

Walter Bowman's Photos, Part of Our Cultural Heritage, Preserved in Copyright Office

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We know that the system of copyright deposit preserves cultural treasures. When deposits that have remained unseen for decades are brought to light, they not only call our attention to these items that may broaden our understanding of America's cultural heritage, but they also highlight the creator.

Such is the photo entitled *Umatilla Babies* that was uncovered by 2009 junior fellows Hannah German and Leslie Tabor. This copyright deposit was mailed to the Office, together with the registration fee of 50 cents, by Walter S. Bowman of Pendleton, Oregon, in 1899. It was registered on November 15 as number 74679. The picture, perhaps unremarkable in 1899, today teaches us not only about the culture of the Native American babies but also encourages research into, and reflection about, the life and contributions of the photographer.

Walter S. Bowman, the son of Oregon pioneers from Iowa, was born in 1865, the same year that photographs were added to protected works,



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Umatilla babies appear content to be photographed (left). The original Bowman studio (above) was housed in a wooden building right on the banks of the Umatilla River in Pendleton, Oregon. Bowman built a new structure of bricks that he himself made. It still stands.

and raised on a farm in Umatilla County, Oregon. Beginning in 1887, Bowman pursued an interest in photography and established his own "splendidly equipped photograph gallery," according to *The Centennial History of Oregon*, a review of prominent Oregonians. His photos depict life in eastern Oregon, including residents of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, storefronts and display windows, farms, well drillers, and society ladies. He was also known as the premier photographer of the Pendleton Roundup, one of the largest rodeos in the world that still takes place annually.

According to a Bowman cousin cited on the University of Oregon Library website (www.libweb.uoregon.edu), Bowman owned one of the first automobiles in Pendleton and was arrested for driving 12 miles an hour in town. Although he died from injuries sustained in a 1938 accident on an icy road, his photos, which he protected by registering his claims to copyright, continue to speak to us today. They are a valuable contribution to our knowledge of our American heritage. ©