



THE NAVAJO “WEARING BLANKET” (NAVAJO FOURTH PHASE TRANSITIONAL CHIEF’S BLANKET)

By the mid-19th century, the Navajo had come to dominate the weaving trade among western tribes. Principal in that domination was the trade in “Chief’s Blankets” or “Wearing Blankets.” They were made of homespun yarn, which gave them a softer, “blanket” feel. They were so well made that they were sought after by men of status, especially those from the Plains tribes, hence the name “Chief’s Blankets.”

Generally, all wearing blankets are wider than they are long. They are worn over the shoulders by both men and women. Collectors have categorized wearing blankets into phases according to their design elements and the time they were created. There are typically four phases with “transitional phases” between each. The Fourth Phase Transitional Period occurred between 1880 and 1900.

The Fourth Phase Transitional Period is characterized by its extreme emphasis on the diamond pattern. The background is less important while the diamond designs serve as the focal point. These blankets were designed to be “circular,” which meant two things: first, when properly worn the pattern came together seamlessly in the front and second, when the blanket was wrapped around the wearer, no sharp edges of corners appeared. The wearing blanket was a highly respected article of clothing. When a wearing blanket was wrapped around an individual, it was like wrapping the respect and admiration of everyone in the community around him or her.