

THE PRIMARY SOURCE

NEWSLETTER FROM WESTERN LIBRARIES
ARCHIVES & SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

FACT OR FABLE? NEW EXHIBITION EXAMINES HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

By Michael Taylor, Special Collections Librarian

Thomas Cook, founder of the world's first tour company, once remarked that "To travel is to dispel the mists of fable, clear the mind of prejudice taught from babyhood, and facilitate perfectness of seeing eye to eye." Cook's words certainly ring true. That said, did early travel photographers share this lofty ideal? In many cases, the answer seems to be "no." Rather than present a neutral, unbiased image of different peoples and cultures (if such a thing is even possible), photographers for various reasons often deliberately obscured their subjects in the "mists of fable" that Thomas Cook dreamed of clearing away. At times, the images also supported powerful business interests that stood to profit from a carefully constructed view of distant lands they had set their sights on.

A new exhibition in Special Collections explores the larger social and political context of photographs created at the height of Western colonialism as tourist souvenirs or to promote tourism in areas that few Europeans or Americans had ever visited just for fun. *Looking Abroad: Photography, Tourism, and Empire, 1870-1920*, will be on display from October 24, 2022, through June 9, 2023.

The exhibition focuses on four geographic areas: the Middle East, Mexico, Japan, and the Pacific Northwest. A major theme is Orientalism—the depiction of Eastern and North African cultures in a highly oversimplified way that, whether intentionally or not, created what Palestinian-American scholar Edward Said called "the ideal other." In Orientalism's heyday in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was rare, Said observed, to find realistic or positive descriptions of these cultures. Instead, the fo-

cus was on things that made them seem, to supporters of the colonial system, "primitive" and "backward," as this made it easier to claim that that system was necessary.



Stereoview card of Mexicans in national costume, circa 1900

Said also pointed out that Orientalist thinking has never been limited to the "Orient." In fact, European representations of the East had much in common with how Americans portrayed Mexico at the turn of the twentieth century, when the two countries' economies were coming closer together. *Looking Abroad* introduces visitors to photography's role in depicting Mexico as exotic and interesting, and therefore worth visiting and investing in, but ultimately needing, some argued, outside intervention. (see p. 4)

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Featured Exhibition: Looking Abroad	1 & 4
Director's Letter	2
New Name, New Look!	3
Staff News & Notes	3
Teaching & Learning with A&SC	3
Acknowledgments	4

DIRECTOR'S LETTER

I am pleased to share news of a change to the name of Western Libraries Heritage Resources to Western Libraries Archives & Special Collections (A&SC). The division requested this change after careful reflection on the negative cultural implications of the current name, particularly for Indigenous communities. Established in 2010, the Heritage Resources division brought together three distinct programs into Western Libraries: University Archives and Records Management, the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies, and Special Collections. The name "Heritage Resources" was selected to represent the diverse collections and services within the newly created division. At the time, staff acknowledged that the term "heritage" was problematic, and as we have developed and incorporated ADEI goals into our daily work, we have recognized the need to revisit the term "heritage" and to prioritize the renaming of our division.

"Heritage" is commonly understood as the values, beliefs and traditions of a particular community, group, or nation that is passed down across generations. The meaning and purpose of "heritage" is often determined by the dominant group or culture and reflected in its social and institutional structures. Archives, museums, and libraries acquire and preserve "cultural heritage" as historical evidence for the purposes of education and research. In many instances, this historical evidence is removed from its cultural context, often without the knowledge or consent of communities to whom it belongs. Indigenous groups have been particularly impacted by the misappropriation of their past and the loss of heritage. Western's archives and special collections house Native cultural resources that consist of documentation collected by local and regional historians with an interest in indigenous culture, as well as faculty whose academic research agendas focused on regional tribes. These materials were acquired without the consent or knowledge of the tribal entities represented or

agreement about who could access these culturally sensitive resources. The contextual information obtained upon acquisition was incomplete and did not reflect Native knowledge and cultural perspectives. We recognize that much of the "heritage" represented in our collections does not belong to us. It belongs to the communities that created the resources in our care and with whom we have a responsibility for shared and respectful stewardship. For these reasons we have decided to formally change our divisional name.

Related to this work, we have developed a "Statement About Potentially Harmful Language and Content" that formally acknowledges the inherent harm and bias in the material we collect and the methods we use to interpret these resources. The statement is a public recognition that material in our holdings can negatively impact the individuals and communities who create, use, and are represented in the resources in our care. The statement is intended to offer the means for respectful dialogue and to engage in practices that build trust and collaboration. We are currently adding the statement to our online research and teaching tools, such as archival finding aids, subject research guides and catalog records. And, we have developed new and revised policies and procedures that address the way in which the division manages culturally sensitive materials and privacy concerns that will be posted on the new and revised Western Libraries website.

These changes are intended to open pathways for productive dialogue about ways that libraries and the people and communities they serve can work together to implement more culturally sensitive ways to collect and describe historical materials. I am grateful to the entire staff of the Archives & Special Collections division for their thoughtful and meaningful contributions to all of these efforts.

~ Elizabeth Joffrion, Director

NEW NAME, NEW LOOK!

Notice something different? In this issue we are pleased to announce our recent name change from Heritage Resources to Archives & Special Collections, which went into effect just before the start of fall quarter. More information about the background and discussion leading up to this decision can be found in the Director's letter on the previous page.

We have been hard at work updating our teaching, research and outreach tools in response to this change, including renaming this publication (formerly called "Heritage Highlights"). After several

conversations we settled on "The Primary Source" — which is both an ode to the rare and archival materials we collect as part of our work, and also an acknowledgment that this newsletter is one of our primary means of communicating information about our programs and collections to our users and supporters.

In the coming months we will be migrating to a new platform for delivering these newsletters in a more accessible format which we hope will improve our communications with you all. Stay tuned!

STAFF NEWS & NOTES

Archives & Special Collections is pleased to introduce Sarah Nelson Smith, whom we recently hired in a temporary position as our Lead Records Management Coordinator with University Archives & Records Management.

Sarah is no stranger to us or to the archival community in the Pacific Northwest and at Western. She earned her MA in History/Archives and Records Management from the WWU History Department, she has worked as an archivist for the Washington State Archives NW Branch (located at WWU), and

she has been both a contract archivist and volunteer photograph cataloger for the Center for Pacific Northwest Studies. Additionally, she has worked as an Archivist for the University of Washington Special Collections and for the National Archives & Records Administration Pacific-Alaska Region in Seattle. While not working for UARM or in her community, Sarah serves as Secretary for Skagit County Fire District #5, where she is also a volunteer firefighter.

Sarah can be reached at nelson5@wwu.edu or (360) 650-3154.

TEACHING & LEARNING WITH A&SC

Archives & Special Collections staff have had the great pleasure of welcoming and working with several classes already this quarter, many of which we have hosted in previous years and probably just as many visiting for the first time.

Special Collections Librarian Michael Taylor is also teaching LIBR 325 History of the Book again this quarter. The class, now offered at five credits, introduces students to major topics in the history of books and printing, and involves extensive use of rare books and manuscripts from around the world and which are held in Special Collections.

Interested in scheduling a class session with A&SC? Please contact us at archives.speccoll@wwu.edu!

Courses hosted by A&SC this fall include:

- Cross-Cultural Representation (Art History)
- Media Studies (Communications)
- Medieval Seminar (English)
- History of the Jews (History)
- History of the Holocaust (History)
- Public History (History)
- Methods of Research & Analysis (History)
- Food Security & Land Justice (Honors)
- Hebrew Bible (Global Humanities & Religions)
- Freshman Interest Group Seminar
- Queer Comics and Graphic Novel (Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies)
- Feminist & Queer Methodologies (Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies)

“ F A C T O R F A B L E ” (C O N T I N U E D F R O M P A G E 1)

In the Pacific Northwest, tourists encountered photographs that evoked sympathy for Native Americans but reinforced the false idea that they were “a dying race.” The exhibit features images by Lee Moorhouse, a photographer from Pendleton, Oregon, who took thousands of pictures of local Indians. Moorhouse was a collector of Native artifacts and clothing, which he provided to sitters who came to his home studio. The images have been criticized for making Native Americans seem like figures of the past who had no place in the modern world.



Photograph of the Sphinx and Pyramids in Giza, Egypt, circa 1893

Also on display are photos produced by Japanese and Turkish photographers. Although they, too, are not neutral and, like all photos, need to be closely interrogated, they show two very different approaches to how non-Western photographers framed their own cultures for Western audiences.

Several classes at WWU have already visited Special Collections to explore the exhibit, which we hope all visitors will take as an opportunity to practice viewing both historical and modern photos with a critical eye.



Photograph of a Japanese woman writing, circa 1897

Please contact exhibition curator Michael Taylor at taylo213@wwu.edu with questions or to arrange a special viewing.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

We would like to thank our volunteers and student employees for all they do in support of Archives & Special Collections. We would also like to thank the many individuals, families, and organizations who have made generous monetary gifts and contributions of collection materials.