

**UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
MUSEUM OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

Edward Sheriff Curtis collection

Arrangement and description

By

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Edward Sheriff Curtis collection

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Edward Sheriff Curtis collection

Dates of creation:

[1897 - 1930]. - Copied by the Museum in [197-?]

Physical extent:

ca. 900 photographs

Biographical sketch:

Edward Sheriff Curtis was born near White Water, Wisconsin, in February 1868. The Curtis family moved soon thereafter to Minnesota, and he grew up near the Chipewa, Menomoni, and Winnebago native tribes. He was 19 (1887) when his family moved to the pioneer villages of Puget Sound, Seattle, where his father, Johnson Curtis, died of pneumonia. Edward had to support the family. He farmed, fished, dug clams and did chores for neighbors, but nonetheless managed to buy his first camera.

With only grade school education, Edward Curtis taught himself photography from self-help guides and built his own camera. He was keenly interested in the Puget Sound natives' way of life. He made his first Native Americans' photographs in 1896. Among them was the photograph of Angeline, the daughter of Chief Seattle, whom he photographed at Seattle waterfront.

He spent a season with the Blackfoot natives of Montana. A selection of his photographs, "Evening on Puget Sound," "The Clam Digger," and "The Mussel Gatherer", won first place in the Genre Class at the National Photographic Convention and won again the next year.

Curtis was later invited to join the famous Harriman Expedition to Alaska the Bering Sea, which was the last great nineteenth century survey to ascertain the economic potential of America's frontier. On May 30, 1899, Curtis set sail from Seattle with a crew of 129 among whom were some of the world's leading scientists including Robert Grinnel, a leading ethnographic expert on Native Americans. Curtis was one of the only two official photographers on the two-month expedition. After a trip of nine thousand miles the party returned with five thousand pictures and over six hundred animal and plant species new to science. New glaciers were mapped and photographed and a new fjord was discovered. Curtis photographed many of the glaciers, but it was his pictures of the native peoples that established his artistic genius.

For the most part, Curtis labored at his own expense. But in 1906, with Theodore Roosevelt's connection, he was introduced to J. Pierpont Morgan who agreed to fund his "North American Indian" project.

Curtis lived among the native peoples and studied their ways in depth and by doing so gained their friendship and trust.

His health and family life suffered due to overwork and long absences. His wife, Clara, and their four children could not always accompany him. In 1919 Clara filed for divorce and received, as part of the settlement, Curtis' studio with all of his negatives. The original filing was years earlier, but Curtis was always in the field and could not be made to come to court. She continued to manage the studio with her sister. Curtis was obliged to move, in 1920, from Seattle to Los Angeles with his daughter Beth from where he continued the Project and shoot films.

He began his involvement with the film industry by assisting Cecil B. DeMille ("The Ten Commandments"). Throughout his career, Curtis would fight to be accepted by scholars of North American Natives, especially the approval of The Smithsonian Institute.

In 1930, Volumes 19 and 20 of "The North American Indian" were published. The project was finally completed. The work, initially expected to take 15 years, took 30 years during which time Curtis visited the Arctic and over 80 North American native tribes.

Custodial history:

In 1973, with the imminent opening of the new Museum of Anthropology (MOA), there was a lot of interest in expanding MOA's collection of photographs for internal study by the Museum staff. This possibly was when the Curtis slides, photographs and negatives were copied from the UBC Library, Special Collections Division, for research purposes at the Museum. Over the years portions of the collection have been in the custody of various MOA staff. What is unclear is when they were brought to the Archives.

Scope and content:

The collection consists of slides, photographs and negatives, all copies of Curtis' most extensive work, "The North American Indian." The collection is divided into two series: slides and photographs.

Notes:

Source of supplied title. Title based on the creator.

Physical extent. Includes: ca. 660 slides, 154 photographs and 111 negatives all b&w and in varying sizes.

Conservation: Master Slides, photographs and negatives have been sleeved in archives print preservers and filed in 3 ring binders.

Arrangement: The archivist has maintained the original order of the master slides.

Restrictions on Access: Consult the archivist.

Terms governing Publication: Copyright is with the Curtis heir.

Finding Aids: A list with slide numbers and the events they correspond to (slide index) is available.

Accruals: Further accruals are expected.

Edward Sheriff Curtis collection

Series 1: Slides

Dates of creation:

[1897-1930]. - Copied by the Museum in [197-?]

Physical extent:

ca. 660 photographs: b&w slides.

Scope and content:

Series consists of only slides based on Curtis' project "The North American Indian Life". The slides are broadly categorized as master slides 1 and 2 (one binder containing 218 slides), duplicate and triplicate (ca. 440) slides in 4 metal boxes. The slides cover nearly all aspects of the North American Indian way of life. While some are photographs of rare native peoples' traditional/ceremonial rites and other events, others are portraits of individuals of importance, photographs of early native costumes and other treasures.

Notes:

Source of supplied title. Title based on the medium of the records.

Arrangement: A list of the master slides and a brief explanation (of the event to which each of them corresponds) is available.

Slides list:

(See appendix 1 for slides list)

Edward Sheriff Curtis collection

Series 2: Photographs

Dates of creation:

[1897-1930]. - Copied by the Museum in [197-?]

Physical extent:

123 photographs: b&w.

Scope and content:

Series consists of 154 photographs and 111 negatives of Curtis' North American Indian Life project. The photographs depict the North American Indian culture, costumes, beliefs, transport, ornaments, treasures etc.

Notes:

Source of supplied title. Title based on the medium of the records.

Arrangement. Each photograph has a brief explanation of the event/place written on the back.

Series list:

The photographs are arranged within the binders as follows:

Binder # 1.	Photographs.	Negatives.
1 Coastal Salish	16	10
2 Haida	1	1
3 Kwakwaka'wkw	40	35
4 Nuu-Chah-Nulth	25	21

Binder # 2.	Photographs.	Negatives.
1 Nootka	29	18
2 Eskimo (Nunavik)	24	9
3 Coastal Salish	14	12
4 Kwaguitl	5	5