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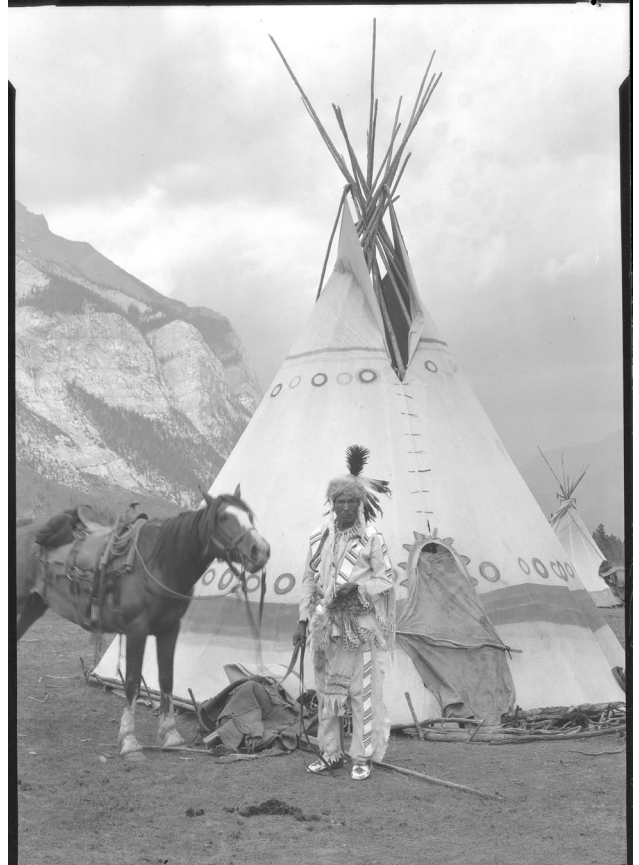
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1 Maggie Hunter, ca. 1915-1925. Byron Harmon/photographer. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Byron Harmon fonds (V263/1/a/1/a/na-3122)
 2 Portrait of Elizabeth (Bella) and Lazarus Dixon (Red Cloud) (Oh-ha-hi-sha) and child, ca. 1910. Byron Harmon/photographer. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Byron Harmon fonds (V263/1/a/1/d/ng-37)
 3 Mary-Jean Simeon, ca. 1920-1930. Byron Harmon/photographer. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Byron Harmon fonds (V263/1/a/1/a/na-3031)
 4 Unknown man in regalia with horse, Banff Indian Days, ca. 1915-1925. Byron Harmon/photographer. Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies. Byron Harmon fonds (V263/1/a/1/a/na-3255)

GIVING THE PAST A NAME

WE CAN'T CHANGE
THE PAST, BUT WE
CAN CHANGE HOW
IT'S REMEMBERED.

By Tera Swanson

Corleigh Powderface is contemplative as we look over the faces of Indigenous Peoples peering out from photographs, some over 100 years old.

"It's the start of reconciliation," she says, turning to the next page of images.

Today, the images are stored in albums in the Whyte Museum archives. Most were taken by Peter and Catharine Whyte at Banff Indian Days, a cultural event that took place annually in Banff National Park from 1895 to 1970. Some were taken in downtown Banff and showcase the subjects wearing full regalia, while others were taken at the event grounds near Cascade Falls. For some portraits, the photographer used a studio setting with a white-sheet backdrop, the subjects at times dressed in white-settler attire, their faces expressionless as was typical

in that era of photography. Other subjects are pictured, seemingly at ease, in their home environments with a family horse or teepee visible in the background.

Yet, no matter the setting, what's common in this particular album of photos is that the Indigenous Peoples in them remain unidentified.

Powderface, a member of the Iyarhe Nakoda Nation, is integral to the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies as a partner, liaison and interpreter for projects involving local Indigenous communities. Recognizing Relations is one such project, initiated in 2014 when Dagny Dubois, an archival assistant with the Whyte Museum, was working on a photo digitization project and came across endless images of unnamed Indigenous Peoples within the archives. Common captions included "Indian," "Warrior," "Stoney" or "Chief." Sometimes the Indigenous Peoples were simply not mentioned at all, even when non-Indigenous people in the same photos were named. Some captions took on a darker connotation. One black and white gallery photo displayed on the walls of the Whyte Museum archives features a woman astride her horse with "Western Indian Squaw, 521" marked onto the image itself.

Together, Powderface and Dubois selected a collection of about 450 photographs, some designated for identification and others to spark memories of events. With tea, tobacco, soup and bannock in hand, they went to Morley to present the images to Iyarhe Nakoda Elders. Powderface acted as a bridge between Dubois and the Elders – 37 of them – to establish trust, while also translating at their meetings. In total, 60 to 70 per cent of the images were successfully identified, though Dubois

notes there could be hundreds more in the archives.

"We had a lot of photos of children at the beginning, as I had this idea that people would recognize themselves," says Dubois, who has joined Powderface for our meeting, "but they wouldn't have grown up with baby photos, so it was really rare for anyone to recognize someone as a child. I think more horses were recognized than babies."

Oftentimes, it was contextual clues in the photos, such as horses, adornment on teepees, or beadwork that helped to identify someone by their clan rather than their facial characteristics. This was what happened for Powderface's mother.

"There was a picture of my mother and her older brother sitting in front of a teepee as children," says Powderface, "and it wasn't until someone else recognized their family teepee that she remembered, 'Oh, that's my older brother, Lawrence.'"

Dubois says her goal with the project was not only to identify individuals, but to challenge stereotypes and help restore dignity by removing inappropriate descriptors. She also saw that these historical photos could act as a link between family clans and their ancestors, and wanted to give this piece of history back to its rightful owners.

"Many people on the reserve did not realize these photos were here," says Powderface. "Even to this day, there are children that say, 'I never knew that was my great-grandfather,' and so I really appreciate the recognition that our people need to be identified and remembered."

whyte.org/recognizing-relations ▲