

## **Digital Imaging Specialist Job Description**

### **IMLS Project: Preservation and Access of the E.I. Couse Cellulose Nitrate Negative Collection**

#### **Project Overview**

This project seeks to preserve, digitize, and make accessible online the Couse Family Collection of approximately 9,000 cellulose nitrate negatives, which were used by the artist E.I. Couse to create contact prints as photographic studies for his paintings. This collection provides key insight into his artistic process as well as daily life in early 20<sup>th</sup> century Taos and greater northern New Mexico.

This project dovetails with our recently completed NEH CARES project to digitize the contact prints which were produced from the nitrate negatives. Taos did not have electricity or running water until 1928 and so E.I. Couse produced his prints using sunlight and a contact process which did not typically produce the highest quality images.

In the early 1990s, the photographer George Marcek produced his own prints from some of Couse's original cellulose nitrate negatives and the quality difference between these newer prints and the original contact prints is significant. With the nitrate negatives in relatively excellent condition given their age and instability, it is critically time sensitive to preserve, digitize, and make accessible this untapped resource for artists, researchers, and students.

Never before available to the public, the digital surrogates will be discoverable online through the New Mexico Digital Collections website, administered by the University of New Mexico and which offers free membership to in-state cultural institutions.

The new digital positives generated from the negatives will be a critically important resource available through The Lunder Research Center for the Taos Society of Artists, a Couse-Sharp Historic Site initiative currently under construction and scheduled to open to the public in mid-2022. It will be of great interest to artists, gallery owners, curators, private collectors, art historians, students, and local community members. The availability of this new resource will support the site's mission and vision by preserving the original negatives and making them accessible for scholarly engagement.

#### **Qualifications**

The ideal candidate for this position will have experience with museum or archival collections, handling fragile materials, operating scanning equipment, photo editing applications such as Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom, familiarity with photographic processes, and digital file management. Additional desired qualifications include an attention to detail, excellent computer skills, a high level of organization, the ability to work independently and troubleshoot minor technical issues, and familiarity with digital image standards and formats, controlled vocabularies, metadata schema, and online image databases. Previous experience with or

knowledge of safe handling practices for cellulose nitrate is highly desirable, but not required. An undergraduate or graduate degree in photography, art history, museum studies, library and information science, or a related field is preferred.

### **Project Duties**

Under the general supervision of the Archivist, the Digital Imaging Specialist will be responsible for creating high-resolution digital surrogates of the original cellulose nitrate negatives in the Couse Family Photo Collection using a flatbed scanner and PC workstation. The work area will be equipped with a fume hood to minimize the impact of any potential off-gassing from the materials. All negatives will be stored in a laboratory-grade flammable materials storage freezer and project staff will practice established safety protocols when handling any cellulose nitrate.

The Digital Imaging Specialist will then generate positive images for public access using a photo editing application such as Adobe Photoshop or Lightroom. Each image will have item-level descriptive metadata created for it in the ContentDM Project Client. The project will employ DublinCore metadata standards as well as several different local and standardized controlled vocabularies used to identify the subjects of the photographs and to allow faceted searching in the public user interface.

Contextual understanding of the people, places, and subjects contained within the photographs will be critical to the success of the project. Familiarity with the history of the Couse family and the Taos Society of Artists is a necessary component of the creation of high quality end-user metadata. The Digital Imaging Specialist will be expected to become familiar with the subject matter through personal enrichment and the reading resources provided.

Uploaded images and metadata will be added to the approval queue to be reviewed by the Archivist for quality and correctness. Any necessary corrections will be communicated directly to the Digital Imaging Specialist. Upon approval, new images will be indexed and ingested into the New Mexico Digital Collections website by the Archivist in preparation for final review before publication. The collection will also be reviewed by several qualified consultants for depictions of any culturally sensitive subject matter before being made available online and any images deemed sensitive will be restricted from the public.

This is a part-time grant-funded staff position. The Digital Imaging Specialist will be responsible for tracking progress and meeting weekly and monthly targets to ensure the timely completion of the project by no later than August 2023. Any issues that might affect successful and on-time completion should be communicated to the Archivist in a timely fashion.

Please submit a resume and cover letter to Marissa Hendriks, Archivist/Collections Manager, no later than September 30, 2021, [mhendriks@couse-sharp.org](mailto:mhendriks@couse-sharp.org)