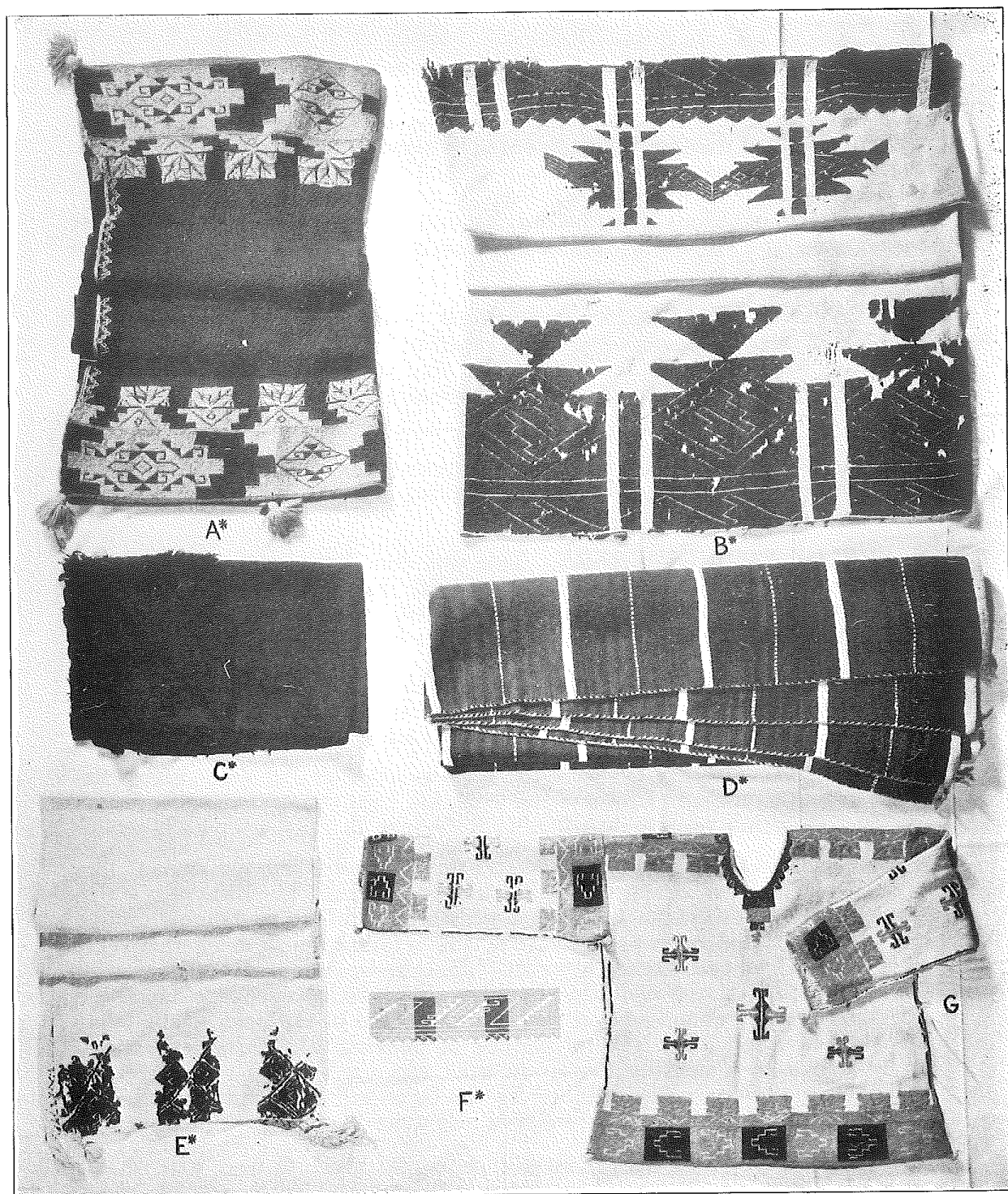


DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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Only specimens with starred letters (A*) are from Acoma. The remaining specimen is from Jemez but illustrates in general an Acoma type.

Acoma Pueblo Weaving and Embroidery

LEAFLET 89

DECEMBER, 1939

1. **ACOMA** (Ah'-ko-mah) is a town of the Keres group of pueblos located in west central New Mexico. It is 20 miles southwest of the New Laguna station on the Santa Fe Railway, about half way between Albuquerque and Gallup. The town has been in its present site atop a lofty isolated mesa for many hundreds of years. It has two colonies, Acomita and Santa Maria (McCarty's), located near the railway northwest of Acoma. The population of the three towns is about 1200.

2. **PUEBLO WEAVING** began in the 8th century, A. D. The oldest dated piece, by the tree ring calendar, bears the date 758 A. D. Weaving on the true loom appears somewhat suddenly among the Pueblos. It has not yet been determined whether it was invented by them or introduced from Mexico. Since this beginning weaving has been carried on continuously in cotton; and in wool since the introduction of sheep by the Spanish in the 17th century. For several generations it has been dying out, now surviving as a major craft only among the Hopi and Zuni, with occasional occurrences elsewhere. See leaflets 18 and 90-97.

3. **WEAVING AT ACOMA** has practically vanished, except for such work as is being done by young people as a result of Indian school teaching. The following notes were obtained from the tiny surviving group of old time weavers. See page 156 for list of illustrations of textiles in other leaflets in this series.

4. **SEX OF WEAVERS.** Weaving was principally men's work, though an occasional woman might weave. The weaving of belts, garters and hair ties was, on the other hand, women's work.

5. **SEX OF EMBROIDERERS.** This was done by women. Embroidery elsewhere among the Pueblos is done by men. It is not known whether the Acoma women were real exceptions to the rule; or whether the pueblo has been influenced by the customs of the Whites in this connection.

6. **LOOM AND EQUIPMENT.** This was said to be the same as at other Pueblos. Though no loom was seen, the woven articles from Acoma bear out the statement. For details see Leaflets 3 and 59-60.

7. **WEAVING TECHNIQS** were the same as at other Pueblos. Plain, diagonal and all-over diamond weaves were made. Leaflet 3 explains plain weaving; and the other two are described in Reference 1.

8. **BELT WEAVING** was done and still survives quite actively among older people as well as among school children and graduates. The belts seen which are certainly from Acoma are all red with green and white designs, though one with black designs was seen. There is no information as to whether there were any designs peculiar to the town. Those seen were of the same type as is made by the Navaho and other Pueblos. Stick heddles seem to have been the rule, though one old weaver said she had heard of the reed heddle being used in her youth. The general method of weaving wool belts is described in Reference 2. Originally handspun wool was used. This was succeeded by bayeta (see section 14) and later by the Germantown manufactured yarn universally used today by southwestern belt weavers.

9. **KNITTING.** Blue wool footless knee-length stockings were knit. None was seen, but it seems safe to presume that they resembled those made today by the Navaho, Zuni and Hopi. Old accounts of the town speak of their manufacture and use.

COTTON

10. CULTIVATION. A little cotton was grown around springs and in sheltered places. Its cultivation stopped about 1850-55, due to the increasing dryness of the climate. As far as could be discovered none is being grown today.

11. PREPARATION. No definite information is available about the methods of separating the cotton from its seeds; and of spinning. Leaflet 18 described these processes among the Hopi; and presumably the Acomans worked along similar lines.

12. ARTICLES MADE. It is certainly known from existing specimens that large shawls (B) (usually called by the Spanish term "manta"), shirts (G), kilts and breech cloths (E) were made. Since heavily fringed braided sashes were and are made at most other Pueblos they were probably made also at Acoma.

The shawls were embroidered with wool (see section 14) and some of them had a design peculiar to the town, two birdlike figures in the middle near the top. One is shown on the cover (B). Some of these were embroidered in black and others in rose and green. Reference 3 describes one in detail. Another type—said to be from Acoma—has rows of tall designs rising from the edges. Each design is made up of pairs of conventionalized flowers set one on the other to produce a design somewhat resembling either the sails set on the mast of an old fashioned square rigged ship; or a Chinese pagoda. These shawls are excessively rare, only a few being known today.

The breech cloths are very long—6 to 8 feet—and have a wide band of embroidery at each end. The 3 remaining today have embroidery in red, brown and blue. An example is shown on the cover (E).

The shirts are made in three pieces, a rectangle which covers the body, with a hole cut for the head, and two sleeves sewn to the shoulders. The edges of the body piece and of the sleeves are held together with ties. These shirts are embroidered as is shown by the specimen on the cover (G).

On the basis of the one specimen known the kilts resemble in shape and type of decoration those made today by the Hopi and others and widely used in all the Pueblos, a long rectangle with embroidery on the narrow ends. A drawing of the embroidery on the single specimen is shown on the cover (F). If this design is a typical example of Acoma kilt embroidery this Pueblo had a design for kilts not found elsewhere. 90; B and 92-93; A, show the usual pattern found on kilts.

WOOL

13. ARTICLES MADE. Blankets (D), women's dresses (C), and embroidered shawls (A) were certainly made; and presumably the blue wool shirts common to most of the Pueblos. A special class of very fine white wool articles, to be discussed below, was also produced.

If the few blankets known are any indication Acoma blankets were of the horizontally striped type common to the Pueblos. Due to lack of information no special features can be described. One old man, Lazaro Cerno, now about 85—or dead—wove what he said would be his last blanket in 1936 (D). It cannot be distinguished from any other Pueblo blanket.

The women's dresses are exactly like those made by the Hopi, a squarish rectangle of dark cloth in a diagonal weave, with bands in blue diamond weave on the long edges (C). The one distinguishing feature is in the dyeing, to be discussed in a later section.

The embroidered shawls (A) are the most spectacular and best known product of the Acoma weavers. Like the dresses they have a center section of dark diagonal weave. But the long edges are covered with broad bands of rich embroidery in bright colors. Red and blue are the most common colors, with red and green in second place. Occasionally other shades are seen. These shawls, which were also worn as dresses, went out of use about 1875.

The special type of fine white wool articles mentioned above does not seem to have been made elsewhere except at the neighboring Pueblo of Laguna. It appears that after cotton growing stopped 75 to 100 years ago the people turned to very finely spun and woven wool. The articles made of this fine wool were the same as those made of cotton. No examples from Acoma of this class of work are available today, as far as can be ascertained.

EMBROIDERY

14. MATERIALS. Most of the red embroidery on the Acoma cloth known today—except for students' work—is done with ravelings from various kinds of commercial cloth, such as the English-made baize called bayeta by the Spanish, American wool bed blankets, or American belt flannel. There is some handspun thread and an occasional use of a fine 3-ply commercial yarn called Saxony. The blues and greens are handspun, though they may be ravelings.

15. NEEDLES were originally made of wood by the Indians. Later, wandering Mexican blacksmiths made iron ones; and still later ordinary commercial steel needles were used.

16. TECHNIC. Though no descriptions are available it may be presumed that the ordinary Pueblo process was followed. The finished article was taken from the loom. Those sections to be embroidered were held taut by various kinds of stretchers while the embroidering was in process. The stitch used is described in Reference 3.

DYES

17. MATERIALS. Black was made from yellow ochre and pinyon gum, though sometimes the bark of mountain mahogany, or a sunflower-like plant were added. The use of ochre and gum without bark is a notable variation from the usual southwestern practice. But informants knew about both and insisted that the barkless type was used. I feel that my informants must be mistaken, for laboratory tests show that the ochre-gum combination does not make black. Tannin from any one of a number of plants must be added to make black. It is quite possible that the difficulty lies in faulty interpreting. Blue came from indigo, and yellow was made from the flower of the rabbit brush. It was said that no green dye was made, but that it was imported from Mexico. But since other Pueblos make green from indigo and rabbit weed yellow it may be that the old people had forgotten.

There was no bright red dye, ravelings of cloth previously dyed red by the Whites with cochineal or madder being used. But mention was made of a dark red dye made from some unidentified flower with a red center.

18. TECHNIC. The most unusual feature of the dyeing at Acoma was the custom of redyeing the women's black dresses and shawls after they had been woven. This was done every few years to freshen up the black. As the dresses were made with bright blue diamond edges this redyeing tended to dim the blue and to give it a brownish tinge. All dresses known or said to be from Acoma show this dulled blue. Naturally the embroidered dresses were not redyed.

Compiled by F. H. Douglas from his field notes and from examination of the great collections. For comparative reading see:

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST

1. Zuni weaving technique—Leslie Spier. Vol. 26, no. 1, 1924

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

2. The Navajo Belt-weaver—R. W. Shufeldt. Proceedings, Vol. 14, 1891

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3. An embroidered cotton garment from Acoma—F. H. Douglas. Material Culture Notes, no. 1, 1937

MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA

4. Technique of the major Hopi crafts—M.-R. F. Colton. Museum Notes, Vol. 3 no. 12, 1931

For additional illustrations of Pueblo textile types referred to in this leaflet see the following pictures in other leaflets. Knit wool leggings, 94-95; I, 96-97; C: Embroidered cotton shawls, 90; D, 91; C, 96-97; A: Wool shirts, 90; G, 96-97; I: Embroidered wool shawls, 94-95; A, D: Wool belts, 94-95; B, C, 96-97; E: Braided cotton sashes, 90; A, 96-97; B.

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