



Bag

Unknown Ho-Chunk (Winnebago) Artist
ca. 1880-1890

W: 15 3/4" l x 12 1/2"; strap W: 4 3/4"

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[URL coming soon]

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Bandolier bags are a product of exchange between the European materials they are made from and the many tribal groups that make them. Each tribe's approach to making a bag has unique qualities that relate to their traditional arts as well as similarities to the groups they were interacting with. Ho-Chunk bandolier bags are only one example of people taking non-Native materials and making them "Native."

A bandolier bag consists of a beaded strap attached to a beaded panel. The bag is typically worn by men and worn diagonally on one shoulder and resting the panel on the opposite hip. Bags were assembled by attaching a beaded strap and panel design to a constructed cloth bag.

This particular bag includes a functional pocket, common for bags made earlier in the nineteenth century. Whereas bags made later in the nineteenth century became a solely decorative panel without a pocket. The beadwork was then attached to black wool with a white muslin backing. Finally, red, yellow, and orange wool edging was added. In some places a single bead may be missing, but the rest still remains intact.

The Ho-Chunk style of bandolier bags are different from other designs because of its offset strap and symmetrical patterns. Ho-Chunk designs are most similar to Potawatomi's geometric designs and this can be justified based on the close proximity of each group in Wisconsin. Bag designs were not always similar to who resided nearby. The Ojibwe bags differ based on their floral asymmetrical designs, and these bags are more prevalent in museum collections and contemporary regalia.

The designs are evidence of the cultural influences present in the area where the Ho-Chunk reside in Wisconsin. This bag would have been made after a large Scandinavian presence was in the state of Wisconsin. This can explain the heart and cross motifs that would not have been historically made by the Ho-Chunk. When heart-like designs were used, four would be used to represent a flower and not isolated as a single heart. The front panel of the bag still follows a design divided into three sections that a majority of other Ho-chunk bags use.

During the period when this bag was made, the missionization of the Ho-Chunk was in effect in Black River Falls as well as removed individuals were returning to Wisconsin from the Nebraska reservation. The 1880s also proved to be a point when regalia and arts were being made for sale in order for Ho-Chunk to support themselves.

The beadwork construction is done by a loose warp technique, which allows for an absence of a loom. Other forms of Ho-Chunk weaving are finger-woven and do not include a loom. When looking at the bag's beaded edges, one can view the weft threads crossing each other on the outer thread.

Today, bandolier bags are still made, but Ojibwe bag designs remain the most prevalent in Ho-Chunk regalia. This style of bag offered an option with more embellishment and a strap making it more transportable. It also utilized beads that were not included in traditional clothing to the extent of other tribe's regalia.

During my time at the Otsego workshop I had the opportunity to visit an object that was relocated to an area away from where it was made. It also showed me how Ho-Chunk have always kept tradition going even if it is only viewable on the side of a beadwork strap, or the symmetry and unified designs. This bandolier bag expressed that Ho-Chunk remained unique even when an art form may seem like all the rest.