

Evelyn Cameron: A Study in Three Parts of Her Photography, Diary, and Life in Montana

by

Kate Van Genderen  
B.A., Montana State University, 2014

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

In the Department of History

© Kate Van Genderen, 2017  
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

Evelyn Cameron: A Study in Three Parts of Her Photography, Diary, and Life in Montana

by

Kate Van Genderen  
B.A., Montana State University, 2014

**Supervisory Committee**

Dr. Rachel Cleves, Department of History  
**Supervisor**

Dr. Jason Colby, Department of History  
**Department Member**

## **Abstract**

Evelyn Jephson Cameron (1868-1928) was born to a wealthy merchant family outside London. At the age of twenty-five, she moved to Terry, Montana to raise horses and homestead with her husband, Ewen Cameron. Evelyn Cameron recorded their time in eastern Montana in her daily diary entries, which span over thirty-five years from 1893 to 1928. She became a self-taught professional photographer, and made thousands of photographs with large-format cameras of the people in the towns of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh. She photographed the landscape, birds, and other animals she kept as pets or encountered in the wild. She wrote in her private diary nearly every day, offering a first-person point of view of life for women in the late nineteenth-century in the American West. This thesis focuses on three particular aspects of Cameron's life. The first chapter focuses on spaces or mediums that Cameron had access to that offered her autonomy and privacy, things which were often difficult for women to find at this time. These spaces and mediums include her photography, her diary, and her darkroom, all of which gave her different sorts of calm or control. The second chapter delves into Cameron's photographic portraits of herself and other women, looking into how women portrayed themselves and others in the American West. Cameron depicted herself as a part of the natural world, and she also did so when capturing other women. The final chapter analyzes Cameron's identity as a Montanan, from her conscious choice to move there to her refusal to return to Britain permanently. She gained American citizenship in 1918 and took living in Montana seriously. Her diary reveals a deep awareness of the natural world and records accomplishments and events that help to build and strengthen her relationship with her chosen home.

## Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Table of Contents .....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Acknowledgments .....	vi
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 .....	17
Chapter 2 .....	36
Chapter 3 .....	63
Conclusion .....	84
Bibliography .....	88

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Evelyn Cameron kneading bread.....	40
Figure 2: Evelyn Cameron seated on petrified tree bridge.....	44
Figure 3: Evelyn Cameron feeding a Sparrow Hawk.....	47
Figure 4: Lilly and Alice Renn.....	50
Figure 5: Janet in Grandad Tree, June 23, 1910.....	54
Figure 6: Cabin Creek picnic, July 13, 1913.....	58
Figure 7: Mrs. Cameron mounting prints.....	59

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis beast would not have been tackled without the support and inspiration of multiple incredible souls. First, I must thank Heather Waterlander in the History Department for her sincere warmth and advice that she offered frequently- without her, so many of us would not be able to accomplish what we do. To my soup snake Hannah “Palindrome” Weeks, who provided helpful translations of German from Evelyn’s diary frequently and efficiently, along with lots of dark humor: I thank you (danke!) and miss you dearly, lieblich. To my sister Emily for her sass, love, and long Skype chats about nothing, thank you. To my parents, Charles and Elizabeth, who encouraged my pursuing yet another degree in yet another country, thank you for letting me wax cynically about academia and sending me massive amounts of support and occasionally money for much-needed coffee. Special thanks to my mother for helping me move in Victoria and driving around with a mattress strapped to the top of the car looking ridiculous! To my high school teacher, soon-to-be-Dr. Jason Neiffer, who infected me with an insatiable love of knowledge and the past in AP European History, your optimism and enthusiasm pushed me in this direction and to this day I am so grateful. To the staff at the Montana Historical Society who answered questions, showed me Evelyn Cameron’s photographs, and were always helpful and friendly, I extend my sincerest gratitude. To the women I never met who spent years transcribing Evelyn’s diary so people like me could easily access it and get to know Evelyn better, thank you from the bottom of my heart. A hearty thank you to Dr. Rachel Cleves, my thesis supervisor, who provided enthusiasm, guidance, and much needed encouragement, along with the most helpful feedback and patience throughout this project. Finally, to the best adventure companion Logan Franco da Silveira, for not only letting me involve you deeply in Evelyn’s world but for avidly immersing yourself as well, obrigada por tudo.

## INTRODUCTION

The tooth dangled delicately from the crossbeam attached to a thin wire. She glanced up at it and ran her tongue satisfyingly around the bleeding hole. The trunk she had just stepped off to pull the tooth out lay next to her on the floor. The tooth was no longer able to cause suffering, and she felt relieved as well as giddy- what she had done had worked! She unwound the wire holding the bothersome object to the ceiling, took it in her hand, and left the small, dirt floor home to go show her husband outside. It was a dull, dreary day in September, 1896.<sup>1</sup>

Evelyn Cameron was a stubborn, complex woman who lived her life the way she wanted to until the end. She pulled out her own teeth, dug her own coal out of hillsides, and developed her own photographs in various makeshift darkrooms. She turned her back on a wealthy, cultured future in London, England, and left for Terry, Montana in 1893 with her husband Ewen Cameron, writing it all down in her daily diaries that span thirty-five years until her death in 1928. Entries speckled with gossip, war, death, and loss, are paralleled with entries that record the monotony of days and the tiredness that inhabits bones hard worked. Her diaries and thousands of her glass-plate and film photographs provide rich sources for insight into how she saw her unusual life on the prairie in Eastern Montana from 1894-1928.

Cameron's life, photographs, and diary are well-known among Montanan scholars. The researcher and writer Donna Lucey happened upon Cameron's entire stock of diaries and negatives in the basement of Cameron's close friend Janet Williams in the 1970s (stored right near gunpowder). Lucey then spent several years researching and ultimately putting together the

---

<sup>1</sup> Evelyn Cameron. *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1896*. 13 September 1896. Montana Memory Project, Montana Historical Society, accessed April 2016.

seminal work on Cameron's life, *Photographing Montana 1894-1928: The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron*, published in 1990. This thorough biographical work discusses Cameron's wealthy, distinguished family, which included a half-brother who married into the Rothschild family, and uses Cameron's photographs and diary entries to trace her life until she died during appendix surgery in 1928. Lucey's work provides any scholar the necessary starting point for learning about Evelyn Cameron.<sup>2</sup>

Cameron's experience as a woman creating her life on the plains of eastern Montana was not unusual. Thousands of women led multi-faceted lives worthy of examination in the American West, and if anything ties all their stories together, it is, as Susan Schackel notes, their differences.<sup>3</sup> These women had historically been passed over in favor of more male-centric narratives. Indeed, Frederick Jackson Turner's 1893 thesis regarding the American West focused on conquering the West, a battle between "savagery and civilization", relying heavily on masculine ideals and establishing an idealized, virile landscape for decades to come.<sup>4</sup> Well into the twentieth century, women and femininity were resigned to two roles in historical literature. The first focused on the domestic and refined wives and heads of households; the second on the immoral and animalistic prostitutes and female outlaws. These tropes especially prevailed in Dee Brown's 1958 popular historical work, *Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West*, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Other aspects of Cameron's life and her diaries are discussed in a smattering of historical articles and theses such as, Kimberley Davitt's "Female visions and verse: Turn of the century women artists and writers in the Montana landscape," (MA thesis, University of Montana, 1993), Ann Roberts and Christine Wordsworth, "Divas, Divorce, and Disclosure: Hidden Narratives in the Diaries of Evelyn Cameron," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 64, 2 (2014), 22-45, and Karen Jones, "Lady Wildcats and Wild Women: Hunting, Gender, and the Politics of Show(wo)manship in the Nineteenth Century American West," *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 34, 1 (February 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Sandra Schackel, ed. *Western Women's Lives: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003), 15.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Association*, (1893), 200.

weren't challenged until 1980, when Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller published "The Gentle Tamers Revisited," an article that asked historians to re-examine previous assumptions and give women in the West more space for new analysis.<sup>5</sup> Their article is generally recognized as the catalyst for the field of Western women's history to emerge.

Among the many volumes of research and analysis that subsequently sprang up, two anthologies thoroughly examine women's experiences from all walks of life. *The Women's West*, edited by Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson from 1987, and *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American West*, edited by Sheila McManus and Elizabeth Jameson, from 2008, both include micro-histories and inclusive narratives, and show readers the enormous amount of material that has yet to be covered in the lives of women in the North American West.<sup>6</sup> *Western Women's Lives: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Susan K. Schackel in 2010, asks researchers and historians to focus on creating communities out of women's historical differences. This work hones in on regional, economic, and class groups and makes it clear that the unique situation each woman faced in the American West has threads linking her, inevitably, to others. By writing about Cameron, embedded within such regional communities, and in relation to the women around her, I hope to add to such histories.

---

<sup>5</sup> Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *A Pacific Historical Review*, 49, (1980), 173-213.

<sup>6</sup> While these anthologies were the most utilized, several other texts regarding female experiences in the West were also influential. Sarah Carter's *Montana Women Homesteaders* (Helena: Farcountry Press, 2009) provided clarity in regards to how Montana women built communities with one another. Mary Greenfield's "From westward space to western place: The end of illusion and birth of acceptance in the American West," (MA Thesis, University of Montana, 2002), helped shape ideas regarding how the West's changes in population, settlement, and attitude into the 20th century were interpreted by residents, including Evelyn Cameron.

Cameron, who spent much of her time outside, exploring the badlands, and writing about Montana, shares space with many other women who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were actively involved in nature. Historically, women had a different relationship with the land than their male counterparts, often involving themselves in preservation, conservation, and developing, as Molly Razum notes in *One Step Over the Line*, “physical and emotional affinities with prairies and plains landscapes.”<sup>7</sup> Glenda Riley in *Women and Nature: Saving the “Wild” West* (1999) argues that women at this time strived to be explorers, adventurers, and naturalists in much the same way that men were, and had intense relationships with the natural world. Cameron, who photographed animals to be published in her husband’s articles and often rode her horses to explore the badlands, took part in such narratives.

When the Camerons arrived in Montana, they came to an American West that had undergone vast changes, a place where indigenous people who had lived there for millennia were almost gone. Those that managed to survive waves of disease, violence, and the United States government’s intervention lived on reservations. The nearest reservation to Terry, Montana is known today as the Northern Cheyenne Reservation. Established in 1884, it had boarding schools, clinics, housing, and other facilities for members of the Northern Cheyenne tribe, mostly orbiting around the town of Deer Lodge.<sup>8</sup> Terry itself lies on the edge of traditional Cheyenne and Assiniboine tribal lands, and close to historical Hidatsa, Mandan, and Arikara lands.<sup>9</sup> All of these tribes in the area were nomadic and moved based on buffalo herds and other

---

<sup>7</sup> Molly Rozum, “That Understanding with Nature: Region Race, and Nation in Women’s Stories from the Modern Canadian and American Grasslands West,” in *One Step Over the Line: Towards a History of Women in the North American Wests*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus, (Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 2008), 132.

<sup>8</sup> “Northern Cheyenne Reservation Timeline, Northern Cheyenne Tribe”, Office of Public Instruction Montana, Indian Education. <http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/IEFA/NorthernCheyenneTimeline.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> “Tribal Territories in Montana Map”, Office of Public Instruction Montana, April 2009. [http://www.montanatribes.org/learning\\_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg](http://www.montanatribes.org/learning_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg)

seasonally available or migratory food sources.

This does not mean that Cameron had not encountered Native Americans previously through other means. By the late nineteenth century, there were dozens if not hundreds of well-known novels and works regarding indigenous groups in North America circulating around Europe. Cameron had likely encountered and perhaps even read these works. It is likely that she also saw lithographs, photographs, drawings, or cartoons in magazines and books, at museums, or in exhibitions. She did write a few words of the Sioux language in one cover of her diary, but she wrote, “looked up Indian words in encyclopedia” to explain their presence.<sup>10</sup> Such mediums of interaction are detailed in Glenda Riley’s *Women and Indians on the Frontier*, published in 1984. Sherry Smith’s *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940* further solidifies this reality that Native Americans were visually consumed, written about, and documented by European ideals and authors and then distributed. What becomes apparent in both narratives, and in Cameron’s diary, is that white settlers like the Camerons did have knowledge of Native Americans but rarely actually encountered them in person by the late nineteenth century.

Cameron first wrote about taking up the art of photography in 1894. By the end of the nineteenth century, Cameron’s interest and participation in this artistic medium was hardly rare. Photography is a craft that women have been involved with since its inception in 1839. Many histories of photography included only a few women, if any at all, until the 1970s when Ann

---

<sup>10</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1907*. 20 May 1907.

Tucker edited *The Women's Eye*, which honed in on famous female photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Alisa Wells. After Tucker's work emerged, C. Jane Gover's *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America* came out in 1988. *The Positive Image* describes how thousands of female photographers pursued photography both for profit and personal satisfaction, noting that by 1900, over 3500 women listed themselves as professional photographers in the United States.<sup>11</sup> While its scope is limited to women on the East Coast of the United States, Gover's work makes it clear that women have always been behind the lens as well as in front of it. In 1994 Naomi Roseblum published *The History of Women Photographers*, updated in 2010, which lists thousands of female photographers divided by their geographic area. Evelyn Cameron has a page devoted to her images, and in the "Montana" section there is an extensive list of little-researched female photographers. Martha Sandweiss discusses the evolution of photographic technology and processes in *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, (2004). Sandweiss outlines primarily male contributions as adventure photographers and documentarians of the exciting, rugged West, but she also describes the realities of handling heavy photographic equipment and helps set the stage for just how difficult and complex early photographic methods were with all the chemicals, temperature control, and fragile equipment that was necessary. She acknowledges that the photographs that were published in newspapers, brochures, and in other mediums were made by men as women were not taken as seriously, nor given jobs as documentary photographers to have their work distributed.

Honing in on Montana's historical female photographers, there is still scant literature discussing

---

<sup>11</sup> C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 17.

their overall contributions and pasts. Delores Morrow's 1982 article, "Female Photographers on the Frontier: Montana's Lady Photographic Artists, 1866-1900," appears to be the first academic work regarding Montana female photographers, and has aged well mostly because few other such histories exist. Dan Aadland's 2000 work, *Women and Warriors: The Pioneer Photography of Julia E. Truell* looks at a photographer who worked at roughly the same time Cameron did, on the nearby Native American reservation at Lame Deer. While due to literature such as Rosenblum's *The History of Women Photographers* and Morrow's article, we know that Cameron was not an unusual character pursuing photography in the state, we still do not know very much about other female photographers in Montana that made the medium their bread and butter. These works argue that women were present, active, and highly skilled in the field of photography in Montana, even if they are not easy to find and study.

Female photographers at this time employed a strategy that obscures their histories today. Many female photographers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries signed their works solely with their initials. Leaving their gender ambiguous was a tactful way to prevent their gender from inhibiting business.<sup>12</sup> Mary Eckert, a woman who operated her own photography studio in Helena for twenty years used the insignia "M A Eckert", in contrast to Cameron, who had a stamp made that said "Mrs. EJ Cameron", making it no mistake what her gender was.<sup>13</sup> If a person left no other evidence of their existence other than a gender-neutral signature this can puzzle historians greatly, and it is likely that many more female photographers exist out there,

---

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Till, "Seven Female Photographers of the Oklahoma and Indian Territories," (MA thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1997) 29.

<sup>13</sup> Delores Morrow, "Female Photographers on the Frontier: Montana's Lady Photographic Artists, 1866-1900," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 32, no. 3, (1982), 76. Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1899*, 22 July 1899.

their own strategies working against them in the archives.

Evelyn Cameron's legacy has not suffered such a fate. Thirty five years of meticulous diary keeping and thousands of photographs make sure that her historical footprint remains large. Her diaries alone are an overwhelming primary source. Cameron usually opens the day's record by noting the weather, delivering a one or two word opinion of said weather, and a list of tasks she performed before breakfast, what breakfast consisted of, then the tasks and chores she completed throughout the day. She often lists what she ate/cooked for Ewen and herself. If she made photographs that day she discusses how many she made, what the subject was, and lists technical information, such as how fast she closed the camera shutter.

Female diaries have often been seen as dry, or lackluster, historical sources. They do not possess narratives in the way that literature does, making them potentially appear as lifeless or difficult texts. Female diaries did not become seen as valuable documents within academia until the 1970s, with the rise of second wave feminism and Women and Gender studies programs in universities. Before then, diaries were mostly regarded as accompanying documentation to the lives of men. Mary Shelley's diary, as Harriet Blodgett notes in *Centuries of Female Days*, was derided as "incomplete" but useful, because her diary illuminated her life and relationships with such notable men as her husband Percy Bysshe Shelley and friend Lord Byron.<sup>14</sup> Several works from the 1980s including Elizabeth Hampsten's *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Diaries of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*, discuss the difficulties of finding female diaries, and justify

---

<sup>14</sup> Harriett Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 2.

their importance.<sup>15</sup>

One of the scholarly works that utilizes a female diary to its utmost potential is Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* (1990), which delves into the diary of Martha Ballard, a late eighteenth and early nineteenth century midwife in Maine. Her diary, kept at a tumultuous time in American history, contains information about medicine, birth control, female relationships, rape, economic and social norms at the time, and a wealth of other subjects. Ulrich used Ballard's entries and wove them with tax records, census records, medical texts, and religious texts available at the time, and securely nestled Ballard's diary in a blanket woven of other contextual sources. In this same thread, Rachel Cleves' 2014 work, *Charity and Sylvia*, offers the use of details within personal diaries to effectively embed Charity Bryant and Sylvia Drake, a same-sex couple in the early nineteenth century, within their small Vermont community and their time and place. Diaries can be wielded powerfully as historical tools as Ulrich and Cleves both demonstrate.

Diaries are complex, multi-faceted works that have many motives and layers to uncover in order to better understand them. The 1996 anthology *Inscribing the Daily*, edited by Suzanne Bunker, gives the reader tools to determine whether a diary is a public piece of diary writing or a private one. In one chapter, "I Write for Myself and Strangers: Private Diaries as Public Documents," Lynn Bloom discusses how private diaries often utilize abbreviations, extensive codification, and possess non-linear narrative styles.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, in Cameron's diary, Ewen is noted mostly as "E".

---

<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Lynn Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 25

Private diary writers often list accomplishments but not in aggrandizing terms. These documents have no readers other than the author, and so description of achievements in a dramatic format is unnecessary. On the days Cameron spent in her darkroom printing off dozens of prints, which was time consuming and delicate work, she did not discuss herself as being hardworking, persistent, and attentive. Instead, the reader must take the “mosaic” of information that Bloom insists will be there and infer much about the writer.<sup>17</sup> Public diaries, like those of Anais Nin or Virginia Woolf, tend to be more fluid and possess a clear narrative, as these writers understood or intended that their words would be read by others. Evelyn Cameron’s diary, in contrast, is a study in short sentences with little to no context. She wrote in Italian, French, and German intermittently when she wanted to impart a deeper level of security to her diary, a typical trait of private diaries, which can be heavily encoded with secret languages, alphabets, or the use of alternative languages.<sup>18</sup>

## **BIOGRAPHY**

This thesis aims to place Evelyn Cameron within broader contexts of female photographers and women in the American West. The first chapter will discuss how Cameron’s diary, her darkroom, and the act of photography functioned within her life. This chapter will shed light on how Cameron found time, activities, and spaces in her daily life to have privacy, independence, and control. The second chapter will be devoted to visual analysis and comparison of several of Cameron’s self-portraits, showing her as an active, engaged agent in her own life and her family. By discussing how these images share similarities and differences to photographs of women at this time taken by Cameron herself, this chapter will demonstrate how Cameron deliberately

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 26.

constructed her visual identity. The third and final chapter seeks to show how Cameron went from being a British woman to fully embracing a regional identity as a Montanan. Cameron became a US citizen in 1918, but her lifestyle, values, and her love for her home show a transition from being an expatriate or an immigrant to fully investing herself economically and emotionally in the plains of Eastern Montana. By utilizing diary entries and photographs of her life in Montana in all three chapters, this thesis will explore particular niches of Cameron's life that have not been studied before. These aspects of her life do not necessarily follow a specific chronology, and so outlining her biography in the introduction is necessary.

Born in 1868 to a wealthy British merchant family, Evelyn Jephson Flower grew up on the sprawling Furze Down Park estate outside London. Her upbringing concentrated on the expected education of a wealthy British family- she rode horses, learned languages, and socialized with the appropriate sort. She met Ewen Cameron, an impoverished Scottish aristocrat, most likely through mutual acquaintances. The Cameron family had at one point been moneyed, but whatever wealth they had was long gone by the time Evelyn and Ewen married in 1889. The Flower family, particularly Evelyn's mother, did not approve of Evelyn's marriage to Ewen Cameron, as not only was there little money to support them, but he was also considered an eccentric man, preferring greatly to write about birds and be a gentleman naturalist than focus on earning income or establishing a career. It also didn't help that he was fifteen years older than Evelyn and unlikely to change his lot in life. Nonetheless, Evelyn and Ewen lived their lives together until the end, departing for America permanently in 1893 after honeymooning in Montana in 1889. The Camerons moved to America intending to raise ponies and send them to England to play polo. The brisk, fresh air and prairie environment were supposed to guarantee

strong, athletic horses perfect for the sport. Alas, this enterprise, despite financial backing, did not work, as most of their horses died or became sick on the journey from Terry, Montana to the ports of England. Ultimately, the Camerons moved away from this venture within a few years of moving to Montana.

Evelyn, who is well known for her crisp large format photographs of Montana from the 1890s to the 1920s, picked up photography in 1894, buying a camera and learning how to load and develop film from one of her boarders.<sup>19</sup> She and Ewen took on several different boarders in their first home in Terry to supplement their income. This kept Cameron busy, and her diaries are a testament to the prolific number of tasks and little chores that she had to accomplish in order to keep a household running. One common theme throughout her diary is the comparison of her industriousness to the more sedentary lifestyle Ewen chose to take on. He often spent entire days writing articles for nature publications, looking at animals, and not doing much in terms of physical labor besides a few minor chores. Indeed, after his death in 1915, Evelyn's diary entries do not change much, as she had always managed most of the workload, and his absence did little to alter her schedule.

The Camerons tired of having boarders in their home by the late 1890s, and decided to purchase cattle for income instead. Over the years, they relied on quarterly amounts of money given to Cameron from a trust fund that her father left behind. This money, alongside funds earned from cattle, selling vegetables, eggs, and photographs, would sustain the Camerons over the years. This multi-faceted income scheme was not unusual for homesteaders and newcomers to

---

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1894*. 16 August 1894.

Montana. Cameron kept track of almost every penny that came in and left their accounts, and her diary often speaks to the financial difficulties they experienced, especially given that Ewen's mother, who lived in "genteel poverty", was constantly asking them for money.<sup>20</sup>

Over the years, the Camerons stayed close to the railroad town of Terry, built to ship cattle that grazed there to larger markets in the East. Terry sits close to the Yellowstone River and on the edge of the Montana badlands, which are rife with fossils, skeletons, and eerie canyons. The wide, flat plains, paired with the seemingly endless skies, were broken only by a few trees. The Camerons encountered wolves, coyotes, mountain lions, hawks, eagles, porcupines, rattlesnakes, bull snakes, antelope, deer, and dozens of other animals, many of whom were considered pests. The Camerons also settled into a commonplace rhythm of many Montanans that focused around the life cycle of cattle and crops. Bitterly cold winters, punctuated by calving season, blended into the achingly beautiful but fleeting prairie springs, full of tiny flowers and the flooding Yellowstone River, saturated with run-off from the high mountains. Next came fertile summertime, when Cameron would regularly grow and harvest hundreds of pounds of potatoes, cabbages, turnips, and other hardy vegetables, and stay late at night on the porch smoking a cigar. One thing remained habitual no matter the time of year: Cameron's photographic adventures. She was well known around Terry and the still-smaller cattle town of Fallon, and was often asked to photograph babies, children, picnics, weddings, household interiors, and other events or places. When she wasn't being asked to make photographs of humans, she was taking her camera with her to the badlands or to photograph animals.

---

<sup>20</sup> Donna Lucey, *Photographing Montana*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1990), 10.

In 1914 Ewen became sick. He was wracked with body aches, and slowly became paralyzed. Cameron took him to southern California, hoping to find doctors who could heal her spouse. Unfortunately, nobody knew what was wrong, and Cameron's diaries in the years 1914 through 1915 are heartbreakingly frantic. She recorded one doctor's 28th visit hopelessly, and nursed Ewen to the end, while he was injected with heroin and strychnine. Yet, Cameron's diaries still echoed whispers of optimism and a love of living, with one entry on May 22 tenderly noting, "Saw a hummingbird, and heard it hum."<sup>21</sup> When her husband of twenty-six years died on May 25th, 1915, Evelyn buried him in California and returned to Montana to resume her life as a widow.

Cameron never re-married, and her diaries continued as usual, with cattle, gardens, and photographs remaining the central focus. Her diet changed as she no longer cooked for her husband, and bouts of loneliness plagued her, but Cameron seemed to enjoy her solitude. Her best friend, Janet Williams, played a central role in the diary, as Cameron's helper, friend, and accomplice in adventures. Cameron remained a valuable member within the communities of Fallon and Terry until her death, and she continued to photograph the residents, their offspring, and the encroachment of technology and settlement. She steadfastly refused to ever own a car, and went about with her cameras strapped to her saddles late into the 1920s. In 1928, after fairly sturdy health, Cameron was struck with an intense pain in her torso that lasted long enough for her to suspect the worst. Before departing to a hospital in Miles City in December, she shot her favorite horse to death, perhaps hoping it might meet her on the other side. She died on December 26, 1928, after undergoing a routine appendectomy, at the age of sixty.

---

<sup>21</sup>Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 1 May 1915.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In preparing to write this thesis, I read every entry of Cameron's diaries from 1893 to 1928, which was available through the Montana Historical Society online. While reading each year, I copied roughly four to ten complete entries per month of her diary into a saved document, focusing on entries that revealed her photographic habits, important moments of her life, personal thoughts, interpretations, or other potentially useful or noteworthy bits of information. As such, each year yielded approximately 48-120 daily entries to look back on and use for reference. Some documented years contain many more copied entries simply due to necessity. The years that her husband was affected by a deadly illness and wasted away in California, years where finances were tight, or where Cameron was first delving into photography and recorded a lot of photographic information, naturally have more entries that were retained. The first years of her widowhood were also looked at closely. With this process I believe I have gleaned a sufficient amount about Cameron's thoughts, experiences, and first-hand interpretations of events to support what I will suggest in the subsequent chapters.

The Montana Historical Society possesses a wealth of Cameron's photographs to examine. I chose to focus on works that show a balance of Cameron performing everyday tasks like kneading bread, as well as doing unusual things like balancing on natural bridges to show the breadth of her self-portraiture and her creation of herself. I also chose to use photographs of women that Cameron photographed that highlighted a women-centric, feminine West that showed women as complex and fixed in the land around them. When I use the term self-portraiture, I refer to the idea that Cameron conceived how she wanted to be photographed. Camera technology at the time relegated her to having her husband or friends actually click the

camera shutter, but Cameron herself decided on light, setting, and subject, as well as loaded the camera with film, set it up, and calibrated the lens to the correct setting. In this sense, I stand by the idea that she was ultimately taking self-portraits.

This thesis explores how Cameron created spaces for herself, constructed a purposeful visible identity through her self-portraiture, and established a home for herself on the Montana prairie far away from her original homeland of England. Her accomplishments and creations seem a far cry from her January 12, 1894 entry, “Wish I could lead a life worthy to look back upon. I am far out of the path now.”<sup>22</sup> Many women in the West shared Cameron’s determination and her trepidations, and this thesis seeks to settle her among her many peers.

---

<sup>22</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1894*, 12 January 1894.

## CHAPTER ONE

Homesteading in Eastern Montana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries required energy, drive, and the ability to adapt quickly to new situations. Rural communities had to be self-sufficient and creative to sustain themselves at a time when trains could be delayed due to blizzards or derailed entirely, and when access to medical care and other resources was limited. Women who ran households at this time had to manage the expected feminine duties of cooking, cleaning, washing, and familial nurture, while often shouldering a portion of whatever farming or ranching work needed doing. These laborious expectations were inevitably haunted by the omnipresent reality that at any moment, unseen challenges were waiting to arise and be tackled. Although Evelyn Cameron never had children, she fulfilled many expected wifely and feminized duties while also shouldering a majority of the ranching and gardening tasks for herself and her husband. For Cameron and many other women at this time, finding space and time for themselves was an ongoing challenge in such a tumultuous environment.

Evelyn Cameron came to a quieter, emptier American West than had previously existed. During the second half of the nineteenth century, while bison were slaughtered by the thousands, pyramids of their bones stacked in eerie altars to destruction, Native Americans were moved to reservations or killed as unruly menaces to order. The lands where the Camerons lived would have once hosted several nomadic tribes, such as the Lakota Sioux, and roaming groups of bison, and while the Camerons delighted in the amount of flora and fauna around them, the West that they and many other immigrants encountered upon arriving was very different than it had been even thirty or forty years before. While Cameron did live fairly close to a Northern Cheyenne Reservation that was southwest of her, she never went there nor does she mention her husband

meeting anybody who identified as Native American.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, the plains of Eastern Montana were not easy places to make a living, even if the government had, in their opinion, made the West safer for railroads and homesteaders with their violent campaigns. While the land around Terry is beautiful, golden-hued, and pierced by angular cottonwoods and groves of trees that signal the presence of water, it is also a land prone to fire, to harsh winds, exhausting heat, sudden blizzards, and destructive hail storms. Wind and water have carved canyons and buttes out of the soft stone in the badlands, and in Cameron's photographs she weaves her horse through the tall, narrow slots and photographs natural bridges and the sweeping slope of edge of the maze-like badlands. Eastern Montana is a beautiful, if intimidating, place to start anew, as Cameron found out when she and Ewen arrived in 1893.

By looking into how diary writing, photography, and the photographic darkroom all functioned for Cameron, this chapter suggests that these three particular spaces and mediums gave Evelyn Cameron opportunities for mental respite, for control, and for privacy. Her diaries reflect a tumultuous lifestyle that required her to be ready to change plans at a moment's notice, while also consistently performing required tasks and emotional labor. Within the century-old pages are passages where Cameron expresses longing for change, satisfaction with her work, and clearly uses her diary to record her private observations about her loved ones. Once Cameron took up photography in 1894, she never put the camera down. Photography allowed Cameron to have a large amount of creative autonomy as well as mechanical control when she photographed

---

<sup>23</sup> "Tribal Territories in Montana Map", Office of Public Instruction Montana. April 2009.  
[http://www.montanatribes.org/learning\\_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg](http://www.montanatribes.org/learning_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg)

clients and the natural world around her. She posed subjects, took matters into her own hands to create images, and clearly disliked when her attempts at making photographs were thwarted. Subsequently, her photographs came alive in the darkroom, a tranquil, exacting space full of organization and solitude. The inherent nature of the darkroom, which requires careful thought and heightened awareness of space and chemicals, makes it an obvious area for a brief interlude from the outside world. All three of these places and activities offered Cameron a multitude of ways to find independence, control, and escape in a setting where those things were limited for women.

## **THE DIARY**

Female diaries have emerged as valuable historical sources on their own merit only in the later part of the twentieth century. Since then, many female academics have focused on features of feminine writing, and the various types of diaries women kept. Many female writers kept semi-private diaries, while others wrote diaries intending them to be published, sometimes to resounding fame and approval. Using Lynn Bloom's criteria, the reader finds Evelyn Cameron's diary that she kept from 1893 through 1928 functioned as a truly private diary.<sup>24</sup> Private diaries, Bloom notes, "are so terse they seem coded," and generally do not give the reader context about characters, events, or anything else, as the writer had no need to do those things.<sup>25</sup>

Cameron's diary leaves out information frequently. The ranch that she and Ewen owned played host to a number of animals. One day in 1913, Cameron wrote an entry remarking on an animal

---

<sup>24</sup> Lynn Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 25

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 26

she dubbed “TeeWee.” She did not describe the animal in a way that tells the reader if it is a hawk, a puppy, or some other sort of creature. The Camerons kept wolf pups, kestrels, even partridges, and so to assume what sort of animal TeeWee was would be foolish. TeeWee the mystery animal makes cameos for months starting in January 1913, and in one scheme is transported “in sack” to a place to be photographed.<sup>26</sup> Only then does Cameron use verbs that identify this animal as a female with four legs, but it is not until January of 1915, two years later, that Cameron finally clarifies that TeeWee is a cat, when she notes “TeeWee always asks for her milk after I come in from chores, and keeps up a subdued meow until she gets it.”<sup>27</sup> When Cameron wrote in her private diary, she had no need to identify TeeWee, because there was no audience, and TeeWee’s identity was already known to Cameron. These sorts of mysteries are commonplace in Cameron’s diary and require the reader to be vigilant but also understanding.

Diary writing functions as a space for thought and order. While truly private diaries do not commonly include deep introspection, they are valuable to their writers. Harriet Blodgett discusses how women who kept diaries must have believed that they were important enough to keep a record of their days, even if few would readily admit it.<sup>28</sup> Cameron wrote in her diary every single day, and ordered sturdy leather bound volumes to take everywhere with her. She was educated, confident, and resilient, and knew that her lifestyle was unusual. As such, her diaries reflect her sense of self, but also act as regular spaces of privacy, as they have been for countless other women. While Cameron may have kept her diary as a space for financial notes, photographic information, weather, and other bits of knowledge, it functioned as a source of

---

<sup>26</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1913*, 7 January 1913.

<sup>27</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*, 15 January 1915.

<sup>28</sup> Harriett Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen’s Private Diaries*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988), 71.

“emotional sustenance” as well.<sup>29</sup> Women have, for centuries used private diaries to deposit their trials and tribulations, as well as their successes. The very act of writing is purposeful and consciously done.<sup>30</sup> Cameron chose, late at night, in hunting tents, at her desk, and even on her husband’s deathbed, to open up her diary and put pen to paper. She chose what to write, what not to write, and how to phrase what she did put down. Cameron often wrote her diary at night, no doubt by the light of an oil lamp, at her desk. At such times, she chose her usual red and black ink pens, recollected her day, and put it down on the open, blank page emblazoned with the proper day. Evidence of her existence and spirit lay in those volumes. This habitual opening to the expected blank page, the choosing of words to describe the weather, which was always the first thing she wrote: there is security and stability in such choices and such spaces. A literal *tabula rasa* to write on was a few minutes of peace from the howling winds outside, from the husband who was frequently ill, from the leaking roof, and from whatever expectations or stresses that Cameron was working through.

In the late summer of 1900, seven years after the start of their Montana adventures, the Camerons returned to England for a year to decide if they wanted to leave the United States permanently. Their polo pony venture in Montana had failed, they sold their first home, and boarded the *USS Minnehaha* for England. Much of this time back home was spent, to Evelyn’s frustration, with her mother-in-law, the elderly Mrs. Cameron. Mrs. Cameron, a woman of good breeding but no money, proved a constant source of frustration to Evelyn Cameron. Cameron’s

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>30</sup> Influenced by Lynn Bloom, “I Write for Myself and Strangers,” in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women’s Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), and Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). Both Hampsten and Bloom write extensively of writing deliberately and consciously, and of female diaries as insulating spaces as well as psychologically complex places that women have used for centuries.

terse diary entries are sprinkled with obvious dislike for the woman, whom Cameron once describes as “jabbering” away while Cameron buries herself in books to silence the elderly matriarch.<sup>31</sup> To make matters worse, Cameron confides to her diary, “Feel so blue at the position of affairs,” as the Camerons spend money they do not have.<sup>32</sup> Evelyn Cameron was, consistently, the breadwinner in her marriage, and also the recipient of a trust fund from her wealthy merchant family, so her awareness of their financial situation was always high.

Furthering Cameron’s grim situation, her mother, Mrs. Flower, did not see why Evelyn Cameron could not stay in England, and stated her opinion that it was not right for Cameron to be working hard in America, and further did not empathize with her daughter’s financial difficulties.<sup>33</sup> Mrs. Flower did not support Cameron’s marriage with Ewen Cameron to begin with, as his family’s destitute nature and his unconventional habits were not ideal for the daughter of a wealthy family. At odds with her mother, her mother-in-law, and apparently not finding support in Ewen, Cameron’s diary entries during this time in 1900 and 1901 feel especially infected with gloom, ultimately underlined by a horrible dream Cameron has where her mother dies.<sup>34</sup>

Cameron’s diary is also full of longing to return to Montana, as she ruminates on the dullness of things. On December 12, 1900, she wrote, “Sat with Mrs C. I wish I could give up this lazy life & do something. It would be a relief to do all the work in this house.” She expresses a similar sentiment on December 31, noting, “This life is so depressingly tame. I long so to be doing

---

<sup>31</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1900*, 11 December 1900.

<sup>32</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1900*, 21 November 1900.

<sup>33</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*, 3 July 1901.

<sup>34</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*, 4 August 1901.

something.”<sup>35</sup> Her relationship with Mrs. Cameron, who over the years asked much of the Camerons financially and otherwise, deteriorated to the point that by the time the Camerons finally resolve to go back to Montana, Evelyn acidly records “Letter from Mrs C to me. Wishes to see us before we leave for USA if we go to town. I prefer to be excused this proposed unnecessary meeting.”<sup>36</sup> Cameron turned to her diary during these times to impart the stresses and dullness of being back home. Her family urged her to stay in England, and her husband did as well, but Cameron had by now grown tired of having maids do work, of riding side saddle like a proper woman, and of useless chattering in old houses.

“I insist on being allowed, at least partly, my way in the future,” she vowed in one late spring entry, and a few months after this, the Camerons packed their trunks and returned to the windswept plains of Montana, no doubt due in part to Cameron’s stubbornness and resolve.<sup>37</sup> Throughout this ordeal, her diary was the one steadfast thing she could rely on. Her diary reflects more stress and conflict at this time than any other since her diaries begin in 1893, and in doing so follow a historical pattern. Women’s diaries, which often began as financial records and records of their partners and families, become spaces for grief, anger, and frustration in times of need. “Diaries support and reinforce the female sense of self,” Blodgett observes, and seeing as Cameron at this time did not write of anything or anybody else that supports or empathizes with her, this rings true.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1900*, 12 and 31 December 1900.

<sup>36</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*, 10 July 1901.

<sup>37</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*, 27 May 1901.

<sup>38</sup> Harriett Blodgett, *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen’s Private Diaries*. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988),63.

Cameron's diary also served as a repository for secrets she kept from her husband and a record of their spats. Cameron's secrets were not many- she and Ewen shared almost everything spare the ranch workload- but they did exist. On January 27, 1908, Cameron's calf Tiger Lily ran through their fence, and Cameron did not tell Ewen about this incident "as it would upset him."<sup>39</sup> When he later found that Tiger Lily was loose, Cameron writes, "I let him think, as he thought, that it was an accident," not bothering to correct him.<sup>40</sup> Cameron wrote as though she was not quite lying to him, but rather passively letting him think what he wanted to.

While Cameron had many friends and acquaintances in Terry and the nearby town of Fallon to chat with, she did not often write about having conversations with them beyond catching up on town news or gossip. Her diary, being entirely private and solely for her to read, was the logical place for such little secrets or ruses to be kept. While she may have talked about such things with Janet Williams, who became her closest friend and surrogate daughter later in life, her diary was still the first place for her to record such events consistently. While Cameron's diary entries are usually sparse in emotion and in detail, it is likely that writing about negative interactions with her spouse was a way for her to leave such undesirable interactions somewhere physically. What goes on between a husband and wife is a private matter, and Cameron and Ewen were raised in cultured, educated British Victorian households and likely did not think it seemly to air their dirty laundry to anybody else. It was also a reality for Ewen and Cameron that they were sharing a small house in a rural location, and ultimately had to rely on one another. They didn't have the luxury of going to friends, or family to confide information easily. Thus, Cameron's diary gave her the space to potentially leave such events behind her and move forward.

---

<sup>39</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*, 27 January 1908.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 January 1908.

After Ewen's death in 1915, Janet Williams became a surrogate daughter and companion of sorts to Cameron. Janet brought food and gifts over, helped Cameron cook, played the Victrola and had late night chats with Cameron in a bed that they sometimes shared. As such, they grow close enough that Cameron quietly recorded Williams's menstrual cycles in her diary. She does this in German, using the term "blumen", as in *blooms*.<sup>41</sup> When Cameron wanted to impart even more private information in her already private diary, she wrote in Italian, German, or French, and sometimes a cocktail of the three. This is not unusual for private diarists to do, and many women create nicknames or even coded languages of their own to further protect their private words.<sup>42</sup> Because Cameron and Williams were so close, close enough that Cameron found herself doing Janet's laundry, this recording of Williams's health is not surprising, just as Ewen's health was religiously recorded in Cameron's diary, even down to the enemas she administered. Her diary serves as a health record of her closest companions as well as an exercise in being comfortable with them. She would likely not write about such personal things regarding her loved ones if she did not believe that these entries would remain for her eyes only.

Ultimately, Cameron's diary served as a place for her to choose her words and write them down. She did this, without fail, for over three decades. In doing so, she followed in the footsteps of many other female diarists, who used their diaries as spaces for grief, elation, frustration, loneliness, and other feelings. Evelyn Cameron's diaries are not kept in unusual ways, nor do they reflect any exceptional traits. Rather, they reflect a hardy, determined woman who turns to

---

<sup>41</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1916*, 20 March 1916.

<sup>42</sup> Lynn Bloom, "I Write for Myself and Strangers," in *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. Suzanne Bunkers, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 25.

these blank pages night after night to impart her interpretation of the world. The act of keeping a daily diary for her offered respite, escape, and freedom to write what she wished without judgement or repercussions.

## **PHOTOGRAPHY**

The act of taking a photograph today has been streamlined and automated to a large extent. Our cameras focus for us, read the light, take in the available data, and translate that data into photographs, while we are relegated to often just pressing a button. However, every single camera that has ever been constructed since the 1840s has ultimately done one thing: capture light and create with it on a light-sensitive surface, be that a glass plate or an electronic sensor. From that time on, photographers have been using these light boxes and constructing images, ideals, and identities. Evelyn Cameron first took up photography in 1894, and didn't put her camera down until her death in 1928. The medium not only provided a fairly steady income but was a way to connect to her neighbors, to show her friends and family where she was and what she was doing, and a way for her to purposefully interact with the landscape around her. Making a photograph, much like writing in a diary, is a deliberate act, one that allowed Cameron to assert her own visions and ideals and make those come to life.

In the 1890s, the world of photography was innovating rapidly. Thousands of women were making their living as photographers, and many more were avid members of photography clubs and picking up cameras for leisure.<sup>43</sup> By this time, dry plate photographic technology, which emerged in the 1870s, allowed the photographer to have light-sensitive coated glass plates that

---

<sup>43</sup> C. Jane Gover, *The Positive Image*, (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1988, 17.

could be transported, used, and taken back home and developed at the photographer's convenience. Roll film, which has evolved into our modern day 35mm film in plastic canisters, was also in its early stages, and allowed the photographer to make multiple photographs in one sitting.<sup>44</sup> Eastman Kodak was opening shops where customers could drop off their cameras and film and come back at another time to pick up photographs and a freshly-loaded camera. Before dry plate technology and roll film emerged, however, photography was a messy, highly complex business. Wet-plate technology, which required many chemicals, limited mobility, and extremely heavy equipment, deterred many who may have been interested.<sup>45</sup> The equipment and chemicals also necessitated an economic investment, which limited participation even further.

Cameron's first camera arrived at the Terry train depot on August 12, 1894. She wrote over the next few weeks of avid experiments and challenges; "The wind got up & blew off the focus'g cloth which I believe caused the failure of the plate [sic]," and then discovering "the lens doesn't work."<sup>46</sup> The "great business" required to light proof her bedroom so that she could successfully load light-sensitive dry plates into her camera is also noted.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, though, she was intrigued despite these initial challenges. The fact that Cameron noted these mistakes and challenges in her diary shows that she felt they deserve to be recorded, likely so that she would not repeat them.

The act of making a photograph with the type of camera Cameron used was not easy. The photographer would load the back of their camera with a glass plate coated with chemicals in

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 125. At this time the glass plates that were used were coated with wet chemicals which meant that they had to be developed immediately for the chemical solutions to react with the chemical baths they were put into.

<sup>46</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1894*, 16 and 20 August 1894.

<sup>47</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1894*, 15 August 1894.

complete or almost-total darkness. These plates are usually fairly thick, and measure 4x5 inches, although some cameras allow for larger 5x7 or 8x10 plates. A heavy, sturdy tripod would be required as well, to hold the weight of the camera and to make sure that the camera itself would not move. The camera would be constructed of durable, heavy materials like brass, leather, and wood, as plastics and other lighter materials were not yet available for camera bodies. Cameron carried or packed her supplies, which were not light, in saddle bags or held to the side of her saddle when she went on photographic trips.

Whether Cameron photographed a marriage, a 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic, or a hawk, she ultimately decided on how and where to make the images. She posed human subjects in chairs or standing, and when dealing with children, placed them on boxes because her heavy camera likely was not able to tilt very much on its tripod. Animals were tied onto the dead branches of trees or fence posts. Not even the most regal of animals escaped her prodding though, as Cameron writes of poking eaglets in their nest with her tripod legs to position them in the best manner.<sup>48</sup> Men and beast alike were at Cameron's mercy, posed and carefully framed before she would snap her shutter closed.

Throughout her diary, Cameron writes of only one subject that repeatedly thwarted her attempts at control and frustrated her to no end: young humans. At this time, photography's limitations required subjects to be still for at least a few seconds unless they were photographed in very bright light. Babies and children tend to move and fidget, which caused her photographs to be disastrously blurry. Cameron's clients only paid her for successful, crisp photographs, so a

---

<sup>48</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1904*, 21 May 1904. This scene was beautifully illustrated and described on page 126 in Donna Lucey, *Photographing Montana*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1990).

blurred baby was a financial loss for Cameron, as her clients were unlikely to have an affinity for children that resembled specters. Cameron never had any children, and in her diary she describes babies and children in generally negative terms. Adjectives such as “willful,” “disobedient,” and “unruly” are employed to depict the youths of Terry, while another Terryite, Mrs. Bright, had “the ugliest little creature I ever saw” (a 2-3 month old baby) that Cameron photographed a few times in December 1897.<sup>49</sup> It is unlikely that Cameron relished packing her camera gear and fragile glass plates and riding her horse, often in the midst of winter, to go photograph these defiant little beasts, only to have the odds of her getting a crisp photograph be slim. Everything else that came under the gaze of Cameron’s lens could be controlled or coaxed into more favorable situations.

Pressing a shutter is an important, if brief, moment. It is, to quote Henri Cartier-Bresson, “the decisive moment.”<sup>50</sup> The photographer at this point has made a multitude of choices regarding subject, camera calibration, timing, and framing. For Cameron, who often only had a few plates to use, this decision was even more important than for photographers who carried more plates or used roll film. As Susan Sontag notes, “picture-taking is an event in itself, and one with ever more preemptory rights- to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on.”<sup>51</sup>

Cameron, who managed a household and was responsible for caring for animals and her husband, had the ability to manipulate, to control, and to make decisions as she made her photographs. Such a degree of monopoly and autonomy must have been satisfying or at the very

---

<sup>49</sup> These incidents were recorded on 6 December 1897, 2 April 1900, and 27 August and 28 December 1897 respectively.

<sup>50</sup> Adam Bernstein, “The Acknowledged Master of the Moment,” *The Washington Post*, 5 August 2004. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A39981-2004Aug4.html>

<sup>51</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 11.

least pleasing. Cameron's diary entries are not emotive, but entries do tend to reflect her photographic successes with positive verbs, suggesting that photography provides for her some sort of positive reinforcement to continue.

There are points in her diary when the interference and lengths to photograph a subject seem to go too far. On July 31, 1905, she and Ewen went to a "heronry" to photograph the birds. She wrote, "Waited for herons to get into good position- wouldn't [sic] - so chopped tree down- took it in turns- 2 flew away when it fell. One caught against sapling- got broken wing. Exposed four 8x10 of it before knocking it on the head. Packed up & went Lewis Wards."

Here, the herons are written about as though they consciously decided to not get in a position she liked for photography. The act of chopping down the tree they lived in, and in the process fatally wounding one for a few photographs, seems to be extreme. Further, the fact that the injured heron was still photographed four times before being brained shows a sort of callousness in pursuit of a photograph that today seems downright cruel. At this time, wildlife photography itself was a grim, unnatural practice, with animals being baited with food, trapped or held against their will, or killed in order to be photographed.<sup>52</sup> Cameron's photographs are creations of artifice in this way; the photographs of this heron cannot communicate the previous destruction, nor the imminent death of the subject. Regardless, they are ultimately her creations.

Cameron was often faced with photographic challenges, such as photographing her friend Netty with a young antelope Netty had procured as a pet of some sort. It was a bright, "just perfect"

---

<sup>52</sup> C.A.W. Guggisberg, *Early Wildlife Photographers*, (London: David & Charles Publishing, 1977), 13.

July summer day in 1908 and Cameron went over to Netty's house with her heavy camera and tripod.<sup>53</sup> They fed the animal milk and sugar, which apparently placated it enough to be photographed on Netty's lap a few times. Cameron also got a memorable photograph of the small ungulate butting Netty. Netty would later pay Cameron for the photos but Cameron likely enjoyed being able to ride to her friend's house on a lovely summer day and photograph this unusual situation. Cameron photographed Netty in the shade, where the tones and shadows would be the most flattering. Photographic opportunities like this, to shoot a friend and her antelope, were likely not lost on Cameron, who photographed wolves, eaglets, grouse, hawks, herons, bobcats, and even horned toads over the years. She developed the photographs two days later, calling the photographs "strong", and had Ewen come and look at the untuned prints to see what he thought.<sup>54</sup> Cameron valued Ewen's opinion as her partner, but she ultimately made every decision with her photographs.

Photography offered Cameron opportunities to execute her vision and to form community connections in ways she wouldn't under other circumstances. She photographed people's babies, their weddings, and community gatherings. Over the years her photographs graced various wildlife publications to accompany Ewen Cameron's writing.<sup>55</sup> She had a skill set for sale, which also gave her confidence and challenges to tackle on her own- even if the challenge was getting a baby to stay still. While some of the methods Cameron used for her photography seem shocking, she was nothing if not determined, and ultimately did not go to lengths that were unusual for the

---

<sup>53</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*, 9 June 1908.

<sup>54</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*, 14 June 1908.

<sup>55</sup> In one interesting scenario, an article that the Camerons had published in the magazine *Country Life* was paid for with a check in 1912 that sunk with the *RMS Titanic*. The Camerons finally received the replacement check on 1 September 1912, five months after the sinking. Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1912*, 1 September. Montana Memory Project, Montana Historical Society, accessed March 2017. Diary entries that mention Cameron's photographs in articles appear on 15 November 1908, 15 April 1912, and 22 October 1913.

times. Photography allowed Cameron the ability to be independent and creative, while creating a lasting memory for others.

## **THE DARKROOM**

Although they are more and more uncommon, photographic darkrooms have been an important facet of photography since the mid-nineteenth century. Today, darkrooms are marked by the red glow of dimly lit lamps that emit only certain wavelengths of light, lest the film the photographer is working with be marred. Plastic trays, protective gloves, timers mounted on walls, and rubber-tipped tongs are used alongside plastic jugs of chemical fixers and developer solution. Today's darkrooms also have silver recycling bins that require being taken to appropriate facilities, as silver is a heavy metal and cannot be dumped down the drain. Maintaining one's own darkroom is, even in today's mechanized, hyper-efficient world, an act of determination and to some extent stubbornness.

Evelyn Cameron worked in darkrooms that, although not as sleek or technologically advanced as those one finds today, would be easily recognizable to a photographer. Like today's darkrooms, Evelyn's had chemicals, trays, and an organized system. Darkrooms are dimly lit at best, and many photographers work in complete darkness depending on what kind of photographic materials they work with. The person working within a darkroom must have their items organized in a systematic way. Cameron's penchant for neatness and order in her household promote the idea that her darkroom, out of necessity as well as her personal habits, was also an orderly space.

Darkrooms are strange spaces. They serve only one purpose: to see what the photographic chemicals on plates or film reveal after their careful conversation with light. Darkrooms are private spaces, and delicately calibrated for moving around in the dark without causing accidents or ruining film. Cameron's darkrooms, whether they were converted spare rooms, attics, or specially built spaces, were for her and only her to occupy. In one of her homes, she and Ewen paid their neighbor, Mr. Hamlin, to construct a darkroom onto the ranch house in May 1896.<sup>56</sup> By having a darkroom constructed, Cameron made it clear that she wanted to dedicate not only her time, but also her economic resources, to making photographs. She was instrumental in its design, directing Hamlin how she wanted it, discussing the status of the project as it progressed, and even bemoaning that, "Hamlin has painted the darkroom some sort of peacock green. We wanted a light blue."<sup>57</sup> Cameron mentally placed herself in the space before it was even finished, and had preconceived ideas of exactly what kind of space she saw herself working for hours on end in.

Cameron was able to be alone when she developed. This solitude may have been very pleasing to her- she shared a bed with her husband, and spent her days caring for cows, chickens, and horses, working with neighbors, and cooking three meals a day. However, when she was able to shut the door on all of this and work with a multitude of fairly predictable elements, this must have been calming or at least a break from everything *out there*. The clink of glass plates unloaded from light proof bags or cameras was normal. Chemicals reliably reacted with other chemicals to develop negatives. Cameron could reasonably expect when she was toning a plate that the

---

<sup>56</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1896*, 26 May 1896. On this day Cameron records, "Men commenced work on the darkroom".

<sup>57</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1896*, 26 August 1896.

contrast would increase. There is a surety guaranteed in a darkroom, an unspoken trust with the various bottles of solution and negatives that if the photographer follows the right steps a photograph will appear.

Darkrooms are safe spaces. Those outside of a darkroom are usually aware that they cannot enter without express permission of the person inside lest light ruin negatives or upset chemical solutions. Those inside the darkroom are working slowly, with limited light. Cameron likely worked with the dim light of an oil lamp. She had glass bottles clinking, the quiet swoosh of chemical baths moving, and the odd odors of solution tinging the air. She had boxes of light-sealed paper for printing, pins for tacking up wet prints, and rags and buckets with water for cleaning messes. Boxes of used plates, negatives, and prints were likely stacked in corners or other out of the way places. Every object in a darkroom was placed in a set, sure spot that way in the dark Cameron could easily find it. There is order in a darkroom, a set method of things. Negatives fail, chemical solutions become over-used, and prints come out horribly, but these are expected results, part of the rhythm of the space. The darkroom on the Eve Ranch was one spot of calm and predictability.

While there is little to no research on the psychology of how photographers experience the darkroom, by understanding how a darkroom functions and is utilized by photographers it is easily understandable how such a space could become a place for a break from the outside world. The Eve Ranch did move over the years, but no matter where the Camerons made their home, Evelyn Cameron had a darkroom. It is only mentioned sporadically in her diary after 1896, but she used it frequently, at least monthly, when she developed her photographs. The Camerons

were never financially comfortable, relying on Evelyn Cameron's multi-faceted income schemes of selling cattle, eggs, vegetables, and her photographic services, but whenever they moved or built a new house they built a darkroom. That Evelyn Cameron apparently insisted on having a darkroom in every home she occupied until her death demonstrates how significant photography was to her, both as a financial aid and an artistic enterprise.

## **CONCLUSION**

The diary, the camera, and the darkroom all offered Cameron various ways to have autonomy, solitude, and imagination within her own world. Empty pages, blank photographic plates, and a clean, organized darkroom all beckoned, each offering their own form of control and creative options. Cameron utilized her diary in a manner similar to many women at this time, using it as a judgement-free space and a place to deposit personal information as well as negative information. Like thousands of other enterprising women at the turn of the century, she pursued photography as a financial crutch but also as a valuable skill that opened doors for her that might not otherwise be there. The darkroom offered her a carefully put together space within which to develop her photographs and press pause on the outside world.

## CHAPTER TWO

Evelyn Cameron would never be described as beautiful. Strong, striking, and dignified certainly, but never beautiful. Her self-portraits reveal wind-and sun-beaten skin on a full face, inescapable markers of living on the plains of Montana. Cameron's eyes, however, are perpetually bright, her gaze energetic, and in her photographs she radiates a vitality that is unmistakable, almost palpable. When she smiled, it was wide and marked by a gap in her teeth, a trait that somehow suits her. She appears always ready to tackle the next challenge, whatever that may be.

Evelyn Cameron created dozens of self-portraits over her years in Montana. In various photographs, she sits astride her horse, stands proudly with her large Graflex camera planted in the high grass, or hauls a massive amount of hay for her cattle. In others she stands near a cart load of cabbage she grew in her garden, or perches precariously on a natural bridge over a canyon in the badlands. She immortalizes herself playing with wolf pups and holds kestrels delicately perched on her hands. In every portrait her vivacity comes through. Cameron made it clear in many of these photographs that she was a necessary part of everything happening around her, and a direct catalyst in her own world. She was not alone in doing this: women have, for millennia, made it clear when they depicted themselves it was as active agents in their own lives, not as victims of fate or circumstance. Cameron's self-portraits added to the already rich conversation regarding how women depict themselves, and this chapter aims to analyze her self-portraits and compare them to the portraits she took of the other women in her life. In Cameron's photographs of herself and the women around her, we see reflections of nature, of unapologetic femininity, self-determination, and ideals of the colonized North American West that were also feminine in nature.

## BACKGROUND

When people think of women in the arts, they think of Botticelli's Venus, beckoning the viewer to view all the fertility she brings forth. Manet's fierce, controversial Olympia glares, daring the viewer to look directly at her, resplendent, unapologetic, and naked. Thoughts turn to the vengeful and beautiful Judith holding the bloody head of Holofernes, and opulent portraits of female royalty bedecked in satin, furs, and jewels, standing formally or with their offspring. Such portraits were all painted by men, fulfilling commissions from their mostly male patrons or creating works for their mostly male audiences to visually consume. Women in the arts and their contributions and ideas, outside of being visual objects have always been relegated to the edges, and still overwhelmingly are.

Yet, when women have the chance to portray themselves, they do so very differently from how men portray them. Women who were able to picture themselves were usually economically stable or had other circumstances that gave them space to be creative. That being said, their ability to communicate a common female experience of possessing value rings true across the spectrum of humanity. As Liana di Girolami Cheney, Alicia Craig Faxon, and Kathleen Russo note, "The self-portrait is a unique work of art, an intimate record of a sitter's personality. It is an acknowledgement of worth, an exercise in technique, a denominator of era, style, and likeness."<sup>58</sup> Self-portraits are, for the art historian and the historian alike, legible documents that do not just assert women's points of views, but do so at particular moments in time, reflecting what these women knew and valued. John Berger notes that for a woman, "from earliest

---

<sup>58</sup> Liana di Girolami Chaney, Alicia Craig Faxon, and Kathleen Russo. *Self Portraits by Women Painters*. (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2009), xxii.

childhood she has been taught and persuaded to survey herself continuously.”<sup>59</sup> Evelyn Cameron, who grew up in a wealthy British Victorian household, was certainly not immune to this. Raised within a class and society that placed a heavy value on poise, morality, and propriety, she would have lived understanding this omnipresent exchange of gaze and gazing. When, at the age of thirty, she began to make photographs, creating a visual idea of herself, Cameron was putting decades of being surveyed to use, not unlike her artistic peers of the past.

The few notable women who created significant self-portraits include Artemisia Gentileschi, a talented and famous Italian Baroque artist worked in the early seventeenth century, and was supported and encouraged by her Roman painter father to pursue the arts.<sup>60</sup> She showed herself as an allegory of painting, with a brush in hand and with her face focused on an unseen canvas. Judith Leister, a Dutch Baroque painter, was accepted by a professional artist’s guild in Haarlem, which was no small feat, and worked within this protective environment.<sup>61</sup> She chose to depict herself painting a canvas, pausing to look at the viewer, paint brush in hand and palette in the other, with the unfinished work in the background. Christine de Pizan, an early fifteenth-century writer and painter, was born to an educated father and took up the arts to support her family after her wealthy husband died.<sup>62</sup> In several illustrations from illuminated manuscripts, she shows herself educating her son, in a position of influence, putting her educated background to good use. Evelyn Cameron, born to a wealthy, educated British family, took up photography to bolster her income and had a wealthy boarder living with her who helped her learn how to use her

---

<sup>59</sup> John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: British Broadcasting Service, 1972), 46.

<sup>60</sup> Liana di Girolami Chaney, Alicia Craig Faxon, and Kathleen Russo. *Self Portraits by Women Painters*. (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2009), 74.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

camera. These women's successes were undoubtedly created by themselves but built on a platform of social status, economic ability, and opportunity. Regardless, these women and hundreds more left portrayals of themselves that show them as active and engaged in their lives and demonstrating their priorities. Women, historically, rarely show themselves as passive creatures.

### **EVELYN CAMERON'S SELF-PORTRAITURE AND PORTRAITS**

Because Evelyn Cameron greatly preferred to photograph in large formats, her photographs are crisp and multi-faceted. She used high quality equipment and was tenacious in the darkroom, making sure that her developed plate negatives or prints were balanced, sharp, and well-toned. Cameron, who was stubborn and exacting to a fault, was nonetheless also humble and not afraid to show herself as a down-to-earth figure. In one self-portrait from 1904, we see Cameron kneading bread in her kitchen (Figure 1). Her thick head of brown hair is secured in a bun, but pieces look as though they may fall in her face at any moment. In a large bowl we see her hands clutching the large, unbaked bread dough that Cameron makes almost daily. With her sleeves rolled up, looking at the camera with her eyebrows raised, it seems as though the viewer has almost walked in on her, interrupting this ritual.



Figure 1  
Evelyn Cameron kneading bread  
Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 90-87.G035-005

All around Cameron we see her kitchen. A metal bucket catches the light on a wooden table. On the left side of the photograph the massive wooden logs used to build her house demarcate the outside wall of her home, filled in with chink material that Cameron herself made, applied, and regularly resealed or repaired. A cabinet behind her is filled with containers and boxes, likely containing spices, ingredients, or other necessities that she might need to cook for Ewen and herself. The floor is made of thin, straight wooden boards, likely pine, and looks impeccably clean. The large stove that Cameron used for cooking takes up as much space as Cameron, if not more. Cameron spent much of her time in this space, wrestling with cooking, kneading, churning butter, and washing up the dishes. She shows herself firmly embedded in this environment, literally up to her elbows in flour and dough.

The cultured suburban estate of Furze Down on which Cameron was raised had nothing like this. Photographs of Cameron from her British, Flower days in the 1880s show her on a horse, sidesaddle, with a cap perched on her head. Both the horse and Cameron look polished, sleek, and polite to an extreme degree. Portraits of a wealthy family like the Flowers would be refined, posed, and work to further the idea of the family as cultured, educated, and elegant. Interestingly, but not unusually, this sophisticated family produced more than one black sheep. Cameron's half-brother, Cyril Flower, was one of the most handsome men in Europe and married into the wealthy and influential Rothschild banking family, becoming Lord Battersea.<sup>63</sup> Lord Battersea was also publically shamed in a homosexual scandal and may have carried on a relationship with FWH Meyers, a poet and classicist interested in parapsychology.<sup>64</sup> Cameron's older brother Alec

---

<sup>63</sup> Donna Lucey, *Photographing Montana*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>64</sup> Matt Cook, *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68 and Trevor Hamilton, *Immortal Longings: FWH Meyers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death*, (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2009), 181.

Flower roamed around Europe aimless and penniless and was possibly in jail at some point, according to Cameron's diary.<sup>65</sup> He sued Evelyn and Ewen Cameron in 1901, and was perpetually unable to provide for himself.<sup>66</sup>

The fact that Cameron chose to photograph herself working in her kitchen, doing a necessary and even dull task, says something about her life choices and how she felt about them. Portraits of Cameron milking cows, hauling hay, and working in her bountiful garden all reflect the idea that Cameron loved her ability to survive and even thrive in such a potentially lonely, desolate place as eastern Montana. To demonstrate this love, she loaded her heavy Kodak or Graflex camera with plates and posed herself doing these perfectly normal tasks, and yet demonstrating that she was hardly a normal figure. One almost wonders what her relatives back home, in their sturdy stone and brick homes, would have said seeing Cameron in such poses! Cameron wanted to be seen this way. Taking a photograph at this time was a deliberate act, one that was not casual in any sense. Cameron put the camera on its tripod, looked through the viewfinder, figured out how best to pose herself, where to put objects, and judged the light for the photograph. It is far more likely that Cameron kneaded bread on the table or at some other counter rather than strain herself bending at such an angle. This is a fabricated setting and pose that still shows a very real action and a very real Cameron.

This photograph also shows something that rural women did every day in other homes. Whether they lived in tar-paper shacks or more sturdy abodes, many women also kneaded bread for their

---

<sup>65</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1905*. 24 January 1905. On this date, Cameron writes of Alec's marriage to a Belgian woman seemingly at random. Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 13 December 1915. On this date Cameron reports that Alec is "incarcerated."

<sup>66</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*. 7 May 1901.

families to eat. Like Cameron, they rolled up their sleeves, had their hair pinned on their head, and performed this task day in and day out. They fed their large stoves coal and wood to heat them up to cook the dough, and like Cameron possibly chopped the wood or dug the coal to do so. Cameron wrote of trying new recipes for her bread, and these women did the same thing. Although Cameron likely made this photograph for only herself and a few select friends or family members, what she is doing is very significant: normalizing and yet elevating women's work. Male photographers would not be interested in photographing their partners doing such menial tasks, but this menial task consumed hours of women's days, and Cameron, who packed a remarkable amount of work into her daily schedules, valued every minute of daylight and likely did not underestimate the importance of even requisite tasks like kneading bread or churning butter. Here she poetically pays tribute to her own labor but also, without meaning to, nods to the ranks of other women doing the same thing.

While Cameron paid homage to her own industriousness, she also clearly saw her life as an adventure and an opportunity to experience a wealth of new things. When the *The Bystander* magazine put out a contest to have readers photograph themselves with a copy of the magazine in the most interesting place, Cameron jumped at the idea with her usual enthusiasm. Cameron, who had a profound and deep love for the eerie, winding canyons and formations of the Montana badlands, posed herself perched precariously on a natural bridge holding the large magazine (Figure 2). Indeed, a queer place to peruse a magazine!



Figure 2  
Evelyn Cameron seated on petrified tree bridge  
Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 90-87.G024-008

Cameron wrote about this experience not as the thrilling, potentially deadly experience it was, but rather as something she simply did as part of her day, in her usual taciturn way. Her skirts obnoxiously caught on the rocks, and she recorded that her sciatica was bad that day.<sup>67</sup> The most evocative, eerie part of that day in her diary reads, “The coyotes howled but one I really thought a man’s voice, but nobody answered. I lit a lantern and went to the top of the bank, but must have been the coyote the most human coyote I have ever heard.”<sup>68</sup> Cameron spent the day in the peculiar badlands only to go home and end up on the river bank at night talking to animals.

---

<sup>67</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1899*. 7 January 1899.

<sup>68</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1899*. 10 January 1899.

Cameron's photographs speak volumes where her terse entries do not. Cameron is the subject in this picture even if she is tiny. The ancient, primordial landscape is almost overwhelming, yet Cameron blends in like a natural specimen. The black and white tones help to further camouflage her petite frame. Almost barren but for scrubby, scrappy little pines and bushes, this place feels alien and foreboding, but Cameron does not appear intimidated. Over the years, Cameron's relationship with this landscape evolved to become one of fierce love and respect, and as the plains around her filled with homesteaders, and cars traveled the roads once reserved for horses, the badlands remained the one place that these things could not, physically, encroach upon.

Many women in the North American West had a respectful relationship with their environment that contrasted greatly with the masculine idea of the West as a place to be tamed, controlled, and used to whatever ends. Women in North America were in fact some of the first, most vocal, and most persistent conservationists, far before John Muir and Gifford Pinchot made their names as such.<sup>69</sup> While not exactly an ode to conservation, Cameron's photography often reflects a symbiotic understanding of her environment, and her diary entries suggest this as well. Where Montana weather often brought blizzards from nowhere and hail storms that could ruin crops, it also let Cameron grow a beautiful garden every year that provided her with food. While the winters were long and cold, the land offered her coal deposits to dig from. Her ranch was surrounded by natural springs and the enormous sky gave her sunsets to admire while smoking a well-deserved cigar.

The particular angle of this photograph effectively demonstrates both the landscape and

---

<sup>69</sup> Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), xiii.

Cameron. Cameron took several different photographs on this natural bridge, but this pose and this camera position work best to showcase the magazine, the landscape, and herself. It also serves to show how Cameron saw herself as an intrinsic part of her environment and at home in Montana. Cameron spent almost every day outside for at least a few hours, and over the decades in Montana she hunted, camped, slept outside, dealt with every sort of weather imaginable, and often reveled in the challenges that were thrown her way by Mother Nature. Cameron was healthy and strong, and made so by living in a place that required her to be.

This self-portrait adds another facet to her self-created visual identity. Cameron's diary shows her using a large vocabulary, reading large numbers of books, magazine articles, and engaging in philosophical discussions with friends and neighbors occasionally. She was engaged, curious, and eager to learn new things. It stands to reason that she would also create a large visual body of evidence that shows herself as such. Every self-portrait discussed in this chapter adds further depth to a complex woman.

One particular portrait of Cameron shows a delightful little sparrow hawk- more commonly known as a kestrel- perched on Cameron's outstretched hand, looking at the camera from the side (Figure 3). Cameron looks at the bird with a small but obvious smile, holding a little worm or other enticing tidbit for the bird to concentrate on. The bird is out of focus, and instead the viewer sees Cameron in crisp, clear detail.



Figure 3  
Evelyn Cameron feeding a Sparrow Hawk  
Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 90-87.G017-006

The Camerons both loved birds. Before Evelyn Cameron married Ewen, he lived for a time on the almost-deserted Orkney Islands, alone, studying the birds that lived there largely undisturbed.<sup>70</sup> By the late nineteenth century, Great Britain was realizing the impact of centuries of felling forests, ruining habitat, and killing “pest” birds and animals. Much of Western Europe by this time was void of healthy populations of wildlife after centuries of destruction and elimination of woods, plains, and the animals themselves. It came as no surprise then, that when the Camerons first honeymooned in Montana in 1889, four years before they returned permanently, the robust populations of animals, flying and earth-bound, enchanted the pair. They

---

<sup>70</sup> Donna Lucey, *Photographing Montana*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf Press, 1990), 10.

fell in love with the resplendent numbers of living creatures, and the sensory experiences of being surrounded by so much life. In Montana, to be serenaded by Western meadowlarks with the coming of summer is like nothing else, and no doubt many other birds sang their songs around the various ranches the Camerons kept. Together, the Camerons were an amateur ornithologist team, with Cameron making photographs and editing Ewen's writing, while Ewen wrote all about the birds on the plains around them. Great horned owls, great blue herons, golden eagles, bald eagles, red tailed hawks, ferruginous hawks, mallards, Canada geese, sandhill cranes, trumpeter swans, and many other species of birds all made their homes there, close to the banks of the Yellowstone River or migrating through.

It was to Cameron's great joy, then, when a freak snowstorm forced this tiny kestrel into her presence in April of 1899. She kept the kestrel inside and decided to photograph herself with it, marveling at how "I handled it without gloves & it never attempted to hurt."<sup>71</sup> Birds of prey, no matter what size, live to kill, and the Cameron's love of these flying death machines spanned their entire time in Montana.<sup>72</sup> In 1908, the Camerons kept two hawks in cages on their property, feeding them raw chicken meat, frogs, and whatever else Cameron came upon, and two years previously she actually kept a sparrow hawk as a pet, perhaps spurred by her previous positive experience with the one pictured here.<sup>73</sup> The particularly petite carnivore Cameron poses herself with has likely been satiated with food to keep it docile and still.

---

<sup>71</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1899*. 19 April 1899.

<sup>72</sup> Helen MacDonald's *H is for Hawk* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014), gives a stunning description of hawks and falcons as these veritable killing machines. It also delves deep into the history of hawking, falconry, and habitat destruction in Great Britain.

<sup>73</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1906*. 31 July 1906.

Although the kestrel is what makes this photograph unusual, the lens still focuses on Evelyn. Whether it is on purpose or accidental Cameron doesn't say, but the clear focus that Cameron's camera lens offers us shows a petite, well-dressed woman with a sturdy, resilient look about her. Her bright eyes look delightedly at the bird, and a slight smile plays on her lips. Behind Cameron the viewer sees carefully hung pictures or posters livening up the log walls. As in Cameron's kitchen, what we can see of this room looks organized and spotless as well. Cameron is wearing a matching woolen jacket and skirt, with a gorgeous buckle in the middle of the skirt's waistband. The wool jacket shows smart, stylish buttons, well-fitted shoulders, and careful details. Cameron likely dressed up for this portrait, as she would hardly dress in a nice outfit for her daily rigmarole of messy chores.

This photograph captures Cameron's curiosity about the world at large. Montana offered her continuous opportunities to learn more about everything. She acquired the ability to unfreeze a pump in the winter, to problem solve on the fly, to take things less seriously. She taught herself how to work with photographic chemicals in her darkroom and how to care for calves and dehorn them. She and Ewen learned about the life cycles of the animals around them, and Cameron's diary is frequently speckled with notes regarding the various animals and animal signs she encounters.



Figure 4  
Lilly and Alice Renn  
Montana Historical Society Research Center. PAc 90-87.N236

This particular portrait of Alice and Lilly Renn is casual and beautifully framed, and is the antithesis of a stiff, formal portrait (Figure 4). The flattering lighting, luxurious look of the wolf pelt, and the light, summery patterns on the girls' clothes recalls more of a Western-themed or romantically inclined fashion spread than a portrait made by a mostly self-taught photographer in rural Montana. Cameron's photographs of women often possess these ethereal, sensitive elements, using light and contrast as well as poses to create photographs that reflect her subjects' personalities.

The Camerons lived close to Terry, Montana, but also close to the even-smaller towns of Fallon

and Marsh. They were well known in all three communities, and as such Cameron's diary is full of social encounters and visits from neighbors. As a photographer, she was also asked to take part in weddings, funerals, picnics, and other community or social events. She got to know many more people in these towns this way, and so it is not surprising that the Renn sisters here look so relaxed. Cameron, although the product of good British breeding, did not depict herself as a very serious person, and her wide smile and good manners were likely to set her subjects at ease.

The Camerons knew the Renn family fairly well, with Cameron's diary containing entries referring to a "Carl Renn" in 1904. The Renns were a sheep herding family, and Cameron's photographic archive that is available online contains several photographs of the many members of the Renn family who lived in the area. Although the Montana Historical Society has dated this particular photograph from between 1905 and 1915, there is an entry on an Indian summer day in October 1908 that describes this photo exactly. Cameron wrote, "I took 2 exposures of 22 month old child holding pony, Mandan. Front view of house, Mrs Renn, sister Connie, child, dogs, pony front. Mrs Renn & Connie sitting on wolf hide on verandah. Saddled up. Took view with creek in, beef herd pasture, & one exposure of cattle crossing creek from Jim's back 1/25 4 film pack."<sup>74</sup>

While the reader cannot be sure who "Connie" is, it is unlikely that at any other point Cameron posed two Renn sisters-in-law on a porch in the sunshine like she did here. In addition, Cameron's diary often gives people nicknames. Janet Williams is often referred to as "Jennie", and it is also possible that either Alice or Lilly preferred to be called Connie. As discussed in the

---

<sup>74</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*. 12 October 1908.

previous chapter, Cameron's private diary has many secrets and strange incongruities that are normal for such a document.

Regardless, this photograph puts forth a casual energy that is also arresting. The subject on the viewer's left, presumably Lilly, looks directly at Cameron's lens. She looks confident and relaxed, with a small smile on her lips. Her dark, healthy-looking hair is pinned back on her head, contrasting with the light striped dress she wears. Her right hand is hidden behind a fold in the wolf pelt, but we see her bare forearms and the rolled up sleeves of the dress, which further creates an image of naturalness. Beside Lilly sits Alice, who looks away from the lens. She looks more melancholy, perhaps lost in thought. She wears a more formal, constricting white shirt with a high collar, a black belt that nips her small waist in, and a light colored skirt. Her right hand is also concealed within the wolf pelt.

The pelt of this deceased predator looks eerily out at the viewer, and is arguably as much a subject as the women. Neatly attached to what must be felt or some sort of durable backing, the pelt lies on the front porch, an illogical place, taking up as much space as each of the living, female subjects. It was likely placed on a wall, near the hearth, or on the back of a chair. Here, it is a prop, underlining that these women are in a wild place. They do not, however, look perturbed about this at all. While these women appear refined, casual, and ladylike here in this fabricated scene, they were more often covered in dust and mud, subjected to the cold, and did just as much labor in whatever conditions as their male partners and counterparts.

However, what is striking is that within this space there are hardly any obvious signs of

masculinity present. There are lace curtains behind the sisters, and the white, neat front of a house, associated with domesticity and security. There is a wolf pelt, which to our eyes looks sensuous and enticing. There is nothing truly harsh here, as the wild wolf has been separated from his fur, and there is no hand of man in this image. There is the hint of nature coming through in the lower left corner in the form of prairie grasses edging onto the porch, but the delicate strands of grass only add to the overall effect. These women appear as though they could easily exist in a world without men. Ultimately, this is a photograph made by a woman of other women in a space that quietly eschews masculinity. In comparison to Cameron's other photographs of herself and other women that are shown in this chapter, this one is unusual in many ways. Cameron shows these women fully embedded in their environment, and thriving in it. They are healthy and happy in their world.

In one portrait of Janet Williams, Cameron's adopted daughter and closest companion, we see her nestled into the crook of a large cottonwood tree (Figure 5). This "Grandad" tree, as Cameron called it, was likely at least fifty years old and was obviously massive. Cottonwood trees, which grow quickly, handily serve as signals for nearby water sources. Here, Williams has easily wedged herself into the tree, wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a coat of some kind with a white shirt underneath, and with her right hand touching the brim of the hat.



Figure 5

Janet in Grandad Tree, June 23, 1910.

Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 90-87.G058-001

This picture typifies Cameron's habit of depicting her subjects as literally part of their landscape, rather than apart from it. When Cameron photographed herself on the natural bridge, even the tones of her clothes blended in, and the perspective that she chose to use placed her directly settled into the landscape around her. We see the same tendency here with her depiction of Williams. Williams is not standing in front of the tree, nor is she standing beside it, but rather literally inside the tree's space. We cannot even see all of Williams, as her legs are mostly hidden save for some wrinkles of fabric that were her skirt. This photograph is of the tree as much as it is of Williams.

Both subjects were worthy in Cameron's eyes. She did not have just one photograph of the Granddad tree, and apparently came back to it more than once. On the fairly flat plains in Eastern Montana, such a behemoth would be known to everybody within a few miles of it, almost like a member of the community. As such, Cameron photographed the tree like somebody she knew well. By 1910, when Cameron made this photograph, she had more than one camera and had been a photographer for over fifteen years. She knew her camera, her lenses, and what she wanted from an image. By posing Janet Williams in the tree, she was able to clearly focus on both of them. The tones reflected in the tree's bark are rich and the tones on Williams are balanced as well.

One theme already discussed that is evident in Cameron's photography is how women in the North American West experienced nature in general. Where Cameron's photographs clearly serve to showcase the natural world as well as the people inhabiting it, other women wrote about the landscapes around them. Women experienced the natural environment differently than men

and worked to preserve it as part of an overall feminine approach to the West.<sup>75</sup> While Cameron may not have labelled herself a conservationist, the work that she and Ewen did to document the animals around them in magazine articles and the photographs she made clearly reflect a love for the wildness and diversity of life around them, and her photographs undoubtedly reflect her strong feelings about the environment she inhabits. Even the simple act of photographing Williams in the nook of a tree demonstrates a playful, yet loving relationship to the land.

Janet Williams is present in dozens of Cameron's photographs and participated in Cameron's life and livelihood often. They went through a lot together, both grieving Ewen's lingering sickness and death, although Cameron was alone in California for much of it. In the year this portrait was taken Williams found a lump on her breast that Cameron writes about with great concern.<sup>76</sup> This was also a year after both Ewen and Evelyn Cameron lost their mothers. Cameron, who never had any children, and did not have a close relationship with her family, gave Williams love, support, and affection in waves, writing about Williams as often as she wrote about Ewen. As such, she portrays Williams in this quirky pose in this tree, also embedding this young woman in the landscape much as Cameron did for herself on the natural bridge. It is possible that Cameron made photographs using Williams as a sort of visual guinea pig to try out poses, lighting, or other visual schemes.

There is an organic energy that comes out of this photograph of Williams. Cameron and Williams, being such close companions, likely fed off of one another emotionally as mothers and daughters and good friends do. Cameron most likely took this portrait as a casual one, not for

---

<sup>75</sup> Glenda Riley, *Women and Nature: Saving the "Wild" West*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 87.

<sup>76</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1910*. 28 February 1910.

anybody other than Williams and herself. However, this photograph also demonstrates Cameron's consistent use of the land around her as a subject. Cameron depicts Williams and the cottonwood tree both as natural creatures worthy of being looking at and admired.

The final portrait that this chapter analyzes was taken in July of 1913 at a Russo-German picnic. The small towns of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh welcomed immigrants from all over the world, and Cameron was often invited to photograph these newcomers, sometimes in traditional dress. Italians, Germans, Russo-Germans, Swedes, and Norwegians all make cameos in Cameron's diary and in her photographs. At the picnic, Cameron took several photographs, but this group of several women is especially remarkable (Figure 6). Although Cameron didn't discuss the particular women in this portrait that she photographed, she still photographed them with a sensitivity that is striking.<sup>77</sup> Cameron did note that the picnic is in a "lovely picture location," with the land around it "very sheltered."<sup>78</sup> She used the soft undergrowth of bushes to blur space all around the women, making them appear ethereal. Cameron used a wide-aperture lens that had a shallow depth of field to blur the undergrowth around these women, something that photographers call "bokeh", which is highly valued for portraiture as it emphasizes and focuses on certain parts of a photograph, creating depth. The trees that are present likely gave the women shading, which creates even lighting on faces and is especially flattering for human subjects. These well-dressed women, all clothed in either white or pastel colors with matching, decorated hats create a perfect picture of femininity that, as Cameron has done before, eschews masculinity and anything except nature and the feminine.

---

<sup>77</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1913*. 13 July 1913.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 13 July 1913.



Figure 6  
Cabin Creek picnic, July 13, 1913  
Montana Historical Society, PAc 90-87.G021-006

By 1913, Cameron had been a photographer for almost twenty years. She understood how to pose her subjects, how to use light to flatter them, and what sorts of portraits her clients would like. Such a romantic portrait of a group of women would likely be praised and valued by the recipients. The fact that the citizens of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh all had access to Cameron's high quality cameras, lenses, and her discerning eye, and her access to them, gives the viewer a glimpse into rural life for women that is valuable. Once again, Cameron has blended women into the landscape around them, and to great effect. These women, though clearly posed, do not appear stiff, and look at home where they are. While once again Cameron was not purposefully pushing forward a narrative of conservation, this portrait would not be the beautiful creation it is without the overflow of nature in every spare space. The natural world plays an important role in

Cameron's photographs, even her more formal portraits.



Figure 7  
Mrs. Cameron mounting prints  
Montana Historical Society Research Center, PAc 90-87.G035-006

To end the analyses of Cameron's photographs of herself and the women around her, this self-portrait of Cameron making prints around 1906 seems appropriate (Figure 7). Cameron visualized herself as an industrious bread kneader, as an adventurous woman who sought out nature, and as a curious woman who clearly loved the opportunity to encounter new things and beings. Here she shows herself as a business woman in her element, examining prints and surrounded by boxes of printing paper and various and sundry photographic elements. The viewer sees stacks of completed prints, and Cameron appearing avidly engaged in her work. She is wearing the same delicate belt buckle she wore in her portrait with the kestrel, and her cat sits in a basket in front. Cameron once again photographs herself in the interior of her home. It looks charming, neat, and rustic. Cameron looks dignified in light colored clothes, with her hair pinned back, and the scene overall looks delightfully posed. Cameron likely employed Ewen to actually press the shutter here, and it is possible that the cat looks alert because Ewen did something to draw the cat's attention.

Cameron premeditated this photograph and likely set up the room and took this photograph at an ideal time of day for the light to come in. If this photograph was indeed taken in 1906, this was also the year that Cameron got started on a much stranger photographic mission. In the spring and summer of 1906, Cameron purposefully trapped a horned toad (really a horned lizard) to use as a prop for a strange still-life she created out of two stacked bison skulls, some fossils, and a pile of sage and wildflowers. She kept the spiny reptile tied in her lunch sack for an entire day after finding it, and wrote excitedly about capturing the creature.<sup>79</sup> Cameron eagerly jumped at any opportunity to create something unusual, as seen with her photographs on the natural bridge,

---

<sup>79</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1906*. 27 August 1906.

and her diary in 1906 reveals a wealth of interesting photographic ventures, among them her self-portrait discussed here.

Cameron depicted herself as a photographer hard at work. The previous chapter of this thesis emphasized the act of photography as one of control and autonomy, and the fact that Cameron photographed herself as a busy woman working away at her business emphasizes this historic quality that women's self-portraits possess. She showed herself in a casual environment, and a feminine one, but she does not appear pompous or proud. Instead, she shows herself doing something that she does well and understands. Cameron had worked hard over the years to learn the art of working with bulky cameras, heavy lenses, and cumbersome chemicals. She had wasted glass plates, thrown out chemical baths, and had screws fall out of her cameras. She even experienced the trials and tribulations involved with photographing the unruly offspring that cropped up around her. It is no wonder, then, that this well-bred Englishwoman would show herself doing something she does well.

Once again, Cameron's photograph appears to hone in on femininity and female-associated spaces rather than give space to masculinity. The interior of the home was her domain, where she spent hours churning butter, kneading bread, sweeping floors, and writing her diary. Ewen is nowhere to be seen, nor are any other elements of maleness around, even though it is almost certain that Ewen is behind the camera to press the shutter. Cameron was not only a photographer and an inhabitant of her home, but was also the breadwinner for herself and Ewen. The way that Cameron stands, straight and confident, eagerly involved in her craft, shows her as a capable and self-sufficient woman.

## **CONCLUSION**

By examining several of Evelyn Cameron's self-portraits alongside portraits she made of other women, several themes become evident. The relationship Cameron had with the landscape around her becomes prominent, reflected in how she poses herself and others embedded deep in the natural world. She also shows herself as a hard-working, adventurous, and curious woman, one who does not shy from the new or the different. Cameron photographs the women around her in such a way that masculinity is often completely erased. As a woman photographing women, her viewpoint, experiences, and kindred spirit influenced the photographs she took. Cameron also consistently involves nature not just as a prop, but as a subject as important as her human ones. This emphasis on the natural hints at a wider conversation that was happening regarding how women experienced the North American West differently and demonstrated these differences. Overall, Cameron's photographs let the viewer know of a whole part of the North American West that was inhabited by complex women who participated whole heartedly in the adventure that was their lives.

## CHAPTER THREE

*“From the flowerlike snow peaks of Oregon to the waterless Redlands of Arizona dwells a spirit that, once it has touched the wanderer, leaves him homeless in all other places thereafter.”*

Evelyn Cameron copied this quote down in her loopy handwriting on the inside cover of her leather-bound journal from 1906. These words, pulled from an article in *The Sun*, a New York-based newspaper, reflect the deep and inescapable draw of an American West that was sensationalized throughout the country. Cameron, though British-born and raised, came to Montana in 1893 and lived there until she died in 1928, with the exception of one year spent back in Britain. The tumultuous and often unpredictable plains of Eastern Montana that she and Ewen chose to live on were a far cry from the polite, restrained, wealthy lifestyle she had lived on the comfortable Flower estate outside London. Ultimately this chapter argues that Cameron adopted an identity as a Montanan, adapting herself to the regional peculiarities around her and not only making peace with them but embracing them with enthusiasm. Cameron’s diary reflects many moments of sincere love and commitment to the land and people around her, and by examining certain events, such as her successful application for citizenship, alongside heartfelt and poignant diary entries that communicate love for her new home, it is possible to see her change from a British expatriate to a Montanan and American over the course of thirty five years.

This chapter does not claim that there is any one year, month, or particular moment that Cameron would arguably identify herself as a Montanan. She never stated this outright in her diary.

However, Cameron clearly wrote about Montana as her home, and there were multiple points in her life where she actively fought to either return to or stay in Montana, and remained steadfast against the idea of ever returning to England permanently. The study of regional identity, which is part of social and political identity, has roots in multiple fields, such as psychology, geography, and history, and has been the focus of dozens of studies. Postmodern theory treats identity as a flexible notion.<sup>80</sup> Available literature shows that people may change their social and political identities frequently, and self-identify in a wide variety of ways based on their value systems and priorities. The pages of Cameron's diary make it clear that she was a complex, intelligent, multi-faceted woman. This chapter strives to recognize her complexities and use her diary entries to demonstrate the economic and emotional decisions, as well as deliberate actions, that Cameron took to live and remain in Montana.<sup>81</sup>

## **BACKGROUND**

The Camerons moved to America in 1893, during a massive wave of immigration to the American West, just three years after the Wounded Knee massacre in South Dakota. The Camerons were hardly unusual in their British expatriate status: in 1890, over 113,000 British men and women made their homes in the American West, with only Germans and the Irish coming in larger numbers.<sup>82</sup> The British infiltrated the West to such an extent that Colorado Springs became known as "Li'l Lunnon" for a time.<sup>83</sup> The Camerons weren't even alone in their tiny town of Terry, as there were a number of British families that lived, had ranches, and spent

---

<sup>80</sup> Leonie Huddy, "From Social to Political Identity: A Critical Examination of Social Identity Theory," *Political Psychology*, 22, no. 1, (2001), 127.

<sup>81</sup> Anssi Paasi, "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," *Progress in Human Geography*, 27, no. 4, (2003), 477.

<sup>82</sup> Elliot Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s-1952*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 453.

<sup>83</sup> Robert Athearn, *Westward the Briton*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953), 6.

time in the area, many of whom were acquaintances or friends of the Camerons. Effie Dowson, along with her husband Major Dowson, an older wealthy British couple, frequently appear in Cameron's diary. Effie is usually written about by Cameron as giving overly extravagant gifts and once as showing off the newest prairie-chic pet: a prairie dog on a leash.<sup>84</sup> Evelyn Cameron was even fixed up with another British person, Kathleen Lindsay, whose husband wrote to Ewen Cameron in 1897 to suggest the two women should become friends when the Lindsays arrived in Terry.<sup>85</sup> These connections early in Cameron's diary kept her connected to her British roots as she and Ewen settled into their new home.

Importantly, the Camerons came to Montana voluntarily, buoyed by money coming from a trust to Evelyn Cameron on a regular basis, and were able to come to a country that spoke their language and to a certain extent worked well with their customs and social expectations. They even benefitted from having honeymooned in Montana previously, and so they knew what to expect. Aside from the British, the only other immigrants that likely had an equally easy time acclimating and immigrating to America were Canadians.<sup>86</sup> Ironically, Cameron's eventual embrace of Montana as her home came partially as a result of her English background.

Many immigrants who came to the American West were escaping famine, war, persecution, or economic stagnation. Many of these newcomers took dangerous jobs as miners, loggers, and factory workers. They were exposed to toxic substances and hazardous work conditions, societal prejudices, and frequent racism. The Camerons experienced none of these struggles. They spoke English, were educated, and had some leisure time for hunting, traveling, wildlife photography,

---

<sup>84</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1909*. 22 February 1909.

<sup>85</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1897*. 1 April 1897.

<sup>86</sup> Elliot Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s-1952*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 455.

long walks, and other activities that strengthened their bond with their surroundings and communities. All of these factors made it easier for the Camerons, along with thousands of their fellow English expatriates, to adapt to America than other immigrants, and undoubtedly facilitated Evelyn Cameron's bond with her new home.

Montana in this time period was becoming host to one of the highest concentrations of immigrants in the American West: over 30% of Montana's residents in 1890 were foreign-born.<sup>87</sup> Many of these mostly European-born newcomers were concentrated around mining centers like Butte, Anaconda, and Helena. The newcomers diverse heritage can still be found all over Montana, for example in Butte there are Cornish pasties to be devoured alongside *povitica*, a Serbian nut roll, and locals head to the Finnish Yachting Club bar to celebrate St. Urho's Day, brought about by local Finns tired of being steamrolled by the Irish and their rowdy St. Patrick's Day festivities. Anybody who takes a stroll through a historic Montana graveyard in many towns will find faded epitaphs speaking to the far flung birthplaces of former residents. Evelyn and Ewen Cameron added to this kaleidoscope of immigrants from different backgrounds who all started anew there.

## COMMUNITY

Without a doubt, Evelyn Cameron's eventual identity as a Montanan would not have been possible if she had not formed strong bonds with people in the communities around her. Citizens of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh all knew Cameron, and her closest companion second to Ewen was Janet Williams, her adopted daughter and best friend, who lived nearby. Within the first year of

---

<sup>87</sup> Elliot Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America's Immigrant West, 1870s-1952*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 454.

being in Montana, Cameron found herself being helped by and helping neighbors. When one boy on a summer day in June 1893 drank carbolic acid thinking it was whiskey, Cameron was summoned to his aid and fed the boy “mustard & warm water- by dint of a lot of coaxing he swallowed very few drops, held him & tried to force some down.”<sup>88</sup> Earlier that summer, Cameron wrote, “Watered tomato plants, most dead-rest in a wretched condition. Mr. Cogshall arrived & came down to help. Told me how to plant them out properly.” Cameron, who eventually grew a large and bountiful garden, benefitted from the tight-knit community around her, where assistance wasn’t seen as a nuisance but a necessity. Neighbors traded eggs for legs of mutton, or rutabagas for potatoes, and leant one another wagons, tools, and a ready hand. The Camerons took part in this trade frequently. Cameron was also frequently complimentary of the townsfolk in Terry and Fallon. One seamstress was deemed to be as good as a “London tailor” after Cameron tried on a “beautifully fitted” divided skirt she needed for riding horses.<sup>89</sup>

Cameron’s diary is rife with social engagements, even if she refused to attend popular balls and dances, as she did not like drinking and the drama that typically followed (though her diary usually repeats the gossip she hears from friends after such social events). Picnics were an especially great way to spend time with her neighbors and catch up. At one 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnic, Cameron recorded, “Ice cream & cake galore, meat & sandwiches. Mrs Johnson brought her phonograph. Chatted. I took 6 exposures. Denby told me he had not sold all the pictures, but a great many that I sent. Spoke to him thru his ear trumpet.”<sup>90</sup> Cameron was invited both to participate and also to commemorate these community events. There she could listen to music,

---

<sup>88</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1893*. 27 June 1893.

<sup>89</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1895*. 25 August 1895.

<sup>90</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*. 4 July 1908.

share stories, stay updated on what was going on, and strengthen friendships and acquaintances. As a photographer, Cameron was regularly invited into people's homes, to their weddings and funerals, and was privy to some of their most fragile, and happy moments. Cameron even produced some post-mortem photographs of children and the elderly, which meant that she was with families at very emotional, straining times.

Cameron grew to have a reputation as a kind, caring, clever woman and being given the task to memorialize the dead shows that she was respected as a suitable person to do such work. When Mrs. Roesler, a long time Terry resident who had known the Camerons for at least a decade, died of stomach cancer in 1922, it was Cameron who was summoned to photograph her body.

Cameron describes having the family move the casket holding Mrs. Roesler to a window so she would have ample lighting for her photographs.<sup>91</sup> She noted in her diary the multiple jars of ice that surrounded Mrs. Roesler so as to preserve her body until she could be properly buried, and writes about how the poor woman, who had just turned fifty-four, "suffered much towards the last" as she died.<sup>92</sup> Cameron, who also photographed the Roesler's children in 1912, was there to document the beginnings of life as well as the end of it. As such, naturally she would have become close to people in her community. It would be hard to call any physical location home if there wasn't a strong community of human beings to make it so.

As Cameron aged, this network came to her aid frequently. Though Cameron was hardy, and hard working until her death, after Ewen's death in 1915 she did recruit neighbors and friends to help her fix fences, bring in hay, and do other menial but laborious tasks. She also began to open

---

<sup>91</sup>Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1922*. 2 September 1922.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid, 2 September 1922.

her home to more festivities. She continued to avoid the town balls and dances that were common social spaces in rural communities, but she invited people to the ranch to listen to music from her Victrola, eat large amounts of food, and chat. Cameron would dress up for these occasions in a nice silk blouse she owned, and at one party where she hosted seventeen people in August of 1922, she even sported her mother's pearl ring which she had converted into a beautiful brooch. The guests feasted on "Mrs. A's chocolate cake, Janets ice cream, lemonade & coffee. Salad of dates, marshmallow etc., bananas."<sup>93</sup> At such occasions, Cameron caught up on local gossip, on everybody's recent medical procedures which Cameron recorded diligently, and her neighbors showed off their fancy new automobiles. At this particular party, "There were Mr Brubaker, 2 children, Mr & Mrs Anderson & 2 children, Mr Frank Sherman and Dr., Mrs. Sherman & Jane, Mrs Stith, Roy Stith & wife, just back from Salt Lake City, thyroid gland removed, eyes prominent, Roy."<sup>94</sup> Cameron, who didn't care for children, unsurprisingly records them without their names. After the party, Dr. Sherman showed off his new Dodge car, which Cameron admired. She never did, though, relinquish her horses. Cameron, a lifelong horsewoman who greatly preferred horses to human companionship at times, rode her horses everywhere well into the 1920s, as the streets of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh shifted from being filled with draft horses and saddle horses to Fords, Chevrolets, and Buicks.

The tight-knit communities near where Cameron lived all helped create an emotional bulwark against loneliness and isolation, frequent realities for homesteaders and ranchers. Although Cameron treasured her solitude and independence, she nevertheless made close friends and fostered bonds with her neighbors. Such emotional investments helped Cameron forge tighter

---

<sup>93</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1922*. 20 August 1922.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 20 August 1922.

bonds with the land she adopted.

## **THE EARLY YEARS**

The first years in Montana were hard ones for the Camerons. Evelyn Cameron's diary in the 1890s is peppered with entries that express a hopelessness of sorts as she and Ewen struggle to make money and to hold onto what money they have. One particularly difficult time came when Ewen returned to England in late 1897 and early 1898 for a few months to work out a business arrangement, leaving Cameron to manage on her own. Cameron, who took on most of the work on their ranch in the first place, did not struggle with this until one day she, to her humiliation, saw Ewen's name printed on the tax delinquency list in the *Yellowstone Journal*, a local newspaper. "ES Cameron, I saw on Delinquent Tax list, in Yellowstone Journal, nuisance \$27.00 odd I cant pay."<sup>95</sup> Ewen, on his way home from England, had not paid their taxes, and Cameron, already at her wits end with people around town not selling her things due to Ewen's bad management of their finances, was at a loss of what to do. She had faced humiliation when she tried to order Christmas dinner earlier in December, but wrote that "I could not send for a goose because Ewen owes the butcher in Miles \$9.00," ending the statement with a dejected "worse luck."<sup>96</sup> The Camerons, who came from cultured, educated families, were not the sorts of folks to have their names printed to shame them in public newspapers read by their neighbors and peers.

Recognizing that Cameron was only twenty-five when she and Ewen came to Montana in 1893 puts such events in perspective. Both Ewen and Cameron had never handled bitterly cold winters, lived in poorly insulated homes, and dealt with the lack of amenities available in their

---

<sup>95</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1898*. 18 January 1898.

<sup>96</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1897*. 22 December 1897.

new rural setting. However, Montana allowed Cameron the ability to mature and find her identity away from the eyes of her family, friends, and upper-class British society as a whole. Without having to navigate the maze of social expectations back in her home, Cameron was able to make mistakes, have victories, dress mostly as she pleased, and live out her life with Ewen, despite her family's objections to his age and impoverished family. Cameron clearly was a black sheep of sorts among her family, and Montana suited her stubborn, curious, and inventive nature, and fostered her growth as a young woman in her mid-twenties. In one depressing entry in 1893, as money troubles drove the Camerons to seriously discuss packing up to head back to England, Cameron determinedly wrote, "I would rather stay out here, I don't care about home now, feel as tho' I would like to never hear nor go near it."<sup>97</sup> She recorded this in their first year in Montana, which hints at the idea that she may have come out to Montana with Ewen to escape her motherland for a variety of reasons. While her rejection of England does not mean that Montana could automatically be considered her new home, it meant that Cameron had to find another option, as she had no intention of ever residing in England again.

When the Camerons eventually did decide to return to England and Scotland for a year between 1900 and 1901, Evelyn Cameron went stir crazy due to the dullness of days, where servants did the chores she relished and her hours were spent with Ewen's elderly, pesky mother. The Cameron's time in their homeland felt gloomy from the start, with Evelyn Cameron's beloved greyhound Jan, also called "Popsie", being run over in the streets on their first day. "We looked around & there she lay on the pavement where she had managed to drag herself, a dog cart going fast had run over her," Cameron sadly notes, "I buried her under limes in back of the garden."<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1893*. 9 September 1893.

<sup>98</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1900*. 23 August 1900.

The rest of their time in England was spent with Cameron itching to be back in Montana. Even though she was back in her homeland, where her accent was normal, where her family lived, where the fine things she had grown up with such as servants and comfortable, well-appointed homes were back at her disposal, she wanted nothing to do with it. Although Cameron's diary does not state that it was her influence and stubbornness that convinced Ewen to return, they nevertheless left on August 22 on the ship *Vancouver*, never to set foot on English soil again.<sup>99</sup>

Life in Montana had been difficult for both Evelyn and Ewen Cameron by the time they spent a year in Britain. They had many good reasons to stay in their motherland. In Montana they were far from home, they consistently encountered financial struggles, and the long winters, which lasted six months at a time, required them to have massive amounts of coal, wood, and food stored. The Camerons even had to welcome boarders into their home in order to stay financially solvent, something Cameron loathed. She called her boarders "nuisances" and in one entry, written as a poem, she notes, "out with more food for the boarders to hoard in their tums already too broad."<sup>100</sup> Boarders invaded her privacy, ate more food that she had to cook, and generally required entertaining that Cameron, who managed the house, the horses, and a garden, simply did not have the time nor inclination to provide.

The Camerons also had to endure hosting Cameron's older, spoiled brother Alec. This man was a terror who gambled, got in fist fights with other boarders, and abhorred working.<sup>101</sup> He did,

---

<sup>99</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1901*. 22 August 1901.

<sup>100</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1895*. 5 August 1898 and Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1895*. 4 March 1895.

<sup>101</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1894*. 25 January 1894.

however, come with a handy financial trust similar to Evelyn Cameron's and therefore was a necessary addition to their household, even if Cameron did refer to him as a "little beast" as he antagonized her to no end.<sup>102</sup> In the end, Cameron ended up caring for men who didn't offer her much help with the ranch work one way or another her entire time in Montana, as even when she and Ewen ran things themselves she did most of the work. Yet, this was her choice. Cameron, who loved her independence, refused to compromise on the life she imagined having in Montana and ultimately got it.

## **THE LANDSCAPE**

After the Cameron's stint in England, Cameron settled back into her rhythm of cooking, photographing, and working all hours of the day to manage her family's affairs. Cameron's diaries once again reveal, despite the terseness of her entries, her fastidious observations about Montana. She avidly recorded the birds she spotted, the way that the landscape looked, and how beautiful Montana was. One day in August 1903 she ventured out to find chokecherries, a delicious and readily available treat, but found that it was too late to collect them. However, Cameron was satisfied by finding wild flowers to decorate her home, and delighted by "a curious green caterpillar with pompoms green on it."<sup>103</sup> Exactly a year later, she mused on the hum of cicadas as she sat on her porch on an August evening, and admired the way that bats flitted about her home, no doubt catching mosquitos and gnats that flourished near the springs around the ranch.<sup>104</sup> Cameron, who recorded even the most dramatic and depressing of events with extreme composure and neutrality, broke this tradition whenever she devoted a few sentences to the

---

<sup>102</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1893*. 26 December 1893.

<sup>103</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1903*. 23 August 1903.

<sup>104</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1904*. 23 August 1904.

landscape around her. She was alert to the world outside her door, and she clearly reveled in the opportunities it afforded. As many Montanans do to this day, she noted the first call of the beloved Western meadowlark on an April morning in 1912.<sup>105</sup> The meadowlark, like Primavera with her robe of flowers, signals the coming of spring in a beautiful fashion. In a place where winter can seem to never be finished, meadowlarks are marvelous to hear.

Cameron was deeply in tune with the land around her. She had little choice: as the Camerons moved away from their polo pony business, they instead invested in raising cattle and in a massive garden that Cameron cultivated herself. Living in the North American West in a rural community or on a homestead required residents of these places to be in sync with their environment. Paying attention to which animals were migrating, noting when the ice on the river broke annually, and recording temperatures, as Cameron did, were poetic as well as practical. Her neighbors, who also paid attention to the rhythms of nature, often relayed this important information as Cameron notes, “River broke up last night with great booming about 9:00 pm Mrs. Folger said.”<sup>106</sup> The symbiotic relationship that Cameron formed with her new home allowed her to not only survive but thrive. Cameron invested time, money, and labor into the land around her, tilling the soil, herding her cattle to feed on the grass, and mining coal from nearby hillsides. In return she received food, money, and warmth.

Cameron also earned the ability to appreciate the evenings where she lingered on the porch smoking her cigars or chatting with her husband. What she also gained was the ability to never be bored. Cameron dramatically recounted her boredom when she was stuck in England in 1900,

---

<sup>105</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1912*. 3 April 1912. .

<sup>106</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1918*. 18 March 1918.

noting “It would be a relief to do all the work in this house,” as she lingered in her mother-in-law’s home.<sup>107</sup> Cameron fought to get back to Montana and inevitably got her wish: every waking hour of the day was often full, whether it was saddling up a horse to go meet a client to photograph, kneading bread, or, or making a bland dish to serve to Ewen with his persnickety stomach. However, some of Cameron’s entries are so poetic as to almost be surreal.

One strange sentence notes, “Saw a rattler let itself fall into a gulch, a rattlin’ all the while.”<sup>108</sup> Cameron proudly killed dozens of rattlesnakes, and kept their rattles for some unreported purpose, but to live in a world where snakes voluntarily jump into gulches seems more appropriate for a magical realism novel than the reports from a keen observer. In another entry, Cameron remarks that she sang to a horned toad and it seemed to enjoy her serenading.<sup>109</sup> While these may seem amusing, they also show Cameron as a sensitive, curious, and engaged participant in the natural world, who sometimes lovingly noticed the living things that she co-existed with. Even the inanimate naturalia around her was not unobserved. One morning she wrote, “Everything looked so beautiful, the dampness of last night having frosted on grass and twig. I got the camera out, took one of the ranch, one view down creek, & another of same view only from piazza.”<sup>110</sup> Waking up to a glittering, frost-covered world right outside her front door, Cameron seized the moment and made photographs to remember such a morning by. She also wrote about it, clearly reveling in the beauty around her, and wanting to not let it pass her by. Montana dazzled her for years and she in turn made odes to it with her camera and words which continue to interest people to this day.

---

<sup>107</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1900*. 2 December 1900.

<sup>108</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1910*. 9 May 1910.

<sup>109</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1903*. 25 May 1903.

<sup>110</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1896*. 15 February 1896.

## PHOTOGRAPHY AND FINANCES

While Montana gave Cameron the opportunity to wonder at the animals and environment around her, she also had the opportunity to make herself well known as a professional photographer. Montana has a sparsely documented history of female photographers but they were numerous, often partnering with their husbands, running studios alone, or taking over after their partners died.<sup>111</sup> The communities that Cameron lived nearby were not well populated, and professional photographers were few and far between. Cameron was a permanent resident and so available year round for photographing people on request. In a place where even the dentist traveled because there wasn't enough business, Cameron was able to have a firm hold on most of the photography business around her.<sup>112</sup> On occasion, she profited enormously. One beautiful Sunday in September of 1904, Cameron made \$42.50, which in rough estimation is about \$1,100 in today's money.<sup>113</sup> She did this by photographing Italian train workers and their coworkers who had stopped for the day.

She wrote, "Then about 9:30 Miss Sherry & I went to see Miss Poole, & she on with us to Dagos. They soon bought up all photos, 'cept 3. New gang in. Took their photos. Also some of the old gang with them. Took 4 men in car. Section man, Miss Poole, Mrs Halwick section Boss' wife group in shade. "E una bella donna sa "said fair, good-looking Italian to another man about Miss Sherry."

---

<sup>111</sup> Delores Morrow, "Female Photographers on the Frontier: Montana's Lady Photographic Artists, 1866-1900," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 32, no. 3, (1982), 76-84.

<sup>112</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1903*. 2 September 1903. On this date Cameron remarks that "the dentist never came." The dentist usually came around via train or horse. The Camerons developed their own methods of tooth care due to the sporadic service, including using carbolic acid, wintergreen, and whiskey.

<sup>113</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1904*. 18 September 1904.

“Dagos” is an antiquated ethnic slur for Italians, and Cameron, who spoke Italian, delighted in being able to listen in on their conversations, which here Cameron records, where one says, “E una bella donna sa”, which means *she is a beautiful woman*, in reference to the Miss Sherry that accompanied Cameron to photograph the groups.<sup>114</sup> Cameron had regular interactions with various Italians, a few under duress. Several Italians in the area apparently had a habit of stealing chickens, eggs, and produce from Cameron’s ranch, and at one point, after having had enough, Cameron records, “Wrote on cardboard to hang on root cellar door. ‘Perla gloria d’Italia non rubari pin [piu].’”<sup>115</sup> This sign, which translates to *For the glory of Italy, do not rob any more*, apparently did its job, and would have been an interesting sight to any intruding Italians, who likely did not assume that the small sturdy British woman who ran the ranch could fluently speak, read, and write Italian.

While she struggled with theft from the Italians, she also made immense profits from photographing her fellow newcomers to Montana. On that September Day, Cameron managed to make an enormous chunk of money in a matter of hours, photographing groups and pairs of men. She likely had them pay upfront and would develop the negatives at home, leaving prints at the post office to be picked up. About a week after she made her first large amount of money, she earned an additional \$16.75 (over \$400 in today’s currency) by going back by the railroad and selling more.<sup>116</sup> As the family bookkeeper who managed the Cameron’s bills, these financial gains were not only helpful but also likely gave her a sense of accomplishment. Here in this difficult, often tempestuous landscape, Cameron was capable of independently pulling in large

---

<sup>114</sup> The author speaks and writes Italian and was able to independently translate Cameron’s diary entries that featured Italian.

<sup>115</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1908*. 19 November 1908.

<sup>116</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1904*. 25 September 1904.

amounts of money, without any help. Cameron could get railroad workers and other working class men, who were not earning large sums of money, to part with their cash. Cameron not only bonded and formed relationships with her community but also provided a valuable service that she profited from financially, artistically, and emotionally. She was able to offer her photographic skill set to anybody who inquired with her, and did so efficiently and professionally.

Cameron may not have been able to have a successful photographic career had she pursued it elsewhere. Back in England, as well as on the more settled East Coast of the United States, many female photographers were derided as hobbyists who lacked the skill and artistic ability to become truly good photographers. In Montana, away from such opinions, Cameron was able to hone her skills and use them to her benefit. It was in Montana that she became the successful photographer she is remembered as, and the rural setting made it easier for her to find her niche where there otherwise may have not been a photographer.

## **AFTER EWEN**

One of the greatest challenges that Cameron faced came in late 1914, as Ewen, who always had a delicate stomach, bad teeth, and generally bad health, began to steadily weaken, first with a general tired feeling and then deteriorating eyesight. Eventually it was clear to Evelyn Cameron that dramatic action is necessary, and she took him by train in February 1915 to Salt Lake City to inquire with doctors. One doctor only warned her that her husband was much sicker than she knows, and she left for southern California shortly after to seek more qualified medical advice.<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>117</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 14 February 1915.

Once there, Ewen only grew worse, and slowly became paralyzed to the point that Evelyn had to do everything for him. With her husband utterly dependent on her, far from Montana, and surrounded by puzzled doctors, Evelyn Cameron endured watching her once-able (if lazy) helpmate become a shrieking, pain-wracked specter injected with strychnine and dead microbes.<sup>118</sup> Small moments away from Ewen and his unrelenting pain became treasured, and Cameron even encountered a girl from Montana in a photography shop, which she wrote down joyfully as one bright spot in her taxing, depressing days.<sup>119</sup> Effie, sans prairie dog, came to comfort and help Cameron, taking a bungalow nearby. Ewen Cameron passed away on the 25<sup>th</sup> of May, with Cameron noting that she “was with him alone at the last. Poor old boy, what a blessed relief.”<sup>120</sup> Efficient as always, on that same day Cameron ordered an autopsy to be performed and bought a black casket. The next day Ewen Cameron was buried in Southern California, and Cameron packed up to go home.

While Ewen Cameron had not been a hardy partner, Evelyn Cameron clearly treasured her husband. One summer day in 1903 she tenderly observed, “E looked so nice I perforce had to take a photo of him.”<sup>121</sup> While her diary records his frequent foul moods, she also records missing him, being excited to have him come home when he is gone, and writing him poems in her diary. One poem she wrote about him goes:

*Ewen Cameron of Barcaldine, with hair of the darkest hue,  
And eyes that recall the heather midst early morning dew.  
With nose as straight as a green larch tree,  
And mouth like a rippling stream  
Oh, he is the bonniest laddie that ever in Scotland was seen!*<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>118</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 28 February 1915.

<sup>119</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 11 April 1915.

<sup>120</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 25 May 1915.

<sup>121</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1903*. 22 August 1903.

<sup>122</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1905*. 13 December 1905.

In addition, there are dozens if not hundreds of portraits of Ewen. In them, he plays with wolf pups, sits on his horse, drinks his tea in the morning, or does other activities Cameron likely posed him for. Cameron's diary is a testament to her strong opinions, stubborn and curious nature, and her ability to make do no matter what, but it is also very much devoted to keeping track of her husband. What Ewen ate, what medicines he required, how his mood was, what tasks he completed, what writing he had done- it was all written down. She makes it clear that she thinks of him almost as often as herself. Perhaps in Ewen she found a human who matched her peculiarities with his eccentric nature, a kindred soul with whom to escape the confines of England and Scotland. Perhaps Cameron enjoyed caring for him. No matter the reason, it is a fact that once Evelyn married Ewen she was devoted to him to the bitter end.

After her husband's death, Cameron headed home to Montana. Cameron was now a widow and an orphan, with no close relatives to speak of. Her family consisted of adopted loved ones like Janet Williams and Effie Dowson. It would be nonsensical to leave her ranch house, her neighbors, and her beloved badlands to pack up and go back to England. At this point, she had spent over twenty years working in her gardens and darkrooms, learning how to care for cattle, perform her own dentistry, and read the signs of the passing seasons. From the start of their lives in Montana, Cameron wrote in her diary that she felt no desire to return to her birth country, and nothing thus far had successfully driven her to this option. Neither money nor death could change Cameron's stubborn sense that Montana was where she belonged.

Before Ewen had fallen ill, he had begun registration for his citizenship in order to hold onto their land permanently. With his death, that responsibility fell on Cameron's shoulders. As soon

as Cameron arrived back in Montana she applied for American citizenship, and wrote in August 1915, “I declared my intention to become a citizen. Brubaker didn’t wish me to file until Ewen’s papers rescinded.”<sup>123</sup> The process would take several years, with Cameron getting an official questionnaire from Seattle in 1917, which Cameron notes has, “awful lot of many questions!”<sup>124</sup>

Cameron gained her citizenship successfully, receiving the official papers on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April 1918. She went to the Terry courthouse accompanied by her dear Janet Williams and Janet’s sister Mabel, who paid for Cameron’s dinner and celebrated with her, after she was asked about subjects like polygamy, the Constitution, and how legislation worked in the United States.<sup>125</sup> Cameron became an American while knowing wounded British men back home and reading about her former compatriots opening the doors of their palatial British estates to house the wounded. The inside cover of her red leather diary for 1918 is marked with a bulleted list of the wounded and dead men that she knows, some of them from England, some of them from Montana. One gruesome note reads, “John- Military on Gen Perevia Staff as Briugade Major. Shot in head. Bullet did not touch brain.”<sup>126</sup>

While World War I waged across the sea, Cameron went to vote in her local elections for the first time. She wrote about this with zeal, in her usual loopy, expressive handwriting. Cameron dramatically rode through sleet on her horse, wearing a flu mask as she voted to avoid getting sick. She excitedly records exactly who she voted for, and ends the entry, “Glad I went to vote in

---

<sup>123</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1915*. 28 August 1915.

<sup>124</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1917*. 18 December 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1918*. 9 April 1918.

<sup>126</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1918*. Inside front cover of diary.

spite of disagreeable weather.”<sup>127</sup> This must have been a major accomplishment for Cameron, who had lived in Montana for twenty five years and had not been able to vote for any of the politicians or policies which had no doubt affected her. She also took part in an American activity as an American, no longer simply a British expatriate or an outsider. In the past she had gone to 4<sup>th</sup> of July picnics to make photographs, but now she had another reason to take part: she was part of a nation that had allowed her to move thousands of miles away from home and make something out of herself. While Cameron doesn’t state in her diary before Ewen’s death that she herself was interested in becoming an American, when she became one she seemed to take it seriously.

All was not quiet on Montana’s own front, though. Although the battles of Verdun and the Somme raged thousands of miles away, in Montana violent anti-German sentiments festered. Montana enacted “one of the harshest sedition laws in the country,” with some cities in Montana banning the use of German entirely.<sup>128</sup> Over 200 Germans in Montana were arrested during World War I in violation of the extreme sedition laws, and it wasn’t until 2006 that those prosecuted were pardoned by the state.<sup>129</sup> Cameron joined in this negativity in her own way and referred to local German citizens of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh as “boche” in her diary.<sup>130</sup> Like the term “Dagos” Cameron employed, “boche” was a derogatory slur that was widely used at this time. The one German man who is not referred to as a “boche” is a Ukrainian-German named Gottlieb Siegle, who over the years becomes a good friend of Cameron’s. He technically hailed

---

<sup>127</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1918*. 5 November 1918.

<sup>128</sup> Elliot Robert Barkan, *From All Points: America’s Immigrant West, 1870s-1952*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 206-207.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

<sup>130</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1918*. 18 January 1918.

from Odessa and was spared Cameron's derogatory wording, although with a name like Gottlieb Siegle in 1918 he likely encountered negative reactions elsewhere.

## CONCLUSION

Cameron did things her own way her whole life. As a widow, she lived out the rest of her days after Ewen's death in her efficient, busy manner. She kept chickens, cattle, and her horses, and relished often ending her days by smoking two cigarettes, a habit she picked up after his passing. Her neighbors help her around the ranch more as she got older but she steadfastly refused to have hired help or anybody stay with her. She treasured Janet Williams' visits, always complimenting her adopted daughter and dearest friend in her diary, as seen in this touching sentence in a 1925 entry, "Dear Janet looks splendid."<sup>131</sup> Williams' visits light up Cameron's diary like sparks throughout their friendship. As a spirited, stubborn woman who left a substantial visual legacy in her thousands of photographs and a massive first person viewpoint in her diaries, Cameron is remembered by many people in Montana as having the necessary hardiness and creativity to make Montana her home. She invested money, time, and emotional labor into Montana and its people and through sheer determination made Montana her forever home. Afternoons spent astride her horse watching birds and observing the landscape brought careful observations, and she lovingly described the flora and fauna around her.

---

<sup>131</sup> Evelyn Cameron, *Evelyn Cameron Diary 1925*. 17 January 1925.

## FINAL CONCLUSION

When twenty-five year old Evelyn Jephson Cameron moved to eastern Montana from Great Britain in 1893, accompanied by her husband Ewen, she embarked on an adventure that would last for thirty-five years. While in Montana, she and Ewen owned several homesteads and ranches, where Cameron raised cattle and horses, kept chickens, and maintained a large, bountiful garden that she sold vegetables from. She also taught herself the art of photography in 1894, and became a well-respected photographer in eastern Montana. She photographed hundreds of residents from the surrounding communities of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh, capturing weddings, picnics, funerals, local businesses, and schoolhouses alongside cowboys, shepherders, and nomadic railroad workers.

Evelyn Jephson Cameron was born Evelyn Jephson Flower, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, and raised in an appropriately lush estate outside London. She spoke four languages, rode horses side saddle, and socialized with other wealthy families. When she and Ewen moved to Montana, Cameron distinguished herself from the rest of her family, savoring hard physical labor and the creativity needed to homestead in Montana over the more stable lifestyle she surely would have had in England. The Camerons were part of a large wave of immigration to Montana, joining thousands of Irishmen, Germans, Serbians, Poles, Finns, and Croatians. Evelyn Cameron's polyglot abilities aided her with communicating with some of her fellow newcomers, and her diary is rife with interactions with people who hail from far-away lands.

Evelyn Cameron wrote in her private diary at the end of each day, recording the tasks she tackled, the challenges she faced, who she saw, what she cooked and ate, and what the weather was like. The pages of her diary are full of her loopy, expressive handwriting, but those same

pages also reflect a space that Cameron had to deposit her fears, trepidations, and successes in, without any prying eyes. In addition, Cameron's photography business allowed her to create images of her choosing, where she had artistic freedom and could also commemorate what she wanted on her glass plate negatives. Cameron's personal darkroom, which she had installed at each house she and Ewen lived in, also offered Cameron a space for respite, seclusion, and autonomy, which was a difficult thing to find in her hectic, chore-filled days.

Evelyn Cameron's extensive photography collection that she left behind gives the viewer the ability to see the American West, specifically Eastern Montana, through a female eye. Montana played host to numerous female photographers at this time but many of their histories are likely silenced by tactics they employed at the time to disguise their gender. Many female photographers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century only used their initials to sign or stamp their photographs, making them essentially gender neutral.<sup>132</sup> Such strategies helped to ensure that female photographers weren't passed by for their services just because a potential client saw that a woman was behind the camera. Evelyn Cameron didn't employ such tactics, but she also didn't necessarily have to- she offered a service that many others could not in a rural area.

Cameron's photographs offer a feminine perspective of a place whose history-telling has been overwhelmed by masculine tropes and ideals. However, Cameron's photographs do not depict the gentle tamers of older Western histories that through their refined ways brought the American West closer to a civilized land. Cameron often photographed her female subjects as being in tune with the land around them. She posed her best friend Janet nestled into the crook of

---

<sup>132</sup> Jennifer Till, "Seven Female Photographers of the Oklahoma and Indian Territories," (MA thesis, Oklahoma State University, 1997 29).

a regal old cottonwood tree, and she photographed herself as an industrious, curious, and capable woman who could knead bread, marvel at birds, and manage to harvest hundreds of pounds of vegetables in a single day alone. What we see through Cameron's eye is a world full of independent, hardy women who formed deep relationships with the land around them, and Cameron purposefully included herself as such a subject. Historically, Cameron took part in a centuries-old tradition of women who, when given the opportunity to depict themselves, did so as strong, intelligent, and active agents in their own lives.

Montana fostered Cameron's independent drive, feeding her voracious appetite for adventure, knowledge, and hard work. She in turn made it her home, loathing her time away from the wide plains and eerie badlands. Though Cameron was born a British woman, and very much held onto British recipes, friends, and habits, she also voluntarily came to Montana with her husband to carve out her own niche. She fought to return to Montana after she and Ewen spent a depressing year back in England and Scotland, and when Ewen died a long, painful death in southern California in 1915, Cameron returned to Montana alone. Cameron created her own family out of beloved friends and neighbors, and she relished the opportunities that the country afforded her for making money photographing people and for discovering new things, whether they be interesting caterpillars or horned toads she could sing to. Cameron's diary makes it clear that she invested heavily in the land, not just financially but also emotionally, enough so to spur her to get her American citizenship in 1918. Through all of this, Cameron makes it clear that she is a Montanan in her hardy nature, her love for the environment, and her conscious, purposeful decisions to further cement herself there. Evelyn Cameron found Montana to be the ideal environment for her own unique set of personality traits and physical abilities. She chose

Montana as the place to experience losses and joy, as the land to work hard, survive, and thrive. Not every woman at this time had as much choice or independence as Cameron, and she took advantage of that independence to the fullest extent. There is little doubt that though born as an English woman, Cameron died in 1928 as a Montanan, having given thirty-five years of her love and life to the land and its people.

Cameron left behind thirty-five years of diaries and thousands of photographs. Such an information treasure trove would allow anybody to explore hundreds of facets of her personality, her habits, and her life. This thesis has chosen to focus on three specific themes, but hardly scratches the surface of Cameron and the massive amount of evidence she left behind. She was a high caliber photographer, keenly observant of the land around her, and eager to learn new skills and see new things. When Cameron died in 1928 she was a well-known figure in the communities of Terry, Fallon, and Marsh Montana, but this thesis works to make it clear that Cameron also tells the stories of other women who made their homes in desolate places, women who loved the land, tilled the soil, had wind beaten faces and marveled at the beauty around them.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aadland, Dan. *Women and Warriors of the Plains: The Pioneer Photography of Julia E. Truell*. Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing Company, 2000.
- Armitage, Susan and Elizabeth Jameson, *The Women's West*, Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1987.
- Athearn, Robert. *Westward the Briton*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1953.
- Bakken, Gordon Morris and Brenda Farrington, eds. *The Gendered West: Interactions, Intersections, and Injunctions*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 2003
- Blodgett, Harriett, ed. *Centuries of Female Days: Englishwomen's Private Diaries*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988.
- Bowes, John. *Land Too Good for Indians: Northern Indian Removal*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016.
- Bunkers, Suzanne and Cynthia Huff, eds. *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996.
- Cameron, Evelyn. *Evelyn Cameron Diaries 1893-1928*. Montana Memory Project, Montana Historical Society.
- Carter, Sarah. *Montana Women Homesteaders: A Field of One's Own*. Helena: Farcounty Press, 2009.
- Cleves, Rachel Hope. *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Coburn, Walt. *Pioneer Cattleman in Montana: The Story of the Circle C Ranch*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968.
- Cook, Matt. *London and the Culture of Homosexuality, 1885-1914*, London: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Culley, Margo. "I Look at Me': Self as Subject in the Diaries of American Women," *Women's Studies Quarterly*, Autumn 1989, 17, no. 3, pp. 15-22.
- Davitt, Kimberly J. "Female visions and verse: Turn-of-the-century women artists and writers in the Montana landscape," MA Thesis, the University of Montana, 1993.
- Di Bello, Patrizia. *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England: Ladies, Mothers and Flirts*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Emerling, Jae. *Photography: History and Theory*. New York: Routledge Publishing, 2012.

- Fischer, Christiane. *Let Them Speak for Themselves: Women in the American West 1849-1900*. Hamden: Archon Book, 1977.
- Gordon, Linda. *Dorothea Lange: A Life Beyond Limits*. London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.
- Gover, Jane. *The Positive Image: Women Photographers in Turn of the Century America*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988.
- Greenfield, Mary. "From westward space to western place: The end of illusion and birth of acceptance in the American West," MA Thesis, the University of Montana, 2002.
- Guelke, Jeanne Kay, and Karen Morin. "Gender, Nature, Empire: Women Naturalists in Nineteenth-Century British Travel," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26, no. 3 (2001), pp. 306-326
- Hamilton, Trevor. *Immortal Longings: FWH Meyers and the Victorian Search for Life After Death*, Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2009.
- Hampsted, Elizabeth. *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Diaries of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982.
- Hausladen, Gary, ed. *Western Places, American Myths*. Reno: University of Nevada, 2003.
- Hedgecoe, John. *The Photographer's Handbook*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Publishing, 1977.
- Hogan, Rebecca. "Engendered autobiographies: The diary as a feminine form," *Prose Studies*, 14, no. 2 (1991) 95-107.
- Jameson, Elizabeth and Sheila McManus, eds. *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American West*. Calgary: University of Alberta Press, 2008.
- Jensen, Joan and Darlis Miller. "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (1980), 173-213.
- Lucey, Donna. *Photographing Montana 1894 to 1928: The Life and Work of Evelyn Cameron*. Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1990.
- Malone, Michael and Richard Roeder. *Montana: A History of Two Centuries*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1976.
- Morin, Karen. "Peak Practices: Englishwomen's 'Heroic' Adventures in the Nineteenth-Century American West," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 89, no. 3 (1999), pp. 489-514.
- Morrow, Delores. "Female Photographers on the Frontier: Montana's Lady Photographic Artists,

- 1866-1900,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, 32, no. 3 (Summer 1982), pp. 76-84.
- Office of Public Instruction Montana, Indian Education. “Northern Cheyenne Reservation Timeline, Northern Cheyenne Tribe.” March 2010.  
<http://opi.mt.gov/pdf/IndianEd/IEFA/NorthernCheyenneTimeline.pdf>
- Office of Public Instruction Montana. “Tribal Territories in Montana Map,” April 2009.  
[http://www.montanatribes.org/learning\\_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg](http://www.montanatribes.org/learning_activities/images/09TrTerrMap1100.jpg)
- Patterson-Black, Sheryll. “Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, 1, no. 2, (Spring 1976), pp. 67-88.
- Riley, Glenda. *Women and Nature: Saving the “Wild” West*. Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 1999.
- Riley, Glenda. “Victorian Ladies Outdoors: Women in the Early Western Conservation Movement, 1870-1920,” *Southern California Quarterly*, 83, no. 1 (Spring 2001), pp. 59-80.
- Rosenblum, Naomi. *A History of Women Photographers*. New York: Abbeville Press, 2010.
- Sandweiss, Martha. *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.
- Schackel, Sandra, ed. *Western Women’s Lives: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003.
- Scharff, Virginia. *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement, and the West*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- Sleeper-Smith, Susan, ed. *Why You Can’t Teach United States History without American Indians*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Smith, Sherry. *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880-1940*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Spring, Marlene and Haskell Springer, eds. *Plains Woman: The Diary of Martha Farnsworth 1882-1922*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Steinitz, Rebecca. *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth Century British Diary*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Till, Jennifer. “Seven female photographers of the Oklahoma and Indian Territories, 1889-1907,” MA Thesis, the Oklahoma State University, 1992.

Turner, Frederick Jackson. "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *American Historical Association*, 1894. 197-227.

Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

Wink, Amy. *She Left Nothing in Particular: The Autobiographical Legacy of Nineteenth Century Women's Diaries*. The University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 2001.