

Outdoor Loyalty

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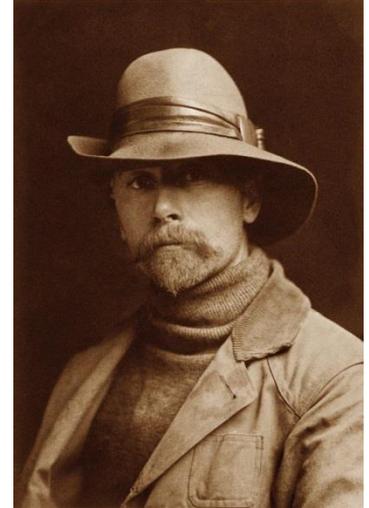
PIONEER OUTDOORIST: Edward Curtis- Anthropologist; Portrait Photographer; Historian; Ethnologist...

When we think about “What an image of an Outdoorist contains”, we usually imagine a person who climbs mountains, single-track mountain biking, trail-seeking snowshoer and a true risk-taker choosing a road less traveled in the great-outdoors. These are all legitimate images. This OutdoorLoyalty.com blog adds to that list, Edward Curtis, an individual pioneer who took to the great outdoors to save the culture of and for The Native Americans from the late 1800s through the 1950s.



The Climber: Edward Curtis on Mt. Rainier 1897 evaluating making the area a National Park.

Ed Curtis was born in 1868 in Whitewater, Wisconsin. By the early 1880's he became enthralled with photography using his dad's portrait camera. He spent all his free time taking photos of landscapes and everything within. His father, Johnson Curtis, taught him how to develop the plates that the images are processed on. In the fall of 1887, Edward and his father, a preacher, left Wisconsin leaving his mother, sister, and brother. They left Wisconsin and moved to Puget Sound, Washington across the Sound from Seattle. Shortly, upon purchasing some land, he and his father built a home and cultivated produce on the very fertile land around them.



Edward Shariff Curtis at 22 of age. (1890)

One day Edward slipped and fell off a log damaging his back severely, becoming bedridden for the next year. His father fell very sick and died about a month later. Edward's mother and siblings moved out to Puget Sound and help Edward recover. With the family back together, Edward recovered over the year and began to live a normal life again. Shortly after, Edward met his future wife, Clara. They married soon after, in 1891, he being 24 and she being 18.

Edward saw an ad for a picture studio needing a new partner and the studio became Rothi and Curtis Photographers. Success came quickly and soon Curtis left and joined Thomas Guphill in a much bigger enterprise, the studio was on Second Avenue with photoengraving facilities. Edward and Clara lived above the shop until a baby, Harold, was born in 1893 and they promptly moved up the hill near the University of Washington in a developed neighborhood. Edward soon became a Seattle celebrity, his name and photography skills were being recognized around the Pacific Northwest. More importantly, it was big enough to house both his and Clara's families.

Edward and Thomas began fulfilling Edward's dream of documenting the vast Native American Indian's culture in 1895. With his self-developed portrait camera and Edward's access to a newly developed recording machine, developed by E. Henry Harriman, that recorded audio on a wax cylinder to pick up and preserve sounds of

conversations and music for posterity along with the portraits. This was a unique process utilized by anthropologists and ethnologists for the following decades.

Edward Curtis and Thomas Guptill (renowned photographer) developed the process called “Photograving” which was the best process for portraits in 1895. It was a laborious process where each photo glass plate was finished by hand to produce a honeyed sepia tone on the glass plates.

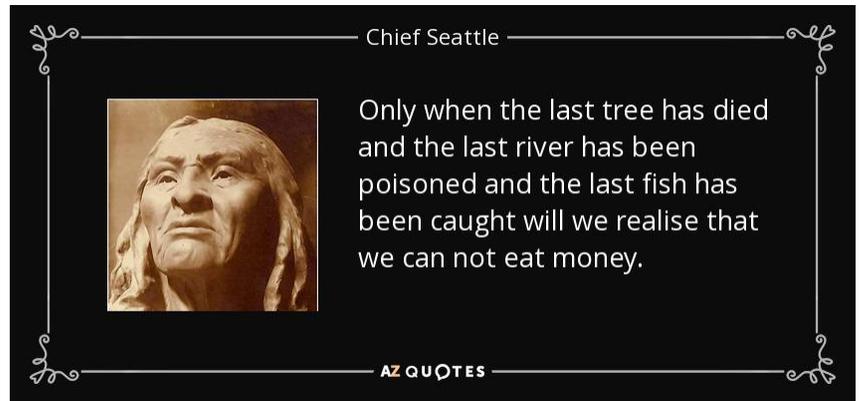


Edward and Thomas processed the photos and recordings of Princess Angeline, becoming the very first documented record of the

indigenous Native American

Princess Angeline, daughter of Chief Seattle in 1896

Indians by Edward Curtis. One motivation for Edward was a statement by a prescient observer Alexis De Tocqueville in 1831 about the American Indians: “They were isolated in their own country, and their race constituted only a little Colony of troublesome strangers in the midst of numerous dominant people.” This statement, by a foreign observer, became Edward’s passion for saving this indigenous culture from extinction.



Chief Seattle (See-ah!sh) 1865

Edward Curtis continued to document colonies (Tribes) in the Puget Sound area, including Vancouver Island. His abilities to capture the essence and truth of his subjects gained him the title of “The Shadow Catcher” by the Native American Indians. His photos and recordings of the tribes were beginning to spread across America. He was recognized throughout the professional and academic Communities studying the condition of the Native American population. Edward and Thomas kept improving their photographing process that enhanced the subtleties that Edward envisioned of his subjects. In 1899, Edward was offered a contract to document for an expedition up the coast to Alaska and on across the Bering Straits following the Aleutian Islands.

Edward was contracted by Edward Henry Harriman, a son of the infamous Harriman Family. The Harrimans were known to be the Railroad Tycoons elevating them to one of the richest families of that time in America. Edward Curtis was chosen to be the official photographer aboard the Steamship “George W. Elder”. The Harriman Family invited the finest Zoologists, Geologists, Botanists and Ethnologists of the time in America. Additionally, they invited two of the finest Naturalists, John Muir and John Burroughs.

This expedition was paralleled to the Lewis and Clark Exploration, 100 years earlier, in American History. In fact, the Harriman Party, in 1899 was the continuation of the 1803 Lewis and Clark journey. They began in St. Louis ending where the Columbia River meets the Pacific Ocean. The Harriman Expedition began in Seattle, up to Alaska, across the Aleutian Islands in the Bering Sea, to Russia and back to Seattle (a total of 9,000 miles). Both parties were recognized and supported by the Presidents of their time. Thomas Jefferson (1801-1809 and William McKinley (1897 to 1901)

Edward Curtis, being adept at engaging with others, was drawn into all the scientists and naturalists engaging with them about his vision of capturing the North American Indians. He befriended George Bird Grinnell, founder of The Audubon Society and Clint Hart Merriam founder of the National Geographic Society. The statistics, of the journey, were amazing:

1. 9,000 miles round trip.
2. Discovery of 600 new species of mammals to science.
3. Edward took over 5,000 documentary level photos.
4. 200 indigenous Native Indians, who over time, migrated off the Aleutian Islands. They were unknown to Historians at the time.
5. And all-important, Mrs. Harriman planting her footsteps in Russian soil.



The Harriman Party in 1899

Edward Curtis sensed that his journey with the “Harriman Expedition” opened up many influential contacts from the East Coast of America. Over the next few months, Edward cultivated several Scientists, Naturalists and Politicians enhancing his vision of saving the North American Indian Culture for the prosperity of their heritage. One of his contacts, George Bird Grinnell (founder of the Audubon Society) presenting a journey to the Blackfoot Indians in Montana. They agreed to meet up in the late Spring of 1900. “Bird”, as he was called by the Blackfeet Indians, had for several summers, ventured out from the East to engage with the Blackfoot Tribes (Pawnee, Piegan, Bloods and other related tribes). In the past 1880s, these tribes had resettled to the Blackfoot Reservation because of “common bonds”.

Edward got aboard a Great Northern Railroad, owned by the Harriman Family, in 1900, heading East from Seattle to what most Americans imagined was the heart of “The Wild West”. He traveled thru Washington, east to Spokane, crossing the panhandle of Idaho, into Montana, then heading north in Montana to the Canadian Border. The train then turned east and encountered an area, which would in 1910 become The Glacier National Park, chugging towards the Marias Pass (5,215’ above sea level). Then coming down the east side of the Continental Divide, going from forest green to prairie brown and high flat sagebrush, to Browning, Montana (The Home of the Blackfoot Nation).

Edward was looking for a community of Indians to cast in lighting on his camera. When Curtis and Bird approached the Reservation, they saw a large circle of “tipis” forming an enclosure a mile or so in diameter. Grinnell, over the past 10 years, found himself crusading to protect a Bison herd, in Yellowstone, for the Blackfoot Indians, being very dependent for their very existence. This crusade had won over many influential people, including Teddy Roosevelt who just became the Vice President under William McKinley. Within a year, Teddy Roosevelt became President due to McKinley’s assassination.

Edward Curtis envisioned his “Crusade” to be Grand and Consequential for the hundreds of Tribes and remnants of Tribes which some of the Native Americans had retained and preserved their primitive customs. Bird was Edward’s passport to something an outsider could not see on their own. The Blackfoot Tribes showed to Curtis how devastating that culture had become as of late. The missionary and military agents have systematically dismantled the customs and ceremonies targeting the younger generation of Indians.

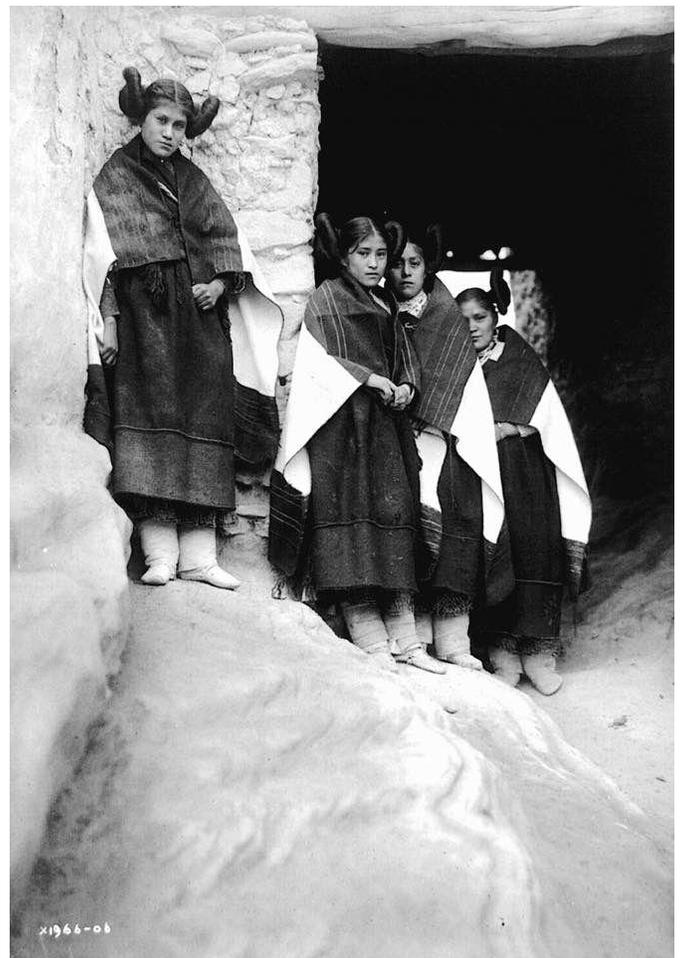
Edward Curtis was well aware that this attempt by the U.S. Government would, in the future, eradicate this rich culture which would be erased from historical knowledge over the past 1,200 years for the “American Indians” in a mere generation. This crisis ignited Curtis’ goal of saving this historical culture in American History. With the time he spent with George Bird Grinnell, they documented the Black Foot Tribes systematically by photos and recordings, as well as writings creating vast pages of visually accurate descriptions of ceremonies, songs, dances and what the day in the life of individual member’s experiences from young children to aged Chiefs, Medicine Men and Spiritual Priests.

Edward Curtis committed his whole existence to document the Native American Tribes West of the Mississippi River including Alaska. This PhotoEthnographic publication on a daily basis from 1905-1930. Edward’s publication became known as “The North American Indian”. The work became one of the most ambitious and expensive Ethno-photographic projects ever undertaken. Curtis received full support by President Theodore Roosevelt and full financial backing of J.P. Morgan. Edward Curtis traveled across the West creating 40,000 to 50,000 Negatives, over 1,000 wax cylinder recordings for the earliest footage of North American Indians. On top of that, he generated 2,500,000 words of the text providing rare and valuable cultural and historical documentation. Edward created a full-length movie with his incredible filming abilities.

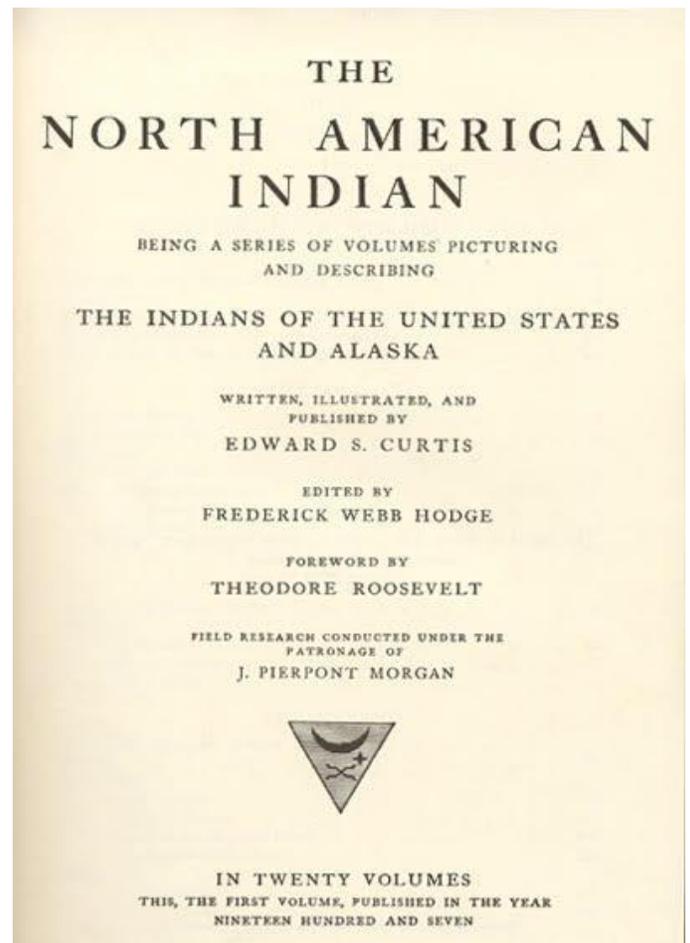
The publication of “The North American Indian” by Edward Curtis

Edward Curtis left this World on October 19, 1952. He described himself as a “Hermit”. He left this world penniless and lonely. The name he acquired, from the Indians he studied, was “The Shadow Catcher”. This was appropriate for the end of his incredible life. Incredibly so, his legacy lives on to present day. In 2018, his original publication “The North American Indian” has been valued at \$500,000. The Christopher Cardoza Fine Arts Organization donated complete sets to 16 Tribal Colleges in recognition of the 10,000 Native Americans who collaborated in the creation of the Original Publication and to support current efforts of Native Americans to reconnect with their History, Culture and Traditions for future generations.

OutdoorLoyalty.com has embraced this “True Outdoorist”; Edward Shariff Curtis. What Edward did, over his lifetime, was to save the Native American Indian Historical Culture by traveling throughout the Western Territory reaching out to all the tribes to understand of their Rituals, Ceremonies, Spiritual, as well as day to day activities on their reservations. Curtis needs to be honored by the Outdoor Industry for his



Walpi Maidens Hopi, 1906 by Edward Curtis



sustainability efforts for the American Indians. We truly owe a note of gratitude to the many generations of Native Americans for their true spirit of protecting the Great Outdoors we all appreciate throughout the present-day National Park

The website link below expands the above blog by the Smithsonian Magazine in video format;

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/videos/edward-curtis-photographing-the-north-ameri/?no-ist>

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