

A Guide to the Books and Portfolios
of *The North American Indian*

Tim Greyhavens

Cover photo: Set #16, in the collection of the Tacoma Public Library, Tacoma, Washington.

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Tim Greyhavens
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Definitions

Edition: This term has two contexts in relation to *The North American Indian*. First, it refers to the print run of the publication. It was Curtis's original intention to restrict the total number of published sets to 500, making it a limited edition. Secondly, the term refers to the quality of the paper used for the photogravures. Curtis offered a standard and a deluxe edition, each using a different paper, to emphasize the exclusivity of the publication. For more about these terms, see the sections below on [Limited Edition](#) and [Papers](#).

Book: The hardbound tome that features both photogravures and the extensive written research collected by Curtis and his assistants in the field.

Set: A partial or complete grouping of the twenty books and twenty portfolios that make up *The North American Indian*.

Portfolio: The folding case and loose-leaf photogravure plates that accompany each book.

Volume: *The North American Indian* was published in twenty numbered volumes. Each volume is comprised of a book and an accompanying portfolio, and the term volume as used herein refers to both components or to the book by itself. Throughout this paper, the books are referred to by Roman numerals, while the portfolios are referred to by Arabic numerals. This was done to distinguish between the two components and for consistency with Curtis's personal references to his work.

Introduction

This guide was created under the auspices of the [Curtis Census](#), an independent effort to advance knowledge about Edward S. Curtis and *The North American Indian* by conducting and publishing relevant research. A primary task of the Census is to identify and locate all known sets and volumes of *The North American Indian*. The Census also serves as an information source for archived documents and current studies related to the publication of the books.

Many scholars and authors have written about Edward S. Curtis and his “big dream.” Both the breadth and the depth of that research continues to increase. As the historical, ethnological, and artistic values of *The North American Indian* are further explored, it is more important than ever to have a common understanding of what distinguishes the physical books and portfolios of the publication.

This guide is both an introduction to the publication and a reference source for those interested in learning more about the details of the bookmaking art infused throughout *The North American Indian*. It is not intended to be authoritative in its scope, but it rather strives to provide a sound starting point for archivists, collectors, curators, librarians, and others who want to learn more about overall body of work.

The Sets



Figure 1: A standard edition set, showing all of the books and portfolios.

A complete set of *The North American Indian* is comprised of twenty individually bound books, each with an average of 250 pages and 75 photogravure images, and twenty accompanying portfolios, each with an average of 36 large image plates housed in a folding case.

The publication's original title was *The North American Indian, Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States and Alaska*. It appeared this way in volumes I-VIII. After Curtis began working more in Canada, he changed the title (beginning with Volume IX) to *The North American Indian, Being a Series of Volumes Picturing and Describing the Indians of the United States, the Dominion of Canada, and Alaska*.

Curtis first developed the idea of a multi-volume set of books about Native Peoples around 1903, but it was not until he secured substantial funding from financier J. P. Morgan in 1906 that his the project began in earnest. He originally proposed that it would take five years to complete the publication, but due to a continuing series of complications it was 24 years until the last volume was completed. Volume I was

printed in late 1907, although it not distributed until early 1908¹, and volume XX finally appeared in 1930.

The sets were available by subscription only. The standard edition, with photogravures printed on Van Gelder paper or Japanese vellum, was initially priced at \$3,000 for the complete set. A deluxe edition, with photogravures printed on Japanese tissue, cost \$3,750. The subscription cost was raised several times during the publication cycle, topping out in 1924 at \$4,200 for the standard edition and \$4,850 for the deluxe edition.

In order to print such an enormous publication while adhering to the highest standards for book arts, Curtis involved three different firms: an engraving company for the photogravures, a printing company for the text pages, and a bookbinder to put it all together. He changed each of these firms at different times during the publication cycle.

Volumes I-XI were bound by Henry Blackwell, New York, with photogravures created by John Andrew & Son of Boston.

In volumes I-V, the text pages were printed by The University Press, Cambridge, MA.

In volumes VI-XX, the text pages were printed by Plimpton Press, Norwood, MA.

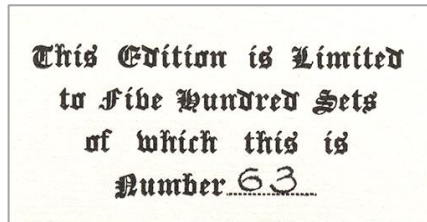
For volumes XII-XX the photogravures were created by Suffolk Engraving of Boston.

Volumes XV-XX were bound by Whitman Bennett of New York.²

¹ Curtis, Edward S. Untitled letter to Belle Greene (J. P. Morgan's librarian), February 7, 1908. Edward S. Curtis Archives, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

² A complete list of the various changes in binders, printers, and engravers is found in [Appendix A](#).

Limited Edition



Curtis began his project with a stated intention of publishing a limited edition of 500 sets. Due to the high cost of the publication and the prolonged publication cycle, he did not reach his goal. It's thought that no more than 300 sets were produced while Curtis was in charge.³

Figure 2: The limitation text.

There are 14 known sets that were printed during Curtis's direction of the project that remained unsold after the last volume was published. In addition, after 1935 as many as 50 additional sets might have been assembled from previously printed but unbound pages and plates.⁴

Most of the sets produced by Curtis are numbered on the verso of the half-title page of each volume with a small printed notice that says "This edition is limited to 500 sets of which this is number ____." All of the volumes known to have been issued by Curtis have a hand-written number in the blank space; however, some sets are not numbered. These are assumed to be sets issued by the [Lauriat Company](#) after 1935.

The limitation numbering did not differentiate between the standard and deluxe editions. A single numerical sequence, beginning with set #1 for J. P. Morgan, was used throughout the publication cycle. However, the recorded dates on documented subscription forms for the sets show that some lower-number sets were sold later in the publication cycle, and some higher-number sets were sold earlier. In addition, there are multiple gaps of up to 15 numbers where no known sets were issued.⁵

There is a signed subscription form for set #474, which is the highest known number in the edition, but it is certainly not an indicator of how many sets were sold. The form is dated December 29, 1921.

Only the text volumes of each set are numbered. There is no corresponding set number in the portfolios, which are marked only with the volume number. The only known way to associate a portfolio with a specific numbered edition is through documented provenance.

³ For current research on the number of sets, see [The Curtis Census](#) website.

⁴ For more information about sets that were sold after 1935, see the [Lauriat Variants](#) section below.

⁵ Around 1912 part of the responsibility for selling the subscriptions was assigned to one or more independent salesmen. At about the same time, the outbreak of World War I greatly reduced the interest in the publication. For more information, see Greyhavens, Tim. *Duty Bound to Finish: Edward S. Curtis and His Quest for Money to Complete The North American Indian*. July, 2018. Academia.edu.

The Books

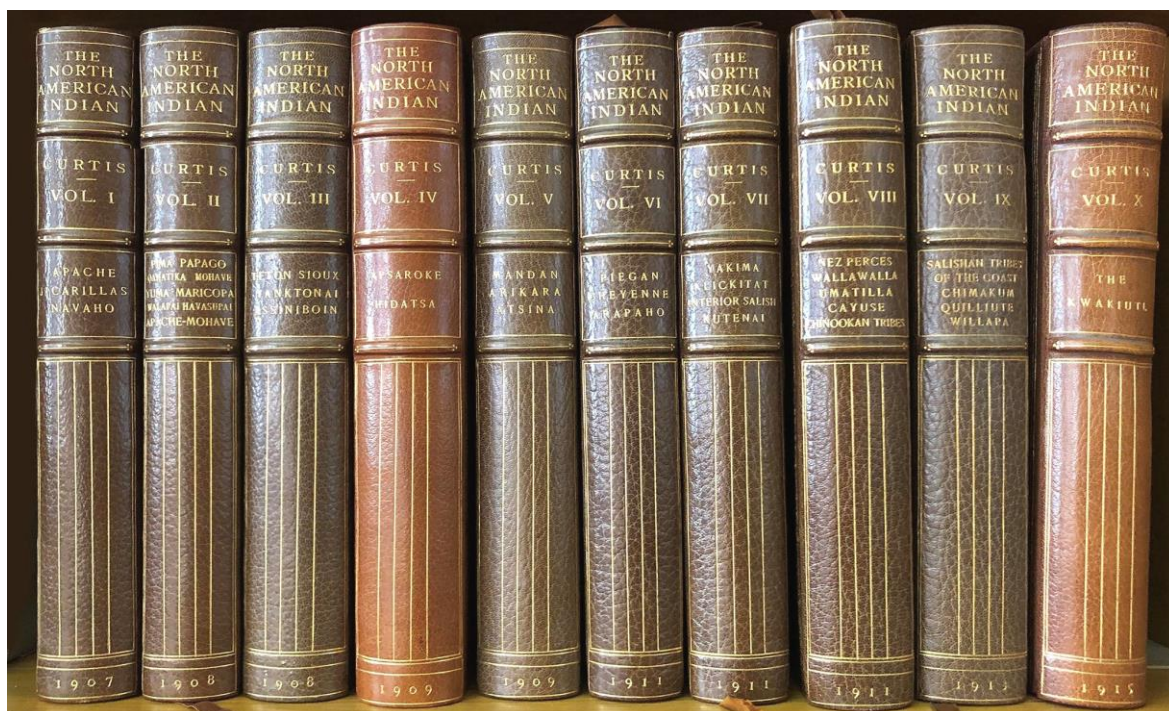


Figure 3: The first ten volumes of set #16, now at the Tacoma Public Library, Tacoma, Washington. Photo by the author. Published with the permission of the Tacoma Public Library.

All twenty books have a standard size of approximately 12.5 inches high and 10 inches wide (31.8 cm x 25.4 cm). The thickness of the books varies from volume to volume, depending on the number of pages and the type of paper used. Those printed on Van Gelder, which is the heaviest weight of the three papers used for the publication, are the thickest, ranging between 2.5 to about 3.4 inches (6.35 - 8.6 cm). Books printed on Japanese vellum are thinner due to the lighter weight of the paper. They average about 2.75 inches (7.0 cm). Books with the photogravures on tissue are approximately the same thickness as those on Van Gelder since that paper was used as the support page for the tissue gravures.

The publisher's imprint appears on the verso of the title page. The text pages of volumes I-V were printed by The University Press, Cambridge, MA. Beginning with Volume VI, the text pages were printed by The Plimpton Press in Norwood, MA. Their imprint changed three times over the course of the publication.

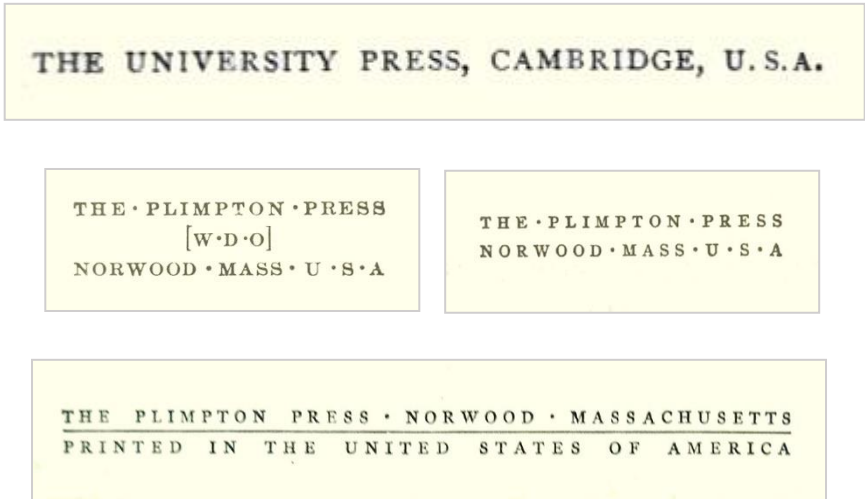


Figure 4: Examples of the publisher's imprint: Vols 1-V (top); Vol VI (middle left), Vols VII-XII (middle right), and Vols XIII-Vol XX (bottom)

The books range in length from 161 numbered pages in Volume I to 366 pages in Volume X. Each book also contains 8-12 preliminary leaves that add to the length of an individual book.

Each of the books is printed in the same order, as follows:

- Front endpaper, often with binders' stamp
- Half-title
- Limitation page
- Title page
- Copyright and publisher's imprint
- Table of Contents
- Alphabet Used in Recording Indian Terms
- [List of] Illustrations
- Introduction
- [Book Chapters]
- Appendices, including tribal summaries; descriptions of music, songs and dances; vocabularies; and biographical sketches.
- Index
- Rear endpaper

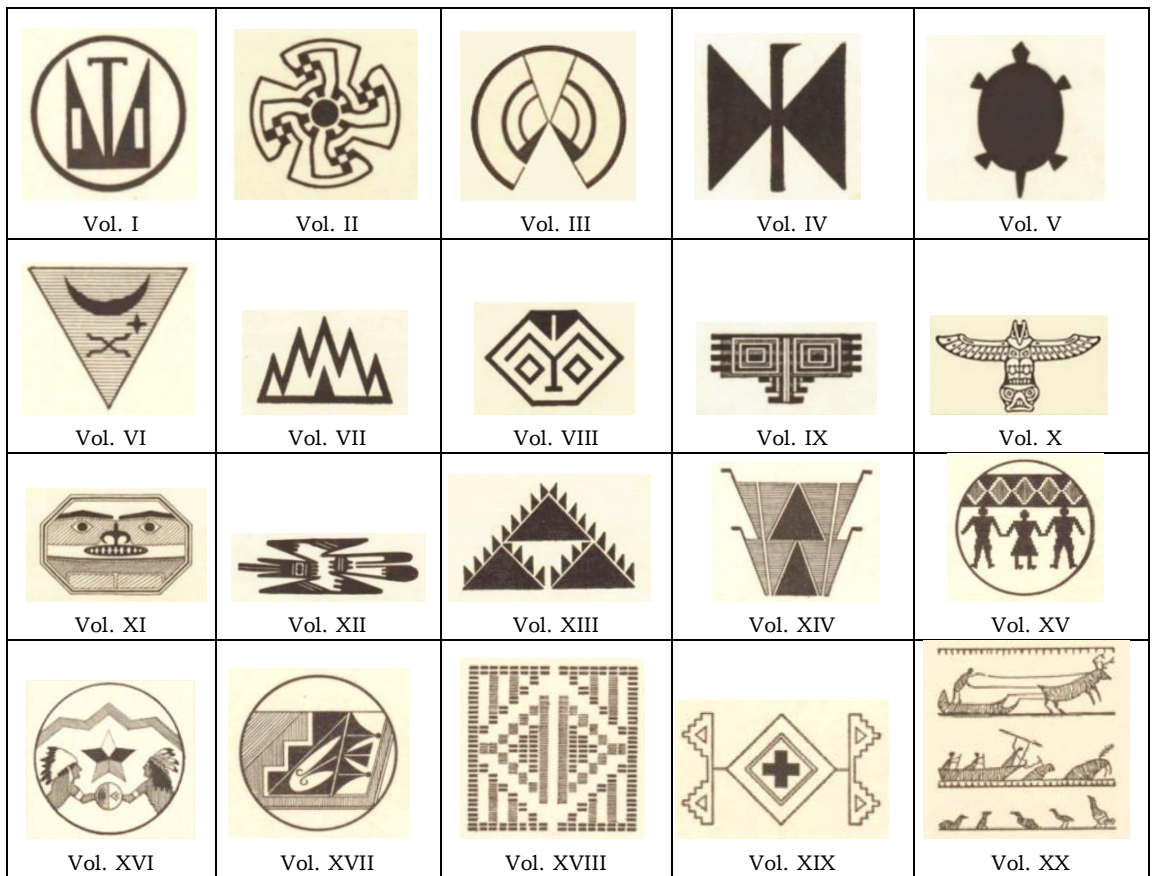


Figure 5: The pictograms that appear on the title page of each volume.

There is a unique pictogram on the title page of each book. Our research thus far has not determined who designed these features, but each design includes elements that seem to be intended to convey a sense of the cultures and locations in that volume. It's possible that they were created by illustrator Frederick N. Wilson, who added a similar series of small designs to Curtis's book *Indian Days of the Long Ago* (1914).

All of the books have gilt tops. The remaining edges are untrimmed and are not gilded.

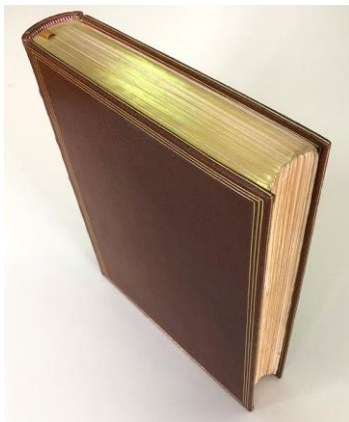


Figure 6: The top edge of each book is trimmed and gilded.

The Portfolios



Figure 7: Each book volumes is accompanied by a separate portfolio of loose plates.

Each book is accompanied by a corresponding portfolio of loose photogravure plates in a large folding case. There is an average of 36 plates in each portfolio.⁶ For sets printed on Van Gelder paper and on tissue, the portfolio cases are approximately 23 inches long, 19 inches wide, and about 1 inch deep (58.4cm X 48.3cm X 2.5cm). Portfolios printed on Japanese vellum have the same length and width but are only about $\frac{5}{8}$ (1.6cm) inch deep due to the thinner stock of that paper.

On all papers, the individual images are approximately 11" X 14" (27.9cm X 35.6cm) on large sheets measuring about 22 inches by 18 inches (55.9cm X 45.7cm) with deckled edges.

⁶ See [Appendix B](#) for a volume-by-volume count.

Each portfolio begins with a single page of text, entitled *The North American Indian: List of Large Plates Supplementing Volume [volume number]*. This page lists all of the plates in the portfolio, along with a brief narrative paragraph that describes the image shown on each plate. After that, each plate has a single image and a small amount of text, including a plate number in the upper left corner; the image title in the lower left corner; the words “From a copyright photograph [year] by E. S. Curtis” directly under the image; and the name of the engraver at the bottom right of the image.

There are 723 plates in the 20 portfolios, each numbered in sequence from 1-722. The difference between the number of physical plates and the number sequence is because the number 400 mistakenly was used for two different images. One is the last plate in portfolio 11 (*Haida slate carvings*), and the other is the first plate in portfolio 12 (*Loitering at the Spring*).

Two other numbering errors occur in the portfolios. Plate 119 (*In the Bad Lands*) is found out of sequence at the end of Portfolio 3, appearing after plate 110 (*Mountain-sheep Hunter – Sioux*). Portfolio 4 begins with plate 111 and continues in sequence, but there is a gap between plates 118 and 120.

In Portfolio 5, plate 150 (*Bear's Belly – Arikara*) is incorrectly numbered on the sheet as 159. Plate 159 (*Announcement – Arikara*) shows the correct number for that plate.

The first two numbering discrepancies are included in the descriptive *List of Large Plates* accompanying each portfolio. The photogravures were printed separately from the text pages, and the fact that these discrepancies were included in the plate lists indicates that Curtis knew about the errors and still chose to leave them in the sets.

The vast majority of the images in the portfolios do not duplicate those in the books, although sometimes the images in the books provide additional scenes of sites shown in the portfolios. In at least two cases the portfolios images are variants of images reproduced in the books: *In a Piegan Lodge* appears in portfolio 6 (plate 188), and a wider view of the same image appears in volume VI (there titled *Lodge interior –Piegan*, facing page 18).

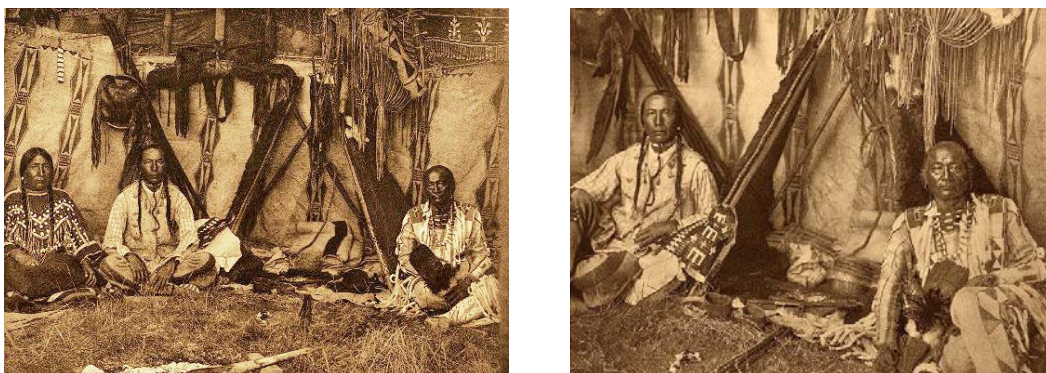


Figure 8: *Lodge interior –Piegan* (Volume VI, facing page 18) and *In a Piegan Lodge* (Portfolio 6, plate 188).

A portrait of a woman entitled *Kenowun, Nunivak* appears in volume XX ([facing page 66](#)). She is shown in a slightly different pose in the accompanying portfolio ([plate 691](#)).



Figure 9: *Kenowun, Nunivak* as she appears to the book ([facing page 66](#)) and in the portfolio ([plate 691](#))

The portfolios are not mentioned in the volume table of contents or indices. In 38 instances, a footnote or biographical sketch in a book cites a portfolio plate, and on a few occasions a plate caption may refer to a book text.

Bindings



Figure 10: Examples of a $\frac{3}{4}$ binding (left) and full binding (right). Note the variation in the color of the leather, which appears in different volumes in different sets.

The bindings on both the standard and the deluxe editions are wrapped in Levant, also known as Moroccan leather, made primarily from goat skins. This leather was considered to be the highest quality that was available at that time, with an embossed large grain surface and highly polished finish.

The standard edition books are bound in $\frac{3}{4}$ style, with a leather-covered spine that extends into the panel and large leather corners. The rest of the cover boards are bound in cloth.

The deluxe edition books have full Levant bindings, with the entire spine and boards are covered in leather.

In some sets, there are variations in the colors of the book bindings, ranging from a light russet to a deep umber. These variations appear to be due to the leather stock that was available when the books were bound. On lighter colored volumes, there is little or no unevenness in the lighter colors that usually appear when differences in a binding's color are due to sunning or other environmental factors.

Similar variations are seen in many sets. The Curtis Census has found no apparent pattern of which volumes are lighter or darker among various sets. In general, most bindings are darker, and, when there are variations, only a few in each set are lighter.

The spine of each volume is divided into four panels, separated by three false cords in the upper half. The top panel shows the publication name; the second panel shows the author's last name and the volume number (in Roman numerals); the third panel shows abbreviated volume contents (Native names); and the bottom panel has decorative lines ending with the publication year at the bottom. The text and line

imprints were hand-embossed with gold leaf, an arduous and time-consuming process that added to the overall high quality of the publication.

Volumes I-XIV were bound by Henry Blackwell in his shop at 56 University Place, New York City. Most of the books in these volumes have a small stamp saying “Bound by Blackwell” or “Bound by H. Blackwell” in the upper left corner on the verso of the front free endpaper.

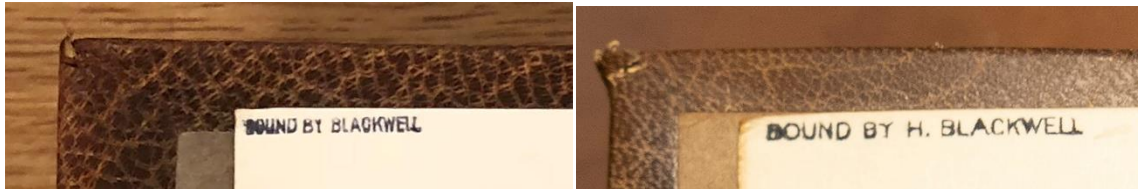


Figure 11: Two variations of the Henry Blackwell binding stamp

Volumes XV-XX were bound by Whitman Bennett at his Bennett Book Studios, also in New York. In some sets, volumes XV-XX have a small stamp, also on the front free endpaper, that says “Bound by Whitman Bennett, N.Y.” The stamp does not appear as consistently as the one for Blackwell, and some sets are missing it altogether.

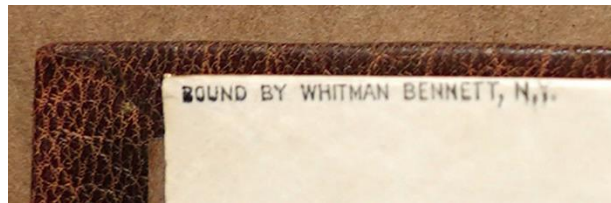


Figure 12: The Whitman Bennett binding stamp

Blackwell died in 1928, and it appears that several years prior to his death he either merged with or sold his business to Bennett. In a 1925 memo from The North American Indian, Incorporated office regarding binding charges, there are two references to bills from the “Blackwell-Bennett Co.”⁷

There is no significant difference in the quality or style of the Blackwell and the Bennett bindings. The typeface and lines on the spine are slightly different in the Bennett bindings; the letters have a slightly stronger stroke and are spaced slightly wider. This difference is not noticeable until a Blackwell and a Bennett binding are compared side-by-side.

⁷ “Memo for Mr. Keyes”, dated April 9, 1925. Edward S. Curtis Archives, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Papers

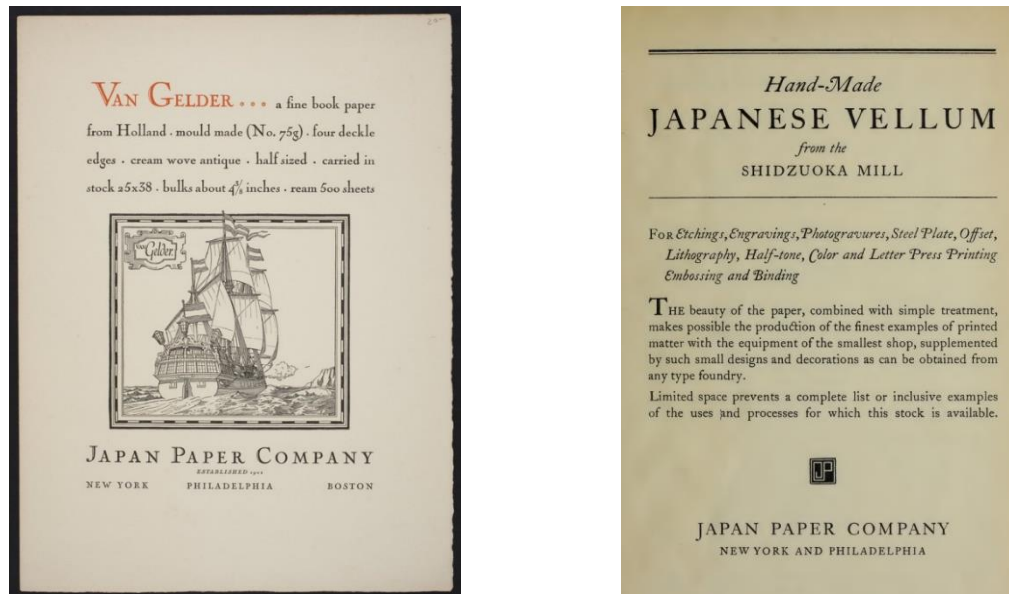


Figure 13: Two pages from sample books printed by the Japan Paper Company.

In general, when a set is identified as being printed on a certain type of paper, the name of the paper refers to the photogravures in the set. For the standard edition, Curtis used two different kinds of paper: Van Gelder etching stock, made in Holland, and Japanese vellum, made in Japan. The deluxe edition gravures were printed on Japanese tissue, also made in Japan.

All of the paper stock came from the Japan Paper Company, which used example pages from *The North American Indian* in their sample books. The company was based in New York and had a New England office at 452 Washington Street in Boston, less than a mile away from where the photogravures were printed.

Van Gelder

Van Gelder is a heavy, hand-milled, manila paper that often has a visible watermark or partial watermark. In earlier volumes, the words "Van Gelder Zonen," or some portion thereof, may appear. Some of the early photogravures may have only the word "Holland," often seen vertically in one corner of the plate. In later volumes, the watermark changed to "Van Gelder Zonen - Made in Holland." There are some sheets in any given book or portfolio that don't display the watermark or that have only one or two words of the watermark due to the way the paper was cut.

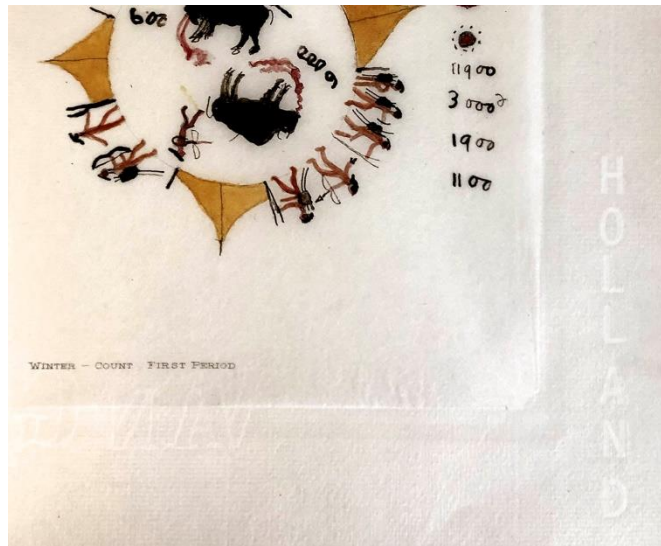


Figure 14: Some examples of the Van Gelder watermark as seen in the books and portfolio plates.
Note: The colors and contrast in these pictures have been exaggerated to emphasize the watermarks.

In general, Van Gelder paper has a slightly rough texture, while Japanese vellum is smoother. In the books, the top side is trimmed and gilded, and the remaining sides are deckled. In the portfolios, all sides are deckled. Although Van Gelder paper is thicker than Japanese vellum, the paper stock is semi-opaque and often allows some text from the following page to show through.

Japanese vellum

Sometimes called Japan vellum, this is a parchment-like paper, yellowish in appearance with a surface that feels like it was lightly waxed. Despite its name, it is not **vellum**—it’s a rice paper. The surface is smoother than the Van Gelder paper, and Curtis thought that it would be more durable.

In a 1908 letter about the publication of the first volumes, he wrote that sets printed on Japanese vellum would be better adapted for libraries “where they would have considerable handling....”⁸

Book pages printed on Japanese vellum have a relatively even end that distinguishes them from the rough edges of the Van Gelder paper. Portfolio plates printed on Japanese vellum are deckled, and, while the core paper is more resistant to wear, the thinness of the plates make them more susceptible to edge damage.

Some references to this paper call it Japon vellum, which is inaccurate. Japon vellum is a different paper, made by treating ordinary paper with sulfuric acid to simulate the surface appearance of vellum.

There are no watermarks anywhere on Japanese vellum.



Figure 15: This bottom view of two volumes shows the difference between the uneven edges of Van Gelder paper (left) and the smoother edges of Japanese vellum (right).

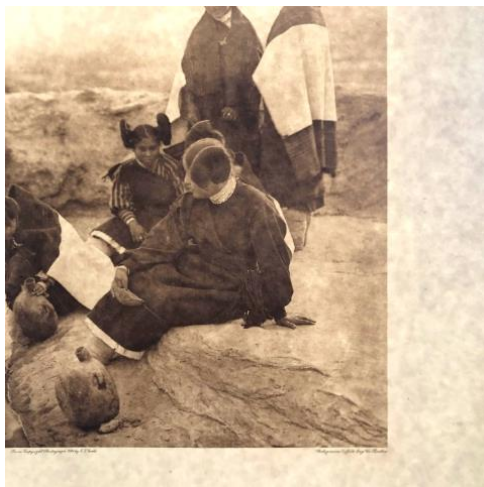


Figure 16: When held in front of bright light, Japanese vellum shows a distinctive mottled appearance.

⁸ Curtis, Edward S. Letter to Belle Greene, February 7, 1908. The Curtis Archives, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

Japanese tissue

The Japanese tissue used in *The North American Indian* provided the highest quality prints due to the paper's ability to reproduce the greatest range of tones. The paper, made from the Japanese [gampi](#) shrub, is known for its semi-transparent body and slightly polished surface.

Tissue prints are easily identified because they were mounted using the chine-collé technique, in which a separate print on tissue is bonded to a heavier support page of Van Gelder paper. While prints on Japanese tissue are highly valued due to the paper's superior printing qualities, the prints are more fragile than those on Van Gelder or Japanese vellum.

Some copies of tissue prints have developed tension wrinkles where hand-painting was applied. This is due to the thin tissue's inability to resist the slight contractions of the pigments over time. Tissue prints are also more susceptible to surface cockling across part or all of a print. In addition, some tissue prints have been affected by acid burn and foxing, with some copies exhibiting significant effects.

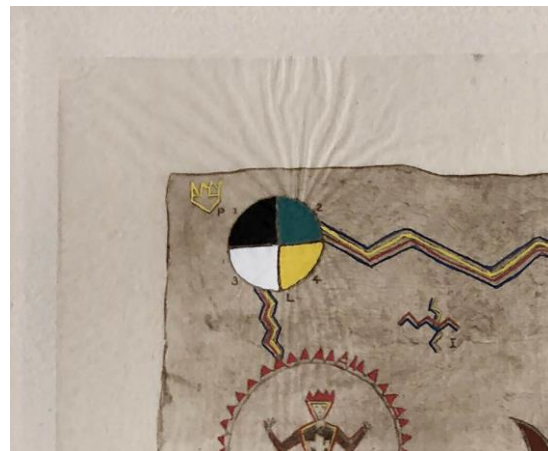


Figure 17: An example of cockling (left) and tension wrinkles (right) in Japanese tissue prints.



Figure 18: Three examples of the same image (Volume IX, Plate 293) printed on Van Gelder (upper left), Japanese vellum (upper right), and Japanese tissue mounted on Van Gelder (lower left). Note the slightly yellow hue of the Japanese vellum plate and the matte cover over the image printed on tissue.

Text Pages

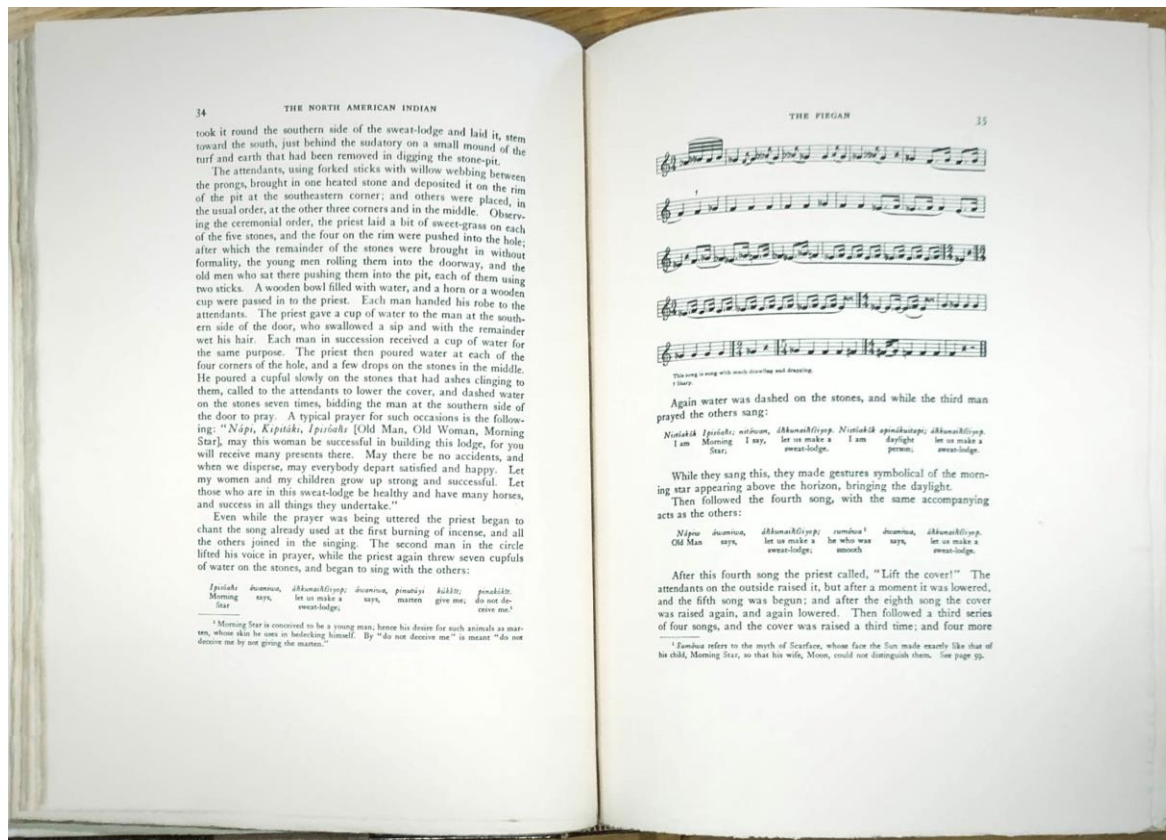


Figure 19: Text pages may include narrative accounts, histories, Native music scores, vocabularies, genealogies, and descriptions of ceremonies and mythologies.

The 20 volumes of *The North American Indian* contain a total of 4,956 numbered pages, including chapter titles, appendices, and index pages. Before the numbered pages begin in each book, there is a table of contents, an “alphabet used in recording Indian terms,” a list of illustrations, and an introduction. Volume I also contains a forward written by Theodore Roosevelt and a general introduction written by Curtis. All of these pages are enumerated in Roman numerals.⁹

Each of *The North American Indian* books was printed using an 8-page [imposition](#), or an arrangement of the printed pages that makes the most efficient use of a large sheet of printing paper. Beginning with volume XII in 1922, the text pages were printed with uniform [signature marks](#). In order to keep these sections in the proper order for

⁹ For a complete list of volume page and photogravure counts, see [Appendix B](#).

binding, printers have sometimes included these small notations made up of letters and/or numbers at the beginning of each signature.

In *The North American Indian*, the signature marks begin with the notation “VOL. XII-a” on the half-title page of volume XII. They continue with “VOL. XII-I” on the first numbered page and are found every eight numbered pages after that (9, 18, 27, etc.) throughout the volume. These marks appear consistently in volumes XII-XX.

It’s unknown why the signature marks began to appear in volume XII. Curtis changed printers with volume VI in 1906, and he changed bookbinders with volume XV in 1926. Neither change coincides with the appearance of the marks. [The engravers of the photogravures changed in 1922](#), but there is no apparent reason why this might have necessitated the addition of the signature marks.

All of the photogravure sheets were manually inserted into the books. The photogravures are printed on one side of a sheet only, and neither the print side nor the blank verso is counted in the pagination or when looking for the signature marks.

Text pages for the standard edition were printed on the same type of paper as the gravures but in a lighter weight. Text pages in the deluxe edition are a lighter weight Van Gelder.

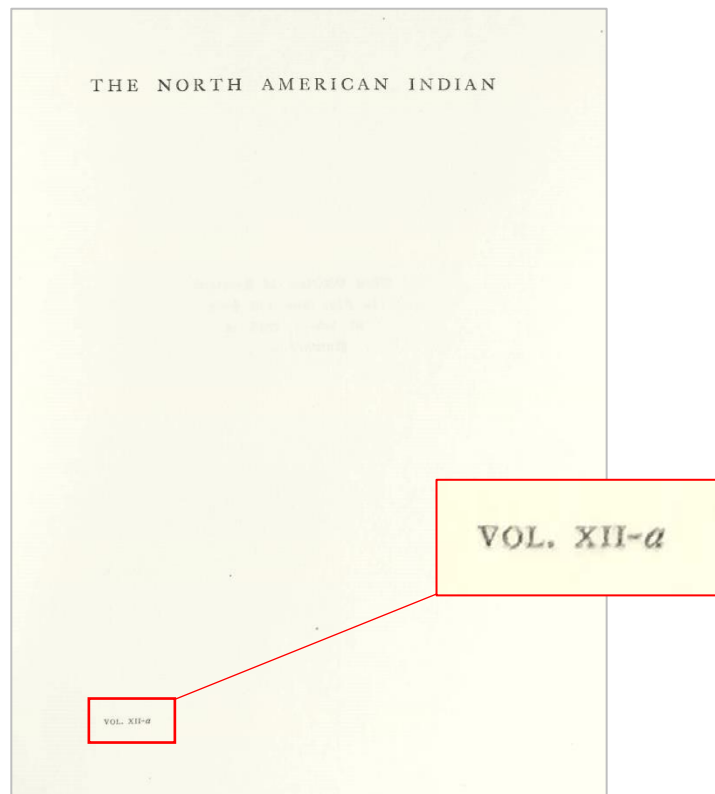


Figure 20: Example of a signature mark.

Photogravures

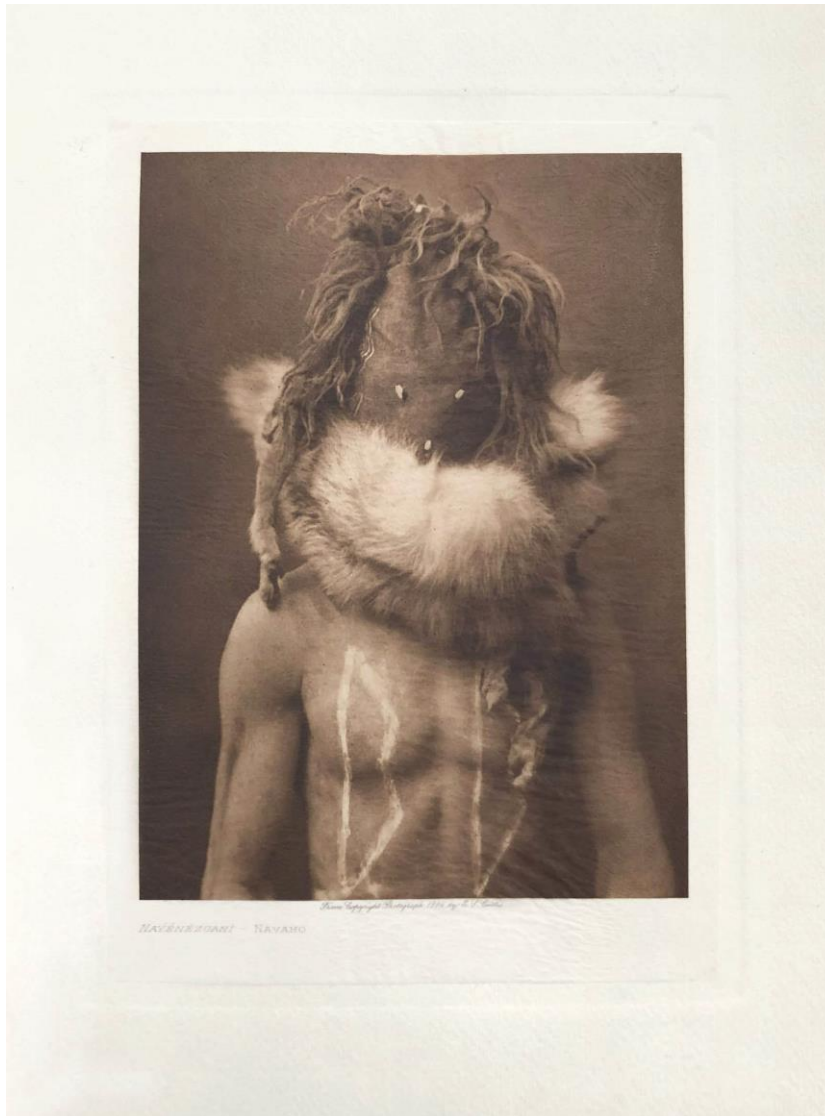


Figure 21: Photogravures on Japanese tissue have the widest tonal ranges.

A photogravure is a continuous-tone, photo-mechanical print that can produce extremely high-quality reproductions of a photograph or other image. In the late 19th- and early 20th centuries, photogravures emulated the beautiful surface and tonal qualities of original platinum prints, which were considered to be the finest photographic printing technique of that era.

The twenty books of *The North American Indian* contain a total of 1,511 photogravures, including prints of 1,486 original portraits or scenes, 15 photographs of drawings made by Native artists, and ten maps and diagrams created specifically for the publication.

The accompanying portfolios have a total of 723 photogravures, each on an individual loose sheet of paper. All of the original photographs were taken by Curtis.

Each photogravure was printed using one of Curtis's glass negatives in a complex and time-consuming process. The technique and chemicals used to create photogravures have changed since the early decades of the 20th century, and current descriptions of the process do not take these various changes into account. The most detailed description of the process was used for the Curtis prints is found in a sample book produced by John Andrew & Son, the firm that printed all of the photogravures in Volumes I-XI.¹⁰

The photogravures for Volumes I-XI were produced by the company John Andrew & Son in Boston. Sometime after 1916 John Andrew & Son was absorbed by the Suffolk Engraving & Electrotyping Company, also in Boston, which printed the photogravures in the remaining volumes. We know that George T. Andrew, who was the “son” in the John Andrew & Son company name, was responsible for overseeing the printing of all of the photogravures in the publication through Volume XI. He died in 1916, which might have led to the acquisition of the Andrew & Son firm by Suffolk Engraving. There are no discernible differences between the qualities of the photogravures throughout the books and portfolios.

In Volumes II-XII, the name of the engraving company is printed at the end of the list of illustrations at the beginning of the book. It does not appear in Volume I or after volume XII.

Figure 22: Examples of the engravers' credit at the end of the Illustrations list in Volumes I-XII.

Photogravures by John Andrew & Son, Boston

Photogravures by Suffolk Engraving and Electrotyping Company, Boston

Figure 23: Examples of the engravers' credit on portfolio plates in all volumes.

Photogravure John Andrew & Son

Photogravure Suffolk Eng. Co. Boston

In the portfolios, each plate bears the name of the engraver at the bottom right of the image.

All original book photogravures are a quarto format. The dimensions of the image and plate impressions vary depending on the particular image. Most images average around

¹⁰ See [Appendix C](#) for the relevant pages from the John Andrew & Son sample book.

5.25" x 7.25" (19cm x 14cm). Plate impressions are slightly larger, averaging around 8" x 7" (20cm x 18cm).

There is a frontispiece photogravure in all volumes, and in 17 of the 20 books photogravures are inserted into the numbered pages section at a relatively consistent rate of one unpaginated photogravure followed by two numbered pages of text or chapter titles. There are several exceptions to this spacing in Volumes X, XI, and XII, with the longest being 35 pages of uninterrupted text in Volume XI.

Twenty-seven of the photogravures in the books are hand-colored, but none of the portfolio plates are colored (see [Appendix B](#) for a complete list). This process involved the painstaking work of individually brushing color dyes, sometimes mixed or overlaid with black, white, green, blue, red or yellow pigments, on each of the printed plates that were selected for coloring. It's estimated that at least 10,000 individual plates were hand-tinted throughout the publication cycle, most likely by women artists working in the engraving companies.

Most images in the books are unique, although in at least 18 of the volumes Curtis included a frontal portrait of a person followed by a profile portrait of the same individual.

In Volumes III, IV, and V only there are sections in the appendices called "Biographical Sketches." These consist of outlines of the lives of people mentioned in those volumes; they range in length from a few sentences to an entire page. A total of 84 of the sketches appear in the three volumes, and at the end of each of them there is a reference to a portrait of that person in the respective book or portfolio.

Otherwise, the individual images are rarely referred to in the text. Out of the more than one million words in the publication, there are only 102 times that the text refers to photographs in the books and 38 times that it refers to images in the portfolios.¹¹

¹¹ Cohen Stuart, Herman. [Verdwijning en verandering: Beeldvorming en boodschappen in Edward S. Curtis' "The North American Indian"](#). PhD thesis, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2016, 404.

Lauriat Variants



Figure 24: An example of a set bound by Lauriat. Photo: © Swann Auction Galleries; reproduced here with their permission.

By the time Curtis completed his project in 1930, the public's interest in it and the overall plight of Native Peoples had significantly diminished. In 1935 the Morgan family decided they had no financial or legal reason to hold onto the photographs and research that Curtis had produced, and they sold all of the assets of The North American Indian, Inc. to Charles Lauriat Books of Boston.

Included in the assets that were sold were fourteen complete and already bound sets of *The North American Indian*; enough printed text pages and photogravures to assemble at least 30 additional complete sets; approximately 285,000 photogravures and original prints produced by Curtis during the project; all of the documentation, recordings, and research notes collected during the project, and the original text drafts for the books. The Lauriat Company paid \$1,000 for the entire collection.

Lauriat immediately offered the fourteen complete sets for sale. Nine standard edition sets were offered for \$885 and five deluxe sets with texts bound in full Levant and folios in $\frac{3}{4}$ Levant were priced at \$1,245. Later they offered five additional sets that were part of the original 25 that Curtis provided to J. P. Morgan in exchange for his initial funding.

Lauriat also stated that they could assemble an additional ten sets from existing printed pages and photogravures, but the Census has determined that they possibly produced at least another 24 sets. Some authors have claimed that as many as 50 additional sets were assembled and sold, but at this time that number has not been documented.

Lauriat sold three main types of set variants:

1. Original edition sets: when the Morgan family sold all of the remaining *North American Indian* assets to Lauriat in 1935, the book dealer acquired at least 14 complete sets in the original binding. Our research thus far indicates that none of these sets are numbered, although in every other way they are the same as a numbered set.
2. Assembled and newly bound sets in leather: Lauriat was able to assemble and bind somewhere between 24 and 50 additional book sets from previously printed but unbound pages. These sets have two distinct features that distinguish them from the original edition bindings. First, they are uniformly bound in what is called “half blue” Levant, which has a dark bluish-brown color (see the photo at the beginning of this section). Secondly, the wording on the spines is different. The second panel from the top simply says “Edward S. Curtis,” whereas the original edition that panel says “Curtis” plus the volume number. In the third panel from the top, the word “The” is omitted before any Native group name.
3. Assembled and newly bound sets in library buckram; at least two copies are known to be held by libraries at this time.

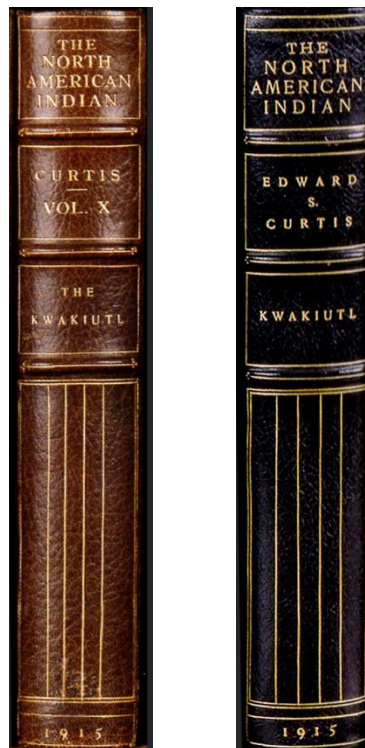


Figure 25: A comparison of the original binding (left) and one created by Lauriat (right).

Lauriat also sold unbound copies of the book pages, and at least one set is known to have been custom-bound later by a collector/owner.

Part of the assets Lauriat bought included 17 complete sets of portfolios 12-20. Between 1935 and 1967 they printed 17 new copies of the plates from portfolios 1-11 in order to have complete portfolio sets to sell. The new copies were printed on a different paper known as Tweedweave by master printer Emiliano Sorini. Accordingly, these newly printed portfolio plates are now known as Tweedweave or Sorini prints; they are considered to be restrikes. Most of these portfolios have been broken up to sell the individual plates to interested collectors.

As part of their efforts to inventory the assets they had purchased, someone at Lauriat Books created a list of all of the known owners of the books at that time. This list shows 272 names of individuals and institutions, and it has often been referred to as the authoritative document for determining how many sets of the books were published. However, the list is known to have some inaccuracies, and it is most valuable as a beginning reference point for further research.

Appendix A: List of the Printers, Binders, and Photogravure Engravers

Volume	Year	Printer	Photogravures	Bindery
1	1907	University Press ¹²	John Andrew & Son ¹³	Henry Blackwell ¹⁴
2	1908	University Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
3	1908	University Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
4	1909	University Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
5	1909	University Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
6	1911	Plimpton Press ¹⁵	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
7	1911	Plimpton Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
8	1911	Plimpton Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
9	1913	Plimpton Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
10	1915	Plimpton Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
11	1916	Plimpton Press	John Andrew & Son	Henry Blackwell
12	1922	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving ¹⁶	Henry Blackwell
13	1924	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Henry Blackwell
14	1924	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Henry Blackwell
15	1926	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett ¹⁷
16	1926	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett
17	1926	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett
18	1928	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett
19	1930	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett
20	1930	Plimpton Press	Suffolk Engraving	Whitman Bennett

¹² The University Press, Cambridge, MA

¹³ John Andrew & Sons, 125 Summer Street, Boston, MA. The stamp of the Gravure-Enching Company, located at this same address, appears on some of the photogravure proofs for volumes I-II (now in the collection of the Princeton University Library). Little is known about that company, and their name does not appear anywhere else in connection with the publication.

¹⁴ Henry Blackwell, New York, NY

¹⁵ The Plimpton Press, Norwood, MA

¹⁶ Suffolk Engraving and Electrotyping, 394 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, Mass.

¹⁷ Whitman Bennett, New York, NY

Appendix B: Lists of the Book and Portfolio Contents

Contents Summary

Volume	Year	Numbered Pages ¹⁸	Original Photos	Maps & Diagrams	Photos of Drawings	Portfolio Plates	Plate Numbers
I	1907	161	73		6	39	1-39
II	1908	142	75			36	40-75
III	1908	212	73	1	4	36	76-110, 119 ¹⁹
IV	1909	244	74			36	111-118, 120-147
V	1909	209	74	1	1	36	148-183
VI	1911	193	75			36	184-219
VII	1911	210	75			36	220-255
VIII	1911	227	75	2		37	256-292
IX	1913	227	75			36	293-328
X	1915	366	71	3		36	329-364
XI	1916	235	74	1		36	365-400
XII	1922	291	75			36	400-435 ²⁰
XIII	1924	316	75			36	436-471
XIV	1924	284	75			36	472-507
XV	1926	225	75			36	508-543
XVI	1926	322	71		4	36	544-579
XVII	1926	249	74			36	580-615
XVIII	1928	253	75			36	616-651
XIX	1930	270	75			36	652-687
XX	1930	320	76	2		35	688-722
Totals		4,956	1,486	10	15	723	

Each set contains 2,234 photogravures, including 1,511 in the books and 723 in the portfolios.

¹⁸ Each book also contains a table of contents, an “alphabet used in recording Indian terms”, a list of illustrations, and an introduction that are sequentially enumerated in roman numerals. They occur before the regularly numbered pages and on average add 8-12 pages to the length of an individual book.

¹⁹ Plate number 119 was placed out of sequence in the portfolio.

²⁰ The number 400 is used twice, for two different images.

Maps and Diagrams

Volume	Facing Page	Title
III	44	Custer battle-field map
V	64	Ground plan of Arikara medicine-lodge
VIII	160	Map of the Nez Perce Territory
VIII	182	Map of the Chinookan Territory
X	18	A Tsawatenok house-front
X	174	A Nakoaktok mawihl
X	250	Thunderbirds and Whales
XI	100	Sketch of an Indian fish-trap
XX	3	Map Showing Dialects and hunting territories of the Coast Eskimo of Alaska
XX	8	Ground-plan, Roof-plan, and Section of Eskimo Men's House

The books contain four maps, four sketches or diagrams of Native designs, and two ground-plans of Native dwellings. All of these were hand-drawn by one of Curtis's project team specifically for the publication.

Photos of Drawings Made by Native Artists

Volume	Facing Page	Title
I	31	Sacred buckskin – Apache*
I	46	Sand mosaic – Apache
I	78	Pikehodiklad – Navaho
I	118	Pikehodiklad – Navaho
I	120	Shilhne'ohli – Navaho
I	122	Zahadolzha – Navaho
III	158	Winter-count, first period*
III	160	Winter-count, 1540*
III	162	Winter-count, 1680*
III	164	Winter-count, 1701-1727*
V	20	Record of custodians of a turtle-drum - Mandan
XVI	152	Native drawings of Santo Domingo masks*
XVI	154	Wall-painting for the summer Shiwanna ceremony – Santo Domingo*
XVI	204	Native conception of a kopsishtaia with mask and tabllita – Acoma*
XVI	214	Native conception of Histiani-Kowasutyi – “Flint-wing”, the Thunderbird – Acoma*

* Indicates the photogravures of these drawings were hand-colored.

This list includes drawings made on animal skins, in sand, and on walls.

Hand-Colored Photogravures

Volume	Facing Page	Title
I	31	Sacred buckskin – Apache
III	26	Pipe-bags
III	30	Scalp-shirts
IV	20	Apsaroke horse trappings
V	22	Contents of bundle of Numak-Mahana – Mandan
V	30	Buffalo-dance costume – Mandan
V	112	Parfleches – Atsina
VI	36	Naval-amulets – Piegan
VIII	92	Wishham beadwork
IX	62	Skokomish baskets
X	18	A Tsawatenok house-front
X	174	A Nakoaktoak mawihl
X	250	Thunderbirds and whales
XI	16	Makah basketry
XIII	162	Day dreams, Crater Lake
XIV	154	A gem of basketry – Southern Yokuts
XV	12	Basketry of the Mission Indians (A)
XVI	152	Native drawings of Santo Domingo masks
XVI	154	Wall-painting for the summer Shiwanna ceremony - Santo Domingo
XVI	204	Native conception of a kopsishtaia with mask and tablita - Acoma
XVI	214	Native conception of Histiani-Kowasutyi - "Flint-wing", the Thunderbird – Acoma
XVIII	Frontispiece	A Blackfoot
XVIII	192	Lodge of the Horn Society – Blood
XIX	144	An Arapaho
XIX	152	Seeing High – Oto
XX	Frontispiece	On Kotzebue Sound
XX	102	Looking to Sea, King Island

Appendix C: The Photogravure Process

This description of the photogravure process as used in *The North American Indian* is from *John Andrew & Son – Sample Book*, Boston: John Andrew & Son, 1912.

Photogravure

Photogravure has been justly called the aristocracy of the photographic reproductive processes. It is an intaglio process having every advantage of photographic accuracy, and the depth and richness of a steel engraving or an etching. It is printed in exactly the same manner as the latter, from a copper plate, the surface of which is protected with a delicate coating of steel. It must be borne in mind that it is exactly the opposite from relief or letterpress printing, inasmuch as the paper is squeezed into depressions in the plate, which are filled with ink, instead of taking the ink off of a surface which is covered with ink.

The process of plate-making is as follows: On a highly polished copper plate is deposited a very fine dust of bitumen, which is a resinous powder. This is subjected to a proper degree of heat which melts the fine particles of the powder to a certain extent, and gives a plate covered with a very fine resinous grain. This copper plate is then coated with sensitized gelatine in practically the same manner as a photographic dry plate is made. A regular toned negative, of the same nature as would be required to make a good print on photographic paper, is made, and from this a positive of the size called for in the final photogravure print. This positive is of the same nature which we see in a window transparency or lantern slide.

The sensitized grained copper plate is then placed in contact with the positive in a printing frame and placed in the proper light, exactly as if we were making a photographic print on paper. The action of the light on the sensitized grain on the copper hardens it in different degrees, according to the different tones in the positive. The highlights or transparent parts of the positive allow the strongest action of light, which hardens the particles of the grain protecting these parts of the plate to the greatest extent, so that when we come to etch the plate the acid has very little chance, or none at all, to disturb the surface of the copper. The shadows being acted upon less, or not at all, leaves the copper in different degrees of protection, and gives the acid a chance to bite into the copper to a greater or less extent, as called for in different values of shadows or blacks in the subject.

We must bear in mind all the time that this operation is exactly opposite from that which we wish to obtain in a half-tone or relief plate, as we wish the lights to be solid metal and the darks to be depressions in the metal, hence the use of a positive instead of a negative. When we get a proper print on the copper and have washed away the superfluous gelatine, we have a plate which is protected in varying degrees in accordance with the tones of the subject.

The next step is to protect all the surface of the copper outside the boundaries of the picture, as this must be perfectly polished copper. This is painted over with an asphaltum varnish, as well as the back of the plate, and we are ready to etch. The etching is done with perchloride of iron solution as an acid, and the result is then dependent on the skill and judgment of etcher. The plate is then thoroughly cleaned, and we have in the darks of the picture a roughness of copper, but extremely fine in texture, and this roughness or grain smoothing itself out through the different tones until, when we get to where we wish white paper, we have no grain at all, but smooth, polished copper.

Any defects are corrected, or minor changes are now brought about, in the same manner that a steel engraver or etcher would manipulate a steel or copper plate, and we are ready for a proof. The plate is put on the bed of the press, which is flat, and kept slightly heated, and the ink applied by a hand roller in quantity sufficient to thoroughly fill all the interstices of the grain in the plate, and the excess wiped away with cloth, and afterward with the bare hand. The paper, which can be of almost any nature, except coated or highly sized, is dampened and laid on the plate. The bed is then run under a roller covered with a woolen blanket, with considerable pressure, which squeezes the paper into the filled-in grain, and the result is a print which in depth of shadow and beautiful gradation, and softness of tone, cannot be equaled by any other photographic reproductive process.

As soon as this proof is considered approved, and we are ready to print the edition, the plate is electro-plated with a very thin coating of steel which in no way affects the quality of tones, but protects the delicate grain which would soon wear away, as the copper itself is too soft to stand the continued wiping and general wear of printing.

Photogravure has been used to the greatest extent for high-class book illustration and the reproduction of paintings for framed pictures. It has come into use recently, however, along commercial lines where the edition has not been too large, and many exquisite booklets, covers, menus, announcements, etc., have been produced. These have the quality and value of steel engravings, but are much more artistic and yet not so prohibitive in regard to expense as the latter.

The impression of quality is heightened when the photogravure is printed on one of the many imported hand-made papers from Japan, Italy, France, Spain and England.

A Report of The Curtis Legacy Foundation
www.curtislegacyfoundation.org