the Crow may have been blessed by the mistakes of the very institutions that were attempting aggressively to eradicate Indian behaviors. The Court of Indian Offenses, for example, seriously exaggerated its power to suppress Crow ceremonial gatherings. “There was a strict policy to de-tribalize all Indians,” tribal historian Joe Medicine Crow explains, “but it didn’t work. The Crow had a big reservation, so they could go out and hide and do dances.”⁷

The court also miscalculated on the significance of fine dress, for, although determined to eliminate indigenous behavior, it allowed Crow women to bead. Such a decision reflected a general policy encouraging Native American women to make art. The policy was based on the assumption that beading and similar innocuous crafts could be sold by poverty-stricken Native Americans to tourists. There is little evidence however, that past generations of Crow beaded to raise money. Most of the handsome objects residing in museums or private collections were made for a Crow person and only later were they sold to outsiders or pawned.

Even today, most of these artisans are too busy dressing their own people to accept commissions from outsiders. Although some women and young girls occasionally earn money with small baubles such as belt buckles and hair ties, few undertake leggings, belts, or other major pieces for someone who is not Crow. “A few women,” explains beader Mardell Plainfeather, “will make something bigger if offered enough money, but it is rare.”⁸ As a

5. Frank Linderman, *Pretty-Shield* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1932; [reproduced 1972, reprinted 1974]), 248.

6. Barbara Loeb, “Classic Intermontane Beadwork: Art of the Crow and Plateau Tribes,” (doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, 1984), 308-68.

7. Joe Medicine Crow, conversation with author, Crow Reservation, 1989.

8. Mardell Plainfeather, conversation with author, Crow Reservation, 1990.

result, Crow art has seldom answered to the tastes of anyone but their own people, and the artists have focused their energy on reinforcing their cultural identity with their art.

Asked why she thought Crow women continued beading through such disruptive times, Lorena May Walks Over Ice of Lodge Grass, Montana, said emphatically, “because they liked to and because they [the Court] let them.”⁹ The court’s interpretation of beading as an insignificant craft rather than an important custom was clearly a mistake. Ironically, the organization that intended to destroy indigenous values unwittingly left open a precious pathway along which the Crow could strengthen the very social systems that government policy was striving to eradicate.

In subsequent years, many non-Indian individuals attempted more positive procedures. A number of priests and ministers, for example, worked to integrate Christian and indigenous religious practices. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Francis Leupp argued in 1905 for more respectful treatment of Native peoples and customs, an effort that bore its greatest fruit in the 1930s when Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier stated emphatically in one of his reports that “No interference with Indian religious life or expression will hereafter be tolerated.”¹⁰

Nonetheless, prejudices die slowly within institutions and in the mind of the public. The next generation of Crow continued to feel pressured by organized religion, the Court of Indian Offenses, and the boarding schools. Their descendants saw themselves interpreted negatively in history books and Hollywood movies. Surrounded by degrading images of what it meant to be Indian, some people stopped wearing their fine clothing.

When the stock market crashed in 1929, and the rains dwindled, Indian celebrations almost stopped. According to Joe Medicine Crow, less beading was done during the depression because there was less money to finance such costly clothing:

There was a terrible drought for ten years. When that happened, it more or less killed off Indian doings. Not only the Crow’s but the Cheyenne’s and other tribes’. Those times, about 1930 to 1940, were drab years. A sad period in history for people in general. Everyone was so poor.¹¹

Despite these hardships, Crow women continued to bead and by the 1960s had become, if anything, more committed to it than before. As one might expect of an active art form, styles changed several times during the new century, yet the

9. Lorena May Walks Over Ice, conversation with author, Crow Reservation, 1989.

10. Washburn, *Documentary History*, 920.

11. Joe Medicine Crow, conversation with author, 1989.



MHS Photograph Archives

An expert beader, Myrtle Big Man posed for this undated photograph in an elaborately beaded dress.

dedication to technical and artistic excellence remained. As a result, the best twentieth-century work competes easily with the fine pieces of the nineteenth century.

The initial shift in contemporary style actually began in the last decades of the nineteenth century when the Crow started, rather tentatively, to experiment with floral design. Beading of flowers had been popular among Native Americans in the East since the early 1800s and possibly was adapted from images these people had seen on European church vestments, embroideries, and laces. By the end of the nineteenth century, the fashion had spread to several parts of North America, including the Great Plains.

The first documented proof of the Crow using floral designs occurred in 1882 when Mierishash, or Two Belly, an important Crow leader, was pho-



N. A. Forsyth, photographer, MHS Photograph Archives

Crow Fair afforded Crow Indians like this man in 1910 the opportunity to display their finery.

tographed in a handsome, beaded jacket with small blooms and vine-like leaves on its breast. Who embroidered this garment or even if it came from Crow hands is unknown, but since it was worn by an important chief, the jacket probably was highly valued.

After this, floral motifs began to appear sporadically—on a pair of moccasins in one family or on a piece of horse gear in another—until about 1910, when Crow beaders became so enamored with the new patterns, they almost abandoned the old transmontane compositions. By the 1920s nearly every man, woman, and child was wearing flowers. Even today, the Crow take so much pleasure in floral patterns that women still make them frequently, and at least half the participants at any important ceremony will be wearing images of colorful blossoms.

In the first years of floral design, artisans favored small hearts, tulips, and ovals, connected by slender stems and stacked in vertical rows. These attractive little blooms were stitched to bare buckskin and sometimes emphasized with outlines of white beads in a manner that recalls the old transmontane style. Colors tended to be applied approximately in layers. Thus, a fanciful tulip on a pair of men's leggings collected in the early

1890s, was made from segments of light blue, dark blue, yellow, red, and green beads (figure 1). The overall effect is of geometric forms with soft corners and fanciful colors that bear little resemblance to a natural flower garden.

By the 1920s, however, Crow women were filling in background with solid beading and were rapidly mastering the art of realistic floral images. Some developed their own designs while others borrowed ideas freely from tablecloths, commercial clothing, food packaging, or any other accessible source. Recognizable flowers such as morning glories, roses, and daisies soon were twining across their garments and floral designs have continued to play an important role in their beading ever since (figure 2).

By the 1950s, the Crow were interested in "Indian design," a style that was gaining favor among Plains and plateau peoples. Like the old transmontane beaders, this new generation sometimes creates strong geometric patterns that fill up an entire design space. They also continue to prefer light blue or pink backgrounds, although white has gained considerable popularity, and they almost always employ the traditional, tight overlay stitch of their ancestors.

Yet in important ways, the new fashion bears little resemblance to the large, bold diamonds and hourglasses of the past. The most obvious difference is the greatly increased complexity of motif. Beaders now tend to create elaborate shapes that they piece together from numerous small parts. Color schemes also have shifted, placing greater emphasis on contrasts (figure 3).

Indian design has become so popular for formal dress that Crow people use it almost as often as they use floral. The dynamic character of the new patterns, however, altered local tastes. Some Crow women looking at colored photographs of the nineteenth-century transmontane work, for example, commented on the simplicity of the older fashions, finding them less interesting than modern styles.

Yet older patterns have not been abandoned. As late as the 1930s, women were producing high quality cradle tops that adhered to all the artistic conventions of the 1800s. Modernized versions of the old style are popular today for the trappings on women's parade horses. In fact, a small revival is taking place. Some beaders are studying nineteenth-century museum pieces and applying the designs to a wider range of objects.

Whichever style they use, many, although not all, modern Crow women sketch ideas on paper before beginning the actual beading, and, if doing Indian designs, may depend on graph paper to

achieve a precise composition. Once a woman has completed a drawing, she bastes it to the front of the garment and beads directly through it. Thus, a twentieth-century piece of Crow work often has a piece of paper sandwiched and well-hidden between the beadwork and its backing.

Technique remains essentially the same as in the nineteenth century, with most Crow women still favoring the smooth overlay stitch. The major innovation has been straight-across beading, which is used for some floral work and most Indian designs. Instead of beading each part separately, the beader creates her design and background simultaneously, stretching a long, unbroken strand the full width of her design field, changing bead colors for each design element, and then sewing the whole strand in place. Her finished motifs probably will have slightly stepped edges akin to needle point (figures 2, 3).

Tight, even stitching remains as much a mark of a good beader as creative design, and many Crow women continue to take such pride in technique that they do their best to make the reverse side as perfect as the front. Ideally, the back side is covered with tiny, evenly spaced stitches tied with knots that are almost invisible. This refinement may be missed by an outsider but not by a Crow, because, as the author has observed many times, a careful critic will almost always turn a piece over to study the back. Other details may be equally tended to. Verlie Half, for example, spent two years completing a beaded belt (figure 2) not only to perfect her design and technique but to accumulate the special "cut beads" that have faceted sides and sparkle in the light. Honoring the quality of her work, she says, "It is my most prized possession."¹²

Why did Crow beaders persist in focusing so much energy on beading even after settlers poured onto the plains and shattered their nomadic, buffalo-hunting life style? What motivated them to spend their scant funds on beading supplies when poverty overwhelmed them? Why, when time has become valuable, do modern Crow women still devote countless hours to beading? The answers to these questions lie partly in the pleasure Crow beaders derive from their art form and partly in the close relationship between beadwork and other fundamental aspects of Crow society. The mutual responsibility of extended family members, for example, is important to almost all of Crow life. This emphasis has continued despite the influence of Euramerican social life and economic structure, which is formed around the smaller, more independent nuclear family. It is particularly important

12. Verlie Half to author, undated letter (August 1990).



Undated photograph, MHS Photograph Archives

Floral designs decorate a buckskin shirt worn by Joe Medicine Crow.

that the bonds among mothers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, and sisters remain strong because Crow people trace clan membership through female members of the family.

Beadwork, because it is labor intensive, helps reinforce these bonds. Some women do everything themselves, but most have to share the task. They may go to the best artist in the family for the design and ask the best seamstress to structure the garments. Often they farm out pieces of beading to different family members, perhaps a legging to a sister, a moccasin to a cousin, and so on. Credit for the project, however, remains with the person who planned it, and if a Crow member is asked who made an outfit, he or she will almost always point to the person who initiated the project.

Beadwork also plays a role in concepts of prosperity, which often differ markedly as do concepts of family structure, from those of the dominant culture. Past generations of Crow like most Plains peoples, believed that socially responsible people shared their wealth, especially with extended family members, and did not accumulate large amounts of goods and money for individual use. Today,

even after a century of pressure applied by devotees to the protestant ethic and capitalism, most Crow honor generosity much more than the accumulation of personal wealth.

They say, instead, that a prosperous person is one who has a good lodge (tepee), numbers of horses, fine clothing, and many good relatives to be proud of. Thus, a person in a fully beaded outfit is making a statement about well-being. Not only does he or she have the finest of clothing, but also relatives who are skilled and dedicated enough to do the beading.

The relationship between beadwork and marriage is particularly strong. To be recognized officially a newly married couple must be outfitted and publicly presented to the Crow people. It is especially important for the groom's relatives to give the bride a fine dress, beaded moccasins, a fully beaded belt, and leggings as well as accessories such as fringed shawls and jewelry.

After the garments are completed, the groom's family must hire a professional crier to praise their new daughter-in-law. Walking or riding with the newly clothed woman at an important gathering such as Crow Fair or the New Year's dances, the crier calls out the woman's name, who has dressed her, and why this has been done.

The Crow sometimes speak casually of this custom. They may say, for instance, that a mother-in-law does not have the right to tell her new daughter what to do until she has outfitted the younger woman. The undertaking, however, is no trivial matter. The project will be so costly and time-consuming that it may not actually be completed before one or two children have arrived.

More important, the presentation of such an outfit carries considerable social significance, because this is the moment when the family publicly recognizes the marriage and welcomes its new daughter-in-law into the family. In spite of a century of exposure to Christian ethics, the Crow people still place more importance on the beaded outfit than on a paper license. The family that neglects this custom brings serious insult to the bride and probably will illicit more criticism than the one who bypasses a church wedding.

The impetus to produce these outfits remains so strong that the preponderance of adult-sized garments in use today began as gifts from new in-laws. A dress worn by Karen Goes-Ahead, for example, was presented to her mother Elvira about two years after Elvira's marriage to the Bird-In-Ground family in 1964 (figure 8). The garment was beaded by Clarice Denny, the groom's cousin, and

Jennifer Flatlip, his sister, and remains highly regarded. Elvira Bird-In-Ground says that her daughter Karen, although she has a fine elk tooth dress from her own in-laws, still wears the dress on occasion, and will one day pass the heirloom on to her own little girl. "It is a great thing that my husband's relatives did for us," she says, "and it is going to be handed down."¹³ In another instance, a legging was created as part of an outfit intended for the maker's new daughter-in-law (figure 3). In similar fashion, if the bride is outfitted, her family may reciprocate by producing striking clothing for the groom, such as the buckskin vest and trousers presented to Bemus Big Hair by his bride's relatives (figure 7). Such men's outfits are often given as return gifts to the groom and are, according to Big Hair, a "token of respect."¹⁴

It is obvious that the Crow retain traditional customs of marriage, money management, and family structure. Equally clear is how the relationship between beadwork and social values contributes to the richness of modern Crow life. After two-hundred years, Crow beadwork is still a living, vital art form playing a crucial role in cultural preservation. That these Plains people have been able to continue such a demanding art form is due partially to the mistaken notion of outside institutions that beading was of small cultural importance. Instead, such institutions as the Court of Indian Offenses and boarding schools left a door open. Something in the Crow themselves drove them and still drives them to bead with such intensity. Unquestionably one strong motivation is pleasure. Most beadworkers enjoy beading. Many people take great pleasure in wearing their handsome garments. Most of them enjoy looking at the beadwork, and at special gatherings many Crow people spend hours watching all that is taking place and admiring the beadwork.

Equally important, however, is the enormous respect Crow people generally have for their cultural values. Frequently confronted with difficult and persistent issues such as housing, education, and the pressures of mining companies and other outside businesses, they work closely now with the larger society and culture around them, but they seem not to lose sight of their Crow identity or the great pride they take in their Crowness. And each time these people appear in their distinctive formal dress they remind themselves, each other, and outsiders that they are Crow. *M*

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13. Elvira Bird-In-Ground, telephone conversation with author, September 9, 1990.

14. Bemus Big Hair to author, undated letter (August 1990).