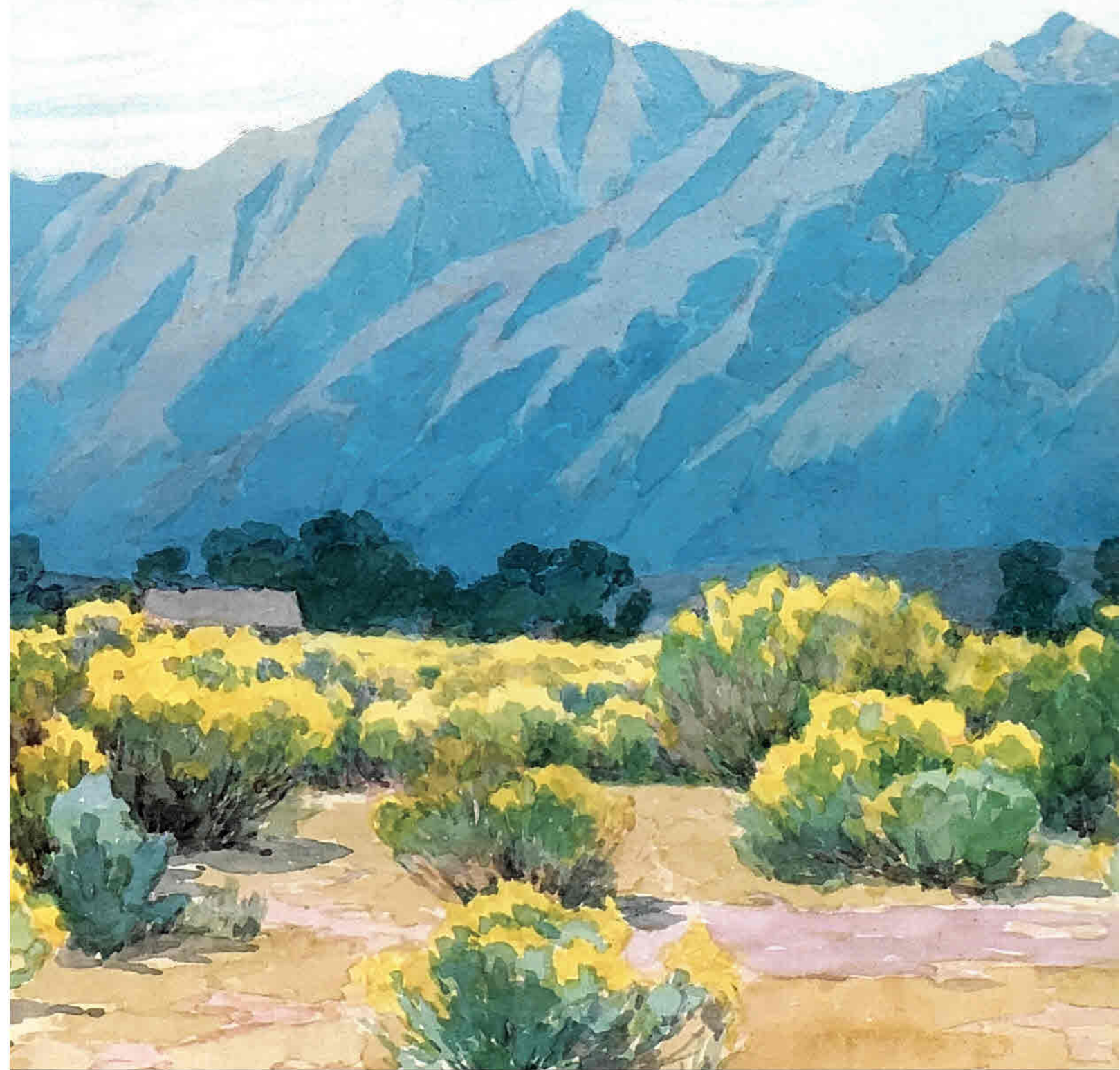


THE LATIMER SCHOOL

LORENZO LATIMER AND THE
LATIMER ART CLUB



Colophon

This First Edition of *The Latimer School*,
Lorenzo Latimer and the Latimer Art Club
is limited to a printing of 2000 copies.

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Frontispiece: Lorenzo P. Latimer *The Road to
Fallen Leaf Lodge near the Bridge at the Cross
roads. Lake Tahoe region, California, 1920*
Watercolor on paper, 15 ¾ x 10 inches.
The W.W. Price Family Collection

Front endsheet: Lorenzo P. Latimer *Indian
Rock & Tamarack Trail. Fallen Leaf, not dated*
Watercolor on paper, 16 x 21 ½ inches.
The W.W. Price Family Collection

Rear endsheet: Hildegard Herz
*Mt. Rose, Slide Mountain from Geiger Grade
near Dead Man's Point, not dated*
Watercolor on paper, 9 ¼ x 13 ¼ inches.
University of Nevada, Reno Special
Collections and the John & Geraldine Lilley
Museum of Art

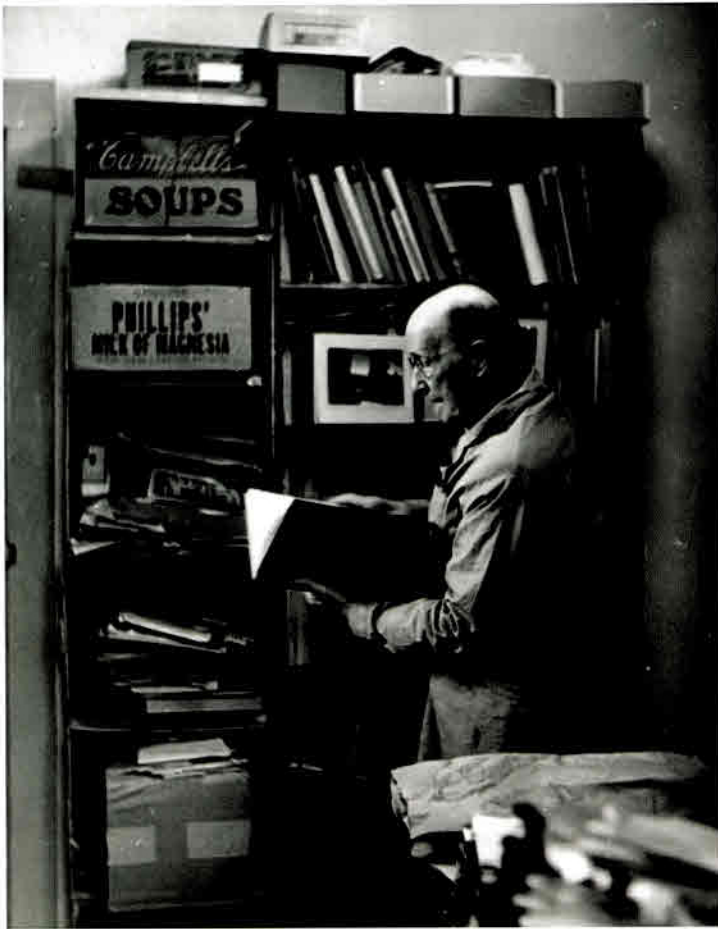


Figure 27
Dr. James E. Church, cofounder of the Nevada Art Gallery
(now the Nevada Museum of Art)
Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries



Figure 28
Dr. James E. Church in the Sierra Nevada
Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries

The Birth of the Nevada Art Gallery

In March 1931, Church requested an appearance at the board meeting of the Latimer Art Club to outline his vision. By this time, the ten-year-old Club was deeply invested in efforts to locate a permanent studio and meeting place. To the Club's board he presented a concept for an art gallery surrounded by beautifully landscaped gardens. The proposed location was a sloping hillside south of University Terrace between West and Nevada Streets just north of downtown Reno. The water of the scenic Orr Ditch bisected the land and sweeping southward views of the Sierra and Mount Rose were to be had from all corners of the property. *Figures 29 and 30* The most pressing matter at hand, however, was that Church was in the process of acquiring a



Figure 29 and 30
Proposed location of the Nevada Art Gallery, south of University Terrace
between West and Nevada Streets just north of downtown Reno
Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections

series of adjacent lots for the project and needed financial support. He invited the Latimer Art Club to consider purchasing a parcel as a gift for a future gallery and grounds. The Club called a special meeting to discuss the opportunity, and on March 17, 1931 they approved a payment of \$350 to be made from their treasury for the acquisition of land for a future gallery. Church himself, along with the City of Reno, contributed funds to purchase lots, as well as nineteen other property owners who donated adjacent land near the adjoining parcels.

As a result of Church's successful campaign to acquire land, he drew up Articles of Incorporation for the Nevada Art Gallery Inc. that were ratified on June 19, 1931. The Articles outlined provisions for a nine-member, not-for-profit corporation comprised of at least one representative of the Latimer Art Club, one member of the Board of Regents of the University of Nevada, and one representative of the Nevada Federation of Women's Clubs, plus six others. James Church and the longtime art collector Charles F. Cutts were to be honored as lifetime trustees. As outlined by Church and others, the gallery would serve the following purposes: 1) to establish a center for viewing the beauty of nature and the art of man; 2) to bring art and life into closer contact; 3) to send forth beauty and idealism to the remote homes of Nevada, 4) to acquire by purchase, gift, or otherwise, real and personal property and 5) to construct build-

ings.³⁰ The Articles also assured the Latimer Art Club that it would receive a 300-square-foot space for its exclusive use as a studio and exhibition room. Church spent the next decade of his life working towards realization of the gallery's construction.

In numerous letters to potential partners and supporters, Church outlined his broad plan for, "an art gallery with a lake and winding waters in the presence of the eternal hills. There will be a roof garden from which one can sit and find himself in the presence of nature or mingle with his fellows in the presence of the art of man. The art gallery shall not become the tomb of cold beauty but a social hall where beauty will make gentle the life of man."³¹ Designs for the gallery were prepared by Church's son, the architect Willis Church, and a landscaping concept prepared by Reno architect David Vhay. *Figures 31 and 32* The grounds proved to be a very important aspect of the plan and the notion of passing through the garden to transition from everyday life to a place of beauty was important to Church, just as it was to those versed in Swedenborgian thought. In 1936, the Latimer Art Club began paying taxes on the properties until they were eventually exempted from property taxes many years later. Thanks to support from the federal Works Progress Administration, a stone and concrete balustrade was constructed along University Terrace in anticipation of the future art gallery. (It remains in place today.) Community members pitched in to clean and clear the grounds and began installing basic irrigation infrastructure. The project limped along with support offered by individuals and elected leaders, but never gained enough fundraising traction to begin construction.

The challenges wrought by the Depression and the debt carried by the organization during these early years worried Church and progress slowed. He did, however, take pleasure in the forward movement of a related project that operated as a satellite of the Nevada Art Gallery beginning in 1936. The Church family along with the family of Maude Sawin Taylor had acquired three lots on forest service land in the Cedar Flat Tract at Lake Tahoe's Carnelian Bay. Taylor was the representative of the Women's Federated Club who had been appointed a trustee of the Nevada Art Gallery. On the lot in the Cedar Flat Tract, Church's son Willis designed a small home with a pine tree growing through its center that was flanked by a circular terrace made from natural stone slabs. *Figure 33* The structure became known as the Tree House, and its design tapped into the quasi-religious nature aesthetic of the era that had been so popularized by previous generations of Swedenborgians and nature lovers like Bernard Maybeck and Lorenzo Latimer. The Tree House became an active outpost of the Nevada Art Gallery and played host to small gatherings, including the Latimer Art Club who came together to sketch on the terrace overlooking Lake Tahoe. Church later authored an essay, "The Tree House, Lake



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Figure 31
 Willis H. Church,
 Proposed Designs for the Nevada Art Gallery, 1950
 watercolor on paper, 17 ¾ x 27 inches
 Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art

Tahoe: A Study in Adaptation to Nature and Man" (1944) and arranged to deed the property, along with that belonging to Taylor, to the Nevada Art Gallery. The Tree House enjoyed steady use for many decades, but in the end never formally transferred permanent ownership to the Nevada Art Gallery.

During the 1930s and 40s, the Latimer Art Club patiently awaited the construction of the new art gallery and garden complex proposed for University Terrace. In the meantime, they maintained their rigorous schedule of public exhibitions, social gatherings, and outdoor paint-outs. Plans for the gallery took many twists and turns. The University Terrace properties were trans-



Figure 32
 Willis H. Church,
 Proposed Designs for the Nevada Art Gallery, 1950
 watercolor on paper, 17 3/4 x 27 inches
 Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art

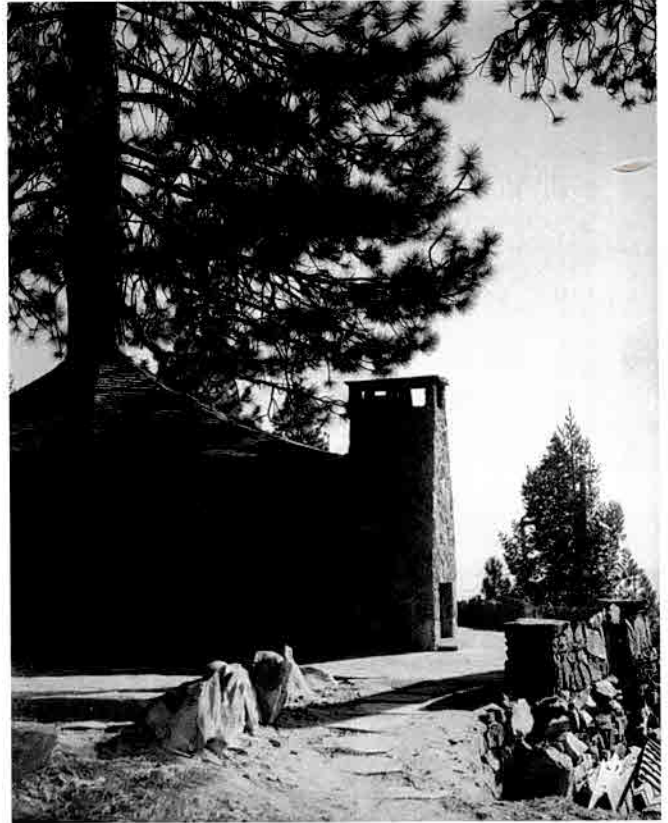
ferred to the University of Nevada Regents in hopes that they would assist with construction, and then returned once again to the Nevada Art Gallery organization in 1948 when legal issues arose. Through all of this, Church and the Latimer Art Club remained committed to building a standalone facility.

They took a collective step closer to realizing their vision in 1948 when Charles F. Cutts, a longtime associate member of the Latimer Art Club and a founding trustee of the Nevada Art Gallery, made a change to his will. Rather than leave his home and estate to the University of Nevada as previously planned, he named the Nevada Art Gallery as the sole beneficiary. After a lifetime spent as a successful Carson City businessman, world traveler, collector, and connoisseur, Charles F. Cutts died on May 7, 1949. *Figure 34* After a legal and very public dispute between the University and the Nevada Art Gallery over his end-of-life decision to change his will, a settlement was reached that divided the estate equally between the two en-

ties. The Art Gallery received Cutts' home at 643 Ralston Street, along with his collections of art, antiques, furniture, books, and approximately \$63,000. In his will, Cutts stated the following about the Nevada Art Gallery, "This is a public-spirited program in which my old friend, Dr. J. E. Church has long been interested, and I desire that it be carried forward as nearly as possible as conceived by him and myself and associates." He set aside his assets "as an aid to the completion of the garden and museum of the Nevada Art Gallery, Inc."

Once the Nevada Art Gallery assumed possession of Cutts' Ralston Street home, the board of trustees and community volunteers set aside their plans for the University Terrace properties and sprang into action. After a full remodel and many interior and exterior updates, the Nevada Art Gallery opened its doors to the public on October 15, 1950. *Figure 35* The Latimer Art

Figure 33
The Tree House at Cedar Flat Tract,
Carnelian Bay, Lake Tahoe, circa 1950s
Special Collections, University of Nevada,
Reno Libraries



Club stepped up to organize the opening festivities, but soon assumed full responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Gallery. *Figure 36* This remained the arrangement many years into the future. Church acknowledged and accorded the Latimer Art Club the respect they deserved when he stated that, “Much of what has been accomplished at the Nevada Art Gallery is due to the Latimer Club as a unit and individual members. They have all served on committees, catalogued collections, worked on the maintenance of the collections and building, arranged exhibits, conducted workshop classes, arranged all but a few programs on art, history, travel, music, and many other topics.”³² All told, the Latimer Art Club worked tirelessly to breathe life into the fledgling organization. Longtime Club member Hildegard Herz served as volunteer historian for the Gallery for almost two decades. She kept detailed scrapbooks summarizing the hundreds of exhibitions, programs, and lectures that were presented between 1950 and 1967. *Figure 37* Exhibitions and public programs were never restricted to fine art exclusively, but assumed an interdisciplinary range of topics from architecture, stained glass, and flower arranging, to poetry, weather, and radioactivity. “Dr. Church recognizes no sealed compartments between the branches of fine arts and science” a newspaper article explained of the Gallery’s unique programmatic mission.³³ The sheer diversity of the Gallery’s offerings proved to be a sound model for attracting visitors to the gallery.



Figure 34
Charles Cutts, whose home was donated to the Nevada Art Gallery in 1948, Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections



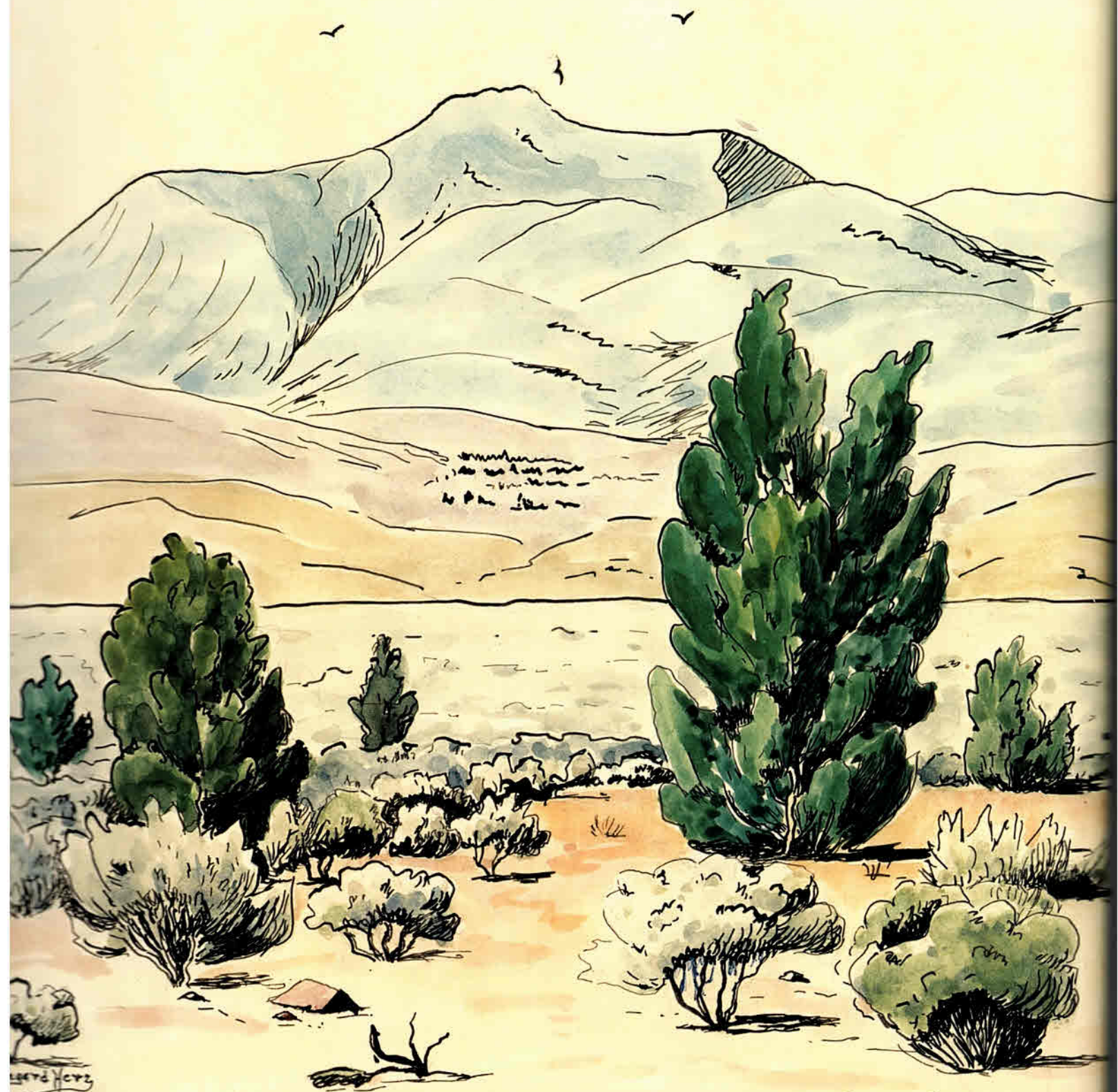
Figure 35
Charles Cutts home at 643 Ralston Street and first location of the Nevada Art Gallery in 1950, Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections



Figure 36
Latimer Club members, Hildegard Herz at right, 1960, Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections

The Nevada Art Gallery's activities were so successful that the Board of Directors planned an addition to Cutts' Ralston Street home in the mid-1950s. While Church disagreed and believed the funds should instead be invested in the properties still held by the organization at University Terrace, he eventually consented. "Problems are many," he wrote in 1952 as enthusiasm for the garden and building complex he initially envisioned began to wane. The expansion of the Seventh Street Freeway (known today as Interstate 80) just south of the properties in 1954 disrupted the serenity of the site and severed it from the downtown corridor. On March 23, 1958 the new wing of the Nevada Art Gallery, designed by architects Graham Erskine and Lehman Ferris, opened to the public. **Figure 38** A year later the organization boasted five-hundred paid memberships. The Latimer Art Club assumed responsibility for the rotating exhibitions in the north rooms of the Cutts home, which became known as the "The Latimer Rooms." Once a year, active members of the Latimer Art Club exhibited their paintings in the large south gallery. Although Lorenzo Latimer had passed away in 1941, his legacy was proudly carried forth by the volunteer group that bore his name. Church remained committed to helping the Nevada Art Gallery acquire significant works by Latimer for its permanent collection and he successfully secured a painting titled *The Last Glow* (1946) from Latimer's estate. **Figure 39** The title of the painting is an apt metaphor for Church's unyielding efforts on behalf

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Mt. Rose from Geiger Grade Road.

of the Gallery, even as his health began to decline during the twilight of his own life. Having a Latimer painting for the Gallery's permanent collection was an important way to cement Latimer's legacy, and Church engaged in extensive correspondence to secure the gift for the collection. Latimer's son, Lorenzo Phelps Latimer, offered the painting to the Nevada Art Gallery to acknowledge how important the people of Nevada had been to his father. "I am always glad to hear from members of the Latimer Art Club because they did more than any other group of people to honor my father and bring him so much happiness in his later years..." Latimer's son wrote.³⁴

On August 5, 1959, Dr. James Church died at the age of ninety. He had served as the president of the Nevada Art Gallery's Board of Trustees for twenty-one years. His spirited vision to establish an art center and garden in Reno is an example of his bold willingness to take risk and is best summed up by the postscript he liked to add to poet Alexander Pope's well-known verse: "fools rush in where angels fear to tread—and more often than not, succeed." Church's longtime friend, Earl Talmadge Ross, assumed the leadership role of president and worked to carry forth the initiatives of the Nevada Art Gallery with great respect for Church's vision. In an effort to resuscitate Church's dream of a Gallery on University Terrace, Ross wrote in 1962 that, "Each successive art exhibit and every program presented at the Gallery emphasizes the fact that we have outgrown our limited present facilities. The Nevada Art Gallery must expand greatly, and in proportion to the growing need and importance of a vital cultural center." Ross worked in close collaboration with the Latimer Art Club to achieve this goal until he finally stepped down from his role as president in 1964.

The newly elected president of the Nevada Art Gallery board was Samuel G. Houghton, a longtime Nevada resident who was long active in civic affairs. Although the activities of the gallery continued to enjoy great popularity, Houghton felt action was needed to stabilize the institution and to increase fundraising capacity. This included asking the Latimer Art Club to join him in promoting programs and events that would increase revenue for the organization. Given that members of the Club were already solely responsible for staffing six gallery positions in 1966, they felt they could not assume more responsibility. They also sensed a shift in philosophy away from many of Church's long-held ideals that had shaped their management

of the gallery since the beginning. They reiterated Church's guiding principles in the short History of the Nevada Art Gallery that they wrote:

The usual manners of the Gallery were in esteem of Dr. Church, with no catering to any class of people and everyone freely invited to come to all gallery activities... He advised modest growth with no cocktail parties, smoking nor using the gallery for a social playground in order to raise finances. He wanted to retain all gallery functions in his idea of qualified representation, including art with no whimsical display nor crude distortion that to him was not fine art. He wanted no commercializing, that is, in any way that would use the gallery for anyone's personal gain.³⁵

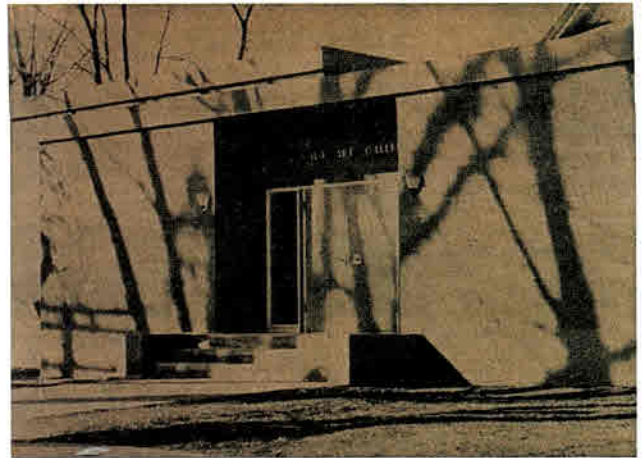


Figure 38
Nevada Art Gallery expansion, designed by architects Graham Erskine and Lehman Ferris, opened 1958
Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment
Archive Collections

By the late 1960s, waves of social and political change were sweeping the United States, including Reno. Modern ideals began to take hold bringing younger artists to Reno and new audiences to the Nevada Art Gallery with more diversified interests and expectations. In 1967, Houghton established a new volunteer branch for the Gallery known as "The ACTION Group." The first newsletter for the group stated, "ACTION is the live wire name selected for the group of...members working to expand community interest in the Nevada Art Gallery, to extend its membership and influence, and to increase its vitality."³⁶ Misunderstandings between the Latimer Art Club and the Board of Trustees came to pass over who was managing and selecting exhibitions and how the Latimer Art Club might better help contribute to the financial needs of the institution. Edda Houghton, wife of Samuel Houghton, was actively involved with the ACTION Group, and under her leadership, participation and enthusiasm grew steadily. The Group assumed new projects and social events, and initiated an annual membership drive.

In 1967, the Latimer Art Club felt the time had come to step back from their longtime duties and to distance themselves from the Nevada Art Gallery. They penned a letter to the Board of Trustees that stated, "We are truly sincere in hoping that everything be worked out, so that the entire membership will return to the Gallery with a clear and willing mind to again establish the old feeling of being part of the Gallery of which we were the nucleus, and to the gallery to help cultural advancement for all groups of the community."³⁷ It was not long until the Board of Trustees amended the Articles of Incorporation eliminating the requirement for representatives from the Latimer Art Club, the University of Nevada, and the Federation of Women's Clubs. Shortly after the Latimer Art Club parted ways with the Nevada Art Gallery, a committee



Figure 39
Lorenzo P. Latimer
The Last Glow, 1900
Watercolor on paper, 29 ½ x 19 ½ inches
Collection of the Nevada Museum of Art

of concerned Club women, consisting of Marguerite Erwin, Hildegard Herz, and Millicent Thompson, began work on "The History of the Nevada Art Gallery" to assure that the contributions of the Latimer Art Club would not be forgotten.³⁸ The document outlines hundreds of exhibitions and public programs that the Latimer Art Club organized over the years. In 1969, the Board of Trustees held a community wide celebration honoring what would have been Dr. James Church's 100th birthday. They also honored the Latimer Art Club's first president, Minerva Pierce, for her continuous dedicated service to the Nevada Art Gallery from 1931-1969. "She loved the gallery as her home, taking great pride in its maintenance, with no thoughts of personal gain," her friends wrote in tribute. For her service she received an honorary lifetime membership to the Nevada Art Gallery.

Although disappointment lingered, members of the Latimer Art Club graciously stepped aside while welcoming new volunteers with support and enthusiasm. As they did, they channeled the philosophical wisdom of James Church by recalling the thoughtful guidance he had offered to them over the years: "People should learn to understand each other better," he would say. "The problems of the gallery are only shadows of its own healthy growing pains," and "institutions are the elongated shadows of individuals."³⁹

Many individuals have come together over the years to help shape the course of Nevada's artistic and cultural future. The year 2021 marks ninety years since the founding of the Nevada Art Gallery and one-hundred years since the formation of the Latimer Art Club. From the 1920s to the late 1960s, the most influential leaders were James E. Church, Charles F. Cutts, Lorenzo P. Latimer, and members of the Latimer Art Club who worked together to establish the first art gallery in the state. Their passion for the organization ran deep, their work ethic never faltered, and their commitment to exploring art, nature and the humanities through an interdisciplinary lens continues to be widely felt. It is on this occasion that we acknowledge these individuals who laid the foundations for what is today known as the Nevada Museum of Art.

Ann M. Wolfe
Andrea and John C. Deane Family
Senior Curator and Deputy Director
Nevada Museum of Art

Endnotes

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2. Daniel McLaren was a landscape architect who designed the grounds for the Panama-Pacific International exposition in San Francisco in 1915.
3. L.P. Latimer, "Why California Artists Should Stay at Home," *The Call*, May 3, 1903, 14.
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6. *The Call*, 79, no. 25, December 25, 1895.
7. Kevin Starr, "Introduction," in *Tahoe: A Visual History*, ed. Ann M. Wolfe (New York and Reno: Skira Rizzoli and Nevada Museum of Art, 2015), 29.
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10. *Ibid.*, 83.
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13. Walter K. Fisher, "William Wightman Price," *The Condor*, 25, no. 2, March 1923, 53.
14. "Anna Cora Winchell, "Private Art Works to be Exhibited to the Public," *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 11, 1914, 26.
15. *Fallen Leaf Lodge Brochure* (Lake Tahoe: Fallen Leaf Lodge), 1915. From Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections, Lorenzo P. Latimer: Artist and Teacher.
16. "Society and Club Gossip," *Ukiah Republican*, August 27, 1920.
17. Starr, 24.
18. Laura Bride Powers, "Art," *Oakland Tribune* (March 10, 1918): 22.
19. *Origin and Purpose of the Latimer Art Club*. Document. Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, Latimer Art Club Records.
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21. Lorenzo P. Latimer. Letter. From the Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections
22. As of 2021, the Latimer Art Club still retains some of these paintings in its collection.
23. L.P. Latimer, "Why California Artists Should Stay at Home," *The Call*, May 3, 1903, 14.
24. *Ibid.*, 14.
25. Gifts presented to Lorenzo Latimer from 1922-1937 included a smoking set, a canteen, a paint box, an overnight bag, a Latimer Art Club pin with a small diamond, a suede jacket, an easel and stool, a pocketbook, a sweater, a matchbox with pin, a pen and pencil set, a leather jacket, and a painting kit.
26. This speech is quoted in the Latimer Club Minutes on September 29, 1926. From Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, Latimer Art Club Records.
27. Florence Church, Unpublished manuscript, January 22, 1904. From Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, James Edward Church Papers.
28. James Church, unpublished journal, October 2, 1927. From Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno Libraries, James Edward Church Papers.
29. James Church, quoted in William H. Hobbs, *Reports of the Greenland Expeditions of the University of Michigan*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1931-41
30. Nevada Art Gallery, 1931 Articles of Incorporation, Jun 19, 1931. From the Nevada Museum of Art, Center for Art + Environment Archive Collections, Nevada Museum of Art: Institutional Archive.
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39. Erwin, Herz, and Thompson, 20.