

Lanterns on the Prairie: The Blackfeet Photographs of Walter McClintock.* Steven L. Grafe, ed. Western Legacies Series, 6. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, in Cooperation with the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, 2009. 336 pp.

Reviewed by Joanna Cohan Scherer

The book's five chapters include a summary of the career of Walter McClintock by Steven L. Grafe; the story of McClintock's adoption by the Southern Piegan Mad Wolf in the summer of 1898 by William E. Farr; a review of the McClintock photographs in their historical context by Sherry L. Smith; and an interpretation of the images by a Blackfeet scholar, Darrell Robes Kipp. This is an exceptionally attractive volume printed on top quality paper and reflecting the visual accomplishments of the photographer from 1896 through 1949. McClintock created over two-thousand images of the Blackfeet that are housed today in the Walter McClintock Papers at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Yale University.

One of the highlights of this book is the manner in which the captions for the plates use McClintock's own words to describe either the incident or people involved. This is excellent primary material for those interested in the historical grounding of the images by the photographer. I presume that the captions in italics are McClintock's but it would have been good to have this articulated in the text. As Grafe points out, McClintock's field photographs "are of great value, regardless of his motivation for taking them, the manner in which he interpreted them or the way in which he used them to promote his own career. They today represent an irreplaceable visual record of the Blackfeet at the beginning of the twentieth century" (p. 41). The index is also detailed and thorough.

The book's presentation does suffer from a contradiction that plagues many books of visual images of photographs of Native Americans—is it intended to be an art book or a book documenting photographs by a historically significant photographer? The manipulation of the photographs for artistic effect is quite evident in the presentation of some images in large format, at the beginning of each chapter, without captions, and then elsewhere with captions. One example has the same photograph reversed from its original format (compare plate 31 of a woman "Strikes in the night gathering Strawberries," 1903 with the same image – cropped and reversed on page 105). In general the use of cropped, small format images periodically throughout the volume is not attractive. The placement of figure references in the text is also problematic in numerous cases. For example, figure 30 of a little girl and dog in front of a play tent is referred in the manuscript text following the sentence "Sometimes [these Euro-American observers who 'discovered' Native Americans] celebrated Indians' cultural resiliency and tenacity and insisted that their perpetuation would benefit all Americans (figure 30)" (p. 85). This placement made no sense to me.

I also wonder why, given the participation of Blackfeet tribal member Kipp in this project, there is no discussion of whether an attempt was made to identify individuals whose names were not

* This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

provided by McClintock. For example, plate 42 is identified in italics as “Black Weasel and wife, 1909.” One would think that the wife could have been identified either from census records or by contemporary consultants. Other examples are plates 22 and 25, in which clear views of individuals should allow for identification. Working with Northern Shoshone and Bannock photographs from this period I found that it is quite possible to identify photographs by interviewing elders and consulting census records (see Scherer 2006). Surprisingly, Kipp notes in his essay that the McClintock photographs are “practically unknown among the Blackfeet tribe” (p. 100). This provides another reason for reviewing the images with elders and attempting to identify the individuals portrayed.

Grafe very competently discussed McClintock’s manipulation of his original negatives and his removal from lantern slides of backgrounds that might have distracted viewers from the point McClintock was presenting in his lecture (p. 109). The cropping of McClintock’s original negatives is well illustrated in this book. I would have liked Grafe to also address McClintock’s use of props in his work, a common occurrence at this time when photographing American Indians. For example, comparing figure 33 and plate 8 it is obvious that the skull on the ground is a prop. It would have been helpful if one of the authors had addressed this issue. But, there are always tangents a reviewer can find that the authors could have investigated and I am doubtlessly more interested in the forensic analysis of historical images of Indians than most readers. In general, this is a really beautiful publication and one I am happy to have in my library.

Reference Cited

Scherer, Joanna Cohan

2006 *A Danish Photographer of Idaho Indians: Benedicte Wrensted*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Joanna Cohan Scherer is an Emeritus Anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution. A visual anthropologist focusing on historical photography, she is the author of many works, including Edward Sheriff Curtis (New York: Phaidon, 2008) and A Danish Photographer of Idaho Indians: Benedicte Wrensted (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), which won the 2008 Collier Prize for Still Photography from the Society for Visual Anthropology. She is currently pursuing a project examining the history of Alice C. Fletcher's ethnographic research among the Omaha and Sioux, two Native North American peoples of the Great Plains region.