MOCCASIN ECONOMICS: ENTANGLED MUSEUM STORIES OF NIITSITAPI WOMEN, LABOR, AND FOOTWEAR

Michaela Ann Shifley

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MOCCASIN ECONOMICS:

ENTANGLED MUSEUM STORIES OF NIITSITAPI WOMEN, LABOR, AND FOOTWEAR

By

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Bachelor’s of Science, Rocky Mountain College, Billings, MT, 2016

Dissertation

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for the degree of

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This dissertation emphasizes how anthropologists can use museum collections as anthropological data banks (Sturtevant 1973) to uncover the unwritten histories of objects, people, and cultures. I show how museum collections are repositories for the untold stories of Native women’s economic histories and how objects embody women’s critical contributions to the economic, spiritual, and cultural survival of their communities throughout time. To reveal the complex, hidden labor processes involved in historical and contemporary moccasin-making, I draw on interviews with contemporary Niitsitapi moccasin-makers, as well as object-based analyses of 109 pairs of moccasins from five museum collections and numerous archival documents and photographs. Analyses revealed that most of the Niitsitapi moccasins in these five museum collections are outgrowths of production for tourist markets. Additionally, I show how moccasin production has historically been influenced by the colonial policies of the United States government and how moccasins’ stories are influenced by museum categorization tools.
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A WORD ON LANGUAGE

Native American, Native, American Indian, and First Nations

Throughout this dissertation, as based on the work of LaPier (2017), I use the terms “Native American”, “Native”, “Indian(s)”, and “American Indian” to “define the peoples of the northern Great Plains who were present before the arrival of Europeans and Americans” (Loc 110/6127). The term ‘First Nations’ is specific to Canadian indigenous groups. In some cases, I use the term ‘Indigenous’ as another way to describe a person’s or people’s cultural heritage. Where possible, I try to limit the use of these broad terms and instead honor the preferences of individual tribal nations, groups, and/or communities and use the identity marker that they prefer.

Blackfoot and Blackfeet

Many people confuse the terms Blackfoot and Blackfeet with each other and even use them interchangeably. This confusion about correct terms has, for the most part, been caused by non-Indian authors and academics, whose incorrect use of tribal identity markers throughout time has caused this confusion to become embedded into the literature.

The term ‘Blackfoot Confederacy’ (or Niitsitapi, meaning the ‘real people’) is the overall heading applied to four distinct, contemporary nations: the Siksika (Blackfoot), the Kainai (Blood), the Apatohsipiikuni (North Peigan/North Blackfeet), and the Ammskaapiipiikuni (South Piegan/South Blackfeet) (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 1978, 2013; Ewers 1958; LaPier 2017; Peers and Brown 2015). The Siksika, Kainai, and Apatohsipiikuni all reside in Canada, while the Ammskaapiipiikuni, known in English as the Blackfeet Nation, reside in northern Montana in the United States. The terms ‘Piikuni’ (a shortened name in the Blackfoot language) and ‘Piegan/Peigan’ (colonial mispronunciations of the word ‘Piikuni’) are more general phrases used by some tribal members to refer to their status as Blackfeet. To make matters even more confusing, the names ‘Peigan’ and ‘Piegan’ are spelled differently depending on what side of the border you are on, with the former used in Canada and the latter in the United States. I use the terms ‘Niitsitapi’, or more rarely ‘Blackfoot Confederacy’, to describe all four tribal groups together and I use individual tribal names when discussing each tribe (LaPier 2017, Loc 245). In historical records, most sources were either not aware of or not descriptive of the differences.
between the four nations, and so in many instances I have to use Niitsitapi to refer to the groups being discussed instead of specific tribal names.

**Tribe, Community, and Nation**

It is important to note that the term ‘tribe’ is a government-applied unit of organization (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 19), and historically, the basic Niitsitapi unit was the band, which ranged in size from ten to thirty-six lodges and “and in population from 110 to 432 persons” (Ewers 1974, 39). The word ‘tribe’ is a designator created by the United States federal government to, often arbitrarily, delineate boundaries between Native communities, which made it easier to sort people into government-determined categories and subsequently make it much simpler to proceed with colonization. In reality, tribal peoples across the world have been intermingling, intermarrying, and trading ideas, philosophies, and objects with each other for thousands of years. Categorization is not as simple as the United States government, and even Western academics, would like it to be. This particularly holds true today, in a world where many tribal peoples can claim ancestors from several indigenous communities, and also have heritages in non-indigenous communities. Where possible, I will use the term that the specific group prefers. Many Native American groups in the United States today use the word ‘tribe’ themselves now, but many still prefer the word ‘nation’ or ‘community’ to be used instead.

**Bison and Buffalo**

Though the terms are often used interchangeably today, bison and buffalo are separate animals and historically distinct. The term “bison” refers to the American bison, which is characterized by its large humped back, brown shaggy coat, short horns, and its association with the American Plains region and indigenous Northern Plains communities. The word “buffalo”, on the other hand, typically refers to animals in the bovidae family that are native to Asia and Africa, such as the water buffalo. Early European explorers are likely responsible for confusing the two terms, and as you will see in direct journal quotes from these early explorers, often refereed to bison as buffalo. To maintain historical accuracy I use the term ‘bison’ throughout this paper, although it should be noted that many Indigenous communities today, including the Niitsitapi, have often adopted the term buffalo when speaking about these important resource animals.
Figure 0.1. Author standing with a pair of Blackfeet moccasins in the collections of the Plains Indian Museum (part of the Buffalo Bill Center of the West) in Cody, WY. Photo by Hunter Old Elk.
Who Am I?

My name is Michaela Shifley. I am a single white female in my late twenties with no children. I grew up in the south-central region of Montana and come from a family of farmers and ranchers. As a child, I was extremely close with my grandparents, so close that they were essentially a second set of parents, and their influence on my life, including my Italian grandmother’s emphasis on the importance of heritage for the soul, has had tremendous impacts on my work as an anthropologist. One of my first jobs during college (undergrad) was at a historic house museum in Billings, MT, and it was there where I first discovered my love for the museum world and saw first-hand the impact that museums can have on public perceptions of different social groups. I am the first person in my immediate family to pursue graduate school.

I think that it is important for readers to understand that I am the product of a Western, colonial public school system and wider community that has historically ignored, undervalued, and dismissed the historical traumas and contemporary challenges faced by Native communities, both in Montana and beyond. Fortunately, my time in university, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels, has provided me with numerous opportunities to learn and grow and to confront and question my position as a non-Native white anthropologist. These learning opportunities have influenced my current positionings on anthropological research, which I believe should, above all things, be collaborative, work towards a common good, and have outputs that ultimately benefit the source community. I also believe that museum collections should not stand apart from their living communities and that excellent anthropological museology will, by definition, include partnerships with contemporary communities when possible. I have tried my best to suspend my colonial, Western scientific lens throughout this project in favor of close and respectful listening to and learning from my Ammskaapipiikuni colleagues, although the extent to which I have been successful in this endeavor remains to be seen.

Anthropology is a discipline that deals with human beings, and this includes both the researcher and the research participant. Because we are all human beings, with all the flaws and beauty that go along with that, no project will ever be perfect. In my opinion, we can only ever strive toward the ideal, never achieve it. I have tried my best throughout this process to make it as accessible and collaborative as possible for those that I am working with, but there will always
be flaws in the process. Too many times have scholars entered Native communities in search of acquiring and objectivizing knowledge, often prioritizing the intellectual or monetary benefits that it may bring them rather than the well-being of their Native colleagues. That is why I want to emphasize that this paper is a publication based on my own interpretations and is in no way meant to represent any sort of ‘final authority’ on the subjects talked about here. The end of this paper does not represent the end of my exchanges with and scholarly obligations to the Niitsitapi and Ammskaapipiikuni communities. In order for research to remain relevant and ethical, I think it is important that our work always remain as living documents, making space for reinterpretation and revitalization as new knowledge is revealed by future Native and non-Native scholars.

Who Are the Niitsitapi and the Ammskaapipiikuni?

The Blackfoot Confederacy (or the Niitsitapi, meaning the ‘real people’) historically and today – is composed of four distinct yet interconnected nations: the Siksika (Northern Blackfoot – Canada); the Kainai (Blood – Canada); the Apatohsipiikuni (Northern Blackfeet – Canada); and the Ammskaapipiikuni (Southern Blackfeet – Montana, U.S.A.) (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 1978, 2013; Ewers 1958; Peers and Brown 2015). Historically, these nations were broken down even further into clan groups, or bands, which could range in size from around one hundred people to over four hundred (Ewers 1974, 39). During the summer, bands would come together for several days to celebrate the O’kan (Sun Dance). Today, tribal members still share kinship, friendship, and other ties across nations.

Traditional Niitsitapi territory extends from what is today the North Saskatchewan River in northern Canada all the way to the Yellowstone River in south central Montana (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2013). Most of this territory is open grassland dominated by short grasses and bushes but was also bordered in some areas by resource-heavy and culturally important forests and mountains. This area is a subset of the wider North American Great Plains region, which historically stretched “some 1,800 miles from the Rio Grande to beyond the Canadian border in the north, and from the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west” (Johnson and Yenne 2011, 89). Niitsitapi country was – and is – abundant with natural resources, including “game animals, berries, and medicinal plants, all of
which were given to the Niitsitapi by Ihtsipaitapiiyo’pa, the Source of All Life” (Peers and Brown 2015, 21).

The Blackfeet Nation (Ammskaapipiikuni), the source of the interviews and community advisory board for this project, has “approximately 17,194 enrolled tribal members, two thirds of whom (9,557) reside on the Blackfeet Reservation” (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 8). Compared with the population of the state of Montana and the United States, the residents of the Blackfeet Reservation are fairly young, with over half (52.3%) of reservation residents under thirty years old and just under a quarter (20.3%) under ten years old (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 12). According to an economic report conducted by the Blackfeet Nation in 2018, the reservation “contains approximately 3,000 square miles (1,525,712 acres) of which 30% (452,729 acres) are individually allotted lands, 33% (508,644 acres) are tribally owned lands and 37% (564,339 acres) are fee title or state lands” (8). The reservation’s topography ranges from “the grasslands and river valleys of its agricultural areas in the central and eastern parts of the reservation to the heavily-forested mountainous region along the western boundary” (8). Major waterways “include the Milk River, Cut Bank Creek, Saint Mary River, Two Medicine River, and the Marias River” (8).

The town of Browning (which is no longer incorporated) is the gateway to Glacier National Park and serves as the principle economic center of the reservation, containing the major shopping center as well as the headquarters of the tribal government. Smaller communities on the reservation include the towns of Babb, East Glacier Park Village, Heart Butte, North Browning, South Browning, and Starr School (8).
Figure 0.2. Blackfeet dancers at St. Mary (Photo courtesy of The Glacier Country Blog: The Official Western Montana Travel & Tourism Blog)
Figure 1.1. Connected. Ledger art by James “Bud” Day, 2019.
CHAPTER 1: THE LANGUAGE OF FEET

Oki (hello).

Telling stories is complicated. Well, at least I think so. Growing up, I could not get enough stories. Some of my first memories are of sitting on my grandmother’s lap, listening to her give life to heroes and villains, taking me on journeys through colorful worlds that came alive through the dips and high notes in her voice. Although the heroes and villains will look different in this story, I hope that I can do the storytelling bit as much justice as my grandmother did. But like I said, it gets complicated. I suppose the story might be messy because human life is messy, and this is a tale about human beings. Even though moccasins might be the focal point, the guiding stars of this project if you will, they can only be that way because of the humans who breathed life into them first. These are tales of humans and their feet, of the complexities of human nature and the ways that we use the materials around us to help us make sense of the world, to connect us to what it means to be human in this vast, confusing landscape of life.

Believe it or not, our feet speak to us. They tell us when we are tired, and when we are ready to get up and dance. They tell us when it is time to rest, and when it is time to run headlong into the next adventure. And if feet speak, then footwear shouts. Footwear is a part of the human experience. Most of our lives are spent in our shoes; they journey with us as we traverse life. Throughout human history, footwear has been entangled in complex webs of human social and cultural interactions. Shoes have allowed women to make money, soldiers to conquer, researchers to explore, and people to move. Footwear is perhaps the most common canvas for the human story. A baby’s first pair of shoes, a bride’s wedding sandals, a pair of well-worn hiking boots; all have something to say if only we listen closely enough to hear them speak. Shoes can often help or hinder our own individual stories; one need only look to the examples of “Cinderella’s magical glass slipper, Hans Christian Andersen’s murderous red dancing shoes, or Dorothy’s sparkling ruby slippers that had the power to transport her back home from Oz” (Costello 2014, 36). Our feet connect us to the world, and footwear marks our place in it. In the profound words of Costello (2014, 238), “…shoes are the vehicles for life.”

Knowing the profundity of footwear to humanity, then, it can only make sense that we ask ourselves, how do we begin to hear the stories that human footwear has to tell? I ask this very question throughout this narrative, and we begin our tale here, in the Introduction. Here, I will tell you why I chose to try and listen to moccasins, and Niitsitapi moccasins specifically. I
will question the roles that museums play in moccasins’ stories, and I will tell you about the forms that these moccasins’ stories will take. Ultimately, these stories will hopefully highlight how moccasins are related to economic processes and changes over time, and how Niitsitapi women have used moccasins as economic tools throughout time.

The Beginning of Our Story

We begin our story about 11,700 years ago, which is when archaeological evidence tells us that humans likely began wearing footwear, namely sandals and moccasins (Gilligan 2010, 58; Trinkaus 2005, 1523). By about 11,000 years ago, ancient people’s toe bones, combined with limited archaeological evidence of shoes left behind, suggests that although they still spent a lot of time barefoot, people were probably also wearing some form of footwear that had semi-rigid to rigid soles (Trinkaus 2005, 1523). It is likely that our ancient ancestors began making moccasins and other types of footwear to protect their feet from harsh environmental conditions, including extreme heat and cold. According to Gilligan (2010), our bodies really do not like to be cold, which is why our skin begins reacting to the cold once temperatures fall below the chilly threshold of eighty degrees Fahrenheit. For an unclothed human standing still in wind-free conditions, shivering begins at around fifty-five degrees Fahrenheit, which is a huge contrast to, as Gilligan points out, the Arctic fox, which does not shiver until temperatures fall below negative forty degrees Fahrenheit. With mild winds, conditions for an unclothed human out in the open become dangerous at around thirty-two degrees Fahrenheit (21). Our appendages, including our toes, fingers, ears, and nose, are particularly vulnerable to frostbite, something that Montanans especially know all too well. The cold, and the extreme heat, is why footwear was such an important addition to early humans’ wardrobes (Gilligan 2010, 22).

On the Northern Great Plains, which is the region that now encompasses Montana, Wyoming, and North and South Dakota in the United States, along with the prairies of Canada, footwear took the form of moccasins, which I define as foot coverings typically made from animal hide that, unlike sandals, covers the entire foot, including the toes. Although moccasins can take many different forms and styles, their main utilitarian purpose is to protect a person’s feet from the surrounding environment, although unlike modern day shoes, moccasin soles are so thin that they still serve as a connection to the earth, no matter the hide barrier.

For reasons that will be discussed more in-depth later, many historical Northern Great
Plains moccasins ended up in museum collections across the world, and that is why the foundation of this project lies within the domain of museum anthropology, which is a growing sub-field within the anthropological discipline (Ames 1992; Babcock 1992; Bell 2017; Byrne et. al. 2011; Clifford 1997; Glassie 1999; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Greene 2015; Harrison 2013; Poulter 2013; Stocking 1985; Sturtevant 1973; Turner 2016).

**Museum Collections as Anthropological Data Banks**

With museums and curation facilities across the country currently facing storage space shortages and funding crises (Bawaya 2007; Kersel 2015), using museum collections – as opposed to traditional archaeological excavations – as sites from which to excavate data is becoming more important than ever. Museums are important repositories for millions of ethnographic, archaeological, and biological objects, and have been since the late nineteenth century. Museums’ limited address in the anthropological literature is an unfortunate oversight when we consider that “a vast amount of data awaits anthropological research in the huge, tangled puzzles of museum collections” (Sturtevant 1973, 49).

A 1969 study estimated that there were upwards of four and a half million ethnographic artifacts living in museums around the world (O’Hanlon 2000, 1), while a more recent survey by the American Alliance of Museums now puts that number closer to roughly ten million ethnographic objects sitting in U.S. museums alone (Fowler and Fowler 1996, 129). Traditionally, museum artifacts have been trapped behind glass display walls and in dark, forgotten storage spaces, removed from human contact and senses (Edwards, Gosden, and Bliss 2006; Smithsonian Institution 2000). Though museums have been steadily returning to the anthropological spotlight after decades of distance (Ames 1992; Babcock 1992; Bell 2017; Byrne et. al. 2011; Clifford 1997; Glassie 1999; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Greene 1992, 2015; Haas 1996; Harrison 2013; Poulter 2013; Stocking 1985; Sturtevant 1973; Thomas 2010; Turner 2016), it has taken much longer for museum objects to be ‘rediscovered’ as sources of important anthropological data (Byrne et. al. 2011; Gosden, Larson, and Petch 2007). It has only been recently, within the past decade or so, that objects have slowly begun to make their way back into the realm of anthropological research.

This dissertation emphasizes how anthropologists can use museum collections as anthropological data banks (Sturtevant 1973) to uncover the unwritten histories and stories of
objects, people, and cultures that are sitting in museum storage cabinets waiting to be told. I show how museum collections are repositories for the untold stories of women’s economic history and how objects embody Native women’s critical contributions to the economic, spiritual, and cultural survival of their communities throughout time. I also show how close looking at an object’s materials can reveal humans’ connections to and influences by wider social and cultural processes throughout time, including such things like movement across the landscape, marriage, war, spiritual power and beliefs, and entanglements with colonial systems and concepts.

Moccasins are the medium that I have chosen to tell Niitsitapi women’s economic and labor histories because currently, there is more Plains Indian footwear in museum collections across the world than any other Plains Indian object (Ewers 1997). Yet, despite their overwhelming commonness in museum collections, as well as the significant cultural importance of footwear in general, no systematic, museum-based, object-centered anthropological investigation of Plains Indian moccasins has ever been conducted. Past studies of Native American moccasins have focused almost exclusively on the distribution of styles and designs across the United States (Hatt 1916; Johnson and Yenne 2011; Lycett 2014; Myers 1987; Penney 2018; Taylor 1998; Wissler 1927) and have limited objects to being simply markers of traditions, rather than considering that careful examinations of their materials could empower the objects to speak for themselves. Most of these past studies have also been completed by looking at photographs or conducting a very surface-level survey of the materials, rather than engaging with the objects directly and in-depth.

Additionally, few studies exist that have examined footwear’s role in economic transactions, with the exception of Racette’s (2004) analysis of moccasins’ role in building Metis identity and Veldmeijer’s (2011) examination of the economic functions of sandals in Ancient Egypt. Some literature has addressed the general production of beadwork as female crafts and tourist souvenirs (Berlo and Phillips 1998; Ewers 1945; Phillips 1998; Schneider 1983; White 2014), but these only include moccasins in some cases, and nowhere are Plains moccasins specifically addressed in-depth. Lukavic’s (2012) examination of moccasin-making among orthodox Southern Cheyenne addresses different regimes of value in moccasin production, but again, his study is not a methodological examination of the objects themselves, but rather a
compilation of ethnographic data that is used to inform discussions of contemporary tribal practices.

Also missing from most of these previous discussions of moccasins and economics is the role of Native women, who were the primary producers of moccasins, for economic reasons and otherwise. Native women’s economic and labor histories have been silenced in museum collections, where their names are often no longer even known, even though the objects that they have left behind are often as intricately made and artistically brilliant as any painting by a famous male artist. This paper explores how moccasins have played critical roles in women’s various economic strategies and processes throughout time and emphasizes how by uncovering the substantial labor costs involved in each step of a moccasin’s creation through close looking, we can show how moccasins are sites of what I call ‘hidden labor’. I define ‘hidden labor’ as labor contributions, measured in physical, emotional, spiritual, monetary, and time costs, that are not acknowledged in discussions of the production processes or in discussions about the objects themselves. My methods engage with moccasins’ materials in a hands-on way, and I use the data that I collected to try and discern moccasins’ stories, as told using the metaphor of the object biography. I think of museums as like bookshelves for moccasins; you can go along the shelves and look at each pair one by one, knowing that there is an entire world inside just waiting to be read.

**Moccasins, Museums, and Object Biographies**

The object biography concept is essentially an anthropological tool that we use to try and explain how objects’ stories can be told in a way that encompasses all the meanings that they have had throughout their life, and it is a theory that has been addressed by numerous scholars in the field (Appadurai 1986; Caple 2006; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Greene 2015; Hoskins 1998; Ingold 2009; Kopytoff 1986; Poulter 2013; Thomas 1991). The object biography theory says that not only can “objects…tell stories”, but that the study of their biographies can “present us with new ways of understanding the past” (Turner 2016, 105). Objects accumulate histories and stories as they move from people and places throughout time, and like people, objects experience birth, childhood, adulthood, old age, and eventually a type of death, whether through destruction.

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1 It should be noted that other genders also historically participated in moccasin-making and continue to do so, including men, although not to the extent that female and female-presentation genders did.
or disintegration, similar to the human life cycle (Hoskins 2006, 78; Joyce and Gillespie 2015, 10). In understanding objects as biographies, scholars ask questions concerning the ways in which “meanings and values are accumulated and transformed” (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170), like the way that an artifact might transform over time from a gift to a commodity to a possession (Hoskins 2006, 74). The biographical approach has also proven useful in helping scholars to understand the different lives of the millions of objects that currently reside in museums. With this approach, objects are no longer separated from the complex social systems – composed of people, places, and materials – that create them. This is important because traditionally, museums have represented objects as inanimate, inert, static beings that are disengaged from social relations (Harrison 2013, 15) and removed from “the contexts of life-activity in which they are produced and used” (Ingold 2009, 88).

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1986) was one of the first to propose the concept of objects as having “‘life histories’ or ‘careers’” (41), and his essay proposes that by following these different trajectories, we can begin to comprehensively understand how objects circulate in the world. Kopytoff (1986) elaborates on this approach by introducing the idea of ‘biography’ as a metaphor to explore the lives of things. When investigating the biography of an object, one would ask

questions similar to those one asks about people [like for example]:…Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized ‘ages’ or periods in the thing’s ‘life,’ and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing’s use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? (Kopytoff 1986, 66-67).

In other words, things cannot be “fully understood at just one point in their existence”; rather, we must look at all of the “processes and cycles of production, exchange and consumption” in an object’s life (Gosden and Marshall 1999, 170). Martinón-Torres (2002, 33) further elucidates on the theory of the object biography by elaborating on the concept of chaînes opératoires, or in English “operational sequences”, a concept that was first introduced by French archaeologist André Leroi-Gourhan and expounded upon by other scholars. This approach focuses more directly on the manufacture and production of objects rather than the detailed life histories that characterize most cultural anthropological approaches. More specifically, the chaîne opératoire “appears as a succession of actions within which materials, humans – or other sources of energy
- gestures, tools and knowledge can be studied together” (Martinón-Torres 2002, 33). Coupaye (2009) uses the example of growing long yams to show how recording operational sequences breaks processes down into a series of “step-by-step actions [that bring] a raw material from a natural state to a manufactured state” (439). All of the components and factors that come together to form a long yam are part of its biography.

To date, the object biography concept has been used extensively in both anthropological and archaeological contexts and has had lasting impacts on the ways that scholars think about the connections between humans and objects. However, current scholarship has not yet completely pushed the boundaries of how this approach can be utilized in research. Anthropologically speaking, object biographies have been used to illustrate the different ways in which people conceive of objects, and through ethnography, have shown how objects can be used as narration tools in order to tell the stories of people’s lives (see Hoskins 1998). Archaeology, on the other hand, has used object biography frameworks to emphasize how data that can be collected from the objects themselves, where a researcher “[focuses] on tiny details as clues to [the] wider social processes and transformations” that can be derived from “[seemingly] apparently insignificant material data” (Hoskins 2006, 80). After a close and critical artifactually-based investigation, archaeologists who use this method then have to step back and try to place the objects in a historical context by “linking them to written sources” like trade records, field notes, and the like” (Hoskins 2006, 78). While both the anthropological and archaeological approaches to object biographies evoke important concepts on their own, neither of them have considered that objects might need both methodologies in order to be fully understood. Objects cannot stand apart from the people who made and used them, just as people cannot separate themselves from the objects that they make and use. The two are, in other words, entangled (Ingold 2009), and in order to appreciate the full richness of an object’s life, scholarship should be emphasizing that the two approaches come together and inform each other.

So how can these concepts be applied to moccasins in museum collections? I use the metaphor of the object biography, combining cultural anthropology’s emphasis on people and archaeology’s focus on objects, in order to try and investigate some of the stories that moccasins’ materials can tell us. Close and critical analyses of moccasins, combined with archival resources and insights and interviews with contemporary moccasin-makers, let us explore all of the rich relationships between objects and people that this approach can reveal (Joy 2009). Humans affect
objects, and objects affect humans, and throughout the process of making and creating, biographies are created. In the case of this dissertation, I found the most compelling biographies to be the ones that revealed how moccasins fit into discussions of Native women’s labor and their contributions to household income throughout hundreds, if not thousands, of years of economic change on the Northern Plains.

**Working with the Ammskaapiipikuni and Indigenous Frameworks**

My work with the Ammskaapiipikuni (Blackfeet) community began in 2017 when I first met and had conversations with members of the Blackfeet Nation Tribal Historic Preservation Office during an on-campus event with tribal leaders from across the state. As the result of those conversations, I was inspired to look more deeply and thoughtfully at their community’s moccasins, which were prevalent throughout many of the museum collections that I was visiting. Due to the poor record keeping by past museums, many Ammskaapiipikuni moccasins have been absorbed under the label ‘Niitsitapi’ (Blackfoot Confederacy, made up of four distinct nations, including the Blackfeet), which is why this project, by necessity, must discuss Niitsitapi moccasins instead of just Ammskaapiipikuni moccasins. The Blackfeet Nation was also located only four hours away from the University of Montana (a short frame of time for someone living in Montana), which was helpful for the ethnographic work that I was hoping to do with community artists. My goal, in collaborating with community artists, scholars, and other experts, was to emphasize that community voices and perspectives are essential when discussing any aspect of Indigenous material culture. Unfortunately, due to the global COVID-19 pandemic that began in 2020, which was right in the midst of the ethnographic portion of this research, the community interviews in this project are sparse, but hopefully supplemented by rigorous investigation in the other research method areas. Future researchers will have an opportunity to add to this research through future ethnographic work.

At the time of this writing, there are only two known works published by the Niitsitapi community that discuss moccasins and moccasin-making in-depth. There are many notable scholars within the Niitsitapi community who have produced works on a variety of topics, including, but not limited to: Niitsitapi science and research methods (Bastien 2004; Littlebear n.d.; see also works by Ryan Heavy Head); Blackfeet relationships with nature and landscape (LaPier 2017, 2018); oral histories and historical accounts (Calf Robe, Hungry Wolf, and Hungry
Wolf 1979; Hungry Wolf 1975); language importance and preservation (Still Smoking 1997; see also language work by Narcisse Blood); as well as more general descriptions of tribal beliefs and practices (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 1978, 2013). It goes without saying that there are also many more Niitsitapi academics and scholars out there who have simply not published their knowledge in a traditional Western manner. However, with the exception of Beverly Hungry Wolf’s Blackfoot Craftworker’s book, published in 1977 (and jointly written with her husband Adolf Hungry Wolf), and her book Ways of My Grandmother (1980), there are virtually no known community-produced works on Niitsitapi moccasins.

The Niitsitapi have also been published on intermittently by non-Indian academics from all realms, including, but not limited to, anthropologists (Conaty 1995; Ewers 1944, 1945, 1958, 1968, 1973, 1997, 2001; Ewers and the US Indian Claims Commission 1974; McCoy 1972; Nugent 1993; Peers and Brown 2015; Wissler 1911), historians (Dempsey 2007; Harrod 1971; Kennedy 2014; Roberts 2007; Rosier 2001; Samek 1987), botanists (Johnston 1970), hobbyists (White 2014), and even an amateur ethnographer (Schultz 1973). Only a few of these studies (e.g., Peers and Brown 2015; LaPier 2017) ever incorporated the perspectives of the communities and people that they worked with into their final products. Furthermore, only three non-Indian works on and about the Niitsitapi address moccasins as more than a passing footnote (Ewers 1945; Sager 1999; VanStone 1992), and these works function more as broad descriptions rather than as analyses of Niitsitapi moccasin production, circulation, and use. I recognize my position as yet another non-Native researcher publishing on the Niitsitapi. However, I hope that my efforts to create equity between myself and the Ammskaapipiikuni community, and my emphasis on community inclusion, will make my work distinct from others.

Because Indigenous concerns are inherently of anthropological concern, I rely on theoretical discourses that emphasize Indigenous understandings of the world. More specifically, I build on approaches that seek to highlight and utilize Indigenous approaches to science, based on work by prominent Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien (2004), and well-known Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson (2008). This research also attempts to seek common ground between Indigenous and Western knowledge bases, as well as research designs that incorporate both Indigenous and Western worldviews, as demonstrated in works by anthropologists like Sonya Atalay (2012) and Chip Colwell (2016). Though Indigenous methodologies are often specific to each cultural group, Kovach (2009) suggests that in general, products resulting from tribal-
centered theoretical frameworks should have strong narrative components in their methodologies and presentations of findings. In consideration of these recommendations, this research will rely on the theoretical frames of the object biography and the chaînes opératoires (or “operational sequences”), which both emphasize investigations that can take narrative form. Both of these frameworks will ‘help objects to speak’ by following their biographies, a theory that has yet to be applied to Plains Indian material culture.

Finally, researcher engagement with museum objects and subsequent collaborations with source communities, such as the Niitsitapi in this case, can result in a host of potential benefits for the community, including: helping to create powerful sites for fostering cultural identity (Karp and Lavine 1991); creating spaces for appreciation of cultural diversity; highlighting cultural resiliency; and helping to restructure community knowledge and inspiring the creation of new contemporary objects (Brown and Peers 2013; Turner 2016). To accomplish these goals, I used this project to emphasize some of the ways in which a community could be reconnected with their material heritage that currently sits in museum collections, including through collaborative ethnographic work, community presentations and outputs, and open access to all data gathered.

The End of the Beginning

Moccasins, at their fundamental level, are about the relationships that form between humans and the ground that they walk on. They are representative of how humans move and interact with and within the world, and thus, moccasins’ study is critical to moving us towards an understanding of our relationships with each other and the world around us. Throughout this paper, I confront a variety of questions. The first is, how can we use object-based analysis, supplemented with other lines of research, to tell the economic stories of the Northern Plains? What stories can we glean from footwear about Native American women’s labor and their historic and contemporary contributions to household income production? What roles do museums play in these stories? And finally, how does any of this matter to contemporary issues that people are facing in Indian Country today? Chapter Two will describe the methods behind the data collection in this project, while Chapter Three takes us through the journey of making a moccasin while also detailing all the labor investments throughout the process. Chapter Four gives more context around the social and economic circumstances under which moccasins have
historically been produced, and in Chapter Five, moccasins’ relationships to the United States government and its assimilation agendas for Native Americans is discussed. In Chapter Six, museums’ roles in moccasin interpretation and discussions of women’s labor are considered, and in Chapter Seven I conclude with a discussion of contemporary Ammskaapipiikuni moccasin makers and some of the challenges that they continue to face in today’s market.

Remember, the stories that you are going to read about in the next chapters are complex, because at the end of the day, they are human stories. They are stories of economics, gender, landscapes, and extreme changes over time. They are stories composed of humanity’s connection to our feet and the coverings that we put on them. Thank you for coming with me on this journey.
Figure 2.1. Coming of Age. Second Place Winner at the 2018 Santa Fe Indian Market. Ledger art by Lauren Good Day (Arikara/Hidatsa/Blackfeet/Plains Cree), 2018.
CHAPTER 2: HOW THE WORK GETS DONE

COVID-19 and Its Effects on Research

In March of 2020, the United States was shut down because of a deadly coronavirus outbreak, now known as COVID-19, throughout the country. College campuses and public schools, along with museums, restaurants, retail stores, and much more that was deemed non-essential, were completely shut down, as was the U.S.-Canadian border. U.S. citizens were advised to quit traveling immediately and stay quarantined indoors in their homes, an order that ended up staying in place for over three months. Even after businesses began opening again, nothing looked the same. Masks were required to be worn, no large gatherings were permitted, and many people continued to isolate in their homes. Even now in 2022, we are still dealing with the aftereffects of this virus and its variants. Our world will never look the same.

I was in the research stage of my dissertation when the pandemic hit, and as a result, many items that I intended to complete could not be done. For example, I intended to include the Glenbow Museum in Alberta, Canada in this study because of its huge collection of Niitsitapi material culture, including moccasins. However, with the closure of the United States-Canadian border from March 2020-August 2021, I was unable to travel there and had to make the hard decision to not include it in this study. Additionally, COVID-19 disproportionately affected Native communities in the United States, and as a result, many tribal borders were shut down for close to a year to non-tribal members in order to protect the vulnerable, particularly elders. Though some interviews could be conducted over the phone or via Zoom, many were not able to take place at all, and ultimately I was able to complete two interviews out of the planned ten to fifteen. Although this was disappointing, it was more important for both interviewees and the researcher to focus on personal health and safety than it was to talk about moccasin-making. Future researchers in this subject should turn their attention to community interviews in order to rectify this unfortunate circumstance.

Privileging Niitsitapi Voices in Research

As part of the effort to ensure that this project both puts Niitsitapi voices at the forefront and is a co-creation with community members, I made a concerted effort to create an Ammskaapipiikuni Community Advisory Board, which is made up of three people – one woman
and two men – who generously provided their expertise and guidance throughout the duration of this project. All three of these members are contemporary artists, some of whom work with traditional mediums. My goal was for these scholars to not only offer guidance and suggestions for directions this research could take, but most importantly for us all to ensure together that Niitsitapi voices, values, relationships, and research methods are accurately and appropriately represented in the research project. Advisory board members were paid a stipend to compensate them for their time and efforts.

Additionally, all interviewees were given the opportunity to review and modify their contributions to this project before the final product was submitted. This was done in order to ensure that, again, community voices and perspectives were privileged in this project. The hope was that allowing participants to play an active role in the way their knowledge is presented to the world would help to mitigate the historically unequal power differentials that have existed between anthropology and Native communities since the discipline’s inception.

**Ethnographic Field Methods**

I conducted interviews with two people, and interviews were semi-structured, which emphasizes pre-formulated questions with open-ended answers, and provides the opportunity for spontaneous follow-up questions (Weller 1998). Both interviews were conducted via phone and Zoom. Participants included people with traditional moccasin-making knowledge, as well as contemporary moccasin makers and artists. Interviewee were chosen through reputational case selection sampling (where community experts – in this case, the Deputy Tribal Historic Preservation Officer - help researchers identify appropriate people for the study) and through informal snowball sampling (Schensul and LeCompte 2013).

This study went through two separate Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviews: one at the University of Montana, and the other at Blackfeet Community College, which conducts IRB reviews on behalf of the Blackfeet Nation. All projects that involve interviews and/or other ethnographic work with Blackfeet community members are required to go through the tribal IRB review process; this process is particularly important when we consider the centuries of harm done to Native peoples by enterprising and often dishonest non-Native anthropologists and researchers. Refer to Appendix Four to review the submitted IRB applications, as well as a project flyer that was handed out to interested participants.
I used photo elicitation as a method to prompt people to share their knowledge of historic – and contemporary – moccasin designs and construction. This was done by creating a binder of images, which were composed of moccasin designs and construction elements, and encouraging participants to flip through it during the interview and reflect out loud about what they observed. Because interviews were virtual, a digital version of this binder was created and emailed to them beforehand, and I asked for their thoughts on the images during the interview.

I obtained signed informed consent forms, and participant confidentiality has been and will be maintained unless people indicate otherwise. With the interviewee’s permission, the sessions were recorded and handwritten notes were kept. All materials are stored in a secure, locked room in my home.

Field Sites

I collected moccasin data from five museum collections which are described at the end of this section. It should be noted that these five museum collections make up only a fraction of the total well-documented Niitsitapi moccasin collections that reside in museums around the world, including at places like the Penn Museum (Philadelphia, PA), the Yale Peabody Museum (New Haven, CT), and several European museums, among others. However, the moccasin collections chosen for this study represent not only some of the largest in existence, but also some of the most accessible and affordable to the researcher.

It should be noted that due to the incomplete and often inaccurate nature of many museum accession records, which is partially a result of poor recordkeeping by early collectors, many museum collections have misnamed or misidentified the cultural origins of Native American objects. In many cases, the moccasin collections I worked with were labeled generally as either Blackfoot or Blackfeet, and often the terms Niitsitapi/Blackfoot Confederacy were used. In fewer instances, moccasins were sometimes linked with specific nations (i.e., Ammskaapipiikuni, Apatohsipiikuni, Kainai, Siksika).

It should be noted that I had originally included The Glenbow Museum in Alberta, Canada, in this study because it has what is probably the largest collection of Niitsitapi moccasins in the world, approximately 175 pairs. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic that began in March 2020 and at the time of this writing is still ongoing, I was unable to cross the border into Canada in order to complete this portion of the study. If circumstances allow it, future
researchers should strongly consider including the Glenbow Museum in any studies of Niitsitapi material culture. The following museums and their object/archival collections were included in this study:

*The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), Washington, D.C., United States*

NMAI has 112 pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins in their collections, one of the largest of its kind in the United States. Data collection was supported by a five-week Summer Institute in Museum Anthropology fellowship, and a ten-week Smithsonian Graduate Student Fellowship.

*The National Museum of Natural History (NMNH), Washington, D.C., United States*

NMNH has twenty-two pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins. Data collection was supported by a five-week Summer Institute in Museum Anthropology fellowship, and a ten-week Smithsonian Graduate Student Fellowship.

*Buffalo Bill Center of the West Plains Indian Museum (BBCW-PIM), Cody, WY, United States*

The BBCW-PIM has seventeen pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins, making it one of the largest Blackfoot Confederacy moccasin collections in the western region. One pair was on display at the time of the research and is not included in this study. Data collection was supported by a two-week Resident Fellowship.

*C.M. Russell Museum (CMR), Great Falls, MT, United States*

The CMR has fifteen pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins, but only eleven were available for study. This museum houses one of the largest Niitsitapi moccasin collections in the state of Montana outside of the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, MT, which is located on the Blackfeet Reservation in northern Montana. The Museum of the Plains Indian was unfortunately not included in this study due to the complex bureaucratic nature of gaining permission to access their collections, which I was unable to navigate successfully.
Montana Historical Society (MHS), Helena, MT, United States

The MHS has eleven pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins, but one pair was not included due to its dubious attribution as Blackfoot or Blackfeet. Data collection was supported here by a Dave Walter Research Fellowship.

Moccasin Data Collection

As all researchers know, one of the biggest challenges that we face in the course of research is time; there is, sadly, never enough of it. In light of this challenge, and in order to facilitate an efficient collection of data, I created and filled out a Data Sheet for every pair of moccasins included in this study. Additionally, a codebook was created for moccasin data entry. Please see the Appendix for copies.

Museum Experiences

Each museum that I visited had its own unique rules for handling its collections. The Smithsonian Institution museums, including the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) and the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI), were the least restrictive in terms of allowing me to handle their objects. This is not to say that these museums were cavalier in their handling protocols, but rather that after I had presented my intended data collection methods to museum staff, they were deemed safe for the objects and allowed me to proceed accordingly. While staff members were nearby to assist and to provide a basic level of supervision, I was essentially turned loose and allowed to work at my own pace. This freedom is what allowed me to experiment in the types of data that I wanted to collect for this project; and the ultimate result is the data sheet that I used for the remainder of this project. The C.M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, Montana had the most restrictive handling protocols of all the museums visited in this study. I was not able to handle any of the moccasins here myself; instead, a staff member had to handle them for me. This museum did not allow me to use calipers on the moccasins, meaning that I was not able to collect certain sets of data, including bead measurements and hide thickness measurements. The other two institutions in this study fell in between these two extremes, with the Plains Indian Museum in Cody, Wyoming falling into the more restrictive category, characterized by constant staff member supervision and limited handling abilities (partly due to arsenic contamination on many objects – see below), while the Montana Historical
Society in Helena, Montana was a bit more lenient. The differences in handling protocols across institutions merits a more in-depth study but are likely related to differing attitudes about the roles that museums and its objects are meant to play in anthropology, science, exhibition, and the revitalization of cultures.

Safety protocols varied between institutions as well. It is well-known among museum professionals that many museum staff tried to protect objects from pests by dousing them in chemicals that we now recognize are harmful to humans: arsenic, mercury, mothballs, etc. That is why most standard museum handling protocols require, at the very least, gloves to be worn while touching certain objects, especially in ethnological collections. Out of the museums that I visited, the C. M. Russell Museum was the most relaxed in terms of safety; in fact, no discussion of potential contaminants on the objects was discussed at all, and the staff handler only wore cloth gloves, which do not protect the hands as well as rubber gloves. The Plains Indian Museum was at the opposite end of the spectrum and took safety protocols the most seriously out of any of the museums visited. While in the collections there, I was required to wear a heavy, long lab coat (which was washed by the museum every day), a set of cloth booties, rubber gloves, and an N95 mask. We also had to disinfect all personal objects (such as glasses), as well as our workstation at the end of the day. Many of these safety precautions were due to the museum having just found, at the time, the presence of arsenic on some of its objects, and as a visiting researcher, I appreciated the seriousness with which the museum approached protecting its employees’ and visitors’ health. At the time of this writing, no long-term studies have yet been conducted tracing the effects of long-term contaminated object handling on museums’ staff health. Anecdotally, I have heard some museum professionals compare their arsenic exposure to being less than what most people are exposed to everyday from vehicle brake pads, while others have likened contaminated object handling as having the same health effects as being a long-term heavy cigarette smoker. The truth is, no one yet knows for sure what the health effects might be, and it merits more study in the future.

**Museum Data**

The following information was collected from the museums in this study:
**Hide/Leather**

Currently, hide type is very difficult to distinguish from a visual analysis; however, in some instances hide origins can be determined based on the thickness and weight of the leather (ex. bison skin is thicker and heavier than deer), and if hair is present, species can most likely be determined (Brown 1942; Davis 2010; Mayer 1952; National Park Service 1996). Many animals provided the hides necessary for moccasin making, including bison, elk, deer, moose, pronghorn antelope, bighorn sheep, and more (Ewers 1944, 2001; Peers and Brown 2015; Schultz 1973). Processing type was determined through visual analysis, and a distinct smell often indicated that the hide was smoked, a common Niitsitapi practice (Ewers 1945). Moccasins made of commercially tanned leather can typically be easily distinguished and were noted as well.

**Moccasin Construction**

Moccasins were sorted into typological groups based on their number of pieces combined with heel, toe, side, and instep seams (Hatt 1916). The presence of a tongue and its shape was noted, as was the presence or non-presence of laces and heel fringe. Soles were sorted by type (soft or hard), wear (no wear, some wear, hard wear), and it was noted whether or not hard soles are made of recycled parfleche (Ewers 1945; Hungry Wolf 1980; Schultz 1973; Wissler 1927). Thread types were also considered (sinew or cotton). Finally, measurements were taken in inches – sole length was measured from big toe to heel end, and sole width was measured at the widest part of the foot under the toes. Cuffs and tongues were also measured in inches, and the cuff material was noted. Cuffs’ circumferences were measured, as well as their height. I also measured the total length from the heel of the moccasin to the top of the cuff.

**Moccasin Design**

First, a moccasin’s decoration type was noted (quills, beads, embroidery thread, etc.), as well as other unique design characteristics it might possess, such as paint, stroud, animal components, thread embroidery, etc. The type of thread used in the moccasin’s design was categorized as either sinew, cotton thread, or both. The presence of cotton thread in moccasin designs can often, but not always, be attributed to repairs made by museum personnel rather than being the thread choice of the original moccasin maker. Stitch types were sorted into flat/overlay or lane/lazy categories, as based on descriptions by Ewers (1945), Hungry Wolf (1980), McCoy
Design elements were sorted into general, rather than specific, color categories (e.g. blue vs. sky blue), although effort was made to categorize colors as either light, medium, or dark in color as compared against each other (e.g. light blue vs. dark blue). Sometimes certain types of beads can be categorized as “greasy”, meaning they have a specific dull sheen to them, or translucent, meaning that a person can see completely through them; these unique features were noted as well. Beads specifically were sorted into Kidd and Kidd (2012) classification categories, the most common of which were IIa (non-tubular beads w/ simple [monochrome] bodies) and Iva (non-tubular beads w/ compound [multi-layered] bodies) (see also Billeck 2008; Ewers 1944, 1945; Hungry Wolf 1980; McCoy 1972 for more bead information). I also used Kidd and Kidd’s categories for diaphaneity, shape, and size. I used a caliper to measure bead size in millimeters, and I typically chose five random beads to measure in the design as an average approximation of all the beads’ size. In cases where there were obvious bead size differences, measurements were taken for all the size categories that I could identify. Luster was based on Karklins’ (1982) explanations of shiny, dull, and metallic.

Moccasin designs were sorted based on typological classifications that describe where decoration is located; I modified Lycett’s (2014) moccasin decoration typology to better represent the design patterns that I saw. Specific patterns were noted and named according to community sources, as well as Ewers (1945), Hungry Wolf (1980), and McCoy (1972). Measurements of design elements on moccasin uppers, sides, and heels were also taken, and assessments were made, when possible of the expertise of the moccasin design application, which is based on whether or not beading is loose or tight, if the hide can be seen where it typically should not show, and if the original artist paid attention to bead uniformity in their design.

Museum Accession/Collection Data

In order to put the moccasins more in context, data was also gathered from museum accession and collection records. This information was collected for each pair of moccasins studied and gathered from the museum curators and/or collections staff. When possible, the following types of data were collected: accession date and type (gift, purchase, bequest, other [found in collection]); date moccasins were created (if available); who the donor was; who the collector was (if different); and who the maker was (if available). Cultural affiliation as assigned
by the museum, the area where the moccasins were collected (if available), and any additional cultural groups associated with design (if applicable) was also recorded. Accession and collection records also gave insight into the material descriptions that early museum staff used to describe moccasins in general, and if changes were made to any moccasins for conservation purposes.

**Historic Document Analysis**

To gain insight into historic Niitsitapi moccasin-making, moccasin designs, and trade practices, I utilized the archival and photographic collections of the following institutions: the National Anthropological Archives, Washington, D.C.; the National Museum of the American Indian Archives, Washington, D.C.; the Montana Historical Society Archives, Helena, MT; Montana State University – Archives and Special Collections, Bozeman, MT; University of Montana – Archives and Special Collections, Missoula, MT; the Medicine Spring Library, Browning, MT; and the McCracken Research Library, Cody, WY.

**Historic Photograph Analysis**

The benefits of using historic photographs to aid anthropological research has been amply discussed (Banks 2001; Bell 2009; Caple 2006; Glassie 1992; Pinney 1992). Furthermore, the somewhat fragmented nature of collections means that collections research necessitates the use of multiple lines of evidence, including historic photographs (Bell 2017). An examination of historic photos in this case helped identify and authenticate historic Niitsitapi moccasin patterns and provided insight into the circumstances in which moccasins were worn and by whom. Data collected from each photograph includes tribal division of subjects (if provided); photographer; environmental context, including locality and setting; moccasin wearer demographics, including names, ages, genders, and descriptions of the overall wearer’s dress; moccasin construction, including sole type and cuff type; and adornment, including the moccasin uppers’ design materials and patterns. See the Appendix for my photograph codebook.
Figure 3.1. Niitsitapi woman outside tipi doing beadwork, ca. 1900-1920. Photo from Bureau of Indian Affairs Glass Negatives, National Anthropological Archives.
CHAPTER 3: HIDDEN LABOR AND THE MAKING OF A NIITSITAPI MOCCASIN

Footwear is an integral aspect of Niitsitapi material and artistic culture. Though moccasins play important utilitarian roles in protecting the feet from harsh outdoor environments, their importance should be especially noted for the roles that they play in helping to maintain specific tribal artistic traditions and contributing to the protection of cultural identity and sovereignty over time. Each step in the moccasin-making process affirms important Niitsitapi cultural values, including relationships with other humans and non-humans, spirituality, connections to the natural world, and the transformative and healing powers of artistic innovation and achievement. In Niitsitapi philosophy, “…natoyi [the all-pervading force in the world] permeates all life, and is shared throughout the entire universe [and by] participating in creating the artistic, one also participates in the healing, loving, life-force that exists throughout the universe” (Hernandez 1999, 164). Thus, for a person to create art, to engage in the act of artistic creation, means participating in both the metaphysical and physical relationships that will foster the creative spirit. This invokes Edge’s (2011) definition of Indigenous aesthetics, which can be loosely defined here as a “transformative experience wherein creative expression engages and enacts a spiritual dimensionality…Thus creative expression and creativity are understood as enactment of the spiritual dimension of being” (1-2). In this view, Native artists are pushed beyond simple creative inspiration and instead pull much of their artistic expression from a collective cultural and spiritual place, a place that is the sum of the individual’s relationships with the worlds, both seen and unseen, around them. Looking at moccasin-making as invoking relationality reminds us that for many, if not most, Native moccasin-makers, the act of creation goes beyond simply putting pieces together. It is a declaration of cultural pride, of connection to those who have gone before, those who are still here, and those who have yet to be. Nina Sanders, Apsáalooke scholar, curator, and artist put it best when she said

Life is a precious moment of artistic possibility, with the potential to communicate culture and meaning as well as invoke love and healing. For Native people, there has always been art, a gift provided to us at our creation. It is within us and takes many forms: singing, dancing, cooking, praying, hunting, educating, speaking, painting, beading, joking. Our art, our gifts, provide us with the capacity to give love, provide strength and manifest hope.2

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Moccasins are known in Blackfeet as *niitsitsikiin* (real moccasin – one piece moccasin), *aisitapiisikin* (Indian shoe), or *aatsitsikin* (shoe). Moccasins and their transformations over time remind me of the words in a story. Collectively, the pieces of a moccasin tell me stories about hunting, squinting eyes and sore hands, painstaking attention to detail, the artistic mind, movement through landscapes and dances, laughter and tears, love for sisters and friends, husbands and children, interactions between clans, tribes, and non-Natives, spirituality, and throughout it all, stories of cultural resiliency, persistence, strength, and hope. If a moccasin could speak, are these the stories that it would tell? Moccasins as objects have lives of their own, and they generate more stories as they pass from hand to hand and are commodified and transformed by the ever-changing meanings projected onto them (Racette 2004, 15; see also Appadurai 1986 and Kopytoff 1986). This is even more true when we consider that moccasins are panoplies of materials from the global marketplace: Czech and Italian beads, English stroud, American needles and cotton thread, and Native hides, to name a few. Moccasins are compositions, biographies that incorporate the stories of humans from all over the world, but most especially emphasize the stories of Native peoples.

This chapter is organized into four main steps of the moccasin-making process: obtaining the hide, hide preparation and processing, designing, and finishing. Within each step, I break down the labor investments involved in order to demonstrate how complex and interconnected moccasin-making truly is. I outline the substantial labor contributions that Niitsitapi moccasin-makers, both historically and today, must make in order to create a pair of moccasins. Everyone sees the finished product, but no one has asked how a pair of moccasins actually comes to its finished state. I argue that the historic invisibility of Niitsitapi women’s labor via moccasin-making, unacknowledged in both museums and scholarship, has contributed to an entire subset of what I call ‘hidden labor’, which I define as labor contributions, measured in physical, emotional, spiritual, monetary, and time costs, that are not acknowledged in discussions of the production processes. By shedding light on the complex labor processes involved in moccasin-making, I demonstrate just how hidden Native women’s economic contributions have become in contemporary scholarship.

Throughout this chapter, I draw from interviews with contemporary Niitsitapi (Ammskaapiipikuni) moccasin-makers, and I also relate moccasin stories from the collections in this project, which incorporate insights from my object-based analyses of 109 pairs of moccasins.
examined at five different museums across the United States. Moccasin stories are also based on an analysis of two hundred and forty-six photos, with approximately three hundred and ten people in them, from various sources, including but not limited to books, archives, and the internet. The oldest visual representation of a Niitsitapi moccasin in this project comes from a drawing by artist Karl Bodmer (Figure 3.2) that dates to ca. 1832-1834, and the most recent photograph in this sample dates to 1960. The photographs span locations (i.e., indoor, outdoor), photographers (i.e., tourists, professional photographers, tribal community members, etc.) and settings (i.e., studios, ceremonies, public performances, casual, etc.).

**Step One: Obtaining the Hide**

*Obtaining Hides in Historical Moccasin-Making*

There is a lot of conjecture, both in the literature as well as in the museum world, about what types of hides have historically been used to make moccasins. Like many other Plains communities, Niitsitapi clans historically lived off the land and traveled according to the seasonal rounds of their main food source, the *iinii* (bison). The traditional Niitsitapi year was usually broken into two seasons, summer and winter, where “during the winter a band typically stayed in one place for about six months, and throughout the summer they traveled to gather the resources they used” (LaPier 2017, 50). Blackfeet scholar and professor Rosalyn LaPier cites the account of Kainaikoan, who “recounted that the Aápaitapi band moved fourteen times in one year […] They began and ended their year in the same place, called Itsipútsimaup, or Battle Coulee, on the Kyúiesisaxtaii, or Bear River (now called the Marias River, a tributary to the Missouri River in what is now central Montana)” (LaPier 2017, 50). Traditional Niitsitapi lands have always been – and continue to be - rich in plant and animal life, and many animals were available to provide the hides necessary for moccasin-making. Hide choice was probably influenced by a variety of factors, including availability of the animal based on the camp’s location on the landscape, the time of year/season, and the purpose behind the moccasins’ use.

Historically, Niitsitapi men generally took charge of hunting big-game animals for both food and clothing, and men began to perform this activity once they reached their early teens (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 2013; Ewers 2001; Harrod 1971, 4). Possession of a healthy and fast *poñońkāamiitá*, or horse, became crucial for hunting success on the Plains, particularly for
Figure 3.2. Blackfeet Warrior on Horseback. Drawing by Karl Bodmer, 1833. Print from the National Anthropological Archives.
hunting the swift and dangerous bison. A good horse cut a hunter’s labor time down significantly because it allowed him to get places faster and more efficiently, and a horse was also able to chase down swift prey that could easily escape a hunter who was on foot. Horses and the Niitsitapi’s emphasis on ‘wealth in horses’ potentially influenced the hide types that could be obtained for moccasin-making because horses were the means through which a hunter could obtain (or not obtain) specific prey, and thus moccasin materials (see Ewers 2001). A successful hunt also guaranteed not only meat and other material for an individual family’s use, but it also meant that the hunter could afford to be generous in sharing his bounty with others, which rewarded him “with social status and political power” (Harrod 1971, 5). Very wealthy Niitsitapi families sometimes owned upwards of forty or more horses. Families that were relatively well-off typically possessed between five and forty horses, while poor families had fewer than five horses and had to rely on others for support in moving and hunting (Ewers 2001). Older Niitsitapi men were usually the wealthiest horse owners because of the years they had spent in their youth accumulating their herds through raiding or breeding (Nugent 1993, 348).

The hide type used for moccasins varied depending on the time of year. Traditional winter moccasins were generally made from heavy bison hide, with the hair side turned inward, creating a soft, warm foot covering that was tough enough to withstand the harsh frozen ground of winter in the Northern Plains (Bullchild 1985, 334; Kidd 1986, 76; Schultz 1973, 180; see also Wissler 1910). Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) employee Anthony Henday, writing in his diary during a trading expedition in Niitsitapi territory on January 1, 1754, describes wearing this type of moccasin: “a Buffalo skin pair of shoes with the hair inwards” (as cited in John Ewers Papers, Northern Plains Indian Moccasin Styles). Bison hides, which were used for a wide range of purposes in Niitsitapi camps - including for robes, blankets, bedding, tipis, moccasins, and more - were collected during the warmer months in preparation for a less mobile winter camp. Wissler (1910) observed that the Blackfeet considered bison bulls to be in the best condition around June, while “the cows, on the other hand, were prime ‘when the leaves began to fall’” (41). In some cases, old bison robes were repurposed for moccasins (Schultz 1973, 180), and Ewers (1944) cites cases where raw bison hides, having been worn soft by children who used them for sledding in the winter, were then made into moccasin soles (185). Smoking the bison skin (discussed in depth later in this chapter) ensured the moccasin would also be waterproof, which was essential to prevent frostbite, gangrene, and other ailments that easily affect vulnerable appendages like
toes. Sometimes winter moccasins were stuffed with grasses in order to prevent heat loss and make them even warmer and softer inside (Ewers 1944, 182; 2001, 181).

Summer moccasins, on the other hand, were generally not made from bison hide because it was too heavy and warm for hot summer days on the prairie. Bullchild (1985, 334) says that poónoka (elk) and sikihtsisoo (moose) were the hides traditionally used to make moccasins, and LaPier also emphasizes the Blackfeet’s use of elk skins in clothing manufacture, particularly for women’s dresses, because the hide was thinner and lighter than bison skin (2017, 55). Dempsey (2007) adds awaakaasii (deer), miistáksoomahkikinaa (bighorn sheep), and omahkatayo (mountain lion) skins to the moccasin hide list, although kyīyō (bear) were “generally unacceptable because of their religious associations” (59). One of Kidd’s (1986) anonymous Niitsitapi informants stated that moose hide was solely used for moccasins, while another stated that sokawakasii (antelope) skin was the preferred summertime moccasin leather (74-75). While LaPier (2017, 57) points out that the thin and soft tanned hides of antelopes were popular for Blackfeet men’s shirts and women’s leggings, along with tobacco bags, Dempsey (2007, 59) says that antelope skins were probably too thin to make adequate moccasin leather. James Willards Schultz, writing in the early twentieth century, cites deer, elk, bighorn sheep, and moose as animals that he directly observed being used for Niitsitapi clothing, including moccasins (Schultz 1973, 37, 119). Áápomahkikinaa, or mountain goat, may have been used as well.

Historical sources can give us even more insight into hides used in Niitsitapi moccasin-making. Peter Fidler, a trader and explorer for the HBC, can be credited with the earliest mentions and descriptions of Niitsitapi footwear and hide use. In a journal entry from January 1, 1793, Fidler observes that Niitsitapi men were hunting elk (described by them as “red deer”) “particularly for the skin to dress into leather, to make jackets, stockings, shoes, and which is much more durable and neat that the Buffalo leather” (Ewers Papers, Peter Fidler Manuscript). In February 1793, Fidler notes that Niitsitapi footwear is also being made from bison hide: “The only method they have to fortify their feet against these formidable and very bad things, they make shoes of the raw hide of the bison – which the prickles are not strong enough to penetrate” (Ewers Papers, Peter Fidler Manuscript). Also a trader, Alexander Henry the Younger, mainly writing about the Niitsitapi between 1799 and 1808, observed that in the summer Niitsitapi dress consisted of “…plain leather shoes, leather leggings reaching up to the hip, and a robe…though
occasionally they wear an open leather shirt, which reaches down to the thigh […] Their winter dress differs little from that of the summer; their shoes are then made of bison hide dressed in the hair…” (Wissler 1910, 118; see also Conn 1990, 81). Here we see a noted difference between summer and winter footwear. Prince Maximillian of Weid, a German writer who traveled along the American Plains in the 1830s on a quest for ethnographic and botanical knowledge, at first reports that Niitsitapi shoes are made “of elk or buffalo leather” (Weid 1833, 425), but later says that they are made of deerskin (432).

Each individual animal mentioned requires different time and labor investments to hunt, process, and carry back to camp. Elk are generally found in higher elevations, while bison and antelope are primarily flatland prairie animals. Moose are happiest in swamplike, mountainous areas, while deer are fairly pervasive throughout this region, although they are not as common in extremely high elevations. Mountain goats and bighorn sheep can be particularly challenging to find, as they tend to stick to high, rocky areas that are difficult for humans to access. When it comes to talking about labor investments in moccasin-making, it is important to note that each type of animal that could have potentially been used would have taken varying degrees of time, effort, and physical exertion to acquire. Sometimes historical hunting trips could take days, if not weeks to complete, and success could depend on the weather, the endurance and ability of one’s horse to travel from place to place, and even an individual’s skill. Because it is so difficult to determine what the hide types are for moccasins in museum collections (primarily due to lack of identifying features like hair), and because hunting is a complex activity that depends on a variety of factors, it is hard to quantify the historical labor costs of obtaining hides for moccasin-making. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the time cost, at the very least, should be measured in days, if not weeks.

**Hide Type and Economic Changes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century**

Although by the late nineteenth century most traditional animal hide clothing had been largely replaced with wardrobes made up of trade cloth and wool, both out of necessity and desire, moccasins still persisted in everyday Niitsitapi life. As recently as 1968 an observer found that more than 100 people among the Kainai were still wearing moccasins every day except for in the winter (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 89). Moccasins likely persisted in everyday Blackfeet dress because they were practical, comfortable (far more comfortable than hard-soled
European shoes), and the wearing of moccasins also acted as a subtle yet powerful symbol of Native resistance to colonization and government efforts to eradicate Native culture. However, in order to obtain the materials necessary to make moccasins, Niitsitapi artists had to turn to an animal that was becoming increasingly common on tribal lands across the United States: cattle.

The history of áapoótskináa, known in English as white horns, or cattle, on Indian reservations in the United States is inherently tied up with the colonizing forces of the United States government, land theft, and ultimately the devastation of many traditional Niitsitapi economies. With the late nineteenth century extermination of the bison, beef was forced to become a main food staple for Niitsitapi peoples, and cowhides had to substitute for traditional bison hides when making clothing. The transition to cowhides in moccasin-making is also likely when the shift from the older soft-soled moccasin pattern to the hard-soled version occurred. The fact that hard-soled moccasins lasted longer than the traditional soft-soled moccasin, making them more economical in a time when supplies were scarce, may have played a role in this shift. John Ewers estimated that by 1883, cowhide-soled moccasins had probably replaced almost all other types of traditional footwear soles on the Blackfeet Reservation (1958, 300). Cowhides had to be purchased by moccasin-makers from beef suppliers; on the Blood Reserve in Canada, artists paid a dollar or more per hide (Dempsey 2007, 59). In 1892, Reverend Maclean noted that the Blood were using cow hides to make a variety of objects, including moccasins and parfleches; out of the approximately seventy to eighty hides a month that “were taken from cattle slaughtered for rations […] the Indians used some [thirty-five]” (Brownstone 2008, 51).

When ranching programs were implemented on the Blackfeet Reservation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Native ranchers finally had direct access to cattle hides and could provide them to community artists themselves, rather than having to buy them from the government. By 1910, Wissler reported that although elk and deer skins, along with the pelts of smaller animals, were still occasionally used in clothing production when they could be found, “the commercial value of steer hides together with the cheapness of cloth tend to reduce the consumption of native tanned skins to a minimum”
Figure 3.3. Issue of Rations at Agency District, Blackfeet Agency, Montana, 1926. Photo from Bureau of Indian Affairs Glass Negatives, National Anthropological Archives.
(1910, 63). In the 1920s and particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, finding hides for moccasins continued to be a major challenge for many artists, not only because they were scarce, but also because they were expensive, although this obstacle did not stop many people from continuing to wear moccasins (Figure 3.3). Moccasin hide type in these decades also became conflated with ideas around authenticity (discussed further in Chapter Four), meaning that hides that were not fully or skillfully-tanned could not be used; this was particularly challenging in light of the loss of traditional tanning methods and other knowledge due to government assimilation policies and institutions, especially Indian boarding schools. Eventually, a cheaper alternative to brain-tanned hides processed by hand came onto the scene in the form of commercially tanned leather, which can be made out of any type of animal hide.

The transition to cattle hide, and eventually to buying hides from other sources, represents a major transition in the labor investment involved in moccasin-making. Rather than spending days and weeks hunting for traditional animals, many Niitsitapi artists could now utilize the animals taking up space in their own backyards (both figuratively and literally). Physical labor investments changed to cash investments as well, with many people choosing to outsource for their hides, a practice that still stands true today.

**Obtaining Hides in Contemporary Moccasin-Making**

In 2022, the process for obtaining animal hides for making clothing still involves many of the same steps as it did in the past. Animals must still be killed, the meat stripped away, and the remaining hides prepped for processing. However, as mentioned previously, many artists now choose to purchase pre-processed hides from outside sources rather than hunting and stripping the animal themselves, which saves both physical labor and time. Prepared hides can be purchased from a variety of sources, including local hunters, roadkill savers, and large retail outlets that sell commercial hides, which are most often cattle. Now much of the effort for getting a hide involves the use of the internet or a cellphone, along with ready cash or a checkbook and a pen, rather than a days-long hunting trip through difficult terrain.

Daniel After Buffalo Edwards, a contemporary and full-time Ammskaapipiikuni moccasin-maker, describes how he gets his hides from an on-reservation source, a non-Native man who is skilled in braintanning in the traditional Blackfeet way. Daniel says that a single deer hide provides enough material today to make for four to five moccasin uppers. In historical
terms, when moccasins were used every day and wore out quickly, that would mean a massive labor investment in hides would be required, although moccasins were often resoled when they could be (as opposed to completely recreated). The deer hides that Daniel uses to make soles can produce around fifteen of them, which makes sense considering that moccasin uppers have a much wider area to cover and thus require more material to make. In terms of monetary cost, one four by two-foot deer hide costs Daniel upwards of $250.00 to buy, with elk hide being even more expensive. Although the physical labor aspect is reduced for Daniel since there is no hunting involved, this is still a significant expense.

Stories from the Collections

Hide Types

Despite the stories that animal hides in moccasin-making can tell us about labor, movement, and landscapes, there are currently no reliable methods to identify moccasin hide types in museum collections. Much of the difficulty for identifying moccasin hide down to the species level is that animal hair is really the only reliable method for identification, and it is rarely present on Niitsitapi moccasins in museum collections. Tanning eliminates any distinguishing skin features that may give visual clues about the hide type and it is unlikely that even a microscopic analysis of hides could pinpoint species without a hair sample (Brown 1942; Davis 2009; Mayer 1952; National Park Service 1996). Considering the difficulty involved in analysis, it is interesting that many museum catalog records throughout this project have attempted to name the species that the moccasin hide originated from. Most of the catalog entries in this project at least make the attempt to talk about moccasin hide type, with most (76 pairs) using non-specific language such as “dressed skin”, “buckskin”, and “leather.” In some instances, the catalogs try to get more specific, with deer hide being the most popular hide type choice, listed for twelve pairs, followed by bison hide at four pairs, caribou at one pair, and elk hide listed for one pair. One entry lists suede or faux leather as the hide type, and fifteen catalog entries do not mention hide type at all. Considering that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine specific hide types without either a significant hair patch sample or, at the very least, a piece of hair that can be put under a microscope, it is unknown how the museum staff made these determinations.
Several museum personnel related to me during this project that bison hide is often distinguishable from other types of hide due to its sheer thickness as compared to other tanned hides, and I found this to be true. However, there is no ‘scientific’ process for this identification, per se, as it relies on individual and specialized knowledge, and is thus not easily replicable for future studies. Thus, due to the difficulties involved in trying to accurately and reliably identify hide type, I decided to eliminate this variable from the study. It is likely that past museum attempts to be specific with hide type result in false or misleading information in the museum catalog. It would be interesting for future researchers to figure out a way for hide type to be identified without hair samples, as this could give important insight into past people’s subsistence and migration practices across the diverse landscapes of North America.

**Sole Types and Wear**

Sole type (**Figure 3.4**) was determined through a visual and physical analysis of the moccasin. Seventy-three moccasins in this sample were hard-soled, thirty-two were soft-soled, and four pairs did not have a sole present. Of the thirty-two soft-soled moccasins, several were actually made in the hard-sole style, meaning that the sole was attached separately from the upper, but the sole material itself was soft, often made of cloth, and were not the traditional rawhide that is typically associated with hard-soled moccasins. In the photograph sample, sole type had to be inferred in most cases due to both the poor quality of the images and the fact that not many sole bottoms are shown in photographs. It is hypothesized, based on a visual analysis, that one hundred and ninety-seven photographs depicted moccasins with hard soles, and only eleven photos contained what are likely soft-soled moccasins.

Wear on moccasins (**Figure 3.5**) in the collections was determined through a visual and physical assessment. In most instances, it is fairly easy to tell if a moccasin has been worn because the thin leather soles are easily marked by daily wear and tear and are also easily stained by sweat from the foot, which often leaves distinct footprint outlines on the bottoms of soles. Eighty-seven moccasins were worn, eighteen were not worn, and four were unknown as they did not have any soles to analyze.

Moccasins on their surface may seem simple and straightforward, but remember, they are also words in a story, objects that have deep and complex biographies. In the case of the Niitsitapi, moccasins and the animal hides that they are made from are linked to complicated
histories full of land theft, corruption, starvation, and grief, but are also connected to stories that highlight Niitsitapi resilience, strength, love for families, and perseverance even in the face of some of the harshest conditions that a human being can face.

**Step 2: Hide Preparation and Processing**

The Niitsitapi language refers to processed hides in several different ways. *Motokis* refers to the hide or skin before it has been processed, whereas *paanssin* references smoked or tanned hide. There is also *ohpaaninnimaa*, or oil prepared hide by hand on both sides. Traditionally after an animal was killed, it was historically the domain of Niitsitapi women to skin, prepare, and process the animal and its hide for moccasins and other types of clothing. Today, anyone who has the time and inclination can try their hand at hide tanning. The traditional braintanning process for preparing moccasin-quality hides, both historically and today, is laborious and long and differs depending on whether the hide is being used for uppers or soles. Tanning hide for moccasin uppers is much more labor-intensive than hide for soles, as the former requires the leather to be softer and thus more processed. The importance of moccasins in Niitsitapi life may be one of the reasons why traditional tanning methods have been kept alive throughout the intense social and economic changes that the community has experienced in the past two centuries. Wissler observed in 1910 that the continued need and use for moccasins specifically in Blackfeet daily life and ceremonies was likely a major factor in why the art of tanning persisted among the Blackfeet rather than being lost completely to the government’s colonizing agenda (63).

**Historical Hide Preparation and Processing**

The first step in the tanning process is fleshing, which involves pinning the hide down to the ground with wooden stakes and using a fleshing tool (typically made of bone, and later metal) to remove excess fat, meat, and hair from the skin. With particularly large hides, like those of bison, women would sometimes start by cutting them in half, and after processing they would be sewn back together. This made it easier to scrape them. After the skin is de-fleshed, it is scraped using a sharp stone, bone, or later, metal, scraper until both sides of the hide are of even thickness (Ewers 1945, 12-13). This process is very much an art in and of itself, as the hide needs to be scraped enough to be clean of flesh and fat but cannot be scraped so hard that holes
Figure 3.4. Sole Type

Figure 3.5. Moccasin Wear
are made in the hide. During an interview with John Ewers in the 1950s, Blackfeet community member Irene Goodstrike describes the scraping process, noting how hides were often soaked in water to help loosen the hair and make it easier to scrape off:

So we’d soak our hide in water and we’d use ashes from the poplar tree or quaking aspen, which give off a clean ash and that contains enough lye in it to help the hair slip from the hide…Then after the hair starts slipping, you test it by pulling it. And you take your old time scraper a great big old Hudson Bay butcher knife, or else a sharp flint rock. And scrape this hair off (John Ewers Papers, Hands and Spirit: The Vitality of Traditional Blackfeet Arts, Part I).

Fleshing and scraping was extremely labor intensive, as it requires hours spent kneeling on the ground, hunched over the hide and carefully – but firmly – scraping the leather clean. One can only imagine the back pains and elbow aches that past Niitsitapi women must have suffered from, especially considering that hide tanning was done constantly throughout one’s lifetime.

After scraping, the skin is then left in the sun for a few days to cure and bleach. If the skin was to be used for rawhide, like for the hard sole of a moccasin or a parfleche bag, this would be the end of the preparation process. If the artist was to use the hide for the upper or cuff of a moccasin, then she would further process the hide by using her hands to apply an oily mixture made of animal brains, liver, and fat to it, letting it dry, wetting it again with warm water, and then rolling it into a bundle (Ewers 1945, 12-13; Wissler 1910, 64). In 1910, Wissler observed that in the absence of the brain/fat mixture, women would use a combination of packing house lard, flour, and warm water as a substitute (64). Even with the brain and fat mixture applied, skins often still needed further softening. To accomplish this, hides would be thrown over a taught rope, usually strung between two trees and later, clotheslines, and pulled until they were soft. Irene Goodstrike describes this process:

The old people used to use a sinew rope or rawhide in a loop on the inside of a tipi pole. Because of the slanting position they could sit down and with the right and left hand pull the hide briskly over this rope until it was completely dry. This gives a white and very soft hide (John Ewers Papers, Hands and Spirit: The Vitality of Traditional Blackfeet Arts, Part I).

After the hide has been fleshed, scraped, cured in the sun, plied with brains, bundled, and pulled, hides then went through a smoking process. Smoking a hide after dressing helps it to become soft and malleable, especially if it had been exposed to rain or snow, and it also gives the hide a
Figure 3.6. Niitsitapi Woman Fleshing a Bison Hide, ca. 1927. Photo courtesy of Native North American Indian – Old Photos Facebook Page.
distinct color. Anecdotally, the odor that lingered on a hide after it had been smoked also helped to ward off mosquitoes and other insects (Ewers 1945, 12-13). Most importantly, smoking contributed to making moccasins waterproof and hardy, thus making them convenient to wear in bad weather and over rough terrain (Bullchild 1985, 334). Historically, many (but not all) Niitsitapi women built smokehouses in order to smoke their skins, a process that typically took half a day or longer (Ewers 1945, 12-13). Irene Goodstrike, talking about the smoking process in the 1950s, describes the process if it occurs out in the open rather than in a smokehouse:

It [the hide] is made into a tube-like envelope with the bottom and open, and suspended over a smoldering fire…The smoke pot is a depression in the earth with their fire at the bottom, allowing the smoke to enter the envelope. The hide is still white on the outside and the desired color on the inside, so the envelope is reversed and pegged down and hung over the smoke pot again to smoke both sides the same color. Then it’s removed and wrapped and stored away for a few days to set the color (John Ewers Papers, Hands and Spirit: The Vitality of Traditional Blackfeet Arts, Part I).

People also repurposed smoked hides for moccasins when needed. For instance, Brownstone (2008) reports that the hide at the top of a tipi was especially prized for repurposing into moccasins because it had been made more waterproof due to the heavy smoking from the central fire inside (52). Rawhide parfleche bags were also often popular items that were cut into moccasin soles when they were no longer useful (Wissler 1910, 81). Repurposing items for moccasins may have become more important during the lean years of the early and mid-reservation era, when supplies and money were scarce.

The end result of this long, time- and labor-intensive process was a soft, tanned hide that could be made into at least four to five moccasin uppers, as per Daniel Edwards’ estimates earlier. There are debates within the literature about how many hides a single individual could process by herself. Some nineteenth century accounts indicate that a woman was only capable of producing about ten processed hides per year (Habicht-Mauche 2005, 42); however, this number could substantially increase if multiple women in a household worked cooperatively. One report claimed “that a Blackfoot chief once boasted ‘that his eight wives could dress a hundred and fifty skins in the year whereas a single wife could only dress ten’” (Jabolow 1950, 20, quoted in Habicht-Mauche 2005, 42). On the other hand, Ewers (1958) contended that one woman could actually prepare anywhere from twenty-five to thirty bison hides herself in one winter (109).
Figure 3.7. Blackfeet Woman Tanning Hides on Clothesline, ca. 1920s-1940s. Photo from Tatsey 1971, 162.
Regardless of how many hides a woman could produce alone, though, there is no doubt that Niitsitapi women took great pride in their hide tanning skills and were quick to notice others’ efforts (or lack thereof). Both Ewers (1945, 17) and Schultz (1973, 64) note that Niitsitapi women were quick to notice a hide that had been dressed and tanned well and were adamant that those hides that were not done well were evidence of laziness. Tanning enough bison hides to make a lodge was a major feat in a woman’s life, and evidence of her pride can be seen by examining scrapers in museum collections, which often show deliberate notches on the handle, a careful record of each lodge that she made.

As demonstrated, hide tanning is not a quick process; like hunting, it can take several days, if not longer, to get through all the steps. There are also hidden challenges in hide tanning. If the hide is left out too long in the sun it will become too thin, making it impossible to scrape thin without ripping it. Hides are also susceptible to being eaten by rats, mice, and other small mammals, which would have especially been a problem in the past, when hides were staked outside on the ground. We must also account for the time and effort involved in making the tools needed for hide tanning, such as cutting tools, fleshers, scrapers, rawhide ropes, and smokehouses. The physical effort and time put into a tanned hide was not just labor though; it was an act of caring, an expression of love made by wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and cousins on behalf of their families. Niitsitapi women’s tanning created homes and clothing that nurtured the hearts of their people, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These motivations must be recognized as well.

**Contemporary Hide Preparation and Processing**

Today, much of the knowledge for preparing traditionally-tanned hides rests in the hands of a few skilled tanners on the Blackfeet Reservation, some of whom are non-Native. Tanned hides can also be bought from commercial outlets or purchased from Native (but not Blackfeet) and non-Native tanners who do not reside on the reservation. Some traditional artists, in need of tanned hides but unwilling to pay the high costs, take on the task of learning to tan hides themselves (Baillargeon 2005, 143).

The traditional braintanning process still looks much the same as before, but with a few changes. For one, modern tools like chainsaws, steel knives specific to butchering and skinning, power washers that can be hooked up to running water (to soak the hides), and enclosed garages...
where animals, and later hides, can be hung all make a huge difference in reducing both the physical labor and time costs involved in tanning. Additionally, as Baillargeon (2005) points out, many hide-tanning recipes today incorporate

[...] modern products such as soaps and detergents and water-softening agents may be used along with or in place of brain in the tanning and softening process. Some people add Sunlight soap or detergent to the tanning solution, and Downy or Fleecy fabric softener may be added to the water during the softening process in order to make the hides softer (149).

As mentioned previously, moccasins today are often made of commercially tanned leather, although there are still many artists who opt to use traditionally tanned hides where they are able. Commercial tanning preserves the hide through a chemical process that often involves soaking in liquids like milk of lime, acids, salt, and other chemicals meant to prevent bacterial and fungal growth. Individual commercial tanneries have their own processes, and often add specific finishes, dyes, and grains to their products. Ultimately, the end result of a commercially-tanned hide is a hide that has both a smooth side and a suede side. For moccasins it is often the suede side that is beaded on and used for the outward-facing side of the upper. Commercial hides are usually cheaper than braintanned hides and at times easier to work with, making them popular choices in moccasin-making.

Today, there are efforts to revitalize traditional Blackfeet tanning techniques throughout the community, often through school cultural programs and summer culture camps. Kiela Bird, an Ammskaapipiikuni artist and moccasin-maker, recalled a particularly meaningful experience that she had at a cultural immersion school on the reservation where students learned how to tan hides along with other culturally important skills. Public school students on the reservation also learn about hide tanning and other cultural values and skills in their classes, with cultural information being built into the overall curriculum from elementary to high school. Local workshops, such as the one run by Kenneth Cook in March 2022, also provide youth and other community members with the opportunity to learn traditional hide tanning skills.

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3 https://bestleather.org/leather-tanning/
4 KTVQ News Story, March 15, 2022
Stories from the Collections

Moccasin processing styles were difficult variables to determine in the museum collections. The first, tanning style, was meant to distinguish between hides that had been traditionally brain-tanned as compared to those that had not. Though it is assumed that almost all the hides in this sample were likely braintanned, there is no reliable or replicable method for determining this besides a visual analysis, which again, requires individualized and specialized knowledge about the tanning process that varies from person to person. The only type of leather that is absolutely distinguishable is leather that has been commercially-tanned, as the look and feel of commercially-tanned hide is completely different from hand-tanned hide.

The other processing method that I had originally set out to determine is whether or not any moccasin hides in the sample had been smoked. According to informal discussions with various museum staff, smoking is said to be determined by a visual analysis of the hide color, with smoked hides having more of a yellowish color and non-smoked hides retaining the traditional brown color. It was also stated that smoked hides retain a distinguishable and obvious ‘smoky’ scent that would be easily identifiable by the researcher. In my experience during this project, I found these indicators to be difficult to determine most of the time, for several reasons. For one, many of the moccasins in this sample were either yellow or had yellowish tinges, but did not have a smoky smell to them, while others did have the distinguishable smoke scent but were not yellow. This made the method for distinguishing smoked vs. non-smoked moccasins confusing and unreliable, and I could not tell whether or not a moccasin was yellow because of its smoked status, its age, or if it had yellow paint on it.5 Plus, it is important to note that how we perceive odors and interpret them is subjective and not easily repeatable from individual to individual. With these difficulties in mind, I attempted to make initial hypotheses as to each moccasin pair’s smoked or unsmoked status, but do not feel that these are necessarily reliable and thus will not report them here. I recommend that future research focus its attention on developing a full-proof method for determining whether or not moccasin leather has been smoked.

5 According to a traditional moccasin maker, it is generally safe to assume that all moccasin leather has been smoked because without that waterproofing process, the moccasin would turn into a misshapen mess the first time it got wet – not a very practical feature for footwear.
Step 3: Designing the Moccasin

After the leather has been obtained and processed – whether it be commercial material or traditionally tanned animal hide – the next step in the moccasin-making process is to design the moccasin, both construction-wise and decoration-wise. Historically the materials that were needed for moccasin-making included the prepared hide, a bone needle, an awl for punching holes through the leather, sinew and/or fibrous thread, quills and/or beads and other décor materials, and charcoal for laying out the design on the hide. Today, most artists have swapped bone for metal needles, knives for scissors, and charcoal for transfer paper. They have also added beeswax for preparing sinew, magnifying glasses for small patterns, and many more seemingly small modern conveniences that have changed the landscape of moccasin-making over time. In the past, most clothing decoration took place during daylight hours to take advantage of the primary light source, sunlight. Today, electric lights that can be turned on any time of the day or night have given artists many more options for when they want to create.

The design section is by far the most comprehensive of this chapter, as it is complex and intertwined with so many different and interconnected variables. First, the construction processes of determining a moccasin’s cut and size are considered. Then, I discuss the decoration process for a moccasin, which includes many types of mediums, such as quillwork, beadwork, additional design materials like animal skins and cloth, stitch choices, thread choices, color choices, and many more seemingly small details that go into the creative decision-making process. Within discussions of most of these design mediums are also considerations of the design medium’s histories and contemporary use, along with moccasin and photo stories from the museums and archives in this study.

Construction Processes

The Moccasin Cut and Stories from the Collections

Determining the pattern, or cut, of a moccasin is the artist’s first step in the construction process, as it will determine the amount of hide needed, the number of pieces needed, and the overall style of the moccasin itself. In Siksika, the word for a moccasin pattern or cutout is sakónímmaan. I define ‘moccasin cut’ as the number of pieces that a moccasin is made up of, with a ‘piece’ defined as a moccasin construction feature that has been sewn on separately from the other features. Moccasin construction pieces include the sole, upper, vamp, cuff, and tongue.
For example, a four-piece moccasin may consist of an upper, sole, cuff, and tongue, all added separately from each other, whereas a one-piece moccasin is a single piece of leather that has been shaped to include the sole, upper, cuff, and possibly a tongue, all in one piece. For the moccasins in this sample (Figure 3.8), the majority, at sixty-seven pairs, were three-piece moccasins. The second-most populated category was the four-piece moccasin with thirty pairs, which consists of separate sole, upper, cuff and tongue. The two-piece moccasin category had six pairs, the one-piece moccasin had two pairs, and four moccasins had an irrelevant piece count due to their condition (only the uppers remained).

Moccasin cut can be an important diagnostic tool in helping to culturally affiliate historic moccasins to both regions and specific tribes. Hatt (1916) hypothesized that moccasins could be regionally and tribally categorized by evaluating the number of pieces and seam types that each moccasin contained, and I wanted to see if this would stand true for the Niitsitapi moccasins in this sample. Based on the number of pieces a moccasin has, it was assigned both a piece descriptor (i.e., one-piece, two-piece, three-piece, etc.), as described above, and a Hatt Series designation, which is determined by evaluating not only the number of pieces that a moccasin has, but also the seam types present. In the Hatt method, seams are evaluated on the toes, sides, insteps, and heels, and seam types can include Straight, Vertical, T-shaped, and Y or II shaped seams. The vast majority of the moccasins in this project, at ninety-five pairs, fell into Hatt Series XV, which is defined as a shoe with a flat sole and upper, vertical heel seam, and a separate tongue piece. Seven pairs are a Hatt XII, or a one+ piece moccasins with a T-shaped heel seam, and often a side seam and special instep piece, while two pairs are a Hatt VIII, or a one+ piece moccasin with T-shaped heel and toe seams. One moccasin pair fell into Hatt VI, a one+ piece moccasin with a T-shaped heel seam and straight toe seam, and four pairs did not have a series designation due to their condition. See Figure 3.9 for a visual breakdown of Hatt Series designations.

Laces (Figures 3.10 and 3.11) do not contribute towards a moccasins’ overall cut style in this process because they are considered (here at least) to be more of a stylistic element than a construction piece. Ninety-six moccasin pairs in the collection had laces, nine had no laces, and four pairs were not relevant to this variable due to their condition. Of those that did have laces, ninety-three moccasins had laces made of leather or hide, two had cloth laces, and one, labeled
Figure 3.8. Moccasin Cut

Figure 3.9. Hatt (1916) Moccasin Series Distribution
Figure 3.10. Does the Moccasin Have Laces?

Figure 3.11. Lace Material
as Other, had laces that were a combination of modern shoelaces and pieces of hide that had been dyed yellow.

*Sizing the Moccasin and Stories from the Collections*

After determining the cut and piece count, the next step in the construction process of a moccasin is to determine the size of the intended wearer’s foot. To do this, measurements must be taken. Many artists today take tracings of the bottoms of their clients’ feet on either cardboard or heavy paper, and this was likely the case in historical moccasin-making as well, although tracings were likely made directly on the hide and with charcoal or later, a lead pencil. In the collections for this study, size was measured in two different ways: through visual analysis, and through physical measurement. Based on a visual analysis, I can make clear distinctions between adult and child moccasins, with the difference between the two being an obvious size differential. Ninety-six moccasins were determined as adult, nine as child, and four were labeled as unknown because they did not have soles attached, making it difficult to determine size, although it is likely that they were adult moccasins at one time.

Physical sole measurements for the moccasins in the museum collections can also give insight as to historic moccasin sizes. Length was measured from the heel to the end of the longest toe. Width was measured from side to side at the widest point of the moccasin, underneath the toes. The average sole length for the left foot is 9 1/8 inches (23.19 cm), and the average width is 3 ½ inches (8.66 cm). The average sole length for the right foot is 9 inches (22.85 cm), and the average width is 3 7/16 inches (8.69 cm). The minimum sole length measurement in this sample is 4 13/16 inches (12.2 cm), and the maximum sole length measured was 11 ½ inches (29.21 cm). The minimum sole width measured was 2 1/8 inches (5.4 cm), and the maximum width measured was 5 ¼ inches (13.34 cm). Combined, the total average moccasin sole length for this sample is 9 1/16 inches (23.02 cm) and total average width is 3 ½ inches (8.68 cm). The average moccasin size in this sample, as compared to typical United States shoe sizing guidelines, would be the equivalent of a 2021 women’s shoe size six or six and a half, and slightly smaller than a 2021 men’s shoe size six.

Additional measurements taken during this project include the upper and the sides of the moccasin. These are important measures to take to ensure that the moccasin is not too small for the wearer. Moccasin upper length was measured from the tip of the toe to the end of the upper at
the start of the tongue (or where the tongue would be). Upper width was measured from sole edge to sole edge across the widest part of the foot. The upper in this case is only includes the top part of the moccasin, from the base of the tongue to the toe; sides and heels were measured separately. The average upper length for the left foot is 5 inches (12.48 cm) and the average width is 5 1/2 inches (13.94 cm). For the right foot, the average upper length is approximately 5 inches (12.44 cm) and average width is 5 5/8 (13.80 cm). The total average upper length for both feet combined is approximately 5 inches (12.46 cm) and total average width is 5 1/2 inches (13.87 cm). Minimum upper length is 2 1/8 inches (5.4 cm) and maximum length is 7 inches (17.78 cm), while minimum upper width is 2 1/8 inches (5.4 cm) and maximum width is 7 9/16 inches (19.21 cm).

Quadrant measurements are defined here as the measures of the lengths and widths of the sides of a moccasin. Quadrant Three is the left side of the moccasin and Quadrant Four is the right side of the moccasin when looking at it from the back of the heel. Length in this case is measured from the base of the tongue (or where the tongue would be) to the heel seam (or middle of the heel if there is no seam). Width is measured at the widest point from the edge of the sole to the top of moccasin’s side, excluding any sort of added cuff.

For Quadrant Three on the left foot, the average length is 5 inches (11.70 cm) and the average width is 2 3/8 inches (6.04 cm). For Quadrant Three on the right foot, the average length is 4 1/2 inches (11.46 cm) and the average width is 2 5/8 inches (5.93 cm). When looking at Quadrant Four on the left foot, the average length is 5 inches (11.58 cm) and the average width is 2 3/8 inches (6.05 cm). The Quadrant Four measures for the right foot are 4 9/16 inches (11.54 cm) for average length and 2 ¼ inches (5.91 cm) for average width. The total average Quadrant Three length for both feet is 4 9/16 inches (11.58 cm) and the average width is 2 3/8 inches (5.99 cm). The total average Quadrant Four length for both feet is also 4 9/16 inches (11.60 cm) and the average width is also 2 3/8 inches (5.98 cm).

The Quadrant Three length minimum is 1 3/4 inches (4.45 cm) and the maximum is 8 inches (20.32 cm), while its minimum width is 3/16 of an inch (0.48 cm) and maximum width is 5 7/16 inches (15.88 cm). For Quadrant Four, the minimum length is 1 3/4 inches (4.45 cm) and the maximum is 8 inches (20.32 cm), and the minimum width is 3/16 of an inch (0.48 cm) while the maximum is 5 5/8 inches (14.61 cm).

Figures 3.13, 3.14, and 3.15 show these measurements.
Figure 3.13. Sole Measurements

Figure 3.14. Upper Length and Width

Figure 3.15. Quadrants Three and Four – Lengths and Widths
Decoration

After determining piece counts, measuring, and cutting, the next, and perhaps most complex, step in moccasin-making is choosing both the design materials and the design itself. Moccasin design materials can include quills, beads, paint, cotton thread embroidery, animal components, and even English stroud. Design elements include not only the images applied to the moccasin, but also subtler details like tongue shape, heel tabs, cuffs, thread choices, stitch types, and colors.

Moccasin decoration was – and continues to be – a communicative device, a medium through which stories and values can be conveyed. More than art, moccasin designs can embody specific ideas about gender relations, spiritual power, wealth and social status, ethnicity, and the influence of Europeans on Native life. These stories can be expressed through a variety of mediums, including colors, shapes, design components (both by themselves and as a whole), as well as through the other design elements mentioned above, like tongue shapes, heel tabs, cuffs, beaded soles, thread choices, and stitching types. Designs can situate people on their landscapes, describe important events, and make statements about environment, love, war, family, gender, and much, much more. According to one of Kidd’s (1986, 75) informants, “moccasin designs were always significant.” Additionally, each moccasin design element has its own specific time and labor demands, ranging from gathering supplies (the labor difference between gathering quills and buying beads is significant, for instance) to investing the time and money required to obtain cultural rights to use certain materials and/or designs.

Design Materials

Quillwork: The Grandmother of Beadwork

*Atonáán*, or quillwork, traditionally the domain of Plains Indian women and a form of appliqué artwork, is one of the oldest and most traditional decorative arts in Indian country. In addition to upholding cultural resilience and traditional narratives through ceremony and protocol, quillwork is a sacred art that is intrinsically tied to both human and environmental landscapes, where the knowledge and materials for the craft are by necessity tied to the land and people who produce them. According to Niitsitapi oral tradition, quillwork was first taught “to

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6 Term coined by Mohawk scholar Joel Monture.
the long-ago people by Thunder...[and since then] it has been regarded as a sacred craft” (Hungry Wolf 1980, 241; see also Ewers 1945, 27). Contrary to popular belief, quillwork is still a contemporarily practiced art among the Blackfeet. Though the number of quillwork artists have dwindled, they are not gone, and ceremonies still exist to initiate new practitioners into the art. Today, both women and men can be initiated into quillwork (Peers and Brown 2015, 56), and there are several traditional quillworkers who produce art on the Blackfeet Reservation today, including Leonda Fast Buffalo Horse, who describes being given the rights to practice quillwork as a “sacred passage [that] means a member of the tribe has been recognized to be a keeper of a traditional task important to the tribe” (Plemmons 2009, 3). Blackfeet quillwork artists are intrinsically tied to the landscape through the very nature of their materials, which are derived from the land around them.

As is the case with any artistic endeavor, the first step in quillwork production is to collect the necessary raw materials. This first means finding a kai’iskááhpa (porcupine), or occasionally a bird, and removing the quills from the animal (Johnson and Yenne 2011, 91; Koch 1977, 35). Contemporary artists can obtain porcupine quills in two different ways: through plucking a dead animal, which is often roadkill that the artist has found or been gifted; or by hunting live porcupines, which entails throwing a blanket or cloth over the porcupine, holding its head down with a forked stick, and then pulling the blanket off, to which the quills have attached themselves (Plemmons 2009, 5). Many Niitsitapi quillworkers prefer “the medium-sized quills from the back and sides of the porcupine” (Ewers 1958, 119), with the largest measuring approximately five inches long and one-eighth inch in diameter, with the average porcupine “[yielding] about eight ounces of quills” (Ewers 1945, 28). Depending upon the size and complexity of the item to be made, hundreds of quills can potentially go into a single object.

Porcupine quills are naturally white with black tips, and if this color does not appeal to the artist, then the quills go through a dyeing process. Using colors “derived from roots, berries, and mosses, or later from colors boiled out from trade cloth, or later still, after 1850, from commercial dyes obtained from white traders” (Johnson and Yenne 2011, 91), the historic Niitsitapi quillworker would wrap the quills together with the dye in a piece of buckskin and sleep on the package until she was satisfied with the colors obtained (Ewers 1958, 119). Quills of differing sizes and colors were traditionally kept separate from each other and stored in “dried and softened [animal] bladders” (Hungry Wolf 1980, 241). Today, after the porcupine has been
plucked, the quills are sorted and culled, boiled in a mixture of vinegar and dish soap, and then
dyed different colors using water and either natural plant-based dyes or synthetic dyes. Finished
quills are then stored until needed for a project. Before applying the quills to a tanned hide,
artists first soften the quills in their mouths and then use a needle and thread to sew them down.
The traditional tools were sinew thread and bone needles, but today sewing materials differ
depending upon availability and artist preference. Other supplies that are usually needed for this
process included a bone marker, a smooth object to flatten the quills after they were applied, and
a knife (Hungry Wolf 1980, 241; Johnson and Yenne 2011, 93).

Quillwork knowledge and rituals are transferred from teachers to a select few students
through “specific prayers, face and hand painting, and the wearing of specific ornaments, such as
necklaces, while quilling” (Hernandez 1999, 164; see also LaPier 2017, 117). According to
interviews collected from Niitsitapi elders by Dempsey, the initiation process historically began
with the teacher, who was often a grandmother or other knowledgeable older woman, painting
the initiate’s face and hands with red ochre so as to prevent blindness and swelling and offering
prayers for good health. Then, the young woman was given a porcupine claw-and-quill necklace
to wear while practicing her craft (Dempsey 1963, 52). To complete the process, the new
quillworker was expected to create a quilled item – for one interviewee, it was a single moccasin
– and present it as an offering to the Sun (Dempsey 1963, 53; see also Ewers 1958, 119). In his
interview with Leonda Fast Buffalo Horse, Plemmons points out that it is still the tradition for a
quillworker’s first item to be something that she gives away to the Sun; Leonda left hers in a tree
(2009, 3). Attempts to work with quills without first learning the proper ceremonies were
traditionally said to result in dire consequences for the attempter, such as blindness or swelled
finger joints (Ewers 1958, 119). Blackfeet artists in the 1930s, who were producing moccasins
heavily for the local tourist markets, refused to work with quills unless they were prepared
properly for fear of being blinded while they worked (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of
Indian Affairs 1938, 23).

In addition to being a sacred craft, quillwork was also a socialized and regulated one. As
part of the initiation process, young women were inducted into the tribe’s quillwork society,
which, as Penney (2018) notes, was common among Plains tribes for “[structuring] training and
[reinforcing] standards of production and design” (9), similar to an artistic guild. However,
membership in a quillwork society did not preclude individuals from producing their own unique
Figure 3.15. Quilled and beaded moccasins (NMAI 143401). Photo by author.
designs. Dempsey’s (1963) elderly Niitsitapi informants pointed out that quillwork patterns were often “the result of dreams and could be used only by the owners unless they wished to give them away” (53). Ewers (1945) notes this practice as well in later beaded items, where objects that hold sacred designs can be sold to outsiders as long as the design itself has been transferred.

Beadwork

Áótoksíinaatti, or beads, have been made and used in one form or another by almost every society in the world. As of today, the earliest known beads, made of snail shells, have been traced back to humans who lived almost 150,000 years ago. In North America, and more specifically on the Northern Plains, it is likely that many Indigenous bead traditions existed prehistorically, although their presence in the Plains archaeological record is relatively rare. Beads produced by Indigenous communities were reflections of their environment and crafted from many materials, including metal, stone, bones and teeth (animal and human), shells, and even vegetation such as seeds (Orchard 1929, 14).

The introduction of European-style beads to North American Indians, first as gifts from missionaries and explorers and then as mediums of exchange, played a critical role in transforming artwork on the continent. Since the inception of European trade in the Americas and elsewhere, beads have facilitated exchanges “between people of different cultural worlds” (Graeber 1996, 13). On the North American Plains, beaded items abounded, and still do. The range of items that can be adorned with beads (aka beadwork) is limited only by an individual’s imagination, but traditionally includes “clothing such as shirts…dresses, leggings, belts, and moccasins, but also bags and containers…knife cases and rifle scabbards, baby carriers, [and] saddle blankets and horse ornaments” (Penney 2018, 3). Beads can be applied by themselves or in addition to other materials, in wide areas or just along edges, in many colors or only a few; the artistic combinations are limitless. Unlike quillwork, beadwork cannot be derived solely from the land, even if its meanings stem its creator’s relationship with the natural world. Beadwork relies on materials that can only be obtained through the continuous give-and-take relationships between groups of people: indigenous and colonizer, buyers and sellers, artists and merchants. Beads, as Robertson (2017) eloquently writes, “operate as floating signifiers for the land,

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7 https://news.artnet.com/art-world/worlds-oldest-jewelry-morocco-2037635
narrative traditions, and ceremony, but also for how colonial presence cross-pollinates to create meaning” (16).

*Saatstakssin*, or beadwork designs, are perhaps the most widely used form of clothing decoration across Indian country today, and European beads are certainly the most commonly used medium to decorate moccasins. This section will provide a comprehensive, in-depth look at both historic and contemporary beads and the labor involved in choosing bead types and sizes as well as the time and effort it requires (both historically and contemporarily) to obtain the beads themselves, whether it is through trade or purchase.

**Historic Beads**

Beads first made their way to the North American Plains by way of traders coming from around the world. They were carried and distributed “by Europeans of all nationalities in the Americas, [including the] Spanish, French, English, [and] Dutch” (Koch 1977, 52). The use of beads as mediums of exchange and trade, and their mass consumption by Native peoples everywhere, prompted bead makers from around the world to enter into the expanding global market and to establish themselves as global suppliers. The largest and most well-known of these beadmakers hailed from Venice, Italy, a city that was soon to become a titan in the bead-producing world. According to Dubin’s (1987) investigation into the area’s historic records, “glassmaking was taking place at Venetian monasteries as early as 882”, though “beadmaking can be traced only to the early 1300s” (107). Glass- and beadmaking procedures were kept secret, especially once demand increased and more factories attempted to get into the business. By 1606, over 251 bead-producing businesses were recorded in the Venice area alone, which is a significant increase from the twenty-four factories that were reported in 1525, some eighty-one years earlier. Venice’s many producers meant that Venetian glassmakers soon “dominated the world market in volume” (Dubin 1987, 107). Dubin observes that in 1764, approximately “forty-four thousand pounds of beads were produced weekly at [twenty-two] Venetian manufacturers” (Dubin 1987, 111), and though the industry suffered a setback starting in the late 1790s when Napoleon rose to power, it soon dominated once again. By the 1880s Venice was shipping almost six million pounds of beads a year to the United States alone (Dubin 1987, 111). Venice was not the only bead source, however. Karklins (1985) explains that “although Venice…Bohemia and The Netherlands produced the bulk of the glass beads that were exported
to the New World, Germany, Austria, England, France and China also appear to have contributed their share” (114). Moravia (present-day Czech Republic) was also a major bead producer and exporter (Augé et. al. 2017, 111). The diversity of bead-production sites around the world, combined with the fact that many Venetians expanded their reach by setting up bead workshops in different cities (Dubin 1987, 107), means that it can be hard to trace a bead’s true European origins.

More than 100,000 varieties of beads – which differed in their colors, sizes, and popularity – have been produced for sale since the industry’s inception (Augé et. al. 2017, 111; Dubin 1987, 111). Such a diverse assortment can make classifying beads difficult, although they can usually be sorted based on their color, where “simple refers to a bead of one color and compound to those with more than one color” (Augé et. al. 2017, 111; see also Karklins 1985). Beads can also sometimes be classified according to their specific manufacturing technique, which ranged from “wound, drawn, wound-on-drawn” to “molded, mold-pressed, and blown” (Dubin 1987, 110). However, as Bundy, McCartney, and Veltre (2003, 35) note, even classifying beads this way can be tricky because individual manufacturers and traders often had their own naming systems, which were not consistent across regions or time. For the North American trade, though, drawn-glass beads dominated. This was because they could be produced identically, in bulk, in less time, and cheaper than other types of beads (Dubin 1987, 110). Once they were polished and their sharp corners rounded off in agitators filled with hot sand, bead manufacturers then “sorted drawn beads in sieves, strung them, and sold them by size in bundles of [twelve] (or more) strings” (Bundy, McCartney, and Veltre 2003, 36).

The first beads to arrive on the American continent are generally referred to as ‘necklace’ beads (Koch 1977, 52-53) because of their large size and the common assumption that they were strung together and used for necklaces. The most well-known of these is the “Cornaline d’Aleppo”, which is a two-colored bead that was mostly made up of an “opaque white interior and translucent, often red, exterior” (Koch 1977, 52-53), although other colors also exist. There are few, if any, existing Plains objects that contain beadwork using these larger beads. Another type of bead – measuring approximately one-eighth of an inch in diameter (Ewers 1958, 120), making it smaller than necklace beads but larger than the tiny seed beads that became so popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century – did gain popularity in early Plains beadwork. These larger beads, called ‘pony’ beads because they were transported by traders’ ponies, or as ‘pound’
beads because they were often sold by the pound (Koch 1977, 53), are referred to in records going back to 1675, when the French bartered them with groups in the western Great Lakes region (Dubin 1987, 274). Contemporary scholarship puts pony beads’ earliest estimated arrival on the Plains much later, at around 1800, which is when Plains material culture begins to show these beads’ incorporation into designs which usually also included quillwork (Johnson and Yenne 2011, 91). The earliest mention of Niitsitapi pony bead use comes from the journals of Prince Maximilian, a German writer who traveled along the American Plains in a quest for ethnographic and botanical knowledge. In 1832, Maximilian noted the Niitsitapi’s use of pony beads in decorating clothing, mentioning their preference for “sky-blue and white beads” (Ewers 1945, 33). It is not clear whether this color preference was shaped by cultural beliefs or because blue and white beads were the most prevalent colors used by traders in transactions with Native peoples on the Plains. By 1875, the pony bead period had mostly ended, although Ewers observed that some older Niitsitapi women who continued to use pony beads up into the 1880s (1945, 34).

The next type of bead to arrive from traders was the seed bead, which quickly replaced the pony bead as Plains women’s preferred adornment method. Though the exact date for the arrival of seed beads on the Plains is unknown, scholars have estimated that it falls somewhere between the early 1840s and the early 1850s (Dubin 1987, 274; Johnson and Yenne 2011, 91; Koch 1977, 53). These tiny new beads usually measured “two millimeters or less in diameter” (Dubin 1987, 274) and came in a much wider range of colors than the earlier pony beads. Furthermore, because they were cheap and relatively easy for Venetian factories to produce, seed beads were traded in much larger numbers than their predecessors, which meant that Native women could create larger areas of beadwork decoration and still have beads left over. Seed beads also lend themselves well to more intricate and detailed patterns.

Color, and to some degree shape and size, were important factors in whether or not beads would be accepted in trade. Lewis and Clark noted in their journals that blue and white beads were especially admired among Native peoples (Dubin 1987, 274; Penney 2018, 12), and how blue was particularly in demand among Plains groups, perhaps because it “was rare in Indian dye sources” (Dubin 1987, 274; see also Koch 1977, 25). Historic trading records also “often note Natives’ preference for these colors” (Augé et. al. 2017, 112), and Hungry Wolf (1980) states that traditional Niitsitapi beadworkers favored both light and dark blue, along with yellow, pink,
rose, and dark green beads (244). Furthermore, as Graeber (1996) notes, beads could also easily transverse from one form to another and back again; for instance, beads can be “bought in bulk, sewn together into elaborate beadwork or onto other forms of adornment, and then – whenever the need is felt – broken up into individual, mutually indistinguishable items once again” (13). This type of flexibility could have been important for historic Niitsitapi beaders, particularly when certain designs fell out of use or when designs sold to others.

**Contemporary Beads**

Today, there are a variety of seed bead brands on the market, although the most popular brands are from Japanese manufacturers Matsuno (Dyna-Mites beads), Miyuki (Delica beads), and Tohos (Tohos beads) in Japan, and the Czech Republic company Preciosa Ornella (Czech Seed Beads, SuperUnos, and SuperDuos). Modern seed bead manufacturers utilize automated and computerized machinery in large factory settings to make mass quantities of beads today, using a complicated process of melting, cooling, cutting, reheating, washing, and reheating again to create a variety of sizes, shapes, and colors (Weller 2015). Most of the differences between brands comes down to variations in quality (measured through size and shape consistency), as well as diversity in range of shapes, colors, and center hole size and placement. The general consensus is that the Japanese seed bead manufacturers have “a well-deserved reputation for achieving greater uniformity and consistency of size, shape and finish” than their Czech competitor (Weller 2015), although their prices can be expensive for the average beader. On the other hand, Preciosa seems to “provide a greater range of basic bead shapes and then adds variations to these bead shapes in the form of cuts, twists, super twists, spirals, bevels, and hole shape” (Weller 2015). Along with buying new hanks of beads from these brands, beaders can also choose to search for vintage beads, which are beads that are no longer made but were used historically and which are sold by many online bead retailers.

Beginning beaders are usually encouraged to use cheaper seed bead brands, including Ming Tree (made in China) and various Indian brands, along with non-branded beads, both because they are inexpensive and easier and less costly to practice with (Beads Jar 2020). According to “A Beginner’s Guide to Seed Beads” (Beads Jar 2020), the major different between cheaper beads and the more expensive brands mentioned above is the consistency in size, which is a major consideration for beaders whose precision work needs same-sized beads.
Figure 3.16. Example of Czech Seed Bead Sizes. Photo courtesy of Kraftika.
Modern seed beads come in hundreds of different shapes, styles, and colors, and in a variety of finishes and lusters. Only the most popular shapes of beads used in moccasin-making will be discussed here, which include rocaille (pronounced roh kai) and cylinder beads. Rocaille beads are round, donut-shaped seed beads that historically were silver-lined and had square holes; today, most now have round holes, although Toho of Japan “have recently re-introduced Rocailles with square holes to provide greater accuracy when placing them in designs” (Big Bead Little Bead n.d.). Cylinder beads, on the other hand, are wider than rocaille and are often more consistent in their shape and size, making them higher quality beads; their brands include Delica by Miyuki and Treasures and Aiko by Toho, although Preciosa does produce its own similarly cut tube bead. Cylinder beads are characterized by oversized holes, thin walls, and their light weight (Weller 2015).

If an artist is seeking a very shiny, sparkly look for their moccasins, they may use Charlotte beads, which are similar to rocaille in shape but they have part of their surface ground down or cut in order to produce a facet, which in turn produces a shine. Charlotte beads generally refer to beads that only have one facet, but the term can also be used to describe beads with two or three facets; according to Weller (2015), “Charlottes with 2 or 3 cuts to the surface are also known as two cut and three cut beads respectively.” Popular also in moccasin beadwork are Hexagon beads, also known as Hex Cut beads, which are six sided with facets all around it. While most modern moccasin-makers use either glass or sometimes plastic beads in their work, many historic moccasins also utilized metal beads, most often French steel cut brass beads, which added more texture and shine to a beaded piece. Seed beads today also come in a large variety of finishes, with the most popular including transparent (completely see through); translucent (allows diffuse light to pass through them); opaque (solid in color – not transparent); color-lined (the inside of the bead is a different color than the outside; also known as ‘hearts’); and iris (an iridescent rainbow coating, often based around purple).

Automation has made the process of maintaining uniform bead sizes much easier than when beads were hand-cut. When measuring seed bead size today, the bigger the bead measurement number, the smaller the bead. For example, size twenty-two beads, which measure less than one millimeter wide, are some of the smallest beads that an artist can work with, whereas size 6 beads, measuring around four millimeters, are among the biggest. The most common size bead in moccasin-making is a size eleven, which can also be written as 11/0 or 11°.
Daniel Edwards noted in his interview that size eleven beads are the typical size he uses in his moccasin-making as well. The zero and degree symbol are pronounced as “aught”, as in an 11 aught bead. According to Weller (2015), the aught “is based on the fact that, historically, bead manufacturers used to refer to the standard sized beads that they made in the largest quantities as size [zero] or null […] Smaller size beads such as a 10/0 were therefore beads that were [ten] times smaller than the size [zero] or null bead.” Seed bead sizes tend to follow a general sizing guideline across manufacturers, but they do vary slightly within sizes across companies, meaning that a size eleven bead from Japan could be slightly larger than the same size bead from their Czech competitor (Weller 2015).

**Buying and Acquiring Beads**

This section discusses how beads have been bought and acquired, both historically and today. The reason why I am focusing so much attention on this aspect of beadwork is because acquiring beads and other materials is an important aspect of calculating the labor costs of moccasin-making. Many people do not realize how complex getting access to beads was in the historical era, and even today there can be hidden challenges as well.

**Historic Bead Buying Processes**

Historically, beads were acquired from trading posts and independent traveling traders, all of which were also sources of trade for finished beaded goods – including moccasins - both from and to the Niitsitapi. Historic beadwork was necessarily constricted by artists’ access to materials. If a trading post ran out of a specific color, or if the river had disrupted the supply of a certain type of bead during one season, then beadworkers would have to adjust accordingly. It is assumed that the Niitsitapi first began receiving European goods through Cree and Assiniboine middlemen, potentially as early as 1750, when the French established their first three trading posts on the Saskatchewan River (Ewers 1944, 14-15). No records have been found to indicate that the Niitsitapi traveled the short distance to these French posts themselves, nor that they made the much longer journey to Hudson Bay in order to trade with the English (Ewers 1944, 15). As Augé et. al. (2017) notes, it is not uncommon for people who live outside of a direct trading zone to never travel to a post but makes it more likely that they found goods through middlemen instead (110). If the Niitsitapi were receiving other European materials from their Cree and
Assiniboine allies, including guns, powder, and cloth, then it is likely that they were also receiving beads.

The Niitsitapi are not thought to have transitioned to direct trade with Europeans until the early 1780s, when they began exchanging goods with the North West Company, which competed fiercely with the English’s Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) for Niitsitapi business until the former was absorbed by HBC in 1822 (Ewers 1944, 16; Ewers 1945, 33). The HBC managed to maintain almost a full monopoly on Niitsitapi trade for over fifty years, with most of the exchanges taking place at Fort Edmonton (formerly Fort de Prairie) on the North Saskatchewan river (Old Fort Benton 1975, 16). However, in the early 1830s, after months of negotiations with the three tribes, the ambitions of the American Fur Company disrupted the reign of the HBC in Niitsitapi country. A critical component to a post’s success in the fur trade was its location along a major river. More than one post in Niitsitapi country was abandoned because the current made it inaccessible, making it impossible to “support furs coming in and materials being traded out” (Augé et al. 2017, 109). Unlike the American companies, North West and Hudson’s Bay were limited by their small carrying capacity, which was restricted to small canoes and packhorses that had to be “laboriously portaged from one river to another on their way to and from the [Niitsitapi] country” (Ewers 1944, 24). As a consequence, bison hides, which were a staple exchange item among the Niitsitapi, could not be profitably transported by HBC due to their bulk, meaning that by necessity the company’s trade “was limited to the smaller and more valuable furs and to provisions” (Ewers 1944, 24). American fur trading posts were not so limited because they could station themselves directly on the Missouri River, whose currents made shipping furs and hides directly back to Eastern factories very easy.

According to Robertson (1999), approximately nineteen American-run trading posts were established within Niitsitapi territory, with the first in the early 1830s and the last in the late 1860s, all with varying degrees of success and tenure over the years. Some only stayed open for a few months, while others operated for years. Many traders in this area abandoned posts for fear of Niitsitapi hostility, and others left forts behind to pursue better or more lucrative spots on the river. The first American fort established among the Niitsitapi was Fort Piegan in 1831, which was built “on a slice of land formed by the confluence of the Marias and Missouri rivers” (Miller and Cohen 1978, 72). Bradley (1900) describes in his journal how, on the first of September 1831, seventy-five men proceeded up the Missouri on a keelboat loaded with trade goods for the
new post (203). Business is reported as being so brisk at Fort Piegan that almost “2,000 beaver skins were traded in the first ten days of operation” (Miller and Cohen 1978, 72; see also descriptions from Bradley 1900, 203). This post only operated for a year before traders abandoned it for fear of supposed Niitsitapi aggression (Miller and Cohen 1978, 72).

The demise of Fort Piegan did not deter the American Fur Company. In 1832, a larger post, christened Fort McKenzie (or MacKenzie, depending on the author), was built further up the Missouri River. Ewers (1944) reports that this post was the “center of [Niitsitapi] trade for twelve years” (23-24). In the early 1840s, several European traders, in retaliation for the murder of a comrade, massacred a party of Piegan people, and the post was quickly abandoned for fear of violent reprisal (Ewers 1944, 23-24; see also Robertson 1999). Bradley’s journal describes how the company decided to burn Fort McKenzie to the ground in 1842, and in an effort to regain the Niitsitapi trade, they rebuilt another post at another spot, naming it Fort Chardon. The attempt did not work, and instead the tribes took their skins and furs to Union Fur Company’s Fort Cotton several miles away (Bradley 1900, 203; Robertson 1999, 93). Eventually, however, Fort Cotton was sold back to the American Fur Company, which by that time had been absorbed into a larger company and renamed Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Co., and the Niitsitapi had no choice but to once again barter with them unless they wanted to make the long, arduous journey to a Hudson’s Bay post in Canada. In an attempt to reestablish positive footing with the tribes, Pierre Chouteau, Jr. and Co. burned down both Fort Chardon and Fort Cotton, and in 1845 established Fort Lewis at a different location (Robertson 1999).

Unfortunately, there was a lack of foresight when Fort Lewis was built, and the owners soon found that access to it was difficult due to the lack of a safe place for Native peoples to cross the river. Thus, in 1847, the fort was relocated to a more suitable spot downstream and on the opposite bank, and was renamed Fort Clay, though many people continued to call it by its former designation (Robertson 1999, 65). By 1850, in need of repairs, Fort Clay was rebuilt (at the same location) from its original wooden structure to a sturdy post made of adobe bricks, and in honor of its restoration was once again renamed, this time to Fort Benton. This post maintained its importance among the Niitsitapi and was the main trading spot for all of the tribes up until the end of the fur trade in America in the late 1860s/early 1870s (Ewers 1944, 23-24; Miller and Cohen 1978, 12; Robertson 1999, 65). An 1851 goods inventory at Fort Benton gives insight into the types of materials that were being offered to the Niitsitapi. In addition to eight
Figure 3.23. Close View of Fully Beaded Moccasin Upper, Right Foot (BBCW NA.202.138). Photo by author.
varieties of beads, there were also fourteen colors of blankets, four types of handkerchiefs, three
types of shawls, and more categories of goods to choose from (Ewers 1958, 69).

Traders also traveled from posts to Niitsitapi bands directly, setting up shop among many
of them for a season or two in order to collect as many hides as possible in exchange for beads
and other goods. Hamilton, writing in 1900 about his trading experiences with the Niitsitapi in
the 1860s, describes how a crier would be sent out to announce the traders’ arrival in camp, and
once they had set up in someone’s tipi, the Europeans would be kept busy for hours, exchanging
beads, cloth, and various dry goods (like tobacco, sugar, etc.) for bison robes and tongues.

During one season in particular, Hamilton claims to have traded for 120 robes and “two
parfleches full of dried [bison] tongues” (1900, 62). Schultz (1973), writing in the early 1900s
about his trading experiences among the Niitsitapi in the latter half of the nineteenth century,
also describes many profitable exchanges. On one night he estimated to have sold “over five
hundred dollars’ worth of goods”, which would keep his trading partner “pretty constantly on the
road all winter, hauling…furs to Fort Benton and returning with fresh supplies of merchandise”
(Schultz 1973, 338-339).

As this short history of the bead trade demonstrates, access to beads and other moccasin-
making materials, such as steel needles and trade cloth, could be complicated by many factors,
such as tribal-trader relations, success in hunting and thus wealth in furs, and even the moods of
the river. Many Niitsitapi beadworkers also faced long, perilous journeys to trading posts, and
their travels were made more complex with the constant shifting of physical posts across the
landscape. Although these few short paragraphs certainly do not capture the full complexity of
the work involved in obtaining beads during the historical period, they hopefully give readers at
least a basic understanding of the amount of physical and monetary labor involved in the process.

Early to Mid-Twentieth Century Bead Buying Processes

It should be noted that there is a clear bias in the literature towards historic Niitsitapi life
pre-1920, which means that we can only speculate about where artists were obtaining their beads
and other materials from the early 1900s and on. We do know that eventually more permanent
trading posts were set up in Blackfeet country, including a general store operated by James and
Joseph Kipp, both tribal members, which was later sold and turned into Sherburne Mercantile in
1896. The mercantile was a source of both beading materials and finished goods, including manufactured clothes, tools, food, and other supplies. It is unclear whether these trading posts operated as outlets for finished beaded goods, although it is likely. The Sherburne family also had a hand in establishing the first lending institution on the Blackfeet Reservation, which gave them a distinct advantage when animal pelts and other wares transitioned to the American dollar as the standard medium of exchange for goods and services. Sherburne’s store operated up until the 1970s, when it burned down. The Blackfeet Craft Cooperative, which opened in the early 1930s on the Blackfeet Reservation, was also likely a source that artists could use to obtain materials, including beads. Anecdotally, it has also been said that many people during this era repurposed old pieces of beadwork and reused beads for new projects, while other beadworkers probably had personal sources that could supply them with the needed materials.

Contemporary Bead Buying Processes

Many contemporary Native artists purchase their beads in bulk online from a variety of wholesale retail outlets. Although there are a few brick-and-mortar storefronts, most often trading posts, where beaders can get their supplies, the major barrier to this option is the isolation of many Native communities from these places. This is particularly true in Blackfeet country, where the nearest crafts and supplies store is often hours away for those who live in the more remote parts of the reservation. Even in Browning, Montana, the hub of the Blackfeet nation, there is only one brick-and-mortar storefront, Faught’s Blackfeet Trading Post, where beading supplies are sold. Traveling for supplies can often present a physical and monetary burden for many artists, especially when gas prices are high or they do not have reliable transportation.

Another option for buying beads is to go through an online retailer. Some popular online bead retailers include: Shipwreck Beads, Firestone Gems, Beadaholique, and Amazon. Seed beads can be purchased either by the hank, especially when buying Czech beads, or based on weight in grams. When buying in hanks, which is ideal for beaders who need large quantities of beads, according to Big Bead Little Bead, “each hank contains approximately [twelve] strands of [twenty] inches”, although the length and number of strands can vary depending on the size of the beads being purchased. Beads that are purchased based on their weight per gram are better for beaders who do not need as many beads at one time. For example, if a person bought a hank of size 11/0 beads, they would receive approximately 4,000 beads, whereas one gram of 11/0
beads would yield about 110 beads (Big Bead Little Bead n.d.). Buying beads online is not always straightforward for many reservation-based artists, however. Many reservation homes lack physical addresses, which means that packages have to be sent to post office boxes instead. For residents who live out of town, even a drive to the post office can be expensive, both in time and money.

**The Act and Learning of Beadwork**

The term beadworker applies to an individual who works primarily with beads to create art, including moccasins. In addition to a creative spirit, beadworkers generally possess a discerning eye for color, light, and composition. Though historically Niitsitapi beaders were generally women, today all genders participate in the craft, and as mentioned above beadworkers are almost unlimited on the type of canvases that they can use to express their visions. Before beginning a project, artists must first assemble their beading kits, which contain a wide variety of bead sizes, colors, threads, beading needles, wax, tracing paper, pencils or charcoal, and hide canvases. Some beadworkers also use notebooks to plan out their designs beforehand. The actual act of beadwork is complex, and requires a high degree of manual dexterity, fine motor control, and exceptional eyesight. Beadworkers must work in well-lit areas and often use magnifying devices in order to better see the tiny beads that they work with, especially because excellent beading often involves counting out exact numbers of beads in the design.

Taking on large and complex beading projects requires confidence and courage on the part of the artists, as beadwork demands high levels of commitment and personal investment, in terms of time and the money for purchasing materials. More often than not, beadworkers invest in projects for their families and communities, rather than for commercial sale; this makes the personal investment costs even more impressive, considering that complicated projects are taken on and paid for in time and money, only to later be given away to others. A skilled beader determines the intention for their piece by “taking into consideration their relationship to, qualities and characteristics of, the intended recipient of a crafted item and whether the item is intended for a specific purpose or occasion” (Edge 2011, 3). Furthermore, beadwork artists must consider “the time required to complete the project, bead size, colour and materials, image design and pattern, and beading method” (Edge 2011, 3). The quality of finished pieces are often judged by a range of standards that depend upon the beadworker’s “knowledge(s), awareness of
core principles, prior learning and experience, standards of craftsmanship, access to materials and resources, and other factors” (Edge 2011, 3). Most Niitsitapi moccasins that are made today are decorated with beads in some fashion, and a majority of the Niitsitapi moccasins found in museum collections are beaded.

Artists who aspire to master the art of beadwork often learn their craft through a variety of methods. Daniel Edwards learned the arts of beadwork and moccasin-making during visits with a knowledgeable elder when he was young, and he made his first pair of moccasins by age fifteen. Later, when he worked at an on-reservation addiction treatment center, patients who observed him working on beadwork projects began asking Daniel to teach them how to bead, which led to beadwork teaching jobs and even a position running a summer camp program to teach youth and adults how to bead. Unfortunately though, not everyone who wants to learn beadwork and moccasin-making has the opportunity to learn from an experienced teacher. This was the case for Kiela Bird, who taught herself how to bead by watching online tutorials and following prolific beadworkers on social media platforms such as Instagram. One of the most difficult aspects of learning this way, according to Bird, is that there is not really anyone to call for help if you get stuck on a tricky piece or method.

**Bead Stories from the Collections**

Various bead attributes on the moccasins in the museum collections were examined in cases where beads were utilized. Bead manufacture method, material, and shape were all noted. Beads were also classified using the Kidd and Kidd (2012) classification and sizing system, which are frequently used in anthropology in order to provide a standardized disciplinary system for talking about beads. Originally, I also attempted to examine bead diaphaneity (defined as a bead’s ability to transmit light, i.e., transparent, translucent, opaque) and luster, but found them too difficult of categories to apply to the beads in this project. Diaphaneity was eliminated because it was very difficult to distinguish the difference between translucent and transparent beads, especially in cases where the moccasins were not allowed to be handled by the researcher, and luster because the category was too subjective and was not applied evenly throughout the sample, thus making it unreliable.

In the 102 cases where beads were used, the manufacture was always drawn; there were no wound beads used on the moccasins in this project (Figure 3.17). Eighty-nine moccasins had
glass beads and three used plastic beads, while ten moccasins utilized a combination of both glass and metal beads (Figure 3.18). Seventy-four pairs used only circular beads in their designs, while one pair used only faceted beads. Twenty-five moccasins utilized both circular and faceted beads. Two pairs of moccasins, both located at the C. M. Russell Museum, used square beads; one pair used only square beads (Figure 3.19).

When looking at moccasin beads through the lens of the Kidd and Kidd classification system, we can see that fifty-eight moccasins used IIa beads (regular seed beads), while only two pairs used solely IVa beads, which are compound beads, such as red-on-whites (aka red hearts). Forty-two pairs of moccasins used a combination of regular seed beads and compound beads in their designs (Figure 3.20). In the Kidd and Kidd bead size categories, thirty-six moccasins used only very small beads (less than two millimeters), while ten used only small beads (two to four millimeters). No moccasins used solely medium beads (four to six millimeters). Fifty-five pairs of moccasins used a combination of very small and small beads, while only one pair used both very small and medium beads (Figure 3.21).

Bead length and width were measured in millimeters with an electronic caliper where applicable. An average of five beads per moccasin were measured, although in cases where there were obvious size differences between different types of beads, measurements were taken for each bead type. Six hundred and ninety moccasin beads were measured throughout this project. The average bead length is 1.98 millimeters and the average width is 1.36 millimeters. The minimum length is 1 millimeter and the minimum width is 0.08 millimeters. The maximum bead length is 4.4 millimeters and the maximum width is 22 millimeters (Figure 3.22).

In the case of the labor discussions that we have been having throughout this chapter, it is clear that the beads on these moccasins were chosen carefully and deliberately for the aesthetic qualities that they would contribute to the overall design. The average bead size for the moccasins in this project are smaller than contemporary size 11 beads, and as noted previously, the smaller the beads, the harder they are to both see and work with. Bead choices and beadwork designs represent a significant physical time and labor investment during the moccasin-making process, and yet only rarely are bead choices and sizes mentioned in museum exhibits and other types of public-facing literature.
Figure 3.17. Bead Manufacture Method on Moccasin Pairs

Figure 3.18. Bead Material
Figure 3.19. Bead Shapes

Figure 3.20. Kidd and Kidd Bead Type Classification
Figure 3.21. Kidd and Kidd Bead Sizes

Figure 3.22. Average Bead Measurements
Paints

The painting of moccasins has been documented by several scholars. Both Hungry Wolf (1980, 225) and Ewers (1945, 42) point out that medicine pipe owners and other holy people were known for painting their moccasins with red earth paint, which was considered to be a sacred color (Blackfeet Gallery Committee 1978). There are also cases in which Niitsitapi mourners, and those dancing the scalp dance, would paint their moccasins black with charcoal (Ewers 1945, 42; Hungry Wolf 1980, 225; Schultz 1973, 223). Traditional paints were made from various materials, including “clays and iron-rich earth (red ochre), as well as bison gallstones, duck droppings, charcoal, and other materials” (Peers and Brown 2015, 48). It is unclear if any moccasins are painted today, although that knowledge may be proprietary to the community if paint is still used for ceremonial purposes.

It has also been documented that in some cases, painted parfleche bags were cut up and reused for moccasin soles (Wissler 1910, 81). In some cases, the moccasin soles in this study were made from repurposed parfleche bags, evidenced by the parfleche designs that remained on the rawhide. Eleven moccasins had obvious parfleche soles, while eighty-six did not. Four moccasins could not be evaluated due to their absence of a sole. In eight cases, due to the fragility of the moccasins in question, the museum tissue paper stuffing that protects and shapes the inside of the moccasin was not removed, and so the presence or absence of a parfleche sole could not be accurately determined.

Cotton Thread Embroidery

Though cotton thread embroidery was not likely a popular or widely used technique for decorating Niitsitapi moccasins, there is one pair, probably collected in the nineteenth century and attributed to the Blackfeet, currently resting at the National Museum of Natural History that suggests this decoration medium was explored by at least one artist. Figure 3.24 shows how the moccasins have been thread embroidered in the Blackfeet floral style. The reasons behind this design choice are unknown but may be related to a lack of traditional beading supplies or simply may have been an artistic choice by the creator. These moccasins may also exemplify artistic influence and/or sharing between the Niitsitapi and their Cree and Metis neighbors; as Sherry Racette (2004, 107-108) points out, thread embroidery moccasin decoration among the latter two groups was not uncommon. Wissler (1910, 129-130) also notes instances of cross-stitch
embroidery on Niitsitapi moccasin cuffs, which may have been related to a past practice of prominent Blackfeet men attaching a strip of white weasel skin the same place, but mentions no instances of embroidery on uppers. This may be because cotton thread embroidery on leather moccasin uppers would present a unique challenge for a moccasin-maker, as the thread needed for embroidery would be difficult to draw through leather as compared to sinew string.

Animal Components

Although quills, beads, and paint were the primary decoration methods for moccasins, other materials could also be added. Eddie Barbeau, who was interviewed by ethnologist John Ewers in the 1950s or 1960s, mentioned that dyed moose mane hair was sometimes used in the pre-bead era (John Ewers Papers, The Vitality of Traditional Blackfeet Arts, Part I), and Clark Wissler observed that trailers, most likely ermine and/or badger tails, were known to have once been popular additions to Blackfeet men’s moccasins but had fallen out of fashion by the time of Wissler’s writing in 1910 (Wissler 1910, 130; see also Kidd 1986, 76).

Stroud

The Niitsitapi word for cloth or textile fabric is nááípisstsi. On moccasins, the most commonly used cloth for decoration is stroud cloth, also known as ‘strouding’, ‘saved-list’ (due to the cloth’s undyed edges, i.e. ‘lists’) or ‘Indian’ cloth, was produced in the Gloucestershire region of England for the early American Indian trade and was in high demand by Native artists (Her Many Horses 2007, 27). The cloth most often came in either navy blue or scarlet red, although greens, purples, and other shades were also produced (Koch 1977, 81). Stroud was used by Blackfeet artists for many different articles of clothing, including moccasins, where it was most often applied around the ankle and used as the lower, or second, part of a cuff. Not all moccasins in the sample utilized stroud as part of the cuff, but when they did, the most popular color was red, which fits with Wissler’s (1910) observations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In no case that the author has seen has stroud been used as the first part of a cuff, where it goes further up the wearer’s leg.
Figure 3.24. Close View of Moccasin Upper with Cotton Thread Embroidery, Left Foot (NMNH E204863). Photo by author.
Design Materials Stories from the Collections

This sub-section describes the breakdown of decoration materials and types on the moccasins in the sample. They are talked about below as a whole rather than being broken down into their individual decoration categories to make it simpler, as the endless combinations of materials used often make it difficult to talk about them as individual features.

Sole Décor

Sole décor is defined as any type of decoration on the inside or outside of the moccasin sole, including paint, beads, quills, etc. In ninety-seven cases the soles had no decoration. Eleven soles had paint applied, and only one moccasin pair in this sample had beaded soles (Figure 3.25). Blue and red were the most popular décor colors used on the moccasin soles in this project, at ten pairs each. Yellow appeared on five soles, green on two, and black on one sole (Figure 3.26).

Décor Types

Décor type refers to the method, if any, that is used to decorate an area on a moccasin. The areas referred to here are: the upper, sides, heel, cuff, tongue, and heel fringe.

The majority of moccasin uppers, at seventy-eight pairs, are beaded. Eleven moccasins in the sample are decorated with both beads and paint, while eight are adorned with beads and patterned cloth. Five moccasin uppers are quilled, three uppers have a combination of quills and beads, and two have a mix of quills, beads, and paint. One moccasin upper in the sample is decorate solely with cotton thread embroidery. All of the moccasin uppers in this sample have some sort of décor; there are no moccasin uppers without decoration (Figure 3.27).

The majority of cuffs, at twenty pairs, are decorated with patterned cloth. Sixteen pairs have cuffs decorated with beads, while three pairs’ cuffs are adorned with both patterned cloth and beads together. Three cuffs have cotton thread embroidery decoration, and three cuffs have been painted or dyed in some way. Sixty cuffs had no decoration at all (Figure 3.30).

While most of the moccasin tongues (eighty-nine) in this sample were not decorated, there were eighteen that did have some form of decoration. Eight tongues were decorated with beads, and four had some form of paint and/or dye applied. Three were adorned with both beads
Figure 3.25. Moccasin Sole Decoration

Figure 3.26. Sole Color Distribution
Figure 3.27. Upper Décor Material

Figure 3.28. Sides Décor Material
Figure 3.29. Heels Décor Material

Figure 3.30. Cuff Décor Material
Figure 3.31. Tongue Décor Material

Figure 3.32. Heel Fringe Décor Material
and metal (likely tin) cones, one had a combination of beads and patterned cloth, and one had just patterned cloth as its décor. Finally, two tongues had three forms of decoration, one with quills, paint, and beads, and the other with quills, metal cones, and animal feathers of some kind (Figure 3.31).

Only five moccasin heel fringes had any sort of decoration; three had paint/dye, one had beads attached to the ends of the fringe, and one had both metal cones (commonly known as tinklers and traditionally made from tobacco tins) and yarn on the ends. The remaining moccasin fringes in this sample (thirty-six) had no decoration at all (Figure 3.32).

Additional Moccasin Design Features and Stories from the Collections

Moccasin design also incorporates other stylistic elements beyond the obvious decorative features like beadwork, such as tongue shape, heel tabs, cuff material and length, beaded soles, and thread and needle choice, and stitch types.

Tongue Shapes

Though the literature does not mention any specific meanings behind moccasin tongue shapes among the Blackfeet, there is documented evidence to suggest that among other Montana Native communities, such as the Assiniboine, tongue shape was important to the function of the moccasin. For instance, an Assiniboine man interviewed by John Ewers in 1953 stated that only moccasins used for special occasions, like dances or ceremonies, had split (forked) tongues, whereas everyday moccasins had simple rounded tongues (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes, 1953). One hundred and five pairs of moccasins in this sample had tongues, while four did not (Figure 3.33). The majority, at sixty-eight tongues, were attached to the upper separately, while thirty-seven were part of the upper itself (Figure 3.34). Forty-eight tongues were square shaped, twenty-eight were rounded, nineteen were forked, and two were triangle (Figure 3.35). The remaining eight moccasins had different tongue shapes on each foot; for instance, four moccasin pairs had a round tongue and a squared tongue, two were squared and forked, and two were squared and triangle. To see a visual representation of these tongue shapes, refer to Appendix Two.

Tongue length was measured from the longest part of the tongue to the base. Width was measured at the widest part of the tongue, which was often, but not always, found at the base.
The average tongue length for the left foot is 3 7/16 inches (8.76 cm), and the average width is 2 1/8 inches (5.35 cm). For the right foot, the average tongue length is 3 7/16 inches (8.77 cm) and the average width is approximately 2 inches (5.13 cm) (Figure 3.36). The total average length for tongues on both feet is 3 7/16 inches (8.77 cm), and the average width is 2 1/16 inches (5.24 cm). The smallest tongue length measures at 1 inch (2.54 cm), while the longest is 6 15/16 inches (17.62 cm). For width, the smallest tongue measures at 9/16 of an inch (1.43 cm) and the widest at 5 ½ inches (13.97 cm).

**Heel Fringe**

Occasionally Niitsitapi moccasins in museum collections will have one or two small pieces of leather left on the back of the moccasin at the heel, which are a product of the manufacturing process but are sometimes left on for decoration rather than cut off by the artist. These leather pieces are referred to as ‘heel fringe’ or ‘heel tabs’, and were a common occurrence in historic Blackfeet moccasin design (Brownstone 2008, 52; Hungry Wolf 1980, 224; see also Sager 1994). It is possible that heel tabs could be a way to identify a person’s specific Niitsitapi nation. Brownstone (2008) notes that “Blood elders interviewed in 2002 thought that the occurrence of two heel ‘spurs’ indicated Blood manufacture” (52). It is also a possibility that heel tabs are related to certain Niitsitapi oral histories or traditions, as they are in other Native communities. For instance, among the Apsáalooke, heel tabs are related to an oral tradition where a young girl falls in a body of water and is rescued when she is pulled up by the tabs on the back of her moccasins (personal communication with Apsáalooke community member, 2018). Fifty-four moccasins in the collections did not have heel fringe, while fifty-one did. Four pairs only had the uppers remaining and so were marked as not relevant to this variable.

**Cuffs**

Cuffs, also called ankle flaps by some, can be one of the most important design additions to a finished moccasin. Added cuffs are pieces of hide or other material sewn around the circumference of the ankle and they vary in length, with some barely hitting the top of the ankle and others reaching high up the leg. Several sources have indicated the cuff length could indicate the gender of the intended wearer, with women’s moccasins having longer cuffs than men’s...
Figure 3.33. Does the Moccasin Have a Tongue?

Figure 3.34. How Is the Tongue Attached?
Figure 3.35. Tongue Shape Distribution

Figure 3.36. Tongue Length and Width
moccasins (Kidd 1986, 76; Scriver 1991, 74; Wissler 1910, 129-130). However, Hungry Wolf (1980) says that while women’s moccasins did have ankle flaps while men’s sometimes did not, this gender distinction in cuff length did not always hold true, and that “in the past there was no particular difference between men’s and women’s moccasins, either in style or in decoration” (225). Sometimes stroud is added as a decorative piece (often called the lower, or second, cuff) at the bottom of the main cuff. Cuffs were generally held in place with long drawstrings or laces that were tied around the leg. Wissler observed that sometimes only one lace was used instead of two, but the reasoning behind this was not mentioned (Wissler 1910, 129-130).

In pre-reservation and early post-reservation eras, cuffs were made from animal hide and went through the same tanning and smoking process as moccasin uppers. One of Kidd’s (1986) interviewees stated that summer moccasins could even have ankle flaps made of weasel skin (76). However, in later reservation periods, likely due to the lack of hide, artists were forced to be innovative and creative for what they used as moccasin cuffs. This shift in material access resulted in a new era of cuff design, with items like flour sacks, mattress ticking, plain canvas, and even pillowcases being repurposed into moccasin cuffs.

In order to categorize moccasin cuffs, I evaluated them based on three factors. The first factor was whether or not the cuff was part of the upper itself (all one piece), or if it was attached to the upper separately. Thirty-eight pairs of moccasins had cuffs that were extensions of the upper, while sixty-seven cuffs were additions that were sewn on separately. It should be noted that in some cases with cuffs that were part of the upper, additional designs elements were added, such as a piece of stroud cloth that was sewn onto the cuff and encircled the ankle. In cases like these, I counted the stroud as an adornment piece rather than as a separate cuff because the additional elements were clearly not added to function as an actual cuff, but instead to simply adorn the cuff that already existed.

The other two factors for cuff categorization included evaluating how many pieces made up the cuff, and what materials the cuff was composed of. These last two factors only apply to separate cuffs, as cuffs that are extensions of the upper are, by definition, one piece and made of hide. A cuff was considered to be one piece if it was composed of a single piece of material, and one+ pieces if it had multiple components. Most cuffs that are made up of multiple pieces are composed of a larger upper cuff that extends up the leg and a decorative lower cuff portion that
wraps around the ankle. Cuff materials were separated into two categories: hide and cloth. My
definition of cloth encompasses a wide range of fabrics, including stroud cloth, canvas, mattress
ticking, flour sacks, and other diverse cloth-like materials. Twenty-five cuffs in this sample were
separate, one piece hides, while twenty were separate one+ pieces made up of hide and cloth.

Twelve moccasins had separate cuffs made up of one+ pieces and were all cloth, while five had
separate cuffs made up of one+ pieces that were all hide. Finally, five moccasins had cuffs that
were separate and made up of one piece of cloth. Four moccasins had no cuffs (Figure 3.37).

Cuffs were measured in two ways: by height and by circumference. Cuff height is
measured from the top to the bottom of the cuff, and circumference is measured around the foot
from the edge of the left-side flap to the edge of the right-side flap. If the cuff is made of two
parts, both height and circumference were measured for the second part as well. The average cuff
height for the left foot is 3 inches (7.68 cm), and the average cuff circumference is 10 1/4 inches
(25.99 cm). For secondary cuffs on the left foot, the average height is 7/16 inch (1.03 cm) and
the average circumference is 6 inches (14.55 cm). On the right foot, the average cuff height is 3
1/16 inches (7.77 cm), and the average circumference is 10 3/8 inches (26.28 cm). For secondary
cuffs on the right foot, the average height is similar to the right foot at 7/16 inch (1.03 cm) and
the average circumference is 5 15/16 inches (15.05 cm) (Figure 3.38).

The total cuff height average for both feet is 3 1/16 inches (7.73 cm), and the average
cuff circumference is 10 5/16 inches (26.13 cm). For secondary cuffs, the total height average for
both feet is 7/16 of an inch (1.03 cm), while the average circumference is approximately 6 inches
(14.80 cm). The minimum cuff height is ¼ inch (0.635 cm) and the maximum is 12 ½ inches
(31.75 cm). For circumference, the minimum is 1 ¼ inches (3.175 cm) and the maximum is 19
3/8 (49.21 cm). When looking at secondary cuffs, the minimum height is 5/16 of an inch (0.794
cm) and the maximum is 1 ¾ inches (4.45 cm), while the minimum circumference is 5 5/16
inches (13.5 cm) and the maximum is 17 3/8 inches (44.13 cm).

The Total Height measurement is defined as the measure from the lowest point to the
highest point on a moccasin, which is physically measured from the edge of the heel to the top of
the cuff. The average total height for the left foot is 4 1/4 inches (10.87 cm), and the average for
the right foot is 4 1/4 inches (10.80 cm). The average total height for both feet combined is 4 1/4
inches (10.83 cm). The minimum total height is 1 9/16 inches (3.9 cm), and the maximum is 11
½ inches (29.21 cm) (Figure 3.39).
Figure 3.37. Cuff Type

Figure 3.38. Total Average Cuff Measures
Figure 3.39. Total Height

Figure 3.40. Number of High Cuffs in Photographs
Cuff data was also collected from an analysis of two hundred and forty-six photos, with approximately three hundred and ten people in them, from various sources, including but not limited to books, archives, and the internet. Cuffs were difficult to see in many cases due to both the poor quality of the photographs and the fact that many cuffs were concealed by other clothing, such as pant leg or skirts, making it impossible to make any conclusions about their materials or designs. However, cuffs were visible in some instances, and in those cases a visual analysis could be performed. Sixty-four moccasins had visible lower cuffs that were probably made of stroud, indicating that the moccasins likely had separate cuffs composed of multiple pieces. In thirty-one cases, the upper portion of the cuff was clearly made of cloth. Eleven moccasins had cuffs that were part of the upper (rather than attached separately), and two moccasins had no cuff at all. In some cases obvious distinctions could also be made between higher and lower cuffs, where higher cuffs are defined as added cuffs that end at least several inches above the ankle or higher (sometimes going even as high as the mid-calf), and lower cuffs are defined as cuffs that end at the ankle or lower. High cuffs can be seen on the moccasins of at least twenty-five female-presenting persons, and on the moccasins of only two male-presenting persons (Figure 3.40). This may indicate that the hypotheses of the scholars mentioned earlier (i.e., Hungry Wolf 1980, 225; Kidd 1986, 76; Scriver 1991, 74; Wissler 1910, 129-130) hold true in regards to cuff height usually being indicative of the gender of the wearer.

**Beaded Soles**

There are no instances in the literature that mention fully beaded moccasin soles among the Niitsitapi. Daniel Edwards said that at the time of this writing he had never seen a living person wearing moccasins with beaded soles and suggested that they were perhaps not popular among the Blackfeet. However, this does not mean that beaded moccasin soles did not exist within Niitsitapi communities historically but implies that they were fairly rare. In the sample, there was only one pair of Blackfeet child-size moccasins with fully beaded soles. This fits with Daniel Edwards’ theory that moccasins with beaded soles may have only been meant for children since they did not walk on the ground.

There are many theories regarding the meaning behind moccasins that have fully beaded soles. Many people in Indian country regard these types of moccasins as ‘burial moccasins’, or special moccasins made for those who have passed on; however, this meaning does not hold true
for all communities. In quite a few cases, fully beaded moccasins were intended for the living, and represented honor, respect, high social status, and were even expressions of deep love from the maker to the wearer. Artist Herman Haupt, who worked among the Sioux in the late nineteenth century, termed moccasins with fully beaded soles as ‘love moccasins’ because Sioux women would make them to give to their lovers (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 90). Thisba Morgan, an instructor at the Oglala Boarding School from 1890-1895, described in letters how older girls getting ready to leave the school to get married would make moccasins with beaded soles to show their beaus that “she was willing to be trod upon under his feet and her heart crushed as he crushed the beads on the soles of his moccasins” (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 90). Baby moccasins with beaded soles were also gifted to new Sioux mothers. Although there is not yet any evidence to suggest that moccasins with beaded soles were used this way in Niitsitapi communities, it is not outside the realm of possibility to suggest that, were any to be found in a museum collection or elsewhere, that they might have served these purposes.

In addition to expressing love for the wearer, fully beaded moccasins were also signs of honor and respect in some communities. During his fieldwork among the Assiniboine in the 1950s, ethnologist John Ewers’s interviewees told him that moccasins with beaded soles were very rare and were known as chief’s moccasins, “worn by wealthy, prominent people on special occasions as sign of their high status – that the wearer did not have to be much on his feet” (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes, 1953). In the biography of Mary Little Bear Inkanish, a twentieth-century Cheyenne woman, the authors point out that a pair of moccasins with beaded soles was presented to Mary during a give-away that her aunt had in her honor, and the moccasins were made “to show that this little girl’s family would not let her feet touch the ground if they could help it” (Her Many Horses 2007, 126). Although it is likely that the lone pair of Blackfeet moccasins with beaded soles in this sample were made specifically for the tourist market, it is possible that moccasins with beaded soles may have been given to Niitsitapi minipoka, or favored children who were raised to take on ceremonial and spiritual responsibilities in adulthood (see Goldfrank 1945 and Wissler 1911 for more information on minipoka).
Thread Choice

Deciding what type of thread to use when both putting the moccasin together and when sewing the designs onto the upper was an artistic and technological choice in and of itself. Before linen and cotton thread came onto the scene, dried animal sinew, the connective tissue of animals that holds bones and muscles together, was used to sew all garments together. Large pieces of sinew would be torn from the legs and neck of an animal during processing and would be set aside to be dried and stored. As Wissler (1910) describes,

When thread is needed some shreds are pulled off by the teeth, softened in water or in the mouth and smoothed out with the fingers. Then placing one end in the mouth, the shreds are twisted by rolling between the palms. Sometimes the end is held under the foot (53-54).

Hungry Wolf (1980, 225) states that Blackfeet women continued to use sinew thread in their work even when commercial threads became available, perhaps because sinew was stronger and took longer to wear out, two qualities that are critical for footwear design. Additionally, whereas linen and cotton threads will unravel if the sewer tries cut down and taper one end, sinew can be “trimmed thinner at one end to more easily thread through a needle so that the thread is thicker than the hole produced” (Ewing and Darwent 2018, 20). Sinew is also unique because it “will swell when wet, virtually self-sealing the puncture holes of the needle and producing a watertight seam” (Ewing and Darwent 2018, 20), which in turn helps prevent moisture from seeping into a person’s moccasins.

Sinew thread does have a time cost to the user, however, as it must be hand-prepared because it has to be torn off and twisted into the right size thread. Commercial threads are not only more convenient because they do not have to go through this process, but they are also far less expensive than sinew. In the project sample, it was common to find moccasins with the hide seams sewn together with sinew, but both the design and the cuffs adhered with cotton thread. This may have been due to both the monetary and time costs of using sinew, or it may have been a performance choice on the part of the designer. Many museum conservators also added cotton thread to moccasins in an effort to stabilize precarious beaded areas, even sometimes going so far as to restring entire rows, which makes determining original thread choice even more

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8 See Michael Schiffer’s *Studying Technological Change: A Behavioral Approach* (2011) for more information on performance characteristics and choices made by producers for clothing in the archaeological record.
complicated. It can often be hard to tell when sinew has been used in moccasin construction, though, because one of the marks of an expert moccasin maker is hidden seams, where the thread is not observable by the outside eye.

Some traditional moccasin-makers today use hand-prepared sinew, but because it can be cost-prohibitive to work with, many artists have switched to commercially available sinew threads. Contemporary threads come in varying materials like nylon, polyester, gel-spun, and a material similar to fishing line, and range in size from thinnest to thickest. Nymo’s nylon beading thread has become one of the most popular choices for working with seed beads and thus moccasins, and many artists use beeswax to coat this thread while working with it in order to prevent fraying and water damage. Some thread brands come pre-waxed. Thread choice for moccasins and other beadwork projects is dependent upon the medium, what size beads are being used, what stitch types are being used, and what the overall project is. Popular thread brands include Nymo, Fireline, Silamide, Silkon, and Spiderwire Ultracast Invisi-Braid.

Different thread choices also require specific types of needles, as do certain mediums. Historically, beadworkers made their own needles out of bone and used them in conjunction with awls, which were used to punch holes in leather so that the needle could pass through. Later, metal needles acquired from traders were used. Like beads, needles today are categorized by numbers, and the higher the number, the thinner the needle. Needles vary in flexibility, eye size, thinness/thickness, and tip type. Beading needles are different than regular sewing needles in that their eyes are the same width as the rest of the body, making it easier for beads to pass over the needle and onto the thread. Many artists choose to use a glover’s needle, which has a triangular head and simplifies the process of punching through leather. Other popular seed beading needles include twisted needles and wide-eye needles (used primarily for stringing beads), as well as milliners’ needles, which are longer and have rounder eyes.

Construction Threads

Construction threads are defined as the threads that are used to sew a moccasin’s pieces together. These do not include the types of threads used to adorn the moccasin, such as with beadwork or quillwork. There are at least eight areas on a moccasin where construction thread can potentially be used: on the toes, heels, sides, sole to upper, upper to cuff, vamp to upper (if soft-soled), tongue to upper, and on areas of repair and other additions. There were two different
types of construction threads identified: sinew, the traditional thread made of animal tissue, and cotton thread. Visual representations of construction threads in this project can be seen in Figures 3.41 through 3.48.

In most cases, thread on toes and sides will only be found on traditional soft-soled moccasins because they are one piece of leather with no additional sole attached and they are typically sewn together either at the toe, at the sides, or both. In this sample, fifteen moccasins had sinew thread at the heel, three had cotton thread, and two had both sinew and cotton. For thread at the toe, six moccasins had sinew, one had cotton thread, and one had both sinew and cotton. For moccasins that were sewn on their sides, five had sinew and one had cotton thread.

In cases where moccasins had added soles, eighty-two were sewn on with sinew. Eight moccasins had soles that were sewn on solely with cotton thread, and seven had a combination of sinew and cotton thread. Of the moccasins that had a separate cuff, forty-five were attached to the upper with sinew, twenty with cotton thread, and three with both sinew and cotton. In the two cases where moccasins had added vamps, they were both attached with sinew. Forty-eight tongues were attached to the upper with sinew, while fourteen were attached with cotton thread and six with both sinew and cotton.

In many cases there was evidence that a moccasin had been repaired in some way, mostly taking the form of added patches to soles and uppers. In rarer cases, additional materials were attached to a moccasin, such as trailers at the heel or cones and feathers on the ends of tongues. For moccasins that had these additions, thirteen were sewn on with sinew, thirty-eight were attached with cotton thread, and nineteen of these additions were a combination of sinew and cotton.

Décor Thread Types

Décor threads are defined as the thread types that are used to apply décor, such as quillwork or beadwork, to the moccasin upper, sides, heel, cuff, tongue, and heel fringe. Décor thread charts can be seen in Figures 3.49 through 3.53.

For the uppers, sinew was identified as the main décor thread on twenty-seven pairs, while cotton thread was used on thirty-one pairs, and a combination of sinew and cotton was detected on forty-nine pairs. In one case, both sinew and a black fibrous material, likely horsehair based on its texture, were the thread types used.
Figure 3.41. Thread Type on Heel

Figure 3.42. Thread Type on Toe
Figure 3.43. Thread Type on Sides

Figure 3.44. Thread Type Connecting Sole to Upper
Figure 3.45. Thread Type Connecting Sole to Welt

Figure 3.46. Thread Type Connecting Upper to Cuff
Figure 3.47. Thread Type Connecting Tongue to Upper

Figure 3.48. Thread Type on Repairs and Other Additions
On the sides, sinew was identified on seventeen pairs, while cotton thread was used in twelve cases. A combination of sinew and cotton were used in twenty-two cases on moccasin sides. The remaining fifty-eight moccasins either did not have any decoration on the sides, thus not necessitating thread of any kind, or a thread type could not be identified.

For moccasin heel threads, sinew was used in fifteen cases, cotton in nine, and a combination of sinew and cotton was used on twenty-two pairs. Similarly to the moccasin sides, the remaining sixty-three moccasins for this category either had no thread at the heel or the thread type could not be identified.

Thirty-one cuffs have cotton thread that was used in its décor, while eight have sinew as the main thread. Six cuffs had a combination of both cotton and sinew threads used for their décor. Sixty-four cuffs either had no thread used or, in several cases, it was too difficult to tell what type of thread was used.

Fifteen moccasin tongues in this sample had décor thread. Six had sinew, three had cotton thread, and six had a combination of both sinew and cotton thread. Décor thread was not a category that was applied to heel fringe.

Stitch Types

Stitch types were important design choices because done wrong, stitches “could result in irritation to the wearer through abrasive friction during movement” (Ewing and Darwent 2018, 8). There are two areas, construction and design, where a moccasin-maker has to make specific choices in what types of stitches were going to be used and why.

Construction Stitches

Ewers (1945, 13) describes four basic stitches that were used when sewing hide pieces together: the “over and over” stitch, the “running” stitch”, the “mending” stitch, and the ornamentation stitch. The over and over stitch was usually the one employed to sew moccasin uppers to soles, and these stitches were hidden from view once the artist turned the moccasin right side out after they had completed their design on the upper and attached the sole. Running stitches can sometimes be seen where the moccasin-maker attached the cuffs, especially if there is a lower stroud cuff; these stitches may have served both a utilitarian function (attaching the cuff to the moccasin) and a decorative function simultaneously. As Blackfeet artist Louise Evans
Figure 3.49. Upper Décor Thread Type

Figure 3.50. Sides Décor Thread Type
Figure 3.51. Heels Décor Thread Type

Figure 3.52. Cuff Décor Thread Type

Figure 3.53. Tongue Décor Thread Type
pointed out to John Ewers in the 1950s, one measurement of a well-made piece of clothing was the quality of the stitching, which was a skill that required a person to take their time and “stitch very fine[...] you have to make your stitches small in order to make your seams look very neat and nice” (John Ewers Papers, The Vitality of Traditional Blackfeet Arts Part I).

Quillwork Stitches

The stitching methods used to attach quills to moccasins, and skins in general, is directly related to both the comfort of the wearer and the aesthetic goals of the artist. Moccasin designs are ultimately meant to tell stories, and the ways in which design materials are adhered to leather are a major component of the overall visual narrative. Johnson and Yenne (2011) identified over twenty different ways that Plains Indian nations sewed quills down onto surfaces, and nine quill-wrapping techniques that were also utilized.

John Ewers (1945) describes the most widely used quillwork stitching techniques used among the Blackfeet, according to his observations and his interviewees at the time. The first method involves stitching intervals of sinew thread down onto the material in two parallel lines, with the quill then being folded under the thread between each stitch (31). The second method is much like the first, except that “the width of the band is gradually varied to produce patterns in quillwork” (31). Johnson and Yenne (2011) refer to this quill sewing technique as the simple band (94), utilizing a single quill and two threads, which was used widely on Plains moccasin uppers, along with saddles, shirts, and knife sheaths. The third method that Ewers describes utilizes a loop stitch that allows quills to be placed diagonally on the surface, which Johnson and Yenne call a variation of the simple band technique (2011, 94), and the last method “produces a V-shaped surface pattern by crossing the quill over itself obliquely” (31), otherwise known as the zigzag band (Johnson and Yenne 2011, 94). In these last two techniques, the stitches still run in two lines but they are not directly opposite each other like they are in the first two methods. The Blackfeet also utilized a method for plaiting quills, where the artist would cross quills over each other in order to form a diamond-shaped pattern (Ewers 1945, 31; Johnson and Yenne 2011, 94; Orchard 1916, 22).

Artists used a lapping system when multiple quills were being used, taking great care to conceal the places where quills overlapped each other when continuing a pattern. Orchard (1916) called this technique “splicing”, where “owing to the shortness of porcupine-quills, it became
necessary to formulate a system of…inserting additional quills, in such a manner that the ends should be secured and concealed” (13). To accomplish this technique, quills were moistened and flattened, making them soft and easy to weave; after they dried, they stiffened, thus creating stability in the design (Orchard 1916, 14).

Beadwork Stitches

Moccasin beadwork is typically done using two types of stitches, which can be used alone or in conjunction with each other; these are called the overlay (or flat) stitch, and the lane (or lazy) stitch (Ewers 1945, 36; Hungry Wolf 1980, 224; Johnson and Yenne 2011, 91; McCoy 1972, 35; Roberts 2007, 155). Historically the Niitsitapi are known to have used both in their beadwork, but with more of an emphasis on the overlay style (Koch 1977, 54). The main difference between the two stitch types is the frequency with which the beader anchors the thread within the design. Overlay (flat) stitch “requires the use of two threads simultaneously…one thread is used for stringing the beads, the other is for stitching the strung beads down” (Hungry Wolf 1980, 243-244), usually making a stitch after every two or three beads. The frequent anchoring of the beads in overlay helped beadworkers accomplish more intricate and complicated shapes in their work, and was frequently used for floral artwork because it lent itself to “the curves and circular stitching required for floral designs” (Roberts 2007, 156; see also Dubin 1987, 275). Lane (lazy) stitching, also called the Crow stitch, on the other hand, was mainly used to cover large surface areas in beadwork (like backgrounds), although Dubin (1987) notes that it was also used to create some geometric and abstract forms (275). With the lane stitch, beads are only sewn down at the ends of rows, which produces “a loose, ridged effect” (Ewers 1945, 36).

Many people today, ranging from museum professionals to hobbyists, will claim that Plains material culture can sometimes be culturally affiliated based on an analysis of stitching styles. Whether this is true or not remains to be seen; a research project that looks at stitches types across cultures would be an important contribution towards answering this question. Some experts say that Niitsitapi stitching on moccasins can be distinguishable from other Plains Indian styles because the Niitsitapi were meticulous in anchoring their beads; therefore, their beadwork seems to appear much tighter (Roberts 2007:155) and “presents such a smooth…appearance that no threads are visible” (McCoy 1972:37). Hungry Wolf (1980) states that “traditional Blackfoot
Figure 3.54. Upper Décor Beading Style

Figure 3.55. Sides Décor Beading Style
Figure 3.56. Heels Décor Beading Style

Figure 3.57. Cuff Décor Beading Style
Figure 3.58. Tongue Décor Beading Style

Figure 3.59. Number of Colors That Appear on One Pair of Moccasins
beadworkers seldom used the lazy stitch, nor the beading loom, which is the other popular form of beadwork” (243-244). It is unclear whether this stands true for contemporary beadworkers as well.

**Stitching Stories from the Collections**

Due to the fragile and sensitive nature of quilled moccasins in museum collections, I did not attempt to identify the stitching methods, which would have required handling the moccasins more than they could handle. For the moccasin pairs that are beaded, however, two different types of beading styles, also known as stitch types, were identified: flat stitch and lane stitch. In some cases, edge beading style was also identified, which is a specific sewing technique and decorative style that is used to attach beads to the edges of objects, most often in this project referring to moccasin cuffs and tongues.

Beading styles/stitch types were identified for various parts of a moccasin, including: the upper, sides, heel, cuff, and tongue (see Figures 3.54 through 3.58). Flat stitch was the beading style used the most on uppers, at fifty-four pairs. Lane stitch was used on twenty-nine uppers, while a combination of flat and lane stitches was identified on twenty moccasin uppers. On moccasins that had beaded sides, thirty-four of those pairs had lane stitch as the main beading style. Twelve sides were done solely in flat stitch, three were beaded using both flat and lane stitches, and one pair fits into neither category, having loops of beads on its sides.

In cases where the moccasin heel had beading, thirty were done in lane stitch, eleven in flat stitch, and three were a combination of both flat and lane stitch. Similarly to the sides, there is one pair of moccasins that fit into neither category, as it had loops of beads for décor.

Of the nineteen cuffs that had some type of beading on them, thirteen can be classified as edge beadwork, four as lane stitch, and two as flat stitch.

Out of the thirteen moccasins that had tongues decorated with beads, five were done in edge beading style, three in lane stitch, and one in flat stitch. Two tongues had a combination of both edge beading and lane stitch, and two tongue had a combination of edge beading and flat stitch. Heel fringe, where applicable, generally had beads attached to the ends of the fringes, and do not fit into any of the beading styles/stitch types discussed here.

On moccasins where lane stitch was used, it is clear that beads were often anchored more often than what lane stitch typically requires, which upholds that supposition that Niitsitapi
beaders were meticulous anchorers. However, this is complicated by the fact that museum personnel often took it upon themselves to anchor beads down themselves in order to preserve destabilizing areas.

**Colors**

Color is perhaps one of the most important design aspects of a moccasin. Beadworkers take great care to be discerning in their color choices and combinations. As Augé et al. (2017) points out, bead color preferences cannot be mistaken as being based purely on what is visually pleasing to the eye. For many cultures, including the Niitsitapi, particular colors can represent or correspond with “cardinal directions and landscape elements…spiritual forces and realms; gender and other social constructs; and particular rituals, songs, prayers, creations, and other interactions with and enactments of the cosmos” (114). In moccasin design, in addition to paying attention to the hues used, it is also important to note which features of the design are what color. For instance, blue triangles may not have the same meaning as blue squares.

According to Hungry Wolf (1980, 244), the most popular colors used by traditional Blackfeet beadworkers included “light and dark blue, ‘greasy’ yellow, ‘Cheyenne’ pink, rose, and dark green.” Depending upon community, one color may be used more dominantly than another; for example, according to one of McCoy’s (1972) interviewees, Bloods allegedly tended to use more yellow than the Piegan and Northern Blackfeet (22). Lighter backgrounds, such as white and light blue, were often used to enhance the brilliance of the other colored beads (Jones and MacGregor 2002, 14). It is important to remember that the language we use to describe color here does not necessarily reflect how a beadworker may interpret it. Lois Edge (2011) describes this dichotomy:

The bead's colour makes no sound, but it is, cranberry, moss and fireweed. It is also wolf willow, sap and sawdust, as well as chickadee, magpie and jackrabbit. A bead is not simply dark blue, but Saskatoon blue. It is not merely black, but beaverhead black (82).

Although there is not much existing literature that talks about the specific significance behind Niitsitapi color choices, a Blackfeet color wheel created by Kevin Crawford (Blackfoot Gallery Committee 1978) may provide some insight. According to his wheel, Blackfeet colors are associated not only with seasons of the year, but also with activities and values. Yellow represents the fall, which is a time of harvesting meat and berries and preparing for the upcoming
winter, whereas red symbolizes wintertime and storytelling. Hungry Wolf (1980, 225) also notes that red is associated with the sacred, and that Blackfeet “medicine pipe owners and other holy people have a tradition of painting both moccasins with [the] sacred red earth plant.” Green is representative of not only summer, but also of celebration and ceremony, both of which are opportunities to visit with relatives. Blue stands for spring, a time of new life, the coming of water, and horse raids. Although direct parallels may not necessarily exist between figures painted on tipis and moccasin designs, it may be possible that color correlations do still exist. For instance, for the vital organs and lifelines of animal figures represented on Niitsitapi tipis are often represented by the colors red, yellow, and green (Hernandez 1999, 170); although it is unknown if these colors’ meanings can be directly applied to moccasins as well, it is worth considering at the very least.

Because all human eyes share physiological commonalities and the mechanism that the eye uses to experience color is the same across the species, it can be argued that “humans in different cultural settings perceive color in similar ways” (Jones and MacGregor 2002, 6). However, that does not mean that all cultures use color in the same way or associate it with the same types of values or beliefs. Just like with design, color in traditional Blackfeet moccasin beadwork is indicative of more than just individual artistic choice; color can also act an important medium that can be used to convey social and cultural values. As Jones and MacGregor (2002, 15) point out, the beadwork choices that Blackfeet artists made (and make) depends “upon the social embedded qualities ascribed to specific colors.” In other words, colors in moccasins were not chosen by chance or in a haphazard manner; although some choice may have been limited depending upon the availability of dyes and beads, in most cases it can be argued that colors were deliberate and specific to both the form (a moccasin) and the design. More specifically, “indigenous valuations of light and color were an integral part of multisensorial worldviews which saw metaphysical concepts manifested in a multiplicity of cultural attitudes to the natural world, spirituality, social identity, and conceptions of power” (Saunders 2002, 209). Color was used to convey messages to other people about how the Blackfeet perceived the natural and spiritual worlds, and to identify the roles and status of the moccasin wearer within Blackfeet society.
Color Stories from the Collections

Color in this case refers to the colors used in the design materials on a moccasin (on everywhere besides the sole, which was discussed separately above), such as beads, paint, quills, and cloth. No distinctions are made between different shades in a color, such as sky blue or navy blue for example; the designation is simply blue. This is mainly due to time restrictions for the research. I simply did not have time to individuate between specific shades, as this would have necessitated an in-depth analysis with a standardized tool (such as a Munsell color book), which would have taken up most of my research time. However, I did identify the number of times that a color appeared on a moccasin, across shades; for example, for one moccasin pair I noted that it had seven shades of blue, but did not specify what shades these are specifically. With that in mind, the colors identified here were as follows: Black, Blue, Green, Grey, Metallic, Orange, Pink, Purple, Red, Tan, Translucent/Clear, White, and Yellow.

The majority of the moccasins examined in this project, at fifty-four pairs, had between six to ten colors, across all mediums, used in their design. Twenty-nine moccasins exhibited between one and five colors, while eighteen pairs had between eleven to fifteen colors used in their design. On seven moccasins, sixteen to twenty colors were identified, and one moccasin had twenty-one colors used (Figure 3.59). When the number of colors used is broken down even further, a five-color moccasin is the most popular choice in this sample, appearing on fifteen pairs. Seven-color moccasins (fourteen pairs) and ten-color moccasins (thirteen pairs) were second and third, respectively. The minimum number of colors used is two, and the most colors used on a single moccasin is twenty-one.

Overall, the most popular color used on the moccasins in this sample was blue, appearing, in numerous shades and mediums, two hundred and forty-one times. Red was the second-most used color, appearing one hundred and seventy-six times. Yellow and green were next, appearing one hundred and five times and one hundred and four times, respectively, were the third and fourth most popular colors. White (eighty-one), pink (seventy-four), black (forty), orange (thirty-three), purple (nineteen), and metallic (ten – applying to bead colors only) were less popular choices. Grey, used twice, was the least popular color used on the moccasins in this project (Figure 3.60).

Color can also be broken down into categories based on individual mediums (Figures 3.61 through 3.65). On moccasins with beads, blue was the color used the most, appearing two
Figure 3.60. Frequency of Colors in Moccasin Sample

Figure 3.61. Bead Color Distribution
Figure 3.62. Paint Color Distribution

Figure 3.63. Quill Color Distribution

Figure 3.64. Cloth Color Distribution
hundred and eleven times, with red (one hundred and ten) and green (ninety) following. Yellow beads (eight-nine), white beads (seventy-three), and pink beads (sixty-two) were also popular choices. Black (thirty), orange (twenty-eight), clear/translucent (fourteen), purple (thirteen), metallic (ten), and grey (two) beads were used less frequently.

For paint, red was by far the most popular choices, appearing eleven times in the sample. Yellow was the second-most used paint color, occurring five times, with green, blue, and black paints making one appearance each.

Red was also the most popular color choice used in quillwork, showing up six times in the sample, with blue, pink, purple, white, and yellow all coming in as second-most used colors, appearing five times each. Orange quills were used four times, with plain/undyed and green quills each being used once. There were no cases of black quills in this sample.

On moccasins where cloth was used, red was the most popular color, occurring thirty-nine times. Tan cloth appeared twenty-two times, making it the second-most used color in this medium, with blue (fourteen), green (ten), black (eight), and pink (seven) following. Cloth with multiple colors on it, which I call compound cloth, showed up on moccasins six times, and white cloth appeared three times. Orange, purple, and yellow cloths were all the least popular color choices, each only appearing one time in the sample.

**Designs**

Though some discussions of Niitsitapi moccasin designs do exist in the literature (e.g., Ewers 1945; Hungry Wolf 1980; McCoy 1972; Roberts 2007), none of these studies have based their conclusions on a statistical analysis of a large cross-section of moccasin designs like this project attempts to do. The other common limitation that past scholars have made when discussing moccasin designs is only considering the designs on the moccasin upper. This study also includes designs on the sides, tongues, and heels of moccasins.

Regardless of where Niitsitapi designs are applied, whether it be on moccasins, other items of clothing, tipis, ceremonial regalia, or human faces, “all [designs] demonstrate that certain signs are intentionally used to express the complexity and the order of the Blackfoot concepts and worldview” (Hernandez 1999, 172). Some common Niitsitapi moccasin designs include basic geometric shapes, often squares, triangles, rectangles, diamonds, stripes, and dots. Hungry Wolf (1980) points out that many designs in Niitsitapi art are made by combining large
figures with smaller ones of different colors (245). It is also possible that some moccasin designs may mirror designs applied to other material culture items, such as tipis. For example, Hernandez (1999) points out that zigzag or wavy designs painted on tipis and other personal items “offered a prayer to the thunder for the owner’s protection” while the Maltese cross design, also known as the butterfly, “signifies that the design was given to the owner of the tipi in a vision or dream” (169), a designation that may possibly apply to moccasins. Other popular moccasin designs include the Keyhole; the Blocky Cross; the Mountain Design (also known as the Triangle Step Design); the Feather Design (also known as the double-triangle); the Three-Finger Design; the Pine Tree Country Design; the Basic Line Design; floral patterns, including Blackfeet Floral; and sometimes, but not often, anthropomorphic figures (Ewers 1945, 36; Hungry Wolf 1980, 226; McCoy 1972, 44; Roberts 2007,156). It should be noted that the names of these designs just mentioned are the colonizer labels, which were assigned by non-Native academics who were not part of the Niitsitapi community and who popularized these design terms by publishing them and encouraging their adoption in academic discourse by largely non-Native scholars. Although many of these terms have now been adopted by many Blackfeet artists when speaking about beadwork, they do not necessarily represent community ideas about what these designs should be called in English.

The specific meanings associated with many of these designs are not widely known outside of the Niitsitapi community, and although design meanings have sometimes persisted throughout time, they are also often debated or interpreted differently even amongst community members. Design ideas can come from many different sources, such as a creative mind, dreams, historical examples, and even online art idea boards, such as Pinterest, which is where Daniel Edwards finds much of his inspiration. The same design can have different meanings for different people, where meaning is largely dependent upon context and shared experiences and backgrounds. It is important to keep in mind that designs and their meanings often change over time and from person to person. Communities do not always collectively agree on what a certain design means, and these differing interpretations can be exacerbated by the artistic license that individuals take with their work. One design can have multiple meanings, and a single design can also be expressed in multiple variations of itself, differing in details like color, angles, and other stylistic preferences. There also exists the possibility of design differences between the four nations of the Niitsitapi, although Daniel Edwards said that he was not aware of any significant
differences in designs between the Ammskaapiiikuni, the Apatohsipiikuni, the Kainai, and the Siksika.

Designs do not always have to prescribe to a so-called ‘traditional’ style. Although many beadworkers do design moccasins with traditional motifs, they also draw inspiration from popular media and figures. I have seen moccasins that feature a smiling baby Yoda, a character from the popular Star Wars franchise, as its main figure; another pair, made for a young girl, had unicorns on them. As has always been the case, art acts in part as a reflection of an artist’s understanding of the world around them, and their interpretations of the world can come in many forms, including in both traditional and non-traditional images. Contrary to popular belief, in the historical period most every-day moccasins were not elaborately decorated, simply because they wore out quickly with daily use over rough terrain. Once the hard-soled moccasin came onto the scene in the late nineteenth century, it became easier for moccasin makers to replace the sole when it became too worn, preserving the upper. Today, decorated moccasins are typically only worn during special occasions, such as powwows, fairs, parades, celebrations, and ceremonies.

This section will consider the meanings and origins of some of the more common moccasin designs seen in this sample, and then several design stories from the collections will be considered.

Keyhole Design

The Keyhole Design (Figure 3.65), also known as “round beadwork” (Ewers 1945, 41), is characterized by a circle that rests at the top of the moccasin upper towards the toes, combined with an irregular rectangle that often widens at its base, is connected to the bottom of the circle, and stretches towards the ankle. The finished product looks somewhat like a keyhole on a door, hence its English name. There are often smaller designs within the circle and rectangle, which can vary widely and are likely dependent upon artistic intentions and preferences, although some common shapes include crosses, smaller circles, terraced triangles (mountain designs) and stripes. The colors used for the Keyhole Design are not uniform.

Keyholes were some of the first Niitsitapi moccasin patterns to be depicted by non-Native artists who visited Indian country. In his 1832 painting of Peh-tó-pe-kiss, or Eagle Ribs, artist George Catlin shows the renowned Piegan warrior wearing a pair of moccasins with what appears to be a version of the Keyhole Design, painted in yellow. The design is not clear enough
Figure 3.65. Example of the Keyhole Design, right foot (BBCW NA.202.153). Photo by author.

Figure 3.66. Example of the Blocky Cross Design, right foot (NMAI 135347). Photo by author.
in this work to see if any smaller shapes are quilled/beaded inside of it. Though early non-Native visual representations of Native peoples have to be looked at through a critical lens, especially considering that early painters in Indian country would often add or subtract design elements in Indian clothing in order to better fit their artistic and political goals, this portrayal of the Keyhole Design on a pair of Piegan moccasins fits with Niitsitapi oral histories (gathered in the 1940s by ethnologist John Ewers) that the Keyhole Design is an ancient moccasin design within the community. Karl Bodmer, in his 1833 sketch of a young Piegan woman at Fort MacKenzie, also portrays moccasins with the keyhole design, executed in blue, white, and possibly yellow, most likely quillwork. Bodmer, working in a style that is much clearer than Catlin’s work, shows how the design continues up onto the cuff of the woman’s moccasin, with a cross depicted in the center of the circle. Paul Kane, in his painting “Big Snake, Chief of the Blackfoot Indians, Recounting his War Exploits to Five Subordinate Chiefs,” created sometime between 1851 and 1856, depicts what appears to be a Keyhole Design on Big Snake’s moccasins, with a red circle and a white border surrounding the entire shape. Charles Stephen’s fieldnotes and drawings from his 1891 visit to the Blackfeet of Montana show that the Keyhole Design was still in use by the end of the nineteenth century. The Keyhole Design continues to be used by Niitsitapi moccasin-makers today.

Design meanings can fluctuate depending upon the artist’s intentions, a viewer’s background knowledge, and what contexts the moccasins are worn in. Native communities may also be selective in what they reveal, with sacred connotations and knowledge left out when speaking to nonmembers. These combined variables make it hard to specify exactly what messages the keyhole design may be intended to convey; however, we can potentially extrapolate from what is already known about shapes and meanings in Niitsitapi art. For instance, the Keyhole is one of the very few in Niitsitapi moccasin art that utilizes a circle. Long Standing Bear Chief (1992) describes the significance of the circle to the Niitsitapi people and its visual connection to life and creation:

The circle is something that you see all about us. The earth revolves in a circle, birds nests are circles. Even the dog makes a circle before he lays down. A circle is significant to us as Indians because it never ends. We look upon the earth and creation as something that never ends (31).
Although the smaller shapes that make up the interior of the Keyhole can vary widely, there is very often a cross shape in the center of the circle, like in Karl Bodmer’s 1833 drawing of a young Piegan woman. Long Standing Bear Chief (1992) explains the meaning behind this specific shape combination:

> Also, symbolically you see the circle with a cross inside of it. This represents the center, the Creator. The center of that is where the lines cross. In other words, the center is where all roads, all thoughts throughout your life, go to and come from the Creator (31).

In his sketches of Blackfeet clothing designs in July of 1931, artist W. Tjark Reiss observed that a circle with a terraced triangle (aka the mountain design, discussed later) inside it was possibly meant to indicate that the owner had taken a scalp in the heart of the mountains. Red circles in particular could indicate protection, such as protection for a person or a camp. It should be noted, though, that non-Native interpretations of Native designs may not accurately reflect community meanings, perhaps due in part to translation errors but more because of the historic Euro-American fascination with the colonial concepts of the ‘primitive savage’ and ‘Indigenous fierceness’ (while of course simultaneously ignoring Euro-American violence against Indigenous people).

Based on this knowledge, the Keyhole could potentially have connections to the never-ending circle of life, creation, the earth, nature, the Creator, and potentially even war and scalps. It could also possibly be connected to historic Niitsitapi bison pounds, which are said to have been similar in shape to the keyhole. Reverend Maclean noted in 1892, when he collected a pair of side-seam moccasins\(^9\) with a keyhole design on the Blood Reserve in Canada, that the design was said to represent a bison pound with a man waving in the animals (Brownstone 2008, 44). It is not clear where or from whom Maclean heard this interpretation. Considering the importance of buffalo pounds as means of large-scale bison entrapment for the subsistence and existence of the Niitsitapi\(^10\), it is quite possible that the Keyhole Design had both physical and metaphysical meanings simultaneously.

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\(^9\) Now housed in the Field Museum in Chicago, IL.

Blocky Cross

The “Blocky Cross” design (Figure 3.66), as it was named by Ewers in his 1945 book *Blackfeet Crafts*, is exactly what it sounds like: a cross design made up of thick squares or rectangles, giving the shape its’ ‘blocky’, or bulky, appearance. The history of this design has not been explored as in-depth in the literature as others, and thus has only been mentioned in passing by most scholars. While above Long Standing Bear Chief gave an overview about what crosses inside circles signify in many Niitsitapi worldviews, he also describes what cross designs alone could potentially signify:

People often see a cross on an Indian’s costume or tipi and they say ‘Aha, this man must be Christian.’ No, that is not the reason. There is a cross, yes, but the arms are of equal length. This represents the four directions and that is a spiritual thing. Each of the major directions of the earth have spirits, and in those points we see that the world, the entire universe, is a spiritual thing” (Long Standing Bear Chief 1992, 31).

Crosses in Niitsitapi moccasin beadwork may have also symbolized Morningstar, a traditional deity who is significant in many Blackfeet oral traditions, ideologies, and cosmologies; thus, the blocky cross design is sometimes also referred to as the “Morningstar Cross” (Roberts 2007, 156-157). As has been noted previously, beginning in the early reservation and boarding school eras, it is thought that Blackfeet artists subtly resisted the colonizing and evangelizing efforts of religious missionaries, particularly Catholics, by continuing to utilize blocky crosses in their work but disguising them as stylized floral quatrefoils (Roberts 2007, 156).

The Mountain Design and the Feather Design

One of the most widely used moccasin designs that is commonly associated with Niitsitapi nations is the Mountain Design (Figure 3.67), also referred to as the arrow point, the triangle step, the terraced triangle, and the triangle checker (Ewers 1945, 38; McCoy 1972, 20). The Mountain Design is made up of small squares and rectangles that combined form a triangle with a series of steps on each side of it, with the steps sometimes applied in contrasting colors (Roberts 2007, 156). W. Tjark Reiss noted in 1931 that this shape was often meant to convey a literal mountain, and combinations of this design could indicate chains of mountains or
Figure 3.67. Example of the Mountain Design, Left Foot (MHS X1982.19.10). Photo by author.

Figure 3.68. Example of the Feather Design, Left Foot (MHS 2018.34.73). Photo by author.
emphasize the gap in mountains where water passes. Smaller shapes in this pattern, notes Reiss, could also imply different interpretations for the viewer, where white rectangles in a mountain design could symbolize rivers running through mountains, while white triangles with orange outlines could indicate valleys and blue triangles water.

While this design may represent a literal mountain, like its name implies, it is also possible that the mountain design, as a triangle in and of itself, holds additional meanings. In many Niitsitapi oral traditions, the triangle represents the sacred space of the lodge or tipi entrances (Roberts 2007, 156; see also Scriver 1990 and Wissler 1927). Reiss verifies this interpretation in 1931, but also notes that triangles in clothing designs can indicate spearheads, hills, and water. The Feather Design (Figure 3.68), also called the “double triangle” (Ewers 1945, 38), is composed of two triangles connected at their bases to form a diamond. In one sketch, Reiss’s informants told him that a white triangle half of a feather design meant deep water, while a blue triangle half meant, simply, water. The feather figure has also been said to represent a literal feather, like the Mountain Design.

The Three-Finger Design

The Three-Finger Design (Figure 3.69) is a common sight in historic Niitsitapi moccasin art. It is defined by a U-shape on the upper, with the two terminal ends of the U at the ankle side of the moccasin, and three prongs, or ‘fingers’, that branch off from the rounded end towards the toes. Other names associated with this design include “White man sewing” and “half breed work” (Ewers 1945, 41); it is unclear from the context whether or not these were names that Ewers’ informants gave to this design or if they were terms that Ewers himself assigned to them. The Three-Finger Design has numerous iterations and interpretations. In some cases, its prongs are straight, but they can also be curved, bent, and stylized into floral shapes. The center of the U part of the design can also vary, with the most common iterations incorporating a geometric figure of some kind and a red background, which is most often red stroud that has been sewn onto the upper and then beaded on.

The meanings associated with this design vary widely. One of the earliest pieces of evidence that we have of the Three-Finger Design being used on Blackfeet moccasins comes from artist Paul Kane’s 1851-1856 rendering of the meeting between Big Snake and other Niitsitapi chiefs; while the viewer can see that a version of the Three-Finger Design is used on
several of the men’s moccasins, no interpretation is given for what the design may mean. Artist Charles Stephen’s 1890 sketches, drawn during his fieldwork with the Ammskaapiipiikuni, indicate that the Three-Finger Design was in use as a moccasin pattern in the late nineteenth century as well, which is the era where most of the visual evidence for this design’s use comes from. However, Stephens did not include any details about meanings the design may hold for the community.

Non-native scholars have commonly assumed that the three prongs in this pattern are meant to represent “the three divisions of the [Niitsitapi] tribe” (Kidd 1986, 75; see also Linderman 1940); Hungry Wolf and Hungry Wolf verified this claim in the 1970s when they interviewed elders, who at the time did believe that the branches were meant to symbolize the three divisions of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Hungry Wolf 1980, 225; see also Hungry Wolf 1977). It is interesting to note, though, that when John Ewers interviewed elders in the 1940s, they actually denied this meaning for the Three-Finger design but did not give any alternative interpretations (Ewers 1945, 41). W. Tjark Reiss’s 1931 sketchbook and the interpretations he garnered from Blackfeet people reveal that the prongs on a Three-Finger Design may indicate the fork in the river where Blackfeet people live, and that this explanation held true whether or not the branches of the design were straight or curved. Reiss was also told that the red in the center of a three-finger design denotes a Blackfeet person, while the design around the red means protection for that Blackfeet person. These variations in meaning speak to how design meanings can vary greatly between groups of people in the same community and across time.

The Pine Tree Country Design

The Pine Tree Country Design (Figure 3.70) looks very similar to the Three-Finger Design in that it has a central U-shape that extends up the foot with the terminal ends at the ankle side of the upper; however, the three prongs do not separate into three distinct lines, but are connected to each other at their base, similar to a tree trunk with branches. According to Reiss (1931), this indicates that the wearer of the moccasins lives in the pine tree country. Charles Stephens verified the use of this moccasin design among the Blackfeet in 1890 but did not specify as to its meaning.
Figure 3.69. Example of the Three Finger Design, Left Foot (NMAI 113074). Photo by author.

Figure 3.70. Example of the Pine Tree Country Design, Left Foot (NMNH 358901). Photo by author.
Basic Line Designs, the Diagonal Checker-Row Design, and the Rectangle and Line Design

The Basic Line Design (Figure 3.71), also known as cross beadwork, striped beadwork, and crosswise bands (Ewers 1945, 41; Hungry Wolf 1980, 225; see also McCoy 1972, 20), is composed of straight lines that traverse a moccasin upper either vertically or, more commonly, horizontally. The number of lines vary across moccasins, as do the line widths. Though he did not show this pattern’s use among the Blackfeet at the time of his work, artist Karl Bodmer’s drawings do indicate that the Basic Line Design was in use among the Mandan as early as 1833 (Ewers 1945, 41; see also Weid 1833). Although specific meanings for the Basic Line Design’s use on moccasins is unknown, Reiss’s 1931 drawings specify that stripes were sometimes used to represent rivers or heads of water. The Diagonal Checker-Row (Figure 3.72), as Ewers (1945, 38) has dubbed it, is a version of the Basic Line Design but instead of a single stripe it is made up of a series of rectangles that stretch diagonally. This design is often used in conjunction with other shapes to make up a larger design on a moccasin, such as antlers on an animal’s head.

The Rectangle and Line Design (modified version shown in Figure 3.73) is one that is not mentioned by name by any of the frequently cited authorities on Niitsitapi clothing designs, but it frequently appears in museum collections labeled as Blackfoot or Blackfeet. This design is characterized by a basic horizontal line that lies across the top of the foot (at the base of the tongue), with a large, often irregularly shaped rectangle or rounded rectangle that is connected to the line by its base and which travels up the foot towards the toes. This is likely the design drawn by Bodmer in his 1833 rendering of a Blackfeet warrior on horseback, although the base line part is hidden from the viewer’s eye. W. Tjark Reiss (1931) drew a version of this design and cites it simply as a Blood design but does not provide any more context as to the meaning. Stephens indicates its use among the Blackfeet in 1891 but does not provide an interpretation of its meaning either. Reiss’s work indicates that rectangles alone could have a variety of meanings, such as water, truth, or when combined with other lines, it could represent a looking glass. It is unknown at this time if any of these meanings could be connected to either the Basic Line, the Diagonal Checker-Row, or the Rectangle and Line Designs.
Figure 3.71. Example of the Basic Line Design, Right Foot (NMAI 132365). Photo by author.

Figure 3.72. Example of the Diagonal Checker-Row Design, Left Foot (NMAI 149430). Photo by author.

Figure 3.73. Example of the Rectangle and Line Design (modified version), Left Foot (MHS 2018.34.72). Photo by author.
Crooked Nose Design

The only person who has published on the Crooked Nose design’s use in Blackfeet moccasin art was John Ewers, whose interviews with elders in the 1940s revealed that it was a very old design used on one-piece winter moccasins, and was most often depicted using red and white quillwork or red, blue, and yellow ‘real’ beads (Ewers 1945, 41). There are no moccasins in the project sample with this design, which fits with Ewer’s supposition that the Crooked Nose design is perhaps one of the oldest moccasin designs; most moccasins in museum collections range are from the 1880s and on, an era that is defined by hard-soled moccasins and well beyond the use of the one-piece moccasin.

Niitsitapi Floral Designs

Niitsitapi floral designs (Figure 3.74) can usually be identified by their use of angular - typically triangular - flower heads, with the overall pattern often consisting of a central blossom in the center that contains offshoots of other flower heads, some that branch forward towards the toes and others that fork off onto the sides of the moccasin upper. Color combinations in these designs are not uniform and vary widely. Unlike the floral quill- and beadwork of other Indigenous nations, which often conform to realistic representations of flower and plant life, such as flower heads with rounded petals, Niitsitapi floral relies on a more abstract style of art to interpret the natural world. It is possible that the Blackfeet floral style is actually based off of the Ki’piaapi, or the prairie crocus flower. In Niitsitapi tradition these flowers are called ‘ears of the earth’ because they listen for the coming of spring (niitsitapiisinni). This specific style of floral quill- and beadwork is unique to the Blackfoot Confederacy and is particularly utilized by Native artists from the Blackfeet Nation in northern Montana, so much so that the name ‘Blackfeet floral style’ has become a popular description for this technique.

Floral designs in Native North American artwork, particularly beadwork, has deep roots in America’s colonial past. While the history of floral designs in among the Niitsitapi and in Indian country is discussed more in-depth in the next chapter, it is important to recognize that moccasin floral styles have been influenced by a wide variety of factors, not the least of which is the desire of an artists to represent the landscape they live in and cannot be completely attributable to colonizer influence on Native peoples.
Figure 3.74. Example of Niitsitapi Floral Design, left foot (NMAI 087437). Photo by author.
Design Stories from the Collections

Design Categories

Moccasin designs can be difficult to categorize, as their complexity and intricate compositions often makes it hard – and even impossible in some cases - to put boundaries around them. However, based on artist interviews and information gathered from the literature (Ewers 1944, Orchard 1916, Roberts 2007), it became clear that some designs could be categorized based on their commonly known English names. Multiple designs can appear on a single moccasin, and designs are counted on both the moccasin upper and sides.

In this sample, ninety-eight named designs were identified (Figure 3.75). The two designs with the most moccasins were the Basic Line and Floral categories, which both had sixteen pairs. Of the Floral group, nine can be designated specifically as Blackfeet Floral, and the remaining seven fall into a General Floral group (Figure 3.76). Fifteen moccasins had the Keyhole design, and fourteen had a version of the Mountain design. The Blocky Cross appeared on ten pairs, the Feather design on nine pairs, the Diagonal Checker-Row on three pairs, and the Rectangle and Line design on three pairs. Although they can sometimes be hard to differentiate between, the Three Finger design was identified on eight pairs while the Pine Tree Country pattern was found on four pairs of moccasins. The Crooked Nose design was not found on any moccasins in this sample.

While the thirty-one designs that do not have a name could be described as amalgamations of shapes, like they are in museum catalogs, it does not feel right to do that here. By that, I mean that it feels disrespectful to both the artist and the community to reduce a design to a summation of its geometric parts just because we do not understand its meaning. Thus, in this project, where designs do not have clear categories, they will remain unnamed until and unless someone can provide an appropriate designation.

Modified Lycett Moccasin Decoration Type

A modified version of Stephen Lycett’s (2014) proposed moccasin decoration types, which were in turn redrawn and modified after Wissler (1927), were used to categorize the moccasin decoration types in this sample. This typological system is meant to examine “variations in the geometric/positional arrangement of bead and quillwork decorations on moccasins” (Lycett 2014, 2). The addition of two more design types, what I call design types 10
Figure 3.75. Design Types

Figure 3.76. Floral Design Types
Figure 3.77. Modified Lycett Type Distribution

Figure 3.78. Upper Designs Length and Width
and 11, were necessary, as they frequently occurred on the moccasins in this project but the original Lycett decoration typology did not have categories for them. You can find the modified version of the Lycett moccasin decoration typology in Appendix Two.

The majority of the moccasins in this project, at fifty-three pairs, fall in to Type 4, which is decoration that has a central U-shaped or other decorative figure on the top portion of the upper. The second largest category is the Type 6 moccasin, which had thirty pairs in it and which consists of a border and a central decorated area. Small groups of moccasins are scattered throughout the other nine categories. The Type 9, a border with central design at top of upper, has eight pairs; Type 7, a border and central area with central bar, has seven pairs; and Type 10, a border and two or more horizontal parallel lines, has six pairs of moccasins in its category. Type 3, defined as a border and two or more centered vertical parallel lines, has two pairs. Types 2, 5, and 11 all have one moccasin each in their categories, while Types 1 and 8 have no pairs that fit their typologies (Figure 3.77).

**Design Measurements**

**Upper**

Moccasin upper designs (Figure 3.78) were measured similarly to the upper measurements above, in that length is measured from the toe to the ankle, and width is measured from one side of the moccasin to the other. In cases where the design may have multiple pieces spread out across the upper rather than being a single solid piece, as is the case in many floral designs, for instance, the total area that a design covers on the upper was measured, rather than individual pieces by themselves.

On the left foot, the average design length was 4 1/4 inches (10.84 cm) and the average width was 4 1/16 inches (10.35 cm). For the right foot, the average design length was 4 5/16 inches (10.89 cm) and the average width was 4 inches (10.20 cm). The total average length for both feet combined is 4 1/4 inches (10.87 cm), and the total average width is 4 1/16 inches (10.28 cm).

The minimum design length was 2 inches (4.9 cm), as compared to the maximum length, which spanned the upper at 8 1/8 inches (20.64 cm). The minimum design width was 1/4 of an inch (0.635 cm), and the maximum width was 7 7/16 inches (18.89 cm).
Tongue

Designs were also measured on tongues (Figure 3.79). Length was measured from the tip of the tongue to the base, and width was measured at the widest part of the tongue design, which was often at the base but not always. The average tongue design length on the left foot was approximately 3 inches (7.39 cm), and the average width was 2 5/16 inches (5.83 cm). On the right foot, the average length was 2 7/8 inches (7.30 cm), and the average width was 2 ¼ inches (5.74 cm). The total average length for both feet was 2 7/8 inches (7.35 cm), and the total average width was 2 1/4 inches (5.78 cm).

Heel Stripe

Heel stripes were considered designs, and length (the length of the strip) and width (at the widest point of the strip) were both measured (Figure 3.80). Twenty pairs of moccasins in this sample had heel stripes. The average length of a heel stripe on the left foot was approximately 2 inches (4.79 cm) and the average width was 9/16 of an inch (1.44 cm). On the right foot the average length of a heel stripe was also approximately 2 inches (4.80 cm), and the average width was 9/16 of an inch (1.36 cm). The total average heel stripe length for both feet was 2 inches (4.80 cm), and the total average width was 9/16 of an inch (1.40 cm). The minimum heel stripe length was 1 inch (2.54 cm), and the maximum length was 3 ¾ inches (9.53 cm). The minimum heel stripe width was 1/16 of an inch (0.2 cm), and the maximum width was 1 3/8 inches (3.49 cm).

Designs Represented in the Photograph Sample

The moccasin designs represented in the photograph sample (Figure 3.81) lean heavily towards Floral designs, with one hundred and ten pairs in that category. Moccasins with geometric designs come in next, at fifty-two pairs, and the Horizontal Stripes pattern is the third most popular category, at thirty-one pairs. The Mountain design is represented twenty-nine times, and the Three Finger design shows up on twenty-two pairs. Seventeen pairs in the sample appear to have no discernable design at all. Thirteen moccasins are decorated with the Keyhole design and twelve have the Vertical Stripe pattern, while the Triangle-and-Line and Other categories each have four pairs in them (Other defined here as a design that has no name). Three pairs are clearly
Figure 3.79. Tongue Designs Length and Width

Figure 3.80. Heel Stripe Designs Length and Width
the Pine Tree Country design, while three other pairs are either the Pine Tree Country or Three Finger Design; it is too hard from the photo to distinguish the any obvious differences that might give a clue for the design to fit into either category. Two moccasin designs could not be distinguished due to the poor quality of the photo.

Designs Represented by Gender

This variable breaks down design type by gender where possible (Figure 3.82). There is a clear bias in this sample towards male subjects, where two hundred and thirteen of the people shown are clearly male presenting subjects, and eight-four are female presenting, with one person unknown due to the distorted photograph.

The majority of both men (seventy-one) and women (thirty-eight) are wearing Floral designs, as is the one person whose gender is unknown. Thirty-eight men and ten women are wearing moccasins that can be classified simply as Geometric, while twenty-eight men and three women are wearing the Horizontal Stripes design. In the Mountain design category, twenty-two men and seven women are represented, and fourteen men and eight women are wearing the Three Finger pattern. Twelve men and only one woman are wearing the Keyhole design, while men and women are almost evenly represented with Plain moccasins, at nine and eight respectively. Vertical Stripes are worn by seven men and five women. Both the Triangle-and-Line and Other categories have four men and no women, while the Unknown category has two men and no women. The Pine Tree Country design category and the instances where the Pine Tree Country design cannot be distinguished from the Three Finger design both have one man and two women in them.

Designs Represented by Year

This variable considers design type and the year in which it appears in the photograph sample (Figures 3.83 through 3.85). Some designs have been counted in multiple categories if necessary. There were eighty-nine photographs that did not have a known date, and they span almost all design types. Overall, spanning from ca. 1832 to 1960, Floral designs are represented the most frequently in the photographs here. The second most frequently appearing designs are ones that fit into the Geometric category, and then third are Horizontal Stripes patterns.
Figure 3.81. Moccasin Designs in Photographs

Figure 3.82. Moccasin Design Type by Gender
Mountain, Three Finger, Plain (no design), Keyhole, and Vertical Stripe designs follow. Triangle-and-Line and Pine Tree Country designs appear the least frequently, along with designs that do not fit into any category and ones that are unknown.

Pre-1860, only one design type – the Vertical Stripe - is represented, and is depicted in a detailed drawing by Karl Bodmer from ca. 1832-1834. There were no photos in this sample that spanned the years between 1860 and 1879; starting in 1880, however, we begin to see more photos of Niitsitapi people emerging, mainly taken by non-Native tourists and professional photographers trying to capture the ‘authentic Indian.’ Between the years 1880 and 1899, there are thirteen photos depicting Floral designs, eight showing the Three Finger design, and four photos each in both the Geometric and Mountain design categories. There are single photographs of the Pine Tree Country and Vertical Stripe designs, one photo with plain moccasins (no design), and one photo of moccasins that clearly have a design on them but does not fit into in any other category. In this time period we also have the moccasin sketches done by Charles Stephens during his 1891 research trip to Blackfeet country; the Three Finger design shows up the most (five times) in Stephen’s drawings, followed by Floral (three pairs), Pine Tree Country (three pairs), Keyhole (two pairs), Mountain (two pairs), Triangle-and-Line (one pair), and Vertical Stripe (one pair) designs.

Between 1900 and 1919, Floral designs again represent the majority at twenty-seven pairs, followed by Geometric patterns (nine pairs), Mountain and Three Finger designs (seven pairs each), and Horizontal Stripes (six pairs). Plain, Triangle-and-Line, and Vertical Stripe designs all appeared on two pairs of moccasins, while Pine Tree Country and Other designs each had a single pair. There were no moccasins with Keyhole designs in this time span.

The years between 1920 and 1939 had the most photographs, and similarly to the decades before them, Floral designs dominate in these decades, appearing on twenty pairs of moccasins in the sample. Horizontal Stripes, at thirteen pairs, and Geometric patterns, at ten pairs, followed. The Keyhole design was identified on eight pairs, seven pairs had no designs at all, and Mountain designs appeared on five pairs. The Three Finger design showed up on three pairs, Vertical Stripes on two pairs, and Triangle-and-Line on one pair. There were four pairs of moccasins where the design could not be identified or it did not fit in to an existing category. Additionally, we also have the sketches of Tjark Reiss from 1931 that represent a variety of
Figure 3.83. Design Type by Year, Unknown to 1919

Figure 3.84. Design Type by Year, 1920-1960
Figure 3.85. Design Type by Year, Approximates

Figure 3.86. Modified Lycett Type Distribution in Photographs
different designs from this era. The sketches include visual depictions of Geometric and Mountain designs (three pairs each), Pine Tree Country or Three Finger designs (two pairs), Three Finger and Vertical Stripes designs (two pairs each), and one pair each for the Horizontal Stripes, Keyhole, Other (dots), Pine Tree Country, and Triangle-and-Line designs.

From 1940 to 1959, we still see the Floral style emerging the most often on moccasins, at nine pairs, followed by Geometric patterns at five pairs and Horizontal Stripes at four pairs. The Keyhole design was represented on two pairs of moccasins, while the Mountain design showed up on one pair. One pair had no design at all. There is only one photograph from 1960, which is the most recent year represented in the sample, and the design is categorized as Geometric.

There were twenty photos that did not have a specific year of origin, but were categorized by various institutions and archives as “Pre” a certain date. For instance, there are three photos that are labeled as “Pre-1910”, eight photos as “Pre-1920”, and nine photos as “Pre-1930s”. Although we do not have specific dates for these, they are still useful for moccasin design analysis, and so are still included here. In the Pre-1910 category, the moccasin designs represented include Floral, Geometric, and Three Finger, all at one pair each. In the Pre-1920s group, Mountain designs are represented the most, at three pairs, while the Geometric and Horizontal Stripes designs each have two pairs and the Keyhole design has one. Finally, the Pre-1930s category has Floral and Geometric at three pairs each, two plain pairs with no designs, and one pair that fits into the Other design category.

Lycett Types and Gender

Lycett Type was also examined for the moccasin designs that were visible, and gender was noted for each Lycett Type group (Figures 3.86 and 3.87). The Type 1 moccasin is represented the most, at one hundred and fifty-three pairs, ninety-two of which were male and sixty were female. Type 6 was the second most popular category, at fifty-four pairs total, the majority of which, at forty-seven, were males, with seven females. Fifteen pairs of moccasins were classified as Type 10, with thirteen males and two females, while thirteen pairs were identified as Type 11 moccasins, all of whom were male. Nine moccasins fit into Type 5 and eight moccasins fit into Type 9, and all of the subjects in both categories were male presenting. Type 7 was represented on five pairs, with three males and two females, and Type 2 appeared.
Modified Lycett Type Distribution in Photographs, by Gender

Figure 3.87. Lycett Type Distribution in Photographs, by Gender

Number of Each Sole Type in Photographs

Figure 3.88. Number of Each Sole Type in Photographs
three times, all on female moccasins. Thirty-eight of the moccasins’ Lycett Types, at twenty-eight men and ten women, could not be identified at all due to poor image quality.

Step 4: Finishing the Moccasin

After weeks, and possibly months, of careful artistic choices, encompassing hundreds of tiny details crafted through the artist’s physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual labor decisions, the moccasin is finally given life. After the hide has been tanned and the construction decided upon, after the pieces are chosen and the designs have been completed, the moccasin upper is then sewn facedown onto the sole. Then, the true test of a sewer’s skill comes into the play – the moccasin is turned inside out to hide the stitching of the upper to the sole. If the designs stay on during this process and the seams have been successfully hidden from the outside eye, the moccasin-maker is said to be truly skilled in their craft. Typically, a pair of moccasins takes Daniel Edwards about five days (approximately twenty hours) to complete. The first four days are spent cutting the pieces and beading the upper, and Daniel completes most of this work in three-hour time blocks in the evenings after his kids have gone to bed. On the last day, it takes him about four hours to sew all the pieces together. For Kiela Bird, who is not a full-time moccasin maker like Daniel, a moccasin upper can take her anywhere from eighteen to twenty-four hours to complete, with more time added to put the rest of the pieces together. Time can also be added if the moccasin is more complex, such as if it has a high-top cuff, has decoration elsewhere besides the upper, and if additional materials like trailers or cuff décor are added.

Stories from the Collections

‘Well-Made’ Moccasins

When looking at finished moccasins, one question to consider is, once a moccasin has been made, how can we tell whether or not it has been made ‘well’? In other words, what are the criteria for what constitutes a ‘well-made’ Niitsitapi moccasin? Based on interviews with current artists as well as information gleaned from the literature, it became clear that there are several factors that contemporary Native artistic communities generally consider for moccasins to be determined ‘well-made’. These factors are: quality of the finished hide; uniformity in thread tension; uniformity in bead size throughout the designs; and the skill with which the design materials were stitched down onto the moccasin.
To analyze these factors in the museum collections, I used several measures for ‘quality’. For hide quality, I simply looked for presence or non-presence of hair left on the moccasin, where leftover hair is a sign of a moccasin that is not necessarily made as well because it indicates lack of precision during the tanning process. There were nine moccasins with hair left on them, generally on the sole. Another measure I used to determine quality was looking to see if any part of a moccasin’s pattern, usually applied to the hide with charcoal, pencil, or tracing paper, could still be seen. The patterns on one pair were still visible, indicating that the maker may not have taken as much care in applying the design, or even that the maker was a beginner and not as skilled in applying the design materials.

Uniformity in thread tension and stitching skills were also measured (or at least attempted). The variable *Hide Between Lanes and Rows* was a measure of the quality of a moccasin’s beadwork as judged by how well the artist formed the lanes and rows of beads during the stitching process. This is assessed by examining if the lanes and rows have been stitched down straight; if they have not, then the hide of the moccasin upper is visible between the lanes and rows of the beadwork. The hide was visible in forty-four cases, and not visible on fifty-nine pairs.

Another measure of a moccasin’s beadwork quality is how well the beads have been stitched down (i.e., uniformity in thread tension). If the beadwork is loose, then the beadworker likely did not take as much care in making sure the beads were securely fastened; if the beadwork is tight, then the artist probably took more time to make sure the beads were stitched down securely. Moccasins could have areas of both loose and tight beading. Seventeen moccasins had areas of loose beading, while eighty-five did not. One hundred and one moccasins had areas of tight beading, and only one pair had no tight beading at all.

Throughout the research process, it became clear that this variable was not as effective at judging beadwork quality as was originally intended, due mostly to the fact that the moccasins in this sample are old and often not in great physical condition, which has resulted in loose beadwork in places where it likely was not loose originally. Additionally, it is likely, judging by the presence of both cotton thread and sinew in the moccasin beadwork in this sample, that museum conservators took it upon themselves to stitch down places where the beading was loosening in order to conserve the quality of the beadwork. Moccasins could also have areas where the beading is loose, but other places where the beading is tight, which muddies the
reliability of this variable. Thus, it is very difficult to judge the quality of beadwork based on whether or not the beading is loose or tight, because we do not know if it was that way originally or if it has been altered by conservation practices.

The third and last measure of moccasin quality was the uniformity of the beads used in the design. Uniformity here is defined as similarity in size and shape within a single bead color. Fifty-two moccasins did have bead uniformity, while fifty did not.

Throughout the research process, it became clear to me that standards in moccasin-making may differ depending upon an artist’s background knowledge, access to materials, and standards of craftsmanship (Edge 2011). For example, a beginner artist who is just learning the moccasin-making process would be not be held to the same standards as a veteran beadworker who has been making moccasins for decades. Overall, based on both the object-based analysis and visual analysis, I would characterize over half of the moccasins in this sample as ‘well-made’, although a Niitsitapi artist may not come to the same conclusions.

What Makes a Finished Moccasin ‘Niitsitapi’?

Another question that came up over the course of this research was, what makes a finished moccasin ‘Niitsitapi’? Or, to put it more broadly, what factors affiliate a pair of moccasins to any Native nation in this country or beyond? It became clear throughout this project that moccasins’ connections to tribal identification and community affiliation are complex, not straightforward, and composed of a combination of factors, including museum records and physical attributes. Although a discussion of cataloging systems and cultural affiliation practices in museums is discussed in more depth in a later chapter, I think the process bears discussion here as well.

I have found the most reliable indicators of a moccasin’s ‘Niitsitapi-ness’ to be first, detailed accession and collection information, when available. Reliable records, or documentation, that indicate a moccasin’s cultural origins can be the most powerful tool that museum curators and Indigenous communities have in determining moccasins’ Native affiliations. In rare instances, records can also give clues about the actual maker and/or wearer of the moccasins, which can provide even more information about a moccasin’s history. However, in cases where museum records are sparse or even do not exist at all, curators and communities can possibly turn to stylistic factors to gain insight into a moccasin’s cultural origins. This
Figure 3.89. What Makes a Moccasin ‘Niitsitapi’? Photo of moccasins from various nations during Rock Your Mocs week, courtesy of the Southern Ute.
process is called *attribution*, which is essentially a close analysis of an object’s material traits that are then used to assign an object to a specific cultural area (Caple 2006; Dongoske et. al. 1991; Greene 1992; Greene 2016; Hatcher 1999). For moccasins, the physical features that are usually used to establish cultural affiliation include designs, colors, and beading style/stitch types. Based on this project, I agree that the first two factors can, with caution, be used in conjunction to reliably affiliate a pair of moccasins with the Niitsitapi. Beading styles and stitch types are not accurate measures because they assume (like I did) that there has been no interference from outside sources, such as museum conservators, who are well-known for sewing down loose moccasin decoration materials (like beads) in order to keep them attached to the hide. Conservation sewing subsequently changes the thread tension (looseness versus tightness) in the moccasin design, and thus can influence an outside observer’s analysis of the beading style/stitch type. Therefore, until a safe and reliable method to look at moccasin uppers from the inside is established, beading styles and stitch types should not be used to help culturally affiliate moccasins. I also contend that cuff style, the moccasins’ Hatt Distribution number, and their Lycett design category can also provide support for a moccasin’s Niitsitapi cultural origins.

As discussed earlier, there are certain designs that are most often associated with the Niitsitapi and which hold specific tribal and community meanings, such as the Three-Finger and Pine Tree Country designs, along with Blackfeet floral designs. In cases where these specific tribal designs show up, it is probably safe to designate those moccasins as reliably Niitsitapi. However, in cases where designs are more general and their specific tribal meanings are unknown, it becomes difficult to use designs in cultural affiliation. In the moccasin sample, not counting tribally specific designs, the most common designs represented were “Other”, followed by “Basic Line”, “Keyhole”, and “Mountain”. All these design categories are known to have been produced by tribes within the entire Northern Plains region and not just by the Niitsitapi, blurring their cultural affiliation. Using designs to affiliate moccasins from the current era is also complex due to contemporary moccasins’ tendencies to fall into ‘pan-Indian’ design categories (often floral), where there are very few visible markers to distinguish one tribes’ moccasins from another’s. It may be useful for future researchers to consider creating ‘design databases’, where a variety of tribal designs from across the nation are compiled and compared to one another to determine certain designs’ most likely cultural origins.
When it comes to colors in Niitsitapi moccasins, the data does support a conclusion that moccasins from this community are most likely to use blue, red, green, and yellow, in that order, more frequently than other colors. This also applies across all design material types, meaning that blue, red, green, and yellow show up the most frequently no matter the materials being used, whether it is beads, quills, paints, or cloth. This is not surprising when we consider that these colors have significant cultural associations and thus appear often in other Niitsitapi art and design, such as in winter counts and ledger art (personal communication with John Pepion, Blackfeet artist, May 2022).

This project has also shown that Niitsitapi moccasin cuffs are likely to be made up of multiple parts (usually two), with stroud (usually red) making up the bottom portion of the cuff; it does not matter what the material is for the top portion of the cuff, only that it is a piece in a multiple-part cuff. It is likely that cuff height marks the gender of the wearer (high cuffs more likely to be worn by females), but this does not always stand true.

The data also shows that the Niitsitapi moccasins in this sample are most likely to fall into Hatt’s Moccasin Series Distribution Category XV, which consists of moccasins with separate, flat soles with vertical heel seams, an added tongue piece, and an instep that often has an opening cut into a Y-shape or in two parallel lines. The object-based analysis also indicated that the moccasins in this sample were most likely to fall into a Modified Lycett Moccasin Decoration Typology category four (a central U-shaped or other decorative figure on the top portion of the upper) or category six (a border and central area). It was interesting, however, that in the photograph analysis it was Lycett category one that was most likely to show up on the moccasins (central design without border on upper, i.e., partially beaded).

The degree to which designs, colors, and other design elements that are currently used are accurately perceived as indicating the cultural affiliation process depends largely on the experience and background knowledge of the viewer, who has to rely on an extensive, comprehensive, and most importantly, accurate, knowledge of specific tribal designs and color usage. While these skill sets are not impossible to acquire, it does require a lot of experience in the museum field and extensive time spent in museum collections looking closely at objects. Overall, the cultural affiliation process has historically been a very subjective process that relies on a person’s unquantifiable background knowledge in the field, which may or may not be accurate and is often hard to question if you do not have the same background knowledge.
yourself. Used alone, many of the factors that I just discussed would likely not stand up to scrutiny in the cultural affiliation process, and in fact should not be accepted alone as proof of a moccasin’s ‘Niitsitapi-ness’. However, used in conjunction with each other, these factors together are likely to indicate that a pair of moccasins came from the Niitsitapi. Future researchers should consider exploring how in-depth statistical analyses (such as Logistic Regression or Neural Network tests) can potentially mathematically prove that these factors just discussed are statistically significant in determining a moccasin’s Niitsitapi cultural origins.

Conclusions

At the beginning of this chapter I asked, how can we use object-based analysis, supplemented with other lines of research, to tell the economic stories of the Northern Plains? Moccasin production is the result of material labor and non-material labor, a combination of physical, emotional, spiritual, monetary, and time costs. There are substantial labor investments involved moccasin’s material production processes, and even tiny details, such as the placement of a bead on the hide, is deliberate. Hunting the animal for the moccasin hide takes time, planning, and certain placements on the landscape depending upon what kind of hide the maker is looking for. Hide and sinew preparation requires days to do and demands its own set of specialized tools, including scrapers and stakes, which in turn take more time to make. Smoking makes the process even longer. If the artist decides to purchase a hide instead of tan it themselves, that still requires an often-substantial monetary investment with no promise of an equal or greater return on investment. By the time the artist is ready to cut out the moccasin pattern and apply the design, days, if not weeks, have already been invested in the creation process.

Even more time is added when we consider the time it takes to prepare quills for applying to moccasin uppers, which requires its own hunting trip and preparation process, or the time and effort that historically had to be expended to obtain beads from traders. Finding design materials in today’s world may or may not take as much effort, although now it is often expended in searching websites and stores and paying hard-earned cash to sellers. The skillful application of beads or quills to hide requires extensive time commitments, both in learning and doing. Quillwork can only be done during certain times, which makes the process longer. Smaller beads take more time and skill to sew down, and the more heavily beaded a moccasin is, the longer it
will take the artist to make. The physical strain on artists’ eyes and fingers over time is great. And the final product of this complex, interwoven process is a pair of moccasins, ready to be worn, ready to be lived and laughed and cried in.

When these labor investments are not acknowledged in discussions surrounding moccasin-making, such as in scholarship and museum exhibitions, all of this work becomes hidden and Native women are rendered invisible and voiceless, as if the final product has suddenly burst into being with no living creator behind it. When Edge (2011) interviewed contemporary Native artists in 2011, most described the labor behind making moccasins and other regalia as “a real [labor] of love” (107). Kiela Bird expressed throughout her interview that the emotional and spiritual aspects were perhaps what was most important to her in her work. To her, the most important part of a moccasin is “how it feels”. In considering the amount of work that goes into a Native artist’s work, “you think about how many hours [the artists] spent, what they were thinking about when they were doing it, who they were doing it for, it [the work in creating] has to be a prayer, it has to be a meditation and a prayer when you do it because otherwise you wouldn't get through it” (Edge 2011, 107). And after all of the work that goes into creating a pair of moccasins, all the time and money, all the hours of cutting and sewing, tacking down beads one after another thousands upon thousands of times, all of the spiritual reflection and connections that need be done and the protocols learned and followed, the moccasins are often simply given away, sometimes for a price and sometimes not. The artist gives of themselves, gives of their time, money, mind, body, emotions, and spirit in order to create these elaborate pieces of footwear that then connect the wearer to the earth. These stories of labor and giving have been historically overlooked, but hopefully have been at least partially revealed throughout this and other chapters.

The next chapter in this story considers the lives of finished moccasins and puts moccasin production into context across time. Here, I have detailed the labor involved in putting moccasins together to create a final product. In the next chapter, I explore how Niitsitapi women have used finished moccasins to help themselves, their families, and their communities adapt to intense social and economic changes over time, and hopefully begin to tap into some of the complex underpinnings of footwear’s role in Niitsitapi women’s labor and women’s historic and contemporary contributions to household income production.
Figure 4.1. “Cecile Ground Schildt”, 2019 Best of Show winner, Santa Fe Indian Market. Jackie Larson Bread (Blackfeet), portrait of her great-aunt in glass seed beads.
CHAPTER 4: MOCCASIN ECONOMICS AND STORIES OF PRODUCTION

Moccasins’ stories are hard to tell. They do not stand still, nor do they stand alone. No, their stories are living. They have lived, do live, and will continue to live when we are gone. Moccasins are living documents, and their stories are webs, woven together into complex, interconnected narratives that ebb and flow together throughout time. Economics, labor, gender, movement, power, landscapes, spirituality, colonialism, resilience, revitalization – these are all just a few of the moccasin stories expressed in this chapter. And throughout all these stories are generations of people, human beings who have also lived, do live, and will continue to live on when we are gone.

One reason why moccasins’ roles in Niitsitapi women’s stories have likely been overlooked for so long is because they are products of informal labor that generally takes place within households, rather than in formal, regulated industries. Additionally, museums have rarely, if ever, directly addressed the labor behind moccasin-making or the complex reasons and circumstances behind moccasin production. Many museums have glossed over moccasins’ complex lives in favor of the ‘prettier’ art history narratives that focus on aesthetic details rather than social and cultural ones. The absence of discussions in the published record surrounding Niitsitapi women, moccasins, and economics have kept these stories hidden from history and inadvertently contributed to the invisibility of the Native women behind the creation of these objects.

This chapter emphasizes the roles that moccasins have played in historic and contemporary Niitsitapi women’s labor, and how women have used moccasins in household income production over time and throughout ever-changing economic conditions. As discussed in the last chapter, I argue that the historic invisibility of Niitsitapi women’s labor via moccasin-making, unacknowledged in both museums and scholarship, has contributed to an entire subset of what I call ‘hidden labor’, which I define as labor contributions, measured in physical, emotional, spiritual, monetary, and time costs, that are not acknowledged in discussions of the production processes. In the previous chapter, I outlined the hidden labor behind moccasin-making, which is quite substantial. Here, I peel back the layers of stories surrounding why moccasins have been, and continue to be, produced by Niitsitapi women, and how moccasins have been incorporated in to Niitsitapi women’s economic strategies throughout time. I use this
chapter to explore how the term ‘craftwork’, along with other colonial labels, have been used to de-emphasize the economic circumstances under which moccasins were produced and used by Niitsitapi women. I will also point out how colonial ideologies have contributed to the reclassification of moccasin-making as a ‘craft’ as opposed to ‘art’, reducing its impact from that of a critical economic and social activity to that of a ‘leisure-time’ activity.

Ultimately, this chapter will demonstrate how Niitsitapi artists have used moccasins over hundreds, if not thousands, of years in their adaptations to the ever-shifting social and economic conditions on the Northern Plains, and the essential roles that moccasins have played in helping to supplement Native household income over time. Although the majority of this dissertation focuses on the Ammskaapipiikuni (Southern Blackfeet, i.e., the Blackfeet Nation), in many cases it is necessary to refer to the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot Confederacy) as a whole. This is because early sources were not careful in their distinctions between Confederacy nations and/or specific bands, and so information can only be applied generally rather than specifically.

First, I will talk about the domestic use of Niitsitapi moccasins and the important roles that moccasins have played both economically and socially in the community. Then, I will discuss moccasins’ specific roles in Niitsitapi household income production and the various exchanges and markets that have stimulated demand and production throughout time, including intertribal trade, the fur trade, and tourist markets from the early reservation era and beyond. While telling these complex stories of moccasin markets, I also try to weave in discussions of larger economic and social influences that have affected moccasin-making throughout Niitsitapi country, including the United States government and its assimilation agendas and missionary pursuits, among others. I divide the story of the tourist moccasin market into two broad periods: the early reservation era (1880-1929), and the Great Depression and craft boom era (1930-1940), with a short discussion at the end of Blackfeet craftwork after 1940. Contemporary moccasin-making discussions take place in the Conclusion chapter of this work.

Section 1: Moccasins as the Foundation of an Economy and Society

Moccasin-making, a complex and intricate form of labor that has been long ignored by scholars, was a life-long occupation for all Niitsitapi, and especially for those persons considered women in the community. Niitsitapi women’s skills in making footwear, as well as other items of clothing, were essential for community survival physically, socially, and culturally. Moccasin-
making was such an important skill to have that “when a girl made her first pair of moccasins, her mother would sponsor a feast for all women in the camp” (Dempsey 1990, 36). Making moccasins was an activity that supported the very foundation of the Niitsitapi economy, as without footwear, no hunting, gathering, or travel could take place, at least not efficiently or comfortably. Moccasins were also products that women could make to trade or sell for other goods and services, which allowed them to have independent sources of income, which they could in turn use to support themselves, their families, and the community.

Oral histories indicate that Niitsitapi women helped provide for their families by hunting together with men, working in tandem to bring down large and swift prey like bison, and women alone were responsible for processing the meat and hides that came from these hunts (Piikuni Traditional Association, quoted in Baumann 2019, 29). Women owned the products of their labor, such as their homes, which were constructed, furnished, and maintained by them (Baumann 2019, 29; LaPier 2017, 56). Other tasks taken on by women included gathering fuel for the lodge, collecting important edible and medicinal plants, cooking meals, making tools and clothing for spouses and other family members, and taking care of children and the elderly (Schultz 1973, 64). There was one task, however, that was one of the most critical aspects of women’s daily labor and which contributed to the continued operation of the entire Niitsitapi way of life: moccasin-making.

Women’s labor, manifesting physically, emotionally, spiritually, and culturally, played an essential role in maintaining the Niitsitapi economic system, and moccasins were one of the many manifestations of this labor. Moccasins were essential tools to a people who survived by moving frequently across the landscape. As Ewing and Darwent (2018) point out, footwear had to meet high technical standards because it “had to mitigate the effects of three lethal environmental factors: extreme cold, windchill, and water exposure” (1). Appendages like toes were particularly vulnerable to harm, especially frostbite. Niitsitapi moccasins needed to stand up to demanding subsistence tasks and long days spent running after game. Hunting and gathering in winter required footwear that was warm and water-resistant, while summertime moccasins needed to withstand sharp rocks, thorns, and other environmental hazards that could easily maim a person. A single pair of moccasins likely wore out within a few weeks, if not days, on the harsh Northern Plains terrain. This was particularly true in ititasimahpi itimitakis, or the dog days (pre-1700s, generally), when horses had not yet been domesticated and moccasins were
made with soft soles rather than hard ones, and thus wore out more quickly. A person needed to have at least several pairs of moccasins on hand for longer journeys, and this work fell mainly to the women of the family, including wives, mothers, sisters, aunts, and grandmothers. In the Niitsitapi oral tradition Kuttoeyis (Bloodclot) and the Bear Family, Percy Bullchild (1985) relates how Bloodclot’s mother makes extra moccasins for him in preparation for his future travels:

He [Bloodclot] told his parents his plan to go and find out about the people in this hunting area of this land of theirs. For a long time his mother had been secretly making extra moccasins for him, knowing that very soon, one of these days, he would be asking to leave to go out into the wicked world (240).

Within the community, in cases where family members were not able to furnish extra pairs of moccasins for those who needed them, travelers could choose to hire a woman in the community to make extra pairs for the trip (Bullchild 1985, 334). This could be a valuable source of income for an artist, who could trade the moccasins for goods that she and/or her family might need, such as extra meat, hides, individual bundles (not community bundles), or even more moccasin-making materials like quills or sinew. This exchange of moccasins for goods within communities occurred among other Plains nations as well. While studying among the Cheyenne, linguist Truman Michelson noted of one woman that “even as a child she was well paid by the parents of her friends when she made moccasins for them” (Schneider 1983, 113).

Moccasins helped women to fulfill their roles as caretakers by literally protecting the feet of their loved ones from environmental hazards, and moccasin-making also contributed to the success of food production and movement across the landscape. Women’s labor, through moccasin production, supported the very foundation of Niitsitapi life and economics. However, it is important to note that moccasins represent more than just footwear meant to protect the feet and support movement; they also fulfilled higher social and cultural purposes for both women and men, such as playing important roles in courtship and marriage practices.

**Moccasins in Courtship and Marriage**

Proficiency in clothing construction, which included mastering hide scraping, hide tanning, and sewing, could quickly mark a young woman as a desirable life partner. In some communities, older Native women were especially watchful for potential skilled seamstresses,
and young women “who sewed silently (without snapping their needle) would be picked as wives for their sons” (Oakes and Riewe 2007, 29). Additionally, mothers would “check to see how a young girl scraped skins…If she kept the scraper at one consistent angle, she would be chosen for a daughter-in-law” (Oakes and Riewe 2007, 29). Skillful hide preparation, including for moccasins, was a talent that was particularly valued, with both Ewers (1945, 17) and Shultz (1973, 64) noting how Niitsitapi women were quick to praise a hide that had been dressed and tanned well, while those hides that were not done well were pointed out as evidence of laziness. Women who could produce high volumes of tanned hides were also praised. As the Blackfeet told Clark Wissler during his fieldwork in the early twentieth century, “‘the dressing of skins [a critical aspect of moccasin-making] was an important household industry…[A woman’s] worth and virtue were estimated by her output’” (Wissler 1910, 64).

Finished moccasins, imbued with hours upon hours of a woman’s time and effort, were often enfolded into women’s courtship and marriage strategies. According to Wissler (1911), if a woman wanted to capture a young man’s attention, “the most conventional way is for her to make moccasins secretly for the youth of her choice, this being regarded as the first proper step” (8; see also Kidd 1986, 48). In the late nineteenth century, Reverend Maclean on the Blood Reserve noted an instance when a “young warrior sang to his lover, ‘Look at me, my love, I am just starting, only cry a little, I am almost gone, make me moccasins’” (Brownstone 2008, 52). After a marriage, the bride would typically accompany her new spouse back to his family’s camp, where she would present his family members with decorated moccasins that she had made herself. After this symbolic action, the new bride then took over responsibility for the lodge, cementing her position in her new household (Brownstone 2008, 52; see also Goldfrank 1945, 16; Hungry Wolf 1980, 88; McClintock 1910, 186; Mountain Horse 1989, 76; Wissler 1911, 8; Zaharia and Fox 1995, 36). An unnamed Blood man, interviewed by ethnologist Esther Goldfrank in the mid-1930s, described his experiences with moccasin exchange prior to his marriage; as part of her bridal gifts, his new wife Wakes At Night (daughter of White Buffalo Robe) “brought blankets and about fifteen pairs of moccasins, enough for all the members of my family” (Goldfrank 1945, 16).

Niitsitapi use of moccasins in courtship and marriage rituals mirrors the practices of other surrounding communities. For instance, Métis communities considered moccasins to be important clothing items that played critical roles leading up to, and during, weddings. In many
cases, moccasins were used to solidify Métis bridal contracts. According to Racette (2004),
traditional Métis marriage practices and customs included “a woman’s manufacture and
presentation of a pair of moccasins to her future husband constituted the marriage contract”
(200). This held true for couples who entered Christian marriages, where “the presentation and
acceptance of moccasins represented an engagement or agreement to the proposed union…When
Norbert Welsh proposed to Cecile Boyer, he recalled, ‘What grand moccasins she made for me! I
was sure I had found the right girl!’” (Racette 2004, 200). Guests at Métis weddings also found
themselves needing to prepare special moccasins for the occasion, as “it was an object of pride to
have ‘worn out more than one pair of moccasins at a wedding’” (Racette 2004, 201). In some
instances, moccasins even became central items during the wedding ceremony itself, as one man
observed at the Red River Settlement in present day Manitoba, Canada during the winter of
1867; “as the bride sang a farewell song to her family:

a friend of the family, would go under the table and take one of her moccasins off and
auction it off. Sometimes it brought a high price which was then used to pay the fiddler or
some other expense of the wedding. The bride who had used her best skill to make her
moccasins pretty and attractive listened blushing to the bidding and was always relieved
when the moccasin was returned to its place (Racette 2004, 200-201).

Once married, Niitsitapi women were tasked with making the majority of their own
and their family’s clothing. But, because moccasin-making was such a constant – yet critical - task,
the responsibility for their production was often shared amongst family members and between
multiple wives in the same household. James Willard Schultz describes this division of labor,
which he observed while living in a Piegan camp during the late nineteenth century:

Under a shelter of poles and brush, close to their lodge, sat Talks-with-the-buffalo and his
women, and as I was passing, he invited me to sit and smoke with him. I casually noticed
that his sits-beside-him-wife, as the Blackfeet call a man’s first wife, was idle; the two
others busily quilling the uppers of a pair of moccasins for their man; quilling of ancient
designs and gorgeous hues. ‘Would that I could have a pair of moccasins as beautiful as
those are to be,’ I said. ‘Get married, then, and have all the pretty moccasins that you can
wear,’ Otter Woman replied (James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University).

Historically, Niitsitapi courtship and marriage was inherently connected to moccasin-making.
Women’s labor, through moccasins and the skills needed to make them, played a critical role in
supporting relationships between spouses and potential spouses. Although it was beyond the
scope of this paper to investigate how (or if) moccasins are incorporated into contemporary
Niitsitapi communities’ marriage practices and/or ceremonies, it may be an interesting topic for future scholars to pursue.

**Moccasins as Metaphors for War and Peace**

Moccasin-making is not often thought of as a war-time activity, but in the dog days and even into the later years of the nineteenth century, that is exactly what it turned out to be. Women’s labor through moccasin-making not only fulfilled the physical needs of war, as footwear was essential to travel, but also served as a symbolic representation of war for the whole community. Wives, mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, and other female relations honored the call to battle via their bone scrapers, awls, and needles. According to Kidd (1986), when a Blackfoot chief or leader “announced his intention of going to war, his wife and female relatives began to make moccasins for him to take…” (164), and Bear Head describes how, for his first war party expedition, his mother “got together the things that [he] would need, extra pairs of moccasins, a rope, awl and sinew thread…” (James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University). Women produced fairly high volumes of moccasins during these times so that warriors and hunters would have extra pairs to stash in cache pits hidden along the landscape in case of emergency, along with other indispensable items such as extra ammunition, food, and tobacco (Wissler 1910, 97). Additionally, Brownstone notes that “the [Niitsitapi] expression ‘Now we have new moccasins’ indicated that an enemy village had been taken, and the tipis could be cut up to make moccasins” (Brownstone 2008, 52).

Moccasins being used in various ways as metaphors for war is a phenomenon that seems to hold true for multiple Indigenous communities. On November 30, 1804, while at Fort Mandan in present-day North Dakota, Lewis and Clark are advised of a potential incoming war party, having been “warned that ‘two towns of the Ricarees [presumably Arikara] were making their Mockersons, and that we had best take care of our horses…”’ (Hunt 1990, 7-8). In this case the term ‘making their moccasins’ refers to preparing for war, and it was a metaphor that was also used among the Niitsitapi in the same way (Brownstone 2008, 52).

On the opposite end of the spectrum, the Niitsitapi phrase ‘taking moccasins off’, or ‘sleeping without moccasins’, often referred to peacetime, when times were calm enough for people to take off their moccasins and not worry about potential war raids in the middle of the night (Brownstone 2008, 52). These phrases also had meaning in other Indigenous communities
as well. During their journey, Lewis and Clark come across Mandan and Hidatsa villages, and during one such encounter, on October 31, 1804, a Mandan chief tells the expedition “that his people ‘now could hunt without fear & their women could work in the fields without looking every moment for the Enemy, and put off their mockersons at night…”’ (Hunt 1990, 7-8).

Moccasins could also help warriors identify both allies and enemies. The distinction between friend and foe could be based on the moccasin’s construction pattern, the designs and colors on its upper, or even a detail as subtle as a footprint left behind on the ground. As Beverly Hungry Wolf (1984) points out, Niitsitapi moccasins “followed basic tribal patterns that could be readily identified by members of other tribes” (217). Explorers Lewis and Clark noted several instances during their overland journey when moccasins were used by Indigenous people to identify tribal affiliation; on February 16, 1805, the journals note that “…among the Mandans during the winter, horses were stole [sic] by raiding Indians – ‘they left a number of pars [sic] of Mockersons…which the Mandans knew to be Sioux mockersons’” (Hunt 1990, 7). Three months later, on May 29, 1805, the captains called on the sole Indigenous woman in their party, Sacagawea, to interpret moccasins and footprints that were left behind in a nearby Indian encampment on the Judith River and “…Clark reports that ‘she told us they were the Indians which resided below the Rocky Mountains & to North of this river [and] that her nation make their mockersons differently’” (Hunt 1990, 8-9).

Reverend John Maclean, who worked on the Kainai (Blood) Reserve in Canada during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, cites in a journal entry in 1896 the story of a “Blood warrior who crept into a Sioux chief’s tipi…[The warrior] ate food from the communal pot while the inhabitants slept, then ran off with the chief’s horse while giving the war cry…He left a moccasin to let the Sioux know that a Blood had performed this brave act” (Brownstone 2008, 52). This story implies that the Sioux people would know the thief’s tribal identity solely from his moccasin. James Willard Schultz, in his book My Life As An Indian, which details Schultz’s time living as a white trader among the Blackfeet in Montana during the late nineteenth century, relates another instance where moccasins are used in tribal identification. During a conversation with Schultz, a man named Weasel Tail points out that he knows the origins of one of the women in their group: “‘She is a Snake woman,’ said Weasel Tail. ‘By the cut and pattern of her moccasins I know that she is one of that tribe’” (Schultz 1973, 146). Another exchange between Schultz and one of his Piegan friends, Wolverine, reveals that footprints alone could be
used to determine someone’s cultural affiliation; in this case, Wolverine says that the footprints they come across belong to Cree, or “men from across the mountains:

‘How could you know,’ I [Schultz] asked, ‘that those whose tracks we saw are not Crows, or Sioux, or other people of the plains?’

‘You noticed,’ Wolverine replied, ‘that the footprints were wide, rounding, that even the prints of their toes could be seen; that was because they wore soft-bottom moccasins, the sole, as well as the upper part, of tanned deer or buffalo skin. Only those people use such footwear; all those of the plains here wearing moccasins with hard parfleche soles’” (Schultz 1973, 24).

While the need for specific war and peace time moccasin metaphors may have faded away in the twenty-first century, moccasins still play important roles in Niitsitapi military culture, including for military veterans. Even in a country that has historically treated their people poorly, many Native military veterans today feel that, as descendants of a warrior people, they have a sacred obligation to defend their communities and homelands. Moccasins and other types of traditional regalia and items, such as war bonnets and individual eagle feathers, can be ways for the community to distinguish and honor contemporary Ammskaapipiikuni veterans during ceremonies and powwows. Native Americans have served in every conflict - on U.S. soil and off - since the American Revolution and today “Native Americans serve in the U.S. military at the highest rate per capital of any ethnic or cultural population” (Scott 2017). Montana has one of the highest rates of military service in the United States,11 and almost 6,000 of Montana’s servicepeople are tribal veterans, many of them Blackfeet. Blackfeet Marine Corp veteran Jesse DesRosier, who served in the Pacific and returned home in 2011, said in a recent news article that “You can’t throw a rock on this reservation without hitting a veteran […] We’re everywhere” (Scott 2017). In recognition of the long tradition of military service in Indian Country, the National Native American Veterans Memorial opened on November 11, 2020, on the grounds of the National Museum of the American Indian. The museum also developed an online exhibition in 2020 entitled “Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces” that details some of the amazing contributions of Native service members in this country.

Although warriors no longer need moccasins to help identify enemies and allies,

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11 https://montanabudget.org/post/honoring-american-indian-veterans-this-veterans-day
Figure 4.3. Members of the Native American Women Warriors, a Pueblo, Colorado-based Association of Active and Retired American Indians in U.S. Military Service, 2015. Photo from Gates Frontiers Fund Colorado Collection within the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.
moccasin designs can still be used to differentiate between tribal nations, especially at intertribal gatherings like powwows. Although some people feel that the contemporary powwow circuit has contributed to a ‘pan-Indian’ style of moccasin design, the last chapter demonstrated that there are still specific designs and features that can be attributed solely to the Niitsitapi. Future scholarship should explore the nature of powwow moccasin designs in more depth. In both a literal and figurative way, women’s labor through moccasin-making contributed to both war and peace. Their work allowed warriors to defend their people and their homelands, and today, moccasin-makers can help honor veterans with finished moccasins as well as specific moccasin designs and features.

**Moccasins in Ceremony and Spiritual Power**

Footwear played an integral role in Niitsitapi ceremonial and spiritual culture, and women, as both the creators of this footwear and as ceremonial and spiritual leaders themselves, were vital brokers in these relationships between humans and other beings and forces. Because moccasin-making, along with quillwork and later, beadwork, has historically been the domain of women, it has been a common practice for past scholars to assume that objects made by women “were not…connected to spiritual or political power, while men’s carvings or paintings were” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 33). These erroneous assumptions have likely ingrained themselves into the literature due to the lack of Native women’s perspectives in past anthropological work, along with the Western academic tendency to make artificial distinctions between what kinds of objects are considered ‘art’ (often the work of white people and men), and what objects should be labeled ‘crafts’ (often the work of people of color and women). This is exacerbated by the fact that museums specifically tend not to acknowledge the possibility that so-called ‘mundane’, everyday objects, such as moccasins, can simultaneously fulfill practical, economic, and spiritual purposes. These assumptions devalue the ceremonial and spiritual labor that women within the community imbue into the items they make. Historically and today, Niitsitapi women are “seen as the intermediary or means through which power has been granted to humans” (Kehoe 1995, 116), and they play vital ceremonial and spiritual leadership roles in their communities, including being bundle owners, Sun Dance sponsors, and wisdom-keepers.

Moccasins, made by women and worn by everyone, were often used to make “visual argument[s] concerning spiritual beliefs” (Roberts 2007, 157), accomplished through the use of
specific designs, patterns, and colors. As Berlo and Phillips (1998) point out, beliefs “about the spirit world and humans’ relationship to it [were – and are] expressed in [decorated] garments” (113). Specific designs, patterns and shapes were sometimes the result of dreams, and thus were thought to hold special spiritual significance and potency. If other artists wanted to use the designs on their own articles of clothing or ceremonial objects, “a price must be paid to the original owner or [her] consent to the use of it must be obtained” (Orchard 1929, 121).

Furthermore, Niitsitapi stories collected by D.C. Duvall in the early twentieth century all emphasize “the importance of symbolic reminders [of important events and spirits] depicted on everyday objects”, often in geometric forms (Roberts 2007, 156 [reprinted from Wissler and Duvall, 1908]). For example, triangles in Niitsitapi artwork are often thought to represent the spiritual and sacred space of the lodge, as well as an important Niitsitapi oral tradition figure known as Morningstar (Roberts 2007, 157). An interview with a female Niitsitapi elder in 1972 revealed that “there usually is a story behind everything that is [decorated]…[where] each figure has a meaning and each design means something specific to the [woman] that made it” (McCoy 1972, 40).

It should be noted that even the very act of creating – whether it be a pair of moccasins or another kind of object – can be a spiritual act for an artist. Edge (2011, 124) points out that during the creation process, the artist “becomes ‘still’ in their involvement in the process of exercising one's creativity, as in an awakening of consciousness in a spiritual sense.” Edge continues:

To experience such stillness is to experience a sense of timelessness, power, strength and beauty, communally. It is as though time is suspended, that all of the women who each engaged in the activity of beadwork both past and present, are joined as one with needle, thread and bead through and in time, just as hearing an Indigenous language spoken awakens our inner and sometimes dormant spirituality connecting with and in connection to our ancestors (124).

Moccasins can often be central items in bundle ceremonies and certain pairs can be associated with specific bundles. Women’s power is often manifest through medicine bundles, which oral traditions say were brought to the Niitsitapi people by means of human’s interactions and relationships with non-human beings such as Beaver and Thunder. Many medicine bundles have to be taken care of by both a female and a male, often a husband and wife team, as most large bundles are too powerful and require too much care to be handled alone. Women are
Figure 4.4. Betty Cooper (Blackfeet) of the Kaamipoisaamiiksi (Women’s Stand Up Headdress Society) holding a traditional Stand Up Headdress, 2019. Photo from the Missoulian, “Mother of Iinii: Betty Cooper Guides Blackfeet in Return of Buffalo”, June 9, 2019.
traditionally the ones who handle the opening and closing of medicine bundles, and they pass the objects inside to their male counterpart during ceremonies (Kehoe 1995, 116). Scriver (1991, 42) describes a pair of keyhole moccasins that were used in a Holy Thunder Medicine Pipe ceremony, and a pair of striped moccasins that were given to him during the transfer ceremony of the same pipe. Both Hungry Wolf (1980, 225) and Ewers (1945, 42) point out that medicine pipe owners and other holy people were known for painting their moccasins with red earth paint, which was considered a sacred color (Blackfeet Gallery Committee 1978).

Moccasins played important roles in other types of Niitsitapi ceremonies as well, often as offerings as thanks or to ask for assistance from a non-human being. For example, newly initiated quillworkers placed a single moccasin in a high place, such as on a hill or in a tree, as an offering to the Sun (Dempsey 1963, 53). LaPier (2017) also describes how Beaver bundle owners could call upon the assistance of the little people in the tribe’s annual tobacco planting ceremony, and how gifts of moccasins, made by women, and other items helped broker this relationship between the human world and the spiritual one:

The little people came to aid the Beaver bundle owners [with the ceremony], if the owners asked for their assistance and if they were given gifts for their help. At the end of the tobacco planting ritual Blackfeet women made little moccasins, little shirts, digging sticks, and small bags of food. They left these in the field before they departed for the summer (74).

Ben Calf Robe described this ritual a bit differently, but still emphasized the role that moccasins played in the tobacco planting ceremony:

The little sticks all have tiny moccasins tied to them, that the women make. These are what they give to the Spirits that make the Holy Tobacco grow. They select a good boy in the camp and they give him a fast Horse. He rides back to the Planting Place with the Offerings. He is told to ride straight there without looking back. They make incense and try to help him mount. On the fourth try they put him on the Horse with the little sticks and moccasins. He sticks them in the ground at the garden, toward where the Sun comes up (East side). Then he rides straight back to the camp, without looking behind, and the Planting Ceremony is all over. They break camp and all go home (Calf Robe, Hungry Wolf, and Hungry Wolf 1979, 63).

At the end of summer, when the community returned to the field to harvest their tobacco crop, they would “hold a thanksgiving feast, and sing and pray again before they collected their seeds for the next season […] But before they did this, they took a little bit of the tobacco, with a new
set of little moccasins and digging sticks, and left them in the center of camp for the little people, just the way the beavers told them to” (LaPier 2017, 74, quoting White Calf).

Although I did not feel that it was my place to ask about moccasins’ use in contemporary Blackfeet and Niitsitapi ceremonies, one of the interviewees in this project, Daniel Edwards, did mention that moccasins are used in ceremonies today. In the case of one ceremony, moccasins are one of the only pieces of clothing worn, as they are inherent connections to the earth. In other instances, moccasins are used in coming-of-age and life transition celebrations.

Moccasins were also necessary for ceremonies, rituals, and celebrations involving dance. Schultz describes a Blackfeet man, Handsome Man, and his friends coming out for a war dance, all of them “dressed in a suit of beautifully fringed and quilled war clothes; face and hands and moccasins red painted; brandishing a war club banded with snow white eagle plumes” (James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University). People dancing the scalp dance were also known to paint their moccasins black with charcoal (Ewers 1945, 42; Hungry Wolf 1980, 225; Schultz 1973, 223). More contemporarily, moccasins play essential roles in powwow dances and competitions, as they are required pieces of regalia needed to compete (Hungry Wolf 1999). Powwows have resulted in some extremely clever moccasin modifications, where in some cases dancers will replace their leather moccasin soles with rubber shoe soles to prevent the bottoms from wearing out as fast.

**Moccasins in Social Wealth and Prestige**

Though moccasins contributed to the overall physical, economic, and spiritual health of Niitsitapi society, they also played a role in helping individual women earn wealth and social prestige. As Graeber (1996) points out, in many societies “the most treasured forms of wealth consist of objects of adornment in the literal sense” (5). The richness and vivacity that a display of skillfully made and decorated moccasins embodied, combined with their often-powerful spiritual significance, created prestige for both the artist and the wearer. Individual moccasin-makers, particularly the skilled ones, were highly regarded and “took pride in their ability to do fine work” (Dubin 1987, 284). Clark Wissler pointed out in his research that a Niitsitapi woman could distinguish herself as a specialist in certain artistic areas, such as moccasin-making or tipi-making, and “when by chance you met a woman who had distinguished herself, it was proper to address her in a manner to reveal your knowledge of her reputation. [such] as ‘Grandmother, we
are happy to look upon one whose hands were always busy curing fine skins” (Kehoe 1995, 115, as quoted in Wissler 1938, 290). For wearers, footwear, along with other factors such as the size of a family’s lodge, a person’s success in hunting and subsequent ability to give goods away, and the ownership of powerful medicine bundles, could help distinguish a person as a wealthy person and/or leader in the community (Kehoe 1995, 115). People often competed socially to see who could display the most beautifully or elaborately decorated items (Bundy, McCartney, and Veltre 2003, 31; Dubin 1987, 284).

Today, many Blackfeet moccasin-makers and traditional artists are held in high esteem for their role as culture bearers, bastions of artistic traditions that have survived colonial oppression and continue to survive even in the face of contemporary challenges. Artists can also find fame in the contemporary art world, especially those who exhibit and compete at regional and national art competitions, such as the annual Santa Fe Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico and the Heard Museum Guild Indian Fair and Market in Phoenix, Arizona. Prize winners at these competitions are experts in their craft and are highly regarded in the Native art world. Jackie Larson Bread, a Blackfeet beadworker, is among the few who have been awarded Best in Show at the Santa Fe Indian Market.

Beadwork, quillwork, and other forms of artistic expression, communicated on moccasins and other mediums, can simultaneously preserve a community’s artistic traditions while also bringing individuals personal esteem and wealth. Additionally, women’s expertise in moccasin-making and other arts could bring prestige not only to them, but also to their households. As Beverly Hungry Wolf points out, “In the social life of my grandmothers, a household was judged not only by the bravery and generosity of the man, but also by the kindness and work habits of the woman” (110).

**Men and Moccasin-Making**

Though in the past Niitsitapi women were the primary moccasin-makers, men still needed the skills necessary to quickly repair, or even make, their own moccasins while out hunting, horse raiding, or while with a war party. In addition to carrying extra pairs of moccasins made for them, men would also take along basic sewing equipment and other materials to make moccasins in case an emergency repair or a new pair was needed (Schneider 1983, 106; see also Ewers 1943). This was also true of men in other Indigenous communities, such as among Arctic
peoples (Issenman 1997, 42). War parties were known to take “between eight and fifteen pairs of moccasins” (Brownstone 2008, 52) per person when traveling, and in other cases, people in hunting or war bands would create cache pits throughout the landscape where they could store extra moccasins, along with ammunition, dried meat, and other essentials (Wissler 1910, 97). According to Dempsey (1990), Niitsitapi boys on their first raids would go as aides to older warriors, “gathering wood, making fires, cooking, repairing moccasins, and looking after the camp” (36-37). Moccasins were not the only items of clothing that men would participate in making, and it was not uncommon for Plains men to be involved in the clothing making process beyond just sewing the pieces together. For instance, Kroeber reported that during his experiences among the Gros Ventre in 1909, he collected a pair of moccasins that had “been beaded and decorated by a woman, but were designed by an old man and symbolized his war exploits” (Schneider 1983, 109). Schultz notes that in many cases, Niitsitapi men would make their own shirts and leggings (although the hide tanning was still done by women), likely due to ceremonial restriction reasons where women were not permitted to handle certain designs and motifs (1973, 180).

Today, moccasin-making is among many traditional arts that men now participate in. In addition to Daniel Edwards, I personally met two other Ammskaapiwini male artists who make moccasins and do beadwork, with several more mentioned in passing. With the attempted erasure of many traditional Native American practices by the U.S. government, including arts and clothing manufacture, many lines of knowledge descent, usually passed down to women from grandmothers and mothers, were interrupted. In order to protect their children, many parents and elders chose not to pass down their traditional knowledge, including how to make moccasins and do beadwork. However, these practices still persisted among some, and now anyone from any gender who wants to learn can be taught. In the case of moccasin-making, it is more important to keep the traditions alive than to restrict the practice to a specific gender.

**Section 2: Moccasins in Niitsitapi Household Income Production**

As the previous section demonstrated, moccasins supported the hunting, gathering, and traveling that made up the foundation of the Niitsitapi way of life, and they also served a variety of social and cultural purposes for both makers and wearers. What has historically been overlooked, however, is the role that women’s labor via moccasin-making has played in
household income production and how moccasins’ important economic contributions have helped Niitsitapi women and their communities adapt to economic and social changes over time.

Niitsitapi women’s roles as essential income producers, and their subsequent entanglement with domestic, intertribal, and non-Native markets, have been traditionally overlooked in the literature and by museums. This is not surprising when we consider the colonial, dismissive attitudes that historical non-Native sources have had towards Native women. As Shoemaker (1995, 3) points out, “Historical accounts of Indian women usually depict them as ‘squaw drudges,’ beasts of burden bowed down with overwork and spousal oppression, or as ‘Indian princesses,’ voluptuous and promiscuous objects of white and Indian men’s sexual desire.” Historical sources and documents often failed to put women’s work into context, viewing it as unskilled and unspectacular labor rather than as extremely skilled production done for higher economic, social, and cultural purposes. As Eli (2013, 53) points out, Native women and their labor have essentially been written out of history, focusing instead on the ‘flashier’ accomplishments of Native men and overlooking the foundational economic support that women provided to their communities through their production of objects like moccasins. Even when Native women’s labor is acknowledged, it is often only talked about as simply the act, such as scraping a hide, rather than being a deep consideration of labor’s connections to wider social processes “or whether the final product will be used for the domestic, tributary, exchange, or cash economy” (Frink and Weedman 2005, 5). The following section attempts to reveal some of the complex underpinnings of Niitsitapi moccasin-making by unveiling moccasins’ commercialization history as well as their relation to wider economic and social processes over time.

Like the female lacemakers of Narspur, India (Mies 1982), and the Kuna women who make molas for sale in Panama (Tice 1995), Niitsitapi moccasin-makers have remained invisible, i.e., removed from public perception. The upcoming section attempts to bring Niitsitapi women’s labor contributions to the forefront, focusing not on making (like the last chapter), but on the labor processes involved in exchanging, trading, and selling moccasins. Because Native women’s voices seldom appear in the historical record, we turn to the outputs of their labor, finished moccasins in museum collections, to help us tell the story of their labor and contributions to income generation over time. Many, if not most, of the moccasins in museum collections today are outgrowths of Native women producing moccasins for sale to non-Native
markets. Beyond community use, there are three major moccasin markets that are identified here: intertribal markets, fur trade/utilitarian markets, and tourist markets. Throughout discussions of these markets, I explore stories of the moccasins included in this project and ask if there is potentially a way for researchers to tell, based on an object analysis, if moccasins have been made specifically for sale. In order to move beyond discussions of objects and typologies and into discussions of real people, though, “we need to consider labor, production, and consumption in human, and often gendered, terms” (Scheiber 2005, 58), and that is what this section aims to do.

**Niitsitapi Women and Moccasins for Intertribal Trade**

Contrary to past anthropological beliefs, neighboring Plains groups did not exist in a vacuum, but were in fact almost constantly interacting with each other through trade, intermarriage, competition for land and natural resources, and war (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 118; Logan and Schmittou 1995, 80). There is evidence to suggest that the nations of the Niitsitapi traded with numerous neighboring groups on the Plains, including the Séliš (Salish), Apsáalooke (Crow), Nakodabi (Assiniboine), Nehiyawak (Cree), and the Nimiipuu (Nez Perce). Quilled and beaded moccasins, surplus pemmican, tanned hides, skin lodges, horses, guns, and Hudson’s Bay blankets are just some of the items that Niitsitapi peoples traded in exchange for watertight baskets, shells, dentalium, pipes, black pipestone, cougar skins, bows, saddles, and many more items (Ewers 2001, 216-217; Griswold 1954, 52-53; LaPier 2017, 53; Peers and Brown 2015; Weid 1833, 98, 100, 107, 118-119). Intertribal marriage also played a role in moccasin design exchange. Different types of marriage, including arranged, love matches, war captive, and others occurred between the various Niitsitapi nations (Raczka 1979, 282), as well as between Niitsitapi and members of other nations, such as the Cree (Schultz 1973) and Shoshone (Raczka 1979, 51).

The exchange of moccasins played major roles in facilitating intertribal relations on the Plains and supported exchanges of artistic ideas and styles between groups (Dubin 1987, 284; Koch 1977, 54), especially once the horse was introduced to Northern Plains groups and travel became much easier (Ewers 2001). Berlo and Phillips (1998) note how intertribal gatherings and trading sites served as venues where women could observe each other’s work, and oftentimes “innovative designs might be remembered, adapted, and transformed into a personal aesthetic statement” (118). The Niitsitapi’s summertime O’kan (Sun Dance) was a particularly important
intertribal gathering, where all of the Niitsitapi bands came together for several days to participate in ceremonies, visit with relatives, and create alliances (Peers and Brown 2015, 21), and also where women from neighboring nations could come to exchange artistic methods and ideas (Ewers 1958, 311; see also Berlo and Phillips 1998 and Phillips 1998). These intertribal exchanges and the subsequent borrowing and merging of designs across the Plains are a major reason why it is so difficult today to distinguish specific tribal moccasin styles, especially in museum collections. As Wissler (1927) so aptly points out, “to put the case in another way, the beaded art of the Plains is an affair of the entire area, rather than of the tribe” (23; see also discussions by Lycett 2015 and 2020).

In addition to trading with each other and with other Plains groups, Niitsitapi bands and smaller parties made longer expeditions to larger regional trade fairs, even going as far as Spanish settlements in the Southwest (Griswold 1954, 52-53). An 1830s-era painting by Karl Bodmer is a good visual example that demonstrates that the Niitsitapi were obtaining trade goods from beyond the Plains region. In the painting, a Piikuni man is shown wearing “a Navajo trade blanket and a Pueblo silver neck pendant, both of which were prized by Indians across the Plains, hundreds of miles from their place of manufacture in the desert Southwest” (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 29). Valuable trade items at these regional and interregional trading sites included finished objects like moccasins, jewelry, and woven blankets, along with indigenous raw materials such as tanned hides and dentalium shells (Her Many Horses 2007, 120).

Intertribal trade was not a practice that ended with colonialism. Ewers noted during his fieldwork in 1953 at Fort Belknap, Montana that the Assiniboine were still trading elaborately decorated clothing, including moccasins, in exchange for horses with the Piegan on the Blackfeet Reservation (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes, 1). Today, intertribal powwows and other celebrations serve as venues for contemporary moccasin-makers from Native nations around North America to share ideas, trade techniques, and observe one another’s work.

Stories from the Collections

It is possible that there are several moccasins in the sample that are representative of intertribal trade. Of the 110 moccasins in this project, fourteen of them have an additional culture of origin listed in addition to ‘Niitsitapi’. Eight pairs of moccasins are connected to communities that the Niitsitapi are known to have traded with historically, such as the Cree (associated with
three pairs), the Assiniboine (associated with three pairs), and the Crow (associated with two pairs). Six pairs are associated with tribes that are farther from traditional Niitsitapi territory, including the Cheyenne (one pair), the Dakota (two pairs), the Sioux (one pair), and the Blackfoot Sioux (two pairs – it is likely that these pairs have been mistakenly labeled as Niitsitapi). One pair of Dakota moccasins from the NMNH (E380954) were actually collected within Dakota territory and were only identified by the museum later as Niitsitapi because of their distinctive Three-Finger design, a design that is heavily associated with the Niitsitapi community. Artist Charles Stephens, while visiting the Blackfeet Reservation in the 1890s, noted one instance of a Piegan man wearing a ‘Flathead’-style moccasin. Forty years later, the 1931 sketchbook and notes of artist W. Tjark Reiss show that Blackfeet people were wearing moccasins from both the Crow and the Sioux. One of Reiss’s Blackfeet informants even noted that his porcupine-quilled Sioux moccasins were the direct result of intertribal trade between the two nations (Reiss 1934).

In the majority of these cases, it is unknown how the moccasins came into Niitsitapi possession if they were indeed from neighboring tribes. For one pair (E425907) at NMNH, though, the original collector, a missionary’s wife named Mary Dutcher, was told directly by the Piegan woman gifting her the moccasins that they were of Cree manufacture (Accession Records, National Museum of Natural History – see Figure 4.5). In most of the other cases, additional cultures of origin have been added or noted in the museum catalog after the moccasins were viewed by community experts or museum curators who felt that the designs may indicate non-Niitsitapi origins. The issue with this process is that many people, particularly non-Native museum personnel, have not always been correct in their assumptions. Mislabeled a moccasin as belonging to one tribe or another when it really does not, or failing to note other tribes associated with the moccasin’s manufacture or use, adds confusion to the museum catalog and affects the interpretations that future researchers may wish to make. Additionally, one of the major questions that identifying moccasins by assigning them to one cultural group brings up is, can the processes that we use to culturally affiliate a pair of moccasins really capture the complexity of the intertribal relations on the Northern Plains? These moccasins have all become associated with the Niitsitapi in some way, even though they have additional cultural groups attached to them in the museum catalogs. Does this mean that these moccasins were made by
another Native nation but were worn by the Niitsitapi? If moccasins are not manufactured by the Niitsitapi but still worn by members of the Niitsitapi community, who do they then belong to, as

Figure 4.5. View of Mary Dutcher’s Cree/Blackfeet Moccasins (NMNH 425907). Photo by author.
far as museums are concerned? These types of questions should be deeply considered by future museum researchers before cultural affiliation determinations are made.

**Niitsitapi Women and Moccasins for the Fur Trade, 1754-1860**

The domestication of the horse, combined with the consistent encroachment of early Euro-American and Euro-Canadian fur trappers and traders and their goods starting in 1754 (Kidd 1986, 83), brought great and permanent economic, spiritual, and social change to the Plains. Though the *iinnii* (*bison*) remained the lodestone of the Niitsitapi way of life, the fur trade, first in *ksísskstaki* (*beaver*) and then in bison, stimulated demand in Indian country, and the Niitsitapi answered that demand enthusiastically. Niitsitapi hunters and artists had long been producing products for intra- and intertribal trade, and so it was not a great shift in thought or practice to begin including products for trade with non-Natives as well. Much has been written in regards to the European fur trade and exchange with the Indigenous peoples of the Plains (Anderson and Parker, 2009; Calloway 1996; Carlos and Hoffman 1986; Innis 1956; Taylor 2011), as well as the fur trade and its effects on the Niitsitapi specifically (Binnema 1992; Blackfoot Gallery Committee, 2013; Conaty 1995; Ewers 1944, 1958, 1968, 1997, 2001; Hungry Wolf 1975; Kennedy 2014; Krech 1984; Nugent 1993; Peers and Brown 2015; Schultz 1973; Wishart 1976). Niitsitapi women and the roles that their moccasins and moccasin-making skills played in supporting both Native women’s household income production and the entire fur trade system itself have been overlooked, however.

**Women’s Labor via Moccasin-Making in the Fur Trade Era**

While Niitsitapi women were building marriage alliances with trappers and traders (Figure 4.5; Lepley 2004; see also Child 2012; Colpitts 2012; Hunt 1990; Osburn 1998; and Shoemaker 1995 for more information about Native women’s marriage alliances) and laboring to produce tanned hides and food for trade (especially pemmican – see Figure 4.6 for a more recent example of the pemmican-making process) (Ewers 1944, 10; Habicht-Mauche 2005, 42; Robertson 1999, 26; Old Fort Benton 1975, 16; Schultz 1973, 375), they were simultaneously producing clothing and footwear for family, community, and trade use. As Racette (2005) points out, “hide clothing served as both commodity and currency” (36) in exchanges where cash transactions were rare. Garment production connected Native women with expansive domestic
Figure 4.5. Natawista Iksina (Medicine Snake Woman), Kainai, with her trader husband Alexander Culbertson and son Joe, 1863. Photo from Montana Historical Society Photo Archives 941-818.
Figure 4.6. Mrs. Cuts Different (Blackfeet), making pemmican by her home in Two Medicine Community on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana, 1941. Photo courtesy of Native North American Indians – Old Photos Facebook Page.
and global marketplaces. In addition to being important to the social and economic success of Native families, along with building vital relationships between neighboring Plains tribes (as discussed earlier), Native-made clothing, and especially footwear, was imperative for non-Native traders and trappers to acquire for survival, and eventually for trade. Niitsitapi women labored to meet the demands of their emerging non-Native utilitarian market, made up of men who found moccasins to be cheaper, warmer, and more efficient for their work than European shoes.

Arguably the biggest artistic shift in women’s moccasin production on the Plains occurred with the introduction of colonial exchange goods via the fur trade, including cotton thread, steel needles, metal scissors, cloth, and trade beads (Kline 2001, 24; Swan and Cooley 2019, 78; Racette 2009, 288). These tools improved upon traditional manufacturing techniques, making moccasin-making faster and more efficient, while also fostering new artistic possibilities, such as beadwork and the implementation of cloth and thread in moccasin designs. More importantly for this analysis, however, is the fact that the fur trade in Niitsitapi country and beyond stimulated a major demand for finished moccasins as well, both in terms of the immediate survival needs of Euro-American and Euro-Canadian trappers, traders, and explorers, as well as for novelty items that could be sent back East for buyers wanting to revel in the idea of the romantic western frontier and its ‘romantic savages’. These demands for moccasins gave Native women the opportunity to establish a new avenue for household income production, which became more and more essential as the economic landscape on the Plains shifted towards the western capitalistic enterprise.

Non-Native visitors to Indian territory recognized early on that moccasins made excellent footwear, for moccasins were technologically better suited to walking long distances through harsh terrain and protecting feet from extreme weather. The journals of Lewis and Clark and their cross-country descriptions with the Corps of Discovery are among the earliest published accounts that demonstrate the importance of moccasins to non-Native travel. The Expedition members started out their journey wearing manufactured shoes, but, as Hunt reports, “By the time the Corps had reached present-day Idaho, it had become a traveling podiatry clinic, devoting every spare moment to nursing bruised, aching and bleeding feet, and to mending, patching or making moccasins” (Hunt 1990, 5). Corps members also traded for moccasins from the Native nations that they encountered, as demonstrated from an August 1806 journal entry that describes the men of the Expedition trading “for both ‘Robes and Mockasons [sic]. Some of
which was handsome’ during their stop at the Arikara villages on the Missouri” (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 89). Moccasins were so important to early non-Native life and success in the West that many independent traders and trappers learned to either make their own footgear or hired Native women to make moccasins for them (note “The Rocky Mountain Man’s” moccasins in the painting shown in Figure 4.8). Writer and self-proclaimed mountain man Rufus Sage observed in 1887 that trappers generally made their own moccasins, while the accounts of John C. Fremont, an explorer, surveyor, and military officer writing in the mid-nineteenth century, note that some trappers were even “semiprofessional cobblers who regularly furnished moccasins at a dollar a pair” (Hanson 1982, 112). Moccasins were often more comfortable and better suited to the weather conditions that hunters, trappers, and other travelers faced. For instance, as Racette (2004) notes, “Pointed toe moccasins with small vamps placed high on the foot were particularly suited for wearing snowshoes” (24) and were especially important for winter travel.

When a trapper, trader, expedition member, missionary, or other traveler did not have the skills, time, or means to make their own moccasins, they commissioned their footwear from Native women instead, often those who were living at military forts and fur trading posts, usually with their spouse. There were a vast number of forts and posts in Niitsitapi territory on both sides of the border where moccasin production by Native women was likely taking place. Major trade sites included Fort Edmonton, operated by the HBC in Canada, Fort McKenzie on the Missouri River in the U.S., and Fort Benton, also in the United States. Other early trading posts that were either on Niitsitapi land or traded substantially with them included: Buckingham House, Carlton House, Chesterfield House, Cumberland House, Finlay’s House, Fort a la Corne, Fort Augustus, Fort Calgary, Fort Cotton, Fort Edmonton, Fort George, Fort Lewis, Fort Lower Nipawi, Fort MacLeod, Fort Montagne d’Aigle, Fort Owen, Fort Pascoyac, Fort Piegan, Fort Pitt, Fort Union, Fort Whoop-Up, Hudson’s House, Manchester House, Rocky Mountain House, and Umfreville’s House, to name a few (Colpitts 2012; Dempsey 2007; Ewers 1944; Robertson 1999; Wissler 1910, 8). Rudolph Kurz observed that women were “employed regularly at [Fort Union on the Yellowstone River] to make clothes for pay (credit on account)” (Kurz 1937, 252). In 1846, traveling artist Paul Kane noted that “the employment of the women at Fort Edmonton ’consists
Figure 4.8. Long Jakes, “The Rocky Mountain Man.” Notice that his outfit includes moccsins. Oil on canvas by Charles Deas (1844). Photo courtesy of the Denver Art Museum.
of making moccasins and clothing for the men and converting the dried meat into pemmican’’” (Kane 1858 [1968], 93), and at Red River, Joseph James Hargrave described “the making of Indian shoes or moccasins’ as one of the settlement’s ‘most common exercises of domestic manufacture’” (Hargrave 1871 [1977], 179). Unmarried men were an important subset of female artists’ customer bases, as these men often hired Native women to not only make and mend moccasins, but also to do other domestic tasks such as laundry and sewing (Racette 2005, 25).

The 1804-1805 post journal at Fort Churchill, operated by the Hudson’s Bay Company, describes Native women and an unknown person working together to produce moccasins and other pieces of clothing for Fort personnel:

- **September 1st** Myself employed at times in cutting out Indian cloathing [sic] (having no Taylor) and the women belonging to the factory making the same, Snowshoes, shoes for the men and various things requisite.

- **October** Myself cutting out Indian cloathing and the women making these etc.

- **February** Myself cutting out and the Indian women making Indian cloathing, Shoes etc. (Fort Churchill Post Journal, 1804-5, B.42/a/130, Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (HBCA), Winnipeg).

Native women and their moccasin-making skills were critical additions to long-distance expeditions, so much so that many expedition parties hired women to accompany them “for the express purpose of making moccasins and repairing clothing” (Racette 2009, 288-289). The women hired for moccasin work were usually the Native wives of expedition party members; according to Racette (2005), the expeditions of Sir John Franklin “included ‘the wives of three voyageurs, who were brought for the purpose of making shoes and clothes for the men’” (25). John Rae’s 1847 expedition also included the wives of three party members, the purpose being that “…the services of the females may be useful in washing, making and mending people’s clothes and moccasins, netting snowshoes…and other necessary work; these women of course will have to be maintained as a charge on the expedition, to be moderately remunerated for any public service they may render, but to be paid by the people themselves for washing, etc.’” (Rich 1953, 76). Individuals traveling long distances were guaranteed to consume large quantities of moccasins during their journey, meaning constant work for the Native women accompanying them.
Even if a Niitsitapi woman was not personally commissioned by someone to make their footwear, she could still produce moccasins, individually or in bulk, for trading post stores and for traveling traders to buy on their way through the country. A May 1851 inventory at Fort Union lists “11 pairs Garnished Mockasins $5.50”, suggesting that moccasins were an important product that was kept on hand by trading posts for those who might want them (Inventory of Stock, the Property of Pierre Chouteau Jr. and Co. on hand at Fort Union, 15 May 1851, Montana Historical Society). Even almost a century later, and in places as far away as the Arctic, Native women were still producing footwear for trading companies. One HBC employee recalled how even in 1939,

Inuit from Baffin Island and northern Québec sold waterproof skin boots to the local Hudson’s Bay posts for $1.25 to $1.50 a pair. These boots were packed one thousand to a crate, with a bottle of seal oil in each kamik. The Hudson’s Bay office in Winnipeg received the shipments and redistributed them to northern Manitoba settlements including Norway House, York Factory, and Nelson House. Northern posts bought the boots for $1.75 and sold them to trappers for $2.35… (Zieba 1990, as quoted in Oakes and Riewe 1996, 121).

Women’s labor, through moccasin-making, supported the very foundation of the fur trade, allowing non-Native people to move freely along the landscape, hunting and trapping along the way.

*Moccasin Prices and Exchange Values During the Fur Trade Era*

Historical exchange values and prices for finished moccasins are not straightforward and depended upon a variety of factors, including what the artist was willing to accept and what the customer was willing to pay. In addition to cash, moccasins were also often exchanged for other goods and staples. Dempsey (1990, 49) notes that clothing and footwear was often exchanged for horses, and those with elaborate decoration could often bring up to five or more horses in trade. Letitia Hargrave, writing in 1840 from York Factory in Canada, described how a Native woman sewing moccasins for her family “‘took the…opportunity to send [six] pairs of moccasins [sic] along with a request that we should send her tea and sugar in return…”’ (Macleod 1947, 73).

Prices for moccasins were often based on subjective, Western-based determinations of ‘quality’, often based solely on the amount of elaborate decoration that was present rather than being judged by additional qualities that Native artists would value, such as how well the hide
was tanned or how well the seams were constructed. The capitalistic process of paying low prices to the artist and marking up the product price to consumers, resulting in a tidy sum for the seller, started at trading posts and expanded to individual traders buying moccasins in bulk. For instance, Norbert Welsh, a Saskatchewan trader writing in the 1880s, described buying packs of moccasins, sometimes in bundles of twenty-four or forty-eight pairs, where he “paid from fifty cents a pair up for them, according to the quality…[and] those for which I paid fifty cents, I sold for from a dollar and a quarter to a dollar and a half, depending on the style and amount of decoration” (Racette 2009, 289). Arguably this marked the beginning of Native women being alienated from the fair returns of their labor by (generally) non-Native men. Lower prices paid to moccasin-makers meant a forced increase in production to try and make up the difference, which in turn meant lower prices again as the market became saturated. Increased moccasin production also meant that resources, such as tanned hides, sinew, quills and/or beads, and other construction and decoration materials were depleted faster, resulting in higher costs for artists as they kept having to acquire more.

These early transactional relationships between Native women and non-Native men, fostered as they were by moccasin production and sale, marks an important transition in moccasins’ entanglement in significant income generation for Native women and their families. The importance of moccasins to non-Native success in Indian territory, and the inability of most non-Natives to make moccasins for themselves, created an opportunity for female artists to profit from their clothing production skills outside of their communities and outside of intertribal trade, as has been discussed earlier.

*Stories from the Collections*

To my knowledge, there are no moccasins in the sample that are direct results of Niitsitapi women producing for someone in the fur trade. Northern Plains moccasins from the fur trade era are relatively rare in museum collections, likely due in part to traders’ emphasis on using moccasins for utilitarian purposes rather than collecting them to save and put on a shelf. If we were to see moccasins from the fur trade, I would expect them to be well-worn and likely not elaborately decorated because they would be worn out and unusable in a matter of weeks, if not days.
Niitsitapi Women and Moccasins for the Tourist Trade, 1840-1929

The Western commodification of the beaver and bison for the North American fur trade encouraged intense resource consumption and overexploitation of the environment, and Native peoples, including the Niitsitapi, were entangled in these open-ended market forces (Anderson and Parker 2009, 105; Krech 1984, 4). Even when trading companies began to realize that their resources were being rapidly depleted, the trade in beaver and bison, especially in Niitsitapi country, was so valuable that companies excluded Niitsitapi territory from conservation programs implemented in the mid-1820s (Peers and Brown 2015, 31). Lack of beaver pelts became a serious problem after 1810, which is reflected in HBC records that show significant drops in beaver exports between 1810 and 1816 (Carlos and Hoffman, 1986, 979). By the fall of 1879, only five years after a description of the Plains being ‘black’ with bison, the animal “had been exterminated in the Canadian portion of the [Niitsitapi] Country except for a few small bands of stragglers” (Ewers 2001, 148). The rate of the bison’s slaughter in Montana “is reflected in the figures of shipments of robes and hides by I. G. Baker and Company at Fort Benton...they shipped 75,000 in 1876, 20,000 in 1880, only 5,000 in 1883, and none at all in 1884” (Ewers 1944, 49).

Thus, by 1880, the era of the fur trade and the Niitsitapi’s heavy economic reliance on the bison had come to a crashing end. The United States-based Piikuni were pinned in place by an international border and the now-militarized boundaries of a newly created reservation. Attempts to leave the boundaries of the reservation often resulted in violent military reprisal and a forced return to reservation lands, a direct violation of the Piikuni treaty rights that had been established almost thirty years earlier. By 1882 most Blackfeet no longer left the reservation except to occasionally raid horses from nearby ranches and neighboring tribes (LaPier 2017, 4). By the first decade of the twentieth century, “an entire generation of Blackfeet had been born, raised, and lived into adulthood on the reservation” (LaPier 2017, 3).

The decimation of the land’s natural resources, including animal and plant populations, combined with the inability to travel to new hunting and gathering grounds, meant that the Piikuni people were staring into the face of starvation by the early 1880s. A lack of animals for hides meant that many traditional clothing sources were dried up as well. Conditions were so dire at this time that the winter of 1883-1884 is now collectively known as the Starvation Winter among the Blackfeet, when over 500 died from starvation and exposure, exacerbated by the
government’s failure to provide the promised rations that had been bought and paid for by previous Piikuni land sales (LaPier 2017). Faced with the choice between choosing a slow death by starvation or agreement to government policies pushing self-sufficiency, the Piikuni chose the latter. As a result, a new reservation-based economy was born, and it would provide the foundation for Blackfeet economic life into the twenty-first century.

According to Kline (2001), the available economic opportunities for Blackfeet people on the reservation working in the late nineteenth century up until 1930 fell into two main categories: “those relating to land use or land development and those involving wage labor or individual entrepreneurialism” (47). Despite best efforts, however, land-based economic strategies were not successful in providing a stable economic framework for the majority of the Blackfeet community. As described in Chapter Five, the failure of farming and cattle ranching programs, the inefficient and ultimately economically detrimental allocation of allotted lands, and the fickleness of other land-use strategies all combined into significant financial difficulty for Blackfeet families. These failures were exacerbated by the lack of consistency in policy and personnel. Between 1905 and 1921 there were ten different Superintendents of Indian Affairs (Farr 1984, 100), along with thirteen different Blackfeet Agents (Kline 2001, 46). Such high turnover rates did little for administrative efficiency and the clear articulation of policy, and certainly did nothing to encourage the Blackfeet to adhere to failing farming and ranching strategies.

With the collapse of most of the major income avenues, Blackfeet people were desperate for work. Many turned to wage labor and entrepreneurial activities to support themselves, although wage labor positions on the reservation were often scarce due to the sheer number of people competing for a limited number of jobs. A Helena Weekly Herald article from September 1884 highlights the desperation of Blackfeet people needing to enter the workforce:

The Agent informs me that they [the Blackfeet] are willing and even anxious to work and that fifty offer themselves where ten are called for. But while there are many ways in which he could usefully employ them he is unable to do so, as they must be paid in rations and he has none to spare (Helena Weekly Herald, September 4, 1884).

Wage labor became even more important to Blackfeet families once agents began removing ‘able-bodied’ people from the ration rolls. Despite the fact that the Blackfeet had a long-standing agreement with the government that the money generated from land sales would include the
purchase of rations, the Office of Indian Affairs nonetheless declared in the early 1900s that anybody who was capable of working would not be provided with rations. In 1901, the current Blackfeet agent James Monteath “cut over 700 mixed bloods from the ration roll of over 2100”, and those who found work on the irrigation ditch projects were also cut off (Kline 2001, 131). Kline (2001) reports that by 1903, only around 550 people remained on the ration rolls (131).

Piikuni women’s labor contributed as much to the creation and success of new reservation-based economic strategies as the labor of Piikuni men did. In many cases, women’s labor and wages is what kept families fed and clothed in a time when starvation was a very real threat. Women actively participated in all of the economic activities that characterize the beginning of the reservation economy in this period, including farming and ranching programs, land leasing schemes, and the wage labor industry as both formal and informal workers. These contributions were often in direct opposition to federal government agendas that tried to relegate Native women to the background, such as Office of Indian Affairs policies that attempted to divide labor tasks by gender and field matron programs that tried their best to confine Native women’s work solely to the individual household (Simonsen 2006).

Blackfeet women’s labor, and the products of their labor, was a valuable resource that could be traded for cash or rations. Although irrigation projects were one of the first opportunities for wage labor presented on the Blackfeet Reservation, Piikuni women were excluded from this form of work. Instead, women were presented with other options for income production, including both formal and informal positions in reservation professions and industries, such as boarding schools and the local hospital, along with cutting and hauling wood for the agency, making bricks, and other odd jobs. Many female jobs on the reservation were defined along racial lines, with ‘mixed-bloods’ typically getting the higher-paying, higher-status positions while “full bloods primarily filled those at the bottom of the pay scale, such as the police force and laborer positions” (Kline 2001, 167). One of the most lucrative informal wage labor jobs on the Blackfeet Reservation was making moccasins and other ‘crafts’, such as baskets (see Figure 4.9), for the burgeoning cultural tourism industry on the reservation.

By the late nineteenth century, Native communities across the United States had long recognized that they could utilize cultural performance and dress in their economic strategies. Moccasins, already having a long history of being utilized economically by the Niitsitapi, now played a major role in generating cash for Blackfeet families on the reservation, a resource that
Figure 4.9. Mrs. Wolf Plume and Good Victory Spotted Eagle making baskets for sale, ca. 1930s. Photo from Farr (1984) (courtesy of Mae Vallance).
was desperately needed to supplement failing government land programs. Most ‘craft’ income likely played a significant role in Native household economies (Cattelino 2004, 76; Racette 2009, 293), and the sheer volume of tourist moccasins that have ended up in museum collections speaks to the significant economic impact that Piegan women’s production had for their families and communities. Though Blackfeet women were both being pushed into and pulled away from moccasin-production by these numerous stakeholders, it is the producers themselves who made the ultimate decision about how, when, and what they were going to contribute. Blackfeet women strategically embraced certain aspects of the Euro-American assimilation agenda, while vehemently rejecting or refusing to comply with others parts, not unlike Native women in other areas of the country (Simonsen 2006). The dire conditions on the reservation necessitated innovative economic strategies, and Blackfeet women utilized the moccasin-making skills that they had been honing for centuries to contribute to household income production.

Relabeling Women’s Production as ‘Craftwork’

By end of the fur trade era, Niitsitapi women had long been producing moccasins for both domestic use and trade. However, by 1880, the perception of Indian objects in general and moccasins more specifically by white audiences began to shift more into a ‘souvenir phase’, with demand increasing exponentially not for utilitarian reasons, but for purely aesthetic ones. Niitsitapi women had been meeting the demands of fur trappers and traders for Native-made clothing for decades, whose motives for consumption tended to range more towards utilitarian needs rather than keeping clothing as representations of their travels. However, once military personnel and early researchers began making their way into Indian country, Niitsitapi women found themselves producing items like moccasins for a new type of audience, one whose members were looking for representations of both their travels and of the ‘exotic’ Indian peoples that they encountered. This shift in the type of market demand that the Niitsitapi were now experiencing has led the to this idea of moccasin-making and other forms of women’s work to be labeled as ‘craftwork.’

In general, the terms ‘craftwork’ and its output, ‘crafts’, have historically been associated with objects made and consumed by women (Berlo and Phillips 1998; Phillips 1998). Much of this has to do with the western European practice of separating the spheres of fine arts and applied arts, or art and craft. In this tradition, the term ‘art’ became associated with masculine
forms of creative expression meant to create and invoke emotion, whereas ‘craft’ was tied to the image of women producing utilitarian objects, often in a mass production format that lacked any sort of higher artistic or emotive purpose (Berry 2011, 32). European men who made art were artists, whereas women who made crafts were not. In Plains Indian societies, including that of the Niitsitapi, this art/craft dichotomy did not exist in the same way. The functional is art, and the reverse is also true. Moccasins can represent the highest artistic standards possible, while also serving as shoes for the feet.

These subjective differences imposed between the realms of art and craft also served to elevate those considered artists, whereas those considered craftspeople were often relegated to the background, which could even mean the tearing away of a person’s identity from their output. Berry (2011) describes the loss of identity for a maker or producer that came with the separation of art and craft:

An artist’s identity is an integral component of her or his work, for the work expresses the artist’s singular vision. A craftsperson’s name, however, is of marginal relevance because craft objects reflect a collective ethos (32).

Perhaps this is part of the reason why many Native women’s names have been lost throughout time in museum collections. To lose the name of an artist means losing access to the artistic vision and interpretation of the creator, while losing the name of a craftworker (or never recording) is seen as no great loss to the overall utilitarian purpose of the object, even if it is beautifully made. The labeling of objects as craftwork creates a separation between the identity of the maker and the function of the object, as if a utilitarian object cannot be imbued with creativity and artistic imagination.

Applying the term ‘craftwork’ to women’s work has falsely changed its perception (in the Western world at least) from a historically critical economic and income-generating form of labor to a leisurely artistic pursuit that is done in a woman’s free time and for non-economic reasons. In Victorian society, perceptions of women’s work within the home were undergoing a cultural shift, and this was soon mirrored in colonial attitudes towards Native labor. Domestic labor in the home was disassociated from economic motives and instead became linked to the preservation of cultural ideals such as “morality, authenticity, purity, and altruistic labor” (Simonsen 2006, 183) and was disassociated from economic motives. This meant that any work that now occurred within the domestic sphere, such as needlework, moccasin-making, and other
'crafts', was now regarded as a household activity rather than an economic one. Because of colonial attitudes perpetuated by government agents and other forces of colonialism, craftwork became tied with the domestic sphere and was thus separated from its economic importance. Field matron programs and reformist movements, such as those touted by the Women’s National Indian Association (WNIA), regarded Native women’s craftwork as ‘civilizing’ influences pushed by assimilation agendas. Other Western players, such as museums, saw craftwork as a return to the ‘primitive’, uncorrupted by market influences or relations of productions (Simonsen 2006, 198). Craftwork was not regarded as work, contributing to the historic invisibility of Native women’s labor that now plagues discussions of female-made objects in museum collections and elsewhere.

Buying Authenticity

Craftwork in Indian Country is unique from crafts in other parts of the country in that it relies distinctly on the consumption of a unique ethnic identity which is in turn tied to specific cultural perceptions of Native peoples. The concept of the ‘craft’ and the ‘souvenir’ in Indian Country is directly tied to the Western desire to consume objects perceived to be imbued with a uniquely pre-industrial, romantic Native American identity (Simonsen 2006, 184). The idea of authenticity is a problem that plagues the West in particular because it is based on the Western notion that value is tied up in an object’s uniqueness and inaccessibility to the masses. Appadurai (1986) describes how authenticity became associated with value: during the early years of industrialization and mass production, elite classes maintained their social superiority by assigning certain objects “prestige” value (45). Goods that have such value are not accessible to the common person, and their consumption by the elite helps maintain social and economic class superiority (Appadurai 1986, 45). Additionally, the ideology of authenticity is based on a Western nostalgia for objects that represent ‘authentic’ pre-conquest, primitive, unspoiled cultures that produce objects for traditional or spiritual use (Shiner 1994, 228).

Authenticity is often tied to an item’s material qualities in that consumers tend to favor artifacts with “preindustrial qualities” because objects that “incorporated Western materials, styles, and forms failed…to satisfy the longing among Western consumers” (Phillips and Steiner 1999, 10) for the ideal ‘primitive’, handmade object. In instances where objects have been transformed into economic commodities, and were mass-produced for a tourist or other external
market, they are deemed ‘inauthentic,’ possibly dismissed as ‘fake,’ and therefore lose their value (Phillips and Steiner 1999, 10; Shiner 1994, 226). This perceived loss of value is somewhat ironic considering that ‘inauthentic’ objects that were produced for the tourism market “have been shown to exhibit all the communicative and signifying qualities of ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’” that tourists are so concerned with for their objects (Phillips and Steiner 1999, 15). As will be discussed in more detail later, Western museums have played – and continue to play – a large role in defining authenticity in the Native arts and crafts industries, often perpetuating the false narrative of Native crafts as hearkening back to a romantic pre-industrial past, rather than recognizing that crafts were (and are) essential economic tools for the survival of Native communities.

A Brief History of Tourism in Niitsitapi Country, 1750-1929

Although the souvenir trade did not gain major steam in Blackfeet country until around 1880, overall it was not a new concept to Indian country. Some of the first Native women to begin producing for tourist markets include “the Huron-Wendat of Lorrette, the Mi’kmaq of the Maritime region, and the Cree of Hudson Bay” (Racette 2009, 290). Native women recognized early on that footwear and other types of Native clothing and containers, such as belts, coin purses, cigarette cases, and wooden and woven grass baskets, to name a few, would be popular among non-Native consumers. Perhaps one of the earliest accounts of Native women making moccasins for the tourist trade specifically comes from an early 1708 French visitor to what would eventually become the eastern United States, who reported that the Mi’kmaq “were making, especially for trade to the French, a kind of dress moccasin decorated with porcupine quills quite different from the more utilitarian sealskin ones they wore every day” (Phillips 1998, 22-23). Moccasins make the ideal craft for both Native women and non-Native tourists because of how well they fit into the ‘ideal souvenir’ category. Souvenirs are commonly thought to be objects that are small, easily portable, heavily embellished, and relatively cheap to buy, with their defining feature being their ability to serve as a reminder of a person, place, or event. Moccasins in particular fit all of the characteristics of the ideal souvenir, with the added advantage of being easily recognizable as representative of the ‘exotic’ Indigenous Other.

Beginning in the late 1840s, overland travel to the West increased in earnest, propelled by settlers looking for new beginnings on the Plains and encouraged by romantic images of what
life on prairie would look like. The discovery of gold in California also “precipitated a westward rush in 1849” (Kline 2001, 27). Influxes of travelers through Niitsitapi territory truly began in earnest, though, when gold was discovered in the Territory of Montana in the early 1860s and the roads to various mining camps led straight through Niitsitapi land (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology; Kline 2001, 29). Other factors that pulled people to Indian country between the 1750s and 1880s included scientific pursuits, United States colonial and military expansion efforts, and missionary work, to name a few. Though these early visitors were not in Indian country to pursue purely leisure activities, like later tourists would do, they were still heavy consumers of Native clothing, and particularly moccasins. Niitsitapi women had already long been producing moccasins for domestic and fur trade markets, and they expanded to include these new visitors as well.

In the later years of the nineteenth century, as travel became easier, first with steamboat travel and then with the extension of the continental railroad into western regions, and as the United States grew more organized and hungry for western expansion, more and more people continued to arrive on the Plains. Spurred on by Victorian ideals, tourists began arriving in droves, seeking a glimpse of the ‘romantic savage.’ Anthropologists and ethnologists seeking to document Native North American communities before they supposedly ‘vanished’ came too, along with photographers with their newly invented portable cameras and museum curators looking to collect objects. All throughout, decorated moccasins continued to serve as popular mementos that represented Indigenous life and culture and which could easily be purchased to commemorate travels through the Plains region. Stimulated by demand coming from all different areas, Niitsitapi women produced moccasins and other goods at extremely high volumes. This industry became even more important as the economic landscape of the Plains changed, eventually culminating in Plains groups’ forced confinement onto reservations and the lifechanging permanent loss of the bison and other food sources.

The years between 1880 and 1929 are characterized by a major boom of non-Native traffic through Blackfeet lands. Although early military personnel, researchers, artists, and missionaries were the first to consume Blackfeet moccasins as souvenirs, it was not until the 1890s that non-Native tourist traffic through Blackfeet lands became heavier, particularly during the summer. Many Blackfeet people found that they could use the increased amount of tourists coming through tribal lands to their economic advantage, and by 1910 an entire tourism-based
economy had emerged on the reservation. As LaPier (2017) notes, during this time “dozens of individual Blackfeet…began telling their stories, reciting their histories, singing their songs, posing for photographers, having their portraits painted, and making material objects for outsiders, all in exchange for cash – a rare commodity on the reservation” (100). Moccasins, already popular among non-Natives for decades, became even more important as popular tourist items among different groups of reservation visitors.

This section will explore the different segments of the Blackfeet moccasin tourist markets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tourist groups in this section include military personnel, missionaries, general tourists at places like Glacier National Park and local fairs, museums and researchers, and artists and photographers. Within these discussions I will also explore the stories of the moccasins in the project sample and investigate whether or not moccasin materials differ depending upon the group for which they are made.

Moccasins and the Military

In addition to researchers, artists, miners, fur traders, and settlers, military personnel also made up a large portion of the market for moccasins in Niitsitapi country and beyond. As expansion westward grew and hostilities on the Plains increased, the U.S. Army’s presence in the West steadily increased as well. Army officers were frequently assigned positions at military posts scattered throughout the western regions, and they were avid buyers and collectors of Native-made objects. As Hanson (1982) points out, “Of all the groups, Army officers serving in the West undoubtedly led the field in acquiring fancy pseudo-Indian costumes, as well as other Indian ‘curiosities’” (113). Though it is possible that military officers saw practical reasons for wearing moccasins, it is more likely that they were drawn into the view of moccasins as souvenirs, chronicles of their travels throughout the West and their contact with Plains tribes. This rapid and enthusiastic of Native culture by those in the military is startling when we also consider the large role that the military – namely the U.S. Army – played in murdering and violently repressing untold numbers of Plains Indian people. On the one hand, military personnel made up a considerable number of customers who were buying moccasins in large volumes, which in turn helped Native women provide food, goods, and money for their families; on the other hand, the military was also the enforcing arm of a government who was doing its best to try and eliminate Indigenous peoples from the face of the North American continent. To demand the
continual production of objects for consumption while simultaneously trying to eradicate the producers is an irony.

The United States Army began to make its presence known in U.S.-based Niitsitapi territory as early as the mid-1860s. In 1865, the American Fur Company sold Fort Benton – a thriving fur-trading site frequently utilized by Niitsitapi-speaking peoples – to the U.S. Army, although it would be almost four years until any soldiers actually occupied it (Robertson 1999, 26). In 1866, a temporary Army post called Camp Cooke was established at the mouth of the Judith River, and it is widely regarded as the first military post to be built in or near Niitsitapi territory (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). A year later, in 1867, Fort Shaw was built on the Sun River to protect miners and settlers in northwestern Montana, and to guard the road from Fort Benton to Helena, the territorial capital (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Moccasins were a popular souvenir item for the Army officers passing through Niitsitapi country. Hamilton (1900) describes visiting the Piegans in the mid-nineteenth century and buying a plethora of moccasins, “small and large”, he specified, for army officers’ wives and daughters (65). Army officers also supplied some of the first photographs of the Blackfeet, appearing in the early 1880s with the advent of the portable camera (Farr 1984, 188).

Stories from the Collections
The oldest pair of moccasins in the sample, E674 at the National Museum of Natural History (Figure 4.10), can be traced back to an Army officer named Captain George Gibbs, who donated the moccasins to the Smithsonian Institution in 1862. It is likely that Gibbs, formerly a member of the Mounted Rifle Regiment, collected these moccasins from a Niitsitapi band during his work with Isaac Stevens on the Pacific Railroad Survey of the 47th and 49th parallels from 1853 to 1855, a project that went straight through Niitsitapi country. The moccasins that Gibbs collected are sparsely decorated, which may be a result of deterioration over time, as there is evidence to suggest that the uppers contained quills at one time. Nonetheless, even at the time of buying these moccasins would not have been heavily decorated. These moccasins are unique from most of the other moccasins in the sample because these are made in the soft-sole style with a center seam ending at the toe, which is in line with the older style of moccasins that Niitsitapi elders have described as the precursor to the hard-sole moccasin. An analysis of the soles
Figure 4.10. Moccasins collected by Captain George Gibbs in the late 1850s or early 1860s (NMNH E674). Photo by author.
suggests that these moccasins have never been worn, which may be a clue that they were possibly made specifically for sale and/or that Gibbs intentionally did not wear them in order to keep them in good shape.

The second pair of moccasins in the collections that can be attributed to a military officer, and also in the collections of the NMNH, were collected by Brigadier General James Glennan while on military duty in the West between 1890 and 1897. Like many buyers throughout Indian country at this time, Glennan was a collector of numerous objects from several different Native communities across the Northern Plains. These moccasins, E385942, are also soft-soled, which is interesting considering that by the 1890s when these were collected, hard-soled moccasins had generally become the norm. An experienced hide tanner would probably not regard these moccasins as ‘well-tanned’, as evidenced by the numerous light-colored spots that demonstrate where the hide was tanned too thin. This may indicate that the tanner did not take as much care during the tanning process to ensure that the hide was evenly scraped, or it may mean that the hide was tanned by someone who was inexperienced with the process. There is no evidence to suggest that these moccasins have been worn, and like the previous pair discussed, these are sparsely decorated, with a simple keyhole design only on the upper. The design itself has been secured by museum conservators with cotton thread, making it impossible to tell whether or not the beadworker’s design was originally tightly applied. Another unique feature of these moccasins is that the cuff is made completely of hide, which is rare to see for moccasins from this time period. Due to lack of animals for traditional hides during the 1890s, moccasin cuffs are generally made up of two pieces, with cloth and/or stroud making up one or both parts rather than hide like these ones.

Missionaries, Moccasins, and Craftwork

Missionaries started to establish a presence in Niitsitapi territory beginning in the 1840s, when Father Point, a Catholic Jesuit priest, arrived in the area with the goal of converting as many Native people as possible. Father Point was the first missionary to live among the Blackfeet for an extended period of time (Harrod 1971, 28), who he said numbered almost ten thousand strong at the time, two-thirds or more being women (Palladino 1922, 188). Catholic missionaries continued to dominate in Niitsitapi territory until 1856, when Protestants finally reached the Fort Benton area (Harrod 1971, 24). The Protestant Methodist Church wielded a lot
of political power on the Blackfeet Reservation between 1870 and 1900, as it was responsible for the appointment of Blackfeet Indian agents. According to Lokensgard (2010), “this arrangement was a result of President Ulysses Grant’s ‘Peace Policy,’ through which Grant hoped to replace corrupt federal agents working with Indians throughout the USA with ostensibly more upstanding individuals affiliated with various churches [...] Jurisdiction over the Blackfeet in Montana [...] happened to fall to the Methodists” (118). The Jesuit order would continue to have a firm hold in Blackfeet country, however, eventually establishing a boarding school, Holy Family Mission, on the Two Medicine River in 1890 that would operate for over fifty years.

Like trappers and traders, missionaries in Indian Country also found moccasins to be a very advantageous and practical form of footwear. Father Dumoulin, a Catholic missionary stationed in Canada, wrote to his superiors in 1819 asking if “‘it [was] necessary to be very particular about saying Mass in moccasins out here where nothing else is worn?’” (Racette 2005, 28). The Sisters of Charity at the Catholic mission at Red River, as noted by the Earl of Southesk during his travels in 1859, also wore “‘moccasins instead of shoes, according to the universal custome [sic] of the country, to which even the bishops conformed’” (quoted in Racette 2005, 28). Missionaries in Niitsitapi country valued moccasins for more than just practical reasons, however. Missionaries were also active and avid collectors of Native footwear and clothing, and many of their writings, including journal entries and manuscripts, provide important information about Niitsitapi moccasin-making in the reservation era. In the moccasin sample in this project, there are several pairs of moccasins collected by missionaries during this era. One such pair at the C.M. Russell Museum (2005.3.10ab) were likely collected by Reverend Cannon Middleton of Cardston, Alberta, who worked among the Bloods and was honored with the Blood name 'Ninaistoko' which might mean Chief Mountain (Beazer 1962). This pair was made for an infant, possibly Reverend Middleton’s granddaughter Dorothy, according to the accession file notes. Reverend John Maclean, also a missionary to the Bloods in Canada, was an avid collector of Niitsitapi moccasins in the 1880s, not just for himself but also for museums, including the Smithsonian. Maclean even received detailed instructions from Smithsonian employees on how to collect and document objects for their collections (Brownstone 2008, 48).

Missionaries in Niitsitapi territory were not only collectors of finished moccasins, but in their correspondence and other writings they provide important insights into the process of moccasin-making and how the practice was changing due to poor economic conditions on the
reservation and reserves. One of Maclean’s journal entries from the time notes that he was buying moccasins and other items for the Smithsonian at what he calls “high prices”, though there are no records to indicate what these prices might be (journal entry as quoted in Brownstone 2008, 48). Maclean’s writings also provide insight into Niitsitapi moccasin-making on the Blood Reserve. In various journal entries, he describes hides used in moccasin-making (cattle), moccasins in courting rituals, how moccasins were used by different Plains tribes in identification, moccasin-making tools like sinew and three edged needles and how they were used, hide shaving and tanning, and how designs were applied to moccasin uppers (with paper) (Brownstone 2008). Cannon H. W. Gibbon Stocken, a missionary among the Blackfoot in Canada beginning in 1885, also wrote several letters noting how skilled young Blackfoot girls were at making moccasins and other items of clothing, especially miniature versions for dolls and other types of play (Stocken 1976, 7).

Along with being consumers themselves, missionaries and other religious leaders were important influences in encouraging Native women to produce crafts for sale to non-Native markets, primarily white tourists. For example, the Ursuline nuns in Montreal helped develop and commodify an Indian souvenir trade on the east coast, encouraging Mi’kmaq women to produce objects like moccasins for sale to tourists as early as 1708 (Racette 2009, 290-291). In the early twentieth century, many missionary groups in Montana focused their attentions on promoting craftwork among reservation residents for sale to non-Native consumers. At Rocky Boy’s Agency, for instance, the Lutheran Indian Mission was the impetus behind the start of the reservation’s craft association in the 1920s, with workers made up of members of the Cree and Chippewa nations (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). Although missionaries were not necessarily the primary driving force of craft production on the Blackfeet Reservation, they did play a role in pushing Native women to produce moccasins and other items for sale. For example, women’s church groups were encouraged to create and sell beadwork to Glacier Park tourists; one such group on the reservation in the 1920s was even led by the minister’s wife, although Blackfeet women took on the majority of the production (Harrod 1971, 124). Wilcox, a Methodist missionary to the Blackfeet in the 1920s and 1930s, also valued Blackfeet women’s artistic abilities and encouraged them to make crafts for sale as well (Harrod 1971, 138).
Stories from the Collections

One missionary to the Blackfeet is particularly worth mentioning here due to his association with various moccasins in the research sample. Reverend Eugene Dutcher and his wife Mary Bishop Dutcher came to the Blackfeet Reservation in 1893 as employees of the Woman’s National Indian Association (Harrod 1971, 110), establishing themselves at the new Epworth Piegan Mission located next to the agency’s Willow Creek boarding school. Though information about the Dutchers while they were at Blackfeet is slim, there are a few reports about their activities at the time. According to Harrod (1971), Agent George Steell “reported in 1893 that Dutcher was busily ‘engaged in completing a residence for himself and family. A chapel is to be erected soon’” (110). Captain Cooke, who took over the Blackfeet agent position temporarily in 1894, described the Dutchers as self-sacrificing people who “have earnestly striven to instill in the minds of the Indian the practical lessons of every day life [sic] and loyalty to the Government and reverence for the Almighty” (Haynes Family Papers). By 1899, the Dutchers had left the reservation for work elsewhere (Harrod 1971, 114).

The majority of the evidence of the Dutchers’ missionary attempts among the Blackfeet lie in the objects collected, photographs taken, and letters written by them during this time. Although the total number of objects collected is unknown, in 1991 the Dutchers’ granddaughter donated twenty-nine Blackfeet items, which the Dutchers had collected, to the National Museum of Natural History, including nine pairs of moccasins (five of which are not officially cataloged as of 2022). The acquisition of one pair of moccasins (E425907) is noted in a letter from Mary Dutcher to a friend, where she describes visiting an Indian woman at her home on the reservation, and how the woman gifted her with several items during her visit, including a beaded purse and pair of moccasins that Mary describes as “made by the Cree Indians” (Letter by Mary Dutcher, Accession Records, National Museum of Natural History). It is unknown if the woman that Mary Dutcher visited was Cree, or if she simply had a pair of Cree-style moccasins that she decided to gift to the missionary’s wife.

The other officially cataloged moccasins from the Dutcher collection range in style and amount of beadwork. One pair was made for a small child or infant (425908), while another adult pair (425905) was either hastily done or done by a beginning beadworker (or both). This analysis is based not only on the beading style, which is done purely in lazy stitch (not typical of
Figure 4.11. Mary Johnson (left) and Lazetta Dutcher Montanya, sister of Mary Dutcher, wearing moccasins shown in Figure 4.12.
Photo from Eugene Dutcher Collection, National Anthropological Archives.

Figure 4.12. Moccasins collected by the Dutchers in the 1890s, also pictured in Figure 4.11 (NMNH 425906). Photo by author.
many Niitsitapi moccasins in this sample – usually flat stitch), but also because the central bar in the designs is crooked and not precise and straight like the design usually demands. One pair in particular, 4259065, is more in line with what we would expect to see of a tourist moccasin (Figure 4.12). It is heavily beaded, and it is has crosses on it, a design which might have different meaning to the Niitsitapi maker, but probably appealed to the Dutchers because of this small detail. These moccasins are also unique in this sample in that they have an added fully beaded high cuff, which is not usually typical of Niitsitapi moccasins. Based on the attachment method for the added cuff, it is possible that it was a later addition to the moccasin, perhaps to make it more attractive to potential non-Native buyers. This pair of moccasins can be seen in a photo taken by the Dutchers, worn by Lazetta Montanya, Mary Dutcher's sister (Figure 4.11). It is interesting to note that Lazetta is dressed up in other pieces of Indian regalia, posed next to an Indian woman also wearing regalia. Looking at the moccasins of both of the subjects, one white and one Native, it is interesting to note that Lazetta’s moccasins are more in line with a ‘traditional’ looking pattern, one that might appeal to a non-Native tourist, while the Niitsitapi woman’s moccasins have a floral design on them, which was generally discouraged in moccasins made for sale.

Over two hundred more of the Dutchers’ photographs and letters were also donated and now reside in the National Anthropological Archives. The photos especially provide a missionary’s perspective of Blackfeet life at the time, and even show several instances where moccasins are still being worn during everyday activities. One photo of Jim White Calf and Makes Cold Weather, Indian Policemen on the Blackfeet Reservation (Figure 4.13), shows that they are both wearing floral-style moccasins in conjunction with other elements of Western dress. As Farr (1984) notes, Indian police officers were known for continuing to wear moccasins even when others had given them up in favor of Western-style shoes; this may have been because the people who joined the Indian police were usually ‘full-bloods’ who were known for holding on to traditional dress in the face of assimilationist policies. Other photos show a mixture of moccasins and shoes being worn, with shoes more often being worn by children, probably due to their forced attendance at boarding school. These types of photos provide valuable insight into the footwear transitions that were occurring on the reservation at the time, with some choosing moccasins and others Western-style shoes. In one photograph of Blackfeet performers in Glacier Park, you can see a mixture of both moccasins (of varying design styles) and shoes. In another
Figure 4.13. Jim White Calf and Makes Cold Weather, Indian Policemen on Blackfeet Reservation, ca. 1890s-1900. Photo from John Ewers Papers, National Anthropological Archives.
Figure 4.14. The Great Northern Railway Performers, Glacier Park Station, ca. 1920/1930. Photo from Eugene Dutcher Collection, National Anthropological Archives.
photograph of Two Guns White Calf and a young boy, perhaps his son, we can see a person of the older generation still wearing moccasins while the younger has chosen shoes.

Moccasins and the General Tourist

Tourists who were not part of any military, research, or artistic agenda were generally traveling for general tourist reasons, such as for pleasure and sight-seeing. This kind of traffic was essential for Piikuni moccasin-makers, as pleasure-seeking tourists in particular were in search of small, portable, relatively cheap objects that could serve as representations of both the their travels and the ‘exotic’ Indian. Although this section is in no way a comprehensive discussion of every possible venue where the general, everyday tourist would have bought moccasins, I will discuss two of the major attractions that drew tourists’ attention: Glacier National Park and fairs. The Blackfeet’s annual O’kan, or Sun Dance, typically held over the Fourth of July in order to fly under the radar of government celebration restrictions, was also a popular event where tourists acquired objects, but that event is outside the scope of this dissertation and it will be left up to future scholars to explore the Sun Dance as a sale venue.

One of the major attractions that brought non-Native tourists through Niitsitapi country was what is now known as Glacier National Park, a protected landscape that currently encompasses more than one million acres and includes glaciers, thousands of plant and animal species, and several soaring mountain ranges that are part of the Rocky Mountains. The Niitsitapi have deep ancestral and sacred mountain relationships with this landscape and with the Mistakis (Rocky Mountains, translates to Backbone of the World) that continue today (Craig 2008; Farr 1984; Zedeño 2017). Recognizing the economic potential that was embodied in the natural beauty of this landscape, the United States government pressured Ammskaapipiikuni leaders to ‘sell’ the mountains in exchange for desperately needed rations and cash. This agreement led to the eventual creation of Glacier National Park in 1910. The completion of the Great Northern Railroad’s (GNR) transcontinental line in 1893, which ran from St. Paul, Minnesota through the Blackfeet Reservation and ended in Seattle, Washington, was responsible for encouraging much of the tourist traffic through the lands that are now Glacier National Park. According to Kline (2001), in the early years of this line, trains stopped at the station outside of the reservation town of Browning, site of the Blackfeet Agency, where individual Blackfeet waited along the tracks for their chance to market their wares to disembarking passengers (204).
Figure 4.15. Two Guns White Calf, ca. 1923. Photo from Eugene Dutcher Collection, National Anthropological Archives.
Tourist traffic through the reservation increased exponentially, and the Western desire to consume Native culture drove Blackfeet long-term wage labor opportunities, including craft production, to new heights. Blackfeet men, women, and children and their labor figured prominently in the success of both the Great Northern Railroad and Glacier National Park, and their work in the tourism business helped provide Blackfeet families with much needed income as economic conditions on the reservation worsened. Referencing the seasonal jobs that many Blackfeet participated in at Glacier Park, Kline describes how Blackfeet workers

…helped entertain the tourists; they worked as models for artists and photographers and as actors for filmmakers; and they contributed elements of their traditional culture through artwork—both as decoration and for sale. They also provided education and cultural interpretation for inquisitive tourists who sought such interactions (218).

Performers often earned cash tips from tourists for their shows, and hotels paid cash bonuses for extra performances (see Figure 4.14). Blackfeet men were paid to wear their regalia and greet the incoming trains as at Glacier Park Station as ‘The Chief’, and escort visitors to the Glacier Park Hotel (Kline 2001, 219; LaPier 2017, 101). This position could be lucrative; a payroll list from Glacier Park Hotel shows that the man who played this role earned a salary of twenty-one dollars during the 1915 season (as quoted in Kline 2001, 220). In 1919 and 1920 records show that some Blackfeet women were hired to greet tourists as ‘Indian door girls’ at both Glacier Park Hotel and Many Glacier Hotel, earning up to ten dollars (Kline 2001, 220). Blackfeet entertainers could also make money by posing for photographs, both by themselves and with tourists (Figure 4.15). Many charged for autographs as well, signing postcards that could be purchased in hotel giftshops at Glacier Park (Figure 4.16). For instance, as Kline (2001) notes, “in the late 1920s, Two Guns White Calf, widely advertised as the model for Indian profile on the bison nickel, reportedly charged twenty-five cents to autograph his portraits” (221-222; see also Farr 1984, 191-192). Blackfeet men in particular were known for signing these postcards with a unique, personalized pictograph rather than an English name, as seen in Figure 4.16. The GNR also paid for Blackfeet performers to go on publicity tours, arranging for them to be ‘‘deadheaded’’ (taken along with paid freight as space allowed) to major eastern cities [where] arrangements were made with hotels for them to set up tipis on the rooftops, resulting in publicity for the hotels”, for local cities, Glacier Park, the railroad, and even the Blackfeet themselves (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 25; see also Kline 2001,
Figure 4.16. Postcard of Emma and Theodore Last Star (Weasel Feather). Elizabeth Lochrie Photograph Collection 79.37.5, Montana Historical Society.
228). Early tours included stops at the Portland Rose Festival and at land shows in Chicago, New York, Denver, and Minneapolis in 1912 and 1913” (Kline 2001, 228).

Traditional clothing, including moccasins, were an important aspect of Blackfeet performance at Glacier Park. Tourists were not interested in the everyday dress (or struggles) of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Blackfeet person. Instead, tourists wanted to see the romanticized, ‘authentic’, stylized version of the Plains Indian, one that hearkened back to a past untouched by Western colonization and industrialization. Though this ‘Indian image’, as it were, was obviously fictional, the Blackfeet community took advantage of the non-Native longing to consume Native culture for their own economic and cultural benefit. In a time when wearing traditional dress was heavily discouraged, if not outlawed outright, Blackfeet performers at Glacier National Park were able to use tourist interest – and dollars – to defy government mandates and capitalize on the income that came with making and performing in traditional clothing. Blackfeet women continued to use their hard-earned clothing-making skills to provide outfits for performers, such as in the case of Julia Howling (Berry Woman), who “worked for six days at two dollars per day as a ‘Seamstress,’ making the outfit for the Indian door girl” (Kline 2001, 220).

Early women’s crafting circles, often run by reservation church groups, were also formed in the 1920s to make moccasins and other beadwork for sale to tourists in Glacier Park (Harrod 1971, 124, 138). Frank C. Campbell, the Blackfeet Agent beginning in the 1920s, also pushed for Blackfeet women to make crafts for sale. In his Five Year Economic Development plan for the Blackfeet Reservation, Campbell wanted Blackfeet women to form beadwork and sewing clubs that would take advantage of the heavy tourist traffic going through their lands. At one point, he even proposed bringing in guest teachers who would teach Blackfeet women other types of popular tourist crafts, such as a Navajo woman to teach rugmaking (Campbell 1921, in Archives and Special Collections at the University of Montana). Unbeknownst to the ladies at the time, these groups would later set the stage for the formation of the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative in the 1930s, which stimulated major moccasin and other craft production on the reservation.

Although Blackfeet people’s work for the railroad and the national park systems may seem exploitative, it is important to remember that these opportunities did not come without benefit to the performers. While simultaneously providing economic opportunities, tourist-demanded performances gave Blackfeet individuals the opportunity to make and wear traditional
regalia (including moccasins), and to perform through traditional mediums such as dance, song, and storytelling in a time when the federal government was trying to wipe out all aspects of Native culture. Additionally, Blackfeet performers were able to control how much of their culture was shared and with whom while they worked. As Kline (2001) points out “they [Blackfeet people] kept some aspects private or altered them to fit the needs or interests of the tourists by substituting what might be referred to as neo-traditionalist activities” (218).

Another place where many tourists could and did buy moccasins and other Indian-made objects was fairs, both regional and local. Fairs were important venues where both Native and white women could display and sell their crafts, compete for monetary prizes, and even observe the work of their peers from other regions. The Chicago World Fair in 1893 specifically built a Woman’s Building to display the arts and crafts of women around the world, including Native women, specifically highlighting their technical expertise in their work (Simonsen 2006, 103; see also Beck 2016). Fairs were places where Native women could test the boundaries of their artistry, utilizing traditional sewing skills but in new mediums that were rewarded by Western judges (Osburn 1998, 80), such as lacemaking and weaving. Native communities also found interested white audiences at fairs who were willing to pay for cultural performances, which necessitated the participation of Native women as both the makers of performance regalia and as performers themselves.

By 1914, all Natives had been banned from attending any fairs or parades in the U.S. and Canada in the hope that it would deter them from participating in cultural activities, for pay or otherwise. However, it quickly became clear that these regulations were completely unenforceable, and by the early years of the 1920s, thousands of Native people were attending events like the Calgary Exhibition and Stampede and the Lethbridge Exhibition. Both of these events served as places where Blood, Blackfoot, and Piikuni women could exhibit and sell their wares (Dempsey 2007, 61), along with participating in events like the annual rodeo, horse races, and dances. The Calgary Stampede also offered prize money to women who wanted to enter their clothing into the ‘fancy costume’ category, a competition in which Niitsitapi and other Native women, including Métis, competed fiercely. New elements of Native dress, including gloves with heavily decorated cuffs and the fringed and beaded vest, also emerged from this time, becoming “essential elements of ‘cowboy’ or western dress” (Racette 2005, 36). Fairs were also held on individual reservations and reserves, though less frequently; at Blackfeet, the first Mid-
Winter Fair was held in 1922, although many of these stalls were dedicated to ‘civilizing’ enterprises such as crop production (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Fairs and other Indian markets, such as the Santa Fe Indian Market that started in 1922, would continue to be important venues for Native women to display and sell their crafts up into the twenty-first century. As Racette (2009) points out, it is important to remember that although performing “Indianness” for consumption by a white audience may seem exploitive and stereotypical from a twenty-first-century vantage point, the Banff Indian Days and Calgary Stampede provided women with a rare artistic and cultural outlet during a particularly oppressive time period in First Nations history (298).

Stories from the Collections

Due to lack of accession information to put the moccasins into context, it is impossible to know in what venues or under what circumstances most of the ‘tourist’ moccasins were bought under. However, due to the popularity of both GNP and fairs, it is not outside the realm of possibility to hypothesize that at least some of the moccasins from the collections were purchased in those types of settings.

Buying Moccasins Right Off of Someone’s Feet

In some cases, tourists were so enthralled by a Niitsitapi person’s moccasins that they literally bought them right off the person’s feet, as was the case for two pairs of moccasins in the sample. The first pair, 143401, collected by Dr. Walter Stevens in the mid-nineteenth century and later donated to NMAI in 1925, have an accession note that says, “Two Moons bought from his feet”, which implies that Stevens bought the moccasins directly from the man’s feet, although we do not know what the purchase conditions were like (Figure 4.17). These moccasins have clearly been worn, as evidenced by the footprints ingrained into the soles, and are also elaborately decorated, with quilled and beaded uppers along with heavily beaded forked tongues that have metal cones and yarn attached to the ends. The cuff, though only one piece, is edged in a blue canvas-like material. The fact that these moccasins are quilled demonstrates their potential spiritual significance to both the maker and the wearer, which was perhaps one of the draws for Stevens’ purchase.

The moccasin pair E378373 from NMNH is another well-documented case of a tourist, John G. Carter, acquiring moccasins directly from a person’s feet, although in this case the
accession notes state that they were actually given to him and not purchased (Figure 4.18). Carter was attending the annual O’kan on the Blackfeet Reservation on July 1, 1926, when Bird Rattler, a significant spiritual leader in his community, took off his moccasins and gave them to Carter. The reasons behind such a gift are unknown, although it may reflect the Blackfeet emphasis on generosity to visitors. Carter stated that the moccasins had only been worn once or twice when they were given to him, and he chose to wear the moccasins himself during other occasions. These moccasins have fully beaded uppers and beaded designs around the sides and at the heel. The beads are unique from any other beads in this project, as they are both tubular and cut/faceted, making them ‘shiny/sparkly’ to the eye. Additionally, there is red paint applied on the sides, potentially indicating that these moccasins have spiritual significance and/or that they were possessed by someone who owned a medicine bundle. They also have one-piece hide cuff (no cloth added), a forked tongue, and the design could possibly be characterized as a Mountain Design with a variation of the Blocky Cross on top of it.

Both pairs of these moccasins represent footwear that was not necessarily made for direct sale to someone outside of the community, making them insightful examples of moccasins likely made exclusively for community use. Neither of these pairs have any signs of hair attached to them, meaning that they are well tanned, and both are richly decorated with materials that indicate especially significant spiritual importance (i.e., quills and red paint). It is interesting to note that in both cases, the female artist behind the moccasins’ creation remains invisible; she is neither the salesperson nor even mentioned in passing by the non-Native buyer. This lack of representation for the maker demonstrates once again how women’s labor has been hidden within museum records and has remained unacknowledged in discussions about moccasins in general.

More Tourist Moccasins

Christian Schuster was an avid collector of material culture in the early twentieth century, collecting numerous Native North American Indian communities around the country, including the Blackfeet in Montana. Museum records indicate that he donated five pairs of moccasins along with several other pieces of regalia, as well as a drum and a saddle, to the NMAI in the 1950s. Although we do not know what Schuster’s specific motivations were for collecting moccasins among the Blackfeet, a letter he sent to the Haye Foundation in New York City
Figure 4.17. Quilled and beaded moccasins collected by Dr. Walter Stevens (NMAI 143401). Photo by author.

Figure 4.18. Moccasins bought from the feet of Bird Rattler by John G. Carter on July 1, 1926 (NMNH 378373). Photo by author.
(precursor to the National Museum of the American Indian) on October 23, 1953, may provide some insight. In this letter, Schuster states that “[Indian] handicraft of far-back-days was the aid to self-preservation…”, perhaps indicating Schuster’s recognition that craftwork played an important role in many Native families’ economic survival.

The moccasins that Schuster purchased, for unknown prices, represent a range of construction techniques and designs. Pair 221813 have a very stylized design that is unique in this sample, not fitting into any preconceived design categories (Figure 4.19). The cuff is part of the upper, and is edged in beads, as is the tongue. The inside of the moccasins’ cuffs has been covered in decorative cloth. The soles on these moccasins have hair remaining on them and do not look worn at all. It is easy to see how this pair would be attractive to the tourist’s eye – they are uniquely but still elaborately decorated, with embellishments to the cuff and tongue, and have brand new soles. It is likely that Schuster would not recognize remaining hair on the soles as a sign of rushed tanning. Pair 222348, one of the rare pair of children’s moccasins in this sample, are similar to the previous pair in that they have bead-embellished cuffs and tongues and for children’s footwear are richly decorated, with a central Keyhole design and a beaded border that travels around the sides and heels (Figure 4.20). These moccasins are also equipped with two hide loops on the inside of the cuffs, perhaps indicating that these moccasins are purely for decoration and not meant to be worn. The soles of these moccasins are not evenly scraped, with patches of lighter colored hide indicating places where the tanner scraped too hard.

Two more pairs of moccasins collected by Schuster – 222350 and 223642 – are distinctive in this sample for their painted parfleche soles, where in both cases the parfleche shows on the inside rather than the outside of the moccasin. In addition to the decorated soles, both moccasin pairs have likely been worn, judging by the wear patterns on their soles, and both have been constructed and sewn using a mixture of sinew and cotton thread. The first, 222350, has stroud and cloth-decorated cuff, a bead-decorated heel and heel fringe, along with a modified version of the Keyhole design, while the second pair, 223642, is made more simply, with no added cuff or cuff decoration and an uncategorizable geometric-style design on the upper only.

The fact that both of these moccasins have been worn may indicate that Schuster bought these from someone in the community who was utilizing them for their own personal use, and decided to sell them when Schuster expressed interest. It is also possible that Schuster decided to wear these himself, although it is unlikely considering that these moccasins are much smaller
Figure 4.19. Stylized moccasins bought by collector Christian Schuster (NMAI 221813). Photo by author.

Figure 4.20. Decorated children’s moccasins bought by collector Christian Schuster (NMAI 222348). Photo by author.
than what would typically fit an adult male, even in the early twentieth century. It is also possible that Schuster could have given these moccasins to other family members or friends to wear. The painted parfleche soles may have been a significant attractant for Schuster’s purchase, as they do lend the moccasins a unique air, especially for 223642, which has bright red parfleche soles that can clearly be seen from a small distance.

Moccasins, Researchers, and Academia

Early Researchers

Early researchers in Indian country were some of the first non-Natives beyond the fur trade to meet, write about, and collect moccasins from Native communities. These initial scientific forays into Indian country also provide us with some of the most descriptive information about Native clothing that exists from this era, along with important visual representations via drawings and paintings. These writings served as more stimulation for the Western imagination and likely were at least partially responsible for inspiring other researchers and tourists to come to the area. Although there are no physical examples left of moccasins from early researchers in Niitsitapi country, we do have valuable historical documents that describe Niitsitapi moccasin-making and moccasin characteristics.

The journals of the Prince Maximilian of Weid, a German writer who traveled along the American Plains in a quest for ethnographic and botanical knowledge, provide the first truly in-depth descriptions of Niitsitapi clothing, including moccasins. In 1833, the pair stopped for five weeks at Fort MacKenzie, an American Fur Company post on the Missouri River which was stationed deep in the heart of Niitsitapi country. Maximilian wrote of both the hides used in moccasin-making (see Chapter 3) and about Niitsitapi moccasin decoration. Through his detailed descriptions of moccasin materials, we can gain important insight into what women’s labor via moccasin production probably looked like. Maximillian describes the moccasins he saw as “beautifully embroidered with porcupine quills, the difference being that each shoe has a different primary color for its ornamentation: if one is yellow, the other is white…This is not done farther downstream along the Missouri, for there the colors and design of both shoes are the same” (Weid 1833, 425). He also notes that bird feathers were being used as quills in moccasin decoration (432). These statements show that local materials were still being harvested for moccasin décor, and that women were still going through the laborious process to collect, flatten,
and dye quills. There is no evidence in Maximillian’s journals to suggest that beads were used on moccasins at this point in time, although he does report that many Blackfoot clans seemed especially fond of sky-blue and white glass beads for decorating other clothing pieces, such as shirts (427). Thus, we know that though Niitsitapi bands had trade beads by this time in the 1830s, they were not yet being utilized in moccasin decoration like they would be later on in the nineteenth century. This is likely because these early beads were bigger than the now-common seed bead, making them less ideal for use in fine embroidery on items like moccasins.

Maximillian also remarks on Niitsitapi women’s labor, writing that “the women sew all these articles of clothing very skillfully” (427) and that on moccasins, women “prick out holes in them with an awl and then [push] the sinew through with [or to secure] the porcupine quill” (432). Although these statements do not capture the entirety of the work that goes into the moccasin-making process, his acknowledgements demonstrate some pieces of the process.

Prince Maximillian is also the first person to note that there may be differences between how the Niitsitapi decorated their moccasins as compared to other tribes in the area (425). This gives us insight into the fact that, although we know designs were being shared and spread throughout the Plains, there were still efforts being made to be culturally distinct in moccasin designs.

Maximillian set the stage for later researchers and artists to travel among the Niitsitapi, recording written and visual information. Anthropologists, ethnologists, and museum curators would make up a large portion of these future scientific endeavors, along with artists and later, photographers.

**Museums, Anthropologists, and Later Researchers**

Historically, museums have acted as important repositories for materials from a number of diverse scientific realms, including natural history, biology, zoology, and anthropology (Greene 2016). Many ethnographic collections were formed systematically during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by scholars who frantically collected material culture, fueled as they were by the false academic premise that indigenous peoples “were on the verge of extinction and it was the responsibility of anthropology to establish a record of these people before they were gone” (Haas 1996, 7). This practice has subsequently been dubbed “salvage anthropology” or “salvage ethnography” (Bell and Geismar 2009, 9; Fowler and Fowler 1996, 130), terms that were characterized by their emphasis on anthropologists’ rush to gather as many ethnographic items as they could from as many culturally unique peoples as possible before the
day came that these ‘primitive’ cultures were “subjected to acculturative forces” (Fowler and Fowler 1996, 130) and disappeared forever.

The collection of ethnographic materials and their subsequent deposit in museums between 1870 and 1940 was so widespread that it has led many scholars to dub this period as the “so-called Age of Museums” (Fowler and Fowler 1996, 129-130; see also Green 2016). During this time, museums not only accepted objects; they also actively gathered specimens and artifacts for their own repositories. Museum personnel were often sent out to gather ethnographic materials in various manners, including through overseas expeditions (Hasinoff and Bell 2015), brief collecting stops in Native North American communities (Munson 2011), and by perusing the collections of private citizens who had gathered artifacts based on their own personal tastes and whims (Errington 1998). As Fowler and Fowler (1996) so aptly state, during the Age of Museums, “objects were literally begged for, bartered for, bargained for, bought, and now and then stolen” (130) by museums and their agents.

On the Blackfeet Reservation, anthropologists, museum curators, and other non-Native academics seeking objects and knowledge came to the reservation in droves, seeking to record the Blackfeet way of life through material culture and other avenues before it supposedly disappeared. Some of the more notable academic visitors to the Blackfeet during this time include: George Bird Grinnell, R.N. Wilson, James Willard Shultz, Walter McClintock, Clark Wissler (in partnership with Blackfeet researchers David Duvall and James Eagle Child), Lieutenant James Bradley, William Hamilton, C. C. Uhlenbeck (in partnership with Blackfeet research assistant Joe Tatsey), Truman Michelson, and A. C. Haddon. Non-Native female researchers were rare on the Blackfeet reservation at this time, which is perhaps a reflection of Western society’s constrictions surrounding ‘appropriate’ jobs for women during this era. Additionally, no Blackfeet women are named or acknowledged as research assistants in the works of the researchers just mentioned, although it would be a mistake to assume that women’s knowledge and connections did not contribute to their publications. The results of their research, though conducted mostly by white college-educated males in a time of rampant racism and sexism, and colored by the biases expected therein, does still provide valuable information about museum and anthropological collecting on the reservation during this time.
In addition to being avid customers for moccasins and other objects, Blackfeet leaders recognized that visiting researchers could provide political and economic assistance in other areas. For one, several Blackfeet individuals offered research and interpretation services for hire and often ended up being critical components to a researcher’s success in the community. Clark Wissler credits his Blackfeet assistants, David Duvall and James Eagle Child, for his success in interviewing and observing Blackfeet community members in the early 1900s (Wissler 1910). Some individual Blackfeet would also ‘adopt’ these researchers in hopes that it would help build relationships between the Blackfeet and Western communities, which could then be used to wield political and economic influence. For example, Piegan spiritual leader Mad Wolf adopted Walter McClintock in 1898, hoping that he would become politically helpful for the tribe (Farr 2009, 179). Although McClintock did not end up being the political advocate that many hoped he would, in some instances, researchers were politically helpful. James Willard Schultz and George Bird Grinnell both advocated, at times, on behalf of Blackfeet people, calling out false information spread about the tribe in the press and even setting up relief funds for those most economically disadvantaged on the reservation (see Robert Bigart’s George Bird Grinnell Research Files and Sherburne Family Papers, Archives and Special Collections at the University of Montana). However, white researchers, despite their adoption, also had negative impacts on Blackfeet life, not the least of which concerned the alienation of published knowledge from the community. Many early anthropologists doing research on Indian reservations were known to ‘smash and grab’, meaning that they would enter a community, glean what knowledge they could from people, and then leave, never to be seen or heard from again. This resulted in many publications being accepted into academic circles that Native peoples had no awareness of, and certainly were not included in any proceeds that the publication may have garnered.

The motivations behind Native material culture sales to anthropologists and museums are complex, composed of a mixture of individual and community motives and stimulated by government assimilation agendas and the demands of non-Native tourist markets. Some sales of Niitsitapi objects were prompted by the punishments and imprisonment that came with the establishment of the Court of Indian Offenses in 1883, which made it illegal for Native people to practice traditional spirituality or take part in ceremonies (Lokensgard 2010, 122). As a result, many Native people, including some at Blackfeet, gave up or sold their medicine bundles and other associated spiritual items, which often included a pair of ceremonial moccasins, to museum
personnel and individual collectors, including to the Glenbow Museum in Calgary, Alberta, and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Dempsey (1990) and Scriver (1991) also note several instances of bundles being bought by collectors with moccasins inside them. The Scriver family of Browning, Montana, along with the owners of the Sherburne Mercantile, were well-known for buying Blackfeet bundles, moccasins, and other objects for their personal collections, and often ended up selling these items to museums (Scriver 1991). Other types of material culture sales were prompted by individual desires to make money, with anthropologists and museum curators simply representing another type of tourist market to the Blackfeet. In many cases, Blackfeet people sold items that they already had on hand; in other instances, people responded to the energetic academic demand for their material culture by actively producing cultural objects, including moccasins, for different interested parties.

Stories from the Collections

There are several pairs of moccasins in the project sample that bought by anthropologists and museum personnel from Niitsitapi peoples. The most well-documented of these cases reside at the Smithsonian Institution, both in the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) and the National Museum of Natural History (NMNH) in Washington, D.C. This is not necessarily surprising, as the Smithsonian has long been a bastion of knowledge and focused its attentions on collecting throughout Native North America. Smithsonian collectors had fairly large collecting budgets and could afford to spend thousands of dollars purchasing items from communities, which in turn helped Niitsitapi makers and sellers provide economically for themselves and their families. It is not clear from the accession file notes on who set the price, the maker or the buyer, but it is probable that the buying process was made up of a series of negotiations between both.

**William Wildschut.** The first collector, William Wildschut, originally from the Netherlands, was an ethnologist and field researcher for the Museum of the American Indian (the precursor to NMAI) from 1921 to 1928. During that time, Wildschut conducted several collecting expeditions among Native North American communities, including the Niitsitapi in both Montana and Canada. The majority of the Niitsitapi items bought by Wildschut likely come from the Northern Blackfoot community in Gleichen, Canada, although in some instances the community he bought from was unclear. Like many of his contemporaries, Wildschut bought all
types of Niitsitapi material culture, ranging from moccasins and other clothing to bundles, in the hopes of ‘preserving’ as much Niitsitapi culture as he could. NMAI currently has six Niitsitapi moccasins collected by Wildschut. Three of these pairs (NMAI 132365, 132366, 132367) were bought during a September 1924 trip to Northern Blackfoot, where he records the price, $3.50 for each pair and the sellers’ names, Heavy Shield, Bull Straight Head, and Lone Speech. Original purchase prices and seller names are rare details to have in a collection and is one strength of Wildschut’s collecting practices. The other three pairs of moccasins (NMAI 135346, 135347, 135348) were likely bought during another trip to Northern Blackfoot in November 1924. Although no individual prices are noted for these pairs, Wildschut did record that he spent over a thousand dollars on objects during this trip, and he notes the sellers’ names as Hind Wolf, Stabs Last, and Many Turning Robes. Although the sellers’ genders in this case are unknown, it seems likely that they were probably all men, which is interesting when we consider that the moccasin-makers were likely all women at this time.

Most of Wildschut’s Niitsitapi moccasins in this project are elaborately decorated and skillfully made, which means that they represent significant hidden time, materials, and potentially monetary costs. Two pairs are heavily beaded, which generally takes a skilled beadworker and at least several days each to make if one is working on them constantly and consistently with few breaks (Figure 4.22). Several pairs have red paint on the uppers, which likely indicates that they were used in a ceremonial setting and also means that the hidden physical and spiritual costs to the female maker were potentially even higher. All of the moccasins contained at least some sinew, both in the construction and design, which in turn demands yet more labor from the maker to obtain and learn to use. All six of these moccasin pairs appear to have been worn, likely by Niitsitapi community members. It was not uncommon for anthropologists and tourists to buy moccasins straight from a person’s feet, and this might have been the case here, as it is unlikely that Wildschut wore them all himself. There are a variety of different designs represented on these moccasins, including two with keyholes, a popular Niitsitapi and Plains Indian design. Interestingly, there are no floral designs represented in Wildschut’s sample, which may indicate that he was focusing on buying moccasins that appeared more ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’, at least according to Western standards. There is one pair of moccasins, 13266, that although aesthetically pleasing to the eye, does not appear to have been as skillfully made as the others, based on the fact that there is hair remaining on the sole.
Figure 4.21. Close photo of sole showing hair remains. Moccasin collected by William Wildschut from Bull Straight Head (NMAI 132366). Photo by author.

Figure 4.22. Heavily beaded moccasins collected by William Wildschut from Hind Wolf (NMAI 135347).
(Figure 4.21), many of the beading rows are not straight, and the beading is not tight or compact. This pair may have been made by a less skilled beadworker or may even represent someone who was rushing to produce a pair for sale to Wildschut.

Not all Niitsitapi community members were enthused about selling items to anthropologists though, especially when the academics in question demanded historical and ‘authentic’ items rather than contemporary objects made specifically for sale. In a 1924 letter to the museum, William Wildschut describes his struggles with convincing many Blood members to sell him what he calls ‘specimens’, and their especial resistance to selling him a beaver bundle:

The first reservation I visited in Canada was the Blood reserve. Unfortunately most of the Bloods were cutting hay in the most out of way places, which were in many cases almost impossible to reach, but what made it more awkward of course was the fact that they were away from their permanent camps and carried few if any specimens with them. In the prices that were asked for some of the pieces shown to me, they also showed me plainly that they did not care to part with much, if any of their specimens. I travelled three days over the reservation and did not obtain a single specimen[…](Letter from Wildschut to NMAI in New York, September 24, 1924, Accession Records, National Museum of the American Indian).

It should also be clearly acknowledged that anthropologists and museum personnel throughout the United States and elsewhere did not always conduct themselves respectfully in Native communities during their collecting expeditions. The most notorious in our profession engaged in unethical and morally reprehensible behavior to get their hands on Native American objects; this includes, but is not limited to, robbing graves, stealing from Native individuals, and offering substantial sums of money to buy objects from people who did not have the spiritual or community authority to sell them. This behavior has contributed to a justified historical mistrust between many Native communities and museums and the perception that all Native American objects in museums were collected unethically. Although I will not say that unethical collecting was necessarily rare, the evidence from this dissertation suggests that the Niitsitapi moccasins in the sample museums were not a result of grave robbing, stealing, or other inexcusable actions. Additionally, the anthropologists and museums that I worked with during this project are on the forefront of attempting to redress the historical wrongdoings of our profession, not only by returning physical objects to communities, but also by sponsoring programs and grants that
support Native communities in reconnecting with their material heritage. Other museums throughout the country should take note and follow suit.

Donald Cazow. Donald Cadzow worked for the Museum of the American Indian for almost twelve years between 1916 and 1928, with a brief hiatus to join the United States Navy during World War I. During his tenure with the museum, Cadzow made many collecting trips throughout North America and the world and is perhaps best known for his expedition to Baffin Island in the Arctic. He also made brief stops among the Northern Blackfeet (Peigan) in Canada between May and September 1926, where he spent a grand total of $1,323.05 on a variety of objects, and $29.50 on moccasins specifically. Although he did not name makers like Wildschut did, Cadzow did note that he purchased moccasins ranging in price from $3.50 to $5.00, depending on his perception of the moccasin’s ‘authenticity’ and role within the community. From his notes, it appears that Cadzow was specifically looking for items that were what he calls “true North Peigan style”, which relates back to the overall Western demand for Native items to represent a supposedly ‘authentic’ Indian identity. Cadzow also sought out moccasins that were used in ceremonies. Quilled moccasins cost him more, which was likely based on a complex combination of Cadzow’s willingness to pay more for what he calls “old-style moccasins”, and Blackfeet women’s demands for higher prices for quilled items, which were difficult to make and thus required significant labor costs. Making quilled items also came with spiritual and even physical risks for the artist, which may have also played a part in their higher prices. In one case Cadzow even bought an entire quilled outfit, including moccasins ($5.00), a shirt ($40.00), leggings ($12.00), and a war bonnet ($18.00).

Similarly to Wildschut, the moccasins that Cadzow purchased are elaborately decorated, and the majority appear to have been worn as well. Two pairs are fully quilled, one pair is a combination of quills and beads, and five are beaded. As mentioned above, moccasins that have quillwork represent an intense amount of labor on the part of the maker, perhaps even more so than a fully beaded pair, because quillwork requires not only physical labor, but also demands a lot spiritually and culturally from an artist. There are a variety of designs represented, with three pairs having been done in the Blackfeet floral style. This may indicate that Cadzow recognized the traditional role of floral-style moccasins in the Niitsitapi community, or it may show that he simply was not as concerned with choosing supposedly ‘pure Indian’ designs. One pair, 149432,
is worth mentioning for the significant amount of black animal hair (likely cattle) remaining on the soles. Hair on soles is an internal marker in the Niitsitapi community of a poor tanning and scraping job. An outsider like Cadzow, however, would not necessarily know that hair remaining on a moccasin’s soles is an indication that the moccasin was poorly tanned. It is unknown whether the remaining hair was the deliberate oversight of a maker who did not expect her customer to notice or care, or whether it was a mistake made by a person who was in a rush to produce for a demanding buyer.

**John C. Ewers.** John Ewers is a scholar who lived on the Blackfeet Reservation in the 1930s and 1940s and is well-known for his publications throughout the twentieth on the Blackfeet, ranging in content from horses to arts and crafts, although some of these publications have been challenged by the Blackfeet community in recent years. Ewers was hired as an ethnologist by the National Museum of Natural History in the mid-twentieth century and worked there up until his death in 1997. Ewers purchased a pair of moccasins included in this project in 1992 from the Northern Plains Indian Craft Shop in Browning, Montana, the economic capital of the Blackfeet Reservation. At a purchase price of $300, Ewers paid much more for his moccasins than his Smithsonian colleagues did seventy years earlier. Obviously, part of the price difference reflects inflation, but the majority of the increase is likely based on the role that the contemporary Indian art market played in encouraging Native artists to sell their items at prices that were fair and reflected the actual amount of time and money that went into the making. Ewers also noted the maker as Harrison Red Crow, a member of the Blood tribe. This is notable not only because the maker’s name is actually recorded, but also because it serves as evidence of changing gender traditions in moccasin-making, where men are also moccasin-makers. This shift in the gender of makers may be due to the important economic role that moccasin-making played in the twentieth century, with all genders needing to capitalize on its significant economic contributions to household income. Gender shifts in moccasin-making is also likely related to the extreme cultural losses that many Native communities have suffered, resulting in a desperate need for people to learn traditional artforms before the knowledge is lost forever.
Artists, Photographers, and Stories from the Collections

Early Nineteenth Century Artists

Early artists in Niitsitapi country some of the first non-Natives outside of the fur trade industry to write about and visually portray the community’s footwear. The earliest known non-Native portraits of Blood and Piegan peoples were painted by artist George Catlin during the summer of 1832 while he was staying at Fort Union. Built at the confluence of the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers in 1828, Fort Union served as one of the most important fur trade posts on the Northern Plains, and although the fort was located a distance from Niitsitapi territory, a party of Blood and Piegan decided to make the journey in the summer of 1832, nudged along by enterprising American Fur Company traders who were hoping to establish a foothold in the Niitsitapi trade. Catlin did not collect any moccasins that can be attributed to the Niitsitapi, and his paintings do not focus on any clear moccasin details that could give clues as to the design or materials. However, his work and writings do provide insight into an outsider’s perceptions of Niitsitapi clothing at the time. Catlin wrote of the Blood and Piegans he encountered and painted: “The several tribes of Indians inhabiting the regions of the Upper Missouri, and of whom I spoke in my last Letter, are undoubtedly the finest looking, best equipped, and most beautifully costumed of any on the Continent” (Jardine 2007, 139). Though Catlin did not note anything about Niitsitapi women or their labor, he did produce one image of a Niitsitapi woman (band unknown), who he calls Eeh-nís-kim (The Crystal Stone), the wife of a Piegan chief.

The work of Karl Bodmer provides a bit more insight into early nineteenth century Niitsitapi moccasin designs and materials. Bodmer was the artistic traveling companion of Prince Maximillian of Weid, who spent several months with the Niitsitapi at Fort MacKenzie (in present day Montana) in the early 1830s. Bodmer is widely credited as being the first non-Native artist to travel to Niitsitapi country, and his early sketches, and later watercolors, give important visual clues into both Niitsitapi life and moccasins. His watercolor “Encampment of Piekann [Piegan] Indians, Near Fort MacKenzie on the Musselshell River” demonstrates the sheer number of Niitsitapi peoples who gathered to trade at forts like Fort MacKenzie, with at least over a hundred lodges represented, if not more. Bodmer also may have unintentionally painted the first visual representation of Niitsitapi women’s labor. In the lower right-hand corner of this same painting, two Native women are shown carrying substantial packs on their backs; though
Figure 4.23. Young Piegan woman wearing Keyhole-style moccasins. Watercolor Sketch by Karl Bodmer (1833). Photo courtesy of Joslyn Art Museum.
their packs’ contents are unknown, the fact that the women are laboring to carry them is quite obvious. Other Bodmer sketches made during his adventures among the Niitsitapi give insight into historical moccasin designs. In his 1833 sketch of a young Piegan woman (Figure 4.23), he portrays moccasins with the keyhole design, executed in blue, white, and possibly yellow quillwork. Bodmer also shows how the quillwork design continues up on the cuff of the woman’s moccasin, although the designs are not clear in and of themselves. In a sketch of a Blackfeet warrior on horseback, Bodmer sketches the design of the main figure’s moccasin, which appears to be a stripe design that extends up the foot. Although many of Bodmer’s paintings from this time now hang in museums across the world, it is unknown whether or not he actually collected any physical items. Considering the difficulties that Bodmer would have faced in preserving moccasin samples during his expedition’s rough and often dangerous traveling conditions, it is unlikely that any moccasins would have survived to tell the tales of his travels today, although certainly not impossible.

Later Nineteenth Century Artists

By the mid-to-late nineteenth century artists, and eventually photographers, had heavily romanticized Native life on Plains. Many images from this era portrayed Native peoples not as living people struggling to adapt to colonial ideals and economics and confined within militarized reservation boundaries, but rather as noble ‘savages’ meant to embody the ideal of a romantic, non-industrialized people of the past. Paintings and later, photographs, from this era contributed to the creation of this idea surrounding what constitutes an ‘authentic’ Indian identity, and these ideas would later serve as the foundation for the Blackfeet craft and tourism industry. Images like these also promoted colonial ideas of manifest destiny and inspired westward movement to lands that were supposedly ‘unspoiled’ by man. Homesteaders, tourists, and other non-Native travelers, inspired by these idealized portrayals of life in the West, moved to the Plains region in droves, hoping to find the area overflowing with ‘authentic’ Indians who embodied the romantic view of the West.

Although early artists – namely Karl Bodmer, George Catlin, and Paul Kane – had produced drawn and painted images of the Blackfeet as early as 1830, the tourism boom in the late nineteenth century brought more artists, and now photographers, in droves. Some artists who
traveled through Piikuni lands during this time mainly include white men like Frederick Remington, Charles Russell, Charles Stephens, E.A. Burbank, Emil Lenders, and Joseph Henry Sharp, to name a few. Most of these artists portrayed idealistic views of Blackfeet life during this time, and most did not acknowledge the role that colonization had played in changing everyday Piikuni life. Blackfeet subjects are usually painted wearing traditional hide clothing, including moccasins, rather than the mixture of Western and Native clothing that was typical of this time. Backgrounds often consist of views of tipis and traditional tasks like hide scraping, rather than showing the log cabins and ranching culture that was being pushed by government agents at this time. Paintings like these are also not usually reliable sources of information about traditional Native clothing, as Western artists were well-known for mixing and matching multiple tribal styles into one artwork, more concerned with aesthetics than accuracy. However, despite their artwork’s often unreliable descriptions of Niitsitapi life, late nineteenth century artists were an important subset of the tourist market on the Blackfeet reservation and at times their work can provide accurate insight into footwear.

Many artists were also collectors, sometimes avidly, of Indian footwear, clothing, and other cultural objects, and were frequent customers of Blackfeet producers. Some, like Charles Russell, used these objects as both models for their paintings and to wear themselves. Charles ‘Charlie’ Marion Russell was a late nineteenth century American painter and sculptor who is most well-known for his depictions of the American Old West, with his most popular subjects being cowboys, landscapes, and Native Americans. Two of the moccasins in this sample reside in the C. M. Russell Museum in Great Falls, Montana, and can be traced to Charlie Russell himself. Russell was known for purchasing Native American objects, particularly clothing, to use as models in his work, and he also was known for wearing the clothing himself. One pair of Russell’s moccasins, S991.19.318ab (Figure 4.24), is fully beaded and stitched expertly using flat stitching, a style of beading that takes a lot of time and precision to apply. These moccasins have been worn, perhaps by Russell or perhaps by the person he bought them from. The second pair of moccasins owned by Russell, S991.19.322ab (Figure 4.25), is intriguing because of the way that they are made. Construction-wise, these moccasins are made in the hard sole style but instead of rawhide or parfleche, the soles are soft fabric, perhaps indicating that the maker never intended for these to be seriously worn, although they have been. The odd sole style might also be attributed to a lack of appropriate material from which to make a hard sole, a detail that might
Figure 4.24. Moccasins collected by Charles Russell (CMR S991.19.318). Photo by author.

Figure 4.25. View of soft soles sewn on to moccasins in hard sole style. Moccasins collected or made by artist Charles Russell (CMR S991.19.322). Photo by author.
also explain why cotton thread has been used in conjunction with sinew in the moccasins’ construction, which is not typical of a moccasin that is intended for a wearer.

Other artists, like Charles Stephens, focused intensely on collecting for academic and personal reasons, rather than for artistic model purposes. When Stephens came to the Blackfeet Reservation in 1891, he, like many before him, focused his attention on collecting footwear, along with stories and cultural information. What makes Stephens’ moccasin collecting unique is that he seemed to be aware of the differences in styles and designs that were characteristic of Blackfeet moccasins at the time, and he both found and drew examples of many of them (Jardine 2007, 143). Sketches from his journal, seen in Figure 4.26, note the use of specific types of moccasin designs, construction features like laces and cuff types, and even the names of the Blackfeet people who were wearing the moccasins at the time. Stephens also attributes one of his sketched Blackfeet moccasin designs to the Flathead Indians, although how he came about this information is unclear. What items Stephens was unable to collect during his trip to Blackfeet, he bought later from local dealers. One dealer in particular, Fred Peeso of Peeso and Zeh, General Merchandise and Indian Traders, located in Camas, Montana, supplied Stephens with many Blackfeet objects in the years after his visit in 1891 (Jardine 2007, 57). Many of these objects, including some of the moccasins, now reside at the Penn Museum in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**Early Twentieth Century Artists**

Much of the artwork depicting Niitsitapi people in the early twentieth century mirror the romantic intentions of earlier artists. Many artistic depictions of Niitsitapi people were used in promotional materials, such as the Blackfeet portraits painted by Winold Reiss that were used in the 1927 Great Northern Railroad calendar to try and attract visitors to Glacier National Park. Along with Winold Reiss, Montana-based painter Elizabeth Lochrie is known for her work with and portraits of Blackfeet people in the 1930s. Lochrie was even supposedly adopted into the Blackfeet tribe in 1932 and named ‘Netchitaki,’ or Woman Alone in Her Way. During her work on the reservation, Lochrie collected Blackfeet objects, including two pairs of moccasins, along with photographs and postcards; these items were eventually donated to the Montana Historical Society, where they still reside today. The Lochrie moccasins may be direct outputs of early WPA crafting programs on the reservation, which encouraged women to make crafts like moccasins for sale to tourists. The first pair of moccasins, X1979.14.54, have been worn and is
Figure 4.26. Moccasin Sketch Card, from the fieldnotes of Charles Stephens, 1891. Photo courtesy of the Stephens Papers, Penn Museum Archives.
clearly made of hand-tanned buckskin, unlike the second pair, X1979.14.59, where the leather is far more processed and clearly commercial in nature (as opposed to braintanned). This second pair also has brown hair patches remaining on the left sole. Both pairs are very ‘Indian’ in their design, although these designs are not part of any named design categories known to the author.

Although not an artist himself, Adolf Spohr’s collection of ethnographic objects during the twentieth century, including two pairs of Niitsitapi moccasins, were the inspiration behind the prolific artwork of his father, Carl W. Spohr Senior. Many of the Spohr objects and paintings is now housed in the Buffalo Bill Center of the West in Cody, Wyoming, which was one of the museums included in this study. The Niitsitapi moccasins that Adolf Spohr collected are, like most of the moccasins collected by people during this era, very elaborate and eye-catching. One pair, NA.202.21, is unique in that it is made in the soft-sole style, which is regarded by many as the older style of moccasin among the Niitsitapi. This pair is also heavily beaded with a complex high cuff that has decorative scalloped edges, all characteristics of a moccasin that would appeal to a non-Native collector’s eye. These moccasins have been worn, although by whom it is hard to say. The second pair, NA.202.153, is also heavily beaded and uses a vibrant pink background to draw attention the central design. Most notably about this second pair of moccasins is that they have soles with hair left on them, which, as discussed previously, is a sign of poor or rushed tanning. Both pairs have traditional Niitsitapi designs (non-floral) – a keyhole and a stacked mountain design, respectively. This is again not surprising considering the Western desire to consume an ‘authentic’ Native identity.

Photographers

With the invention of George Eastman’s portable Kodak camera in 1888 came a growing number of professional and amateur photographers flocking to Indian country, desperate to capture a way of life that was thought to be rapidly disappearing. With them came tourists who desired to purchase images along with objects, and Blackfeet workers and performers obliged, especially at Glacier Park. As Raibmon (2006) point out, “photographs, stereographs, and postcards were popular souvenirs” (38) for late nineteenth and early twentieth century tourists, and photographers paid Blackfeet subjects to pose in a variety of settings. The first few photographs of the Blackfeet “began to appear in the early 1880s, usually the work of army officers, government officials, and a few local white men associated with the agency” (Farr
Early amateur photographers on the reservation included people like A.B. Coe, a schoolteacher and later the Superintendent of the Agency school, and Charles S. Francis, a tourist and sportsman. More professional photographers of the Blackfeet at this time included anthropologist George Bird Grinnell, researcher Walter McClintock, and photographer Edward Curtis (Farr 1984, 188-189). Like their artist contemporaries, many of these photographs portray Blackfeet life as seen through a romanticized Western lens, ignoring the daily struggles of reservation life in favor of showcasing Indians as reminders of a pre-industrial past (see Farr 1984 and Grafe 2009 for more information on early photographers and their impacts in Indian country).

Thomas Magee, N.F. Forsyth (of Butte, Montana), and J.H. Sherburne (licensed trader in Browning, Montana) also photographed Blackfeet people but were more focused on studio shots. As Farr (1984) points out, these men in particular “tried to profit by selling popular ‘Indian views’ […] Stereopticon slides, studio cards, post cards, tinted wall photographs, all emphasized a noble, savage, exotic Indian” (189). As mentioned previously, the Great Northern Railroad also hired their own photographers, such as T.J. Hileman of Kalispell, Montana, to capture romantic images of Blackfeet people, dressed in traditional clothing, against the beautiful mountain backdrops of Glacier National Park (Farr 1984, 191). These images were then used in promotional materials for the park, along with being sold as postcards in hotel giftshops. Blackfeet workers in the park, at fairs, and elsewhere on the reservation often profited from having their photo taken or by signing autographs on postcards. Farr (1984) also notes that after 1910, the largest group of photographers capturing snapshots of the Blackfeet were actually non-Native locals and tourists “visiting the reservation and nearby Glacier Park [who] carried their cameras to Sun Dance celebrations in Browning, or they turned them on reservation personalities and agency families” (190).

Photos from this time period, romanticized as they are, can provide valuable insight into moccasin designs, construction, and the transition to new types of footwear over time. For instance, an analysis of two hundred and forty-six historic photos, with approximately three hundred and ten people in them, from various sources, shows that floral-style moccasin designs were by far the most popular among community wearers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including amongst men and women. This data also showed that certain moccasin decoration styles were used more often than others, with designs on the upper without
a border among the most popular forms of decoration. Although cuffs and soles can be hard to see in historic photographs due to poor image quality, my analysis demonstrated that high cuffs were seen more on women’s moccasins than on men’s as well as that in cases where soft-soled moccasins were obviously worn, they were less likely to be decorated than hard soled moccasins. Data from Chapter Three and Chapter Five give more insight into the ways in which photographs can be used to examine moccasin designs, constructions, and changes over time.

The Great Depression and the Craft Boom Period, 1930 – 1940

When the stock market crashed on what is now known as Black Thursday, or October 29, 1929, officially marking the beginning of the Great Depression for America, the landscape of craftwork and wage labor would change forever in Blackfeet country. The 1930s mark what is perhaps the most significant change in Blackfeet craft production in this century, as it is during these years that women are specifically targeted by the U.S. government for their craft skills and acknowledged for their economic contributions to the household. New Deal policies aimed at reducing unemployment, especially the creation of the Work Progress Administration (later the Work Projects Administration), encouraged women around the United States to participate in wage-earning industries, especially household industries like craftwork. The Great Depression and its subsequent economic effects within the entire country were especially felt on Indian reservations, which were already struggling with economic development and steady employment for their residents. New Deal proponents emphasized once again the economic relief that handcrafted goods could potentially provide for Native American communities, and they were not necessarily off-base; the Federal Emergency Relief Administration “cited Indian handicrafts as the largest craft industry in the nation in 1934” (Becker 1998, 120).

Craftwork as an avenue for household income production was not a new idea in Blackfeet country, as these past sections have shown. The major difference between Blackfeet moccasin production for past markets and production during the New Deal era was that women’s work and acknowledgement of their critical economic contributions to their households became officialized through government policy and several on-reservation organizations, such as the Blackfeet Craft Cooperative. Rather than working as individuals, craftworkers were treated as a collective and had to adhere to the construction and design standards set by (often non-Native) organizers.
This section will discuss what Blackfeet craftwork and moccasin-making looked like during the New Deal era, emphasizing the significant impacts that moccasin-making had on women’s abilities to provide economically for their families during this difficult period. I will show how societal attitudes during this period influenced a re-definition of craftwork in Indian country, and how this has subsequently affected public perceptions of moccasin-making. The end of this section will provide a short discussion of moccasin-making after the 1930s.

The Great Depression, the New Deal, and Women’s Labor

The 1930s saw the United States in the grip of the Great Depression. People across the country were out of work, out of money, and desperate for employment. Indian reservations, already heavily impoverished due to harsh assimilation policies in the past, were hit especially hard by the lack of wage work. When Franklin D. Roosevelt was sworn in as President on March 4, 1933, he spent his first one hundred days in office initiating what he called the New Deal, which were a set of government relief policies and programs created throughout the 1930s designed to provide employment opportunities across the country. Major relief programs enacted during this time and specifically targeting Indian men included the Civil Works Administration, which only lasted for a year due to rising cost, and the Civilian Conservation Corps-Indian Division (CCC-ID). As Child (2012) notes, these initiatives “mostly required heavy physical labor such as building bridges, buildings, roads, and dams—jobs reserved exclusively for men” (O’Neill 2012, 194; see also McFee 1972, 55). The Works Progress Administration (WPA – later renamed the Work Projects Administration in 1939) and the Public Works Administration (PWA) were later programs, in the second wave of New Deal-era policies, that also provided work relief for Indian reservations. O’Neill (2012) points out that some of these projects even “employed entire families in various types of conservation work, including rodent control, livestock management and national park maintenance” (199). However, most of the jobs that these programs created were meant for Native men; as O’Neill (2012) reports, “out of approximately 156 WPA projects on Indian Reservations, 11—7 percent—were designed to employ women” (199).

Certain New Deal programs did, however, target women’s labor specifically by encouraging craft production as a form of income, particularly those women living in areas with strong craftwork traditions, such as Southern Appalachia and Indian reservations. Craftwork
played a role in rural work relief and rehabilitation projects sponsored by at least six federal programs, including the two largest craft-pushing programs on the Blackfeet Reservation, which were the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and its Extension Service, and the WPA, which by itself set up over three thousand craft projects in rural America (Boris 1988, 190). Other programs included the “Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Resettlement Administration, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), presumably because [crafts] offered a means of economic self-sufficiency and promoted technical skills that might prove useful in industrial employment” (Becker 1998, 96).

The New Deal and the Re-Definition of Craftwork

Conversely, while New Deal programs were encouraging craft production as a form of income, changes in the social philosophies surrounding craftwork and women in America were also taking place. These philosophies, though they acknowledged that crafts were a source of supplementary income for women and their families, postulated that craftwork should be primarily seen as a hearkening back to America’s folk traditions, a purely artistic activity done by women in their homes during their free time. This was outgrowth of the beliefs put forth by the American Arts and Crafts Movement a few decades earlier, which idealized the “home filled with useful and beautiful things, simple and natural in design and form [and where…] crafts offered beauty for the middle-class home and eschewed the ‘standardization of the Machine Age’” (Becker 1998, 80).

According to Washell (2016), the Great Depression era “brought a renewed interest in American folkways and traditional crafts as a means to rebuild a national collective identity and provide an alternative to a lifestyle based on material wealth” (34). Craftwork, or handicraft, as it was also labeled, became associated with ‘virtue’ and ‘the natural’; economics, in the minds of consumers, was not supposed to play a role in production for the maker. Instead, craftworkers, particularly women, were seen as folk artists satisfying their creative urges while also contributing to American folkways and the rebuilding of a national identity. As Boris (1988) points out, “arts and crafts became the material equivalent to folk music and folklore”, and craftwork fit in nicely with the other artistic projects being encouraged during this time, such as the work done by the “photographers of the Farm Security Administration, the muralists of the
Works Progress Administration, and the writers of the ‘popular front’” (190). Thus, a social tug-of-war was being waged; on the one hand was craftwork as a form of labor, participated in for a cash income, and on the other hand was craftwork as a form of artistic expression meant to fulfill social and emotional needs (Becker 1998, 170).

As Boris (1988) notes, labeling women’s domestic craftwork as ‘art’ or even ‘folk art’ instead of as labor for income, and labeling women’s production motivations as nationalist and community-centered rather than economic, obscures the actual reality of craftwork performed inside the home (138). Moccasin-making and other types of craftwork can be tiring, physically and mentally. It is hard on a person’s back and neck from bending over to bead; hard on fingers and hands that are constantly moving with the push and pull of the needle and thread; and is especially hard on the eyes, which are constantly strained by observing and creating intricate, tiny details. Mentally, moccasin-makers have to grapple with creative decisions and possibly remembering and complying with cultural protocols (depending on the medium used), not to mention the mental work it takes to juggle everyday life, such as children, grandchildren, chores, and other jobs, while simultaneously creating. In the words of an Appalachian bedspread tufter, craftwork is “the hardest work I ever did do’” (as quoted in Becker 1998, 149). Additionally, although most Native women hoped to earn money from their crafts, their earnings were often labeled as ‘pin money’, which refused to take their economic needs seriously and also refused to consider crafts as the important economic resources that they really were.

Craftwork was also defined as a leisure-time activity, something that was done in a woman’s free time when not doing her duties as the caretaker of the home and children. However, Becker (1998) found that in many cases, “women often pursued craftwork as a full- or part-time job, rather than working at it at odd times between other primary chores”; some women would work up to ten hours a day to meet orders, only stopping once for a meal (145). Craftworkers absorbed many of the hidden costs of craftwork and received no compensation for the extra expenses or labor entailed in purchasing tools, purchasing materials, and transporting items to buyers and to markets. For female Blackfeet moccasin-makers in the 1930s and even up to now in 2022, this would have included not only bearing the cost of the moccasin-making materials, which would have been dear, especially for the hide, but also the work entailed in packing their items from home to the marketplace and potentially back home, which would have been especially tedious if selling to tourists at Glacier National Park.
Additionally, craftworkers in the 1930s and beyond faced major wage inequities in their work. Some received literal cents on the dollar, regardless of how much they may have spent on a piece. Becker (1998) reports that the “the median annual income from crafts [in the South] in 1933 was only fifty-two dollars”, which is miniscule when compared to the wages that work in other industries could earn, such as a Southern factory worker, who could earn “twelve dollars a week, or six hundred dollars a year” (130). Native craftwork was not immune from these wage inequities. Demand for Native crafts was stimulated by the new social elite desire to display works of ‘folk art’ in the home, turning these intricate forms of labor into decorative objects for fashionable homes (Boris 1988, 138). The increase in consumer demand led to a need for higher production volumes, meaning that Native craftworkers were spending more time, money, and effort on producing larger numbers of items for sale, and yet elites still demanded ‘affordability’ for their crafts (Washell 2016, 34). Consumers wanted their decorative objects to be embodiments of ‘folk traditions’ and were not willing to acknowledge the economic reasons behind production for the makers, which created a gap between the costs borne by the producer and the price that the customer was actually willing to pay. In other words, Native women craftworkers were spending an increasingly costly amount of time, money, and effort to keep up with demand, but were not being compensated fairly because customers did not want to acknowledge that labor costs were actually a part of an object’s creation. A report by the Department of the Interior shows that although American Indian craft sales generated upwards of one million dollars in 1939, the profits from craftwork were barely enough for artists to live on, generally making up only two to three percent of an artist’s total income.  

Additionally, the U.S. government attempted to use New Deal era relief policies and programs for Native women, like craftwork projects, to continue pushing federal assimilationist policies. Rather than being an opportunity for permanent employment, however, most women’s relief work programs on the Blackfeet Reservation became extensions of ingrained BIA assimilation policies that pushed ‘modern home improvement’ activities, such sewing, cooking, and food preservation techniques, onto Native families and Native women especially. Blackfeet women’s labor was recharacterized by many federal officials as ‘charity work’, “…something they did for self-improvement and community welfare, not to earn wages to support their

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families” (O’Neill 2012, 194). But Blackfeet women did receive wages from these craftwork and other federal relief programs during this period, wages that were often on par with men’s.

Though 1930s federal relief programs were still colonial in nature and may have still been pushing Blackfeet women to learn Euro-American forms of work, such as sewing and cooking, the difference was that now Native women were earning up to $44.00 a month in WPA wages to participate (O’Neill 2012, 200-201).

**WPA Blackfeet Crafts and the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative**

In November 1933, the Civil Works Administration announced funding for Indian employment. On the Blackfeet Reservation, “women were so eager to work [on emergency sewing projects] that it was necessary to use them in rotation on a thirty-hour work basis” (Banks 1983, 22). Even after the New Deal was implemented, however, it took a while for many of the federal relief programs and dollars to reach Blackfeet country and Blackfeet women in particular. In a 1934 letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier, Mary B. Salois, a well-known member of the Blackfeet community and the head of a volunteer organization on the reservation dedicated to improving economic and education opportunities for Blackfeet people, wrote to “express her concern that work relief programs were not reaching the women of her reservation” (O’Neill 2012, 196). Salois told the Commissioner that the issue of women’s unemployment was a very serious “social and economic problem confronting us here on our Reservation” (as quoted in O’Neill 2012, 196). Salois explained further that “there was ‘no work for the girls and also the women, a great many dependent on their own efforts for a livelihood’” and that “‘there is nothing with which to direct [Blackfeet girls’] minds in the right channels in a town like Browning, where all the ‘big business’ is controlled by whites and an Indian boy or girl is never given a chance to work’” (as quoted in O’Neill 2012, 196).

Although Blackfeet women had already been producing crafts for sale to non-Native consumers for decades by this point, New Deal programs brought formalization and organization to reservation craftwork (see Figure 4.27). Traditional ‘crafts’ like moccasin-making, along with handspinning, weaving, rugmaking, lacemaking, and quilting were all represented in the craftwork policies promoted on the Blackfeet reservation and on other Indian reservations across Montana. Outside teachers, both Native and non-Native, were brought in to teach Blackfeet
Figure 4.27. WPA Sewing Club from Two Medicine - L to R: Mrs. Calf Looking, Mae Williamson, Nora Spanish, Louise Pepion, Tiny Racine, Anna Potts, Rosy Big Beaver, ca. 1930s. Photo from Olga Ross Hannon Collection, Montana State University.
women skills that supposedly would aid them in their craftmaking, such as how to spin wool and how to weave (Banks 1983, 25). These skills in particular were likely taught because of the immense popularity that Southwestern-style rugs had in the tourist market at this time, and government agents probably hoped that Blackfeet women would be able to capitalize on this market in Montana. In some cases, it appears that Blackfeet women were amenable, and even eager, to learn new craft methods. Since they had spent so much time learning how to spin yarn, a few women pushed to learn how to put their skills to use in weaving as well. Donaldson Schultz describes one of these weaving classes and the craft outcomes that resulted:

> Since the women had learned to spin their own yarn in the little sewing rooms, they wanted to learn to weave, and they did learn very quickly...They started out with small things like table runners and progressed to the point where they could make curtains and even bedspreads of two sections sewn together down the middle (Banks 1983, 26-27).

Donaldson Schultz points out that the weaving projects were done using local reservation and tribal resources, including traditional Blackfeet dyes found in nature and wool bought from non-Natives who leased reservation lands to run their sheep (Banks 1983, 26-27).

Through the WPA, Blackfeet women were often employed to make clothing for reservation residents who did not have adequate winter wear, especially children and the elderly. The BIA Extension agent assigned to the Blackfeet, Jessie Donaldson Schultz (wife of scholar James Willard Schultz), described how “the government had sent in barrels of army surplus long underwear that they [the women] could cut up to make little boys’ pants and shirts and little girls’ short dresses and blouses […] They even made little coats out of this heavy underwear” (Banks 1983, 24). In April 1936, Donaldson Schultz described how Blackfeet women transformed cast-off men’s clothing and bedding, leftover from abandoned CCC camps, into children’s clothes, quilt blocks, and “hooked rugs with Blackfeet designs” (Jessie Louise Donaldson-Anne Banks Papers). One Blackfeet woman even found a way to transform men’s old drawers into knitted dresses, which, according to Donaldson Schultz “…when dyed are remarkably pretty…The girls are enthusiastic over the dresses and want one or more if they can get them” (as quoted in O’Neill 2012, 202).

Blackfeet WPA craft and sewing clubs soon led to the formation of a formal crafts cooperative in March 1936, known as the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative. Local leaders of this reservation crafts movement included Mary Little Bull, Mary Little Plume, Angeline
Williamson, Cecil Horn, Nellie Buel, Cecile Tail Feathers, Rose Big Beaver, and Margaret Middle Calf in the Two Medicine River region, along with Louise Berrychild, Gertrude No Chief and Annie Calf Looking in Browning (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22). Willie Rose, Nora Spanish, and Maggie Croft, along with Jessie Donaldson Schultz, were also part of the original founding team for the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative and on July 3, 1936, the group approached the tribal council for starting funds and were given $3,733.49 (Banks 1983, 24-25).

The first craft sales under this new organization took place in the summer of 1936 during the annual Blackfeet Sun Dance, which tended to draw high numbers of tourists to the area. A group of Blackfeet women set up shop in a tipi set up expressly for selling crafts, and that day they made a $31.50 profit, which Donaldson Schultz noted seemed like a fortune to the women (Banks 1983, 27). An initial craftshop was set up in Browning for the remaining summer months of 1936. By the spring of 1937, a formal constitution was adopted by the group and a second location for a craft shop was decided on. In addition to the shop at Browning, a government grant was used to refurbish a cabin as a craft shop at St. Mary’s Lake (Figure 4.28), located just outside of the east entrance to Glacier National Park (Banks 1983, 25-26). A newspaper article reported that more than two hundred and fifty Blackfeet people were making crafts for sale in the Blackfeet shop by November 1937 (Jessie Louise Donaldson-Anne Banks Papers). Figure 4.29 shows just a few of these craftworkers at work. By June 1938, there were ten active craftwork clubs across the reservation, “with a total membership of 400” (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22).

The Crafts Cooperative sold a wide variety of articles made by both women and men. Dolls dressed in ‘authentic’ Blackfeet clothing and footwear, moccasins, bags, coin purses, and jewelry were just a few of the items made and sold by the members of the Crafts Co-op, along with miniature lodges, drums, mock bows and arrows, and shields. Suede and buckskin jackets particularly popular among tourists (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1937, 41-42; U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22). The craft shop was generally only open during the summertime, to take advantage of the increasingly heavy tourist traffic through Blackfeet lands. This also gave craftworkers time during the winter to make the abundance of crafts that were needed for the shop, as well as time to learn new skills and practice new techniques.
Figure 4.28. Blackfeet Indian Craft Shop at St. Mary. Photo from James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University.

Figure 4.29. Women Doing Craftwork Outside of Blackfeet Craft Shop in St. Mary. Photo from James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University.
Economic Impacts of the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative

The WPA craftwork clubs, later followed by the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative and its formal craft shop, provided numerous economic opportunities for Blackfeet women – and men - to earn income for themselves and their families. Some Blackfeet women were paid by the WPA to teach certain types of crafts, while others were hired as clerks and bookkeepers in the shop itself. A special committee of male WPA workers – Louie Randall, Victor Pepion, Albert Racine, and Cecil Crow Feathers – were even employed to do research into ‘ancient Blackfeet designs’ that could be utilized on craftwork items (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1937, 41-42; U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22).

During craft sale season, twenty-five percent of the overall profits went to the crafts shop to cover the salary of the clerks, as well as the cost of materials, which were often furnished to craftworkers by the shop (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1937, 41-42). Craftworkers were paid an advance when their work was accepted, rather than after it had sold. This system was likely very beneficial to the craftworkers as it provided them with cash upfront without depending on the final sale of the item. Moccasins, along with dolls, jackets, bags, coin purses, necklaces, and many other types of items made for sale flew off the shelves at alarming rates. Prices for these goods were so high at this time that Blackfeet women mined their own personal collections of clothing, toys, and jewelry in order to sell them at the shops. Donaldson Schultz describes this scramble for objects to meet demand:

The demand for craftwork was so great that the women used some of their own belongings, things which they had had for a long time, and I gave them back gifts which they had given me, pouches and gloves and what not, with the understanding that whoever had made them would make me another pair just like them (Banks 1983, 28).

As previously mentioned, the first craft sales made by the group during a single day during the 1936 Sun Dance in July amounted to around $31.50. A few months later, when the first craft shop was set up, sales during the month of August and one week in September resulted in a $400 profit. By the time the shop had closed for 1936 season, craftworkers still had $200 worth of special orders to complete (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1937, 41-42). The next year, now armed with advertising and in a new location closer to Glacier National Park, the craft shop was raking in thousands of dollars in craft sales. By the end of March 1938, after a previously busy summer season in 1937, the shop had made almost $4,250
After taking out twenty-five percent for expenses, the craft shop would have distributed almost $3,188 to its Blackfeet craftworkers. Although individual profits would have likely been diluted due to the large amount of craftworkers making and selling items in the shop, participating in craftwork sales during this time could still produce a significant boost in income for Blackfeet women and their families. By the time Jessie Donaldson Schultz and her husband departed the Blackfeet reservation in the early 1940s, the craft shop was making upwards of $8,400 a year (Letter from James Willard Schultz to Mr. Lee M. Ford, Mr. Charles M. Kessler, and Mr. Charles McDonald April 5, 1946. James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana Historical Society).

A large part of the tourist demand for goods from the Blackfeet craft shops came from Glacier Park tourists. That was why, according to Donaldson Schultz, it was vital to have bathrooms in the St. Mary’s Lake craft shop, as the Great Northern Railroad and Glacier Park busses had agreed to let their guests get out and make purchases as long as they had a place to relieve themselves along the way (Banks 1983, 27-28). The gift shops inside Glacier Park generally refused to carry Blackfeet items, both because they believed that tourists would rather buy items from the Southwest and because the gift shops would not buy items that could not wholesale for eight cents or less, an insultingly low price that Blackfeet crafters refused to accept. Instead, craftworkers chose to either sell their items at the craft shop at St. Mary’s or venture out on their own and sell their own items to tourists outside the Glacier Park hotels and railroad stations (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 21). Other types of customers for Blackfeet crafts were likely similar to what Indian craft shops in other parts of the state were experiencing. The missionary in charge of the Rocky Boy craftshop in Montana said that their customers included places like churches, other gift shops, non-Native dealers, and individuals; this was likely reflected at Blackfeet as well (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). The Blackfeet craft shops also took special orders, like that of Count Folke Bernadotte, nephew of the king of Sweden, and his wife. The Count commissioned an entire outfit for himself, including moccasins, a heavily beaded shirt, leggings, breech cloth, and a war bonnet. For his wife, he asked for a beaded buckskin dress (Banks 1983, 30). These items were later returned to the Blackfeet Nation by the Count’s family in the 1990s, almost sixty years later. Though there are no records to indicate how much an outfit like this may have cost the Count, it was likely upwards in the hundreds of dollars, at least.
Moccasins and the Blackfeet Craft Cooperative

Continuing the tradition of generations, moccasins persisted as economic objects made by Blackfeet women for sale to non-Natives. Schultz observed in 1934, when craftworkers were still working under the auspices of the WPA alone rather than the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative, that Blackfeet women were still expert hide tanners and capitalized on their artistic skills by making beaded and even porcupine-quilled moccasins of “various sizes and shapes” for sale to tourists (James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University). Moccasins were one of the most popular items sold in the Blackfeet Craft Shop, as well as at other Indian craft shops around Montana, including the one created by the Fort Belknap Indian Arts and Crafts Association in the 1920s. Ewers estimated that thousands of pairs of moccasins had been made for sale between the mid-1930s when the craft cooperative was organized and the late 1940s, when he was living on the reservation. He also observed that older ‘full-blood’ Blackfeet were still wearing moccasins almost daily during this time (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Moccasins’ popularity in the 1930s tourist trade is highlighted in craft shop promotional materials from the time, such as in the pamphlet *Tipi Smoke*, which advertised:

MOCCASINS (emphasis in original) of durable white or smoked buckskin…typical of each locality and tribe…in an amazing variety of styles and decorative design…You may wish your moccasins beaded in a quite simple design or perhaps you prefer to have them elaborately beaded in an all-over pattern…You may wish a pair of the stiff-soled moccasins that ‘go places’ out of doors or do you want the comfortable soft soles for ‘free ‘n’ easy’ around the house? Perhaps a soft white buckskin pair beaded in pastel colors for the little papoose? The Indian moccasins…because of their casual ease and good looks…are at home in all walks of life…(‘Tipi Smoke’ Pamphlet James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana State University).

Moccasin Prices

Prices paid to craftworkers for finished moccasins varied, and were often dependent on the size, the gender of the intended wearer, the amount of beading, and whether the moccasins were ‘high tops’, referring to the length of the cuff up the calf. Moccasins made for sale in the Blackfeet craft shop were also assessed by a board, made up of several craft members and WPA teaching staff, as to their salability. Footwear was classified by this board as either ‘salable’ or ‘very salable’ based on a combination of predetermined factors regarding how the moccasins were made, such as how well the hide was tanned, the neatness of the stitches, the evenness of the beading, and the ‘attractiveness’ of the colors and patterns. For instance, moccasins classified...
as ‘very salable’ must have: “1. Snowy white soft, pliable, well-tanned buckskin; 2. Sinew sewed – neat stitching; 3. Attractive, colorful designs; 4. Well-cut patterns; 5. Smooth, even beading” (Price List to Be Paid Fort Belknap Craftsmen for Articles Purchased by the Fort Belknap Arts & Crafts Board, John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). These standards were originally agreed upon by the Craft Cooperative as a whole, although they were often reinforced by non-Native women who were trying to market objects that would appeal to a white tourist’s gaze.

The standards set by the Cooperative were also connected to subjective discussions of authenticity in Blackfeet craftwork, discussed later in this section. In 1943, Indian craft cooperatives across Montana came together to form the Northern Plains Indian Crafts Association with the intention of standardizing and regulating craftwork rates across all of the reservations (Price List to Be Paid Fort Belknap Craftsmen for Articles Purchased by the Fort Belknap Arts & Crafts Board, John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes).

Men’s moccasins represented the highest income potential for a maker, likely because they were bigger and thus required more materials and time to make. A pair of ‘salable’ men’s moccasins that were fully beaded, for instance, and made in a shoe size eight to ten, could earn a moccasin-maker anywhere from $4.75 to $5.00, whereas ‘very salable’ moccasins of the same design could make a woman between $5.50 and $6.00. Semi-beaded high top women’s moccasins were the next largest wage earners, at $4.25 or $5.00 depending on their ‘salability’ category. Infant moccasins made the least amount of money for a craftworker. For a pair of ‘salable’ solid beaded infant’s moccasins, the maker could earn $0.75 to $1.00 depending on the size, and a ‘very salable’ pair of fully beaded infant’s moccasins garnered around $1.50 to $1.75; these amounts went down if the moccasins were only semi-beaded (Price List to Be Paid Fort Belknap Craftsmen for Articles Purchased by the Fort Belknap Arts & Crafts Board, John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). A moccasin-maker would have to make between six to eight pairs of infants’ moccasins to earn the same amount of money that one pair of men’s moccasins brought in.

Based on the above numbers, and if the Blackfeet craft shops honored their twenty-five percent garnishment for fees and supplies, that means that Blackfeet moccasins were being sold for between one dollar (for cheapest infant’s moccasins) and eight dollars (for the most expensive men’s moccasins). Based on estimates of moccasins sold in other Indian craft shops around this time, it is possible that Blackfeet moccasins were sold for upwards of twenty to
twenty-five dollars a pair, again depending upon the style and the amount of decoration. For instance, Schultz reported that Arapaho moccasins, sold at the craft shop on the Wind River reservation, were selling for as high as twenty dollars per pair in the 1940s, and one of Ewers’ sources stated that he could sell a pair of Assiniboine moccasins for twenty-five dollars in 1953 (Letter from James Willard Schultz to Mr. Lee M. Ford, Mr. Charles M. Kessler, and Mr. Charles McDonald April 5, 1946, James Willard Schultz Papers, Montana Historical Society; John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes).

One of the most significant challenges that the reservation craftwork industry across Montana faced was trying to appeal to a tourist market that wanted quality but resisted paying fair prices for it. This contradiction is expressed in a memo sent out to Manitoba chiefs in 1962: “The Tourist or Buyer wants to buy real Indian Handicrafts, the same things Indians made many years ago.... Things priced under $5.00 sell the best” (as cited in Racette 2009, 300). One advantage of being a part of the Crafts Cooperative rather than an independent seller is that most of the materials, with the notable exception of hides, were provided by the Cooperative in exchange for a share of the profits from the final product. However, that does not negate the fact that prices were still extraordinarily low for Blackfeet crafts, including moccasins.

The low prices demanded by consumers in no way accounted for the substantial amount of time and effort that went into making a pair of moccasins, particularly if they were made to meet the ‘very salable’ standards of the crafts standards board. Well-tanned buckskin, the hallmark of a ‘quality’ pair of moccasin’, required either a person that was skilled in the art, which was fairly rare on the Blackfeet reservation at this point due to government assimilation policies discouraging the practice for decades, or cash on hand, also a rare commodity, to invest in hides tanned by someone else. The Fort Belknap Indian Arts and Crafts Association cited lack of hides as its most serious handicap in craftwork, and reported that many hides were brought down to the reservation from residents’ friends and relatives in Canada (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). Similar challenges were faced when sourcing sinew, which was also required of moccasins sold by Montana Indian craft shops, as it too was an indicator of ‘quality’ to the outside eye. Prices also did not account for the time it took a moccasin-maker to create their design and actually bead it. Based on interview estimates from contemporary artists, semi-beaded adult moccasins require anywhere between sixteen and twenty hours to complete and likely double that amount of time for moccasins that are completely beaded. Applied to
Blackfeet moccasin-makers in the 1930s, who were making, at most, eight dollars for a men’s pair of fully beaded moccasins, this formula implies that artists actually made between $0.20 to $0.25 an hour for their work if it met the rest of the board’s artistic standards and was classified as ‘very salable’. By making moccasins that were affordable to the standard tourist, Blackfeet women were essentially making sweatshop wages. The challenge of establishing fair prices for work continues for Blackfeet artists today and will be discussed in more depth later.

Moccasins, the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative, and the Challenge of Authenticity

The Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative standardized, and often changed, how authenticity was both perceived and measured in Blackfeet craftwork. Authenticity is generally a concept used when talking about craftwork in conjunction with the tourist market and the white gaze, as it is intrinsically linked to the consumption of the Native American ethnic identity. Most often, authenticity refers to the Western desire to consume objects perceived to be imbued with a uniquely pre-industrial, romantic Native American identity. However, in the case of Blackfeet moccasin-makers during the 1930s, authenticity was a process that was constantly negotiated, challenged, and re-negotiated between Blackfeet women, non-Native women, and the federal government.

Blackfeet women actively participated in the negotiation of authenticity in craftwork and moccasin-making. A Department of Interior report from 1938 highlights how involved Blackfeet women were in setting the craftwork standards at the craft shops, stating that “members have met with the instructors to discuss ideas, to agree on standards of work, and to look into old ways of making the fine Blackfeet crafts articles” (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22). When the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative was first formed in 1936, the original founders, which included multiple Blackfeet women along with government extension agent Jessie Donaldson Schultz, “elected a board of directors who would examine the work brought in and test it for its authenticity” (John Ewers Papers, Looking at Blackfeet Arts and Crafts Before 1941). Authenticity was defined by the board as artists’ use of specific materials, specific designs, and the meeting of certain beading standards (such as straight lines, no ‘humps’, etc.). Newspaper articles from the era talking about the formation of the craft shops emphasize the Cooperative’s focus on authenticity, with one 1937 article noting that the “rule of the shop [is] that all material accepted must be authentic Blackfeet work, bearing authentic designs” (Indians

Although we do not know how Blackfeet women who chose not to sell their items in the craft shops negotiated authenticity, it is likely that their standards were similar to those of the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative, if for no other reason than to be competitive with others.

Non-Native players like Donaldson Schultz, along with other government agents and programs, also sought to influence the definition of authenticity on the reservation. Although Donaldson Schultz’s standards mostly reflected those set by Blackfeet women, she did play a part in changing the designs used (discussed later). Through legislation like the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935, the federal government also attempted to impose their ideas about ‘quality’ and ‘authenticity’ onto Blackfeet artists. For instance, “the government advocated standardization of quality and the implementation of controls to guarantee the authenticity of handmade goods” (Becker 1998, 119). Overall, the definition of authenticity in reservation craftwork was based on both Blackfeet standards of traditional artistic excellence and Western ideas of what constituted authentic ‘Indian-made’ products. Both sets of standards combined, intentionally or unintentionally, to inspire artists to make items that were both artistically excellent and appealing to the non-Native tourist.

**Authenticity in Materials**

Adherence to authenticity in moccasin-making demanded Indian-tanned hide as opposed to commercially produced leather. One of the standards in classifying an item as ‘very salable’, as discussed previously, was that it be made from “snowy white, soft, pliable, well-tanned buckskin” (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). The Crafts Cooperative made it clear that “positively no work made on dark, grayish, poorly tanned buckskin will be bought” (John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). This standard was difficult for artists to uphold, however; as has been noted, hides were hard to obtain and very expensive at this time. Eventually, the board changed its standards to reflect these barriers, capitulating to the demands made by artists that commercial leather was easier to work with and much less expensive than Indian-tanned buckskin (Sample Book of Colorful Indian Designs by Paio-Taki, Jessie Louise Donaldson-Anne Banks Papers).
Authenticity was also defined in type of thread used (sinew versus cotton thread), and ‘quality’ was determined by how neat and even the stitches were, both in beadwork and the overall moccasin’s construction. Describing the standards of the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative in 1937, a newssheet states that “all beads must be strung on sinew and each bead tacked to the buckskin[...] Moccasins must be sewn with sinew” (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1937, 41). Jessie Donaldson Schultz also noted that beadwork must be done with sinew before it would be accepted (Sample Book of Colorful Indian Designs by Paio-Taki, Jessie Louise Donaldson-Anne Banks Papers). Sinew was likely linked to authenticity because it represented the ‘traditional’ method of sewing to both Blackfeet women and to the white tourist’s gaze. Just like with hide, however, exceptions were made for cotton thread’s use in craftwork. Cotton thread was acceptable when it was used to tack down beads, as this supposedly made the item last longer and thus made the object more appealing to tourists (Sample Book of Colorful Indian Designs by Paio-Taki, Jessie Louise Donaldson-Anne Banks Papers). Cotton thread was also much cheaper and easier to obtain than sinew, which may have been part of the reason that it was eventually accepted in beadwork, although it was used in a way where the naked eye could not discern its presence.

Beadwork was considered ‘quality’ if it was done smoothly and evenly, or “neatly done”, with no hint of a pre-applied pattern underneath. This type of beading requires that the beads be tacked down after every one, two, or three beads, which is a laborious process that requires exceptional eyesight, patience, and a plethora of time. The typical tourist would likely not be able to tell the difference between poor quality and high-quality beadwork; it is a standard that is generally set by artists within the community, who push each other to strive for the hardest, tightest-looking beading methods possible. Authentic beadwork styles accepted in the craft shops would have probably been based on criteria established by Blackfeet women themselves, as it takes an experienced beader or a practiced eye to determine the often minute differences between poor and high quality beadwork. Multiple documents from this period point out how high the standards were for beaded items sold in the craft shops. One report about the Blackfeet crafts program, produced by the Department of the Interior in June 1938, notes how “standards of work have risen to a very high level, through the process of careful selection of articles for sale, and of insistence upon meticulous standards of authenticity and good workmanship” (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22).
Authenticity in Design

The negotiation of authenticity was perhaps most robust when it came to moccasin designs. Moccasin designs were considered most authentic if they looked ‘Indian’ in nature, as tourists were most concerned with buying objects that represented supposedly ‘authentic’ Indian culture. Consumers tended to favor moccasins with non-Western designs because objects that “incorporated Western materials, styles, and forms failed…to satisfy the longing among Western consumers” (Phillips and Steiner 1999, 10) for the ideal ‘primitive’, handmade object. Tourists wanted objects that represented the romantic image of a Blackfeet society untouched by colonialism, assimilation, and industrialization. To feed that desire, Blackfeet moccasin-makers, along with the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative, focused their attention on creating items that had intrinsically ‘Indian’ designs. The WPA even hired four workers to research “ancient Blackfeet designs” that could be used in reservation craftwork (U.S. Department of the Interior Office of Indian Affairs 1938, 22).

Perhaps the biggest change that occurred in moccasin designs with the Craft Cooperative’s emphasis on adherence to ‘traditional’ tribal motifs was the elimination of floral style beadwork on items made for sale in the craft shop. Floral style – which is defined as ornamentation where “images of plants and flowers [are] the predominant motif” (Penney 1991, 54) – gained most of its popularity in the late nineteenth century, although some scholars put its origins as far back as the early eighteenth century. There are many debates within Plains Indian anthropology and art history about where floral styles originated, and how they made their way into Plains women’s beadwork. Some scholars believe that floral designs existed prior to European contact and were introduced to the Plains from the Great Lakes area – namely, from the Chippewa, Cree, and Ojibwa – via intertribal trade (Ewers 1945, 38; Koch 1977, 59; Penney 1991, 55). Others say that floral imagery was introduced to Indigenous peoples through contact with European products and people. Calicoes, which are cotton textiles that often have small, repeated images of flowers on them, were popular items among Plains groups during the fur trade era, and Penney (1991) postulates that these designs were borrowed and adapted by individual Native artists beginning in the mid-1800s (56). Ewers (1945) also states that at the time of his fieldwork, some Blackfeet elders claimed that floral beadwork came to them from Blackfoot women who were inspired by the goods that their white husbands possessed (38). Ironically, Berlo and Phillips (1998), along with Penney (1991) have suggested that floral
Figure 4.30. Example of Blackfeet Floral Style (NMNH 316227). Photo by author.
patterns proliferated due to the early European tourist market. Tourists wanted an ‘authentic’ memento of their travels, and therefore wanted to purchase something that represented Indian identity but still appealed to their European tastes. Floral images appealed to early Europeans’ aesthetic senses, but they contained the aura of ‘authentic-ness’ that they were seeking (Phillips 1998).

One of the most widespread hypotheses concerning floral styles in Plains beadwork is that enterprising white evangelicals, supported by assimilationist policies and ingrained prejudice, forced Indian women to incorporate floral into their art, though this position is not without its critics (see Johnson and Yenne 2011, 98). Floral patterns, associated as they are in many European cultures with Christian religion, were meant to represent the ‘civilizing’ influences of Western society on Native Americans (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 30). Beginning as early as the seventeenth century, young Indigenous girls were taught floral embroidery in mission schools (Berlo and Phillips 1998, 103; Penney 1991, 55). Christian missionaries among the Niitsitapi, particularly the Catholic nuns who ran many Indian boarding schools, heavily discouraged traditional beadwork designs, pushing for artists to incorporate floral motifs instead in order to symbolize their commitment to Christianity (Roberts 2007, 157). However, just because Niitsitapi women seem to have readily incorporated floral styles into their beadwork does not mean that they were passive receptors of a colonizing European will. Roberts (2007, 156) has postulated that many Niitsitapi floral designs are actually reflections of cultural shapes and symbols, such as the floral quatrefoil being a recreation of the Morningstar cross design. Additionally, instead of rounded flower heads that would have been indicative of the faces of Christian saints, Blackfeet flowers on moccasins generally have triangular heads. Indigenous agency still existed within the Christianizing paradigm, and it is without doubt that this agency was reflected in beadwork as well. Several Blackfeet colleagues in this project have suggested that there is, in fact, a distinct Blackfeet floral style, characterized by pointed, abstract flower heads (Figure 4.30). Based on the moccasin sample used in this project, there is no doubt that this style is uniquely Blackfeet, and it has clearly been popular across time with Blackfeet moccasin makers, as it was present in every single moccasin collection that I looked at.

Even though floral-style beadwork in moccasin-making had been used by the Blackfeet for decades, if not longer, by the time the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative was created in 1936, many beadworkers were still encouraged to use so-called ‘traditional’ designs only, which did
not include floral designs. Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick (1985) describe this abrupt transition away from floral beadwork in the craft shops, even though the designs were still used amongst the Blackfeet community:

…Susie Red Horn, known as perhaps the best Blackfeet moccasin-maker during the 1940s, recalled that when she learned to bead moccasins during the 1890s, she used floral designs and continued to use them until the middle 1930s when the new Blackfeet Cooperative Crafts Shop ruled that only the older geometric designs could appear on moccasins sold through that market. Even so, some Blackfeet women continued to bead floral designs on moccasins they made for members of their own families or for gifts to other Indians (91).

In some cases, however, floral beadwork a protection strategy used by artists to protect Blackfeet clothing from outside collectors. When Ewers was working on the reservation, he was told by Blackfeet artist Cecile Black Boy that she had deliberately beaded her husband’s outfit in floral designs “because she understood that white collectors did not like floral beadwork, and she didn’t want her husband to be tempted to sell his outfit to a collector” (John Ewers Papers, Northern Plains Indian Moccasin Styles).

Although Native designs were mandatory for items in the craft shops, this did not necessarily mean that the work had to be done by a Blackfeet person. There was less of a focus on authenticity in ethnicity at the Blackfeet craft shops than might otherwise be expected. Ewers noted that a beaded suede jacket offered for sale in the Blackfeet crafts shop in 1943, though classified ‘Blackfeet style’, was actually “designed by Miss Mable Morrow, a non-Indian Arts and Crafts Specialist of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, who had been assigned to assist the Blackfeet to develop saleable handicrafts” (John Ewers Papers, looking at Blackfeet Arts and Crafts Before 1941).

Stories from the Collections

Although we do not know if any of the moccasins in the sample were actually collected in the 1930s, we do know that twenty-six pairs were accessioned into museum collections between 1930 and 1969. Out of those twenty-six pairs, there are six that likely were made during the 1930s, even though they were not placed in museum collections until years later. All six pairs of these moccasins have what we would call ‘Native-style’ designs, including a keyhole (NMAI 206633), cross (NMAI 207948), mountain (MHS X1982.19.10), round with leaves (CMR
2011.11.10a), and two three-finger designs (MHS X1982.21.03 and NMNH E380954). Five out of the six pairs have a single upper design, which may imply a maximization of time for the maker, who likely made more money by selling several pairs of moccasins rather than a single intricately made pair. However, one pair, NMAI 207948, is fully beaded and heavily decorated, including a beaded tongue with metal cones and horsehair on the ends, heel fringe dyed yellow, and even soles painted red on the inside. These moccasins would have taken much longer to make than any of the others discussed here, and its various embellishments may be related to both artistic license and potentially an effort to appeal to a non-Native gaze that was seeking an object that embodied a distinctly Native identity. It is possible that these moccasins were made for community use and sold to a collector later, although this theory is complicated by the fact that there is brown hair left on the soles, a detail that is almost never seen on moccasins that have been previously used or made specifically for a community member. Two other pairs of moccasins also have hair left on their soles (NMAI 206633 and CMR 2011.11.10a).

The high numbers of ‘Native-style’ designs for the moccasins in this sample that were made and/or collected during the 1930s are potentially reflective the social attitudes previously discussed regarding design authenticity and appeal to non-Native audiences. This is even more likely when we consider that none of these six pairs have a floral design. In contrast, photographs of the Blackfeet community between 1920 and 1940 demonstrate that floral-style designs are the most prevalent moccasin designs seen among community members. This is not reflected in the museum moccasins from this period though, or even the moccasins in the entire sample. Floral styles are by far the most represented moccasin design in the photograph sample as a whole as well, which reflects floral style’s widespread use among community members, both men and women.

All six of these moccasin pairs also use sinew in their construction, although three pairs (NMAI 206633, MHS X1982.19.10, and CMR 2011.11.10a) do incorporate cotton thread either into repairs or design additions, such as the decorative cuff piece added to CMR 2011.11.10a with cotton thread. As discussed previously, any moccasins sold through the Blackfeet Crafts Cooperative in the 1930s were rigorously examined for their use of sinew in construction, which considered to be a marker of quality and authenticity.
Blackfeet Crafts After the 1930s

By the late 1930s, the United States’ involvement in World War II changed the state of women’s employment on the reservation. All able-bodied workers, regardless of race and gender, were recruited for the war effort, and craft income, though still an important part of Blackfeet women’s economic resources, became less pressing. By September 1940, the United States had begun providing substantial material support for the Allies, who were waging war against the Nazi regime in Europe. Men and women were called to work in factories across the country to support the war effort, and women in particular began working in these industries after the United States officially joined the war in December 1941. The National Museum of the American Indian reports that as many as one in four Native American women worked on assembly lines, and in aircraft and supplies factories during World War II, with many more taking over men’s positions in local industries.

Native American women and men also joined the United States military at high rates during the war. Over 800 Native women were accepted into the Women’s Army Corps and the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service during this time (National Museum of the American Indian, Why We Serve: Native Americans in the United States Armed Forces). Some women, like Blackfeet community member Minnie Spotted Wolf, even joined the Marine Corps Women Reservists, the first Native American woman to do so (Figure 4.31). Others served on the frontlines as nurses, mechanics, and even truck drivers. Eventually, the Museum of the Plains Indian, built in 1941 and initially run by scholar John Ewers, became an alternate hub for Blackfeet craft sales, as well as for craft sales for other tribes in Montana. In 1943, the WPA program was officially terminated. However, both women and men continued to make crafts for sale in the Blackfeet Crafts Shop and Museum of the Plains Indian.

In the early 1950s, Blackfeet women were once again the target of government-run, home-based craftwork programs that emphasized crafts as a path to economic independence. These programs were likely part of federal ‘improvement’ efforts on the Blackfeet Reservation during this decade, which also brought electricity, running water, and sewage systems to the rural parts of the reservation (Johnston 1999, 78-79). According to Johnston (1999), reservation residents in the 1950s still “lived in one- or two-room homes that were among the earliest permanent dwellings on the reservation” (78-79). Although it thankfully does not apply to the
Figure 4.31. Minnie Spotted Wolf (Blackfeet), the first Native American woman to join the U.S. Marine Corps. Photo courtesy of the Bureau of Indian Affairs Archives.
Blackfeet Nation, the 1950s are largely known as the ‘Termination Era’ for many Native American communities, a time when renewed government assimilation efforts attempted to abandon their treaty and federal trust responsibilities by terminating tribal governments (Child 2012, 140; Berman 2004, 137). Government-sponsored Urban Relocation Programs also began in this decade, which attempted to “draw Native peoples away from ‘dying’ [reservations] and into urban wage labor” (Sangster 2012, 28). Almost 30,000 reservation residents across the U.S., including Blackfeet Reservation residents, migrated to urban locations as a result of these policies in the 1950s, and the 1960s and 1970s saw three times that number (Williams 2012, 19). As Littlefield (2012) points out, both of these trends, particularly termination, were actively resisted by Native peoples and thus were relatively short-lived (47).

In the 1960s, the Blackfeet Crafts council still existed, although it was a little less robust than it had been thirty years earlier (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Men and women were still producing craft items for sale in the local crafts shops and museum, although not at the rate that they had produced at during the 1930s. Mineral royalties and oil revenue, combined with craftwork, ranching, land leases, and hay production, represented the main income avenues for many Blackfeet during this decade (Rosier 2004, 30). In 1964, a terrible spring flood that resulted in several deaths and massive property damage prompted many Blackfeet people to move from the more remote parts of the reservation and into the urban area of Browning. A series of bad winters through the 1960s, and the resultant loss of livestock, put ranchers out of business and also pushed them into resettling in Browning. Tribal governments during this period, including the Blackfeet Tribal Council, were beginning to tap into the ‘War on Poverty’ programs of the Johnson administration, along with other federal social programs “that expanded their ability to deliver health, education, and economic services to their members” (Littlefield 2012, 47). However, the reservation was still characterized by high rates of unemployment, inadequate housing, low educational levels, and high rates of illness. Hoikkala (1995, 214) reports that in 1964, “an estimated seventy-four percent of reservation families earned less than $3,000, the amount that the federal government considered the poverty threshold [while] the median income of a reservation family was $1,800, or thirty percent of the national average.” It should also be mentioned that the 1960s is also known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’ era among many Native communities due to troubling but prevalent practice of Indian children being removed from their homes by social workers and placed within white families. In 1969, an
investigation by the Association of American Indian Affairs revealed that “in most states with large American Indian populations, [twenty-five to thirty] percent of Indian children had been separated from their families” (Jacobs 2012, 185).

Not much is written about Blackfeet moccasin-making, craftwork, or even daily life between 1970 and 2022. Moccasin-making and art creation obviously did not stop during these years; it just stopped being talked about by many scholars, with the exception of Beverly Hungry Wolf in her book *The Ways of My Grandmothers* (1980). The lack of literature is likely due to many scholars’ almost single-minded focus on historical, as opposed to contemporary, processes in Native American communities. There is also only one pair of moccasins in this sample that was made later than the early 1960s. Although I do address contemporary Blackfeet moccasin-making in the last chapter of this work, there is no doubt that future research should focus its efforts on investigating Blackfeet art production during these decades. It is likely that analyses of Blackfeet craftwork during these later years will incorporate discussions about the Native art market and the ways in which it has affected – and continues to affect – pricing, notions of authenticity, and ideas around Native identity.

**Conclusion**

I have spent this chapter peeling back the layers of stories surrounding why moccasins have historically been produced by Niitsitapi, and especially Ammskaapiipiikuni, women and how moccasins have been incorporated in to Niitsitapi women’s economic strategies throughout time. Hopefully this chapter has demonstrated how Niitsitapi women have used moccasins over hundreds, if not thousands, of years in their adaptations to the ever-shifting social and economic conditions on the Northern Plains and showed the essential roles that moccasins have played in supporting Native household income.

One of the major, and perhaps obvious, conclusions of this chapter is that many, if not most, of the moccasins sitting in museum collections today are outgrowths of Native women producing moccasins for sale in some fashion to non-Native markets. Even moccasins that were not necessarily made for use outside of the community still found their way into museum collections when non-Native tourists bought them right off the feet of their owners. Niitsitapi moccasins in museum collections are usually representative of the economic hopes and efforts of the women (and sometimes men) who made them. Moccasins are sites of intensive, complex,
interconnected webs of labor and economic and social processes, all of which have come together to form the footwear that we see before us when we walk through museum storage spaces.

Another question that I have asked throughout this chapter is, using object-based analysis, can we differentiate between moccasins that have been made for sale as opposed to moccasins that were made specifically for community use? The answer is vague: probably not, although there are some indicators that we can look for that might provide insight. One clue of moccasins made specifically for sale may be poorly scraped/tanned soles, which seem to be fairly pervasive across the tourist moccasins in this sample. As has been discussed, soles with hair remaining on them may indicate an artist who did not think that non-Native tourists would notice this sign of rushing or lack of skill in the tanning process. Moccasins that have soft soles but are made in the hard sole style are likely a good clue for moccasins that were made specifically for sale, as this type of sole would almost never be used in moccasins that were actually going to be worn. Poorly done beadwork, such as crooked lines and pattern lines left behind, may also indicate a tourist moccasin, although these features are rare. The use of cotton thread to attach moccasin soles may indicate tourist moccasins, as that is indicative of moccasins that are never intended, by the artist at least, to be seriously worn. However, cotton thread used on other moccasin features, such as in beadwork, is not a reliable indicator for distinguishing a moccasin made for sale, as there are usually no records that can demonstrate whether the cotton thread was a deliberate design choice by the artist or if it was added by later museum staff for conservation efforts.

There is no evidence at this time to suggest that differentiation can be made based on moccasin designs or colors, as there is too much variety in design style throughout the sample. However, based on previous discussions, it is likely that floral-style moccasins were made for community use first, considering the social pressure that artists were put under to produce only ‘Native-style’ moccasin designs for tourists rather than floral-style. It does seem that quilled moccasins are much more likely to have been made specifically for community use, although the use of quills on moccasins does not seem to prohibit their later sale to people outside of the community. Tourist moccasins are also more likely to be elaborately decorated in all areas, including the upper, tongue, and cuff, although this does not stand true in all cases. It makes sense that tourists would be drawn to heavily embellished, Native-looking moccasins, as these fit
the definition of the ideal souvenir that many non-Natives look have historically sought. Overall, the data supports the conclusion that there are no significant material differences in Niitsitapi moccasins made for sale as opposed to purely for community use. Moccasins made for sale likely embodied all of the characteristics of artistic excellence in the Niitsitapi community, but there are cases where they probably were not made that well, possibly due to a lack of materials or possibly because the artist was producing rapidly.

These stories are complex and intertwined with one another, making it difficult to separate out the individual threads that make up the whole. The moccasin stories expressed in this chapter are the stories of living people, people who may be gone now but whose voices we can still hear speaking through the objects they left behind. Their stories live on in the moccasins they made and wore, and object-based analysis has helped us hear what those stories have to tell us.
Figure 5.1. This Is What It Feels Like To Be An American Indian. Ledger art by John Isaiah Pepion (Blackfeet), 2012.
CHAPTER 5: MOCCASINS AND THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

In addition to being sites of Native women’s economic and labor histories, museum collections are also untapped sources of information about Indigenous communities’ fraught historical and contemporary entanglements with colonial policies. Museum collections and the Native female-made objects that they house are repositories for the often-overlooked human stories of grief, resistance, resilience, and the power of love for one’s community and culture. This chapter discusses the roles that moccasins played in the persistence of traditional cultural dress for the Niitsitapi, even in the face of the devastating assimilation agendas that were forced onto Native communities via repressive legislation, agricultural programs, allotment, field matron programs, and Indian boarding schools. This chapter will also demonstrate an important aspect of Niitsitapi women’s economic and labor history in the face of U.S. government oppression in that, as assimilation schemes continued to fail, women utilized government agendas to continue footwear exchange and sale traditions that had already been in place for over a century.

Through the medium of moccasins and the laborious process of moccasin-making, Niitsitapi women, particularly looking at Piikuni women in this case, simultaneously cooperated with and resisted government assimilation agendas according to their own needs, both individually and culturally. First, I will discuss how moccasins and moccasin-making have been affected by government legislation, including government attempts at cultural erasure and assimilation. Then, I will show how agents of the government, including Indian agents, field matrons, and Indian boarding schools, affected both the production and persistence of footwear and other types of traditional clothing in Ammskaapiipiiikuni life. Finally, I will conclude with a short discussion of more contemporary government acts and how they have affected – and continue to affect – contemporary moccasin makers.

Moccasins, Legislation, and the Persistence of Traditional Clothing

The federal government’s policy of ‘assimilation and elimination’ in Indian country also grew more powerful between 1880 and 1930, often perpetuated through the medium of federal legislation. Traditional spiritual and cultural activities were deemed criminal ‘offenses’ that Indian peoples could now be officially prosecuted for in a court of law. A special court, called
the ‘Court of Indian Offenses,’ was established in 1883 specifically to prosecute Native people who refused to give up traditional ways, such as owning a medicine bundle. As Lokensgard (2010) points out, “The ‘Rules for Indian Courts’ are unambiguous: ‘Any Indian who shall engage in the sun dance, or war dance, or any similar feast, so called, shall be deemed guilty of an offense’” (122). Punishments for participating in cultural activities included the withholding of treaty-guaranteed rations and even imprisonment (Lokensgard 2010, 123). In Canada, similar oppression of Indigenous peoples was happening, most notably with the 1884 amendment to the Indian Act, which banned the practice of potlatching (Roth 2018, 38).

The harsh restrictions on Native culture continued to expand into the later nineteenth century, with the government attempting to squeeze its colonial fists around Native communities and strangle them to a violent cultural death. In 1889, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs decreed Indians were not to teach or be taught their own histories, as to do so would interfere in the ‘civilizing process. By 1894 the Office of Indian Affairs had prohibited even more traditional cultural activities and specifically targeted Native clothing, declaring that:

Sun dances, Indian mourning, Indian medicine, beating of the tom-tom, gambling, wearing of Indian costumes...selling, trading, exchanging or giving away anything issued to them have been prohibited, while other less pernicious practices, such as horse-racing, face-painting, etc., are discouraged (U. S. Comm. Ind. Affairs 1894, 159, as quoted in McFee 1972, 52; emphasis added by author).

In spite of the dire economic conditions and the oppressive government policies being enacted, or perhaps in defiance of them, traditional dress on the Blackfeet Reservation persisted, although more and more articles of hide clothing began to be replaced through necessity by cloth as hide-bearing animals in the region became scarcer. Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick (1985) assert that by the late 1880s “only the uniformed Indian policemen and some of the Blackfeet chiefs had fully adopted white men’s clothing for daily wear” (39). Photos from this period often show people wearing a mixture of traditional and European clothing, including Ammskaapiikuni leader White Calf, who is shown in an 1888 photograph wearing what Indian agents called ‘citizen’s dress’, which in this case was a pair of trousers and a Western-style coat (Figure 5.2). But, even dressed as a ‘citizen’, White Calf still wore moccasins on his feet (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 39). This persistence of traditional clothing was not uncommon. Blackfeet Agent George Steell reported in 1890 that “reservation residents were [still] generally wearing blankets ‘and old-time costume’” (Grafe 2009, 106).
By 1894, however, in keeping with the Office of Indian Affair’s increasingly oppressive decrees, the new Blackfeet agent, Agent Cook, reported to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs in 1894 that many traditional practices, including wearing ‘Indian costume’, were being even more heavily discouraged on the reservation, although moccasins continued to be worn nonetheless (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). When George Steell took up the agent’s position once again in 1895, he observed that “Blackfeet men had adopted 'the clothes of their white brothers, and the women are fast discarding their native dress for the more becoming one of their white sisters” (Grafe 2009, 106). A February 1899 U.S. Indian Inspector’s report for the Blackfeet Agency claimed that the Ammskaapidikuni, who were estimated to number around 2,100 people, lived in houses, spoke English, wore white clothing, and had given up tribal traditions in favor of Western customs (Inspection Report of Blackfoot Agency, MT, by C. F. Nesler, U. S. Indian Inspector, February 9, 1899, Thomas R. Wessel Papers, Montana State University). The same Inspector’s report notes that shoes were being shipped in bulk to the reservation at this time, although the number of people who actually wore them is unknown.

Later that same year, in September 1899, the new Blackfeet agent W. R. Logan writes that of 1,957 Piikuni on the reservation, 1,950 of them were wearing “Citizen’s Dress, Wholly”, while only seven were wearing “Citizen’s Dress, in Part” (Report for Blackfeet Agency by W. R. Logan, September 9, 1899, Thomas R. Wessel Papers, Montana State University). According to this report, all Piikuni at this point had adopted Western-style clothing in some fashion, although the extent to which this is true is impossible to confirm.

Although there were practical advantages to wearing European clothing, such as the cheapness and convenience of cloth and the advanced protection of rubber shoe soles, the adoption of European clothing into everyday Blackfeet dress is also likely related to the economic and social rewards that came with proving one’s ‘assimilation.' For instance, individuals who took up assimilation activities like building log cabins in place of setting up the lodge and planting gardens rather than gathering resources from the surround area, were rewarded by the agent, often in the form of more rations, which were desperately needed (LaPier 2017, 4). Transitions from purely traditional to European clothing were likely part of subtle Piikuni strategies to take advantage of these ‘rewards’ that the agent offered.

There is no doubt that these repressive policies were meant to affect traditional artistic expression significantly, both in Blackfeet territory and in Indian Country as a whole, although
the extent to which they succeeded is debatable. One of the most significant disruptions that repressive legislation made in Native artistic expression is the ways in which art knowledge was transmitted within communities. The official outlawing of cultural practices, combined with the painful colonial impact of Indian boarding schools (discussed later), made it very difficult for older teachers to pass down their knowledge to their younger students. As elders passed on, it became even more difficult for Native students interested in traditional arts to learn.

Additionally, as Racette (2009, 295-296) points out, during these years “a considerable volume of ceremonial objects related to prayer and dance, often representing the highest artistic standards of a community, were confiscated and removed.” Among the Blackfeet, footwear, clothing, bundles, and other types of objects were bought up rapidly by museums and anthropologists (as described in Chapter Four), and with the disappearance of those objects went many opportunities for youth to learn how to make and care for them. Fortunately, culture bearers from all of the Niitsitapi communities have protected and preserved many of the traditional arts that were affected during this time, and thus moccasin-making and other traditional activities have persisted.

Despite the government’s best attempts, legislation did little to curb the everyday use of traditional dress, especially moccasins, and it did not have the effect on Blackfeet behavior that agents were hoping for. For instance, even though there were efforts to stop dances and other celebrations on the reservation, the Blackfeet agent in 1880 “reported that the Blackfeet still conducted their O’kan [Sun Dance] in August” (LaPier 2017, 4). In Canada, although the Canadian Indian Act had officially outlawed Plains Indian ceremonies in 1895, the Siksika, Kainai, and Apatohsipiikuni held their O’kan anyways (Raczka 340). Eventually the United States Blackfeet moved the O’kan to July fourth to intentionally coincide with America’s Fourth of July holiday to avoid government reprisal and likely imprisonment (LaPier 2017, 4). F.C. Campbell, agent to the Blackfeet in the 1920s, wrote of his frustrations with being unable to convince Piikuni people to work their land and cattle instead of participating in the weekly Sunday horse races held between competing community groups (Kline 2001, 73), despite the fact that the practice was technically illegal. Furthermore, Reverend Maclean wrote of a lively market for ceremonial clothing and regalia among the Blood in the late nineteenth century despite government bans, noting in January 1888 that “one of the chief occupations of women was the
manufacture of beadwork panels that were sewn onto blankets and other garments ‘which can be detached at any time without any injury’” (as quoted in Brownstone 2008, 51).

Native resistance to government oppression continued through the mediums of art and performance on both sides of the border, and Niitsitapi communities found unlikely support in their resistance efforts through their non-Native neighbors, who were avid consumers of Indian culture. Although various campaigns had been launched in the late 1890s and early 1900s in both the U.S. and Canada to discourage any Native involvement in cultural activities, the colonial governments soon found these restrictions unenforceable. This became even more true as other economic plans implemented on reservations and reserves failed, forcing Niitsitapi to find innovative ways to provide for their families. In his 1896 annual report, Indian Commissioner Amedee E. Forget complains of the agency’s failure to deter Blackfeet participation in dances and ceremonies:

I might draw attention to one of the most serious [impediments] encountered in our efforts to secure the final abandonment of heathen rites and ceremonies by the Indians. I refer to the encouragement given to the Indians on reserves adjacent to towns and settlements by that element of the white population which is ever ready to assist in the creation or maintenance of anything which panders to an appetite for the sensational and novel and to whom the resultant effect on the actors therein is a matter of perfect indifference. So long as such ‘shows’ are patronized and supported by the gate-money of this class of whites, so long will the difficulty of securing a total abandonment of such continue (Indian Commissioner Amedee E. Forget, Annual Report, 1896, as quoted in Raczka 1979, 373-374).

On the Blackfoot Reserve in Canada, Inspector James A. Markle observed a similar situation, writing in 1908 that white encouragement in nearby towns encouraged Natives “‘to leave their homes and their work to take part in parades, old time dances, &c.[…] These mirth-loving people will leave their hay-making or any other important work for weeks at a time and travel from town to town to take part in horse…race, parades and like diversions’” (as quoted in Dempsey 2007, 61). These performances in neighboring towns would transform into an entire industry for the Niitsitapi, where cultural commodification for white audiences became not only an important economic strategy but was also a way to keep spiritual and clothing production traditions alive in the face of the West’s attempts to eliminate and/or assimilate Native peoples for good.
Figure 5.4. White Calf at Old Agency, ca. 1888. Photo from Farr (1984) and Montana State University Archives.
Moccasins and Government Agents

The United States government, in efforts to support westward expansion for incoming settlers, did its best to subjugate Plains Indian communities by exerting federal control over their bodies, their land, and their spirits. The United States government’s first real foothold in Niitsitapi territory began with the establishment of an Indian agency, a federal practice common throughout Indian country. Agencies, run by non-Native government officials called ‘Agents’ and overseen by regional Superintendents of Indian Affairs as well as the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., were first established to distribute tribal annuities that were bought by Native peoples through the trade and sale of land via treaty and other legislative means. Annuities included things that Niitsitapi people wanted or needed for use in their daily lives, such as rations like flour, sugar, and coffee, and objects like metal cooking pots, steel needles, and trade cloth (Ewers 1958). Agencies were also meant to act as distribution centers for ‘civilization’, exerting government control on Indian lives through the distribution of rations, western-style clothing, and the distribution of ideas surrounding ‘proper’ gender roles and ‘appropriate’ types of work. Agents and their employees, including field matrons and boarding school staff, played complex roles in both discouraging and encouraging Blackfeet moccasin production and wear, as will be discussed in more depth later.

In the early years of the Niitsitapi agency’s existence, when hunting and gathering areas were still rich in resources and the Niitsitapi were still able to follow their traditional movements on the landscape, the Blackfeet agency was used mainly as a place where bands could gather and trade with each other, along with also receiving annuity payments. An agency for upper Missouri River tribes was created in 1852 and included the Blackfeet beginning in 1855 with the signing of the Lame Bull Treaty in the same year (Raczka 1979, 261). In 1861 an agency was established for the Piegan specifically at a location on Sun River (Raczka 1979, 261); in later years, the agency would be moved multiple times, eventually settling permanently in what is now Browning, Montana. As the economic landscape of the Plains changed with the extermination of the bison and the creation of reservations, agencies became more important to daily Indian life than they had been in the past. Rather than acting as a convenient meeting place for Niitsitapi bands to mingle and trade, and as one of many places in Niitsitapi country where non-Native supplies could be obtained, the Niitsitapi agency became literally essential for life, where government-issued rations staved off starvation.
The Reservation Era

The 1870s is the period that generally marks the beginning of what scholars call ‘the Reservation Era’, which “is typically understood as beginning at the time that the United States succeeded in confining a group of Indians to a reservation and being able, generally, to enforce their residence on this tract” (Kline 2001, 32). It is during this time, when the agency was transformed into the capital of a militarized reservation zone, that economic conditions became extremely dire for the Blackfeet community, which would eventually prompt government agents to begin encouraging moccasin-making and other craftwork as an alternative economic strategy.

Though the Blackfeet Reservation was not officially created until 1874, the Bear Creek Massacre in 1870 (aka the Baker Massacre in colonial textbooks), when Major Baker and his company slaughtered dozens of Piegan women, children, and elders in cold blood, was the true beginning of U.S. military and government control in Niitsitapi territory (Kline 2001, 32; see LaPier 2017 for more information on the heartbreaking story of the Bear Creek Massacre, which is still commemorated by the nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy today). Additionally, by the late 1870s, the Niitsitapi’s main food and clothing source, the bison, had been virtually eliminated on the Plains. The Blackfeet Agent report from 1879 recounts one last successful bison hunt by the Piegan in the Judith Basin area; after that, no more bison could be found (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Both confinement onto the reservation and the loss of the bison, along with the completion of the first transcontinental railroad, “hastened the transition from a bison-based hunting economy to the new reservation economy” (Kline 2001, 33).

The early years of the reservation’s creation were not kind to the Niitsitapi, and the economic devastation that came with the loss of the buffalo and the failure of most farming and ranching programs (Kline 2001; LaPier 2017) is what prompted agents to begin encouraging moccasin production as crafts to sell to incoming tourists even though people barely had the materials to make moccasins for themselves. Indian Agent reports from the early 1880s, supplemented by newspaper articles and eyewitness accounts of the time, describe the grim living conditions and corruptions that Niitsitapi families contended with during this period. For instance, in 1882 T. C. Power, a Fort Benton-based flour supplier to the Blackfeet Agency, failed to deliver his promised rations multiple times and when he did, his shipments were often rejected by the local inspector for being of unacceptable quality (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 5). By February of 1883, Blackfeet Indian Agent John Young wrote to the Commissioner of
Indian Affairs to explain that not only were the Blackfeet beef rations exhausted, but that nearby non-Native cattle ranchers refused to sell any beef to the Agency, even though many of those cattle were being fed illegally on Blackfeet lands (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 6). Government Inspector Benedict, visiting the reservation in June of 1883, reported that many Blackfeet children had starved to death the previous winter, and was taken aback “by the fact that the local cattlemen could send a county sheriff on the reservation to arrest Indians for killing cattle which had trespassed on their lands” (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 6).

Another inspector, C.H. Howard, was sent out to review the dire Blackfeet food conditions in November 1883, warning the Indian Office again of the critical lack of resources, writing, “‘It was my first experience in witnessing actual starvation. I have never before visited an agency where there was so complete destitution. Children and adults are dying for want of proper nourishment when sick’” (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 6). The lack of resources among the Ammskaapipiikuni was so dire by this point that the winter of 1883-1884 has subsequently been named the Starvation Winter. According to LaPier (2017), Blackfeet leader Almost-a-Dog kept careful track of the deaths that occurred over this period by putting notches in a willow stick, and “he recorded 555 deaths that winter” (14). By August of 1884, Agent John Young reported that “the Blackfeet were eating the bark off of the cottonwood trees out of desperation” (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 6). In response, the Indian Office replaced Agent Young with R.A. Allen and issued rancid and maggot-infested bacon to the Agency, along with poisoned flour and meager amounts of beans (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 6; Still Smoking 1997, 39). Yet another inspector sent out to investigate conditions on the Blackfeet Reservation, this time employed by the governor of the newly established Montana Territory, published his report in the Helena Weekly Herald in September 1884, writing of the criminally deficient amount of food that Blackfeet families were being issued by the Agent:

In few words, the men and women have received an average of a trifle over two pounds of beef and two pounds of flour per week, and their children, of whatever age, one-half of this amount. During the winter, those who were strong enough scoured the neighboring ranges and brought in quantities of the cattle that had died from exposure and disease. But with the approach of warmer weather the cattle ceased to die and the meat they had secured became too putrid for use (Helena Weekly Herald 1884, 2).
As one eyewitness said, the Blackfeet were so destitute at this time that “They have not a fur or even skins for moccasins, and there is nothing in their lodges except the individuals themselves” (Helena Weekly Herald 1884, 2). Although the Blackfeet community eventually recovered physically from the Starvation Winter, its emotional and cultural impact is still felt even today in 2022. Efforts are made during a yearly remembrance event to commemorate this difficult time in Blackfeet history and honor the memories of the people who died.

Agent efforts to encourage Blackfeet women to make moccasins for sale during this period are filled with confusion and conflicting ideas. Although agents wanted Blackfeet women to work to relieve the rampant poverty that reservation families were experiencing, agents also wanted them to strive for the Western ideals of womanhood, which included taking care of the home and children almost exclusively. At the same time, traditional footwear for personal and cultural use was being outlawed in Native communities while simultaneously their manufacture was being encouraged as an economic strategy. In an effort to satisfy the government’s need for both assimilation and poverty alleviation, craftwork was transformed into a ‘civilizing’ activity by agent, an act that was meant to bring Blackfeet women (and others) into the Western world by ‘introducing’ them to small-scale commodity production and Western-style crafts like lacemaking and sewing. Niitsitapi women in general, and Ammskaapipiikuni women specifically, had already long been producing commodities like moccasins for sale, and it was not a huge social or cultural shift to incorporate agent and government demands for production. However, the Western emphasis on labeling Native women as domestic workers and homemakers rather than as important contributors to household and tribal income production, perpetuated by field matrons and boarding schools, affected the ways in which Native women’s labor has been perceived both historically and today.

**Moccasins and Field Matron Programs**

Unlike many of their Western male counterparts, female field matrons recognized early on the economic potential that Native women’s craft production represented, and they focused many of their time and attention on encouraging Native women to produce. This was in direct opposition to current government attempts to restrict all Native cultural practices, which is ironic considering that field matrons were technically government employees. Administered between 1890 and 1938, field matron programs were government-created agendas that specifically
targeted Native women for assimilation, using the medium of the Euro-American home to encourage women to give up their cultural associations and become ‘civilized’ (Figure 5.3). Field matrons were most often middle-class white women hired by the Bureau of Indian Affairs who instructed Native women in ‘domestic affairs’, which included “training in ‘housekeeping, sewing clothes, decorating the home, and caring for animals and children’ [along with] encourage[ing] ‘the games and sports of white children,’ pressur[ing] Indian women to observe the Sabbath, urg[ing] legal marriages, and bolster[ing] Native American women’s desire for consumer goods as an incentive for their husbands to work” (Osburn 1998, 69). Field matrons also frequently cared for the sick and elderly on reservations. The field matron program was meant to take control of Native women’s labor and redirect it into approved forms of work, such as taking care of the home, and it supported white, middle-class values regarding what a home should look like and what women’s roles should be within it.

Like field matrons across Indian country, field matrons among the Blackfeet pushed hard for local Native women to adopt Euro-American values and forms of work. Many of the field matron programs on the reservation were administered through women’s auxiliary groups, which were formed in 1922 as part of Blackfeet Superintendent (formerly the agent position) Frank C. Campbell’s farming and assimilation agenda. In addition to farming chapters for men, Campbell promoted the organization of women’s auxiliaries “with the purpose of educating and encouraging Blackfeet women in the traditional Euro-American domestic arts” (Kline 2001, 75-76). An article in the Great Falls Tribune on October 7, 1923, describes the tasks that Blackfeet women were being ‘taught’ by local field matrons:

> Through the efforts of the field matrons[…], the Indian women, members of the auxiliaries to the chapters, are being taught canning, cooking, sewing and other household accomplishments, and in this connection the field matrons are seeking to interest the women in the erection of screen doors and windows in their homes for the improvement of health and living conditions (Great Falls Tribune, October 7, 1923, 12).

Though Native women had no choice but to be wage earners due to the dire economic conditions on reservations, many of the professional roles that white women could take on were generally denied to Native women, although Blackfeet women could and did find formal positions as cooks, seamstresses, laundresses, boarding school matrons, and hospital employees. Craftwork thus became the medium through which economic independence for Native women was encouraged. According to Simonsen (2006), the industries that field matrons “chose to foster
Figure 5.3. Peter and Orcelia Flintsomoker, Under Beaver Flintsomoker, and Martha Spearson in front of house, ca. 1920s. Field matrons targeted Blackfeet households like this one for ‘improvements.’ Photo from Farr (1984), courtesy of Fred Des Rosier.
among the [Native] women were a combination of those kinds of indigenous crafts that they associated with household products, such as weaving, basket making, beadwork, and pottery, and new domestic tasks such as lace making and quilting” (104). Among the Blackfeet, field matrons encouraged women’s auxiliary groups to produce traditional ‘crafts’ such as moccasins and other objects containing beadwork for sale to non-Native markets, particularly the tourists coming through the reservation on their way to Glacier National Park. In 1923, a plan was even put forth to hire a Diné (Navajo) woman to teach weaving so that Blackfeet women could capitalize on the huge tourist interest in Southwestern-style objects, although Blackfeet women only selectively cooperated with this agenda (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology).

Although field matrons recognized that craftwork could provide economic independence for Native women, their reasoning behind encouraging craft production was still very colonial and focused on the wider Western assimilation agenda. Simonsen (2006) points out that field matrons believed “that the young [Native] women needed wages to escape their families, culture, and what reformers saw as the oppressive tribal environment” (104). Field matrons also saw Native participation in craftwork and other forms of ‘white’ wage labor as a necessary part of the ‘civilizing’ process. These were obviously not the economic motivations driving most Native women to produce, however, with most only selectively cooperating with field matron’s subtle ‘colonizing through craftwork’ agendas to the extent that it would help them provide economically for their own families and communities. By the time field matron programs in Indian country came to a permanent end in 1938, Blackfeet women were cooperating with the federal agenda to produce moccasins and other crafts for sale but still retained their unique cultural identities.

**Indian Boarding Schools, Moccasins, and Craftwork**

Indian boarding schools in the United States and elsewhere are notorious for being colonial tools of oppression, and they played a major role in perpetuating physical, spiritual, and cultural trauma for tens of thousands of Native families, both historically and today (see Adams 2020; Churchill 2004; and Stout 2012, among others). However, similarly to the contradictory legislative policies put forth by the federal government regarding Indian arts and crafts, boarding schools, for all of their oppression, were actually major drivers of Indian craft production from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Boarding school craftwork, which included
moccasin-making along with other arts such as woodworking, needlework, knitting, weaving, and rugmaking, served as one of the mediums through which government and boarding school officials promoted wage labor on reservations. Though promotion of Indian craftwork in schools was meant to serve the colonial agenda, Indian peoples turned this to their own advantage, keeping traditional arts alive and even innovating certain crafts in a time when it was very difficult for Native communities to create freely. As Racette (2005) points out, Indian boarding schools did not simply serve as distribution centers for Western-style crafts and techniques. Instead, curriculums were “also [molded] by local artistic traditions and the continuing importance of moccasins and other indigenous clothing forms as essential requirements for life in the West” (Racette 2005, 21-22). Boarding schools also mark an important transition in Niitsitapi footwear traditions, as they were the venues where European shoes were introduced and promoted.

The Indian boarding school era is generally considered to have started with the founding of the Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania (also known as the Carlisle Indian School) in 1879, and its end is usually put around 1940, after the Great Depression (Child 2012, 122). As Dorion (2013) points out, Indian children were not receiving traditional American academic educations at these institutions; instead, “Indians attending boarding schools were given vocational training and pressed into activities that ‘subsidized’ the cost of running the school” (Dorion 2013, 26). The founder of Carlisle Indian School, Brigadier General Richard Henry Pratt, coined the now-famous phrase regarding the goal of Indian boarding school, which was to ‘kill the Indian and save the man’. An excerpt from a letter sent by Blackfeet Agent John Wood to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in April 1875 highlights the colonial, racist attitudes that government officials had towards Indian children, the attitudes that were the foundation of the boarding school era:

A boarding school would prove of great benefit, as the children could attend more regularly and would acquire our language much sooner if removed from the lodge and its sights and associations. So long as the children are allowed to remain in the lodge listening to the superstitious performance of the ‘medicine man,’ their advancement in civilization will be slow and difficult and their manners barbarous and indecent (Letter from John Wood, US Indian Agent, to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, April 19, 1875, Blackfeet Agency, MT, Montana Historical Society).
In the 1890s, compulsory school attendance laws were passed to try and force Indian families to send their children to boarding school. Because there was such a marked resistance among Indian families to send their children to these colonial institutions, Congress passed additional legislation in 1898 that allowed government officials to forcibly remove Indian children directly from their homes and place them into boarding school (Child 2012, 122). Lone Wolf describes his experience of being taken from his home by U.S. soldiers when he was around eight years old and being sent to Fort Shaw Indian School in Great Falls, MT:

It was very cold that day when we were loaded into the wagons. None of us wanted to go and our parents didn’t want to let us go. Oh, we cried for this was the first time we were to be separated from our parents. I remember looking back at Na-tah-ki and she was crying too. Nobody waved as the wagons, escorted by the soldiers, took us toward the school at Fort Shaw. Once there our belongings were taken from us, even the little medicine bags our mothers had given us to protect us from harm. Everything was placed in a heap and set afire. Next was the long hair, the pride of all the Indians. The boys, one by one, would break down and cry when they saw their braids thrown on the floor. All of the buckskin clothes had to go and we had to put on the clothes of the White Man (Dyck 1972, 24).

While many Blackfeet students like Lone Wolf were forced to attend school, others were hidden by their families so that they did not have to go. Dire economic conditions on the reservation also prevented many families from sending children to school as well. As a result, as Harrod (1971) reports, by 1915 “631 out of the 950 children of school age were not in school” (120).

The boarding school era for Ammskaapipiikuni children began in the 1880s with the arrival of Ursuline nuns at St. Peter’s Mission in 1884, who immediately began instructing Blackfeet girls in Catholic religion and domestic skills such as making bread (Still Smoking 1997, 48-49; The Blackfoot Gallery Committee 1978, 121). In 1889, the first Blackfeet children were sent to the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, and when Fort Shaw Indian School was established in the Great Falls, Montana area in April 1892, over fifty Blackfeet students were sent to attend (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Two boarding schools were built on the Blackfeet Reservation in the early 1890s, including the Catholic-run Holy Family Mission on the Two Medicine River as seen in Figure 5.4 and the Willow Creek school at the Blackfeet agency, which was located at the present-day site of Browning, Montana (Johnston 1999, 63).
Figure 5.4. Holy Family Mission School Girls, early 1900s. Photo courtesy of Native North American Indians – Old Photos Facebook Page.
Harrod (1971) reports that by 1892, there were one hundred Blackfeet children in each of the two schools (84).

Blackfeet boarding school curriculums were similar to other Indian schools around the country in that they focused on teaching the students English, indoctrinating them into a Western religion, instructing them in vocational tasks, and eliminating all traces of students’ Native culture and spirituality. Many of the children who attended Holy Family Mission stayed there year-round, while others were only there during the school year. Catholic holidays such as Easter also provided families with an opportunity to see their children during the academic year (LaPier 2015, 191). While in school, Blackfeet girls were forced to learn tasks that would prepare them to enter the workforce as domestic servants, such as sewing, cooking, and laundering, while boys were taught trades like saddlemaking, woodworking, and farming (Ewers 1953). Figure 5.5 shows one example of a Blackfeet boarding school classroom setting, where Blackfeet girls are being taught to sew. Major attention was paid to promoting jobs and interests that would make students assimilate to Western life faster. Boys were encouraged to play in the Holy Family Mission brass band (LaPier 2015, 259), while girls were encouraged to hone their domestic skills by learning Western cooking, such as how to make bread, as seen in Figure 5.6.

Students were also forced to work on school farms and in gardens, as well as in kitchens and laundry rooms, providing free labor for the schools to continue running. For instance, LaPier (2015) describes the experiences of her grandfather, Iòkimau, as a teenager attending Holy Family Mission, stating that, “Like all the male students at Holy Family, he spent two thirds of his day out on the mission farm in order for the Mission to sustain itself” (259). In a letter to an Indian Bureau official in 1906, George Bird Grinnell also reported that school boys were the ones keeping the Mission school’s crop production alive, although they were paid nothing for their labor (Letter from George Bird Grinnell to F. E. Leupp, Indian Bureau, March 9, 1906, Robert Bigart's George Bird Grinnell Research Files, University of Montana). Schools did, however, provide opportunities for wage work for Native adults on reservations in a time when it was desperately needed. Reservation boarding schools were one area where Blackfeet women could be hired for long-term positions, including as Matron and Assistant Matron. Kline (2001) reports that in 1924, “the boarding school ‘Matron’ took charge of the girls when they weren’t in class for $600 annually, while an ‘Assistant Matron’ took care of the little boys when they weren’t in class, for $500 per year” (161). Schools also needed seamstresses, laundresses, and
Figure 5.5. Sewing Class, Cut Bank Boarding School, 1907. Photo from Sherburne Collection, University of Montana.

Figure 5.6. Baking Bread at the Willow Creek School, ca. 1907. Photo from Sherburne Collection, University of Montana.
cooks, positions that earned up to $500 per year (Kline 2001, 161). Furthermore, housekeepers “at the day schools prepared meals for the children for $300 per year” (Kline 2001, 161-162). Blackfeet women could also work as matrons and cooks in the local hospital, positions which could earn them anywhere between $420 and $540 depending upon the role and the duties involved. Stints as reservation policewomen were also possible, as it was for Mrs. Julia Wades in the Water in the 1920s (Kline 2001, 162).

Living conditions at Indian boarding schools varied, and were often dependent upon individual students’ experiences. While some Native people have said that boarding school represented a positive time in their lives, when they were well-fed, sheltered, and learning what they considered to be valuable life skills, others report having terrible experiences that were defined by abuse and corruption by school officials, corrupt practices, and homesickness. Lone Wolf describes his experiences of loneliness and the fear of punishment for speaking Blackfeet while at Fort Shaw:

> If we thought that the days were bad, the nights were much worse. This was the time when real loneliness set in, for it was then that we were all alone. Many boys ran away from the school because the treatment was so bad but most of them were caught and brought back by the police. We were told never to talk Indian and if we were caught, we got a strapping with a leather belt (Dyck 1972, 24).

Still Smoking (1997) expounds on other punishments issued to students for speaking their language, including kneeling on broomsticks and having one’s hands whipped, being put in a corner for a long period of time, and in some cases even being starved (95).

Some students never made it home at all, often dying of illness, abuse, and exposure before their families could be alerted. Tuberculosis in particular ran rampant through schools, and some estimates suggest that by the early 1900s, “three out of four Blackfeet children who went to boarding school died of tuberculosis within five years” (Johnston 1999, 81). The same held true at Niitsitapi boarding schools in Canada as well, with many Siksika children in particular dying of disease while away at school (see Eggermont-Molenaar and Callens 2007 for more information on this). There are other reports of abuse and neglect from Blackfeet boarding schools, including one instance at the Willow Creek school where an investigation in 1901 found that boys were being punished for minor infractions by being confined in small basement cells for up to a week and being fed only bread and water during that time (Juneau-Spotted Eagle Associates 2005, 12).
Boarding School and Shoes

Similarly to other boarding schools across the country, Blackfeet boarding schools were sites of colonization that attempted to erase all aspects of Indian identity and replace it with Western values and forms of work. Traditional clothing and adornment were forcibly replaced with European garments, including the exchange of moccasins for hard-soled shoes. Although shoes had been included in Blackfeet rations and distributed at the agency for years, most children did not begin wearing them until they went to school. Ben Calf Robe, in recalling some of his boarding school experiences, remembered that leather shoes were given to children at school, “…along with the rest of our clothing, including hats. Before that time I only wore moccasins” (Calf Robe, Hungry Wolf, and Hungry Wolf 1979, 7). Calf Robe also recalled that the missionaries who ran the boys’ school gave them skates to strap onto their leather shoes so that they could play hockey by the schoolhouse (Calf Robe, Hungry Wolf, and Hungry Wolf 1979, 7). During his time living and working on the Blackfeet Reservation in the 1930s and 1940s, John Ewers observed that many of his informants (born in the 1870s and 1880s), when asked, all said that they did not begin wearing shoes until they went to school (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology; see also Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 89). This also held true in other Indian communities across Montana. During his fieldwork at Fort Belknap with Gros Ventre and Assiniboine peoples in the 1950s, Ewers again noted that most had only worn moccasins until their schooldays. For instance, Raymond Feather, born in 1876, stated that, “When I was a boy of 10 and went to school, school gave me first shoes I had every worn” (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Joe Walkslow said to Ewers that “When I was a boy I wore moccasins all the time[…] I didn’t begin to wear shoes until I started to school in 1893”, when he was around nine years old (John Ewers Papers, A Blackfoot Chronology). Figure 5.7 showcases this transition to hard soles and European shoes for young students, such as this Blackfeet boy at the Mission school around 1910.

The transition from moccasins to hard-soled European shoes was not easy for most Native children or adults. This was likely due in part to the minimal efforts that were made to ensure that shoes actually fit. For instance, the 1890 report of Special Agent Jere Stephens at Fort Belknap noted that, “On ration days a family might get ‘1 pair man’s shoes’ and say ‘1 pair girl’s shoes. If the suit of clothes or overcoat happens to be a 40 in size and the man 36, or vice versa, he is expected to find someone else who is in the like dilemma and make a trade with him.
Figure 5.7. Blackfeet Boy from the Mission School, ca. 1910. Photo from Eggermont-Molenaar (2005, 119).
The same rule will apply to shoes…”” (Report of Special Agent Jere Stephens on Indians of Fort Belknap Reservation, December 1890, John Ewers Papers, Assiniboine Field Notes). If they could not find anyone to trade with, many Native people were forced to wear shoes that were either too big or too small, making their walking experience miserable. Children’s experiences with shoes at boarding schools were similar. Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick (1985) describe the real physical pain experienced by children forced to wear hard-soled shoes in place of moccasins, as observed by a boarding school teacher:

Thisba Morgan, a teacher at the Oglala Boarding School on Pine Ridge Reservation from 1890 to 1895, writing of her Sioux pupils, told of the ‘suffering their poor little feet were to endure when they were taken out of their soft-soled moccasins and put into the awful brogans furnished by the United States Government. They limped and shuffled about trying to walk in the heavy things that were blistering their feet, some leaving bleeding sores which often became badly infected’ (89).

Though many Native people did choose to transition totally to shoes, that did not stop others from continuing to wear moccasins. According to Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick (1985), one of their informants, Mrs. Pauline Dempsey, found as recently as 1968 “that at least [one hundred] older people among the Blood tribe […]in southern Alberta continued to wear moccasins daily, except in winter” (Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 89). Even students resisted wearing shoes to some extent. In a photo of students at the Blackfeet Agency school in September 1888, one girl on the right hand side in the front row notably wears moccasins on her feet, in glaring contrast to the rest of her classmates (Figure 5.8). This is also the case with another student in Figure 5.9, also a young girl.

In addition to continuing to wear moccasins, some people used parts of shoes to enhance and innovate their traditional footwear. Special Agent Jere Stephens, again writing of the Gros Ventres and Assiniboine at Fort Belknap, observed in December 1890 that “the shoes that are issued to them they do not like, and will often cut the tops off to make soles for moccasins, while the bottom of sole leather they do not use at all, claiming that they cannot walk in stiff-soled shoes” (as quoted in Walton, Ewers, and Hassrick 1985, 89). Although there are no Niitsitapi moccasins made from shoe leather in the project sample, I did run across a pair of Gros Ventre moccasins in the collections of the National Museum of Natural History that demonstrates how shoes and moccasins could be melded together. In this case, a pair of moccasin uppers have been attached to a high-heeled leather sole (Figure 5.10). Today, it is not uncommon to see moccasins...
Figure 5.8. Blackfeet Agency School on Badger Creek, Miss Cora/Corine M. Ross as teacher, September 1888. Photo from Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives.

Figure 5.9. Students at Blackfeet Agency School at Badger Creek, ca.1880-1900. Photo from Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives.
with rubber soles attached during competitive powwow events, as active dancers would constantly need new pairs of moccasins otherwise due to the constant friction of the sole against the ground.

_Boarding Schools and Crafts_

In terms of craftwork, boarding schools, in conjunction with other colonizing forces such as government legislation, field matron programs, and missionaries, were sites that pushed crafts as both ‘civilizing’ endeavors and as a way that Indian students could earn money. While Niitsitapi women had been producing moccasins and other objects for outside consumption for over a century by this time, boarding schools were partially responsible for encouraging craft production on much wider scales and promoting craft consumption to much more diverse audiences than in the past. Many schools encouraged students to take up a craft and then marketed the end products to white tourists, the proceeds from which, according to the schools themselves, would be used to help Indians become efficient laborers in the Western workforce (Simonsen 2006, 204). Carlisle Indian School, for instance, was well known for the craftwork of its students and regularly advertised sales of the ‘Handicraft of the American Indian’ in its publication _The Indian Craftsman_, “telling potential consumers that ‘if you wish Genuine Indian Handicraft, [Carlisle] is where You Absolutely Know you are going to get what you bargain for’” (as quoted in Simonsen 2006, 204). Capitalizing on the non-Native desire for ‘authentic’ art, Carlisle promoted Indian products like Pueblo pottery, beadwork, baskets, rugs, and other crafts made by both female and male students (Simonsen 2006, 204).

In Montana, Indian boarding schools were also promoting student craftwork, or ‘handiwork’, as it was often labeled by school officials. Drawing, woodworking, ironworking, needlework, leatherworking, and even work in cloth were all courses taught at Fort Shaw Industrial School in Great Falls, MT, where many Blackfeet children attended (Greer 1958, 46). To promote their mission of Indian ‘progress’ to a Western lifestyle, Fort Shaw submitted Indian student craftwork to exhibits at the Great Falls Fair. In 1895, the Great Falls Tribune noted that Fort Shaw students had submitted to the fair exhibit “…numerous dresses, wrappers, underclothing, rugs, and embroidery made by the girls and tailor-made suits and shoes made by the boys” (Great Falls Weekly Tribune, Vol. XI, No. 21, October 4, 1895, pg. 8). At the 1897 Great Falls Fair, the Great Falls Tribune again noted that
Figure 5.10. Side view of Gros Ventre moccasins at the National Museum of Natural History that have a shoe sole attached to them (NMNH 391183). Photo by author.
There is a large exhibit of the fancy work of the girls of the school, comprising dollies, pillows, sheets, center-pieces, crocheting, and other fine work, some of the best done by an Indian girl only ten years of age. Another exhibit is the wood carving done by both the Indian boys and girls on hard and soft wood [...] There is a collection of chains, bolts, and other products of the blacksmith shop, made by boys of the school (Great Falls Daily Tribune, October 6, 1897, pg. 4).

In this case, the crafts presented by the Fort Shaw Indian students were meant to symbolize their move towards the ‘progress’ of Western civilization, embodied in the skills that non-Native children picked up from an early age. It is unlikely that moccasin-making – or any traditional Native arts for that matter – made their way into the Fort Shaw curriculum or Great Falls Fair exhibition considering that the school’s focus seemed to be more on promoting an image of a ‘civilized’ Indian child rather than capitalizing on the white Victorian desire for Indian goods. There was a focus at Fort Shaw, however, on promoting craftwork in general as a vocation for both Blackfeet girls and boys, and some of their craft objects even made their way into museum collections around the country.\(^\text{13}\) Although there may not be any direct evidence to suggest that any of the moccasins in the current sample were made by Niitsitapi children in boarding school, that does not mean they do not exist elsewhere. It is quite likely that many boarding school crafts, moccasins and otherwise, remain on dusty museum storage shelves and in people’s closets or cabinets, awaiting the day that someone remembers them.

Canadian residential schools were also heavily encouraged to promote Indian arts and crafts production among their students. In Canada, “the policy of requiring Blackfoot children to attend boarding school lasted all the way into the 1970s” (Lokensgard 2010, 119), unlike in the United States, which officially relaxed its boarding school policies in the 1930s, although many Blackfeet children still attended boarding school up into the mid-1950s. Similarly to U.S. pundits, supporters of Indian craft production at schools in Canada believed that it would provide a means of income for Indigenous peoples, which would in turn support national welfare. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, pamphlets were sent to boarding schools across provinces promoting Indigenous art education, “including the ‘reproduction of tribal designs in needlework, knitting, weaving or rug making…’” (Roth 2018, 47). These pamphlets “also lamented that children were

\(^\text{13}\) Check out Kristi Dawn Scott’s 2011 Master’s thesis from MSU, “Child Artisans of the Northern Plains: Woodcarving at Fort Shaw Indian School, 1892-1910” for more information about craftwork at Fort Shaw and boarding school collections in museums

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‘adopt[ing] what they believe to be ‘white man’s’ ideals, and need more encouragement to express their own ideas or to take pride in the former skill of their ancestors’” (as quoted in Roth 2018, 47).

Even though boarding schools provided a way for Indian students to learn new craft skills and in some cases provided a venue for marketing their work, they also broke important lines of inheritance in many traditional Native arts by removing Native children from the teachings and mentorship of older traditional artists in their communities. This particularly applied to Blackfeet girls, who traditionally learned moccasin-making and other skills from older women who passed down their knowledge in culturally important ways. As Racette (2009) points out, “Excellence in traditional art forms typically relies on opportunities throughout childhood to observe, play, help, engage in mentoring relationships with experienced artists, and acquire the environmental and technical knowledge needed to secure and prepare raw materials”; students at boarding school were gone too often to be able to participate in these forms of knowledge (294-295). Many Blackfeet children who attended boarding school were often away from their families and communities for years at a time, only able to see their relatives during major holidays like Easter and Christmas (Still Smoking 1997, 103). Even those who only stayed at school during the academic year still lost critical opportunities to learn from community artists. These substantial breaks in transference, along with the passing of older artists who died without the opportunity to pass down what they know, have resulted in the substantial loss of many traditional skills and art forms in Native communities, including at Blackfeet. According to the interviewees in this project, skills like moccasin-making are usually acquired from sources like the internet, books, and non-Native hobbyists, unless one is lucky enough to find a community teacher, often a relative, with the time, willingness, and expertise to teach them.

*Indian Schools and Crafts in Later Years*

With the failure and subsequent closure of many Indian boarding schools in the United States, combined with the onset of World War I and later, the Great Depression, many Indian children found themselves without a school to attend. When the Public Works Administration was established in the 1930s, the first set of seven rural schools were built on the Blackfeet Reservation in the communities of Heart Butte, Old Agency, and Starr School. Although the Bureau of Indian Affairs originally operated the schools, “as the public school system became
able to provide instruction and buildings, the government signed them over to the districts” (Still Smoking 1997, 46). By the early 1940s, twenty-four schools were open on the reservation, with twenty of them serving more than 453 children, and thirteen of them being all-Indian. With the consolidation of services in the 1960s, these rural schools “soon closed and children were bussed to the public schools […] By 1964, only five rural schools still existed” (Still Smoking 1997, 47). Although the curriculums at these schools are unknown, it is likely that as time went on, the emphasis on vocational training and craftwork among students went down as public school instruction became more standardized and more Blackfeet community members were able to take positions as teachers.

Blackfeet schools today celebrate and encourage cultural pride. Blackfeet Native American Studies curriculums have been incorporated for all grade levels and in all Blackfeet public schools on the reservation. These programs focus on language, history, culture, and design, the last of which emphasizes teaching the history and making of contemporary cultural items like moccasins, drums, star quilts, and more. A group of three all-day language immersion schools on the reservation, collectively called the Piegan Institute, have also been established for students in kindergarten through eighth to learn the Blackfeet language. Summer culture camps and workshops also focus on teaching traditional arts to youth and adults, including hide tanning, moccasin-making, and other activities.

Other organizations have also taken the initiative to incorporate moccasins into learning. The Moccasin Identifier project, developed by Carolyn King in partnership with Mississauga of the Credit First Nation, provides free education kits for grades one through eight that utilize a moccasin stencil art project, in conjunction with age-appropriate readings and classroom discussions, that address the historic presence of indigenous peoples on the landscape and affirms the vibrancy of Native cultural identity. Contemporary Native advocacy groups have also made efforts to emphasize the importance of moccasins. Rock Your Mocs is one such effort, and uses an annual week-long celebration in November to celebrate Native heritage through the making and wearing of moccasins. Rock Your Mocs is celebrated throughout Indian country, including in Native schools, which often have some type of moccasin-focused activity (such as a coloring worksheet) to celebrate the week.

Remembrance projects incorporating decorated moccasin uppers have also been created to honor all of the Indian children that died during their time at boarding school, many of whom
were buried on school grounds so that school authorities could avoid the cost of shipping their bodies home to their families. One such project, seen in Figure 5.11, was done in honor of the children found in 2021 at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School in British Columbia (215 children found), at the Marieval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan (751 children found), and the St. Eugene’s Mission School, also in British Columbia (182 children found). Sadly, these are far from the only Indian boarding schools to have child remains on their grounds. Though the United States has yet to take formal action addressing the historical mistreatment of Indian peoples at boarding schools, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland formed the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative in 2022, which gives hope that perhaps someday there will formal acknowledgement of this crime against humanity and eventual restitution for Native nations in this country. Currently, there are several human remains recovery projects being initiated at Indian boarding schools across the world to bring children back to their ancestral homes, although much work remains to be done at this point. Still, I hope that one day this work will be accomplished and that all of the ‘lost children’, as they have become known, will someday rest in peace in their traditional homelands.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, government interference in Native lives did not end in the nineteenth century. However, in some cases, legislation was used as a tool for good rather than harm in Indian country, especially as Native people became part of legislative bodies and advocacy groups that could advocate for change. For Native artists, two major pieces of legislation, including the Indian Arts and Crafts Acts of 1935 and 1990, have made attempts to protect traditional artists from misappropriation and fraud, although the extent to which they have succeeded is debatable.

One of the foundational pieces of legislation supporting Indian craftwork during the New Deal-era was the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935, which would later act as the basis for the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 led to the creation of a five-member board whose purpose was to “promote the economic welfare of Indian tribes and the Indian wards of the Government through the development of Indian arts and crafts and the expansion of the market for the products of Indian art and craftsmanship”\(^\text{14}\). The Indian Arts and

Figure 5.11. Moccasin upper remembrance project in honor of the Indian children who lost their lives at boarding school. Photo courtesy of social media.
Crafts Board (IACB) had the power to undertake market research for arts and crafts opportunities in Indian communities and to utilize various government agencies and their resources to promote craftwork programs. Board members also made recommendations to agencies for loans to further promote the aims of reservation arts and crafts programs. The Board also provided technical assistance for craftwork by hiring craft teachers on reservations. Although some of these craft production workshops focused on trying to ‘reteach’ beadwork and quillwork to Plains Indian women (Berman 2003, 40), others introduced relatively new craft forms to Native communities. On the Blackfeet Reservation, for instance, some craft workshops focused on teaching Blackfeet women Southwestern-style activities like weaving and rugmaking, likely in an effort to help women capitalize on the tourist fascination with Southwest objects.

This Act was also the government’s first attempt to prohibit the marketing and sale of goods as ‘Indian’, or as belonging to a certain tribe, unless the maker was actually Native. The Board worked on implementing a series of government trademarks that would prove the authenticity and quality of Indian crafts, especially regarding Hopi pottery and Navajo textiles and jewelry. The purpose of this aspect of the Act was to curb the underground market for counterfeit and reproduced Indian products, often made in different countries (especially Mexico in these days) and shipped to gift shops around the United States. Counterfeits and forgeries were an especially significant problem with Southwest items, whose extreme popularity in the tourist market prompted countless attempts by non-Natives to reproduce and sell them as authentic to Southwest artists (see M’Closkey 2002 for more information on this issue). The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 was not particularly effective at curbing false marketing and labeling because the sanctions were not strong enough deterrents, and people were rarely brought up on charges of forgery.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 is essentially a truth-in-advertising law that expands upon the premises of the 1935 version, which is to protect Native artists from misappropriation and buyers from fraudulent products. Artists who intend to sell their goods under the label ‘Native’ must be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe, and those who want to sell imitation productions must label themselves clearly as non-Natives. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990, though it was meant to protect Indian-made goods and support Indian

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15 See previous.
sovereignty by authenticating artistry, perpetuates issues surrounding how Native identity is defined. As Dorion (2013) points out:

Proving Indian ancestry is an exclusionary contentious process, and one rife with inconsistencies: There are still tribes unrecognized by the federal government due to Termination Era policy; tribal blood quantum requirements vary between tribes; the Dawes act rolls are still used as a criteria for Indian eligibility, but discount those Indians who refused to or could not sign (28).

Furthermore, the 1990 Act still does not have strong enough sanctions to deter serious Indian art imitators, especially those who work in other countries and ship their goods through a broker to the United States. However, the U.S. government has had some success in using the Act to prosecute large-scale fraud operations involving Southwestern pottery, which is a promising step in the right direction. Additionally, Blackfeet moccasin-makers are not only vulnerable to misappropriation by product imitators, but also by large retail chains and fashion designers who take and use designs without compensating the original artists, which the Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 does not adequately address (Brooks and Peters 2017, 202).

Overall, as this chapter has demonstrated, moccasins’ stories are entwined with the complicated and often painful histories of the United States government and its colonial presences within Indian country. However, as has been noted throughout these pages, colonial policies meant to eradicate and/or assimilate Blackfeet and other Native peoples were not successful. Blackfeet women and men continued to provide for their families by making traditional crafts like moccasins, despite the convoluted and contradictory policies put forth in legislation and by government agents.
Figure 6.1. Intervention Piece. Edgar Heap of Birds (Cheyenne/Arapaho), 2019. On display at the Saint Louis Art Museum in St. Louis, Missouri. Photo courtesy of online article from the Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribal Tribune.
CHAPTER 6: MOCCASINS AND MUSEUM STORIES

This chapter explores how museums and their tools, including curators, accession and collection records, and catalogs, contribute to framing the narratives surrounding Native women’s economic and labor histories. These tools can be used to reveal information about these histories, but also can intentionally or unintentionally hide important information that could inform these stories in better and more completely. Native women’s economic and labor stories, manifest in moccasins, both live in and have been influenced by museum record systems and are manifest in accession, collection, and catalog information, which are in turn connected to museum staff and anthropologists who influence the amount and type of data that contribute to these narratives. Museum tools are simply another kind of material that can be examined closely in order to reveal material heritage’s connections to wider social and cultural processes. In this chapter, I demonstrate how data collected from museum tools, first in accession and collection systems and then in catalogs, can inform another avenue through which Native women’s critical contributions to the economic, spiritual, and cultural survival of their communities throughout time can be revealed.

Accession and Collections Record Data

Data was collected from an analysis of museum accession and collection records, as well as the museum catalog. Accessioning is defined as the formal act of accepting objects into a museum collection. After being accessioned, objects are usually assigned identification numbers, after which they become part of the museum’s permanent collection, with all of the legal and ethical protections that come with that status. Accession and collection records contain all of the information that museums can possibly gather about the object, including where, when, and how the object was collected, who collected it, who made it (if possible), and any other information deemed relevant to the object’s history and creation. Some museums have kept meticulous accession and collection records during their operation, while others have not. There are multiple reasons for an absence of information, including: lack of information gathered by the original collector, changing professional values about what information is important about an object, poor early record keeping systems, and underpaid and overworked museum staff who did not have the
time to gather much information. This lack of accession and collection information is more common with objects in early collections, especially those that ended up in museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Improved record keeping systems, especially once digital records came onto the scene, and standardized museum profession practices have gone a long way towards correcting these oversights with later collections.

Still, this is not to say that gathering accession and collection records during this project was necessarily simple or straightforward. For objects that actually have records, some digging and time commitment to find them is required, as due to lack of both funding and staffing, many files at the museums in this study have not yet been digitized. At the National Museum of Natural History, many of the accession and collection details are still on microfilm. At the Buffalo Bill Center of the West and the Montana Historical Society, most of the donor records are paper and stored in large file cabinets. Though these records are necessary for researchers to get clearer ideas about objects’ histories, it is very time consuming to search for them.

**Types of Accessions**

Almost half of the accessions in this sample, at forty-seven out of one hundred and eight pairs of moccasins, were gifts or donations that were made to the museum. Often, it is not the original collector who donated the moccasins, but family members or friends who have inherited them throughout time. The second largest accession group is museum purchases (thirty-three), meaning the moccasins were purchased using museum funds from private sellers, followed by bequests (ten), which are requests made by people in their wills or trusts that require certain items to be donated to a museum following their deaths. Nine moccasins at the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) were specifically collected for the museum’s collection by museum staff or representatives. These purchases are likely an outgrowth of the ‘salvage anthropology’ era, a time when academics wrongly thought that Native American cultures were going extinct and so invaded indigenous communities en masse, trying to collect as much material culture as they possibly could in the name of cultural preservation. For instance, William Wildschut, who is named as the collector of six of the Niitsitapi moccasins in this sample, was an NMAI anthropologist who is well-known for collecting Native American objects, particularly Crow medicine bundles, during the salvage era, and often under less than ethical means.
Two moccasins have unknown accessions and six are categorized as “found in collection,” which essentially means that there is no existing documentation to verify how the moccasins found their way to the museum. ‘Found’ items are a common problem in almost all museum collections, and is an issue most often caused by systemically poor record-keeping by museum staff over long periods of time. Finally, one pair of moccasins, categorized as ‘other’ in the accession category, was collected by a military captain in the early 1860s during his travel through Niitsitapi territory, and he later donated them to the recently created Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Military personnel were an important group of tourists and object collectors in Indian country, as they stimulated a lot of demand for crafts like moccasins and other portable items. A breakdown of accession types can be seen in Figure 6.2.

There are eleven people named in association with the moccasins in this sample, and out of those eleven, only two, one female and one male, can be confirmed as the actual moccasin-maker themselves. The other nine people, all males, are recorded as being the owners of the moccasins, but not the maker. As it is likely that most, if not all, of the moccasins in this sample were made by women, this absence of maker’s names is a glaring oversight, and contributes to the continued invisibility of Native women in museum collections, which is discussed more later on in this chapter.

**Dates**

Only two moccasins were accessioned before 1900. Many accessions (thirty-seven) fall between 1900 and 1929, which makes sense considering that these years are generally regarded as significant periods of collecting for museums. Twenty-six pairs of moccasins were accessioned between 1930 and 1969, twenty between 1970 and 2000, and only twelve moccasins accessioned after 2000. **Figure 6.3** shows the moccasins’ accession dates.

Accession dates do not always reflect the date that the moccasins were either collected from the community or made by the moccasin-maker. Once collected from the maker or owner, moccasins more often than not spent years in individual personal collections before eventually making their way to museums. If the collector was not meticulous about recording the collection date, place, and seller, these details are usually extremely difficult, if not impossible, for museums to determine later. Seventy-six moccasins in this sample have an unknown collection date, while documentation verifies that two pairs were collected between 1850 and
Figure 6.2. Types of Accessions

Figure 6.3. Date Moccasins Accessioned, by Year
Figure 6.4. Approximate Year Moccasins Made

Figure 6.5. Year Moccasins Collected
1870, six between 1871 and 1899, and three between 1900 and 1919. Nineteen pairs of moccasins were likely collected in the 1920s, one in the 1950s, and one in the 1990s. The ‘made’ dates of the moccasins in this sample are widespread, and only several pairs, through documentation, have firm creation dates. Most of the other creation dates in the museum records in this project are speculations based on individual visual analyses of moccasin materials, such as bead and leather type. These analyses are not uniform across institutions and often differ even within a museum’s own collection because they rely heavily on individual people’s perceptions of what materials contribute to dating, along with varying levels of knowledge of Plains Indian history and moccasin construction. That is not to say that a skilled museum curator cannot give an accurate date range for a moccasin, but it is important to remember that dating is a complex process that is often not treated as such and is heavily influenced by personal and institutional biases and differences in knowledge. Figures 6.4 and 6.5 show a breakdown of the years the moccasins in the sample were both collected and made, while Figure 6.6 shows the differences in years between when moccasins were accessioned and when they were made.

**Locality**

Thirty-nine pairs of moccasins are listed as being collected from the United States, thirty-two from Canada, eleven from either the U.S. or Canada, and twenty-six pairs have an unknown country of collection. Regionally, the moccasins in this sample are widely spread out. For the United States, thirty-two pairs of moccasins are documented as coming from Montana, two from North Dakota or South Dakota, and one from Dakota Territory. Nine are listed as simply ‘Northern Plains.’ In Canada, twenty-one pairs are attributed to Alberta in general, seven to the Gleichen area of Alberta and one from Alberta’s Pincher Creek. One pair’s locality is listed simply as the Saskatchewan River in Canada, and one pair is listed from the Northwest Territories. Nine pairs of moccasins are listed as coming either from Montana or Alberta, and twenty-four pairs have an unknown locality. Specific reservations and reserves are rarely named in the museum catalogs in this sample. Twelve pairs of moccasins are listed as either Blackfeet Reservation (eight) or more simply, Blackfeet (four), while six are listed as Siksika, seven as coming from the Piikani Reserve, and one from the Blackfoot Agency in Canada. That leaves eight-two pairs of moccasins without specific reservation/reserve information. Figures 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9 break down this information visually.
Culture of Origin

Almost all the moccasins in this sample, with the exception of three pairs, have been assigned at least one culture of origin, as seen in Figure 6.10. Fifty-six pairs attempt to be tribally specific and use proper tribal designations, with thirty pairs labeled as Piikuni or Piegan, ten as Kainai, nine as Siksika, and seven as North Piikuni or Peigan. Seventeen moccasins are labeled using the informal English names of several of the nations, such as sixteen moccasins designated as Blackfeet and one moccasin labeled as Blood. Twenty-five moccasins are identified more generally as Niitsitapi. There are six moccasins that list other tribal nations as the primary culture of origin, including two pairs as Blackfoot Sioux, one as Crow, one as Dakota (Eastern Sioux), and two as Fort Belknap; however, these moccasins were still included in the moccasin sample because they were housed with other Niitsitapi materials and considered by the museum to have origins somewhere within the Blackfoot Confederacy. Eleven moccasins also have additional cultures of origin listed in addition to a Niitsitapi designation – these include one as Assiniboine, one as Cheyenne, three as Cree, two as Crow, one as Dakota, and one as Sioux. These can be seen in Figure 6.11. These designations could have been made for varying reasons, the most obvious being that the moccasins were collected from a different tribal nation but were later identified as having Niitsitapi characteristics, such as specific design patterns. The other explanation is that the moccasins were actually collected from a Niitsitapi nation, but that museum staff identified the moccasin design as something other than Niitsitapi and thus gave the moccasins a different cultural origin. The methods and accuracy of these cultural assignments made by museum staff are discussed later on in this chapter. Four pairs of moccasins have no culture of origin listed at all.

Museum Catalog Records Data

Data about the moccasins in this sample was also collected from the museum catalog. I define a museum catalog as a compilation of key descriptive information about an object, often including but not limited to measurements, dates, construction materials, design materials, colors, and any other physical attributes about an object that are deemed important. Catalogs can also contain donor and/or collector information, and often include notes made by museum staff, conservators, descendant community consultants, and others. No two museum cataloging
Figure 6.6. Date Accessioned versus Date Made

Figure 6.7. Country of Origin, as Listed in Museum Catalog
Figure 6.8. Reservation/Reserve of Origin, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.9. Region/State of Origin, as Listed in Museum Catalog
Figure 6.10. Culture of Origin, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.11. Additional Cultures of Origin Listed in Museum Catalog
**Figure 6.12. Moccasin Cut, as Listed in Museum Catalog**

**Figure 6.13. Hide Type, as Listed in Museum Catalog**
systems are the same and as such differ in many ways, including in the types of information collected, the depth and breadth of such information, and the ways in which the object information is collected. Although cataloging practices and biases will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter, it is important to remember here that the museums in this project each focus their attention on different aspects of a moccasin’s materials, and the ways that moccasins are described in their catalogs not only differ between institutions, but often differ even within a museum’s own catalog.

Moccasin Cut

For the most part, most of the museum catalogs did not address moccasin cut. Out of the sample, one hundred and two of those catalog entries did not address moccasin cut. The Buffalo Bill Center of the West lists one of their moccasins as a one-piece, while the National Museum of Natural History lists two pairs of moccasins as two-piece and one moccasin as a three-piece. The Montana Historical Society considered moccasin cut the most in their catalog entries out of all of the museums in this study, but still to an inadequate degree; out of the nine moccasins from MHS, they provide the moccasin cut for four of those, with one listed as a two-piece moccasin and three as three-piece moccasins. Figure 6.12 details moccasin cut discussions in the catalogs.

Hide Type

Most of the catalog entries in this project at least make the attempt to talk about moccasin hide type, with most (seventy-six pairs) using non-specific language such as “dressed skin”, “buckskin”, and “leather.” In some instances, the catalogs try to get more specific, with deer hide being the most popular hide type choice, listed for twelve pairs, followed by bison hide at four pairs, caribou at one pair, and elk hide listed for one pair. One entry lists suede or faux leather as the hide type, and fifteen catalog entries do not mention hide type at all.

Considering that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine specific hide types without either a significant hair patch sample or, at the very least, a piece of hair that can be put under a microscope, it is unknown how the museum staff made these determinations. The one exception to this rule may be bison hide, which can sometimes be visually identified due to its sheer thickness and heaviness as compared to other types of hide. However, it is likely that
Figure 6.14. Sole Type, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.15. Presence of Laces, as Listed in Museum Catalog
Figure 6.16. Construction Thread Type, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.17. Décor Material, as Listed in Museum Catalog
most attempts to be specific with hide type result in false or misleading information in the museum catalog. Figure 6.13 breaks down hide type acknowledgements in the catalogs.

**Sole Type, Laces, and Construction Thread Types**

Only thirty-three catalog entries addressed moccasin sole type, with twenty-five pairs listed as hard soled and eight as soft soled. That leaves seventy-seven pairs of moccasins with no acknowledgement whatsoever of sole type in the catalog. This is especially surprising when we consider that museum anthropologists often use sole types to help put dates around when moccasins may have been constructed. Figure 6.14 shows sole type in the catalogs.

Laces are frequent additions to many moccasins, as they help keep the footwear attached securely to a person’s foot, and they are often very long so that they can be wrapped several times around person’s calf. Forty-seven entries acknowledged the presence of moccasin laces in some way, although they were labeled differently in individual museums’ catalogs. For instance, some catalog entries, such as those at the NMAI, called laces “hide thongs” and “babiches”, whereas other places went with the term “laces”, as well as simply “thongs.” This leaves 63 entries without any acknowledgement of laces, even in cases where they have in fact been added to a moccasin (see Figure 6.15).

Construction threads, as shown in Figure 6.16, are defined here as the threads used to put a moccasin’s pieces together. These include the threads used to attach the sole, cuff, tongue, and laces to the moccasin upper, or in the case of soft-soled moccasins, the thread used to sew the moccasin pattern together. Sinew is the thread that is traditionally used to make moccasins, although moccasin-makers in later years have been known to use commercial sinew instead, which is more processed and at times easier to work with than personally-prepared sinew. In some rare cases, likely in times of scarcity or in cases when moccasins will likely not be worn, cotton thread is known to have been used as the construction thread instead of sinew. Only 12 catalog entries addressed construction thread type. NMNH lists sinew three times, commercial sinew once, and cotton thread once. Three of the entries at NMAI list sinew as the construction thread, and one entry lists cotton thread. The Buffalo Bill Center of the West lists sinew as the construction thread for one pair of moccasins and commercial sinew for one pair.
Adornment Materials and Designs

Without question, the museum catalogs in this study focus most of their attention on moccasin adornment materials and designs. In some cases, the designs are the only thing that the catalog mentions about a pair of moccasins. In almost all cases, except for one, the museum catalog in some way addresses the moccasin’s adornment material, with the large majority being beads (seventy-one), followed by beads and cloth (twenty-four), quillwork (five), quillwork and beadwork (three), and a scattering of single pairs of moccasins that have combinations of these and other materials. It is interesting to note that only twenty-seven entries mention the presence of cloth in their descriptions of the décor, whether it be stroud, canvas, or something else, even though almost all the moccasin pairs in this study utilized some type of cloth in the decoration. Figure 6.17 shows the breakdown of décor material discussions in the catalogs. This speaks once more to the fact that museum catalogs are human constructions that tend to focus only on what information is deemed by the institution to be important, rather than being inclusive of all the possible information that exists to be cataloged.

Some of the museum catalogs attempt to get more detailed about the adornment materials, particularly beads. In seventy-seven cases the bead material is listed, all being glass, although only twenty-three entries mention the type of bead involved (all seed beads). Seventy-one entries address the décor stitch type used on the moccasins, with thirty-eight citing overlay/flat stitch, twenty-seven lazy/lane stitch, and six where both types of stitches are used. The majority (ninety-three entries) do not talk about the type of décor thread involved in the adornment, leaving fifteen entries from three museums (NMAI, NMNH, and MHS) that addressed décor thread in some way (nine listed as sinew, six listed as cotton thread). Figures 6.18, 6.19, 6.20, and 6.21 break down these variables visually.

In sixty-six cases there is no design acknowledgement in the museum catalog. For the remaining forty-four entries, there have been attempts to describe either their design elements or the design as a whole (see Figure 6.22). For instance, in seven cases museum personnel have attempted to give the design a specific name, the most common being the “keyhole” design, which is a name that was assigned to a specific design shape on Niitsitapi moccasins by Ewers in his 1945 Blackfeet Crafts and is addressed in more detail in Chapter Three. It is unclear where he got this name from, although it is likely that it is a reflection of his own interpretation of what the design shape looks like to an outside observer (like a keyhole on a door), rather than a
Figure 6.18. Bead Material, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.19. Bead Size, as Listed in Museum Catalog
Figure 6.20. Décor Thread Type, as Listed in Museum Catalog

Figure 6.21. Décor Stitch Type, as Listed in Museum Catalog
designation that he got from a Niitsitapi moccasin-maker or tribal member. In fourteen cases, the catalog lists the design as “floral,” or is at least described as having floral aspects, such as leaves and petals. In five cases the catalog lists the design simply as “geometric,” with no other details about the design listed, and in sixteen entries the moccasin designs are described as amalgamations of geometric shapes like triangles, circles, rectangles, squares, crosses, diagonal boxes, and diamonds. Four catalog design descriptions are combinations of both named designs and shapes.

**Gender**

In eight entries, the catalog speculates about the gender of the moccasin wearer (see Figure 6.23). At the BBCW one pair of moccasins is designated as men’s, and at CMR one pair is labeled as women’s moccasins. NMAI labels two moccasins as women’s and one as men’s, as does the NMNH. In no instances are there any explanations as to how or why a gender was chosen for these moccasins, making it unclear what physical aspects could have contributed to these designations.
Figure 6.22. Design Descriptions from Catalogs

Figure 6.23. Named Genders for Moccasins in Museum Catalogs
**Additional Charts**

All of the variables just discussed have also been broken down by individual museum; see Figures 6.24 through 6.34 for these visual representations.

![Moccasin Cut, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog](image)

**Figure 6.24. Moccasin Cut, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog**
Figure 6.25. Hide Type, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog

Figure 6.26. Sole Type, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog
Figure 6.27. Presence of Laces, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog

Figure 6.28. Construction Thread Types, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog
Figure 6.29. Décor Material, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog

Figure 6.30. Bead Material, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog
Figure 6.31. Bead Size, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog

Figure 6.32. Décor Thread Types, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog
**Figure 6.33. Décor Stitch Types, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog**

**Figure 6.34. Design Descriptions, as Listed in Each Museum Catalog**
Museum Stories Discussion

Based on the information just presented, what role do museums play in telling the economic stories of Native America and the stories concerning Native American women’s labor and their historic and contemporary contributions to household income? I contend that museum accession and collection records, along with the museum catalog, play important roles in hiding Native women’s labor and erasing labor discussions from museum narratives.

It has long been recognized by anthropology that museum records systems are human-made tools that often do not adequately document the objects under their purview (Greene 2015, 2016; Turner 2016). In large part, lack of object documentation began because late nineteenth and early twentieth century collections were assembled prior to the development of standardized anthropological recording and excavation methods and thus objects often arrived in the museum with little to no provenience or provenance information (Martinez, Teeter, and Kennedy-Richardson 2014, 200). This issue was compounded by the fact that early museums often sought to expand the scope of their collections by exchanging items with other institutions, which meant that an object “could be exchanged a number of times with provenience information being lost along the way” (Martinez, Teeter, and Kennedy-Richardson 2014, 200). Documentary information that accompanied artifacts on their journeys through museum collections was not always placed together either. Sometimes information was put into accession files or museum publications, and at other times information remained in the collector’s unpublished notes. Recorded information was also subject to influence from donors and individual museum personnel, both of whom would add and omit data about an object based on their own biases, or sometimes simply by accident (Greene 2016, 153). As it stands today, museum accession, collection, and catalog records play essential roles in shaping the discourse around museum objects and their interpretation to the public. These records act as the main sources of information for curators, collections managers, researchers, and the public, and are tools that are utilized by almost every single museum in the world (Krmpotch and Somerville 2016, 178). As evidenced by the research conducted during this research project, it is clear that contemporary museum record-keeping systems, particularly the museum catalog, are biased, inaccurate, and often inadequate constructions, and it will be the job of twenty-first century museum anthropologists to attempt to rectify these issues.
**Accession and Collection Records**

For the accession and collections records in this sample, the lack of consistent record-keeping over time, both by the original collectors and past museum staff, has resulted in many moccasins that have little to no contextual information associated with them. Accession information regarding donors do not give enough context about the objects being donated and how the donor originally got the object in their possession – was it a tourist purchase? A gift? A commission? It is impossible to know. Many moccasins have no ‘collected on’ date, nor do they have detailed information about collection location, which means that it is left up to museum staff to utilize other methods, discussed later, to try and affiliate the objects with a time and place. Most notably, all but two of the moccasins in this sample have no maker’s name associated with them, which means that the women who created over a hundred pairs of moccasins have been forgotten by time.

While it will be virtually impossible to rectify the lack of contextual information for moccasins already in collections, given that most of the donors and past staff are long dead, it should be standard museum practice from now on to conduct in-depth interviews with potential donors in order to get a clear idea of where the object came from and what the donor’s purpose was in getting it. Objects that have little to no contextual information should no longer be accepted into contemporary museum collections. Additionally, many of the records in this project required hours of searching through hardcopy and microfilm documents for relevant information, which is a hardship and deterrent for people seeking information. In a perfect world, accession, collection, and donor information would be made easily accessible to researchers and in a digital format; however, in a modern world where museums are underfunded and have staff who are overworked and underpaid, this should be noted as a goal to aspire to rather than an immediate problem that needs to be fixed.

**Catalog Records**

Classification can be a useful tool for museums (Errington 1998; Greene 2016; Kopytoff 1986). The process of classifying and sorting objects is characterized by “assembling, categorizing, comparing…ordering and reassembling…[which] involve judgments of value and putting ‘things’ in place” (Harrison 2013, 11). The tendency to impose order upon the chaos of the environment by “classifying its contents” is an inherent need of the human mind (Kopytoff
1986, 70), and this need is clearly reflected in the creation – and continued utilization – of the museum catalog and the processes through which objects are identified and sorted. According to Greene (1992), “a substantial proportion of the objects in most ethnological collections…[are] inadequately documented” (9), which means that anthropologists and curators have had to rely on other methods to identify objects. Unfortunately, the use of these methods has resulted in a museum cataloging system that is “like a bad index in a book; it helps a lot but should not be trusted to be complete or accurate” (Sturtevant 1973, 45).

The catalogs in this study, like museum catalogs everywhere, are biased human constructions that only focus on certain aspects of moccasins and ignore many of the other important features that contribute to moccasins’ biographies. Museum catalogs clearly cherry-pick the types of information that they report about objects, and there is no consistency in cataloging practices between institutions. The catalogs in this study are entrenched in individual museums’ histories, and because cataloging practices have changed over time, there is a lack of consistency in the types of information that have been collected, reported, and emphasized about particular objects. By only focusing on specific features and ignoring others, museum catalogs ignore the labor costs that are associated with these other, seemingly less important features. Overlooking important moccasin construction features also makes it seem as if these aspects are not critical to the moccasins’ functions and erases any notion that moccasin-making is made up of deliberate, careful choices on the part of the artist, with each component being just as important as another.

Almost all of the catalogs in this sample are missing any mention or discussion of moccasin cuff style or height, both of which are deliberate choices made by an artist when creating a moccasin. Cuffs, especially if they are decorated, also require more time, effort, and materials to make, and their lack of acknowledgement in catalogs erases the labor that went into their creation. Most catalogs are also missing sole measurements, and not a single catalog had any measurements of design areas. Discussions of processing methods, like tanning and smoking techniques do not exist either. To be fair, those aspects are hard to determine and identify with the naked eye, which may have contributed to their absence from the catalog record. However, some type of acknowledgement of the processing method should at least exist somewhere in the catalog, even if it is a one-line note; by not mentioning it at all, all of the labor that went into the moccasin hide’s processing is ignored. Additionally, the lack of discussions surrounding tanning
methods in catalogs also contributes to catalogs’ ethnocentricity, as one of the hallmark features of a well-made moccasin within the Niitsitapi community is how well it has been tanned and whether there is hair left on it or not.

The presence of tongues, as well as their shapes, is also not mentioned in the catalogs in this project, which is a significant oversight when we again consider the extra time, thought, and effort that go into tongues’ creation. Tongue shapes can also have important cultural meanings, both for wearers and viewers, and not acknowledging them overlooks their potential importance to interpretation. Though moccasin cut, sole type, and construction thread type are sometimes acknowledged, they are not mentioned consistently across catalogs, or even within single catalogs. This is also a huge oversight, as all three of these aspects can inform discussions of the economic conditions under which the moccasin may have been made (sinew vs. cotton thread; cowhide soles vs. other), the time period it was made (soft sole vs. hard sole), and cultural affiliation.

Although the ways in which anthropology has come to understand culture and cultural development have shifted and broadly expanded since the discipline’s inception, museum classification and cataloguing practices have not. Cataloguing fields are “now so deeply engrained in museum practice that they have become naturalized, invisible, and seldom questioned” (Greene 2016, 148). Catalog fields are questioned in this project, however. Considering the historic lack of Native representation in anthropology and the museum field, it should be no surprise that the catalogs in this study were found to be very Eurocentric. We can see this skewedness not only in the information that is missing, as mentioned above, but also in the way that catalogs talk about designs. The ways in which the museum catalogs in this study talk about moccasin designs vary considerably, both within individual catalogs and between them. Because no guidelines currently exist to help museum staff in naming or describing designs used on ethnographic materials, it has been left up to individual institutions and staff members to use their own methods. This has resulted in entrenched Eurocentric design naming systems that are often inconsistent, inaccurate, and inadequate in describing any sort of artistic intention.

Current design naming systems in these selected museums are Eurocentric because out of the 110 catalog entries for the moccasins in this sample, not one utilizes any Niitsitapi language or descriptors. The design descriptions are all in English, and even in cases where the designs are
named, they are based on non-Native scholars’ interpretations of what the designs are, rather than tribal interpretations. Attempts to change these entrenched naming systems will need to involve institution-wide reevaluations of all ethnographic materials, in-depth analyses, and thoughtful selections of better descriptors, which will in turn need to involve tribal consultants. Consultation will be complex not only because of the significant time and money involved in such a feat, both on the tribal end and the museum end, but also due to the difficulty in assigning specific cultural affiliations to ethnographic materials, particularly moccasins. Design descriptions, as they stand now, attempt to pigeon-hole moccasins into specific visual categories, forcing them to fit within the parameters of English words that might not accurately reflect the overall design. Reducing moccasin designs down to Eurocentric shapes also overlooks any sort of artistic intention that a moccasin-maker may have had.

**Catalogs and Cultural Affiliation**

There are generally two methods that curators use to culturally affiliate objects with specific cultural groups: documentation and attribution. Documentation, as the name suggests, relies on museum records, including information provided by the donor(s), to put boundaries around where and from whom the object was collected. This is perhaps the most reliable method in cultural affiliation because it relies on firsthand accounts, which are generally accurate. The second method, attribution, happens when there is little to no documentary evidence to support a cultural affiliation, and is based on a close analysis of an object’s material traits, which are then used to assign the object to a specific cultural area (Caple 2006; Dongoske et. al. 1991; Greene 1992; Greene 2016; Hatcher 1999).

Using attribution to assign objects like moccasins to cultural categories becomes problematic when we consider that, as Sturtevant (1973) notes, culture area information “often requires correction” (44) and is no longer an adequate system to describe the complicated natures that many museum objects possess. One of the major downfalls of museum cataloging systems, including those in this study, is that they downplay the difficult and complex processes involved in culturally affiliating objects, including moccasins. Poor record-keeping has resulted in inaccurate or unnamed localities for the moccasins in this project, which means that in most cases curators have to rely on attribution methods to culturally affiliate them. Most of the time, designs are the main feature being used to assign moccasins to a cultural category, but this
becomes a problem when we consider the widespread sharing of moccasin designs across the Plains. Additionally, attempts at cultural affiliation overlook the fact that moccasins may have been made by one tribe, but worn by members of another, made possible through trade, intermarriage, and even war.

Not all objects can be reduced to a set of material traits in order to deduce their cultural origins; it is often far more complicated a process, especially for objects from the North American Plains. Attribution in museum catalogs does not critically evaluate “the historical processes that have produced the current [museum] categories of…culture”, and too often curators and anthropologists still hope “to find a one-to-one correlation between [past] cultures and modern tribes” (Dongoske et. al. 1991, 605). The cultural origins of the moccasins in this project are more complex than attribution methods would lead us to believe and attempts to culturally affiliate the moccasins has often resulted in the erasure of specific Niitsitapi nations and even bands. For instance, some designs may be assigned to the conflated category of ‘Niitsitapi’, but in reality may actually belong to a specific nation within the Niitsitapi, to a certain band within those nations, and even to a particular family or individual.

Regardless of these complications, however, the culture area concept is still widely used in object identification and classification and is one of the primary data fields in contemporary ethnographic museum catalogs, including the ones that are publicly accessible online (Greene 2016, 158). Thus, to combat some of the difficulties involved in cultural attribution for moccasins, it would be useful to someday create a comprehensive database of specific tribal moccasin designs, where tribal experts can contribute their own insights and comparisons can be made between the designs of neighboring tribes. An in-depth analysis of historic photos across time and culture could also provide insight into moccasin designs across regions.

**Conclusion**

Museums are one of society’s most powerful storytellers. They hold the keys to creating meaningful narratives surrounding moccasins and other objects from the Northern Plains, and accession and catalog systems and information play critical roles in crafting those stories for both museum staff, outside researchers, tribal communities, and the general public. Right now, there are no worldwide, nationwide, or even statewide standards for what kinds of information systems should be used in museums. Although there are certain standardized systems that have been
pushed, such as PastPerfect, museums can choose not to use it and instead use a combination of other methods, which often ends up being Excel or some other tool that was not built specifically for accession, collection, and catalog data. In the future, American museums should consider implementing cataloging programs that would standardize catalog information across local and even national contexts.

Ultimately, analysis of the accession, collection, and catalog information in the museums in this sample has shown how current museum record-keeping systems contribute to the erasure of Native artists, and women in particularly, and disregards the amount of labor – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and time-wise – that objects like moccasins embody. Museum records erase Native women from labor contributions discussions, thus making their labor ‘hidden’ from museum staff, scholars, and the general public. Future museum interpretation and exhibits about moccasins should include at least an acknowledgement of how museum records influence the stories that these institutions tell about moccasins and other objects. museums can rectify the historic silence that has surrounded Native women, their labor, and their footwear.
Figure 7.1. Song of the Woman Warrior. Mixed media portrait of Elouise Pepion Cobell by Deborah Magee (Blackfeet), 2020. Photo courtesy of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, where the portrait is part of their permanent collection.
CHAPTER 7: ART AS ECONOMIC ENGINE

“Art is the greatest asset Indian people have in our communities, yet it is the most underdeveloped.” - Elouise Cobell (1945-2011), Blackfeet rancher and activist.

Throughout this paper, I have confronted a variety of questions, including: how can we use object-based analysis, supplemented with other lines of research, to tell the economic stories of the Northern Plains? What stories can we glean from footwear about Native American women’s labor and their historic and contemporary contributions to household income production? What roles do museums play in these stories? All of these questions have (hopefully) been addressed in previous chapters. Here, I would like to answer my final question, which is, how does any of this matter to contemporary issues that people are facing in Indian Country today?

Some of the most significant challenges that contemporary Native communities face today include “lack of access to quality health care, few employment opportunities, resultant lower socioeconomic status, generational poverty and trauma, and the ensuing high incidence of alcohol and drug misuse” on reservations (Paul and Caplins 2020, 29), along with traditional lands recovery, high proportions of missing and murdered Native people (particularly women), and keeping cultural traditions and languages alive, to name a few. On the Blackfeet Reservation, “one-third (33.7%) of reservation households have incomes below $20,000 annually and almost one-half (49.6%) have incomes below $30,000 annually” (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 15). According to a 2018 study conducted by the Blackfeet Nation, “almost forty percent of all residents of the Blackfeet Indian Reservation live in poverty” (16), which is over twice the state of Montana’s average poverty rate. The Blackfeet Nation identified several factors as contributing to the reservation’s high poverty rates and subsequently high reliance on public assistance, including lack of private sector activity and lack of jobs for residents (17). High poverty rates and lack of jobs has also led to substantial rates of urban migration, with large numbers of young people especially leaving to seek employment, housing, schooling, and other opportunities off the reservation. James (2017) points out this struggle, noting

Since contact, the struggle for Indian communities has been, and remains, to hold on to culture, land, and natural resources in the face of human and technological encroachment. Recently, a new struggle has developed: to hold onto the people. Indian and indigenous communities worldwide are bleeding young people into surrounding societies. The 2010 U.S. Census illustrates this. In that census more American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN)
Figure 7.2. Entrance to Blackfeet Land. Photo by Cindy Uken (2018), “Montana Tribe Tackles Health Disparities with Help from Student Researchers.” Rural Health Quarterly.
people lived away from tribal lands than on them; the majority of AI/AN people live in urban areas (ix).

Like many reservation-based economies, one of the most significant barriers to business establishment and expansion on the Blackfeet reservation is the historic lack of access to start-up and expansion funds (i.e., credit and capital). This is because the trust status of tribal lands makes it difficult to use trust land “to mortgage land or buildings, to get business start-up capital, or to use equity in non-business property for financing” (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 26). Reservations are also notoriously underbanked; according to Clarkson (2017), “Indian Country is the most underbanked territory in the United States…[and] according to the Native CDFI Network [in 2016], eighty-six percent of Indian Country communities lack a single financial institution within their borders to access affordable financial products and services” (90). Thus, because it is not easy to get start-up capital or access appropriate financial services on the reservation, many residents who want to start businesses are forced to turn to other avenues for funds, such as private investors (who are often family members) and loans. However, these avenues come with their own challenges; due to the historic lack of reservation economic development across the country, many Native families cannot rely on access to generational wealth as a source of start-up funds and obtaining a private loan through a bank is often difficult due to a major lack of on-reservation credit-building opportunities.

How, then, is moccasin-making possibly relevant to these economic challenges for both Blackfeet individuals and the community as a whole? As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, moccasin-making has been used for centuries in Blackfeet and Niitsitapi household income production strategies, and the economic potential for moccasin-making still holds true today. Reservation-based artists, including moccasin-makers, represent one of the most significant on-reservation, human-embodied economic development opportunities in Indian country and on the Blackfeet Reservation in particular. The First Peoples Fund, an organization that supports Indigenous artistry throughout the United States, refers to Native arts and artists as “economic engines” that can help support communities’ efforts to alleviate poverty on reservations (First Peoples Fund 2013, 10). First Peoples Fund goes on to say that

…Native culture and tradition-based knowledge represent an important asset with the potential to increase the economic productivity of tribal communities. The creative production of art and artistic expression are, today, among the most promising ways to expand the market economy in rural and urban Native communities (2013, 5).
Reports by the U.S. Treasury have characterized “Native American communities as America’s ‘domestic emerging market’” and “cites the sales growth rates of Native American-owned business as double the US average and business creation rates as seven times the US average” (Harrington 2017, 11). Economic expansion can be driven by Native art and artists in four ways, according to a study conducted by the First Peoples Fund (2013). The first is by increasing leadership capacity, which simply means providing training and support to Native artists that will help them increase their own income and empower them to take leadership and mentorship roles within their communities. The second way is by using art to increase assets and wealth among low-income individuals and families, which in turn generates household income and eventually economic stability, which then translates into better economic stability for the overall community. Native art can also drive economic development by altering the underlying causes of poverty, wherein individuals are empowered to acknowledge their art as a revenue-generating activity and can therefore help others do the same, thus drawing people out of the cycle of poverty. Lastly, Native arts are sustainable, long-term solutions to economic development issues on reservations, and if given the right tools and support, arts like moccasin-making can be an avenue for Native communities to alleviate poverty in the long term (10; see First Peoples Fund 2013 market study “Art as an Economic Engine in Native Communities for more information on these strategies).

**Blackfeet Moccasin-Making Today**

Art is the primary home-based business in Indian country and it is estimated that up to thirty percent of Native peoples are either practicing or potential artists (First Peoples Fund 2013, 7-8). Although most of these Native artists tend to live below the poverty level “and lack the necessary arts-specific business skills and training to operate successful American Indian art ventures”, with culturally appropriate support, “the Native arts economy has the potential to expand dramatically, affecting not only the artists themselves, but their communities, as well” (First Peoples Fund 2013, 7). Contemporary moccasin-making can be viewed as a ‘microenterprise’, which is a small business that “tend[s] to be small…, home based, minimally capitalized, and labor intensive, with modest sales volumes and a narrowly defined…clientele” (Ehlers and Main 1998, 430). The major difference in this case is that most moccasin-makers do not tend to formally incorporate as businesses and instead exist within the informal
entrepreneurial labor sector. Another way of categorizing Blackfeet moccasin-making labor is by viewing it as an informal, home-based art business, which the First Peoples Fund (2013) has identified is the sector with the most potential for dramatic growth on reservations (7).

Ammskaapipiikuni moccasin-makers today are comprised of people of all genders and all ages. They are also comprised of all skill levels, ranging from self-identified beginners like Kiela Bird to more experienced artists like Daniel Edwards. Many Blackfeet moccasin-makers today can be considered what James (2017, xvi) calls “solo-preneurs”, which consists of one person combining several economic efforts – like moccasin-making and working in a formal wage-labor industry job, for instance – in order to make ends meet. Although some Blackfeet moccasin-makers like Daniel Edwards find enough success in the industry that moccasin-making can be done full-time and operate as a major source of household income, most people make moccasins on much smaller scales and often only for family and friends.

Like many informal craftwork industries, moccasin-making generally takes place in the home, in the evenings, and in conjunction with domestic labor in the household, meaning that it is often done around other household tasks, such as taking care of children, cooking, and cleaning. Daniel Edwards said that he usually starts working around 10:00pm, when his kids are in bed, and works for approximately three hours until around 1:00am. Kiela Bird, with two young children under five years old, also works at night for several hours after her kids have gone to sleep. One of the challenges of working at night for Kiela is that she cannot do quillwork, as cultural protocols state that quillwork can only be done when the sun is up. Whereas most people spend their evenings winding down from the day, these two artists spend their evening hours at work, creating moccasins and other art pieces to help provide for their families. As I have been emphasizing throughout this project, art is not merely a leisure-time activity, but an actual job.

**Current Challenges in Moccasin-Making and Art Production**

Contemporary Blackfeet artists like Daniel and Kiela face numerous challenges when it comes to making moccasins and other forms of art. For one, the lack of local shops from which to buy supplies has often acted as a major impediment for artists. Although this problem has been largely mitigated with access to online ordering, remote reservation residents still face
Figure 7.3. Selection of moccasins made for sale by Daniel After Buffalo Edwards.
Photos by Daniel Edwards, courtesy of Daniel’s Facebook page.
challenges in having to drive long distances to the post office to pick up their supplies, as many homes on the reservation do not have addresses and therefore cannot have packages delivered directly to them. For supplies that cannot be bought online, many people face a two-hundred mile or more drive to the nearest major economic center in Great Falls, Montana, which can be a burden that is made worse if a person does not have reliable transportation or cannot afford the significant gas costs. Both artists in this project said that they self-provision, which means that they buy their own materials using personal funds rather than using capital, such as small-business loans. Many also obtain materials from friends, family, other artists, and even community members who know about their art and do their best to support them in the ways that they can.

Moccasin sales themselves are often done through a combination of market-based sales and trades, with word of mouth and social media playing critical roles in promoting artwork and generating customer orders for both Daniel Edwards and Kiela Bird. Daniel in particular said that many people contact him for moccasin orders through Facebook, which also serves as a platform for promoting his designs and his business. Several local shops, including the gift shop of the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning, also provide venues where moccasins can be sold, especially to tourists. Large events like powwows and other celebrations often incorporate artist booths as well, which can provide artists with opportunities to market their work to their own communities, other Native communities, and non-Native visitors. Labor costs involved in selling moccasins today include the time and effort it takes to promote work, whether it is online or in print; the significant time and monetary costs involved for more remote reservation residents who have to travel to Browning (or even Great Falls) to supply shops with products; and the substantial money, time, and physical work it takes to set up booths at art shows, markets, and other smaller venues. To help offset some of these costs, infrastructural investment in reservation-based artists, such as by tribal governments, should consider providing stipends or other forms of financial assistance to assist artists in finding and traveling to obtain supplies and markets. Moccasin market opportunities for Blackfeet artists are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Because the cost of production for moccasin-making can be difficult to quantify monetarily, especially when it comes to itemizing the substantial time costs required, it can also be challenging for artists to set prices that fairly compensate them for their time and efforts. One
reason for this is that there is no formal wage scale to compensate artists because moccasin-making is an informal home-based industry, so it is left up to individuals to set their own price points. For people who do not have a comprehensive business or art-business background, it can be difficult to determine what a ‘fair’ price is for their work, which often results in selling prices that are too low.

Additionally, Native entrepreneurs are unique in the business world because of their tendency to value community and family relationships over material success (Harrington, Birmingham, and Stewart 2017, 31). Many Native businesspeople also emphasize community well-being and the revitalization of traditional knowledge over personal profit, which is in stark contrast to other sectors of non-Native business, which tends to value income generation above all. Both Daniel and Kiela expressed how price-setting is one of the hardest challenges they face in their work. In Daniel’s case, he does have established price points for certain moccasin characteristics, with the lowest priced moccasins, usually incorporating Blackfeet floral designs, selling for around $200.00 and the highest priced, typically high-top moccasins that are more expensive to create, selling for around $600.00. However, Daniel expressed several times that he was not as confident in the business side of selling moccasins, and that he struggles to determine price points that will both compensate him fairly and also not be too expensive for his buyers, who are often community members. Kiela also felt uncomfortable with the selling aspects of her art business, stating that she did not yet feel ‘expert enough’ to charge highly for her work. Although art business programs have been attempted on the Blackfeet Reservation before (see Plemmons 2009), some participants felt that it did not include many relevant topics, like price-setting, and lacked consistency, resulting in its eventual discontinuation. Considering the challenges that Daniel and Kiela face in this arena, future investments in reservation-based art industries should consider establishing consistent, accessible, and comprehensive art business education programs that teach price-setting and other art business skills in culturally appropriate ways.

Another challenge that many Native artists face is finding physical space where they can work on their art efficiently and without distractions. With two young children, Kiela finds it especially difficult to find areas to work where little hands cannot grab beads or other materials that can be swallowed or otherwise messed with. She does not have the space to dedicate solely to an art studio, which means that even though she works after her children have been put to
“All Native models exist because of culture bearers, including Native business models. They are the nucleus of culture that all of our art, modern and traditional, flows from, and none would exist without the traditional ways and belief systems. Identity, knowledge, teachings, traditions — that stream that exists without the individual people — they all emanate from the beliefs and practices held and passed on by our culture bearers.”

—Alfred “Bud” Lane III, Vice President Siletz Tribal Council, President Northwest Basketweavers Association and First Peoples Fund board member
bed, they can still accidentally access her art space during the day. Daniel also faces space challenges, noting that he uses his kitchen table to cut out moccasin pieces out and sets up a small table in his living room where he keeps his supplies, like beads and sinew. Although this setup works for him, having to use a heavily trafficked room in the house, where materials have to constantly be picked up and moved around to make space during the course of daily life, adds extra labor to his moccasin-making process that is not necessarily accounted for when talking about the work that goes into moccasin-making. Space issues are not easily resolved, especially because many artists work late at night and thus may not feel comfortable or safe traveling to an off-site studio space. However, tribal investments in community artists should consider how artistic space can be created, inside or outside of personal homes, in culturally appropriate and meaningful ways.

The Challenge of Authenticity

An additional challenge that Blackfeet moccasin-makers, and in fact all Native artists, face that non-Native artists often do not is confronting the idea of cultural authenticity in their art. As has been discussed previously, Native artists have historically been constricted by non-Native tourist markets that have demanded objects that ‘look Native’, which in turn influenced, at least in part, the types of moccasin designs that were and were not made for sale (such as floral styles not being made for non-Native markets). Today, artists from all the Niitsitapi communities challenge what it means to be a Native artist in a contemporary world, and in moccasin-making, that can often mean expressing popular pop culture themes and motifs in traditional mediums, such as making a pair of moccasins with Baby Yoda beaded on them. At the same time, traditional expressions of cultural heritage and the use of enduring cultural designs can be meaningful for both moccasin-makers and wearers and contributes to cultural revitalization and pride.

Also related to ideas of authenticity in Native art is the pressure of what McChesney (2003, 228) calls the “technological ceiling,” which is the idea that artists must use only traditional methods to make their art, or it is not ‘authentic’ enough. McChesney talks about how this idea is often applied to Southwestern potters specifically, who are forced by the market to authenticate their work by using only traditional methods of making pottery, such as making clay by hand and firing pots in the ground, rather than using potters’ wheels and kilns (2003, 228).
For moccasin-makers, the imposition of the technological ceiling often means that artists must use sinew rather than cotton thread, historic glass beads rather than plastic, and traditionally tanned hides rather than commercial leather. Not only do the traditional materials often involve larger monetary investments, they can also take more time and physical labor to prepare. Physical markets, mostly composed of non-Natives, still try to impose colonial ideas of authenticity onto Native artists, relating authenticity to historical and so-called ‘traditional’ creation methods, rather than recognizing that contemporary Native art is a living medium of expression and should be allowed to utilize new and modern tools and materials without being accused of being culturally inauthentic (Roth 2018, 53). However, it also important to recognize that, like other confrontations with authenticity, many Native artists prefer to use traditional methods in their work, as it can be both a sign and a reminder of cultural revitalization. Overall though, Native artists should be allowed to use the materials that they want to use instead of being restricted by market ideas.

Another major challenge for Ammskaapipiikuni moccasin-makers and artists that has been heavily addressed in the literature for other Native communities (Dorion 2013; Fowler 2013; Kennedy et. al. 2017; M’Closkey 2002; and Roth 2018, among many others) is the problem of cultural misappropriation. Cultural commodification by non-Native people and industries has always been a major concern in the Native arts and crafts market, and it continues to be a significant challenge faced by artists today. In contemporary American culture especially, Native people have historically been commoditized by numerous industries throughout time, “beloved for their stereotyped bravery and strength and [thus] emblazoned on sports logos, foods, and clothing” (Fowler 2013, 44). Supposedly ‘Native American-inspired’ clothing and accessories have become extraordinarily popular in American retail stores, where customers are encouraged “to wear ‘tribal’ printed tops and pants, imitation turquoise rings, and Jeffrey Campbell moccasins” (Fowler 2013, 45). It can be incredibly challenging for Blackfeet and other artists to protect their intellectual property legally, as this process involves not only significant legal fees, but also a complex process of naming specific designs for protection, which can be hard when multiple communities used the same or similar designs. However, there are some protections for Native artists and their work. As discussed in Chapter Five, the Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1990 attempts to prevent the misrepresentation of Native art by non-Natives, as does the Montana Consumer Protection Act. In Montana, the “use of the Native American Made
in Montana logo requires enrollment in a Montana tribe and residency in the state” (U. S. Department of the Interior 2017, 1), and “it is illegal to market an art or craft item using the name of a tribe if a member, or certified Indian artisan, if that tribe did not actually create the art or craft item” (U. S. Department of the Interior 2017, 2). Although there are issues with both these laws, they at least make the attempt to protect Native artists from fakes, frauds, and misappropriations of their work.

**Ammskaapipiikuni Moccasin Market Opportunities Today**

Blackfeet moccasin markets today are comprised of both Native and non-Native customers. In Native communities, moccasins are important regalia needed for celebrations like graduations, dances, ceremonies, and other cultural activities. Moccasins are also needed for powwows, especially by dancers who are competing and who generally wear out moccasins fairly quickly. Investigation of these markets was outside of the scope of this project and not really possible in a pandemic, but there are certainly future research opportunities for scholars who want to explore contemporary domestic moccasin markets in more depth.

Many of the economic opportunities derived from contemporary moccasin-making come from cultural tourism. The First Peoples Fund (2013) identified tourism as a meaningful, culturally appropriate economic avenue for emerging and established artists that has great potential for growth in the future. Tourism is directly related to increases in demand, which in turn is correlated to fair pricing, more buyers, and less competition among artists (18). Cultural tourism is nothing new to either the Blackfeet or the Niitsitapi as a whole, as described in earlier chapters, and in fact the Blackfeet Nation, in a 2018 report, identified the tourism sector, especially at Glacier National Park, as one of its greatest sources of potential income generation and economic development for reservation residents (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 30). Not only does cultural tourism represent significant income potential for Native artists and stands as a critical economic industry in Indian country, but it can also serve as an important avenue for keeping traditional arts alive and contribute to revitalizing art knowledge that may otherwise be lost.

Cultural tourism in Montana represents one of the largest growing markets in the state and has the potential to generate significant economic development opportunities for Montana-based Indian nations, including the Blackfeet. According to the Montana Budget and Policy Center, 11.7 million people visited Montana in 2015, “spending $3.66 billion and contributing an
estimated $5.15 billion to the overall Montana economy” (2017, 1). In 2016, the number of visitors to the state topped 12.3 million, where each person spent an average of $147.00 per day and stayed between four and five nights. These numbers “supported nearly 53,000 jobs across many industry sectors, produced $4.8 billion in goods and services sold, and generated $194 million in state and local taxes” (Institute for Tourism & Recreation Research, “Economic Snapshot of Montana’s Travel Industry”, as quoted in Montana Budget and Policy Center 2017, 1).

Native American cultural tourism specifically represents a significant portion of Montana’s tourism dollars. Data collected between 2012 and 2014 indicated that almost “thirteen percent of visitors to Montana came to experience American Indian history and culture”, meaning that 1.4 million visitors annually “were drawn to Montana for reasons directly related to American Indians” (Montana Budget and Policy Center 2017, 2). Furthermore, Made in Montana products, which includes Indian arts and crafts like moccasins, accounted for seven percent of non-resident traveler expenditures in 2016, which translates to $230.6 million added to Montana and reservation economies over the course of the year (Montana Budget and Policy Center 2017, 2). In 2018, almost eighty-two percent “of visitors to Montana expressed an interest in sites and experiences related to Native American history and culture” (Montana Department of Commerce n.d., 3).

There are significant opportunities for Blackfeet moccasin-makers to capitalize on tourist traffic through Blackfeet country, especially with the heavy crowds that Glacier National Park brings, particularly in the summertime. Potential non-Native moccasin markets include local Montanans as well as visitors from outside the state. According to a survey conducted by Sage, Wheeler, and Nickerson in 2019, a large majority of resident Montanans and frequent non-resident Montana travelers have reported traveling through the Blackfeet Reservation more than any other Indian reservation in the state, with seventy-three percent of people indicating that they were likely to stop there (iv). The largest tourist draw to Blackfeet country is still Glacier National Park, with the second most visited site being the Museum of the Plains Indian in Browning (Sage, Wheeler, and Nickerson 2019, 15). Tourists who chose not to stop on the Blackfeet Reservation during their travels indicated that it was often because they were not sure what was available (Sage, Wheeler, and Nickerson 2019, 29). Larger online presences, combined with wider marketing strategies across the reservation, could potentially bring more visibility to
moccasin-makers and other artists who are looking to expand their customer bases into the Montana tourism market. The dollars generated from cultural tourism activities on the Blackfeet Reservation, including selling moccasins, could significantly benefit economic development within the community.

Tourism can also help spread cultural awareness about Blackfeet artists and the community in general, and it provides an economically viable way for Blackfeet moccasin-makers to continue creating and keep moccasin-making traditions alive. Although utilizing cultural heritage as an economic resource may face opposition from some, likely fueled by past and current examples of misappropriation, “cultural tourism and art markets have also long been considered as potential sources of income, pride, and cultural perpetuation for Indigenous communities” (Roth 2018, 4). This is especially true in Niitsitapi country, where moccasin-making has a long history in economic strategies. As Roth (2018) points out, one of the major advantages to capitalizing on cultural heritage’s economic potential is that it never runs out; heritage is at once used as a resource and yet at the same time “perpetuated rather than depleted” (173). Heritage can be preserved by expending it as a tangible economic resource, while simultaneously expanding to serve as an individual’s and community’s intangible cultural wealth (Roth 2018, 173).

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As has been noted previously, there is much more potential to unlock in this project with further ethnographic work, which should hopefully now be possible with the end of the COVID-19 pandemic in sight at the time of this writing in March 2022. There is also a lot of statistical potential for this data, not the least of which could be statistical application in determining significant factors in cultural affiliating moccasins with the Niitsitapi. Future work should also consider creating a shareable, accessible ‘design database’ that Indigenous communities and scholars can all contribute to in order to begin establishing parameters around moccasin designs across the Plains, which can then hopefully aid in cultural affiliation processes. This work merely scratches the surface of the potential contributions that object-based analysis, in conjunction with other sources of information like archives and partnerships with Native communities, can make to the field of anthropology and beyond. I would encourage future scholars to continue pushing the boundaries on what is possible for object-based analysis in
What Reservation-Based Native Artists Need to Be Successful

Figure 7.4. What Reservation-Based Native Artists Need to Be Successful. Chart by First Peoples Fund (2013, 11).
museums. I also recommend a deeper consideration of moccasins’ role in the contemporary Native art market, as well as a thorough look at the arts-based economy on the Blackfeet Reservation and in-depth investigations into the ways in which it can contribute to economic development for the people living there. Future scholars might also consider delving more deeply into discussions of the differences in economic systems and how those could potentially influence who controls money in the household.

Conclusions

Though much of this paper has been spent discussing the historical contexts of Niitsitapi moccasin-making, it is important to remember that moccasins’ stories continue to be told by Native artists today. As has been demonstrated, moccasins have historically been used in Niitsitapi economic strategies and income generation, which in turn has helped both individuals and the overall community adapt to changing economic conditions over time and keep material culture traditions alive in the face of adversity. This is still the case with moccasin-making today, where artists are generally engaged in producing for both Native and non-Native markets. Niitsitapi moccasin-makers are also still entwined with cultural tourism in the twenty-first century, where cultural and material heritage serve as critical economic resources not only for individual households, but also for Native communities throughout Indian country. Ultimately, Niitsitapi interactions with the colonial enterprise has resulted in creative engagement with the capitalist market and the continued capitalization on heritage as a tangible economic resource.

As pointed out by the First Peoples Fund (2013), “many emerging Native artists and other culture bearers are involved in the informal sector economy primarily because they lack the resources and comprehensive understanding of the distribution channels and networks for their art forms” (7). The market study conducted by the First Peoples Fund identified six major support pillars that emerging reservation-based Native artists need to be successful; many of these have already been pointed out above as barriers that contemporary Niitsitapi artists face. These support pillars include access to markets (physical and electronic); access to supplies; access to credit and capital; increased business knowledge; access to (informal) social networks; and space to work (2013, 11-15). Because these businesses are home-based, effective support must not only be culturally appropriate, but also “reflective of how households allocate time [and] mindful of family structure” (First Peoples Fund 2013, 8). Additionally, as Harrington,
Birmingham, and Stewart (2017) point out, it is ultimately an exercise of economic sovereignty “when tribal governments and communities decide what types of businesses to allow in Indian Country and what business endeavors a reservation community will support” (33). There are currently seventeen arts and crafts businesses on the Blackfeet Nation that have a formal Blackfeet Tribal Business License (Blackfeet Nation 2018, 70). With support, these types of businesses can grow drastically and can serve as an economic engine for future development on the Blackfeet Reservation, something that the community has identified as drastically and immediately needed.

Museums have an important role to play in helping to support contemporary Native moccasin-makers and artists. Not only can museums serve as venues where traditional knowledge can be recaptured through visits by descendant communities, but they can also continue supporting Native art’s critical economic roles by facilitating accessible art markets where artists can sell their work. Many museums also have the tools to sponsor art business education programs, as well as classes where interested students can learn making and business skills from experienced Native artists. These types of classes can also help support Native communities’ goals of keeping cultural artistic traditions alive. Museums can also continue to add contemporary artists’ moccasins and other forms of work to their collections, which not only supports artists’ incomes, but also reminds the general public that Native communities are not relics of the past, but in fact are very much alive and thriving.

Like I said at the very beginning of this paper, moccasin stories are complicated because they are actually the stories of people, of human beings who have lived powerful and complex lives throughout time. But perhaps the most important tales that moccasins have to tell are the ones about the transformative powers that working with traditional materials and mediums, and engaging in the act of traditional artistic creation, has for artists from all Native communities. Creating and teaching tradition-based art enables artists “to revitalize and mobilize endangered knowledge, and to confront trauma and hidden histories, while affirming the ongoing vitality and sovereignty of their communities” (Racette 2017, 123). Traditional artistic expression, such as moccasin-making, can help preserve the Niitsitapi way of life, maintain cultural identity, and perpetuate traditional spiritual values, while also offering a way out of poverty and providing an avenue for economic development with Niitsitapi communities (First Peoples Fund 2013, 5). Stitched into Niitsitapi moccasins are the economic, social, and cultural stories that have grown
between artists, communities, and markets throughout time, and those stories are powerful and
deserve to be told. I hope that I have done them justice here.

*Nitsiiksimatsi’tsi’pa* (Thank you).
Figure 8.1. *Rides a White Horse Woman.* Linocut painting by David Dragonfly, 2018. Featured in the 2021 Showcase of the Museum of the Plains Indian (Indian Arts and Crafts Board) in Browning, MT. Photo from the 2021 Showcase Exhibit Catalog.
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National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, MD


Photograph Sources

Archives and Special Collections, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, MT

Sherburne Family Papers, MSS 67, Box 129, Folder 24, 27. Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana, Missoula, Montana.

McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, WY

Paul Dyke Collection, MS 320. McCracken Research Library, Buffalo Bill Center of the West, Cody, Wyoming.

Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, MT


James Willard Schultz Papers, Collection 10, Box 8, Folders 2, 3, 4, 5, 10. Merrill G. Burlingame Special Collections, Montana State University Library, Bozeman, Montana.

Montana Historical Society Research Center, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

N.A. Forsyth Stereographs, ST 001, Series IX, Subseries II. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Archives, Helena, Montana.


PAC 954. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana.

956-038. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana.


PAC 79.37, Elizabeth Lochrie. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana.

PAC 79.49, Elizabeth McComb. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Photograph Archives, Helena, Montana.

Photograph Negatives, Folder 1: 940_400-799. Montana Historical Society Research Center,
Archives, Helena, Montana.


Photograph Negatives, Folder 4: PAC 94_64-84. Montana Historical Society Research Center, Archives, Helena, Montana.


National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, MD

BIA Glass Plate Negatives. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.


John Canfield Ewers Papers, Box 3, 5. National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

Truman Michelson Photograph Collection, 1910-1926 (unprocessed). National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Center, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, MD

National Museum of the American Indian Photo Archives. National Museum of the American Indian Cultural Resources Center, Smithsonian Institution, Suitland, Maryland.

Penn Museum Archives, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA


Winold Reiss Archives, New York
Winold Reiss Archives. The Reiss Partnership, New York.


**Drawings and Paintings**


Bodmer, Karl. “Young Piegan Blackfeet Woman.” Watercolor and pencil on paper, 1833, Joslyn Art Museum, Omaha, Nebraska, [https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NE003243?destination=edan-search/catalog_of_america%3Fpage%3D400%26edan_q%3D%253A%252A%252A%26edan fq%255B0%255D%3Ddate%253A%25221830s%2522](https://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NE003243?destination=edan-search/catalog_of_america%3Fpage%3D400%26edan_q%3D%253A%252A%252A%26edan_fq%255B0%255D%3Ddate%253A%25221830s%2522).


**Web**


Figure 9.1. Long Journey Back Home. Acrylic paint on canvas by John Marceau (Blackfeet), 2019. Featured in the August-October 2019 Summer Showcase of the Museum of the Plains Indian (Indian Arts and Crafts Board) in Browning, MT. Photo from the 2019 Showcase Exhibit Catalog.
CHAPTER 9: APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Moccasin Data Collection Sheet

Appendix 2: Moccasin Data Codebook and Additions

Appendix 3: Photograph Data Codebook

Appendix 4: Informed Consent Forms
APPENDIX 1: MUSEUM DATA COLLECTION SHEET

Shifley, Michaela – Data Collection Sheet (Blackfoot/Blackfeet Moccasins)

DATE: 

OBJECT CATALOG #: 

---

___PICTURES TAKEN?
   ___ Right Foot
   ___ Front view (@ toe)
   ___ Back view (@ heel)
   ___ Side view (left)
   ___ Side view (right)
   ___ Close ups of decorated areas

___ Left Foot
   ___ Front view (@ toe)
   ___ Back view (@ heel)
   ___ Side view (left)
   ___ Side view (right)
   ___ Close ups of decorated areas

___MATERIALS RECORDED?  
___COLORS RECORDED?  
___DESIGNS RECORDED?  

___CATALOG INFO RECORDED & LOGGED?  
___ACCESSION INFO RECORDED & LOGGED?

PART I

1. Hide Type: Known Unknown Notes:

2. Processing? Brain-tanned Non-Brain-tanned / Smoked Unsmoked

   Note: can almost always assume it’s brain-tanned; be aware that yellow-colored leather and a distinct smell can indicate hide was smoked (make sure to distinguish from paint)

3. Moccasin Type (Cut/Construction)  

   Soft sole Hard sole / Worn Not Worn

   One-piece Two-piece Three-piece Four-piece Five-piece Six+

   Vamp? Y / N
   Welt? Y / N
   Laces? Y / N
   Cuff? Y / N Hide Material
   Heel Fringe? Y / N

   Tongue? Y / N Description/Sketch:

   Notes:

385
Native Tech Typologies (informal – for personal use):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PIECES</th>
<th>HEEL SEAM</th>
<th>TOE SEAM</th>
<th>SIDE SEAM</th>
<th>INSTEP</th>
<th>MIDDLE SEAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>T-shaped</td>
<td>Straight slit</td>
<td>Exists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One +</td>
<td>T-shaped</td>
<td>T-shaped</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>T-shaped</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat sole + upper</td>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Y or II shaped</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Moccasin Construction Thread Types – sinew (hard and poky), cotton thread, hair, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heel</th>
<th>Toe</th>
<th>Side</th>
<th>Sole to upper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sole to welt</td>
<td>Upper to cuff</td>
<td>Vamp to upper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tongue to upper</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

5. Measurements (in inches)

Sole (length from big toe to end & width at widest part of foot under toes; height is sole to cuff):

Left:

Right:

Cuff:

Left:

Right:

Tongue:

Left:

Right:
### PART II: DESIGN

1. **Decoration Type:**
   - None
   - Quills
   - Beads
   - Paint
   - Other

2. **Decoration Thread Type:**
   - Sinew
   - Cotton
   - Both
   - Other (specify)

3. **Decoration Stitch Type & Placement** (overlay/flat/applique, lane/lazy, etc.)
   - Uppers: Flat Lane Both / Notes:
   - Toes & Sides: Flat Lane Both /
   - Heels: Flat Lane Both /
   - Cuffs: Flat Lane Both /

4. **Bead Color(s) Description:**
   - Red (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Yellow (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Blue (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - White (Greasy, Light, Translucent/Clear)
   - Black
   - Green (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Purple (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Orange (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Pink (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)
   - Grey (Greasy, Light, Medium, Dark)

Color terms used in this analysis include white, light blue, bluish-green (more green than blue), greenish-blue (more blue than green), royal blue (brilliant bright blue), dark blue, black, pink, yellow, purple, and red.
**Beaded Design(s)** (need to read more literature on specific Blackfoot/feet design terminology)

**Description & Sketch** (ex. keyhole, lines, etc.): 

![Figure 1: "Blackfeet Basic Geometric Designs" (McCoy 1972:44)](image1)

![Figure 3: "Blackfeet Designs" (McCoy 1972:45)](image3)

![Figure 4: Drawings that represent some of the most basic designs used on Blackfeet moccasins (Hungry Wolf 1980:226)](image4)

**Moccasin Decoration Typology** (Lycett 2014)

![Figure 2. Examples of moccasin decoration types.](image2)

1) central bar without border; 2) border and central bar extending to toe; 3) border and two centered parallel lines; 4) a central U-shaped or other decorative figure on top portion of upper; 5) covered upper without border; 6) border and central area; 7) same as 6 but with central bar; 8) border and central area with two parallel lines; 9) border with central design at top of upper (Redrawn and modified after Wissler 1927).

doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0112244.g002
Quality Measures:
Can you see hide in between rows? Y / N
Can you see hide in between lanes? Y / N
Beading loose? Y / N → Area?
Beading tight? Y / N → Area?
Are beads generally uniform size? (was the beader picky about beads or no?) Y / N

MEASUREMENTS:
Upper (Left): Side to Side Toe to Ankle

Upper (Right): Side to Side Toe to Ankle

Upper Design (Left): Length (T2A) Width (S2)

Upper Design (Right): Length (T2A) Width (S2)

Q3 (Left): Length Width

Q3 (Right): Length Width

Q4 (Left): Length Width

Q4 (Right): Length Width

Heel (Left): Length Width/Circumf.

Heel (Right): Length Width/Circumf.

Heel Stripe: Length Width

Other Designs:
**BEADS**

ALL BEADS WILL BE DRAWN (as opposed to wound) & GLASS

Kidd & Kidd Classification:  **IIa** (non-tubular beads w/ simple [monochrome] bodies) – reg. seed beads

**IVA** (non-tubular beads w/ compound [multi-layered] bodies) – red-on-white

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diaphaneity</th>
<th>Transparent</th>
<th>Translucent</th>
<th>Opaque</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Circular</th>
<th>Faceted</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Luster (Karklins 1982):  **Shiny** | **Dull** | **Metallic** | **Greasy** |

Average Sizes:

**Kidd & Kidd Sizes:**  Very small (<2mm) | Small (2-4mm) | Medium (4-6mm)

Red-on-whites or other colors?
APPENDIX 2: MUSEUM DATA CODEBOOK

Page 1..............................Collector and Accession Information
Page 3..............................Materials as Recorded in the Museum Catalog
Page 7..............................Materials as Recorded by Me
# Tab 1 – Collector and Accession Information

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
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<td>Object ID Information (Not Variables)</td>
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<tr>
<td>REPOSITORY</td>
<td>Repository</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACCESSION</td>
<td>Accession Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>CATALOG</td>
<td>Catalog Number</td>
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<td>DONOR</td>
<td>Object Donor</td>
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<td>Object Collector (may be the same or different as Object Donor)</td>
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<td>Type of Collection</td>
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<td>Dates</td>
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<td>Year Object was Accessioned</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATECOLLECT</td>
<td>Year Object was Collected from the Source Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>DATEMADE</td>
<td>Year Object was Made by Source Community (if available)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<tr>
<td>LOCALITY</td>
<td>Country, Region/State, and Reservation/Reserve of Object</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural Groups Associated with Object</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CULTOFORIG</td>
<td>Culture of Origin (if available)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADDGRP</td>
<td>Additional Cultural Groups Associated with Object</td>
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| VAR: DONOR          | Col: D                                                                      |
|                     | Name of Object Donor                                                       |
|                     | 0 Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog                                          |

| VAR: COLLECTOR      | Col: E                                                                      |
|                     | Name of Object Collector                                                   |
|                     | 0 Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog                                          |

<p>| VAR: TYPEACCESS     | Col: G                                                                      |
|                     | Unknown/Not Enough Information                                              |
|                     | 1 Museum Purchase                                                          |
|                     | 2 Gift / Donation                                                          |
|                     | 3 Bequest                                                                  |
|                     | 4 Loan                                                                     |
|                     | 5 Found in Collection                                                      |
|                     | 6 Collected for Museum                                                     |
|                     | 7 Exchange                                                                 |
|                     | 8 Other                                                                    |</p>
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<td>Scientific Pursuits</td>
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<td>Tourist</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>Reservation /Reserve</td>
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<td>Additional Cultural Groups Associated with Object</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Construction</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOCCUT</td>
<td>Moccasin Cut/Construction Type (Number of Pieces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIDETYPE</td>
<td>Hide Type for Body/Upper of Moccasin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLETYPE</td>
<td>Sole Type</td>
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<td>LACES</td>
<td>Laces on Moccasin</td>
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<td>Thread Type Used in Construction (if noted)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Measurements</strong></td>
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<td>LENGTH</td>
<td>Length of Moccasin</td>
</tr>
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<td>WIDTH</td>
<td>Width of Moccasin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEIGHT</td>
<td>Height of Moccasin</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Decoration</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>DECORMATERIAL</td>
<td>Decoration Material(s) on Uppers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEADMATERIAL</td>
<td>Bead Material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEADSIZE</td>
<td>Bead Size Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>DECORTTHREAD</td>
<td>Thread Type Used in Design</td>
</tr>
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<td>DECORSITCHTYPE</td>
<td>Stitch Types Represented in Decoration</td>
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<td>DESIGNS</td>
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Year (XXXX, i.e. 1930, etc.)

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Year (XXXX, i.e. 1930, etc.)

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Col: E  
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| VAR: ADDGRP    | Col: G | Additional Cultural Groups Associated with Object |
| VAR: MOCCUT    | Col: H | Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog |
|               |      | 1-Piece Moccasin |
|               |      | 2-Piece Moccasin |
|               |      | 3-Piece Moccasin |
|               |      | 4-Piece Moccasin |
|               |      | 5-Piece Moccasin |
| VAR: HIDETYPE  | Col: I | Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog |
|               |      | Not Specific (i.e. Dressed skin, Buckskin, Leather, etc.) |
|               |      | Buffalo Hide |
|               |      | Elk Hide |
|               |      | Deer Hide |
|               |      | Suede or Faux Leather |
|               |      | Other |
| VAR: SOLETYPE  | Col: J | Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog |
|               |      | Soft |
|               |      | Hard |
| VAR: LACES     | Col: K | Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog |
|               |      | Yes |
|               |      | No |
| VAR: CONSTRTHREAD | Col: L | Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog |
|               |      | Sinew |
|               |      | Commercial Sinew |
|               |      | Cotton Thread |
| VAR: LENGTH    | Col: M | Length in centimeters |
| VAR: WIDTH     | Col: N |
Width in centimeters

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<td>Beads</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Cotton Thread Embroidery</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Animal Hair</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Plant Fibers</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Quills + Beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Quills + Beads + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Quills + Animal Hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Quills + Animal Hair + Cloth</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Quills + Plant Fibers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Beads + Cloth (incl. cloth on cuffs and in the design itself)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Beads + Cloth + Paint</td>
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<td>Beads + Animal Hair</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Beads + Paint</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
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<td>Pony</td>
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<td>Seed + Pony</td>
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<td>Sinew + Cotton Thread</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Commercial Sinew</td>
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<th>Col: T</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
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</table>
1 Lazy Stitch (aka Lane Stitch)
2 Overlay Stitch (aka Flat Stitch)
3 Lazy + Overlay Stitch
4 Other

VAR: DESIGNS Col: U
0 Unknown or Not Listed in Catalog
1 Geometric
2 SEE DESIGN LIST
3 Other
4 Floral

VAR: ADDMATERIALS Col: W
Additional Materials Used

VAR: REPAIRDESCR Col: X
Repair Description

VAR: REPAIRDATE Col: Y
Repair Year (XXXX, i.e. 1930, etc.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
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<tr>
<td>CATALOG</td>
<td>Catalog Number</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIZE</td>
<td>Size (Adult/Child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIDETYPE</td>
<td>Hide Type for Body/Upper of Moccasin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HYPOTH?</td>
<td>Hide Type Hypothesis / Additional Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TANNINGSTYLE</td>
<td>Tanning Style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMOKED</td>
<td>Is the hide smoked?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOCCUT</td>
<td>Moccasin Cut / Construction Type (Number of Pieces)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLETYPE</td>
<td>Sole Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEAR</td>
<td>Wear Pattern</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Parfleche Sole</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAMP</td>
<td>Vamp (aka an insert)</td>
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<tr>
<td>LACES</td>
<td>Laces on Moccasin</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Lace Material</td>
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<td>CUFFCONSTRUCT</td>
<td>Cuff Construction Method</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Heel Fringe</td>
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<tr>
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<td>TONGUESHAPE</td>
<td>Tongue Shape</td>
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<td>Hatt (1916) Series Classification</td>
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<td>Hatt (1916) Series Attributes</td>
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<td>THREATOEOE</td>
<td>Toe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction - CONSTRTHREAD</td>
<td>THREADSIDE</td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>THREADSOLEtoUPPER</td>
<td>Sole to Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREADSOLEtoWELT</td>
<td>Sole to Welt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THREADUPPERtoCUFF</td>
<td>Upper to Cuff</td>
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<tr>
<td>THREADVAMPtoUPPER</td>
<td>Vamp to Upper</td>
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<tr>
<td>THREADTONGUEtoUPPER</td>
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<td>THREADCUFFHEMS</td>
<td>Cuff Hemming/Other</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sole</th>
<th>L-SOLELENGTH</th>
<th>Sole Length (measured from big toe to heel of foot)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>L-SOLEWIDTH</td>
<td>Sole Width (measured at widest part of foot under toes)</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left Foot</th>
<th>L-TOTALHEIGHT</th>
<th>Total Height - Sole to Top of Cuff</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>L-PART2-CUFFHEIGHT</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Upper Length (Toe to Ankle)</td>
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<td>Height - Sole to Top of Cuff</td>
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**ADORNMENT**
- Adornment Decoration Materials, Thread Types, And Beading Styles
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<tr>
<th>Adornment Colors</th>
<th>SIDESDECORBEADINGSTYLE</th>
<th>Heels Beading Techniques</th>
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<td>BEADCOLOR</td>
<td>Bead Colors Used</td>
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<td>Material/Cloth</td>
<td>CLOTHCOLOR</td>
<td>Cloth Colors Used</td>
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<td>Soles (parfleche soles)</td>
<td>SOLECOLOR</td>
<td>Colors Used on Sole (all mediums)</td>
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<td>UPPERDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on the Upper</td>
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<td>SIDESDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on the Sides</td>
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<td>CUFFDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on the Cuffs</td>
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<td><strong>Hide</strong></td>
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<td>BEADMETHOD</td>
<td>Method Used to Make Bead(s)</td>
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<td>BEADMATERIAL</td>
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<td>Kidd &amp; Kidd Classification</td>
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<tr>
<td>KIDDSIZES</td>
<td>Kidd &amp; Kidd Sizes</td>
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<td>Diaphaneity</td>
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<td>SHAPE</td>
<td>Shape – Circular, Faceted, Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>LUSTER</td>
<td>Luster (Karklins 1982)</td>
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<td>Average bead sizes</td>
<td>AVGBEADSIZES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average size of the beads measured on the moccasin</td>
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<td>HIDEBETWROWS</td>
<td>Is the hide visible between rows?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HIDEBETWLANES</td>
<td>Is the hide visible between lanes?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BEADSLOOSE</td>
<td>Is the beading loose?</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEADSTIGHT</td>
<td>Is the beading tight?</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEADSUNIFORM</td>
<td>Are the beads generally uniform in size?</td>
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<tr>
<td>REPAIRDESCR</td>
<td>Evidence of Repair to Moccasin and Repair Description</td>
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VAR: SIZE  
Col: D  
0  Unknown  
1  Adult  
2  Child  

VAR: HIDETYPE  
Col: E  
0  Unknown  
1  Known  

VAR: HYPOTH?  
Col: F  
0  Unknown  

Hide Type Hypothesis/Additional Notes  

VAR: TANNINGSTYLE  
Col: G  
0  Unknown  
1  Braintanned  
2  Not Braintanned  
3  Commercially Tanned  

VAR: SMOKED  
Col: H  
0  Unknown  
1  Smoked  
2  Not Smoked  

VAR: MOCCUT  
Col: I  
0  Unknown  
1  1-Piece Moccasin  
2  2-Piece Moccasin  
3  3-Piece Moccasin  
4  4-Piece Moccasin  
5  5-Piece Moccasin  

VAR: SOLETYPE  
Col: J  
0  Unknown  
1  Soft  
2  Hard  

VAR: WEAR  
Col: K  
0  Unknown  
1  Worn  
2  Not Worn
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Vamp is Present</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leather or Hide</td>
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<td>Cloth</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Separate cuff, 1-piece, hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Separate cuff, 1+pieces, hide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Separate cuff, 1-piece, cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Separate cuff, 1+pieces, cloth</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Separate cuff, 1+pieces, hide and cloth</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Cuff is part of upper</td>
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<th>Col: T</th>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>VAR: TONGUEATTACH</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Separate from Upper</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Not Separate from Upper (tongue and upper are one piece)</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
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</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Squared</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Forked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Rounded + Squared</td>
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<td>Rounded + Forked</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Squared + Forked</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Cotton Thread</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Other</td>
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VAR: L-CUFFCIRCUMF    Col: AR/AS
Cuff circumference in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-PART2-CUFFHEIGHT    Col: AT/AU
Part 2 - Cuff height in inches /centimeters

VAR: L-PART2-CUFFCIRCUMF    Col: AV/AW
Part 2 - Cuff circumference in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-TONGUELENGTH    Col: AY/AZ
Tongue length in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-TONGUEWIDTH    Col: BA/BB
Tongue width in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-UPPERWIDTH    Col: BC/BD
Upper width (side to side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-UPPERLENGTH    Col: BE/BF
Upper length (toe to ankle) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-UPPERDESIGNLENGTH    Col: BG/BH
Upper design Length (toe to ankle) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-UPPERDESIGNWIDTH    Col: BJ/BJ
Upper design Width (side to side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-QUADRANT3LENGTH    Col: BK/BL
Quadrant 3 length (left side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-QUADRANT3WIDTH    Col: BM/BN
Quadrant 3 width (left side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-QUADRANT4LENGTH    Col: BO/BP
Quadrant 4 length (right side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-QUANDRANT4WIDTH    Col: BQ/BR
Quadrant 4 width (right side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-HEELLENGTH    Col: BS/BT
Heel length in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-HEELWIDTH    Col: BU/BV
Heel width in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-HEELSTRIPELENGTH    Col: BW/BX
Heel stripe length in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-HEELSTRIPEWIDTH     Col: BY/BZ
Heel stripe width in inches/centimeters

VAR: L-OTHERMEASUREMENTS   Col: CA
Other design measurements in inches (no cm conversion)

VAR: R-SOLELENGTH          Col: CB/CC
Sole length in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-SOLEWIDTH           Col: CD/CE
Sole width in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-TOTALHEIGHT         Col: CF/CG
Total height in inches (sole to top of cuff)/centimeters

VAR: R-CUFFHEIGHT          Col: CH/CI
Cuff height in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-CUFFCIRCUMF         Col: CI/CK
Cuff circumference in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-PART2-CUFFHEIGHT    Col: CL/CM
Part 2- Cuff height in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-PART2-CUFFCIRCUMF   Col: CN/CO
Part 2- Cuff circumference in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-TONGUELENGTH        Col: CQ/CR
Tongue length in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-TONGUEWIDTH         Col: CS/CT
Tongue width in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-UPPERWIDTH          Col: CU/CV
Upper width (side to side) in inches/centimeters

VAR: R-UPPERLENGTH         Col: CW/CX
Upper length (toe to ankle) in inches/centimeters
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**VAR: SIDESDECORTHREAD**  
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2  Cotton  
3  Sinew + Cotton  
4  Other

**VAR: SIDESDECORBEADINGSTYLE**  
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2  Lane Stitch  
3  Flat + Lane Stitch  
4  Other

**VAR: HEELSDECORMATERIAL**  
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2  Paint  
3  Beads  
4  Cotton Thread Embroidery  
5  Animal Hair  
6  Plant Fibers  
7  Cloth  
8  Quills + Paint  
9  Quills + Beads  
10  Quills + Paint + Beads  
11  Quills + Beads + Cloth  
12  Quills + Paint + Beads + Cloth  
13  Quills + Animal Hair  
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18  Beads + Cloth  
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<td>Beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cotton Thread Embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Animal Hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Plant Fibers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Quills + Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Quills + Beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Quills + Paint + Beads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Quills + Beads + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Quills + Paint + Beads + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Quills + Animal Hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Quills + Animal Hair + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Quills + Animal Hair + Cloth + Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Quills + Plant Fibers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Beads + Paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Beads + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Beads + Paint + Cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Metal Cones + Yarn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VAR: HEELFRINGEDECOR Col: EJ**

See Color List

**VAR: PAINTCOLOR Col: EL**

See Color List

**VAR: QUILLCOLOR Col: EM**

See Color List

**VAR: BEADCOLOR Col: EN**

See Color List

**VAR: CLOTHCOLOR Col: EO**

See Color List

**VAR: SOLECOLOR Col: EP**

See Color List

**VAR: TOTALCOLORS Col: EQ**

Total number of adornment colors represented on the moccasin
VAR: UPPERDESIGNS  Col: ES
See Design List

VAR: SIDESDESIGNS  Col: ET
See Design List

VAR: HEELDESIGNS  Col: EU
See Design List

VAR: CUFFDESIGNS  Col: EV
See Design List

VAR: LYCETTTYPE  Col: EW
0  No design / Not Applicable
1  Central design without border on upper (i.e. partially beaded)
2  Border and central bar extending to toe
3  Border and two or more centered vertical parallel lines
4  A central U-shaped or other decorative figure on top portion of upper
5  Covered upper without border (i.e. fully beaded)
6  Border and central area
7  Border and central area with central bar
8  Border and central area with two or more vertical parallel lines
9  Border with central design at top of upper
10 Border and two or more horizontal parallel lines
11 Two or more horizontal parallel lines covering upper

VAR: BEADMETHOD  Col: EX
0  Unknown / Not Applicable
1  Drawn
2  Wound
3  Other

VAR: BEADMATERIAL  Col: EY
0  Unknown / Not Applicable
1  Glass
2  Metal
3  Plastic
4  Other
5  Glass + Metal

VAR: KIDDCLASSIF  Col: EZ
0  Unknown / Not Applicable
1. IIa (non-tubular beads with simple [monochrome] bodies; i.e. regular seed beads)
2. IVa (non-tubular beads with compound [multi-layered] bodies; i.e. red-on-whites)
3. Both IIa and IVa
4. Other

**VAR: KIDDSIZES**  Col: FA
0. Unknown / Not Applicable
1. Very small (<2mm)
2. Small (2-4mm)
3. Medium (4-6mm)
4. Very small + Small

**VAR: DIAPHANEITY**  Col: FB
0. Unknown / Not Applicable
1. Transparent
2. Translucent
3. Opaque
4. Transparent + Translucent
5. Transparent + Opaque
6. Translucent + Opaque
7. Transparent + Translucent + Opaque

**VAR: SHAPE**  Col: FC
0. Unknown / Not Applicable
1. Circular
2. Faceted
3. Other
4. Circular + Faceted

**VAR: LUSTER**  Col: FD
0. Unknown / Not Applicable
1. Shiny
2. Dull
3. Metallic
4. Greasy
5. Shiny + Greasy
6. Metallic + Greasy

**VAR: AVGBEADSIZES**  Col: FE
The average bead sizes for several different color beads

**VAR: HIDEBETWROWS**  Col: FG
VAR: HIDEbetwlanes Col: FH
0 Unknown / Not Applicable
1 Yes
2 No

VAR: BEADSLOOSE Col: FI
0 Unknown / Not Applicable
1 Yes
2 No

VAR: BEADSTIGHT Col: FJ
0 Unknown / Not Applicable
1 Yes
2 No

VAR: BEADSUNIFORM Col: FK
0 Unknown / Not Applicable
1 Yes
2 No

VAR: REPAIRDESCR Col: FM
Evidence of repair to moccasin and repair description

Color List
Black
Blue
Green
Grey
Metallic
Orange
Pink
Purple
Red
Tan
Translucent/Clear
White
Yellow
1. Central design without border on upper (i.e. partially)

2. Border and central bar extending to

3. Border and two or more centered vertical

4. A central U-shaped or other decorative figure on top

5. Covered upper without border (i.e. fully beaded)

6. Border and central area

7. Border and central area with central area

8. Border and central area with two or more vertical parallel lines

9. Border with central design at top of upper

10. Border and two or more horizontal parallel lines

11. Two or more horizontal parallel lines

Modified Lycett Moccasin Decoration Typology
Tongue Shapes

- Rounded
- Forked
- Squared
- Triangle
APPENDIX 3: MOCCASIN PHOTO CODEBOOK

Page 1..............................................Tab 1 - Photograph Data
Page 6............................................Appendix 1: Design List
Page 7............................................Appendix 2: Modified Lycett
Moccasin Decoration Typology
# Tab 1 - Photograph Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photograph ID Information</strong> (Not Variables)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPOSITORY</td>
<td>Repository</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLLECTION</td>
<td>Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHOTONUMBER</td>
<td>Photo Number / ID Number / Additional ID Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATETAKEN</td>
<td>Date (Month and Year) Photograph was Taken OR Approximate Year Range of Photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Photograph Details</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHOTODESCRP</td>
<td>Description of Photograph (including any original captions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRIBEDIVISION</td>
<td>Tribe Division, if Provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHOTOGRAPHER</td>
<td>Name of Person Who Took Photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental Context</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOCALITY</td>
<td>Country, Region/State (with City, if known), and Reservation/Reserve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SURROUNDINGS</td>
<td>Inside / Outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SETTING</td>
<td>Ceremony / Candid / Studio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are There People Wearing Moccasins?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IF YES, THEN:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAME</td>
<td>Name of Wearer (if provided)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AGE</td>
<td>Age of Wearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>Gender of Wearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALLDRESS</td>
<td>Overall Dress of Wearer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moccasin Construction</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOLETEYPE</td>
<td>Sole Type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUFFCONSTRUCT</td>
<td>Cuff Construction Method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adornment</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPPERDECMATERIAL</td>
<td>Uppers Decoration Material(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UPPERDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on Upper – SEE DESIGN LIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESIGNDESCRP</td>
<td>Written Description of Design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDESDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on Sides – SEE DESIGN LIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEELDESIGNS</td>
<td>Designs Used on Heel – SEE DESIGN LIST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LYCETTTYPE</td>
<td>Modified Lycett Moccasin Decoration Typology Category – SEE MOCCASIN DECORATION TYPOLOGY SHEET</td>
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</table>
### Photographs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photographs</th>
<th>RIGHTPHOTO</th>
<th>Photograph of Right Foot</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LEFTPHOTO</td>
<td>Photograph of Left Foot</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Are There People Wearing European-Style Shoes?

**IF YES, THEN:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoe Wearer Demographics</th>
<th>S-NAME</th>
<th>Name of Wearer (if provided)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>S-AGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VAR:** DATETAKEN

Col: E and F

- **F** Month (XX, i.e. 01, 02, etc.)
- **G** Year (XXXX, i.e. 1930, etc.)
- **OR**
  - **G** Year Range (i.e. 1930 – 1960, etc.)
  - **0** No Date/Unknown

**VAR:** PHOTODESCRIP

Col: G

Description of Photo (including any original captions)

**VAR:** TRIBEDIVISION

Col: H

- **0** Unknown/Not Provided
- **1** Piegan/Pikuni/Amkakapikuni
- **2** Blood/Kainai
- **3** Peigan
- **4** Northern Blackfoot

**VAR:** PHOTOGRAPHER

Col: I

Name of Person who Took Photo

**VAR:** LOCALITY

Col: J, K, and L

- **J** Country
- **K** Region or State
- **L** Reservation/Reserve

**VAR:** SURROUNDINGS

Col: M

- **0** Unknown
- **1** Inside
- **2** Outside

**VAR:** SETTING

Col: N

- **0** Unknown
- **1** Candid
2  Ceremony
3  Studio

VAR: NAME  Col: O
Name of Person Wearing Moccasin, if provided

VAR: AGE  Col: P
0  Unknown
1  Adults
2  Children
3  Infants
4  Adults + Children
5  Adults + Infants
6  Adults + Children + Infants

VAR: GENDER  Col: Q
0  Unknown
1  Female
2  Male
3  Female + Male

VAR: OVERALLDRESS  Col: R
0  Unknown
1  Traditional
2  European
3  Mixed

VAR: SOLETYPE  Col: S
3  Unknown
4  Soft
5  Hard
6  Soft but made in hard sole style

VAR: CUFFCONSTRUCT  Col: T
7  Unknown
8  Cuff is part of upper
9  Separate cuff, 1-piece, hide
10 Separate cuff, 1+-pieces, hide
11 Separate cuff, 1-piece, cloth
12 Separate cuff, 1+-pieces, cloth
13 Separate cuff, 1+pieces, hide and cloth
VAR: UPPERDECOMATERIAL  Col: U
20  Unknown
21  No Decoration
22  Quills
23  Paint
24  Beads
25  Cotton Thread Embroidery
26  Animal Hair
27  Plant Fibers
28  Cloth
29  Quills + Paint
30  Quills + Beads
31  Quills + Paint + Beads
32  Quills + Beads + Cloth
33  Quills + Paint + Beads + Cloth
34  Quills + Animal Hair
35  Quills + Animal Hair + Cloth
36  Quills + Animal Hair + Cloth + Paint
37  Quills + Plant Fibers
38  Beads + Paint
39  Beads + Cloth
40  Beads + Paint + Cloth

VAR: UPPERDESIGNS  Col: V
1-21  SEE DESIGN LIST
0  Unknown

VAR: DESIGNDESCRIP  Col: W
Written description of design

VAR: SIDESDESIGNS  Col: X
1-21  SEE DESIGN LIST
0  Unknown

VAR: HEELDESIGNS  Col: Y
1-21  SEE DESIGN LIST
0  Unknown
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<th>Col: Z</th>
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<td>12</td>
<td>No design / Not Applicable</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Central design without border on upper (i.e. partially beaded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Border and central bar extending to toe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Border and two or more centered vertical parallel lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>A central U-shaped or other decorative figure on top portion of upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Covered upper without border (i.e. fully beaded)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Border and central area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Border and central area with central bar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Border and central area with two or more vertical parallel lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Border with central design at top of upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Border and two or more horizontal parallel lines</td>
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<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Two or more horizontal parallel lines covering upper</td>
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<tr>
<th>VAR: RIGHTPHOTO</th>
<th>Col: AA</th>
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<td>Photograph of Right Foot</td>
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<th>Col: AB</th>
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<td>Photograph of Left Foot</td>
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<tr>
<th>VAR: S-NAME</th>
<th>Col: AC</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name of Person Wearing Moccasin, if provided</td>
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<th>VAR: S-AGE</th>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Infants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adults + Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Adults + Infants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Adults + Children + Infants</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
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<th>VAR: S-GENDER</th>
<th>Col: AE</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female + Male</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<th>VAR: S-OVERALDRESS</th>
<th>Col: AF</th>
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<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>European</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 4: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Michaela A. Shifley, Principal Investigator
Phone: (406) 794-8369
Email: michaela.shifley@yahoo.com

SUBJECT INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Study Title: Tracing Narratives: Biographies of Niitsitapi Moccasins (working title)

Investigator(s): Michaela A. Shifley (Anthropology)
Phone: (406) 794-8369
Email: michaela.shifley@yahoo.com

Faculty Supervisor(s): Dr. Kelly Dixon, Committee Chair and Advisor (Anthropology)
Phone: (406) 243-2693
Email: kelly.dixon@msou.umt.edu

Purpose: The purpose of this research study is to learn how historic and modern Blackfoot and Blackfeet moccasins were and are made. By drawing on the extensive knowledge of community members, artists, and other experts, I hope to see how moccasins were (and are) made, used, and sold. I wish to also highlight the vibrant, living community of Blackfoot and Blackfeet moccasin artists who continue to make their living by making, using, and selling moccasins. You have been invited to participate because of your expertise in this area. The results will be used for my Ph.D. dissertation, and potentially scholarly journal articles and workshops.

Procedures: Your participation will involve a recorded interview (either via written notes, audiotape, or video recording device) that will take approximately 1+ hours. You will be asked questions about historic moccasin making, as well as questions about how moccasins are made today. With your permission, pictures may also be taken. This study will happen in a place where you feel most comfortable; this could be your home, a coffee shop, a library, or other public place.

Compensation: People’s time is valuable, as is their knowledge. In order to show my appreciation for your time and participation in this project, you will receive a $250 consultation/participation fee per interview session.

Risks/Discomforts: This is a minimal risk research study. That means that the risks of participating are no more likely or serious than those you encounter in everyday activities. However, answering some questions may cause you to think about feelings that make you sad or upset. If this happens, and you wish to stop at any time, we will stop immediately. You are under no obligation to continue if you feel uncomfortable in any way.

The University of Montana IRB
Expiration Date
Date Approved
Date Approved
Chair/Admin
Benefits: Your participation in this study may help us to enhance our understandings of Blackfoot and Blackfeet moccasin making, as well as contribute to helping anthropology incorporate important Indigenous voices into the field. Although you may not directly benefit from taking part in this study, the data gathered from your interview will benefit anthropology and education.

Confidentiality: I will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this study remains confidential. Your records will be kept confidential and will not be released without your consent except as required by law. Your identity will be kept private, and all audiotapes will be transcribed without any information that could identify you if you do not give your express permission to be identified.

All information will be securely stored in a locked drawer in a restricted-access office in the University of Montana’s Social Sciences building. The data that you provide will be kept in perpetuity. This form will be kept in perpetuity as well.

If the results of this study are written in a scientific journal or presented at a scientific meeting, your name will not be used without your permission. However, it may be possible for someone to recognize your particular story, situation, or response.

Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal: Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. If you agree to participate now and change your mind later, you may withdraw at any time by telling the interviewer or leaving the room. If you choose to withdraw after I have already collected information about you, please contact me as soon as possible and all information you provided will be erased.

Questions: If you have any questions about the research now or during the study, please contact: Michaela Shifley at 406-794-8369. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, you may contact the UM Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (406) 243-6672.
Statement of Your Consent:

I have read the above description of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved, and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that a member of the research team will also answer any future questions I may have. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I understand I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Printed Name of Subject

Subject's Signature

Permission for Name Usage

* If you do not want to be acknowledged by name in any publications or presentations, please initial here ________.

* Your initials ______ indicate your permission to be identified by name in any publications or presentations.

* I want my Native name used: __________________________

OR

* I want my English name used: __________________________

Permission for Audiotaping and/or Video Recording Interview

* Your audio/digital recording may be used in presentations related to this study.

* If your audio/digital recording is used for presentations of any kind, names or other identifying information will not be associated with it without permission.

* Your initials ______ indicate your permission to audio record the interview.

* Your initials ______ indicate your permission to video record the interview.
Permission for Photography

* Your photograph may be used in presentations related to this study.

* If your photograph is used for presentations of any kind, names or other identifying information will not be associated with it without permission.

* Your initials _________ indicate your permission to photograph any/all parts of the interview.