



Birchbark letter rack decorated with quillwork

Photo: Hanover Studios, London

tradition. For example, natives might produce beaded cloth clothing for their own use and beaded novelties for sale to tourists. Graburn's other levels — in which whole, non-native genre are taken up in native society — do not apply here since these traditions have their roots in native society.

Graburn's scheme lets us see how much of any given artefact may be considered native. In this case, it also lets us compare artefacts of the four main traditions from different areas of eastern Canada, which are represented in the Bedford collection.

The earliest and most important tradition is that of the Huron birchbark artefacts made at Lorette and sold in huge quantities in the early 19th century. The embroidery techniques — learnt in part from French-Canadian nuns and reintegrated into native life — were used to embellish birchbark, cut to form entirely European-style objects. At the same time, traditional souvenir items, particularly moccasins, continued to be made of black-dyed skin and decorated with moosehair or quillwork.

After the middle of the 19th century, significant changes took place, which affected both Huron production and that of other native Canadian groups. Most important was probably an expansion of demand for native work, plus an improvement in communications. This allowed, for instance, the Huron idea of making birch bark Glengarrys covered in cloth and decorated with moosehair to be taken up elsewhere, particularly by the New York and Ontario Iroquois.

The influence of moosehair-embroidered birchbark artefacts is not clearly understood. Some items were sold at Niagara Falls where they would have influenced the local Tuscarora; we know, for example, that fans decorated with stuffed birds were on sale at the Falls in 1860. From this kind of traffic — both inland from Lorette and out towards the Maritimes — it seems reasonable to assume that other native groups imitated Huron work.

The manufacture of Huron moosehair embroidery seems to have come to an abrupt halt

after about 1860. The reasons for this, and for the transformation of the manufacture of moccasins, is still unclear. In the early 19th century, when the production of birchbark work was at its peak, the Huron created the finest and most heavily quilled moccasins of any native group. Huron quillwork disappeared over the next half century, whereas Huron moosehair embroidered moccasins underwent another transformation which — unlike the moosehair on birchbark work — enabled their production to survive into this century. This transformation introduced the use of tanned leather to replace dyed skin and new decoration with simple geometric patterns in moosehair instead of elaborate floral designs.

### Marketing native artefacts

The pattern of Huron craft productions is most nearly paralleled by that of the Maritime provinces, and especially by Micmac materials. Best known of the individual traditions is that of Micmac birchbark boxes decorated with quills and split roots. Complementing the birchbark tradition was that of beadwork on cloth, which was employed not only in the creation of sumptuous garments for native use, but also in the generalised production of caps, hats and pouches sold in large numbers to non-natives. The designs of these were either in the double-curve motif, native in origin, or in a wide variety of related floral traditions that combine native and non-native elements. These floral traditions are perhaps the hardest to associate with specific native groups, since similar types of hat and pouch, for instance, were produced not only in the Maritimes and northern New England, but also in Ontario and New York by the Iroquois.

These Iroquois souvenirs form the largest group of native artefacts made for sale. Most of the beaded Glengarrys, pouches, and whimsies were made by the Tuscarora in New York and Mohawk at Caughnawaga between the middle of the 19th century and the middle of this one. Iroquoian materials did not include birchbark; but the Ottawa and Ojibwa started to create birchbark souvenirs in the middle of the 19th century. These were (and are) decorated with geometric and floral designs. Many were of forms used elsewhere, while others were embroidered canoes, altar furniture, model houses and other novelties. One of the similarities with the Huron material is that there was no equivalent, at least in the early stages, of decorated beadwork souvenirs.

The beaded, quilled and embroidered objects brought to Europe and used to decorate houses are still poorly understood, as cultural phenomena and in terms of the artistry and craftsmanship involved in their production. The Bedford display, with its diverse materials from discrete tribal traditions, brings together for the first time materials that emphasise the native and non-native aspects of a uniquely Canadian material culture.

In past exhibitions, Iroquois beadwork and Huron and Micmac birchbark have been displayed as an adjunct to entirely native materials. The intention of this exhibition is to help these productions regain their position as an important bridge between Europe and native North America.



Nest of Micmac boxes

Photo: Ken Smith, Edinburgh