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From Depression to War: The FSA Photographers and Idaho's Landscape, 1936-1942

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by

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The project presented by Christopher S. Blanchard entitled "From Depression to War: The FSA Photographers and Idaho's Landscape, 1936-1942" is hereby approved:

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Abstract

This paper places Idaho's natural landscape at the forefront of analysis utilizing the over 1,200 black and white photographs taken in Idaho by Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers between May 1936 and April 1942. These photos of Idaho's natural landscape and the people in it illustrate the political, economic, and social history of Idaho during the Great Depression and early war years.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Literature review and criticism	4
The FSA in Idaho.....	6
From Depression to War: Picturing the Social Landscape	9
Appendix.....	42

List of Photos and Exhibits

Photo 1: Sign at the Idaho State Line	43
Photo 2: Sign on Ranch in Canyon County	44
Photo 3: Bleached Skull of a Steer	45
Photo 4: Pile of Bleached Bones	46
Photo 5: Steers, Cruzen Ranch	47
Photo 6: Western Idaho Dairy Farm	48
Photo 7: Boundary Stumps	49
Photo 8: Largest Lead Mine in the World	50
Photo 9: Logs on Flat Cars	51
Photo 10: Ola Self-Help Sawmill Co-op	52
Photo 11: Brining in Load of Logs	53
Photo 12: Dust Storm over Holbrook	54
Photo 13: Children of Farmer, in Dust Storm	55
Photo 14: Dry, Sandy Soil Makes Farming Impossible	56
Photo 15: Wind Erosion is Covering Remains of an Unsuccessful Farm in Idaho	57
Photo 16: Rupert, Idaho Swimming Pool	58
Photo 17: Sandlot Baseball Game	59
Photo 18: Roy Carlock	60
Photo 19: Fishing in the Salmon River	61
Photo 20: Pea Picker	62
Photo 21: High School Girls	63
Photo 22: Wives of Some of the Members (Ola Self-Help Cooperative)	64
Photo 23: The Halley Family	65
Photo 24: Aluminum for Defense	66
Photo 25: Weighing Hamper of Peas	67
Photo 26: Japanese Exiting Sanitary Facility	68
Photo 27: Japanese-Americans Taking Down Their Flag	69
Exhibit 1: Russell Lee Captions	72
Exhibit 2: Library of Congress Caption	73
Exhibit 3: Lange General Caption #48	75
Exhibit 4: Lange General Caption #49	82
Exhibit 5: Humbird Lumber Advertisement	85

Introduction

Photographer Dorothea Lange knew when she sat down that the Ola Road would soon be impassable. It was October 1939 when she visited Gem County's Squaw Creek Valley, and mid November by the time she made notes of her visit. Winter approached quickly. When it came, the small group of settlers in Ola, Idaho, faced total isolation from their nearest neighbors in Emmett, which lay forty miles to the southwest. That situation would not soon change. The immediate concern of Ola resident Charlie Carlock and 35 other of the town's men, however, was not the Ola Road, but another: the makeshift road leading to the rich stand of timber bordering the east side of the valley (See photo 11, Appendix A). Nature provided the timber, residents of Squaw Valley provided the labor, and the FSA provided financing for a sawmill constructed four years prior (See photo 10, Appendix A). Everything for self-sufficiency was in place. But without an infusion of working capital for equipment to maintain the road and operate the mill, Carlock knew that sustaining tiny Ola, would be "a long, slow process."¹ Ola survived, and continues to survive today. Carlock family members even still live there. But not since the time of Dorothea Lange's visit in 1939, and a follow-up visit three years later by Russell Lee, has anyone paid as much attention to Ola, Idaho as the Farm Security Administration – the FSA - and its photographers.

This expansive Depression-era collection depicts how Idahoans reacted to New Deal politics, the depressed economy, and changing social and cultural mores. It is also a starting point for understanding the FSA's history in Idaho, as little scholarship exists for Idaho's FSA collection as it does for many other states.

The FSA photographic collection represents one of the more enduring visions of America – even if that image was carefully scripted. The FSA began as a division of the Resettlement Administration (RA), an agency created to relocate farmers from failing farms. Headed by former Columbia Professor Rexford Tugwell, the RA and Tugwell faced withering criticism from an increasingly conservative Congress after 1936. Tugwell soon departed, the RA soon disbanded, and left holding the photographic projects was Roy Stryker, head of the FSA's Office of War Information (FSA/OWI) Historical Division.

Tugwell and Stryker knew the photographs would be instrumental in gaining support from Congress and the public at large for New Deal Programs. The FSA photographers were originally sent out across America to document rural poverty, and that they did. As the constituency in Congress changed and new Deal programs came under fire for being collectivist big-government operations, the photographers received new directives: take pictures of government successes. Thus, originally considered mere images in a propaganda campaign, scholars tend to overlook the value of the photos as historic evidence. As historian Jane Adams noted of the photographs in 2006, “despite their ubiquitous use by historians, historians and social scientists have rarely used them as evidence in historiography.”² This neglect is unwarranted.

Despite the use of these photos as propaganda, the photos are excellent artifacts for understanding Idaho's social history during the Depression and early war years. Further, the photographs, nearly all of the rural landscape, show that the environment is an appropriate category of historical analysis especially for Idaho, which in the early years of the twentieth century developed deep connections to the environment. For

Idaho, the environment is the natural place to begin to explain the state's political, economic, and social history during the New Deal.

Granted, the work of the FSA photographers, the New Deal, the Great Depression, and the years leading up to World War II are all topics historians have covered extensively. But, as Rome writes, "environmental history provides a new way of seeing the terrain we think we already know well."³ The FSA photos allow us to literally "see the terrain" as Rome states, and to see people interacting with that terrain. Thus, this project follows Rome's methodology of using the environment to illustrate political, economic, and social history.

As this work is a social history focused on the lives of the people on the landscape, it also builds on the work of Richard White who wrote on the importance of our work lives in the landscape. Richard White wrote that histories focused on how work and not just recreation links us to the environment, is where historians ought to begin.⁴ With Idaho's economy almost exclusively rural during the New Deal, White makes a compelling case. This project assumes the view advocated by White and interprets the work lives as well as the recreation habits of Idaho's people in the Depression and early war years.

The FSA's photographs of Idaho constitute a remarkably thorough representation of Idaho history during the New Deal. The activist role assumed by the federal government in this period caused great consternation among laissez faire politicians and naturally conservative Idaho residents. New Deal programs launched by

Roosevelt were contentious, a response to dire times, and the photographs document that contention.

FSA photographers created hundreds of images of Idaho's economy, which at that time was almost entirely dependent upon agriculture, timber, and mining. The FSA photographers also illustrated the environmental damage caused both by industry, and lack of proper resource management. The photographic record shows that Idahoans used the outdoors to a great extent for recreational purposes, perhaps because of bonds formed by working in the environment, and it comports with the written record regarding changes in the workplace that led people to engage in more outdoor activities. Lastly, the photographs illustrate the often-ignored social, gender, and ethnic histories of Idaho. They are in short, a photographic encyclopedia of America.

Literature review and criticism

Substantial scholarship, including bibliographies, exists on the FSA and the photos produced by the agency. Beverly Brannan, curator of the FSA photographs for the Library of Congress, has authored or edited several works on the photographs, including, *A Kentucky Album: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1943*; *Documenting America, 1935-1943: Approaches to American Culture*; and, *FSA: The American Vision*.⁵ Other scholars have produced state-specific works for more than twenty states.

Specific instances of political histories include Lili Corbus Bezner's *Photography and Politics in America*, and Sidney Baldwin's, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration*.⁶ University of Delaware historian James C. Curtis

authored an excellent general history of the photos in *Mind's Eye, Mind's Truth: FSA Photography Reconsidered*.⁷

Social histories like Nicholas Natanson's *The Black Image in the New Deal* uses the images to illustrate how FSA photographers neglected to cover black chain gangs and child labor, among other things.⁸ Cara Finnegan's, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA*, argues the photographs give new understanding to poverty and America's social welfare history.⁹ There is also a substantial body of work examining the photographs themselves as either art or artifact.

In *Documentary and Propaganda: Photographs of the Farm Security Administration*, Michael Carlebach asserts that the work by Roy Stryker's photographers, "was propaganda infused with the methodology of documentary."¹⁰ Indeed, the photographs were used for partisan purposes – to induce the American people of the need to reform the agricultural sector. "Selection of lens, film, camera, angle, lighting, and moment of exposure were all unavoidable decisions that expressed the point of view of the photographer," insists Carlebach.¹¹ Other scholars offer different criticisms of the photographs.

For example, humanities professor Maren Stange argues that the FSA photographs do an insufficient job of showing labor's response to the poor working conditions in America's farm belt. Historian David Conrad countered that argument in a thorough history on the subject in 1965.¹² Stephanie Ross offers the FSA photographs as specific evidence that pictures contain moral messages in her essay, "What Photographs Can't Do".¹⁴ Ross's essay supports the contention that the photographs would have

been highly useful as tools in a propaganda campaign. The subject matter – abject poverty in largely underdeveloped rural areas - lends itself to such interpretations, and it is probably not unexpected that the photographers felt deeply about their art.

Scenes of extreme poverty heavily impacted photographer Russell Lee and that angst came through in his work. In *The Power of Art*, Simon Schama identifies that strain in other noted artists as well, for example, Turner, Caravaggio, Bernini, and Rembrandt. Schama wrote that works by these artists were created when, “the artist under extreme pressure, undertakes a work of supremely ambitious scope in which his own most essential beliefs are embodied. All of them are directly personal testimonies; all of them make claims for art that go well beyond the pleasure principle. They are works that seek to change the world.”¹⁵ Certainly the same can be said for at least a portion of the works created by the FSA photographers.

Notable works on the FSA in the intermountain region include Brian Q. Cannon’s *Remaking the Agrarian Dream: New Deal Rural Resettlement in the Mountain West*, and his essay, “Life and Land: the Farm Security Administration Photographers in Utah, 1936-1941.”¹⁶ Montana State University’s Mary Murphy produced an outstanding work on Montana’s photographs, *Hope in Hard Times*, and University of Nevada – Reno historian Elizabeth Raymond will soon release a work on Arthur Rothstein’s photos of Nevada.¹⁷

The FSA in Idaho

The primary sources for this project include the full collection of black and white photographs taken in Idaho and evidence little used by scholars of the West , the

photographers' field notes. Russell Lee made a total of 942 images in trips to Idaho in July of 1940, May through November of 1941, and July and August of 1942. Lee's images include those taken in Canyon County of government-run farming operations, several series in Minidoka and Twin Falls counties, and the urban environment in downtown Caldwell. Lee wrote of his experiences photographing America in a 1941 article, "Life on the American Frontier." When asked by local residents in Pie Town, New Mexico why he was taking pictures, Russell simply responded, "I want to show the rest of the country how you live."¹⁸ His expanded writings, though, show colorful flourishes illustrative of the day: "I am a photographer hired by a democratic government to take pictures of its land and people. The idea is to show New York to Texans, and Texans to New York. The idea is to show steel workers how a Louisiana sharecropper lives – what a sharecropper looks like, what kind of house he lives in, how he works, what he wears, how he plays, and the problems he's up against."¹⁹ He concluded that thought saying, "the idea is to substitute understanding for machine guns and a Gestapo as a means of keeping the country working together, unified, cooperative."²⁰

The well-known Dorothea Lange catalogued the second largest collection of photographs in Idaho, taking 178 photos in one stint in October of 1939. She visited Ada, Adams, Bonner, Boundary, Gem, Payette, and Washington Counties. Her extensive field notes add to her rich collection of photographs and capture forthrightly the combination of angst and hope pervasive during the Depression years in rural America. Arthur Rothstein, Wilbur Staats, and John Vachon combined to produce the remaining 95 photographs, the earliest taken by Rothstein in 1936.

Staats photographed only in Fremont County; Vachon only in Bonneville County.

Rothstein's photos focused heavily on environmental damage, and deprivation everywhere he visited and his photos of failed farms in Oneida County prove no exception. As noted, all of the photographers kept textual records of their photographs (some more so than others), appending to them correspondence, maps, brochures, clippings, and other general information about the area being photographed. The Library of Congress's supplementary reference file related to the photographs contains office files, captions, and scrapbooks. Two microfiche reels – reels 8 and 9 – contain the Idaho files, and they enrich the photographs with firsthand, primary source accounts of Depression era life in Idaho.

Some explanation of the number of extant Idaho images is warranted. The American Memory website returns 1236 photographs when using the search term "Idaho." Twenty-one of those, however, are of Idaho Springs, Colorado. So the total number of processed images of the state of Idaho is actually 1215. Some of those images are duplicates, so there are not 1215 *unique* images. In calculating the images attributable to each photographer, all of the duplicates were ascribed to Russell Lee since it is easy to ascertain that the other four photographers had no duplicates in their portfolios. The names assigned to the photos used in this project derive from the captions, and are not names given to the photos by the photographers. All of the images are in the public domain as they were works commissioned by the U.S. Government.

Ultimately, the FSA accumulated 270,000 images of America as the country endured depression and prepared for war. As photographer John Vachon noted of the

FSA photo collection, “if it is not the single most monumental photographic coverage ever executed, it is certainly the most monumental ever conceived.”²² The Library of Congress hosts more than 160,000 developed images on its *American Memory* website, making them easily accessible and frequently accessed.²³ This collection covers the six years between 1936 and 1942, six years unlike any others in American history when sweeping economic instability and a newly activist federal government radically altered Idaho and the nation.²⁴

From Depression to War: Picturing the Social Landscape

Following Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s defeat of Herbert Hoover in the 1932 presidential election, the federal government began its New Deal, creating anti-poverty programs and legislation aimed at restoring national economic security. A myriad of these programs greatly impacted rural America. One of the first programs, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) in May of 1933, initiated the controversial practice of paying farmers not to grow crops. These subsidies, however, created a reliable source of income for farmers and by reducing the supply of agricultural products, helped push prices upward. This practice continues today.

In June, the Roosevelt Administration passed the National Industrial Recovery Act in an effort to create jobs through federally financed infrastructure projects. When the Supreme Court found this act unconstitutional a short time later, other agencies fulfilled the goals of the Act. For example, the Public Works Administration (PWA) expended millions of dollars on rural public works projects. In Idaho, PWA contracts

largely went to environmental projects. Idaho received \$4,486,246 in PWA funding in 1933 - \$1.7 million of that for forest road construction.

Another well-known program, the Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC), also contributed to the development of rural infrastructure, which altered the way Idahoans interacted with the environment. Work commenced on May 16, 1933, on the first of the CCC camps and as historians Merrill D. Beal and Merle Wells described, more than 18,000 men moved to Idaho to “construct forest roads, telephone lines, lookouts, firebreaks, public camp grounds, to suppress undesirable rodents, and to commence a large scale program of blister rust control to save the great stands of Northern Idaho White Pine from the ravages of destructive fungus.”²⁵

The Rural Electrification Administration also made Idaho’s hinterlands more habitable and accessible by extending electricity to rural Idaho by setting up local electric co-operatives. By 1937, the state had 76 major hydroelectric plants and was the sixth largest potential producer of hydropower in the U.S.²⁶

In addition to direct relief and public works spending, the federal government employed a final strategy in mitigating rural poverty: providing credit to entrepreneurs and existing farm owners. For example, the Farm Credit Administration refinanced properties of Idaho’s debt-ridden farmers at lower than market interest rates and over longer periods of time. Additionally, the Farm Security Administration, when not running photographic projects or farm labor camps, also made loans to enterprising individuals. Half of all families relocating to Idaho’s Owyhee County relied upon the FSA for various types of credit.²⁷ The average settler there borrowed \$1037 from the FSA

and \$25 from other sources in 1938, creating annual debt payments of \$158. Settlers who had brought in three or four seasons of crops typically had annual net repayments of only \$72.²⁸

The U.S. Supreme Court invalidated the AAA in 1936, prompting Idaho Senator James Pope to author the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, which essentially continued the practices of the AAA. With 53% of Idaho's farmland under the aegis of this program, Idaho farmers took in payments of \$1.9 million in 1937. And despite the Supreme Court's edicts, Congress created a second Agricultural Adjustment Act and from that program, Idaho farmers earned \$2.3 million in 1938.²⁹

Overall, mountain, Pacific, and western states consumed more loans, work relief, and general relief payments, per capita, than the rest of the nation between 1933 and 1939, with the Mountain States far outpacing other regions at \$716 per capita spending (compare with the \$424 per capita spent in the drought ravaged Great Plains region).³⁰ Idaho ranked fifth in the nation in per capita expenditures at more than \$744.³¹ Though the state had a conservative political bent and outwardly condemned and feared government intervention, Idahoans, whose real income suffered the third greatest decline of the 48 states, were ready for the New Deal by the time the economy collapsed.³² Some feared what this activist federal government meant for democratic institutions; others wondered what it meant locally.

In Idaho, hostility towards those seeking relief was common according to Jean Lee who wrote to FSA/OWI section chief Roy Stryker, "it was a growing belief in southern Idaho that people living in FSA camps were not workers, but people looking for

grants and food stamps. Contractors' workers held F.S.A. campers in "outspoken contempt as relievers."³³ One contractor Jean spoke with told her that "F.S.A camps are not work camps but primarily housing projects."³⁴ While the FSA "campers" suffered derision, labor contractors were on guard against those who might try to organize their workers. Jean Lee recorded: "There had been a rumor that some labor organizers were coming into the Nampa, Caldwell, Weiser area and use it as a testing ground. I asked the camp boss at Nampa if he had seen any of the organizers. He replied, "That's what I'm here for. I find out a man's business and if he means trouble I just tell him that we don't want him. They come in and tear up the crops and that don't do the farmer no good and they keep the people who want to work from working. It just ain't nice."³⁵

The politics of relief found in the labor camps were often aggravated by bad policy or management by government agencies, another topic touched on by Jean Lee as her husband photographed labor camps in Idaho. In that same letter to Stryker, Lee described labor shortages or overages all over the Northwest, a problem she says originated in part because of inefficient state employment services. From Bonners Ferry, Idaho, she wrote: "There seems to be no central clearing point for labor. Consequently there is often a shortage at one spot and a surplus at others. State Employment makes pleas over the radio for workers maybe a hundred miles away, growers are hiring townspeople (department stores, banks, etc., close so that employees can go to the fields). Then the transient workers flock to that spot. By the time they get there half the crop is in, and again there is a surplus."³⁶

Mrs. Lee further commented that the federal government had taken over for the State Employment systems in some states and that the State of Texas seemed to have a particularly good system for allocating farm workers. She recommended that Stryker make these points known in his reports to Congress.³⁷ Lee's letters to Stryker provided interesting commentary on the politics and policy found in the Idaho camps, but it was the work of the photographers that got the attention of the public.

FSA photographs such as Dorothea Lange's widely published "Migrant Mother" photo succinctly captured the political angst of the era, and as James C. Curtis has noted, "Examined in its original context, the series reveals powerful cultural forces at work in the 1930s: the increasing centralization and bureaucratization of American life; the anxiety about the status and solidarity of the family in an era of urbanization and modernization; a need to atone for the guilt induced by the destruction of cherished ideals; and a craving for reassurance that democratic traditions would stand the test of modern times."³⁸ Another of the more enduring photographs of the Idaho FSA collection is the photograph of the freeway sign declaring that relief funds are not available to non-Idaho residents (see Photo 1, Appendix A). Even so, Idaho attracted its fair share of newcomers, not because of the prospect of relief benefits, but because of opportunities to start again or improve one's lot on a new piece of ground.

New residents flocked not to urban centers (Idaho had none at the time) but to rural areas in Minidoka, Bonner, and Canyon counties among others – places where they could work the land either on their own, as part of labor camps, or as part of federal projects. Agriculture and natural resource production formed the basis of the

state's economy in the Depression and pre-war years, and photos of the environment as Idaho's economic engine dominate the FSA files.

"Farming" said Merle Wells, "was the business that brought stability to Idaho."³⁹

Then, as now, Idahoans grew field crops such as wheat, hay, barley, oats, potatoes, seed beans, grass and clover seeds, seed peas, sugar beets, corn, and onions. Other crops included fruit and berries such as apples, cherries, prunes, pears, peaches, strawberries, and raspberries. Dairy, ranching, packing, and sugar-making also contributed to a robust agricultural sector. As was to be expected, farming in this period of activist government was near to a public/private affair with the Idaho state government growing in reach even as it slashed expenditures. Idaho had established a Department of Agriculture in 1919. To this, State leaders added: in 1935 the Agricultural Adjustment Board; in 1937 the State Water Conservation Board (later superseded by a *federal* agency – the Bureau of Reclamation); in 1939 the Fruit and Vegetable Advertising Commission, and the Potato and Onion Commission. Also, in recognition of looming environmental problems, the state created the state Soil Conservation Commission on March 9, 1939, and two days later, the Noxious Weed Commission.

Farming was difficult work. In Northern Idaho, access to water was a problem; in portions of eastern Idaho, residents were displaced and relocated by the Resettlement Agency from land that was unsuitable for farming. Idahoans captured all these sentiments in a song popular at the time, neatly summing up the hopes and perils of farming during the Depression:

I have some friends on Elm Creek,
I love the tracks they make;

And when I get to Idaho
I hope to make a stake.

My mother and father were very poor people;
They lived by a church which had a high steeple.
They raised apples but sold them so low
They made no fortune in Idaho.⁴⁰

Fortunes also ebbed and flowed in the mining industry. In the years following the Depression, towns like Kellogg and Wallace in northern Idaho helped Idaho become the nation's largest producer of silver and zinc. The region was also the home to the nation's largest lead mine. Even with such scale, lead and zinc mines were net money losers, but some mine operators got federal help in 1934, allowing them to weather the Depression. Under heavy lobbying from Idaho Senator William Borah, and Senators Burton Wheeler and William King from Montana and Utah, President Roosevelt signed into law the Silver Purchase Act on June 19, a bill that benefitted Idaho to a greater extent than any other state by virtue of its leadership in silver production.⁴¹ In the middle of the twentieth century, the region produced 97% of the state's zinc-lead ore; 88% of the silver, and 80% of the lead; only Missouri mined more lead than Idaho (See photo 8, Appendix A).⁴²

Idaho was also rich with copper and gold, and also with thorium, a mineral used to coat wire and as an alloy for magnesium, and antimony, used in flame proofing paint and ceramics. Today, eastern Idaho's phosphate deposits used in fertilizer productions constitute the state's greatest mineral wealth. Idaho also has limestone, shale, and sandstone deposits in Bannock County, elements used to produce cement. Finally, the opals, agates, and jasper mined from several counties in Idaho account for the state's

nickname, “The Gem State.” While mining kept Idahoans in jobs during the Depression, timber production created new opportunities for individuals and large companies alike.

The FSA’s Russell Lee and Dorothea Lange each made photographic records of timber harvesting, Lee in southern Idaho (See photo 9, Appendix A), and Lange in Bonner, Boundary, and Gem County. In Gem County, Lange documented Charlie Carlock and the Ola Self-Help Sawmill Cooperative, founded by thirty-six Squaw Valley Creek residents in 1935 (See Lange General Caption #48, Appendix B). Thirty miles from the nearest electricity, forty miles from the nearest town - Emmett - and accessed by a road that was impassable in winter, Squaw Valley residents needed to find a way to sustain themselves after facing several years of harsh conditions that caused the deterioration of farming and grazing. As Lange described, “in 1935 after years of overgrazing, lessened rainfall, and low farm prices, most of these families were on relief.”⁴³ Lange’s extended captions sent to Roy Stryker described the founding of the mill in detail: “The nearest supply of lumber available is at Emmett which makes its cost, delivered to the farmer, prohibitive. Their own valley is bordered on the east by a forest that could develop an unlimited supply of Yellow Pine and Douglas Fir. In the fall of 1935, 36 men made application to the Farm Security Administration for a loan of \$1500; this to be used for the purchase of equipment to help establish a small sawmill.”⁴⁴

Lange made her photo documentary three years after the construction of the mill, at which time the mill owners were applying for a second FSA loan, this time for working capital. The mill created work for area residents when farming and ranching offered little or no return. On the cool October day that Lange visited the mill, nine men

worked the mill, with one noting, “Now take this year -- with the drought. If we hadn’t a had the sawmill to drop back on to I don’t know what we’d a done.”⁴⁵

Bonner and Boundary counties were in a very different position, however, when Lange visited just two days after leaving Gem County. These counties were transitioning from an economy driven by large timber companies to a farming economy supported by migrant farmers fleeing the drought on the Great Plains. Again, Lange’s captions describe the scene: “This is a logged off region, the big lumber mills are abandoned. It was once heavily forested with stands of Ponderosa Pine, Douglas Fir, Larch, Cedar and Hemlock. Agriculture settlement on the bench lands of this region began as early as 1902, but was relatively unimportant until 1932 (See Lange General Caption #49, Appendix B).”⁴⁶

Great Plains immigrants joined others from southern Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in settling the Idaho Panhandle. Extensive advertising by large timber companies drew people to the region, people hoping finally to have something of their own, or trying desperately to replace what they had lost (See Humbird Lumber Advertisement, Appendix B). From Lange:

Advertisements of cut-over lands by railroad and lumber companies desirous of disposing of their logged-off land have brought many of these new families. . . Many contracted for land they had never seen. They have bought raw lands, partly developed farms, which were abandoned by previous settlers. Many come with little cash, many come with no cash, and no equipment. Forty three percent of the land purchased by new settlers for farming is classified by the United States Department of Agriculture as non-agricultural. The most recent settlers are taking up the poorest land.⁴⁷

The cut-over land covered with stumps complicated attempts to get ground ready for farming. Most farmers owned quarter-sections – 160 acre parcels - but few farmers had been able to put more than 30 acres under cultivation. An addendum to Lange’s field notes, a 1939 Bureau of Agricultural Economics study, found that of the 189 farms studied in Boundary and Benewah Counties, 36 percent of the owners had cleared hardly one acre per year; 35 percent had cleared no land; and 39 percent had cleared two and a half acres or more; the median was 1 1/2 acres per year.⁴⁸ As Lange noted, “at this rate it would take a settler nearly 12 years to get 20 acres under cultivation.”⁴⁹

Like other settlements in Idaho during these years, the FSA made loans to the poorest of the panhandle settlers. “Stump farmers” in Bonner and Benewah used FSA loans to procure blasting powder and rent bulldozers, speeding the clearing of land for growing crops. Even so, the work was backbreaking. Stumps were loaded onto sleds, pulled by a team of horses, offloaded into a pile, and then burned (See photo 7, Appendix A). The FSA made a total of 50 land-clearing loans to residents in this area in the spring and summer of 1939. The Denchow family, for example, received a \$250 loan to clear their property six miles north of Sandpoint.⁵⁰ Even after getting the land cleared, these settlers faced yet another hurdle: getting water to their crops, their herd, and their homes. For some eastern Idaho farms, water – or lack of it – became the dominant issue. The lack of water led to a lack of vegetation, and desertification in some cases, and Idahoans had to learn to cope with the changes in the landscape.

An economy dependent on agriculture and natural resource production inevitably produces ill effects. Overgrazing, plowing, and removal of topsoil and native plants led to dust storms; mining led to polluted water and loss of flora; poor crop management and misuse of the land led to soil depletion. Timber harvests and blasting in northern Idaho led to deforestation. Federal writers and photographers captured this environmental damage in word and image.

Vardis Fisher's Federal Writers recorded that in Idaho's early years the state was "one large cattle ranch with millions of acres open to grazing. New homesteads and federal grazing policies such as the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act concentrated cattle and sheep into smaller areas, leading to overgrazing. The state then developed better rangeland management policies and by the late 1930s, Idaho's 3.8 million acres of pastureland and 25.7 million acres of range land supported a million head of cattle (See photo 5, Appendix A).⁵¹ The Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenancy Act passed in 1937, also aided rangeland management in Idaho when it established the Curlew National Grassland, helping to improve soil conditions on 47,000 acres near Malad, Idaho, in the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.⁵²

Beale and Wells note that, "early Idaho farmers gave little or no thought to the depletion of the fertility of the soil. Repeated heavy crops were taken off the land and little put back."⁵³ At least some of the farmers responsible for continuing poor farm management practices, interestingly enough, came from the Great Plains where rapid conversion of field to farm also took its toll on the natural environment. Donald Worster

estimates that the Pacific Northwest gained 460,000 Dust Bowl refugees during the Depression years (See photos 12 through 15, Appendix A).⁵⁴

Development also took its toll on the environment. Jane Chase wrote vividly of what the necessities of war had done to the Twin Falls landscape where Morrison Knudsen had erected a Japanese internment camp: “They just cut the sagebrush off to the bare desert and set up all the barracks and it makes a rather strange looking settlement, flat brown earth and gray low buildings. The earth is fine dust that blows all over when dry, and turns to slidy gooey grease when wet . . . there isn’t a green thing in sight.”⁵⁵

Dorothea Lange attached detailed notes to a photograph she took in Bonner County where the Cox family had cleared 17.5 acres of land by removing trees with blasting power, powder they acquired with a \$60 loan from the FSA. The Cox family had moved to Idaho from western Nebraska in 1936, a year when the Soil Conservation Service recorded 68 dust storms of regional significance emanating from the Great Plains. The Coxes were glad to be in Idaho. The only complaint Mr. Cox mustered was that the timber company from which he purchased the land made clearing the land sound easy. Mr. Cox, in his fifties at the time, relayed that it was not.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, working the land created strong connections to the environment and in the 1930s and 1940s, like today, the environment was both workplace and playground, something captured in numerous FSA photographs and by academic researchers as well. Writing on recreation habits in the 1930s, Elizabeth-Fones Wolf notes that with the onset of the Depression, companies dropped expensive benefits

programs (such as housing and company paid recreation). This in part contributed to people seeking free or low cost entertainment and recreation in the outdoors.⁵⁷ Labor unions helped fill the gap by sponsoring sporting events such as baseball, soccer, and basketball, and also hiking trips and outings on horseback (See photos 16 and 17, Appendix A). Camera clubs, picnics, and gun clubs also put Depression era workers in contact with nature. Meanwhile, social institutions such as fishing and hunting became important not only as recreation but in providing sustenance as well (See photo 19, Appendix A).

As the Federal Writer's Project noted, "no state in the Union is a more undeveloped natural playground or has more to offer in hunting and fishing in remote areas than Idaho."⁵⁸ Like Idaho's farmland, the State's remote fishing and hunting spaces faced pressure from increased usage mainly because of improved access to remote areas via the newly constructed roads through Idaho's forests. These roads brought opportunity for Idaho's Depression-ravaged residents but calamity for Idaho's game.

Hunters were able to supplement their incomes with bounties from the killing of predators: \$10 for bears; \$25 for bobcats; up to \$75 for mountain lions.⁵⁹ At the same time, Idaho's elk and deer populations grew dramatically. Between 1931 and 1941, elk increased from 10,000 to 29,000, and in the four-year span between 1932 and 1936, the deer population swelled from 60,000 to 125,000.⁶⁰ As one hunter recalled, sentiment around Idaho was that there was "plenty of deer for everybody."⁶¹

The growth in popular game animals came at a time when Idaho families were in great need, and oral histories confirm that poaching and hunting beyond state sanctioned limits occurred all over the state. One deputy game warden recalled, “nobody paid much attention to fish and game licenses; a lot of people wouldn’t buy ‘em.”⁶² Government statistics bear this out, showing a marked increase in poaching-related citations, confiscations, and fines between 1930 and 1940.⁶³ Dorothea Lange made several photos of Ola resident Roy Carlock as he posed with his hunting rifle and made further mention of it in field notes she sent back to Roy Stryker. She wrote “he (Carlock) is one of the best hunters in the community and keeps his larder well stocked in the hunting season (See photo 18, Appendix A).”⁶⁴ While deer and elk were plentiful at the time, so were ducks. Writers from the Federal Writers Project further noted that ducks along the Snake River from Milner to the Oregon border numbered 1500 per mile and that in the Lake Lowell area, they also numbered in the thousands.

Idaho has a plethora of things to enjoy in the natural world: mountains, valleys, canyons, rivers, falls, springs, creeks, lakes, hot and cold pools, deserts, extinct volcanoes, and caves (and ice caves).⁶⁵ These natural amenities brought new people to Idaho. Dust Bowlers escaping the Plains and others from the Pacific Slope came to the state to take advantage of better natural conditions for rural living. Some, like stump rancher Nelle Portrey Davis, even rejoiced in things as simple as the rain.⁶⁶ Even with favorable natural conditions, work was hard, times were changing, and there were new social pressures requiring adjustment.

New arrivals to agricultural lands on the Oregon/Idaho border came either out of necessity – drought had forced them to leave – or for the chance to own their own farm. Most came to the Oregon/Idaho border specifically because of low land values, and low capital requirements for establishing a home and farmstead. Economists from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics found in a 1939 report that social conditions and attitudes of these new settlers were dependent upon several factors – previous conditions, current living conditions, and the prospects of improvement. Common complaints among migrants were lack of social life; dust; poor roads; climate; and, homesickness. Still, of the new families moving to the Owyhee Reclamation project, only seven percent expressed overall displeasure with living in the area.⁶⁸

Most area residents could have significantly improved their standard of living had credit policies been better suited for them. Most residents saw steady gains in net worth, but found it hard to borrow against increased property values. The average value of a dwelling of an FSA client was nearly \$400 in 1938 and often had unsatisfactory attributes that led to health problems for the inhabitants. Rather than build a temporary structure that would have to be torn down later, or that would be inadequate in the future, farmers in this region often poured a concrete foundation where a future dwelling would sit, and then covered that structure with a simple metal roof. As the BAE economists described, “houses were generally small and cheap, poorly built, and had few conveniences. Overcrowding of dwelling space was common.”⁶⁹

Though the focus in many areas was on the newcomers to Idaho, the reality was that population contracted between 1940 and 1945 as people moved to the Pacific

states to take manufacturing jobs. This marked the beginning of steady urban growth culminating in 1970 when, for the first time, more people in the state lived in cities than in rural areas.⁷⁰ The movement of mostly young, male workers to the Pacific coast and the start of World War II brought more change to Idaho as women and ethnic minorities took on new roles in the social structure and the economy.

Women attracted a fair amount of attention in the Depression years, a fact largely attributable to the heavily circulated photos of Dorothea Lange. These photographs have led to numerous interpretations of gender roles. In looking at women in Montana-based FSA photos, historian Mary Murphy notes that, “In the FSA file, women tend to be undifferentiated from region to region. There are hundreds of pictures of mothers and children, of women canning, feeding chickens, sweeping the yard, engaged in farm labor (See photos 20 through 24, Appendix A).”⁷¹

Murphy argues that gender roles are dynamic; photographs are static. Photographs contain partial truths, she says, even though “they appear as accurate representations of the past that we seek to understand.”⁷² The difficulties in interpreting the photographic record aside, the photos of the Nampa pea fields show that women worked side by side with men and began that work at an early age; it was common for farmers to call high school girls into the fields to bring in crops, a fact documented by Russell Lee (See photo 21, Appendix A).

In an interview with one of Russell Lee’s subjects in the Montana farm belt, Minnie Harshbarger, who was 15 when Lee photographed the family, was asked to interpret the photographs 63 years later. She recalled that “she wore overalls to do

chores outside,” and that “as soon as they got big enough all the children had chores.”⁷³

While the photos may be one-dimensional, they do record what is well-known at that time: women and girls worked in the fields; when in camps they not only worked in the fields but did the cooking, cleaning, mending, and routine household chores. Stump ranchers and pioneer women often had to do work such as carpentry as men did the more laborious tasks of blasting stumps, plowing, and sawing.

Jacqueline Ellis in examining the work of FSA photographer Esther Bubley, finds Bubley’s portrayal of gender in FSA photographs the opposite of Dorothea Lange’s, stating, “unlike in photographs by Dorothea Lange, Bubley did not portray working-class women as metaphoric sites of passive endurance which would eventually lead to the rejuvenation of American nationalism.”⁷⁴ Ellis points out that photographers like Lee and Lange confused some Americans with their photographs by portraying their subjects as working class Americans when the reality of many working class Americans, male and female, was actually quite different.

William Stott characterizes Lange’s images of women as “helpless, guiltless . . . and though helpless, yet unvanquished by the implacable wrath of nature.” Thus, in the view of Stott and Ellis, the stereotypical images of the “toothless wife and scrawny children” ravaged by the environment do not provide a reliable “picture” of Depression era history.⁷⁵ There are yet more interpretations of FSA images of women.

Wendy Kozol applied the “Madonna of the fields” label to a number of the photographs. That term has become ubiquitous among scholars of FSA photos who sometimes refer to Dorothea Lange’s famous photograph, “Migrant Mother” as the

“Migrant Madonna” or similar variations.⁷⁶ The Idaho photos of women in the landscape seem to indicate one thing quite clearly: that in rural communities, during the New Deal, women tended to experience the environment through work (rather than recreation), probably to a greater extent than they do today. This would support White’s contentions, but more work on this subject is merited. The same can be said of Idaho’s ethnic minorities. Japanese and Japanese Americans experienced the environment to a great extent by harvesting crops all over southern Idaho. Mexicans and Mexican Americans did as well. They also experienced the labor strife of the day, made famous by John Steinbeck. This situation has changed to a great extent for Idaho’s Japanese-Americans, but remains largely the same for Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. The environment and how ethnic minorities relate to it is another area worthy of further study, and would add to our current understanding of minorities in Idaho.

For example, *The Saturday Evening Post* recorded in 1949 that the African-American community in Boise filled two churches. Boise also had about 4,000 Basques in residence at the time, as well as a few hundred Chinese and Japanese residents. Boise at one time also had the Northwest’s third largest Chinese district, and the founders of territorial Boise included twenty Black freemen.⁷⁷ The writers on the Federal Writers Project wrote, “in the State’s early years of settlement, of foreign-born stock apparently only the Chinese came in appreciable numbers, and such prohibitions and persecutions were laid upon them that practically all of them disappeared or were exterminated.”⁷⁸ By the 1940 census, only 208 Chinese remained.

The vast majority of ethnic minorities in Idaho during the Depression years and preceding the war were Scandinavians – Danish, Swedes, and Norwegians. In all of Idaho, the 1940 census counted, among others: 2,533 Germans; 1,113 Russians; 967 Spaniards; 307 Mexicans; 191 Japanese; and, 595 African-Americans. The Federal Writers noted that the African-American population concentrated in Pocatello.

During the height of the Depression, state and local governments, in cooperation with the federal government, deported 82,000 people of Mexican ancestry between 1929 and 1935. The crackdown by the Hoover Administration was intended to take non-citizens off the relief rolls and out of jobs that American citizens could hold. In an interesting role reversal, some white Idahoans reported feeling discriminated against; farmers who formerly hired local townspeople to bring in crops were now more apt to bring in Mexican or Mexican-American workers whom they could pay less (and who reportedly worked better). This “discrimination” along with events such as the 1935 strike in Driggs by 1500 mostly Mexican pea-pickers that led to the calling in of the National Guard, spelled doom for laborers of Mexican ancestry.⁸¹ Eventually, the heavy-handed deportation tactics of the U.S. Immigration Service caused another 500,000 Mexicans and Mexican-Americans to leave the country of their own volition lest they be removed to Mexico by force of law. Some modern scholars place this figure considerably higher.⁸² The result of all this, however, had little to no impact on the economy in any sense and history would show that yesterday’s bane is today’s boon.

Facing a labor shortage caused by a buildup in the military industrial complex following America’s entry into World War II, the federal government reversed policy and

began *encouraging* workers from Mexico to come to the States. Thus the “Bracero” program, begun in the summer of 1942, brought back the same number of Mexican workers – 500,000 people – that the federal government had previously deported.⁸³

Another ethnic group – the Japanese (and Japanese Americans) - also figured prominently in Idaho during this period. After the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the federal government rounded up 120,000 Japanese and Japanese Americans from the Pacific coast, and constrained them in internment camps located in the western interior.⁸⁴ In Idaho, the camp at Twin Falls held thousands of Japanese and Japanese Americans, a fact that troubled Governor Chase Clark who openly and derogatorily opposed their relocation to the state. Like their Mexican counterparts, the Japanese went into service on local farms. Jane Chase recorded in November of 1942 that 3,000 Japanese from the Minidoka camp harvested potatoes, apples, and sugar beets (See photo 25, Appendix A).⁸⁵

Just as governments past have done with “disloyal” citizens and residents, the War Relocation Authority sought to reeducate (i.e., Americanize) those of Japanese ancestry while in the camps, something captured by Russell Lee in numerous photos while visiting the former CCC camp in Rupert in July of 1942 (See photo 27, Appendix A). In other photos, Lee captured even more overt racial politics.

Touring the FSA’s Farm Family Community Camp in Twin Falls, Russell Lee took a photograph of a Japanese-American exiting a restroom facility at the camp (See photo 26, Appendix A). Realizing that it could be politically contentious, and not in line with the goals of the FSA, Lee made several notes to the photo before submitting it to

Stryker. Lee wrote: "Please show this print and caption to Mr. Stryker and ask him to caption it as sees fit or remove it from set if he thinks best. This is the shower tent for Japanese-Americans living at the Farm Security Administration Farm Family Community, Twin Falls, Idaho. Because of racial feelings between whites and Japanese living in this camp, the Japanese do not use the regular sanitary facilities of the camp."⁸⁶ Lee also made handwritten notes on the side of his caption card reading, "Note omit" "Pix & neg to go to R.S." and "pix to be removed (See Russell Lee Captions, Appendix B)."⁸⁷ As fate would have it, the FSA did archive the photo and Lee's notes on the caption card at the Library of Congress. Even so, the published version of the photograph on the Library of Congress's website, reads, "There was no caption for this image in the FSA/OWI shelflist (See Library of Congress caption, Appendix B)."⁸⁸

A curious omission in the Idaho FSA photos is the state's five Indian Tribes. Not a single photograph appears in the Idaho file, though FSA photographers did photograph other tribes under contract to the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA). Historian Richard Lowitt has written that no group suffered more than Native Americans during the time of the Depression; conditions for Idaho's Native Americans were certainly worse than for other Idahoans.⁸⁹ Even when new leadership was ostensibly improving the OIA, almost half of all Indians on western reservations were landless. Those that did hold property fared not much better.

The per capita value of land holdings of western Indians in 1933 amounted to \$800. Per capita relief for Idaho residents was nearly that amount - \$744 annually from 1933 to 1939.⁹⁰ In addition to the extreme poverty of the reservation dwellers,

government entities forbade Duck Valley's Shoshone and Paiute from holding their traditional festivals, and instead encouraged them to celebrate American holidays like Independence Day.⁹¹ The Roosevelt Administration did, however, create an agency specific to relief of Native Americans – the Indian Civilian Conservation Corps (part of the Indian New Deal). The ICCC employed 1,038 of Idaho's Native Americans with women performing traditional chores such as sewing and cooking and men building infrastructure – firebreaks, trails, wells, and reservoirs.⁹² So, while Idaho's Native Americans were agents in the New Deal just like their fellow Idahoans, their history exists outside the eye of the camera. In the end, however, little escaped the photographer's lens, and Idaho has a rich pictorial history of the New Deal era because of it.

This project is the first work done on the FSA in Idaho, and one of few works addressing the environment during the New Deal. The FSA's photographs of Idaho's natural landscape constitute a reliable pictorial representation of Idaho history during the New Deal era and should not be disregarded as simple elements of a bygone propaganda campaign.

The FSA photographers carefully included photographs illustrating the political history of the state like the famous "no relief" photo which caused great consternation among laissez faire politicians and naturally conservative Idaho residents. The photographs also document the nature of Idaho's economy – farming, timber, mining – and the associated environmental damage caused by extractive industries. Idahoans were pictured using the environment for recreational purposes, and the photographic

record comports with the written record of changes in the workplace that led people to engage in more outdoor activities.

Lastly, the photographs illustrate the often-ignored social, gender, and ethnic histories of Idaho. Because gender roles are complicated, and photographs are static and not dynamic, it may be improper to try to ascribe meaning to photographs of men and women interacting in the environment. However, we find complementary oral, written, and photographic histories of Idaho's women. And though Idaho is typically not thought of as an ethnically diverse place, there were numerous photos of ethnic minorities working in CCC, USDA, and FSA labor camps throughout the state.

As an environmental history, this project shows that the environment provides an excellent platform from which to view and interpret history, and the photos – almost all of Idahoans interacting with the landscape – provide a ready and reliable source of evidence. This project and the photographic evidence also lend support White's assertions that people come to understand their environment through work.

A rural state in the time of the New Deal, Idahoans were used to toiling on the land, but Depression following drought and recession in the 1920s brought increased hardships. Still, long time Idahoans and new arrivals alike met the challenges of the New Deal Era head-on. Photographers like Lee, Lange, Rothstein, Vachon, and Staats could not help but be impacted by men like Ola's Charlie Carlock, or struggling residents in eastern Idaho who, even despite drought, back-breaking labor, poverty, and isolation, might break into song:

Millionaires grow in Chicago
In mansions of marble and pride;

Homes grow in Eagle Rock,
And friendships, true and tried.

Plutocracy thrives in proud New York
Though poverty dogs its heel;
Real brotherhood grows on Eagle Rock,
Where hearts have time to feel.

It's pleasant to play in Paris
Where gaiety gains renown;
But oh! when it comes to living
Give me that dear Idaho town.⁹³

Notes

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² Jane Adams, and D. Gorton, "The New Deal Farm Security Administration in the Lower Mississippi Delta: Reading the Photographic Record," (paper presented at the Agricultural History Society meetings, MIT, Boston, MA, June 15-17, 2006, <http://www.siu.edu/~jadams/fsa/index.html>).

³ Adam Rome, "What Really Matters in History: Environmental Perspectives in Modern America," review of *Perspectives in Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century*, by Howard Sitkoff, *Environmental History*, Vol. 7., No. 2, April, 2002, 304.

⁴ Richard White, "'Are You and Environmentalist, or Do You Work For a Living?': Work and Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 185.

⁵ Beverly W. Brannan and David Horvath, *A Kentucky Album: Farm Security Administration Photographs, 1935-1943* (Louisville: University of Kentucky Press, 1986); Carl Fleishauer and Beverly Brannan, *Documenting America, 1935-1943: Approaches to American Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Beverly Brannan and Giles Mora, *FSA: The American Vision*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2006).

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¹⁵ Simon Schama, *The Power of Art*, (London: BBC Books, 2006), 9.

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¹⁷ C. Elizabeth Raymond, e-mail message to the author, Dec 16, 2007.

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- ¹⁹ Russell Lee, 40.
- ²⁰ Lee, 41.
- ²² Carlebach, 25.
- ²³ Library of Congress, "America from the Great Depression to World War II: Photographs of the FSA/OWI, 1935-1945," Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html> (6 May 2007).
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- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

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- ⁸⁵ Chase, 5 .
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Appendix A

Photo Essay

Photo 1: "Sign at the Idaho State Line"

Photographer: John Vachon

Created: April 1942

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-065540-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c21919

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c21919>)



The barren landscape mirrors politics as Idaho tells the dust bowlers, no aid for you. John Vachon only photographed in Bonneville County, so this photo is probably on the Idaho/Wyoming border, near Montpelier, or Alpine. Idahoans consumed federal benefits on a large scale. For example, the Federal Emergency Relief Act provided direct payments to unemployed workers, eventually paying out nearly \$20 million to Idaho's unemployed.

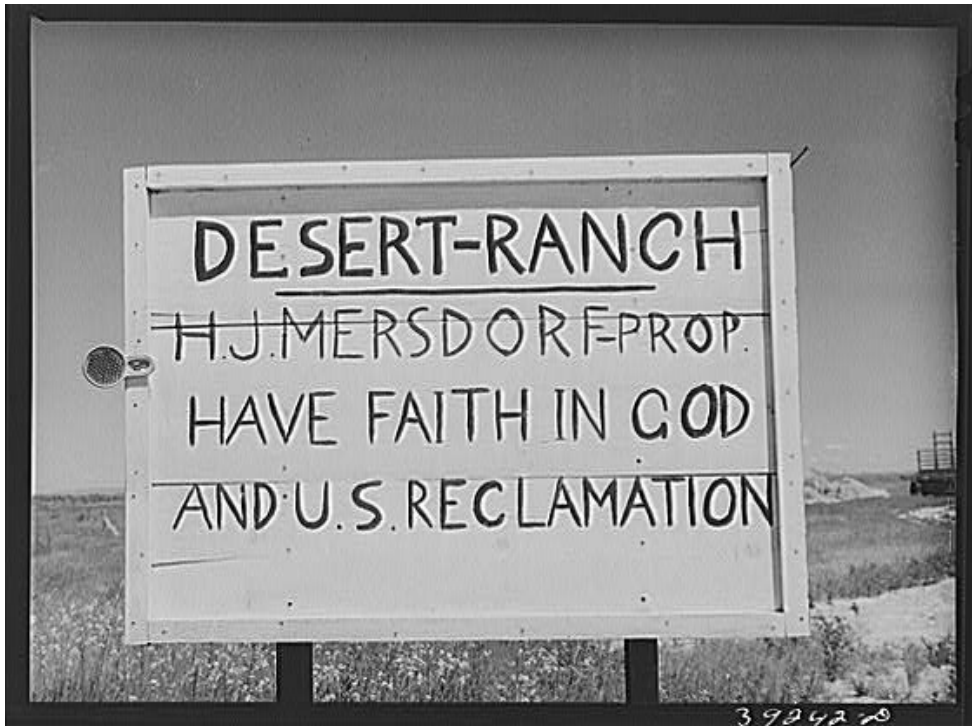
Photo 2: "Sign on Ranch in Canyon County"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: May 1941 Canyon County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-039434-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c01314

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c01314>)



Mixed feelings. Independent minded Idahoans saw themselves as pioneers in every sense of the word, yet they were dependent on the federal government for everything from crop support, to irrigation, farm credit, and direct relief. Still, Idahoans worried about the ubiquity of the federal government. Water from the Black Canyon project eventually irrigated this farm.

Photo 3: "Bleached Skull of a Steer"

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: May 1936, South Dakota Badlands

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34- 004507-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b27761

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27761>)



South Dakotans accused Rothstein of playing politics when he published this photo of a single bleached skull. Critics claimed it made the situation look worse than it really was.

Photo 4: "Pile of Bleached Bones"

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: May 1936, Oneida County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-004460-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b27738

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27738>)



The above photo, however, shows animal remains in Oneida County, ID. – a location that suffered extreme soil degradation and loss of flora much like areas in the Great Plains. Photo from Oneida County, portions of which were resettled by the federal government.

Photo 5: "Steers, Cruzen Ranch"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: June 1941 Valley County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-039746-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c01805

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c01805>)



By the late 1930s, Idaho's 3.7 million acres of pastureland and 25.6 million acres of range land supported a million head of cattle. Vardis Fisher, writing for the Federal Writers Project in Idaho, likened the state to one large cattle ranch. At the Cruzen Ranch (pictured) in Valley County, cattle were grass-fed all summer then sold off in the fall.

Photo 6: "Western Idaho Dairy Farm."

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: October 1939

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021497-C (Digital ID: fsa 8b35296

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b35296>)



The dairy industry supported roughly 216,000 head of various breeds at the time Dorothea Lange visited Idaho. Russell Lee also took numerous photos of dairy farms in Canyon County, calling it the county's "principal pursuit." Today, Idaho is one of the top five largest dairy producing states in the country.

Photo 7: “Boundary Stumps”

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: October 1939 Boundary County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021871-D (Digital ID: fsa 8b37389

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b37389>)



Even with bulldozers and blasting, stumps had to be moved, stacked, and burned. Following the world’s largest fire in 1910, forest management improved in Idaho, and residents were only allowed to burn stumps during prescribed times. Nell Portrey Davis wrote that numerous, well-positioned fire lookouts enforced this policy without exception.

Photo 8: “Largest lead mine in the world (surrounded by destroyed trees).”

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: July 1936 Kellogg, Idaho

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-005079-D (Digital ID: fsa 8b28088

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b28088>)



The caption sums up the story well. Idaho grew economically because of natural resource appropriation, but also suffered environmental damage in the process. At the time of Rothstein’s visit, 80% of the state’s lead came from the Kellogg area, and only Missouri mined more lead than Idaho. Silver was the real mother lode for Idaho. The state’s Sunshine Mine was the largest silver producer in the world in the New Deal years. Mines directly employed 7,000 people at that time, and about 60,000 jobs were dependent upon the mining industry.

Photo 9: “Logs on Flat Cars ”

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: June 1941 Cascade, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-039682-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c01743

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c01743>)



Russell Lee added a note to this photo that read, “The state of Idaho now has about 81 billion feet of old growth lumber standing, 8.8 percent is owned by the State; 30.3 percent privately owned and 60.9 percent by the federal government.” In 1941, Lewiston claimed the largest sawmill in the United States, and the second largest in the world; the state had about 250 mills in operation in the 1930s. The state had the largest stand of white pine in the world at the time of Lee’s visit to Idaho. In the Depression years, commercial forestland covered 18.8 million acres (about 36% of Idaho), and the timber industry harvested about one billion board feet per year.

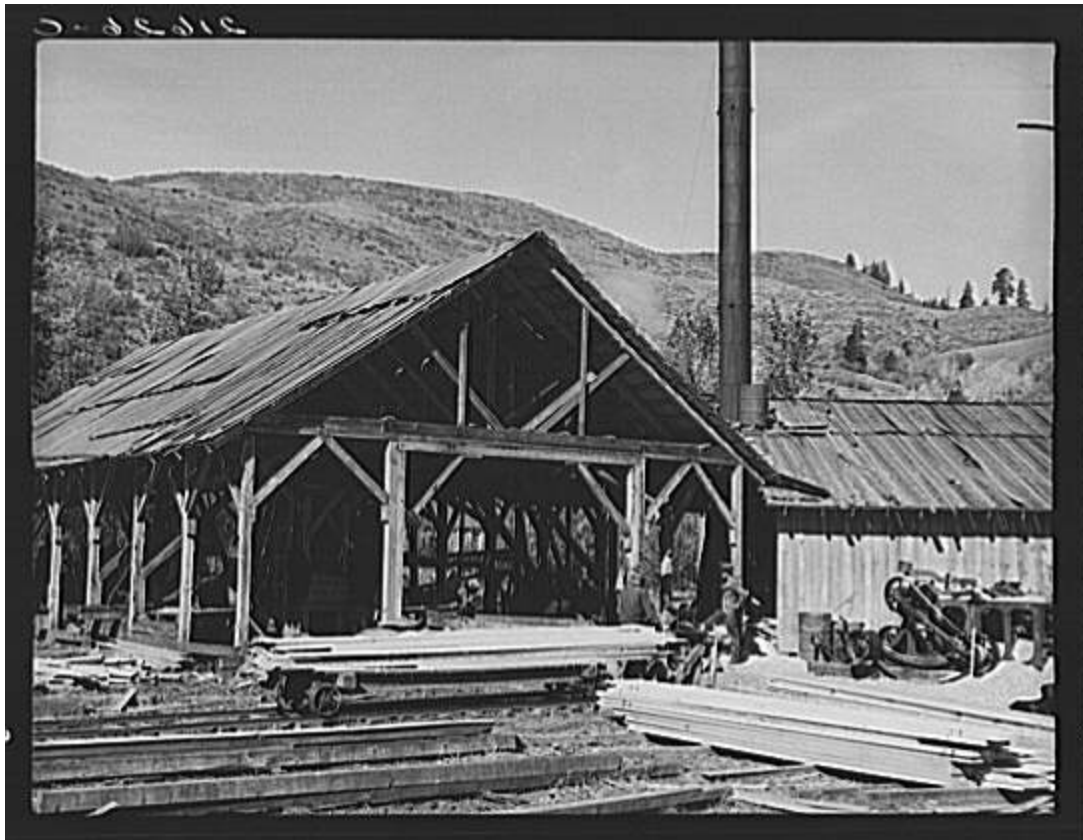
Photo 10: “Ola Self-Help Sawmill Co-op”

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: October 1939

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021626-C (Digital ID: fsa 8b35382

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b35382>)



The sawmill that saved Ola. The residents of this isolated town needed another profit center to survive when farming declined; they were too isolated to take jobs elsewhere. The cooperative that owned the mill twice borrowed money from the FSA – the first time to construct the plant the second to bank some working capital. Both Lange and Lee visited Ola, which was a true microcosm of the Great Depression in the west: hard working individualists but almost dependent on aid from the government.

Photo 11: “Bringing in Load of Logs”

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: October 1939 Ola, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021503-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b35303

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b35303>)



Keeping the road open to get logs out of the forest, to the mill, and ultimately to market was a primary challenge for members of the Ola Self-Help Cooperative. Members of the Co-op built this road – all three miles of it – with pick and shovel.

Photo 12: "Dust Storm over Holbrook, ID"

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: May 1936

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-004636-D (Digital ID: fsa 8b27816

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27816>)



Oneida County, and other parts of eastern Idaho looked much like the Great Plains, dust storms and all. The Resettlement administration relocated several families from land in eastern Idaho and returned the land to grazing to stabilize the environment.

Photo 13: "Children of farmer in Dust Storm"

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: May 1936 Oneida County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-004626-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b27809

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27809>)



Rothstein took several photos of these farm kids, standing in the midst of an eastern Idaho dust storm.

Photo 14: "Dry Sandy Soil Makes Farming Impossible."

Photographer: Arthur Rothstein

Created: May 1936 Oneida County, ID (Grazing Project)

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-004649-D (Digital ID: fsa 8b27824

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b27824>)



Rothstein's extended caption of this photo reads: "Back to grazing. The tract on which these buildings stand should never have been farmed, but it took protracted drought to drive that lesson home. This land is now under option by the Resettlement Administration which intends to convert it into a large grazing area. Oneida County, Idaho."

Photo 15: "Wind Erosion is Covering Remains of Unsuccessful Farm in Idaho"

Photographer: Wilbur Staats

Created: March 1937

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-004649-D (Digital ID: fsa 8b38612

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b38612>)



Staat's photo was taken just north of Rexburg illustrating the consequences of removing topsoil and native grasses.

Photo 16: "Rupert Idaho – Swimming pool"

Author: Russell Lee

Created: June 1942

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-073833-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c25382

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c25382>)



This photo illustrates the interplay between the landscape, work, and play. The canals were designed to irrigate crops but were used almost immediately as a source of recreation as well.

Photo 17: "Sandlot Baseball Game"

Author: Russell Lee

Created: May 1941 Twin Falls, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-038967-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c01044

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c01044>)



As was common during the Depression and the War years, people increasingly used the outdoors for recreation because they had a strong connection to the land from working it, and because labor unions were sponsoring outdoor activities to compensate for reduced corporate benefits during the Depression.

Photo 18: "Roy Carlock"

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: October 1939, Ola, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021528-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b35327

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b35327>)



Lange noted that Roy Carlock was one of the best hunters in the community. Hunting is a well established social institution in Idaho but during the Depression, people counted on meat from game as a regular part of their diet. Hunters also earned bounty money for killing predators such as bear and wolves.

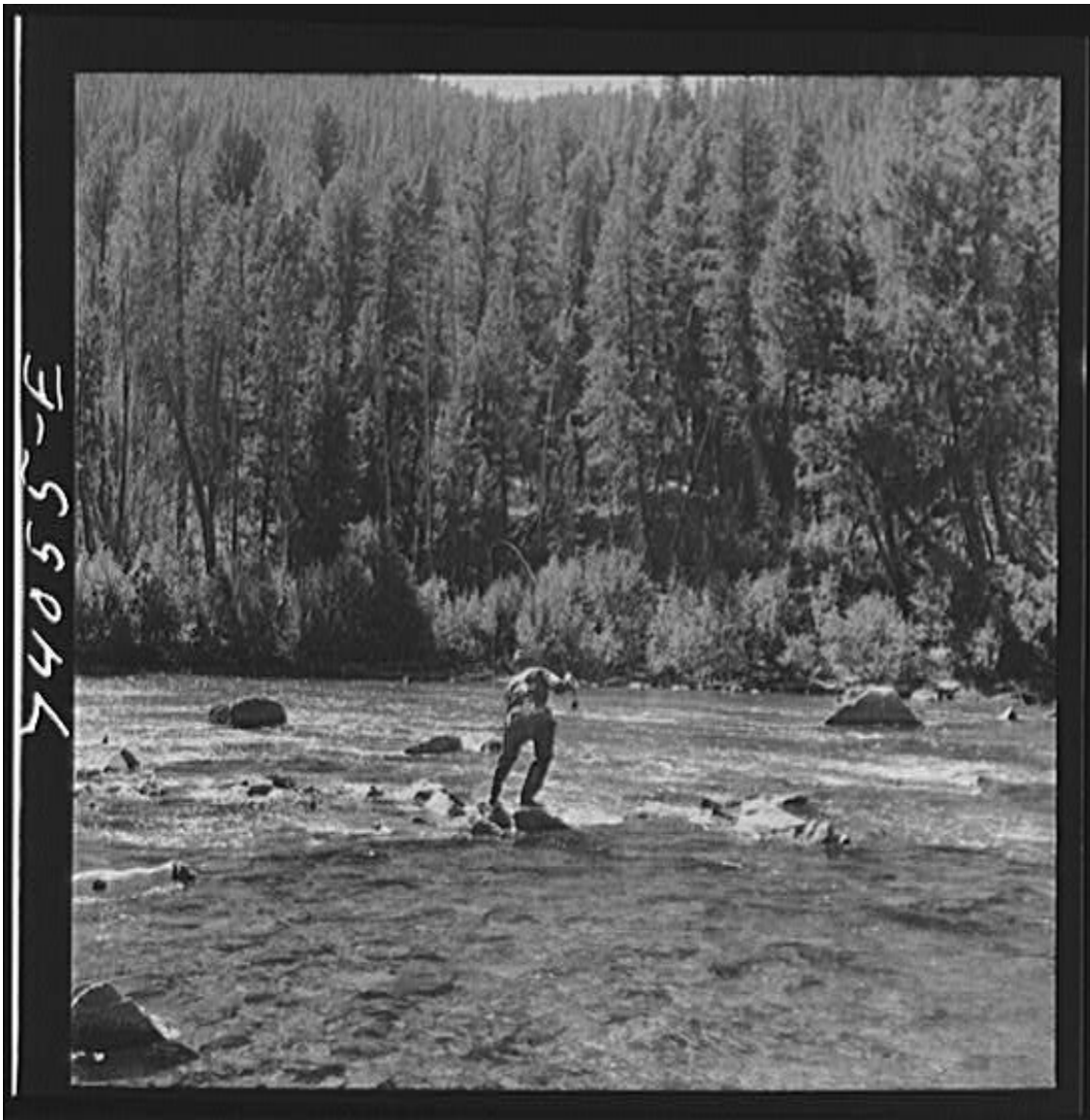
Photo 19: "Fishing in the Salmon River"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: August 1942 Custer County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-074055-E (Digital ID: fsa 8c32634

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c32634>)



Fishing was part recreation and part sustenance for poverty stricken Idahoans. In 1938, Idaho's citizens passed an initiative to manage the state's fish and game. The state spent nearly two million dollars between 1946 and 1948, building 17 hatcheries that produced more than 32 million fish annually. This helped replenish dwindling fish stocks in remote lakes.

Photo 20: "Pea Picker"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: June 1941 Nampa, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF33-013058-M5 (Digital ID:)



Lee photographed this girl several times during a trip to a pea farm in Nampa. The series shows the changing nature of the fields: once the domain of local town residents, Mexicans and Japanese and Japanese-Americans soon began appearing.

Photo 21: “High School Girls”

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: June 1941 Nampa, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF33-013056-M2 (Digital ID: fsa 8a30118

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8a30118>)



It was common for town residents – shopkeepers, bankers, even high school girls – to go into the fields to help get crops in. Soon, however, workers under the Bracero program, and interned Japanese Americans began appearing alongside area residents during crop season.

Photo 22: “Wives of Some of the Members (Ola Self-Help Cooperative)”

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: July 1942, Ola, Idaho

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-073727-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c25320

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c25320>)



Like the photos from Boundary County and the government camps, women typically appear in traditional roles – like this photo of the women supervising the children. In Ola, when men are photographed, they are hunting or working in the forest or in the mill.

Photo 23: "The Halley Family"

Photographer: Dorothea Lange

Created: Oct. 1939, Priest River Valley, Bonner County, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-021705-E (Digital ID: fsa 8b35462

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b35462>)



Stump farming was no easy life, so women often did more than the usual caring for kids and the home. If the men were busy blasting stumps or sawing logs, women would light and supervise fires. In her book on stump farming, Nell Portrey Davis wrote that she even did the interior carpentry on the family's house.

Photo 24: "Aluminum for Defense"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: July 1941, Nez Perce, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF-070033 (Digital ID: fsa 8c22266 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c22266>)



As the War gained steam, towns across the nation began collecting scrap aluminum. Often it was women who conducted these aluminum drives.

Photo 25: "Weighing Hamper of Peas"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: June 1941 Nampa, ID

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF33-013055-M4 (Digital ID: fsa 8a30115

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8a30115>)



This picture hints at Idaho's ethnic diversity which increased dramatically with the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans. The internment did not last long – only a matter of months – and Japanese began living in USDA, FSA, and CCC camps in other parts of the state. Concurrent with this policy was that federal relocation processing centers in the Pacific states sent Japanese and Japanese Americans directly to labor camps, rather than to camps specifically for internment.

Photo 26: "Japanese exiting sanitary facility"

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: July 1942, Rupert Idaho

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-073838-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c25387

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c25387>)



Russell Lee never intended the above photo to be published because it demonstrated racial disunity. The Library of Congress actually maintains this façade today, not including the caption that exists in Russell Lee's field notes.

Photo 27: “Japanese-Americans Taking Down Their Flag”

Photographer: Russell Lee

Created: July 1942, Rupert Idaho

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA-OWI Collection, reproduction number, LC-USF34-073861-D (Digital ID: fsa 8c25411

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8c25411>)



Like Idaho’s Native Americans, Japanese and Japanese-Americans were encouraged to celebrate American institutions, and adopt American ideals – even after being forcibly removed from their homes and made to live in crude camps.

Appendix B

Photographer's field notes and supplementary files

- 73830D- Children of Rupert, Idaho go to swimming classes in the school bus.
- 73831D- At the swimming pool, Rupert, Idah.
- 73832D- ~~CCC camp at Rupert, Idaho, which is now used to house Japanese-Americans who are doing farm work etc.~~
- 73833D- Swimming pool, Rupert, Idaho.
- 73834D- Newspapers are delivered daily to the Japanese-Americans who live at the Farm Security Administration Farm Family Community, Twin Falls, Idaho.
- 73835D- ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ killed
- 73836D- killed
- 73837D- ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ Detail of building in which Japanese-Americans live at the CCC camp, under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.

73838D- Please show this print and caption to Mr. Straker and ask him to caption it as he sees fit or remove it from set if he thinks best. This is the shower tent for Japanese-Americans living at the Farm Security Administration Farm Family Community, Twin Falls, Idaho. Because of racial feeling between whites and Japanese living in this camp, the Japanese do not use the regular sanitary facilities of the camp.

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- ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~
- 73839D- same as 73834D
- 73840D- ~~The camp council meets with the camp manager at the CCC camp under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73841D- same as 73840D
- 73842D- ~~Preparing lunches for the Japanese-Americans who are doing farm work and living at CCC camp under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73843D- ~~Japanese-American boys who have arranged an apartment for themselves in CCC building, Rupert, Idaho. Space permitting, the Farm Security Administration allows the people in this camp to adapt the buildings to their particular living requirements.~~
- 73844D- same as 73842D
- 73845D- ~~Japanese-Americans resting after work at the CCC camp under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73846D- ~~Japanese-Americans play games at CCC camp under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73847D- House of members of the Ola Self-Help coop, Idaho.
- 73848D- Lumber ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ from the Ola Self-Help coop is sold, Ola, Idaho.
- 73849D- killed
- 73850D- ~~Japanese-American farm workers play ping-pong. They live at CCC camp, under FSA supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73851D- ~~Japanese-American couple who do farm work and live at the CCC camp under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~
- 73852D- ~~Japanese-American boy cultivates potatoes. He lives at CCC camp, under Farm Security Administration supervision, Rupert, Idaho.~~

Russell Lee Captions, July 1942

Citation: Russell Lee, "Caption for Idaho photo #73838D," Jul., 1942, U.S. Office of War Information Overseas Picture Div. Wash. Section, FSA-OWI written records, 1935-1946, Microfilm roll #8.

Russell Lee visited several USDA, CCC, FSA and former FSA camps in southern Idaho. This page is a copy of what Lee submitted to the FSA along with the negatives. Though the Library of Congress has these files, its web site maintains that no caption exists for the photo (see screen shot following Lee captions). As the photo indicates, the object of the FSA photographs was to show Congress and America how much federal programs were helping America. This cause is not helped if it appears that racial strife existed in the government's operations.

Click on picture for larger image, full item, or more versions.



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MEDIUM: 1 negative : safety ; 3 1/4 x 3 1/4 inches or smaller.

CREATED/PUBLISHED: [between 1935 and 1942]

NOTES:

To identify this image it may help to search for images that have neighboring call numbers, are similar in appearance, and have titles. There was no caption for this image in the **FSA/OWI** shelflist.

Annotation on original negative jacket.

This image in a jacket marked "Killed."

Use electronic surrogate.

Transfer; United States. Office of War Information. Overseas Picture Division. Washington Division; 1944.

Film copy on SIS roll 12, frame 2248.

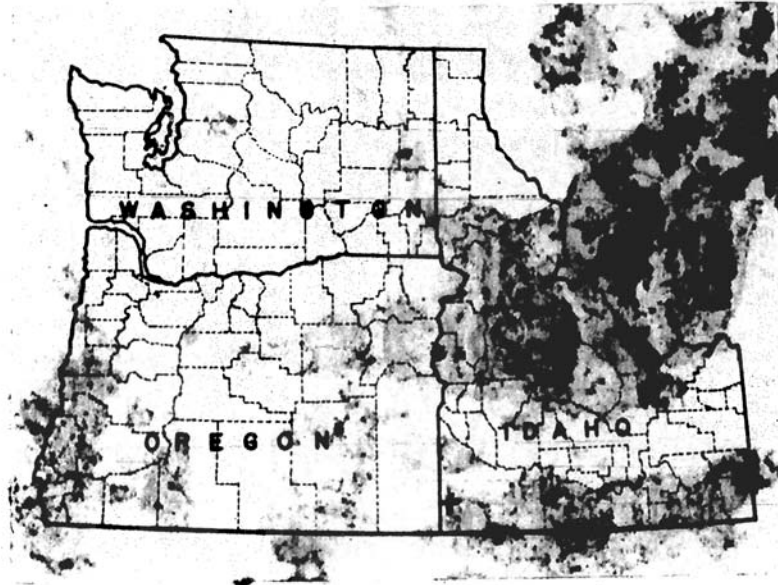
Dorothea Lange: "General Caption #48"

Citation: Dorothea Lange, "General Caption #48," Nov. 18, 1939, U.S. Office of War Information Overseas Picture Div. Wash. Section, FSA-OWI written records, 1935-1946, Microfilm roll #8.

Of the five photographers that visited Idaho, Lange submitted by far the most detailed caption sheets. The following pages are the notes of her trip to Ola where she was escorted through the settlement by the FSA county manager and Charlie Carlock, the spokesman for the Co-op members.

Lange
Nov. 18, 1939

GENERAL CAPTION NO. 48



DATE: October 18, 1939.

PLACE: Squaw Creek Valley, Gem County, Southern Idaho

SUBJECT: Ola Self-Help Sawmill Cooperative (FSA)

In about 1862 a group of pioneers moved into a little valley way back in the foothills of Gem County. Due to the lush feed growing upon the ranges and in the valleys they settled upon what is now known as Upper Squaw Creek Valley. They built log cabins and barns. They raised their families there and their sons and grandsons still live there. As the years progressed more people came in. The log cabins were supplanted by wood frame houses--but Squaw Creek Valley is still an isolated and remote settlement of small farms 40 miles north of the nearest town, Emmett, over an unimproved road, which is impassable in winter. They are 30 miles from the nearest electricity.

In 1935 after years of overgrazing, lessened rainfall, and low farm prices most of these families were on relief. They were living in houses which had depreciated until they were unfit shelter for people or livestock. The nearest supply of lumber available is at Emmett,

which makes its cost, delivered to the farmer, prohibitive. Their own valley is bordered on the east by a forest that could develop an unlimited supply of yellow pine and Douglas fir. This forest is under the supervision of the Payette National Forest Service and permits could be obtained.

In the fall of 1935, 36 men made application to the Farm Security Administration for a loan of \$1500; this to be used for purchase of equipment to help establish a small sawmill. With the lumber produced they planned to rehouse themselves, to sell lumber to other small-scale farmers near them at prices which they could afford to pay, for shelter for the livestock, for fences for their fields. Also to use their lumber as a medium of exchange for commodities. This loan was granted late in 1936--the first group loan existing in Region XI (Washington, Oregon, Idaho).

That was three years ago. The cooperative has been successful. None of these families are now on relief. They have met the repayments on their loan. Their chief struggles have been in building the road up to the timber (see letter attached), since they had to use pick and shovel method, lacking heavy equipment. They have been handicapped in growth and in operation because they have had no working capital.

This community is now making application to the Farm Security Administration for an additional loan to supply this working capital. This is a farm valley, and they work in the sawmill in slack times as a supplement to work on their own farms. On the day photographs were made nine of the farmers were working in the mill.

I. These photographs show a view of the mill, Squaw Creek Valley, the farms, the kind of country which surrounds the mill:

- ↓ 21509E - Member of the cooperative lives in what was once the "Jackknife" Saloon. "Hasn't been able to get lumber for his new house yet." This type building is characteristic of early Idaho. The stagecoach used to stop here, to change horses and for the refreshment of travelers. This continued in 1914. (See negative 21645C.)
 - ↓ 21512E - Same as 21509E.
 - ↓ 21514E - Jackknife School. Eleven pupils, two of them children of families who belong to the cooperative.
 - ↓ 21515E - Same as 21514E.
 - ↓ 21519E - Mail bag. A note on rural life.
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- 21541C - Looking down on the mill (see neg. 21624C) from the hill above. Shows the upper end of Squaw Creek Valley, the creek lined with trees, the new dry-shed near the mill, Carl Kanady's house (see negatives 21634C and 21657C), Claude Kanady's house (see neg. 21652C) and cultivated surrounding fields.
- 21549C - The upper end of Squaw Creek Valley, near the mill, showing part of the timber resources.
- 21552D - The Carlock farmstead from the hill, showing layout of farm. (See neg. 21644C.)
- 21606C - Road, going up Squaw Creek Valley, leaving Ola. "That fence was built about 1890."
- 21608C - Entering the town of Ola. Voting farmers in Squaw Creek Valley number 185. Town population about 30.
- 21609C - Same as 21509E.
- 21617C - A new house, for descendant of old Idaho family, now member of the cooperative. Lumber supplied by the mill. His board lumber charge was about \$66, windows and doors an additional \$35. Note lumber pile in yard. (See neg. 21656C.)
- 21620C - Continuing up Squaw Creek Valley. Note old wagon and buggy against barn, and split rail fence. "That buggy was used for the mail until 1921."
- 21621C - Same as 21655C.
- 21634C - Closeup of Carl Kanady's house and baby. "She likes to sit in the door and watch the geese." (See neg. 21541D for view from hill above.)
- 21640C - Newly plowed fields on land belonging to members of the cooperative.
- 21644C - Carlock farmstead. Shows new fence, new barn under construction, new house. White house seen across pasture in trees is the old family home. "We don't buy anything but flour, sugar, salt, coffee, pepper, etc. We grow everything and plant everything we need but that. (See negative 21552D for view from high hill above, which shows layout of the farm.)"

- ✓ 21645C - Road up the valley toward Ola, looking back at "Jackknife Saloon." "The Thunder Mountain gold rush went over this road. They had to use 32 horses to get some of the equipment over." (See neg. 21609C.)
- ↓ 21652C - Home of Claude Kanady, President of the cooperative, across from the sawmill. (See negative 21541D for view from hill above.) First part of the house was built a year ago, now he is adding to it lumber from the sawmill.
- ✓ 21655C - Squaw Valley farm, 640 acres with 60 in tillable land. Raise mainly livestock. Established about 50 years ago. Note old shakes on small building in field in foreground. The cooperative has supplied shingles for barn and grainery. Note new lumber, from the mill, piled in the yard.
- ↓ 21656C - A new house, lumber from the cooperative. His farm consists of 60 acres of tillable land, 100 acres in pasture. (See negative 21617C.)
- ↓ 21657C - Carl Kanady's wife and baby in doorway of their home. (See negative 21541D.)

II. These photographs show the kind of men who are members of the Ola Self-Help Cooperative:

- ↓ 21504E - Member of the cooperative, in the woods.
- ↓ 21528E - Same as 21531E.
- ↓ 21530E - Roy Carlock, member of the cooperative, in front of his new house. ~~He keeps the whole community supplied with game during the hunting season.~~ His people have lived in the valley since it was first settled.
- ↓ 21531E - Roy Carlock, member of the cooperative, ~~keeps the whole community supplied with game during the hunting season.~~ His people have lived in this valley since it was first settled.
- ↓ 21614C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.
- ↓ 21622C - Five Idaho farmers, members of the cooperative, in the woods, standing against load of logs ready to go down to their mill, about three miles away.
- ↓ 21625C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.
- ↓ 21628C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.

- ✓ 21629C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.
- ✓ 21633C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.
- ✓ 21635C - One of the 36 men who are members of the cooperative.
- ✓ 21642C - Young Idaho farmer, member of the cooperative, plowing, in the fall of the year. Tractor is used cooperatively. "He'll run that thing ten hours a day--rather do it than ride an airplane."
- ✓ 21643C - One of the 36 Idaho farmers who are members of the cooperative.
- ✓ 21647C - Charlie Carlock, aged 36, the spokesman for the group who form the cooperative. He has just this morning come back from a visit to the FSA county office at Emmett, 40 miles away. He is a descendant of the early Squaw Creek Valley settlers.
- ✓ 21658C - Nine men were working in the mill on this day. Shown lined up before the mill at noon, just before going home for dinner. The man in the rear, in the black hat, is Ed Warr, FSA County Supervisor.

Heard at the Mill, October 18, 1939:

"Now take this year--with the drought. If we hadn't a had the sawmill to drop back on to I don't know what we'd a done."

"I says, we don't want to replace a shack with another shack."

"We don't want to be asking too much in what we ask for, but we would like to see it so we don't have to be always rebuilding the road and fixing around so we can get a load"(that is, logs) out."

"We went to the Governor but he didn't understand--thought it was just more of a relief scheme."

"If we don't get the loan we'll go ahead just the same, but it will be a long slow process."

III. These photographs show the mill, members that work at the mill, members that work in the woods, member plowing.

- (?) ~~21541C - Shows view of the mill and surroundings looking down from high hill above.~~
- ✓ 21503E - Bringing ⁱⁿ a load of logs, late in the afternoon from the woods to the mill, over road three miles long which members built with pick and shovel.
- ✓ 21507E - Member works in the woods, rolling log to truck with help of a peavey, a hooked and spiked stick used as a lever.
- 21543D - ~~Members of the cooperative, in the timber, snaking a fir log down to the truck.~~ *RES 11/26*
- ✓ 21546D - ~~Same as 21543D.~~ *Members of the cooperative, in the timber, snaking a fir log down to the truck.*
- ✓ 21559D - The sawmill. The carriage and log turner were made by these Idaho farmers.
- 21588D - ~~Same as 21559D.~~ *RES 11/26*
- ✓ 21589D - Members rolling white fir log to lumber truck. Note sticks, hooked and spiked, used as levers, called peavies.
- ✓ 21591D - Same as 21543D.
- ✓ 21624C - The sawmill. (See negative 21541C.)
- ✓ 21639C - Young Idaho farmer plowing, in the fall of the year, while other members work in the sawmill. The tractor does work for five member-families.
- ✓ 21641C - Same as 21639C.
- ✓ 21560D - The sawmill in operation. It was built by the farmer-members of the cooperative.
- ✓ 21626C - Closeup of the sawmill.
- ✓ 21653C - Same as 21639C.

Dorothea Lange: "General Caption #49"

Citation: Dorothea Lange, "General Caption #49," Nov. 27, 1939, U.S. Office of War Information Overseas Picture Div. Wash. Section, FSA-OWI written records, 1935-1946, Microfilm roll #8.

In addition to her captions and field notes, Lange submitted the marketing material from the Humbird Lumber Company. Lange wrote extended captions for several of her reels to Boundary, and Bonner County. She encountered a number of interesting families while there including immigrants from Norway (the Evansons) starting over for the third time, and a Mennonite family. Far from propaganda, her notes and photos capture the hard realities for newcomers to northern Idaho. Stump farming was laborious, and capital was in short supply. The firsthand account from Nelle Portrey Davis, "Stump Rancher" portrays the life of a stump farmer in a much rosier light.

GENERAL CAPTION NO. 49

DATE: October 20-23, 1939
PLACE: Bonner and Boundary Counties, Northern Idaho.
SUBJECT: Recent Settlement of Cutover Lands in Northern Idaho.

Boundary County is the northernmost county of the Idaho Pan-Handle, bounded on the north by Canada. Bonner County joins it on the south. This is a logged-off region, the big lumber mills are abandoned. It was once heavily forested with stands of Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Larch, Cedar and Hemlock. Agriculture settlement on the bench lands of this region began as early as 1902, but was relatively unimportant until 1932. A major portion of the settlement has taken place since then. The river bottom lands are held in large ownerships. They are the richer lands and are high-priced.

The majority of the new settlers of northern Idaho are land hungry farmers from the drought stricken areas of the Northern Great Plains states. South Dakota leads in the number of people who have fled here--then North Dakota, then Colorado. Many Washington, Oregon and Idaho families are also attempting to establish farms here, of whom the heads have formerly worked in the lumber and forest industries.

Advertisements of cut-over lands by railroad and lumber companies desirous of disposing of their logged-off land have brought many of these new families. (Note advertisement of Humbird Company in file.) Practically all the land available for settlement is privately owned, with lumber companies holding the bulk of it. The price of the land appears low. Many contracted for land they had never seen. They have bought raw lands, partly developed farms, which were abandoned by previous settlers. Many come with little cash, many come with no cash, and no equipment. Forty three percent of the land purchased by new settlers for farming is classified by the United States Department of Agriculture as non-agricultural. The most recent settlers are taking up the poorest land.

The severest problem which newcomers in this area have to face is that of getting enough land cleared to support a farming enterprise and their inability to make a living because of the difficulties involved in getting rid of stumps. Farms in the cutover area are most commonly 160 acres in size but very few farmers have been able to clear more than 30 for cultivation. Of 189 cases of new settlers studied in Boundary and Benewah counties (Bureau of Agricultural Economics--1939) 36 percent have cleared at the rate of less than one acre per year, 35 percent have cleared no land, 39

GENERAL CAPTION NO. 49 --CONTINUED

percent have been clearing two and a half acres or more. The median is $1\frac{1}{2}$ acres per year. At this rate it would take a settler nearly 12 years to get 20 acres under cultivation. Lack of cash dooms the new farm family to years of hard manual labor before even a modest amount of cleared land can be obtained. There is very little supplementary income from outside work, since mills have closed down, the region is sparsely settled, remote from commercial enterprises.

The Farm Security Administration is assisting these people to develop their farms by granting powder loans and loans for land clearance by the bulldozer method. (See general caption #41 for photographs of bulldozers operating in Washington, August 1939.) Fifty land clearing loans were made by the Farm Security Administration in this area during the spring and summer of 1939.

190 Bonner county, Idaho families have received standard loans totaling \$54,758, of which \$15,846 principal and \$1,257 interest has been repaid. A total of 340 families have received grants totaling \$42,835. Of this number, 84 were also standard loan clients. 23 active cases at present, 19 families from drouth area.

142 Boundary county families have received loans totaling \$33,049, repaying \$6,623 principal and \$381 interest. 99 families have received grants totaling \$15,617. 47 of these families also have standard loans. There are only 3 active grant cases now, 2 of whom are from the drouth area.

Advertisement from Humbird Lumber Company

Large commercial timber companies had the best of both worlds. After they were done removing trees from the land, they were left with valuable real estate that they could then sell to farmers. As Lange indicates, some farmers blown out in the Great Plains, responded to advertisements like this and bought Idaho land sight unseen. Nelle Portrey Davis describes coming to Idaho to look for land after facing ruin in Colorado. Upon arriving in Northern Idaho, they encountered a former neighbor (they saw their Colorado license plates), and the neighbor showed them the location of a suitable lot. Not everyone, however, was that fortunate.

Humbird Lumber Company

Sandpoint, Idaho

My Dear Sir:

We are sending you a map with prices and full information about land settlement and home building here.

Since this map was printed we have sold all of our timber and saw-mills and closed out our lumber business, so that we can offer no wage work to any one. Smaller companies who bought our timber employ quite a few men during the summers, but jobs are scarce.

The land was reserved in these timber sales, and we can now offer you as the timber is removed, thousands of acres at lower prices than ever.

Our easy 1927 plan of clearing and 10% payment is still in effect, but a settler must have enough capital to carry him for the first year or two while he gets his land producing.

We sell 40 acres or more in a block.

There are no farms for rent here.

All good breeds of livestock can be purchased at reasonable prices.

Building material is plentiful and prices of all commodities are moderate.

We have little cold and wind in winter and our rainfall is very dependable.

Good roads and schools follow the settlement closely and high school advantages are available since roads are kept open in winter.

It is best to come to investigate after March when the snow is gone and the roads are good.

June is the best time to see how crops grow and soil produces.

Since this depression began it is hard for a stranger to "make good" here unless he can bring one or two thousand dollars to support his family, to make his payment and to pay his expense of development.

Very few of our purchasers have much capital, and it makes the undertaking discouraging, but ambition, energy and persistence mean more than money once you get started.

We want good settlers and are interested in your success.

With thousands of acres to choose from, we make prices and terms to suit if you really mean business.

We know of no way you can get so much dependable information as to read the local weekly paper until you can come in person. It will tell you all about the weather, what the people are doing and how they are doing it, prices paid and received by the farmers so that you will feel acquainted when you come out to visit us.

Send \$2 to the Northern Idaho News, Sandpoint, Idaho, and it will be sent you for one year. You may find it the best investment of \$2 you ever made, if it is *dependable* information you desire.

Drop me a line when you are coming and I will plan to show you over our holdings and locate you where you will be satisfied and prosperous in your new home in Idaho.

Very truly yours,
Humbird Lumber Company,
T. L. Greer, Mgr. Land Dept.