

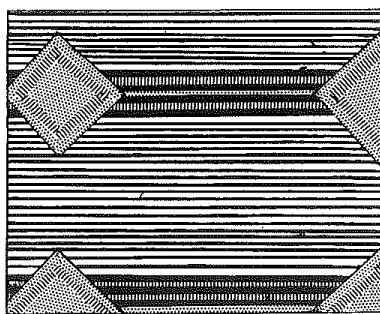
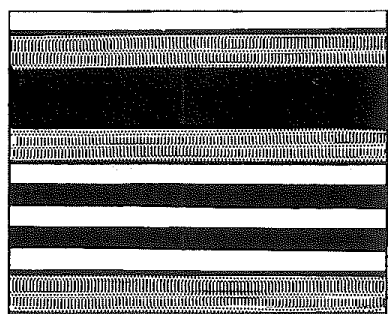
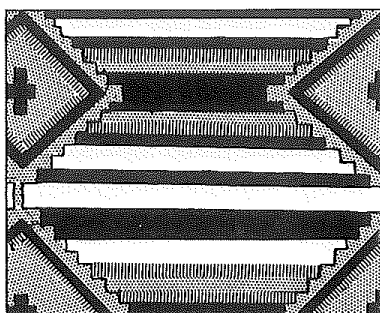
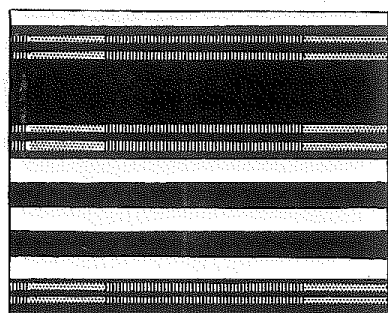
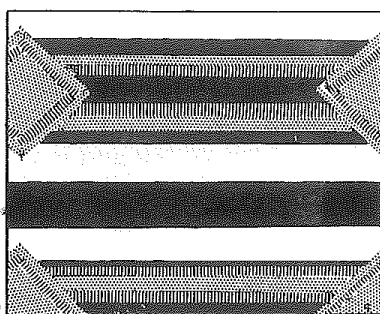
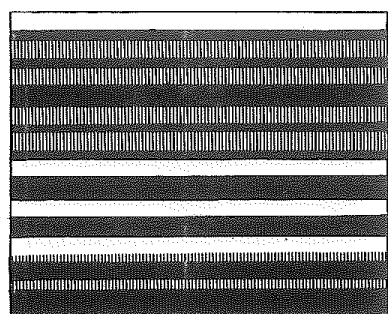
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET, DENVER, COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF INDIAN ART

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NAVAHO WEARING BLANKETS

LEAFLET 113

DECEMBER, 1951

1. **INTRODUCTORY.** This leaflet is concerned with the wool shawls or blankets woven specifically for men and women and worn by them until toward the end of the 1800's. Except for size and differing stripe width the two were identical in pattern and went through the same series of design changes.

The man's blanket is well known under the very misleading term "Chief blanket," misleading because under native conditions the tribe did not have chiefs in the usual sense, and because these blankets were not restricted to tribal leaders. Any man who could afford one might wear one of these man's blankets.

The woman's blanket is not so well known and is often not recognized for what it is.

2. **THE NAVAHO INDIANS** live on a large reservation in northeast Arizona and running over into adjoining parts of New Mexico and Utah. The tribe now numbers about 70,000 and is the largest in the United States. It is steadily increasing. See Leaflets 55, 59-60, 86, 89, 92-93 and 94-95 for additional information.

3. **NAVAHO WEAVING** began about 1700 when the tribe, then living in northwest New Mexico, was thrown into close contact with Pueblo Indians—master weavers for centuries—fleeing from the Pueblo rebellion of 1680-92 against the Spanish. 1709 is the earliest reference to Navaho weaving in Spanish records, though there are detailed earlier references to the tribe and its other activities. The tribe came to be the most productive of all Indian weavers north of Mexico. The loom and all the technics connected with spinning, weaving, etc. are Pueblo in origin, as well as some types of textiles; but the Navaho developed many blanket and rug types of their own. See Leaflet 59-60 for more facts.

BASIC FEATURES

4. **SIZES.** The man's blanket averages about 50 by 70 inches in size; and the woman's about 45 by 60. These are averages, for both larger and smaller sizes were made.

5. **COLORS.** Black, white and blue were the rule in the oldest types of man's blankets. In the standard fully developed types red was added for the designs. Other colors, mostly green and orange, appeared occasionally.

In the woman's shawl white is said to have once been used with the black, blue and red, but gray has long been substituted for the white.

6. **MATERIALS.** All of the types of wool used in other Navaho weaving are found: hand-spun native wool, various types of threads raveled from commercial cloth (English bayeta, bed blankets, American flannel); and several sorts of commercial machine-spun yarn, depending on the period when any given example was made. See Leaflet 116 for more facts.

7. **QUALITY OF WEAVING** is usually very high, especially in the men's blankets. In the best examples stitch counts for the weft (the threads you see when looking at a blanket) will run consistently in the 70's or higher to the inch, while the warp (hidden foundation threads) will average 20 to the inch. Spinning is fine and even, the blankets are thin, and all details of workmanship are carefully carried out.

Women's shawls are consistently coarser than men's blankets. The wool is spun less fine so that the shawls are thicker and less tight in weave. Care in weaving is also less likely to be evident. This seems curious since both types were woven by women. Men never wove among the Navaho, though in the Pueblo tribes men were the weavers and embroiderers.

8. LAYOUT OF DESIGN. These blankets differ from all others made by the Navaho in that the stripes run the length instead of the width. This means that the warps (hidden foundation threads) run across the width, while in all other types they run lengthwise.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

9. HISTORY. In general the simplest designs are the oldest and the most complex ones the latest. But this does not mean that design development proceeded in a rigid sequence of increasingly elaborate designs.

Therefore the notes which follow only indicate the steps from design simplicity to complexity, with only an approximate relation to the passage of time.

Cover designs show slightly more than one-half of the lower right hand section of each example.

10. FIRST PHASE. (A) The design is basically a set of broad alternating black and white parallel stripes of uniform width divided into two sections by a broader black band in the center and bounded on each long edge with another broader band. In these three wide bands are set narrow stripes, usually two, of deep rich blue made with indigo dye.

When this type of man's blanket began is not known but the style was fully developed by the early 1850's—shown by dated specimens—which strongly indicates a beginning a number of years earlier.

11. SECOND PHASE. (B) This differs from the first in having small units of narrow red bands introduced in pairs—with varying detail—near the corners and at both ends and center of the blue and black mid-stripe. This set of small red units is the germ of the "9-spot" design of the full-blown "chief blanket," the well known center square and surrounding parts of squares. The red units are either some raveled material or the slender, silky 3-ply commercial yarn called Saxony.

The first dated examples of this type were collected in the 1850's and nothing can be said about its origins.

12. THIRD PHASE. (C) The identifying feature of this phase is the substitution of red center and edge stripes for the small red units of phase two. There may be a single broad stripe or a group of several narrower ones. Sometimes a design in blue, such as a meander or fret, may be included in the red bands.

In the matters of history and materials what has been said about the first two phases can only be repeated.

13. FOURTH PHASE. (D) This is the classic "Chief blanket." On its broad black and white stripes appear a central square, quarter squares in the blanket corners, and half squares on the centers of the edges, all in red and all set diagonally to the blanket edges. It is supposed that the design was made so that, by folding, the various parts of squares would repeat the central unit. However, there does not seem to be any factual basis for this theory.

In these fully developed "chief blankets" Navaho weaving reached one of its peaks of fine perfection, good color taste and effective beauty of design. The type appears to have been at least somewhat new about 1850, and to have become the standard a decade or so later.

14. FIFTH PHASE. (E) After a peak period from about 1850-80 "chief blankets" began to change. Aniline dyes and commercial yarns came to the Navaho in 1875-80 and the Santa Fe railroad entered their territory in 1880-81, bringing as a consequence a flood of machine-made cloth—and the first large groups of tourists who wanted heavy floor rugs, not light wearing blankets.

Out of this combination of circumstances came a type of textile which kept the old basic striped layout of the "chief blanket" but developed elaborations of the 9-spot red designs; and was a rug, not a blanket.

The old classic red areas sometimes increased to meet and greatly reduce the striped area; or the 9-spots became squares or large crosses frequently bearing all sorts of small design elements. Coarse weaving supplanted fine, and chemically (aniline) dyed Germantown yarns tended to drive out the old simple colors, and the hand-spun or raveled threads.

15. WOMAN'S SHAWLS. (F), followed exactly the same course of development as that described for the "chief blankets," but are radically different because of having narrow black and gray stripes. The black and white striped type mentioned in reference 2 seems not to be known in any collection; and only three examples of the first phase type (with gray replacing white) have been found. All other types exist in some quantity. Adoption of the woman's shawl design and layout by the rug industry was much less common than that of the man's blanket.

16. CHILDREN'S BLANKETS were definitely made as smaller replicas of the two adult types, apparently much more commonly for girls than boys. There is one first phase boy's blanket in the Denver Art Museum and occasional examples of other phases for boys are known. Shawls for girls are, on the other hand, relatively common.

17. SYMBOLISM. The designs in men's and women's blankets are not symbolic, that is they do not stand for ideas or things.

Compiled by F. H. Douglas from examination of the great collections, and the following sources:

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4. Navajo Textile Arts—H. P. Mera, 1948.

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5. Southwestern Textiles in the Barton Collection—H. P. Mera, 1949.