

Archives Enriched by Copyright Deposit

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On August 30, 1869, six bedraggled and nearly starved men floated out of the Grand Canyon to national acclaim. Led by Major John Wesley Powell (1834–1902), a one-armed former Civil War officer, the perilous expedition through towering cliffs and turbulent waters was the first exploratory rafting trip through the Grand Canyon.

The leader of several expeditions to explore and map the West, Powell went on to become the second director of the U.S. Geological Survey (1881–1894) and also served as head of the U.S. Bureau of Ethnology until 1902. This bureau sponsored anthropological research on Native Americans. Anthropology, which had previously been a gentleman's hobby, became a respected profession. Under Powell's direction, the Bureau of Ethnology established what we today would call a photo archive. Over time, the Bureau of Ethnology became the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). It merged with the Smithsonian to become the Smithsonian Office of Anthropology in 1965, and

today is known as the National Anthropological Archives.

Seeking to increase its photo collections, in 1949 the BAE went to the Library of Congress to copy the Library's copyright deposit collection of American Indian photographs. This task proved too great, and this enlargement of the bureau's collections waited until the mid-1950s, when approximately 6,000 of these photos were transferred from the Library to the bureau. Today, a number of these deposits, all in the public domain, may be viewed at www.siris.si.edu/.

Summer interns working in the Copyright Office in 2009 uncovered an 1899 copyright application from the Smith-Hassell Company of Denver, Colorado, that includes original deposit copies for photographs of Native Americans. It seems that the second deposit copy went to the Library's collections and then was transferred to the bureau, today forming part of the National Anthropological Archives's trove of upward of 400,000 photos, including some of the earliest extant pictures of indigenous people preserved for further researchers thanks to the system of copyright deposit. ©



Smith-Hassell's 1899 copyright deposit of photos of Native Americans includes those entitled "San Frisco Weva" (left), "Squaw and Papoose" (center), and "The Sleeping Beauty" (right).

