

Moccasin Styles



Moccasins are just one part of the entire traditional outfit, as seen in this 1850s photograph of Caroline Parker, Tonawanda Seneca. They are meant to compliment the leggings, beaded skirt, and decorated overdress.

Do moccasins make the outfit?

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Moccasin styles of changed over time as new materials were introduced through the fur trade. The oldest surviving moccasins are generally in European museums, taken overseas very early and kept in private or royal collections. The pair of moccasins seen below is made from tanned animal hide, sewn with sinew, and decorated with dyed porcupine quills. The orange, black and white colors appear on a number of quilled items fro that same era. These are known as center-seam moccasins in that they are usually made from one piece of leather that is sewed together at the vamp - front. The quills are sewn over the seam.



Exhibit from the North American collection of the Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde München, Maximilianstraße 42, Munich, Germany. Moccasins with porcupine bristles, eastern woodlands, 18th or early 19th century. Photo by Daderot.

The Sensible Shoe

Built for comfort and protection and unisex in style: these are the characteristics of the sensible shoe. The sensible shoe has also been persistent, remaining in use with little change to design even as new designs have developed and fashions have come and gone.



Leather soft-soled moccasins with porcupine quill decoration, Eastern Woodlands, circa 1900. One-piece construction with a single seam up the center of the foot and a single seam at the back of the heel. The front of the upper and the ankle collar decorated with porcupine quills and a red cloth trim around the collar. Purchased by Groucho Marx. PM 41-72-10/24400

The moccasin, the brogue, the Scottish gillie, and wooden shoes are examples of the original sensible shoe. Best represented in the Peabody collections is the moccasin. Most Native American footwear is commonly referred to as moccasins, from the Algonkian mahksun or makizin. They are of two types: soft-soled and hard-soled. Soft-soled moccasins were and are found mainly but not exclusively in the East. Their upper and lower pieces are made of the same or similar materials; often they were constructed from a single piece of hide. They were also straights; that is, right and left were interchangeable.

Hard-soled moccasins are always constructed of at least two pieces, and the lower piece (the sole) is of a stronger, stiffer, or thicker material than the upper. Each shoe is fitted for the left or right foot. It is not known when hard-soled moccasins developed in North America, but they were rare before 1875.

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A type of soft-soled moccasin-style shoe was common in many societies at least as early as the Middle Ages. The two-piece hard-soled shoe developed in Europe around 1500. Left- and right-foot-specific shoes had appeared sporadically throughout history in various cultures, but remained rare until the mid-1800s.

Wooden shoes, clogs, klompen, or sabots—associated mainly with the Dutch today—were commonly worn among the peasant classes of northern Europe from the fourteenth century onward; when they first came into use is unknown. Carved from a single block of wood, they were durable, inexpensive, and warm—warmer when stuffed with hay—and offered protection from mud, rain, and animal hooves.

Source: <http://www.peabody.harvard.edu/node/514>



The porcupine quills are soaked in water, made pliable, then folded over running stitches of sinew or thread. Sinew is made from the tendons of deer, which also has to be moisten to make it soft enough to use as thread. It and the quill later dry and harden, staying in place on the moccasin.

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We can see two styles of sewing. The center is a plaiting technique using two quills that are interwoven into geometric patterns. The curvilinear lines are made by a single quill.

We can also see the use of glass seed beads on the edges of the cuffs on both.

The curvilinear lines mimic growing plants. The designs appear to be at the discretion of the maker, and seldom do we see two pairs of moccasin that look exactly alike.

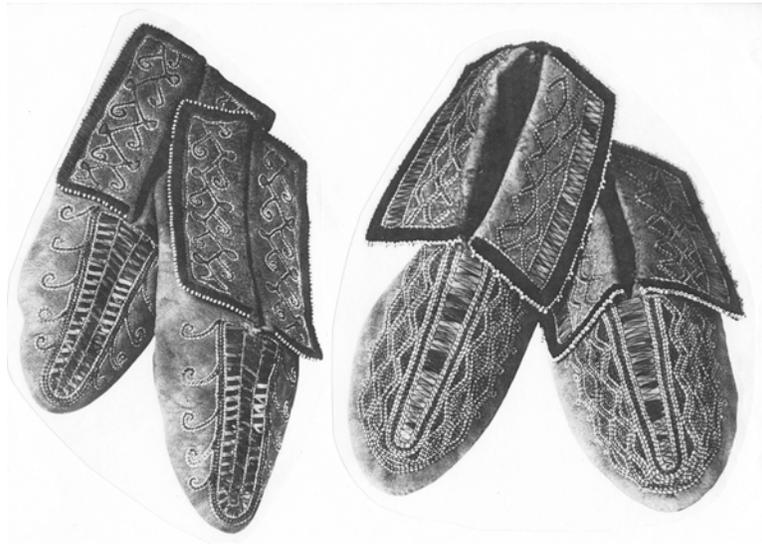


Left: Painting of Indian Affairs Superintendent, Guy Johnson wearing quill decorated moccasins and cap, late 1770s.

Right: Detail of Benjamin West painting showing quilled moccasin, leggings and leg garter.

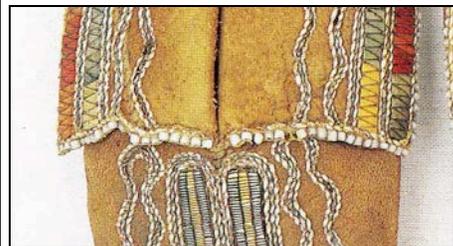
Moccasins were common gifts to the Europeans officers and colonial administrators. They are a unique native invention, most practical and very comfortable. The beautiful designs also made them a prized item.

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North America, Northeast, Eastern Woodlands, USA, New York, Seneca or Cayuga
Pair of moccasins Traditional, mid-19th century Buckskin, porcupine quills, sinew
Gift of Robert G. Chaffee, Class of 1936; 159.14.14400

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While the quillwork would indicate an older pair of moccasins, there are white glass beads on the edge of the cuffs which means they were either added later, or these could have been made in the early 19th century.

Beaded Moccasins



PAIR OF YOUNG WOMAN'S MOCCASINS

Aboriginal art at the Senate, Ottawa

Likely Mohawk / Eastern Woodlands (circa 1880)

Leather, glass beads and wool

Moccasins are among the articles of clothing most closely associated with Aboriginal peoples. This word comes from the Algonkian language family, possibly from Montagnais. In the past, moccasin styles were as varied as the Indian peoples that made them, each having its characteristic ornamentation and designs.

Moccasins were adopted by Europeans in the 17th century and are still widely worn today. They are footwear perfectly adapted to their environment: flexible, comfortable and practical.

There used to be a rule of thumb that if the cuffs were one piece that wrapped around the back of the moccasin, those were made for women. If the cuffs are cut into two separate flaps, it would indicate that they were men's moccasins. However, that rule is not always adhered to.

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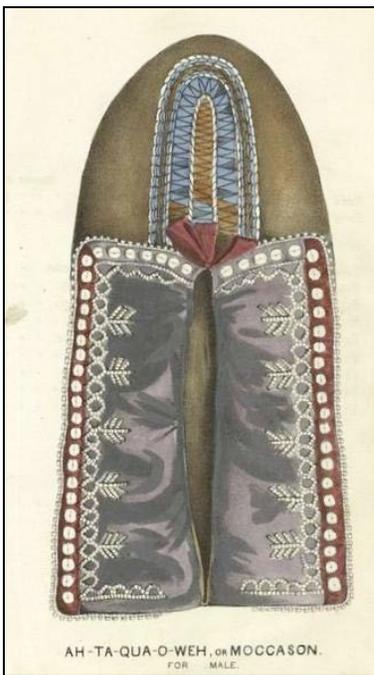


Rear view of beaded cuffs on women's moccasin. Wrap-around cuffs.



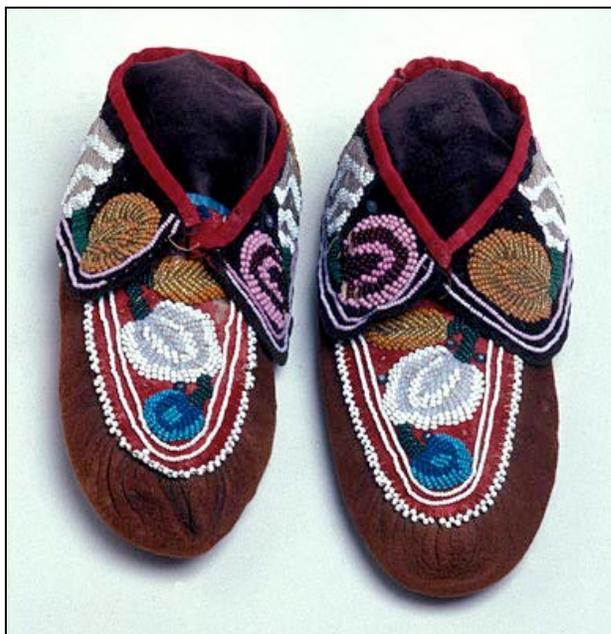
The Haudenosaunee are known for raised beadwork techniques, as seen on these bead vamps. Loose strings of beads are sewn over an underlying row in such a way as to create a 3-D effect. Solid white beads were generally used to “frame” the beaded vamp or cuff. This photo shows how a running stitch of three white beads is used to sew the vamp onto the lower, leather moccasin.

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1850 - Seneca man's moccasin with quills and beads.

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North America, Northeast, Eastern Woodlands, USA, New York, Mohawk
Moccasins

Mid-late 19th century

Commercial leather, cloth, glass beads, and paper

Gift of Eileen K. Barfuss, Class of 1984; 986.21.26712A and B



Moccasins, [pair], mens, felt / beads / leather, made by the Iriquois Indians of the Six Nations, Ontario, Canada, c1870-1880

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Mens (?) pair of straight moccasins, constructed by gathering leather onto apron with oval toe and oval seat. Moccasins consist of one piece leather sole and upper with black felt apron over card featuring a beaded floral design in white, pink, green and yellow, a black velvet collar also beaded and red bound top edge. Moccasins lined in coarse sacking and leather sole features an inverted T back seam. The left forepart is patched with leather and whipstitched.

Read more:

<http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=239353#ixzz1kX5YIYLq>
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Background from Frank Kodras 13/1/2011

The moccasins are of Iroquois origin. Moccasins like these and whole slew of other items were made for the early tourist industry and therefore are classified as souvenir art. They were sold by independent vendors as well as natives themselves around the famous tourist attractions such as the Niagara Falls. They were sold at various exhibitions, different fairs and early railway stations. This is one of the main reasons why they were ignored and overlooked by the early museum collectors. Material such as steel needles, threads, beads, cloth, ribbons and etc. came from the European fur trade which started in late 17th century, one of the best known trading companies is the Hudson Bay Company.

The leather used is most likely a deer hide buckskin or also known as a brain-tan, judging by the colour it might be maple smoked. No caribou or caribou hunting in this region. The raised beadwork is typically done over a paper stencil or rather paper cut-out, this is very characteristic of Iroquois beadwork style. There might be a possibility that the wide, somewhat rounded moccasin vamp shapes might indicate the gender of the wearer as a male, the pointed vamps female.

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Vamps (From the Collection of the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution)



Narrow toe vamp for women



Wider, rounded toe vamp for men.



Called a pucker-toe moccasin due to the way the leather gathers over the toes when the seam is sewn. A second piece of leather is inserted and sewn to create the puckering effect, then covered with the beaded vamp. As the moccasins wore out, the beaded vamp and cuffs could be removed, repaired and sewn onto a new pair. A form of artistic recycling.

Fancy Cuffs



Oneida Moccasins vamps

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The cuffs have “scalloped” edges and vamps, along with the use of larger beaded flowers, using clear beads to make the design sparkle more.

Baby Moccasins



Kahnawake Mohawk



Seneca

Huron Moccasins



Wendat (Huron) moccasins ca. 1800 Canada
Hide, porcupine quill, metal cones, horse hair, dye 28 x 8.5 x 7 cm
Purchase NMAI 19/6362

These cuffed, soft-soled Wendat moccasins, with a seam running down the center of the vamp and up the heel, were made by a very skilled artist: Their deerskin is slightly darkened. The cuffs are decorated with three lanes of dyed quillwork. The red, yellow, and black quills were flattened and folded back and forth across a lane and stitched around the each cuff. The cuffs were then edged with white quills. A single lane of quillwork hides the seam on the vamp. It, too, is outlined with white quillwork. The moccasins are further embellished with tin cones with dyed deer hair pendants.

<http://www.nmai.si.edu/exhibitions/infinityofnations/woodlands/196362.html#about>

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Indigenous Knowledge Centre - Hodinohso:ni Art Lessons

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