Beadwork Kelsey

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March 3, 1947

Miss Edna Kelsey
59 Third Street
Garden City, L.I., N.Y.

Dear Miss Kelsey:

I was very happy to get your kind letter expressing your pleasure in my book JIM BRIDGER. How interesting it must have been to read the letters to your grandmother from her sons, telling of their stage-coach journeys in the West. I am happy to learn that your father also enjoyed my work. I have had fun writing my books.

It is not easy to find a letter from Jim Bridger, as he never learned to write, so far as I can learn. His letters must have been dictated.

American Indians appear to have made beads out of shells, but of course these were not anything like so small as the glass beads manufactured by white men, or more recently by Japs.

This craft of covering leather with beadwork developed from the old Indian technique of dyed porcupine quills, which were used in much the same manner. The quillwork is often very beautiful, in color much softer than the beads, with a soft lustre that makes it very attractive.

I had hoped that when the war cut off the supply of Jap beads the Indians would return to their quill technique, and a few old-timers did so for a while. But the wages offered in war work soon drew the Indians away from their native crafts.

Should you ever visit the Museum of Natural History in New York City, you might find some examples of old quillwork on the garments of Indians there. A note to the Associate Curator of Ethnology, Miss Bella Weitzner, might tell you just where to find these, in case you are interested in seeing them.

With many thanks and hearty good wishes, I remain,

Yours cordially,

W. S. CAMPBELL
(Stanley Vestal)

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