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Interior of wampum shell before being turned into a beadContents1 Introduction2 History3 Wampum as Trade CommodityWampum, which were small beads made from white and purple seashells found on the beaches of Long Island, Connecticut, and Rhode Island.Associated with spiritual power, wampum served several key functions in indigenous communities throughout eastern North America long before European contact.Wampum was widely used to pay ransom, tribute, and reparations among the indigenous peoples of the area.For the Iroquoian-speaking Five Nations of upstate New York, who lived far away from coastal New England, wampum also became an essential symbolic good that was used in many rituals. Additionally, wampum woven on belts and strings served as mnemonic devices in diplomatic meetings.1HistoryPrior to 1637, the native peoples of eastern Long Island had little contact with the English colonists. For the most part, contact with the outside world was mediated through the Pequot tribe of Connecticut.The indigenous people who lived among the shores of the Long Island Sound and the shores of Long Island made wampum.During this time, their use was controlled largely by local sachems and symbolized power and status of the wearer. They symbolized ceremony and ritual exchange. 1620During the 1620s, wampum became used as a good and currency during the fur trade between native and colonial communities.The Pequots continued to control the trade of wampum manufactured by Long Islands east end tribal groups, the Shinnecock and Montaukett.21633John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Colony, considered Long Island the best place for obtaining wampum for trade.3Wampum as Trade CommodityThe strong association of wampum and European trade goods on archaeological sites suggests some important economic function during the early historic period. This function was made explicit in the 1660 letter from Governor Stuyvesant to the directors of the Dutch West India Company.Wampum, he explained, is the source and the mother of the beaver trade, and for goods only, without wampum, we cannot obtain beavers from the savages.4Thus, aside from the well-known decorative and social uses of wampum by Indians, wampum served as an important if not critical exchange commodity for Europeans engaged in the fur trade.5 NativeTech: Native American Technology & Art WAMPUM HISTORY AND BACKGROUND Shell beads have long had cultural significance to the Native Americans of southern New England; shell beads in the Northeast have been found which are 4500 years old. These shell beads were larger and relatively uncommon because drilling the material was difficult with stone drill bits. This earlier bead, proto-wampum, was traded within ceremonial contexts, in part for the connections of shell with water and its life giving properties. Shell beads come in many traditional shapes and sizes, including small discs or hishi beads. Before contact with Europeans, shell beads were either disk shaped, or barrel shaped, usually made from the whelk's spiraling inner columella. Other shapes of shell beads include tubes, and other forms resembling a ball, cone, diamond, square, or hourglass. Wampum from Middle and Late Woodland periods (beginning around AD 200) had a robust shape, about 8mm in length and 5mm in diameter, with larger stonebored holes of more than 2mm. Wampum beads of the mid-1600's averaged 5mm length and 4mm diameter with tiny holes were bored with thin pins. Seneca's in New York after European contact during the late 1600's increasing numbers of shell beads which measured approximately 7mm length and 5mm diameter, having metaldrilled holes with a diameter of just under 2mm. The word "Wampum" comes from the Narragansett word for "white shell beads". Wampum beads are in two colors: white ("Wmpti" from "Wompam") from the Whelk shell ("Meteshock"), and purple-black ("Sikt") beads ("Suckahock") from the growth rings of the Quahog shell ("Suckauanuck"). The quahog shell used to produce purple wampum and other shell pendants is exclusively the species with the Latin name "Mercinaria mercinaria". There are several types of Whelk used to make the white beads and pendants with the Latin name 'Busyon'. In southern New England beads are often manufactured from two local species: Busyon canaliculatum (Channeled Whelk) and Busyon carica (Knobbed Whelk), which both inhabit the waters from Cape Cod southwards to Florida. Early historic Iroquois wampum also originates from the species Busyon sinistrum (Lightening Whelk) along the coast from New Jersey through Florida around through the Gulf, and also from the species Busyon Laeostomum (Snow Whelk) who's habitat ranges from New Jersey down to Virginia (Pendergast 1983: 97-112). Some early historic documents contain inaccurate references to the shells being of periwinkle or muscle shell, sometimes mistaking the beads themselves for porcelain or bone. The periwinkle shell was not even introduced to the New England coastline until the late 1800's (Krepicio 2001: personal communication). European traders and politicians, using beads and trinkets, often exploited gift exchange to gain Native American favor or territory. With the scarcity of metal coins in New England, Wampum quickly evolved into a formal currency after European/Native contact, it's production greatly facilitated by slender European metal drill bits. Wampum was mass produced in coastal southern New England. The Narragansetts and Pequots monopolized the manufacture and exchange of wampum in this area. Tools for making "Dutch" wampum (Orhard 1975: 84). Click for closer view. The intense hardness and brittleness of the materials made it impossible to wear, grow the shell by machinery first. First, thin portions were removed with a light sharp hammer, and the remainder was then sliced with a slender saw. The slender stick, and was the proper way to string. The beads were made by most bead-workers today, probably developed the late 1600's and early 1700's with the florescence of the Native wampum industry. Inserted into another piece of wood, sawed like the first stick, which was firmly fastened to a bench, a weight being so adjusted that it caused the scissure to grip the shell and to hold it securely. The drill was made from an untempered handsaw, ground into proper shape and tempered in the flame of a candle. Braced against a steel plate on the operator's chest and nicely adjusted to the center of the shell, the drill was rotated by means of the common hand-bow. To clean the aperture, the drill was dexterously withdrawn while in motion, and was cleared by the thumb and finger of the particles of shell. From a vessel hanging over the closely clamped shell drops of water fell on the drill to cool it, for particular care was exercised lest the shell break from the heat caused by friction (Jennings 1976: 93-94). A fathom (six feet of strung beads) of white wampum was worth ten shillings and double that for purple beads. A coat and Buskins "set tick with these Beads in pleasant wild works and a broad Belt of the same [Josselyn 1988: 101]" belonging to King Philip (Wampanoag) was valued at Twenty pounds. Even in the 1600s there was noted distinctiveness of Native-made wampum and the inability of others to counterfeit it, although attempts at imitations included beads of stone and other materials. King Philip, Wampanoag (from a lithograph by T. Sinclair appeared in Events in Indian History, 1842). "Strung money was known as wampumpeage, or merely peage. Customarily arranged in lengths of one fathom (6 feet), which contained anywhere from 240 to 360 individual beads, depending not only on the size of the beads but on their current worth, for "fathom" soon came to denote a specific monetary value. Individual strands were then worked into bands from one to five inches wide, to be worn on the wrist, waist, or over the shoulder. ... Occasionally the Indians fashioned great belts containing over ten thousand beads" (Vaughan 1979: 120-124). With the increased manufacture after European contact, these beads were carried inland along indigenous trade routes as far as the Great Plains and as far south as Virginia. By the 1700's the Dutch Europeans began to fabricate vast quantities in factories such as the Campbell wampum factory in New York. The use of wampum as money, even among the English, continued until the American Revolution. Important matters such as treaty agreements were likely to be marked by an exchange of Wampum belts, with designs in two colors, which thereafter served as visual reminders of the event itself, and to call to memory the arrangements agreed on." (Russel 1980: 185). Bow Loom used in New England to weave wampum belts. Wampum belts consist of rows of beads woven together. Belts were made using the techniques of both hand-held and loom-woven beadwork, often on a simple loom made from a curved stick resembling an archer's bow. Weaving traditionally involves stringing the beads onto twisted plant fibers, and securing them to animal sinew or leather thong warp. Try your hand at weaving a Virtual Wampum Belt Inner fibers stripped from milkweed, dogbane (a close relative of milkweed), toad flax, velvet leaf, and nettle plants were twisted into fine threads. By the 1700's a multitude of Native American weaving techniques had developed for wampum belts, bracelets, necklaces and collars. By the 1700's in New England, tubular glass beads and small round pony beads were being woven into belts and bands. Penobscot Wampum Collars & Belt (Speck 1976) Loom, wide belts of wampum were not produced by Native Americans until after European contact. However, the methods and techniques used in making large wampum belts probably developed from the ancient Native American traditions of finger-weaving. Some of the earliest post-European contact wampum belts were worn as collars around the neck. These early wampum collars are made without the use of a loom, much like prehistoric finger-weaving, with one end of the belt anchored and the other end left free to weave the warp and weft elements on a bias (diagonal). The very first woven wampum most likely incorporated single beads strung onto twine while finger-weaving sashes, garters, burden-straps or other bands. The belt weaving technique known as "double-strand square weave appears earlier (late 1500's and early 1600's) than the 'single-strand square weave' technique. Although a loom is helpful, but not necessary, the double-strand square weave technique does not require the use of metal spools, as the beads are woven over the wefts passing under the wefts passing over the wefts. The double-strand square weave technique was used by the Narragansett and the Shawnee. The Shawnee used a particular group. Belts and bands were validated treaties and were used to remember oral tradition. Ceremonies of dance, curing, personal sacrifice incorporate religious and ritual aspects of beads. Jewelry was also used to display many physical or social "rites of passage", and shows that a person has gone through a certain transformation in their life, like maturity or marriage. Wampum could be presented by the family of a prospective husband to the family of a potential wife, and if accepted, granted approval for the marriage. "The young man, when he had settled his mind upon marrying some special girl, would appoint an uncle, or some elderly man to be his go-between. Extra dignity was lent to the occasion by having two old men for negotiators. He would then procure some wampum, if he were rich enough a collar or necklace, if not, just a string. Next he would compose a message, the main points of which would be represented by the arrangement of white and purple beads. This message, accompanied by the mnemonic wampum, would be forthwith entrusted to the go-between's care, and he would go to the home of the girl's parents carrying the wampum in a rolled-up red handkerchief or other gaudy cloth. Here his message would be delivered, and the wampum left , to be debated upon by the girl's family. The negotiator would depart for a while to allow time for deliberation. Before long he would return for an answer. Now should the girl's family have decided negatively, the wampum would be returned to the old man, who would deliver it to the sender. And the matter was dropped. But should the suitor be favorably regarded, the wampum would be retained and upon the negotiator's next visit he would be answered in the affirmative or asked to defer a little longer. The retention of the wampum was considered a sign of consent. It often happened that the husband, after the wedding, would buy back the wampum" (Speck 1976: 254-255). Some pictures adapted from published sources on wampum Single-Strand Square Weave Technique Double-Strand Square Weave Technique Inter-Net Links for Wampum and Woven Beadwork Return to NativeTech's Beadwork Menu Beadwork Bibliography and Books to Buy On-Line Reproduction wampum beads are available from Waaban Aki Crafting Text and Graphics 1994 - Tara Prindle unless otherwise cited. Wampum was used by Indigenous peoples and to record treaties and settle disputes (courtesy NMC/CMC/575-620). Nicholas Isawanhanhi, Huron chief, shown wearing the regimental coat commonly awarded to Indigenous trading captains during the fur trade. Painting by Chatfield (courtesy Library and Archives Canada/C-38944). Wampum which comes from a Narragansett (Algonquian language family) word meaning a string of white shell beads are tubular beads manufactured from Atlantic coast seashells. While a variety of shells may be used, most often the white shells are formed from the whelk shell and the purple from the quahog clam shell. Belts made of wampum were used to mark agreements between peoples. Wampum belts are of particular significance with regards to treaties and covenants made between Indigenous peoples and European colonial powers. Function and Uses of Wampum Indigenous peoplesliving along the coast collected the shells, produced the beads, and traded them in-land, for example to theHaudenosaunee, for furs, corns, beans and squash. The beads had considerable value in eastern and maritime Canada for ornament, ceremony, the fur trade and diplomacy, particularly in the 17th and 18th centuries. Wampum was threaded on string or woven into bracelets, necklaces, collars, sashes and later into belts that served as physical representations of political agreements. Particular patterns symbolized events, alliances or kinship relations between different peoples, and wampum could be used to confirm relationships, propose marriage, atone for murder or ransom captives. Beads and belts also validated treaties and were used to recall oral tradition. Many communities had wampum keepers, who protected the belts and interpreted the history contained therein. Wampum Belts, Treaties and Alliances BeforeConfederationsome groups of Indigenous people, particularly those in theEastern Woodlands, indicated their agreement to certain treatiesby presenting long wampum belts to Crownofficials. Some examples include the Hiawatha Belt (the belt of the Haudenosaunee), the Covenant Chain(Wampum) 1764, and the Two Row Wampum Belt (Kaswentha). Two Row Wampum Belt (Kaswentha) The Two Row Wampum Belt (Kaswentha)of theHaudenosaunee is a well-known example of a wampum belt. It still symbolizes an agreement of mutual respect and peace between the Haudenosaunee and European newcomers (initially the Dutch) to North America. The principles were embodied in the belt by virtue of its design: two rows of purple wampum beads on a background of white beads represent a canoeand a European ship. The parallel paths represent the rules governing the behaviour of the Indigenous and European peoples. The Kaswentha stipulates that neither group will force their laws, traditions, customs or language on each other, but will coexist peacefully as each group follows their own path. The Kaswentha continues to represent theCovenant Chainalliance between theSix Nationsand their European partners, extending from the 17th century to modern times. As a foundational philosophical principle of respect and friendship, the Belt may be able to function as a framework for improved relations between Indigenous peoples and various levels of government. Contemporary Significance Wampum belts and other wampum bead artifacts continue to hold significance for Indigenous peoples and any treaties or agreements they might represent. Numerous wampum artifacts exist in private collections and in local, provincial and national museums both in Canada and the United States. Wampum in public collections have become the subject of repatriationnegotiations between community members and institutional officials who seek to uphold the rights of a given community to their cultural artifacts while balancing traditional care and preservation techniques. Beaded wampum belt given to William Penn, 1682; in the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, New York CityNational Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, New YorkWampum, tubular shell beads that have been assembled into strings or woven into belts or embroidered ornaments, formerly used as a medium of exchange by some North American Indians. The terms wampum and wampumpeag were initially adopted by English settlers, who derived them from one of the eastern Algonquian languages: literally translates "white strings of shell beads" [5].rd, wampumpeag means "strings of white (shell beads).Before contact with white settlers, the Indians used wampum primarily for ceremonial purposes, as a record of an important agreement or treaty, as an object of tribute given by subject tribes, or for gift exchange (q.v.). Its value derived from its ceremonial importance and the skill involved in making it. In the early 17th century wampum came to be used as money in trade between whites and Indians because of a shortage of European currency. When machines were invented in the mid-18th century for mass production of wampum, the resulting inflation stopped its use as money in the eastern United States. 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