



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

George Thornton Emmons photograph collection

Rachel Menyuk

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National Museum of the American Indian
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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	George Thornton Emmons photograph collection
Date:	1870-1917 (bulk 1870-1890)
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.001.053
Creator:	Emmons, George Thornton
Source:	Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation
Extent:	20 Photographic prints 12 Copy negatives
Language:	English .
Summary:	Photographic prints and copy negatives made by George Thornton Emmons among Native communities in Alaska and British Columbia mostly between 1870 and 1890. Communities photographed include —Nisga'a (Niska), Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl), Yup'ik, Nuxalk (Ballacoola), Haida, and Tlingit.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

It is unclear when most of these photographs were obtained by the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. It is likely they accompanied ethnographic collections sent by Emmons, the earliest of which arrived in 1905.

Related Materials

George T. Emmons field notes, mostly object lists from Alaska and British Columbia, can be found in the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation records (NMAI.AC.001) Box 215-217.

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); George Thornton Emmons 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: nmaiarchives@si.edu). Photographs with burials, human remains or any other cultural sensitivity are restricted.

Conditions Governing Use

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Biographical / Historical

George Thornton Emmons (1852-1945) was born in Baltimore Maryland and attended the U.S. Naval Academy attaining the rank of lieutenant j.g. in 1883 and lieutenant in 1887. While being stationed in Sitka, Alaska Emmons became interested in the native cultures of the region, particularly the Tlingit and Tahltan. He collected over 11000 objects and sold his first collection of 1351 artifacts to the American Museum of Natural History in 1888. Emmons accompanied the Alaska exhibit during the World's Columbian Exposition from 1891-1893 and began writing up his Tlingit research for AMNH in 1894. Following his retirement from the Navy, Emmons continued collecting Alaskan artifacts which he sold to collectors, including George Heye and the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation. Emmons first started selling and donating collections to George Heye in 1905 and continued to do so for the remainder of his life. In 1932 Emmons moved to Victoria, British Columbia to work on his Tlingit book, which was still unfinished at his death in 1945. Following his death, his manuscript based on 40 years of research and writing was taken over by Frederica de Laguna and 1955 and finally published in 1991.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes photographic prints made by George Thornton Emmons among Native communities in Alaska and British Columbia mostly between 1870 and 1890. Communities photographed include—Nisga'a (Niska), Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl), Yup'ik, Nuxalk (Ballacoola), Haida, and Tlingit. There is at least one photograph that is dated 1917. Many of the photographs include portrait of Native men and women often posed outside of their homes or community structures. There are also photographs of totem poles and masks. There are some images of graves that have been restricted. The copy negatives were later made by the Museum of the American Indian during a large photograph conservation project in the 1960s.

Scope and Contents

P00232-P00234, P00239, P00275, P00572-P00573, P01476-P01479, P01726-P01728, P03047, P08606-P08607, P12763, P12767. N11618, N35404, N37558-N37560, N37562, N37597, N37598, N37883-N37885.

Arrangement

Arranged by catalog number.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

British Columbia
Haida
Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)
Nisga'a (Niska)
Nuxalk (Bellacoola)
Photographs
Tlingit
Yup'ik (Yupik Eskimo)

Cultures:

Haida
Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)
Nisga'a (Niska)
Nuxalk (Bellacoola)
Tlingit
Yup'ik (Yupik Eskimo)

Types of Materials:

Copy negatives

Names:

Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation

Places:

Alaska