

Photos, lecture highlight Native American legacy



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October 30, 2013

Photos, lecture highlight Native American legacy

by Christi Mathis

CARBONDALE, Ill. -- A new display at Southern Illinois University Carbondale's Morris Library features the work of Edward Sheriff Curtis, an acclaimed photographer who spent more than three decades documenting the lives of Native Americans.

The exhibition, which opens Friday, Nov. 1, as well as a special discussion and brown bag luncheon on Nov. 14, are in conjunction with the university's celebration of Native American Heritage Month in November.

"Edward S. Curtis's Masterwork, The North American Indian" is open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. throughout the month in the library's Hall of Presidents and Chancellors. The public is welcome to view the photographs.

Curtis first photographed the North American tribes around 1887 in Washington. His portrait of Princess Angeline, Chief Seattle's daughter, took the top prize in a photo contest and in 1899 he was one of two official photographers for the Harriman Expedition to Alaska. Over the course of the next three decades Curtis photographed and documented more than 80 tribes living west of the Mississippi River, from the Mexican border

to northern Alaska. Documenting a vanishing way of life and displaced peoples, the photos were published in “The North American Indian,” a 20-volume set, thanks to support from businessman J.P. Morgan and President Theodore Roosevelt.

Morris Library’s Special Collections Research Center holds 13 of those 20 volumes, offering researchers a unique opportunity to study the iconic images firsthand, according to Beth Martell, library specialist. For the exhibit, Martell chose 130 images from the collections to spark the imaginations of viewers. The photos highlight the native North Americans, their customs and their lifestyles. Martell said that often times, people see one or two images at a time, but the exhibit offers viewers the opportunity to see many of the faces at once.

“I feel that a lot of information gets translated subconsciously through Curtis’s work and seeing it en masse will have a much bigger effect. The more you learn about Curtis and what he was doing, the more awesome the expanse of his experience becomes. I’m trying to impart a little of that,” she said.

Martell will give a curator’s talk at noon on Nov. 14 at the library. Gray Whaley, associate professor of history and an adviser in Native American Studies, will also speak during the hour-long informal discussion. His presentation is entitled “American Indian Activism and the Primitive Imagery in the Age of Edward Curtis.”

Everyone is welcome and may bring their lunch as they enjoy the free presentation. Martell said anyone with an interest in photography, Native American studies, history, research or expanding their knowledge and experience will find the exhibit and presentation of interest.

For more information, to schedule a special tour, or for details about further research using the Curtis volumes, contact Martell at 618/453-4097 or bmartell@lib.siu.edu, or call the Special Collections Research Center at 618/453-2516. Additional information is also online at lib.siu.edu/blog/20.

Upcoming Events

Edward S. Curtis Exhibit

11/9/2015

8:00 AM - 12:00 AM

[View Description](#)

12:00 PM - 1:00 PM

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