

Chuck Stewart: The Man Behind the Lens

Before Chuck Stewart became one of America's most celebrated photographers, he was a young boy with a camera, a deep curiosity, and an unwavering determination to document the world around him. Over the course of more than seven decades, that curiosity evolved into an extraordinary career that helped shape the visual history of American music.

The objects displayed in this gallery belonged to Chuck Stewart (1927–2017) and represent the everyday tools that supported his photographic practice long before the digital era. Exposure calculators, crop guides, color-compensating filters, precision measuring tools, reference manuals, studio stationery, and handwritten notebooks were essential instruments in producing photographs of exceptional technical quality and lasting artistic significance.

Among the artifacts on display are vintage China markers used to identify negatives and contact sheets, a 1950s Ansco Exposure Calculator, Kodak's *Master Photo Guide* (1953), Kodak color-compensating gelatin filters, a 1971 Perrygraf Cropper, a Sterling circular protractor, Union Precision Tools, Chuck Stewart Photography stationery, a New York Telephone Company Blue Book filled with musicians' contact information in Stewart's own handwriting, and a 1950s Rolleiflex camera representative of the equipment he used throughout his career.

One object, however, marks the beginning of everything.

At the age of thirteen, Chuck Stewart received a Brownie box camera as a birthday gift from his mother. Within days, he photographed internationally acclaimed opera singer Marian Anderson during her 1940 visit to Dunbar Middle School in Tucson, Arizona. He had prints made and sold them to students and faculty, marking his first professional photography sale. That experience ignited a lifelong passion for photography and confirmed what he already sensed—that photography would become his life's work.

Also featured is a reproduction of Stewart's first photograph alongside an enlarged reproduction of the 1952 *Our World* magazine article, "Negroes and the Atom Bomb." As the only Black still photographer assigned to document the atomic bomb tests at Yucca, Nevada, Stewart played a remarkable role in recording an important chapter of American history. Accompanying the article is a personal letter he wrote during that military assignment to two young women, one of whom would later become his wife, offering a rare glimpse into the life of a young photographer at the beginning of an extraordinary career.

Together, these artifacts reveal far more than the tools of a profession. They illuminate the discipline, craftsmanship, curiosity, and quiet determination that defined Chuck Stewart's life and work. Before his photographs became part of our cultural memory, they began here—with a camera, a willingness to learn, and a lifelong commitment to seeing people with honesty, dignity, and respect.

As you continue through *Framing the Sound*, these objects offer a deeper appreciation of the photographer behind the photographs and the remarkable journey that transformed everyday moments into enduring works of cultural history.