

Finger Weaving a Voyageur Sash

by Joani Reese

Finger Weaving A Voyageur Sash

Twine ribbons: gold, red, emerald, for his eyes
Her furrier trades, her babe a nascent flame.
Her hands keep weaving: Listen to the cries.

This sash will dip for water, tote supplies.
Spread beeswax forms the cup, deft hands the frame.
Twine ribbons: gold, red, emerald, for his eyes

A chevron pattern forms as threads embrace.
Skinned beaver pelts all sold, he'll paddle home.
Her hands keep weaving: Listen to the cries.

Skilled fingers work, a smile in place denies
approaching screams--perhaps a children's game.
Twine ribbons: gold, red, emerald, for his eyes.

Her focus on each knot fast fingers tie
--not Frenchmen overrun, not bodies maimed.
Her hands keep weaving: Listen to the cries.

Night's air awhirl, the sky shoots fireflies.
Sometimes, she cuts blood roses in her dreams.
Twine ribbons: gold, red, emerald, for his eyes.

Sad voyageur, death swooped with swift surprise.
Thuds shake the door. A sister screams her name.
Her hands cease weaving: Listen to the cries.

Her lover, bones and ashes where he lies.
and still wild roses star far fields the same.
His sash weaves with the fire's flames that rise
in ribbons: gold, red, emerald, for his eyes

Voyageur Sash

In the 1700s and 1800s, both French voyageurs (independent fur traders) and Native Americans enjoyed wearing colorful sashes for both practical and ceremonial occasions. They are known by many names: voyageur, metis, Red River, Hudson's Bay, and L'Assomption sashes. The men wore them by wrapping them twice around their waists. Voyageur sashes could also be slung around the forehead to support packages being carried. In addition to their own use, voyageur sashes were also traded for pelts.

The early fur trade was carried out between natives and the trade companies by French voyageurs on the rivers ("Voyageur"). From an article by Jessie Clemans: "These 'magnificent river rats' of the north, as the historian Peter C. Newman has called them, formed a class as distinctive in dress, customs, and traditions as the lumberjack and cowboy did later. Before putting into an inhabited port, the voyageurs usually stopped to shave, slip into their cleanest shirt, and stick a plume in their hat. Around their waist they tied the colorful voyageur sash and, below their knees, matching garters. Now they were ready to come singing around the river bend with paddles flashing, settling their loaded canoe precisely at the landing spot and swaggering ashore." (qtd. in "Voyageur")
"Voyageur Sashes." Hoosier Handweaving Studio: Voyageur Sashes, Shawls, Recycled Rag Rugs, Placemats and Table Runners. Web. 4 April 2010.

