

Traditional Shuswap Clothing and Adornment



SHUSWAP
CULTURAL SERIES
BOOK 4

SECWEPIMC CULTURAL
EDUCATION SOCIETY

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Artist - David Seymour

Researcher/Writer - Marie Matthew

Cover Design By - Richard Gray

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CLOTHING AND
ADORNMENT***

SHUSWAP CULTURAL SERIES - Book Four

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Traditional Shuswap Clothing and Adornment Introduction

The Shuswap people long ago were totally self-sufficient. They used the resources in their environment to fulfill all of their needs. This was a particularly challenging task when it came to the problem of making clothing. In order to be comfortable during all seasons in their temperate climate, the Shuswap needed a wide variety of clothing.

Most clothing was made from the hides of the same animals that were used as food. Occasionally, the Shuswap used the hides raw, but usually they were made soft and pliable by the tanning process. After tanning, the buckskin was carefully cut into various shapes and sewn into a wearable item. When hides were scarce the people used different kinds of plants, woven or braided, to make clothing.

Clothing manufacture was a year-round activity for the traditional Shuswap, but done much more in the winter when less time was spent securing food. As with other aspects of Shuswap life, everyone in the family helped, at times, with the jobs related to making clothing.

Although it involved many extra hours of work, the Shuswap took time to make their clothing attractive. They decorated their garments with items found in the immediate environment, creating distinct styles of dress. They were also concerned with personal adornment and wore many kinds of jewellery. Special occasions were times of special dress and ornamentation. Style was sometimes used to show that the wearer was involved in a certain activity; the training youth and the warrior had identifiable clothing and adornment.

The traditional Shuswap did a very good job of providing themselves with clothing suitable to their rather harsh environment. But they were concerned with more than usefulness. The work they put into decorating themselves and their clothes shows us that they were proud of their appearance and were skilled in the use of the sewing tools they had created.

Tanning Process

Clothing was made from the hides of all hair and fur bearing animals. Those used included deer, elk, caribou, moose, beaver, wolverine, muskrat, rabbit, marmot, coyote, mink, marten, otter, squirrel, ground squirrel, fox and lynx. Before they were suitable for sewing into clothing, the hides had to be cleaned, softened and preserved through the tanning process.

Cleaning the Hide

The cleaning of the hides usually took place on the hunting grounds because it was easiest to clean a fresh hide. For cleaning, the hide was draped over a peeled cottonwood post with a rounded top or a similar post. A hide scraper, made from the ulna bone of a deer leg, was used to remove all flesh, fat and sinew from the hide. If the hide was to be used without hair, the hair would be removed with a knife and the skin cleaned on the second side in the same way. After cleaning, the hide was dried, folded and stored until winter when the tanning process usually continued.

Washing the Hide

The hide was soaked in clean water and stretched repeatedly to break down the fibres in the skin. The rinsing was done in cold water, which was changed about three times to ensure that all the blood was removed. After the washing, the hide was thoroughly wrung out. For a large hide, the twisted hide was placed around a solid pole or tree, and a stout stick stuck through the holes near the foot of the animal (at the two ends of the twisted hide) and the stick was used as a lever to twist much tighter than would be possible by hand.

The Hide Frame

At this point the hide was either softened or further dried on the tanning frame. The tanning frame was made from four poles lashed together to make a rectangle. The frame was made from any convenient poles and held almost vertical by being set against a tree or other sturdy object. To be tied onto the frame, the hide was slit about every ten centimeters, two centimeters from the outside edge, all around the perimeter.

A buckskin thong was drawn through the slits, and tied onto the frame and pulled tight to stretch the hide taut in all directions.

When a hide was placed on the frame after cleaning, it was to aid in drying.

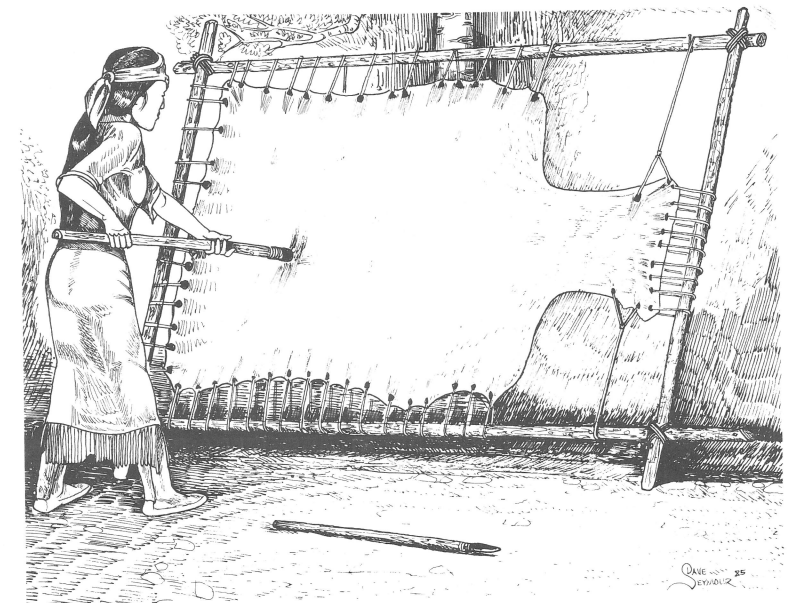
Softening the Hide

The hide was softened by an overnight soaking in deer brain. The brain was used for softening because it contained fine fat particles which are absorbed by the hide. Before it was ready for use the brain had to be boiled until cooked and all the blood was removed. It was then mashed, so that the fat particles were broken up and mixed with cold water in a large birch bark soaking basket, the size of the hide. The hide was put into the water and the brain mixture to soak or the brain was rubbed into all parts of it, making the hide feel slippery. The hide was then wrung out thoroughly, as described above in the washing process.

Tanning the Hide

The hide was then stretched onto a frame. The frame was leaned upright, against a tree, or laid horizontal, several centimeters above the ground and held up by stakes around the edges of the frame.

A tanning rock was lashed to a tanning stick, about three to five centimeters in diameter and 1.4 meters long. The rock had to be rounded at the end and smooth, so that it would not puncture the hide. The tanning stick was used by pressing it against all areas of the hide, softening it as it dried. During the tanning, the hide had to be kept warm and was worked on near a small fire or in the shade on a sunny day. The tanning continued until the hide was completely dry and soft.



Smoking the Hide

The tanned hide, now called buckskin, was then smoked over a low fire of punky or dry, rotting fir or dried pinecones. It was hung over a wooden teepee shaped frame about 1 ½ meters high and smoked until it turns orange in colour. The smoking helped to keep the hide soft, even after it becomes wet during wear and it kept bugs and worms from chewing on stored hides.

Methods of Sewing

Before the tanned skins could be worn, they had to be sewn into clothing. And before clothing could be made, the materials for sewing had to be collected and manufactured. The Shuswap made thread from eleagnus bark, nettle bark, Indian hemp bark and sinew from the back of the deer. The bark was made into thread by being spun on the thigh, three strands at a time, to make strong, even strings. Awls and needles were made from the fine leg bone of the deer and the penis bone of the black bear. Although the women did much of the sewing, the men also worked to make their winter moccasins and to ornament their clothing. Girls began to watch and take part in the sewing chores at a young age. Clothing would be made as it was needed, with much of the sewing being done in the winter months when less time was spent on food gathering activities.



Articles of Clothing Moccasins

Moccasins were the footwear for all the people throughout the Shuswap territory. Moccasins were usually made of buckskin but were also made from caribou, elk and moose hides.

To make a moccasin, a strong piece of buckskin would be cut to the right shape with a stone edged skin cutting knife and stretched over a moccasin last. A last is a foot shaped form which helped to shape the moccasin. To make it keep the correct shape, the skin was dampened with water and pressed into shape along the edges with a smooth, rounded flake of jasper stone. After shaping in the correct size, the moccasin was sewn together with a bone awl and thread of eleagnus bark or sinew.

Moccasins of the Shuswap were of four types. The first was the crosscut style. Another common style was to shape the sole and sew an upper strip all around the foot. The top, or tongue, was then fitted into place. A seam was sewn up the back of the heel. A third style was the round toe moccasin. The least common style was to sew down the instep, over the tip. A few of the southern Shuswap made moccasins sewn up one side. Almost all of the moccasins had trailers. A trailer is an added fringe sewn to the back or heel of the moccasin for decoration.

For most of the year the moccasins were made from buckskin with the hair removed, but in winter they were made with hair on and worn hair-side out. The hair helped keep the moccasin dry as well as providing added insulation. These moccasins had long tops attached at the ankle, making them into boots. Sometimes the hunters wore the winter moccasin combined with winter leggings of sheep or deer skin which were worn over the usual clothing and footwear. When or where hides were not available the people made winter boots of woven sage bark or woven rushes.

Moccasin Decoration

Usually moccasins were left without decoration. Sometimes the tongue was decorated with porcupine or bird quills or dyed horse hair embroidered onto it. For use in embroidering, the bird quills were split, flattened, scraped and cut to the right width. In more recent years, when horse hair was used it was dyed black with soot, red with red ochre or yellow with paint made from a solution of wolf moss in water.

Shirts

Everyone wore shirts made from the hides of the larger animals. Although elk, caribou and moose were used, the most common material was buckskin. The shirt was cut from the animal skin so that the leg part could be used as the sleeve. It was sewn together at the sides and fastened at the shoulder or throat with thongs of sinew or eleagnus bark. Shirts were made with both long and short sleeves and were the most highly decorated article of clothing.

The women's shirts were made longer and looser fitting than the men's. They had a wider sleeve and were belted at the waist. The wide sleeve type could have a wide flap which was cut square from the neck, fringed along the bottom and decorated with quills or shells. Shirts were often decorated and usually fringed along the bottom. Quills, shells or elk teeth were scattered over the front or sewn along the seams and fringed along the bottom. Sometimes a sleeve was attached above the elbow to the short sleeved style, to make a long, wide sleeve to the wrist. The women also wore sleeveless shirts or bodices which were either fringed above the waist or fell below the waist and were held in place with a belt.



Skirts and Dresses

The women wore buckskin kilts, or skirts, which were belted and fell below the knee. These were fringed around the bottom. They also wore dresses attached at the shoulder and belted, which fell to below the knee and were fringed around the bottom. Sometimes the skirts and dresses were made of woven sage bark or woven rushes.

Pants

Both men and women wore short leggings made of buckskin. The men and boys also wore a breechcloth and sometimes wore it without the leggings during warm weather. The breechcloth was a rectangle, soft buckskin. For a man it would measure about thirty centimeters wide by one and one half meters long. It was worn between the legs and hung over a buckskin belt both in front and at the back. In warm weather, this was the only trouser worn by men and boys. The front apron of the breechcloth was sometimes decorated and cut in points along the bottom. The girls' breechcloth was cut like a pair of shorts and held at the waist by a belt of bark or buckskin. Long leggings were also made of buckskin. Leggings were fringed along the sides and bottom for decoration. Leggings and aprons were sometimes made of woven sage bark, rushes or sedge bark. The bark style had the top trimmed with rabbit fur for comfort and a straw braid was attached to the front, just below the knee to tie the legging on.

In the winter the men wore pants which were called combination trousers and were made from bear, deer and marmot skins. The front of the legging was made of bear skin and the back of deer skin, with a deer skin fringe running down the outside of the leg. The bear skin leggings were sewn to a narrow piece of marmot skin which was attached to the belt and covered the front of the body.



In the back, the leggings were attached to a piece of deer skin which covered the back and had buckskin thongs to attach it to the belt in front.

The boys' winter combination suit was made of buckskin and marmot skin. The leggings were of marmot fur in front and buckskin in the back. The leggings were sewn to a wide band of buckskin at the waist in front. Marmot skin was sewn to the buckskin band in front and had a loop at the bottom. The marmot skin was pulled through the legs and caught up with the belt, which was tied at the back. The buckskin areas on the trousers were decorated in red with red ochre.

Capes and Ponchos

For warmth and protection from the rain, the Shuswap wore capes and ponchos of different types. The rain cape was made of closely woven sage or eleagnus bark. Children wore capes of buckskin which were fringed around the neck, front and bottom. These opened in the front. Capes for adults were made from deer skin, with the hair side out. When other skins were not available capes and ponchos were made of dog skins and woven sage or rush bark.

Warriors sometimes wore capes made of coyote skin. The shaman's cape was made of wolf skin.

Robes

Winter robes for children were made from marmot, squirrel and ground squirrel skins sewn together. Adult robes were made of marmot skins, woven strips of lynx or muskrat fur, or of two

large deer skins sewn together. Woven rabbit skin strips were also made into warm robes. The skins for a robe were combined in the following way. Two skins were placed crosswise as the neck piece. There followed an upper row three skins wide, then a row four skins wide with tails left on the outside skins, for decoration. The lower part of the robe had two rows of skins, with seven skins in each row. The upper and lower parts would be sewn together. The skins were joined so that the dark neck piece of the animal fit between the light coloured leg pieces, giving the robe an attractive pattern.

Robes were also made of fawn skins or beaver skins sewn together. A fawn skin robe would be made by placing a skin crosswise and attaching two rows of vertical skins below it. Robes were also made of dog skin when other materials were not available.

Robes were often dyed red, with red ochre, even with the hair on. Rabbit skin robes were dyed red. The southern Shuswap obtained buffalo robes through hunting across the Rockies and through trade with the Okanagan and Thompson people. The Fraser River Shuswap made robes of woven goat's wool out of blankets traded from the Lillooet and Chilcotin. There were also robes made out of woven dog's hair (these dogs are now extinct).

Caps

During the winter, fur caps were made by cutting fur pieces to fit the head and sewing them into the right shape. The small furs of marmot, squirrel, lynx and fox were used for the winter caps.

Older men wore caps of fur with the tail left on and hanging down the back. They might have a cap made of the deer's head, with the ears on it and decorated it with four tail feathers of the hawk standing upright at the top and red bird feathers behind each ear.

The older women wore buckskin caps sewn to fit around the head. These might have quillwork along the seam and the buckskin fringed around the top. The hunter's cap was made from the head skin of the deer.

Headbands

Head pieces were worn by most of the Shuswap. The older wore caps. The men had headbands of marten, mink, otter or beaver fur, cut in a strip and sewn to fit. These were sometimes decorated with feathers and strings of hair or dentalia.

The young women's headbands were made of buckskin and had a fringe falling down the back. They were embroidered with dentalia. Young men and women in training wore headbands of woven cedar or inner bark of willow.

The warriors had fur headbands with strings of feathers, usually eagle feathers, attached, falling down the back or along both sides. Hair was also used to decorate the warrior's headbands.

Winter Wear

Besides the warm moccasins, pants and robes, the Shuswap had other ways of keeping warm in the winter. They made mittens from furs, wearing them fur side in. The mittens were sometimes attached to the winter robe at the shoulders by long thongs so that they would not be lost. They also made neck wraps of small fur, sometimes woven, to wear with their robes. Winter socks were made by cutting small animals furs to the shape of the foot and sewing them together, fur side in, to be worn inside the moccasins. Sometimes woven sage bark, eleagnus bark, caribou hair or dry grass was packed inside the moccasin to act as a sock.

Adornment of Clothing and Body

The Shuswap decorated their clothing with many articles found in their environment, or constructed from other materials. They made paint from red ochre, wolf moss, charcoal and soot, alder bark and cherry bark to beautify their clothing. They used shells, teeth, feathers, quills and dentalia to make their clothing unique and interesting.

They also made many kinds of jewellery. Earrings made of dentalia, teeth and bone were worn by both men and women. Later, beads and copper were also used.

Large bird quills were made into earrings as well. These were carefully scraped until they were transparent, then filled with dyed bird down, shredded bark, wool or hair. Quills themselves were also dyed and strung onto threads, to be worn as earrings.

Both men and women wore neck pieces of various lengths. These were made of strung dentalia, bird quills, plain or dyed feathers, eleagnus seeds, animal teeth, claws and wampum or glass beads. Chokers with quills on one side were also used. Dentalia shells with incised designs were also worn in the ear. The necklace of the Shaman was made of grizzly bear claws.

Round, oval, square, oblong, triangular and crescent shaped pendants were sometimes worn, attached to necklaces. These were made of bone in early times. After European contact, they were made of copper as well. The bone pendant was often incised with designs and filled with red paint. The pendants were flat and sometimes highly polished. A very large pendant would be worn on a thong, without a necklace.

Many of the women and a few men used nose ornamentation. These were made of dentalium shells with the scalp of a red headed woodpecker attached to each end. Polished and incised bone rods were also used, having the scalp of red headed woodpecker glued to each end.

Sometimes a large breast piece or head ornament was made by sewing several rows of dentalia onto buckskin or stringing dentalia on a thong and folding it into a flat knot. A large breast piece could adorn the wearer, from throat to waist. They were usually twelve to fifteen centimeters in size and mostly worn by men.

Hair

The Shuswap wore their hair in many different styles. The hair was styled every day, except

during a hunt. It was washed in warm water with birch leaves in it. It was sometimes oiled with tallow from the deer's back, sheep's fat or occasionally salmon oil or bear grease. Wooden combs were used to style the hair. Hair was usually allowed to grow long but it was cut when a Shuswap person was in mourning.

Most often, the hair was parted in the middle and braided once on each side. Very thick hair was braided twice on each side. The women wore their braids fastened together at the back while the men's usually hung down. Some people parted their hair at the side before braiding. Very few people made two parts, bringing the front hair into a knot over the brow and braiding the rest. Some cut their hair from around the face and braided the rest in several loose braids and knotted it at the back of the neck.

Warriors and boys in training wore their hair knotted behind the ear or in "horns". Young girls wore their hair in knots behind their ears.

The hair was ornamented with combs and scratchers being stuck into the knotted hair. Ornaments were also worn in the hair on each side of the head, behind the ear. These might be matching buckskin flaps decorated with quills and dentalia or pendants attached to each side.

Other Styles of the Shuswap People

Personal beauty — The beard was removed and the eyebrows kept narrow. The hairline was kept straight. The face was sometimes painted. The women painted their faces red with micaceous hematite or yellow with a wolf moss solution. Men used red or brown face paint. The shaman applied black face paint. Warriors also used black paint; the whole war party using the same design. The paint was put on dry or mixed with grease. The face painting designs stood for dreams or visions.

Sometimes face painting was done for spiritual reasons. The face was painted to ask for good luck or good weather when approaching certain lakes or areas on higher plateaus and to represent clouds and rain to prepare for the rain song. A bear hunter painted a charcoal bear claw design on each cheek when hunting for bear. If he killed a bear, he would paint the whole face black, with blacker claw marks to announce his kill, which must never be mentioned aloud by him because that would be boastful and perhaps offensive to the bear.

Although it was not common, some tattooing was done, on the back of the wrists of young people and on the face. It was done by passing a painted thread under painted skin. Facial tattoos of women were of perpendicular lines on the chin and radiating lines on the cheeks or chin called "eagle tails". This type of tattoo was used among the Kamloops Shuswap.

Dress and Adornment for Special Activities

Individuals and groups of people showed that they were involved in special activities by their dress and adornment. The warrior could be recognized by the knotting of his hair and by the eagle feathers worn in his hair and on his war cap or at his elbows, wrists, legs and moccasin trailers. He also had feathers attached to his weapons and carried a shield.

Shields were of different types. One was made of rods of rosewood, woven together with bark thread or thong. The wood was then covered with bear or other skins. Another was of two or three thicknesses of raw elk hides glued together. The hides were sewn together at the edges and hung from the neck by a thong. Two or more coats of glue were spread on the outside of the shield to hold a layer of sand in place. The sand helped to make the shield arrow proof. It was worn as a tunic and covered the front of the body. The shield, of oval or oblong shape, was dyed red and decorated with feathers and tufts of slave hair.

Young men and women in training also had special dress and adornment. The young girl wore her hair in knots on each side of her head and wore a large robe painted red on the sides and the breast. Her face and body were sometimes painted red. Among the Kamloops Shuswap, only the cheeks were painted and the Western Shuswap did not have face paint for the training girls. The training boys rarely had face paint, except occasionally in the Southern Shuswap territory. Both girls and boys usually wore headbands of inside bark of willow or cedar. Boys might have had an eleagnus bark headband or no headband at all. Both wore strings of dew claws on their knees or ankles.

Dress for the ceremonial dance was simple. The men wore only a breechcloth and belt. The women wore a short, belted dress. The Western Shuswap wore a cedar bark headband and long trailers for the ceremonial dance. Face paint for the ceremonial dance was red and white vertical stripes. For the many other kinds of dances, the dancer often dressed to imitate the subject of the dance, so that it was more a costume than a kind of dress.

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SHUSWAP DECLARATION

TO WORK IN UNITY ON SHUSWAP LANGUAGE, HISTORY AND CULTURE

Traditionally, Shuswap territory covered an area of 56,000 square miles and included the Thompson River drainage basin, extended eastward to the Columbia River Valley and reached north into the Fraser District. European settlement and colonialism eroded Indian title to traditional lands and led to the eventual breakdown of the Shuswap Nation. Where thirty communities existed at the turn of the century, seventeen remain occupying only one-third of the traditional territory.

British imperialism and the colonizing of the Indian nations resulted in the disintegration of the society and a gradual decline of Shuswap culture and language.

For years the Shuswap bands have struggled to recover their heritage and restore it to its true role as the foundation of their nation.

Perseverance and hard work resulted in the signing of the Shuswap Declaration, August 20, 1982. The seventeen Shuswap bands had agreed to work together to preserve, record, perpetuate and enhance the Shuswap language, history and culture. The Shuswap Declaration marked the renewal of a strong and harmonious relationship that existed among the bands prior to European contact.

The Secwepemc Cultural Education Society is one of two sub-groups of the larger Shuswap Cultural Working Committee involved in cultural education programming and carrying out the Shuswap Declaration Agreement.

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