

The Evolution of Seminole Patchwork

In researching a study on ethnic clothing, I found it difficult to trace the evolution of Seminole Patchwork. Through much correspondence I found several books and information I would like to share.

When the Seminoles migrated to Florida their garments were made of leather or buckskin, totally unsuited to the hot, humid climate of Florida. Woven fabrics were acquired from the traders, which were made into simple garments. While it might appear that garments which did not cover the entire body would be cooler, the designs adapted were totally suitable, for they provided necessary protection from the mosquitoes.(1)

The everyday garments were simple. However, the ones worn by the chiefs were very elaborate. Through European influence, turbands were adapted and the colorful attire of the Scotch Highlanders -- traders and settlers--influenced the kilt-like dresses adapted by Osceola and others. (3, 2)

According to Neil, "...at one time, all the Seminole men, including the most savage fighters and ablest leaders wore skirts. Dresses were simply the characteristic costume adopted by the Seminoles, just as blankets or eagle feather bonnets characterized some other tribes."(4)

Many different styles of shirts have been worn by the men-- the earliest being the long plain shirt without trousers which was adapted from the European trade shirts of calico or plaid fabric. This was a knee-length loose fitting garment with long sleeves. Long shirts, decorated with epaulets and rows of ruffles were worn with coats, and around the 1880's, rows of applique were added to these two colorful garments. (2) Fairbanks states, "As a style, patchwork developed among the Seminole only after the introduction of the first hand-turned sewing machine in 1905."(1) "Patchwork began to replace applique bands around 1910." (2)

A big shirt designed from patchwork fabric, with a waistband, is still worn among some of the older Seminoles. These have been adapted to contemporary life by utilizing the waistband as a belted jacket (similar to the battle jacket) and made to be worn with slacks. The original garment, decorated with colorful borders, evolved into a garment produced from fabric made of patchwork. (2)

Women's clothing also was changing. Their original long skirts and long sleeved blouse, appliqued with bands of bright fabric, changed with the coming of the sewing machine. The bands disappeared to be replaced by patchwork, assembled in rows, and inserted into the skirt at regular intervals.(2) Blouses were exchanged for full waist-length capes, a colorful addition to the costume. In contrast to the bandanas adapted for neckwear by the men, the women wore pounds of beads around their neck.

"Admittedly, the clothing produced today for the tourist trade is primarily decorative," Downs says. "However, the key point in understanding the articles of clothing produced by the Florida Indian people for their own use is that they are not merely decorative, and that they function on a symbolic level in the Indian culture." (2)

--Betty Ferguson--
Richland, WA

This article has been largely based on information found in the following books, all of which I recommend

(1)Charles H. Fairbanks, THE FLORIDA SEMINOLE PEOPLE, Phoenix, Indian Tribal Series. (I have located a copy in the Albuquerque, New Mexico Public Library. It is not available outside that area.)

(2)THE ART OF THE FLORIDA INDIANS (catalog from the 1977 exhibition), Lowe Art Museum, University of Miami, 1301 Miller Dr., Coral Gables, FL 33146. (This 23 page catalog was researched by Dorothy Downs and is an excellent buy at \$2.50.)

(3)Irvin N. Peithman, UNCONQUERED SEMINOLE INDIANS. (History, language, costumes, customs, folklore, mythology, tribal law, etc. Many photos, old and new, which could be useful in researching patterns. No directions. 95 pages, \$1.95.)

(4)Wilfred T. Neil, FLORIDA'S SEMINOLE INDIANS. (History, information on the Seminole culture, changing styles, songs and dances. 128 pages, \$1.50.)

Note: Both (3) and (4) listed above were published by Great Outdoors, St. Petersburg, FL. Add 35¢ postage and handling charges each. A bargain!

(5)FIBERARTS MAGAZINE, 3717 4th St., N.W., Albuquerque, NM. (An excellent publication covering many phases of contemporary fiber and fabric. It carried an excellent article on the Seminoles and quoted Fairbank's book. A copy of this article could possibly still be ordered from them.)

There is a museum in Florida which I'd like to visit. Meantime, they handle mail orders and will send a flyer upon request: Seminole Arts and Crafts Center, 6073 Stirling Rd., Hollywood, FL 33024.

Ed. Note: Other publications which may be of interest to you:

EMBROIDERY, Spring 78, "Patchwork from Strips" by Valerie Tulloch.

GOOD HOUSEKEEPING, GHN #732, "Seminole Patchwork."

THE INDEPENDENT, Feb 13, 1974, "Four Lines to Travel."

ANTIQUES JOURNAL, October '75, "Seminole Indian Patchwork" by Betty Evanoff.

WOMEN'S CIRCLE (no date), "Seminole Sewing--Works of Art" by Cleo M. Stephens.

FAMILY CIRCLE, Jan. '75, "Indian Crafts."

"Dazzling Designs by the Seminole Indians" by Roxa Wright.

McCall's NEEDLEWORK & CRAFTS, Spring '77, "Seminole Sewing."

ARIZONA HIWAYS, May 1975.

WOMAN'S DAY, "Native American Indian Crafts." #1--"Brilliant Patchwork" by Roxa Wright. #2--"Seminole Patchwork" by Anne Cheek Landsman.

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: (1) Feb. '48, "Seminoles" by Louis Capron; (2) Dec. '56 "Florida's Wild 'Indians,' the Seminole," by Louis Capron; (3) Nov. '69, "Florida's Emerging Seminoles," by Louis Capron.

SMOKE SIGNALS, United States Dept. of the Interior, Indian Arts & Crafts Board, Spring 1966 (out of print).

Bradkin, Cheryl Greider. THE SEMINOLE PATCHWORK BOOK, copyright Cheryl Greider Bradkin, 1978, 3534 Altamont Dr., Carmichael, CA 95608

Stribling, Mary Lou. CRAFTS FROM NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS. (chapter on "Seminole Patchwork.")

Whiteford, Andrew Hunter. NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN ARTS.

On the Book Shelf

THE SEMINOLE PATCHWORK BOOK

by Cheryl Greider Bradkin, published by the author, 3534 Altamont Drive, Carmichael, CA, 1978, soft cover \$4.50.

A 32 page spiral-bound well illustrated informative book with clear concise directions and 16 pages of patterns. A short history of the people and an easy-to-follow text makes this book a must! Order directly from the author or I bought mine from The Quilt Patch, 1620 Ridgefield Street, Eugene OR 97404, \$4.50 plus postage and handling.

MACHINE APPLIQUE

by Karen Bray, published by the author, 21 Birch Drive, Walnut Creek, CA 94596, 1978, soft cover, 48 pages, \$6.50.

I am delighted that Karen Bray has written this book, if for no other reason than I am an admirer of her work. She has included photographs of some of her prize-winners, such as: Memories of 1960, As American as the Nation's Holidays and the Family Interest Banner (See JOURNAL, Fall '77, Vol. I, No. 1).

Karen has given simple, easy-to-follow instructions and diagrams for a smooth, nice-looking machine applique. It is a durable and long lasting technique which has a special quality all its own. Novices especially will want this book.

I am sorry she didn't include a foolproof method for achieving the special effects she obtains with her combination of machine applique and embroidery. Maybe that will be another book.

Order directly from the author.

