

■ *MaryEllen Smith*

## Copyright Lore

F.A. Rinehart (1862–1928) is considered one of the finest photographers of the late nineteenth century—one who raised the then-new medium of photographic portraiture to an art form. In fact, Rinehart was the official photographer of the 1898 Trans-Mississippi and International Exposition in Omaha, Neb., where his studio was based.

The exposition was intended to showcase the developed West from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Coast, encourage business investment, and demonstrate that the area had recovered from the financial panic of 1893. During the five

months it was open to the public, over 2.6 million people visited the Exhibition's 4,062 exhibits.

A special feature of the exhibition was the Indian Congress, an event that brought together more than 500 Native Americans representing 35 tribes. It was intended, wrote W.V. Cox, Secretary of the Government Exhibit Board, to display “the mode of life, native industries, and ethnic traits of as many of the aboriginal American tribes as possible,” because “the Indian tribes are rapidly passing away or modifying their original habits and industries by adopting those of civilization; there are yet many tribes within our borders whose quaint habits and mode of life ... are little known to the majority of our own people, and an assemblage of this kind proposed would not only be beneficial to the Indians participating, but would be extremely interesting, as well as profitable, to the large body of people in attendance.”

And so, to document the lifestyles and physiognomy of the Native American

tribes still extant at that time, “a special fund was appropriated [by the exposition management and the Bureau of American Ethnology of the Smithsonian Institution] for securing portraits of the Indian delegates. The work was done by the exposition photographer [F.A. Rinehart], under the supervision of a member of the Bureau, according to a systematic plan, the Indians being photographed in costume in tribal groups and singly, in bust, profile, and full length, resulting in a series of several hundred pictures forming altogether one of the finest collections of Indian portraits in existence.”

The photographs featured here, which were taken at the Indian Congress of 1898, were rediscovered—still attached to the original copyright submission form—by Library of Congress Junior Fellows Mary Brazelton and Emily Hurst during their summer 2005 experience in the Copyright Office. They were supervised by Junior Fellows Project Manager **Frank Evina**, who is pleased to note that the program has been approved for 2006. These photos will now engage the interest of yet another generation of Americans who celebrate our country's diversity, past and present.

For more information about the exposition and the congress, visit the Omaha Public Library's website at [www.omaha.lib.ne.us/transmiss](http://www.omaha.lib.ne.us/transmiss). ©

