

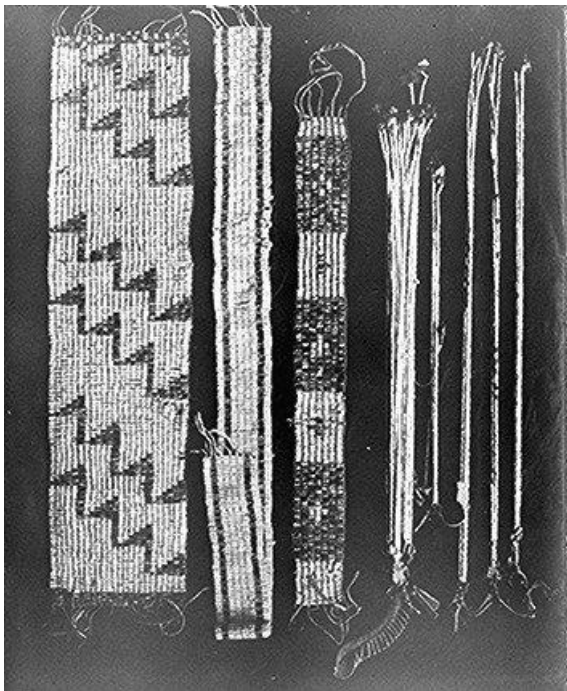
String and belt wampum, ca. 1890

String and belt wampum, ca. 1890

Circa 1890 photograph of string and belt wampum. "Wampum" means "white shell" in the Algonquin language family spoken by several tribes. Wampum consists of cylindrical beads made from the ends of shells rubbed down, polished, and threaded on strings. Each intricate wampum bead could take as much as a day to create, and many were combined to form bracelets, belts, collars, and more. "Belt" refers to the shape of the item, not the purpose -- they were not worn as we would wear a belt today.

Wampum were traded amongst native tribes (and later European settlers) and often used to visually represent important events or stories. They were not used as currency until European settlers arrived.

See this entry on Ohio History Central for more information about Wampum belts: http://www.ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Wampum_Belt



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