After her mother's death in 1964, Nancy Newhall wrote to the Massachusetts Society of Mayflower descendants, which had asked her to become a member.

She would, I know, like me to become a member in her stead, but though I have celebrated the Pilgrims and the Puritans in their own words in *Time in New England*, the book I did with the photographer Paul Strand, and in *This Is the American Earth* with Ansel Adams, I seem to have inherited so strong a strain of idealism that I pour all of my energies into the present and I hope the future. [1]

The two books Nancy Newhall mentions in this letter are among her most eloquent and widely praised publications. Both were uncommon books that set a high standard for future generations. *Time in New England*, published in 1950, was the first major book in which her innovative ideas as a designer, editor, and collaborator coalesced. *This Is the American Earth*, published in 1960, featured the work of Ansel Adams and thirty-two other photographers in the first large-scale photo book in what would become the Sierra Club's Exhibit Format series. In both books, Nancy Newhall struggled to create a new relationship between word and image. The text was not a description of the photographs, and the photographs were not mere illustrations of the text; rather, the words were approached as enhancements, and the images were the finest art photography. Newhall called this relationship synergistic, and it was closely related to Alfred Stieglitz's idea of *equivalence*. Long acknowledged and revered by insiders for her creativity, she combined intellectual breadth and depth with hands-on design. Nancy Newhall was a very shy person who was most comfortable and effective directing from "backstage." She shunned celebrity and refused invitations to teach and lecture. These two books also frame her personal transformation from a New Englander to a woman of the West and Southwest dedicated to the causes of conservation.

Nancy Newhall revolutionized art photography book-making in particular, along with notable innovations as a curator, editor, and perceptive historian. Currently, the value of her contributions to both photography as a fine art and conservation as moral imperative is in many ways still on the ascendance. During her lifetime, she published over eighty articles, books, and catalogs, curated fifteen major exhibitions, and wrote the script for a never completed film on Sierra Club founder John Muir.[2] No discussion of the history of photography or the American conservation movement is complete without reference to the work of Nancy Newhall. With hindsight, the range of her work is staggering. She confidently tackled both nineteenth and twentieth-century photographers in the United States and in Europe. Her work is often reprinted, and her contributions continue to resonate, especially her role as editor of *The Daybooks of Edward Weston I & II*. Chosen by Weston as his official biographer, their work together is still unfolding. An unpublished 1953 collaboration, *Edward Weston's Book of Nudes*, that could not find a market in the prudish fifties, was released by The J. Paul Getty Museum in September 2007. It is an exemplary book faithful to Newhall's elegant layout and design and Weston's juxtaposition of nudes with landscapes and still lifes. There are more unpublished treasures in the Estate of Beaumont and Nancy Newhall, including her biography of Alfred Stieglitz and a 1956 mock-up of a book on African-Americans. [3]

Born Nancy Wynne Parker in 1908 in Swampscott, Massachusetts, she was the only child of prosperous parents. Her father's position as an executive for B.F. Goodrich Company required moving constantly and included a year in Paris when Nancy was age eleven. Fluent in French, she wrote poems in that language, and translated Latin poems into lyric English forms. She wrote her first poem at the age of seven and had one of her poems published in *St. Nicolas*, an excellent juvenile magazine of the era, at the age of twelve. After this, she never quit publishing. Precocious and anxious to enter art school at the age of sixteen, she wrote that her parents "compelled" her to enroll at Smith College, her mother
During their courtship, Beaumont remembers preparing Nancy's painting panels of wood with gesso in his weekend workshop, where as a youth he built model ships. In 1933, her first solo exhibition of paintings and wood engravings at the Grace Horn Gallery in Boston was reviewed by the critic of the Boston Herald: "Not only does the young artist show command of her medium . . . but she also shows an amazing sureness of touch. She draws exceedingly well. She is capable of filling a small canvas with brilliant sunshine without resorting to obvious tricks. Her shadows are vibrant with illumination."[7] During this time, she was the Art Editor for The New Frontier magazine and wrote provocative articles on Thomas Hart Benton and Leon Kroll, highlighting their very different orientations. She wrote that Benton, ". . . has hacked a clear trail through the decadent jungle of European art" and heralded his leadership in the, ". . . revolution to free art from a ridiculous ritual in the hands of the spiritually dead, and to set up again in all its power to fulfill its great public duty of interpreting life of the present."[8] Kroll, who thought the claims of the American scene painters' nonsense and false, asserted that, ". . . great art rises above the conditionings of time and place, and is admired for universal qualities."[9] Rather than see these views as oppositional, Nancy Newhall readily conflated both positions -- truly great American art was also universal.

Beaumont and Nancy became officially engaged on New Years Eve 1935, in Times Square, with the promise to marry as soon as Beaumont secured a steady, well-paying job. As fiancés, they took frequent train trips to Manhattan where both would use the library at the Metropolitan Museum of Art -- he to research photography, she to research early American architecture. Beaumont gave Nancy her first camera, a miniature Kodak called a Bantam, and she began learning from him, ". . . about photography, its esthetics and its ignored role in 19th and 20th century art history."[10]

Nancy was living in her painting studio in Marblehead, Massachusetts, when Beaumont began working as a librarian at the fledgling Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in November 1935. In spring 1936, with his appointment as Director, International Exhibition of Photography, 1839-1937, Beaumont and Nancy set the wedding date. Married on July 1, their honeymoon was delayed until the autumn, when they boarded the SS Queen Mary for Europe. This trip to Paris and London would become the modus operandi for their lives as a couple, a flexible itinerary combining work and pleasure that were most often one-and-the-same. Together they met photographers, collectors and publishers, and searched the libraries of photo societies. They reviewed portfolios and visited studios. Beaumont selected prints and often left it to Nancy to collect them for his inaugural history of photography exhibition. Ultimately, Beaumont's ambitious landmark installation at MoMA had a checklist of 841 items, including cameras on tripods, daguerreotype-processing equipment, even a nineteenth-century field dark tent. Although in later years, Nancy Newhall always said, "When I married Beaumont, I married photography," her immersion was not instantaneous. While in Paris, she also researched Gericault paintings at the Louvre. More specifically, it was with the installation and the March opening of the exhibition "Photography, 1839 - 1937" that Nancy became fully engaged in championing photography as art. On her resume, she pinpoints 1937 as the year she, "gave up painting; took up photography; decided to put energies behind artists and causes I believed in."[11]

The newlywed's first apartment was a third floor, one-bedroom walkup in a brownstone at 19 W. 56th Street, within walking distance of MoMA. Beaumont described this apartment in terms of how many people, thirty-five to forty party guests, the main room could accommodate. In addition to "marrying photography," this reserved woman also married a gregarious host who loved to cook and entertain. Their door was always open, and as they moved to larger homes, it was not unusual for a guest to come for a few days and stay for months. In their New York apartment, they both worked at the dining room table, across from one another. This changed when they moved to their first two-story home in Rochester, where Beaumont had a studio for writing in the early hours before going to his job at the George Eastman House, and where Nancy often wrote in bed on a portable typewriter, with her current project spread out around her.

True to her enthusiasm for photography and ready for a crusade, Nancy wrote and Beaumont selected the photographs for a 1937 article titled "Against Iconoclasm."[12] Signed Nancy Wynne, it is a passionate entreaty to preserve the artistic treasures of Europe, with a text that noted how the world stood "on the verge of a terrible war." Beaumont had been a contributor to The Magazine of Art for a number of years, and this collaboration surprised and delighted the editor. Nancy submitted a completed layout, with sequenced, sized, and captioned photographs. This was as unusual then as it would
Ansel and Edward lugged their monstrous black boxes to the rocky coast and up mountainsides to hand-held cameras; however, Nancy had not been in the company of creative photographers who worked with large-format cameras. Ansel Adams and his wife Virginia took charge of the Newhalls' visit, introducing them to a wide circle of San Francisco artists, to the drama of Yosemite Valley, and to the splendors of Big Sur. After meeting Edward Weston and Charis Wilson in their modest Carmel Valley home, the Newhalls canceled plans to visit relatives in Oregon and checked into the Highlander Motel for two weeks. Each day they walked to the Westons' home where they first saw the journals he wrote every day at dawn, his daybooks: "We just wanted to be exploring different country."

Refugees...to listen was to scream inside...In the West we would at least have been safe...France had just fallen, the last of the continent; England was under heavy bombing; there was no Europe to go to anymore..Refugees...to listen was to scream inside...In the West we would at least have been safe...France had just fallen, the last of the continent; England was under heavy bombing; there was no Europe to go to anymore..Refugees...to listen was to scream inside...In the West we would at least have been safe...France had just fallen, the last of the continent; England was under heavy bombing; there was no Europe to go to anymore..Refugees...to listen was to scream inside...In the West we would at least have been safe...France had just fallen, the last of the continent; England was under heavy bombing; there was no Europe to go to anymore..<br>Horatio Greenough, Herald of Functionalism" was the Newhalls' next jointly signed article. In an attempt to give the "form follows function" mandate of the Bauhaus an American context, the Newhalls revisited nineteenth-century sculptor and philosopher Horatio Greenough. Nancy certainly found in Greenough an echo of her own desire to create new forms that would grow out of the challenges of the American experiment. "In the America of the 1840s and 50s, the native tradition in building evolved through scarcity of labor, was already passing architecture and crafts into new fields, finding new forms for necessities and powers." Her search for, and emphasis on, inspirations unique to the development of the USA is a theme running throughout her life's work.

The first chapter of an unrealized television script written at this time, America Makes the Americans, is titled "The Savage Continent." She presents wilderness as a challenge, a provocateur for human invention, and presents a perspective on the frontier that emphasizes taming of the environment for human purposes. It continues the thread of "functionalism" and reflects identification with the American Renaissance of the 1920s. Virgin territories are seen as potential sites for a city, farm, or factory.

Within a year, Nancy glimpsed the unfamiliar American West, an environment that changed her perspective on landscape and human tenancy of the land. She began an apprenticeship that combined the art of photography with a call for conservation. Nancy's fascination with television was set aside, but not her desire to present Americans with an inspirational image of themselves. Until she created This Is the American Earth, her predominate focus would be collaborations with individual creative photographers, many of whom worked in the West. Her period of initiation into photography as art, and into the landscapes of the West, was both arduous and rewarding.

In 1940, the Newhalls boarded a train bound for California. It was their first trip West, and it was prompted by the devastation and upheaval in Europe: "France had just fallen, the last of the continent; England was under heavy bombing; there was no Europe to go to anymore...Refugees..to listen was to scream inside...In the West we would at least be exploring different country." Ansel Adams and his wife Virginia took charge of the Newhalls' visit, introducing them to a wide circle of San Francisco artists, to the drama of Yosemite Valley, and to the splendors of Big Sur. After meeting Edward Weston and Charis Wilson in their modest Carmel Valley home, the Newhalls canceled plans to visit relatives in Oregon and checked into the Highlander Motel for two weeks. Each day they walked to the Westons' home where they looked at his prints, and where they first saw the journals he wrote every day at dawn, his daybooks: "We just wanted to read it. It knocked us over. It was a beautiful beginning."
Before coming West I had never beheld the engulfing ground of an 8x10 camera. Now here were images from the world by Ansel and Edward [Weston], moving, sparkling . . . I only had a Rolliflex --- I began to see what Ansel meant when he called it "navel photography" and I resigned [myself] to photographing through the back of the station wagon.[21]

At first, Nancy was intimidated by both Adams and Weston, and her timidity was surely compounded by the overwhelming proportions of the landscape. Her vista was literally expanded by many miles wide. Her sense of being adrift and disoriented is conveyed in her photograph made at Point Lobos, on the coast near Carmel. This image has a completely ambiguous scale and is a negative Nancy printed repeatedly during her lifetime. Although the pool of water is probably tiny, the craggy rocks also feel monumental and ominous. Like many of her best photographs, the Point Lobos prints engage viewers on a kinesthetic level, with the central calm warmth surrounded by protective barriers.

Edward and Charis's sparsely furnished cabin on Wildcat Hill was constructed with one purpose; everything was in support of Edward making art. All of it, especially the wild majesty of the West, was fundamentally different from the decorum of Nancy's upbringing. She was startled at how directly the land spoke to her innermost person:

"I had tiptoed in and out of museum trustee David McAlpin to assist the Newhalls in founding the department. Beaumont and Ansel had known Alfred Stieglitz for a number of years. Nancy says of her introduction to the great photographer: "I had tiptoed in and out of the place [gallery] for yearsBetween them, they dragged me, much like a reluctant puppy...I was to go back almost every day for two years...It was one of the most illuminating experiences of my life. I learned about art and its creators as I doubt any university can ever teach."[22]

Nancy, the creative artist, was undoubtedly responding to the camaraderie of thoroughly dedicated artists. Ansel, the main protagonist and native son of this unsettled terrain, exuded an intensity that matched her own and on which she thrived: "If you work with Ansel Adams, you get up before dawn . . . the unrisen day calls forth Herculean amounts of work, you may get two breakfasts before noon... or far from towns, and too busy to bother . . . exist on laughter until sundown."[23]

On their California sojourn, the Newhalls told Adams of their hope to establish the first museum department of photography at the Museum of Modern Art. By the fall of 1940, Ansel was brought to New York with the financial support of museum trustee David McAlpin to assist the Newhalls in founding the department. Beaumont and Ansel had known Alfred Stieglitz for a number of years. Nancy says of her introduction to the great photographer: "I had tiptoed in and out of the place [gallery] for yearsBetween them, they dragged me, much like a reluctant puppy...I was to go back almost every day for two years...It was one of the most illuminating experiences of my life. I learned about art and its creators as I doubt any university can ever teach."[24]

For two years, Nancy visited Stieglitz daily with a plan to write his biography. Beaumont remembers her method as a test of her remarkable memory. [25]Wanting nothing to come between her and Stieglitz, she would take no notes during their time together, and then rush home to write down their conversation word-for-word. In 1922, Stieglitz made his first "Equivalents," a series of photographs of clouds called Music: A Sequence of Ten Cloud Photographs. The photographer had been accused of producing magnificent portraits either because he photographed extraordinary personalities or because he hypnotized his sitters with his own powerful personality. Music was intended to "show that my photographs were not due to the subject matter."[26] This linkage between music and photography served as a model for Nancy. When working with Paul Strand on Time in New England, she wrote "The book begins to sing in my head: I can see it."[27] Equivalence is a concept that inspired many photographers, most notably Ansel Adams and Minor White at this time. Nancy was the first to take hold of it as a model for combining words and images. In her response to each project, without a formula or recipe, she wanted to potentiate the power of photographs. Equivalence is a concept that has defined definition by numerous articulate writers. Even Nancy, who was both precise and poetic, could only recount her experience of viewing Stieglitz's "Equivalents." Nancy's photo of Stieglitz in gallery with equivalents lined up):

Frankly, I thought it was mostly humbug, and Stieglitz at his romantic worst. Then one afternoon, he turned me loose, alone, among the several boxes of Equivalents...A couple of hours later I came out in tearsthe sun itself could not compare to this blinding brilliance within...There must be some way to lead those who don't understand those things. Dramatic anecdotes don't do it -- at least not for me. He said, "You will have to make your own Equivalents." Make your own Equivalents. That still rings in me. It has been the guiding principle of almost all the books and shows I have done.

It has been an extraordinary experience to observe how a different text or sequence or general context can change what people see and feel in the same photograph. Behind us all stands Stieglitz: without Equivalents and the
sequence concept, both of which are beyond journalism, we might never have done what we have done -- perhaps we would have had to invent it ourselves. [29]

For all of her artistic orientation, Nancy was a rigorous scholar who very early began to describe the characteristics that qualified a photograph as fine art for her. Beaumont always emphasized Nancy's approach to photography as a medium, rather than as different techniques. She did not care if photographs were in focus or blurred, and she avoided technical discussions of equipment and f-stops and darkroom specifications. In an article titled "Four Photographs" featuring images by Stieglitz, Strand, Helen Levitt, and Weegee, she identifies three qualities common to the work of these disparate artists:

1. It must be photographic; it must achieve results impossible in other mediums. If a photograph suggests a painting or etching, its maker is unequal to seeing with the swift exactitude and power of a photographer.
2. It should bear the imprint of the photographer's individuality so unmistakably that to anyone who knows his work his signature is superfluous.
3. It must have inner life, which is not exhausted by years of looking. This is the acid test of a photograph; thousands are made everyday which cannot survive a second glance. [29]

As World War II escalated, Nancy Newhall was needed at MoMA, and she could no longer meet with Stieglitz in his tiny gallery. In August 1942, Beaumont received his orders to report immediately for active duty with the Army Air Force. Nancy stepped forward as acting curator of photography at MoMA. She served for the three years Beaumont served as a photo intelligence officer in Egypt, North Africa, and Italy. With one-way delivery of a letter averaging two weeks, Nancy was on her own for a job she never wanted, her mission to sustain the fledgling department of photography. It was a time of great personal stress. Not only were New Yorkers subject to frequent air raid drills, but there was a demoralizing lack of confidence and support from the museum administration. These three jam-packed years at MoMA reverberated throughout her life. According to Beaumont, because of this experience, Nancy swore off any possibility of working for bureaucratic institutions. On the more positive side, her working with so many excellent contemporary photographers would generate a plethora of worthy projects in her future.

Ansel Adams, an irrepressible correspondent, fed Nancy's romantic, independent spirit with invitations to the open expanses of the West:

Your world seems more related to the Saraband and some fresh air, and some space under the sky, than to the esthetic chess games . . . or the Witches Cauldron of the Museum Menage. Come out west soon-come take a real simple trip in the Sierra; I can show you a place near at hand that would make you feel like the shipmates of Ulysses. [30]

During the summer of 1944, Nancy, exhausted and unhappy, left New York for Los Angeles. Ansel and Virginia picked her up at the train station and they drove up the Owens Valley to Yosemite:

How to describe the first trip up the Owens Valley? Even today, more than twenty years later, moments from the journey suddenly come back down the alien corridors of existence. Virginia must have divined that this might result in more than just a jaunt for a weary museum worker, for when, after the first stop, I started to climb in the back seat, according to customary rotation, she halted me, "No -- ou stay in front." Her face became radiant. "It's your duty to see." [31]

Virginia was determined that Nancy witness the devastation of the once fertile and verdant agricultural valley. Water from the Owens Valley had been drained to fill reservoirs for the expansion of Los Angeles. Virginia had been raised in Yosemite. She was the daughter of Harry Best, the owner of Best's Studio, a concession in the park. Both Ansel and Virginia were ardent conservationists, and Yosemite was home to their family. Although Ansel took a more active public role in the cause of conservation, Virginia was no less fervent.

Nancy's photograph of a dead tree is an image not of the romantic splendor of the West, but of devastation in the name of progress. Her own fatigue and loneliness is also amply conveyed. On this trip, her education as an advocate of the environment began in earnest. While her and Beaumont's first trip was an introduction to untrammeled beauty, on this second solo visit, Nancy saw just how vulnerable that beauty was and how it needed active protection. In the company of the Adamses, both native Californians with few ties to the cultural traditions of Europe, Nancy rethought previously held perceptions and experiences not only of the landscape, but also of photography and art:

Hitherto, I had inclined to the notion that natural beauty was too easy; mere copying, that the penetration of the commonplace and its transformation into the new and significant form were the true test of the true artist. Edward [Weston]'s work clearly related to Picasso and Brancusi. Ansel's did not. "Nature" and "beauty" were scorned as
Nancy was not only working out her attitude toward Ansel's vast panoramas, she was struggling with the dissolution of hope brought on by the war. Adams had been accused of being frivolous and unpatriotic in his persistent concentration on nature's grandeur in his photographs. Nancy was feeling her way toward an idea expressed in a letter to Ansel upon publication of This Is the American Earth:

It is terrifying to be living in what may be the last days of the world... Instant and complete destruction is enough to mourn for the end of man and beauty, and all love and promise... I think our job is to prepare a way for a new faith and a new world. I don't think we do it by fighting bits and pieces of the old negativity... I think we do it by powerful words and images. Man still has the capacity for faith and action; it is up to us to rouse it, to convert it.

Upon returning to New York, Nancy was surprised by a new sense of bravado and confidence, an unexpected legacy from her trip. She noticed this fundamental change while visiting a frail and ailing Stieglitz:

During a terrific thunderstorm, I opened the window and stuck out my head in the rain, the thunder, the darkness and the lightning. For the first time in my life I looked down a skyscraper without cringing. "Why," I thought, "with all those hand holds and toe holds it would be much easier to repel down those seventeen stories than any practice precipice in Yosemite."

Nancy needed all the mettle she could muster in her struggle to realize the Strand and Weston retrospectives at MoMA. Her position had always been considered temporary; her salary was set at half pay. Nancy wrote Ansel about the Edward Weston show, "I'd like people to come out of [the] show with a feeling as of hearing a great horn-note among the mountain tops."

Upon Beaumont's return from World War II in 1945, there was suddenly no place for the Newhalls at the museum. Even though Nancy exceeded all expectations with running an adjunct center of photography and realizing both small and large exhibitions, she was told she would have to leave. The winds of favor had shifted to Edward Steichen, who promised a hundred thousand dollars from ten photographic manufacturers for his appointment as director of the department of photography. When Beaumont was told Steichen was his boss, he resigned in frustration. The Newhalls turned their hopes westward at Ansel's urging. He proposed they found an institute in California to publish a journal and books, teach workshops, and organize exhibitions.

Both Nancy and Beaumont were determined to live as freelancers. At lunch with Paul Strand, the photographer mentioned to Nancy his desire to do something on New England. She suggested a book featuring the words of New Englanders themselves from the 1700s to the present. "The first photographs by Paul Strand I ever saw were images of forest, raindrops and rock made on the Main coast in 1927 and 1928. They struck me with the force of revelation. Here was what I had felt as a child close to the same earth and never expressed in any medium."

Originally thought of as a three-month project, Time in New England absorbed Nancy for five years. Paul Strand did not have a darkroom when he and Nancy worked on his retrospective, and he printed all the exhibition prints in the museum darkroom. When Nancy found a rousing quote, she would contact Paul and ask him to make a specific photograph to accompany the words. In the foreword, she cites two compelling challenges that kept her embedded in the project. She wanted to "examine first hand the enigma of New England, unobscured."

Further, here was the challenge of a new form: could the words of eyewitness- not captious or pseudo-verse, but actual letters, poems, journal... be joined to these images so each would expand and clarify the other?

The sound of that lost time was essential... the great music of seventeenth century prose,...the brisk, bright marching tunes of the Revolution.

Nancy's correspondence with Ansel from this period reveals that both were working with Stieglitz's idea of the equivalence. "Ansel at one end of the continent, high up in the Sierras, and Paul Strand and I at the other, in sweltering New York... using the subtle connotations between word and photographs, [discovering that] you can create a third effect --- synergistic if you like --- which is emotional and visual all at once and more powerful than either."

Beaumont and Nancy headed west together in May 1947 for a photo excursion to truly remote and untouched patches of the Southwest: Death Valley, Bryce Canyon, and Zion National Parks. It was on this trip that Nancy and Ansel became a team that eventually produced numerous articles, books, and exhibitions. Jokingly, she began to call herself the "Anselographer." Undoubtedly, Nancy's powerful public presentations of Ansel Adams as a serious artist were in large part responsible for elevating him to the pantheon of America's most successful photographers.
Following their western adventures, Nancy accompanied Beaumont to North Carolina for the summer session at Black Mountain College. While Beaumont taught, Nancy concentrated on making photographs. With insight and apparent ease, she made exquisite penetrating portraits of Annie Albers, Buckminster Fuller, and others. She was most challenged by the landscape. "A difficult branch of the art," she wrote "in only one of the two kodachromes and maybe two of the black-and-whites have I succeeded in making them convey something of what they make you feel. Of course, the Blue Ridge isn't the Sierra or the Tetons, but they do sweep and swoop until you feel like a small bubble on a very large wave."[40] "Black Mountain Landscape," an image of hills reflected in a placid lake (an image Nancy always referred to as "Mae West") is one of Nancy's finest photographs. As with most of her favorite images, she printed it in many variations through the years. It is appropriate that Nancy first satisfied her criteria for a successful landscape in North Carolina, where she was more on her own, and where the mountains were not as staggering as the Sierra Nevada. This Black Mountain image invites the viewer with quietude and gentleness, a very different tone than the heroic monumentalism of Adams's photographs, which often render the individual insignificant.

*Time in New England*, though finished to Nancy's satisfaction in 1948, would not be published until 1950. This was after Strand's 1949 move to France due to his disaffection with American politics and the trial of his friend Alger Hiss. Although the publication would receive high praise and Strand would go onto publish five more portraits of a place, Strand was not on hand to supervise the printing of the book. The reproductions did not meet either Nancy's or Strand's high standards and the book was quickly remaindered. Despite this, an editor at Little Brown offered Nancy a contract for a book of her own photographs and writing. She responded, "My husband was even more pleased with your letter than I was. He is the leader of a small but determined faction who insists that I should stop editing and exhibiting and biographing other people."[41] Ansel agreed and wrote to Beaumont:

> When she writes it is beautiful, when she photographs, ditto. She should spend more time on herself than on us “biographical material.” I mentioned this letter to her, but I think she has the feeling her niche is along evaluations, criticisms, etc. . . . that picture of me on the book [jacket] is really superb photographically.....What could she do with the world at large? [42]

In the fall of 1949, the Newhalls set aside their dream of moving to the West and made their way to Rochester, New York, where Beaumont became the first curator of photography at the George Eastman House. When Nancy was not assisting Beaumont in setting up the collection and mounting exhibitions, she was increasingly absorbed in projects directing her toward the West. Between 1949 and 1967, Nancy would make more than a dozen trips to the West. During the 1950s, she would spend at least a third of her time in California as a houseguest of Virginia and Ansel's. According to Beaumont, Nancy's career at this time was really in California.[43] On a trip in 1950, Nancy found that she had missed something else essential to her understanding of America. Three hours late and trying to gain time, the transcontinental train deposited her on the platform in Sacramento without her baggage. Too late for the connecting train to Merced to meet the Adamses, she boarded a local bus. The result was, "one of the most important journeys of my life."

> I had never seen anything like that bus, Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Negroes. . . . The temperature inside the bus rose, to what in spite of open windows must have been 120°. . . . The distressing stops . . . . patient people waiting, waiting, waiting --- to me it was a revelation, at once sordid and marvelous. Something happened to me during this journey, something distinctly echoing . . . . Dorothea Lange in the wartime shipyard . . . Where I had been involved and was now committed. [44]

Up to this time, although Nancy may have wanted to speak to the diverse peoples of America, she had little exposure. She had been sheltered in a society of artists and intellectuals, among the educated, the comfortable, the witty, and the empowered.

In 1951, both Newhalls joined Ansel for a photographic expedition to Santa Fe, Taos, Chimayo, and the small pueblos and mountain villages of Northern New Mexico. The journey culminated at a photo symposium in Aspen, Colorado where they officially co-founded the influential journal *Aperture* with Minor White as editor.[45] Nancy made many of her best images of the Southwest on this trip. Her camera vision was confident and mature. One of the strongest photographs is taken from a graveyard atop a foothill, using the string of houses in the background as the horizon line. It is, in many ways, a modest image that refers to the cycle of life in a small frontier town. She has framed a fragile sweetness in the wrought-iron grave marker, a reminder of human tenderness in the unforgiving terrain of the Southwest.

A contract for a series of articles for *Arizona Highways* magazine to be written by Nancy, with photographs by Ansel, increased the frequency of her trips to the Southwest. Beginning in March 1952, they traveled on assignment to Death Valley, Mission San Xavier del Bac south of Tucson, and Organ Pipe National Monument on the Arizona-Mexico border. In many ways, *Arizona Highways*, a state-sponsored magazine promoting tourism, an attitude despised by both Nancy and Ansel, seems an unlikely vehicle for the two artists. However, they had in common a desire for validation of their
Nancy was speaking in a new tone, mystical and religious, and distinctly out of place in a cynical, fashionable world. She

Two places in particular magnetized Nancy in her travels for the magazine: Death Valley and Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. These two environments epitomized the wilderness to Nancy, a place to shed her accepted concepts of reality.

Facts unfamiliar to the East and Europe must be taken into account, and the basic fact is wilderness. In the West there are immense distances where any track of man is either invisible or ridiculous. The oldest civilizations on the continent are there, in the Indian pueblos and the Spanish foundations; so are some of the most advanced manifestations of the newest civilization . . . . The proper study of man in the West is the powers of the functions of the earth, and how he may live with them during his brief tenancy . . . In man as in nature, the same forces are at work. [47]

In researching Death Valley, Nancy kept digging deeper. She buried herself for months in treatises on geology, wagon trains, and mining. The opening of the article clearly demonstrates how thoroughly she was jolted to a new perspective, an expanded sense of time and space: "Unearthly and immense, Death Valley so seizes the imagination that during the century the white men must have known it, it is a history of illusion." [48] The eight-page article would turn into a sixty-four-page guidebook, self-published by the newly incorporated "5 Associates," made up of Ansel and Virginia, along with Beaumont and Nancy. [49] As in Time in New England, Nancy selected quotes revealing the vanity, insanity, heroism, and desperation of fortune-seekers and frontier families. However, combined with words of eyewitnesses from a lost time in whose, "cadences was the sound. . . . and in [whose] thought [was] the germ of a nation," Nancy added her own words for the wonders she discovered. [50]

Finally, as the article concludes, Nancy claims, " . . . if you stay to explore, you will begin to understand why the Indians are still here. . . . Phenomena that anywhere else would be objects of pilgrimage are lost in the immensities . . . . Up at the Race Track after a rain, huge boulders weighing up to a quarter ton move in the wind leaving tracks like snails on the clay." [51] Death Valley, in its remove and isolation, was a place where every nuance, however fleeting and transitory, could resound in a willing and open participant.

It was at Organ Pipe, however, that Nancy experienced a personal transformation. Like Death Valley, Organ Pipe, in the harsh desert of southern Arizona, is desolate and stark, tough and unforgiving—a home for cacti, lizards, and litters of bleached bones. In this article, Nancy does not speak through others; she does not quote geological or historical sources. She includes the reader with the hortatory use of the word you. All is sensation; the land is a living body:

"You are shut in by distances of light. You walk in the focus of the sun's rays. You are clothed in sun; sun glows in your blood, until even your bones feel incandescent.

You feel in your body why the desert wears grey, and why it blooms with such vital brilliance.

Night clings, palting to your body, until once more day is limitless, and you are walking on the desert in the sky." [52]
reveals herself as a woman of undeniable faith, a humble convert to immense mysteries. Her words are testimony of an epiphany, declaring how she felt embraced within the whole of creation. Although Beaumont was baffled by Nancy's turn toward mysticism, he was completely accepting of an orientation made familiar by their dear friend Minor White. They met Minor in New York in 1945, and he was an integral part of their circle of closest friends and cohorts. They worked together at MoMA, and Nancy wrote a script for a movie with Minor when he lived in the Adamses' San Francisco studio building. Minor also lived with the Newhalls when he first came to Rochester to work at George Eastman House, and gave Nancy a cherished and much used copy of the I-Ching.

The fifties were a productive and busy time for Nancy. In addition to the Arizona Highways series, she curated "The World of Edward Weston," an exhibition of one hundred of his finest prints, sponsored and traveled by the Smithsonian Institution. In 1952, she and Beaumont took an extended trip to Europe, with especially memorable visits to Alvin Langdon Coburn in Wales, Bill Brandt in London, and Cartier-Bresson and Brassai in Paris. Together, they also prepared a series of live television programs for WHAM-TV in Rochester, with Beaumont displaying his flourish as an entertainer in front of the camera, and Nancy completely at home sending countdown signals from the control room. During this time, she and Ansel took on well-paid commercial jobs, including a 1954 book titled The Pageant of History in Northern California, a prestige publication commissioned by a San Francisco bank. [53]

The most extended project of the decade for Nancy began as a two-week volunteer effort in 1955. Nancy offered to help the Sierra Club save its small clubhouse, the LeConte Lodge, built before Yosemite was a National Park. To keep it in Sierra Club hands, the government required it to be open to the public. Originally, Nancy began coordinating a modest conservation exhibit. Over the next five years, it grew into Nancy's most triumphant creation, reaching far beyond the borders of fine art photography. This Is the American Earth initially expanded into an ambitious exhibition of more than one hundred photographs by Ansel and thirty-two other photographers, with Nancy's accompanying lyric poem as wall text. A second copy of the show at the Academy of the Sciences in San Francisco attracted a huge audience, with two more copies of the exhibition packaged by the Smithsonian to circulate throughout the United States, and four more copies ordered by the United States Information Service (USIA) to travel internationally. By 1959, Nancy was being pressured and given carte blanche to design, edit, and create a book from the exhibition for the Sierra Club.

While This Is the American Earth branched into and built momentum throughout the 1950s for Nancy, she and Beaumont also returned to Edward Weston's inspirational daybooks. Motivated to help Weston as he declined from Parkinson's disease, they were able to use the George Eastman House to raise funds and publish The Daybooks of Edward Weston: Volume I, Mexico, in 1957. Weston wrote in a large cursive script on both sides of his journal pages, and as the editor, Nancy was distressed to find he had literally excised the names of those still alive, carefully cutting rectangular windows through the paper, leaving Nancy with puzzles to solve in verso. Greeted with acclaim, Volume II, California was picked up by Horizon Press, a New York commercial house, and co-published with George Eastman House in 1961. Weston's Daybooks and Nancy's monograph on Weston subtitled The Flame of Recognition, a complete issue of Aperture in 1958, would become reliable standards on the list of Aperture editions, as did Time In New England.

Beaumont and Nancy ambitiously began a joint project in 1957 titled Masters of Photography, featuring sixteen European and American photographers. Together they selected the images, but due to extenuating circumstances, the biographies and introduction landed in Nancy's capable hands. In 1958, when the book was due at the publishers, Beaumont was in Europe-first in Salzburg giving a seminar on film, then in Paris, where he received news that General Oscar Selbert, the first director of George Eastman House, had died suddenly. Nancy described the situation:

Beaumont became the next director of George Eastman House and grounds and an underpaid staff cowering in corners, plus shows of memorabilia such as heads and horns shot by Eastman in Africa, Admiral Byrd's and Mary Pickford's cameras; two molting dioramas, and a dead advertising show in the former garage. I helped him restore House, grounds, morale, and organize space for offices, shows, etc. Project was to take nearly ten years, during some of which I served as consultant on restorations, exhibitions, publications, [56]

With the 1960 publication of This Is the American Earth, Nancy raised the bar yet again for a book of "photograph-writing." In accordance with her desire to augment the visual with the musical, her oversized symphonic format opens with an "Overture" of four panoramas spread across the fold, edge-to-edge. Underneath, Nancy begins her invocation:

This, as citizens, we all inherit: This is ours
to love and live upon,
and use wisely down all generations. [56]

She poses such questions as "What is the price of exaltation?" next to an image of a raging waterfall.

One way to assess Nancy's accomplishment is to ask if this book meets her own criteria for photographic art. First, is the
played dramatically across the contours of the Sandia Mountains, their view framed in floor to ceiling glass panels. At last, they were both happily settled in a home where the spectacle of weather, sun, and sky combined to create a setting conducive to their work and leisure. Over the years, they would entertain many friends in their home, often joining with Ansel and Virginia Adams to host gatherings that were both a celebration of photography and a forum for discussing the problems of the aging poor. Co-sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity called Project FIND, the OEO published a series of books and workshops to educate the public about issues of poverty and environmental degradation. Nancy Newhall was a key figure in this effort, organizing workshops at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and writing a book called "Photographic" to challenge the traditional limits of photography. With renewed purpose, they began to take every opportunity to work together in the West. Beginning in 1967, they would retire and be free to work on only projects of their choice, Nancy and Beaumont bought land next to Ansel and Virginia. They gathered such a broad scope of photographs and ideas, "selecting, compressing, arranging, restating, at last achieving a stirring counterpart of images on film and in word, that can reveal in the whole what only the parts could suggest." The structure of a classical music composition reflects a lifetime of a home filled with music and on-going Ansel piano concerts for friends. The book, she creates six "Movements": (1) Brief Tenant, (2) New World, (3) The Machine and a New Ethics, (4) The Mathematics of Survival, (5) Dynamics, and (6) The Crucial Resource. As with Time in New England, she constructs an autobiography of place, quoting poets, historians, philosophers, scientists, the Bible, Thoreau, John Muir, and many others concerned with the individual's relationship to the natural world.

The third criterion Nancy Newhall demanded of a photographic work of art is "inner life," a much more subjective judgment. This Is the American Earth reached many hands. When it went out of print, over ninety thousand copies had sold, and a worldwide audience of untold thousands had visited the exhibit. Today, the publication is recognized as groundbreaking and still referenced in the tsunami of books written to champion environmental efforts.

With the coming of the sixties, Nancy continued to work actively in both California and New York. Along with helping Beaumont much more closely in upgrading the George Eastman House physical plant, she immediately selected the most significant and beautiful photographs of all periods for a permanent exhibition that proudly affirmed their orientation to "The Art of Photography." A highlight was the 1963 M. H. de Young Museum's invitation to curate and design a retrospective for Ansel. It would be the largest one-man show they had ever given to a photographer and filled an entire wing. It would also be the occasion for Nancy to publish the first part of her Adams biography, Volume I: The Eloquent Light. Too large for most museums, Beaumont edited the exhibition and it successfully traveled throughout the country. Like the earlier bank commission, in 1964 the Newhall-Adams team was tapped for another well-remunerated commercial project, an extravagant commemorative publication to celebrate the University of California Centennial in 1967. Nancy and Ansel visited the six existing campuses and the three new ones barely beyond the planning stages. For the final book called Fiat Lux, Nancy fussed over three separate mock-ups though three years of revising.

Culminating a twenty-year vision, on New Year's Day of 1967, Nancy and Beaumont met with their close California friends to plan a center for photography. Ansel, Brett Weston, Wynn Bullock, and others founded The Friends of Photography, with Nancy serving as a Trustee, and Beaumont serving as an Advisor. Anticipating a time when they could retire and be free to work on only projects of their choice, Nancy and Beaumont bought land next to Ansel and Virginia. With renewed purpose, they began to take every opportunity to work together in the West. Beginning in 1967, they would teach five summer workshops at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Titled "Images and Words, The Making of a Photographic Book," it was a twelve-day intensive with Adams concentrating on photography, Beaumont on books and layout, and Nancy on sequence, sizing, and pacing. The result was a forty-six-page Santa Cruz portrait of the city published by the university. The next year's summer workshop drew forty-three students for a pilot program to search out the problems of the aging poor. Co-sponsored by the Office of Economic Opportunity called Project FIND, the OEO thought the results so moving they ordered 25,000 copies to distribute.

At the end of the decade, Beaumont noted, with characteristic consideration and reserve: "Nancy and I decided to retire in 1970 because I had enough executive experience." He took early retirement and gave George Eastman House one year's notice. Ready and open for adventure, neither he nor Nancy had any plans beyond leaving Rochester and driving toward California. While staying for two weeks at The Wild Horse Guest Ranch on the outskirts of Tucson, Beaumont received an invitation to fly to the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Unprepared to give a formal lecture, he gave a gallery talk, and was thoroughly surprised by an invitation to join the faculty. With a proviso that he would attend no meetings and serve on no committees, Beaumont called Nancy who instantaneously said, "Take it. Take it." They bought a very contemporary condominium still under construction in the La Luz compound on Albuquerque's west mesa, and worked with the then young and now famous architect, Antoine Predock to customize it for both books and cooking. To Nancy's delight, Beaumont not only loved teaching, but invited students to use his library, which was much more comprehensive than the university's. He cooked, they entertained, they made many friends, and they worked on their independent projects. At last, they were both happily settled in a home where the spectacle of weather, sun, and sky played dramatically across the contours of the Sandia Mountains, their view framed in floor to ceiling glass panels.
The last of the Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams guidebooks was released in 1970, a booklet on *The Tetons and the Yellowstone*. In Beaumont's 1993 memoirs, he recounts Nancy's unexpected and accidental death on their trip to the Grand Teton National Monument during the summer of 1974:

I had not seen this lush country, and she was eager to share it with me. On our last day we took a trip down the Snake River in a raft. Our guide and oarsmen, while pointing out the natural features of the riverbank, told us the water was unusually high and was eroding the bank around the roots of a huge overhanging tree. He said someday that tree would fall. Suddenly, without warning, it fell across the raft on us. Nancy was struck with such violence that she died a week later. Her death was very tragic and extremely painful. [60]

Beaumont was deeply touched that after Nancy's death three contemporary composers sought the rights to set to music her words from *This Is the American Earth*. With the benefit of hindsight, there was a silence to looking at black-and-white photographs before Nancy Newhall added her soundtracks. In his memoirs, Beaumont concludes the chapter of his life with Nancy by quoting from Ansel's tribute at her funeral:

Nancy Newhall was one of the few personalities of our time who recognized beauty as a major component of art. In this she occupies a rare position beyond the modes, manners and doctrines posed by the social and political currents of our period.

. . . Nancy's services to creative photography are historic; its true measure has yet to be evaluated. Time in New England and This Is the American Earth are typical of her inspiration and conviction. Warm and impulsive in spirit, she was nevertheless ruthless in her rejection of the phoney, the pretentious and the empty intellectual forms of art. Her standards of creative perfection were matched by her standards of scholarly perception. We all remain indebted to her for elevating our craft, our awareness and our confidence in creativity. The world has benefited greatly and will benefit in the years to come because of her presence among us. [61]

On a more personal note, Ansel concluded a written eulogy for Nancy, edited by Beaumont and published by the Friends of Photography in 1976:

It is as difficult to describe Nancy as it is to tell about the wind blowing in the sea, the sound of falling water, the subtle moods of greeting or parting or the shining revelation of a flower or a mountain. What we tangibly produce is separate from what our presence in both space and time really accomplish. It is not so much what we do as what we stir others to do. The ever-widening circle of creative stimulation Nancy achieved was in no way planned or anticipated. Her spirit will persist in many corridors of photography and creative thought.

In truth, when I think of Nancy Newhall I think of the "morning stars singing together." [62]

Ever since her death, Nancy Newhall's root earnestness and poetic understandings have made her susceptible to easy dismissal, to charges of a naiveté. Yet, a rereading and reevaluation confirm just how far she went beyond platitudes to excavate the rough-hewn complexity of the American soul. After an era of disillusionment, greed, and corruption, perhaps a new generation is ready for her sensitive nuanced approach.

First names are used throughout this essay, not only to avoid confusion about which Newhall or Adams is being discussed, but also in keeping with the spirit of their informality and friendships, and in accord with the author's familiar experiences as Beaumont Newhall's assistant from 1980 to 1985.

The correspondence between Beaumont and Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams quoted in this essay is in the Archives of the Center of Creative Photography, University of Arizona. All other materials by Beaumont and Nancy Newhall are in the J. Paul Getty Museum and Archives. Photographs and quotations " 2006 from the Estate of Beaumont and Nancy Newhall are reproduced with permission of Scheinbaum and Russek Ltd., Santa Fe, New Mexico.

This essay has been rewritten and expanded from a version originally published in *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, edited by Vera Norwood and Janice Monk, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987; reissued by University of Arizona Press, 1997.

Endnotes


In 1956, Nancy Newhall curated "The Negro Exhibit" at George Eastman House, Rochester, NY.


5 Beaumont Newhall, interview by David Scheinbaum, October 4, 1990.


9 Nancy Wynne Parker, "Leon Kroll on 'Art in America'," *The New Frontier* 2, 1 (February 1935): 24-27.


11 Ibid.


14 Nancy Newhall to Ansel Adams, 3 January 1951.


16 Ibid.


18 Nancy Newhall to Gilbert Seldes, 16 February 1939.


22 Ibid., 109.


27 Nancy Newhall to Paul Strand, n.d.

28 Nancy Newhall, "Notes for a biography on Stieglitz" (unpublished manuscript): 131-132.


30 Ansel Adams to Nancy Newhall, 11 June 1942.


33 Nancy Newhall to Ansel Adams, 27 February 1950.


35 Nancy Newhall to Ansel Adams, n.d.


Nancy Newhall to Ansel Adams, 18 September 1948.

Nancy Newhall to John Woodburn, 29 May 1951.


White co-founded Aperture, which he would edit until 1975, with Ansel Adams, Dorothea Lange, Barbara Morgan, Nancy Newhall, and Beaumont Newhall.


Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams, "Death Valley," Arizona Highways 29, 10 (October 1953): 68-75. This article was expanded into both a paperback and clothbound book: Death Valley (Redwood City: 5 Associates, 1954). Subsequent editions were published in 1959, 1963 and 1970.

The 5 Associates publishing venture was established by the Adamses and the Newhalls, and a young man? (Unfortunately, no one seems to have his name), who died shortly after the group came together. 5 Associates was founded in Redwood City and also published expanded versions of the Arizona Highways articles on Mission San Xavier del Bac, 1954; and The Tetons and Yellowstone, 1970.


Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams, This Is the American Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1960), ii-iii.

Nancy Newhall and Ansel Adams, This Is the American Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1960), jacket.


Beaumont Newhall, Focus, 245.

Ibid., 245-46.


About the author

MaLin Wilson-Powell has been an active participant in the art world since 1972. She has held curatorial positions and was an independent art critic, lecturer, art projects coordinator, editor, and educator. Wilson-Powell’s appointments in New Mexico included Curator at the Museum of Fine Arts, Santa Fe, and assistant to photo-historian and McArthur Fellow Beaumont Newhall. She has curated over twenty-five exhibitions with brochures or catalogs and published over three hundred articles.

Resource Library editor’s note:

The above text was reprinted in Resource Library on November 20, 2008, with permission of the Museum of
Photographic Arts, which was granted to TFAO on November 11, 2008.

Resource Library wishes to extend appreciation to Lauren Turner of the Museum of Photographic Arts, for her help concerning permissions for reprinting the above text.

To view Resource Library's article for the exhibition please click here.

Editor's note: RL readers may also enjoy:

- Nancy Newhall: A Literacy of Images (11/12/08)

and images of the historic Southern Arizona mission referenced in this text.

Read more articles and essays concerning this institutional source by visiting the sub-index page for the Museum of Photographic Arts in Resource Library.

Search Resource Library for thousands of articles and essays on American art.

Copyright 2008-2013 Traditional Fine Arts Organization, Inc., an Arizona nonprofit corporation. All rights reserved.
Eloquent Images. Word and Image in the Age of New Media. ISBN 9780262275507 376 pp. September 2005. Content Publisher The MIT Press. Eloquent Images. Eloquent Images suggests that these debates misunderstand the dynamic interplay that has always existed between word and image. Arguing that the complex relationship between text and image in New Media does not represent a radical rupture from the past, the book examines rhetorical and cultural uses of word and image both historically and currently. Now if you upload an image again, you will be able to see the uploaded image before the user name. Great! we have successfully created a profile update section with Laravel Image Upload. You can find the Source Code of the above example on Github.