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HATS FROM THE NOOTKA SOUND REGION.

CHARLES C. WILLOUGHBY.

In the early days of the New England whaling industry the sailors brought back as mementoes many valuable ethnological objects from the Pacific islands and the northwestern coast of America. Much of this material found its way into the cabinets of the older societies of Boston, Salem, and other New England towns.

The Peabody Museum of Harvard University has acquired a number of these old ethnological collections, either whole or in part, including that of the American Antiquarian Society, the Boston Athenæum, the Boston Marine Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, and the Boston Museum. The few objects in these collections from the northwest coast are of great value, illustrating as some of them do phases of the arts which have become extinct or much modified.

Among the objects received from these societies are eight hats of the type illustrated upon Plate I, a style of head covering very rarely found in museums or private collections. It is probable that this form of hat originated among the southern Wakashan tribes, probably the Nootkas, although Lewis and Clark found them on the lower Columbia in 1605 at Fort Clatsop and thus described them (p. 768).¹

"We gave a fish-hook also in exchange for one of their hats. These hats are made of cedar-bark and bear grass interwoven together in the form of a European hat with a small brim of about two inches and a high crown widening upwards. They are light, ornamented with various colors and figures. . . . These hats form a small article of traffic with the whites, and their manufacture is one of the best exertions of Indian industry."


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and the bark of cedar interwoven in a cone form with a knob of the same shape at the top. It has no brim, but is held on the head by a string passing under the chin and tied to a small rim inside the hat. The colors are generally black and white only, and these are made into squares, triangles, and sometimes rude figures of canoes and seamen harpooning whales."

When Captain Cook visited Vancouver Island during his famous voyage of 1776–1780, he found the same form of head covering worn by the Indians of Nootka Sound, and on one of the plates in the second volume of the octavo edition (London, 1784) is a drawing of a woman with a hat of this form. This is reproduced at b, Plate I.

Cook writes (p. 242) that the "natives wear a hat like a truncated cone or a flower pot, made of very fine matting, ornamented with a round knob or a bunch of leather tassels, having a string passing under the chin to prevent it blowing off," and on page 266, "The whole process of their whale-fishery has been represented . . . on the caps they wear."

It is probable that this kind of head covering was prevalent from Nootka Sound to the Columbia River, at least in the coast region.

The peculiar manner in which the cedar-bark strips and the grass spires are manipulated (Fig. 1) to form the design is seen in the modern basketry of the Skokomish, and is probably found in other basketry of the Puget Sound region. It occurs in the basketry of the Hooper valley and other northern California Indians, as will be seen on examination of the basket caps and old cooking bowls made from shredded pine roots and squaw grass. This squaw grass of the Hupa and Shasta Indians seems to be identical with the bear grass of Lewis and Clark.

The conventional representation of the canoe shown in the whaling scenes upon Plate I is found upon the modern basketry of the Makah Indian of Cape Flattery, Washington, the southernmost of the Wakashan (Nootka) family.

The hats in the Peabody Museum are all of twined weaving, and are made principally of cedar bark and grass spires. The
construction is double, as shown in the cross-section (Fig. 2). Each headpiece consists really of two hats, an inner and an outer one, joined at the rim, the last few pairs of twisted woof elements of the outer hat enclosing also the ends of the warp of the inner. The inner hat, or lining, is coarsely but neatly woven of cedar bark, and only in one specimen (a, Plate I) is there a knob at the top of the lining corresponding to that of the outer hat. Upon the under side at about three inches from the rim each warp element is doubled upon itself, forming a loop about three-fourths of an inch long. Through these loops is run a strong double cord of Indian hemp. The loops are bound together by twined weaving, and form an inner rim edged with the cord of hemp, which fits the head snugly. To this is fastened the thong which passes beneath the chin of the wearer.

The exterior or outer hat is woven principally of grass spires and cedar bark. In most of the specimens a narrow strip below the knob is made of fine cedar roots. The warp appears to be formed of split roots, and is fine and strong. The grass of the woof was originally an ivory white, the selected cedar bark used in conjunction with it being usually stained a dark brown or black.

Each strand of the twisted pair of woof elements forming the design is composed of a grass spire and a strip of cedar bark of the same width laid side by side, the strand thus formed being white upon one side and black upon the other. These double strands are used not only where figures appear, but throughout the groundwork of the design as well. The figures are principally black upon a white ground. In forming them the strands are simply reversed, the black sides which were concealed beneath the grass spires in the white background being carried outward, as shown in Fig. 1. In some of the specimens the knob at the top is woven separately and afterwards joined to the hat. In the hat illustrated at $f$, Plate I, a small wooden hoop is placed within the knob to preserve its
shape. The materials are selected and prepared with great care. The designs are spirited and well executed, and the technique is of the highest order.

The principal design upon all but one of the hats represents the chase of the orca or killer whale. It has been harpooned, and the harpoon line with attached floats is trailing behind. A man standing in the bow of a canoe is about to dispatch the animal with a lance. Other canoes, apparently empty, fill out the design. The Indians of Nootka Sound and vicinity, as well as the tribes to the southward, hunted the orca, but the animal was held sacred by the northern coast tribes and was never hunted by them.

A very different design is shown upon the hat illustrated at f, Plate I. The mythical bird is represented four times, twice by itself near the brim and upon opposite sides, once hovering just above an orca, and again with the whale in its talons. A peculiar and characteristic feature is the life line, extending from the beak to the heart, which is represented by a light spot. There are two small, winglike projections back of this spot on each of the birds, which remind one forcibly of the tufts of feathers above the neck membrane of the pinnated grouse. A similar mythical design is etched upon an Eskimo harpoon rest carved in ivory, illustrated on Plate LXXII of the National Museum Report for 1895. In this drawing the bird is twice represented hovering over the whale, and twice with the whale in its talons.

There are doubtless many valuable and rare ethnological objects still in the families of the old whalers in the eastern and middle states. These should be deposited for safe keeping in museums of standing, where they would be preserved for all time, and be accessible to students. Otherwise their destruction or loss is inevitable.

Peabody Museum of
American Archaeology and Ethnology,
Cambridge, Mass.
PLATE I. — a, d, e, f, hats from the Nootka Sound region; c, same as a; d, woman of Nootka Sound, from "Cook's Voyages."