

## Kwakwaka'wakw Button Blankets

“Our history is not written down; it is in our carvings, our totem poles and our button blankets”

*Chief James Sewid - Ol Siwid*



The Kwakwaka'wakw decorate blankets with strands of cedar bark and abalone shells. These blankets are called **k'angaxtola** “a place to sew things on”. When our people were able to buy pearl shell buttons from China at trading posts we began decorating our blankets with them. These blankets are called **kikugwitsam** “having mother-of-pearl”.

Today, the type of button blanket a person wears continues to determine rank.

“The rows of buttons lining the inner side of the red border represents the number of potlatches your father has hosted. If he has hosted one potlatch, then you are entitled to have one row of buttons. If he has given two potlatches, then you are able to show two rows on your border”.

*Ethel Alfred – T'solati'lakw*

Mirrors and **ixt'sam** “cut abalone shell ornaments” are sewn onto blankets to protect the wearer by reflecting any negative energy or jealousy back to the person that has sent it. The abalone shell is a gift from the sea, our greatest source of wealth. Abalone shell ornaments represent wealth and Chiefly power that was needed in ancient times to trade for the precious shells.

