

# STILL CHASING RAINBOWS

FUNNY MAN BARRY FRIEDMAN TAKES  
TRADE BLANKETS VERY SERIOUSLY INDEED.



By Kathy Wise

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**B**ARRY FRIEDMAN WAS A COMEDY WRITER second. The blanket obsession came first.

A Hollywood mainstay, he wrote jokes for Phyllis Diller, Johnny Carson, Arsenio Hall, Jay Leno, and Jerry Seinfeld, among others, earning six Emmy nominations and a CableACE award for his work in television. But before the accolades and the TV writing gigs, he was just a broke Arizona State University graduate, without a job or much of a plan. The year was 1969.

"I saw an old Pendleton Indian blanket at a garage sale and it was marked '85 cents FIRM,'" Friedman recalls. "That was within my budget, so I took the plunge." Fascinated by the seemingly endless variety of colorful blanket patterns, he's been buying and selling them ever since. In 2002 he released his first book, *Chasing Rainbows: Collecting American*

*Indian Trade & Camp Blankets*, based on four decades of firsthand experience and research. Described as the bible of Indian blankets, *Chasing Rainbows* traces the story of commercially produced wool trade blankets during their golden age from 1892–1942, as well as the equally collectible cotton Indian camp blankets.

Now Friedman (who also happens to be the vintage

blanket consultant for Pendleton Woolen Mills and Ralph Lauren's primary source for antique Indian blankets) is back with a second compendium, *Still Chasing Rainbows* (Column B Press, 2014), which continues his quest to document the strange irony of "real" Indian blankets.

According to Friedman, around about 1890, after the

Indian Wars had ended and the vast majority of Native Americans had been displaced onto reservations, federally licensed Anglo traders set up shop near Indian lands. One such trader had a revolutionary idea: Why not enlist Navajo blanket weavers to start making rugs and take advantage of the burgeoning Oriental rug fad back east? The Navajo weavers, who had never before made rugs, started to do so—and an industry was born. From that point on, rugs became the stuff of export,

while blankets became a reservation import.

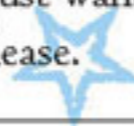
"In 1969 when I started, there had been *no* research done on commercially made blankets, whereas Navajo textiles had already been researched to death," Friedman says. "It was unexplored territory, and that appealed not only to the collecting side of my personality, but also to my lifelong love of history. I find it astonishing that for





more than 120 years the *only* blankets Indian men and women have acquired have been designed by white guys!”

Friedman traces the tradition as far back as June 17, 1882, to the first shipment of trade blankets by the Illinois company J. Capps & Sons, the first documented producer of Indian trade blankets. Pendleton Woolen Mills, Oregon City Woolen Mills, and others would soon follow. The book’s images are stunning, and the modern, timeless nature of the century-old patterns is fascinating. But it is the depth of knowledge that Friedman brings to the subject matter that is the most compelling. That and his unmistakable sense of humor. So if you’re in the market for a trade blanket, or just want to learn more about their history, take this book... please.



*On September 20, Antéks will be hosting a reception, book signing, and sale of antique blankets with Barry Friedman at its Dallas Design District showroom. Shiprock Gallery of Santa Fe owner Jed Foutz will also be present to showcase vintage Native American weavings and jewelry and to do on-site appraisals. For more event information, visit [www.anteksbome.com](http://www.anteksbome.com). To order the book, visit [www.barryfriedmanblankets.com](http://www.barryfriedmanblankets.com).*

## TRADE BLANKET COLLECTING TIPS

**Barry Friedman shares some tricks of his trade.**

- ▶ Pendleton was not the only trade blanket manufacturer, nor was Beacon Manufacturing Company the sole camp blanket producer. Differentiating between the various companies’ blankets is critical, as are knowledge of labels, understanding rarity of pattern, and being able to assess condition.
- ▶ The most important thing to avoid in an old blanket is shrinkage—many have been cared for improperly over the years, and shrinkage is a real value-killer. The general rule is that if a blanket is less than 5-by-6 feet, shrinkage is likely an issue.
- ▶ Trade blankets are always wool. Brown background trade blankets are the most common; primary colors are the most desirable, with red and black combinations at the top of the list.
- ▶ In camp blankets, which are always cotton, the most desirable patterns are ombré—where the colors shade into each other. Lavender is also highly sought after.

