

This is the exhibit in Hyde Gallery —

**EUGENE BUECHEL:  
"ROSEBUD AND PINE RIDGE PHOTOGRAPHS"**

Eugene Buechel came to South Dakota as a Jesuit scholastic in 1902, at the age of twenty-eight. Except for the years 1904-1906, when he was completing his studies at St. Louis University, Buechel spent the remaining fifty-two years of his life on the Rosebud and Pine Ridge reservations as pastor, teacher, and superior at the St. Francis and Holy Rosary Missions.

Buechel's interests were wide. He was a non-Indian authority on the Lakota language, having published *A Bible History in the Language of the Teton Sioux* in 1923 and the detailed *Grammar of Lakota* in 1939. He prepared extensive notes for a Lakota-English dictionary, which was completed by Rev. Paul Manhart and published in 1970 as *A Dictionary of the Teton Dakota Sioux Language*. Buechel developed a small museum, which now bears his name, to house and display an impressive collection of artifacts which he had received as gifts and obtained as museum acquisitions. He also made a complete botanical collection of plants found on the reservations, with four dried samples of each variety, one taken in each season. The Buechel Memorial Lakota Museum currently displays these collections and distributes his published works.

In 1922, at the age of forty-eight, Buechel began making photographs. There is no evidence that his camera distracted him from the mission schools, parish work, and study of the Lakota language. Buechel apparently used his camera as one more means of recording and organizing his experiences, as a complement to his journals and his memory.

Buechel used the simplest of adjustable cameras, estimated his exposures, and sent his exposed films to a commercial studio for processing and printing. His maturity and his distance from the technology of photography may explain the directness of his images. They are not in any aspect about the photographic process, but about his subjects and his relationship to them.

Eugene Buechel's photographs demand comparison with those of his countryman August Sander. Buechel was born near Fulda, Germany, in 1874, which places them as immediate contemporaries. Could Buechel have known of the style of Sander, or did they simply share a marvelous, straightforward Teutonic vision? Probably without influence, Buechel was making the purest of photographs: self-effacing, intuitive, and direct.

Buechel photographed during an important transitional period on the reservations, when the white man's lifestyle was a dominant and accepted influence. The romantic era was finished, the traditional way of life nearly invisible, and the shape of the future uncertain. Buechel understood that he was a witness to this change, and with his camera he chose and clearly rendered the people and landscapes he knew so well.

Most of us look at Buechel's images as cultural, temporal, and geographical outsiders, but we do not see his subjects as anthropological oddities, rather as living, whole people. We have the distinct impression that these people have entrusted Buechel with their images, and that is through his care that they are seen. These are respectful and generous photographs.

David Wing  
October, 1974