

Images and Reality

Post Cards of Minnesota's Ojibway People 1900-80

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OVER the past century, thousands of photographs have been taken of the Ojibway (Chippewa) in Minnesota. Many of these have been released to the public as

¹ Based on our own research over the past seven years, we would estimate conservatively that over 25,000 different post cards have been issued with American Indian subjects from 1898 to the present. For further discussion of the history of American Indian pictures on post cards, see Patricia Albers and William James, "The Dominance of Plains Indian Imagery on the Picture Post Card," in George P. Horse Capture and Gene Ball, eds., *Fifth Annual 1981 Plains Indian Seminar in Honor of Dr. John C. Ewers*, 73-97 (Cody, Wyoming, 1984).

² This figure is based on the sample of post cards (N = 308) used for this study. Detailed information about each post card was recorded on a pre-coded, seven-page schedule. All relevant data were tabulated to determine numerically significant changes in post card content over time. For partial results of these tabulations, see Patricia Albers and William James, "Tourism and the Changing Photographic Image of the Great Lakes Indians," in Nelson Graburn, ed., *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10:123-148 (1983).

³ See also, for example, Patricia Albers and William James, "Utah's Indians and Popular Photography in the American West: A View From the Picture Post Card," in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 52:72-91 (Winter, 1984). Our post card sample was drawn in the summer of 1980 from the collections of the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Public Museum, the U.S. Forest Service at Cass Lake, and our own private collection. We wish to thank these institutions and their staffs for their assistance in our research. We also wish to acknowledge the University of Utah Research Committee for funding this study.

⁴ See John Berger, *About Looking*, 51-53 (New York, 1980).

stereoviews, cartes de visite, book illustrations, framing prints, and post cards. Commonly found in drug stores, stationers, and curio shops, the post card ranks as a major medium from which the public has drawn its visual image of the Ojibway and other American Indians.¹ Since the format originated in the late 19th century, the Ojibway have been pictured on as many as 1,000 different cards, and of this number, at least 300 are from Minnesota.²

Studying the history and diversity of post card pictures reveals a great deal about the role that popular photography has played in promoting authentic as well as stereotypic images of the Ojibway and other American Indians. The post card is well suited to a study of image-making not only because of its mass production and wide distribution, but also because it contains written messages and captions that offer invaluable information for interpreting the use and meaning of American Indian photographs viewed by the general public.³

IT IS WIDELY HELD that photographs are "real," that they record an appearance that existed in some actual time and place. While photographs can authentically document people, places, and events in genuine "lived-in" contexts,⁴ they can also distort the appearance of a people's reality by picturing them in settings

Drs. Albers and James, both of whom are anthropologists at the University of Utah, have published widely on how American Indians are stereotyped in the popular media.



"THE PARTING," number 16 in Reed's Indian Pictures series, for which the photographer carefully staged his subjects' appearance to create pristine, exotic, and often deceptive images

and dress which have nothing to do with their everyday experience. Photographs can record and enlighten as well as deceive. In the case of those depicting American Indians, there has been a long history of deception.⁵

A large portion of the photographs taken for public consumption do not portray Indian life as it was lived when the picture was made. Instead, photographs were intentionally staged in order to project an image that would be construed by the public as visibly "Indian." Famous photographers of American Indians, such as Edward S. Curtis, regularly dressed, posed, and placed their subjects in settings that conformed with popular notions of the Indian's romantic past. Roland W. Reed, who had several studios in Minnesota, was another well-known photographer who staged the subject and setting to project a highly stereotyped image of the American Indian. In the 1930s Reed issued a popular set of post cards based on his photographs of the Blackfeet and Ojibway. The problem with these kinds of photographs, of course, is not neces-

sarily that they were contrived, but that most of those who viewed them were not aware of the deception.

Since photographic images are believed to be "real," they establish a standard of visual authenticity for the public. To most viewers, then, the works of talented photographers like Curtis and Reed represent the way Indians actually lived. The public comes to understand their life from pictures, not from lived-in experience. In the end the Indian, in the public mind, is no longer a person but a symbolic image created and stereotyped by photographers and other media makers.

Even when pictures are not staged, photographers still purposefully select a particular set of genuine appearances from the wider stream of human activity. There are many photographs of the Minnesota Ojibway, for example, that do represent aspects of their life as it was lived when the picture was made. In the early decades of the 20th century, many of these pictures depicted the places in which Ojibway actually lived and worked. Especially common were views of indigenous campsites where bark or reed wigwams stood clearly visible in the background. Although these dwellings were an integral part of Ojibway life in this period, they represented only one of several different types of housing used at the time. Yet it is the wigwam, not the log cabin or wood-frame house also occupied by the Ojibway, that appears predominantly on early post cards.

Once a photograph is taken, it becomes subject to further manipulations. It can be displayed in contexts and given meanings which may or may not correspond with the lives of those pictured. How a photograph is rendered and interpreted, as one art critic notes, depends to a large extent on the uses to which it is put. When photographs are taken for private consumption, such as a family album, their meaning is embedded in a rich and varied tapestry of experience. Viewers have some knowledge of the lives of the people depicted. They know and understand the subjects and the history of their personal lives.⁶

⁵ Here and below, see Joanna Scherer, "You Can't Believe Your Eyes: Inaccuracies in Photographs of North American Indians," in *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communications*, 2:67-79 (1975); Margaret Blackman, "Posing the American Indian," in *Natural History*, 90:69-75 (January, 1981); Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis*, 17-23 (Washington, D.C., 1982); and William E. Farr, *The Reservation Blackfeet, 1882-1945: A Photographic History of Cultural Survival* (Seattle, 1984); Patricia Condon Johnston, "The Indian Photographs of Roland Reed," in *American West*, March-April, 1978, p. 44-57; Peg Meier, "A Photographic Treasure Reappears," in *Minneapolis Tribune*, April 16, 1978, picture sec., 4-17; "Photographic Art Studies of the North American Indian by Roland Reed," undated pamphlet, copy in MHS reference library.

⁶ Berger, *About Looking*, 52.

A COMMON early post card view portraying an aspect of everyday life



DURING the first two decades of the 20th century, many privately made photographs were printed on post card stock. Studio photographers often issued their work on post cards, and people who owned cameras sometimes had their photographs printed on this medium as well.⁷ Many of the early 20th-century photographs that Indian people had taken of themselves

were of this kind, and some of these still remain in family photographic collections. Many of the photographs that white people took of their Indian neighbors were also printed as post cards.

In marked contrast to private photographs are those taken and used for public display. Here, in most instances, the subjects are strangers to those who view the photograph, and the setting in which the picture is viewed is often removed from the life of the person depicted.⁸ The addition of supposedly explanatory captions to the post card often affects viewers' percep-

⁷ Hal Morgan and Andreas Brown, *Prairie Fires and Paper Moons. The American Photographic Postcard: 1900–1920*, xiii–xv (Boston, 1981).

⁸ Berger, *About Looking*, 52.

A PRIVATE post card picture, taken in front of the store of a Mrs. Robinson in Onamia



tions as well. Even when photographs for public consumption picture an authentic slice of life, they are apt to convey erroneous impressions based on popular fantasies and stereotypes. Subjects have no interaction with viewers and no control over the uses and interpretations of their own image.

The post card illustrated here is a good example of what can happen when a photographic image is removed from the context in which it was taken. This picture from the Kenora region of Ontario, just across the Canadian border from Minnesota, was mailed from Grand Forks. Its caption not only gives the viewer a distorted understanding of the life of the Ojibway woman pictured, but, by extension, it also promotes a false impression of American Indian women in general. This sort of image-making is not only alien to its Ojibway subject, but more critically, it fosters a highly negative and damaging stereotype. It is precisely this kind of misuse that led social commentator Susan Sontag to write: "To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed."⁹

IN THE EARLY decades of the 20th century, when the camera was not yet a mass-market item, an important role of professional photographers was to document outstanding events, places, and people in the communities in which they lived and worked. Throughout Minnesota locally based photographers, such as C. N. Christiansen of Bemidji, took hundreds of photographs that were reproduced on post cards and were sold through a variety of retail outlets, including drug, stationery, and general stores. They were issued in small numbers and printed as real photographs. When a special view was in large demand, national post card publishers were often contracted to reproduce the picture in large quantities through a process known as lithography.¹⁰

Many of the post cards that were locally produced in the years before 1920 have qualities that link their use and meaning to the "private" photograph. These cards were bought primarily by people who lived in the areas where the pictures were taken. Sometimes the cards were mailed to friends and relatives in distant places, but just as frequently these cards were kept as personal mementos and housed in family post card albums so popular during this era.

The Ojibway were often major subjects in the post cards produced and sold in those areas of Minnesota where they lived. One of the first things that strikes the observer of these early cards is their ordinary quality. The Ojibway are pictured in their everyday dress,



CLEAR LAKE, MANITOBA, CANADA

either in clothing that was fashioned after styles popular among whites or, less frequently, in ethnic dress that conformed to decorative styles of the Ojibway and other western Great Lakes Indian cultures of the period. The poses are candid and unassuming and the photographic backgrounds for the cards are the settings where the Ojibway lived, worked, and traveled. In short, most of these pictures, although they did convey some stereotypes, revealed something of Ojibway life as it was being lived in the early 20th century.¹¹

Besides pictures that showed Ojibway in their everyday surroundings, there were many portrait

⁹ Sontag, *On Photography*, 13 (New York, 1973).

¹⁰ Carol Russell, *In Our Own Back Yard: A Look at Beltrami, Cass and Itasca Counties at the Turn of the Century*, 72-75 (Bemidji, 1979). Lithography is a printing process commonly used in the reproduction of post cards in the years before 1920; Dorothy B. Ryan, *Picture Post Cards in the United States, 1893-1918*, 25, 150 (New York, 1976).

¹¹ Albers and James, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10:128-134. This use of natural context was not unique to post card pictures from Minnesota. It was also characteristic of cards of the Ojibway and other American Indians, such as the Winnebago and Menominee, issued in neighboring regions of the western Great Lakes.

MEN posed in traditional decorative accoutrements worn over European-style clothing in this card (right), distributed about 1915.



CANVAS tents adorn an indigenous setting in a card (left) from R. Daniels' Pine City studio.

A RARE image of the Midewiwin ceremony (right)



AN EARLY lithograph, "Gathering Wild Rice, Turtle River, Cass Lake, Minn.," by Bloom Brothers Co., Minneapolis, around 1910

ANOTHER scene from everyday life (right), probably taken in Onamia



views. Most of these were taken either in a photographer's studio or in an outdoor setting. The backgrounds in these pictures were the same as those used in pictures of local whites; the neutral background served merely to frame photographs in which the Ojibway were the central subject. The style of posing Indian people also



resembled the way in which local whites were pictured. Often, the subjects faced the camera directly in a manner that was characteristic of formal portraiture during this period. More "artistic" modes of posing are also evident, but very few have the contrived appearance of later post card views.

Most of the highly caricatured pictures during this time were taken of Kahbe Nagwi Wens, or John Smith, a well-known Ojibway from Cass Lake who was purported to have lived to the age of 125. Pictured on over 30 different post cards issued between 1908 and 1965, he ranks as one of the most frequently photographed Ojibway in Minnesota. Smith sold many of his post cards to travelers riding the trains between Duluth and Grand Forks.¹²

Most captions and messages written on these early post cards are simple and straightforward, merely identifying the subjects and their activities, or the place where the picture was taken. On some cards there is no caption, which implies that the identity of the picture was self-evident to those most likely to view it. Messages written on the back of these cards indicate that the people who used them lived in the area where the picture was taken. Most contain the kind of personal news and gossip commonly communicated on post cards during the pre-1920 era. When remarks refer to the picture, they often suggest that the user knew the Ojibway subjects personally or knew from direct experience something about them in general. The message on the back of one card picturing John Smith, for example, reads as follows:

Oct. 22, 14.

dear Susie hello . . . this Indian John Smith was confirmed this summer had his picture taken the day he was confirmed he was fixed just as he was when he was confirmed doesnt he look old and wrinkled I have seen him a good many times . . . from Aunt Sarah.¹³

THE YEARS between 1920 and 1950 marked a major transition in post card imagery of the Minnesota Ojibway. Photographs that pictured the Ojibway in a

¹² Carl Zapffe, *Kahbe Nagwi Wens: The Man Who Lived in 3 Centuries*, 70 (Brainerd, 1975); Patricia Albers, "Post Cards of An American Indian Centenarian: Kahbe Nagwi Wens. John Smith," in *Barr's Post Card News*, December 3, 1981, p. 4, 28, and January 7, 1982, p. 4, 31, 32.

¹³ This post card, by an unidentified photographer and publisher, is in authors' collection. It was mailed from Cass Lake to Corinth, New York, in 1914.

KAHBE Nagwi Wens





ONE of the popular Curteich Indian Scenes series

highly caricatured and stereotyped fashion gradually replaced locally taken authentic pictures. Many factors influenced the change, but a major one was the rise of tourism, which was rapidly becoming a dominant industry in northern areas of Minnesota, replacing lumbering and farming in importance.¹⁴

¹⁴ This process occurred much later in Minnesota than in neighboring Great Lakes states. In Wisconsin the transition had already occurred by 1925 and in Michigan, it had taken place during the first decade of the 20th century. Duane R. Lund, *Tales of Four Lakes: Leech Lake, Gull Lake, Mille Lacs, the Red Lakes, & the Crow Wing River*, 84, 94-97 (Staples, 1977).

¹⁵ This post card in authors' collection is from *C. T. Indian Scenes*, S-1126, Curteich Company, Chicago. It was reproduced from a photograph taken at Lake Itasca in the early 1930s by the Minnesota Tourist Bureau and was mailed from Ray, Minnesota, to Waukegan, Illinois.

¹⁶ In our sample, over 90 percent of the stock cards pictured Ojibway men wearing war bonnets.

While tourism was taking hold in Minnesota, the post card after 1920 lost much of its documentary role. Larger numbers of people owned cameras and were printing their pictures on regular photographic stock. Additionally, other media, especially newspapers and magazines, were replacing the post card as a major repository for local-interest photographs. When this happened, the post card began to function, almost exclusively, as a photographic medium for tourists.

The shifting use of the post card is most evident in the character of the messages that appear on it. Increasingly, it is clear that those who bought and sent post cards were tourists, not local residents. Their messages made it obvious that the Ojibway pictured were complete strangers — anonymous subjects about whom the viewer had little knowledge, as in the following example from the late 1940s:

Hi there Tommy:

Be good Boy. We saw big Indians. and is it warm here.

Grandpa & Uncle Ed have gone out to catch a fish.

So long — Gram & Grandpa¹⁵

The tourists who came to northern Minnesota purchased and sent two kinds of post cards on which the Ojibway were portrayed. The first type, as in an earlier era, were locally issued and printed photographs. The second kind were published by national or regional post card companies. Most of the cards included in the second group were stock views — that is, pictures sold regionally or nationally in areas far removed from the place where the photograph was originally taken. The Minnesota Ojibway were subjects in three major stock series issued during this period, one by the photographer Roland Reed, and two additional sets published by the Curteich firm of Chicago. The first Curteich set, issued in the 1940s, includes ten post cards based on pictures taken by the Minnesota Tourist Association at the Itasca Pageant in 1933; the other contains 12 views of Ojibway from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. Cards in this series were sold not only throughout the Great Lakes area in the 1940s but also in Oklahoma and other distant states.

While the local views even in this later era continued to reproduce pictures from aspects of the Ojibway's everyday life, the stock cards promoted an image conforming to the public's notion of what a "real" Indian looked like. These cards either featured popular stereotypes drawn from the image of the American Indian as an equestrian, buffalo-hunting, tepee-dwelling, and war-bonneted Plains Indian, or were derived from romantic fantasies originating in Longfellow's epic poem "Hiawatha."¹⁶

The local and more realistic post card images of the Ojibway were published in Minnesota until the 1940s although in ever decreasing numbers. Photographs pic-



A LATE example from the 1930s of a locally issued card depicting the Ojibway in an indigenous setting

turing Ojibway in their daily dress and in indigenous settings, especially summer encampments, sugar camps, wild ricing areas, and local celebrations, remained popular until about 1935. Backgrounds were neutral, except when pictures were taken at an indigenous campsite where a bark tepee or wigwam stood prominently in the background. The style of posing remained unpretentious as well. After 1935, however, those cards increasingly resembled the ones produced by regional companies.

The dress and settings in the stock views, by contrast, were either conspicuously staged, as in Reed's post card series, or photographed at tourist attractions where mock Indian villages were erected and performances of Indian activities such as craftwork, dancing, and canoe racing took place. Men now appeared in Plains war bonnets, even though other features of their dress still conformed to Woodlands styles. Women were seen either in buckskin dresses or in the increasingly popular "jingle" dress which probably originated among the Minnesota Ojibway sometime between 1915 and 1925.¹⁷

The subjects appeared as caricatures of the Indian "warrior," "hunter," and "chief." Typically, the Ojibway were posed against picturesque backgrounds or backdrops containing objects, like canoes and wigwams, that were conspicuously and stereotypically associated with the American Indian. Profile as well as angular modes of posing subjects became more frequent. Pictures made in this way conveyed a sense of the extraordinary; their subjects appeared as noble figures whose image transcended the mundane and commonplace.¹⁸

Beyond differences in the pictures themselves, there were interesting contrasts in the captions found on post cards. On the local varieties, captions were little more than identifications of the place, person, or activity pictured, but on regional stock views the captions

tended to be demeaning, hackneyed, or trite in character. Captions, like "Chief in His Full Regalia," were commonplace; or in more detailed ones, such as those found in Reed's post card series, the following was characteristic:

THE PARTING. Two bands of Indians have reached the parting of the ways, with pack on back the Indian maiden bids farewell to the young brave who travels with his band to distant hunting grounds.¹⁹

Many stock cards contained no captions at all; even so, this absence may have invited more distortion of meaning. The lack of written interpretation merely allowed viewers to project their own false impressions onto highly caricatured pictures. In word as well as picture, the Ojibway seen by the public were largely abstractions—devoid of any concrete historical or contemporary place. Their culture was frozen in a frame from some distant and mythical past. The result was a growing disparity between the Ojibway's ordinary experience and their public image as revealed in the kinds of pictures appearing on post cards.

BY 1950, post card pictures of the Minnesota Ojibway were almost entirely stereotypical in character. Those issued locally with settings from everyday life had

¹⁷ These dates were established by examining post cards and other photographic media. The jingle dress is designed in the style of a buckskin outfit. Made from cotton or velvet, it is trimmed with rows of metal cones that jingle when the wearer dances.

¹⁸ This was a popular style of posing royalty and other famous people, including Plains Indian "chiefs," before 1920. In subsequent years, however, it became prevalent among the general public, especially in portraits posed for special occasions such as weddings and graduations; see Albers and James, in *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 52:85–88.

¹⁹ Post card 16 in Reed's *Indian Pictures*, in authors' collection.

ANOTHER card from the Curteich series (right) that caricatured Minnesota's Ojibway



WOMEN clothed in jingle dresses for the dance in this card, locally issued in the 1930s



A LOCALLY made but stereotyped post card image, the work of E.A. Martinek, 1932

largely disappeared; those that were still locally produced closely resembled the regional stock-view cards. The Ojibway were photographed predominantly at tourist attractions, where Indian culture was re-created as a spectacle for the traveler. The Indian Trading Post at Mille Lacs, Fort Mille Lacs at Onamia, and Lake Itasca were the locations where the vast majority of post card pictures were taken in the years after 1950.

Aspects of Ojibway culture promoted at these tourist attractions were based largely on the public's understanding of what "Indian" culture represented. Some of the attractions, especially the Mille Lacs Trading Post, presented accurate and responsible exhibits that were linked to the Ojibway's own cultural traditions. Others, such as Fort Mille Lacs and Lake Itasca, drew heavily from the Plains Indian image, popularized in western movies and television series of the time.²⁰ The growing fame of this image is seen most strikingly in the style of costuming, the backgrounds, and modes of posing that prevail.

The vast majority of modern post cards contain pictures of adult men, in marked contrast to earlier periods when men and women of all ages appeared on this medium. Also, fewer individuals' pictures are reproduced; certain men, such as Ben Little Creek, who participated in spectacles for tourists and posed at Lake Itasca, appear repeatedly. War bonnets and other costume features fashioned after the styles of Plains Indians largely replaced the more authentic Woodlands apparel of any earlier era. Characteristically, Ojibway subjects are posed in caricatured ways: smoking peace pipes, brandishing weapons, or scanning the horizon. Stereotypical material objects are conspicuously present in the photographs as well, with Plains-style tepees frequently appearing, and even totem poles, which are indigenous to the Indians of the Northwest Coast. Scenic places, where the setting is itself a tourist attraction, become the prevalent locations for photography.²¹

It is interesting to note that archival collections that keep post cards of the Minnesota Ojibway rarely contain examples from the modern period. This absence is significant, for it reinforces popular visual impressions of the Ojibway as a people locked into a time frame from the distant past. Notwithstanding their stereotypical character, modern post cards are still part of the contemporary Ojibway experience: they represent aspects of the lives of those Ojibway who performed and posed for tourists and the tourist media. It is certainly true and regrettable that contemporary post card images are deceptive. Yet, this deception is itself significant; it underscores the media's powerful position in creating the cultural myths of modern times.²²

By 1960, the visual objectification of the Ojibway and their culture was virtually complete in the popular

medium of the post card. The written caption found on a stock card from the 1950s, published by the L. L. Cook Company of Milwaukee, exemplifies this trend:

Indian Scout. Scanning the horizon, as his ancestors before him, the Indian of today has become a favorite subject for camera enthusiasts.²³

Local cards, too, began to contain highly caricatured captions, as in the following one found on the back of a 1960s card picturing Fort Mille Lacs:

This Indian Village of Chief NE-GA-NE-GESHEG, located on the west shore of historic Lake Mille Lacs, is visited daily by travelers who visit with the Chief and his people and *see them tend to their day to day living as well as work at their crafts.*²⁴

Fantasy has become reality. Travelers are led to believe that what appears at tourist attractions faithfully replicates Ojibway life in modern times.

In the last decade, the caricaturing of Indian people has reached new heights on the post card. Not only are there fewer images of American Indians but photographs of Minnesota's Ojibway have disappeared almost entirely. One of the few Minnesota Ojibway post cards available today reproduces a picture of Chief Bemidji from the turn of the century. What remain are stock views from national post card firms. Today, a tourist traveling the western Great Lakes area will find cards of Indians from distant locations, like New Mexico, Oklahoma, and North Carolina, identified only by captions such as "Real Indian Chief," "Indian Princess," or "Brave Indian Warrior."

The disappearance of Ojibway pictures from the post card has significant consequences. On one hand, this lack can be interpreted as a positive trend. Removed from public display in tourist-oriented media, contemporary photographs are no longer susceptible to

²⁰ The dominance and popularity of Plains Indian imagery at tourist attractions was widespread in the years between 1940 and 1965, not only in the western Great Lakes but in other areas of the United States as well. See Albers and James, in *Fifth Annual Plains Indian Seminar*, 73-97, and in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10:134-142.

²¹ Albers and James, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, 10:130. On the popular image of the American Indian as a Plains male, see Patricia Albers, "Introduction," in Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine, eds., *The Hidden Half: Studies of Plains Indian Women*, 1-8 (Washington, D.C., 1983).

²² It is possible that the lack of modern post cards in archives is due to "a natural collecting time lag in donations of about 50 years," according to Bonnie Wilson, head of special libraries, MHS.

²³ Post card 60265, copyright 1952, in authors' collection.

²⁴ Post card J-111, distributed by Northern Minnesota Novelties of Cross Lake, copy in authors' collection; emphasis added by authors.



OJIBWAY outfitted in a mixture of ethnic dress in this picture (above) taken in the early 1960s at Fort Mille Lacs Indian Village



TWO views of Ben Little Creek taken at Itasca State Park and published by the L.L. Cook Company, Milwaukee



manipulations beyond the Ojibway's own control. There are modern and public photographs of the Ojibway. Whether these appear in sensitive photographic essays like Charles Brill's *Indian and Free: A Contemporary Portrait of Life on a Chippewa Reservation* (1971) or in local newspapers and magazines, their content and use are being monitored more carefully by the Ojibway themselves.

On the other hand, the disappearance of contemporary Ojibway pictures in popular media, like post cards, contributes to the public's misguided interpretations. In the absence of photographs that portray the Ojibway as they live today, their culture is viewed as a historic relic, a dead chapter in Minnesota history. All that remains of "real" Indian life are memories preserved in photographs from a past era. As a result, public attention is deflected from the modern struggles and experiences of the Ojibway, and the way is opened for uninformed white people to rationalize the disappearance of Indian culture and treaty rights as well. If the public feels that "real" Indian life, as judged by the false imagery promoted on post cards and other visual media, has vanished, it is easy to argue that the special federal status of Indian tribes is no longer justified. This attitude can be changed if the Ojibway, like the Seminole of Florida, the Stoney of Alberta, and the

Cherokee of North Carolina, make and distribute their own post cards. By such an endeavor they could co-opt and exert control over one of the main visual media which in modern times, at least, often misrepresented their lives to the public.

A noted Minnesota Ojibway author, Gerald Vizenor, tellingly reminds us of the gulf that exists between imagery and reality: "John Ka Ka Geesick was known to tourists because he had posed for a photograph from which postcards were printed and sold. He was invented and colonized in the photograph, pictured in a blanket and a turkey feather headdress. On the streets of the town he wore common clothes. . . .

"Ka Ka Geesick was a man of visions and dreams; his music and world view connected him to a tribal place on the earth. He was secure at the center of his imagination and memories; in a sense, he was in a spiritual balance, blessed to live so long. The world around him, however, invented his culture and advertised his images on picture postcards."²⁵

²⁵ Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa: Narrative Histories*, 143 (Minneapolis, 1984).

THE CARDS on p. 230, 232, 234 (bottom), 235, 237 (top), and 239 (top and bottom) are in the authors' collection; all others are in the MHS audio-visual library.

JOHN Ka Ka Geesick





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