

FROM DUSTBOWL AND DAIRY FARM TO DEFENSE HOUSING: UNDER- STANDING THE FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION PHOTOGRAPHS OF BATH IRON WORKS

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In the late 1930s and early 1940s, Roy Stryker and his team of photographers at the Farm Security Administration (FSA) set out to create images of America that could bolster the spirit of the country in the midst of economic depression and international war. By 1940, photographs of small towns and America's increasing military capability were common. In December 1940, Stryker sent photographer Jack Delano to Bath, Maine, to document the housing shortage for workers at the Bath Iron Works. This assignment was part of the FSA's project to monitor and record migrant populations during the Great Depression, with the goal of creating better housing opportunities for workers. Rachel Miller is a graduate student in American and New England Studies at the University of Southern Maine. She holds degrees from Vassar College and Trinity College, Dublin, and works as the Education Assistant at the Maine Historical Society. Her current research project explores Americanization programs in the Portland Public Schools between 1922 and 1945.

IN DECEMBER 1940, the photographer Jack Delano was sent on his first major assignment for the Farm Security Administration (FSA), what he would later remember as “a photo story on the shipyard and the itinerant construction workers” at Bath Iron Works (BIW) in Bath, Maine.¹ Recently hired by FSA Historical Section director Roy Stryker, and based in Washington, D.C., Delano was honored to work as photographer Walker Evans had, to be making “art seriously concerned with the plight of the dispossessed, the needy, and the landless.”² Bath did offer landless and needy subjects, although not the migrant farmers Evans had famously photographed. Some residents of Bath were living in trailers and converted summer cottages because of a boom in employment at the Iron Works, due in turn to the demand for warships created by the

escalation of European conflict. It was Delano's responsibility to document the resulting housing shortage.

The crisis Delano photographed was short-lived, but the industry that engendered the housing shortage played a key role in Bath's growth and development since European settlement. Once known for wooden clipper ships and schooners, Bath shipbuilders adjusted to changes in maritime technology and began building with steel at the end of the nineteenth century. After only ten years of incorporation, Bath Iron Works produced its first naval vessel in 1893, a gunboat that foreshadowed the torpedo boats and destroyers that would cement the firm's reputation. Although the shipyard workers continued to build commercial and pleasure crafts, the bulk of the company's contracts came from the U.S. Navy, and BIW was very successful during World War I. However, the sporadic private and naval commissions of the interwar period were not sufficient to keep the company afloat, and the firm was liquidated and then reorganized by longtime employee Pete Newell in 1927.³

Newell proved adept at negotiating navy contracts for destroyers throughout the 1930s, and as the German Army moved into western Europe in the spring of 1940, Bath Iron Works rapidly expanded its building capacity in anticipation of the demand for warships. In July 1940 BIW had contracts for twelve vessels, including six destroyers, with the promise of more commissions before the end of the year.⁴ Eventually responsible for building one-fourth of all the navy's destroyers between 1940 and 1945, Bath Iron Works was an integral part of the Allied effort on the sea, building one destroyer every seventeen days and employing 12,000 people during peak production, an increase from only several hundred in the 1920s.⁵ Many of these workers came from elsewhere in Maine, and their immediate need for housing brought their scarce and substandard living situations under the surveillance of Jack Delano, acting by proxy for Roy Stryker and the FSA.

Taken at the conclusion of 1940, the Bath photographs came toward the end of Roy Stryker's tenure as the decade's preeminent initiator and distributor of documentary photography. Stryker was hired as a publicist for the Resettlement Administration (RA) because of his connections to a former mentor at Columbia University, Rexford Tugwell, an agricultural economist who joined President Franklin Roosevelt's administration in 1933. Greatly indebted to socially motivated photographers like Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis, Stryker believed strongly in the power of the image as a reform tool. He was eventually appointed to oversee all photography for the RA, and continued in this capacity when

the RA was renamed the Farm Security Administration in 1937. Like so many of the federal programs developed during the 1930s as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal, the FSA and its predecessor were implemented to help counteract the extreme poverty in the wake of the Great Depression, particularly the plight of migrant workers and tenant farmers. Stryker's primary responsibility was to use photography to garner support for progressive initiatives from a broad audience, and he selected his images with an eye to both the Senate floor and to *Life* magazine.

After eight decades of publication, exhibition, and interpretation, the photographs taken for the FSA have become the most recognizable documentary images in the history of the genre. Presented as an objective and unadulterated record of "How American People Live," the realism of the FSA photographs was "deliberate, calculated, and highly stylized," produced by an elaborate process of selecting, posing, and framing on the part of both the individual photographers and by Roy Stryker.⁶ His project provided visual testimony in favor of the federal government's role in "reshaping habits of individualism through agricultural engineering and technocratic control, through social intervention and the rational employment of philanthropic surveillance."⁷

This last term expertly describes Delano's photographs of the Iron Works' employees and their families. To garner sympathy and compassion from viewers, the images had to represent the human subjects as both in need and worthy of federal assistance. The FSA photographs are often divided into three stages, beginning with the migrant workers, shifting to the "Small Town" phase in 1936, and concluding with the file's transition to the Office of War Information in 1942.⁸ Because of timing and content, the Bath series would seem to fit best in the last stage, but the photographs are also connected to images of migrant agricultural workers, to the promotion of American democracy, to New England, and to the escalation of war. The images of Bath Iron Works do not fit neatly into any of these categories but instead draw connections among them, demonstrating the continuity of Stryker's project across geographic locations and subject matter and validating the presence of the federal government in the lives of private citizens. Looking closely at the Bath Iron Works series expands our understanding of Maine's place in the FSA photographic project and sheds light on the evolution and continuity of the archive as the country moved from the Depression into World War II.



Figure 1. Farm Security Administration photographer Jack Delano visited Aroostook County in 1940 to photograph agricultural scenes. Although FSA photographers often looked for rural deprivation to help win support for the New Deal, in this image of potato farmer Edison Houston of Perham, Delano depicted a relative prosperity brought about by government assistance. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042157.

FSA's Bath Subjects

Stryker's initial project was to document for the public the recipients of federal aid for migrant farm workers, and the images of this population continue to dominate the popular perception of the FSA. Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, Walker Evans' Hale County work, Arthur Rothstein's *Fleeing a Dust Storm*, and similar works of agrarian destitution and environmental devastation have come to stand in for the file as a whole. Much of the scholarship on the FSA has also focused on the rural photographs, and when the lens shifts from the American South and the Dustbowl, it settles again on farming. The only academic study of FSA photographs taken in Maine concerns the northeastern counterpart of these iconic images, the potato-farming clients in St. John Valley photographed by Jack Delano and John Collier.⁹

On first consideration, the subjects in Delano's Iron Works photographs have little in common with the most familiar FSA subjects. Because the men were employed in industry, they seem to lack the most basic connections to Stryker's project. It is, of course, true that not all FSA photographs showed poverty exclusively. The Aroostook County images portrayed a relative prosperity, including an agricultural fair in Presque Isle and the early success of seed potatoes. As indicated in the captions accompanying these photographs, however, the economic success and overall well-being shown was a direct result of federal aid (fig. 1). The recent prosperity of the shipyard workers, on the other hand, was due to the increase in contracts of a private industry. The BIW employees and their families photographed by Delano were not clients of the FSA, and they were not photographed in a setting that suggested they would be in the future.

While the rural photographs are the best known, Stryker did send his photographers to document manufacturing and industry. Two months before he was sent to Bath, Delano visited the Pratt & Whitney airplane plant in Connecticut, which was escalating production to meet the demands of European war. In 1936 Stryker sent Carl Mydans to New Hampshire to record the closing of the Amoskeag mill, where he took photographs of the factory and also captured street scenes. Never venturing into domestic interiors, Mydans relied on padlocked tenement doors and empty storefronts to illustrate the community's disintegration (fig. 2). The Bath photographs do not follow these models. Delano took no photographs inside the Iron Works, choosing instead the interior of the workers' homes or the local bar as background and subject matter. Neither a celebration of American mechanical brilliance in wartime, nor

a eulogy for a fading industrial era, this set of images did not follow the narratives produced by other FSA photographs of industry.

As part of the story of a New England manufacturing history, the BIW photographs can also be interpreted in a regional context. Although Stryker directed his photographers to New England in the first year of the Historical Section's existence, this region is more closely associated with the second phase of the FSA, the Small Town Project photographs. This change was a direct result of Stryker's orders to show an optimistic, united, and successful American democracy in the face of European fascism and the threat of "Hitler at our doorstep." With Stryker's shooting scripts as a guide, his photographers documented families at home, churches, town meetings, and Main Streets. "That shooting script is in his pocket," Stryker wrote of his photographers, "and, often read, to a large extent in his head. As he drives along, through hundreds of towns, he cannot help but run into items on the script."¹⁰

New England, Vermont in particular, proved ideal for this purpose. Of all the states represented in Sherwood Anderson's book *Home Town* (1940), approved by Stryker and intended "to calm Americans' jitters in the face of events unfolding in Europe," only North Carolina is depicted as many times as Vermont.¹¹ New England, imagined as a wellspring of civic values and rugged individualism, was not exclusive to the FSA's project, but drew from the wider visual vocabulary used to describe the region as a whole. As photographic historian William Robinson has written, "by the 1930s, the most characteristic photography emerging from New England could be called 'wonders of the rural world' – the town meeting, the farmer at his plow, New England autumn colors (in black and white), general store, youths bicycling on a country road, and the like."¹² Stryker's shooting scripts contained many of these symbols of New England life. The script he sent to photographer Marion Post Wolcott for "Winter in New England" suggested "hand shoveling" snow, "The square – the Common," "making apple pie," and "close-up of horse's head, showing frost on horse's whiskers."¹³ Post followed these instructions closely, photographing farmers at work, community members at a town meeting, and storefronts on Main Street on the same trip. She may well have photographed young people riding bicycles if it were possible to do so in several feet of snow.

Although Post's photographs of New England are likely the most familiar, other FSA employees, including Delano, were instructed to make images of a similar style. In his autobiography, Delano recalls Stryker's



Figure 2. In 1936, photographer Carl Mydans documented industrial decline in Manchester, New Hampshire. Mydans's images showed sections of Manchester as being nearly devoid of activity as a result of a mill closing. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF33-T01-000836-M3.

instructions in the fall of 1940: "These [photographs] should be ... the symbol of Autumn, particularly in the Northeast – cornfields, pumpkins, raking leaves, roadside stands with fruits of the land. Emphasize the ideas of abundance – the 'horn of plenty' and pour maple syrup over it – you know – mix well with white clouds, and out on a sky blue platter."¹⁴ Delano did not take photographs of Vermont in 1940, but the following year he traveled throughout the state, lifting Post's veil of snow to reveal fairgrounds and thriving FSA clients like William Gaynor (figs. 3 and 4). As Delano even wrote to his employer, "some of the shots will no doubt drip with 'Pure Vermont Maple Syrup' but that [is] all right."¹⁵ Highlighting the bonds between families and community, Delano's Vermont photographs follow Stryker's recommendations from the previous fall, and closely resemble Delano's images of Aroostook County, which also featured county fairs and FSA clients.

Even on his initial trip to New England, Delano proved he was capable of taking photographs that could be used to promote New England.



Figure 3. Jack Delano traveled throughout Vermont in 1941 to photograph scenes of rural abundance that resulted from FSA programs. Here he shows dairy farmer William Gaynor, an FSA client who owned a farm near Fairfield, Vermont. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-045649-D.



Figure 4. Here Delano depicted another scene of abundance in rural New England: the Gaynor family eating dinner at home in Vermont. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-045713-D.

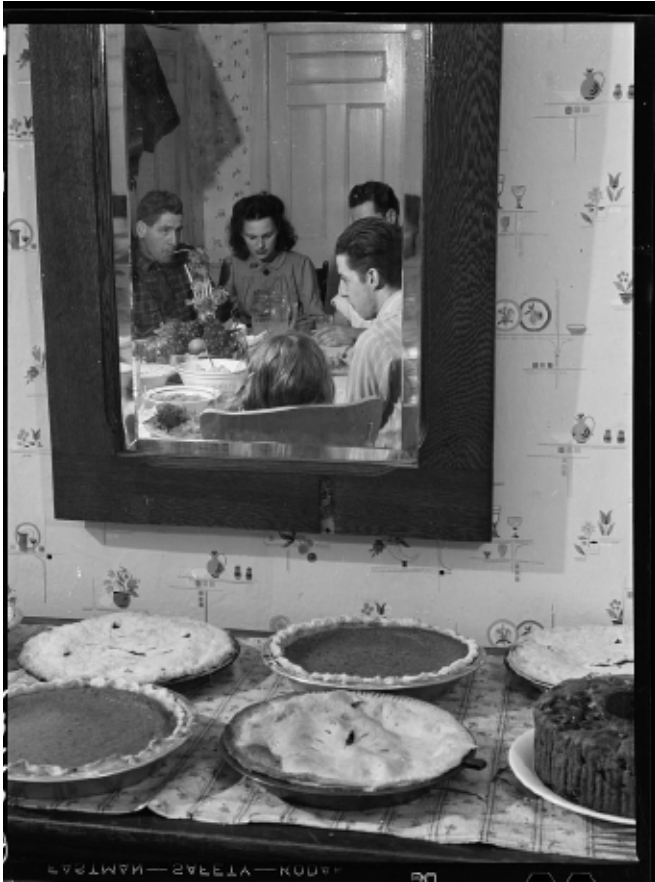


Figure 5. Delano's photograph of the Crouch family Thanksgiving in 1940 anticipated Norman Rockwell's illustration *Freedom from Want*. Delano's caption read, "Pumpkin pies and Thanksgiving dinner at the home of Mr. Timothy Levy Crouch, a Rogerine Quaker living in Ledyard, Connecticut." Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-T01-042712-D.

His photographs of the Crouch family Thanksgiving anticipated Norman Rockwell's illustration *Freedom from Want*, drawn from FDR's delineation of the Four Freedoms in his State of the Union speech only a month after Delano returned from New England in 1940 (fig. 5). Delano clearly knew how to create images that showcased the settings and activities that Stryker could use to promote his upbeat America, the pleasant iterations of New England that linked prosperity and democracy, freedom and abundance. However, the photographs of the Iron Works show only one of Stryker's suggestions in the shooting script for New England: the "Tourist camps – lodges" scene.

Like Post's photographs of skiing in Vermont, Delano's show the distinct mark of New England tourism in the wintertime. Stryker himself had vacationed in New England, and must have been aware of the campaigns framing Maine as an ideal destination for those seeking respite in the county fairs, family farms, and small-town communities that his file helped to promote.¹⁶ However, far from upholding Bath as Vacationland, Delano's work showed an unexpected and unpleasant use of tourist camps. In one image, signs advertising "Day's Cabins, 1M" and "Red House Tourist Home, Bath" stand alone in the center of the frame, their presence indicated by an arrow (fig. 6). Delano's caption is long, like many of those accompanying the BIW images, and it provides a crucial piece of information to understanding the work these photographs were intended to do: "A sign about two miles outside Bath, Maine. Although many of the tourist cabins were only used during the summer months, they are now, in many cases, being turned into winter houses for shipyard workers and their families." The arrow in the sign points not only toward the tourist cabins, but also to the motivating factor behind the Iron Works photographs: the housing shortage.

Roy Stryker sent Jack Delano to Bath in December 1940 to photograph the crowded housing conditions of the Iron Works employees. In a letter sent to Delano toward the conclusion of his New England assignment, Stryker gave the following instructions:

Your major emphasis will be upon the following things: Living conditions; all-over shots of Hoovervilles; inside shots, showing crowding; lack of sanitary facilities; children out of school ... signs on the way into town – in the town (these signs will probably concern themselves with places to live, places to eat, recreation, church, etc. They can be a very important part of our record; watch for them).¹⁷

Once the purpose of Delano's visit to Bath is made apparent, the photographs become easier to interpret. The view of the tourist camp signs



Figure 6. Delano was sent by Roy Stryker to Bath in December 1940 to photograph the housing shortage there. Due to the growth of production during the war and the increase in the size of the workforce, many workers at the Bath Iron Works used summertime tourist camps as year-round housing. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042593-D.



Figure 7. Delano photographed the Burton family in their trailer, which was located about five miles outside of Bath. His original caption for this image detailed the struggle of Mr. Burton to gain employment at the Bath Iron Works, as well as the substandard housing in which the family lived. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042581-D.

was included in Stryker's "major emphasis" list, as were the two "Land for Sale" photographs. Although Delano did take one photograph of a general store in Bath and several shots of the Iron Works from a distance, the majority of the photographs were of families in trailers, the exteriors of the trailers, and the male shipyard workers at lunch or at the bar.

Stryker was equally clear about what he did not want photographed. "Do not try to get pictures inside the industries," he added, but "simply such pictures as will give an idea as to why the people are coming into the town."¹⁸ He did not want industrial photographs like those of the Pratt & Whitney plant, because, although the growth of the defense industry was the cause of Delano's visit, he was sent to record the effects on the workers rather than the work itself. All of the photographs Stryker ordered were built around concrete particulars – "roadside stands with fruit" – that served as metonyms for the purest, most American way of life. The extremely detailed shooting scripts for Vermont had no parallel in Bath, possibly because the message the photographs were supposed to send was less abstract. Viewers simply needed to grasp that defense workers needed better housing, not that the New England "horn of plenty" was a bulwark of American democracy. However, one aspect of the larger picture remains unclear. Knowing the purpose of Delano's visit may help us interpret the photographs, but it does not locate the series within the file as a whole. By 1940, as we have seen, Stryker's focus expanded to include more than migrant farmers. But what did the Farm Security Administration have to do with a housing crunch?

War, Housing, and the Bath Photographs

The answer comes when we consider the origins of the Resettlement Administration (later renamed the Farm Security Administration). The major focus of the RA and its successor, the FSA, was the living and housing conditions of migrant workers – their *resettlement*, not necessarily into permanent housing but into conditions deemed suitable by the federal government. Because the FSA was "the agency most experienced and effective in building minimum-standard houses for thousands of families living in squatters' camps amid substandard conditions," it was deemed the "logical choice" to be the first government body responsible for defense housing.¹⁹ "Today, in the face of a national emergency," wrote the *Architectural Forum* in January 1941, "Farm Security stands out as the agency most experienced and successful in the work of building houses quickly and cheaply."²⁰ There is no indication



Figure 8. This image of Mrs. Burton and her child was meant to show the limited space in which the family lived in their temporary trailer outside of Bath. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042583-D



Figure 9. In this image of Leslie Bryant and his wife, Delano again demonstrated the use of temporary housing by workers in the Bath area. Bryant worked at the Bath Iron Works, but decided to purchase a trailer rather than a house because, according to Delano's original caption, "they do not know where they will go next in search of work when this 'boom' is over." Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042647-D.

that the FSA was responsible for any of the housing constructed in Bath. However, Stryker wanted the Bath photographs to be used to garner support for defense housing, writing to Delano that “the National Defense people, particularly Mr. [Sidney] Hillman’s group, are very much interested in housing conditions as they exist in these ‘boom’ towns.”²¹

Bath was an ideal location for defense construction; the prospect of work attracted new residents but the available housing was substandard and scarce. The city had experienced a similar surge in population during World War I, and the homes built to accommodate these workers had fallen into disrepair over the course of two decades. Earlier in the year, the Iron Works had received a large portion of the \$1.3 billion naval appropriation and, with encouragement from the navy, was expanding its capacity to build.²² Although the Iron Works was a private industry, its ability to provide employment was dependent on the government. The lack of private available housing and the promise of steady work made Bath an ideal candidate for federal defense housing, and in the early fall of 1940, Bath’s mayor sent a representative to Washington to advocate for federal aid through the Lanham Act.²³

The Lanham Act, also known as the National Defense Housing Act, was signed by Roosevelt two months prior to Delano’s visit to Bath. The act allocated \$150 million to the Federal Works Agency to build housing “for persons engaged in national defense activities and their families.”²⁴ Proposed by Representative Fritz Lanham (D-Tex), the act was well received by his fellow Democrats and by real estate and banking interests, who were promised that the construction would not compete with private building. Lanham also made sure that the housing would be available only to defense workers and not to low-income residents, even as his act diverted funding originally intended for slum clearance and converted more than 150 public housing neighborhoods into defense housing.²⁵ Lanham’s bill meant that only those who were deemed deserving of housing would receive it.

This last point is important and connects the Bath photographs again to the original thrust of the FSA – scholar Miles Orvell’s concept of “philanthropic surveillance,” or the use of photographs to make a middle-class audience feel sympathy for migrant workers.²⁶ Although now depicting an industrial setting, Delano’s photographs and captions tell us that many of the workers had previously worked as farmers, and one had been an employee of the Work Projects Administration. As Stryker wrote to Delano, “some of our migrants are moving into these areas” and “our emphasis at this particular time on industrial centers is simply

in keeping with the shift which is taking place in the country.”²⁷ This shift was both the escalation toward war frequently documented by FSA photographs of this time and the movement of migrant labor from rural to urban areas where new employment opportunities awaited them.

The growing number of workers in Bath, and the resulting strain in housing conditions, is most apparent in the images Delano made of the trailer interiors. It is also in these photographs that the contradiction inherent in Delano’s project – to make families seem both to deserve and require federal money – is most apparent. As critic Stuart Cohen has pointed out, “the great rhetorical battle was to persuade the American middle class to embrace solidarity with those below them on the class ladder.”²⁸ To do this, adds James Curtis, photographers “manipulated individual images and entire photographic series to conform to the dominant cultural values of the middle class.”²⁹ Miles Orvell has suggested the file’s cumulative power “derived from the uncanny effect of seeing people in situations that simulated normal activity but yet conflicted sharply with implicit norms,” and he cites the examples of “children reading a book in a living room papered with newspaper” and “a mother and children in rags.”³⁰ Although he does not use the language of class, Orvell is discussing its recognizable disparities, for the “uncanny effect” is produced by a family with the visual markers of poverty arranged in a middle-class posture.

Most of the photographs of the Bath workers’ homes featured at least two family members, usually a mother and child, a husband and wife, or all three. These arrangements highlighted both the cohesiveness of the family and the smallness of the interior. In the two photographs of the Burton family, for example, the first showed the parents holding hands and looking at each other, as their son looked out toward the photographer (fig. 7). Although the living space was obviously small, the focus of the image was on the bond between the parents, which physically shielded the child from the viewer. In the second photograph, the camera’s focus shifted to the left; the father was no longer shown, and the mother and child occupied only half of the frame, while a small stove and three pots take up more space than the human figures (fig. 8). The first image showed the strength of the intact family, and the second showed the threat posed by deficient living conditions.

Lest we assume that Delano was simply recording the reality of a domestic interior, the photographer’s own words speak to the profound influence of his time as an art student on his documentary work. He preferred not to use flash technology because he believed it impeded the



Figure 10. Delano shot a series of images of the Brown family in Bath. Here he depicted Mrs. Brown and her children looking at a *Bath Daily Times* headline which stated that the Bath Iron Works would be expanding and hiring new workers. Although the image implies prosperity, Arthur Brown found only part-time employment at the Iron Works. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042624-D.



Figure 11. The Brown family's youngest child had to sleep in the kitchen. This was the overcrowded housing Delano was sent to Bath to document. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042625-D.

“truth of the scene,” and he considered his study of light in Vermeer and Rembrandt’s work, as well as his perspective in Renaissance painting, a crucial influence on his own artistic practice.³¹ His technique is most evident in his photograph of the Bryant couple, in which the door of the trailer was the prominent frame in the foreground of the image. The wife receded into the middle ground and the husband into the distant background, compressing the small interior into a tunnel (fig. 9).

One of the most surprising aspects of Delano’s photographs of families is that the images alone did not do the work Stryker required. Captions have long been considered an essential part of the interpretation of the FSA file, but Delano’s were unusually extensive. It often took him two or three sentences to communicate to the viewer what was not explicit in the image, and these captions worked to fix or limit the potential meaning. The following description of the Burton family is representative:

Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Burton and child. Mr. Burton came from Moose Head Lake region, Maine, where he used to run a sportsman’s camp. Have been traveling around in a trailer for three years. Had a few weeks work at one of the branches of the iron works a number of months ago, has been unemployed since. Has been trying to get work at the Bath Iron Works but so far has been unsuccessful. Was planning to move to Bath with their trailer the next day. Trailer was about five miles out from center of Bath. Had no electricity and used the sanitary facilities of a house nearby.

After giving the name of the subject(s) and their place of employment, Delano added information about their previous home, the livability of their current residence, and other quality-of-life factors related to their temporary homes. In other captions, he described the lack of water and electricity in some trailers, the likelihood of workers moving on from Bath when the “boom” ended, the expense of living in town, and the long distance from the trailer to the school. The photograph of the Burton family, however, communicated none of this necessary information.

The caption played an important role in creating what Miles Orvell calls the “uncanny effect” of the FSA photographs. In one of four photographs of the Brown family, Mrs. Brown was seated next to a stove with her three children reading a copy of the *Bath Daily Times* (fig. 10). Delano did not use framing techniques to indicate that this image was taken in a trailer, and the interior shown could be any modest home. The title of the newspaper was very clear, as was the headline: “With

contracts for 32 ships, Bath Iron works to expand.” The local paper grounded Mrs. Brown in her location, and the promise of work prominent in the image created an atmosphere of prosperity. While Delano’s photograph made the Browns look successful, he used the caption to undermine this construction, adding that the oldest child did not attend school, the father was employed part-time, and the family could not afford the rent in town. Contradictions like this also existed among images of the same family. In a second photograph of the Browns, the baby was alone on a bed covered in a patched quilt, the paper peeling from the walls (fig. 11). The caption tells us this was not the bedroom, but instead a kitchen – here was the crowding Delano was sent to document, and so the accompanying text was very short.

In addition to taking photographs of the trailers, Delano also photographed workers at lunch or at the bar. In a letter to Delano, Stryker added that, “amusements and recreation have become a serious problem; keep an eye out for a significant picture which will illustrate this.”³² It is possible that Delano photographed men at the bar to illustrate the “serious problem” of recreation, but it is not clear if the activities in themselves were a problem, or that places of amusement were also crowded. If the latter were the case, Delano followed instructions; he took photographs of a crowded lunchroom and a busy recreation hall (fig. 12). Delano’s photographs certainly did not indicate the social dissolution associated with alcohol consumption.

Photographic Intent

What did Delano mean to convey with these photographs? Though clearly identified as shipyard workers, the men were not engaged in productive labor and were not positioned as the worthy poor. The photographs lack the contextual information of the trailer series; the human subjects were always in the immediate foreground, occupying most of the frame, and the captions were much shorter. These were portraits of singular people, not of families or situations, and they framed the shipyard workers as individuals (figs. 13 and 14). As Stuart Cohen has written, the faces in the FSA photographs “reflect middle-class values as they dominated the first decades of the twentieth-century in America; individual strength, perseverance, the inherent dignity of the individual as individual.”³³ However, as both Miles Orvell and Maren Stange have noted, the cumulative effect of individual portraits in the file universalizes individuality and erases the particulars of the specific portrait, all without negating the concept of individuality.³⁴ Historian Martha



Figure 12. Because of the wartime boom in production, Bath Iron Works added new employees, which not only created a housing crunch, but also crowded conditions in the city's center. Delano captured this at the Star Lunch restaurant, which was adjacent to the Iron Works. According to Delano's original caption, "about two hundred men come in for lunch every day. The owner had to build an addition to the restaurant to make room for all the men during lunch hour rush." Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042618-D.



Figure 13. Malcolm Clough, an Iron Works employee, lived in Portland and commuted to Bath. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042631-D

Sandweiss has suggested that photography as a medium documents “the anecdotal, the vernacular, the everyday,” but it cannot explain the intricate social, political, and economic realities that constitute an image’s historical context. “Photography emphasizes material consequences at the expense of ideological forces,” Sandweiss writes, and Roy Stryker and his photographers used this “inherent particularity of photography” to their advantage, transforming social problems into individual trials.³⁵ These portraits introduced the viewer to singular people, to Malcolm Clough and Eddie Burns, for example (figs. 13 and 14). Instead of illustrating the needs of destitute families and communities, the images framed the shipyard workers as individuals.

By the end of 1940, Stryker wanted his photographers to create images of America that could bolster the spirit of the country in the face of international war. Photographs of small towns and increasing military capability were representative of this period, and although the Bath photographs were taken in a small town dependent on wartime manufacturing, they were linked to the earlier projects of the FSA. The Iron Works photographs were a continuation of the “benevolent surveillance” pioneered by Stryker for the Resettlement Administration, the monitoring and recording of migrant populations with the goal of creating better housing opportunities. To win public and political support for these projects, skeptical viewers needed to be convinced that the subjects were both worthy and in need of aid. They needed to show moral character amid material deprivation; the intact, but strained family and the hard-working individual represented in the BIW photographs accomplished this feat.

The impact of the FSA photographs on the depiction of the American people is impossible to measure. The file Roy Stryker created provides endless work for historians, and the photographs that were published in the mass media continue to shape the American understanding of both the visual documentary mode and the face of the nation in the 1930s and early 1940s. Stryker told his photographers to capture “not the America of the unique, odd or unusual happening, but the America of how to mine a piece of coal, grow a wheat field, or make an apple pie, the crucial everyday America.”³⁶ But Stryker himself helped to create this “crucial everyday America” by assembling a file of complementary photographs shaped by his editorial script. The FSA archive embodies Stryker’s belief in the rhetorical power of photography and preserves his conviction that images could be used not to reflect a reality, but to shape policy and popular opinion.



Figure 14. Bath Iron Works employee Eddie Burns lived in North Bath. Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, LC-USF34-042636-D.

It is not clear if Delano's Bath photographs were ever published in a national news magazine; Stryker did suggest to Delano that they might accompany an upcoming article in *McCall's* about defense workers, but images by photographer Russell Lee were chosen instead. Still, the FSA photographs were used for many purposes; Delano's BIW photographs were likely circulated within the government to secure funding for further defense housing or naval appropriations. The photographs seem to have been successful on some level because subsequent FSA images of defense housing in California, Pennsylvania, and Alabama documented projects already funded and in progress. Jack Delano visited Bath Iron Works in December 1940 during a transitional period for both his employer and his subjects. Roy Stryker's move from the FSA to the Office of War Information at the end of 1942 paralleled the shift that his photographic subjects were making from agriculture to defense; the Bath se-

ries, featuring industrial workers who had likely once been farmers, captures this critical moment of transition for both the FSA-OWI file as a whole and for the American workforce, and that in Maine as well.

NOTES

1. Jack Delano, *Photographic Memories* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 1997), p. 58.
2. Delano, *Photographic Memories*, p. 29.
3. Andrew C. Toppan, *Bath Iron Works* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing Co., 2002), p. 7.
4. Ralph Linwood Snow, *Bath Iron Works: The First Hundred Years* (Bath, ME: Maine Maritime Museum, 1987), p. 327.
5. Toppan, *Bath Iron Works*, p. 62.
6. James Curtis, *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), p. 5. "How American People Live" was the title of the FSA exhibit at the First International Exposition of Photography, held in 1938 in New York City.
7. Miles Orvell, *John Vachon's America: Photographs and Letters from the Depression to World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 14.
8. See, for example, Curtis, *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth* or the Library of Congress collection on the "American Memory" website.
9. C. Stewart Doty, *Acadian Hard Times: The Farm Security Administration in Maine's St. John Valley, 1940-1943* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1996).
10. Roy Stryker, "The Farm Security Photographer Covers the American Small Town," quoted in Orvell, *John Vachon's America*, p. 291.
11. Nancy Price Graff, *Looking Back at Vermont: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1936-1942* (Middlebury, VT: Middlebury College Museum of Art, 2002), pp. 63, 100.
12. William Robinson, *A Certain Slant of Light: The First Hundred Years of New England Photography* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), p. 185.
13. Roy Stryker, "Suggestions for a Shooting Script on Winter in New England," 1939-1940, Roy Emerson Stryker Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.
14. Roy Stryker to Jack Delano, September 1940, quoted in Delano, *Photographic Memories*, p. 59.
15. Jack Delano to Roy Stryker, August 8, 1941, quoted in Graff, *Looking Back at Vermont*, p. 78.
16. Donna M. Cassidy, *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2005), p. 67.
17. Roy Stryker to Jack Delano, December 13, 1940, reel NDA 21, Jack Delano Papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington.

18. Stryker to Delano, December 13, 1940, Delano Papers.
19. Donald Albrecht, "Introduction," in *World War II and the American Dream* (Washington, DC: National Building Museum, 1995), p. 8.
20. "Farm Security Administration," *Architectural Forum* 74 (January 1941): 4.
21. Stryker to Delano, December 13, 1940, Delano Papers. Labor leader Sidney Hillman was appointed by Roosevelt to the National Defense Advisory Committee in 1940.
22. Kenneth R. Martin and Ralph Linwood Snow, *Maine Odyssey: Good Times and Hard Times in Bath, 1936-1986* (Bath, ME: Patten Free Library, 1988), p. 43.
23. Martin and Snow, *Maine Odyssey*, p. 48.
24. Kristin M. Szyylvian, "The Federal Housing Program During World War II," in *From Tenements to the Taylor Homes: In Search of an Urban Housing Policy in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. John F. Bauman, Roger Biles, and Kristin M. Szyylvian (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), p. 124; Albrecht, "Introduction," in *World War II and the American Dream*, p. 12.
25. Margaret Crawford, "Daily Life on the Home Front: Women, Blacks, and the Struggle for Public Housing," in *World War II and the American Dream*, p. 92.
26. Orvell, *John Vachon's America*, p. 14.
27. Stryker to Delano, December 13, 1940, Delano Papers.
28. Stuart Cohen, "Photography and the Farm Security Administration," in *The Likes of Us: America in the Eyes of the Farm Security Administration*, ed. Peter Bacon Hales (Boston: David R. Godine, 2009), p. xvi.
29. Curtis, *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth*, p. ix.
30. Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), p. 229.
31. Delano, *Photographic Memories*, p. 51.
32. Roy Stryker to Jack Delano, December 13, 1940, Delano Papers.
33. Cohen, "Photography and the Farm Security Administration," p. xvi.
34. Orvell, *The Real Thing*, p. 230; Maren Stange, *Symbols of Ideal Life: Social Documentary Photography in America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 130. For Stange, the subjects are "individual, but no longer the particular," and for Orvell, "the particular became universalized."
35. Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 327.
36. Roy Stryker, quoted in William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 50.