Turning the Lens is now touring across the country and the Glenbow photos are being augmented by additional photos which Paul researches at the respective locations on the tour. Through his research for Nickle Galleries at the University of Calgary, Paul sourced a selection of Arnold Lupson photos from the Glenbow Museum, which date from 1919 to 1949, and "are rich in views of First Nations personalities and activities, including the Sarcee (Tsuut’ina), Blood, Peigan, Blackfoot (Siksika) and Stoney peoples of southern Alberta" (Glenbow). The importance of acknowledging the history, landscape and people of each given place is an essential component of this exhibition tour, as is maintaining the social media call-and-response facet of information exchange between the viewers of the photos and what is on view.

The photos that make up Turning the Lens are powerful because they reflect an unscripted truth, illustrating people and places that deserve to be acknowledged; candid and authentic views of the lives of people connected to land, family, community and culture. The photos and what they represent are an important key to the best way forward, which is not in forgetting the past, but in naming one’s truth and carrying hope forward.

Arin Fay, Curator, 2019

We would like to thank the British Columbia Arts Council and Canada Council for their generous support of the Indigenous Archive Project.

Cover
Young girl and boy standing on grass, between a teepee and a dirt road, Ghost River, Alberta, ca. 1962
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Inside cover (from top)
Tom Big Plume outside cabin
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-307-os

Feast at Oscar Otter's place
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-568-os

Teenagers Violet and James Starlight
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-535-os

Inside back cover (from top left, clockwise)
Joe Big Plume by ravine
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-411a-os

Alice Crow and son, Harry Bull Bear
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-132d-os

Harry Red Gun and children
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-127-os

Back cover (from left, clockwise)
Calf Robe and family with dog
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-979-os

Alice Crowchild (glasses)
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-425-os

Bessie (Little Bear) Crowchild
Courtesy Glenbow Archives, na-667-470-os

Paul Seesequasis - Turning the Lens: Indigenous Archive Project

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Artists Statement

Newly arrived in Canada, Arnold Lupson (c 1895-1951) first saw Indigenous people in regalia during The Stampede Parade. This incident sparked a life-long fascination with Indigenous peoples and Lupson soon became a recognized fixture at Indigenous gatherings and on reserves, his camera always in tow. Eventually he befriended then Tsuu’sina Chief, Joe Big Plume. He was also romantically attracted to Big Plume’s sister, Maggie Big Belly (Natidah – Searching Woman), who was recently widowed. With Big Plume’s approval, Lupson married Maggie and was later adopted into the family and given the name Eagle Tail.

Lupson, from 1919 to 1949, took hundreds of photographs of Tsuu’ina, Siksika, Kainai, Piikani and Stoney peoples. Though he was reported to have been briefly a photographer for the London Daily Mirror; this is unsubstantiated, and it is as probable he was a self-taught photographer whose skills with the camera improved over the thirty years of picture taking. Whatever cameras he used are lost to history but fortunately the more than 800 photographs he took have survived and the majority are digitized and available to the public through the Glenbow Museum.

Lupson spent much time on the Tsuu’ina reserve, eventually building a cabin for Maggie, but given the laws of the Indian Act, he could not live there; though after his death he was buried there. Lupson’s job as a rancher enabled him the funds to travel around southern Alberta, taking photos of not only the Tsuu’ina but the Stoney Nakoda, Kainai, and Piikani. Much of his photographic gaze was directed to capturing camp life, cultural and spiritual ceremonies, and Indigenous people in regalia, a not uncommon afflication and fascination for western photographers. In 1999, Key Porter Books published “With Eagle Tail”, a collection of Lupson’s photographs, co-authored by Colin F. Taylor and Hugh Dempsey; however the book is almost entirely comprised of ceremonial, camp and regalia photos which was, an “outside eye,” revealing Lupson’s fascination with traditional regalia and ceremony.

But, like his American contemporary, Walter McClintock, whoromantically attracted to Big Plume’s sister, Maggie Big Belly (Natidah – Searching Woman), who was recently widowed. With Big Plume’s approval, Lupson married Maggie and was later adopted into the family and given the name Eagle Tail.

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But, like his American contemporary, Walter McClintock, who spent years photographing the Blackfeet in Montana and shared Lupson’s often romanticized framing of Indigenous peoples, Lupson did take other kinds of photos that portrayed people in normal clothes, at non-ceremonial events and going about everyday things.

In selecting the photographs for this exhibition, I have taken a different tack, choosing to focus on the Lupson images of day-to-day life on the reserves of the time, of people dressed as they would be on an average day, of community gatherings that were not ceremony, and of portraits of family life. These are photos that resonate with the ‘ordinary’ and it is that normalcy that puts them outside of the outsider’s static gaze and, most importantly, preserves a legacy for descendants of the people in the photos; the families and the nations. It enables a process of visual reclamation, a testament to the dignity of its subjects and a permanent record for community historians and researchers. It says, ‘this is how people were, this was how daily life was.’

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.

P.S.