

**2020 Lance & Elena Calvert Award for Creative Work**  
**Reflective Essays**

**Calvert Award Reflective Essay**  
**Lauren Paljusaj**

As part of Gallery Practices: Exhibition Design and Development (ART 410), a Fall 2019 class and Spring 2020 independent study, I began researching objects held in the UNLV Special Collections and Archives (SCA). The goal of the class was to research and propose an art exhibition using photographs from SCA. The proposal was approved by the curators of Special Collections, and the second semester of the class focused on finalizing the image checklists, creating mockups of the exhibition cases, and writing copy for the exhibition. The exhibition is entitled *Intimate Nevada: Artists Respond*, and was scheduled to open April 15, 2020 at Special Collections.

I selected specific photographs based on the following criteria: location, composition, subject matter, and implied meaning. Some of these photographs had no identifying material other than the name of the collections they belonged to. I used collection finding aids to locate related collections to read letters, ledger books, and other types of materials that could potentially give information on the photographs themselves and the historical context. For example, I spent a lot of time working with the C. A. Earle Rinker Photograph Collection, and I sought out the Rinker Papers, which contains letters Rinker wrote to his family, to determine if the postcard of a tent bearing the name “Waldorf-Astoria” was a place that Rinker had lived in, or if it was just a landmark of the mining camp. I did research on photographic techniques and formats to help determine time periods and the equipment used to capture the photographs.

Part of my job as a student assistant in Special Collections and Archives is to write finding aids for our collections that provide enough information for researchers to locate materials and get started on their projects. The difference while I was working on my own research project was that I got to step to the other side and do deep dives into materials, instead of just describing them and listing the inventory. I was able to think like a researcher, and put pieces together to form a complete story of the objects.

Using the subjects of vernacular photography, the history of frontier photography, and social history, the goal of my research was to find the role of place in photography. I’m interested in how we view the places around us in the everyday context of life, how that appears in what we choose to photograph and look at, and if those ideas change over time. As I mentioned above, I used primary sources from Special Collections and Archives. Outside of Special Collections and Archives, I used journal databases to search for articles related to these subjects, and I checked

out books from the Lied Library and the Interlibrary Loan system. Using these secondary sources, I was able to contextualize my chosen photographs in the social landscape of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Nevada, as well as give more meaning to each individual object. This enabled me to piece together a story of a place that no longer exists.

The biggest challenge I faced while working on this project was having to choose between using original objects for the proposed exhibition or making reproductions. Which objects should be displayed in their original form, which should be reproduced, and why? Each photograph in the exhibition has unique qualities that influenced my decision to include it. The physicality of the objects was an important factor in their inclusion, whether it's the emulsion fading in certain parts of a print, giving it almost holographic qualities, or the hundred-year-old typewritten letters on onion skin paper.

Working on *Intimate Nevada: Artists Respond* enabled me to experience primary source research firsthand. Researching my chosen photographs, combined with using secondary sources, I came to the conclusion that importance of place spans centuries. It's why we take photos of monuments and vacation spots, buy postcards, and personalize our homes and offices. What these environments look like changes over time, but places shape our memories and give homes to our experiences.

## **Calvert Award Reflective Essay**

**Anne Savage**

It never occurred to me that photography was more than keeping a memory. To me, cameras were mere tools to recall memories. In researching *Intimate Nevada*, an exhibition collaboratively developed with Lauren Paljusaj under the direction of Dr. Susanna Newbury, I discovered a better understanding of why photographs matter: they deepen our appreciation of reality.

Last fall, I enrolled in ART 410--Gallery Practices II, Exhibition Design & Development, where we studied at UNLV's Special Collections and Archives. Our assignment was to use its vast photography holdings to create an original art exhibition. Exploring the archive was like opening a box of chocolates--even with librarians as informed guides, I had difficulty choosing which photographs to sample first.

I set about looking through UNLV's digital photograph collection *Southern Nevada: The Boomtown Years*. After finding some favorites, I called various items up for first hand examination. Studying objects by physical touch allows one to closely examine textures, smells, colors, flaws, storage methods, preservation techniques, and inscriptions. These show how a photograph becomes a collector's item, significant to its owners and to us today. Assisted by Su

Kim Chung, Aaron Mayes, SpecColl staff, and guided by finding aids, I followed every lead I could. Here, I learned how a photograph can seem more *present* than past, how collecting information from diverse sources helps place images in context. Processing primary objects into art historical vertical files as evidence of history, I created references to aid others' future research.

Following my own inquiry meant I could study something I liked. I stumbled across an encounter between a boy and a burro. I'm partial to candid. I'm also partial to burros.

I believe photos are evidence of things past. Every photograph has significance; it's kept for a reason. This is what made "Jack Tuck, a Las Vegas Neighbor in 1904" (Lake-Eglington Collection, pho004875) such a compelling mystery. Without accompanying information about its subject, I puzzled, "Is Jack Tuck the donkey or the man?" I scoured the entire digital collection until I found another image of "Jack Tuck" (a man!) posing with the Lake children and a wagon-pulling burro ("Spud" Lake Collection, pho020002). I then followed "Lake" to the Oral History Collection, where Olive Lake's recollections of her childhood included Jack Tuck and his family. In Digital Collections' scans of the valley's first newspaper, *Las Vegas Age* (1905-1947), I found multiple entries for "Tuck", from an advertisement for his father/son business to winning a horse race at the town fair. He was coming alive, and then I found his obituary--a warmhearted memorial to a well known son of the community. This created questions and Ancestry.com had answers: Jack Tuck, Jr. was born in 1889, in Needles, CA and died in 1915, in Las Vegas. Brought to life through research, an old photograph of a 15 year-old boy with a burro became the story of a life in Las Vegas.

Though I grew up here, my familiarity with Las Vegas has become richer through research. Scrutinizing one photograph has reshaped my capacity to see, has encouraged a deeper appreciation of my surroundings---prompting personal reflection. I know Vegas streets and buildings bear names of early residents. Through my research, I felt he was integral to Las Vegas' founding. How odd that "Tuck" wasn't a fixture in our contemporary landscape the way Stewart or Clark are. Tuck was a rancher, butcher, and a member of the community!

Still determined to reestablish his bond to Las Vegas, I wanted to find his gravesite. After two hours walking Woodlawn--Las Vegas' first cemetery--I came up empty handed. Instead of letting that stop me, I pivoted to the familiar--Special Collections! In the manuscript collection, the Helen J. Stewart papers (MS-00171), document early burials here. However, there was no recorded burial of Jack Tuck, Jr. Current Woodlawn employees informed me that indeed, many early Vegas families' remains are there, but if no interment/reinterment records exist, bodies are assumed to be where they were originally laid, lost to history.

This project started with a charming photograph and has transitioned to gained experience that will forever inform my research. I unearthed old roots; they're now a familiar anchor that connects me to Las Vegas. I cherish this new understanding of "Home Means Nevada"; and value my newfound passion for inquiry--born from connecting ordinary people to the histories that temporarily forgot them. Our exhibition *Intimate Nevada* is based on this simple but profound idea.