



Thomas C. Donaldson and the 1890 U.S. Census

The University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives houses thousands of 19th century photographs documenting people and places all over the world. One outstanding collection was gathered by Thomas Corwin Donaldson (1843–98), who had a lifelong interest in Native North Americans. His collection of artifacts and photographs was acquired for the Museum by department store magnate John Wanamaker in 1899.

Donaldson, born in Ohio and trained in law, was a man of many accomplishments. In 1869 he moved to Idaho Territory, where he held various government posts. He later became General Agent for the Smithsonian Institution, for which he compiled the monumental work *The George Catlin Indian Gallery* (1887) on the life and work of this famous painter of Native American subjects. He was one of a committee of six appointed by the U.S. Government to codify the land laws of the United States; his contribution was published as *The Public Domain* (1880–84).

In the years 1890–93, Donaldson served as Special Agent in charge of the Indian portion of the Eleventh Census of the United States. In this capacity he acquired about 1,500 photographs to

illustrate the *Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed in the United States (Except Alaska)* (1894). These images were obtained from local photographic studios throughout the country or taken by Special Agents assigned to a particular area. The photographs are well documented and represent the work of little-known photographers, and honestly and accurately portray the living conditions and personalities of the subjects (see the back cover for more images). The historical value of the images increases when one considers that nearly all the data collected in the 1890 census was later lost in a fire.

Alex Pezzati
Reference Archivist

"Flathead [Salish] women and children. Flathead Agency, Montana. Ca. 1890–91."

