

***Peoples of the Plateau: The Indian Photographs of Lee Moorhouse, 1898-1915.* Steven L. Grafe. Foreword by Paula Richardson Fleming. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005. 221 pp. (Co-published with National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum.)¹**

Reviewed by Joanna Cohan Scherer

This book is a biographical sketch of a pioneer photographer, Thomas Leander “Lee” Moorhouse. It provides a high-quality printing of 114 of his Native American images reproduced on glossy paper that does justice to the people and places pictured. The text, however, is not an academic study (with source references) of Moorhouse’s work, despite the fact that Steven L. Grafe has published scholarly articles on the photographer in other venues (Grafe 1997/1998, 1998).

Moorhouse’s photographic career spanned the years from 1897 to about 1915, during which time his main goal was recording local history around Pendleton, Oregon. He produced images of eastern Oregon ranch life, railroad activity, pioneer town scenes (such as Fourth of July celebrations), commercial enterprises (including the Pendleton Round-Up), and photographs of Native Americans (including members of many Plateau groups: Cayuse, Yakima, Umatilla, Colville, Walla Walla, Palouse, Wisham, Warm Springs, Nez Perce, Flathead, Bannock Indians from the Great Basin, and Crow Indians from the Plains culture area). He created or collected about 9,000 glass plate negatives that are currently housed in the University of Oregon Library, Portland, the National Anthropological Archives in Washington, D.C., and the Umatilla County Historical Society in Pendleton.

Moorhouse was a man of many interests and talents—an Oregon businessman in the clothing trade and later in insurance, a rancher, a civic leader who was mayor of Pendleton in 1885, an Indian Agent of the Umatilla Indian Reservation from May 1889 to August 1891 (as a result of a political appointment for services to the Republican party), and an avid collector of Indian artifacts.

He defined himself as an authority on local Indian culture and considered himself a photographic artist. His pictures were sold commercially as postcards and used as official promotion materials for the blankets manufactured by the Pendleton Woolen Mills. While his photography business was but one of his livelihoods, I cannot agree with Grafe that Moorhouse should be considered an amateur photographer. Photography businesses in pioneer towns were often not the sole source of income of their proprietors and the fact that he had his studio in his home, that he used outdoor lighting (at a time before the flash came into practical use) and that he used props did not make him less a professional. Many professional pioneer photographers had home studios and worked in other fields as well. That he intentionally created and left a huge collection of photographs, and that these images were intended to visualize a time and place in history should give him the distinction of being considered a professional photographer.

Grafe notes that one of the important aspects of the Moorhouse Indian collection is that he usually identified his subjects by name (p. 4), thus avoiding a common practice among some

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turn-of-the-20th-century photographers of Native Americans of presenting their Indian photographs as generic images of a “vanishing race.” However, it is unclear how careful Moorhouse actually was. For example, as Grafe himself points out in plate 16, although labeled Umatilla by Moorhouse, two of the identified people photographed were in fact Cayuse. Also, as I have observed elsewhere, Moorhouse’s penchant for labeling individuals with names (I discussed the case of Frank Randall, a Bannock from the Fort Hall Indian Reservation) and tribal identification, and then adding his own signature, appears to be a sort of branding of the image (Scherer 2006:63-64). That the photographer could own (indeed contemporary photographers still own their own negatives and the rights to use their images) and copyright these images is, and was, an expression of the unequal power that exists in photography. How that unequal power evolves is an interesting fact of history. Moorhouse received some profits from his Indian images, but more significant is the value of his extensive picture record of Native Americans and Anglo pioneers from the Plateau area to the visual history of this region.

One cannot help but wonder what inducement the photographer gave to men such as the Cayuse Indian Dr. Whirlwind (plate 4) who posed in Moorhouse’s front yard studio before a backdrop, clothed in a trade blanket that the author says was one of Moorhouse’s studio props. Since many male Plateau Indians owned such blankets and wore them in this characteristic fashion, folded and wrapped around the waist, I would have liked to know the source for Grafe’s information about this particular blanket as part of the photographer’s collection (see Kapoun 1992:11, 44). The Pendleton mill, which was incorporated in 1895, marketed its products to Indian reservation markets. The Umatilla people helped advertise the colorful Pendleton blankets and modeled the robes for brochures that were made for traders and Indian agents around the country. As a promoter and booster of Pendleton’s business, an important purpose of many of Moorhouse’s Indian portraits, in which blankets are prominently displayed (plates 22, 57, 79), was probably as advertisement for the woolen industry. In many of Moorhouse’s Indian photos, the subject either stands on a blanket or a blanket is used as an item of clothing. A good illustration of this is the image of Chief Joseph, who is pictured wrapped in an early Pendleton blanket (plate 12, p. 66; also reproduced in Kapoun 1992:30). It is interesting to note that on a cover of the 1901 Pendleton catalog, this Moorhouse image of Chief Joseph was used, but he is shown wearing a different Pendleton blanket (Kapoun 1992:124).

I am also somewhat intrigued by plate 3. It shows Moorhouse posed with his rifle and natural history specimens, including stuffed deer and birds, and part of his collection of Indian artifacts. But the American flags in the background make me question whether this photograph was printed backwards. It clearly shows the stars on the upper right rather than left. While the handwritten notation, “Major Moorhouse’s Indian Curios Pendleton Or.” would lead the viewer to orient the image as published, it is unlikely that the American flags on the wall would have been displayed in this manner. This suggests that the labeling of the images (presumably by Moorhouse) can confound as well as enlighten.

Although it is not the definitive work on this prolific photographer that I had hoped for and that Grafe is obviously capable of contributing, I nonetheless enjoyed this book. I am also grateful that Grafe reproduces, with proper credit, Indian photos that Moorhouse collected but did not make himself. This book reproduces, for example, some photographs of Plateau Indians made by Thomas H. Rutter (plates 57, 75-80) and some by O. G. Allen (figure 4, plates 34-35). Many

photographers of this period had their collections broken up, so it was not unusual for photographers such as Moorhouse to own and incorporate the works of other photographers in their own collections. I am just glad that Grafe took the care and time to bring the correct maker of these images to the reader's eye.

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