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Economies of Valuation and Desire:  
How New Deal Photography Made the Amish Modern

By

Elizabeth Louise Bennett

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requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History of Art

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Margaretta M. Lovell, Chair

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## Abstract

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How New Deal Photography Made the Amish Modern

by

Elizabeth Louise Bennett

Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art

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“Economies of Valuation and Desire: How New Deal Photography Made the Amish Modern” connects two substantial bodies of scholarship: the visual culture of the New Deal, and twentieth-century visual and literary representations of religious sub-cultures in the United States. Its primary objectives are two-fold. First, it provides an alternative model for the Great Depression as a historical narrative and popular concept in the American imagination. The images at the center of my dissertation propose a counter-narrative to those typically offered, which describe great waves of migration across the landscape – narratives of Okies, and other de-territorialized American identities moving through shifting topographies of loss and renewal. In contrast, the earliest group of photographs to depict consenting Amish subjects in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania make visible an American community’s firm rootedness to a particular place, and moreover, the cost of that endurance to other citizens. Second, the project contributes to the field of Anabaptist Studies a critical assessment of twentieth-century photographs of the photography-averse Amish, a subject that has yet to receive consideration in any field. Since they arose as a distinct group within the Amish Church in 1865, the Old Order have exercised serious proscriptions against photography as both act and object. Yet images of Amish individuals have proliferated in American visual culture since the early twentieth century and contribute to our collective idea of the community as insular, old-fashioned, and curiously benign. A particular set of New Deal photographs act as a pivot point in a history of picturing the Old Order – they are paradoxical images because they present the Anabaptist community as nearly extinct on the periphery of the modern world, yet also a viable threat to central tenets of multiple modernisms. Furthermore, it is precisely the Old Order’s particular objections to photography that constitute some of the most serious challenges to established ideas of Modernism.

“Economies of Valuation and Desire” considers photographs by Irving Rusinow taken for the American Farm Community Study, a sociological research endeavor directed by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics from 1938 to 1942. As the Bureau’s Head Field Photographer, the little-known Rusinow replaced Dorothea Lange, who left in 1940 to pursue work on a Guggenheim Fellowship. The Study was comprised of six rural communities, including the Lancaster Amish, that the Bureau’s team of sociologists selected as representative of the nation’s rural inhabitants. In 1941, Rusinow produced about 1,000 photographs of these communities; however, only 76 of them were published with the Study’s technical reports between 1942 and 1945. The project investigates a small portion of the photographer’s (published and unpublished) images within the context of the Study’s ultimate objective: to structure the six communities into a legible “continuum of stability and instability” and in the process, uncover cultural, environmental, and agricultural variables that led to a community’s economic success



or failure. The Community Study was in the service of the Bureau's primary program, Federal-County Land-Use Planning; the second half of the chapter considers the possibilities of Rusinow's photographs for this larger program. Land-Use Planning facilitated direct dialogue between all agricultural stakeholders in order to propose and enact policy change. Bureau-organized municipal meetings brought together farmers, university agriculture extension agents, social scientists, Washington bureaucrats, and farm union representatives who collaborated to literally redraw maps of local topographies as the first step towards higher agricultural profits and more economically resilient communities. Land-Use Planning was tasked with inculcating big business methods into agriculture, but doing so with a grassroots democratic approach that required "inside" information about each of the communities in question. To this end, Rusinow's camera was the program's fundamental research tool, freely oscillating between ethnographic and anthropological looking at (O)ther Americans. His photographs substantially reframe established narratives about the New Deal; they muddy (or unexpectedly illuminate) Roy Stryker's assertion that the most famous government photography project, enabled by the Farm Security Administration, was going to "introduce America to Americans." I argue that Land-Use Planning photography was deployed as a mode of surveillance in the countryside, a tool for social gardening with which the vulnerabilities of peripheral populations could be identified, ordered, and "corrected."

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## Introduction

### The Amish Bernie Madoff

This postcard from a gentler and simpler America is about as unlikely a place imaginable for the news that broke in September: one of Sugarcreek's own, a prominent member of what some people here call the Plain Community, was under arrest, accused by federal prosecutors of running a Ponzi scheme that betrayed his neighbors' trust and wiped out more than \$16 million of their savings.<sup>1</sup>

They are calling him the Amish Bernie Madoff. His real name is Monroe Beachy; he is a seventy-one-year-old Beachy Amish man; he lives in Sugarcreek, Ohio; and he stands accused of directing a Ponzi scheme that targeted his Amish and Mennonite neighbors in Tuscarawas County, the southern border of the largest Amish population in the United States. As readers, we are also struck by the "unlikeliness" of the place for such a news story to break. Sugarcreek, a village "as sweet as its name," is home to just over 2,000 residents: "The Little Switzerland of Ohio" because of its robust Anabaptist presence.<sup>2</sup> Ponzi schemes seem too cynical, complicated, and specific to occur in "this postcard from a gentler and simpler America."<sup>3</sup> We are shocked and upset when what we perceive as the worst parts of our modern society infiltrate these pockets of pastness in the countryside. Since the early twentieth century, the Amish in northeastern Ohio and Lancaster County, Pennsylvania have embodied this Other America. We call each of these places "Amish Country," a term that both defines its geographic boundaries and designates it as separate from every place else – the United States but suspended in an earlier time.

But the Amish Bernie Madoff is not an historical enigma; and the Amish are neither strangers to the complexities of capitalism nor unskilled in the art of entrepreneurial exploits. They are shrewd businessmen and enterprising farmers whose territory has rapidly expanded since the early twentieth century, and whose numbers, in the past four years, have continued to increase annually by 5%. In 2010, the Amish had established communities in twenty-eight states as far west as Montana, South Dakota, and Colorado. Their total North American population is now nearly 250,000 individuals; and if their growth continues at this rate, they will double that number by 2024.<sup>4</sup> The Amish have prospered during the so-called "Great Recession," what many economists call the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Many Americans continue to experience ongoing hardships precipitated from the late 2000s financial crisis that resulted in the collapse of large financial institutions, the bailout of banks by national governments and downturns in stock markets around the world. In many parts of the country, the housing market also suffered, resulting in numerous evictions, foreclosures and prolonged unemployment. In this context of American economic hardship, the speed of Amish population growth and the geographic reach of their communities are staggering. They are literally forging new western frontiers – pioneers of Amish Country. These growth trends are not the marks of a simple static people; but rather, they indicate a

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<sup>1</sup> Diana B. Henriques. "Broken Trust in God's Country." *The New York Times*. February 25, 2012. (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/26/business/in-amish-country-accusations-of-a-ponzi-scheme.html>). Accessed 25 February 2012. Henriques, a veteran financial reporter for the *New York Times*, also wrote "The Wizard of Lies: Bernie Madoff and the Death of Trust" (New York: Times Books/Henry Holt, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Martin. "Amish Population Growing, Heading West." *USA Today*. September 14, 2011. Source of statistics: Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies at Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, PA. ([http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-09-14-amish-population\\_N.html](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2010-09-14-amish-population_N.html)) Accessed 16 February 2012.

thriving population with economically robust communities. The pages that follow consider the circumstances around the first time that the Amish looked Modern to mainstream Americans.

### Chapter Sequence and Concerns

“Economies of Valuation and Desire: How New Deal Photography Made the Amish Modern” focuses on a period more than a half century ago and connects two substantial bodies of scholarship: the visual culture of the New Deal, and twentieth-century visual and literary representations of religious sub-cultures in the United States. Its primary objectives are two-fold. First, it provides an alternative model for the Great Depression as a historical narrative and popular concept. The images at the center of this project propose a counter-narrative to those typically offered, which describe great waves of migration across the landscape – narratives of Okies, and other de-territorialized Americans moving through shifting topographies of loss and renewal. In contrast, the earliest group of photographs to depict consenting Amish subjects in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania makes visible an American community’s firm rootedness to a particular place, and suggests the cost of that endurance to other citizens. Second, the project contributes to the field of Anabaptist Studies a critical assessment of twentieth-century photographs of the photography-averse Amish, a subject that has yet to receive consideration in any field. Since they arose as a distinct group within the Amish Church in 1865, the Old Order have exercised serious proscriptions against photography as both act and object. Yet images of Amish individuals have proliferated in American visual culture since the early twentieth century and contribute to collective ideas of the community as insular, old-fashioned, and curiously benign. New Deal photographs act as a pivot point in a history of picturing the Old Order – they are paradoxical images because they present the Anabaptist community as nearly extinct on the periphery of the modern world, yet also a viable threat to central tenets of multiple modernisms.

In May 2009, I serendipitously came upon the archives of Irving Rusinow, who, like hundreds of other photographers employed by the government in the 1930s and 40s, have gone missing in the historical record. I tracked down the photographer’s stepson Jeff Rusinow after he posted one of Irving’s earliest short films that had been produced for the government in the 1950s. Jeff led me to Susan (Rusinow) Braverman who graciously invited me to her Bethesda, Maryland home where she lives with her husband Mark and son Jacob. Before dinner one May evening, she led me to a closet in her home that was stacked floor to ceiling with boxes of her father’s photographs, films, and writings. It was the Holy Grail of graduate school. Since then I have been working with the Bravermans, Jeff Rusinow, Terry Rusinow (Irving’s second daughter), and Kim Rusinow (the photographer’s second wife) to sort, organize, and record all of the photographer’s materials in preparation for proper archival storage at an institution in the Washington D.C. area. In many ways then, this project is a recovery mission both of a little known New Deal photographer and of his pictures of a misunderstood American community.

Chapter One, “Lange’s Replacement,” utilizes the materials found in the Rusinow archive in Bethesda and constitutes the first recounting of the photographer’s earliest work as a government employee. It is largely biographical in scope, beginning with studio work as a portrait photographer in New Jersey, then considering his first assignments in the American Southwest for the Soil Conservation Service, and ending with the photographs he took in Virginia for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics before he replaced Dorothea Lange as Head Field Photographer and executed his most well-known series for the Bureau’s Community Stability-Instability Study. In charting a very short period in his early private and public sector career (roughly 1935-40), the chapter has two primary objectives. First, it seeks to explain how a little known twenty-six-year-old

photographer from New Jersey earned the opportunity to fill the professional shoes of Dorothea Lange, one of America's most famous photographers already in 1935. Second, I offer a model of how New Deal photographers "were made." The 1930s and 40s in the United States constitutes a watershed in a history of photography because the government employed so many photographers and tasked them with only documenting: people, programs, life on the rural and urban peripheries of mainstream America. Irving Rusinow is only one photographer, however, his work and professional movement between New Deal departments illuminates how the administration viewed the camera as a tool for research and as an instrument of public policy.

After situating Rusinow within a larger context of New Deal philosophies, goals, and methods for photography in Chapter One, the remaining chapters zoom in on his work for the Community Stability-Instability Study. By refocusing our lens ever more precisely on his photographs to eventually linger on his images of the Amish, I demonstrate how unexpectedly complicated these Amish pictures are in the context of the New Deal project. Scholars have spent time articulating why and how twentieth-century representations of the Amish work to domesticate the sect in order to meet changing ideological needs of mainstream publics.<sup>5</sup> There has been little scholarship, however, that ascribes representations of the Amish, and other American sub-cultures, with value beyond the ideological. Rusinow's photographs are the earliest to describe the community as a viable template for rural American economies. But we shall see that both the conditions for Rusinow's presence in the community (e.g. Amish women were unavailable as subjects for his camera) and the specific questions driving the Community Study itself required that the photographer reconcile, what I call, problems of visibility.

We engage the first of these problems in Chapter Two, "Last West." In this chapter, our driving questions include, what does community look like? And how does a photograph signal stability? The problem of visibility here hinges upon how these terms – community and stability – were deployed and executed by the New Deal Department of Agriculture. I argue that the USDA was in the business of both building communities according to utopian visions with a nineteenth-century pedigree, as well as studying existing stable communities in order to learn the conditions for their survival in an economic depression. Following from the first chapter in which we were introduced to Rusinow as Dorothea Lange's replacement, our two primary sets of objects in Chapter Two are photographs by Lange of Jersey Homesteads, one of these experimental communities built by the USDA's Subsistence Homestead's Division, and Rusinow's photographs for the Community Study, one of the most notable sociological studies about community undertaken during the New Deal. I argue that there were vast discrepancies between the information yielded from studies of existing communities and the information applied in the building of new ones; in short, while community studies looked backwards in the hope of identifying a better way of life, community building projects looked forward to a utopian future when agrarianism and industrialism might comfortably coexist. Despite such discrepancies, however, Chapter Two offers an alternative to the dominant narrative of the Great Depression: instead of a period of migration, the Great Depression, in both history and myth, was also a story of tremendous stasis, of a desire to remain, retain, and reimagine one's own place.

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<sup>5</sup> Some recent books that have considered how the Amish have appeared in American popular culture include, David Weaver-Zercher. *The Amish in the American Imagination*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press University, 1993); and Donald Kraybill, David Weaver-Zercher, and Steven Nolt. *Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

The Bureau's Community Study concluded that the Lancaster Old Order Amish represented the "most stable" rural American community; correspondingly, Rusinow's pictures root the Amish to a specific place by describing the richness and permanence of their hand-built environment as well as the community's full participation in Lancaster's economy. Chapters Three and Four, "Economies of Valuation" and "Economies of Desire" respectively, constitute a two-part examination of Rusinow's Amish pictures. As I demonstrate in Chapter Two, these images are unprecedented partly because they ascribe widely applicable economic value to representations of the Amish as opposed to earlier images that largely functioned only ideologically. Both of these chapters consider the specificities of value – agricultural, political, and economic – that his photographs ascribe to local Amish economies and the requisite cost of the community's stability to other Americans.

Chapter Three engages Rusinow's images of Amish farmsteads, or economies of valuation: male economic spheres in which the value of things (land, farm structures, work animals, social standing within the community) is constituted by competition between Amish and *english* (the Amish term for non-Amish) as both consumer and laborer. Particularly in regards to farmsteads, the Bureau wanted to better understand the process by which the Amish were buying up abandoned *english* (mostly Scotch-Irish) farms and rehabilitating them to expand their own operations. Rusinow's photographs demonstrate this process of Amish expansion by way of comparison between new, sturdy Amish structures and dilapidating *english* buildings abandoned by victims of the Depression. The relationship between image and text is central to the discussion, and I consider both the captions that accompanied Rusinow's images (not written by the photographer but rather, an anthropologist involved in the Study), and a contemporaneous diary of a Bureau employee who worked in the Amish community for a week as a farmhand. By closely reading text with image I demonstrate how tightly bound are issues of value with issues of proximity – geographic, temporal, material, personal, prosaic. With their captions, Rusinow's images of farmsteads situate the origins of valuation not on the face of the thing in need of estimation – the barn or the house – rather, it reveals value as being interstitially located in the gaps between things.

The project's fourth and final chapter explores "economies of desire," public and private spaces of female production, sale, display, and acquisition. This chapter focuses on Rusinow's photographs of the selling floor of the city of Lancaster's Southern Market and the unpeopled domestic interiors of Mennonite homes in the County. At the time of production in 1941, Rusinow only had the Amish leadership's permission to photograph men in the Lancaster community; therefore, these photographs of female spaces point to the presence of women metonymically via objects. Like his images of male economic realms in the Amish community, these images "work" through multiple visual displacements of bodies and information. I argue that Rusinow's photographs of the public market and the private home visually enact the social processes by which peripheral identity has been historically constituted. Just as Amish women are only present in Rusinow's images by way of their relationship to objects and bodies visible in the photograph, so too have historically peripheral identities been contingent upon their relative positions to a pervasive dominant.

Until 1976, when the Amish won the right to legally educate their children in accordance with their religious beliefs, government officials routinely arrived at Amish schools to forcibly transport students to public institutions. Photographs of these occurrences are unexpectedly disorienting because they are so viscerally affecting. For example, the cover of a Des Moines, Iowa newspaper in 1967 shows the backs of three Amish boys running for a cornfield behind their school to evade capture. These kinds of photographs transform the little red schoolhouse into a site of violence and rupture in the later twentieth century, and are eerily premonitory of the photographs surrounding

the 2006 Amish schoolhouse shooting in Nickel Mines (Lancaster County), PA. The project's Postscript ruminates on a small portion of the Associated Press images to appear in the days following the October 2006 event. It does not attempt to offer a political assessment of the shooting as it occurred; rather, it treats Nickel Mines as a culminating visual episode of the Amish in American photographs, a terminus where these pictures and those classified under the genre of American school shootings collide, and another recent instance of the Amish Modern revision. Just as Rusinow's images of the Amish revealed the Anabaptist community as serious economic players in a modern economy, so did Nickel Mines imagery reveal the one-room schoolhouse as a post-September 11 space, contested terrain upon which the twenty-first-century citizen continues to reconcile individual autonomy and safety with centralized authority and standardized bodies of knowledge.

## Chapter 1

### Lange's Replacement

Irving Rusinow (1914-90) was twenty-six when he replaced Dorothea Lange (1895-1965) as Head Field Photographer for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics in 1940. Lange, a veteran documentary photographer best known for her pictures of migrant workers in California and Arizona, left the Bureau at the age of forty-six to begin a project on American religious communities with the assistance of a Guggenheim Fellowship. This chapter has two objectives: first, it is a recovery mission of the early career of a virtually unknown New Deal photographer, who was charged with filling the shoes of the most well-known New Deal photographer; second, the following pages argue that Rusinow's career as a government photographer demonstrate the extent to which the New Deal Department of Agriculture deployed the camera as a fundamental research tool in sociological studies with the underlying intent of making visible ideas of "community".

#### Biography

Irving Rusinow's early career as a government photographer is obscured by names like Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, and other photographers working for Roy Stryker and the Farm Security Administration. These photographers produced the most published and iconic images from the era, shaping a collective narrative about the Great Depression and New Deal. On the other hand, Rusinow's later work as a director and producer of educational films is far better known in academic circles.<sup>1</sup> By every autobiographical account, Rusinow considered himself a filmmaker; still pictures were only a means to an end. In an essay "Portrait of America: Something to Get Off of My Chest" from 1935 Rusinow declared:

It happens that I am taking pictures. Understand, I am not a photographer the way other people are doctors or lawyers, or musicians. I take pictures of people, at the present moment, because doing so helps me pay my board, my room rent. But I am no more a photographer than I am a writer. [...] You would probably be surprised in no small measure to learn what I really am. [...] Let your laughter follow surprise: I am a motion picture director.

In 1949, the filmmaker received his first commission from the Department of Agriculture for a "Step-Saving Kitchen," a short film that demonstrated a "U-shaped kitchen developed by the housing staff of the Bureau of Human Nutrition and Home Economics...Advocates and demonstrates modern farm kitchens."<sup>2</sup> The Department of Agriculture, National Education Association, Department of Transportation, and Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs contracted work from Rusinow frequently before he established his own production companies, Irving Rusinow Film Productions in 1959, and Reading Unlimited (with his second wife, Kim) in 1974.<sup>3</sup> Most of the films that Rusinow produced himself were in the service of progressive education reform about which he and Kim, a reading teacher, felt strongly. By the time of his death in 1990, Rusinow had directed or produced over 100 educational or documentary films. Led by the efforts of Geoff Alexander, Director of the North American Academic Film Archive, scholars are now

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<sup>1</sup> Rusinow is a well-known pioneer in the mid-twentieth-century production of academic films; his work is thoroughly catalogued in the North American Academic Film Archive.

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of Agriculture Motion Pictures Service. *Step-Saving Kitchen*. Directed by Irving Rusinow, 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Susan (Rusinow) Braverman, June 22, 2009.



beginning to seriously consider Rusinow's motion picture work, particularly as representative of the post-New Deal government's transition from still to moving pictures as the preferred instructional format after World War II.<sup>4</sup>

In contrast, Rusinow's New Deal photography career was short, beginning in 1937 with the Soil Conservation Service and ending in 1943 with the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Before his career with the government, he took "commercial and illustrative" photographs, and did dark room work at the Commercial Photographic Corporation in Newark, New Jersey where he spent his teenage years pursuing a "scientific course" at Southside High School.<sup>5</sup> He majored in Architecture at the University of Chicago in 1932, but did not return for his sophomore year, choosing instead to travel through Italy taking pictures.<sup>6</sup> Rusinow first applied for government employment in 1936.<sup>7</sup> He took pictures for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) and Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE) (both of the Department of Agriculture) in 1937, 1939, and 1941. In the intervening years, he worked as a free-lance photographer and at several photography studios in Summit, New Jersey where he moved in 1936. From 1942-43, he was a photographer for the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs (CIAA) of the Department of Commerce, a position that took him to Latin America.<sup>8</sup> In 1943, still at the CIAA, he turned from still photography to motion picture production, and did not take photographs in a professional capacity again.

### Archival Collections

Rusinow's photographs are held in two locations in the United States: the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and the Bethesda, Maryland home of Susan (Rusinow) Braverman, the photographer's eldest daughter. Additionally, five of Rusinow's images are in the Photographic Archives of the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe, and one photograph is in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Rusinow's pictures at the National Archives (in the form of 4x5 black and white negatives, 5x7, and 8x10 reference prints), are part of the official records of the agencies for which he worked. A small number of these photographs (about fifty) exist in the records of the Soil Conservation Service, where Rusinow was employed for short periods in 1937 and 1939. Similarly, over 1,000 of his images are in the collection of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics (BAE), where he worked in 1940-41. These pictures comprise a very small part of the 26,000 items in the BAE collection, which spans the years 1896 to 1947; included in the general holdings are photographic prints, glass plate and celluloid negatives, lantern slides, and film strips.<sup>9</sup>

In the Rusinow Archive in Bethesda, Maryland, the photographer's own hand appears often in pencil; he was a meticulous archivist of his own work. Most of the still photographs are copies of the original 5"x7" and 8"x10" reference prints made by an unknown government employee charged

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<sup>4</sup> Phone interview with Geoff Alexander, June 10, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> Irving Rusinow, Application for Federal Employment, October 10, 1946, and Application for Employment, January 10, 1941. Federal personnel file for Irving Rusinow, National Archives Personnel Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>6</sup> "Irving Rusinow, 75, Dies; Made Films, Documentaries." *The Washington Post*. August 11, 1990. B6. Phone interview with Kim Rusinow (Rusinow's second wife) on July 15, 2009. Susan (Rusinow) Braverman's archive of her father's work contains about fifty photographs from this Italy trip.

<sup>7</sup> Irving Rusinow, Application for Federal Employment, October 10, 1946, and Application for Employment, January 10, 1941; Federal personnel file for Irving Rusinow, National Archives Personnel Records Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>8</sup> Irving Rusinow, Application for Federal Employment, October 10, 1946. Federal personnel file for Irving Rusinow, National Archives Personnel Center, St. Louis, Missouri.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Burger. *Guide to the Holdings of the Still Picture Branch of the National Archives*. (Washington D.C.: National Archives Trust Fund Board, 1990), 59-60.

with developing photographers' negatives.<sup>10</sup> Rusinow seems to have left these pictures in an organized system for retrieval or selection – they are in neat stacks, clearly labeled with the name of the department for which they were taken, each of the stacks contains several images that have been turned the opposite direction as the others. In Rusinow's system, these images appear to be exceptional in some way, either as discards or particularly handsome prints. With his photographs in the Bethesda archive, there are two film reels from his work for the Department of Transportation.<sup>11</sup> His other film work resides with his second wife Kim (Camille) Rusinow in Alexandria, Virginia. The assortment of writing that appears in the Bethesda Archive is a scattered and peculiar assemblage of documents. Most of what appears written in Rusinow's hand is from his high school years, including pages of poems (rhyming and juvenile but sincere and thoughtful) marked up in red by the hand of other students, probably for a class assignment; essayistic rants that are leftist leaning, and other statements similar in tone and spirit to the essay in which he asserts himself as a film maker. His writings give us a picture of Rusinow as eager, driven, and ambitious.

Even as a young person, the photographer appears to have been professionally industrious, intent on his chosen career path as a filmmaker, and armed with an aesthetic eye. The Bethesda archive contains a letter from Richard Boleslavsky, in response to a letter from Rusinow regarding the director's 1934 film "Men in White" starring Clark Gable and Myrna Loy. On Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios letterhead, Boleslavsky thanks Rusinow for the "very nice things" he said about the film. The next three lines of the letter clarify some assertions that Rusinow made about some of its imagery that Boleslavsky seems to have felt were not entirely accurate:

The cross you mention is not a cross at all, but the shadow of the crossbars on the window pane.

The snow is used to show a lapse in time from summer to winter.

The diagonal "wipe outs" are used to speed up the tempo.<sup>12</sup>

It seems that Rusinow was both attuned to the use of symbolism in the content of Boleslavsky's work, and also eager to understand the post-production processes by which aspects such as a film's tempo could be manipulated by technology after the fact. We see here the nineteen-year-old Rusinow already thinking like a director – he sees like the man, not only behind the camera, but beholding the entire scene and orchestrating its narrative.

#### Soil Conservation Service, 1937 and 1939

By 1937, at the age of twenty-two, Rusinow had several years of studio work under his belt, and was making progress as a studio photographer in New Jersey. In the summer of that year, he left New Jersey and traveled to New Mexico for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), his first government assignment. Originally the Soil Erosion Service (SES) of the Department of the Interior, the SCS became part of the Department of Agriculture in 1935, charged with enacting a new national policy of soil protection. Many of its individual programs used photography as a means for documentation and of acquainting the public with the benefits of water and soil conservation. In the agency's early

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<sup>10</sup> There are no photographic negatives in the Rusinow Archive in Bethesda. It is possible that these are either in an unknown box in the Braverman's home or in the possession of another family member.

<sup>11</sup> His daughters, Susan and Terry, both speak fondly about their roles in his films. Often, they appeared in them as children, and in the case of Rusinow's filmic work for the Department of Transportation, Terry recalls acting as her father's "sound girl" on several scenes in the film about the U.S. Postal Service. (Phone interview with Terry Rusinow, June 10, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Richard Boleslavsky to Irving Rusinow, August 13, 1934. Susan (Rusinow) Braverman Archive, Bethesda, Maryland.

years, still pictures were used to dramatically portray the damage wrought by improper use of soil and water, and to persuade a general audience that conservation efforts were necessary.<sup>13</sup> Like his work for the Bureau of Agricultural Economics a few years later, Rusinow's pictures were intended for two audiences: congressman and other government officials for reasons of political and fiscal persuasion, and a general urban American public that required education about rural problems beyond their gaze and thus, awareness.

### *The Santa Cruz Valley Survey*

Rusinow's SCS pictures document New Mexico's native Hispanic peoples and were a small but important part of the New Deal's focus on the state in the 1930s. A severe agricultural crisis – the results of overgrazing, flooding, and erosion – had damaged hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland in the early part of the century and threatened the livelihood and the lives of native Hispanics, Native Americans, and Euro-American residents.<sup>14</sup> During the 1930s, New Deal officials launched comprehensive efforts to correct basic environmental problems in the region and therefore, improve the lives of native communities. A wide assortment of government agencies sent representatives to New Mexico throughout the decade, including those within the Department of Agriculture (SCS, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Resettlement Administration/Farm Security Administration, Agricultural Adjustment Administration, Forest Service), Works Progress Administration (Federal Arts Program), and National Park Service (Historic American Buildings Survey).<sup>15</sup> Collectively, these efforts became known as the Indian and Hispanic New Deal.<sup>16</sup> Government programs and funding were aimed specifically at those populations in the state because they suffered acutely the effects of regional farming problems. Specifically, programs targeted at native Hispanics sought to alleviate poverty; to modernize agricultural practices, education, and domestic life; to revive native arts and crafts; to document and preserve native Hispanic traditions; and to generally restore the cultural and economic integrity of native villages.<sup>17</sup> In all of these efforts, the fledgling field of Rural Sociology, armed with the field research methods of anthropology (itself a relatively new discipline), formed a framework for investigating Hispanic and Native American communities on the New Mexican landscape.

Rusinow's first assignment in New Mexico was directly linked to the New Deal's efforts in the state's Hispanic villages. Under the direction of Dr. Eshref Shevky, the photographer took pictures in the Santa Cruz Valley, an area of the upper Rio Grande River north of Santa Fe. By 1937, Shevky was well known in both the SCS and in academic circles. He was a self-trained ecologist, conversant in the literatures of anthropology, sociology, and economics, and held a Ph.D. in Experimental Medicine from Stanford University.<sup>18</sup> Before the SCS, Shevky had worked for the Soil Erosion Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs in New Mexico, where he conducted "human dependency surveys" on the Navajo reservation.<sup>19</sup> "Human dependency," in this case, referred to an all-inclusive

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<sup>13</sup> D. Harper Simms. *The Soil Conservation Services*. (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 169.

<sup>14</sup> Alvar W. Carlson. *The Spanish-American Homeland*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 193.

<sup>15</sup> Marta Weigle (ed.). *New Mexicans in Cameo and Camera: New Deal Documentation of Twentieth-Century Lives*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press), 1985, ix.

<sup>16</sup> Suzanne Forrest. *The Preservation of the Village*. New Mexico Land Grant Series, John R. Van Ness, (ed.). (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 33.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Lawrence C. Kelley. "Anthropology in the Soil Conservation Service" in Douglas Helm and Susan Flader (eds.) *The History of Soil and Water Conservation*. (Washington D.C.: The Agricultural History Society), 1985, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Shevky is best known for his later studies on the social structure of urban Los Angeles but he laid the philosophical foundations for his later career while studying Spanish-American communities in the

ecological system whereby “communities are composed of an integrated, interdependent balance of plants, soils, humans, and animals.”<sup>20</sup> In these studies, Shevky employed teams of individuals with varied academic backgrounds to interview reservation residents. Their aim was to learn about the functioning of the institutions of Navajo life, in hopes of ascertaining how best to relieve the specific problems on the reservation, and thus, formulate a plan for economic development that would sustain Navajo culture.<sup>21</sup>

When the SES became the SCS in 1935, Shevky continued his surveys and was able to expand them to include native Hispanic communities in the wider Southwest.<sup>22</sup> Shevky probably commissioned Rusinow’s Santa Cruz Valley pictures for such a survey but neither photographic nor textual evidence for this commission exists in the SCS record. However, we do know that the photographs were intended to illustrate a report on the Valley, compiled by a joint committee comprised of representatives of the Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior.<sup>23</sup> The Santa Cruz Valley had been experiencing severe economic disintegration; it had lost half of its land to overuse, and many of its 4,000 inhabitants were on some kind of government relief. The Interdepartmental Rio Grande Committee was created in January 1937 to “give permanent relief to the native rural population of the Upper Rio Grande watershed and correct the destructive misuse of the lands in the area.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the joint committee sought to uncover the basis of the problems in the Valley and to offer substantive, corrective solutions.<sup>25</sup>

The committee did not produce an illustrated report of their findings, however, portions of Rusinow’s Santa Cruz pictures exist in published form elsewhere. *Survey Graphic*, a monthly magazine concerned with social themes, included a photographic essay by Rusinow in its February 1938 issue. *Survey Graphic* was also the primary popular venue for Farm Security Administration photographs. Historian Cara Finnegan argues that in the 1930s, “[FSA] Historical Section photographs did not end up in the magazine naturally or because of an intrinsic interest in the topic.... the appearance of FSA photographs in *Survey Graphic* was the result of a carefully constructed and nurtured, mutually beneficial relationship between Roy Stryker...and Florence Loeb Kellogg, the art director at the journal.”<sup>26</sup> *Survey Graphic* was the first non-governmental journal to publish government photographs and Finnegan estimates that in the last years of the 1930s, editor Paul Kellogg dedicated a third of the journal’s articles to Roosevelt’s vision. Most of these articles included photographs by Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, and others.<sup>27</sup> From Rusinow’s work for the SCS in 1937, the magazine published nine pictures of the Santa Cruz Valley.

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1930s. The Eshref Shevky Papers are at the University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>20</sup> Susan Abbott. “Federal Perspective: Interpretations of Mexican American Communities.” *Prologue*. Vol. 32. No. 1. (Spring 2000), 41.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 34-45, and Donald L. Parman. *The Navajo and the New Deal*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 99-100.

<sup>22</sup> Kelley, “Anthropology in the Soil Conservation Service,” 38.

<sup>23</sup> Irving Rusinow. “Spanish Americans in New Mexico: A Photographic Record of the Santa Cruz Valley.” *Survey Graphic: A Magazine of Social Interpretation*. Vol. 27. (February 1938), 95.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to studies of soil erosion in the Santa Cruz Valley, the Interdepartmental Rio Grande Committee also worked to acquire better land for Spanish-Americans in the Tewa Basin (outside Santa Fe) and set up a system for flood control near Las Cruces.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Cara Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Cara Finnegan. “Social Welfare and Visual Politics: The Story of *Survey Graphic*.” *New Deal Network* website (<http://newdeal.feri.org/sg/essay.htm>). Accessed 5 January 2012.

In the Foreword to the Survey Graphic essay, “Spanish Americans in New Mexico: A Photographic Record of the Santa Cruz Valley,” Kellogg states:

The photographic record of the Santa Cruz Valley, made by Irving Rusinow of Newark, N. J., and reproduced in part on these pages, is an appealing section of the committee’s report to the federal departments. Though the report has not been released, an economic interpretation which looks beneath these idyllic scenes can be gleaned from papers by Eshref Shevky of the Soil Conservation Service in the southwest region.<sup>28</sup>

“Spanish Americans in New Mexico: A Photographic Record of the Santa Cruz Valley” demonstrates the variety of images Rusinow took during his brief time in the region in 1937. These pictures document everyday activities: men form and lay adobe bricks to dry in the sun; horses pull carts laden with alfalfa; children tend goat herds and haul water; a weathered old man leans against an old, weathered wall. Such images suggest how life was carried out in Santa Cruz, and how life takes its toll on the people there. Some of the clues the pictures provide about the community are overt, such as the presence of vernacular architecture, landscape, crops, and tools; some are more subtle, and speak to the existing social hierarchy, the division of labor and responsibilities, and the standard of living in the Valley. In contrast to Kellogg’s description of an “idyllic” Hispanic community, Rusinow’s photographs describe labor as a natural force that physically weighs down on the inhabitants of this inhospitable topography.<sup>29</sup> In both of these images – two men making adobe bricks, and a woman readying wheat berries for home milling – we are introduced to the Santa Cruz Valley community as they stoop and bend, pressed to the earth, not for profit but for their own survival. [1.1] [1.2]

Like all of the Santa Cruz pictures included in the Survey Graphic article, these two images are compositionally balanced. The photographer exhibits a penchant for symmetry within the frame. In both images, Rusinow displays a strong preference for the diagonal line, which he uses to draw the eye into the photograph from bottom left to middle right. In one picture he does this by angling his lens at the adobe bricks on the ground, which march across the page in a clear line; and in the other, he uses the pile of wheat, the bowl of wheat, the edge of the ground cloth, and the crouched woman to lead the viewer’s eye to the stone wall in the background. Rusinow had an eye for texture as well. In the adobe brick picture, the photographer describes the lining of dry clay soil with wet clay soil to be baked by the sun and dried into ordered forms. The contrasting darkness of the bricks against the lighter raw earth speaks to the wonders of recent government-funded irrigation projects in this region of the country that receives very little rainfall; and the contrasting texture of the unruly clumpy earth beneath a perfect grid of building bricks reminds the viewer of both the poverty of the region and the innovations of human history.

At this point in his early career, Rusinow was most experienced as a portrait photographer. These skills certainly helped him in the Santa Cruz assignment and the dexterity with which he adapted portraiture conventions to Shevky’s call for photographs of environmental systems is impressive. Two photographs, a picture of two children carrying water and an elderly man sitting against an adobe wall, are some of his most intimate encounters with the village residents and yet we do not lose sight of the figures’ place in the larger environment. [1.3] [1.4] Everything about the picture with the two children is worn, the ground is in as much disarray and disorder as the log-stacked

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<sup>28</sup> Rusinow, “Spanish Americans in New Mexico”, 95.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

structure for livestock. The children's clothes are dirty and wrinkled; their hair is messy. Even Rusinow's use of a slow shutter speed renders their movement blurry and unkept. We feel the weight of their pails and the necessity of their action; we sense the sun's burden on their little bodies.

Survey Graphic published the photograph of the man sitting against the wall with the caption "...the old sit contentedly in the sun."<sup>30</sup> Contentment does not quite work here as an adjective for the scene and I doubt Rusinow intended this reading. The man could easily disappear here into the wall, into the ground. The darker shade of his clothing is one of the only contrasting elements that distinguish him from his inanimate surroundings. His clothes and boots wear the very substances on which he sits and his face is just as worn and cracked as the dried adobe against which he leans. Rusinow gives us not so much a portrait of contentment as a holistic picture of a place, one that was built from native materials by people who continue to maintain and live upon the ground they share.

As we will also see later in other photographic assignments Rusinow completed for New Deal agencies, the photographer seemed to astutely understand his role as an illustrator of sociological studies. In many ways, his photographs for the Santa Cruz Survey visually express what Shevky strove to emphasize technically in his surveys. Shevky believed that "the phenomena of the earth – its geography, climate, etc. – could not be studied apart from its associated human activity, and that together they could not be adequately analyzed from the perspective of a single discipline."<sup>31</sup> Thus, his team of researchers for what he called Human Dependency Surveys came from a variety of academic backgrounds. Such a mix of perspectives allowed the study to truly address itself to the "content of the area" – its people, its soil, its flora and fauna – as a coherent whole, as inextricably linked and interdependent.<sup>32</sup> Rusinow's Santa Cruz photographs document, in microcosm, such a complex integration. They are black and white records of labor, economic, social, and agricultural situations, and issues. They are visualizations, as Shevky called them, of the patterns, activities, and processes operating within the Santa Cruz Valley.<sup>33</sup> Though no recorded communication between Rusinow and Shevky appears to survive, the photographs Rusinow took suggest a mutual orientation and understanding.

### *The Middle Rio Grande Survey*

Rusinow's second assignment for the SCS took place in 1939, again for a survey conducted by Shevky. In September and October of that year, he returned to the government payroll to do a series of images of the Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, where a \$10,000,000 irrigation and flood control project was underway.<sup>34</sup> But Rusinow did not document dams, flood damage, or canals as one might expect, given the hefty financial investment in new infrastructure for the region; rather, he took pictures of the Hispanic peoples who lived in villages along the Rio Grande. In the SCS Archive in College Park, there are thirty-seven photographs by Rusinow for the Middle Rio Grande Survey, which exhibit both similarities and departures from his earlier work in the Santa Cruz Valley.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>31</sup> Eshref Shevky. "A Note on Photography in the Regional Survey," Foreword to Irving Rusinow "Six New Mexico Photographs." *The New Mexico Quarterly* 10 (February 1940), insert between pages 16 and 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Workers of the Writer's Program of the Work Project's Administration in the State of New Mexico. *New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State*. (New York: Hastings House, 1940), 4.

In the Middle Rio Grande series, we see again the landscape, people, and types of labor that characterize this particular region of the Southwest. Like images from the Santa Cruz series, we see men crafting new, wet adobe bricks, while impossibly dry earth attests to the architecture, climate, and age of the region. Similarly, the Middle Rio Grande pictures also describe both agricultural and environmental problems in the region and their effects on conditions of life. The second series of pictures, however, reveal both more of the nuances in the region's culture, and of Rusinow's photographic and artistic sensibilities. These substantive and aesthetic developments are most visibly apparent in the Survey's pictures of the built environment.

For Rusinow in the Middle Rio Grande Survey, architecture became key to capturing photographically a sense of place. Exactly one third of his photographic series depict buildings, and most of these images are stark, almost severe in their presentation: neat in composition, precise in overall balance, and unequivocal in message – these structures are rooted to this landscape, they are engendered by their natural surroundings. In “House, Lemitar, Socorro County, N.M.,” an adobe home seems both an appendage to, and dwarfed by, a craggy mountain in the background; its windmill, outdoor adobe oven, and laundry being whipped by the wind attest to the dependence on, and dominance of, the environment in the Middle Rio Grande. Similarly in “View, San Juan, Arribo County,” a small school, photographed from a distance that makes it appear even smaller, seems a tiny, human island in an ocean of high plateaus and low sky.

Some of the most telling of the Middle Rio Grande architecture pictures reveal other forces that shaped life in the region. In “Store, Lemitar, Socorro County, NM,” Pedro A. Vigil's general store – with a metal roof and a gas pump – speaks to the inevitable influences of modern life, of technologies, resources, and economies that originated outside the region. In a style that would mark Rusinow's later work, the photographer describes the building with a fully-frontal view, symmetrical in composition, and sturdy in structure. This mode of photographing architecture was made famous by FSA photographer Walker Evans as early as 1936 in his photographs of the American South that later formed the basis for Let Us Now Praise Famous Men with James Agee in 1941. Like Evans' fully frontal and stoic buildings, Rusinow's architectural subjects are infused with legitimacy and endurance in a seemingly doomed landscape. Similarly, another architectural portrait of a weather- and time-beaten church, guarded by its cemetery's tombstone statuary, attests to old influences and tradition in this place – the culture here is worn but it survives and is protected by forces unseen by the eyes of outsiders.

Rusinow's accomplishments in the Middle Rio Grande project were noted in 1940 by *The New Mexico Quarterly Review*. In the magazine's February issue, the Review published a photo-essay by Rusinow with six of the Survey pictures.<sup>35</sup> The pictures are accompanied by a Foreword written by Shevky, which explains and underscores the importance of photography to government studies. Shevky maintained that now photography, like sociology, anthropology, climatology, and hydrology, was a central component of the integrated disciplines that informed his surveys.<sup>36</sup> As a technique of analysis and evaluation, the photographs were documents in and of themselves, and contributed to the survey's “orderly and vivid” presentation of data.<sup>37</sup> It is perhaps this perception – that photographs are descriptive documents in and of themselves – that explains Rusinow's sparse captioning of his images. At a time when SCS photographers were usually instructed to provide

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<sup>35</sup> Shevky, “A Note on Photography in the Regional Survey,” 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

detailed information for their images, and when concern that “otherwise excellent pictures [would become] worthless because of insufficient data,” Rusinow’s captions were decidedly spare.<sup>38</sup> Most of his captions consist of only a few words of description, along with a date, precise time, type of film used (Agfa mostly), and precise camera settings. Some captions are so brief that they are more akin to titles; for example, “Cow,” “House with chili,” or “The Mexican.” It is possible that Rusinow simply did not take the time to make careful notes of his subjects; but given what we know about his meticulous archiving tendencies, it seems more likely that, like Shevky, the photographer felt that the informational value of the photograph lay entirely within the frame, free of the inherent limitations of the written word – that the image itself was a document.

### The Photographic Stakes of the SCS Pictures

Until Rusinow’s pictures of the Santa Cruz Valley and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District, there was little photography of Hispanic life in New Mexico. The earliest known images date to 1888 by Charles Lummis, a Harvard-educated writer and explorer. He recorded only a few images of a group of Penitentes, a Spanish-American Catholic sect.<sup>39</sup> [1.5] In Rusinow’s photograph of a church in Taos County, we see the characteristic marks of early-twentieth-century Modernist photographers working in the American Southwest; [1.6] particularly resonant here is Ansel Adams’ earlier images of the region’s unique landscape, native populations and traditional cultures. Adams, along with Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Georgia O’Keefe are some of the most well-known American photographers to visually translate the natural and man-made landscapes of Native American reservations into stark, thick aesthetic forms, unmatched in their dexterity at making visibly manifest degrees of light on textured surfaces. New Deal photographers also worked in the state sporadically in the 1930s photographing Native American populations. Dorothea Lange and Arthur Rothstein, both with the FSA, took pictures for short periods in 1935-37. Rothstein focused his camera on Native Americans at the Taos Pueblo and the Mescalero Apache Reservation, as well as Euro-American settlers in Las Cruces. Lange photographed Bosque Farms, a government-sponsored rehabilitation settlement for farmers displaced by the Dust Bowl, and other Dust Bowl migrants stranded and destitute along New Mexico’s Highway 70.<sup>40</sup> There is evidence that Lange knew of Shevky’s human dependency surveys in Hispanic villages, and that she may have been interested in working with him, but it is not clear if she ever did.<sup>41</sup>

In July 1940, Russell Lee made the first FSA studies of Hispanic village life in New Mexico. He and Roy Stryker, with the aid of Dr. George Sanchez (a professionally established, native-New Mexican sociologist) selected for study the two towns of Penasco and Chamisal in Taos County, north of Santa Fe.<sup>42</sup> Stryker had intended for Lee’s images to be published in 1940, but World War II stymied funding and interest for a photographic book on the subject.<sup>43</sup> Compared with Rusinow’s

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<sup>38</sup> Nan Spear to James T. Mitchell, November 22, 1939; 431-8 Photographs, Pictures, Slides, July 1939-December 1939, Box 195; General Files, 1939-40; Records of the Soil Conservation Service, Record Group 114; National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>39</sup> Van Deren Coke. *Photography in New Mexico from the Daguerreotype to the Present*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1979), 15.

<sup>40</sup> Nancy Wood. *Heartland New Mexico: Photographs from the Farm Security Administration, 1935-41*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 7.

<sup>41</sup> Dorothea Lange to Eshref Shevky, June 1, 1936, in Series I, Roy Stryker Collection, Photographic Archive, University of Louisville.

<sup>42</sup> William Wroth (ed.). *Russell Lee’s Photographs of Chamisal and Penasco, New Mexico*. (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1985), 134.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 135.



work in the state, Lee's series seems a more comprehensive view of Hispanic life. Interior scenes and depictions of local families gathered together are lacking in Rusinow's series; moreover, Lee's camera captured more images of the production of handcrafts, town scenes, and farm work. The FSA photographer's subjects also seem more affluent than Rusinow's sitters; we see modern clothes, appliances, household goods, and tools more often in Penasco and Chamisal than in the Santa Cruz Valley and Middle Rio Grande Conservancy District.<sup>44</sup>

While Rusinow's New Mexico photographs number fewer than Lee's, they represent the first substantive attempt to document Hispanic life conditions in an inhospitable natural environment. In his lifetime, Rusinow's Soil Conservation Service work received little attention. However, these images did not go completely unnoticed. The SCS itself included them in local exhibits and in lists of the agency's best photographs.<sup>45</sup> They were also published in several periodicals. In addition to the photo-essays in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Mexico Quarterly*, individual pictures from the series appeared in *Travel*, *American Photography*, and *U.S. News*. In their February 1939 issue, Scribner's published a series of six New Mexico photographs by various photographers that offered a "sharp and honest if not comprehensive, impression of life among the people and scenes particular to that state." The spread included on its title page, Rusinow's "Oasis" from the Santa Cruz series [1.7]. Here we see the photographer's propensity for describing architecture with the Modernist mark of shadow on flat surfaces, which would carry through his later work.

#### Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1940

After completing the Middle Rio Grande Survey, Rusinow remained in New Mexico for a few months, working free-lance for a number of local organizations. In February 1940, he returned to New Jersey, and leaving public service temporarily, became a supervisor of the Augusta Berns Studio. There he took portrait and commercial photographs, and also made "commercial motion picture films."<sup>46</sup> At some point, Rusinow learned about a recently vacated position at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, a sister agency to the SCS within the Department of Agriculture. The circumstances surrounding Rusinow's employment by the BAE are not entirely clear. It is possible that John Provinse, an anthropologist from the SCS, who also often collaborated on projects at the BAE, recommended Rusinow after seeing the work he did in New Mexico. Undoubtedly, Rusinow looked good on paper. By 1940, the photographer had established himself within a circle of federal bureaucrats, academics, and photographers; furthermore, he had far more experience as a government photographer than the majority of individuals who joined Stryker's FSA photography program, including Dorothea Lange who came to the FSA from the private sector. It is likely then that a combination of factors – a promising portfolio, a great resume, a recommendation from John Provinse, and extensive experience working on social scientific studies – made the BAE take notice of the twenty-six-year-old photographer as a suitable replacement for Lange.

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics was a relatively short-lived government agency. Established in 1922, it initially consolidated the multiple efforts at agricultural economics within the USDA. In

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 59, 66, 87.

<sup>45</sup> B. Brixner to Gordon K. Zimmerman, December 16, 1939, and B. Brixner to James T Mitchell, February 8, 1940; 438.1 Photographs, Pictures, Slides, July 1939-December 1939, Box 195; General Files, 1939-40; Records of the Soil Conservation Service, Record Group 114; National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>46</sup> Irving Rusinow, Application for Federal Employment, October 10, 1946, and Application for Employment, January 10, 1941; Federal personnel file for Irving Rusinow, National Archives Personnel Center, St. Louis, Missouri. The application does not list the names of Rusinow's "commercial motion pictures films," and in my talks with Susan (Rusinow) Braverman, she does not recall her father talking about his earliest films.

its first decade, the Bureau focused on the many and varied economic problems that emerged in the American farming industry after World War I. Concentrating on such issues as tax structure inequalities, farmer indebtedness, faulty land policies, and even changing American eating habits, BAE farm economists conducted extensive research projects and offered numerous proposals for farm relief.<sup>47</sup> The role of the BAE increased in substance and importance during the 1930s. In response to President Roosevelt's interests in land-use planning, the Bureau became, for the first time, the central planning agency of the USDA. In 1938, its size and scope was greatly expanded, and its internal structure overhauled completely in order to orchestrate social scientific studies, almost identical in vision and process to Shevky's surveys, for the Bureau's primary program, Federal-County Land-Use Planning.<sup>48</sup> Specifically, the Bureau's functions expanded to include attendant regulatory, service, and research activities, which given its broad scope and expansive reach across academic disciplines, attracted to the BAE some of the foremost thinkers on agriculture and rural life.<sup>49</sup> Their work, however, was not necessarily aligned with the activities of New Deal programs, and the Bureau quickly earned a reputation as a committed research institution that privileged education of farmers and the general American public over supporting the prevailing paths of their sister action agencies.<sup>50</sup> By the time, it ceased operating as an independent agency in 1954, the Bureau's research program had taken the USDA into previously neglected fields of scholarship. Most notable was its work with sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, and photographers to emphasize the importance of land-use planning as the basis for all agricultural issues.

#### *The Culpeper and Radford Photographs, February*

The Federal-County Land-Use Planning Program facilitated direct dialogue between multiple levels of stakeholders in order to propose and enact federal policy change regarding agricultural production. Bureau-organized municipal meetings brought together farmers, university agriculture extension agents, social scientists, Washington bureaucrats, and farm union representatives who collaborated to literally redraw maps of local topographies as the first step towards higher agricultural profits and more economically resilient communities. Land-Use Planning was tasked with introducing and inculcating big business methods into agriculture, but doing so with a grassroots democratic approach. To this end, Rusinow's camera operated as a fundamental research tool for attaining information about American communities as they existed in the present, as well as how and why they were changing. At the National Archives, images from his first two assignments from the Bureau are labeled "Agricultural Planning." Stylistically they bear strong resemblances to the photographer's SCS series, and are also a revealing prelude to his more significant work for the Bureau's American Farm Community Study, which we will consider for the length of the following chapter.

On February 13 and 14, 1940, Rusinow was in Culpeper County, Virginia, and took approximately twenty pictures of the region's buildings and natural landscape. These images are not described well

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<sup>47</sup> Theodore Salutos. *The American Farmer and the New Deal*. (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), 14; Paul Conkin. *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1959), 75.

<sup>48</sup> Douglas Helms. "A Wealth of Resources: A Research Demonstration" in Trudy Huskamp Peterson (ed.). *Farmers, Bureaucrats, and Middlemen: Historical Perspectives on American Agriculture*. (Washington D.C.: Howard University Press), 1980, 39-43; Richard S. Kirkendall. *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt*. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1965), 80-83.

<sup>49</sup> Jess Gilbert. "Eastern Urban Liberals and Midwestern Agrarian Intellectuals: Two Group Portraits of Progressives in the New Deal Department of Agriculture." *Agricultural History*. Vol. 74. No. 2. (Spring 2000), 162-80.

<sup>50</sup> Salutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal*, 18 and 91.

in the BAE records, and the objects themselves bear little identification. In the archival file, the prints are marked “Agricultural Planning” and are further categorized into “dwellings,” “churches,” and “people.” Like his New Mexico pictures, the Culpeper photographs are also sparsely captioned: “Store,” for example, or the ambiguous, “Farmer occupying farm.” Stylistically, this series is recognizably Rusinow’s work. As in his SCS pictures, images of the built environment, particularly architectural structures, comprise a significant percentage of the total number of images. For example, “Brick church at Jefferston” is composed with precision, symmetrical in composition, and fully-frontal in presentation. And again, “Store” is an evenly proportioned image in which the building is predominant, pushed up against the picture plane, and filling the picture’s borders almost completely. In this image, we also see signs of the County’s current economic instability and disintegration – in the store’s broken windows, and sagging porch cluttered with outdated machinery, we sense that this place of commerce is representative of a larger lack of commercial activity in the County.

The Culpeper pictures were probably the result of a stop Rusinow made on the way to a BAE assignment in Radford, Virginia, southwest of Culpeper. In response to the national emergency that would lead to the United States’ involvement in World War II, the government began building defense works in the town, and the BAE was involved in monitoring the transition from rural village to a center of construction and defense activity.<sup>51</sup> It is unclear what Rusinow was sent to actually document, or if he had even received specific instructions from Russell Smith, the Bureau’s photography program manager, or anyone else at the BAE. Most likely, the Bureau sent him to document land-use planning activities in the town, and the effects of its programs on the community in transition. It becomes clear from the photographs themselves, however, that Rusinow found a single story in Radford, one that was compelling enough to warrant sixty images, almost the extent of the Virginia series.

In the Archives, the Radford photographs are organized into a few broad categories, including “Agricultural Planning,” “Defense Boom,” “Housing,” “Miscellaneous,” and “Planning Committee.” Virtually all of the pictures, however, take as their primary subject the social effects of the town’s sudden economic boom. Some of these effects seem beneficial: pictures of a crowded dance floor at the “Spanish Grill,” and a long line at the local movie theater portray a lively town, filled with young men and women enjoying themselves with newly-earned money. The caption for a photograph of a farmer speaking with a FSA agent indicates that a federal program was in place, which supplied local farmers with new homes if they allowed the government to house defense workers on their land. Another photograph of a farmer’s “substandard” home is a clear indication of the potential benefits of such a program.

However, most of the Radford pictures deal with the problems, rather than the advantages, fostered by the defense boom. The town’s small streets and surrounding country lanes are clogged with cars at rush hour; the local liquor store is crowded with men after work. In these pictures, crowds do not connote liveliness and prosperity; rather they are stressful, potentially dangerous environments. Rusinow also described the depersonalizing effects of growing industry and crowded environments. One image shows a hoard of anonymous workers filing off a commuter bus from Knoxville, Tennessee, while the morning is still dark. Similarly in “Defense boom worker at Radford,

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<sup>51</sup> Russell Smith to Morse Salisbury, March 12, 1942; Project-American Farm Community Study, General Correspondence 1941-46, Box 538; Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 83; National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Virginia,” Rusinow added to the caption, “Note identification button.” This rare textual addendum seems to suggest that a place so massive in scale and mechanized in process strips away the identity of individual workers and community members. The photographer further emphasizes his point by keeping the man’s eyes in shade, almost completely hidden from the viewer adding to his anonymity. The greatest number of pictures in the Radford series is devoted to recording what Rusinow termed the “panorama of overpopulation.”<sup>52</sup> In picture after picture, we see trailers, cars, and dilapidated shacks being used as temporary living quarters by men who have come to Radford looking for work. The rolling hills, streambeds, roadsides, and in-town makeshift camps are dotted with these small and inadequate “homes.” In these pictures, we see the aftershocks of the town’s temporary economic boom.

There is no evidence to confirm whether this story of community disintegration and instability was the one expected by Rusinow’s employers at the Bureau. If the intent was to justify BAE planning programs, then the images were successful: the photographer makes clear that there is a definite need for some sort of planning assistance in the community. In this respect, Rusinow’s Radford pictures are similar to those by FSA photographers, including Dorothea Lange, who were tasked with finding visual evidence that would legitimize government programs in distressed rural regions. Indeed, the most famous New Deal photographs, Lange’s mid-1930s images of migrant workers in California and Arizona certainly show an alarming need for federal intervention. However, the BAE could have only intended for Rusinow to document the activities of the Land-Use Planning committees, which, by 1940, had been at work for almost two years. If that was the case, then the photographs potentially illustrate the failure of this government program: Rusinow’s Radford pictures suggest that the committee’s efforts to direct positive social transformation in the community had not, in fact, succeeded.

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<sup>52</sup> Photographer’s handwriting on the back of photograph number 83-G-37498; Community Studies Records; Record Group 83; Still Picture Collection, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

## Chapter 2

### Last West

Most of the modern emigrants to the West reached California. Between the middle of 1935 and May 1939 a full 300,000 persons of this class, or an average of above 6,000 a month, were counted entering the borders of that state alone, by automobile. More than nine-tenths are native American whites.

-Paul S. Taylor, 1939<sup>53</sup>

The title of this chapter comes from the concluding section of *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*, first published in 1939 by Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor. The book was a photographic essay, one of the first of its kind to join documentary photographs with sociological text (and thus, a photographer with a sociologist) for the purposes of presenting “rural dislocation and unease” to an urban American public.<sup>54</sup> Lange and Taylor’s project described the great westward migration in the 1930s by former tenant farmers from the South, Texas Panhandle, and Great Plains states. The authors identified four underlying causes for exodus from the regions: depleted soil, increased agricultural mechanization, severe drought, and counterproductive agricultural policy.<sup>55</sup> On the original cover of the book was a photograph of the back of a pick-up truck heading west, a semi-circle of canvas drawn tightly around the object and human contents of the vehicle’s wooden bed: “Covered Wagon – 1939 Style”. [2.1] The title and image together argue that the occupants of this truck are new pioneers, braving a frontier, headed west in search of opportunities unavailable in their home place. In the “last West” of the nineteenth century, wagon trains traversed the country for the opportunity to settle, cultivate, and support a family on purchased land. *An American Exodus* proposed a “new West”, what Lange and Taylor described in the book’s concluding section as, “[the] opportunity to obtain intermittent employment in a disorganized labor market – no experience required.”<sup>56</sup> It is the opportunity for this opportunity that drives the covered wagons of the 1930s.

Narratives of exodus and migration ground popular conceptions of the Great Depression. Like *An American Exodus*, these narratives describe the 1930s and 40s as a period of mass human movement across the country, a steady stream of people coming and going on landscapes that also move in and out of dormant states. In these narratives, identity itself becomes uprooted from specific geographies, replaced with descriptors such as “Okies” and “Arkies” that signal not so much a point of geographic origin as a condition of being perpetually in between there and someplace else. John Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) provides perhaps the most famous narrative of the Great Depression. In the novel’s opening pages, the author collapses these concepts of land, migration, and identity into a single silent character, the dust:

In the roads where the teams moved, where the wheels milled the ground and the hooves of the horses beat the ground, the dirt crust broke and the dust formed. Every moving thing lifted the dust into the air: a walking man lifted a thin layer as high as his waist, and a wagon

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<sup>53</sup> The New York publishing house of Reynal & Taylor published the original book in 1939. Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor. *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion.* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, Published for the Oakland Museum, 1969), 110.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 110.

lifted the dust as high as the fence tops, and an automobile boiled a cloud behind it. The dust was long in settling back again.<sup>57</sup>

It is tempting to call the dust the story's central protagonist. Steinbeck treats it as a distinct, nearly embodied, presence that is measured by the waists of men walking. People move through the dust, constantly displacing it as they tunnel through thin dry plumes that inevitably settle behind them again. Man's movement engendered the dust, Steinbeck says, and now the dust lends shape to his movement.

This chapter presents an alternative narrative to those offered about the Great Depression that describe great waves of migration across the landscape, narratives of Okies and other de-territorialized identities moving through shifting topographies of loss and renewal. Rather than denote the movement of people, my use of "last West" points to states of settlement and stasis on either side of the journey – those communities to which people go and from which they flee. Specifically, this chapter focuses on New Deal efforts to build and study different kinds of communities in response to the rapid disintegration of those formerly established on the land, and the photographic record of that effort. It examines two types of community-focused programs under the New Deal, those which studied existing communities in order to better understand their strengths and weaknesses, and those programs that built new communities for the purpose of fulfilling particular practical and ideological desires.

First, we will consider the cooperative community of Jersey Homesteads in Hightstown, New Jersey, funded by the Subsistence Homesteads Division and built by architects Alfred Krastner and Louis I. Kahn in 1935. Dorothea Lange's photographs of the community in 1936 and 1938 will guide our discussion. Second, we will turn to photographs produced by Irving Rusinow for the American Farm Community Study, a sociological research endeavor orchestrated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics from 1938 to 1942; the purpose of the study was to establish a continuum of economic, cultural, and agricultural "stability" among rural American communities. Both Lange's work on Jersey Homesteads and Rusinow's Community Study series demonstrate both the importance of "community" to New Deal efforts and philosophies, and the unstableness of the actual term.

### Building Utopia, 1935

The Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 established the Subsistence Homesteads Division within the Department of the Interior with an initial fund of \$25,000,000 for the development of both rural and industrial land.<sup>58</sup> The Division was the earliest manifestation of the Farm Security Administration, the immediate predecessor to the Resettlement Administration, and therefore, a loan program for "aiding in the purchase of subsistence homesteads" in order to alleviate the overbalance of population in industrial centers.<sup>59</sup> M. L. Wilson was the Division's first Director; he soon hired as his assistant, Dr. Carl C. Taylor, a Thorstein Veblen-trained sociologist from the University of Missouri and the future head of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the American Farm Community Study.<sup>60</sup> In 1934, Taylor addressed a joint meeting of the American

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<sup>57</sup> John Steinbeck. *The Grapes of Wrath*. (New York: The Viking Press, 1939), 4.

<sup>58</sup> M.L. Wilson, "The Place of Subsistence Homesteads in our National Economy." *Journal of Farm Economics*. Vol. 16, No. 1. (January 1934), 76.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Both Wilson and Taylor left the Division in 1935 after it was absorbed by Rexford Tugwell's Resettlement Administration (RA), which later became the Farm Security Administration in 1937. Taylor carried concurrent

Farm Economic Association and the American Sociological Society about the inescapable challenges presented by the new Division's purpose and power:

I suppose we will all grant that giant undertakings [the building of subsistence communities] are both difficult and precarious and probably most of us are convinced that they will do more harm than good unless they are guided by the best knowledge available, and handled with an understanding that American families who will make a success of homesteading can not be handled as guinea pigs and that communities that rise above the level of coal towns and army camps can not be built from Washington...<sup>61</sup>

The coy hesitancy that underlay this paragraph characterized his entire talk; it was understandable considering the practical and ideological scale of the projects proposed by the Division from the outset. In an essay in the *Journal of Agricultural Economics* in 1934, Wilson outlined the role of Subsistence Homesteads to the national economy:

Subsistence homestead communities can be a sort of new synthesis of present day ideals and aspirations for community life. A survey of the magazines and periodicals of fifty years ago indicates a yearning for horseless carriages and rapid means of communication, and for many things now common-place in the national life. The yearning now among wide classes of people is for security, for wholesome recreation, for constructive use of leisure time, and for things which seem to be typified best by what might be called *the community idea*. This represents a revolt against the crass materialism and the shallowness of the jazz age. It really amounts to a new community synthesis of continuity of employment, of education, of recreation, of security and other factors which go into the better living to which we all aspire [author's italics].<sup>62</sup>

Other characteristics of Wilson's "community idea" included the honing of handicraft skills in which "the worker can express his individualism," and decentralizing industry so that Americans had more time for leisure, which in Wilson's mind, meant caring for the family garden and livestock, tasks that carried the greatest opportunities for expressing the solidarity of family.<sup>63</sup> Wilson's words visualize utopian visions of community and legitimize such ambition by placing it under the purview of the federal government. He believed that a return to agrarian living would require a massive educational effort in order to ready Americans for their responsibilities as farmer-citizens living in subsistence communities. Much of this educational effort, Wilson proposed, should come in the form of co-operative institutions that would serve as aids to "creative community development" as well as a revolutionary, yet vague, "co-operative attitude."<sup>64</sup>

appointments as director of the Research division within the RA and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Paul K. Conkin. *Tomorrow a New World: The New Deal Community Program*. (New York: De Capo Press, 1976), 129-30.

<sup>61</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Social and Economic Significance of the Subsistence Homesteads Program: From the Point of View of a Sociologist." *Journal of Farm Economics*. 17: 4 (1935), 730. (Paper presented at a joint session of the American Farm Economic Association and the Section of Rural Sociology of the American Sociological Society. Chicago, December 27, 1934.)

<sup>62</sup> M.L. Wilson, "The Place of Subsistence Homesteads in our National Economy." *Journal of Farm Economics*. Vol. 16, No. 1. (January 1934), 80-81.

<sup>63</sup> Wilson's template for this kind of community were the Mormons in Utah. I have not been able to track down the exact location, but the photographer Irving Rusinow lived in one of the Division's experimental communities with his first wife and two daughters in Virginia. The community was comprised of houses that looked like igloos. *Interview with Susan (Rusinow) Braverman*, May 2008.

<sup>64</sup> M.L. Wilson. "The Subsistence Homesteads Program." *Proceedings of the Institute of Public Affairs*, 1934, 171-72.

The Division was largely a failure. In its first seven months of operation, Wilson and his staff of five received requests for loans totaling \$4,500,000,000. By the end of the Division's tenure in May 1935, it had built 691 houses and depleted less than \$8,000,000 of its original budget.<sup>65</sup> When the economist Rexford Tugwell took over Wilson's projects in 1935 under the umbrella of the Resettlement Administration (RA), one of the 100 incomplete projects he inherited was Jersey Homesteads. Of all the communities that Wilson initiated and the RA completed, Jersey most fully embodied the Division's vision of American communities in the future.

Now the Borough of Roosevelt, Jersey Homesteads was an exclusively Jewish cooperative community five miles south of Hightstown, New Jersey. The brainchild of Benjamin Brown, a Russian immigrant, the project was originally conceived as a 1,200- acre colony of 200 Jewish needle workers from Manhattan's garment district. Families would live on small plots and manage cooperatively a farm, dairy, and poultry plant as well as a garment factory and a store from which to sell their men's and women's outerwear garments.<sup>66</sup> Writing in 1938 for the WPA's Federal Writer's Project, an unidentified author describes the young community as rural therapy for the industrially afflicted:

In exchange for a crowded tenement, a pleasant house and garden; for a cluttered city street, sunny fields and cool green woods; for an ill-lighted, stuffy workroom, a modern glass and concrete factory set in the open country. These and the opportunity to share in the profits of their own labor are the advantages enjoyed by the group of families that has joined the Jersey Homesteads, a cooperative colony near Hightstown.<sup>67</sup>

Dorothea Lange photographed Jersey Homesteads in 1936 and 1938. She took about sixty pictures that document the architecture, people, and activities of the community. Her photographs on the ground do not greatly differ from pictures she took of other communities for the RA/Subsistence Homesteads Division. For example, her photographs of Jersey Homesteads and Bosque Farms, a RA resettlement farm in New Mexico are very similar in subject matter. [2.2-2.7] Each project includes portraits of individual members of the community in the landscape; men working cooperatively in the fields; and photographs of the homes in various states of completion. These images document the community's progress, both in terms of the construction of physical infrastructure and the social adaptation by community members to their new life.

Lange's photographs were also important for the professional posterity of the RA. From the very beginning of the project, the planning and building process was plagued with delays and bad decisions; the most notable of which was Tugwell's initial design for the houses in the community. Only half of them were standing when the first ones began to collapse under the weight of their prefabricated concrete walls.<sup>68</sup> There were also legislative delays, as many in Congress did not think

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<sup>65</sup> Conkin. *Tomorrow a New World*, 129-30.

<sup>66</sup> Each of the original 200 settlers contributed \$500 to the project, and most expressed their primary motivation for leaving the city as a desire to escape rampant religious persecution. *Ibid*, 263.

<sup>67</sup> Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, *Stories of New Jersey: Its Significant Places, People and Activities*, 1938, M. Barrows and Company, New York, co-sponsored by the New Jersey Association of Teachers of Social Studies and the New Jersey Guild Associates, Inc.

<sup>68</sup> Jason H. Cohen, "From Utopia to Suburbia: The Architecture and Urban Planning of Roosevelt, New Jersey," unpublished Henry Rutgers Masters Thesis (Rutgers University, 1994), 41-47.



that the federal government should be building private manufacturing facilities.<sup>69</sup> All of the delays cost the RA about \$250,000 more than they had originally budgeted, and as the factory (which was the first operating component of the community) failed to meet customer demand in New York in its first year, there was fear and disgruntlement that the community might not make good on their loans. Lange's photographs attempt to combat these problems with portraits of agricultural and industrial productivity existing side by side. [2.8] [2.9] Here in a twentieth-century utopia, men labor in the fields right in front of "one of the most modern factories in the country...[as] sleek as an airplane."<sup>70</sup>

The design for Jersey Homesteads had a utopian pedigree. After Tugwell's houses began to collapse, the economist hired the German architect Alfred Krastner to complete the city plan. Krastner, in turn, brought with him a young architect named Louis I. Kahn.<sup>71</sup> A proponent of both Ebenezer Howard's Garden City designs and the Bauhaus movement, Krastner and Kahn built a community that fused neo-agrarian ideals with International Style design. While Lange's photographs on the ground, depicted the community's Bauhaus architecture, the sleek monotony of the garment factory and the white, flat-roofed block houses, the few aerial photographs in her entire oeuvre captured a different perspective of the community, one which demonstrated the integration of modern functional design with older standards for communal living originating in England.

At the turn of the last century, Ebenezer Howard proposed a radical vision for English cities of the future. He sought an alternative to the then current state of urban living and centralized industrialization, the latter of which, he thought, had made the former an unbearable situation. In place of "rotten, old tenements," Howard proclaimed, people should move into "new and comfortable dwellings," replete with outdoor space for recreational activities and communal land for cultivation.<sup>72</sup> **Figure 2.10** shows one of Howard's diagrams for a city reproduced in his 1902 publication, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*. In the diagram of the circular city of about 32,000 people on 1,000 acres (the land around the city would total 6,000 acres), the manufacturing ring occupies the outermost position on the circle, the residential rings with alternating bands of garden space occupy the middle grounds, and a central park comprises the community's center. The area surrounding the circle was reserved for cropland and pasture (as well as "various charitable and philanthropic institutions" such as "Convalescent Homes" and an "Asylum for the blind and deaf").<sup>73</sup> The idea here as Howard describes it is for the city to be encircled by a railway; the placement of factories and warehouses along the periphery of the town would enable:

...goods to be loaded direct into trucks from the warehouses and workshops, and so sent by railway to distant markets, or to be taken direct from the trucks into the warehouses or factories; thus not only effecting a very great saving in regard to packing and cartage, and

<sup>69</sup> Conkin. *Tomorrow a New World*, 278.

<sup>70</sup> Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, *Stories of New Jersey: Its Significant Places, People and Activities*, 1938, M. Barrows and Company, New York, co-sponsored by the New Jersey Association of Teachers of Social Studies and the New Jersey Guild Associates, Inc.

<sup>71</sup> "History of Roosevelt, NJ" Rutgers University Archives. Introduction to the Collection.

<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rul/libs/scua/roosevelt/rstory.shtml>. Accessed 4 December 2009.

<sup>72</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (London, 1902. Reprinted, edited with a Preface by F. J. Osborn and an Introductory Essay by Lewis Mumford. )(London: Faber and Faber, 1946), 139.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

reducing to a minimum loss from breakage, but also, by reducing the traffic on the roads of the town, lessening to a very marked extent the cost of their maintenance.<sup>74</sup>

While a reduction of traffic would greatly increase the quality of communal life taking place at the center of the community, the presence of industry on the city's periphery would allow for a degree of economic stability that Howard believed had not yet been attained.

One of Lange's aerial photographs of Jersey Homesteads and a twenty-first-century satellite view of present-day Roosevelt, New Jersey captures the outline of the community as designed by Krastner in 1935. [2.11] [2.12] The architect did not copy Howard's design exactly, but he did retain the most basic elements. The building in the foreground of Lange's image is the garment factory, which still stands today in the satellite image as Action Packaging Automation in the right bottom corner of the graphic. Although there was no railway in Jersey Homesteads, the garment factory sits on Oscar Drive, an open road for loading trucks to access the industrial perimeter without traversing the community's center. Beyond the grove of trees (a natural device to separate industry from the community's center), Howard's circular city has been replaced with a loose oval within which the houses stand. In between blocks of homes, Krastner has also left distinct open spaces for personal gardens and recreation space. Like the Garden City, the architect placed a park at the center of the oval, and a belt of agricultural land also surrounds the residential area; the bulk of the 414-acre farm extends uninterrupted northwest of the community's social center.

Howard's philosophy on "urban colonization," was based on an ideal "social city" in which "citizens would savour the beauty and freshness of the country together with 'the higher forms of corporate life.'"<sup>75</sup> Both the Garden City and Krastner's later iteration reflected a particular relationship between an agrarian existence and the most modern of technologies. To be sure, both plans envisaged utopia spatially; space, in these cases, being the proximity between citizens' interaction, labor, and responsibility. The variety of pictures that Lange took of the community evidenced the execution of Krastner's and by extension, Tugwell's ambitious plan. Through her photographs, the RA could demonstrate their commitment to both durability in functional design and positive change through Howard's turn-of-the-century vision. Moreover, Wilson's initial billing of Jersey Homesteads as an innovative cooperative community made Lange's aerial photographs even more crucial, as the success of social, industrial, and agricultural cooperation largely depends upon the ease with which interdependency is reached between citizens and their designated tasks. Lange's photographs made visible the spatial skeleton within which interdependency could be achieved.

However, the experiment in cooperative interdependent living at Jersey Homesteads did not succeed. In fact, they never even made it to carrying capacity. In the two years that the community functioned as intended, (that is, with all of its cooperative parts up and running) no more than 120 Jewish families actually lived there. Some of this was the RA's fault as it took them two years to build all of the homes. However, many of the community's failures had to do with bad management and loss of interest – at one point, about 1938, the farmers just stopped farming.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> John Rockey. "From Vision to Reality: Victorian Ideal Cities and Model Towns in the Genesis of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City." *The Town Planning Review*, 87.

<sup>76</sup> The FSA photographer and American painter Ben Shahn lived at Jersey Homesteads for a short while and was commissioned to paint a mural on their community center. Conkin. *Tomorrow a New World*, 272.

### Studying Stability, 1941

The American Farm Community Study was a sociological investigation, funded by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, that sought to determine why some rural communities thrive while others fail. Shortly after leaving the Division of Subsistence Homesteads, Dr. Carl C. Taylor headed the Bureau and led the study. In 1940, he sent social scientists to six rural communities across the country where they played the role of participant-observer for four to five months, after which they wrote a technical report of their findings. Taylor had little interest in “obtaining a geographic sampling of contemporary rural communities in the United States,” that is, in comparing communities by region; rather he and his team chose communities that represented “points on a continuum from high community stability to great instability.”<sup>77</sup> In the end, the sociologists concluded that a dust bowl community in Sublette, Kansas, was the epitome of instability, followed closely by Landaff, New Hampshire. Harmony, Georgia fared a bit better on the continuum; Irwin, Iowa occupied a middle position, followed by El Cerrito, New Mexico, and finally the most stable rural community, the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. “Stability” and “community” were the key words in this project and the scientists were interested to know how compatible the two terms were in a rural landscape reeling from depression, drought, and displacement.

In many ways, the American Farm Community Study was the perfect marriage of M. L. Wilson’s vision and Carl Taylor’s methodology when they worked together at the Division of Subsistence Homesteads. Taylor wanted to know the variables that spelled either success or disaster for rural communities. Only then, he believed, could a broader system of land-use planning be best implemented to alleviate crowded cities and repopulate rural areas. Beginning in early spring 1940, Taylor and his team dispatched six social scientists to communities across the country.<sup>78</sup> The men – Olen Leonard (New Mexico), Kenneth Macleish (New Hampshire), Walter Kollmorgen (Pennsylvania), Edward Moe (Iowa), Earl Bell (Kansas), and Waller Wynne Jr. (Georgia) – lived in their communities for four to five months with a basic instruction manual and a fair amount of latitude regarding the tactics of their research and the compilation of their findings.<sup>79</sup> In a letter to Macleish before he left for New Hampshire, Taylor outlined the assignment, summarizing the particular aspects about which he wanted his sociologists to learn. In short, he wanted an investigation into the natural history of the region and the history of the community’s settlement on the land; the social, institutional, and cultural patterns both currently and historically; the value system of the people, the things by which they “measured the worthwhileness of their day;” the leadership structure within the community; the impact of New Deal agricultural programs; and an overall impression of the community’s stability. Most importantly, he wanted his researchers to identify the external and internal forces that were currently changing the communities.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to anthropologist Kenneth MacLeish (son of Nobel Laureate, Archibald MacLeish), fresh out of Harvard, there was a true variety of academics to which Taylor entrusted his detailed

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<sup>77</sup> Carl C. Taylor. “Foreword” in Kenneth MacLeish and Kimball Young. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community, Landaff, New Hampshire*. (Washington D.C.: U.S.D.A. Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942).

<sup>78</sup> His team included Charles Loomis, a sociologist and Taylor’s former student; J.E. Hulett, a senior sociologist within the Bureau and formerly of the Works Progress Administration; Kimball Young, a noted sociologist; and John Provinse, an anthropologist who frequently worked for the Soil Conservation Service (SCS)

<sup>79</sup> Carl C. Taylor. “Foreword” in Olen Leonard and C.P. Loomis. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: El Cerrito, New Mexico*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, November 1941).

<sup>80</sup> Letter from Carl C. Taylor to Kenneth Macleish, May 9, 1940; Macleish, Kenneth, General Correspondence, 1936-40, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

task. Each of them brought a unique set of professional experience and personal comfort to the role of participant observer. Olen Leonard, for instance, was already an established sociologist working in the American Southwest with both Spanish-American and Native American communities. Waller Wynne, Jr., whom Taylor sent to Georgia, had just completed a sociological study of rural relief programs sponsored by the Works Progress Administration. Walter M. Kollmorgen was finishing a dissertation from Columbia University's geography department on agricultural "islands" in the south, particularly the anomalous German and Swiss-German populations in Tennessee and Alabama. When he finished the manuscript, he took it to Washington where he impressed M.L. Wilson. Wilson, in turn, referred him to Taylor, who assigned him the Old Order Amish community in Lancaster County.<sup>81</sup>

The method of participant observation, a long-accepted approach in the field of anthropology since the nineteenth century, was also gaining notoriety in the 1930s in rural sociology as a means to obtain "inside" information. Taylor believed that only through interviews with residents and active participation in community life could the social scientists understand how social, economic, and agricultural forces interrelated in the communities. He also believed that there was some invaluable advantage gained when the researcher shed his native framework to take on the cultural skin of another. In Kollmorgen's report on Lancaster County, for instance, Taylor described the geographer (and Kollmorgen's sister, Joanna, who traveled as his typist) as personable yet highly professional researchers:

Walter Kollmorgen and his sister, both of whom speak High German, lived in the community for 4 months and probably came as near to developing the status of participant observers as is possible without being members of the Amish church. They have deep sympathy with the viewpoints of these religious people, but have not allowed their observations to be anything less than objective.<sup>82</sup>

Taylor's data could not be sullied by the messiness of subjection. But he would not be so lucky with all of his scientists. For example, Irwan, Iowa was Edward Moe's first government assignment and possibly, his first time using the participant observer method. His letters to Taylor from the community reflect a growing and genuine attachment to the people there. One month into the assignment he wrote that he had "been accepted into the community to a degree that I couldn't have expected," which meant that he was attending numerous social gatherings and singing in the Methodist choir.<sup>83</sup> A month later he was "doing the preaching" at the church and the community was entreating him to stay permanently.<sup>84</sup> The more experienced Waller Wynne Jr. had a completely different problem. He was truly shocked by the dire conditions of tenancy in Georgia and furthermore, had a deeply felt repulsion to the landscape of central Georgia – he found the red soil of Putnam County to be "almost indescribably repellant."<sup>85</sup> In more than one case, Taylor employed

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<sup>81</sup> Walter M. Kollmorgen. "Kollmorgen as a Bureaucrat." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. Vol. 69, No. 1 (March 1979), 79.

<sup>82</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Foreword" in Walter M. Kollmorgen. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*. (Washington D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics to Lancaster County, 1942).

<sup>83</sup> Letter from Edward Moe to Carl C. Taylor, April 29, 1940 and May 28, 1940; Project – American Farm Community Study – Iowa; General Correspondence, 1940-46, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>84</sup> Letter from Walter Wynn to Ed Hulett, February 5, 1940; Project – American Farm Community Study – SE Georgia; General Correspondence, 1940-46, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

his team leaders to re-work (and even rewrite) some of the reports that he felt had suffered from less than objective research.

Russell Smith, director of the Bureau's Division of Economic Information, hired the twenty-six-year-old photographer Irving Rusinow in late 1940 to produce images that would both accompany the sociologists' technical reports and comprise six photographic essays for publication along with a seventh, synthesizing volume of the study. Taylor does not seem to have requested a photographic component to his study and for the duration of the project, there was minimal collaboration between the project director and Smith. However, Smith was friends with Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration, who in 1940 was well-known for his orchestration of the most famous government photography project to date. Like Stryker, Smith believed that the government should freely wield the power of the camera, not limiting its record to "physical conservation work, erosion, or similar matters...[but] should deal with the economic, social, and cultural phases of each [geographic] area."<sup>86</sup> He did not view photography as merely an illustrative tool, but one that could "deal" with larger issues that had historical "phases." Photographs could tell a story. The nearly 1,000 photographs Rusinow took over the course of four months for the Community Study told many stories.

Although the American Farm Community Study was a thorough success, lauded in the academic community especially as a seminal contribution to the fields of rural sociology and agricultural economics, World War II cut the project short. The Bureau produced only one of the six planned photographic essays, and the Study's team of sociologists never produced a seventh volume of the technical reports.<sup>87</sup> Since the 1940s, there have been five follow-ups to the Community Study performed by various University departments that attempt to fill the void left by the unpublished final report. The most recent of these endeavors, Persistence and Change in Rural Communities: A 50-year Follow-up to Six Classic Studies, repeats the study exactly in method and execution with six social scientists from rural sociology departments across the country.<sup>88</sup> This most recent study also contains ten of Irving Rusinow's original photographs: unattributed, mostly misdated, and in one case, inverted.

Taylor's Community Study was the main source of research feeding the Bureau's primary program, Federal-County Land-Use Planning; indeed, the U.S. Department of Agriculture completely restructured and enlarged the Bureau (first established in 1922) in 1938 for the purposes of administering the program. Land-Use Planning facilitated direct dialogue between multiple levels of stakeholders in order to propose and enact federal policy change regarding agricultural production.

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<sup>86</sup> Letter from Russell Smith to Roy Stryker, August 27, 1940. Smith, Russell; General Correspondence 1936-40. National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>87</sup> Taylor did not feel the researchers had gathered enough information from each community to write a definitive seventh report. There was also a definite shift in budgetary priorities within the BAE beginning in 1941 when war felt imminent. For Taylor's discussion of reasons for abandoning the seventh volume see Carl C. Taylor. "Techniques of Community Study and Analysis as Applied to Modern Civilized Societies" in R. Linton (ed.) *The Science of Man in the World Crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1945, 416-41. For further discussion of the Bureau's activities during World War II see Chapters 12 and 13 in Richard S. Kirkendall. *Social Scientists and Farm Politics in the Age of Roosevelt*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1966.

<sup>88</sup> The opening reception at the 2011 National Conference of the Agricultural History Society in Springfield, Illinois was devoted to the Community Studies. I am included in a small group of historians and rural sociologists who are preparing a government grant proposal to fund another version of the study, but one that begins with a more critical assessment of how we define both "community" and "stability." Dr. Linda Aleci at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA and I are the art historians in the group, and tasked with developing the visual arts aspect of the grant proposal.

Bureau-organized municipal meetings brought together farmers, university agriculture extension agents, social scientists, Washington bureaucrats, and farm union representatives who collaborated to literally redraw maps of local topographies as the first step towards higher agricultural profits and more economically resilient communities. Land-Use Planning was tasked with introducing and inculcating big business methods into agriculture, but doing so with a grassroots democratic approach. To this end, Rusinow's camera operated as a fundamental research tool for attaining information about American communities as they existed in the present as well as how and why they were changing.

Even before Rusinow joined the project in 1940, however, Land-Use Planning was under fire by a congress overrun with American Farm Bureau supporters; Big Ag, in contemporary parlance, feared the potential uprising these county committees represented. In the waning months of the program, the Bureau strove to represent the process of land-use planning as not a government-imposed program, but a local job that required members of the community in order to improve their own living conditions. In the absence of the Bureau's own cache of photographers, Smith hired FSA photographer Marion Post Wolcott in 1939 to document the activities of a Land-Use Planning program taking place in Caswell County, North Carolina. [2.13] [2.14] In Post's series, we see two small groups of people, one planning future uses for their land – literally “putting their heads together” over a map for the sake of their community – and another playing cards outside of the courthouse on a Saturday afternoon. To a suspicious Congress, Post's images propose that the process of land-use planning is a natural activity that exercises the same healthy neighborly discourse (and constructive disagreement) as a friendly card game. The Bureau couched the program in these exact terms to the public in other ways as well. In an exhibit poster for the program at a county fair in Indiana in 1941, a strong young blacksmith hammers a piece of metal into shape. Around him the poster reads:

The land use planning process...Local communities shape and temper ideas into plans—as a blacksmith shapes and tempers metal into tools...ideas subjected to the HEAT of discussion, HAMMERED into shape by facts, TEMPERED by deliberation – are shaped into useable plans for developing – BETTER RURAL COMMUNITIES<sup>89</sup>

Under circumstances that remain unclear in the historical record, Russell Smith hired Dorothea Lange as the Bureau's first Head Field Photographer in January 1940. Her contract with the FSA ended on January 1 and in March, she set out for Sutter County, California to document migrant camps. From Sutter County she continued northeast to document three more counties in California before traveling south to Arizona where she documented four more. It was the only assignment she would ever receive from the Bureau and she finished it in nine months. There is no clear evidence to suggest that Smith hired Lange with the intention of having her work on the American Farm Community Study. Indeed, nowhere in the vast file of BAE correspondence does a photographic component to the technical reports even appear before July 1940. But the shape of Lange's photographic work provides hints that she approach the Bureau's migrant camp assignment differently from those executed under Roy Stryker. In Lange's later pictures one senses a greater interest in the holistic community – particularly the spatial and thus, social relationships at stake within and between communities in the landscape. It seems possible that Smith considered Lange's assignment a sort of testing ground for a larger project to come, as well as a way to lend credibility to his greatest photographic hopes for the Division.

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<sup>89</sup> Bureau of Agricultural Economics; Indiana 1936-40. National Archives II, College Park, MD.

Along with her photographs of Jersey Homesteads, Lange's images for the Bureau of western migrant camps are the only aerial views she ever employed. Different from the New Jersey pictures which suggest a concern with the shape of the community itself in the landscape and the ways in which its parts make the whole successful, these later photographs define the camps in spatial relation to both new and more established communities. For example, the established city of Marysville in Yuba County, California, which Lange toured in March 1940 is designated a reference point for two migrant camps that encroach upon the city's limits. **[2.15] [2.15 detail]** In the extended caption, Lange makes clear the proximity of these communities and the economic incentive for their location:

Olivehurst, 2 miles south of Marysville, Yuba County, California. Air view of the city of Marysville, population 5,763, county seat of Yuba County. The rural shacktown of Olivehurst is situated two and one-half miles from this town, beyond the incorporated district. Marysville is now the trading center of the important peach growing section of the Sacramento Valley. Established in 1848, it was a boom town during the early mining days. The squatter settlement photographed is located on the right bank of middle bridge, or D St. Bridge. A fast developing rural shacktown, Linda, seen in distance at right.<sup>90</sup>

In image and text, Lange describes how Marysville's central role in commercial peach production encouraged migrant laborers to become residential locals, members of the economic community. **[2.16]** Similarly in this image, Lange notes the proximity of newer "farm labor homes" recently erected just beyond the boundaries of the FSA-built Winter's Farm Works Community.<sup>91</sup> Different from her other photographs for the RA/FSA, these pictures remark on the place of the community in the social landscape, the effect of their existence on other communities, and the change that they represent to current modes of social, commercial, and agricultural structures. Beyond the bureaucratic functions of these photographs that document the accomplishments of the FSA, they work much more broadly to track settlement on the landscape, acting as a kind of gauge for measuring change and stasis in communities. Rusinow's photographs for the Community Study were investigations of this same measurement.<sup>92</sup>

Throughout the Community Study series, we sense Rusinow's camera oscillating between sameness and difference. The images are homogenous in subject matter. Within each of the six community files in the Bureau's archive, Rusinow's photographs are categorized under the same few

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<sup>90</sup> Extended caption list in Dorothea Lange file; Record Group 83; Still Picture Collection, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Charles Loomis was the first person on Taylor's team to mention Lange's potential involvement in the American Farm Community Study. In a letter to Edward Moe in July, he wonders whether Lange "could be encouraged to photograph some of the communities." In August, Lange had expressed to Smith an interest in the project. Her enthusiasm for a study that looked at how small rural communities functioned is not surprising considering that earlier in 1940 she had applied to the Guggenheim Foundation for a project that would eventually take her to Iowa, South Dakota, and Illinois to photograph the Amana community and the Hutterites. Although the project (she would never complete it) focused on relatively isolated religious communities, she hoped it to be a broader investigation of "the relation of man to the earth and man to man, and the forces of stability and change in communities of contrasting types." Despite such clear symmetry between the community projects of Lange and Taylor (and Smith), the photographer's enthusiasm for Taylor's study never developed into actual involvement. The reasons for her declination are not made explicit in the record but it seems probable that she chose to complete her own community study with Guggenheim funds over government employment.

classifications: agriculture, interiors, individuals, houses, church, recreation. In this way, they closely align with the “shooting scripts” that Roy Stryker famously distributed to his photographers as a guide towards useful subject matter in the field. However, with six communities to photograph in less than seven months it seems as if Rusinow would have thought of his assignment as constituting a single large body of work, one in which he could methodically establish a visual format and system of production around a few genres of subject matter. In the largest sense, the great similarities in composition, depth of field, and vantage point deployed in the Community Study series indicates that the photographer did indeed use the opportunity to establish a few distinct visual modes. However, in the context of the Study, which sought to articulate the differences between stable and unstable communities, any system of visual representations grounded in standards of sameness would risk running counter to the primary objective.

The anthropologist Kenneth Macleish acted as a mediator between Rusinow’s photographs and Taylor’s study. MacLeish accompanied Rusinow to at least three of the communities (New Mexico, Kansas, and Iowa) and it is probable that he went to all six.<sup>93</sup> From the caption list in the BAE file, we know that Macleish had control over the use of Rusinow’s photographs in the technical reports.<sup>94</sup> Additionally, Smith assigned Macleish to write the text for the six “camera reports” (only one of which was realized) and it is likely that Macleish actually wrote all of the captions for Rusinow’s images. Although Macleish was young, he was instrumental in the shaping of Taylor’s study; and as the son of Poet Laureate Archibald Macleish (Librarian of Congress from 1939-44 and author of the FSA photographic essay, *Land of the Free* (1938)), he also had an FSA pedigree. In the field, Macleish acted as a guide for Rusinow, directing him to the subjects that were a natural complement to the information in the technical reports. Macleish’s hand in Rusinow’s photographs is most apparent in the subjects of the photographer’s gaze. Most of the photographs that Rusinow took correspond perfectly with either a specific piece of information or a larger theme that runs through the technical reports. For instance, the sparse numbers that populate Landaff’s only church in Rusinow’s photograph illustrate the sentiment expressed by the gentleman seated in the left set of pews. [2.17] A year earlier, he had confided in Macleish and Young:

I go to church right along unless the weather is especially good or something like that, and than [sic] I go for a picnic. But I like to have the church in town, because it doesn’t look good to have a community like this with no church, and new people aren’t so likely to come and live in it.<sup>95</sup>

Rusinow’s picture is a document of both the church’s waning number of attendees and a portrait of this particular churchgoer. The photograph also demonstrates the additional access that Rusinow’s camera might have enjoyed accompanied by Macleish. In this case, the anthropologist was familiar with Landaff, and Landaff’s citizens familiar with him after five months of participant observation.

Macleish also directed Rusinow to photograph one of the most financially well-off farmers in the El Cerrito community. [2.18] This man, whom sociologists Charles Loomis and Olen Leonard interviewed extensively in 1940 for this very reason, appears in the photographer’s portrait in the

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<sup>93</sup> We have letters from Kenneth Macleish to different people stating his plans for visiting these three communities. Macleish, Kenneth; General Correspondence 1936-41, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

<sup>94</sup> Approximately 8-10 of Rusinow’s photographs were published with each of the technical reports.

<sup>95</sup> Kenneth Macleish and Kimball Young. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: Landaff, New Hampshire*. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, April 1942), 72.



interior of his home where the indicators of his wealth are apparent. The wallpaper is the most obvious example of his wealth; in other interiors from the New Mexico series, photographs and posters adorn adobe plaster walls. More than any other community, Rusinow's photographs of the people of El Cerrito reveal the photographer's comfort with the community and with the camera. The El Cerrito series contains by far the most portraits of any community and the extent to which Rusinow (and Macleish) seem to have been adopted by the townspeople stands out in the archive. Loomis and Leonard had a similar experience – both were entreated by the townspeople to stay longer – a fact that probably speaks both to the kindness of the community members and the degree to which the government representatives were willing to immerse themselves in the experience. Rusinow immersed himself as well. The only piece of personal correspondence by the photographer that exists in the BAE file is a telegram from Rusinow to a friend in El Cerrito. On the occasion of Japan's siege of the Philippines in the first years of World War II, Rusinow hurriedly wired to ask if any "local boys were with the American forces."<sup>96</sup>

The New Deal Department of Agriculture was in the business of both building communities and studying how the most stable rural communities were surviving economic upheavals. For the Department, "community" was a highly malleable, fleeting term that was embraced by the administration and the public for these very reasons. Lange's photographs of Jersey Homesteads demonstrate that building community was a utopian endeavor – the ideological scale of Jersey Homesteads quickly overwhelmed the project's allocated funds and political viability in a depressed economy. Arguably the task of building community was a failed endeavor in part because it never became an exercise in simplification and reduction, in first identifying and then, prioritizing the (real and/or perceived) fundamental elements of community. Instead, Jersey Homesteads was conceived in accordance with a nineteenth-century utopian vision, and executed wholesale without practical priorities.

On the other hand, Rusinow's photographs for the Community Stability-Instability Study demonstrate that USDA-funded studies of existing communities (as opposed to the design of new ones from scratch), were tasked with performing precisely this critical exercise: to identify and locate, through simplification and reduction, fundamental components of stable community. There was great discrepancy between these two types of community projects enacted by the Department of Agriculture, which offers us alternative models for thinking about the Great Depression. First, New Deal USDA assistance programs did not constitute a unified heroic effort with a single objective for reestablishing people on the land; but rather, they were a series of attempts, often orchestrated at cross purposes, to fulfill multiple fleeting ideas of community. Second, beyond a period of visible and miserable migration, the Great Depression is also a story of tremendous stasis, of a desire to remain, retain, and reimagine one's own place. Although Steinbeck's story charted the movement of the Joad family, their journey was only always in search of a new permanent home.

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<sup>96</sup> Telegram from Rusinow to Leni Fuhr, March 28, 1942; Project – American Farm Community Study – New Mexico; General Correspondence 1941-46, National Archives II, College Park, MD.

### Chapter 3 Economies of Valuation

In the next two chapters we turn our attention to some of those fundamental elements of stable community as they were identified and articulated by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics' Community Study. Our case study will be the Bureau's investigation of the Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, the "most stable" community according to the final reports. Irving Rusinow spent three days in the County in February 1941; it was the second stop on his tour of six communities that ended in Harmony, Georgia in June of that year. He took ninety-two photographs of the Amish and Mennonite communities around the city of Lancaster in the southeastern part of the state. This chapter will be particularly attentive to Rusinow's images of farmsteads, what I call economies of valuation: male economic spheres in which the value of things (land, farm structures, work animals, social standing within the community) is constituted by competition between Amish and *english* as both consumers and laborers. In the next chapter, we will consider Rusinow's photographs of Mennonite home interiors and the selling floor of Lancaster's Southern Market. These economies of desire are spaces of female production, sale, and acquisition.

In this chapter, we examine relationships between text and image. We have two primary types of objects for inquiry. First, Rusinow's photographs, and second, the diary of an *english* farmhand on a Lancaster Amish farm in 1940. Both the pictures and the diary strove for answers to the same question: how have the Amish thrived in a period of widespread economic depression? The first half of the chapter will engage the farmhand's diary while the second half will consider Rusinow's photographs. At stake here is a reconfiguration of the historical status of the Amish (and other subcultural American communities) from ideological symbols to a viable template for economic growth in the first half of the twentieth century. Central to the discussion is the issue of authorship. The diary and the photographs are documents of Contact, of the confluence and collision of Others. One of the primary tasks of the following pages will be to articulate how these documents – these material marks of proximities between – acquire value themselves and assign value to their subjects.

#### The Diary: Content

Moses had bought this place for \$4000. It was an old plantation with 150 acres, a stone house, and barn. He kept saying "It's not good soil but I didn't pay much. I'm putting lots back in." As we approached he told how badly the place had grown up when he bought it a year ago. Now he had cleared [the brush] away from the house so we could see the place. On the way we saw a place that another Amishman had [recently] bought. It was [still] all grown up.<sup>97</sup>

This quotation comes from the diary of Dr. Charles P. Loomis during the eight days in May 1940 when he worked as a farmhand on a Lancaster Amish farm. Loomis, a sociologist best known for his work with Native American and Spanish-American communities in the American Southwest, was the Chief Field Supervisor for the Bureau's Community Study as well as the author of the El Cerrito, New Mexico technical report. Along with Walter Kollmorgen, author of the Lancaster report, Loomis' interest in the Amish centered on the speed and methods by which the community was expanding beyond the boundaries of Lancaster County and Pennsylvania. Since the early 1930s, the Amish had been vigorously buying up run-down and abandoned farmsteads formerly owned by

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<sup>97</sup> Charles P. Loomis. "A Farmhand's Diary." *Mennonite Quarterly Review*. Vol. 53, No. 3 (July 1979), 237.

(mostly Scotch-Irish) families. The Amish would rehabilitate the land and buildings in order to either expand their existing operations (with or without an Amish tenant) or set up a newly married son with part of the family business. By 1940, the Lancaster Amish community had established entire church congregations as far south as St. Mary's County in southern Maryland.<sup>98</sup>

In the course of Kollmorgen's three-month stay in the community beginning in March 1940 (with Joanna, his sister/typist), it became clear to the geographer that the agricultural success of the Lancaster Amish was a result of different and additional forces than those that created German "agricultural islands" in the South, the subject of his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University (later published by the Bureau). Unlike the German- and Swiss-Americans in Tennessee and Alabama whose agricultural success depended upon their geographic insulation from surrounding Anglo- and African-American populations, Kollmorgen concluded that the Amish Pennsylvania-Germans were thriving in the midst of national economic depression precisely because they were actively expanding their boundaries.<sup>99</sup> It was the method that drove this expansion that fascinated Kollmorgen, Loomis, and other social scientists at the Bureau. They wanted to know how the Amish were so consistently turning sub-standard (non-Amish) land and infrastructure into profitable farms.

Moses Lapp, one of Kollmorgen's "informants" from the Lancaster Study and an active purchaser of *english* farmsteads, offered to open up one of his properties to the men from the Bureau. Loomis was to work on one of Lapp's properties in the care of an Amish tenant farmer, Christian King and his family.<sup>100</sup> At the time of the study, the Lancaster Old Order Amish, which occupied about 150 square miles, was comprised of eighteen church congregations each of which boasted about 100 members.<sup>101</sup> It is important to note that Lapp/King's farm was twenty-five miles east of the city of Lancaster, well outside the center of the community where land prices were much higher because of farming practices that had improved the productivity of the land. At the center, there had also been a higher capital investment in farm buildings and other inventory. For these reasons, Amish families at the center of the community were wealthier than the vanguard of the Amish pushing out – "on the edge of things"; those closer to the city of Lancaster were also less exposed to *english* neighbors on the margins of their domain.<sup>102</sup> In other words, Loomis' experience was peripheral from the Amish community's own perspective, but also representative of the community's most current situation and certainly symptomatic of its future.

#### The Diary: Format

Arrived with Walter Kollmorgen and his sister at Moses Lapps' place. Moses was fixing a spring-toothed harrow for a son, ten years of age, to use. He was in the field but eventually came to the house. Mother Lapp gave us water to drink. We saw her cooler in her kitchen. It was a water cabinet and effective, so she said. I thought, "These Amish have modern conveniences."<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>99</sup> Walter M. Kollmorgen. *The German Swiss in Franklin County, Tennessee: A Study of the Significance of Cultural Considerations in Farming Enterprises*. (Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1940).

<sup>100</sup> It is unclear why Loomis, and not Kollmorgen, took on the role of farmhand. However, Loomis arrived in the County just as Kollmorgen was leaving; it is possible there was a concern that the role of farmhand would compromise the otherwise "objective" perspective Kollmorgen had cultivated in the past few months, and the geographer had yet to write the final report from his findings.

<sup>101</sup> Loomis, "A Farmhand's Diary," 236 and 248.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 236.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 237.

Throughout Loomis' diary, the author is generous in his intermingling of detailed observations and his thoughts about those observations. It becomes clear early on that what the text illuminates is both an Amish family's perspective on the non-Amish citizens with whom they regularly interact and Loomis' own internal process as he begins to better understand the factors that shape Amish life. The author's realization that he did not know "Amish have modern conveniences" is dually functioning for the ensuing narrative: it situates him in a starting position of surprise, uncertainty, and intellectual lack, a location from which he will begin a transformation of self, presumably taking on the role of dynamic protagonist in his own narrative of becoming. We need to consider his decision to use the diary format as documentation mode in his field research. Kollmorgen, in his role as participant-observer, did not use the format to document his observations of the community; he did not textually position himself among his sociological subjects. Rather, Kollmorgen's notes and technical report express the voice of a distant third person, a strategy he mastered in his earlier work on agricultural islands in the South:

This island is a German settlement in Cullman County, Ala., located about 50 miles north of Birmingham. [...] A tourist traveling through Cullman County on the north-south Bee Line Highway will note some unusual features about its agricultural development, particularly north and south of the city of Cullman, located somewhat north of the center of the county. [...] As agricultural developments of this kind are not typical of the Cotton Belt the traveler may make some inquiries concerning local farming.<sup>104</sup>

Not only does the geographer articulate a distant third-party perspective in his observations of the Germans outside of Cullman, but he places himself and his reader in the role of tourist/traveler – we are transient figures, passing through the landscape on Bee Line Highway, interested in the sites as we come upon them, but always on our way out. As we saw in the previous chapter, Dr. Carl C. Taylor (the Community Study's primary director) was particularly invested in the participant-observer method of sociological field research precisely because of this imposed proximity between the transient character and the fixed subject of study. As he put it, "[Kollmorgen and his sister] have deep sympathy with the viewpoints of these religious people, but have not allowed their observations to be anything less than objective."<sup>105</sup>

In great contrast, the diary as a literary genre is a very different format for expressing observation. It is autobiographical, an observation of Self. In Loomis' case, it is an observation of his subjects as well as an observation of himself as observer. The farmhand's diary is perhaps best characterized using the 1970s anthropological term "observation of participation" in which "ethnographers both experience and observe their own and others' co-participation within the ethnographic encounter."<sup>106</sup> This postmodern methodological shift in the field of anthropology also entailed a representational shift of authorship: instead of a choice of writing a memoir focusing on the Self – a diary, for instance – or a standard monograph focusing on the Other – like a sociological technical report – the observation of participation allows for the Self and Other to be presented together within a single narrative, focused on the character and process of the ethnographic dialogue.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Kollmorgen. *The German Settlement in Cullman County, Alabama*, 1.

<sup>105</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Foreword," i.

<sup>106</sup> Barbara Tedlock. "From Participant Observation to the Observation of Participation: The Emergence of Narrative Ethnography." *Journal of Anthropological Research*. Vol. 47, No. 1 (Spring 1991), 69.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Loomis' diary is a good example of this process: while it is both self-reflexive and generous in its observations, the bulk of material is, for all parties, reactionary to the events that unfolded over eight days.

But the content of the diary does not explain its format. Considering the audience(s) for his research, why did he choose the diary format? More to the point, why choose the diary format when you know there will be an audience for your prose? On the topic of audience, there exists a long and productive debate between contemporary scholars of autobiographical literary genres – what is the importance of audience when close reading a text? Some scholars maintain that diaries are private – that they are created with the assumption of privacy – while others maintain that they are exercises in a kind of secret exhibitionism; still others prefer to think of the diary as intended for a fictive rather than real audience (presumably, a different sense of self could also be included in this fictive arena of presentation).<sup>108</sup> Loomis' diary, however, seems to be an exception to all of these formulations of autobiographical audience. We know that he undertook this exercise to work as a farmhand in order to learn more about the methods by which the Amish were rehabilitating *english* farmsteads to expand their own communities. In this sense then, we know that Loomis' audience included his government employer, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics. Furthermore, we know that Moses Lapp, who facilitated the arrangement, agreed to do so precisely because he wanted to assist the Bureau in its research.<sup>109</sup> On the one hand then, the diary is a research tool executed with all the same expectations as Kollmorgen's report: it would be submitted to the Bureau and scrutinized by social scientists as primary source material.

On the other hand, since its creation, Loomis' diary has been held separate from the primary repository of his professional papers at New Mexico State University. Until the "Mennonite Quarterly Review" published the diary in a July 1979 edition of the journal, only a mimeographed copy of the manuscript resided in the Ernst Correll Collection at the Archives of the Mennonite Church in Goshen, Indiana. Correll (1894-1982), originally from Germany, was an historian and Anabaptist scholar with a doctoral degree from the University of Munich. Correll was also a frequent consultant to agricultural economists at the Bureau of Agricultural Economics.<sup>110</sup> In addition to Loomis' diary, the Correll Collection contains correspondence from the 1940s with Kollmorgen and O.E. Baker (a Chief Economist at the Bureau) as well as a copy of Kollmorgen's dissertation.<sup>111</sup> If we are to consider the farmhand's diary with this audience in mind then, an audience invested in Anabaptist Studies and its place within the Academy, then Loomis' text is also historiographically valuable to our understanding of Anabaptism in America.

But all of these audiences for the diary – the Bureau, Correll, and his colleagues – only deflect the unquestionable strangeness of Loomis' chosen methodological format. The record does not provide us with the sociologist's motivations, but we can make a few deductions regarding his reasons for

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<sup>108</sup> Deborah Martinson. *In the Presence of Audience: The Self in Diaries and Fiction*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003, 141.

<sup>109</sup> Loomis. "A Farmhand's Diary," 236.

<sup>110</sup> Ernst Correll joined the Goshen College faculty in 1924 and co-founded the Mennonite Historical Society. During these years, he was a major influence in the College's revived interest in Anabaptist and Mennonite studies. He later taught at American University in Washington, D.C., and maintained his work on Anabaptism through frequent collaborations with other Anabaptist scholars, such as Harold S. Bender, a prominent theologian at Goshen College and founder of the "Mennonite Quarterly Review." Ernst H. Correll, 1894-1982; Hist. Mss 1-28, Papers, 1924-1966; Archives of the Mennonite Church, Goshen, Indiana.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

keeping a diary. The first has to do with the importance of his performance of the role of Amish, as opposed to Kollmorgen's immersive yet necessarily distant methods for studying the community. Indeed, farmhand continues to be the only role within the Amish community that can be filled by a non-Amish individual, and even in this role, Loomis was not able to attend an Amish church service. While the Amish partake in some non-Amish activities, these events occur outside of the community. Amish do not marry non-Amish and outsiders are rarely entreated to stay in the community without good reason.<sup>112</sup> But that being said, Loomis was not really a farmhand in the traditional sense; all parties involved understood that farmhand was only pretense for another kind of arrangement: instead of the exchange of labor for money, Loomis and Lapp participated in the exchange of work for information. Moreover, this arrangement went beyond contact between Amish and non-Amish; it constituted unprecedented cooperation between the Amish and the government, two entities that have a long history of conflict.

In this context of cooperation, Loomis is in control of both halves of the arrangement; the amount of effort he exerted as a farmhand would have dictated the level of respect and gratitude garnered from his hosts and thus, the level of information he desired. Stated this way, the exchange becomes less clear because the currencies at play become less distinguishable. Loomis' compensation for physical labor was not only information – Kollmorgen's three-month stay yielded quantifiably more information than Loomis' much shorter visit – rather, his compensation was the earned privilege of being able to document what he learned in the format of a diary. Suddenly the question of audience seems to miss the whole point of the autobiographical genre. Loomis was aware of the inevitably public nature of his prose – indeed, as the Study's Chief Field Supervisor he was an active agent in the shaping of this public – but what he wrote about the Amish was not as significant as how he was able to write it; that is, with a voice that neither originated in nor acquired authority from the requisite distance between the participant-observer and his subject. The unprecedented value of Loomis' voice was that his “subjectivity”, an otherwise unsavory character in the research methodologies employed by the Study's authors, actually elevated the status of the document.

### The Photographs: Content

The Bureau selected the Lancaster Amish as a community for study precisely because sociologists expected to find agricultural and economic stability within, what was presumed to be, an insular self-sustaining cultural unit. Their assumptions were not unfounded, just vastly understated. Since the early 1930s, the Amish had been rapidly expanding their community by vigorously buying up run-down and abandoned farmsteads formerly owned by primarily Welsh and Scotch-Irish families. The Amish were rehabilitating the land and buildings in order to either expand existing farming operations (with or without an Amish tenant), or set up a newly married son with part of the family business. Between 1920 and 1952, the Old Order Amish saw its greatest population growth, the total number of individuals more than tripled in thirty years. During this time, Amish families had on average six children so the issue here is not the speed by which their population grew, it is the fact that they could maintain such numbers, and keep everyone on the land and out of the city. The Amish are agrarian people; they are farmers first, but they are also furniture makers and owners of

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<sup>112</sup> As I learned on the farm of Amish writer, David Kline in 2009, the exception to this rule are the families of the formerly Amish, those who decided to leave the Church before they were baptized into the faith usually around age 21. In this case, these daughters and sons and their families are welcomed into the community. Kline's eldest daughter, Elsie, did not choose baptism and during my visit, her non-Amish husband was helping to build an outbuilding on David's property. Interview with David Kline, May 2009.

small businesses in the local community. They are not commuters, and thus their enterprise requires land to sustain an agrarian existence for their family and their family's families.

At the time of the study, the Lancaster Old Order covered about 150 square miles and was comprised of eighteen church congregations, each of which boasted about 100 members. During his short visit, the photographer Rusinow stayed on a property owned by an Old Order Amish farmer and kept in production by an Old Order Amish tenant. What's important here is the location of that farm, outside the center of the community, twenty-five miles east of the city of Lancaster. In the center, near Lancaster, land was more productive than on the margins, and there was a higher capital investment in farm buildings and inventory. Thus land prices were much higher and Amish families much wealthier than the vanguard of the Amish pushing out. Those closer to the city of Lancaster were also less exposed to *english* neighbors on the margins of their domain. Rusinow's photographs depict what was peripheral from the Amish community's own perspective, and representative of the community's most current situation and certainly of its future.

Rusinow's pictures juxtapose Amish farmsteads with those of *english* farmers in the surrounding communities. In one direct comparison published on a single page of the technical report, we see a barn built by a Scotch-Irish family badly in need of repair. In the bottom image, we see a barn recently built by an Amish farmer. On the older structure, the plaster is crumbling, the brick is exposed, windows are missing, as are some shingles from the roof; the fence and gate look neglected, and even the snow that covers the ground looks, like the barn, heavy and heavily traversed. In contrast, the snow is almost entirely gone around the new Amish structure; the ground is flat and even, and forms a neat foundation for the sturdy bank barn described by the photographer in  $\frac{3}{4}$  view. From this perspective, we are offered the stone ramp of the new structure, a distinguishing characteristic of the Swiss-derived bank barn in which both floors are accessible to wagons from the ground. The ramp would have allowed direct wagon access into the hayloft while the opening directly below would have led to the stone-exposed basement level where animals were stalled and manure was collected for crop fertilization. The structure looks manicured, clean, strong, and stable.

Within the technical report, the photographs were vertically juxtaposed, and the caption suggested a larger narrative, a more encompassing analogy than simply bad barn versus good barn: "Before and after. Top picture shows a barn on a farm in Honey Brook (Chester County) bought by an Old Order farmer a few years ago. The condition of the barn reflects the condition of the farm and neighborhood. Lower picture shows barn erected shortly after the farm was bought." [3.1] Both barns belong to the same Amish farmer, it seems; the new one was supplemental to the old dilapidating structure, which even in a renovated state, will not adequately provide for the growing needs of the owner. The caption here provides us with more than just evidence of the Old Order's push outwards, into Chester County, thirty miles east of Lancaster. It is the textual description of the photographs, as visualizing a "before and after" situation, that is peculiar. It is peculiar because these two images do not describe the same barn, pre- and post-renovation for instance – "before and after" does not work here as it usually does in photographs, whereby two images are markers of the transformation of a single object. Typically, the conceptual point, we could say, of before and after pictures, resides in the space between the two images, that which is necessarily unseen and impossible to picture. Here the designation of "before" and "after" has little to do with either the visibly articulated state of the objects (because the old barn remains in disrepair and the new barn is

simply new), or the temporal space between the images, because the point of reference is unclear – before and after what exactly?

In image after image, we see unpeopled landscapes and built environments in the Amish community described in terms of violent conquest. For example, in another comparison, the photographer captures two farmsteads comprised of house, barn, and outbuildings. The first homestead is described as “one of the better Amish farm places,” with the replacement value of the barn alone noted being “at least \$10,000.” **[3.2]** This would have been a significant expense considering that the annual net income for an Old Order farm in the 1930s was around \$1,000.<sup>113</sup> The Amish home adjacent to the large barn looks its equal in size and substance. While many *english* in the County as well as Protestant and German-Reform Pennsylvania Dutch adopted the English Georgian style as early as the first decades of the nineteenth century, the Amish and Mennonites maintained traditional Swiss and German house forms. With a design provenance rooted in the Hans Herr House – built in 1719 and the oldest surviving example of Pennsylvania Dutch architecture in the County – this Amish home exhibits the same steeply sloped roof, lack of dormer windows, and covered porch space on the front of the house (the *Vorkich* in Pennsylvania Dutch, meaning the space beneath the eaves, literally “before the kitchen”).<sup>114</sup> **[3.3]** Another distinctly Amish architectural feature, the *Gros Dawdy Haus* (grandfather house) also juts out from the right side of the home; the eldest members of an Old Order family would have lived out their lives here once they had handed over the business of the farm to a son and his family.<sup>115</sup> Between the house and the barn exists an expansive and expensive natural and built environment that, we suspect, extends farther back into the frame. This “better Amish farm place” requires great physical distance between camera and compound in order to see even the most general outline of its latitudinal breadth. Rusinow’s position before his subject denies the viewer any real sense of what exists at the property’s terminus in the far background; we are left with the impression that the boundaries of this Amish farm are, if not boundless, at least beyond our visual comprehension.

In comparison, the Scotch-Irish farm place looks vulnerable to collapse, not only definitive in size but also constricted within the shallow space of the photograph. **[3.4]** According to the caption, it is in a region “rapidly being invaded by Amish farmers.” Indeed, as photographic subject, the farm looks vulnerable to both collapse and conquest; the buildings appear sparse, feeble, and confined within the shallow space of the photograph. The camera provides little spatial breadth, leaving us with an image not so much of a farmstead, as of a far more easily usurped barn next to house. The low placement of the camera offers a slight upward slope to the extremely data-rich foreground, and the development process (which Rusinow always did himself) leave us with an extremely data-free sky. Along with the disorienting expanse of fallow field in front of the house, the blank sky above seems to oppressively press down on the solitary structures in the cold landscape. The documentary photographer does not take the chance that active skies inevitably carry. He knows that clouds are risky because they move, and thus threaten the ordered, static, and stable landscape subject. Art historian Robin Kelsey calls this the “graphic picture” because it operates like a legible surface of record as opposed to the index of a three-dimensional scene.<sup>116</sup> As a photograph of pending

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<sup>113</sup> Katherine Jellison, “All Women were Once Amish Women,” (unpublished conference paper), 7.

<sup>114</sup> William Woys Weaver, “The Pennsylvania-German House: Its European Antecedents and New World Forms” *Winterthur Portfolio*, 245.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>116</sup> Robin Kelsey. “Viewing the Archive: Timothy O’Sullivan’s Photographs for the Wheeler Survey, 1871-74.” *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 85. No. 4, (Dec. 2003), 702-23.



invasion, the image gains more currency as a legible surface of record, for conquest is first and foremost a quantitative project; and only second, a totalizing operation.

### The Photographs: Valuation

We now have a better idea of what exactly Rusinow's "before and after" photographs purport to be about: there is an ongoing Amish invasion of the Anglo-American lands on the margins of the community's established center in Lancaster, and we could say that these images provide a view of the land and its infrastructure before and after Amish conquest. At stake in this particular narrative of transformation then, is not the material status of any single object (like a barn), but rather the economic, cultural, and perhaps even ethnic status of the nation. Before and after: these photographs perform their work in the past and future tense.

Rusinow did not write these captions, however. Although the record is incomplete in this regard, it is probable that anthropologist Kenneth Macleish accompanied Rusinow to Lancaster.<sup>117</sup> We know that Macleish was with Rusinow a month earlier in Landaff, New Hampshire, and it is probable that the Bureau wished for one of the Study's primary authors to remain with the photographer in order to guide his camera towards subjects central to the already completed technical report. Very little correspondence exists between Dr. Carl Taylor, the project's leader and Director of the Division of Farm Population and Rural Welfare, and Russell Smith, Director of the Division of Farm Economics and Rusinow's immediate boss; but as Loomis' diary demonstrates, the Amish community was of unique concern to the Study and its facilitators. Certainly Macleish's presence with Rusinow would indicate that the Bureau intended for the photographs to act as illustrations of the report's conclusions. Macleish authored two of the Study's technical reports and most likely, all of the captions for Rusinow's pictures.<sup>118</sup> The anthropologist was not only familiar with the intellectual questions driving the Community Study but he was also well-versed in its creative and photographic precedents.<sup>119</sup>

The anthropologist's captions work by way of relations, between modes of valuing the built environments depicted in Rusinow's images. On the one hand, his valuations are based in tangible numbers, statistics, data, and research. For example in **Figure 3.2**, there is an unequivocal process of valuation in the caption for the barn in this image – it could “not be replaced for less than

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<sup>117</sup> We do not know where Rusinow (or Macleish) stayed while in the Lancaster community in February 1941. It is possible that he also stayed at Moses Lapps' place with the King Family; this seems like a plausible scenario in the event that, like the farmhand, Lapp was the Amish “informant” who facilitated entrance into the community for the photographer as well.

<sup>118</sup> There is evidence in the Bureau's archives that Macleish wrote the captions for Rusinow's photographs that appeared in the technical reports for El Cerrito, NM, Landaff, NH, and Lancaster County. The captions for photographs in the other six reports read very similarly. Additionally, Rusinow's older work for the Soil Conservation Service bears a much different voice than the Community Study photographs. All of his pictures for SCS assignments in 1938 and 1939 have sparse captions that note a single descriptor, the location, and date for the image. For example, for Rusinow's second assignment in 1939, the photographer captioned a picture of a young girl in New Mexico as “Child. Pajarito School, Bernalillo County, N.M., October 13, 1939.” In great contrast to Rusinow's voice, MacLeish's captions are detailed and contain types of sociological information that the photographer most likely could not have learned in a three-day visit. Kenneth Macleish to Carl C. Taylor, November 22, 1941; 431-8 Photographs, Pictures, Slides, July 1941-December 1941, Box 195; General Files, 1939-40; Records of the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Record Group 80; National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

<sup>119</sup> Kenneth Macleish's father, the Poet Laureate Archibald Macleish, had collaborated with Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration in 1936 on the photographic essay *Land of the Free*. As we saw in the previous chapter, this book, along with Dorothea Lange and Paul Schuster's *American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* (published in the same year), established the genre of the photographic essay as it exists today.

\$10,000.” By assigning a monetary value to the structure, he is also assigning a monetary value to those responsible for erecting such a structure; in the crudest sense, we could say that the anthropologist’s estimation of the barn’s value lends credibility and legitimacy to the entire Amish project. But at the same time, no matter the seeming concreteness of Macleish’s valuations they find grounding not in the presence of the thing but in its absence. Macleish does not say that the barn is worth \$10,000, he says it would cost \$10,000 to replace. In other words, the barn’s function in Rusinow’s picture is not as an illustration of Amish prosperity, it is an illustration of the cost of potential loss. The purported subject of this Amish picture is an even less stable articulation. It appears to be contingently constituted because the action in question – the action of loss – has not happened yet. In this way, the photograph works in the subjunctive tense, somewhere between a future that is riddled with *english* anxiety, and a present concerned with quantifying what could potentially be lost to the past.

Macleish’s tendencies toward absence and lack are most apparent when his captions do not readily deliver monetary values. His consistent use of words such as “marginal,” “invade,” “disappear,” and “displace” most deftly demonstrate how tightly bound are issues of value with issues of proximity – geographic, temporal, material, personal, prosaic. Each of these terms situates the origins of valuation not on the face of the thing in need of estimation – the church, the barn, the house – rather, it is interstitially located in the gaps between things. For instance, the photograph is not an image of a Presbyterian church in Leacock County near the town of Intercourse. [3.5] Macleish’s prose deems it “once a center” of a community now “disappeared.” The Church’s value lies in its status as a marker of something no longer, and the function of the photograph is to visualize what is left. The relational content of Macleish’s prose and Rusinow’s images explains the format that together they constitute. The anthropologist asks the reader to recollect, remember, and reimagine the unseen, while the photographer’s camera illuminates that which the eye alone cannot.

We are caught then between these two readings of image and text – between a visual narrative about the past and present occupation of land, and a less structured activation of “loss”, an entity that haunts the landscape and psyches of Americans still suffering economically and now on the eve of another world war. But it’s the fact that we are caught that’s important; we are implicated in every way in these pictures and the information they convey about the Amish, the *english*, and the southeastern Pennsylvania countryside is relevant to us. Unlike the earliest ethnographic images of the Amish, there is no Amish body in these photographs that easily and definitively marks them as different from us. No longer vague, amorphous, empty, or malleable, these Amish own land that other Americans lost; they build expansive and expensive barns to support thriving agricultural enterprises; and they are physically displacing whole communities in a period of widespread economic depression. These pictures make the Amish modern; not only immediately relevant to mid-century Americans, but potentially threatening as well.

In the next chapter, we will see that photographs of farmsteads and churches were not the only kinds of objects that constitute such a treatment of valuation in text and image. There we will examine Rusinow’s photographs (with Macleish’s captions) that purport to depict Amish women but instead actually visualize the unpeopled domestic interiors of Mennonite homes. Here as well there is a visual displacement of bodies and information. Like the arrangement that enabled Loomis’ diary, we recognize in these pictures something further and beyond a direct one-to-one exchange of labor for information. And in these photographs as well, the Amish community’s stability on the land is signaled through an absence of what previously thrived.

## Chapter 4

### Economies of Desire

We continue our discussion of Rusinow's Amish pictures with a consideration of those images that depict economies of desire: public and private female spaces of productivity, sale, acquisition, and display. Like the photographer's pictures of farmsteads that reinscribed the Amish with specific economic value, his images of the selling floor of Lancaster's Southern Market and the interiors of Anabaptist homes also constitute a shift of function. Until the 1930s, popular photographs of the Old Order emphasized the peculiarities of the Amish individual in contexts outside her own isolated community. However, Rusinow's camera revealed the community to be long embedded participants in overlapping American economies, rather than insular and isolated on the periphery. Furthermore, as we will see, his pictures reveal that it is precisely their full participation in these economies that make them a potential threat to those historically at the center.

In order to see how Rusinow's photographs reconfigure the community's place in relation to larger economic structures, we will first examine where and how pictures of the Amish first appeared in American popular culture in the years before Rusinow's project. We will consider examples of both postcards and photographs from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This discussion will identify the earliest mode of looking at the Amish, which was decidedly ethnographic in intent, and expressed Anglo-American suspicion of German immigrants.

#### The Peculiar Amish Individual

Visual representations of the Amish in popular culture are few and far between before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. This is not to say, however, that the Amish had not occupied the American imagination until this point. The "Pennsylvania Dutch" were a source of anxiety for the original Quaker English immigrants in the state. Much of the Anglo-American unease about their fellow citizens stemmed from the fact that this second population was too large and their economic contributions too great to dismiss or knowingly overlook.<sup>120</sup> In the eighteenth century, the Pennsylvania Dutch comprised roughly one third of the population of Pennsylvania and dominated important industries of printing, woven textile production, and agriculture.<sup>121</sup> All of this might have been easier for Anglo-Americans to swallow if the Pennsylvania Dutch did not insist on retaining their native tongue in their new country. Moreover, these groups shared two languages: High German for writing, and the Pennsylvania Dutch dialect (*Pfaelzisch*), which is phonetically derived from Palatine German spoken in the Rhine Valley.<sup>122</sup> Many Anglophones viewed their unwillingness to embrace English in every aspect of their lives as an act of outright defiance and a refusal to participate in the established signs of society.<sup>123</sup> Through the nineteenth century, these groups retained both languages; the Amish continue to speak Pennsylvania Dutch today.

In 1795, the United States Congress considered a proposal to begin printing federal laws in German as well as English. The petition was quickly dismissed, resurrected one month later, and then

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<sup>120</sup> "Pennsylvania Dutch" is a catch-all phrase used to describe Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist German immigrants from the Palatinate who settled in the south central and southeastern part of Pennsylvania beginning in the seventeenth century. Steven Nolt. *Foreigners in Their Own Land: Pennsylvania Germans in the Early American Republic*. (State College: Penn State University Press), 2002.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> John Hostetler. *Amish Society*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 76.

<sup>123</sup> Dennis Baron. *The English-Only Question: An Official Language for Americans?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 56.

ultimately rejected.<sup>124</sup> What survives of the historical record on the initial debate within the House of Representatives elucidates the issue as grounded in both reason and emotion, of practicalities in the short term and tough love in the long. As an argument for the translation of federal statutes into German, Rep. Thomas Hartley of Pennsylvania argued, “it was perhaps desirable that the Germans should learn English; but if it is our object to give present information, we should do it in the language understood. The Germans who are advanced in years cannot learn our language in a day. It would be generous in the Government to inform those persons.”<sup>125</sup> To which Rep. William V. Murray of Maryland countered that, “it had never been the custom in England to translate the laws into Welsh or Gaelic, and yet the great bulk of the Welsh, and some hundred thousands of people in Scotland, did not understand a word of English.”<sup>126</sup>

While on one level the question posed has to do with government’s role in providing information to its citizens and conversely, the citizen’s responsibility to remain law abiding, Murray’s evocation of “the English custom” is a thinly veiled snub – the Welsh did it without complaining, why can’t the Germans? However, compared with Benjamin Franklin’s frequent and notorious railings against the Pennsylvania Dutch, Murray’s remarks are mild. In a 1751 essay, Franklin famously asked,

Why should the Palatine Boors be suffered to swarm into our Settlements, and by herding together establish their Language and Manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a Colony of Aliens, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our Language or Customs, any more than they can acquire our Complexion?<sup>127</sup>

Franklin offers an extraordinarily imagistic passage that visualizes the Pennsylvania Dutch as a dark alien herd swarming the countryside, Germanizing stunned citizens in their beds not with their uncivilized ways, but by the sheer number of their brood. The earliest photographs of the Amish to appear in the later nineteenth century visualize Franklin’s analogy of German colonization. And as we will see, Rusinow’s 1941 photographs not only allude to the strength of their swarmy numbers, but they also provide evidence for the colonization already at work.

The Amish first appeared in photographs in the 1860s when the wet-plate collodian process and albumen print moved photography into the popular sphere. In these earliest visual representations, the Amish are Franklinitian: alien individuals in the urban environment of the city of Lancaster where their manner of dress and elusive demeanor mark them as conspicuous outsiders, foreigners in their own land. **[4.1]** This 1912 postcard appropriates a photograph from the 1880s. It would have been available for sale in the city of Lancaster nearly seventy years before the County’s tourist boom after the Second World War. The image gives us a sharp perspectival jolt as a tall wall dominates the left side, juts back on a strong diagonal, and terminates at a figure in the top right corner. Such a sidewalk provides a blank and vast backdrop for what looks to be four Amish women and one man arranged like frozen cut-outs against the wall, flat atomized planes that recede into a forcibly rendered depth. They look as though viewed through a stereoscope, lacking three-dimensional volume yet efficiently filling two-dimensional space. They do not look engendered by that

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 27.

<sup>125</sup> Annals of Congress 4: 1228-29.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Leonard W. Labaree (ed.). *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, Vol. 4, 1959), 234.

environment; all of them cling to the wall, preferring its safety to the threshold opposite where sidewalk meets busy road and *english* men in top hats stride by.

The same photograph appeared alongside nine others in a *Travel* magazine article by Katherine Taylor in 1921. Although the article is titled “Pennsylvania Dutch,” the author expends the bulk of her prose on the Old Order Amish. At best, her words describe them as a peculiar group of people with unfamiliar habits; at worst, the article is a deriding series of anecdotes that cast the community as uncouth imbeciles. Regarding their hygiene, the author noted, “they have an aversion to soap and water for anything but vegetable and floor scrubbing;” about their demeanor, she continued, “they exhibit a sluggish dullness [due to the fact] that they work all day; go to bed before eight; [and] rarely read.”<sup>128</sup> The people in the photographs, Taylor attests, look out of place precisely because they are ill equipped to navigate even the most basic protocols of modern society. Like other Americans before her, she cannot altogether dismiss their ethos of hard work, but she can suggest that it gets in the way of everything else necessary for making a modern citizen, tasks that include reading and by extension we presume, learning English. Just the grammatical ambiguity of the article’s title alone with its lack of definite article to clarify the presumable noun in question, draws an equivalency between the people and the language, and her prose proclaims a general mistrust of both.

In one photograph from Taylor’s article, an urban wall once again acts as a studio backdrop against which three Old Order individuals are arrayed in a straight line. [4.2] Although they appear somewhere in between three-quarter and full profile, they are unquestionably closer to vague silhouettes than unique subjects. The woman’s bonnet hides her entire face, while the broad brims of the men’s felt hats cast a shadowy band over their eyes. These figures appear appropriately anonymous Pennsylvania Dutch figures that one encounters in the city by sheer happenstance. They are not altogether innocuous, and yet they remain under control, we could say, by their ordered arrangement across the almost gridded surface of the wall. The camera corners this tidy array of figures, casting them submissive as they avert their gaze and defer to our visual scrutiny. There is little formal distinction here between these members of a Franklinian “swarm” and the tall dark shadow of the inanimate street lamp to the left of the woman.

In another image from the 1920s article, an Amish family appears from the back on a Lancaster sidewalk. [4.3] Unlike the previous images, the Amish figures are not neatly arrayed against a vertical surface, easily available to our visual inspection; however, the selective overexposure of the image creates a similarly flattened surface against which we may more accurately measure the subjects. There is a severe lack of data on the ground plane; indeed, there is no delineation between sidewalk, street, or sky – and instead, an immense white void surrounds, nearly subsumes, the four Amish subjects whose garb, in contrast, contains an entire grey scale of value. Not only does this environment not appear to engender these subjects, but they appear physically detached from it.

These images suggest that the earliest American mode of looking at the Amish was decidedly ethnographic, and expressed long established Anglo-American suspicion of German immigrants. In these early twentieth-century photographs, the Amish appear as alien individuals in the urban environment of the city of Lancaster – their manner of dress and elusive demeanor mark them as conspicuous outsiders, foreigners in their own land. It is important to note that the body of the individual is the primary marker of identification because it is the primary marker of difference for, and from, the viewer. As ethnographic images, or images in the service of identifying an Other in

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<sup>128</sup> Katherine Taylor, “Pennsylvania Dutch,” *Travel* magazine (June 1921), 36-41.

flesh and desire, the pictures domesticate the Amish and keep them contained as measurable wholes that we can closely scrutinize. These images offer the perception of control. And their authority depends upon the illusion of scientific objectivity offered by the camera, an objectivity that is manifest in the pictures as a discernable distance between subject and viewer.

Ethnographic subjects are necessarily not modern subjects. I am deliberately using the term “modern” here in a grossly under-theorized way. What I mean is the colloquial, vernacular, and unabashedly totalizing use of an exceedingly forgiving term. I mean only that the ethnographic Amish subject is not relevant to us in any immediate way. He is vague, amorphous, empty, malleable – an always available ideological receptacle.

### To Modernize and Democratize

The objective of the American Farm Community Study was to identify successful examples of agrarian culture. The Bureau of Agricultural Economics’ leader, Carl C. Taylor, conceived of the project as a necessary research step for expanding and making more effective their primary program, Federal-County Land-Use Planning begun in 1938. Land-Use Planning facilitated direct dialogue between all agricultural stakeholders in order to propose and enact policy change regarding agricultural production. Bureau-organized municipal meetings brought together farmers, university agriculture extension agents, social scientists, Washington bureaucrats, and farm union representatives who collaborated to literally redraw maps of local topographies as the first step towards higher agricultural profits and more economically resilient communities.<sup>129</sup>

Sociologist Jess Gilbert characterizes the program conceived by the “eastern liberal academics and Midwestern agrarian intellectuals” that comprised the BAE in 1938 as a “low modernist” form of policy enactment.<sup>130</sup> This mode of New Dealism worked from the bottom up, enabling meaningful citizen participation in policy making and incorporating regional needs into federal regulations. The BAE sought at once to modernize and democratize rural America. Land-Use Planning was the epitome of this valiantly liberal attempt to empower those in the hinterlands by providing information and a format for directed discourse. Gilbert’s designation of the program as “low modernist” is a response to what geographer David Harvey and political scientist James C. Scott have labeled “high modernism” whereby social order is imposed from the top down by those who presumably understand its scientific and rational purposes.<sup>131</sup> Scott described this directionality of power specifically within the New Deal Department of Agriculture as a form of “domestication, a kind of social gardening devised to make the countryside, its products, and its inhabitants more readily identifiable and accessible to the center.”<sup>132</sup> He is suggesting here that high modernism works from both the top down and from the center out, and moreover, that the center imposes order on the periphery so that its inhabitants may be exploited and its resources and goods consumed. Using the Land-Use Planning Program as his primary example, Gilbert argues that “high modernist” is a too rigid and uncompromising designation for the Bureau which, while placing great

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<sup>129</sup> Jess Gilbert. “Democratic Planning in Agricultural Policy: The Federal-County Land-Use Planning Program, 1938-42.” *Agricultural History*. Vol. 70, No. 2, (Spring 1996), 233-50.

<sup>130</sup> Jess Gilbert, “Eastern Urban Liberals and Midwestern Agrarian Intellectuals: Two Group Portraits of Progressives in the New Deal Department of Agriculture.” *Agricultural History*. Vol. 24, No. 2. (Spring 2000), 162-80.

<sup>131</sup> See David Harvey. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990); and David C. Scott. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>132</sup> Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 184.

stock in science, technology, and progressive reform, also saw unequivocal value in local knowledge and small-scale farming – to modernize and democratize.<sup>133</sup>

Rusinow's photographs suggest that the Bureau's program of land-use planning did indeed value local knowledge from every citizen. The photographer took a picture in portrait of one of the inhabitants of Landaff (Grafton County), New Hampshire in early March 1941, just a few weeks before arriving in Lancaster. Here we see one of the New England town's residents, Mrs. Charles Chandler at leisure, resting on a daybed and knitting. [4.4] Framed on the wall behind her right shoulder, is a map of Landaff redrawn by her and other local land-use planners in 1939. The caption tells us that "Mrs. Charles Chandler is over 60, runs a large house alone, bakes bread, preserves a great amount of meat, fruits and vegetables, makes soap and knits clothes. She came to Landaff from Vermont some 40 years ago. On the wall behind her is a property map of the town prepared by the BAE." The map appears to hold value for Mrs. Chandler both as a framed object in a room that, at least Rusinow would have us believe, is where she unwinds after a long day of incredible production, and also as an associative concept – the map is a sign of personal investment in her community, and her community will in turn benefit from her participation in the Bureau's program.

Presumably Mrs. Chandler learned a lot about the economics of agriculture when she helped redraw the map. How, for instance, could farmers get the most from their agricultural product? Where did the American farmer stand on the global economic stage? These were precisely the types of questions that the Bureau wanted farmers and farm community members to be asking.<sup>134</sup> The BAE attributed the many problems faced by rural Americans (not least of which was rapid outmigration to the cities), to farmers' general lack of business savvy, a veritable disconnect between the technical skills of effective farming and the larger concerns of the market. Well before Taylor led the Program, he pinpointed the problem in a 1926 essay on the "rural population debacle" of outmigration:

[Farmers] must place themselves in a position to reap the same sort of rewards that corporate businesses have accomplished by a theoretical, if not actual, separation of production technique and money-making. [...] It is the task of the Bureau [of Agricultural Economics] to introduce and inculcate big business methods into agriculture. [...] It will develop slowly in the field of agriculture for two chief reasons: first, because agricultural production becomes organized in large proportions only at the point of marketing; and second, because the trained leaders in agriculture are spending most of their time, energy, and money in working on the occupational or technical production problems of agriculture rather than on the business problems of agriculture, and furthermore, because many of those who are working on the business side of agriculture do not understand the intricacies of the price system.<sup>135</sup>

Sociologists and agricultural historians usually place the beginnings of American agricultural modernism at the end of the Second World War when chemical weapons were repurposed into pesticides able to wipe out agricultural pests on an unprecedented scale.<sup>136</sup> Until the last quarter of

<sup>133</sup> Gilbert, "Eastern Urban Liberals and Midwestern Agrarian Intellectuals," 170.

<sup>134</sup> Gilbert. "Democratic Planning in Agricultural Policy," 240.

<sup>135</sup> Carl C. Taylor. "Our Rural Population Debacle." *The American Economic Review*. Vol. 16. No. 1 (March 1926), 163.

<sup>136</sup> Scott. *Seeing Like a State*, 183.

the twentieth century, this brand of big agriculture was hegemonic in this country and the export model for production ventures in South America and Africa.<sup>137</sup> But here Taylor provides evidence that the paradigm shift for American agribusiness happened much earlier, and more importantly, that it was not at first grounded in questions of production at all, but rather in the intricacies of greater systems of circulation.

Rusinow's camera, employed by the BAE, was a key social science instrument for teaching the farmer about his place in larger systems of exchange and circulation simply by making visible those larger systems and presenting them in a recognizable format. In photographs of Lancaster's Southern Market and the Mennonite home the visual format is narratively structured into decipherable sequences of elapsed time in which actions unfold in discernable steps. The anxiety in these pictures comes not so much from any visual element within the photograph, but rather from a palpable awareness of the photographer's relationship (as Other) to his subjects and his uneasy orbiting of their space. In Rusinow's pictures of farmsteads, on the other hand, anxiety stems from a format of juxtaposition, between picturing "what is" and "what was" on the landscape. There is a grammar to these images, and the photographer oscillates between the present and past tense in order to fix a projection of the future.

### The Market

Since 1757, some kind of market structure has always stood at the very center of the city of Lancaster. In 1730, the city's founders, Andrew and James Hamilton, planned the town around a 120 square foot space designated as a market. Until 1888 when Lancaster native and architect C. Emlen Urban built the Southern Market at 100 South Queen Street, the space hosted a myriad of outside stalls for the sale of farm products.<sup>138</sup> The history of markets in Lancaster follows a typical trajectory of public markets in northeastern cities. The first American public markets in the seventeenth century were open-air markets, without a building, that ran the length of a street. They were viewed as public facilities in towns of substantial size and most often were located in the town's center and if possible, close to the docks, as those in outlying areas most often transported their goods via waterway.<sup>139</sup> Certainly this was the case of the site of the Southern Market on Queen Street. Queen and Prince streets run parallel through the very center of the town, their paths converging less than 200 meters north of the Conestoga River, a small tributary that feeds into the Susquehanna River twenty miles to the west. In Pennsylvania alone, the Susquehanna River drains half its land area and was the primary method of transport for producers across the state to get their goods to market.

The development from open-air markets in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to street market houses and block market houses in the nineteenth century had to do with demands by producers, consumers, and municipal leaders. While producers insisted a more permanent indoor space was necessary for ensuring the quality of their products, the city saw there was revenue to be made in the facilitating of markets. Block market houses, like the Queen Anne style Southern Market was one of the first in 1888 to be privately owned and thus, it was in direct competition with the city-owned Central Market also in downtown Lancaster, not four blocks to the northwest.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> *To Build Strong and Substantial: The Career of Architect C. Emlen Urban*. City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, unpublished booklet, 2009, 8.

<sup>139</sup> James A. Mayo. "The American Public Market." *The Journal of Architectural Education*. Vol. 45. No. 1. (Nov. 1991), 41.

<sup>140</sup> *To Build Strong and Substantial*, 9.



Like many block market houses, the Southern Market has an open square plan, which was cheaper to build than the long rectangular buildings of street market houses because they required fewer linear feet of support walls.<sup>141</sup> The Southern Market also boasts towers at its corners, which was a common practice in market design at the turn of the century because it allowed for more natural light to illuminate a vast space.<sup>142</sup>

It is the vast crowded space of the Market's interior that concerns Rusinow. [4.5] Here the photographer surveys the view of the main selling floor from above at the back of the building; from this position we see nearly the expanse of the market's 90 x 250 foot footprint. This is the first photograph in the sequence of three Rusinow took that describes the primary market in which the Amish and Mennonite of Lancaster's hinterland sold their wares. At first our eyes find those of others who gaze back at us from the commercial cacophony on the ground floor. Two men stare up at the camera from a stall in the bottom left quadrant of the photograph. Their gazes eventually move us back towards the diagonal made by the first full line of vendor stalls. From here, our eyes move not necessarily quickly, but steadily and expectantly down the orderly rows, taking in the multiple geometries at work; every once in awhile we stop to linger on the gestures of those who wait behind the counter or saunter down the aisle. The scene appears busy but not chaotic, ordered but loud.

Rusinow positioned his camera at just that particular place so that we could see the women who wait behind the counter of stalls 39 and 40, identified by a large white sign near the bottom right of the image. The vendors in question wear black bonnets and white prayer caps, one of which is centered perfectly at the bottom of the composition. These Mennonite or Church Amish women provide us a spatial and visual nexus for understanding the scene. We can see that they do not reside near any true center of the square floor plan, however, within the market space that is visible to us, they serve as an anchor point from which southeastern Pennsylvania's market economy seems to unfold. It is difficult not to read this image as an establishing shot of sorts; here, Rusinow says, is the scene and here are its requisite players.

In the next image, we see that the requisite players are the women of stall 40. Now at ground level, we see their bonnets and prayer caps again but foregrounded are the baskets of eggs and lines of dressed chickens that are the primary offerings for sale. [4.6] The older woman looks at us with an expression that is not necessarily welcoming, while the younger ignores us altogether, her drowsy gaze pulled to the side, away from the poultry under her purview. It is a decidedly unremarkable image, and our interest in it lies in how it documents, even embodies, the male photographer's own movement through this space of circulation and exchange. Here Rusinow has descended from his upper story to participate in the action. He is now the one who saunters through the aisles, assessing products, and making transactions with both cash and camera.

In the third picture of the market sequence, Rusinow has continued down the aisle to stalls 49 and 50 where we see another small group of Mennonite women who either do not notice the photographer or turn their gaze purposefully away from him. [4.7] These women have a wider variety of goods for sale, pork in various forms, it seems, judging from what looks like headcheese, sausages, and blocks of scrapple. For this picture, Rusinow moved a little to his left, closer to the

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<sup>141</sup> Mayo. "The American Public Market," 39. For a discussion of public markets in the United States see Helen Tangires. *Public Markets and Civic Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,) 2003.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

vendor side of the aisle, which opens up our perspective to now see the relationship between female seller and female consumer. To be sure, the woman who comes into the frame at the very right is but a fragment of a subject, even the basket of paper-wrapped goods is visually privileged over its carrier. But her presence in any form is crucial because she is our counterpart, the camera's mirrored self as consumer; but not however, the photographer's equal in this economic space where photographs and money are seemingly homologous forms of power.

John Tagg, Jonathan Crary, and other historians of visual culture, have described photography as having the same circulating effects as a cash economy. About the parallels between these systems of exchange, Crary suggests:

[Photography and money] are equally totalizing systems for binding and unifying all subjects within a single network of valuation and desire...Both are magical forms that establish a new set of abstract relations between individuals and things and impose those relations as real...Photography is an element of a new and homogenous terrain of consumption and circulation in which the observer becomes lodged.<sup>143</sup>

In true postmodern fashion, Crary's argument perches comfortably on a branch of semiotics: we deal in signs, in mediators, in representations, in copies. And it is difficult to deny the extent to which photographic and monetary currency derive power from a kind of implied consent or at least acknowledgement of the system; the paradox of course is that photographs and money (paper with different properties) simultaneously impart value because of the status of the system while also devaluing its individual participants. Crary ignores so much, however, when he insists that a "homogenous terrain" paves both economies of value and exchange. Rather than neutralizing or making universal the system of economy at work on the selling floor of the Southern Market, Rusinow's photographs of his time there reveal that the Market's status derives from even larger cultural systems in which women and men play distinctly different roles.

Within Amish and Mennonite families, women were the primary producers of goods sold at public venues and the primary sellers of those goods. In a 1990 interview with historian Katherine Jellison, Naomi Fisher, an Old Order Amish woman from Lancaster, reported that her mother's 1933 diary recorded selling farm products every Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday at the Southern Market. Fisher remembered helping her mother make forty gallons of apple butter at a time to sell, and she also recalled helping her mother milk cows to make cup cheese—or *schmier kase*—which they placed in cardboard containers and sold for ten cents a carton.<sup>144</sup> Her mother also specialized in pies that sold for a quarter:

Mother figured that if she made one hundred pies, she had \$25. We paid nineteen cents for a twelve-pound bag of flour and three cents for one pound of lard. We baked one hundred pies at a time. We got up early and started. The range baked four pies at a time. When it was hot, we just done it. There was no such thing as it being too hot. We just went and did it.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Jonathan Crary. *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 13. Also see John Tagg, "The Currency of the Photograph" in Victor Burgin (ed.). *Thinking Photography*. (London: Macmillan, 1982), 110-41, and Alan Sekula, "The Traffic in Photographs". *Art Journal*. Vol. 41, No. 1 (Spring 1981), 15-25.

<sup>144</sup> Transcript of 1990 interview acquired from Katherine Jellison in 2009.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

From Rusinow's photographs and the Bureau's technical report on the Amish, we learn that in addition to pies, cheese, and apple butter, Amish women and children tended to the family's flock of poultry for the production of both meat and eggs to be sold in Lancaster.<sup>146</sup>

For the Amish community, the public market was a space in which women assumed the role of both producer and seller of goods to urban consumers. Art historian Elizabeth Honig has suggested the public market in seventeenth-century Holland was identified as an "urban public sphere...defined as a spatially located and temporally stable container of specific communal values. It was ordinary, orderly, and enduring."<sup>147</sup> She goes on to argue that in addition to the market being a space explicitly tied to the city, to political centers of power, the public market was also a commercial space for feminine activity, and a realm of desire and economic exchange that was an outgrowth of the Dutch home.<sup>148</sup> In Rusinow's series, the photographer makes visible a very similar connection between the market and the Anabaptist home; both types of images are coded female and the tension we read in them comes again as an effect of the photographer's own alien presence there.

### The Home

Amish and Mennonite women living in Lancaster County in the 1930s and 40s were central to the discussion of changing gender roles taking place across the country. In the Bureau's technical report on Lancaster County, the author, Walter Kollmorgen, focused much of his discussion on Amish women. Amish women, he reported, still fulfilled the traditionally female roles on the farm which included housework, food preparation, gardening, child care, milking, and assisting with larger farm tasks at particularly busy times of the year. Kollmorgen praised Amish women's skills numerous times throughout the study, remarking that they "still can and preserve great quantities as well as a great variety of food...Many still prepare many gallons of apple and pear butter, can and preserve much meat, prepare great quantities of jelly and store away impressive quantities of dried apples, beans, and corn."<sup>149</sup> In addition to their skills of food preservation, the geographer also marveled at the extensiveness of Amish women's home production of textiles:

It is doubtful that rural women anywhere in this country do more needlework and sewing than the women and girls of the Amish family. Only under-clothes are bought ready-made...Amish women spend much time over embroidery work, quilting, and making carpets and pillow cases. Each daughter begins to fill her dower chest with things of this sort at an early age. She accumulates embroidered pillow cases, several pieced, embroidered, and stitched quilts, hooked rugs, and other household items.<sup>150</sup>

Not only was Kollmorgen sure to note the amount and quality of labor performed by Amish women but he spoke of their labor as a heritage of womanhood, emphasizing both the traditional tasks that Amish women still perform and those rituals that will ensure survival into the future. The stability of the Old Order community, he asserts, has as much to do with the man's ingenuity and foresight as it does with the woman's embrace of the roles befitting her sex and position within the family. To be sure, Kollmorgen does not shy away from articulating the rigidity of the Amish family's

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<sup>146</sup> Kollmorgen. *Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community*, 30.

<sup>147</sup> Elizabeth A. Honig. "Desire and Domestic Economy." *The Art Bulletin*. Vol. 83. No. 2, (June 2001), 300.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

patriarchal structure; “The man is distinctly the head of the household and in most cases directs the affairs of the family. Neither on the family level nor on the community level does the wife initiate or direct important activities.”<sup>151</sup> Katherine Jellison argues that it was precisely this patriarchal structure that Kollmorgen, Taylor, and others within the Bureau most respected about the Amish and saw as the primary factor underlying their success as diversified farmers.<sup>152</sup>

The Bureau was not the only USDA department eager to understand the precise workings of the Amish family. The Bureau of Home Economics in partnership with the Bureau of Labor Statistics launched a Study of Consumer Purchases in the 1930s that sought to determine the consumer habits of families in cities, small towns, and rural communities across the country. Between 1935 and 1936, Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers interviewed women in 300,000 families and asked them to fill out questionnaires that asked about habits of food production, spending, in-home clothing production, cooking, sewing skills, and other areas that would give the researchers insight into how white, nuclear (both husband and wife were present in the home), and independent (from government aid) families made ends meet. Considering these criteria and their long history of subsistence and commercial farming, the Pennsylvania-German population in Lancaster County was particularly ideal. In the end, the Study included 1,200 households in the area including 150 Old Order Amish women who agreed to participate. The results were clear and overwhelming. Not only did Amish families consume far less than *english* families in the County (the latter spent twice as much annually on clothing their family than the former) but the Old Order Amish family even differed considerably from other “plain” groups who bought more food stuffs and produced less in the garden.<sup>153</sup>

The importance of Amish women to the Bureau’s findings posed a problem for Rusinow because the community would not allow him to photograph Old Order women. Upon first glance, the photographer appears to have simply omitted from the series those female subjects he could not picture. But there are six photographs within the series that are unquestionably connected yet totally anomalous; these images of Mennonite and Church Amish home interiors stand out in the series, both for the intimacy of the domestic scene and the conspicuous absence of the women who routinely occupy that space. These images, I think, are the photographer’s solution to making visible the inaccessible Old Order woman, and illustrating Kollmorgen’s claims about the economic value of female labor in the Lancaster Amish community.

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>152</sup> Katherine Jellison. “An Envidable Tradition of Patriarchy: New Deal Investigations of Women’s Work in the Amish Family” in Catherine McNicol Stock and Robert D. Johnston (eds.). *The Countryside in the Age of the Modern State: Political Histories of Rural America*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 240. Some in the Bureau even attempted to integrate their professional admiration for Amish patriarchy into their personal lives. O.E. Baker, a senior agricultural economist for the BAE, visited Kollmorgen while the sociologist was on assignment in Lancaster. Baker had long argued that the success of American agriculture depended upon “large farm families to produce agricultural products and sizeable off-farm families to purchase and consume those items.” After witnessing Amish families working together on the farm and in the home, Baker was even more convinced of his theory. Once Baker retired from government service and began a teaching career at Colorado State University, he applied the lessons learned from the Amish family to his own, particularly to one of his daughters who he convinced to raise chickens in the backyard and dress in homemade clothes that resembled the plain costume of the Amish.

<sup>153</sup> For more about the Amish and the Study of Consumer Purchases see Steven D. Reschly and Katherine Jellison. “Production Patterns, Consumption Strategies, and Gender Relations in Amish and Non-Amish Households in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, 1935-36” *Agricultural History* (Spring, 1993).

Four of Rusinow's interior scenes showcase the needlework of Mennonite women and are therefore demonstrative of domestic skills: the Bethlehem Star quilt in the bedroom, the block-style quilt top lying in the living room, and the two examples of framed needlework that adorn two corners of a room. [4.8] Particularly the quilts are products of domestic labor that work metonymically to point to the presence of women. Both of these quilts are pieced textiles comprised of hundreds of small pieces of fabric probably joined with a sewing machine and then quilted by hand. In Mennonite and Amish communities especially, quilting is an inherently family- and community- affirming activity, as women of many generations pool their labor to produce quilts for important occasions. Not only does the quilt evidence female production in the home but it also visualizes, it embodies, a female line of succession in a familial structure that privileges men. Rusinow's picturing of the quilt denotes it as a product of domestic labor, a sign of women's adherence to and situation within the family structure, and a product of creative expression not shared by their husbands or fathers.

But I would argue that even more than female labor, Rusinow's interiors are about the display of female-made goods and moreover, women's buying power. The quilt on the bed is not just an example of the Mennonite woman's quilting skills, it is also one of her "best" quilts that only graced the bed on special occasions when it could be admired by guests to the home. Similarly, the two examples of framed needlework assume a prominent position on the wall; like paintings, they are meant to be read and admired for their design as well as their data – or sentiment – content.

Most explicitly, Rusinow's three cabinet pictures make little reference to anything but consumption and display. We can presume that the cabinets are not homemade, as there are few instances of homemade cabinetry with plate glass from Pennsylvania.<sup>154</sup> [4.9] We also know that they are not traditionally Pennsylvania-German objects. Although the corner cabinet in the middle image is of German origin, the china cabinet is an English invention of the late seventeenth century.<sup>155</sup> In this case, the cabinets are also filled with English dishware including Staffordshire figurines and tea sets. In other words, Rusinow's cabinet pictures cast the woman as collector, connoisseur, and consumer, these "best" objects have been purchased, and they are displayed here in an English (and *english*) cabinet created for that very purpose.

Eugene Atget's *Interior of M. B, collector* (1910) offers a useful comparison here. [4.10] As history's photographer of Old Paris, Atget's project was also metonymic – his interiors are void of their inhabitants but teeming with their material trace. In this particular case, M. B's china cabinet brims with curios acquired from his travels to China, India, and French Indochina. Its glass doors stand open to our waiting gaze, some of its contents nearly spill over the edge, while the rest of the objects are tiered on platforms so that we can see as many of them as possible. These objects cast M. B as a savvy collector, a worldly figure, a modern man; and his china cabinet acts as repository and presentation format for the visible traces of him within the home.

When viewed with their captions, however, Rusinow's cabinet pictures begin to fall away from Atget. [4.11] Rather than prominent displays of the female self, the captions render the images something more akin to household inventories, objects in need of individual accounting rather than admiration for their whole composition. For example in the bedroom scene, the caption notes that, "lace curtains would not be permitted in conservative Amish houses." Likewise in the image, the caption noted that the mounted deer head would inappropriately adorn an Old Order Amish

<sup>154</sup> James Krenov. *The Fine Art of Cabinetmaking*. (New York: Macmillan, 1977), iv.

<sup>155</sup> Peter Jones. *Shelves, Closets, and Cabinets, From A-frames to Z-outs*. (New York: Service Communications, 1978), 68.

interior. [4.12] About this Mennonite living room, we learn that, “the embroidered pillow on the sofa would not be found in an Amish home.” [4.13] These Mennonite interior scenes seem to have been close approximations of the Amish homes that Rusinow actually saw in Lancaster. The captions then do more than describe the image; they remedy Rusinow’s approximation, make it more exact, by noting when the viewer should mentally subtract objects from the room in order to finally see the real subject of the picture.

It is telling then that Rusinow’s strategy of visual subtraction is off; he is not consistent in his arithmetic and in some cases, he is just plain wrong. The photographer notes that the lace curtains in the bedroom, for example, would not be found in an Amish interior. However, the quilt on the bed is a more obvious clue that what we are looking at here is not an Amish scene. While it is difficult to distinguish between Mennonite quilts and other American examples, Lancaster Amish quilts are highly distinctive within an American quilting tradition; they are distinguished by pieced tops with either a diamond or square central motif, and they are covered with elaborately quilted patterns. Printed fabrics such as the ones used to comprise this Bethlehem Star quilt never comprise these textiles. The quilt on the bed then resembles neither in pattern nor in material, quilts characteristic of the Lancaster Amish. This bedcovering is surely unfit for an Old Order bed and yet Rusinow makes no mention of it.

The photographer also has a tendency to make the interior older than it actually is. The caption tells us that the bed in **Figure 4.11** “is over one hundred years old.” Surely, it is not. The bed is in the Eastlake style, a type of furniture inspired by the designs of English architect and author Charles Eastlake.<sup>156</sup> His influential treatise, *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*, was published in the United States in 1872 and enjoyed three additional printings after that.<sup>157</sup> More than likely, the Eastlake bed and matching dresser in the scene were produced in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, at the height of (or even more likely, after) the style’s popularity in this country. At best, the bed is seventy years old.

Rusinow’s interior scenes displace the Old Order woman from the economic realm of the home. In these photographs, her visibility to the viewer is relative, contingent upon that which we do not see. Unlike the earliest photographs of the Amish that situated the female individual within an urban landscape in order to inscribe meaning onto her, Rusinow has here extracted the Amish body all together. In its place appears an interior that is coded female and prominently displays the products of her labor and the spoils of her participation as an active consumer in multiple modern economies. With both image and text, Rusinow imbues these unpeopled interiors with an identity rooted in the traces of their unseen inhabitants. These scenes are very specific places, however, and any specified location is only achieved through equally specific displacements of people and information. In Rusinow’s interiors, the Amish woman exists as a relative figure, her identity – her visibility – utterly dependent upon her relation to other women, and the difference between her things and those of another. These pictures visually enact the social processes by which Amish identity has been historically constituted. Just as Amish women, the real subjects of Rusinow’s images, are only constituted by their relationship to objects and bodies visible in the photograph, so too have ideas of the Amish been contingent upon their (ever changing) relative position to American desires and anxieties in the first half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>156</sup> Comment by Dr. Margaretta M. Lovell, meeting of the Berkeley Americanist Group (BAG), April 2010.

<sup>157</sup> Charles Eastlake. *Hints on Household Taste in Furniture, Upholstery, and Other Details*. 1872, frontispiece.

## Postscript

### Picturing Amish Forgiveness

On Wednesday morning, news of the Amish schoolhouse shooting from Monday continued to unfold; but it also seemed to unravel steadily backwards, as more and more in the Amish community publicly forgave the shooter. On that Wednesday morning, October 4, an NBC news reporter hurried up to the grandfather of Lena Zook and Mary Liz Miller, and asked if he had any anger toward the gunman's family. His answer, a decisive "No," and then later in the interview, "I've already forgiven him in my heart," marked a decisive shift in the American media coverage of the Nickel Mines schoolhouse shooting in 2006. One day earlier, the grandfather had himself hurried to the hospital beds of his seven- and eight-year-old granddaughters just to watch each of them die in her mother's arms. Twelve hours before Charles Roberts, a local milk truck driver, fatally shot Lena, Mary, and three other Amish girls against the blackboard of their one-room schoolhouse, before taking his own life with a pistol. Roberts was thirty-two, the father of three children; in a suicide note he vowed vengeance on God for the premature death of an infant daughter almost a decade earlier.

The following explores that shift in the media coverage of the Nickel Mines shooting, from Charles Roberts's rampage inside an Amish school to his forgiveness by the Amish community. It argues that photographs surfacing in the days after the event sought to picture Amish forgiveness by heavily engaging two familiar, yet seemingly antithetical visual modes: American school violence and representations of Amish education. By situating the Nickel Mines photographs within these visual histories, we will see how one type of photograph dominated in the shooting's aftermath while others remained conspicuously absent. I begin with a discussion of images that appeared on the day of the shooting and the day after, and conclude with some thoughts on the photographs that surfaced beginning on October 4.

#### Picturing Crisis

Dubbed by the media a "massacre," Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold's meticulous assault on thirteen students inside Columbine High School (April 20, 1999) remains the awful standard by which Americans have measured the magnitude of subsequent school shootings. Although Seung-Hui Cho characterized his own rampage on thirty-two students at Virginia Tech University as "going Columbine," the 2007 shooting paled in comparison to the incident that itself has become a colloquial verb in American parlance and a visual phenomenon that merits its own genre.

Two types of photographs comprised the media's visual formulation of Columbine; now a familiar formula, these photographs shape both our vision and fundamental conception of the school shooting as a crisis. All of them possess both indexical and iconic value, ensuring their historical relevance and, in Roland Barthes' terms, their continued pathos.<sup>158</sup> The first type of image is the easiest in which to gauge the incongruence between the photographic tendencies of Columbine and Nickel Mines. **[P.1]** Still images from security cameras in the high school record the shooters as the siege plays out. In the image on the right, probably the most familiar, Harris and Klebold move, heavily armed, through the cafeteria and back into the library where they would eventually take their own lives. From a high corner of the evacuated, vacuous room, we see Harris, slouched and at ease, his attention captured by the sunlight that punctuates then envelops the far side of the scene. To his right, Klebold strides through the frame with a decisive swagger, his gait supporting perfectly the

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<sup>158</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 62.

upward angle of his gun. It is not, I would argue, only the poses of the two shooters that render this picture unyieldingly hypnotic. It is also the transitory moment of the scene, the movement of the figures, deferred here for only a second, from cafeteria to library, from life to death, from sunshine to darkness. It is Barthes' soliloquy. The quality of the still -- grainy, distorted, yet all-encompassing -- heightens the picture's disorienting effects and situates the viewer in a privileged position that both oversees the event in real time and is guarded from it by virtue of this very fact, literally inscribed across the bottom of the image itself.

Photographs comparable to the Columbine security stills do not exist for Nickel Mines. A lack of security cameras in the school prohibits us from witnessing the event as a narrative, delineated by time, and stilled for contemplation after the fact. Instead on the day of the shooting, the American public was inundated with photographs of the Amish community mourning what had already happened. In these pictures, Amish adults most often appear in small, quiet groups down the road from the schoolhouse, on the periphery of the building, or crossing a nearby field to return to a neighbor's home. **[P.2]** Although the camera offers a privileged, distanced position here, we do not witness a singular moment that succinctly expresses the crisis; rather, these are contemporary genre pictures, complete with picturesque staffage in an autumnal landscape.

Art historian Elizabeth Johns has said that the numerous character types to appear in mid-nineteenth-century American genre paintings points to the need in a young country to define itself as distinct from its former colonizer.<sup>159</sup> In the Nickel Mines photograph, one of the most revered types of genre subjects, the yeoman farmer walks across a green, productive field, framed by golden foliage and his family spanning every generation. **[P.3]** In Eastman Johnson's version, a leisurely outing by cranberry pickers in Nantucket evidence the same sense of nationalist pride, as a multi-generational and thus, resilient family, harvest the bounty of their unique American landscape. **[P.4]**

I have been calling another type of photograph common to the Columbine formula, "evacuation pictures," a name that both describes the removal of wounded students from school buildings and denotes a more broadly conceived formal and ideological evacuation of everything that was once suggested by American schoolhouse imagery. Alongside photographs from Nickel Mines of police officers investigating the crime scene, the school buildings at Columbine and Virginia Tech look like grossly oversized parodies of the one-room schoolhouse; solemn stone monoliths once associated with a progressive system of communal instruction, have now become tombs for youth and hideouts for young killers. **[P.5]**

In one of the most iconic genre pictures of the nineteenth century, Winslow Homer's *Snap the Whip* (1872), the little red schoolhouse occupies the central middle ground, encircled and guarded by children in the front and the Catskill Mountains in the back. **[P.6]** Here the schoolhouse opens its door to the youth who will mend and renew a country ravaged by civil war; and in turn, the children protect the schoolhouse from an accelerating industrial society that threatens to invalidate its very existence. Other genre paintings depict the schoolhouse in a similar light, each of them citing the structure as a national symbol of youth and integrity, inseparable from the children who play on the lawn and invaluable to an American public eager yet ambivalent about the direction their young country is going.

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<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Johns. *American Genre Painting: The Politics of Everyday Life*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 9.



Even pictures of the Nickel Mines schoolhouse on the day of the shooting temper Homer's imagery. Here we see a dystopic scene of loss; the fortress has been compromised; modern vehicles and representatives of the state replace Homer's mountains and rambunctious children. [P.7] The building seen here in profile is a turn-of-the-century structure that evidences much of the architectural design and function that characterize a sort of hybrid between progressive learning models and earlier rural schools. This kind of school architecture is common in Amish communities, where the convenience of blackboards and individual desks have modified the earlier amphitheater format of the country school. It was in Lancaster County that this hybrid form of the private Amish schoolhouse arose in the first half of the twentieth century out of the desperate need to rescue the Amish system of education from the intrusion of outside forces.

In August 1937, township officials in East Lampeter, Pennsylvania began to consolidate one-room schoolhouses and move students into a single, government-subsidized public school. All across the country at the end of the nineteenth century, large public institutions began to supplant small rural schools, as education reformers recognized the quickly widening gap between the type of education children received and the type of industry roles they would inevitably fill. Centralization, advocates for New Education believed, would transition schools to a model of instruction that mimicked business and industrial models, at once making more efficient and cost-effective the school as a public institution and preparing America's youth for jobs in private, bureaucratic sectors.

For Amish communities across the country, these kinds of consolidation efforts were a direct attack on their system of education, which formally educates youth only until the eighth grade. In East Lampeter, Amish leaders petitioned the township for exemption from the plan on the grounds that government aid constituted unwanted charity and an expanded school curriculum would instill in their children undesirable values. Their petition was rejected and the dispute quickly reached crisis proportions after several Amish men were jailed for refusing to send their children to the public school. For three years, the Amish resisted the township decision until eventually they overrode it completely, opening their own private schools in buildings that recalled Homer's ideal.<sup>160</sup> The East Lampeter event garnered national attention in part because Americans empathized with Amish parents even at a time when the sect's pacifist beliefs were unpopular; and in part, because the dispute revolved around the one-room schoolhouse, a vanishing architectural icon of American identity.<sup>161</sup> In 1937-8, the New York Times alone ran twenty-three articles on the Amish, and a deluge of other print media followed, including WPA posters that celebrated a Dutch Wonderland of agriculture, costumes, and architecture. [P.8]

Thirty years after East Lampeter, fathers in a northern Iowa Amish community also spent time in jail for refusing to hire *english* teachers, who met state and federal certification standards. The Hazelton County Amish were eventually granted exemption from state school standards, but not before desperate officials rounded up Amish children in 1965 in order to escort them to public schools. In an image that has been widely reproduced in Anabaptist Studies circles, a photographer for the Des Moines Register captures the scene as six Amish boys run for cover into a cornfield

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<sup>160</sup> For more on the East Lampeter schoolhouse debate see David Weaver-Zercher. *The Amish in the American Imagination*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); and Gertrude Enders Huntington. "Persistence and Change in Amish Education" in Donald Kraybill and Marc A. Olshan (eds.) *The Amish Struggle with Modernity*. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 77-96.

<sup>161</sup> Similar in scope and method to David Weaver-Zercher's text on the Amish in the American Imagination, see Jonathan Zimmerman. *Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory*. (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2009.

behind their school. [P.9] I present the photograph here as much for the historical context of this discussion as for its unsettling ability to evoke the repeated descriptions of Nickel Mines officials, who said that Charles Roberts let the boys in the school leave the building before he tied up his female victims. The boys ran through a cornfield behind the school in order to reach the nearest neighbor.

### The Unbaptized

[P.10] The same morning that the grandfather of Lena Zook and Mary Liz Miller spoke to reporters about forgiveness, an Amish woman from Georgetown, PA appeared in silhouette on CBS's Early Show to talk about the same thing. "We have to forgive," she said. "We have to forgive him in order for God to forgive us." Her statement comes directly from Matthew 18, where in the last fifteen verses we find Peter asking if forgiving a person seven times is enough; Jesus responds with a story about an unforgiving servant who refuses to extend mercy only to be punished by his master for his lack of compassion. For the Amish, there are two main lessons to be taken from this story. First, that God's forgiveness of them directly depends upon their ability to forgive others; and second, that forgiveness is difficult. The third verse of Matthew is as equally central to the Amish faith and is the centerpiece of instruction at Amish Council Meetings, biannual worship services that prepare the community to accept communion. The third verse says: "And he said: 'I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.'"

For contemporary Amish, who descend from sixteenth-century Anabaptists in Switzerland and Germany, the child is a cogent symbol of their creed. Anabaptist, from the Greek meaning to baptize again, refers to the sect's rejection of infant baptism and belief that only an informed adult can completely and freely make the life-long commitment to be Amish. Youths typically join the church in their late teens after they have participated in a rite of passage known as *Rumspringa* (literally, jumping around) whereby they are free to experience the *english* world. As children then, the Amish are not subject to the same kinds of prohibitions as adults including the Church's proscriptions against photography. This exception is most apparent in the countless photographs of Amish children in American popular culture. Outside the constraints of church doctrine and occupying a preciously liminal state within the community, Amish children are often highly cooperative subjects for photojournalists and tourists alike. If Matthew says that to be like a child is to be a humble, virtuous, and merciful Christian, then to be a twentieth-century Amish child, is also to be a potent, because vacant symbol for Amish and *english* alike.

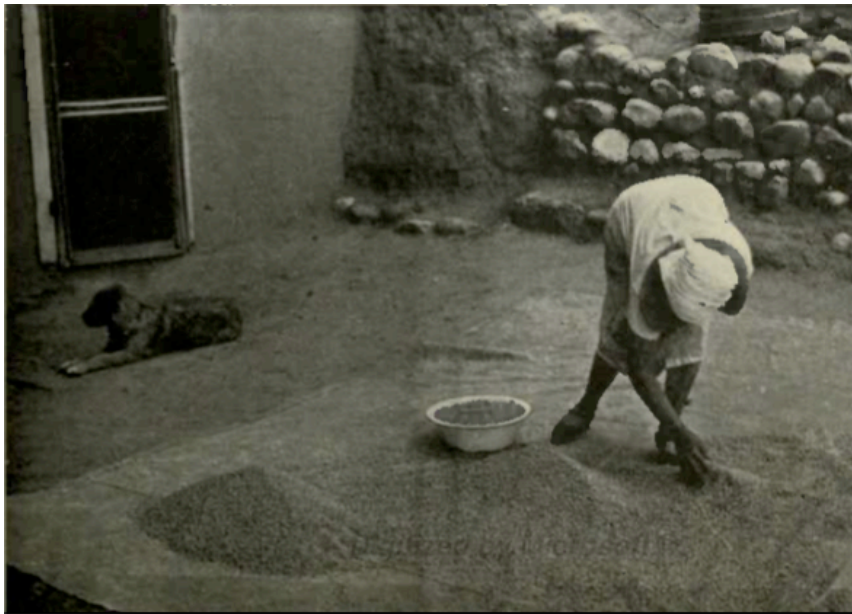
In conclusion, let us return to the Des Moines Register photograph and present it beside the work of Rusinow. As we saw in the last chapter, Rusinow performed a number of substitutions in his photographs of female spaces of economy. For example, we find an active displacement of Old Order Amish women in the unpeopled domestic interiors of Mennonite homes. [P.11] Similarly in the series, we find that Mennonite women in Mennonite homes stand in for Old Order Amish wives and mothers. Yet the success of his photographs (within the context of the largely reproduced technical report) suggests that Rusinow's substitutions did not invalidate the project's cultural or ethical authority, and instead, the forced and even false completeness of these pictures garnered further American interest for the people pictured. [P.12] While the Iowa photograph does not necessarily recall the perspective or technical clarity of Rusinow's pictures, the subjects' fleeing silhouettes, their visual anonymity, evokes the substitution that ensures the authority of Rusinow's project. In the hands of the Iowa photographer and Rusinow, Amish youth become reproducible, easy duplicates with their hats, dress, and beliefs that, when reduced to their basic form, look only

slightly more individualized than Katherine Milhous's 1941 WPA poster in **Figure P.8**. Here, Amish children are boy and girl stamps in the landscape, laid down in consistent patterns around a red schoolhouse and flanked by the stylized birds and tulips most commonly seen in Pennsylvania German *fraktur*.

After Lena and Mary's grandfather forgave Charles Roberts, photographs like these overtook earlier kinds of pictures. From inside buggies, young girls peer out windows as they slowly proceed down the main street of Nickel Mines on their way to bury young friends and family. **[P.13]** Unlike Columbine, instead of seeing photographs of the shooter's victims, we saw composite images that merge genre types: school shooting pictures become Eastman Johnson's stoic cranberry pickers, Rusinow's sociological subjects, and Disciple Matthew's compassionate child inscribed with multiple histories and yet still a vacant symbol for an entire tragedy. Amish proscriptions against photography actively disengage the Nickel Mines images from the visual system usually reserved for American school shootings, and further tether the event to a visual history of crisis around the Amish education system. Art historian Jonathan Crary has argued that around the "hegemonic set of discourses and practices in which vision takes shape," there are "oppositional moments" when dominant practices of vision are "resisted, deflected, or imperfectly constituted."<sup>162</sup> The Old Order Amish community's relationship to photography represents such an oppositional moment – just as their refusal to engage with the camera constitutes a resistance to modern practices of vision, so do the many photographs of them deflect the appearance of violence performed by the camera upon unwilling subjects.

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<sup>162</sup> Crary. *Techniques of the Observer*, 11.



### 1.1

Irving Rusinow

*...while houses are made of adobe, which is both cooler and warmer than wood...*

1937

Santa Cruz Valley, NM

In *Survey Graphic* (February 1938)

### 1.2

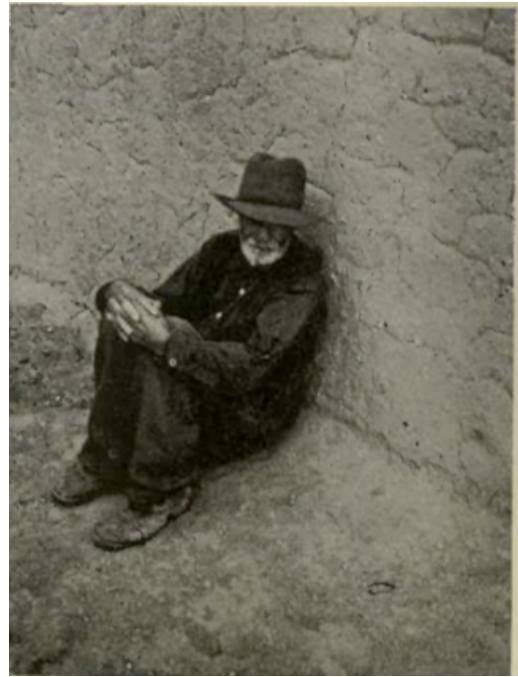
Irving Rusinow

*...and wheat, grown for home consumption and largely hand-processed.*

1937

Santa Cruz Valley, NM

In *Survey Graphic* (February 1938)

**1.3**

Irving Rusinow

*Children do their share of the farmwork...*

1937

Santa Cruz Valley, NM

In *Survey Graphic* (February 1938)

**1.4**

Irving Rusinow

*...and the old sit contentedly in the sun.*

1937

Santa Cruz Valley, NM

In *Survey Graphic* (February 1938)





1.5

Irving Rusinow

Title unknown, probably Taos County, 1941

In Rusinow Archive, Bethesda, Maryland



**1.6**

Ansel Adams

*Saint Francis Church Rancho de Taos, New Mexico*

1929





1.7

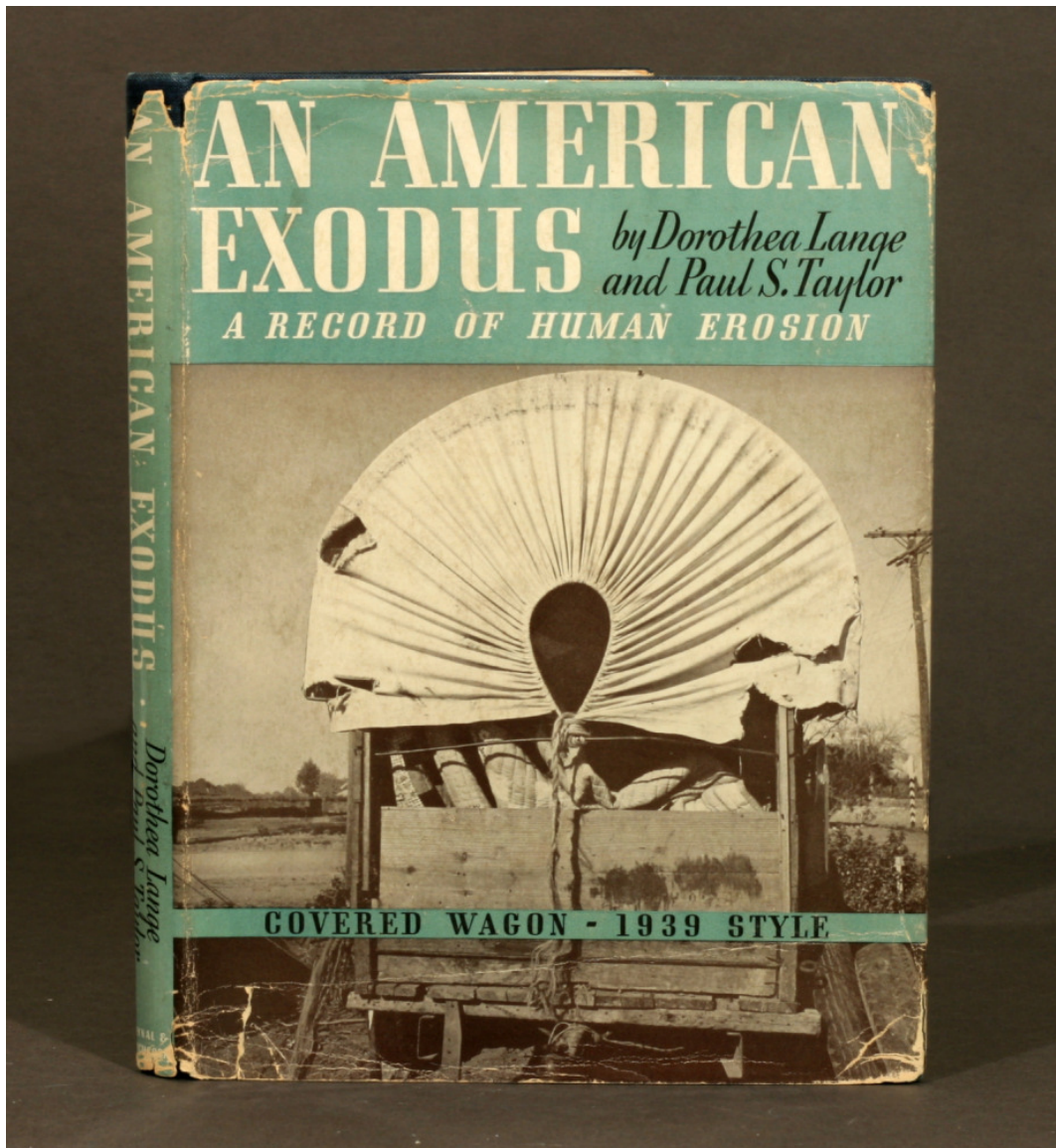
Irving Rusinow

*Oasis*

1938

*Scribner's Magazine* (February 1939)



**2.1**

*An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*

By Dorothea Lange and Paul S. Taylor

New York: Reynal & Taylor Publishers, 1939



2.2  
 Dorothea Lange  
*Resettled Child of Bosque Farms, New Mexico*  
 December 1935  
 Bosque Farms, NM



2.3  
 Dorothea Lange  
*Jewish-American farm mother*  
 June 1936  
 Hightstown, NJ



**2.4**  
Dorothea Lange  
*Making adobe bricks*  
December 1935  
Bosque Farms, NM



**2.5**  
Dorothea Lange  
*Potato Field*  
June 1936  
Hightstown, NJ

**2.6**

Dorothea Lange

*Temporary housing for the settlers*

December 1935

Bosque Farms, NM

**2.7**

Dorothea Lange

*Houses at Jersey Homesteads*

June 1936

Hightstown, NJ

**2.8**

Dorothea Lange

*Factory and field, both to be run on cooperative basis by resettled families at Hightstown...*

June 1936

Hightstown, NJ

**2.9**

Dorothea Lange

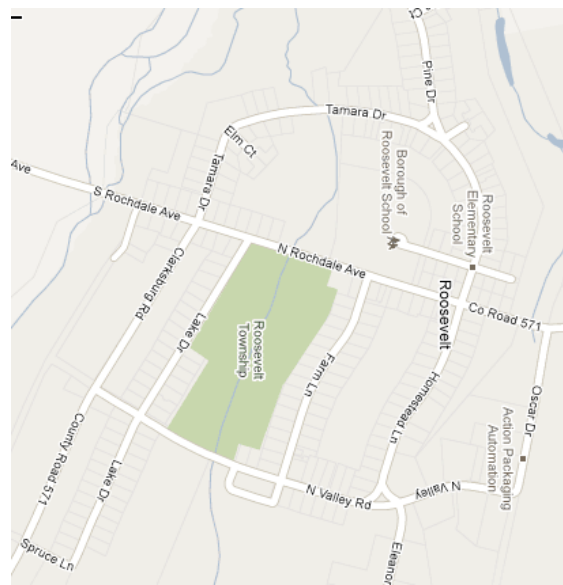
*View of nearly completed factory for garment workers*

June 1936

Hightstown, NJ







## 2.11

Dorothea Lange

*Aerial view of Jersey Homesteads* (looking west)

Between 1936 and 1938

Hightstown, NJ

## 2.12

Google satellite map of Roosevelt, NJ (looking west)

(Action Packaging Automation is on Oscar Drive at the bottom right)



**2.13**

Marion Post (Wolcott)

*Meeting of the neighborhood or community land use planning committee in Locust Hill.*

1940

Caswell County, NC

**2.14**

Marion Post (Wolcott)

*Community members playing cards in front of the courthouse on a Saturday afternoon*

1940

Caswell County, NC





**2.15**

Dorothea Lange

*Olivehurst, 2 miles south of Marysville, Yuba County, California.*

1940

For Bureau of Agricultural Economics

**2.16**

Dorothea Lange

*Air view of Winter's Farm Works Community (F.S.A.)  
with farm labor homes on adjoining land.*

1940

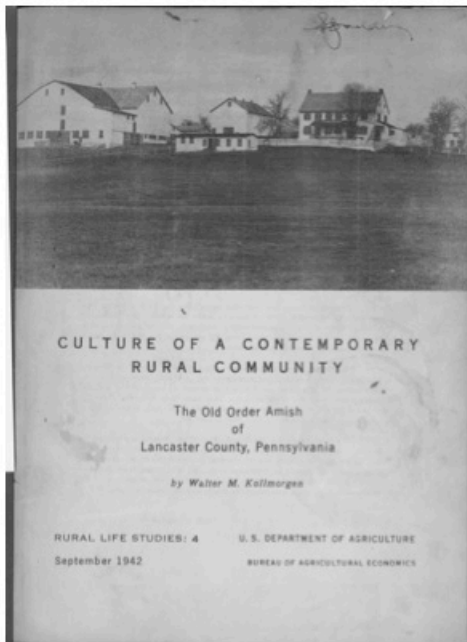
For Bureau of Agricultural Economics





**2.17**  
 Irving Rusinow  
*Church interior*  
 March 1941  
 Landaff, NH

**2.18**  
 Irving Rusinow  
*...This was taken in one of the best furnished dwellings in the village - one of the few whose walls are papered...*  
 April 1941  
 San Miguel County, NM



### 3.1

*Culture of a Contemporary Rural Community: The Old Order Amish of Lancaster County, Pennsylvania* (published by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942)

**3.2**

*This is one of the better Old-Order Amish farm places. Barns like this cannot be replaced for less than \$10,000. The part of the barn nearest the camera is a straw shed in which feeders are kept. Straw is stored in the second story.*



**3.3**  
Hans Herr House  
1719  
Lancaster County, PA

**3.4**

*This Scotch-Irish farm place is located in a region which is marginal to the Amish and which is rapidly being invaded by Amish farmers. Notice the lightening rods on the barn. These are not to be found on Amish buildings.*

**3.5**

*Leacock Presbyterian Church near Intercourse, Pennsylvania. Established 200 years ago, it was once the center of a Scotch-Irish community which has now disappeared. The land is owned today by Amishmen.*



#### 4.1

*Religious Sects of Lancaster  
County* Postcard produced by the Curt  
Teich Company (Illinois), distributed by  
Isaac Steinfeldt (1912)

Original photograph circa 1880



**4.2**

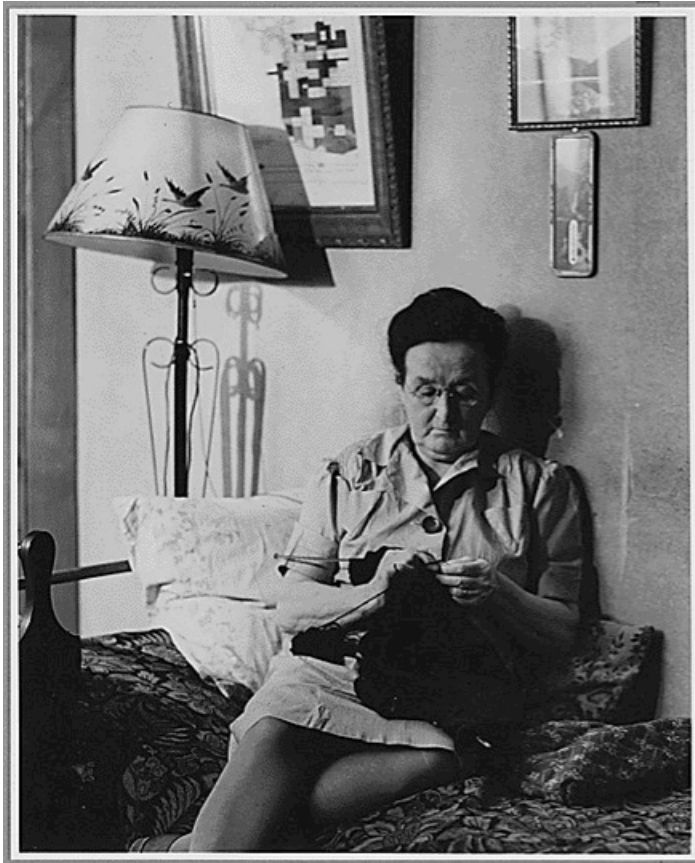
From "*Pennsylvania Dutch*"

*Travel* magazine (June 1921)



**4.3**

From "*Pennsylvania Dutch*"  
*Travel* magazine (June 1921)

**4.4**

Irving Rusinow  
Landaff, NH  
1941

*Mrs. Charles Chandler is over 60, runs a large house alone, bakes bread, preserves a great amount of meat, fruits and vegetables, makes soap and knits clothes. She came to Landaff from Vermont some 40 years ago. On the wall behind her is a property map of the town prepared by the BAE.*



**4.5**  
Irving Rusinow  
*Lancaster County, PA – Southern Market*  
1941



**4.6**  
Irving Rusinow  
*Lancaster County, PA – Southern Market*  
1941



4.7  
Irving Rusinow  
*Lancaster County, PA – Southern Market*  
1941



**4.8**  
Four photographs  
of Lancaster  
interiors that  
exhibit needlework  
by Mennonite  
women



**4.9**

Three Rusinow photographs of Lancaster interiors that include a display cabinet





**4.10**  
Eugène Atget  
*Interior of M. B, collector*  
1910

**4.11**

*This is a bedroom in a conservative Mennonite household. The bed and the folded spread are both over 100 years old. Note flowers on the dresser and in the window. Lace curtains would not be permitted in conservative Amish houses.*

**4.12**

*Another good example of the household china cabinet. The mounted deer head on the wall would not be found in the house of an Old-Order Amish man.*

**4.13**

*China cabinets of this type are more common than the corner cupboard. The embroidered pillow on the sofa would not be found in an Amish house. Notice the beautiful illuminated record listing the birthdates of the members of the family.*



**P.1**  
Still images captured by camera inside  
Columbine High School  
April 20, 1999



**P.2**  
From the *New York Times*  
October 4, 2006



**P. 3**

From the *New York Times*

October 3, 2006



**P.4**

Eastman Johnson

*In the Fields* (1878-80)

Oil on board

17 x 27 in.

The Detroit Institute of Art



**P.5**

Clockwise from left to right:

Columbine High School (April 20, 1999);

Virginia Tech University (April 16, 2007);

Nickel Mines Amish School (October 3, 2006)



**P.6**

Winslow Homer

*Snap the Whip* (1872)

Oil on canvas

22 x 36 in.

Butler Institute of American Art

**P.7**



From the *New York Times*  
October 3, 2006



Irving Rusinow  
*Exterior of Old Order Amish Schoolhouse,*  
*East Lampeter (Lancaster County), PA*  
1941



P.8

Katherine Milhous

From the *Rural Pennsylvania* series

Circa 1938-41 (for the WPA's Federal Art Project)



**P.9**

From the *Des Moines Register*

1965



**P.10**

Still from *The Early Show*  
October 4, 2006

P.11

From Irving Rusinow's Lancaster County Amish series (1941)





**P.12**

Irving Rusinow

*Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The clothes worn by these Old-Order Amish boys are without exception homemade. Their hair is cut in the approved manner, which is the same for men and boys. Hair may be parted in the middle only.*

1941

P.13



Tim Clary for the Associated Press  
October 5, 2006



Mary Altafar for the Associated Press  
October 5, 2006



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## Appendix A: Terms

Amish: an orthodox Anabaptist sect that separated from the Swiss Mennonites in the late seventeenth century under the leadership of Jakob Ammann, and exists today primarily in northeast Ohio and southeast Pennsylvania.

Amish Mennonite: less conservative faction of the Amish that separated from the Old Order Amish during the Great Schism of 1865.

Anabaptism: originally a fringe, or radical, movement of the Protestant Reformation, and spiritual ancestor of modern Baptists and Quakers. The movement's most distinctive tenet was adult baptism. The Amish, Mennonite, Hutterites, and Church of the Brethren are Anabaptist groups.

Church Amish: Amish sect that worships in meeting houses as opposed to homes.

English (with a lowercase "e"): refers to the Amish designation of non-Amish individuals.

Mennonite: member of a Protestant church that arose out of the Anabaptists, a radical reform movement of the sixteenth-century Reformation. It was named for Menno Simons, a Dutch priest who consolidated and institutionalized the work initiated by moderate Anabaptist leaders.

Old Order Amish: one of the most conservative factions of the Amish that separated from the Amish Mennonites in the Great Schism of 1865.

Pennsylvania Dutch/Pennsylvania German: seventeenth- and eighteenth-century German-speaking settlers in Pennsylvania and their descendants. Emigrating from southern Germany (Palatinate, Bavaria, Saxony) and Switzerland, they settled primarily in the southeastern section of Pennsylvania, where they practiced any of several slightly different forms of Anabaptist faith, however, mostly Amish and Mennonite.

## Appendix B: Government Organizations

<u>Acronym</u>	<u>Organization</u>	<u>Dates of Operation</u>
BAE	Bureau of Agricultural Economics	1922-46 (I. Rusinow employed 1939-42)
CIAA	Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs	1941-45 (I. Rusinow employed 1942-44)
FSA	Farm Security Administration	1937-42 (became the OWI)
OWI	Office of War Information	1942-45
RA	Resettlement Administration	1935-37 (became the FSA)
SCS	Soil Conservation Service	1935-93 (I. Rusinow employed 1936/1939)
SES	Soil Erosion Service	1933-35 (became the SCS)
SHD	Subsistence Homesteads Division	1933-35
WPA	Works Progress Administration	1935-43