

# The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: The Arnold Lupson Photographic Collection\*



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**RÉSUMÉ** Ce texte explore les effets transformateurs de la numérisation sur les photographies en examinant l'histoire d'une série d'images photographiques, la collection Arnold Lupson, déposée aux Archives Glenbow à Calgary, en Alberta. Les photographies de Lupson, qui ont été prises dans les années 1920, montrent des peuples des Premières Nations. Au cours des années, des personnes travaillant selon différents courants archivistiques ont laissé leur marque sur les descriptions de ces photographies, qui ont été retravaillées et modifiées. Des vestiges de ces premiers efforts descriptifs paraissent toujours dans les bases de données numériques qui portent maintenant la marque culturelle de ces photographies. Le texte conclut que pour mieux comprendre cet héritage colonial, nous devons être capables de faire le lien plus ouvertement entre l'histoire matérielle de ces photographies et leurs copies virtuelles.

**ABSTRACT** This article explores the transformative effects of digitization on photographs by tracing the history of one series of photographic images, the Arnold Lupson collection, at the Glenbow Archives in Calgary, Alberta. As Lupson's photographs of First Nations peoples, originally taken in the 1920s, moved through different hands and archival grids, the meanings attached to the photographs were reworked and renegotiated, and remnants of these earlier interventions continue to haunt the digital databases that now bear the cultural weight of these photographs. It is argued that in order to fully grasp these colonial legacies, we need to be able to reconnect the material history of the photographs more overtly to their virtual surrogates.

... the technical structure of the *archiving* archive also determines the structure of the *archivable* content even in its very coming into existence and in its relationship to the future. The archivization produces as much as it records the event.

Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*

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According to its website, the Glenbow Museum has digitized more than 82,000 photographs. Instead of sifting through rows upon rows of index cards stacked neatly in filing cabinets, the researcher of the digital era now employs an online database to sort, search, and arrange relevant results of thumbnail-images, a tool publicly accessible to all who have access to a computer and a broadband connection. This digital interaction has reshaped the way historians and other scholars conduct their research. However, as Mark J.P. Wolf reminds us, “Digitization, as a form of translation, is not a neutral process, for it changes whatever passes through it.” Wolf points to the homogenizing effects of digitization, absorbing the “raw material” of other cultures and filtering it through the “grid of digitization,” producing cultural biases that ultimately favour “digital culture itself.”<sup>1</sup> Along similar lines, Joanna Sassoon offers a sustained critique of the specific effects of digitization for photographic collections, arguing that “digitizing is essentially a cultural process,” and suggesting that while digital collections may offer “the illusion of enhanced access to collections,” there are serious consequences to the loss of materiality.<sup>2</sup>

While appreciating, and drawing from, these critiques, my interest in the online photographic collections of the Glenbow stems from an exploration of the history of the archive itself. Digital collections, despite their recent appearance and explosive growth, carry within them the fragments and shrapnel of earlier archival transformations. By tracing the journey of one particular photographic collection through the archive, from private hands to public resource, from material object to digital artifact, I want to highlight some of the colonial legacies hidden within the virtual layers of digitization. What follows is a patchwork of encounters with the photographic collection of Arnold Lupson; by weaving together the variegated histories of these images through the material and digital realms, a larger picture emerges of how archival grids and the processes of digitization have altered the meanings attached to photographs.<sup>3</sup>

1 Mark J.P. Wolf, *Abstracting Reality: Art, Communication, and Cognition in the Digital Age* (Boston, 2000), pp. 89, 109.

2 Joanna Sassoon, “Photographic Materiality in the Age of Digital Reproduction,” in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images* (London, 2004), p. 200. Among her other concerns, some of which are outlined below, Sassoon worries that sublimating the material photograph within a “morass of digital mono-media” will lead to a loss of “the trust of researchers that institutions are looking after the best interests of the material above other forms of commodity-based politics” (p. 201).

3 To be clear, my object in this paper is not to condemn or admonish the work of any particular archivists, but rather to use this case study to reflect on a wider history of archival practices. I am indebted to the staff at the Glenbow for their encouragement of this project and for their assistance in accessing unprocessed records on the early years of the Glenbow Foundation.

### Was a Good Farmer

The face that stares out at me from the computer screen looks like many other images of Aboriginal peoples, which populate photographic archives in Canada and around the world. While too often the subjects of these pictures are anonymous, this one is specifically named. The Glenbow photographic database offers this description:

Image No: NA-667-95

Title: Many Fires, Blackfoot.

Date: [ca. 1920s]

Photographer/Illustrator: Lupson, Arnold, Calgary, Alberta

Remarks: Head and shoulder view. Was a good farmer.

Subject(s): Blackfoot - Personalities / Blackfoot - Costume



**Figure 1:** Screen capture of Glenbow Photographic Database, showing portrait of Many Fires (accessed 7 May 2007). Used with permission, Glenbow Archives.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Exact URLs for individual images do not exist, but the online searchable database is available at: <http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesPhotosSearch.aspx> (accessed 7 May 2007). It should be noted that after the main research for this paper was conducted (May 2007), the Glenbow independently decided to replace the category of "costume" with "dress."

Juxtaposed against this particular image, the Glenbow's description raises as many questions as it answers. The subject matter has little to indicate the activity of farming, as evidenced by the close framing of the portrait and the "costume" Many Fires is wearing. And yet, slipped into the "remarks" is the comment, "Was a good farmer." Where did this assessment come from, and what is its relevance (if any), to the meanings embedded within the photograph itself?

Beyond the actual details provided, the omissions of the description are also worthy of notice. The subject and photographer are clearly identified, but from within the photographic database, one cannot trace any particular information on Arnold Lupson, or how his images ended up being part of the Glenbow Museum's photographic collections. The description reflects the common perception that the history of the photograph as an object is less important than the image content, the "subject" depicted within the picture. Whatever the compositional characteristics of the image, in this case, the significance of Lupson's photograph is reduced textually to the subject description "Blackfoot – personalities / Blackfoot – Costume." Joan M. Schwartz expertly dissects the problems inherent in this form of classification:

Traditional item-level description of photographs, indexed by subject and credited to the photographer, but without adequate contextual information about their functional origins and provenance, or clear links to such contextual information, transforms photographic archives into stock photo libraries, reducing photographs to their visible elements, and conflating photographic content and photographic meaning.<sup>5</sup>

The fields of text that surround the image of Many Fires certainly fit this mould, although the addition of "was a good farmer" points to a level of archival intervention that goes beyond the visible elements.

As these descriptive practices long preceded the rise of digital databases, in order to understand the textual ordering of Many Fires's portrait online, we need to historicize the archival processes which have re-framed the photograph. The Glenbow Museum's photographic archive was established soon after the founding of the Glenbow Foundation by oilman and philanthropist Eric Harvie in 1954.<sup>6</sup> Archivist Hugh A. Dempsey, then recently hired, researched a wide variety of other institutions before recommending a method for managing the growing number of photographs that the Foundation had collected. Drawing upon a system designed by the Historical Society of Minnesota, Dempsey instituted procedures for accessioning and indexing

5 Joan M. Schwartz, "Coming to Terms with Photographs: Descriptive Standards, Linguistic 'Othering', and the Margins of Archivry," *Archivaria* 54 (Fall 2002), p. 157.

6 For a recent exploration of Harvie and the Glenbow, see Frances W. Kaye, *Hiding the Audience: Viewing Arts and Arts Institutions on the Prairies* (Edmonton, 2003), Chapter 4.

negatives and prints. Photographs would be numbered consecutively and accession cards would include “subject, date, cost, description, and source.” The photographs or prints of negatives would then be filed under standardized subject headings, and cross-indexed file cards would be produced for each “individual and subject relating to the photo.”<sup>7</sup> By 1958, the Glenbow’s photographic holdings had grown to include fifty-five thousand negatives, three thousand prints and smaller amounts of movies, slides, and colour film, while plans for an in-house darkroom were under consideration.<sup>8</sup>

The archival structures established by Dempsey in the 1950s remain visible in the online database today. However, in the shift from card catalogues to digital database, new tools and interfaces have been created that dramatically alter how the researcher interacts with photographs. While the process of digitization has not substantially changed the information included or the text itself, it has transformed how the textual data is used to categorize and classify. No longer dependent upon a finite number of cross-reference cards, the textual addenda outside of the “subject” lines assume a whole new level of importance in online searching. In the original card catalogue system, one could only search by image number or through subject headings. Now, all of this data is searchable, and a keyword search of “farmer” would bring forth Lupson’s portrait of Many Fires. What was once deemed incidental to the “true” significance of the photograph (the real “subject”), now has the potential to produce new taxonomies and meanings.

Perhaps this is not necessarily a bad thing. Subject headings, and the manner in which they are applied, can themselves serve as tools of exclusion.<sup>9</sup> Restricting the search to the subject heading “farmers” brings forth 218 results in the online Glenbow photographic database. Like the photograph of Many Fires, a number of the results are portraits of individuals that offer no visual connection to farming as a profession. But the central identity of a person as a “farmer” is signaled in the subject line in a way that is absent from the description of Many Fires, where farming is a marginal remark that is not, apparently, worth cross-referencing. Only one image of the 218 with subject-identified “farmers” is described as being related to First Nations, and it is an undated, unidentified photograph of a family loading a wagon with poles. None of the portraits or , as designated by the Glenbow subject headings,

7 Glenbow Archives, Glenbow Administrative Records, Box 21, file “Equipment (photography),” memo, Hugh A. Dempsey to J.H. re. Photographic Filing System, 9 November 1956.

8 Glenbow Archives, Glenbow Administrative Records, Box 15, file, “Glenbow Foundation: A Summary of Activities to March 15th,” p. 3.

9 There are many critiques of the power of description in archival recordkeeping. For one recent contribution, see Wendy M. Duff and Verne Harris, “Stories and Names: Archival Description as Narrating Records and Constructing Meanings,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), pp. 263-85.

“personalities,” provide any link between the identities of being both First Nations and a farmer. Thus, it could be argued that online keyword searching in this case has the power to subvert old classifications that were complicit in perpetuating colonialist assumptions on the fundamental incompatibility of Aboriginal peoples and agriculture.<sup>10</sup> Through the power of the keyword search, the portrait of Many Fires emerges as part of a new and more diverse pantheon of “farmers,” an association produced by the ability of computerized databases to multiply fields of reference.<sup>11</sup>

However, where did the particular assessment of Many Fires as a “good farmer” come from in the first place? In 1955, before Dempsey had officially established an archival system for classifying photographs, the Arnold Lupson photographs were brought to the attention of Eric Harvie by Kenneth Coppock, the owner of a local saddlery, who agreed to loan the approximately 1,100 black and white negatives of varying sizes to the Foundation for copying purposes, although he later donated them outright. The photographs cover a wide range of Aboriginal peoples and ceremonies from Southern Alberta, taken largely in the 1920s. The obvious problem, however, was that as a group of negatives there was no textual description to explain who or what was being depicted. Norman Luxton, who had entered into a partnership with Harvie in connection with the Luxton Museum in Banff, examined the images and declared that, “we will have perhaps five hundred good reference [sic] Indian lore and handicraft work.”<sup>12</sup>

With no archival system yet in place for classification, and needing more textual description to understand what was represented in the photographs, Harvie hired George Gooderham, a recently retired Indian Agent,<sup>13</sup> to write biographies of those who could be identified in the photographs. Philip H. Godsell, a former inspector for the Hudson’s Bay Company, writer, and an

10 On the reality and myth of Aboriginal agriculture on the prairies, see Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy* (Montreal and Kingston, 1990). Carter demonstrates that it was “Euro-Canadian observers, not Indians themselves, who have claimed that Indians and agriculture are incompatible,” obscuring both First Nations’ positive response to agriculture and the role of government policy in undermining it (p. 3).

11 This is a classic example of what Lilly Koltun refers to as “unintended elements,” which are “scooped up with the intended and suddenly expose a fruitful connection or dissension . . .” Lilly Koltun, “The Promise and Threat of Digital Options in an Archival Age,” *Archivaria* 47 (Spring 1999), p. 131.

12 Glenbow Archives, Luxton Museum Collection, Box 2/2300-9(5), Norman Luxton, correspondence 14 February 1955.

13 According to the Glenbow finding aid for his collection, Gooderham was the son of an Indian Agent who took up his father’s post on the Siksika reserve at Gleichien, Alberta, from 1920 to 1946. From 1946 to 1954, he was the Regional Supervisor of Indian Agencies in Alberta and the Northwest Territories. The Glenbow Foundation hired Gooderham in 1955, and he continued to work for Harvie for more than twenty years.

avid collector of Native artifacts, was also hired as a researcher and collaborated with Gooderham in editing and producing a series of photographic albums based on Lupson's photographs. Organized by "tribes," the photographic albums provide biographical sketches of various people identified in the images, and occasionally offered an extended commentary on traditional customs, objects, and ceremonies.

The image of Many Fires takes on entirely new meanings when situated within the context of the photographic albums of Godsell and Gooderham. As material objects, albums impose their own sense of order and narrative upon what has been contained within. Far from being an isolated image, the portrait of Many Fires is numbered and grouped with two other photographs, including one of his wife alone, and one of him posing with his wife and horse. Gooderham's introduction to the three images associated with Many Fires offers a revealing glimpse of how the former Indian Agent's perspective shaped many of the biographies in the album:

A progressive Blackfoot, the photo was likely taken in the '20's when he was attending the Calgary Stampede. He was a good farmer and intelligent, but did not speak or write English. He died of a heart attack about 1930.

His wife (134A) was uneducated but kept her four-roomed cottage on the farm clean and tidy. It was fairly well furnished but notwithstanding she and her husband still made their bed on the floor. She died in the early '40s.

Photo No. 134B was taken at the Stampede. His mount is a pinto which was favoured and more highly valued than horses of any other colour by the Blackfeet.<sup>14</sup>

The issue here is not simply the source of the phrase, "He was a good farmer," but rather the power of Gooderham's textual glosses to re-frame the meanings attached to the photographs. Despite his positive assessment of Many Fires, colonialist assumptions and an abiding faith in assimilation are deeply embedded in this description, and they are starkly evident throughout the albums. Many Fires's wife remains unnamed, but is judged to be morally acceptable based on domestic cleanliness. Many Fires is viewed as "progressive" despite the shortcomings of language and the continued custom of sleeping on the floor. Gooderham's authoritative judgment could be both generous and damning. In the same Siksika album, another series of portraits features Tom Cutter. Similar to the photographs of Many Fires, Cutter is featured both close up and on a horse, probably at the Calgary Stampede. Gooderham's description, however, frames the photographs rather differently:

14 George H. Gooderham, *Northern Plains Tribes. Vol. 1 Blackfeet*, ed. Philip H. Godsell (Calgary, 1955), p. 95. Glenbow Archives, Gooderham Fonds, M 4350. Photographs in the albums had their own numbering system, and the three photographs here were numbered 134, 134A, and 134B.

“He was a pleasant, ineffectual Indian. He had a little education and struggled to farm. Had a clever, though unscrupulous wife, and outlaws for brothers.”<sup>15</sup>

The photographic albums were produced in the mid- and late-1950s, when the Glenbow Foundation itself was in its early formation. Tensions existed between the self-declared “Indian experts,” such as Godsell and Gooderham, and the new professional museum and archives staff, including Hugh A. Dempsey.<sup>16</sup> The albums were potentially useful as reference material, but could not serve as an adequate classification system for the Lupson collection or the rest of the photographs that were starting to pile up. Parallel to Gooderham and Godsell’s project, the Glenbow printed copies of the Lupson negatives, ordered them with standardized numbers, and arranged them in a separate series of binders. Therefore, two separate, and, in many ways, competing archival “grids” were imposed on the Lupson images: one which systematically ordered the photographs within the larger photographic holdings of the Glenbow, and one which sought to explain the images by contextualizing a wider general knowledge about them, following the albums’ title, the “Northern Plains Tribes.” In the archival albums, the back of the print depicting Many Fires lists the new number (NA-667-95) and the description “Many Fires, Blackfoot Indian, ca. 1920’s. Was a good farmer.” Whether due to space or the discretion of more modern sensibilities, archival intervention has reduced Gooderham’s biographical sketch to a bare phrase. “Was a good farmer” is a remnant and a point of intersection between the two competing archival grids developed a half-century ago, and is now carried into new realms through digitization.<sup>17</sup>

### Digital Albums

The mystery of the origins of the remark is solved, but Gooderham’s text did not remain buried in a set of obscure photographic albums. His extended description of Many Fires is still attached to the image in another digital format, on another part of the Web. In 2005, three of the five Lupson photographic albums were digitized by the Glenbow (those related to the Kainai, Piikani, and Siksika nations). These, however, were not integrated or cross-referenced with the Glenbow’s main photographic database. Instead, they

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>16</sup> Godsell in particular resented Dempsey’s presence and interference in his various projects. Prior to joining the Glenbow, Dempsey had written a “scathing attack” questioning the accuracy of one of Godsell’s articles. See Hugh A. Dempsey, “Glenbow’s Early Days,” *Glenbow*, vol. 6, no. 4 (September/October 1986), p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> The digital database seems to have collated information from both the print cards and other cross-referencing index cards. For example, the phrase, “was a good farmer” is not included in the index card listed under Many Fires’ name, but “Head and Shoulders view” is, a line absent from the print card.



were published through the Archives Society of Alberta's (ASA) *InWord* text database. Although the albums were originally produced as a way to make the photographic collection meaningful, the digitization process has now re-framed the albums as primarily textual records. The images themselves have been marginalized so completely that Arnold Lupson's name does not even appear in the online description for the album:

**Title:** Northern Plains Tribes: Blackfeet [Siksika]

**Fonds title:** George H. Gooderham fonds

**Physical Description:** 197 pages

**Description:** Consists of biographies and photographs of Siksika members of the Blackfoot Nation, written by George Gooderham and Philip Godsell for the Glenbow Foundation. See pages 6-8 for a list of people included.

**Repository:** Glenbow Archives

**Creator:** Gooderham, George; Godsell, Philip

**Topics:** First Nations

**Language:** The material is in English.

**Standard number:** M-4350-vol1



Help Feedback Home  
Doc Search => Results => Item

#### Display - Alberta InWord

Previous Entry

Next Entry

Title: Northern Plains Tribes: Blackfeet [Siksika]  
Fonds title: George H. Gooderham fonds  
Date: 1965  
Physical Description: 197 pages  
Description: Consists of biographies and photographs of Siksika members of the Blackfoot Nation, written by George Gooderham and Philip Godsell for the Glenbow Foundation. See pages 6-8 for a list of people included.  
Repository: Glenbow Archives  
Creator: Gooderham, George ; Godsell, Philip  
Topic: First Nations  
Language: The material is in English.  
Standard number: M-4350-vol1

#### Document pages

To access the scanned document pages, click on the following page numbers.

To return to the item description click on the **Item** link on the menu.

Page: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 >>

**Figure 2:** Screen capture of Alberta *InWord*. Archives Society of Alberta, <http://asalive.archivesalberta.org:8080/access/asa/documents/> (accessed 7 May 2007). Used with permission, Archives Society of Alberta.

In this description, the images are used merely to illustrate the writings of Gooderham and Godsell, and the albums are hierarchically designated as but one part of a larger Gooderham fonds. Through these particular channels, reclassification and digitization has actually produced a new virtual object, a manuscript of “biographies and photos” authored by Gooderham and Godsell.

The extent of this transformation in meaning is hardly a superficial one. In their material form, the researcher encounters the albums within a particular spatial context where the archival grids overlap. In pencil, familiar “NA” photo numbers have been added to the albums to indicate where the images can be cross-referenced to the larger collection in the print binders, located just a few feet away. Digitization, which so often produces new relationships and associations through the power of relational databases, has, in this case, produced the opposite effect. It has segmented and separated what, in the spatial context of the photographic reading room, was clearly intended to be interlinked at an operational level, even if the origins and assumptions that guided the two competing systems were at odds with one another.

Nor should we underestimate the impact of the loss of materiality in the transference of the albums from reference room to virtual domains. Within the reference room, the albums clearly function as, in historians’ terms, “secondary” materials. They were conceived of, and viewed as, carriers of a particular “primary” source, which were the photographic prints (and which implied an even more “primary” original, namely, Lupson’s negatives). No one who uses the albums in their physical form could fail to make the distinction between “primary” and “secondary” material, between the individual photographs and the typed manuscript pages of text that surround and contain them. The paper, the binding, the style of font, all serve as sensory cues that the viewer would recognize, situating the albums as a product of a particular time, confirmed by the date and forward explanation placed at the front.

However, Alberta *InWord* is an online database of primary textual documents (as opposed to its separate counterpart for visual materials, *InSight*). In publishing the albums here, and situating them in relation to the Gooderham Fonds (rather than viewing it as a product of the Glenbow itself, despite the qualifying remarks in the description), they become more narrowly defined as historical artifacts, removed from the context of their own production. The albums are now firmly enshrined as “primary” sources, abstracted from their original use and re-framed by a new syntax and archival structure. The very process of digitization reinforces the merging of interpretive layers, as all parts of the album are flattened and squeezed to suit the needs of the computer screen. The imposed uniformity that now confronts the viewer who accesses the albums online, hides the tensions that were apparent within the physical albums. In other words, text and image are bonded even more closely, because the material clues that alert us to their distinctiveness have been removed. Ultimately, as Joanna Sassoon suggests,

By its nature as a visualizing medium, digitisation encourages a shift from thinking about the complexity of the material object to viewing the visual surface of an image. At once the technology reduces the subtlety of the material features of the individual photographic object and highlights the homogenous nature of the digital image.<sup>18</sup>

This situation leaves us with a great deal of uncertainty on the status and meaning of Gooderham's textual intervention. Has the view from the Indian Agent now been given new life in the digital realm? Have such judgments been rendered more authoritative, through the endless possibilities of distribution and circulation, or less so, now that the albums themselves have been designated as "primary" in nature? Does the very claim to be "primary" or a "raw" source imply that further interpretation is necessary, or does it suggest that these materials are somehow "purer" than secondary works?

The Alberta *InWord* database does not allow for full-text searching within the documents it has scanned, but exactly how this material is "read" online also remains uncertain. If one is jumping from page to page in a non-linear fashion, how easy is it to miss the front matter that, in bare form at least, offers a brief contextualization of the original album project? (Indeed, can one even speak of a "right" way of reading them?) What are the institutional ethics in digitally publishing content that embodies such teleological notions of "progress" and essentializing assumptions of race (not to mention, in some cases, photographs of objects or practices that may be considered sacred knowledge by Aboriginal communities)?

Coming to terms with these issues is important, but yet another hidden layer of context surrounds the digitization of the Lupson albums. At the Glenbow's request the scanning of the albums was included as part of a larger online educational project critiquing the Eurocentric nature of archives. This innovative interactive website, *Seeing with New Eyes: a Journey into Blackfoot Knowledge*, is a collaborative project produced by the Archives Society of Alberta and Red Crow Community College, located on the Kainai Nation. Through a first-person perspective, the website places the viewer in the role of an urban aboriginal teenager who reconnects with his/her Blackfoot heritage by "exploring culturally significant sites, interacting with Blackfoot elders, and hearing traditional stories."<sup>19</sup> Along the way, the participant is confronted with multiple and competing forms of knowledge, contrasting Blackfoot knowledge and modes of knowledge transfer with Eurocentric assumptions. The Glenbow itself plays a role in the site's narrative and is presented as a useful but flawed source of knowledge, offering an incomplete

18 Sassoon, p. 190.

19 See <http://blackfoot-awakening.ca> (accessed 10 May 2007).

pathway to rediscovering cultural identity and a connection to the land.<sup>20</sup>

While *Seeing with New Eyes* does not employ Lupson's photographs directly, a wide variety of documents were digitized as part of its production, in order to support the educational modules that teachers and students could use to contrast and compare Blackfoot forms of knowledge with western-archival practices.<sup>21</sup> In one instance, grade ten social studies students are asked to search the Archives Society of Alberta databases (which includes *InWord*) for examples of "representations of Blackfoot people that they consider harmful or inaccurate," in order to develop "an understanding of how records created in the western record keeping tradition limits one's ability to comprehend Blackfoot culture fully."<sup>22</sup> Therefore, in order to facilitate the larger educational objectives, funds were allocated to expand the *InWord* database to include all or parts of twenty-seven new fonds, including three of the Lupson albums, which were already designated as part of the Glenbow's Gooderham fonds.<sup>23</sup>

Undoubtedly, the digital pathways we take to retrieve the object play a significant role in shaping our reading of it, and those who search *InWord* as part of an educational module from *Seeing with New Eyes* will be asking different questions than those who stumble across the material in a more random fashion. But it remains notable that in the age of hypertextuality and destabilized narratives, this digitization project assumed a one-way relationship (educational module to the digital archive), and not the reverse (from primary material to a deconstruction of the archives). The description of the Lupson albums within the *InWord* database offers no connection to the project that made possible their digital replication. Going "back" (or "up" following the model of directory structures) within the Lupson albums leads the viewer to the extended description of the Gooderham fonds. Thus, the appearance of a stable archive as a neutral repository of documents is reproduced online, but the context surrounding this particular digital production, which played a significant role in the decisions over *which* materials were digitized, and *why*, is obscured.<sup>24</sup>

20 For background on how some of the concepts for the site came about, and on Kainai attempts to develop new educational programs dealing with cultural identity, see Ramona Big Head-Mills, "A Teacher's Perspective on the issue of Identity," <http://blackfoot-awakening.ca/toolkit/index.html> (accessed 10 January 2008).

21 Michael Gourlie, "Archival Material Digitized for 'Seeing with New Eyes: a Journey into Blackfoot Knowledge'," <http://blackfoot-awakening.ca/toolkit/en/media/docs/essays/fonds.pdf>, (accessed 10 May 2007).

22 "Instructional Unit – Module 3," [http://blackfoot-awakening.ca/toolkit/en/media/docs/units/social\\_studies/module3.pdf](http://blackfoot-awakening.ca/toolkit/en/media/docs/units/social_studies/module3.pdf), (accessed 10 May 2007), pp. 1-2.

23 Gourlie, p. 2.

24 Notably, the photographic album of the Tsuu T'ina, which forms the largest part of the Lupson collection, was not digitized because it fell outside of the boundaries of the project, which was viewed as relating only to those First Nations identified as Blackfoot.

### Arnold Lupson and his Photographs

To this point, the textual attachments and archival structures have dominated our excursion through multiple sites of the Lupson photographs. But as Paul Frosh notes, photographs “are not only the *objects* of classification. In the century and a half since the invention of the daguerreotype, photographs have also become primary *agents* of classification.”<sup>25</sup> Photographs do not simply represent a subject, but actively construct new typologies. According to Alan Sekula, in its widest mode this inclusive archive “encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain.”<sup>26</sup> Framed in this way, the “archival” nature of these photographs extends beyond the history of the Glenbow, and leads us back to the original producer of this particular collection: Arnold Lupson.

Arnold Lupson emigrated to Canada from Britain in 1919, inspired, according to one account, by an experience of photographing a group of visiting Native Americans when he was working for London’s *Daily Mirror*. In Calgary, Lupson found employment tanning hides, eventually becoming a saddle maker. He continued his photographic pursuits, taking numerous pictures of Aboriginal peoples during the Calgary Stampede. He was well-acquainted with the Tsuu T’ina Nation, becoming close friends with Chief Joe Big Plume, and marrying his widowed sister, Maggie Big Belly. Although federal government regulations prevented him from living on the reserve, Lupson built a house for Maggie and his stepdaughter, Mary, on the reserve and visited on weekends, while continuing to work in Calgary. Lupson was adopted into Big Plume’s family and used his connections to secure access to other southern Alberta First Nations, photographing people, events, and ceremonies.<sup>27</sup>

Lupson was an avid collector of Native artifacts, and his photographs, not surprisingly, reflected an ethnographic interest in the “traditional” material culture of Aboriginal peoples. While there are a certain number of candid images relating to everyday activities, such as cattle branding, and casual images of people he was close to, the vast majority of the photographs were taken during events like the Calgary Stampede, Banff Indian Days, or other formal occasions and ceremonies. Beadwork, tipi designs, headdresses, medi-

25 Paul Frosh, *The Image Factory: Consumer Culture, Photography and the Visual Content Industry* (Oxford, 2003), p. 92.

26 Alan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA, 1989), p. 348.

27 Colin F. Taylor and Hugh Dempsey, *With Eagle Tail: Arnold Lupson and 30 Years among the Sarcee, Blackfoot and Stoney Indians on the North American Plains* (Toronto, 1999), pp. 8-15; George H. Gooderham, *Northern Plains Tribes. Vol. 4 Sarcees, No. 1*, ed. Philip H. Godsell (Calgary, 1956), pp. 7-8; Glenbow Archives, Gooderham Fonds, M 4350.

cine bags, and sacred objects were highlighted and privileged, while elements of modernity were often deliberately kept out of the frame. In these photographs, the people themselves are less important than the clothing and accessories that signaled an “authentic” Native tradition. The relative importance of these material artifacts was apparent when, following Lupson’s death in 1951, his Native collection was sold off for hundreds of dollars, while his negatives were, reportedly, given away to Kenneth Coppock, his former employer.<sup>28</sup>

Lupson’s photographic collection was intended to serve as an “archive” of Native culture, and this was certainly Norman Luxton’s reading of it when he described its use as “good reference [sic] Indian lore and handicraft work.”<sup>29</sup> In their framing and subject matter, the Lupson negatives are part of a larger visual economy of Aboriginal peoples. The redistribution of such photographs through digital-image databases carries both benefits and dangers, and many commentators view digitization, combined with other forms of visual repatriation, as one avenue for indigenous peoples to reclaim identities and histories.<sup>30</sup> Through their dialogue, Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas point to the creative potential in subverting the ethnographic archive, producing new possibilities in reclaiming Aboriginal memory, even from photographs whose subjects have been “dressed up.”<sup>31</sup>

These contemporary re-imaginings of the archive are significant and exciting, but in themselves, they do not erase the unequal, material power relations that historically produced the archive and facilitated the circulation of particular images to a wider consumer culture. Lupson distributed and marketed some of his own photographs through a short booklet produced in 1923. Entitled *The Sarcee Indians of Alberta*, this appears to be his only known published writing. Focusing largely on eleven photographs, the short accompanying text offers an ethnographical view of the Tsuu T’ina, tracing some of their history, customs, and ceremonies. Through captions, Lupson names most

28 Gooderham, p. 8; Taylor and Dempsey, p. 14. Godsell reported that Coppock purchased it from Maggie Big Belly “allegedly for the sum of \$15.00.” See Glenbow Archives, Godsell Fonds, M 433, Box 2, file 41, Philip H. Godsell to J.D.H., n.d.

29 Glenbow Archives, Luxton Museum Collection, Box 2/2300-9(5), Norman Luxton, correspondence 14 February 1955.

30 See Elizabeth Edwards, “Talking Visual Histories: Introduction,” and John E. Stanton, “Snapshots on the Dreaming: Photographs of the Past and Present,” both in *Museums and Source Communities: A Routledge Reader*, eds. Laura Peers and Alison K. Brown (London, 2003); Carol Payne, “Lessons with Leah: Re-reading the Photographic Archive of Nation in the National Film Board of Canada’s Still Photography Division,” *Visual Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 (April 2006), pp. 4-22.

31 Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas, “Aboriginal Interventions into the Photographic Archives: A Dialogue between Carol Payne and Jeffrey Thomas,” *Visual Resources* 18 (2002), pp. 109-25. See also Alison K. Brown and Laura Peers with members of the Kainai Nation, *Pictures Bring us Messages/Sinaakssiiksi Aohsimaahpithkookiyaawa: Photographs and Histories from the Kainai Nation* (Toronto, 2006).

of the people depicted in his booklet, but despite the fact that his extended family is featured prominently, Lupson hides his own personal relationship to these subjects by calling himself only “a white man adopted into the tribe, who speaks their language and is acquainted with the many customs, beliefs and stories of this primitive people.” By positioning himself as a white, outside observer, Lupson aligns his own textual voice with the perspective of the camera, appearing to offer an impartial assessment of his subjects.

Despite having been taken only a few years prior to the booklet’s publication, Lupson’s photographs are presented as witnesses to a culture already entering “history,” with the text framing these images through a familiar “vanishing race” narrative lens. Lupson concludes, “The last of these people, 150 all told, are making a stand against the steadily advancing influx of white settlers. Their old life gone, they are fast becoming citizens, and a few more years will find the old-time Sarcee gone forever .”<sup>32</sup> Like so many other outside photographers of his age, Lupson automatically viewed his work as an active, but quickly closing, “archive” of Tsuu T’ina culture and custom. But if Lupson used the technology of the day to constitute and circulate his archive, this process has enfolded back upon itself as technology again archives the archive. *The Sarcee Indians of Alberta* is now digitized and can be found as a full-text searchable document, through Peel’s Prairie Provinces.<sup>33</sup>

### Conclusion

Historians are increasingly aware of the role of archives in shaping the structure of their histories, and archival encounters are now becoming central to the narrative, rather than relegated to acknowledgement pages or buried in footnotes. Drawing upon Pierre Nora’s characterization of the “historiographical age” of history, Patrick Joyce suggests:

As the nation and the social are transformed, so too is the nature of the archive. In the process, the historians, who were once objective guides and spokespersons, become in the transition from “memory history” to “historicized memory” exemplifications of sites of memory themselves ... Historians depend now on their subjectivity. Indeed, the archive in this new phase becomes the object and not merely the tool of history ...<sup>34</sup>

As the materials researchers work with become increasingly ephemeral, historians and other scholars need to engage with the archive (both digital and

32 Arnold Lupson, *The Sarcee Indians of Alberta* (Calgary, 1923), n.p.

33 See <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/4846.html> (accessed 14 May 2007).

34 Patrick Joyce, “The Politics of the Liberal Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 2 (1999), p. 47.

material) as an active player in the production of historical knowledge. This question is particularly important in reflecting on colonial archives and the production of colonial “others.” Ann Laura Stoler suggests that far more is at stake here than simply re-framing subject categories:

If a notion of colonial ethnography starts from the premise that archival production is itself both a process and a powerful technology of rule, then we need not only to brush *against* the archive’s received categories. We need to read for its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions, for its consistencies of misinformation, omission, and mistake – *along* the archival grain. ... Reading only against the grain of the colonial archive bypasses the power in the production of the archive itself.<sup>35</sup>

The colonial legacies unveiled by reading “along the archival grain” are not unique to photographs. However, such concerns take on new dimensions when set against the historical tendency of archives to treat photographic material apart from textual records and employ separate classification systems focused on visible subjects. Framing the question of digitization within the historical trajectories of the Arnold Lupson photographs reveals the multivalent difficulties in making the archival grain of images visible.

Digitization disrupts the easy, linear narrative of how an object passes from one archival grid to another. It would make a satisfying story to portray the shift in meanings across these sites as one of progressive enlightenment over time: from Lupson’s own understanding of the photographs as an archive of traditional customs, to Gooderham’s re-framing of the images as testimonies to assimilation and success, to their current redeployment as examples of the Eurocentric archive. However, digitization brings all of these layers to the forefront simultaneously, sometimes in wholesale form, sometimes through fragments scattered about in other places. Even as we engage in a digital deconstruction of Eurocentric archival assumptions, the legacies of Lupson and Gooderham confront us in unexpected ways and in unexpected places.

The cultural processes of digitization transform the meanings attached to photographs, and transform how we interact with them. Sometimes these shifts subvert colonialist assumptions, and sometimes they reinscribe them in new ways. But how do we trace these shifts across time and (virtual) space? Schwartz points out that

35 Ann Laura Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form,” *Archival Science* 2 (2002), p. 100.



archives must ensure that they not only document the history of the record, but that they also record the history of that institutional documentation ... At present, database design which merely changes the content of a record and logs the last person to edit that record fails utterly in the archival mission to preserve the context of archival records creation.<sup>36</sup>

Of course, budgetary considerations play a large role in restricting the ability of institutions to expand digital documentation. However, the privileging of resources for the technical process of digitization over the labour-intensive work involved in describing, contextualizing, meta-tagging, and recording archival interventions (whether a result of institutional priorities or the demands of granting agencies), avoids, rather than confronts, the wider cultural issues that face archival institutions in the digital era. As historians start to approach the archive as the object of their research, and not simply as a filter for results, we need to be able to make the connections between material histories of the artifact and their virtual avatars.

36 Schwartz, "Coming to Terms," p. 159.