

# Leo Kim Photograph Collection Donated to NDSU Archives



February 4, 2020



The NDSU Archives has recently acquired nearly 22 linear feet of photographs, negatives, slides, and records produced by distinguished photographer and former NDSU student, Leo Kim (pictured left). The collection reflects Kim's ability to discover light, texture, shape, and form while capturing his subject. Kim was intrigued by sights most people would overlook. His artistic eye was described as "an evidently very perceptive and selective instrument" by Jerome Lamb, publisher of Fargo periodical, *The Small Voice*. From beautiful landscapes to unique commercial work, the Archives is thrilled to add this powerful collection to their regional treasures.

Leo Kim was born in Shanghai, China in 1946 to Korean immigrants. His father died before his birth, leaving his mother with four young children.

After being forced out of China, missionaries helped the family move to Macao; at times they also lived in Hong Kong. In 1966, Kim's mother was killed in a plane crash on Mount Fuji in Japan. Kim then moved to Austria and studied art history at the University of Vienna. In 1969, he moved to the United States to continue his education. He was drawn to North Dakota because of low tuition rates and living expenses, and was intrigued by the smaller population and wide-open spaces.

Kim became an architecture student at North Dakota State University, where he took photos for *The Spectrum* and co-edited the 1971-72 *Bison Annual*. He began his photojournalism career working for *The Forum*. For a short time, he volunteered as editor of the *Standing Rock Star* on the Fort Yates Reservation, then returned to Fargo where he worked as a contract photographer.

In 1985, Kim moved to Minneapolis and continued his work while maintaining his connections with North Dakota. In 1999, he traveled around the state capturing its serene landscapes. The images were compiled into a book, *North Dakota: Prairie Landscape*, which he dedicated to the people of North Dakota. He stated, "The open prairies, rolling hills, and gigantic skies celebrate liberating isolation but reflect the strong and fierce nature of the land." Kim followed with another book, *Saint Paul Serenity*, capturing the Minnesota's capital city while devoid of people. Kim generously shared his artistic gifts by mentoring aspiring photographers. His works were exhibited in galleries across North Dakota and Minnesota, and traveled around Germany. They can be found in many private collections and publications. Kim died on August 18, 2019, at the age of 73.

The donation of Leo Kim's celebrated work greatly enhances the NDSU Archives' strong photojournalism collections. Collections include the work of Cal Olson and Chet Gebert, who helped *The Forum* win the Pulitzer Prize for its coverage of the 1957 Fargo Tornado. The Archives also holds the work of Mike Lien, a skilled photographer whose career started at *The Forum*, then led him to the *New York Times* Washington Bureau during the early 1970s.

The mission of the NDSU Archives is to preserve the history of North Dakota and the Red River Valley. Leo Kim's work will continue to inspire others as the Archives preserves the collection and makes it accessible to the public. For more information about the NDSU Archives or to donate materials to its collections, visit [library.ndsu.edu/archives](http://library.ndsu.edu/archives).

Top image: *Thunderclouds, Bottineau, August 1999*

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Leo Kim  
Virtual  
Program  
and Online  
Exhibit

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