

Among the Chinook and other Indians on the Northern Pacific the dentalium forms not only an article of ornament, but considerable trade is carried on between the various tribes on Vancouver Island through the medium of these shells. The earlier writers on American currency give tabulated statements of the currency values of the white and blue wampum which were long used as current money in the transactions between the Indian and white races.

The Indian tribes, however, had other purposes to which they put the use of the wampum than that of either currency or ornament. It was used to record the history of all great operations of the tribe; indeed Penn's title deed to the land purchased by him consisted solely of a string of wampum. Among the North American tribes this wampum was much prized and held sacred. It corresponded in its use to the ancient quipu of the Peruvian and Mexican.

Wampum consists of beads of different colours strung together, generally in the form of a belt. It is of two kinds, the white and the purple. The white is worked out of the great concho into the form of a bead, and perforated to be strung on leather. The purple is worked out of the inside of the mussel shell. They are woven as broad as one's hand, and about two feet long. At the close of the war between the English and King Philip in 1675, when Philip was killed, an old chief handed to Captain Church two broad belts elaborately worked in wampum. One of them reached from the shoulder to near the ground. This was the Magna Charta of the New England tribes.

The laws of the celebrated Iroquois league were recorded in wampum made of spiral fresh water shells strung on deer skin thongs or sinews, and these strands braided into belts or simply united into strings. These strings were the only visible records of the Iroquois, and were kept and interpreted by a specially constituted keeper of the wampum.

In the mounds of the Mississippi Valley beads and shells have been found in great quantities. In Grave Creek mound shell beads such as constitute wampum were found to the number of between three and four thousand.