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narratives, these pieces often carry a sense of nostalgia and authenticity that modern jewelry simply cannot replicate. Whether you're sifting through a dusty estate sale, browsing vintage shops, or exploring online marketplaces, knowing how to discern genuine old pawn jewelry from contemporary reproductions is essential for anyone looking to invest in these timeless treasures. Identifying old pawn jewelry requires a keen eye and a bit of knowledge about the characteristics that set these pieces apart. From understanding the hallmarking and craftsmanship to recognizing the materials and design styles prevalent in different eras, there are several key factors to consider. The age of the jewelry, the cultural context from which it originates, and the specific techniques used by artisans can all provide vital clues that help in authenticating a piece. Moreover, the emotional connection that old pawn jewelry often embodies adds another layer of significance. Each item carries with it the memories of its previous owners, making the act of identification not just a matter of valuation but also a journey into the lives of those who once wore them. Recognizing Authentic Markings One of the most effective ways to identify old pawn jewelry is to examine its markings. Authentic pieces often bear specific stamps or hallmarks that indicate the metal content and the maker. Look for: Metal purity marks: Common stamps include "925" for sterling silver, "14K" for 14-karat gold, and "10K" for 10-karat gold. These markings are usually found on the inside of the piece, such as the clasp of a necklace or the back of a ring. Maker's marks: These can be initials, a signature, or a specific symbol used by the craftsman. They are often found near the metal purity marks. Cultural or tribal symbols: Some pieces, particularly those from Native American communities, may feature traditional symbols or designs that indicate their origin. Understanding these markings is crucial for authenticating a piece and understanding its value. The appearance of the jewelry The way old pawn jewelry looks can provide valuable clues about its age and authenticity. Consider the following factors: Surface wear: Old jewelry often shows signs of wear, including scratches, scuffs, and areas where the metal has been rubbed away. This wear is often uneven and follows the contours of the piece, which is a sign of age. Patina: A natural patina, or a thin layer of oxidation, can develop over time. A piece with a uniform, aged patina is more likely to be authentic than one that has been polished to a mirror finish. Design and craftsmanship: Look for intricate designs and fine craftsmanship. Old pieces often feature detailed engravings, hand-stamped patterns, and complex metalwork that is difficult to replicate with modern machinery. Materials: Old jewelry is typically made from high-quality materials like sterling silver, 14K gold, and platinum. These materials are more durable and have a different texture than modern alloys. Researching the background of the piece can reveal important details that confirm its age and authenticity. Understanding the Characteristics of Old Pawn Jewelry Old pawn jewelry often exhibits distinct characteristics that set it apart from contemporary pieces. Recognizing these traits is essential for accurate identification and valuation. Key factors include: Materials: Typically crafted from silver, gold, or turquoise, old pawn jewelry uses natural materials and traditional metalworking techniques. Craftsmanship: Look for signs of handcrafting, such as irregularities in design, which suggest a piece was made by skilled artisans. Patina: The surface of old jewelry often shows a natural patina, a result of age and wear. 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attributable to Native Ameircans. I am sure others will give their opinion on this, but I reckon Jason would be the authority. 2 Likes Some collectors are very strict about the usage of the word "pawn" - as in, if there's no actual original pawn ticket attached to it, it shouldn't be listed as pawn. It has come to be used as a catch-all term for "old." 7 Likes Yes. I think it's not exactly helpful to buyers, especially those still in the learning curve, when terms lose their meaning-on purpose. Old pawn is now used for vintage material of whatever quality and sourcing, but prior to that it was a synonym for dead pawn, a phrase that stood for an actual commercial situation. An item was pawned, and if not redeemed went "dead" and therefore possible to be resold. Not necessarily the pawn ticket, but I would expect an honest seller to have the ability to back up the claim and put it in writing if selling something as "old pawn." 3 Likes Particularly awful is when sellers describe Fred Harvey jewelry this way...uh, no. 1 Like Good article covering the origins of pawn. More of a safe deposit box for the Navajo than anything. @JW Harvey isn't exactly off limits for this designation according to this history, but I agree that since it wasn't real Native American jewelry that it shouldn't be considered old pawn. Antique American Indian Art, LLC Learn About the Art > About Old Pawn Jewelry > Old Pawn Thank you for showing me this excellent site which covers the question of old pawn as well as having other resources. 2 Likes Off subject here, but I just have to tell you that here on the east coast it's not too often I hear or see someone using the word "reckon" but your use of it just warmed my heart! That is a word that was often used by my Grandma and my Dad and on the rare occasion I hear or see it, it immediately makes me think of them! Thank you for that lovely reminder tonight. 3 Likes A magical term in the Indian art world, "old pawn" is usually misapplied when spoken out of ignorance of the cultural context to which it was originally assigned. Early trading post traders relied on their Navajo neighbors to be their best customers, as tools, rope, trade blankets, food, and general supplies were the primary products which the trader sold. Building a good customer base among the Navajo required the trader to become a trusted member of the community, and to do so, he often wore many hats. Settling disputes, loaning materials and money, providing shelter for Navajos traveling from distance, and even taking care of the body of a deceased Navajo whom no one claimed or wanted to deal with, were just some of the trader's responsibilities. The pawning system was established and regulated under the BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs), and provided that the trader could loan money on an item for 1 year during which time the owner could retrieve it for the loan amount plus 10%. The regulations also required the trader to tell the owner when the year was coming due, and, if the item was not reclaimed, the item went to dead pawn status, after which the trader than could sell the item to anyone. Nonetheless, it was usually in the trader's best interest not to sell items that went into dead pawn as to not offend the owner - as this would then hurt the trader's reputation in the community. In fact, most early pawn was never intended to "go dead and unclaimed," particularly as the loan was often for only a fraction of the item's value. For the Navajo, the items were placed in pawn for multiple reasons. Not only would you receive some quick cash or goods, but secondly, the items were pawned for safe-keeping in the owner's interest. This was a practical solution to the Navajo owner, who often moved with his sheep herd, and had few options as to where to hold valuables. In addition to being relatively safe, the jewelry was usually on display with its pawn ticket, and all the other Navajo patrons of the post could see the items, thereby raising the status of the owner.Material wealth for the Navajo had traditionally been measured in animals and in blankets. The Navajo knew little of banks, and paper money had no value to them. When a wealthy Navajo (one with many sheep and goats) saw that the trader placed value on the silver jewelry, and that credit could be obtained with it, he began to commission local smiths usually paying in sheep or goats. The trader, preferring jewelry over animals, was more familiar with silver, and happy for a more versatile trade item; the smith was happy to increase his flocks, and the heavy weighted jewelry brought prestige to the owner and better credit from the trader. As the pawning system became established, jewelry took center stage as the item of choice to work with. Often, Fred Harvey jewelry, made between 1910 and 1930, is referred to as "old pawn" jewelry (or at least placed within that category for dating purposes). However, reality is that the traders who catered only to the Navajo would not put the Fred Harvey style jewelry in their cases as the Navajo didn't care for it. Consequently, most of the Fred Harvey jewelry was made and sold on or near the railroad which skirted the southern part of the reservation, and was not "pawned" for the various reasons aforementioned. With the appearance of the automobile on the reservation in the 1930s, the northern part of the reservation, still heavy with old pawn, became the center of focus for museums and collectors to try to build collections of "old pawn" before it disappeared (as did all the old ways). Additionally, the traders, now seeing new tourists for the first time saw their dead pawn depleting, and, to replace stock, started buying some of the Harvey style jewelry. This was a win-win for the trader, as a Harvey piece sold to a tourist brought in money to the post, yet he was able to keep in favor with his local Navajo by not selling the dead pawn yet to be claimed. Over time, the Navajo, who began seeing the lighter weight, shiny Harvey jewelry, began to accept it more and more and incorporated it into their lives - although the heavy "Old Pawn" would always remain the prize.To learn more about Fred Harvey Jewelry, click HERE.

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