

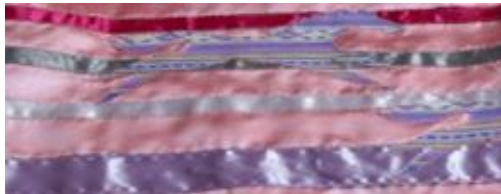
Traditional Native American Ribbon Skirts



Based on where you are from, there are different teachings and customs related to Native American Ribbon Skirts. For example, in some communities, women make Ribbon Skirts and in others, men do. The Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center, is open to and inclusive of various traditions and teachings. As described by MIWRC Elder in Residence, Linda EagleSpeaker, (Blackfoot - Blood Tribe) ceremonies are passed down through generations and remain the same whereas the traditions surrounding the ceremonies evolve and grow – just like the cultures and communities they are part of.¹ For example, in recent years, red dresses and skirts have become an activist symbol to raise awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives.



Traditionally, Ribbon Skirts are made to be full-length - connecting you to the Earth.
“When you put on your skirt, you’re showing Mother Earth who you are.” By Myra Larimer, Fisher River Cree Nation



Simple skirts with as few as one ribbon can be worn daily whereas more ornate skirts are intended for ceremonies and important events. Notice the horses appliquéd above which add so much beauty. Ribbons can also hang from sides of skirts as shown to the right. All skirts pictured were made by Linda EagleSpeaker.¹



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(Left) Another example of beautiful ribbonwork appliqué.

In some tribes, Ribbon Skirts are said to symbolize the tipi. Just as the tipi is the home for the family, the woman's body is the sacred space that brings new life into this world. Women sustain and nourish life as it grows, just as the tipi protects those inside it. Again, the importance of the length of the Ribbon Skirt is mirrored in the design of the tipi. ¹



E65663/27931 - *Painting of Menominee women* by Samuel M. Brookes, 1858. This painting shows the early use of silk ribbons as a decorative trim to garments, such as skirts and shawls. ²

According to the historians at the Milwaukee Public Museum, “The silk ribbons used in native ribbonwork were brought by French traders to the Great Lakes region in the later part of the 18th century. The exact origin of ribbonwork appliqué is unknown, but by the beginning of the 19th century, Europeans had observed this unique style of decoration among several tribes. The first recorded instance of ribbonwork appliqué was on a Menominee wedding dress made in 1802.

Ribbonwork reached its peak in the last quarter of the 19th century, having moved out from its epicenter in the Great Lakes to several tribes in the Prairies, Plains, and Northeast.” ²

Image Sources:

1. All of the skirts pictured were made by Linda EagleSpeaker. Skirt and tipi photos were taken by Randy Vickers.
2. Milwaukee Public Museum. (2017) “History of American Indian Ribbonwork.” <https://www.mpm.edu/research-collections/anthropology/online-collections-research/ribbonwork-woodland-indians/history-an>

Text Sources:

1. EagleSpeaker, Linda. (2019, May 29). Personal Teaching
2. Milwaukee Public Museum. (2017) “History of American Indian Ribbonwork.” <https://www.mpm.edu/research-collections/anthropology/online-collections-research/ribbonwork-woodland-indians/history-an>

