Anishinabe (Ojibwe) Dance Blanket. 2007.1

Artist: most likely 1-3 Ojibwe or Dakota women, Great Lakes/Woodlands Region of Minnesota
Description: 53 x 62 x 7/8 inches: Beadwork and silk ribbon applique work on wool. Large central geometric beaded medallion, two lower corner designs of floral beadwork embroidery, appliqued ribbon work borders across bottom and partly up the sides.
Time Period: 1840-1850
Geographic Setting: Minnesota River Valley, Mendota to Traverse de Sioux to Little Rock Creek
Relevant Biographies: Anishinabe , Dakota, Joseph LaFromboise (1805-1856), his wife, Jane Dickson(1820-?)

Historical Setting

Many Native American peoples migrated from the Eastern Woodlands region of the United States to Minnesota. Broadly speaking, the Sioux are linguistically distinct from the Anishinabe who belong to the Algonquin group of Native Americans. Both groups trace some ancestral claims to Mille Lacs, MN. Throughout their early history, the Sioux and Ojibwe were in conflict and as a result, the Siouan groups were pushed farther southward and westward. Encounter and exchange with Europeans began as early as 1640 with the arrival of French explorers, fur traders, and Jesuit missionaries (Radisson, DuLuth, Marquette, Joliet, Hennepin, LeSueur, etc.) By 1805, the area was part of the Northwest Territory of the new United States which Zebulon Pike explored. He concluded the first treaty with the Dakota Sioux who were well-established farming and fur trading along the Minnesota River. The 100,000 acres in the 1805 treaty became Fort Snelling and the future metropolitan area of the Twin Cities. The Dakota were paid 2 cents an acre. Population in MN soared in the 1850s and successive treaties were negotiated with the Dakota bands. By 1850s they were moved to reservation areas extending along the Minnesota River. The Dakota Conflict of 1862 ended good relations between settlers and the Dakota. Minnesota gained statehood in 1858.

Biographical Information

The Algonquian language group which lived west of the Iroquois was originally known as the Anishinabe. They divided themselves into three groups, Ottowa, Potawatomi, and Ojibwe, the largest group. The Ojibwe believed a spiritual prophecy that said if they kept moving west, they would find a place where food grew on water. When they reached the wild rice lakes and cranberry bogs of Minnesota and Wisconsin they ceased their journey.

No written history of the Dakota Sioux exists before the 1600s. They are thought to have migrated from the eastern areas of the Great Lakes. The Sioux call themselves *Ociti Sakowin,* or the Seven Council Fires. The Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota are the tribal divisions of the Sioux. The Sioux followed the buffalo on the Great Plains. Individual, family, and band relationships form the basis of Sioux society. Family kinship ties were of great importance to the Sioux, thus many generations and unmarried relatives lived together and were responsible for each other.

The Twin Cities area is a blending area for the Dakota and Ojibwe. Joseph LaFramboise, whose mother was part Ottowa is a good example of the Metis, or mixed race culture that was common to the fur traders in MN. The LaFramboise family were well-established fur traders based in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. When Joseph's father died, his mother sent him to Montreal to be educated. He learned to read and write French, speak English and a number of native languages. His first position in the family business as a

clerk, an opportunity which put him in contact with John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company. Joseph's Metis heritage served him well as he established himself as a fur trader in the new Minnesota territory and navigated the Native American world and the American world of settlement. He was granted rights to the first trading post of the American Fur Company in MN. Following in his father and grandfather's footsteps, he also married Native American women, two of Chief Sleepy Eye's daughters. This linked him in both a kinship and trading relationship to the Dakota people and he never shirked his economic duty to his Dakota relatives. LaFramboise helped translate the Treaties of 1837 and 1851, sometimes negotiating, sometimes working behind the scenes to explain the terms of the annuities to his relatives. Well-known and respected by the likes of Henry Sibley, LaFramboise even named one of his sons after artist George Caitlin. By the 1840s, LaFramboise astutely observed that the Dakota way of life in MN was giving way to the Americanization of the area. In 1845 he married Jane Dickson, daughter of South Dakota trader William Dickson. Jane, fifteen years younger than LaFramboise, was also of mixed heritage: white, Dakota and Ojibwe. Their marriage was the first recorded Christian wedding in Nicollet County. It is stated that Jane did not speak at the ceremony, possibly because she did not understand English. Local lore has it that she wore the dance blanket at the ceremony. "A blanket worn over the head or around the shoulders was a strong cultural symbol for the Dakota bands." Jane and Joseph had five children, three who survived to adulthood. Sadly, not much other information is known about her. As fur trading died out and Minnesota applied for statehood, LaFramboise left the trading business and became a successful farmer near the future site of New Ulm.

Beadwork

Native American women did beadwork before the introduction of manufactured beads. Seeds, shells, bark, bones were all made into beads and applied to clothing and important objects. The new beads from the European traders were eagerly adapted into existing designs.

Two types of beads were used as a trading commodity at the start of European contact. Pony beads, 3/8 to ½ inch, sometimes painted ceramic, were traded in from China through the Columbia River and by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Smaller glass beads, seed beads, were used by almost every trade expedition. There is evidence that beads were exchanged from both coasts through inter-tribal trading networks and spread quite rapidly. The role of beadwork is highly significant for Native American women. In Anishinabe, the seed beads are called "Manido-min-swag" or "little spirit seeds, gift of the Manido." These little items were a gift of beauty from the spirits, and perhaps the white man was the intermediary who provided them. While Native Americans ascribed no monetary value to the new beads, some researchers suggest that the perfection and shininess had a spiritual value. Blue and white seed beads were highly prized, and additional colors worked their way into the traditional palette. The height of beading occurred during the "Reservation Period" in the 1870s. Early beadwork designs followed quillwork patterns and evolved to more complicated designs. Stitches used include the lane, loom, or trail stitch, spot stitch, and double needle stitch technique. Bone awls, tanned hides, sinew thread gave way to steel needles, commercial fabrics, and cotton thread. Native American women constantly incorporated new motifs into their work as they encountered new people. Specific designs were developed for the tourist market, while some designs were retained solely for tribal use. There may be as much as 20 pounds of beading on the yoke and upper sleeves of an upper Plains Indian buckskin dress which may take over a year to bead.

Native American women consider beadwork a sacred task which shows honor and respect to spiritual powers through artistry and hard work. One needed to have a good feeling when beading. Beadwork is done as a prayer or a vow and may remind the wearer of a vision quest or personal sign. The phrase

“something sacred wears me” sums up the power of a beautifully beaded piece: wearing it is more than looking attractive, it is a spiritual experience which protects the wearer as each sewn bead is a prayer for the wearer. Contemporary artist Joyce Growing Thunder Fogarty (Assiniboine Sioux) learned to bead from her grandmothers and aunts. She states that her award-winning pieces honor them as they can now receive recognition as her teachers.

Provenance:

In January 2005, Rita Joerg of Preston, MN took her great- great-grandmother’s beadwork blanket to the PBS Antiques Roadshow in St. Paul. In the family for years, it had been used as a table cover and had been displayed at the Sleepy Eye Library from 1940-1972. Family history told that the blanket had been created by Jane Dickson, wife of Joseph LaFramboise, and was worn at their wedding. It was valued at $60,000 and deemed a remarkable piece of Ojibwe or Dakota craftsmanship. A dealer contacted the MIA’s curator of Native American collections, Joe Horse Capture.

Tour Topics

1. The three different design elements illustrate blending of cultures, both Native American and Euro-American. The center medallion is composed of concentric geometric circles. The corners are floral motifs found in Ojibwe beadwork (compare to bandolier bags in G261). French Ursuline nuns brought European embroidery designs to Native American women as early as 1639 in Quebec and some aspects may be seen in the corner florals. The appliquéd silk ribbon work could be either Ojibwe or Dakota. (compare to quillwork in G 261) The corner blocks are similar to a traditional American patchwork quilting pattern, Square in a Square. All materials in the blanket were traded in from Europe.
2. Native American beadwork (see above).
3. Portal to the life and times of a metis trader, Joseph LaFramboise and his wife, Jane Dickson.
4. Provenance of the blanket.
5. Care and conservation of the blanket. (see notes from Joe Horse Capture’s lecture.)

Tour Questions

1. Look carefully at the design areas of the dance blanket. How are they the same, how are they different? How many different designs can you see?
2. Local lore tells us that this blanket was worn by a woman of Metis (mixed Native American and American heritage) on her wedding day. What special clothes or textiles do you have? Why might people keep handmade and special items like these?
3. If this blanket could talk, it could describe the early days of Minnesota. What questions would you ask?
4. What makes this blanket beautiful?
5. What happens when two different cultures meet?

Bibliography/Sources

Joseph LaFramboise: A Factor of Trade, Treaties, and Culture. Master's Thesis:

https://krex.k-state.edu/dspace/bitstream/2097/.../JanetTimmerman2009.pdf

On beadwork: www.nativetech.org

Thaw Collection Exhibition Catalogue

Notes from Joe Horse Capture's lecture

Submitted by Sue Hamburge, March 2011