

FROM THE COLLECTIONS

Chippewa Bandolier Bag

“One of the bead-work pouches is the great ornament of an Ojibway, and any person wearing it is considered to be in full dress; it is worth a pony among the Sioux.”

—Rev. Joseph A. Gillfan, to Minnesota Historical Society Executive Council, November 1897¹

Gashkibidaagan, or Chippewa (Ojibwe) bandolier bags, were exchanged for horses with Dakota, Arikara, and Hidatsa people in North Dakota. Created by women, these bags are still worn by men for dance and on important occasions. The basic structure comprises a pouch, a panel above the pouch, and the shoulder strap, which is worn across the chest. Chippewa women’s beadwork was traded as far west as the Salish people on the Idaho-Montana border.

Stylized roses, leaves, and flowers along a trailing vine were common beadwork motifs in the first decade

of the twentieth century. This bag is decorated in spot-stitch appliqué technique on black velvet with a brown cotton backing. The bandolier bag was acquired by Danish immigrant Alex Schwartz, a druggist in Devils Lake from 1910 to 1915. The Dakota of Spirit Lake Nation would trade beadwork, such as this bag obtained from the Chippewa, in exchange for necessary medicines.

See this bag on exhibit in *The Horse in North Dakota* at the ND Heritage Center & State Museum in Bismarck from August 25, 2018, through early 2020.

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1. Quoted in Marcia G. Anderson, *A Bag Worth a Pony: The Art of the Ojibwe Bandolier Bag* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2017), 25.



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Chippewa family near Larimore, Grand Forks County, North Dakota, circa 1900. The man on the left is wearing geometric bandolier bags, popular before 1880, while the two young men on the right wear large floral motif bags, popular after 1890.
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