

FINGER WEAVING

Part 1

by Richard Conn

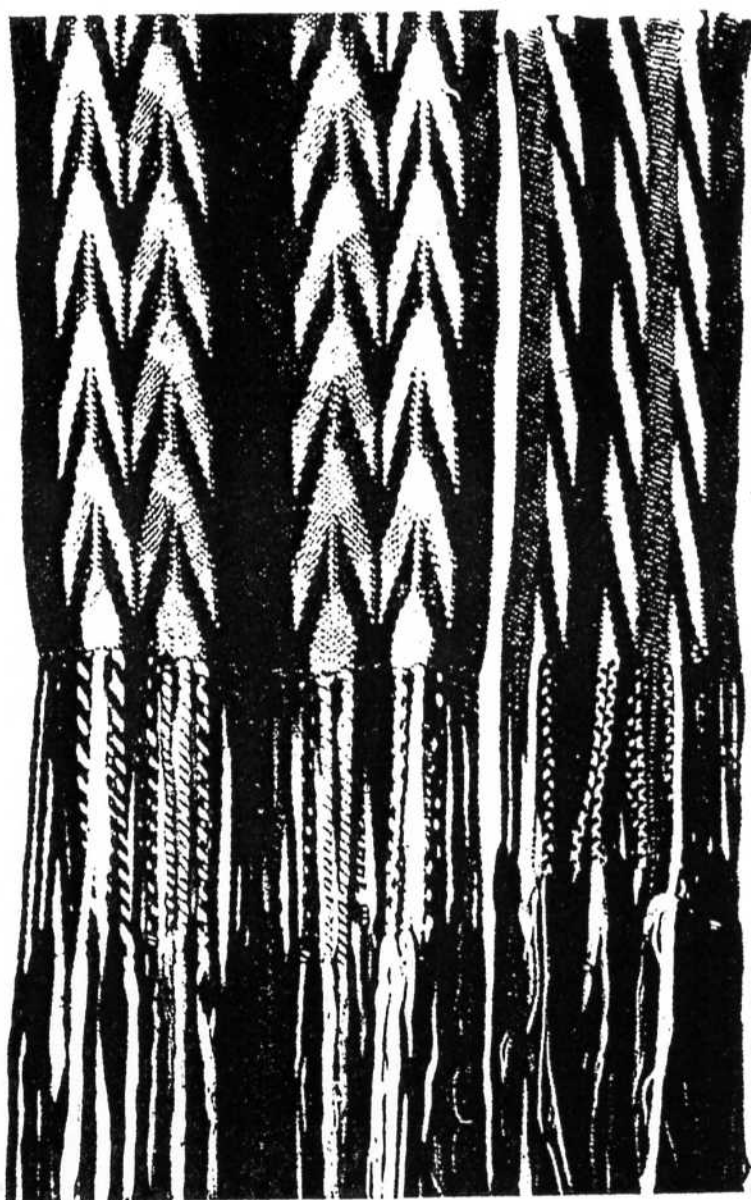


Fig. 1 Two finger-woven sashes, Winnebago (left) and Menomini (right). Both designs are variations of the basic technique. Photo courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian.

Some years ago, I began a series of articles in "American Indian Tradition" on the various kinds of braided sashes. Unfortunately, this magazine went out of business after the first article was published, and the others were never printed. In the time since, people have written to ask for instructions on the material that was to be covered in the unpublished articles. So far I have had to disappoint them. Now, "American Indian Crafts & Culture" has made it possible to start again and, hopefully, to finish. Let's hope this series doesn't prove a jinx to Mr. Stewart. This first article will cover the basic details - how to calculate the amount of yarn, how to arrange it, etc. - and the simple chevron pattern. The next will be concerned with arrow pattern and the process of braiding several bands simultaneously. The final article will explain the flame and reflex patterns and some ways of treating fringe.

The first step in making a piece of finger weaving is, obviously, to figure out your pattern and then plan how much yarn you will need. I except you will work out the actual design from pieces you have seen, whether in photographs or in the flesh. After you have worked out the pattern and the colors, you should make a full-sized sketch of one unit; that is, one full repeat of the design. With this sketch, you will be sure of what you're going to make and it will also help you figure the yarn correctly.

Most sashes and garters are woven of sweater-weight knitting yarn that comes in hanks of a specified number of yards, marked on the

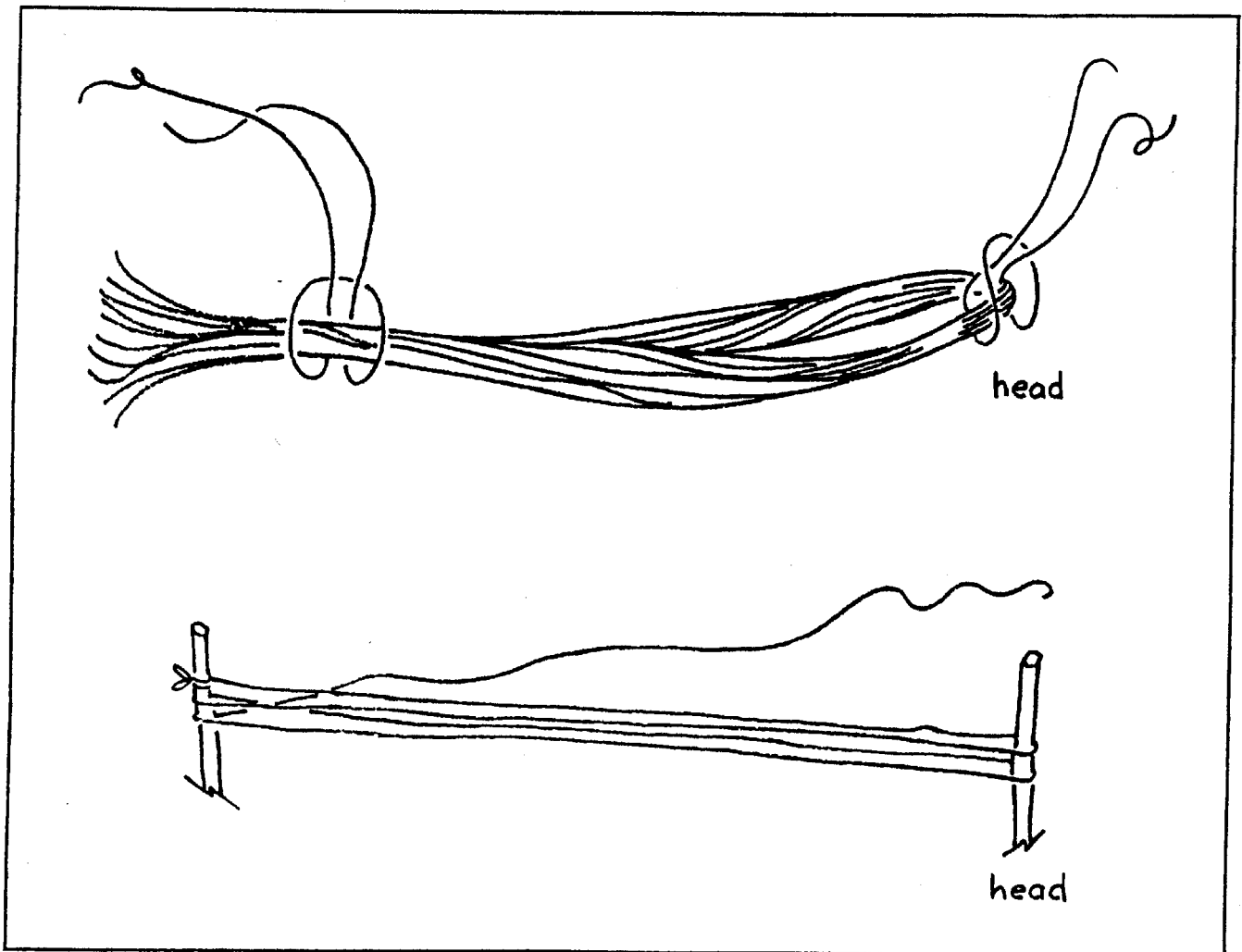
wrapper. Measure your sketch to see how wide your project is to be, and multiply this by twenty-four (since sweater-weight yarn will work out at about twenty-four strands to the inch of width). If you are using finer yarn, you may have to make a practice piece to determine the strand width count. Next, decide on the length of the braided section and add 10% for the "take up" or length you will lose by the strands' lateral movement in braiding. Then add extra length for the fringes on either end and you have the total length. Using your sketch, work out the number of strands required for each color on the basis of twenty-four to the inch. Multiply this by the overall length and you will know how much yarn of each color is required. Then, it's off to the yarn shop.

Many Indians like Red Heart brand yarn, and it does work up well. You should get wool yarn, as both cotton and all-synthetics aren't very elastic. But, you don't need to buy an expensive wool yarn like Shetland or Argyle. Something from Woolworth's will do very well.

Having your yarn, you are ready to set it up for work. You must find two winding posts and set them the proper distance apart; that is, the overall sash length you figured out before. The winding posts must be two solid objects around which you can wind yarn without slipping. You might clamp two sticks to the edge of a work table, or use two ladderback chairs, or anything else suitable. Tie an end of yarn to one post and start winding back and forth until you have enough strands of the first color. Although it sounds silly to mention it, don't forget that each round trip between posts gives two strands. I have seen people wind off yards of yarn without realizing they had counted only one side. End at the first post, untie your original knot, tie it to the other end and cut off the excess. Repeat for the other colors. Don't worry about having the colors in proper sequence yet.

After the yarn is all wound off and tied, it must be set in order. At the second winding post (the one opposite the knots), insert the head tie string as shown in Fig. 2. This should be a piece of strong cord about two yards long. Then go to the first winding post, untie the knots and cut all the yarn loops open. Then tie a second heavy cord around this yarn bundle as shown in Fig. 2. Next you have to find a

Fig 2 Top: How to insert the head and bottom tie strings. Bottom: How the yarn is wound.



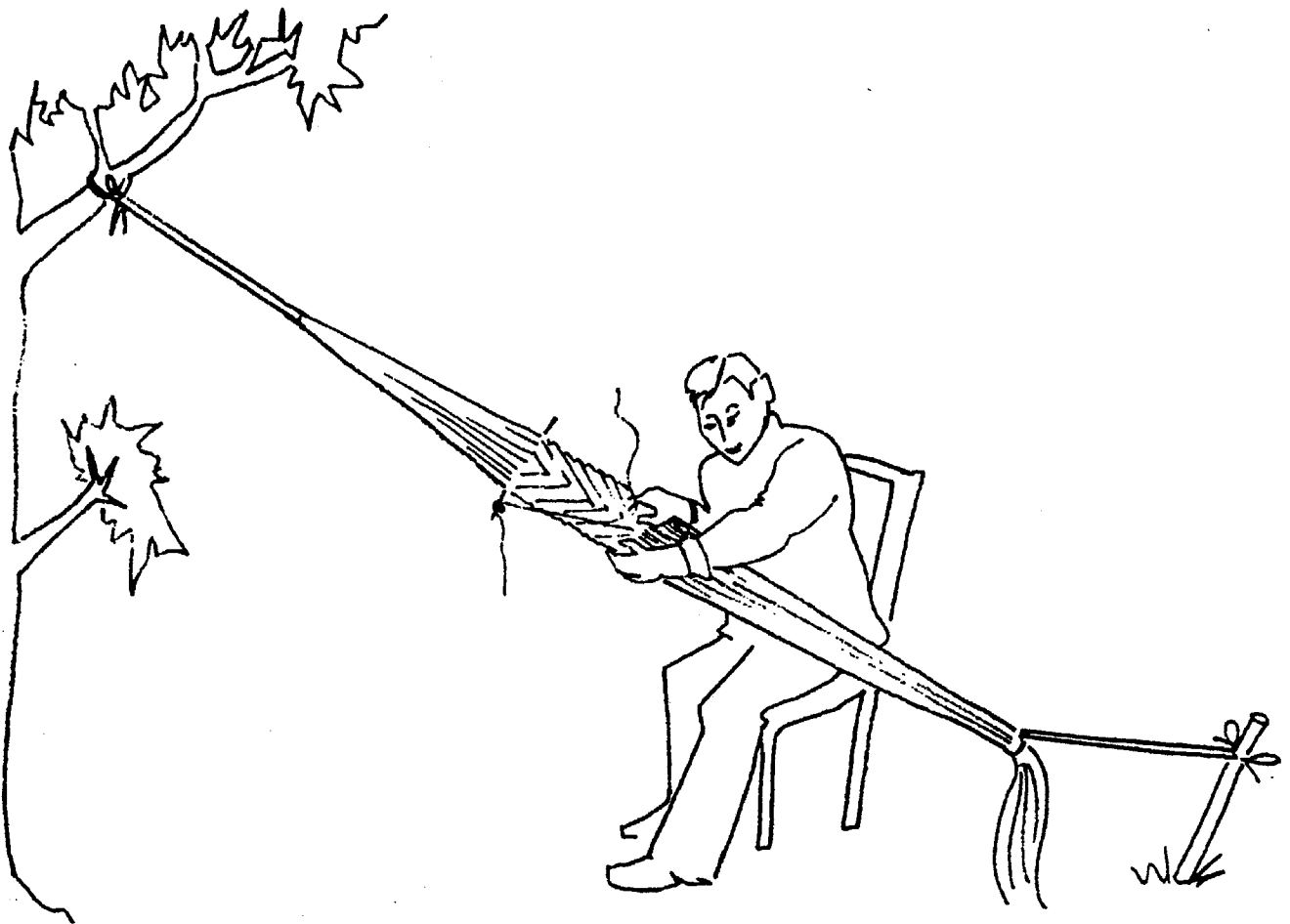


Fig. 3 How to arrange the yarn bundle for working.

convenient place to set up the yarn bundle and work. Personally, I like to work with the yarn at about a 45 degree angle as shown in Fig. 3. Others prefer it more nearly vertical or horizontal.

With the yarn arranged comfortably, you must insert the headstick. This may be a peeled willow shoot, a piece of dowel, or something similar. It should be about three-eighths inch in diameter and eight inches longer than the braiding will be wide. Lift up one strand of the color that goes in the center, measure down from the upper tie a distance equal to the fringe of one end, and loop this strand around the head stick. Continue looping the center color strands around the stick and then check the distance again. Fig. 4 shows how these loops are made. Continue looping the rest of the strands onto the head stick, working alternately on both sides, and arranging the colors in proper order. When all are in place, be sure the head stick is square, and push the strands tightly together.

Finally, check the tension of the yarn bundle. Each strand should be taut, so that it does not sag, but not tight. You should be able to raise or lower any strand several inches without difficulty. Now, you're ready to begin braiding.

At this point, let me ask a favor. Finger weaving is great fun, and the whole point of these articles is to let you in on the enjoyment. But, almost everyone who wants to learn the process is thinking of making an arrow sash. The arrow process isn't easy at first, and you will have more luck with it if you do some practicing with the basic method first. Let me urge you to do one or two pieces in the basic chevron pattern in order to get the feel of the technique before going on to the more complicated patterns. I've seen enthusiastic people insist on beginning with an arrow design, make a mess of it, and give up. This is like learning to drive a diesel truck - too much for the first lesson.

First, then, you should try a single band

of plain braiding. With your yarn in order, pick up an edge strand, pull it loose from the bottom tie, and simply weave it through the rest, going alternately over and under. As it comes out at the other edge, wrap it several times around the head stick. Then go back to the starting point, pick out the next edge strand and do the same. This time, be sure you've alternated with the course above; that is, you are now going over the strands you went under before and vice versa. At the end, unwrap the first working strand from the head stick, and turn it over the second working strand. The first strand must re-enter the work in proper alternation also - if the second working strand went under the last taut strand, the first working strand must go under it as it re-enters the yarn bundle. Wrap the second working strand around the head stick and tuck the first into the bottom tie. Fig. 5 diagrams how this basic weave should look. Just continue the process above, picking up each new working strands at the same

Fig. 4 How to loop strands around the head stick.

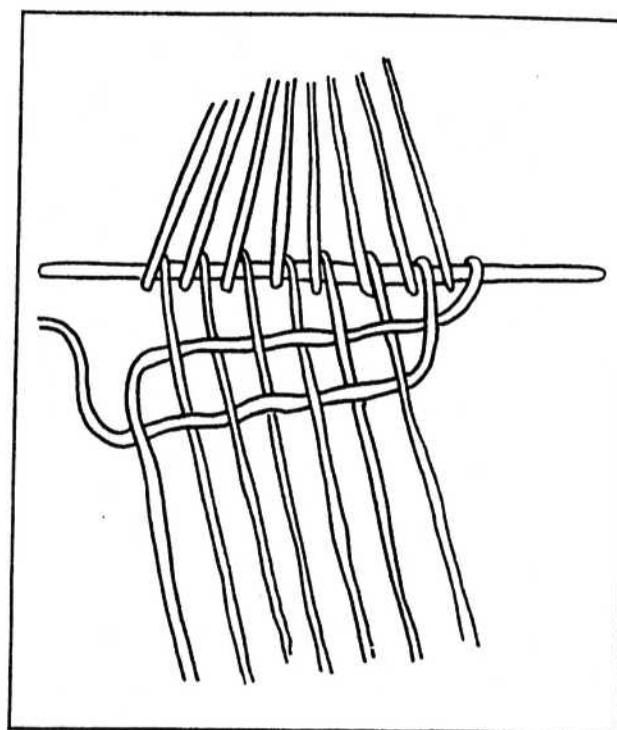
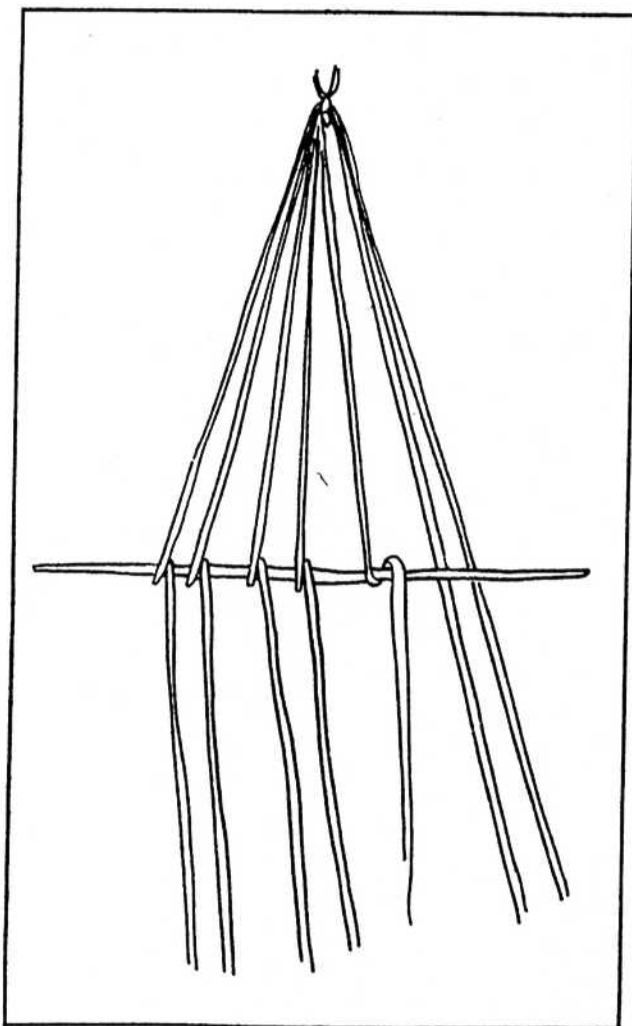


Fig. 5 The single band braiding process. In actual practice, the strands are tight together. Here and in the following figure, they have been opened up for clarity.

edge and putting each old working strand back into the bundle properly, and in a little while, you'll see a pattern forming. Because you are taking up yarn from one side and replacing it on the other, your pattern will have diagonal stripes as in Fig. 1, right.

This single band braiding is very easy. The only problem is making sure the strands alternate correctly. If you do get one strand going the wrong way, your mistake cannot be righted two or three courses later and will only get worse. If you do make a mistake, you must go back and straighten it out.

The next step is a band of double-band braiding - the kind that will make chevron designs. Now you must work with an even number of strands, since the work begins from the center and each half must have the same number of strands. Find the center point and pick up the strand on one side of it - either side. Weave this strand through the opposite side, going over and under and so on until you wrap the strand around the head stick. Then, turn the head stick 180 degrees. The weaving you just did will now be opposite its original place. Take the strand that was on the other side of the first center (it will now be in the same position as the first one you picked up) and weave it through the side opposite it, being sure to pass it under the first taut strand.

(continued on page 14)

FINGER WEAVING

continued from page 5.

Fig. 6 shows how this looks. I've made one side dark and one light to clarify the operation. Turn the head stick back to its original position, pick up the next center strand from the first side and weave it through the second side; that is, this third working strand goes along just below the first one you did. The fourth will go below the second, and so on. By the way, each crossing of a band with one or more working strands is called a course of weaving. In this case, working strands 1 and 2 are a course since together they crossed the whole band. After the third working strand is in place, the first is turned over it and back into the yarn bundle as before. Again, you must be very careful to get a proper alternation of taut strands as you go. From this point, the process goes on weaving in first one side and then the other of each course. After

Fig 6 A, First half of the first course. B, Second half of the first course. Note that the work has been reserved. C, First half of the second course. The work has been reversed again.

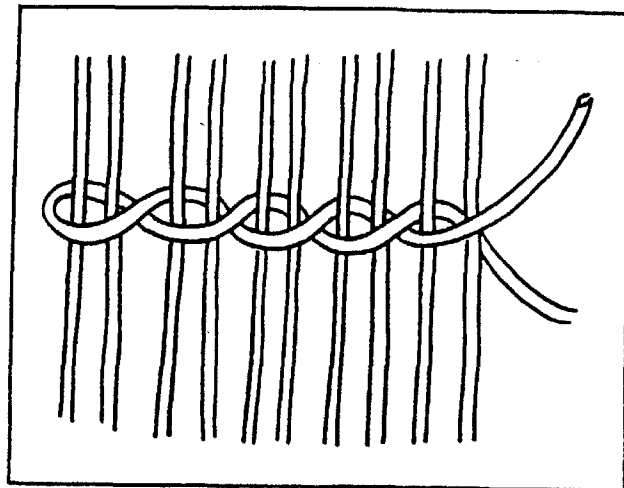
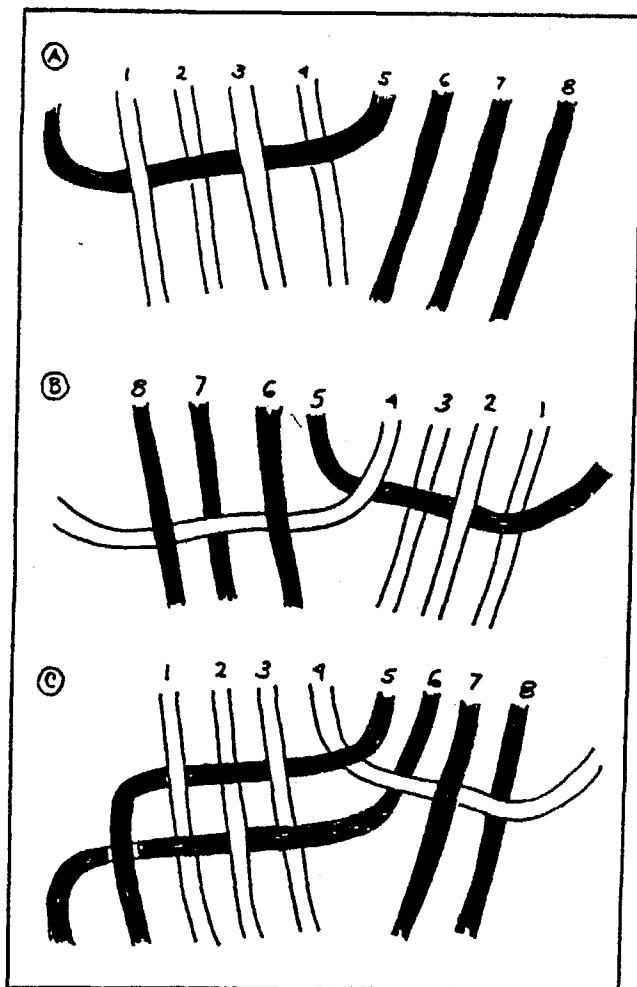


Fig. 7 How to make the twining stitches.

you have done several courses, untie the bottom string and slip all the loose ends back into the yarn bundle.

When you stop work for the evening, it is necessary to hold the last row of weaving tight. For this, you make a tenter bar which can be a stick about one inch in diameter and split lengthwise in two, or it could be two flat sticks of the same size. Place the halves of the tenter bar over the working edge and clamp them together firmly with string or rubber bands. Then untie both ends of the work, roll it up, and it will hold itself securely until you're ready to work some more.

When you have finished your piece of braiding, insert a row of twining stitches at both ends to keep it from unravelling. Fig. 7 shows how these stitches are done. You may use a short piece of yarn, double it around one edge of the sash, twine, and tie at the other edge. You may also use two long pieces and let them add to the fringes at both sides. Some people prefer to do the twining stitches at the upper end right after inserting the head stick. Whether you do or not, be sure to put them in both ends before releasing the tension on the taut strands. With twining in place, untie the yarn and cut open the loops at the upper end.

The basic process makes chevron-like designs. You can vary these according to the colors you choose and by varying the size of the chevrons. For example, one chevron might be ten strand wide, another six, and so on. You may also make chevrons half one color and half a second. To do this, just set up an equal number of the two colors exactly opposite each other on the head stick. The colors will alternate as you braid, so that if you started with color A on the left, it will come out on the right next time, then back to the left, etc. You may also vary chevrons with striping. Here you set up strands of two colors in adjacent pairs. Suppose you wanted a striped chevron eight strands wide. In each half of the work, you would arrange eight strands of the two

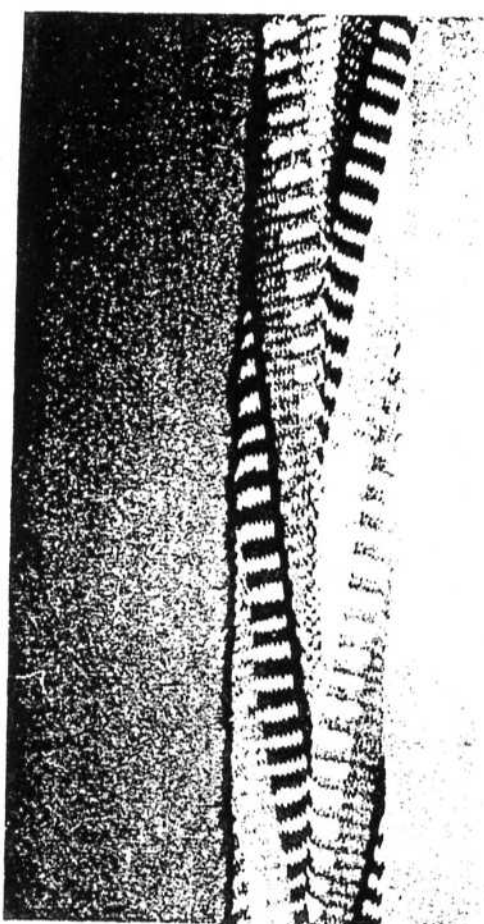
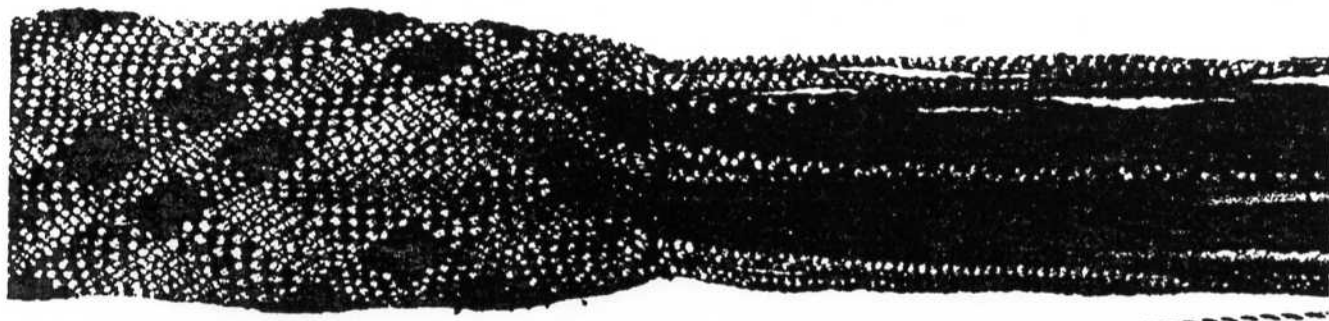


Fig. 8 Chevron sash with striped designs.

colors thus: ABABABAB, making sure the same color was nearest the center on both sides. As you work all of color A will show on the surface in one course and all of color B the next time. Fig. 8 shows how this striping looks.

The preceding directions make what is called a warp-face braid, which means that the working strands hardly ever show on the surface. This is caused by pushing the strands closely together on the head stick before braiding and by keeping the yarn bundle taut. There is another

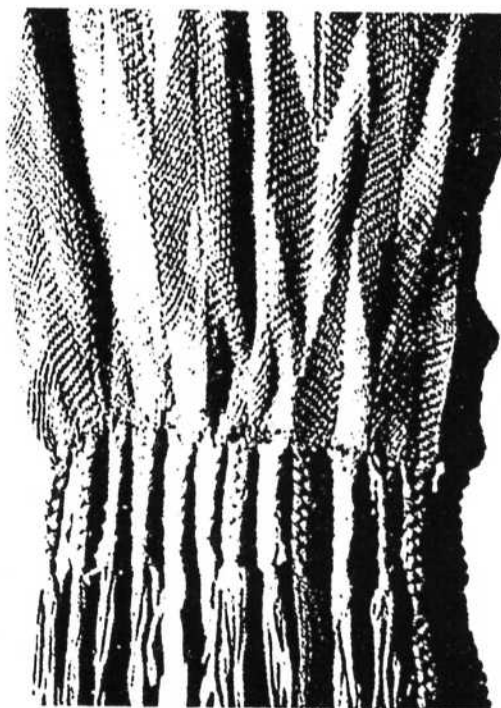
Fig. 9 Sauk & Fox plain-face sash. Note the checkerboard appearance caused by letting the working strands show. Photo courtesy Museum of the American Indian.



kind of plain finger weaving in which the working strands do appear on the surface and the work resembles Monk's cloth woven diagonally. This is the process used to make the Iroquois sashes and the beaded edges of Osage arrow sashes. Fig. 9 shows an example of this plain-face braiding. To do this kind of finger weaving, space out the strands on the head stick so they just touch and no more, and loosen up the tension on the yarn bundle so the strands hang a little slack. As you work, push each working strand up against the preceding one as tightly as you can. This plain-face braiding is harder to master than the warp-face variety. Tension is the problem, and you will have to practice a bit to get the feel of it.

In the next article, we will take up the arrow pattern. Again, let me urge you to practice the basic process and familiarize yourself with it before attacking the more involved arrow designs. ■

Fig. 10 Ojibwa chevron sash of several bands woven together. Photo courtesy Milwaukee Public Museum.



FINGER WEAVING

Part 3
2?

by Richard Conn

The second article in this series contained directions for the basic arrow pattern. Since the last two patterns that will be explained here are merely variations of the arrow pattern, I will refer back to the second article for the basic details.

Flame pattern sashes are best known to us through the very fine examples - the Assomption sashes - made by the French Canadians. Fig. 1 shows a handsome example from the Museum of the American Indian. It was collected among the Iroquois, but was surely made by a French-Canadian woman somewhere in southeastern Quebec. There are comparatively few examples of flame

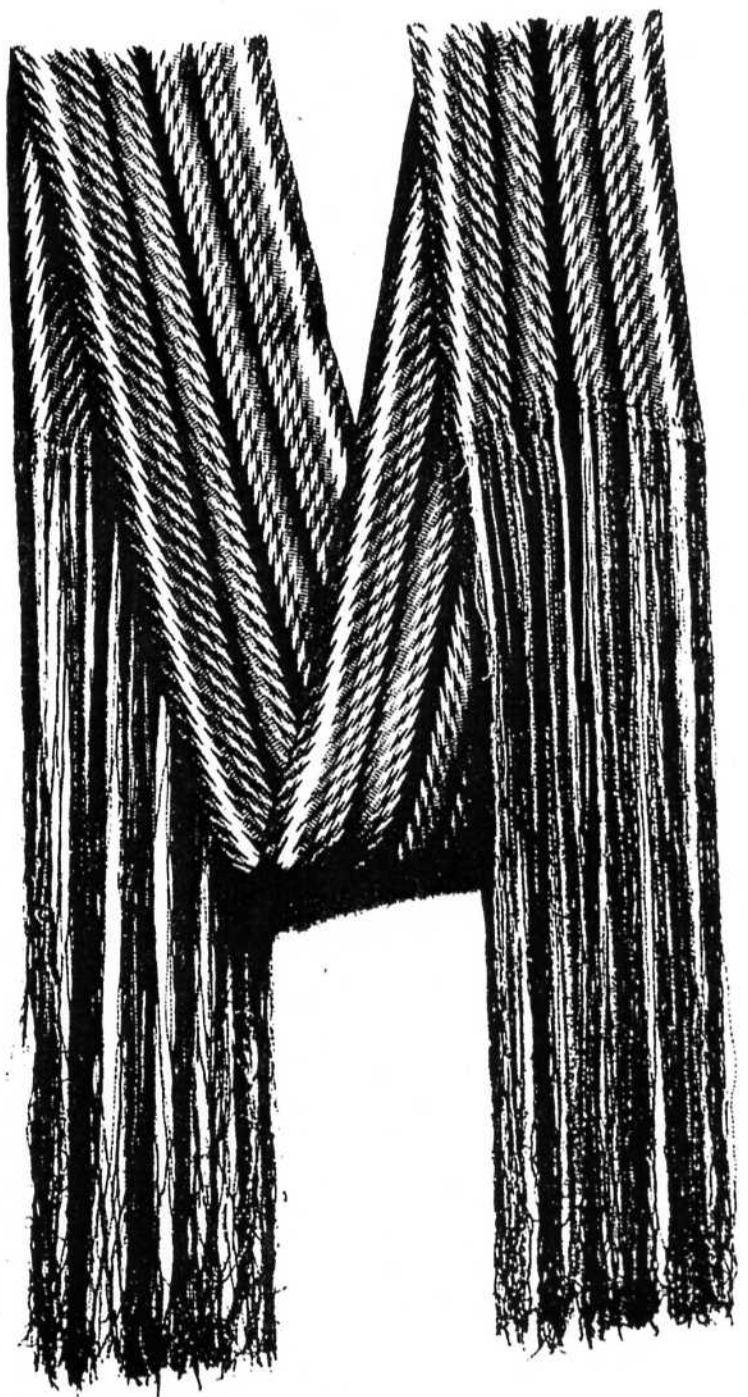


Fig. 1 A French-Canadian Flame Sash. Photo courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian.

sashes made by Indians today, although one sees some nice ones in old collections. Finger weaving, by the way, seems to have been unknown in France, and there is little doubt that the French immigrants learned the technique from their Huron neighbors. The French-Canadian sashes are closely similar to Indian flame sashes, but differ in being made with a very fine yarn.

Part 2

FINGER WEAVING

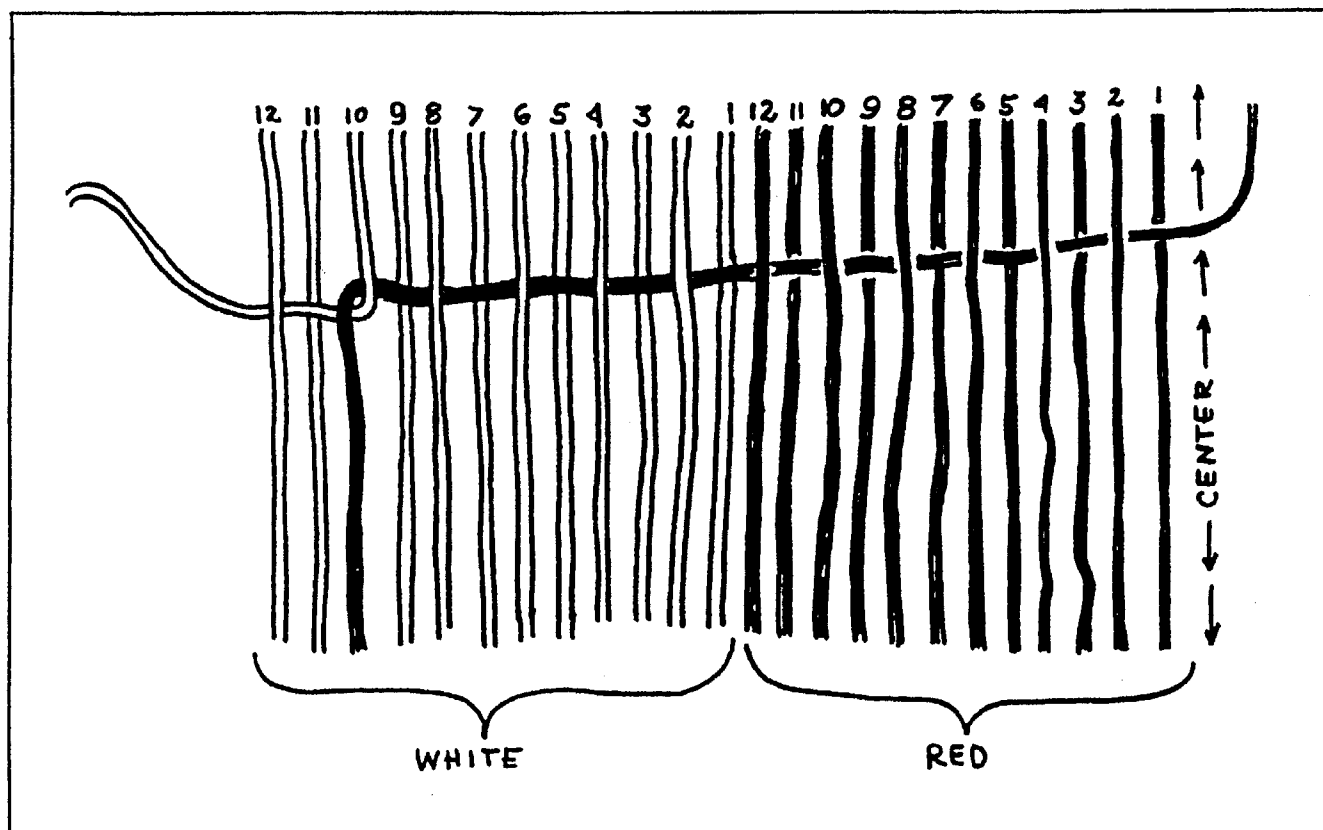
by Richard Conn

The first article in this series gave the basic directions for measuring yarn, for arranging it in order, and for the basic braiding process. To that information this article will add the additional instructions you will need to make the arrow pattern. So, before starting you should be familiar with those basic directions and hopefully you should have made one or two practice pieces in the basic braid.

The first thing you will need to know is

Fig. 2: The basic twist of working strands to begin the arrow barb.

how to figure your yarn for the arrow pattern and how to set up the colors on the head stick. Let's say you want to make a red arrow two inches wide on a white background. Remembering that there are about twenty-four strands to the inch, you will take half the width for the arrow color and the remainder for the background; that is, twenty-four strands of each color. Set these up with all the red in the center and with half (twelve in this case) the white on each side. All arrows are examples of double-band braiding, so you must have even numbers of strands, but you can vary the number to make your arrows small or large. Arrows narrower than one inch will not show up well, though, unless you're using very fine yarn.



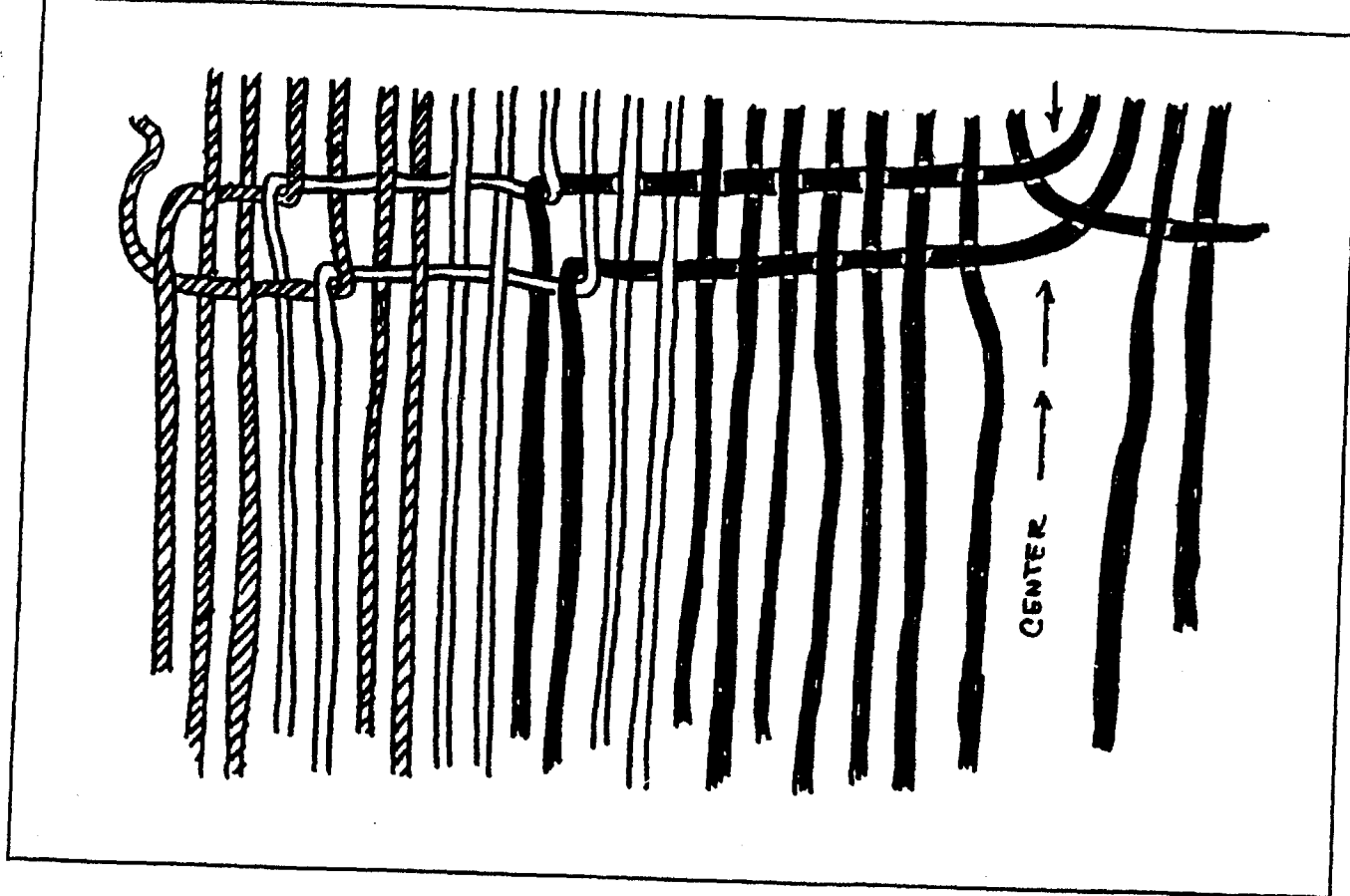


Fig. 2 The process of braiding flame design.

Flame pattern is actually just a set of arrows overlapping laterally, or to put it another way, it is like making arrows inside one another. To begin, the colors must be set up in a special manner. First there is generally an arrow chain in the center with rather small arrow barbs that will determine the size of the flames. Please refer to the illustration of the arrow chain in Part 2. Let's say the central arrow chain is to be twelve strands wide on either side and that you plan to make your arrow barbs six strands wide. You would then set up eight or ten strands of the second color. That is, enough strands to cover the six-strand displacement the arrow barb will cause plus two or four more strands to make the connecting line between the "flames". Then you would set up a number of strands of the third color equal to those of the second and so on for as many "flames" as you want. So far, then, you have a "heart" of twelve strands, and several flames each containing the same number of strands - eight or ten in this case. Indian sashes usually have five or six flames. Finally, the edge is set up. This should have a few more strands than the flames - perhaps from twelve to twenty in this example. The wide edges serve as a background to show the jagged flame designs.

When all the colors are set on the head stick in proper order, the work begins as usual by taking one strand next to the center and

weaving it through the opposite side the over one-under one alternation. The working strand must come up under taut strand six of the second color, with which it will twist. This latter strand now becomes the working strand and comes up under the sixth strand of the third color where it twists, and so on until the sixth strand of the edge color comes out and is wrapped around the head stick. As before, turn the head stick and braid out the second half of this course. As in the simpler patterns, you must be careful to keep an even tension on all the taut strands and to tuck the strands back into the yarn bundle with the right tension. Fig. 2 shows how the flame process looks. Notice that the second course is laid in as before, with the twist places coming just inside those of the previous course. As you can now see, you are actually making a series of arrow halves side by side. If you have already tried braiding some arrow designs, there should be no problem making flame design - it's just more work.

There are two possible variations in the basic flame pattern. The first is called "flechées nettes" by the French-Canadians. Fig. 3 shows how it looks. To make this pattern carry the working strand further so that it twists with the last strand of the second color, which in turn twists with the last strand of the third color, etc. This eliminates the connecting bars between the flame points and makes the

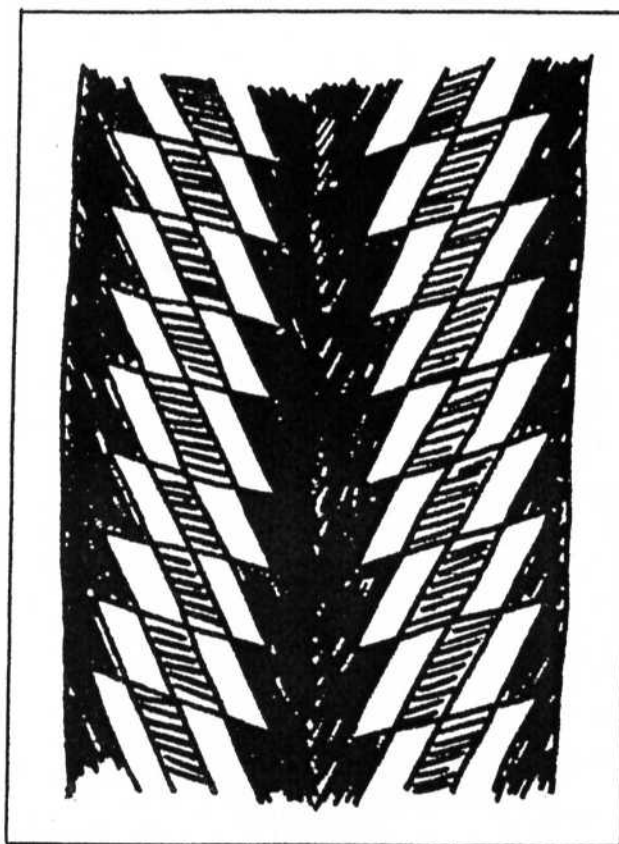


Fig. 3 Flechees Nettes, a variant of flame design.

pattern of diamond shapes.

The second variation is color. That is, using all your ingenuity to make the most attractive combinations of flame colors. You may also make striped flames, using the instructions in Part 1. Most French-Canadian flame sashes have two or even three striped flames on each side. Apart from these variations, the flame pattern is pretty regular.

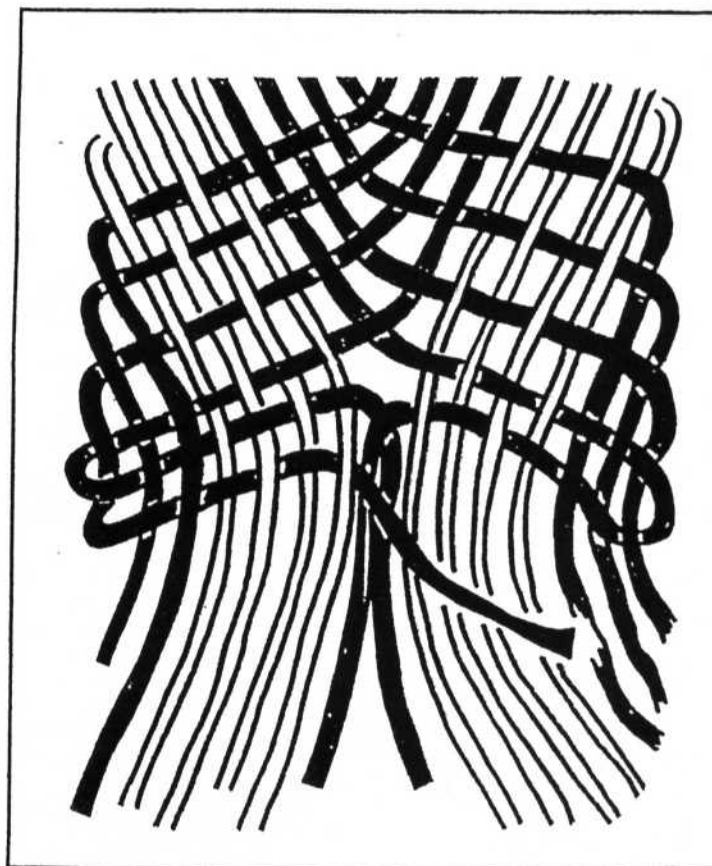
The least common pattern seen in Indian finger woven sashes is the reflex or reverse pattern. Fig. 4 shows a fine old reflex arrow sash. It is possible to apply this method to any finger-woven design, and there are handsome examples of reflex chevron as well as of arrow. It would even be possible to make reflex flame sashes, although I can't recall having seen any. Probably this would be an unnecessary amount of work for the results you'd get.

To make a reflex design, braid out one unit of the basic pattern. If a chevron, this means braid until the original edge strands have met at the center. If an arrow, work until all the arrow-color strands are back in the center and you are ready to begin the second pair of arrow barbs. Then reverse by braiding from edge to center. The last working strand from the first unit goes back into the work moving opposite its previous direction. Note that it must turn around the edge strand so as to alternate properly with its last course, and that it ends at



Fig. 4 The reflex arrow design. Photo courtesy of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

Fig. 5 The process of braiding reflex designs. Note that the last working strand from the first design unit reverses and re-enters the work beginning at the edge.



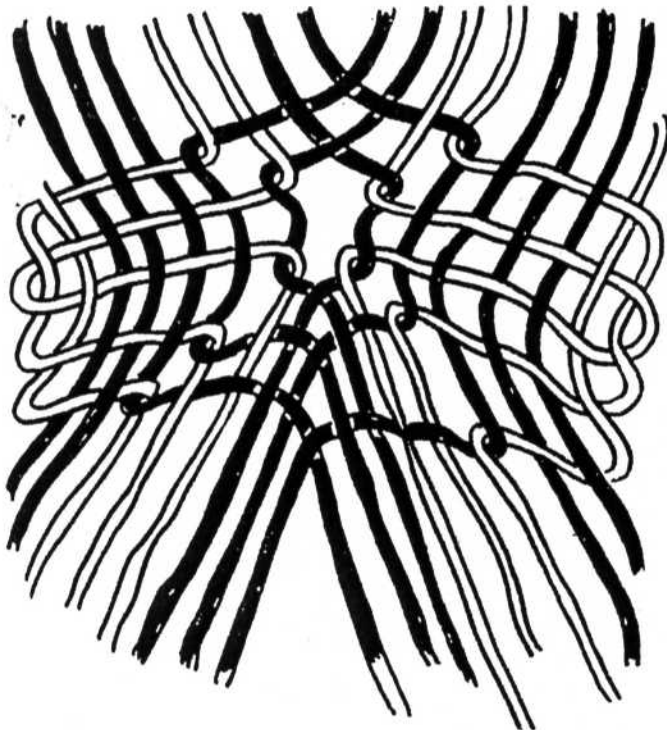


Fig. 6 Part of the process for making reflex arrow designs. Note that when the working strands reverse, the twists are made from the center and work out in each succeeding course.

center, from which point you wrap it around the opposite end of the head stick. Fig. 5 shows how this reverse is made. When you have finished the first reverse course and turn the head stick back to begin the second, unwrap the first working strand from the head stick and tuck it back in the yarn bundle, just as you did in interweaving bands as explained in Part 2. Remember that the working strands, meeting in the middle now, will go on to become taut strands in the opposite sides - just as in the interweaving process. The reverse weave continues until you have finished the next unit. In effect, you will have made a mirror image of the first unit. Then the working strand reverses itself and begins moving toward the edges again as you make the third unit. As you are finishing each reverse unit, your work will tend to pucker up in the center. Don't worry if this happens, since it's almost unavoidable.

Reflex arrows present one more problem, that of making the twists correctly in the reverse units. In the last course of the first unit, you should have twisted off the last strand of background color inside the barb and the course should have brought all the arrow-color strands back together. As you begin the first course of the reflex unit, your working strand (which will be background color) twists back into place with the same strand that replaced it in the preceding course. Then, in each following course of reflex, the twist place falls one strand out-

side the previous one. In other words, in the reflex units you make the arrow barbs backward, starting at the notch and finishing at the tip. Figs. 6 and 4 show how this is done and how it is supposed to look. Reflex pattern sashes are very nice, very rare, and well worth the trouble they will require you to take. Anyone who can do them is obviously a master of the art. But, they are hard to do, and you will be well-advised to leave them until you've had plenty of experience with the simpler patterns.

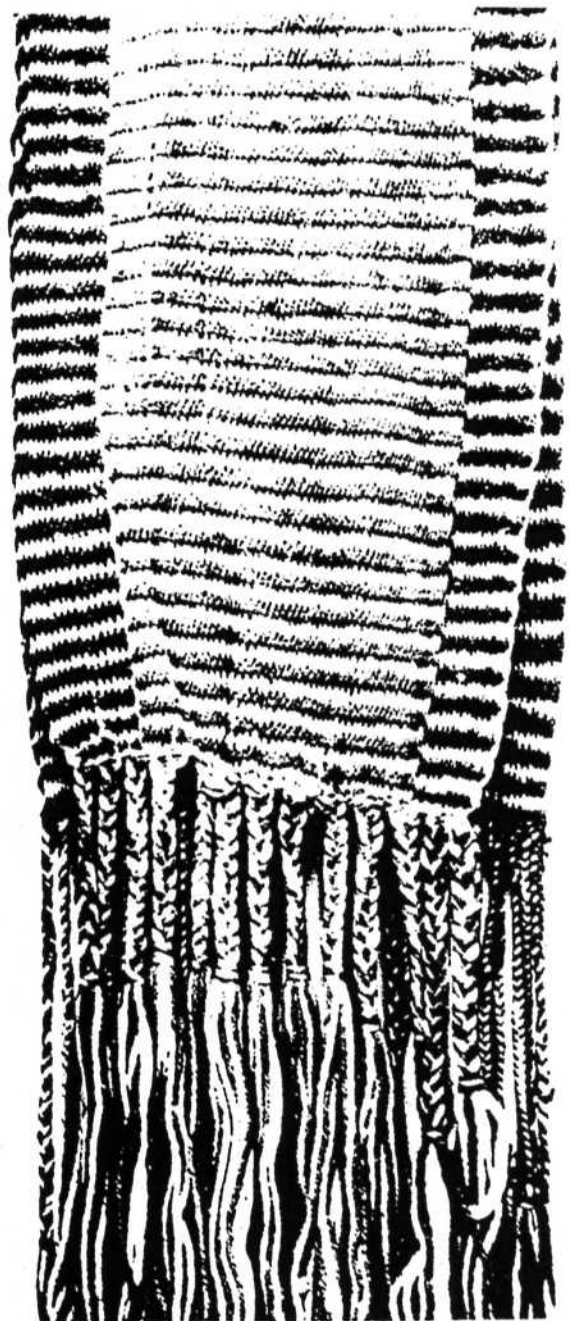


Fig. 7 Plain fringe with a short section of four-strand braid at the top. Photo courtesy of the Museum of the American Indian.

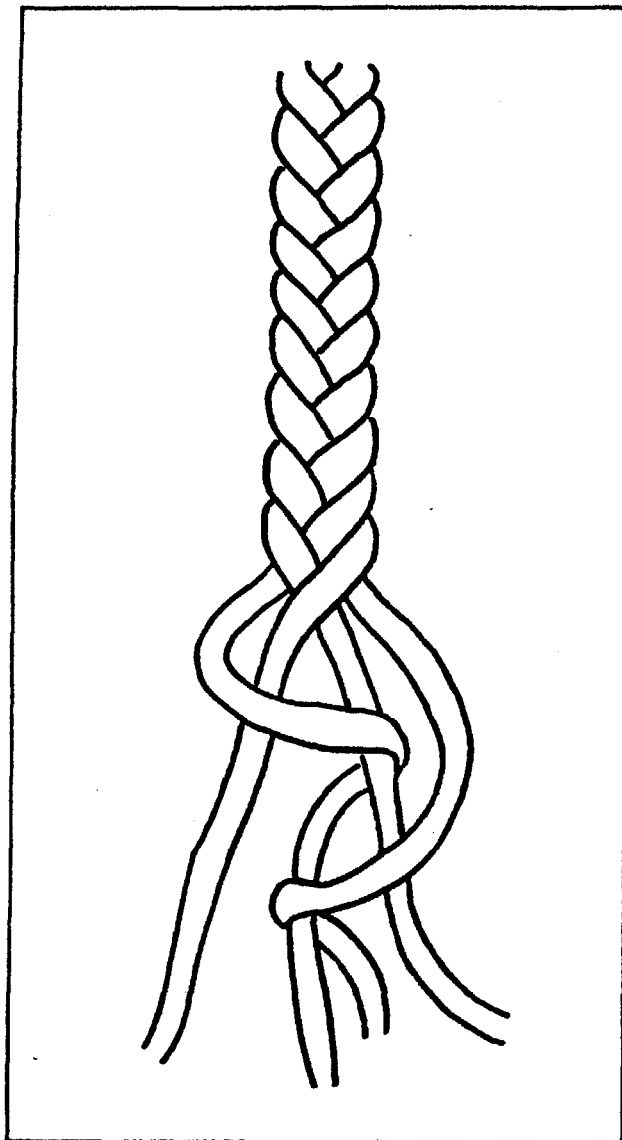


Fig. 8 Four-strand braid. Note that each working strand comes from the edge, passes over two strands and back under one.

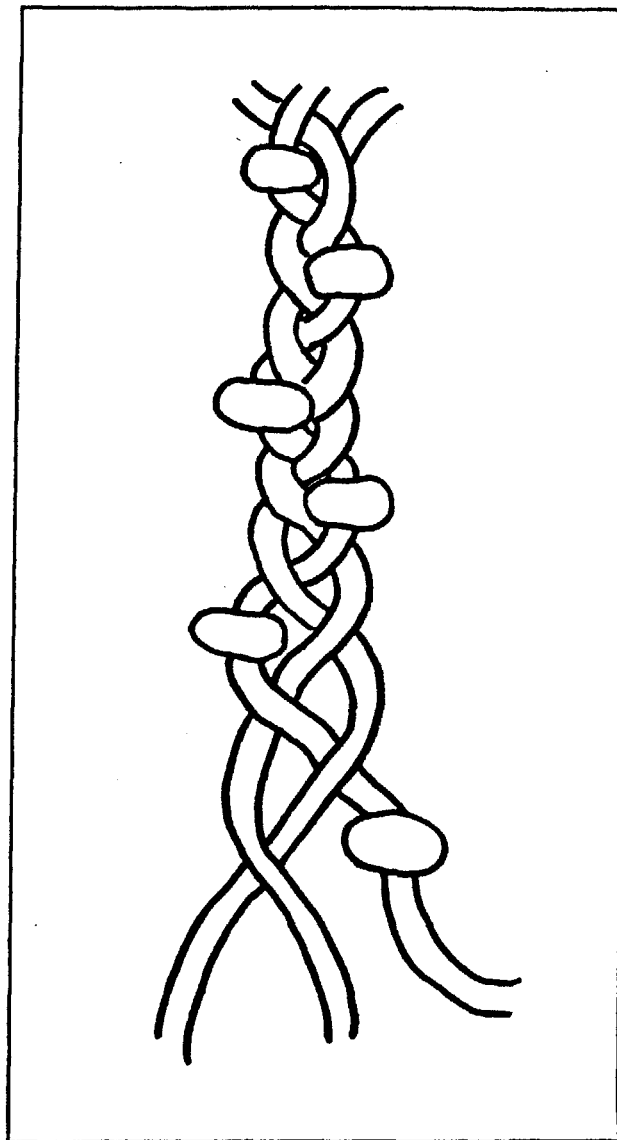


Fig. 9 Three-strand fringe with beads. In this example the beads are all carried on the same strand.

The final thing to consider with any sash is the fringe and how to finish it. When you have completed the braiding, you put in one row of twined stitches at each end to keep the sash from unravelling. Part 1 showed how to make this twining. Next, straighten the sash and trim the fringe ends even. You can just leave the fringe plain, like the fringes of the sash in Fig. 1. However, most sash fringes have had something further done to them. Fig. 7 shows one common treatment. The fringes have been gathered into bunches and braided for a few inches. In this case, the worker made a simple three-strand braid, using two or more strands for each of the three braid elements. After braiding for three or four inches, she fastened the work in a loop knot and let the balance

hang plain. Three-strand braiding is the kind we all learned in kindergarten - the method used to braid hair.

Another possibility is four-strand braid. This method, less familiar to most of us, is shown in Fig. 8. Here you line up four braid elements (which may consist of two or more yarn strands each) and braid them as follows: take an element from one side and cross it over two elements and back under one. Take the element from the opposite side and repeat. If any of you ever made a whistle lanyard with plastic strip, this is the method you were using. Generally, fringes are braided only for the top three or four inches only. The balance is left plain, or twisted into two-ply cord as described below. However, sometimes Osage

So, there you have it! Finger weaving is certainly lots of fun and very rewarding. Good luck, and may your sashes always take first prize!

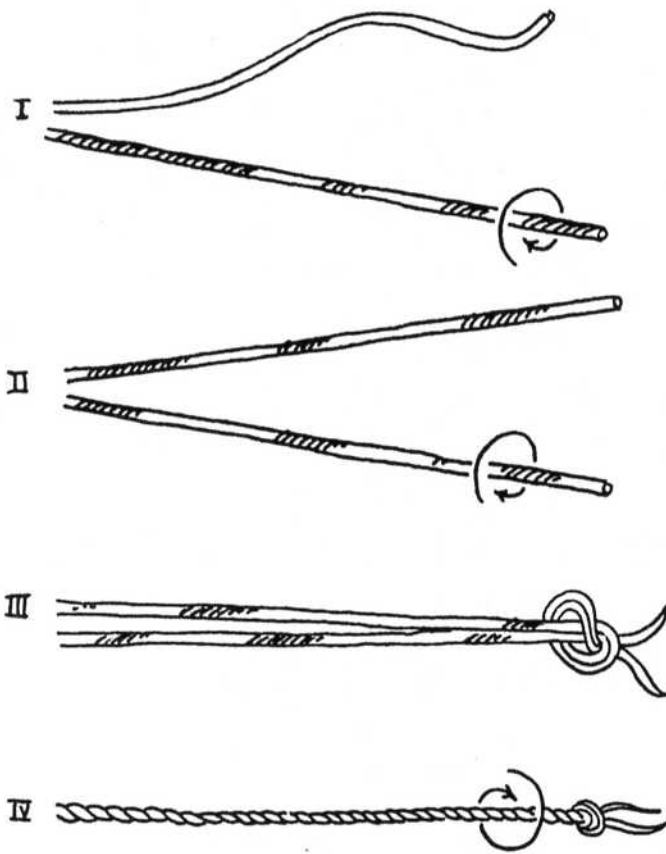


Fig. 10 Making twisted fringe - (1) one strand is rolled tightly. (2) holding the first strand tight, the second is rolled to the same tension. (3) still held tight, the two strands are tied in a simple loop knot. (4) the tension is released, allowing the two strands to twist around each other.

sashes have units of three-strand braiding (with single-strand elements) as part of their fringes. These can have beads woven in, as shown in Fig. 9.

Fringes are often spun or twisted into two-ply cord as shown in Fig. 10. To do this, take out two adjacent fringe strands and roll one on your thigh or a flat surface until it's very tight and starts to knot up if you release the pressure. Then holding this first strand tight so it won't untwist, roll the second one until the tension on both is equal. Still holding both strands tight, tie a loop knot near their free ends and release the pressure carefully. They will twist round each other into an even two-ply cord.

The most elaborate fringe treatments are those of the Osage sashes, where there is usually a combination of several kinds of fringing. Fig. 11 shows an Osage fringe made up entirely of single finger-woven bands. It is more common to see one or two finger-woven bands together with some twisted and three-strand braided fringes, however.

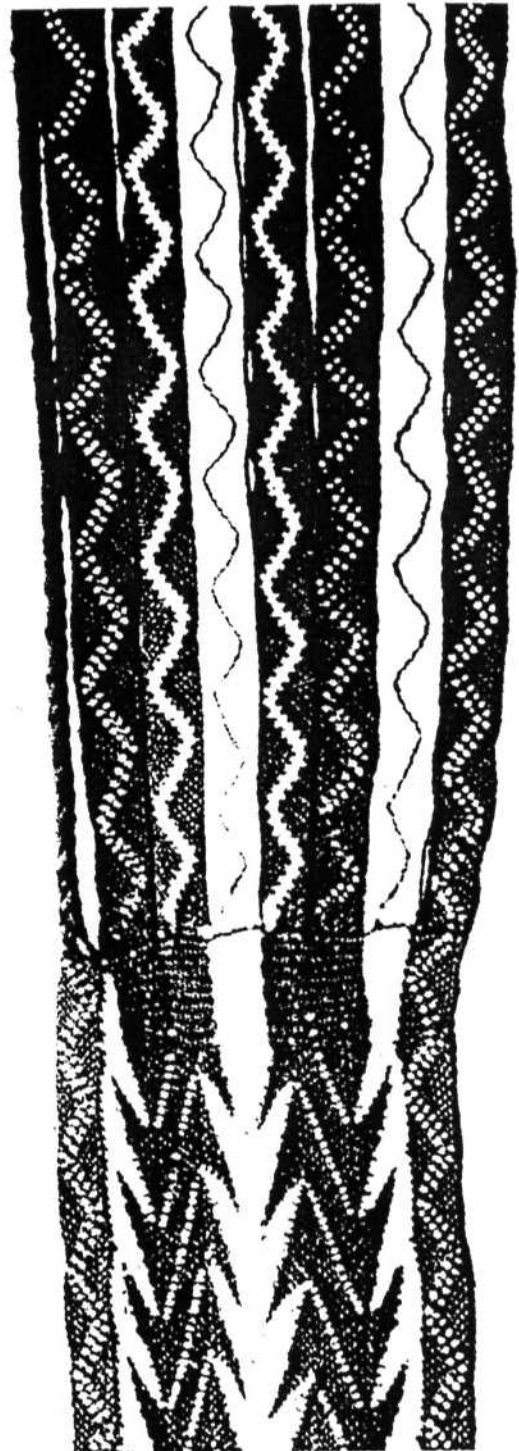
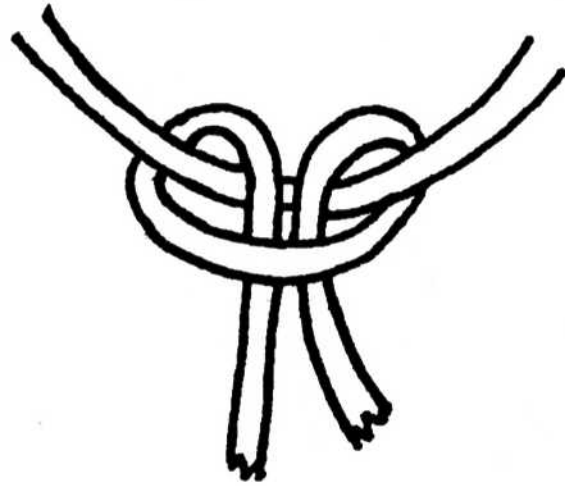


Fig. 11 An Osage sash with complex fringe made of single braided bands. Photo courtesy of Eckford DeKay. In other Osage sashes, these single bands combine with plain or twisted fringe elements.

Finger weaving

In this kit you will find yarn, a key chain ring, and a safety pin and these instructions. Take one piece of yarn and fold it in half. Fold the looped end over the key chain ring and pull the two loose ends through the loop. You have just made a lark's head as in the illustration. Continue in the same manner with the rest of the yarn. You may put them in any color combination. Now you are ready to start finger weaving



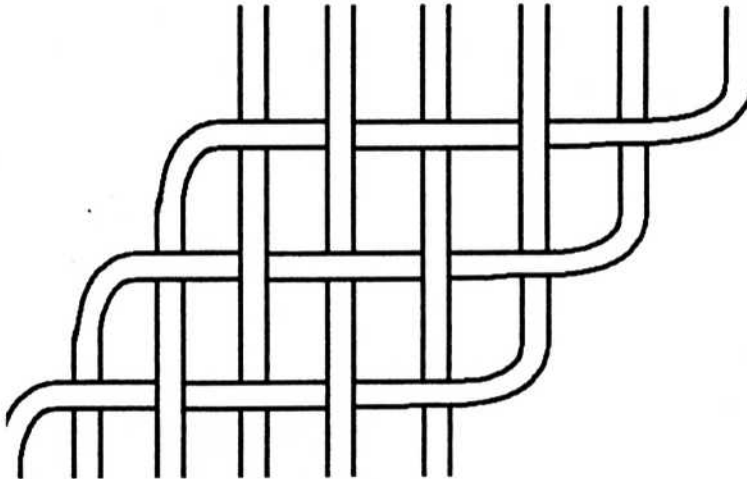
Sit down and use the safety pin to fasten the key chain ring to your pants at the knee. To weave a row it is necessary to pick up every other yarn with one hand. Take the yarn on your right if you are right handed (Left if you are left handed) and put it under the "every other yarns" you already picked up. See the illustration. Gently pull to make it even. Easy! . . . right? This yarn that you just wove through is now put with the other yarns. That's right each row uses a different yarn to weave the row.

For the next row you will do the same except you will pick up the other yarns you did not pick up for the first row. Take the yarn on your right and put it under the yarns you just picked up. Put it back with the other yarns. You now have two rows done.

Repeat row one and row two for a couple of inches. You will know if you are pulling the weaving thread tight enough, when you do not see it in the row it weaves.

You will know if you are pulling the weaving thread too tight, when the yarn looks real tiny compared to what it regularly is.

To finish your key chain braid the yarn ends. Tie an overhand knot at the end of each braid. Trim the ends even.

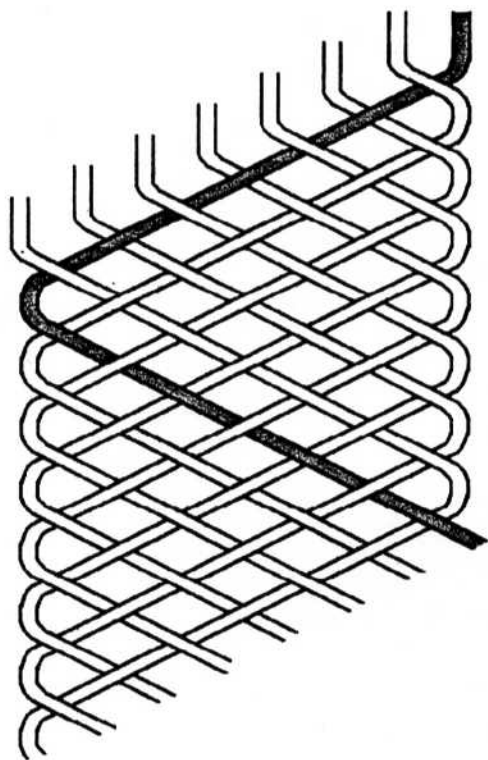


Divide the yarns into an upper shed and lower shed. Use a warp thread as a weft thread by placing it between the upper and lower sheds. Reverse the sheds. Continue until the sash is one-half the length needed. A note on tension . . . As you weave keep the stitches uniform. Pull the weft yarn until you do not see it through the warp yarns.

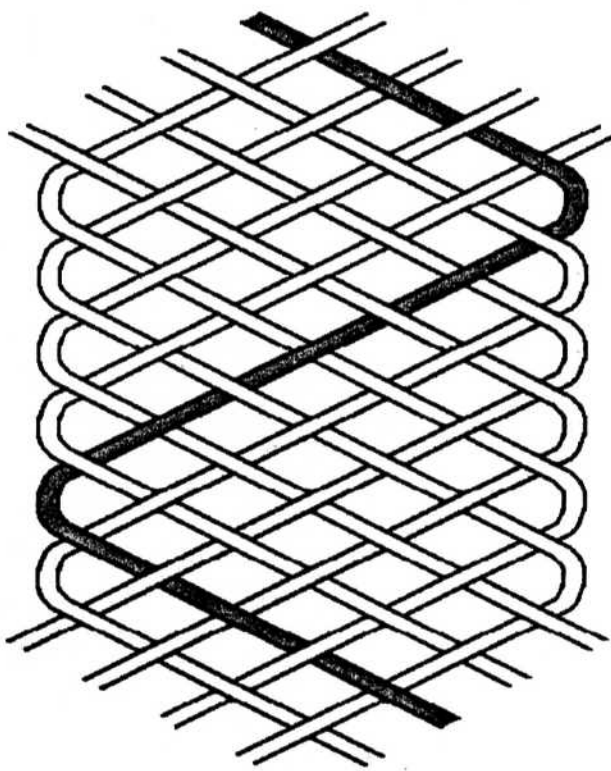
Remove pencil and untie the loose overhand knots. Weave the second half of the sash. You can leave the yarn ends as is and finish the fringe or you can secure the end yarns by twilling two pieces of yarn across each end.

There are several ways to finish the fringe. You can divide the yarns into groups and continue to finger weave each group several more inches. Or you can make a flat braid or a round braid, or twisted fringe with the ends. The last choice is to do a combination of several endings.

Diagonal



Chevron



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Pictures

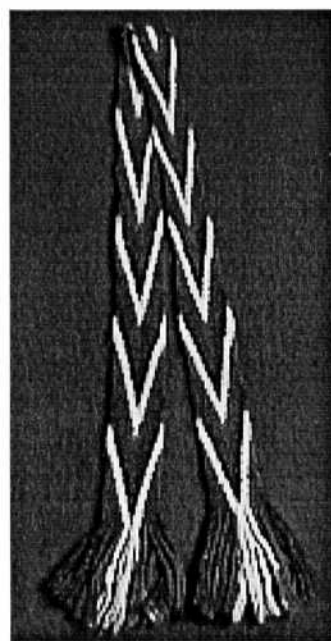
- 2003 National Mountainman Rendezvous, Manilla, Wyoming
- Festival of the American West, Jensen Historical Farm, Wellsville, Utah
- Buffalo Bill Museum, Cody, Wyoming
- Sashes and graphics by Jeanne Tams

Finger Weaving

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Art. III. *Ceinture Fléchée* : Finger Weaving a Voyageur Sash, By J. Gottfred

Instructions on how to make a chevron pattern sash using traditional finger weaving methods.



One of a pair of legging ties (garters) woven by the author.

The Fléchée

The ceinture fléchée, or arrowhead sash, was one of the famous badges of the voyageur. The ceinture fléchée had many uses. It was used for warmth, as a tump line and a support on the portage, as an emergency rope, and as a mark of distinction and origin. When tightly woven and treated with beeswax, it could even be used as a cup.

Originally, ceintures fléchées were woven by hand using a technique called 'finger weaving'. Later, sashes were machine loomed in England for the Canadian mass market.

The term 'fléchée' refers specifically to the original arrowhead design, but there

were many other patterns. The chevron, the 'flammés' (flames), the 'éclairs' (lightning bolts), the 'W' (double chevron), and the 'tête de flèche' (large two-tone arrowhead) were also used. Colors and patterns were distinctive of various regions. Probably the most famous of all sashes were those from the Assumption area of Lower Canada, which had multiple multicolored lightning-bolts (éclairs) flanking a central red core.

Garters for stockings were also finger woven in many styles, although the simpler designs look better on narrower items.

This article describes how to finger weave the chevron pattern.

Materials

All you need for finger weaving is wool, one or two short lengths of dowel, and your fingers. It is important to use pure wool for your weaving. Wool with even a small amount of synthetic fiber in it is too slippery to yield satisfactory results. This is unfortunate, as pure wool can be difficult to find.

Get wool which is as thick as possible. If you intend to build a sash, you will need to find very thick wool, or, more likely, you will need to twist together three smaller threads to get something thick enough to use for a eight or twelve inch wide sash.

Getting Started

For this project you will need six strands each of two different colors of wool yarn and two six-inch dowels. This will give you a finished product about half an inch wide. This is a nice width for a watch chain, bookmark, hood or mitten string, &c., and it is easy and fast to do. White and red or white and dark green make a very attractive combination.

The finished product will be about one-quarter to one-third the length of the strands that you start with. The tighter you weave your work, the shorter the finished piece will be.

Normally, unless you are making something like a watch chain where you want the chevrons or arrows to point in the same direction along the whole length of the piece, you will work from the middle of each length to each end. This means that the chevrons start in the middle of the piece, and point outwards towards each end. It also means that at any point, you are only dealing with lengths of wool that are half the length of the final piece.

Let's assume that you are using white and red. Cut six white and six red strands to the same length. Make the lengths at least two feet long.

You will now need to place the strands on to the wooden dowel. Lay the strands out in the order in which you will place them on the dowel. For the chevron, the order will be three white, six red, three white.

There are two ways to place the strands on the dowel. The first, traditional, way is to find the center of each strand and loop it over a single dowel. Personally, I do not like this method for small projects because I find that the strands move around too much.

The method that I recommend you start with is to take two dowels, line them up side by side, and tightly bind them together at one end with some extra wool. Now, slide the middle of each strand in between the two dowels. Once they are all lined up in the correct order, tightly bind off the other end of the doweling. The idea is to pinch your wool tightly in between the two pieces of doweling. Make sure that the wool binding the ends together is secure; it is important that the strands stay in place. (If you're not very good at knots, you might use masking tape instead— but you can't do that at re-enactments!)

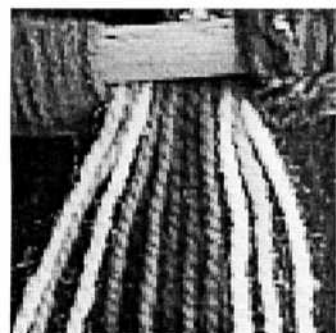
Once all the strands are on the dowel in the correct order and so close together that they are touching, you then gather up all the strands on one side of the dowel and tie them into a bunch. Use a knot that you will be able to untie later!

Tie some more spare wool around the bunch, and tie the other end to a chair, or pin the bunch to a pillow in your lap. When you are weaving, you will need to pull on the strands to get an even and tight weave.

Weaving the Chevron Pattern

Hold the strands that you have now arranged (3 white, 6 red, 3 white) so that they are extending from the dowel towards you. Strands that run lengthwise are called the warp strands, strands that run side to side (across the width) are the weft strands. At this moment, all of the strands are warp strands.

When weaving the chevron, you are always weaving from the middle of the work toward an outside edge. Each warp strand becomes a weft strand in turn,, then becomes a warp strand &c. It may sound complicated, but you will find that it is easy once you get started.



Ready to begin.

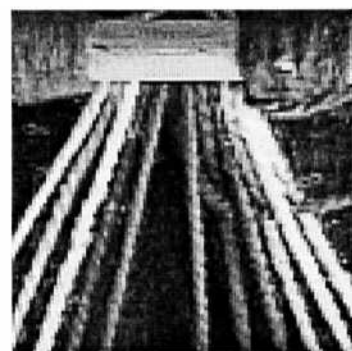
The First Weaving

To begin, divide the warp strands in two. On the left side, you will have 3 white strands and 3 red strands, and on the right side you will have 3 red strands and 3 white strands.

When reading the strands, we will read them from the middle out. So, at this moment, on the left side, (reading from right to left) you have 3 red strands, and 3 white strands (R, R, R, W, W, W). On the right, (reading from left to right) you have 3 red strands and 3 white strands (R, R, R, W, W, W).

With the right hand, you will now pick up strands from the right hand side. Pick up the first strand (red), the third strand (red), the fifth strand (white). You have now picked up every second strand starting from the first strand.

With your left hand, pick up the first strand (reading from right to left) on the left hand side. This strand (red) will now be used as a weft strand on the right hand side. Pull this strand through under the strands that you have in your right hand, and on top of the remaining right hand strands. Put down the strands in your right hand, but do not lose track of the weft strand that you just pulled through. The best way to keep track of this strand is to loop it up over the dowel.



The first weaving.

The Second Weaving

With your left hand, you will now pick up warp strands from the left hand side. What was the first (red) strand on the left hand side is now being used as a weft strand on the right hand side. You should now consider this strand to be part of the right hand side. This means that the left hand side currently consists of five warp strands, (R, R, W, W, W).

Starting again with the first strand (red), pick up every second strand on the left hand side. Your hand should contain 1 red and 2 white strands.

Now, with the right hand, pick up the first warp strand (red) on the right hand side. This strand will now become a weft strand on the left hand side. Pass it under the strands in your hand, and over the remaining strands. You may now put down the strands in your left hand. Again, be careful not to lose track of the weft strand that you have just woven. Remember, the best way to keep track of this strand is to loop it up over the dowel.

You have now woven two strands, one from each side. Think of this as having done one row. The warp strands should now be symmetrical. Reading from the middle out, each side should consist of 2 red, and 3 white strands (R, R, W, W, W).

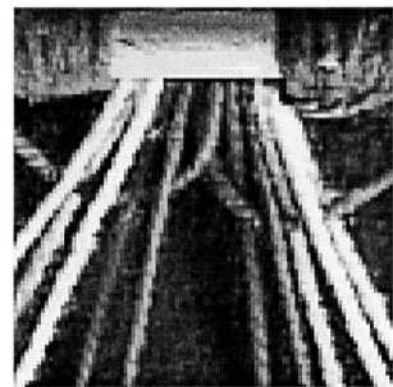
You must now pause and look at your work. On the right hand side, the first warp strand is red, and is a 'down' strand, that is, it is currently underneath the weft— it is being pushed down by the weft. The second strand is a red 'up' strand. the third is a white 'down', the fourth a white 'up', and the fifth a white 'down'.

On the left hand side, the first strand is a red 'up' strand, the second is a red 'down' strand, the third a white 'up', the fourth a white 'down', and the fifth a white 'up'.

In the middle, the two weft strands cross ; the top strand is the left side weft.

Every time you have woven two strands (right and left wefts), your strands look the same — only the color order will change.

This will become clearer after you do the next row.



The second weaving.

The Third Weaving

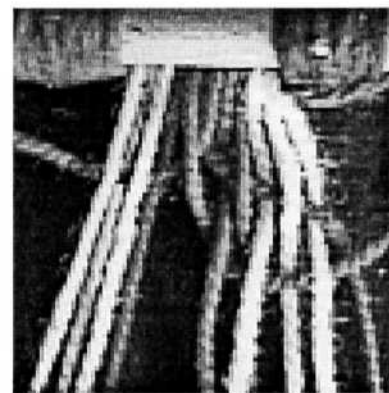
You will now weave as you did for the first weaving. You will take the first left hand side warp strand, and weave it through the right side. Take careful note that you must weave the right side next because the first strand on the right hand side is a 'down' strand. That means that when you pick it up, it will cross, or cover, the weft. The first strand on the left hand side is an 'up' strand ; if you were to pick it up you would expose, or uncover, the weft.

You must always weave the side that starts with the 'down' strand. If you always weave one row at a time (that is, do one right weft and one left weft), then you will always start again by picking up strands on the right hand side.

On the right hand side, pick up the first strand (down & red), the third, (down & white), and the fifth (down & white).

Now bring the weft strand through and lay it straight out. The previous weft strand should still be set aside over the dowel. That strand must now come down and under the new weft strand, and thus become the new warp strand at the end of the row. You must now place the weft strand that you just wove over the dowel so as not to lose track of it.

The right hand side now consists of the following strands: up & red, down & red, up & white, down & white, up & white, down & red.



The third weaving.

The Fourth Weaving

Now, you must finish the row by weaving the right hand side first strand (up & red) through the left hand side. On the left hand side, pick up the first (down & red) and third (down & white) strands. Pull the first strand from the right hand side (up, red), through and lay it out straight.

The previous left hand weft strand must cross the new weft strand on top— note that on the right side it was (and will always be) underneath, on the left side it will be (and will always be) on top.

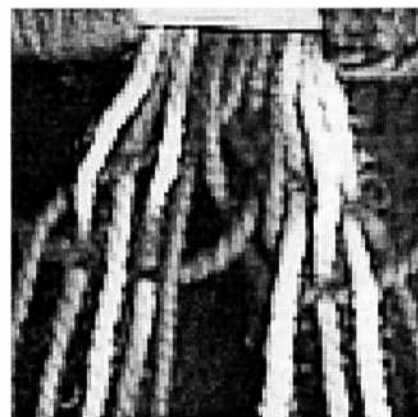
Place the new weft strand over the dowel so that you do not lose track of it.

Checking Your Work

You must now check your work. The left hand side should consist of the following strands : up & red, down & white, up & white, down & white, up & red. (R, W, W, W, R)

The right hand side now consists of : down & red, up & white, down & white, up & white, down & red. (R, W, W, W, R).

Note that the strand colors are the same, but if you compare the left side to the right side, you will see that if a strand is up on the left side, its right side counterpart is down and vice-versa.



The fourth weaving.

Subsequent Weavings

After each row (that is , after you have woven one right side, and one left side), all that will change is the order of the colors — the 'upness' and 'downness' of each strand position remains the same. If you learn to recognize the correct strand position, then you can immediately spot a mistake.

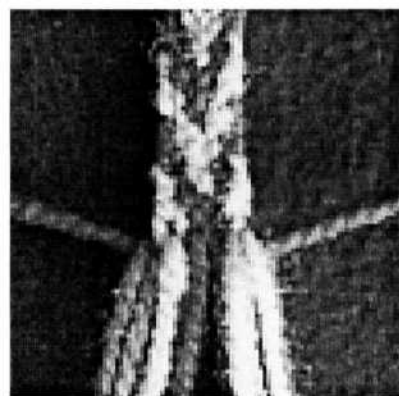
It is important to spot mistakes right away, as you cannot carry on. I have occasionally had to unravel an inch of weaving when my attention lapsed and I forgot to check my strand count and whether the correct strands were up and down!

After you have woven the next row your strands on the left hand side should be: up & white, down & white, up & white, down & red, up & red. (W, W, W, R, R).

The strands on the right hand side should be : down & white, up & white, down & white, up & red, down & red. (W, W, W, R, R).

Tension

After every row it is a good idea to pull on each warp strand to adjust the tension of the piece. Try various tensions on a few trial pieces, and you will rapidly find the correct 'pull'. You do need to pull fairly hard, especially when using a larger number of strands.



Weave tension.

Finishing the Ends

To finish the ends, you have a couple of options. You can twist two strands together, or you may simply braid together three or four strands and knot them at the end. (I am partial to a three-strand braid, as it leaves you with finer, smoother fringes than the twist method.)

To twist two strands together, pick up one strand and twist it until it kinks. Then, without letting the first strand unwind, twist the second strand in the same direction, until it also kinks. Now, starting at the bottom, let the two strands naturally wind together. You can tie a knot in the end to keep them together. You can twist with or against the natural twist of the strand, but you will get a different effect depending upon which you choose. Experiment on a test piece to see which type you prefer, before using it on your real project.

Larger Pieces

For your first project, I would recommend that you begin with something small, such as the garters used for decoration, and to hold up leather or woolen leggings.

A nice chevron garter (or woman's Indian style belt) of two colors would consist of 12 white, 24 red, and 12 white strands.

If you are using three colors, A, B, & C, then place your strand on the dowel thus: 8 A, 8 B, 16 C, 8 B, 8 A.

If you are using four colors, A, B, C & D, then place your strands in the order: 6 A, 6 B, 6 C, 12 D, 6 C, 6 B, 6 A.

You will find that using four colors is actually easier to weave than using two colors. This is because it is easier to keep track of the smaller number of strands of each contrasting color. For a nice four-color design in traditional colors, try white,

red, dark green, and black.

Once you have had some practice and are ready to commit the time for a larger project, you may wish to try weaving a full sized ceinture fléchée.

The width of such a belt should be six to eight inches for a man, half an inch to four inches for women and children. The bourgeoisie wore deluxe belts measuring up to ten inches wide (Bourret & Lavigne, 18). The total finished length should be around twelve feet. Such a project will keep you out of trouble for a while!

You may have difficulty finding wool of adequate thickness for such a project. In that case, you may need to twist together thinner wool to make thicker strands. This problem was also common two hundred years ago!

Wearing the Ceinture Fléchée

The ceinture fléchée can be worn in a couple of different ways. For the maximum decorative effect, simply wrap it around your body, and loop one end over the other so that the ends hang down just to one side of the center. After you have adjusted it to a comfortable tightness, smooth out the folds of the hanging portion to make it flat. This is the way to wear the ceinture fléchée if you are going to a dance and want to look your best!

An alternative to this method is to first fold the ceinture fléchée in half along its length, then wrap it once around the body with the fold on the bottom, and tie it in the same way as above. By putting the fold on the bottom, you have just created yourself a pocket in which you can store your pipe, tobacco, tinder, a few coins, your clasp knife, some string, your watch (if you can afford one), and perhaps a couple of musket balls hammered into a pair of dice!

If you don't want the ends dangling in your way while you are chopping wood &c., then simply wrap the fléchée around your body twice, and tie the fringes together. This effectively doubles your pocket space, so you now have space for a deck of cards, a snuff box, a candle stub, and perhaps a piece or two of cheese and a biscuit!

I discovered that my fléchée was far more useful and comfortable than I had ever imagined. Storing all that stuff around your waist is far more comfortable than stashing it into pockets that you either sit on or bend around! For the life of me I can't imagine why the fléchée ever went out of style. This discovery is an example of those serendipitous aspects of living history which make it so much fun!

Further Reading

The definitive work on the history of the ceinture fléchée is *Assomption Sash* by Marius Barbeau, published by the National Museum of Canada (Bulletin 93, Anthropological Series no. 24.).

The best work I've found on weaving the various designs is *Le Fléché, L'art du tissage au doigt*, by Françoise Bourret and Lucie Lavigne (Les Éditions de L'Homme, Montreal : 1973).

The best, most readily available work in English is *Finger Weaving: Indian Braiding* by Alta R. Turner (Cherokee Publications, Cherokee, North Carolina : 1973). It is carried by Jas. Townsend & Sons, Panther Primitives, and the Log Cabin Shop.

I wish to thank Kim Palmer at Victoria Settlement, and Liène from La Société des Amis du Fléchée in Edmonton for their kind assistance in getting me started on this enjoyable past-time.

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FINGER WEAVING

History

Many cultures around the world including, Peruvians, Laplanders, Occidentals, and Arabs, have had some form of finger weaving in their development of weaving. In 1673, Marquette noted explorers referring to brightly colored belts and bands made of buffalo wool. North American Indians also used hides, goat hair, inner tree bark, corn husks, reeds, pine needles, yucca plants and other vegetable fibers to make clothing, mats, pouches, and storage bags. The Shoshone woman standing in the picture is wearing a woven rabbit wrap.



Winnowing Pan

Shoshone rabbit wrap

There are several types of weaving: netting, twinning, interface weaving, and warp face weaving. Some speculate the Europeans, introduced the use of warp and weft, hence, warp face finger weaving. The Europeans influenced finger weaving in North America when they introduced spun wool. Warp face finger weaving is an unusual type of weaving in that the warp and weft are interchanged during the weaving process.



Interface weaving, especially decorated with beads, is mainly found in articles from the southeastern region. The large intricate designs, such as the Flame sashes, are from the Northeast. The Chevron design is usually seen in the plains area.

Historical photos show finger weaving usage in turbans, sashes, arm bands, garters, blanket strips, and pack straps. Wide sashes such as the voyager or Assumption sash were sometimes folded in half lengthwise and used as a pouch to hold items. Silver brooches decorated some sashes.



Voyageur Sash
Gift of Mrs. T.R. Goodwin

Charles M. Russell characteristically wore a colorful voyageur sash. He gave this one as a gift to his friend, Philip R. Goodwin.

Diagonal

Chevron

Double Chevron

Lightning

Arrowhead

Combo

Interface



Cotton



Acrylic



Acrylic



Wool



Wool



Wool



Wool

Materials

Yarns

- 1.) Wool yarn makes the best sashes, especially, if you are trying for authentic reproduction. It is more expensive than other types of yarn. Some wool yarns are fragile. When working with wool, you will notice the minute barbs that hold the wool in place, which makes it hard to separate yarns, but great for holding yarns where you put them. Wash wool sashes by hand in cold water.
- 2.) Cotton is easy to work with and readily available.
- 3.) Acrylic yarns come in a variety of colors and is economical. Acrylic yarn does tend to stretch though.

Dowel

Use an unsharpened pencil or 1/4" dowel

Anchor

- 1.) Attach unused end to a chair back
- 2.) or safety pin to a pant leg
- 3.) or secure to a nail

Beads (optional)

Use size 5 or 8 beads depending on the size of your yarn.

Technique

Research your sash. What style matches your outfit? Will it tie in the back by the fringe or will you tie a knot the sash at your side? Do you want the sash to show or just the fringe? How long do you want the fringe to hang? Cut yarns figuring three yards makes a sash about 36 inches long with 15 inches of fringe at each end. Use 5 yards, if you want the sash to go around your waist twice.

Divide yarn into 1 – 6 groups. Gather each group of yarn at the center point and tie in a loose overhand knot. Wrap each yarn over the pencil one at a time. Secure the side with the overhand knot to an anchor point, such as a chair back.

YARN-WORK DETAILS

By Jerry Smith

In an expertly written three part series for AICC, Richard Conn relates all the techniques of finger weaving and explains each pattern, a classic work. Perhaps you have experimented with one or more of these patterns and having your tension just right feel that you would like to make a "set" of yarn-work, tabs and garters for a straight dance suit as pictured. The dimensions and numbers presented here will help you complete your project.

Chevron, arrow, reflect arrow, and single brand braid (diagonal pattern) are four common patterns used to fashion present-day yarn-works. The dimensions given apply to any of these patterns.

Side Tabs

Side tabs or sashes and garters are constructed in the same fashion. Each has a middle band of work that splits into two sections on either side. The weaver starts in the center of the middle band and works to one end then to the other. Twining stitches (Part I, page 14) are always taken before the work is split in two.

Side tabs are usually fashioned from 64 strands of 100% wool yarn. For chevron patterns the number of strands per color may vary but for a two color arrow or reflect arrow pattern it will be 32 of each color. For a 3 color arrow pattern the 32 strands of one tab would be: 8 maroon, 16 lt. green, 8 purple, for a lt. green arrow bordered with maroon on one side deep purple on the other. 8 strands per color is needed for a 4 color arrow pattern of maroon, yellow, turquoise blue and deep purple for example.

As shown in Fig. 1 the 5" middle section if folded over to form a belt loop and the loop can be machine sewn in place over the twining stitches. The belt or tie that is looped through the pair of side tabs is worn under the shirt hidden from view. The length can vary from one set to the next somewhat with the dancers height though 36" is a standard adult length. Allow 10-15% take-up in working yarn.

Garters

Hidden under the bells, the casual observer does not realize the middle band of the garter exists, but it does function to partially protect the ribbon-work from the rub of the bell revet and leather. The 14" middle band is then designed to approximate the circumference of the leg just below the knee. Garters are fashioned from 48 strands of 100% wool yarn. The number of strands per color are proportioned as those for the side tabs.

The garter ties in Fig. 2 are foot long ends of the twining strands used in the twining stitches with the center of another 2 ft. strand added when the twining stitches are knotted. These resulting 4 strands are then braided in 4-strand braid or made into a twist fringe (Part III pages 6 & 7) knotted at the end.

Figure 3 indicates how the garters are tied in place on the leg of the dancer. The missing $1\frac{1}{2}$ " on the garter tabs of Figure 2 allows the ends to hang evenly. Another tribute to the genius of the Indian craftsman. The shortened tab must be on the opposite side of the garter ties.

Reference

Conn, Richard; "Finger Weaving, Part I,II,III," AICC, Vol. 7 Dec., Jan., Feb. 1972

