Editor's Note: This photograph and the story behind it recall an era of violence when Native American voices were silenced. Today's Native American leaders are influencing public discourse and policy on all kinds of issues including Indigenous sovereignty, human rights, and cultural heritage.

A shishishe, also known as Curley, was born in 1856 into the Crow tribe. At the age of 20, he joined the United States Army as a scout. He was assigned to the 7th Cavalry Regiment, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer. In June 1876, Curley scouted for Custer's expedition in the Black Hills in South Dakota, and reported a sighting of a large encampment of Indians along the Little Bighorn River. Custer's troops engaged the encampment and suffered the now infamous defeat. Of the five companies of the 7th Cavalry Regiment that Custer commanded, Curley was the only survivor. He died in 1923.

This image (UPM image #243435) is from a cabinet card collected by Charles H. Stephens (1855–1931), an artist and illustrator who studied and taught at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. His wife, Alice Barber Stephens, was one of the more prominent illustrators of what is known as the “Golden Age of American Illustration,” from the 1880s through the 1920s. Charles Stephens is now best known as an amateur anthropologist and collector of American Indian artifacts. The Penn Museum acquired his collection in 1945, including his photographs, which are housed in the Archives.

—Eric W. Schnitke, Assistant Archivist