

## MS-5

The Museum of Northern Arizona  
Harold S. Colton Memorial Library  
3101 N. Fort Valley Road  
Flagstaff, AZ 86001  
(928)774-5213 ext. 256

### **Title**

Edward Curtis collection

### **Dates**

1907-1913

### **Extent**

1.5 cm textual material

### **Biographical History**

Edward S. Curtis (1868-1952) was born near Whitewater, Wisconsin. In 1874, the Curtis family relocated from Wisconsin to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Edward Curtis embarked on his long career as a photographer when he built his first camera. In 1885, he began to apprentice with a local photographer. Two years later, the family again relocated, this time to Seattle, Washington. There, Curtis began investing and working as a partner in a series of photography studios.

In 1892, Curtis married Clara Phillips, and couple would go on to have four children. They lived in a household that included much of Curtis' extended family, including his brother, noted Pacific Northwest photographer Asahel Curtis. The family remained in Seattle, and it was during this period that Curtis began to distinguish himself as a photographer of Native American people.

In 1906, Curtis was offered \$75,000 by J.P. Morgan to create what would be his seminal work, *The North American Indian*. The piece included 1,500 images, was 20 volumes in length, and aimed to document Native American life before it "disappeared." He conducted extensive research with over 80 tribes, and produced over 40,000 photographic images and over 10,000 recordings.

In 1919, Curtis and his wife divorced, and she was awarded his studio and all of his photographic negatives. Curtis and his daughter went to the studio and destroyed all original glass plate negatives. Following the end of his marriage, Curtis and his daughter, Beth, relocated to Hollywood, where he continued to work in photography. For a period of time, he worked as an assistant to Cecil B. DeMille. In 1927, Curtis returned to Seattle, and completed the final volume for *The North American Indian*. He sold the rights to the work to J.P. Morgan's son in 1930, and five years later, it was sold to the Charles E. Lauriat Company of Boston.

Curtis passed away at the age of 84 in Whittier, California, at the home of his daughter. Today, his work is the subject of much controversy in terms of its authenticity and historical accuracy. Regardless, anthropologists consider his contributions to be significant.

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Charlotte Bowditch of Santa Barbara, California, has a great deal less biographical information. Her relationship to Edward Curtis appears to have been based on common Native American interests. Curtis was, on several occasions, commissioned to purchase a variety of goods such as baskets (1908), a hat (1913), and a variety of other objects.

### Scope and Content

Collection consists of correspondence from Edward Curtis to Charlotte Bowditch concerning his answers to her research requests, as well as information about his efforts to obtain Native American objects on her behalf. Collection also consists of promotional and review material about Curtis' *The North American Indian*.

### Conditions Governing Reproduction and Use

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### Languages and Scripts of the Materials

All materials are in English

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Collection was donated to the Museum of Northern Arizona in 1962 by Frances McAllister (MS-5).

### Related Archival Material

- Edward Curtis photographic collections at the Library of Congress
- Edward Curtis prints at the Peabody Essex Museum

### Description Control

Finding aid written by Libby Coyner using *DACS*, 21 July 2009

<b>Edward Curtis collection</b>				
<b>File #</b>	<b>File Description</b>	<b>Date(s)</b>	<b>Extent</b>	<b>Box/File</b>
MS-5-1	Charlotte Bowditch-Edward Curtis correspondence	1907-1913	.75 cm textual	Asst. Box 1.3
MS-5-2	<i>The North American Indian</i> promotional materials and reviews	1907-1913	.75 cm textual	Asst. Box 1.4

### LCSH Access Points

Curtis, Edward S., 1868-1952

Indian arts

Indian baskets