

IMAGES of HOPI



Plateau magazine of the Museum of Northern Arizona

This publication is Volume 62, Number 1 in a continuing series, *Plateau*,
published quarterly by the Museum of Northern Arizona

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ISSN 0032-1346

Postmaster: send change of address to:
The Museum of Northern Arizona Press
Route 4, Box 720, Flagstaff, Arizona 86001

IMAGES of HOPI

1904-1939

by Trudy Thomas

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Museum of Northern Arizona

INTRODUCTION

As early as the 1850s, the Hopi people began posing for photographers. The first photographs we know of were taken by members of federal survey parties charting the western American frontier. Anthropologists, traders, and missionaries followed to study and exchange goods, services, and ideas with the Hopi people. After the construction of the Santa Fe Railway across Arizona in the 1880s, settlers and tourists began to come to the Southwest in large numbers. And by 1900, visitors by the thousands were pouring onto the mesas to witness ceremonies such as the Snake Dance despite the fact that the Hopi lived more than sixty miles from the nearest train stations.

Some of these visitors were professional photographers. Others were involved in completely different professions but used photography as a way to record their experiences in the Southwest. A few stayed for extended periods of time. Others either returned year after year or visited only once. Whether their stays were brief or extended, most of these visitors took away with them photographs of what they had seen—photographs that provide for us a treasury of visual ethnohistorical information about the people who lived on the Hopi mesas during the early part of the twentieth century. In addition to depicting details of Hopi life, the pictures also tell us something about the non-Indian society from which the photographers came.

The individuals who documented life in the Hopi villages during the early part of this century came to the mesas for a variety of reasons and therefore approached their subjects in different ways. Some photographed the Hopi people with strict documentary zeal in an effort to record daily events as they occurred. Others attempted to recreate their own perceptions of a time already past by staging elaborate photographic sessions using paid models. A few photographers systematically researched their subjects before selectively committing their ideas to film, while others photographed what appear to be a spontaneously chosen mosaic of images that, taken together, offer a partial overview of Hopi life. Some early photographers concentrated on expanding the technical possibilities of their medium, while others avoided using even such basic image-controlling devices as filters and exposure meters.

In spite of their differences in approach to their subjects and to the photographic medium, the photographers who came to Hopi shared a common conceptual orientation that had a profound effect upon their art. These photographers were inheritors of and participants in a national philosophy that demanded transcontinental expansion and economic, social, and political integration. The dual goals of territorial expansion and material progress formed the philosophical and pragmatic basis of the doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which pervaded American art and life during the latter

half of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

As the expansionist era drew to a close, visual expressions of serious concern for the vanishing frontier began to emerge in artworks that had once focused upon grand landscapes and other heroic scenes of the exploration and conquest of western America. Photographers, like illustrators and painters before them, began to temper their documentary zeal with a sensitive and sometimes even romantically sentimental nostalgia for the land and the people they portrayed. These seemingly disparate themes coalesced in many of the photographic images of life and culture on the Hopi mesas during the early years of this century.



"Hopi Girl." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912

Photographers, like painters, used light and composition to portray their subjects. As photographers experimented with the artistic possibilities of their medium, some came close to reducing their subjects to simple decorative motifs in an overall composition. In this way, they transformed Native American history into part of a mythical American West.

Although a few early photographers changed historical fact into imaginative fantasy, most were driven by a need to document as truthfully as possible what they perceived to be the final phase of Native American life on the American frontier. Therefore, thanks to the efforts of the "pictorial ethnohistorians" of this period, we now have a remarkable visual record of Hopi life and culture at the turn of the century.

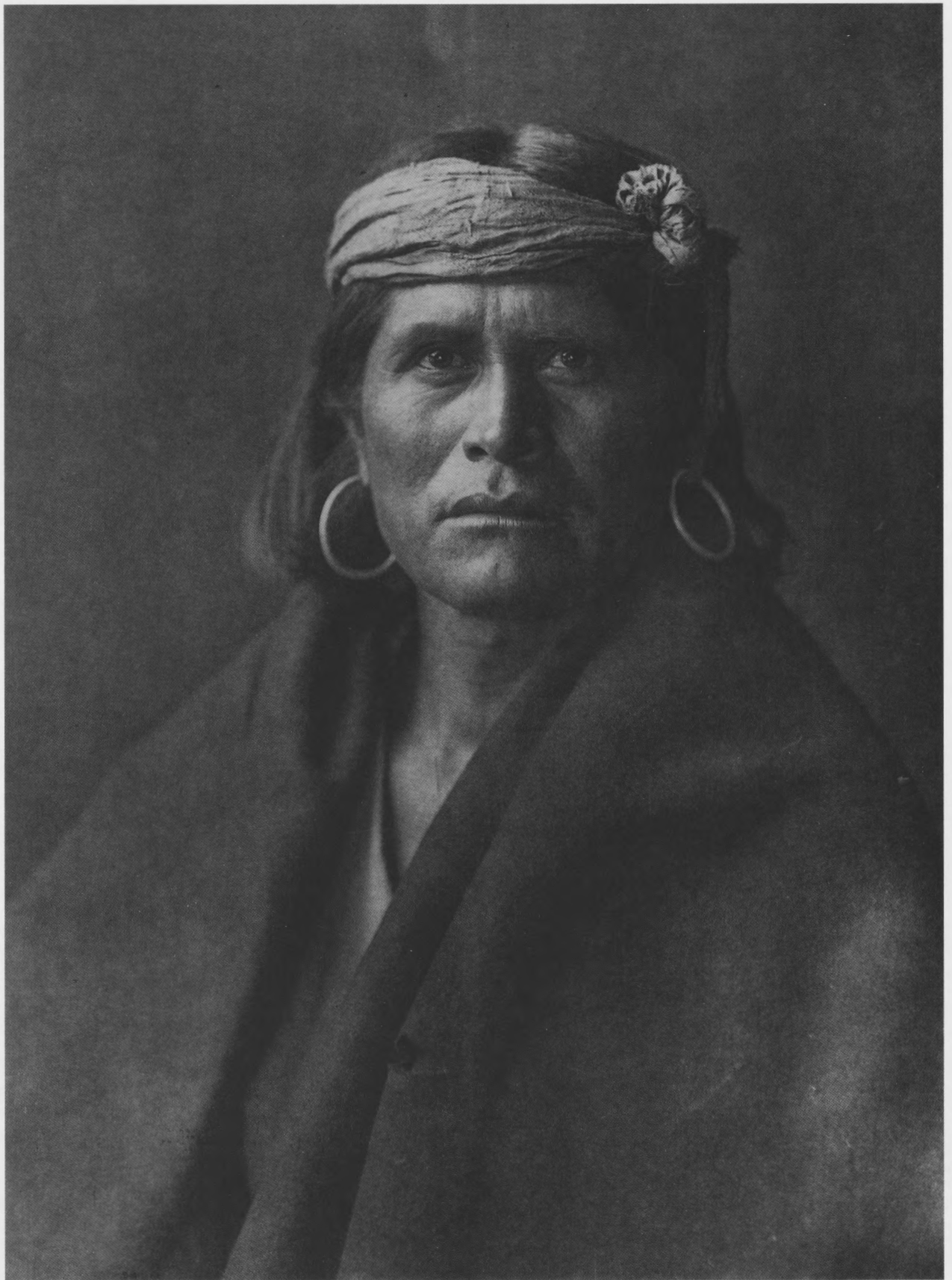
EDWARD S. CURTIS

(1868 – 1952)

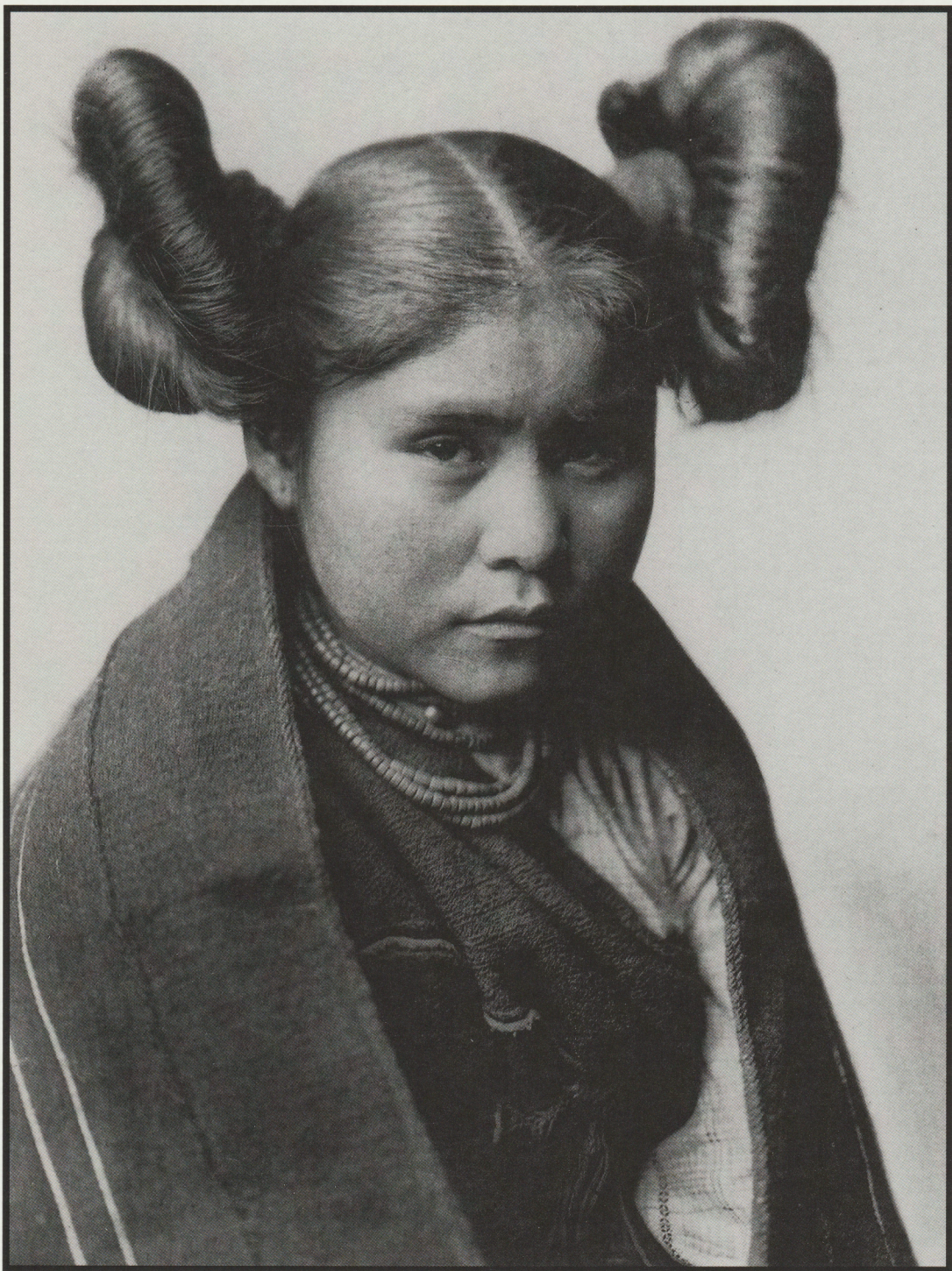
In 1896, Edward Sheriff Curtis began to photographically record available information about the customs, ceremonies, and daily life of Indian people west of the Mississippi River—from Alaska to New Mexico. Thirty-four years later, his project was complete. The photographs presented in this *Plateau* magazine are part of that extraordinary photographic effort. Curtis' North American Indian project produced 40,000 negatives (nearly all glass plates), 1,500 prints, and 20 complete portfolios totaling 722 plates. His goal was not merely to record, but to emphasize traditional aspects of Native American life for future generations. It is clear that Curtis' presence was, at the very least, tolerated by his Indian subjects. At the Hopi mesas, however, he is said to have participated in a Snake Society ritual, passing endurance tests and thus winning the respect and confidence of the Hopi people.

Edward Curtis was born near Whitewater, Wisconsin, the son of a traveling preacher who took his young son with him on treks through the wilderness of Minnesota and Wisconsin. During the 1880s, Curtis worked for a photography gallery in St. Paul, Minnesota, and it was there that he experimented with various techniques. After a short stint as a railway crew foreman, Curtis moved to Puget Sound in Washington Territory. In 1892, he opened a photography studio specializing in family portraits and began photographing the local Native American people in his spare time.

An avid mountaineer, Curtis came upon and led to safety a lost party of scientists during a climb in Washington Territory. The party included (among others) C. Hart Merriam of the U.S. Forestry Department and George Bird Grinnell, the author of a number of volumes on the American Indian. The political influence of this group of men became a great asset to Curtis. As a result of their encouragement, he decided to pursue his interest in photographing the Indians of North America. In 1899, this group hired Curtis to join an expedition to the Bering Sea; naturalist John Muir and ornithologist John Burroughs also accompanied the group on the Bering Sea Expedition. It was on this journey that Curtis made his first serious photographs of Native American lifeways.



"A Walpi Man." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921



"Chaiwa-Tewa." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921

Curtis financed his own photographic documentation project for nine years. In 1905, an exhibit of his work caught the attention of Theodore Roosevelt, who subsequently secured financing for Curtis' project of photographing eighty North American Indian tribes. The first volume was published two years later. Curtis collected and photographed the material for each volume systematically, developing a procedure that was both efficient and thorough. First, his staff researched each tribal area that Curtis sought to photograph. Then, Curtis' photographic sessions followed. He always oriented these sessions to specific points of interest defined by the research.



"Loitering at the Spring." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921

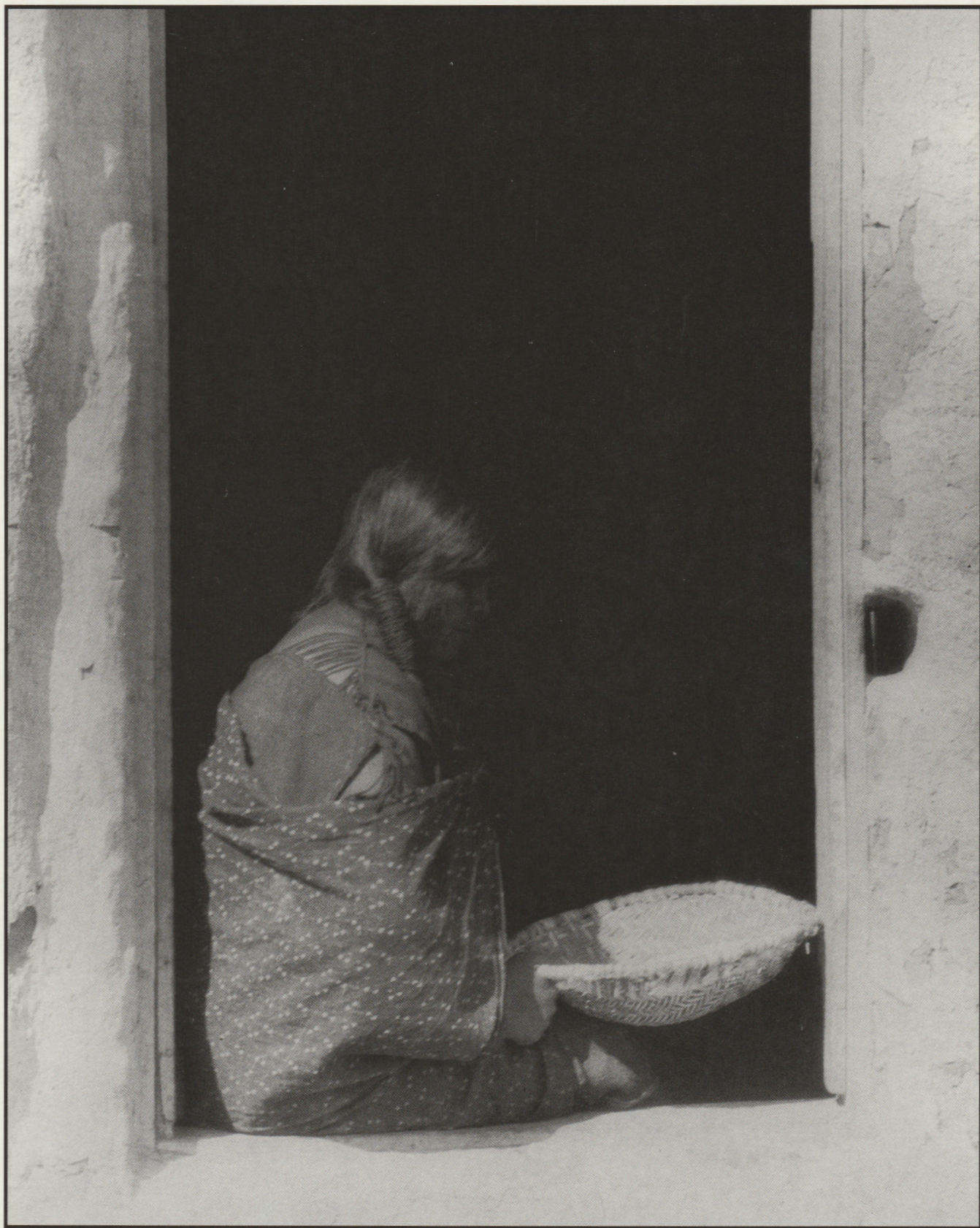


"A Hopi Girl." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921



"A Hopi Mother." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921

The photographs appearing in the Curtis portfolios of North American Indians were selected from 40,000 photographs taken by Curtis between 1897 and 1930. Each volume took one to two years to produce. As he photographed, Curtis used no exposure meters and no filters. The pictures were hand printed from copper-plates. Curtis' purpose was objective documentation, though he often paid Indian models to pose in recreated scenes of the traditional lifestyle he wished to record. Curtis never thought of himself as an artist but, rather, as a recorder of a vanishing way of life.



"Empty Basket." Photograph by Forman Hanna, ca. 1917-1939

FORMAN HANNA

(1882 – 1950)

Forman Hanna once stated "I would not be bothered by subjects I did not understand or care for." He practiced pictorial photography in a manner that emphasized simple, straightforward, well-balanced compositions. He avoided the predictability of the commonplace snapshot, however, by combining unusual subjects with a well-developed technical knowledge. Hanna became a master of the subtleties of light and composition, and he chose as his favorite subjects the American Southwest and its Indian inhabitants—subjects considered extraordinarily exotic by the majority of the non-Indian viewing public in the early twentieth century.

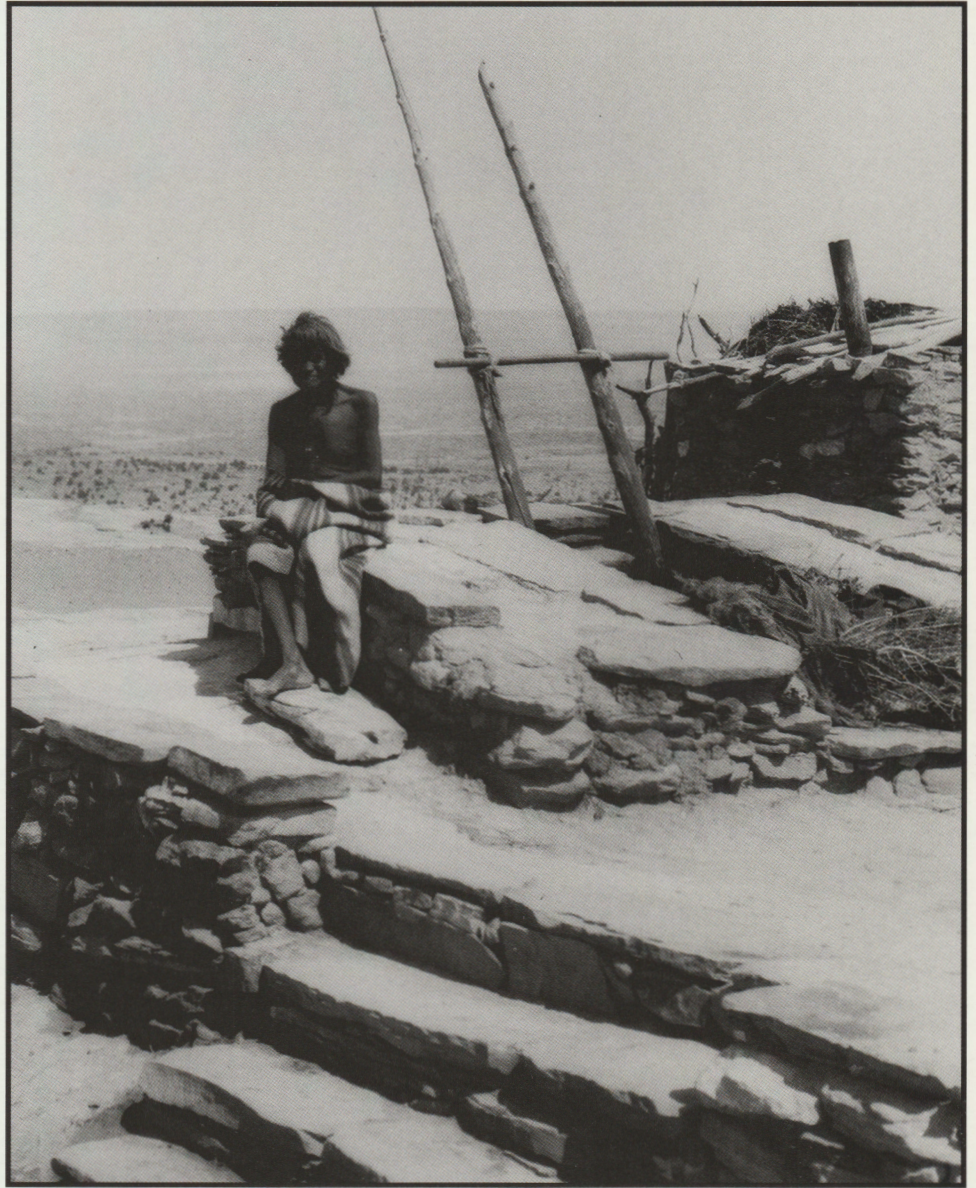
Forman Hanna studied pharmacy at the Galveston School and University. While in school, he began reading camera club magazines, and it was through these magazines that he was introduced to photographic techniques that allowed photography to be more than a simple and literal reproduction of the subject. It was in Galveston that Hanna first began to make photographs that exhibited an understanding of the possibilities of this medium.

In 1904, Hanna graduated from college in Galveston and secured employment in a pharmacy in Globe, Arizona. While in Globe, Hanna began to print and develop film for his drugstore customers as he continued to develop his interest in photography as an art form. Hanna was largely self-taught, but he imitated the styles of Eastern photographers whose work he saw in camera club magazines, thus improving his technique. Hanna made long excursions into the Arizona back country and showed the photographic results of those journeys in photographic competitions outside of Globe, Arizona. He joined many of the leading photographic associations—even the Photographic Society of London.

Forman Hanna first visited the Hopi mesas in April 1917. He returned at least every other year thereafter for the next two decades to pursue his true interest: the photo-documentation of southwestern Indian culture. Hanna's major concern on his expeditions was making a good photograph, and while he admired and respected his Indian subjects, he never formed personal friendships with them as did Curtis, Kopta, and others. His honestly sympathetic admiration for his subjects, however, spurred him to do his best to live up to the responsibility to record for history vivid images of their way of life and the land in which they lived.



"House Group, Walpi." Photograph by Forman Hanna, ca. 1917-1939



"Ancient One." Photograph by Forman Hanna, ca. 1917-1939

For most of his work, Hanna used a four-by-five-inch Graflex single-lens reflex camera with a crisply defining anastigmat lens that had been developed to bring sharp definition to the edges of images. To soften the final result, he enlarged the negatives with a single layer of thin chiffon yardage stretched across and immediately below the enlarging lens. In this way, Hanna manipulated twentieth century photographic technology to suit his own artistic taste.

In 1939, poor health forced Hanna to forego most of his travels to the pueblos, and he was forced to confine his photographic efforts to places easily accessible by automobile. At the time of his death in 1950, Forman Hanna had exhibited his photographs in thirty-three foreign countries and in virtually all the major American galleries.

KARL MOON

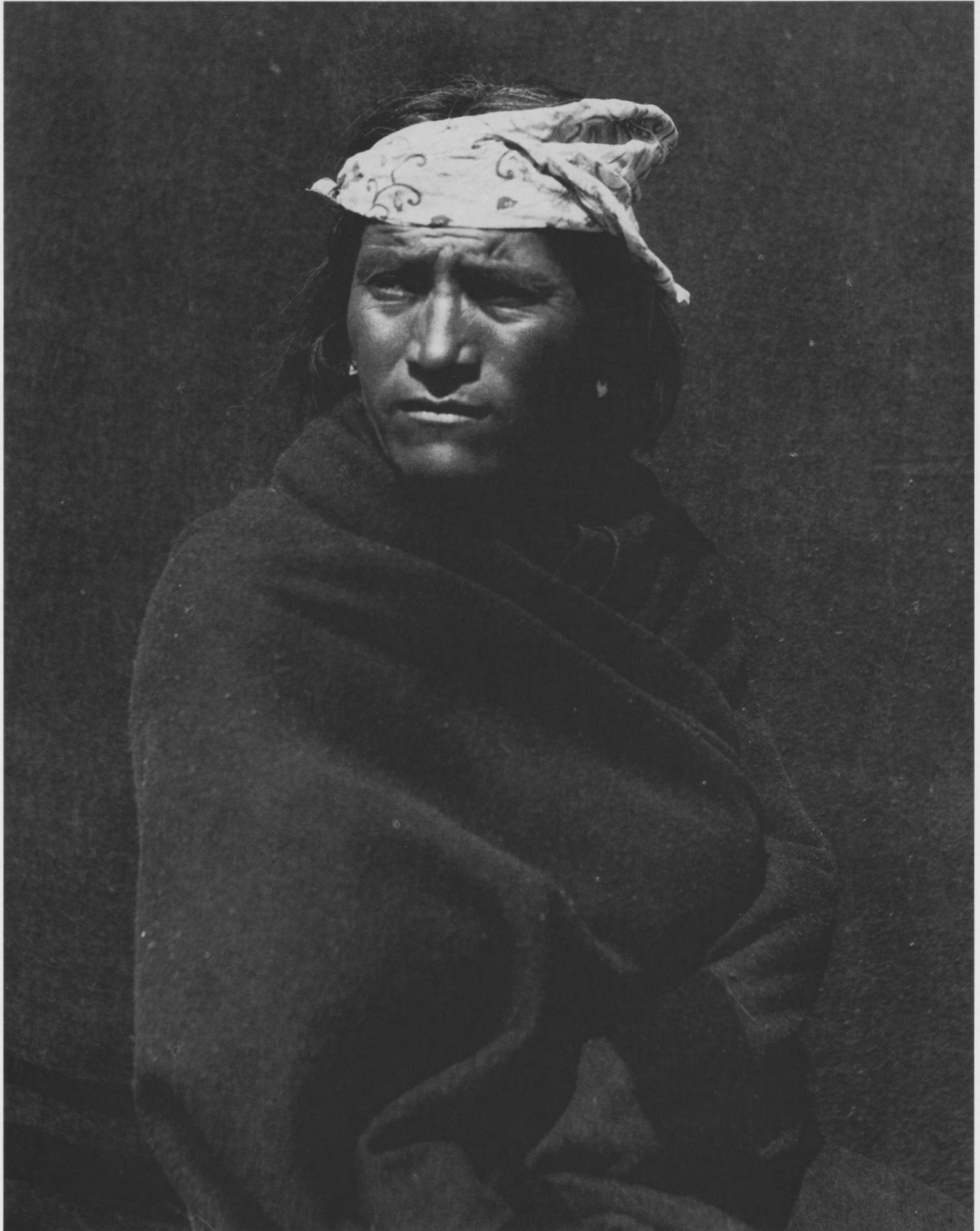
(1878 – 1948)

Karl Moon was both a photographer and a painter, and he brought an artist's eye and creative sense to his photographic work. Early in his career, Moon studied painting with Thomas Moran and Louis Akin, both of whom are known for their landscapes of the American West. As a photographer, Moon specialized in Native Americans of the Southwest, where he worked from 1904 to 1907.

A native of Wilmington, Ohio, Moon left Ohio to live in the West. His first stop was Albuquerque, New Mexico. In 1907, Moon accepted a position managing part of the Fred Harvey Company at the Grand Canyon. He lived in Arizona until 1914, when he moved to Pasadena, California, where he devoted his life to landscape painting, writing, and illustrating for children's books.

By the mid 1890s, the photograph was on its way to becoming a commonplace reality for the public in two basic forms—personal portraits and snapshots and as reproductions in magazines, books, and newspapers. Major breakthroughs made in lenses, developing emulsions, and in films made sharper images possible. At the same time, however, professional photographers began to experiment with a number of photographic techniques designed to enhance the idea of photography as art.

Many photographers began to soften the very images that advances in photographic technology had recently brought into clearer focus. A number of these photographers turned away from the high-contrast tonal variations now technically possible and began to produce such special effects as murky sepia-brown tones, purposely fuzzy backgrounds, and blanked-out skies devoid of natural celestial phenomena. In short, these photographers of the early to mid-twentieth century mastered and then manipulated the technological advances of their medium to create their own vision of their chosen subjects. Karl Moon was one of these photographers who, through heavy use of cropping and retouching, altered the image originally recorded by his camera. The results of his efforts can be considered as much a series of creations by an artist as they are documentary records captured by the camera lens.



"Koy-Yah'-Wa-Ma, The Hopi Snake Priest at Walpi." Photograph by Karl Moon, ©1914



"Street Scene in Tewa." Photograph by Karl Moon, ca. 1904-1907



*"Sunset on the Mesa
after the Storm."
Photograph by Karl Moon, ©1910*



"Hopi Blanket Weaver, Walpi." Photograph by Karl Moon, ©1914

KATE CORY

(1861 – 1958)

Kate Cory was born in 1861 in Waukegan, Illinois, the daughter of a newspaper editor who was a personal friend of Abraham Lincoln. She studied art at Cooper Union and the Art Students League in New York City. It was in New York that Cory met painter Louis Akin, who had returned recently from a year among the Hopi. Intrigued by Akin's impressions of Hopi people and the



"Hopi Weaver, Navajo Style Textile Design." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912



"Somaikoli, First Mesa." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912

land they lived in, Kate Cory left New York for Arizona the following year, never to return to the East. She lived on the Hopi mesas for seven years (from 1905 to 1912), working in isolation with limited access to equipment and supplies and developing her photographic skills as necessary to accommodate the conditions under which she worked. During that time, she became one of the small number of non-Hopi individuals permitted to observe and record preparations and performances of the Hopi ceremonial calendar. Cory also photographed nonceremonial details of Hopi daily life.

Since Kate Cory lived with her Hopi subjects, she experienced with them some of the intimate details of their lives—their joys and sorrows, fears and difficulties. This closeness is reflected in her photography. When she left the mesas in 1912, she settled in Prescott, Arizona, where she gave up photography to devote herself to painting. Kate Cory lived alone until she died in 1958 at the age of 97 years.



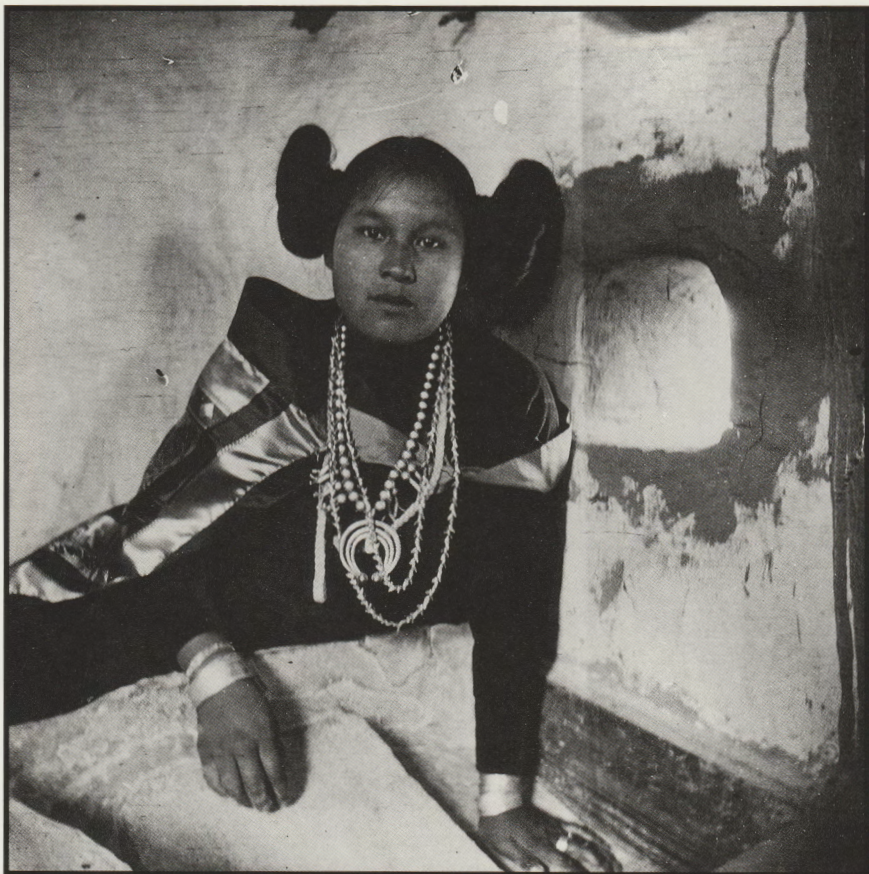
"Making Piki Bread." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912



"The Trail Up Hano." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912



"Water Carrier, Sichomovi." Photograph by Kate Cory, ca. 1905-1912



*"Hopi Girl."
Photograph by Kate Cory,
ca. 1905-1912*

*"Shy Hopi Child
(Hopi Flute Boy, First Mesa)."
Photograph by Kate Cory,
ca. 1905-1912*



EMRY KOPTA

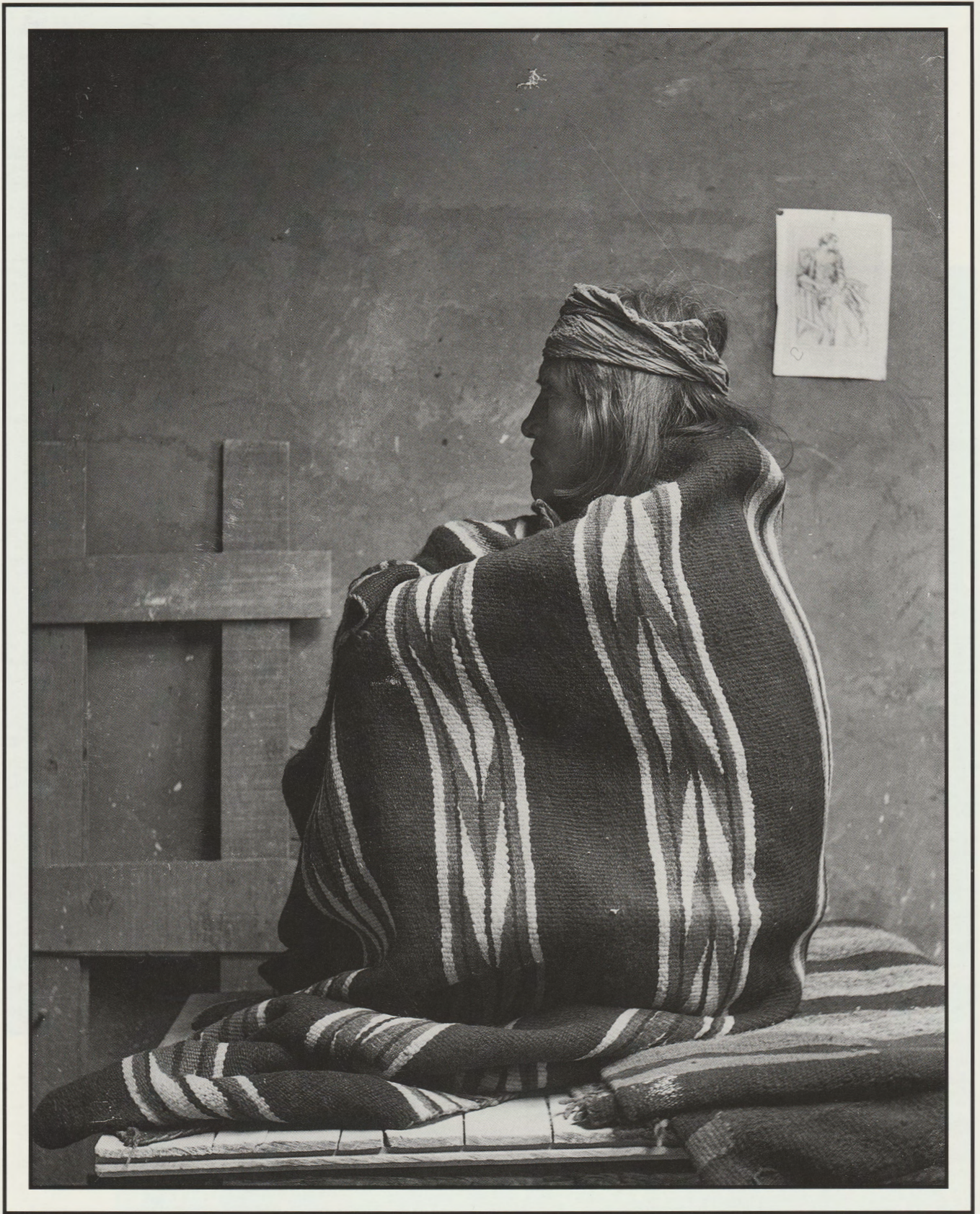
(1884 –1953)

Emry Kopta was a sculptor and photographer who lived among the Hopi for twelve years. His studio, his work, and his home were on the reservation. Kopta was born in Austria in 1884 and reared in Czechoslovakia, where he was educated by private tutors. At the age of sixteen, Kopta accompanied his family to America and settled in San Francisco, California. Young Emry studied art in San Francisco and in Paris. In 1912, upon returning from a five-year stay in France, Kopta visited Hubbell Trading Post with friends Lon Megargee and William R. Leigh, both of whom later became famous as painters of the American West.

From Hubbell Trading Post, the three traveled to the Hopi mesas. Kopta was greatly impressed by the Hopi people and chose to remain at Hopi when his friends moved on. He began to create sculptures of some of the people he met there, remaining on the Hopi Reservation for the next twelve years. During this period, he lived at the home of the owner of the Polacca Trading Post, modeling portraits of his Hopi subjects in ceramic and bronze. He also recorded some of the details of their lives with his camera. The famous Hopi potter Nampeyo supplied Kopta with clay from her sources and taught him to prepare it and to manipulate the firing process. In return, Kopta donated proceeds from the sale of some of his artworks to the Hopi people whose likenesses he modeled.

Like other photographers, Kopta recorded dramatic events characterizing Hopi life and ceremonies, but some of his best pictures are those that provide us with images of what constituted the commonplace scenes of daily life on the mesas during the early twentieth century.

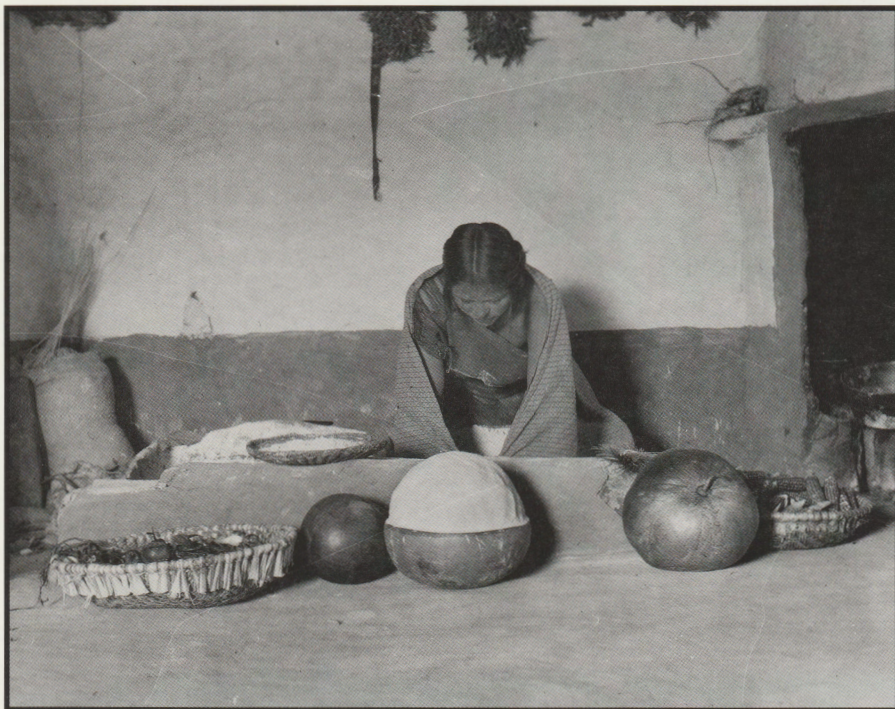
In 1922, Kopta met Anna Phelps, a teacher at the Indian School. They were married in Flagstaff, Arizona, and also in a second ceremony in Polacca. After their marriage, the couple settled in Phoenix, where Kopta continued work as a sculptor.



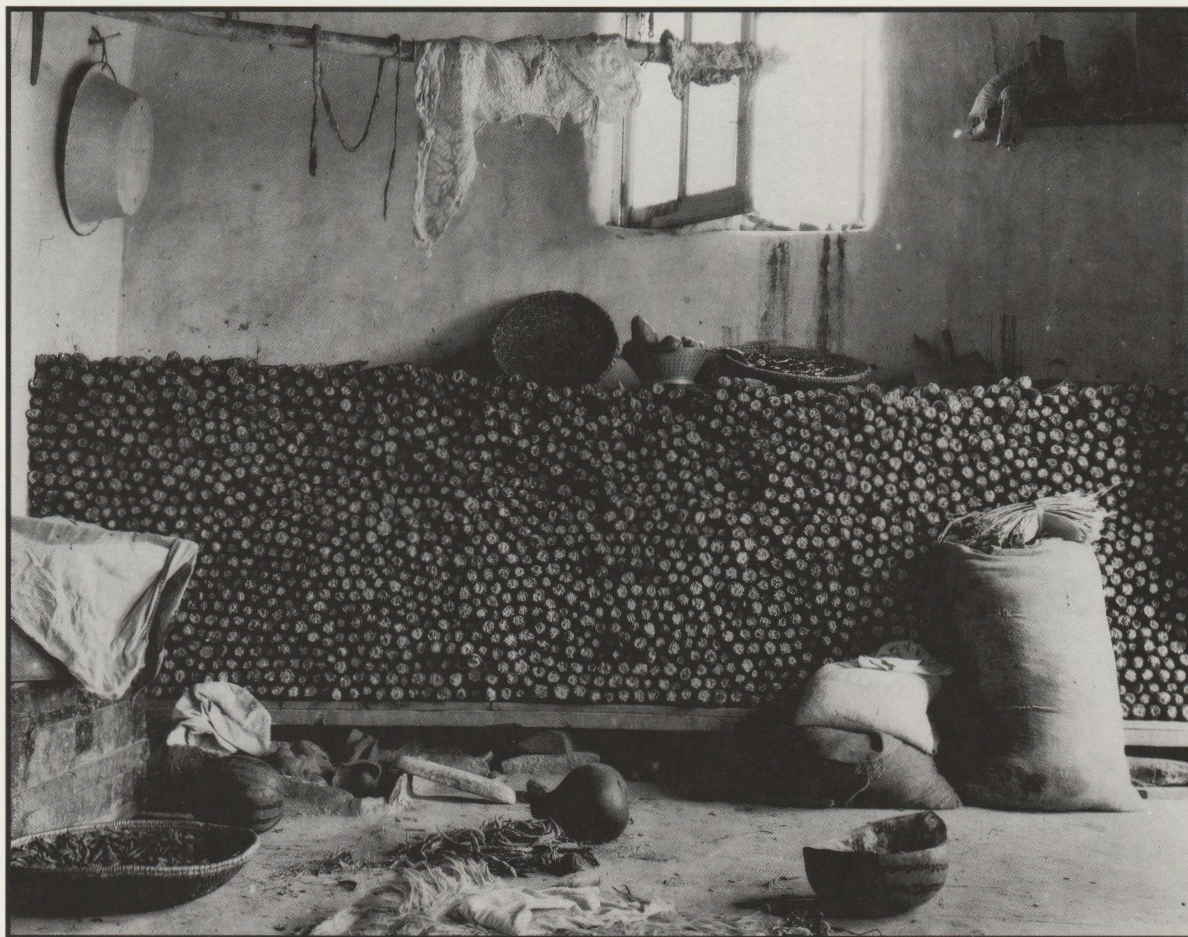
"Artist's Model: Sacci." Photograph by Emry Kopta, ca. 1912-1922



"Hopi Maidens." Photograph by Emory Kopta, ca. 1912-1922



"Grinding Corn." Photograph by Emry Kopta, ca. 1912-1922



"Stacked Corn." Photograph by Emry Kopta, ca. 1912-1922

JOSEPH MORA

(1876 – 1947)

Joseph Mora was another photographer who chose to live and work on the Hopi mesas. Born in 1876 in Montevideo, Uruguay, Joseph Jacinta Mora was only one year old when his family came to the United States and settled in Boston, Massachusetts. Mora received formal art training at the Art Students League and Chases Art School in New York and Cowles Art School in Boston. From 1897 to 1900, he worked for the *Boston Traveler* and the *Boston Herald*.

In 1903, Mora left Boston for Arizona with the express desire to witness firsthand the Hopi Snake Dance at Oraibi. Too late for the 1903 ceremonial, Mora settled in San Jose, California, where he planned his first excursion by wagon to the Hopi mesas for the following year. During his stay in California, Mora traveled



"Lalakonti or Basket Dance, Walpi." Photograph by Joseph Mora, ca. 1904-1906.
Courtesy of Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives, Northern Arizona University

*"From A Walpi Housetop—
Drying Peaches."
Photograph by Joseph Mora,
ca. 1904-1906. Courtesy of
Cline Library, Special
Collections and Archives,
Northern Arizona University*

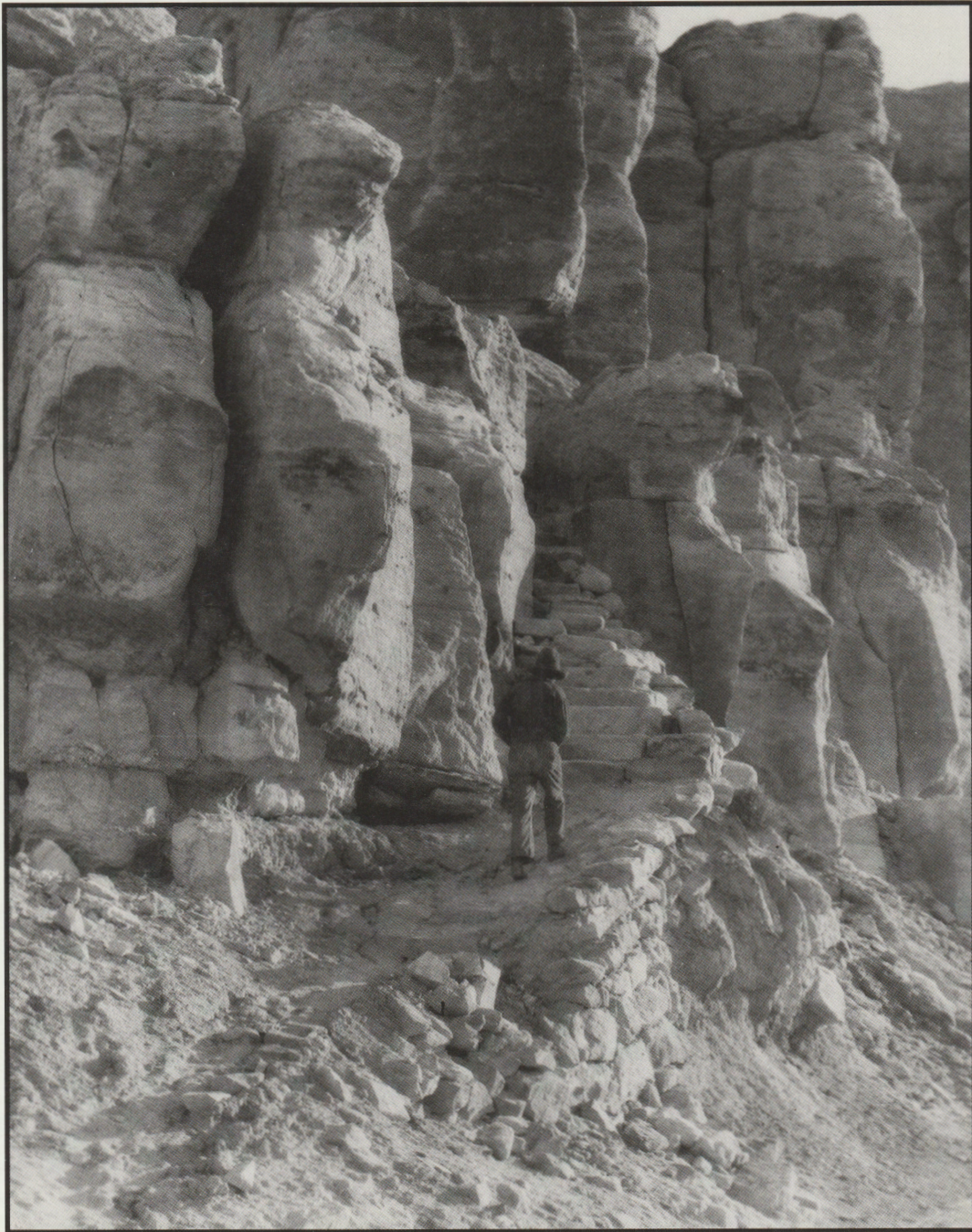


*"Oraibi." Photograph by Joseph Mora, ca. 1904-1906.
Courtesy of Cline Library, Special Collections and Archives,
Northern Arizona University*

throughout the state sketching and photographing the California missions, ranches, and gold-mining towns. In 1904, Mora visited the Hopi for the first time. Fascinated by the people and the region, he settled at Polacca and became one of the few non-Hopi to undergo a kachina initiation. Upon arrival at Polacca, Mora immediately began a series of pencil, charcoal, pen and ink, and watercolor studies. Al-

though he recorded individuals and their social life on the mesas in photographs as well, Mora focused most of his attention on Hopi ceremonial life. None of his exquisite photographs of Hopi religious life are shown here, however, out of deference to Hopi privacy.

Mora remained in Arizona until 1906, painting and photographing the people and the land. After 1906, he settled in California and worked on bronze sculptures until he enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War I; Mora resumed his art career in 1920. From 1920 until his death in 1947, Mora produced architectural sculpture and murals for both private and public buildings throughout the West.



"Hopi Trail, Walpi." Photograph by Forman Hanna, ca. 1917-1939

CONCLUSION

The collection of photographs shown on these pages may seem to have captured a Utopian world—beautiful, calm, and invulnerable to the pressures and hardships of human life. It is important to be aware, however, that these images are presented as works of art and are not intended to be interpreted as a complete record of Hopi life past or present.

Historic photographs can and often do provide valuable ethnographic information to the viewer, but, unfortunately, their content and meaning is rarely self-evident. In most cases, we do not know the names or the personal histories of the Hopis portrayed. Yet, in spite of the fact that interpretive data does not always accompany the photographic image, photographers who recorded details of Hopi life at the turn of the century created a valuable visual record of the Hopi people, their environment, lifestyle, material culture, and religion.

These photographs are unique because they depict a landscape and an era that will never be the same again. Some of the photographs document features of the natural and cultural landscape which have altered so drastically over time that they can no longer be reconstructed from memory. Since these photographs were taken, many trappings of modern America have been incorporated into the Hopi lifestyle—including modern homes with electricity and running water, a restaurant and motel, a health center, and a building to house tribal government. Time has brought change.

The Hopi people also have changed. In the past, camera-carrying visitors were welcome in Hopi villages, but their ever-increasing numbers encroached upon Hopi privacy and threatened the existence of a pattern of life that had endured for more than a thousand years. The photographs in this volume could not be taken today because in the years since they were made, the Hopi people have come to different conclusions about how they want to protect their culture and interact with the larger world. Today, photography is banned on the Hopi mesas.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Trudy Thomas has earned a B.A. in anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley, and a M.A. and Ph.D. in art history and archaeology from Columbia University with specialties in the tribal arts of Africa, Oceania, Indonesia, and North America.

As Curator of Fine Arts at the Museum of Northern Arizona, Dr. Thomas has, since 1988, organized and directed more than one dozen projects focusing upon the art of the Colorado Plateau—including the exhibitions: “Louis Akin: Painter of the Colorado Plateau,” “James Turrell and Roden Crater,” “MNA Native American Silver,” “Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton: Images of the Colorado Plateau,” “The Native American Tradition,” “Photographs of Hopi Life, 1904-1939,” “Grand Canyon Views,” and “Navajo Folk Art.”

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All photographs not otherwise credited are from the Museum of Northern Arizona archives.

Plateau Managing Editor: Diana Clark Lubick
Graphic Design by Dianne Moen Zahnle
Scanner halftones by Colorgraphics of Arizona
Typography by MacTypeNet
Printing by Land O'Sun



*"Child Holding Kachina." Photograph by
Emry Kopta, ca. 1912-1922*

This issue of *Plateau* magazine was made possible by an endowment from the Margaret T. Morris Foundation.

Cover: *"Watching the Dancers." Photograph by Edward S. Curtis, ca. 1906-1921*

The Museum of Northern Arizona



Photograph by Richard Weston

Founded in 1928, the Museum of Northern Arizona is known worldwide for its collections, research, and exhibitions. One of the few institutions in the Southwest to combine an exhibit program and a major research center, MNA features galleries interpreting both the natural and cultural history of the Colorado Plateau.



ISBN 0-89734-104-X