



Fig. 2: Minnie Camas Willie, the photo on the far right hem of Ella's dress. CREDIT: National Archives and Records Administration, Still Picture Branch: 75-SEI-8.

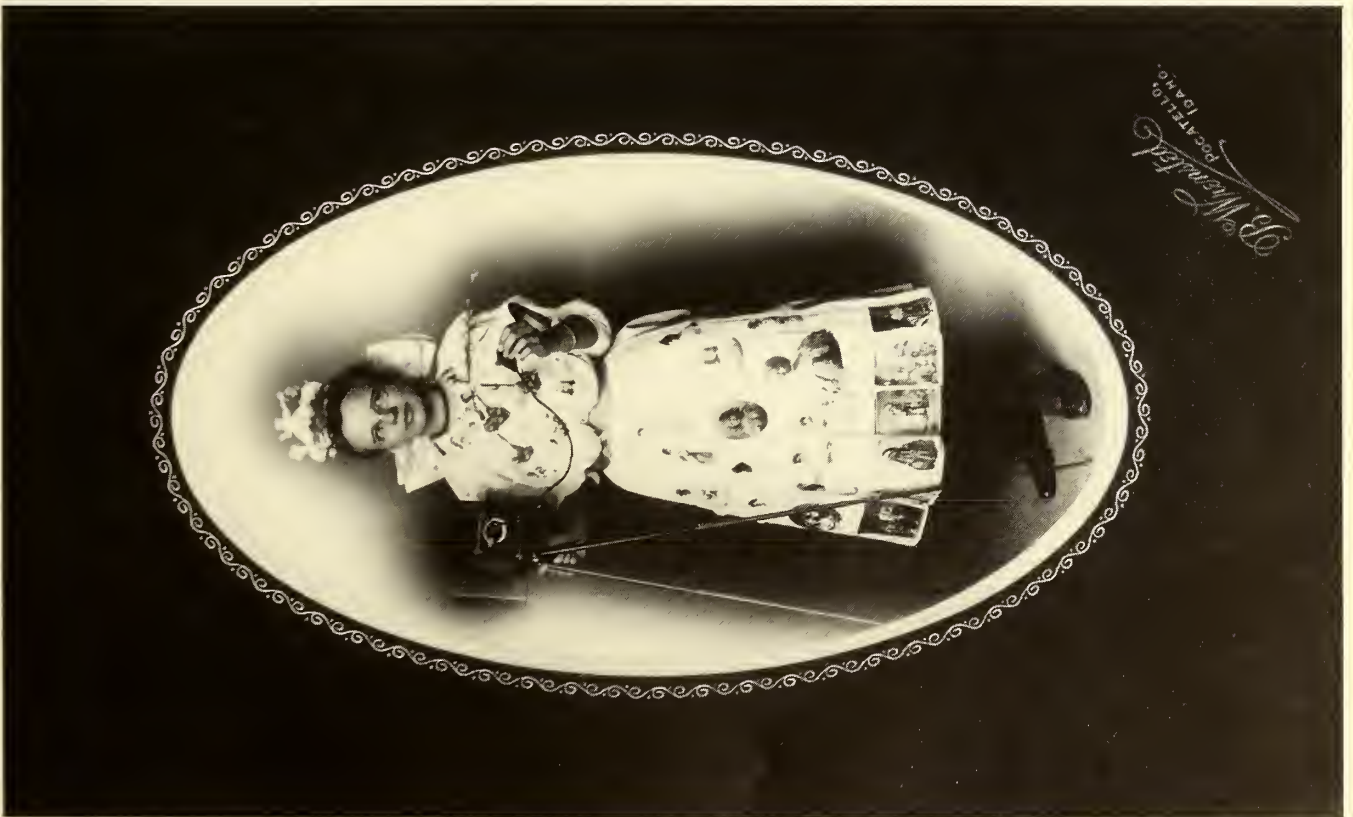


Fig. 1: Ella Wrensted, photographed about 1909. CREDIT: Smithsonian Institution, Handbook of North American Indians Project: Sherwood Collection.





Fig. 4. Sho-Ban cowboy, probably Jim Marshall. CREDIT: National Archives and Records Admin., Still Picture Branch: 75-SEI-108.



Fig. 3: Logan Appenay, Bannock. CREDIT: National Archives and Records Admin., Still Picture Branch: 75-SEI-59.





Fig. 5: Pat Tyhee, Bannock "Before" (on left) and "After." CREDIT: Smithsonian Institution, National Anthropological Archives: Eugene O. Leonard Collection.



Fig. 6: Wrensted's first studio in Pocatello, Idaho, 1905. CREDIT: Smithsonian Institution, Handbook of North American Indians Project: Sherwood Collection.



## TEACHER'S CORNER: STUDYING PHOTOGRAPHS AS HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

### Directions for Class Activity:

I. Divide the class into small groups. Have each group study the seven photographs shown and record what the clothing, props, and background seem to say about each person and about Wrensted's studio. Also have students note questions they have about each picture. Each group then shares perceptions and questions, noting similarities and differences.

[As a practice exercise for students who have not studied photographs as historical documents, you may want to have your students bring in photographs of themselves or their family that are several years old. Give each student a photograph belonging to someone else in the class and ask them to examine the clothes, background, and props to see how much they can glean about the person(s) in the picture. Next have them consider what distortions or lies might occur about the person from looking at the picture. Then have the owner of the photograph explain it.]

II. Share the following information about each photograph with the students and have the groups note how it alters or confirms their own observations in Part I.

Figure 1. Ella Wrensted was Benedicte's niece and one of her assistants. In 1909 she was seventeen-years-old. In this photograph, she wears a dress decorated with portraits made by the Wrensted studio. This photograph probably was used for promotional purposes. Her surviving sister, Helen Wrensted Sherwood (b. 1907), believes that Ella took almost all of the photographs that were made outside the studio, including those at the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Ella Wrensted later became a commercial photographer in Wyoming, continuing the family tradition of women photographers.

Figure 2. Minnie Camas Willie is a Northern Shoshone. Wrensted usually posed the Northern Shoshone and Bannock full-length, which

emphasized clothing. Minnie Willie's clothing is traditional. In creating an image of Northern Shoshone and Bannock Indians, Wrensted sometimes used certain props to enhance the subject, such as blankets that appear on the floor or were draped over a chair, couch, or table. Although Anglos had their photographs taken in the same studio with the same backdrop, blankets were never used. Of course, Wrensted was not the only photographer to use the blanket to symbolize Indianness. For some Indians the blanket signified their refusal to adopt Anglo dress and habits. We do not know for certain whether Minnie Willie or Benedicte Wrensted chose the clothing or the blanket in this photograph.

Figure 3. Logan Appenay, a Bannock, is dressed in his Grass Dance regalia. He is wearing beaded moccasins with flaps and designs influenced by Métis or Cree styles. He also wears beaded garters, anklets with bells, a beaded bandolier and breechcloth, oxford shirt with floral bead yoke and cuffs, a choker, and multiple necklaces. His long underwear shows dirt smudges on the right leg indicating the likelihood that his costume was not just for show. The long underwear was adopted during this period because of sensitivity to the impact of "nakedness," probably serving the same function as body paint. The Grass Dance celebrated early spring and was performed to ensure plentiful food, such as salmon, berries, and grasses (Scherer, 1994: 352).

If people did not know Logan Appenay only wore this costume for the Grass Dance, how would this photograph perpetuate the stereotypical view of the Indian as Noble Savage?

Figure 4. This Northern Shoshone is dressed as a cowboy, most likely indicating his work as a rancher. The usual "Indian" props are not evident. The backdrop of water, reeds, and other plants is most likely Wrensted's attempt to portray the Northern Shoshone Indian in a natural setting. What stereotype might such a backdrop reinforce? [Indians' natural closeness to nature.]

Figure 5. Pat Tyhee, a Bannock Indian, had these "Before" and "After" shots taken most likely on the

same day to show his progressive learning (Scherer, 1993: 16). The caption for the left image reads, "Pat Tyhee before haircut and new suit." That for the right image reads, "Just had a new suit of clothes and had his hair cut."

These historical images reflect official U.S. policy toward the Indian. There was a concerted effort by Indian agents to urge men to cut their hair and wear non-Indian clothes. According to the local newspaper: "In May 1901 Agent A.F. Caldwell announced that the Indian Department had generously provided a number of new farm wagons for those interested in farming, but no Indian would receive one until he agreed to a haircut....As the Indians lined up, two barbers spent an entire day cutting the long braids of Indian farmers, who reluctantly submitted to the 'civilizing' ordeal in order to get some wheels" (Madsen 1980:187; *Pocatello Tribune*, May 2 1901, p. 187).

Pat Tyhee was promoted as a progressive Indian and was supported by the Anglo power structure. He was, for example, selected by Agent Major Caldwell to be one of four representatives of the tribe at the inauguration of President Taft in Washington, D.C. in 1909 (Scherer, 1993:16; *Pocatello Tribune*, January 28, 1909).

How does Pat Tyhee's clothing change your perception of him?

Figure 6: Wrensted's first studio as it appeared in 1905 was located at 132 South Main Street. Wrensted's niece, Ella, is in front of the studio with their dog, Jackson. The display cases show Wrensted's photographs, but none of these appears to be of the Shoshone and Bannock Indians from the Fort Hall Reservation.

III. Have your students discuss or write about the following questions that explore the larger implications of the photographs.

1. Photographs can be valuable sources for historical and anthropological study. Each photograph is an historical document and thus constitutes primary research material. Even though you have just a small sample of Wrensted's

photographs, what could be the possible historical and anthropological value of her work? From another perspective, do the photographs preserve the heritage of the Northern Shoshone from Fort Hall Reservation? If so, how do they? What do you think you can really tell about the Native Americans in Wrensted's photographs? Are these photographs different from others you have seen of Native Americans? If so, how and why? Consider the questions in Part I. Which ones remain unanswered? Can we rely on photographs alone for a complete story?

2. Is it possible to tell whether the clothes, decorations, and other props are from the people themselves or from the photographer's studio? How does your answer affect your ability to assess the truth of the photographs? Do you think Native Americans should be careful about how they photograph themselves? Why?

3. How do the photographs reinforce or undermine stereotypes?

4. How does the individual identity of the person come through in the photographs?

5. What can we deduce about the conventions of portrait photography in Wrensted's time? [Formal, no candid photographs, theatrical lighting, studios as stage sets.]

#### Reference Cited:

Madsen, Brigham. *The Northern Shoshoni*. Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, LTD, 1980.

Scherer, Joanna C. "Benedicte Wrensted: An Idaho Photographer of Indians," *Visual Anthropology* 6(4), 1994.

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The entire Wrensted exhibit can be found on the WEB: <http://www.nmnh.si.edu/anthro/wrensted>.

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