



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

Deaconess Harriet M. Bedell photographs, 1910-1939

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	Deaconess Harriet M. Bedell photographs
Date:	1910-1939
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.037
Creator:	Bedell, Harriet M., 1875-
Extent:	233 Photographic prints (black and white) 115 Copy negatives (black and white)
Language:	Any notes written on the photographs are in English.
Summary:	Photographs in this collection include indoor and outdoor portraits, domestic scenes, landscapes of Gwich'in (Kutchin), Seminole and Cheyenne Indians taken by Deaconess M. Bedell from her work as missionary between 1907-1939.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

In 1940 Harriet Bedell sent her negatives to the Museum of the American Indian, via William Stiles, to be made into prints. These prints are the bulk of the collection [P14817-P14911, P14955-P15050]. Later in 1940 Bedell presented the museum with an additional 29 prints [P14913-P14941] and in 1941 and 1942 Bedell sent two additional gifts totaling 13 prints [P15328-P15330, P15355-P15364].

Related Materials

The Harriet Bedell Collection of 126 prints of Bedell working among the Seminole Indians in South Florida from 1933 to 1960 is located at the State Library and Archives of Florida. Information can be found here: [Harriet Bedell Collection](#).

Preferred Citation

Deaconess Harriet M. Bedell photographs, National Museum of the American Indian Archives, Smithsonian Institution (negative, slide or catalog number).

Restrictions

Access is by appointment only, Monday - Thursday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment.

Conditions Governing Use

Single photocopies may be made for research purposes. Permission to publish or broadcast materials from the collection must be requested from National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center. Please submit a written request to nmaiarchives@si.edu.

Biographical Note

Harriet Mary Bedell was born on March 19, 1875, in Buffalo, New York, to Horace Ira Bedell and Louisa Sophia Oberist. Bedell was confirmed in the Episcopalian church and graduated from Normal School in 1894. Following graduation, Bedell worked as a school teacher before deciding to enroll in the New York City Training School for Deaconesses in 1906. She also spent several months in Buffalo at a local hospital learning the rudiments of nursing. Between 1907 and 1916 Bedell was sent to the Whirlwind mission in Blaine County, Oklahoma. There, she worked as a missionary-teacher among the Cheyenne alongside Deacon Oakerhater (Cheyenne). During her time in Oklahoma Bedell contracted Tuberculosis and spent some time in Denver, Colorado recovering. By 1916 plans were made to close the Mission and Bedell was told she was to be transferred to Alaska where her teaching skills were needed. She accepted the remote post in Stevens Village, Alaska, among the Gwich'in (Kutchin) people. In 1922, Bedell left Alaska briefly to be officially ordained as a Deaconess in Portland, Oregon. During her time in Alaska, Bedell also established a boarding school in nearby Tanana but due to the stock market crash of 1929 and the scarcity of funds the boarding facility was unable to remain open. In 1931, following an unsuccessful trip to Buffalo to try and raise money, it was decided that there was no reason for Bedell to return to Alaska.

In 1933, Bedell travelled to Florida by invitation to speak and was appalled by the living conditions she witnessed among the Seminole in southern Florida. Bedell worked to reopen the Glade Cross Mission in Everglades City which had closed in 1914 as well as opening a new Mission in Collier City. In addition to focusing on health and education, Bedell encouraged the Seminole women she worked with to revive traditional doll-making, basket-weaving and intricate patchwork designs. Bedell worked in South Florida until 1960 when hurricane Donna destroyed her home and the Glade Cross Mission and she decided to retire. Bedell lived to be 94 and spent her final years at the Bishop Gray Inn in Davenport, Florida until her death on January 8, 1969. In the year 2000 Bedell was named a "Great Floridian" and in the diocese of Southwest Florida celebrate Harriet Bedell Day annually on January 8th.

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of photographs made by Deaconess Bedell while she worked as an Episcopal missionary among the Southern Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Cheyenne), Gwich'in (Kutchin), and Seminole peoples in Oklahoma, Alaska, and Florida respectively. Although Bedell work in Oklahoma from 1907 to 1916, the Southern Tsitsistas/Suhtai photographs are dated from 1910 to 1915 and consist of informal group portraits of men, women, and children dressed in both traditional and Anglo American clothing; group pictures of school children--boys and girls--at the Whirlwind Mission school and the mission campus itself; and traditional and Anglo American dwellings of Southern Tsitsistas/Suhtai individuals. Among these photographs are studio portraits collected but likely not made by Bedell. Bedell worked in Alaska from 1916 to 1931; the Alaska photographs in the collection date from 1926 to 1931. Among the photographs are informal, outdoor group portraits of Gwich'in men, women, and children, and photographs depicting the landscape, dog sled teams, and Gwich'in dwellings, summer camps, and men fishing and boxing. The Florida photographs date from 1933 to 1939 and depict informal, outdoor group and single portraits of Seminole men, women, and children in traditioanl clothing, photographs depicting men rowing dugouts, Seminole dwellings (chickees), camps, and baskets. Most of these photographs were made at the Glade Cross Mission in the Everglades. The negatives are primarily copy negatives.

Arrangement

Prints: organized in folders; arranged by print number

Negatives: organized in envelopes; arranged by negative number

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- Cheyenne Indians -- Missions -- Photographs
- Gwich'in (Kutchin)
- Gwich'in Indians -- Missions -- Photographs
- Seminole
- Seminole Indians -- Missions -- Photographs
- Southern Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Cheyenne)
- Women in the Episcopal Church
- Women missionaries -- United States

Cultures:

- Gwich'in (Kutchin)
- Seminole
- Southern Tsitsistas/Suhtai (Cheyenne)

Types of Materials:

- Black-and-white negatives
- Photographic prints

Places:

- Alaska
- Florida
- Oklahoma