

**85. A 1937 GOVERNMENT VIEW OF INDIAN BEADWORKING ABILITY, by Roderick Sprague (1993, 22:11-13)**

Reproduced below is the complete text of an article entitled "Glass Seed Beads" found in a 1938 issue of the mimeographed publication *The Coeur d'Alene Teepee* (1[3]:3,6). The publication was edited by the Jesuits at DeSmet Mission on the Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation in northern Idaho from 1938 to 1940, using largely Coeur d'Alene Indian writing and labor. The article was reprinted from a "memorandum on beads prepared recently by the Education Division of the Indian Service [later the Bureau of Indian Affairs], principally for schools." Since this article was published in January of 1938, it is assumed that the memo was produced in 1937.

One historically interesting thing is the attitude concerning the relative evaluation of Czechoslovakian and Italian beads. Even more important is the low opinion held by the white bureaucrats concerning the ability of American Indian children to do beadwork with "facet cut" and translucent beads. While faceted beads do tend to cut the thread, modern Indian bead workers are at a loss to explain the attitude toward translucent beads expressed in the instructions. Additionally, the knowledge of beads would appear faulty with statements such as the one suggesting that all dealers use the same size designations.

For those who might want to see the original, greater success will be found in searching for a bound reprint edition produced in 1981 by Serento Press, Plummer, Idaho. This edition was completely retyped and can be found in many area libraries. The reprint pages are 30 and 33. The 1981 edition was used for this work, thus the errors indicated by [sic] could have been introduced in the original memo, the original published form, or the reprint. The published memo reads:

The office of the [Indian Arts and Crafts] Board sent us the following memorandum on beads prepared recently by the Education Division of the Indian Service, principally for schools. Our bead classes will attempt to follow these regulations.

**Glass Seed Beads**

The best glass beads at present are imported from Czechoslovakia, but this country produces different qualities

and importers bring in different qualities. Because of this it is impossible to say beads should only be purchased from one dealer.

**Requisite of Good Beads**

- A. Evenness of color.
- B. Even size.

SIZES: Apparently all dealers use the same system in designating size of beads. Sizes 16/0 [sic] and 3/0 are suggested as best suited for fine work. A complete color range can be had in either while in size 4/0 only a limited color range seems available. Size 0 seems a little too large for good work, though here too a full color range is available.

COLORS: About 30 different colors and shades are available in the opaque glass beads.

REQUIREMENTS IN ORDERING: A slight deviation in size, thickness, color and polish cannot be avoided. If here, however, there should be more than the smallest variation in any hank, that hank should be returned. Upon receiving an order, every hank should be inspected.

Italian beads are considerably cheaper than good Czechoslovakian beads, but are not so satisfactory. No Italian bead should be accepted as a substitute for a Czechoslovakian bead.

To be satisfactory beads must be made out of colored glass. No dyed bead is to be ordered or accepted.

No facet cut beads are to be used in the schools.

No translucent (the glassy one [sic]) beads are to be used in the schools. Both of these two last types of beads, it is true, are found in good old beadwork, but their successful use in designs is perhaps beyond the capacity of school pupils. (SEE PAGE 33).

Cont. It should be remembered that the numbers used by different dealers to designate colors differ according to different dealers. In ordering by number rather than by sample, one must be careful to use the number system of the dealer to whom the order is sent.

SAMPLE CARDS: These cards are expensive. It is suggested that care be used to preserve those you have or those you may obtain.