



Smithsonian  
*National Museum of the American Indian*

## Grace Nicholson photograph collection

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2019

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	National Museum of the American Indian
<b>Title:</b>	Grace Nicholson photograph collection
<b>Identifier:</b>	NMAI.AC.001.039
<b>Date:</b>	1905-1930
<b>Extent:</b>	374 Photographic prints 38 Copy negatives
<b>Creator:</b>	Nicholson, Grace, -1948 Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	This collection contains 374 photographic prints and 38 copy negatives made by Grace Nicholson, a collector and dealer of Native American and Asian arts and crafts in Pasadena, California. The majority of the photographs were made between 1910 and 1930 among various native communities in California, though there are smaller amounts of photographs in Arizona and New Mexico. Communities photographed include—Hupa, Yurok, Pomo, Karuk (Karok), Tolowa, Yokayo Pomo, Achomawi (Pit River), Atsugewi (Hat Creek), Hopi Pueblo, Kumeyaay (Digueno), Mojave (Mohave), Paiute, Taos Pueblo, Wintu, Acoma Pueblo, Maidu, Chukchansi Yokuts, Yokuts.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The majority of the photographic prints were donated by Thyra Maxwell in 1968 and 1969. The rest of the photographs accompanied collections purchased by the Museum of the American Indian or presented to the Museum from Grace Nicholson in 1923.

### Separated Materials

Correspondence between Grace Nicholson and George Heye as well as Pomo myths recorded from William Benson can be found in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation records (NMAI.AC.001) in Boxes 262, 262A, 263. Baskets made by Mary and William Benson, as well also additional collections donated and sold by Nicholson to the Museum, can be found in NMAI's ethnographic collection.

### Related Materials

The majority of Grace Nicholson's papers and photographs can be found at the Huntington Library in San Marino, California; Grace Nicholson Photograph Collection (photCL 56), Grace Nicholson Papers and Addenda (mssNicholson papers and addenda).

Additional Nicholson material can be found at the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley; Photographic negatives and prints of Calif. Indian baskets and other ethnographic items handled by Grace Nicholson from about 1912-1925 (Accession 2880), Grace Nicholson's ledger of Indian baskets from about 1912-1925 in Pasadena, California (Accession 2881).

## Processing Information

This collection is still in need of processing. Collection record written by Rachel Menyuk, Processing Archivist, in 2019.

## Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); Grace Nicholson photograph collection, Item Number; National Museum of the American Indian Archive Center, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions

Access to NMAI Archive Center collections is by appointment only, Monday - Thursday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment (phone: 301-238-1400, email: [nmaearchives@si.edu](mailto:nmaearchives@si.edu)). Photographs with cultural sensitivity are restricted.

## Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Grace Nicholson was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 31, 1877. She moved to California following her parents and grandparents death, in 1901 and was soon purchasing Native American baskets and other artifacts in association with Carrol S. Hartman, an old family friend from the East. Traveling north through California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and south and east through Arizona and New Mexico, she collected, not only for herself, but also for such institutions as the Smithsonian, the Field Columbian Museum of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania Department of Archeology and later the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. Nicholson kept extensive diaries and notes on her buying trips through Native American territory, especially of the Karok, Klamath, and Pomo Indians. Her subjects included Native American legends, folklore, vocabulary, tribal festivals, basket making, the art trade, and living conditions. Native American artists with whom Nicholson established long-term business and personal connections included Pomo basket weaver Mary Benson (1878-1930) and her husband William Benson (1862-1937), as well as Elizabeth Hickox (1875-1947) of the Karuk tribe. By August of 1902 she was establishing a shop and studio at 41-143 Raymond Ave., Pasadena and she regularly paid higher prices than competitive buyers, thereby obtaining the finest pieces.

In 1909 Grace Nicholson was awarded a silver medal for her ethnological collection exhibited at the Alaska-Yukon- Pacific Exposition in Seattle. In 1924, Nicholson designed and opened a new building for her collections nicknamed the "Treasure House" where she also handled the work of a number

of the outstanding artists among them, Joseph H. Sharp and Grace Carpenter Hudson. Throughout her collecting career, Nicholson maintained a correspondence with George Heye selling and donating collections to the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation from 1916 until her death in 1948.

Following Nicholson's death, her Native American Indian art collection was left to her assistants Thyra Maxwell and Estelle Bynum who became the executors of her estate. Her 12,000-item Asian art collection was auctioned by the Curtis Gallery in November 1950 and purchased by Los Angeles businessman Edker Pope. In 1968, Maxwell donated Nicholson's papers and photographs to The Huntington Library and sold Nicholson's collection of baskets made by the Bensons, as well as a large collection of correspondence and myths from William Benson, to the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, of New York City (now the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution).

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## Scope and Contents

The Grace Nicholson photograph collection contains 374 black and white photographic prints (38 copy negatives) made by Grace Nicholson between 1905 and 1930 however many of the photographs are undated. The majority of the photographs were shot within various native communities in California, including Hupa, Yurok, Pomo, Karuk (Karak), Tolowa, Yokayo Pomo, Achomawi (Pit River), Atsugewi (Hat Creek), Maidu, Chukchansi Yokuts, Yokuts, Kumeyaay (Digueno), Wintu. There are smaller amounts of photographs from Arizona and New Mexico which include photographs within Hopi Pueblo, Taos Pueblo, Acoma Pueblo, Mojave (Mohave) and Paiute communities.

A large number of these photographs include portraits of Native men and women posed with baskets, either made by themselves or other community members. There are also posed portraits of families in front of their homes and going about their daily activities. Nicholson was often close with the families she photographed and took care to include their names with the images, though there are many photographs where the sitters are still unidentified. Some photographs of certain dances and ceremonies have been restricted due to cultural sensitivity.

The majority of the prints are silver gelatin (DOP) and the copy negatives (acetate) were made by the Museum of the American Indian sometime in the 1960s as part of a large photograph conservation project. There were also a number of photographic prints found within the Grace Nicholson manuscript materials (NMAI.AC.001) that were transferred to the photo archives in the early 2000s.

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## Scope and Contents

Prints from Grace Nicholson: P05451-P05497, P05505, P08339-P08368, P08469-P08479, P09400-P09453, P09463-P09464, P09836-P09838. Prints from Thyra Maxwell: P18316-P18317, P18932-P19107, P20830-P20836, P20999-P21075. Prints pulled from the MAI records (NMAI.AC.001): P28169, P28170, P28443-P28445. Copy Negatives: N35814-N35844, N36250, N41439, N41551-N41556.

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## Arrangement

Arranged by catalog number.

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

### Subjects:

Achomawi (Pit River)  
Acoma Pueblo  
Atsugewi (Hat Creek)  
California  
Chukchansi Yokuts  
Hopi Pueblo  
Hupa  
Karuk (Karok)  
Kumeyaay (Diegueño)  
Maidu  
Mojave (Mohave)  
Paiute  
Pomo  
Taos Pueblo  
Tolowa  
Wintu  
Yurok

### Cultures:

Achomawi (Pit River)  
Acoma Pueblo  
Atsugewi (Hat Creek)  
Chukchansi Yokuts  
Hopi Pueblo  
Hupa  
Karuk (Karok)  
Kumeyaay (Diegueño)  
Maidu  
Mojave (Mohave)  
Paiute  
Pomo  
Taos Pueblo  
Tolowa  
Wintu  
Yurok

### Types of Materials:

Copy negatives  
Photographic prints

### Names:

Maxwell, Thyra