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Executive director Kenneth Schuster goes through a stack of prints from the Treaty of Fort Laramie by 19th century American photographer Alexander Gardner shown in a storage area at The Brinton Museum Wednesday, March 7, 2018.

NEW BRINTON EXHIBIT SHOWCASES RARE PHOTOS OF TREATY OF FORT LARAMIE

BY RYAN PATTERSON

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BIG HORN - Think of Wyoming in the 1860s. You may envision a scene from an old movie or television show.

Those shows likely draw inspiration from early photographs, courtesy of people like Alexander Gardner.

The Brinton Museum opens an exhibit Thursday focusing on Gardner's work photographing the Treaty of Fort Laramie 150 years ago in what is now southeastern Wyoming. The treaty was the first of its kind between the U.S. government and Native Americans.

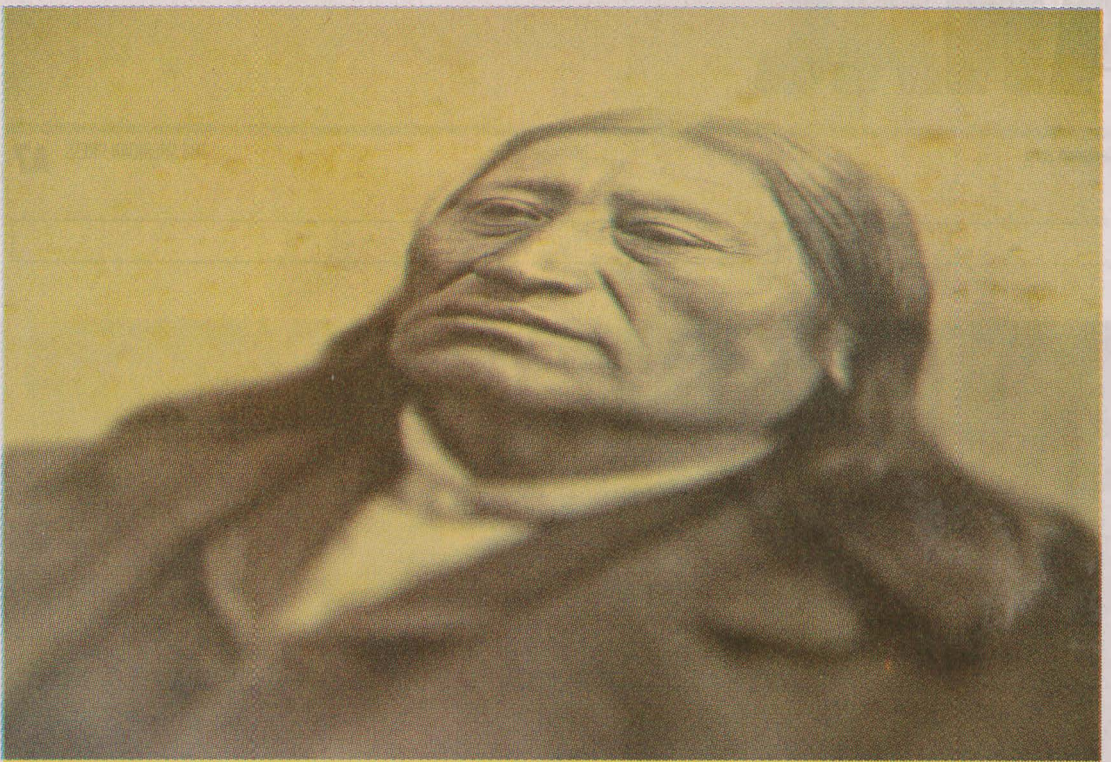
The exhibit lasts longer than most at The Brinton. It runs from March 15 to May 28 and will have a rare second showing in the fall from Sep. 2 to Nov. 9 to make sure as many people as possible view it and so all the local schools have a chance to visit.

The 27 original Gardner photographs are part of a collection of more than 2,000 photographs of the American West gifted by the will of Forrest E. Mars Jr. to The Brinton Museum's Endowment Fund.



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A portrait of Iron Nation of the Brule Lakota people from the Treaty of Fort Laramie by 19th century American photographer Alexander Gardner shown in a storage area at The Brinton Museum Wednesday, March 7, 2018.

EXHIBIT: Portraits of Native Americans

FROM

"You just don't see these," curator of exhibitions and education Barbara McNab said of Gardner's images. "They're exceedingly rare."

Museum director and chief curator Ken Schuster said some of Gardner's photographs are worth six figures. They are not all of the treaty, as some are photos of the area surrounding Fort Laramie.

There are also portraits of members of the different Native American tribes present at the treaty signing, an Indian burial and the vast Wyoming landscape.

In choosing how to display the photographs, McNab and Schuster lay the photos out and try to make the different pieces tell a story.

Gardner was born in Scotland and, in addition to taking western photos, he was a Civil War photographer. Gardner is probably most well-known for portraits he took of Abraham Lincoln. The federal government commissioned Gardner to travel with officials in the Indian Peace Commission and document the Treaty of Fort Laramie for posterity. Gardner kept his captions simple, saying things like, "Near Deer Creek."

The photography process varied a bit back then. Today, anyone can snap a picture in a second by tapping a smartphone. In the 1860s, the setup and taking of a single photo took two or three hours.

Photography also showed people the largely unexplored West and that parts of it needed to be protected. Photographers William Henry Jackson and Thomas Moran captured images of Yellowstone National Park



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in the 1870s and convinced government officials the land was worth preserving.

After the first Treaty of Fort Laramie failed to stop conflict in 1851, another treaty took place 17 years later. It was agreed to by the U.S. government and the Lakota, Arapaho and Yanktonai Dakota. It gave the Lakota ownership of the Black Hills and additional land in South Dakota, Montana and Wyoming. The treaty also ended Red Cloud's War, which lasted about two years and pitted the U.S. government against the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne and Northern Arapaho tribes.

The treaty was first signed April 28. Notable signatories included William Tecumseh Sherman, then a lieutenant general in the

U.S. Army, and Sitting Bull of the Oglala Lakota.

In addition to the exhibit, the museum will also host an educational symposium April 14 about the exhibit. The symposium will discuss Gardner's oeuvre, background on some of Gardner's photo subjects and events leading to the signing of the Treaty of Fort Laramie.

Four guest scholars will participate in the symposium, including Andrew Smith, who sold the Gardner originals to Mars. Keith F. Davis, a Sheridan native who is the curator of a photography museum in Kansas City, will attend as well.

A century and a half after the treaty of Fort Laramie, the new exhibit offers a glimpse into the past.