



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

"Hiawatha: the Indian Passion Play" performance photographs

Rachel Menyuk

2023

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Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	"Hiawatha: the Indian Passion Play" performance photographs
Date:	1906
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.162
Creator:	Moore, F. E. (Frank E.)
Extent:	98 Photographic prints 18 Copy negatives
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection include souvenir photographs shot by producer Frank E. Moore of his 1906 outdoor stage production of "Hiawatha: The Indian Passion Play" based on Longfellow's epic poem <i>The Song of Hiawatha</i> . This production of Hiawatha was performed near the Cattaraugus Reservation, New York, and included Seneca [Cattaraugus] performers, possibly with Jesse Cornplanter in the role of Hiawatha.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of Reginald P. Bolton, 1918.

Related Materials

Library of Congress, Lot 8218, "Scenes from theatrical production of Hiawatha, Lake Chautauqua, New York."

Processing Information

Processed by Rachel Menyuk, Processing Archivist, 2023.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); "Hiawatha: the Indian Passion Play" performance photographs, image #, NMAI.AC.162; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

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"Song of Hiawatha"

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow first published the epic poem, *Song of Hiawatha*, in 1855. By 1900, the poem had been translated into 20 different European languages as well as back into the Ojibwe language at the turn of the century ushering in a "Hiawatha Revival" that captured American Imaginations. In 1901, Louis Oliver Armstrong, an amateur ethnologist and land agent for the Canadian Pacific Railroad, wrote a new libretto from the Longfellow poem in English and Ojibwe which was first prepared with Garden River Anishinaabeg community members as actors. His performances, or "Pageants," became regular events which led to additional versions and tours around the United States. Not long after Armstrong discontinued his show in 1905, Frank E. Moore created his own version. Originally from Middletown, Ohio, Moore gathered a large cast of Native performers from various tribal communities including many actors from the Seneca Nation on the Cattaraugus Reservation. Moore continued the tradition of large outdoor pageant performances of "Hiawatha" which were performed along a body of water and featured Native actors performing traditional dances and wearing "Native" costumes alongside narration of Longfellow's poem.

In 1913 Frank E. Moore produced the stage version of Hiawatha into a film, hiring Jesse Cornplanter (Seneca) to play Hiawatha. Jesse Cornplanter had previously accompanied his father, Edward Cornplanter, acting and singing in the Hiawatha pageant on tour through the United States and Europe. "Hiawatha" was shot in upstate New York and northern Michigan by Moore and was the first feature film to use an all-Native cast, with reportedly 150 actors from the Cattaraugus Reservation. A twenty-eight-minute cut is housed in the American Film Institute's collection in the Library of Congress.

Sources:

McNally, Michael D. "The Indian Passion Play: Contesting the Real Indian in "Song of Hiawatha" Pageants, 1901-1965," *American Quarterly* Vol. 58, No. 1 (March 2006), pp. 105-136.

Evans, Katy Young. "The People's Pageant: The Stage as Native Space in Anishinaabe Dramatic Interpretations of "Hiawatha"," *Melus* Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer 2016), pp. 124-146.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes 98 photographic prints from a souvenir book of a 1906 performance of "The Song of Hiawatha" produced by Frank E. Moore. The performance was held on the shore of Lake Chautauqua near the Cattaraugus Reservation. It is very likely that several of the performers photographed in this collection were also a part of the 1913 film production of Hiawatha, also produced by Frank E. Moore. This includes Jesse Cornplanter, in the role of Hiawatha, and his father Edward Cornplanter. The photographs show scenes from the theatrical production featuring characters such as Hiawatha, Minnehaha, Nokomis, and Pau-Puk-keewis. 18 copy negatives were later made from the photographic prints.

Scope and Contents

Prints: P04612-P04709; Copy Negatives: N35315-N35332

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:

Seneca [Cattaraugus]
Theatrical productions

Cultures:

Seneca [Cattaraugus]

Names:

Cornplanter, Jesse J.

Places:

Cattaraugus (N.Y.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Views from "Hiawatha: the Indian Passion Play" , 1906

98 Photographic prints

[Image\(s\)](#)

Scope and
Contents:

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