

Fred Sigman: The Las Vegas Wash Collection CAE1311

Introduction/Abstract

Local photographer Fred Sigman worked along the banks of the Las Vegas Wash, a 12-mile long channel running along the southeastern side of the Las Vegas Valley, during the last two decades of ecological change and usage patterns; his body of work is the most complete record of the wash during the late 20th century. This archive contains early research materials from 1970 – 1972, a journal, correspondence, Clark County Wetlands Park promotional materials, digital imagery, book project materials, and press.

Biographical Note: Fred N. Sigman

Born in Asheville, North Carolina, Fred Sigman spent his early years growing up in his mother's childhood home, until the age of nine, when they moved to Paris. Fred Sigman attended boarding school at Notre-Dame de Boulogne outside of the city near the famed Bois. During those years living in Europe, he began to take pictures with a camera wherever they traveled. In France, he walked among the ruins of the ancient Romans and found a world to himself in the woods of Boulogne and Fontainebleau to the south. His teachers assigned the writings of Jean de la Fontaine and Charles Baudelaire, poets in allegory and the peripatetic way.

He returned to the United States for college, where he received a B.A. degree from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He received his M.A. and PhD from the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque. He has taught art history throughout the southwest. He has exhibited throughout the United States including New York, Palm Beach, Las Vegas, San Diego, and Albuquerque. Internationally he has exhibited in Sweden and Mexico.

Scope and Content

The Las Vegas Wash is a 12-mile long channel running along the southeastern side of the Las Vegas Valley. The wash, which in the last two decades has become more of an urban river, serves to collect the valley's excess urban runoff, treated wastewater, and stormwater (both natural flows and those emanating from the extensive storm drain systems of Las Vegas and Henderson), then carry it all out to Lake Mead. The wash almost dried up during the rapid urbanization of the 1960s and 1970s; but ironically, as that growth continued, increasing amounts of water created a manmade wetland that became an informal park used by the homeless as well as bird watchers. As the wetland came to be perceived as a natural filtering system for urban runoff, as well as a recreational area, plans were made by the Las Vegas Valley Water District to create a county park around the wash. This was also necessitated by the need to control increasing bank erosion. Another facet of interest to artists working in and around the Wash was the development of Lake Las Vegas, a luxury planned community featuring a manmade lake for boating and fishing surrounded by homes and two golf courses. The flow from the Wash was channeled to pass under the lake through two seven-foot pipes. Aerial and ground-based photographs documenting the concatenation of the wash, Lake Mead (itself a reservoir, not a natural lake), and the development's water feature create an opportunity to express the complex relationships among water uses in the western desert states.

This unique riparian corridor now carries an average of 150 million gallons of water daily out of the valley and into Lake Mead. It hosts approximately 200 fish and wildlife species, more than 200 species of plants, and provides return flow credits to the Colorado River. Local photographer Fred Sigman worked along the banks of the Las Vegas Wash during this entire history of ecological change, the subsequent evolution of usage patterns, and development; his body of work is the most complete record of the wash during the late 20th century.



This archive contains early research materials from 1970 – 1972, a journal, correspondence, Clark County Wetlands Park promotional materials, digital imagery, book project materials, and press.

Inclusive Dates

1964 – 2008

Bulk Dates

1998 – 2004

Quantity / Extent

.25 cubic feet

Language

English

Arrangement

This archive is organized into nine folders based upon material type.

Related Archive Collections

CAE1110: *Fred Sigman: Photographs of the Las Vegas Wash Portfolio*

Related Publications

Fox, William L. *In the Desert of Desire*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005.

Sigman, Fred N. *Bottomlands: Photographs of the Las Vegas Wash*. Las Vegas: WSG Editions, 2008.

Sigman, Fred N. *Motel Vegas*. Las Vegas: Smallworks Press, 2019.

Container Listing by Folder:

CAE1311: Folders 1-9, 1964 - 2008

CAE S-Box 52

- 1 Artist Information, 1982 – 2008
- 2 Ecology Action Materials, 1964 – 1972
- 3 Journal, 1998 – 2002
- 4 Clark County Wetlands Park Materials, 1995 – 2001
- 5 Related Research Materials, 1998 - 2002
- 6 Book/Portfolio Correspondence and Writings, 2000 – 2005

- 7 Book/Portfolio Working Photographs, 1998 – 2004
- 8 Book/Portfolio Images, 1998 – 2004
- 9 Press Materials, 1971 – 2000