

Captioning is often a fraught process that increases with the age of the photo. Turn of the century photographs, in particular, often have original captions that are generic in the least, ‘Indians in a canoe’ for instance, or non-existent. Sometimes, the terminology of the time is archaic and offensive to contemporary eyes.

Old captions provide a challenge for historians, museum collections and archivists of Indigenous photography. Is the right nation attributed? If a family name is written, is it correct or is it misspelled?

The act of naming is a political act of decolonization and one of reclamation. It is an ongoing dialogue between the image and the viewer. From an archival and historical perspective, it is best to be receptive to what may be differing opinions on captioning, dating and of attribution. It is not a closed door but an open window that allows for fresh and changing interpretations.

We encourage feedback regarding the photographs and captions that are exhibited here as a means of researching and challenging captions that may be inaccurate. This sort of response and criticism is essential in the process of re-naming archival images and an important part of the Indigenous Archival Photo Project.

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