

and leg. Typical was the boot with a hard, turned-up sole attached to a deerskin upper that wrapped around the leg.

Coloring, extracted from natural materials, mainly the earth, plants and animals, were added as a decorative style to the footwear.

In each case the soft soled shoe or moccasin was beneficial in quietly stalking game.

Although native footwear survived the transition of the European people, many art forms and cultural traditions were drummed out of existence. Native footwear survived the stitches of outside influences. Moccasins were sewn together using new concepts and man-made materials and escaped the threads of manufacturing.

Today true moccasins are hand sewn, hand beaded and manufactured with pride. True native footwear was enhanced by the European influence but no shoe today can match the authenticity or beauty of native footwear.

A belief among the natives is that Mother Earth guides her people throughout the walk of life, so do the Indian women of our nation. They are responsible for maintaining traditions.

Their responsibility for preparing materials for sewing and decorating tribal dress and moccasins is acknowledged by the fact that The Bata Shoe Museum attributes In The Steps of Our Ancestors to generations of native women.

The exhibition reflects the changes that continue to affect the lives of native people. More importantly, it shows their determination to keep native culture alive.

The Bata Shoe Museum has collected a comprehensive array of North American footwear from pre-Columbian (1840-1910) sandals to modern award-winning moccasins from the Decorated Moccasin competition that the Bata Shoe Museum sponsored in 1987.

*Cindy Jacobs is a freelance writer.*