

Photography of the Indian: Concept and Practice on the Northwest Coast

ALAN THOMAS

When photographers arrived on the Northwest Coast in the wake of the first gold rush they were presented with an historic opportunity. Eighty years earlier naval artists had come off the ships of the great navigators to sketch the Indians in their villages; on their return to Europe they had astounded the public with their work.¹ Their heirs, the photographers, arrived on the same coast to find the same subject-matter, a thriving Indian culture relatively untouched by white settlement. Nowhere else on the North American continent, it is possible to argue, was there a better opportunity to record primitive societies with the camera. It is true that photographs were unlikely to arouse the wonder with which the first drawings from the Pacific were received; the world had become much older in seventy or eighty years and the imagination of Western civilization was tuned differently — towards successes in material progress, for instance. Yet here too the photographers had something to offer: they could present their subjects with an unprecedented fidelity to fact, with a mechanical accuracy.

A dramatic full-scale seizing of the opportunity did not occur until Edward S. Curtis came on the scene at the turn of the century. His immense ambition to depict “all features of Indian life and environment, types of the young and the old, with their habitations, industries, ceremonies, games and everyday customs”² and his no less remarkable achievement, the twenty volumes of *The North American Indian* (containing many photographs made on the Northwest Coast) should not be allowed to obscure the work of other photographers on the Coast, some of whom came well before Curtis and faced much greater technical difficulties. While no single figure produced on the heroic scale of Curtis,

¹ John Webber was the expeditionary artist who drew the Indians of Nootka Sound on Cook's third voyage. “Webber's drawings were published with the official account of the third voyage. The greatest care was taken in their printing and publication and their fame soon spread throughout Europe.” Bernard Smith, *European Vision and the South Pacific, 1768-1850* (London: Oxford U.P., 1960).

² E. S. Curtis, *The North American Indian*, vol. 1, intro. xiii.

the large numbers of photographs in the archives of British Columbia and elsewhere testify to a continuing and energetic pursuit of the primitive Indian as a subject from the earliest days of photography in this region and by photographers working to very different ends — commercial, official and, increasingly in the last decade of the century, scientific. And as we survey the work of Gentile, Dally, the Maynards, Dossetter and Hastings (who worked closely with Dr. Franz Boas, the anthropologist), understanding grows of the opportunities and problems faced by these pioneers, and questions arise that bear, in turn, on Curtis' achievement.

The fact that Indians were sought out to the degree they were as photographic subjects in the last century attests to the continuing vitality of Romantic ideas of the primitive life — a life idealized in its simplicity and closeness to nature. The Romantic challenge to civilization had wilted in the face of the confident materialism of the industrial age, but it still exerted a hold on the imagination. Its opposite, a denial of the value of the primitive, was often expressed in terms of an aggressively ethnocentric Christianity which held Indians to be heathen, pitiful or wicked (according to one's severity of temper) and occupying a lower level or an earlier stage in human existence. The natural interest of settlers on the Northwest Coast would lead them easily to take and use the second idea, but this did not necessarily render null the appeal of the first.³ Men and women of the time appear to have been able to entertain both ideas at once, or rather, to respond to either according to occasion. No matter if Indians were heathen and trouble-makers; commercial photographers could sell views of Indian villages or portraits of Indians adorned with nose-rings.

A commercial trade in celebrated "savages" was, in fact, a feature of early attempts by Coast photographers to exploit the Indian as subject matter. Charles Gentile, who was active in the colony from 1863, published small-size prints of Indian warriors. Typically, his subjects were men from the remote west coast of Vancouver Island and they were depicted wearing only a blanket and bearing, perhaps, a paddle or a war-axe; sometimes they were identified by a printed name. On the back of one such photograph the reputation of the sitter is expanded upon: "Cedar Karnim, chief of the Clay-o-quot Sound Indians. A celebrated

³ A thorough discussion of the complexities of white attitudes to the Indian of the Northwest Coast is found in Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1977), pp. 73-94. See also, in this regard, J. E. Chamberlin's *The Harrowing of Eden* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975).

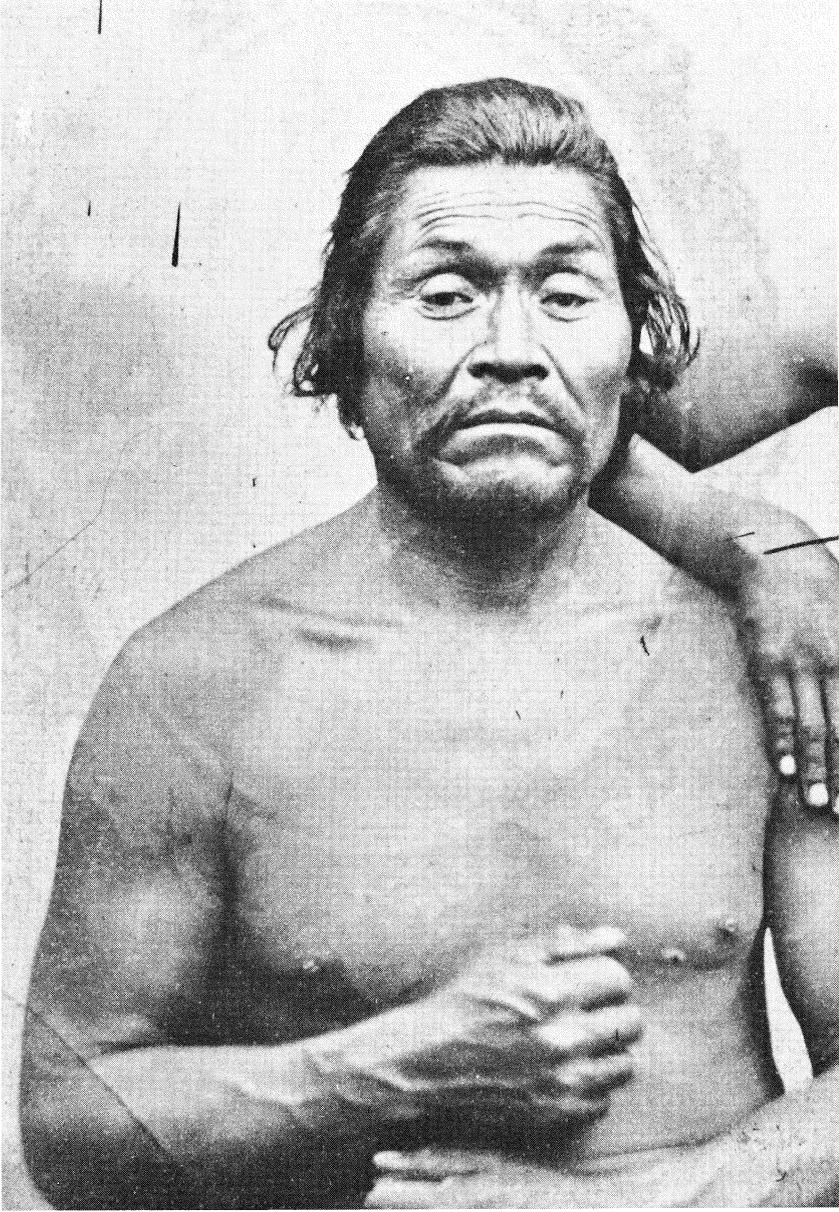


PLATE I. A celebrated warrior, Cedar Karnim, photographed by Charles Gentile, c. 1865.

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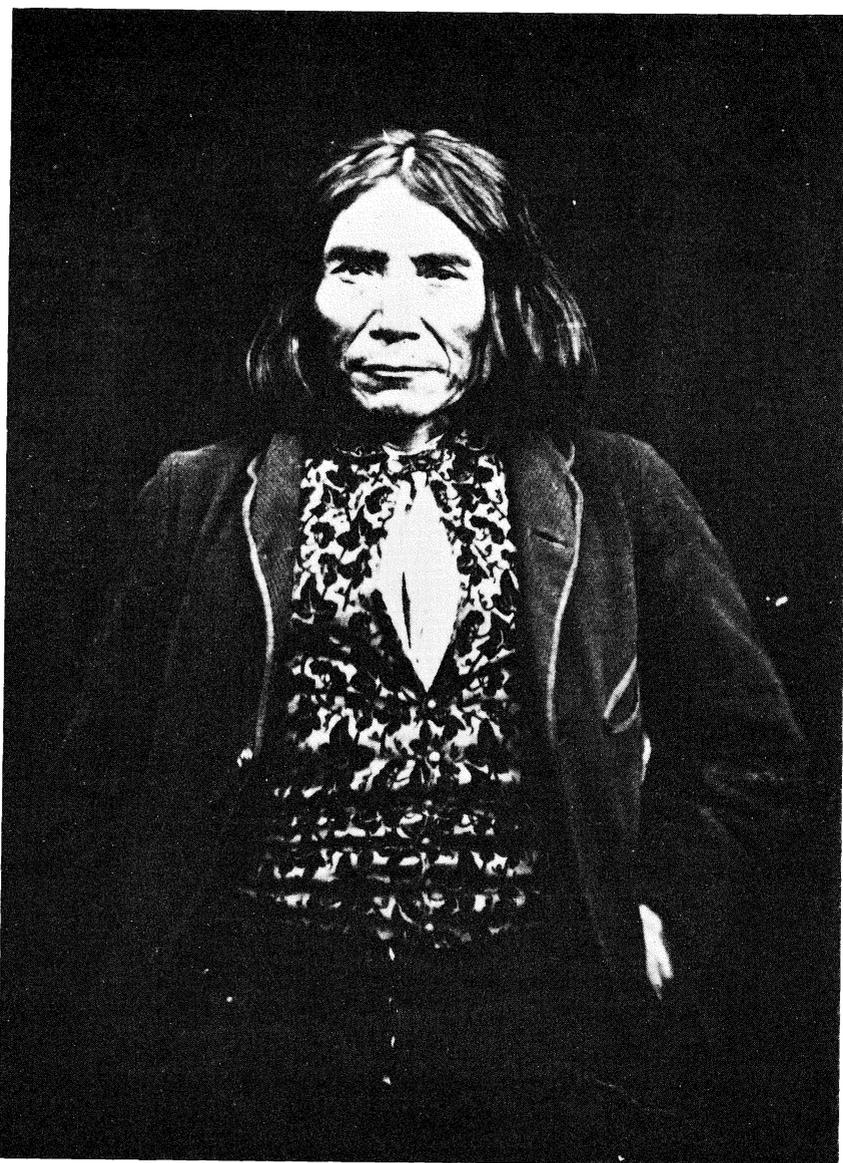


PLATE II. Indian wearing flowered waistcoat. Photograph by Frederick Dally.
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warrior and orator who has killed over 200 men (see Sproat's *Scenes and Studies of Savage Life* ch. on Modes of Warfare)."⁴ This inscription illustrates the spirit in which these photographs were collected. They were part of the sixties vogue for mass-produced celebrity photographs (so-called *cartes-de-visite*), a world-wide craze which, in politer parts of the globe, placed the features of international statesmen, theatrical stars and writers within album-covers. The customers for Gentile's trade in celebrated warriors were probably both colonists and the many adventurers and other visitors who passed through the port during the years of sporadic gold-rush and settlement. Other customers for Indian portraits may have been local Indians, for we find some portraits taken in a very different style. They show confident-looking Indians, in non-Indian dress, posed before the camera so as to register personal qualities.⁵ The contrast makes clear the deliberate nature of Gentile's savage-in-a-blanket mode. The small size of the *cartes-de-visite* (approximately 2" by 4") and the wooden poses of the warriors did not, of course, allow a very extensive view of primitive Indian life. Although Charles Gentile also travelled with his camera into the interior of British Columbia to make some of the first views recorded of regions which were just becoming dotted with new gold towns, the Indians are only properties, put in to enhance the scene, in the few views which survive of his journeys.

A far larger and more varied body of work comes from the camera of Frederick Dally, whose portraits-and-views trade in Victoria between 1866 and 1870 was most plainly directed towards serving the settler society. Dally took portraits of local shopkeepers, group portraits of officers aboard visiting naval ships and views of harbours, roads, staging-posts and gold workings. He also photographed Indians, and over his studio embossment are found many portraits. However, the decisive and characteristic contribution made by Dally to photography of the Indian arises from the views he took while travelling up the Coast and into the Interior, and which he comments upon in his journals. Dally shows himself remarkably alert to the manifold activities of Indian life. His photographs of canoes, lodges, fish-weirs, hunting camps and winter

⁴ This photograph, and others by Gentile, are in the collection of the British Museum's Ethnography Department, Museum of Mankind, Burlington Gardens, London.

⁵ It is an open question whether or not Coast Indians entered photographers' studios in the 1860s and paid for their portraits to be made. Given the accounts of Indian fear and ignorance concerning the camera, discussed in Margaret Blackman's article in this issue of *BC Studies*, it might seem sensible to presume they did not. On the other hand, who were the purchasers of portraits that exist of respectable-looking Indians in white dress if not the sitters?



PLATE III. The peace and beauty of an Indian village (PN-1459). Dally's view of Quamichan, 1866.

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earth-houses are still to be found illustrating anthropology textbooks. He also possessed a nice aesthetic sense. Writing in his journal of a morning spent photographing the village of Quamichan, he adopts a tone of easy familiarity, even contempt, toward the Indians posed in the scene, a tone that can readily be imagined typical of the settler.⁶ But Dally takes very great care with the photograph, and the Indian village comes to us as a place of idyllic beauty. The concept, if that is not too large a word, behind the Quamichan scene was presumably the scenic view — a photograph of a beauty spot, by contrast with the representative town view, or the view of local road transport, or of monuments, other favoured subject categories of nineteenth-century photography. Dally was original in establishing an Indian village as a beautiful scene.

He was not always so successful or so imaginative. Travelling into the Interior, Dally stops at Mission and brings a group of Indians and priests down on their knees “at prayer,” as he notes, “for the sake of the photograph”; meeting a party of mounted Indians on the road, he halts them for a tourist picture revealing the signpost to Cache Creek; encountering tribes inland which have never faced a camera, he perfunctorily arranges them for a group portrait that reveals little. It seems that one can look in vain for a governing aesthetic standard or approach beyond that of collecting views. But Dally’s curiosity was obviously well developed and the great virtue of his magpie approach was that it allowed his openness and curiosity to flourish and to produce a wide variety of photographs.

Frederick Dally’s journeys into the Interior and around Vancouver Island may have encouraged Richard Maynard, who over the next two decades travelled widely with his camera. But Maynard’s photography of the Indian appears to have been given its first distinct impetus and direction with his appointment to accompany the Indian Commissioner, Dr. I. W. Powell, on official trips by ship up the Island in 1873 and again in 1874. Maynard’s notebook entries which cover these voyages leave no doubt that the Indians were his given subject (though this did not prevent him from photographing residences of officials and other subjects of general interest). And although in later years Maynard did not travel again with the Commissioner, he continued to make photographic expeditions north, in which the Indians were a prime subject.

⁶ “After being at work all day I felt hungry so I called out to the Klootchmen in the canoe. ‘Nika tiki muck-a-muck!!’ Ans. Klootch. So off they paddled and brought back some dried clams strung on a withe which were sweet and good!! and I kept a few and brought them back to England with me.” Dally, album 5, p. 14, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.



PLATE IV. Tourist photograph by Dally, c. 1867. (PN-1417).

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In this, he was followed by others — indeed, by the eighties it appears to have been a regular feature of a Coast photographer's life to travel north for Indian pictures and a spirit of competitiveness appears to have existed in the bringing back of views of magnificent lodges and totem poles. Most of these were private trips, though Powell continued to commission commercial photographers to accompany him on official visits, and O. C. Hastings and Edward Dossetter went north with him in 1879 and 1881 respectively.⁷

These journeys were accompanied by an evident neglect by Coast photographers of far more easily accessible Indian subjects. Many photographs exist of the Songhees and their village on the Inner Harbour at Victoria, and also of Indians at New Westminster, but the numbers are not as great as the closeness of those locales might lead us to expect; the archival holdings are particularly scanty for the early period, roughly 1865-1885, when many fine photographs were being brought back from the north. It is difficult not to interpret this imbalance as arising from the dualist pattern of ideas in white attitudes.

The primitive Indian was to be found beyond the touch of white civilization and made an admirable photographic trophy; the wretched and degraded Indian, living at close hand to the town, was inappropriate as a subject for window display and for the album. In practice it was not always easy for photographers to express positive ideas about the northern primitive, but these seem to have been the assumptions that governed the Powell expeditions. Certainly Powell himself, in his reports, reveals a prevailing dualism: for him the northern tribes were far superior in habits and personal appearance to tribes further south. Powell also possessed a strong historic sense of his role when on his travels. Though he was voyaging in a steam-driven vessel, and up a charted coastline, he was conscious of following in the wake of the great navigators of the previous century, and he ordered photographs to be made which matched views sketched by naval artists eighty years earlier.⁸

⁷ Pamela Haas of the American Museum of Natural History informs me that Dossetter was securing photographs for the Museum on this voyage in 1881 and dispatched his glass negatives to New York soon after his return. Dr. Powell was obliged to obtain prints from the Museum. Details of these transactions are given in her book on Dossetter, *Visits of Inspection*, publication pending.

⁸ "At Nootka most of the tribe were absent and I was sorry not to be able to renew my acquaintance with the chief Ma'quinna, the descendant of the Ma-quinna of Cook, Mears, Quadra and Vancouver, one hundred years ago. . . . I took a photograph of the village and, as a matter of curious comparison, I have added another taken from a sketch of Vancouver, made in 1790." I. W. Powell, *Department of the Interior Reports* (1876), p. 130.

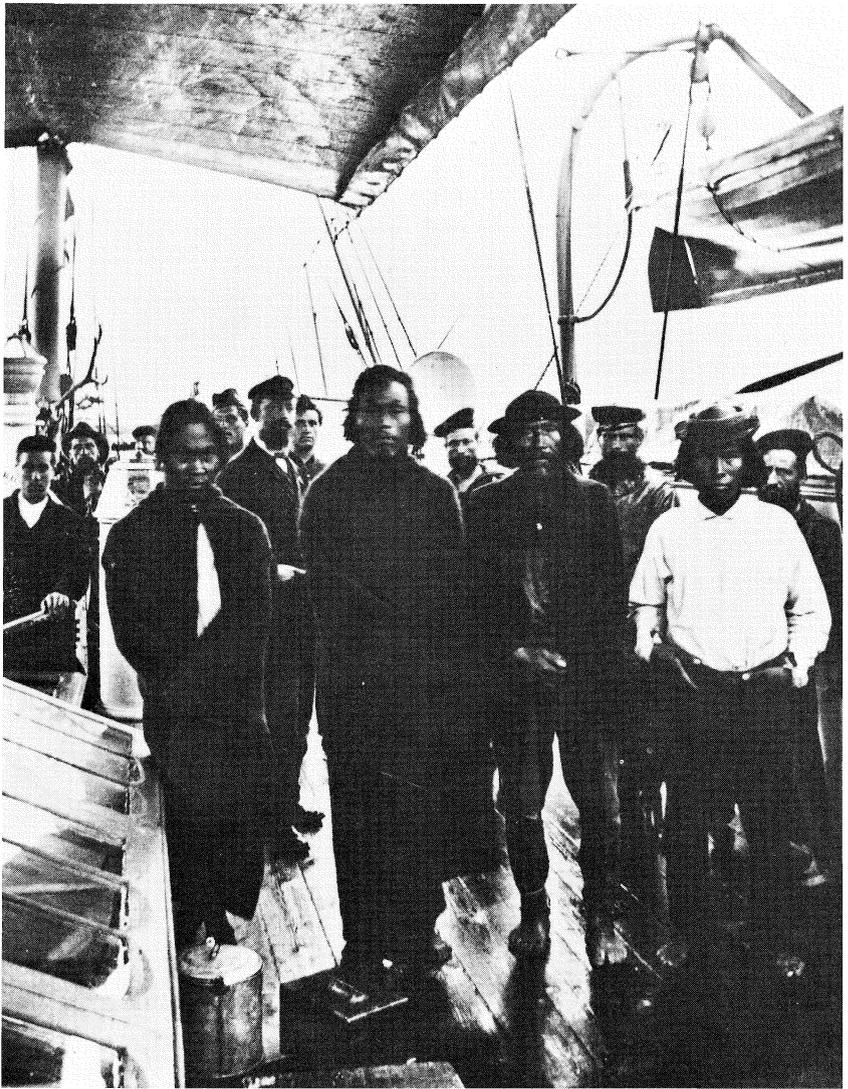


PLATE V. Indians aboard H.M.S. *Boxer* photographed by Richard Maynard, Barkley Sound, 1874 (PN-4801).

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Powell's sense of history may have communicated itself to Maynard. The best photographs made by Maynard on these voyages have a distinctly historical quality. In one we see Indians, some of them blanket-wrapped, standing in the midst of an inquisitive crew on the deck of H.M.S. *Boxer*. The picture calls to mind those episodes recounted in the logs of Pacific mariners in which The Indians Come Aboard — and, to continue in that vein, Maynard's Indians present to the onlooker a wild, noble and manly bearing. Again, at Nootka Sound, where Cook's ships had found their first North American harbour, naked Indians are photographed by Maynard as they loll in the sand beside their canoe — in the background rise the masts and spars of H.M.S. *Boxer*. The effect is astonishing: we see a photograph which might be from the pre-photographic Age of Discovery.⁹

It should not be thought that with this handful of remarkable photographs Maynard had established a subject and a technique. The special nature of the *Boxer* voyages to small, remote communities gave him a rare opportunity to photograph Indian life still only lightly touched by white civilization. But the chances which allowed these opportunities could also create difficulties.

Take the presence of the blue-jackets from the *Boxer*, for instance. Their inclusion in his scenes need not undermine them: the contrast of uniformed sailors and wild Indians could be telling. But Maynard was not always successful in posing this particular mixture of subjects. A promising scene in a Discovering-the-Primitive *genre* shows Indians squatting along the log sill of a village house and sailors sitting on the canoes drawn up on the beach. The Indians crouch, with knees drawn to chin, and blankets wrapped about them, an unrevealing posture; the sailors, on the other hand, know about photography, and they stretch themselves in positions of ostentatious ease, as if on sofas. The juxtaposition can appear mildly ludicrous to modern eyes. This photograph is typical of many others taken along the Coast in this decade in which disparate elements are not brought into a whole.

Richard Maynard is not alone in this — the archives contain a large number of photographs which are historically interesting but less than

⁹ Richard Maynard's notebooks are of little use in determining what might have been in his mind when he took these photographs. The relevant entry in his notebook for 1874 reads: "10th Lv. Refuge Cove at 5:20 a.m., Nootka at 10 a.m. 13, 14, 15, 16 Indian Ranch at Nootka — 17 Naked Indians 18 Boxer in Nootka Sd. — 19 Landscape of N. Sd. 20 Indians, 21 Indian Camp, 22 Boxer." Maynard Diary, Provincial Archives of British Columbia.

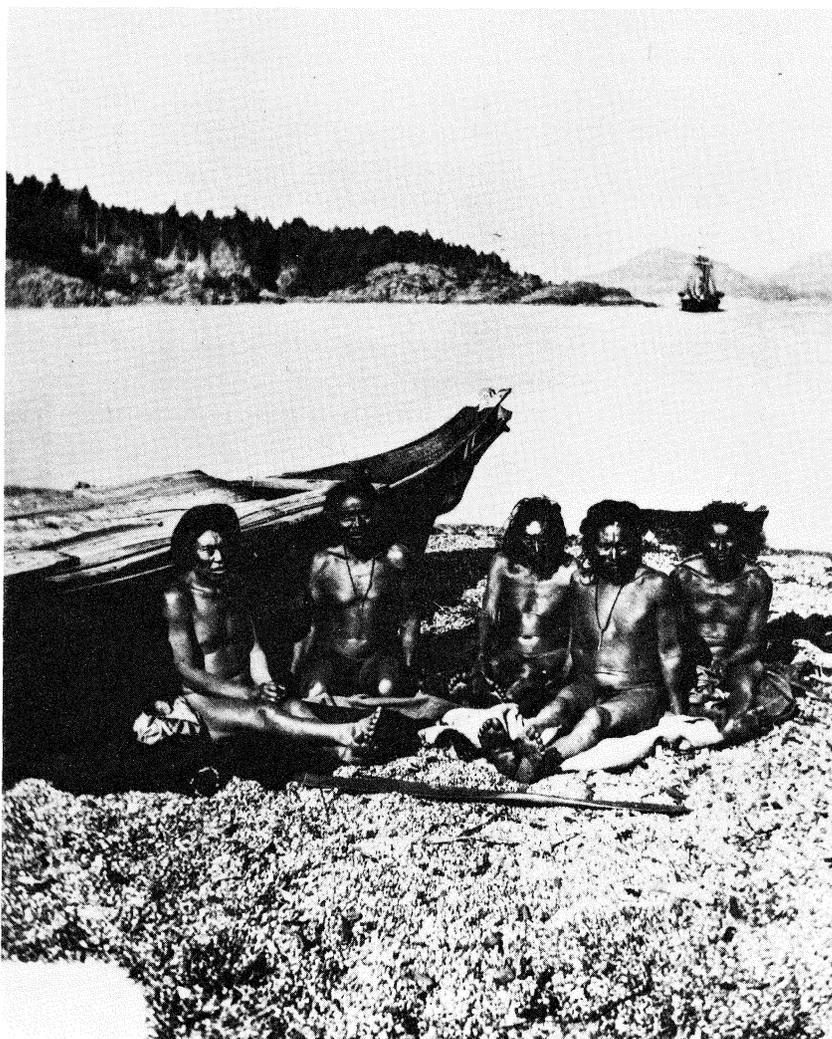


PLATE VI. Nootka scene by Richard Maynard, 1874. H.M.S. *Boxer* in the background (PN-1171).

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successful in simple terms of unity and clarity of composition. Most of the problems occur with human groupings. One view by Edward Dossetter of the Indian Commissioner seated in the midst of an Indian band is intolerably busy, and the eye seeks the setting of mountain and forest with relief. Such naive confusions and failings are not to be read as a reproach. They indicate the range of problems faced by Coast photographers and their consequent uncertainties. Some problems are those common to the photography of the day — it was, both as technical process and art, still relatively new. The current photographic conventions of categories (the recording of an official visit, the scenic view, the depiction of a local monument) can explain some of the chronic overloading of these pictures; others seem to arise from the challenges of a previously unphotographed visual environment.

Yet we can see a certain discipline emerging in the handling of both man and environment. Indians traditionally squatted on the ground in a position designed, one might think, to thwart the camera. Their villages, low rows of houses, could easily be lost between forest and water. Again and again we see the field photographers working at these problems and producing solutions, photographs whose later reproduction has been a testament to their success. Maynard arranges a group of women at Quatsino in a rough line arising at a low angle from the horizon. He positions the camera low and half-front to create a pleasing composition and to register the women's elongated head-shapes — a characteristic of much interest to whites. (Individual figures from this photograph were later used by Mrs. Maynard in making "composites" discussed below.) Both Maynard and Dossetter also used the intersecting lines of beached canoe and house-front or pole to create triangles and columns, those basic compositional elements. A celebrated example is found in Dossetter's well-known photograph of Haida chiefs at Skidegate, Queen Charlotte Islands (1881): two chiefs, with weather-beaten faces and glittering eyes, one wearing a government-issued jacket, the other a smart topcoat, stand before the thick column of a Raven house pole. As with many of these photographs, the new is displayed in contact with the old. Dossetter's wide views of villages are also justly celebrated. One, of Tsanwati, succeeds through the photographer's choice of distance and angle. Dossetter gives prominence to the shapes of canoes and line of house-fronts and holds the people away from the camera, naturally dispersed among the structures. Although the figures were certainly posed (one of them might be a visiting white official) the whole effect is unposed and natural: the

village stands before us, a complete primitive world, miraculously recorded.

By the early eighties we can say that the field photographers were increasingly able to control their Indian subject-matter and link content and composition to express themes. In a sense they were just catching up with the artists of Cook's day. With tact and discipline they could create studies which were both informative and pleasing — as Webber and his colleagues had done.¹⁰ And further, what should not be denied them, their constant material was the actuality of appearances which could be awkwardly intransigent but which could also provide a powerful appeal. This quality, arising from the camera image's directness of link with external fact, is well demonstrated in a photograph made by Maynard at Cape Caution in 1873. It shows Indians from a village said to have murdered the crew of a sailing ship, the *George S. Wright*. Maynard may have thought a group portrait of some of the inhabitants of this notorious village a trophy — like Gentile's notorious savages — which could not fail to appeal. He simply ranges his subjects, men, women and children, in a row below the houses of the village. The picture is remarkably effective despite the absence of any expressive quality in the composition. The camera confronts the Indians directly; with equal candour the Indians, clutching their blankets about them, gaze back at the camera. The photograph reminds us that fact, clearly recorded, can fascinate. The visual content is rich, and it is possible to read, in this single picture, a view of both the noble and the degraded Indian. To this complex reality the field photographers were tethered.

We find a similar simplicity and strength of communication in a handful of Indian photographs which Mrs. Hannah Maynard, Richard's wife, took in her studio. In these photographs Indians have been brought into the studio from off the street. In most cases they are evidently peddlars. One, according to an inscription on a lantern slide, is Mrs. Maynard's washerwoman. They squat on the floor, backs to the wall, baskets before them; as the shutter opens they eye the photographer warily. These studies are not really portraits. The genre to which they belong is urban, and typically European: studies of street-types, flower-sellers, cabmen and so on. Mrs. Maynard may have been aware of the vogue. The principal

¹⁰ There was still the problem of interiors. Webber had been able to sketch a Northwest Coast lodge, with its special areas for cooking, sleeping and storage. Photographers, struggling with the technical difficulties of lighting, were still competing for Indian interiors at the end of the century. B. W. Leeson produced a very dramatic shot of a Kwakiutl house interior about 1910.



PLATE VII. The remote, primitive world of Tsanwati, Knight's Inlet, photographed by Edward Dossetter in 1881 (AMNH-42259). COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY



PLATE VIII. Indians of Cape Caution, Smith Inlet (“who supposedly murdered the crew of the *George S. Wright*” according to an old caption), photographed by Richard Maynard, 1873 (16273).

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factor in the choice of these subjects was probably simple availability: they were literally at the studio door. By contrast with their abrupt and unceremonious beginnings, a number of these photographs went on to serve quite different ends. Mrs. Maynard made a specialty of the creation of photographic "composites." In the case of these squatting Indians, their figures were isolated and placed against photographs of Indian poles and house-posts — the triangle of the figure against the column. The concentrated effects of these composites could be powerful and curiously eerie.

Such studio experiments represent an attempt to develop an expressive photographic art. Adherents of naturalistic photography may find them difficult to take seriously. But in the work of Mrs. Maynard and a successor, B. W. Leeson, we find clearly stated, if at times facile, expressions of concepts arising from white attitudes to the Indian. Leeson, who was a customs official at Quatsino, and occupied himself with photography, was a contemporary of E. S. Curtis, and his work reflects a common view. Typically, Leeson takes a figure, perhaps squatting, isolates it and re-photographs it against a chosen background-photograph of the wild coastline. The conjunction is potent, conveying a deep sense of brooding: the Indian ponders his decline and extinction, seated on a silent shore. Essentially, the studio artist employed as motifs for an intensified expression of theme the repeated patterns and images found by the field photographer: the squatting figure, the canoe on the beach, the cluster of poles against the sky.

But to go on to Leeson is to anticipate the influence of Curtis' guiding concept. Edward Curtis' vast enterprise, begun about 1900, to photograph the Indian of North America was based on the premise that this was the last chance for white historian-photographers to record the original inhabitants of the continent: the Indians were The Vanishing Race. Notwithstanding his thesis, Curtis needed to find areas of flourishing Indian life, and the Northwest Coast was very useful to him. (Indeed, he chose it as the location for a venture into film-making.) Curtis was a field photographer who used the outdoors as a studio, staging scenes with elaborate care and using subjects in authentic costume, handling authentic artifacts. This elevates his work in degree of conceptual control well above that of Maynard, Dossetter and the general run of field photographers whose control of material rarely extended beyond the selection of site, subject and camera position. Curtis also possessed a dramatic visual imagination. It is demonstrated in one of his best-known photographs, which shows a line of mounted Navajo Indians riding away from the



PLATE IX. Indian street-sellers photographed by Mrs. Maynard in her studio, c. 1875 (PN-6118).

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camera into the dusk, the last rider half-turning in the saddle as if in a gesture of farewell. The message is powerful and Curtis returned to it with subtle variation in many other photographs. One Northwest Coast version shows a Nootka woman, in authentic bark costume, paddling away from the camera towards an undefined horizon; the movement of the paddle, lifting from a swirl of water, is again like a farewell salute. Not surprisingly, we also find squatting figures in Curtis' portfolios. In one shot, clam-diggers sit on the shoreline at Nootka Sound, waiting for the tide to fall. The photograph expresses a sense of infinite patience and acceptance, and it would be easy to read it metaphorically as *Waiting for the End*.¹¹

We would not go to Curtis for views of actual Indian life at the turn of the century; although his *Vanishing-Race* concept derives from that era he deliberately steps outside time in his photographs. Dr. Franz Boas, the renowned anthropologist, who was active on the Coast a few years earlier, expressed disapproval of the non-scientific nature of Curtis' work. But the two men actually demonstrate a common willingness to build up the photographic record by re-creating scenes of Indian life before white contact. In the production of such scenes of primitive life Curtis became a veritable impresario, commissioning, for his film, the renewal of old war canoes and manning them with be-wigged Indian actors. Boas simply took advantage of ongoing ceremonies — for instance, a potlatch at Fort Rupert in 1894 which he photographed very extensively, using O. C. Hastings as his cameraman. But the anthropologist did not balk either at the dramatic staging of scenes to demonstrate traditional arts. In one such photograph, a woman spinner, in a traditional cloak, works at a demonstration hearthside while she rocks a demonstration baby formed from a bundle of bark. Boas himself helps to hold up a blanket as a backcloth.

In considering Boas' potlatch photographs we might take note of earlier photographers' work in recording this ceremony. Both Dally and Maynard photographed the potlatch gathering of the Songhees band in Victoria in the sixties (indeed, these photographs comprise part of the slender body of material on town Indians from that decade). The potlatch was an activity that aroused much fascination as well as much disapproval on the part of the settler population; it was certainly a favoured photographic subject. From these photographs we can see that

¹¹ Curtis, *The North American Indian*, vol. XVI, contains this material from Vancouver Island. For a discussion of Curtis' purpose, see R. A. Andrew, "The Vanishing Race of Edward S. Curtis," *Beaver* 293 (Summer 1962): 10-13.

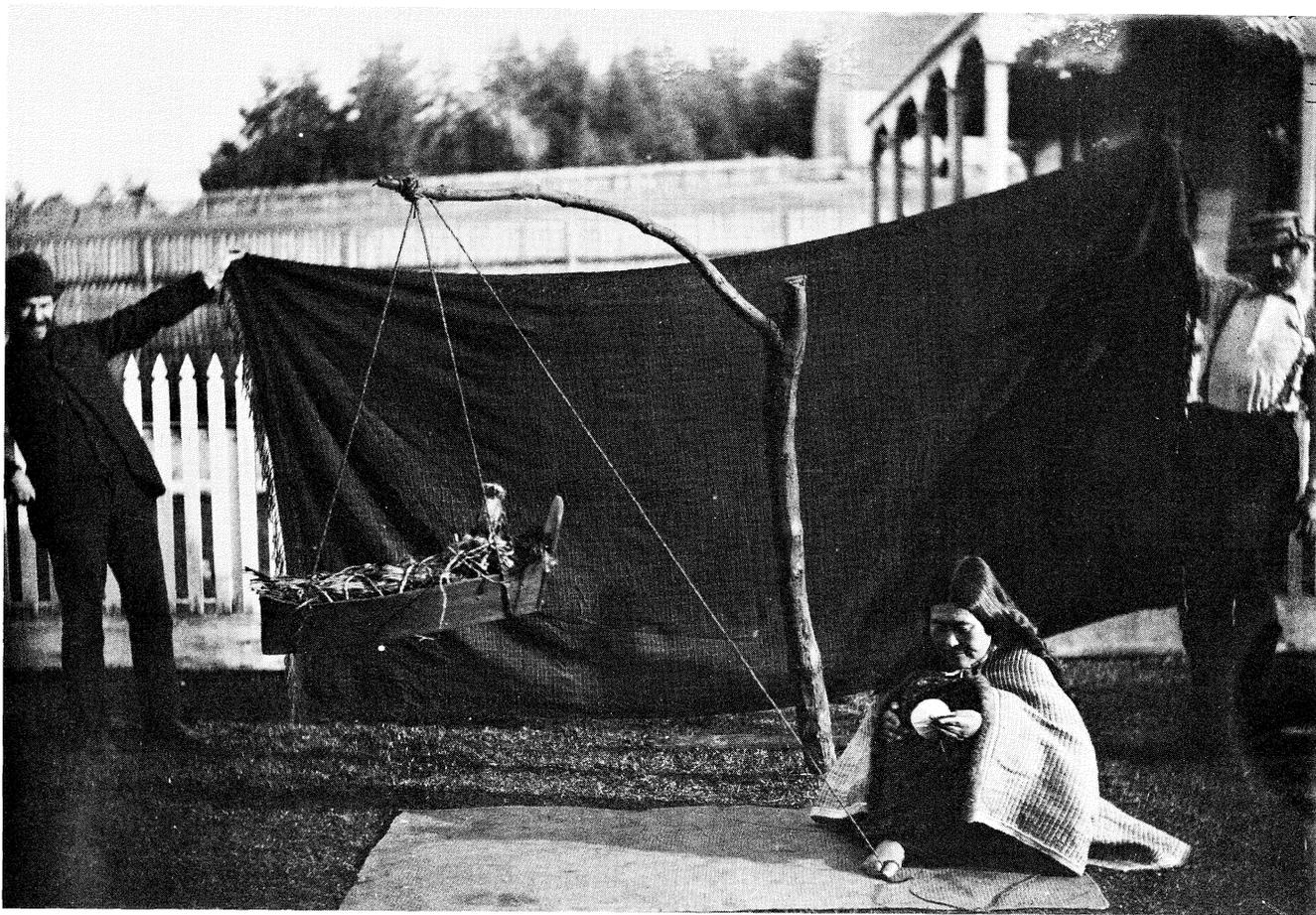


PLATE X. Dr. Franz Boas (left, wearing jacket) assists in holding up a background blanket as an Indian woman spins and rocks a demonstration cradle (AMNH-11604). This photograph was probably made at Fort Rupert in 1894 by O. C. Hastings, under Dr. Boas' direction.

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potlatching was a widely attended spectator sport. We see Indians who are at the centre of the ceremony, other Indians gathered behind them, watching, and — still further back — groups of white men and women watching the Indians. The photographer is the final spectator. He sees it all but — in these photographs — very much from outside. These rough, untidy scenes depicted by Dally and Maynard are historical documents. It is possible to study them and learn from them. The raw material they offer must be invaluable to the social historian of the Coast.

Markedly different are the photographs made by Boas and Hastings at Fort Rupert twenty-five years later. The camera is taken into the centre of the action and moved about freely. Shots from beside the piled blankets, or looking over a row of participants at a facing row of contenders, open the drama of the ceremony to view. They are both dramatic and enlightening. Boas had to understand the structure of the potlatch well to photograph it in this fashion. He obviously had the co-operation of the participants in his work, and the symmetry, neatness and instructive clarity of the scenes he photographs suggests that he may even have assisted in staging them. There are no white spectators in these shots; if any were present, obviously Boas was not interested in showing them. He knew that he was securing a photographic “first” — an Indian ceremony recorded from the inside and with an intimate understanding of its nature.¹²

Broadly, the arrival of the American Museum of Natural History's Jesup Expedition, led by Boas, provided a stimulus for a wave of picture-taking of the Northwest Coast Indian in the nineties. We find O. C. Hastings, who had travelled with Powell decades earlier, going north again to photograph the Indian in far greater detail than before. And the early work of the field photographers was again in demand. Hundreds of new photographs were also commissioned; in particular, the heads of Indians were photographed, side-view and front, in many northern communities to serve the new, systematic ethnography.

Science, with its lucid precision and its defining, normative tendency, provided the best final statement in photographs of the Northwest Coast Indian as primitive before the end of the century. Curiously, the actual

¹² Margaret Blackman, in “Potlatch in Photographs,” *Anthropological Papers of the University of Alaska*, 18-2:52-63, points out that Boas narrowed the scene of potlatch by not choosing to show “all the piles of blankets and the entire assembled crowd.” The result of these choices may have been a gain in dramatic impact. Boas knew that he had something for popular consumption and wrote to his wife: “When I come back I will try to sell the pictures to Scribner or another magazine.” R. Rohner, *The Ethnography of Franz Boas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), p. 190.

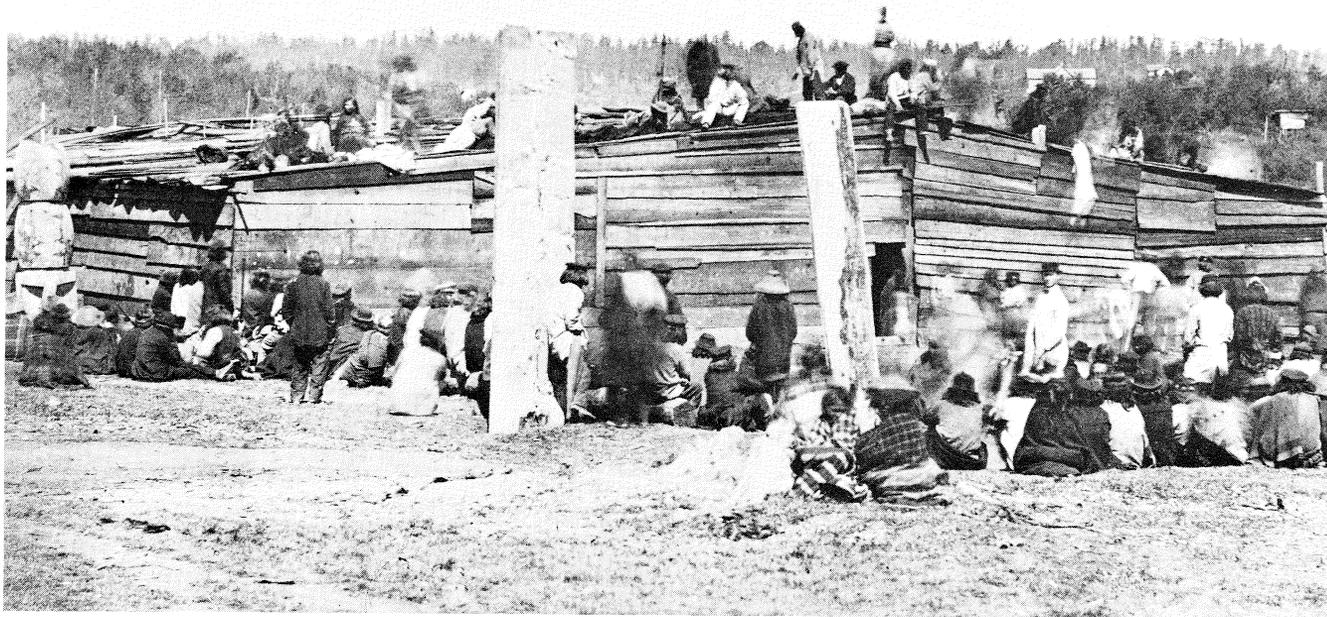


PLATE XI. View of a potlatch at the Songhees village, Victoria, taken about 1870 by Frederick Dally (c-24286).

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PLATE XII. "Lagno speaking for the Chief who gives away blankets," at a ceremony at Fort Rupert, 1894. Photograph by Boas and Hastings (AMNH-336116).

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scientific knowledge conveyed by such photographs seems limited.¹³ Dr. Boas' use of photography works as much in popularizing the study of man by demonstration as in gathering specific data. This is surely true of his dramatic series of views of the potlatch. What of the hundreds of head-shots now entombed in the museum's archives? They were made to illuminate the question of the origin and antiquity of Indian peoples on the continent. Today it is their plain veracity which appeals. We look at the photographs of a Haida woman and we speculate how she acquired the best dress she wears and why a Salvation Army pin adorns the collar. It is the saving grace of such a photograph that its meaning has widened beyond the scientific concept that gave it birth. Anthropologists, too, recognize this; if it were otherwise these photographs would have been boiled down to statistics and thrown out long ago.

Similarly, openness to experience caused some of the problems of early field photographers and can make their work the more appreciated today. The successes were genuine and extraordinary, and even what are failures to our eyes photographically remain fascinating as cultural documents. Details of the content of those pictures may assist our understanding of Indian culture; the photographs themselves are documents in the history of white civilization in North America and its attitudes to the Indians.

The savage, or the naked, or the primitive Indian was pursued and photographed — sometimes wearing the brass-buttoned coat of government — as if that were the real and only Indian. And this meant that the Indian, in other aspects, was neglected. This tendency was perhaps reinforced by the conditions of professional photography on the Northwest Coast in the nineteenth century — a specialist pursuit with a handful of competing practitioners. The spread of photography in this century, with every man his own Dally, so to speak, may have lessened this tendency to imbalance. It could be a useful undertaking to analyze the photography of the urbanized Indian on the Coast, both in the nineteenth century and subsequently, to understand further the shape the photographic record has taken under the pull of changing concepts and practices.

¹³ Science also has its excesses. The American Museum of Natural History has among its large holdings of photographs a picture taken by one of the Jesup Expedition scientists, Harlan I. Smith, at Alert Bay (neg. 46038) which shows a naked old man paddling a canoe on dry land for demonstration purposes. In justice, in annotations to other photographs, Smith shows an interest in the actual conditions of life of the Indians he is studying.



PLATE XIII. Anthropological portrait: full-face "type" photograph of a Haida woman, 1898 (AMNH-11724).

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