



Smithsonian

National Museum of the American Indian

William R. Heick photographs

Mattie Lewis

2025

Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical / Historical	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	2
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Diné, 1963	3
Hupa, 1962	4
Kwakwaka'wakw, Circa 1951	5
Pikuni, 1963	6
Pomo, 1961-1963	7

Collection Overview

Repository:	National Museum of the American Indian
Title:	William R. Heick photographs
Date:	1951-1963
Identifier:	NMAI.AC.354
Creator:	Heick, William R. (1916-2012)
Extent:	56 Photographic prints
Language:	English .
Summary:	This collection includes 56 oversize photographs taken by William R. Heick between 1951 and 1962 among the Diné, Pomo, Pikuni, Hupa, and Kwakwake'wakw communities.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

Gift of William R. Heick, 1997.

Processing Information

Collection processed by Mattie Lewis, Archives Technician in 2025.

Preferred Citation

Identification of specific item; Date (if known); William R. Heick photographs, image #, NMAI.AC.354; National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions

Access to NMAI Archives Center collections is by appointment only, Monday - Friday, 9:30 am - 4:30 pm. Please contact the archives to make an appointment (phone: 301-238-1400, email: nmaiarchives@si.edu).

Conditions Governing Use

Permission to publish materials from the collection must be requested from National Museum of the American Indian Archives Center. Please submit a written request to nmaiphotos@si.edu. For personal or classroom use, users are invited to download, print, photocopy, and distribute the images that are available online without prior written permission, provided that the files are not modified in any way, the Smithsonian Institution copyright notice (where applicable) is included, and the source of the image is identified as the National Museum of the American Indian. For more information please see the Smithsonian's [Terms of Use](#) and NMAI Archive Center's [Digital Image request](#) website.

Biographical / Historical

William Heick (1916-2012) was a photographer and filmmaker known for his work document Indigenous peoples in North America. He was born in Kentucky and attended the University of Cincinnati. Heick's photography career started during World War II when he served as a naval intelligence photographer. He went on to study photography at the California School of Fine Arts. In 1951, he visited the Kwakiutl Nation in British Columbia and developed an interest in Native people. He worked for the American Indian Film Project based out of Berkeley, collaborating with community elders to preserve traditions on film. Outside of his work with Indigenous communities, Heick was a historian and filmmaker for the Bechtel engineering firm, created two documentaries for the Quakers, and produced short series on cultural practices throughout the world. Heick continued working until his death in 2012.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains 46 oversize black and white photographs and 10 oversize color photographs taken by William Heick and his students across the United States and Canada. The photographs were taken at the same time Heick was working with the American Indian Film Project, led by Samuel Barrett and Dr. Alfred Kroeber. Additional photographs and the corresponding films are available at Berkeley through the Northern Regional Library Facility, the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology, and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive.

Image numbers P27947-P28000. The Diné photographs are restricted for cultural sensitivity.

Arrangement

Arranged into five series alphabetically by tribe then catalog number.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Diné (Navajo)
- Hupa
- Kashaya Pomo
- Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)
- Pikuni (Piegan) [Blackfeet Nation, Browning, Montana]

Cultures:

- Diné (Navajo)
- Hupa
- Kashaya Pomo
- Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)
- Pikuni (Piegan) [Blackfeet Nation, Browning, Montana]

Container Listing

Diné, 1963

28 Photographic prints

Oversize 1 (photographs)

Oversize 2 (photographs)

Oversize B32 (photographs)

Scope and Contents: 28 photographs taken at three Diné ceremonies in 1963 and are restricted due to cultural sensitivity. Images depict medicine men, patients, singers, ceremonial objects, and sand paintings. According to correspondence with William Heick, "Each ceremony lasted 9 days and was filmed in its entirety. This meant we were on call 24 hours a day because the medicine men followed the traditional regime, napping for short periods and eating in the hogan between active parts of the ceremonies. Synchronous sound was recorded." The films are at Berkeley. The three ceremonies include: Red Ant Holyway, led by medicine man Dex Chenin (or possibly Deshcheene) Nez Begay and filmed at Valley Store, Arizona in June 1963

The Mountain Chant, led by medicine man Willie Cisco and filmed at Lukchukai, Arizona in November 1963. Singer Tonnie Sonnie Yazzie of Naschitti is also identified.

Yeí Bí Cheí, the Night Chant, filed at Lukuchukai, Arizona in December 1963

Image numbers P27948-27949 and P27953-P27977

Culture: Diné (Navajo)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Hupa, 1962

1 Photographic print

Oversize 3

Scope and Contents: - One photograph of a wooden, one-story Hupa ceremonial house in Witchpec, California. Image number P27982.

Culture: Hupa

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Kwakwaka'wakw, Circa 1951

19 Photographic prints

Oversize 3 (photographs)

Oversize 4 (photographs)

Photo-folder 1 (photographs)

Scope and Contents: 19 photographs taken among the Kwakwake'wakw people during the filming of two short documentaries "Blunden Harbour" and "Dances of Kwakiutl." Images depict women on a beach, dancing and spectators during Winter Ceremonial, totem poles, buildings, and people in regalia. Identified in the photographs are Chief Charlie George and his wife, Chief Willie Seaweed (Heyhlamas), and Mungo Martin and his wife.

Image numbers P27983-P28000.

Culture: Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakiutl)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Pikuni, 1963

3 Photographic prints

Oversize 4

Scope and Three photographs depicting a group playing a game in the grass and horses.

Contents: Image numbers P27950-P27952.

Culture: Pikuni Blackfeet (Piegan)

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Pomo, 1961-1963

5 Photographic prints

Oversize 4 (photographs)

Oversize B32 (photographs)

Scope and Contents: Five photographs of Essie Parrish, a Bole Maru shaman. She was the last shaman practicing sucking. In 1963 and 1964 she was filmed by Heick for two films "Sucking Doctor" and "Pomo Shaman," available at Berkeley. Images depict the sucking ceremony, leaching acorns, and regalia.

Image numbers P27949 and P27978-P27981.

Culture: Kashaya Pomo

[Return to Table of Contents](#)