

Bandolier Bags

The Bandolier Bag often called a “Friendship Bag” when used as a presentation object has evolved over time with the introduction of modern materials, such as beads and a variety of different types of cloth. Initially, the bandolier bag was copied by the look and style of the European cartridge bags that soldiers used during the early nineteenth century. The first bandolier bags were actually not bags at all and solely used for decoration, presenting a square panel of cotton, wool, velvet or leather. The floral design of the bandolier bag is typical of Great Lakes Native American work. The design first appeared around 1800 and by 1900 had become the dominant pattern in the area. The bags quickly became functional and iconic for the tribes that used them, being seen as an item of prestige.



Cree/Metis Bandolier bag circa 1865

This item is currently on view at National Museum of the American Indian, catalogue #15/1690: Collection history unknown, but said to have been collected by an official of the Hudson's Bay Company in northern Manitoba circa 1865; formerly in the collection of Mrs. E.C. McDonald; acquired by MAI in 1926.



Metis Guide, note crossed straps of bandolier bags.

Bandolier bags are large, heavily beaded pouches with a slit at the top. They have a beaded wide strap worn, ornately decorated, worn diagonally over the shoulder, thus resting the bag at hip level. The design is created using glass beads, a European trade good that replaced the traditional porcupine quills. The bags themselves are typically constructed from trade cloth, such as cotton, wool, velvet, or leather. A Bandolier Bag is a bag presented to represent honors given to a worthy man. Though bandolier bags are closely associated with the Anishinaabeg, they are not exclusively found among them as many bandolier bags have identifiable stylistic tribal and regional differences. Unlike a medicine bag made from the whole skin of an animal, a bandolier bag can be either pieced leather or fabric. Unlike a medicine bag that is always worn across the shoulder, a bandolier bag may be worn either across the shoulder to the side or in front like an apron.

In the Anishinaabeg language, “bandolier bag(s)” is *aazhooningwa'igan(ag)*, literally meaning “worn across the shoulder.”



Chippewa Camp on the Plains, State historical Society of North Dakota A3462



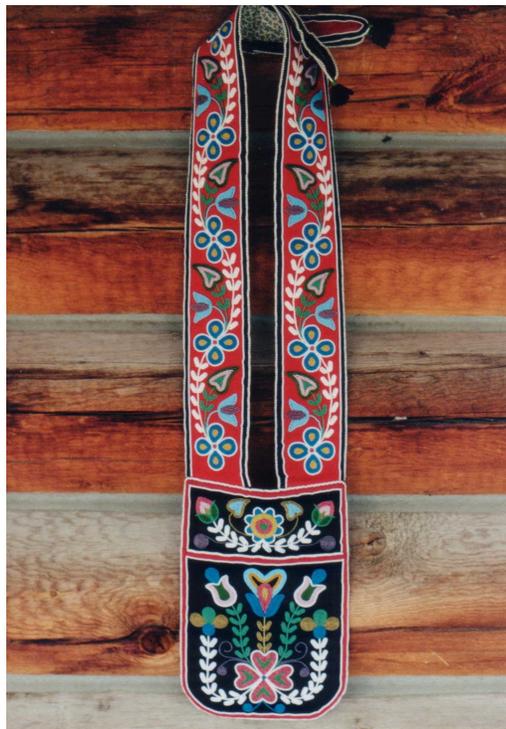
Joe Rolette, Metis member of the Minnesota Legislature representing Pembina
Minnesota Historical Society Art Collection • AV1991.85.38, 85404



Chippewa at Fort Dufferin in 1873, British Boundary Commission photograph.



Jolly Joe Rolette



Floral appliqué Metis bandolier bag, made by Gary Johnson ca. 1999. (design ca. 1835). Beaded on red and black stroud or melton cloth. (Louis Riel Institute photo collection, photo by Gary Johnson).



Meechas family at Portage la Prairie
J.F. Rowe, photographer
Provincial Archives of Manitoba, N 258.



NMAI Cree Métis bag ca. 1875; Manitoba, Canada; Wool cloth, beads, silk 42 x 35 cm. Mrs. E. C. McDonald Collection 15/1692. Subarctic Cree panel bags are composed of a red- or black-fabric pouch with a panel of woven beads, fringed on three sides, hanging below. As seen here, elaborate floral motifs decorated both sides of the fabric pouch.



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Jack LeClair and Bob View, identified as Ponca, c. 1910. The bandolier bag on the horse has repetitive woven designs that are closely related to those of the Omaha and Winnebago.

Source: Nebraska State Historical Society, RG2066-3-1

Reference:

Gary Johnson. "The Art of Porcupine Quillwork and the Metis." In *Metis Legacy, Volume Two: Michif Culture, Heritage and Folkways*, by L. J. Barkwell, L.M. Dorion and A. Hourie (Eds.) Saskatoon, Gabriel Dumont Institute, Winnipeg: Pemmican Publications, 2007: 93-102.

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