



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Roy Emerson  
Stryker, 1963-1965

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Roy Stryker on October 17, 1963. The interview took place in Montrose, Colorado, and was conducted by Richard Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

### Side 1

RICHARD DOUD: Mr. Stryker, we were discussing Tugwell and the organization of the FSA Photography Project. Would you care to go into a little detail on what Tugwell had in mind with this thing?

ROY STRYKER: First, I think I'll have to raise a certain question about your emphasis on the word "Photography Project." During the course of the morning I gave you a copy of my job description. It might be interesting to refer back to it before we get through.

RICHARD DOUD: Very well.

ROY STRYKER: I was Chief of the Historical Section, in the Division of Information. My job was to collect documents and materials that might have some bearing, later, on the history of the Farm Security Administration. I don't want to say that photography wasn't conceived and thought of by Mr. Tugwell, because my background -- as we'll have reason to talk about later -- and my work at Columbia was very heavily involved in the visual. I had illustrated a book for Mr. Tugwell, I use photographs in my classes, and of course we must never forget that Tugwell was basically and primarily a descriptive economist, as well as a very good theoretical economist. But his introductory approach to economics was what you might call a descriptive approach. And I was a product of that. So, again, let me say that Tugwell, in giving me his instructions on what he thought I ought to do, did include and did recognize that photography was going to be a part of it. Which was interesting, in a way, because if you read the job description -- as I think I'll go and get it and re-read it - there's very little emphasis in that on the role of photography or that there were going to be a photographic unit.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, what do you think that Mr. Tugwell had planned to use to supplement photography in this program?

ROY STRYKER: Well, we should remember that Farm Security was an action program. They were going to help move people out of depressed areas -- primarily rural: it was a rural program. They were going to help people get back into a going-concern situation, to be able to make a living on their places, and to help straighten out their debt difficulties, to help them get better practices. So that basically, he was only concerned with photography, with writing, with newspapers and magazines, as a reporting to his field people, as reporting to the public. I don't honestly know how much, and I can't answer this, I don't know if anybody else will ever know how much Tugwell really conceived having to sell back to the people the thing he was doing. And that, basically, was the only reason - inferred, at least, in your question was, "What was he planning to use photography for?" I think it was only primarily in supplying his field people with tools to make the program clear. And I suppose he had more sense of what we actually accomplished with the photographs of telling the American people about some of these "lower third" and their problems than I realize. But, as I say, basically, his was an action program. And I must say that I think we strayed a long way from where we were supposed to start. And we did it like all things happen -- not exactly accidentally, but in spite of the good plans, the well-chosen words in the job descriptions and in the administrative order. We strayed because circumstances pushed us in this direction. And what we finally did was to wind up with few documents and a lot of pictures.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think the reason for this was because pictures are more potent as a communications medium than, for example, an articles, or -

ROY STRYKER: No, definitely not, definitely not. Despite the fact that I have been involved, now, for practically all my life since Farm Security days -- from 1933 on, I have been involved almost continuously with photographs. I still think that the printed word, that the word is dominant thing, and the photograph is the little brother of words.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm surprised to hear you say that.

ROY STRYKER: I feel very keenly. And I think the word -- if I may digress for a moment -- I think we've coined a very unfortunate phrase -- "photojournalism." We're riding it hard now. Life (magazine) came along in its early day and was so dominated by the idea of the picture that they almost forgot the words. No, that's not a fair statement; but they kidded themselves into thinking the photograph was the dominant thing. It is not. And my feeling is that there are some times when photographs stand alone, but more often the photograph is, as I say, the corollary, the assistant, and the helper of the word. And (?) of the two joined together. And I don't happen to think the word is "photo-journalism." I think that's too bad that we talk about photojournalism. We don't use the expression "word journalism." Did you ever hear that?

RICHARD DOUD: True.

ROY STRYKER: And so I think it's a little silly that we say "photo-journalism."

RICHARD DOUD: Mr. Stryker, would you care to discuss a bit about the selection of the photographers of the Project? Who you picked, and why they were selected, and how you arrived at choice on individuals?

ROY STRYKER: It isn't a well-organized, uniform approach by any means. Arthur Rothstein was really the first one I had selected. Arthur was a -- graduated the year that Farm Security was getting under way. He had worked for me in a project which I will tell you more about some time, which was a project that I had worked with Rex Tugwell and one of the professors at Columbia on -- a visual record of American agriculture. And Arthur, with many others who were placed under the National Youth Project -- Arthur did photographing of documents, pictures, stuff for me. And he wanted to be with the medical school. It didn't break right for him, and I said, "Come on down, spend a year as photographer with me." And he was the first man that came in with me. And he stayed on, and never took -- and he is now, of course, head photographer for Look magazine. But medicine was something he forgot. Walker Evans was in the Subsistence Homesteads, doing photography for the Interior Department. He was transferred over to Farm Security when resettlement really was organized. So I acquired Walker because he was already hired. A man by the name of Theodor Jung was working with an educational unit -- the exact title I can't remember for the moment, doing graphics, designing booklets, doing layouts things of that nature for this particular unit in the AAA. He was a Viennese boy, had been trained and used a camera a lot, 35mm., and wanted to come over and join us. He came for a while, never took many pictures, and finally decided to go back to the AAA. So he wasn't there very long. Carl Mydans was hired -- because of a sickness, I didn't start, as I had planned to start, when Resettlement first went into action. So Carl Mydans was hired by Suburban Resettlement, which had to do with so-called "greenbelt" towns. Carl was on the staff taking pictures when I finally got back into Washington to take over my job. And due to an administrative order, Carl was transferred over from the greenbelt projects and joined my staff there. It wasn't too long after this that he quit to go work for Life magazine and Russell Lee took his place. Russell had come in looking for work. I was impressed -- very much impressed -- with the man's ability and the series of pictures he showed me. So as soon as Carl had decided to leave, I hunted Russell up and he stayed with us almost till the end of the Farm Security project. Dorothea Lange had done a good deal of work on the immigrants in California. I had seen her work and became very much interested in what she had done, and proceeded to find ways and means to see if she was available. She was, and I got her transferred into our operation. Now, from that point on, there was Jack Delano who came in; Marion Post. There were many others who came in for short times, and there were people who came in after we became -- in operations, at least, before we were actually transferred over to the Office of War Information. But coming back to (?), let me see: there was Ben Shahn. He was never on our payroll but was assigned to other organizations within Resettlement and farm Security, known as Special Skills -- they were largely artists, craftsmen, and designers. And Ben came over -- he was assigned to us and did an extended photographic trip, and contributed, incidentally some of the most exciting, some of the most interesting human documents in the whole file. But Ben was never a full-time Farm Security photographer. In the last days, through the latter part of our time, Ben did come in for a definite job assignment. He went out to Ohio and did a series of pictures in and around Columbus, largely rural -- farming, farm people. I think that covers the bulk of our people. Now, coming back in general, it's very strange that most of our people were interested in art, had some art training, had desires to be artists, perhaps suddenly discovered photography offered them something. Russell was a chemical engineer. Married an artist, painted some, saw a couple of the artists who used cameras very effectively, decided that was what he wanted to do and it would probably be the place to belong. And he took up the camera and turned it in to be a very remarkable man in photography. I think by and large I was looking for people -- because I got more mature, knew more about photography -- never forget, I was pretty unsophisticated when I took that job as far as how to pick a photographer. Let's be very honest about it. In that job and elsewhere, I began to realize it was curiosity, it was a desire to know, it was the eye to see the significance around them. Very much what a journalist or a good artist is, is what I looked for. Could the man read? What interested him? What did he see about him? How sharp was his vision? How sharp was his mental vision as well as what he saw with his eyes? Those are the things you look for.

RICHARD DOUD: You've already mentioned, I think, where some of these people went after the FSA project.

Would you care to discuss some of the others? I think that most people know that Mr. Shahn went on to become one of our greater artists in this area. What about the others?

ROY STRYKER: Well, Walker is a staff member of Fortune, with a very interesting assignment, which is -- he's called an editor. He goes out and does special photographic assignments. I don't know how much he does editing inside of it but he's done -- if look through the old copies of Fortune you'll see some quite remarkable picture series.

RICHARD DOUD: This is Walker Evans?

ROY STRYKER: Yes. Remarkable series. Still showing the same old competence, still showing his discerning eye. A series he did on the railroads, on the locomotives, in which he shot the close-ups of the drive mechanism; the beautiful sequence he did in on the old buildings -- the continuation of an early love of his, which was at Saratoga; he went back up and did some of the material up there. You'll see that Walker Evans is still, in his way, continuing his 8 x 10 camera perception, if I may use that strange phrase, of the world about him. Arthur Rothstein left, went into the Army, came out, went to Look magazine, and is now chief photographer there. One man I didn't mention previously is John Vachon. John Vachon, whom I'd like now to add something about that I didn't put in that previous discussion we had, John came into Washington from Minneapolis. I think he came in to go to Catholic University. Got into some trouble down there because he was curious about the world about him and didn't attend classes. Finally wound up as a messenger in our place. I needed -- I'd had a librarian who was so much the librarian that she was going to get us so fouled up in the minute classifications she was working at that -- I asked her to make me an outline one time. I think she wrote around seven pages. I pinned her down and asked her if she could redo it and keep the paging down. We finally went at this for about a week, and I think I wound up with about thirty-some pages. (Richard laughs.) And I in my jesting way said if she couldn't do better than that, I was going to jump off the top of the building (which was about seven or eight stories high). I went off to a meeting, and when I came back, I had a call from the head of Personnel. And when I went in, he said, "I'm afraid you're in trouble, you've threatened suicide if the woman didn't do so-and-so and she's quitting." (Richard laughs again). And I explained to him what had happened. He said, "Well, she's not staying because she's not going to be the cause of your death."

RICHARD DOUD: This got you John Vachon?

ROY STRYKER: No, no, this is this woman, this librarian, I forget her name now. She was a nice person but with no imagination and never could adjust herself that we didn't need a meticulous, detailed classification of all the documents that might be in some great building. But she did quit, thank goodness. I needed a librarian -- John was out doing filing and messenger work, and I asked him if he'd like to take it. And he took it over and became very successful at it. Because he applied a great deal of common sense that he had. Without knowing too much about it, we got a pretty good file. I came back from vacation once -- I've never had an assistant down there, but I came back and John had taken to loading one of our cameras. He'd gone off on a walking tour and came back with some surprisingly good pictures. Later on it became apparent that John should quit the filing and become a photographer, and he turned in to be a superbly good one. He's what I have said many times is the only "congenital photographer" that I ever realized we had. And he's now of course one of Look's top men. Extremely talented man; extremely talented. And did some superbly good pictures. Marion Post, whom I haven't mentioned much yet, came in late. She'd been doing photography for one of the Philadelphia papers, and she came down, and we needed an extra photographer, put her on. And if you look through the file, you'll find Marion has particularly a great sense of our land, of our terrain and a feeling of people on the land, probably more than some of the others. A great love of people, a great warmth and understanding of people. Marion also suffered from being a very attractive girl, and I always wondered how she could possibly get along. The War was just starting, and I asked Marion one time, I said, "Marion, don't you have some trouble around sometimes?" She said, "Yes, very often a local police picks me up. We have a Coke, and he asks me something about his sex life, and I ask him something about his, and by this time I look at my watch and say, 'If I don't get back to work, I'm going to get fired.'" (Richard laughs). But Marion went through, as I suppose they all did -- that first period of worry and fuss; taking too many pictures. I remember having called her up one at a time and said I was sending her a motion picture camera so she could make more of the same thing. That was probably what she needed to startle her into being more thoughtful and not being quite so insecure, realizing she was better than she thought she was, and sending us in three pictures instead of fifteen. Russell Lee is now freelancing successfully, out in Texas. Jack Delano came in from a WPA project and quickly -- he was a musician and a very good one, an artist by training. And very successful. He's at the moment the head of educational television in Puerto Rico. John Collier was one of our latest ones. John was son of the old Indian Commissioner. He had very little schooling but in some ways was one of the most sophisticated of all of our people, in that strange unsophisticated manner. John has surprising perception. Somewhere or other he got a great deal of sense of what is good photography and, except for his forgetfulness at times, did a good job. He went out on a trip one time and phoned in that he'd forgot his lenses. Of course, (?) dig them up for us and we sent them to him. Another time he went into one of the Regions. They loaned him a car. Some weeks later a call came through and said, "Have you seen John Collier?" "Nope." "He's gone home, he's left the car someplace. We think we know where it is, along a railroad

siding, but no key." Sure enough, John had decided he'd had enough, saw the train coming, he stopped, pulled up the car and slammed aboard the train and came on in. (Richard laughs). We found him. He'd been up for two or three nights, working, and we got him out of bed and got the key and got it back. But that made life interesting, because each photographer had his own little idiosyncrasies, and that added zest and glamour to the place.

RICHARD DOUD: What is Dorothea Lange doing?

ROY STRYKER: Dorothea Lange now -- she's been through a long, critical illness; is much better. A very unusual illness. As she said, she's all the doctor books in the United States. But she's shown great fortitude, and she's much better. She and her husband have been traveling. He's given up his position as head of the Economics Department for University of California and has been, has set up some sort of special organization for international study. And she has been with him in Egypt and to the Near East in the last several months. Dorothea is quite an unusual person. She was the real matriarch of our organization. If you look at the pictures she did of the immigrants, hers was the greatest collection of immigrants. They all did them, but Dorothea -- Dorothea, I guess, is the mother; I said the matriarch; she is the mother. And she at the present time is doing very little photography. She has recovered considerably from this serious illness she had, and I gather -- I hear, but I haven't seen her for some time, have a hunch that Dorothea is going to ripen into many years yet, of -- not perhaps photography but taking photography, advising on photography; what I don't know. I wish I knew. I don't know what she'll do.

RICHARD DOUD: Could you tell us something about the standards by which these people worked? Did you have certain things that a photograph must say? Were there certain problems of composition that must be solved? Or certain artistic effects that must be achieved?

ROY STRYKER: The word "composition" was never talked about, never mentioned. It was a taboo word. We didn't talk about composition. I don't like the word. I think it's been loaded with all sorts of very spurious things. They try and get in the electrical and so on compositions. No. We had none of this. Photographers were intelligent people that worked for us. They were communicating. They were intelligent enough -- some of them had art training -- they were intelligent enough to sense what they were doing. They were trying to tell us, tell the public, make pictures that were genuine, that recognized peculiar situations whether it be a piece of geography or a human being, and recognized the pertinent things in this particular situation. They had taken the time to check certain facts or investigate, to understand why they were at that place, and what they were going to do. From that point on, ten pictures were taken. Of those ten pictures, if you looked at them -- we never evaluated them in terms of set values. We looked at them in terms of what did they have to say about this little group of people, this particular village, this particular dust area, or what. I think, to summarize it, they were intelligent people reporting things that they felt and saw based upon past experience, based upon a good deal of investigation. And above all else, particularly as regards the human side of this, a sincere, passionate love of people, and respect for people. I think that's the important thing. At no time did we have rules or criteria in the sense that are inferred in your question.

RICHARD DOUD: A very good answer.

ROY STRYKER: And God knows, we didn't follow any of the rules the cover magazines talk about. (Richard laughs) You'd be surprised that we were bombarded with cover magazines -- "What stop did you use on this picture?" "What film was used?" And I didn't know. And I didn't care. And I sometimes got so disgusted that I gave them fool answers and they published it and then got nixed. They taught them not to ask questions like that. I am not a photographer. I am not so much concerned with things of that particular kind. I have had to tell many people I hadn't the vaguest idea what stop they used, because I didn't know about stops. I was interested in what the picture said; what was in the picture.

RICHARD DOUD: do you consider yourself a humanist, then?

ROY STRYKER: I don't know, I dunno. What's a humanist? I don't know. What do you mean by a humanist? What do you put it in those terms for? You tell me what you're asking and I'll try to answer.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, it seems to me that the best definition of the humanist at this point is Roy Stryker, a man who is intensely interested in the human animal -- what motivates him, the effect he has upon his surroundings have upon him, his interrelationship not only with his surroundings but with his fellow man. I think this is basically what you are interested in.

ROY STRYKER: Well, all right. In a sort of unorganized, illiterate way, yes. I'm an illiterate humanist.

RICHARD DOUD: Very good. I think it would be interesting to know a little bit about the attitude of the people who are photographed. A good many of let's say your immortal pictures, if I may use such a term, are of people. This is probably because people are more interested in people than anything else -

ROY STRYKER: Well -

RICHARD DOUD: What did these people think when your photographers were taking their pictures under certain really unnatural or undesirable conditions? How did these people react to being photographed in these surroundings?

ROY STRYKER: Well, first of all, let me supplement what you have said. After all what was the Depression? It was what hitting the people. And while I was a great believer that it's the geography that makes the people, and underneath it all we kept the land and its geographical structure and so on, but after all, when all is said and done, the problem of the Depression of that period was the suffering human beings that were caught and trapped in it. So obviously we were concerned with people. We had no other choice. And we were the kind of people that we were going to be concerned with. Now, coming on to following up what you have said: I don't know, except in acute instances, because I wasn't in the field. I can only generalize this thing. I can generalize in terms of what photographers told me. I can generalize it in terms of what I see in the photographs. What were their reactions? I can give you a very precise answer in one case which I think is probably quite true. I was with Mr. Lee, Russell Lee, on a trip coming down from some work we'd been doing up in Minnesota and down through Wisconsin. And we saw a very curious, very nice-looking little old lady with her hair done in a little top knot, and we stopped beside the log cabin she lived in. Russell -- I kept quiet and listened -- Russell said to her, "Can we take your picture?" And she bristled. "What do you want my picture for?" "We're with Government." "Oh you are, well, I don't want you to take my picture." He said, "Well, now look. There's a lot of people think that you represent a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings. We don't think so. We'd like to tell them a little bit more about who you are, what your problems are." And got her intrigued and she started to talk to him. And it was one of the most interesting experiences I had while I was in this job, one of my few experiences out in the field. We stayed the afternoon, she invited us to lunch, she wanted us to come back and meet some of her neighbors. The picture is still in the file. I still sort of glow when I see it. But there was an interesting illustration of what I think was probably pretty prevalent all the way through. The photographer ran into opposition. He soon conquered it by his honesty, his forthrightness, sympathy, and a certain warmth that they all had. But always their honesty. And I think that was technically -- I think Walker Evans would do it one way, Ben Shahn had quite different way. Ben, of course he was as honest as the rest, but he said, many times he talked to them in terms of what he knew were their problems and got in touch. He used a right-angle viewfinder a lot, and sometimes you look at Ben's pictures and you think you see the consternation, the irritation, the frustrations of these men; but Ben stirred up some of that. Honestly, I don't think there was anything dishonest about Ben's manner, because the questions were asked and the conversations were started in complete fairness. I wasn't with the other -- I don't know how Dorothea would react. Dorothea would, because of, as I said previously, her matriarchal attitude, her mother instincts, would warm up anyone. And if you look at the captions -- she wrote the best captions of all. When you see what she had people say to her, it must have been that she sparked a great deal of simpatia, a great deal of rapport. And Arthur, naive little Bronx boy that he is -- he doesn't like this but it's a compliment to him -- he'd come out of -- not the slums, not by any means, but the middle class; and he stayed within that naivete of the city boy. I can give you a little illustration of this. Arthur went out to do the cattle story. He met it on a ranch -- I didn't know the people, we were sent there through the Agricultural Adjustment Administration -- the Brewsters, who then had a dude ranch. First of all, they were intrigued with Arthur's knowledge of the cattle business. They got involved and became Arthur's helper to get the right pictures. Later on Mr. Brewster came to Washington. He stopped in to see me and thanked me for sending Arthur Rothstein. He said, "Mr. Stryker, we have been quite anti-semitic at our dude ranch. But we were so delighted with Arthur Rothstein that our anti-semitism left us when we (?) Arthur's work." I said, "What did you like about --" "A sort of strange, sophisticated ignorance. For a city boy that was a surprising amount of knowledge. With it all, he is just a boy who was exuberant, who was seeing a new world." He said, "I can't tell you how pleased we were with him." There's another example. Carl Mydans wasn't with us long but I can just guess. Carl had some of the same thing. Some people would call it bumptiousness. I wouldn't. A love of people and a love of life. And those things were contagious. So you see we had quite a gamut. Walker -- I never went out with Walker but I'm sure that Walker had none of Arthur's instincts, none of his old traits. I'm sure he had nothing of Lange's; quite different than Ben. Walker was apt to stand back and see a static relationship in most of his pictures. A very, very significant -- and I don't use the word "static" in any unfair manner -- Walker could take in the cemetery in a steel town in Pennsylvania, a cross in the cemetery, the streets, crowded houses, steel mills in the background, and it became a very telling picture. He also took some very interesting people. But at no time -- Walker's pictures were different than anybody else's of people. His pictures of people were always different. They weren't wooden by any means. You have to see them to understand -- I don't think I can explain the difference. You have to see -- you have to see a lot of these things. I don't think that you can always put in words these differences. But if you start looking through the file and laying these pictures out, you'll soon sense it yourself.

RICHARD DOUD: What about the general public -- do you feel that at that time the public understood and appreciated what you were trying to do? I know there's been in certain instances a lot of outcry against particular photographs and particular situations, but in general, do you think the public appreciated your project?

ROY STRYKER: Oh, to some extent, yes. We came at a very propitious time, a very favorable time, I think. Remember, we were a year ahead of Life, about a year ahead of Look. Photographs were new. We were in a period of hard times in this country, a very disturbing time. Even people who weren't hungry -- and none of us was hungry, in a sense, none of the photographers was -- but we -- they had \$5 a day and they lived on it -- but -- now I'm talking about what the photographers, about the people we photographed. Let's change that just a little, in answer to your question. People were distressed, disturbed, worried; I think more worried than any of us ever realized. So, as these things were picked up by the newspapers, picked up by the magazines later on, and seen in various ways, I suspect that a lot of the public -- I don't know, nor does anybody know -- but I suspect that more of the public than we realize understood what we were trying to do. I think they found in so many instances a rapport with some of the faces they saw. I don't know. I think we can awfully easily over-emphasize this; very easily. I think it's a dangerous thing to get onto. Now, I'm not trying to duck that; I just wouldn't know. You have no measures of those things; we can't count them; we didn't have any polls at that time. We don't know how many of them read these things, but we apparently were accepted, in more ways than we realize.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I think possibly one gauge of this acceptance might be the response to the exhibitions that have been put on using these photographs. Whether this is a true gauge or not is a bit difficult to say, because in many cases these shows would have been viewed by only a certain segment or a certain stratum of the society, I suppose. But it seems to me that this is at least a guide to how people reacted.

ROY STRYKER: Well, yes. But it's an awfully limited sampling, and yet I think it's a good sampling. We had one show, one exhibit that I think we could place much weight on. That was a show that was done in New York, at the International Photographic Show exhibit in 1938 at Grand Central Palace. I was quite a large show, and we were given a very good space. We were shorthanded, and two photographers more or less designed the show. It was a tough show, it was a pretty brutal statement of -- by the kind of pictures we selected. As our friend Ben Shahn said later -- he didn't see the show up, he saw the pictures -- he said it gave no one even a chance to catch their breath as they walked around. And the only index we could possibly have had of that show, that we could place any credence in at all, was a box that Rothstein conceived and the blank 3x5 cards. And we wound up with some almost 500 comments. And they were extremely varied -- from calling us "Communists" (although Communism wasn't very well known then, it wasn't the word everybody used) to an enormous number of the people who answered said, "Why isn't something done about it? Why don't we do something about these people?" On the whole, the comments were sympathetic, understanding, and even to the point of being distressed about these conditions; why couldn't something be done. That was one show. Now, I don't think we have any concrete hard facts that we were accepted by 10%, 30%, 40% -- I think we have no answer. We seem to have been accepted, we did survive, we did get talked about. That's about as much as I'm prepared to say.

RICHARD DOUD: At least you made people aware of a situation, whether they were in favor of your methods of doing so or not.

ROY STRYKER: Somewhat. We of course undoubtedly affected a lot of people. We made a lot of people aware. And as I say, photographs were fresh then, so maybe we had more impact because of their freshness, because photographs' newness. Life didn't cover many of our stories; Look didn't. So it was done by an enormous number of small magazines. We got into the local presses out through the fields, where field people used the material. I don't know, I wish I did know. But we had no polls, we had no measures -- unlike an advertising agency today, which is forever taking its pulse by having somebody make a test of how many people saw this, what they think -- I don't know. It's useless to try to answer that.

RICHARD DOUD: Mr. Stryker, was there any political problems to be surmounted or circumvented in the Farm Security photography project?

ROY STRYKER: No. I answer you -- as far as I'm concerned, we had very few political problems. The experts took care of them. We did the work, we did the photographs. And we lived in a time in Washington when the politicians weren't harassing as much as they do now.

RICHARD DOUD: Why do you feel there was so little of this -- I mean --

ROY STRYKER: We lived in a damned disturbed country.

RICHARD DOUD: Politicians had something better to do than --?

ROY STRYKER: -- and they weren't going around snapping. They were all disturbed. We were -- as I say, and I say it again -- we were in a very disturbed period. We don't know how close we came to revolution. And we all were concerned with everything. We had a great leader who, as time wore on, political problems increased. But I still was protected. I think it's a simple thing that I was protected, that I don't think political problems -- I told you when we were riding out here about Dr. Weaver, who is the head of FHA, Federal Housing. He was an old Farm Security man and made some remark about people were going to get back to photographing, maybe we ought to use them. I have a feeling that being a Negro, in that unusual position that he was in, that he would be

subject to much more scrutiny, that there would be men in Congress who would like to crucify him, would like to bring him up there; people who would question his integrity and question his operations. And I think for him to take to photography would be very dangerous. As I told him, he'd be forced to meet every hour on the hour, and if they didn't have enough committees, they'd make some new ones.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, perhaps the political situation would be much more of a problem no matter who took over a case like this than it was in the 30's.

ROY STRYKER: Oh, certainly. I think that to go down there and try to get a photographic project like Farm Security again would -- you'd have to surmount some pretty dire situations politically. I don't think you could. I don't think the time is right to start another one of these large operations. I don't think it would work. I think if it were promoted by certain people, then the Southerners would take it on. If promoted by somebody else, then the urban people would take it on. And vice versa. No, I just don't think you could do it.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I think we'll leave that as it is for the time being. And ask what you consider the immediate impact of the project.

ROY STRYKER: Well, I think you have to measure the impact by some things that have happened. I think it affects the Steichen show at the Museum of Modern Art (1955- The Family of Man?). It had a big attendance, it had a lot of publicity, it had a lot of talk. And apparently it's going to move out now; and its second index of impact will be how many places ask for it and what will be the attendance there. I think if we could find some way to evaluate reactions, conversation, comments, which we don't very often (?) to do, we might be surprised how effective it's going to be in Ft. Worth, and if shown in another place how effective it's going to be there. But I don't know how much we can measure those things. I don't know how well we are prepared to know what those impacts are. I know that the Museum show was a success, measured by their terms -- it drew attention, a troop of us came. I don't know what more you can say.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, as against the immediate impact -- and we have sort of talked about this before -- do you think it's too early to consider the more enduring social or political or economic significance of the 270,000 pictures?

ROY STRYKER: In a way yes, and in a way no. I think time will have to operate there, because I think we have a tendency to find a resource. We found the Brady pictures quite late; we used them when they fitted, when they were significant -- some man found them because they could express something that was in him. You see, in the end, the 270,000 or 250,000 pictures are only going to be significant if somebody goes in and takes 15 of them, one of them, 50 of them, and does something. He does an article, makes an exhibit, he puts the frontispiece, he puts the cover because the magazine, the International Harvester, tells a story in such a way that apparently it intrigues the people who've looked at the magazine for years and like it. I think that's the answer -- what can somebody do with it? And in the end, he is a person who wants to communicate, he's a person who wants to express something, he's a person who has an axe to grind -- what will you. And I think that's the answer. Now, I made the -- as time goes on, we found the Brady pictures, we used them quite often. They tend to be war pictures. The Farm Security file is a pretty broad file. Maybe we'll find a lot of things in there to utilize. The state of the use of photographs journalistically is in a sort of a bad state right now, unfortunately, because I think we fail to recognize the relationship between words and pictures. I think Life finds itself in a rather difficult thing, Look is more successful. Why? I don't know. I'm not prepared to say why Look is more successful than Life. But I think this is an unfortunate thing, that we have failed to recognize this fine relationship, this very sensitive relationship between the photograph and the word.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, the fact that there is still an interest in this file of picture is incontestable. Are you surprised, or would you have been surprised in the 1930's that people 30 years later would be excited about the pictures?

ROY STRYKER: I would never have thought about it, it never occurred to me. I lived in 1930, and I lived in '31 and '32 and '33, I lived in each of those years. I wasn't even giving any thought to the future. I hadn't the vaguest idea. Sure, I knew the Brady pictures that were taken. Sure, I look at the Brady pictures and get excited about them. Those were Civil War, those were in the 1860's, and I fell in the 30's, I come in the 30's. Because I had them going -- even before I was involved in Farm Security I knew them, because they were telling me something startling. I saw in some of them things that no amount of text could ever have told me -- the ruins that I saw that Brady had taken looked like some of the ruins of the Old World. Some of the pictures of the soldiers were something that I don't think we have surpassed with all the cameras and all the fine film and all the good photographers we've got in World War I and II. But -- no; as time wore on, I suppose I was more and more intrigued as the file grew and I had a little bit more -- I became a little more engrossed with what I was doing, a little more conscious of it, a little more wondering what would come out of the pictures. But I am completely surprised. Completely surprised at where we have arrived. I am completely surprised that the file is attracting the attention that it seems to be attracting.



RICHARD DOUD: I have a couple of question here... One is, just how much did the Brady pictures influence you, as the head of this project.

ROY STRYKER: I don't know. Those are very difficult things to say. I don't think I ever should have said "Brady pictures -- Farm Security must be like this." No. No -- I couldn't. There's no answer to that, because if I'm a designer, and I see a piece of design over here, I say, "I'll make my design here, I'll be influenced by this man, I won't copy this man's design (he laughs)." Sure I was influenced. How, and how much, I don't know. And remember, that was a war, and we were in a different kind of war.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you feel a little bit --

ROY STRYKER: Let me interrupt just a minute. I'm much more apt to be influenced by the Hine pictures than I was the Brady pictures; the Lewis Hine pictures. Because they were closer to the intent which we were doing.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think, though, that the Brady pictures might have given you a sense of the history that the Hine pictures, perhaps, would not have?

ROY STRYKER: No. No. Each in its own way gave me a (?); same thing. But the Hine pictures -- some of the things I saw that he took at Staten Island, and some of the things I saw Brady take, one is more desperate, one is the horrors of war, and the other is entirely different; it portrays something different. One is highly emotional and the other is less emotional -- not with no emotion; each has a very strong impact; very strong.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I'd sort of like to take up this controversial topic now of what did the Project contribute to the art of photography? We didn't really define what we meant by "the art of photography." If you consider art as a discipline, this would mean one thing; if you consider art as perhaps an expression or an extension of the feeling or the emotion of the photographer, this might have a different answer. But whether or not you consider photography as an art, do you feel that the people who were taking pictures after the 1930's fell back upon any of the methods --

ROY STRYKER: Oh sure.

RICHARD DOUD: -- and what methods? How heavily did they lean on what your people did for the FSA?

ROY STRYKER: I think that we were early in a transition and a trend that was going to take place. I think that we were there early. I think that the things that we did -- the small camera, the arranging that we did, and we had to be aware. You see, you must never forget that we came at a time when there was a crisis in our land, there was great problems in our land, a great turmoil and a great -- I mean, upset. And that we were in a period when we were aware. We suddenly had an awareness. And I think at the present time we're not as aware as we were then. I think they may have copied some of our ideas but I think they have failed to get the significant situation as of today as we did then. I think we're a little bit dulled. First of all, I think we're dulled by being more used to the photograph. I think the photograph was new then.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think perhaps an over-exposure has set in?

ROY STRYKER: I think so.

RICHARD DOUD: That's really hurt --

ROY STRYKER: I think so. Now, you see, I think over-exposure is a very curious thing. As long as man has problems, as long as he has sorrow, as long as he has happiness, as long as he has joy, as long as he has routine; and as long as there's death, and birth -- all these things that make human beings different from the animals, that make life something to be lived and something to be fearful of and something to look forward to -- all those things make great journalism, great paintings. And in the end there will only be good photographers and great photographers, if we're a part of that. That's going to hold. It's always held. It just happened that we've got a new tool to bring these things in. Television can be great so long as it recognizes this. There have been some great things done on radio, because the voices comes to us in the hands of sensitive, intelligent people who have something to say, who want to say something, who have some consciousness of this world. And they'll always be there. But we are, as I said a moment ago, we are dulled because we're getting too much of it, we're getting hacks, we're getting people who have nothing that they want to say. You read that little article there about this town. Right away you begin to get excited about this town. Why? Because it's a nice piece of journalism. But it's a problem -- a dying town.

RICHARD DOUD: You mentioned a couple of time that there are many instances where you feel that photographs are really a detriment rather than an aid.

ROY STRYKER: Sure. Lots of times you don't use photographs. I think we do it time and again -- the photograph

has nothing to do. I think there are times when the word is so much more -- is so much better. Look: Our Town (play by Thornton Wilder, first produced in 1930's) was a wonderful piece of presentation, a wonderful piece of drama. We didn't have to have people on the stage. We, each of us, could sit there and have that wonderful experience of making our own scenes, our own stage sets, our own -- we built "our town" for ourselves. It's like reading a wonderful book, and you say, "Oh God, I don't want to look at the movies. I must see that in the movies, because I've built myself a whole set of feelings, and I don't want to look at the movies. I must see that in the movies, because I've built myself a whole set of feelings, and I don't want to have pictures." I got into a terrible controversy with Life one time when I was there for a short time. Somebody came up and said, "There's nothing the camera can't do." I said, "That is unadulterated malarchy. I'm shocked that you should say that. There's times that the camera should never be allowed and you ought to have sense enough not to go ahead with the camera."

RICHARD DOUD: A picture is valuable, then, only when it can give us something better than we can supply ourselves with -- when it can supplement our own imagination, or our own emotions?

ROY STRYKER: Well, you put it one way. I would say I think it's very wonderful when -- very significant, very useful, very important, when -- back to what we've talked about before -- when the photographer, like the good journalist, helps us to take off the waste, take off the hat, take off the unessentials, and there stands stark, exciting, easily done, the thing that was most important about that particular scene. That's what's important. One picture. Ansel Adams has in one of his books the pictures of aspen. It's a beautiful picture. But the relation of those aspens to those background trees always me. That's landscape, if you will. A lot of people don't get excited like I do. Why? I don't know. But time and time again -- maybe it's a small item, maybe it's a great important thing; maybe it's a small statement, maybe it's an epic statement. No matter what it is -- I see the man, there's a picture of a man with bib overalls and waist overalls -- it's not an important thing -- but they stand with their back in front of . And I'm always rather intrigued with that picture because I know the difference between those two men. The bib overalls represent one type of man doing one thing, and the waist overalls mean something else. There's a very interesting news picture of a child drowned in a little pond in a Massachusetts town. This also got me into a controversy once. And somebody said, "It's too bad that the camera-man didn't get around and take the faces of these people." Let me describe the picture to you: the mother and the father with the little -- the mother, its her child, his child. The father has is arm around her. There's great sorrow and tragedy there; they're dredging the lake for this child. There's a little kid, the little -- twisting his overalls. She's probably -- I don't know. When I saw this picture first, I didn't know all the facts, the facts as they turned out to be. Winding his overalls up on his fingers upset child... Why have taken their faces? What more did you want -- by the tension of that back, of that man with his arm around her, and that little kid twisting his overalls? What more did you need? There was a picture that needed no more words. It did need some words to say. It needed a nice headline: "Dredging for a child in Lake So-and-So." ...had a different headline. I could go on and give you many illustrations. But that to me was a very significant illustration. And, as I say, I got into a big argument with people over that. Because it's too bad they didn't see their effects. You saw the tension in the woman's back, and the husband with his arm around her. What more did you need?

END OF SIDE 1  
SIDE 2

(Several minutes of blank tape before dialogue begins)

ROY STRYKER: ... see what was going on there. And what we got was not an organized story like the men in the magazines like to say -- "a story." It was a series of pictures which was the life of some quite old-fashioned people who came out of Oklahoma and Arkansas. Who had traditions, practices, the so-called "play-parties" which we like to talk about. Of course, don't happen anymore. The ice cream social, the church meeting, and all those things, and there they were in front and he captured them and brought them back to us.

RICHARD DOUD: This is Picketown?

ROY STRYKER: Yes, Picketown. It was a very interesting experience. Now, this is not Farm Security, this has to be Standard Oil. Esther Bublely went into Texas and found a place call Tomball. She started taking pictures in one small town. She started taking these pictures. She got her first set of contacts back, and she was in the post office, and she took them out and people saw -- many more pictures than we would use, ever. Some woman said, "You must come up to one of our, the meeting where we're playing bridge at the house. I think you'd enjoy the bridge party." Before long the whole town was excited, because what had happened? Esther, with her extreme competence with that 35mm, very unobtrusive -- they didn't realize she was there, she wasn't invading them, she was sort of floating around. And all of a sudden they saw themselves, not unpleasantly, yet with her discernment, with that wonderful technique of her camera, and they said, My God, it's interesting. And they couldn't tell her what to do but each time that they saw the pictures they felt, Gee, that is interesting. That's Mrs. So-and-So, you know that's right, she looks just like that, she always acts like that. Well, Tomball got into the magazine that Esquire put out -- "Small-town USA." They ordered more and more copies. They began to

think of themselves as the typical small town of America. University of Texas got a grant of money from the Humble Oil Company and made a study of Tomball as a small town. That was the impact of that in --

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think people really like to see themselves depicted as they are?

ROY STRYKER: Well, if they're not ridiculed, if they're not held up to ridicule, if they are part of the complex. Mrs. So-and-So may say, "Well, that's not my husband." He says, "Well -- ", he's, you know, more good-natured, and he says, "Hell, that's they way I act, looks like me, I guess, I don't know." Sure. A little surprised. But you see that's a group experience, they're all willing to go along. They're not picked out, they're not singled out, they're not being picked out in any way that makes them feel uncomfortable. The whole was in it.

RICHARD DOUD: I think you said before that you feel that if the photographer approaches an individual honestly and perhaps with compassion, these are the things that count.

ROY STRYKER: I think that you can just about photography anybody if you happen to have finesse, but the finesse has to be backed, as you said, by honesty, by the fairness that that guy can except from you.

RICHARD DOUD: I don't know whether this is fair to bring up or not. But I know some of the Brady photographs could be quite shocking in the brutality of the thing. But personally I get a different feeling from a Brady photograph than I do from some of the current shock photography that we see in our more popular magazines today. Why?

ROY STRYKER: I think some of this that you're talking about lacks -- well, let me put it this way: they're striving to get an effect but Brady didn't strive to get anything. This was war, it was there. And they push this thing sometimes.

RICHARD DOUD: You know what I mean -- one of our more popular photographic news magazine not too long ago showed a picture of a man in South Africa whose Volkswagen was machine-gunned by a group of U.N. soldiers and his wife was killed. To me this was not good photography. I thought it was a terrible display of unfeeling exploitation.

ROY STRYKER: I wonder if you couldn't expect a fine writer, a man sensitive with words couldn't have gotten something out that had more impact than that. I think he could have. I think that there were pictures that came out of war with just dead bodies. I think there were other pictures that were done subtly.

RICHARD DOUD: Is a lot of this perhaps happy accident? Or do you think that --

ROY STRYKER: Most great pictures are the product of -- oh, no, listen -- the accidental factor is very large, very large. And I don't want to -- please, don't misunderstand me, there are very very brilliant, able photographers who know exactly what they want to do. They have the accidental factor of being there at the right time to get it but they know what they're doing. A competent man knows what he's doing. On the other thing, you see, if you were to have the time and go through the new files, and you take them collectively and go through them, you'd come out with a fantastic exhibit. Because the old news photographer always went to the dogfight, and the dogfight was right in front of him. He pointed the camera and by God, there it was. That was an "accident." I don't want to underrate, I don't want to take anything away from that man. He had the courage to go there, he had the courage to sense it. In a certain strike picture, a bunch of guys standing with their backs to the cameraman. The windows are broken -- and they've got lead pipes and clubs in their hands and they're hidden away, all you see is their backs. It was quite a picture. The man knew what he was doing. He "happened" to get there, he saw it. I don't know the photographer, I'd like to know how well he planned in advance but I think he saw and he had to work fast. Cartier-Bresson is terrific. He sees so fast, and gets his camera work so fast. He's unusual. Very little is accidental. He's there. That's an accident. He had to be there at the right time -- that is the great accident factor: You're there. Now quite different from that: Walker Evans' pictures are quite different. They're not the accident, he plans them, he walks around, he looks, and all of a sudden -- his is a composed job. He takes time. Very few of his -- his are like Be Shahn's are not. Ben Shahn is there at the moment, he helps, perhaps, to set up some by his conversation, but he sees the faces, he sees the juxtaposition of faces; a second later it's too late. He had to hit it right. Some of that is accident, but he knows what he's after, he sees -- you see, he sees a whole concept there. Walker walks around and all of a sudden sees -- coming back to my old picture -- the tombstone in the cemetery, the street, the houses. It's an interesting picture, because you know that he planned it. That's not "composed" in the sense that that word is so badly used at times, but he hunts till he finds the right viewpoint, the right place to stand. But he's telling you a sort of social situation. And the woman wanted that picture -- she wanted it for a different purpose but she sensed the importance of the picture. Well, you can go through -- the same thing with Ansel Adams. Ansel Adams photographs our parks and our mountains. Terrific things. Better than --

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think it takes a different type of individual, then, to photograph people and human situations such as perhaps Ben Shahn was better at?

ROY STRYKER: Sure. Certainly. I had two very interesting boys in Pittsburgh. They were entirely different. One boy is never going to do people like the other boy. One man was going to do patterns, structures, design. He's -- but he still gets good pictures. The other boy had -- he "gave off"-- I know, this is silly, like Russell Lee. He gives off in this same sense, you know, he's all right. But he had some feeling like human beings. He'd take man in a steel mill. The first thing you know, in some pictures you had the feeling of the importance -- the photographer for some reason or other made those people feel important; they had dignity. And they sensed this guy could give it to them. Not make them beautiful, not make them look like something they weren't. But he put a dignity into that picture. They responded to him. He didn't do the other things as well as the other boy. When Philip was working for me in Standard Oil -- a refinery is a landscape of pipes, spheres, and one man can do it magnificently. Another man never gets it. And this man -- it's very unlikely that he'll ever go into a refinery and capture some wonderful pictures.

RICHARD DOUD: It takes all kinds!

ROY STRYKER: Certainly. Each picture is useful, each picture is viable, each picture is -- each of them are competent, each of them are ( I hate to use this word) each of them are artists in their way, each of them --

RICHARD DOUD: I'm glad you said that! (both laugh)

ROY STRYKER: All right! All right!

RICHARD DOUD: (still laughing) That concession. Well, I don't know if you'd care to comment on some of the controversial photographs -- the better known controversial photographs of your people. The famous --and the Iowa Madonna --

ROY STRYKER: That wasn't exactly controversial. There's not too much to say. Rothstein had moved to his --from --over to --and cactuses and sparse vegetation. It wasn't dishonesty at all because it was complete honesty. It was a political situation. Newspapers picked it up because we were then going over into a political controversy. Which is a perfectly legitimate, worth-while thing. Thank God that's what democracy is -- a difference of opinion. The result was, there was a stampede, everybody take up the thing and damn us for it. I don't think they even looked carefully. In the end, I think they made something more out of it; it wasn't that important.

RICHARD DOUD: By itself it was a terrific picture.

ROY STRYKER: No. Not a terrific picture. An interesting picture but it wasn't a terrific picture. I don't think it began to even come anywhere near the pictures we had the following -- I don't think -- I think they made a great picture out of it because they made all this fuss. I don't think it was a great picture.

RICHARD DOUD: You could call it infamous rather than famous?

ROY STRYKER: No, I just think they made it a well know picture, let's put it that way. I shouldn't use the word "famous." I just think they made it a very well know picture. I don't think it would ever have had that importance if they hadn't given it a flurry all through the papers because they wanted to raise hell with the Administration's being dishonest. Of course it was dishonest. Maybe what I said, I said it -- didn't realize I'd said it but I guess I did say it. Well, there was a drought, and the hell with it! And I've been quoted on that. I wasn't very smart to have said it that way, but I did, and I said it, and it's out now. There was a drought. Sure he was naïve. Sure he was out of the city; he was moving around; he was almost composing. It were better left alone. We'd have been smarter if we hadn't let those pictures get out. It didn't hurt. There wasn't -- I think if we'd deliberately staged something, with intent -- I think it was too bad that one of our men in the organization labeled the little girl "a tenant Madonna" when she wasn't a mother, and when you put a false statement on that it was unfortunate; didn't do us any good; didn't gain anything by it. It was sort of silly. But we didn't give many of those. So I don't think we should call it that important. But they sure made it important. It was very interesting -- in one of the releases, and I think it's in the set of the things that -- ask Georgia -- one man said, "From this time on, news photographers better be very careful whether they move around to get two views or three views. They may be accused of rigging a picture. The model or the movie actress is out there. They better just take one picture and be satisfied." This was a little cynical crack back at some of this colleagues.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I think we have discussed the possibilities and some of the problems of a project comparable to the FSA photographic project. I think that you feel that this type of thing might very well be done, if handled right, would be a worthwhile thing. But there are ethnic problems facing anyone trying to do it. We mentioned a few minutes ago that the political problem would be so much greater now than it was before. How do you feel about --

ROY STRYKER: Well, let me add to what I said. Let's just look at one of these. Let's say I want to pick something out that's small that we can walk around it and get our hands on it. It'll only take a few minutes. Suppose that I want to take a section of the Cumberlandts -- I think that's a pretty broad thing. I don't think it would be at all

difficult, if you had a budget, could be given a reasonable amount of freedom -- I don't think it would be at all difficult to start in at the Cumberlandds and come out with a terrific job done. I think I could do it if I were left alone and given the budget. I wouldn't want to pay high salaries, I wouldn't want to pay high expense accounts, I would want to have it reasonably related to the cost of living today. I don't want any fancy frames, I want it a quite project. But I am convinced I could go in with a few photographers, shifting them back and forth. But it would take some money, just a reasonable amount. I imagine that we'd be criticized. I imagine we'd run into opposition, that we'd run into political criticism. But I think that properly handled we could do the project without -- that we'd turn out quite a significant, quite exciting set of pictures. How big? How many? It wouldn't be any 270,000, it wouldn't need to be.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think that it's the responsibility of the federal government or of a state government or the responsibility of private individuals to take an interest --

ROY STRYKER: Well, Dick, I don't think there's any particular right answer to that. I think it happens to be -- it's not the responsibility of any one group per se. It's the responsibility of some group who wants to do something. It's the responsibility of a State who says, "We've got a problem here, and by George, we'd like to talk about it, we'd like to make people conscious of the things that we face down here in this country. We'd like to do it, and we hope that it would be possible for us to do it thoroughly, honestly, openly, and that we'd get recognition that we'd admitted our problem." Now, this is a problem situation.

RICHARD DOUD: It's a hard thing to get people to do -- admit they have a problem in the first place, you know.

ROY STRYKER: Yes. I think -- I don't think it's too difficult. I think plenty of States -- just recently the Department of Agriculture, I think -- I didn't follow it through, I want to get more of it -- we're talking about what's happening to the youth in the rural areas. In the old days, he went back to farming. Farming was a way of life for him. He's now going to have to head for the cities. What's he going to do when he gets there? How well is he trained for it? What can he do about it? That would be a very interesting project. It's nation-wide. It deals with a pretty tragic group of people, and they're going to get hit like this: "That's you." What do they need? What's their problem like? What do they look like? Where do they come from? What was their home like? What happened? We ought to be able -- it's too bad we can't -- you see, it's one thing to take a set of pictures that are put in front of us; there's also something else -- the journalistic job of then building the story. So the word has a heavy burden to carry here. The picture is the face of the kids, the picture is like this story here. The town is declining because there is no farming, and the kids are not staying in town. They're moving out, and the old folks are left behind. There's all kinds of things to do there. So you can make -- you can take any one section, you don't have to go far. You can take three sections. There's a very interesting story about these people that could be done. There was a project. Should the Department of Agriculture do it? I don't know. You can do it news-wise, make one story. It would be nice if you had a lot of pictures, a lot of stories coming in, in various ways. You see, that's the thing we need -- to see into these -- once we've done a superior job, then it's well if we could get it seen by a lot of people. Or, maybe we can do it over again in many places, so it begins to have proliferation, it comes up, and up, and up. And so you see it here, and you see it there, you see it -- it's variants of the same thing. It's freshness if you see it three times but it's also a lot of factors -- it can be done. It needs someone who has a sense of how to do it. It needs photographers -- it needs more than anything else, photographers who are excited, who believe in something. A photographer sat here the other night, a very competent photographer -- Cal Bernstein. He's doing advertising, he's making money, making a living. We talked about this because -- "I wish you or somebody else could set some things going that I could participate in, something I believed in. It's as simple as that: something I believe in, something I want to do because I believe in it. I do nice picture of toothpaste. Nyahh! I believe in it because it pays me. My God, I want to do something else, to please me, get out, help do something, make something." He's very --

RICHARD DOUD: Is this part of the reason for the success of what you people did? Did you have -- did you think you people had this?

ROY STRYKER: Oh sure, oh absolutely. Of course. Absolutely. We believed, we knew, we saw, we sensed we were a part of this perception, part of coming in contact, part of seeing a world -- a country of ours in turmoil, a country in trouble. We weren't beaten. But all we had to fear "is fear itself." They were getting away from that. And people -- sure, they were downtrodden, beaten, but -- land found people that were off their land, but, damn it all, if you watch those captions and look at some of the pictures, by God, some of those guys said, "We still can carry on." So those are the things we found. We were part as subtly perceiving by coming, by facing it. We saw ourselves -- you know, sometimes it's well for us all, a family to see itself with problems, instead of everything easy. All of a sudden there's cohesiveness, they're pulled together suddenly because they have to -- they're like cattle suddenly attacked by the wolves, the cows all circle around and the calves all come to the middle. We all have to face that. And I think that's what happened. Life isn't all a series of pools, and television sets. My God, there's some trouble in the world. Maybe that's what we need. That's what we thought. And we believed. And we belonged to our organization and a President who was trying to give hope and faith. We belonged to an organization that -- in a strange way, that Farm Security itself was a very interesting organization. You'd be

surprised today -- it's almost like a club, an organization. If you belong to that, you belong to something special. Still, a man -- I'll bet you there are more people in the Farm Security sharing a respect, sharing an administration, sharing a warmth over the success of this. Even though at the time they may have been a little mad because we didn't take more pictures of the rehabilitation plans. But there again -- I bet you if we do a good picture of (?) you'd be surprised at the number of men want it. But by God, we were part of that. I'm sure of it. Because we were all part of a very interesting program, of a very interesting time. And our photographers were more knowledgeable. They weren't interested in going out and just holding their camera up and shooting, They knew what they were doing. It's where people think they were.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you think that some of the problems facing us today are similar enough to the problems of the 30's -- although more localized, but the general approach you used then could be followed today?

ROY STRYKER: Yes. It would be harder to do. Yes. It would be harder to do. You'd have to be very sure that you don't get people that are tired. People who have been involved in photography to the point where they have to turn -- push so it got thrown out of focus, instead of being straightforward. Sometimes it's well to say, "Look, this man is hungry. You don't have to show a disturbed, confused picture, out of focus, to show that he's hungry. This -- man -- is -- hungry! PERIOD." Or, you can say, "The trouble is, too many of us have never had an empty belly as this man did." In as simple language as that. The simplicity of photography sometimes is as valuable and as important and as ruthless and as devastating as simplicity of words. That's where we're making some of our mistakes today. A lot photography I don't think is going any place. It lacks directness, and simplicity, and honesty. We're interested in technique. We're interested in twisting the camera -- listen: there are things today you can do with a camera that are fantastic. But you still have got to make them work for the direct, simple, the obvious, the honest thing. The terms are better. It's as simple as that. We're getting so involved, sometimes -- the kids get so involved in their cameras. Pictures I've set in -- my gosh, when they put a television set on the rim of the Grand Canyon and make a double page spread of it, then write a silly caption, like Holiday Magazine did. Ri-diculous! It's a corrosion, it's an erosion of technique that's --

RICHARD DOUD: Is this partly the fault of the public for not insisting on -

ROY STRYKER: Oh-h-h, there's that to it. There's all -- a bunch of tired editors. Don't know what the hell is in there. They're tired, they don't -- also part of a tired period right now. I guess we have too much money to spend; to affluent.

RICHARD DOUD: Any solution?

ROY STRYKER: Well, I'm not sure. Mr. Steinbeck had a point: he'd hate to see a depression come back but maybe a little dose of Depression might be helpful. How can you get a little and not have too much? I don't know. I wouldn't want to see it come back like it was. How could we get people that they could believe in? The CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) was a terribly important thing. And a lot kids went out of the depressed areas, bad conditions, the slums, didn't know where they were going; and they went out. And many a city boy never went back to the city. "Because I saw trees, I planted, I did something worthwhile. I want to go back and do it." I think it was wonderful -- the CCC was one of the most important things -- it brought a lot of youth a purpose. This is a difficult world today -- we're in a terribly difficult world. The turmoil of the world today is very hard for anybody. So what do we get? By television, we sit and watch murders, or ... It's a difficult, difficult world. I'm afraid I have too small an intellect. I'm just a small human being. I don't know that I can answer your questions.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I want to thank you for trying. I appreciate your comments very much. It's been a pleasure to discuss this with you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview with Roy Stryker  
Conducted by Richard Doud  
At the Artist's home in Montrose, Colorado  
June 13, 1964

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Roy Stryker on June 13, 1964. The interview took place in Montrose, Colorado, and was conducted by Roy Stryker for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

## TAPE 1

RICHARD DOUD: This is an interview with Roy Stryker at his home in Montrose, Colorado, June 13, 1964. The interviewer is Richard K. Doud. Well, Roy, a lot has happened since we were together last October and I'm hoping that now we'll have a chance to clear up a lot of point that we missed then, and fill in a lot of the gaps that have come up. I was hoping I could have a chance to go back to my first question then and get you to talk a little about your background and how this whole thing originally started with you.

ROY STRYKER: All right. I think that I would like to go back a little farther than you indicated in your question on my background. I think it might be interesting to know what of home I was in. Mainly, what I am trying to do for you is to say why did I get involved in photography when I wasn't a photographer.

RICHARD DOUD: Good.

ROY STRYKER: I grew up in a home where we had the old stereoscopes, the old stereo pictures with the thing you picked up and held in your hand, with two eye pieces. We had the collection of what is know as Cabinet Photos, pictures of the mines, picture of the mountains and so on. They were around. We had a Montgomery Ward or Sears Roebuck catalogue, I don't know which. We had the Department of Agriculture yearbooks. We had bulletins. And I became a reader. In fact, I had some eye trouble when I was a kid and I was supposed not to read. My brothers many times had to go down and find me in a corner somewhere where I'd got a book of fairy stories of something else about the local library here in town. I was reading a lot. So I did have that environment of curiosity and it was encouraged. My father's attitude was, get an education. My older brother had been an assistant in the superintendent of education's office in Kansas and he sent many of the sample books on Greek mythology and things of that kind. So I had a lot of things to read. I merely want to emphasize that I seemed to like photographs, I enjoyed those old stereoscopes; I enjoyed the comic ones, and there were many comic ones, I enjoyed the serious ones, I took a few of my travels around, because, as you know, there were sets came through on Rome, there was also a set on "Josh Billings Goes to Town". All right. Then, I wanted to be a chemist and I was in hopes of going back to the University of Kansas to take a course -- get my chemistry with a man who later started the Mellon Institute. In high school I devoted most of my spare times to the chemistry laboratory. A very smart principal of the school probably knew that I knew more chemistry than he did, and he gave me a free hand around the place. I did not get there because he encouraged me to go to the Colorado School of Mines. He wanted one of his students in a state institution. I don't know what my scholarship was, I suppose ten dollars. Anyway, at the end of the first year, some eye trouble, and lack of funds. And I didn't think I could go back, particularly on account of the eyes. I went back and my brother, the one just next older than myself, was interested in picking up some land and getting into cattle. It interested me. It wasn't long before he and I had accumulated a couple of thousand acres of grassland. And for seven years I particularly looked after the cows. In the winter time I grub staked out, worked for a cattle outfit or a mining outfit or some other place. I bring this up, incidentally, because I didn't make much money in those times but I developed a very rich experience, a rich background. The time spent in the hard rock mines up around Ophir, Colorado, working down on the end of the Uncompahgre Divide when they were getting uranium, fernetite, not uranium, when the ore was going back to Chicago for experimental work. All those things gave me a feeling of a lot of different aspects of life. The rumor has got around that I was a cowboy. Well I wasn't a very good one. Like the old man I used to work for winters, he said, "Roy, I wouldn't look very good at a rodeo but I can sure set my rope on my own steer, if I see him." I suppose I was that way and I'm going to have to disagree with a lot of people that I was a cowboy. I had boots, and I wore a bobtailed levi jumper, and I had a pair of chaps; but that didn't make you a rodeo cowboy and you would never qualify today. All right, that's just a little incidental. I had time to read, I carried stuff around in my chaps, in my saddle pocket but I didn't let anybody around here catch me reading it because that would have been frowned upon by the cow punchers. I might have been taken out and given the proper treatment. But I did read all the time. I was an incessant reader. The War came along. I got into the service. My buddies were -- one of my closest buddies was a professor of botany. Some of the others were teachers, one was a dentist. And I guess there was a restlessness. I was still in France and I decided when I got out at New York I was going to go to Columbia. They wouldn't let us out. So they brought me on to Fort Leavenworth. That was in the winter. I came back home in time for the early spring, got my saddle horse out, and the old dog was there. And by spring time I was back on the hill. The pull was very strong. I wasn't quite sure whether I was going to go back to school or not. There was that big urge. The second semester was on and I decided that I would go back to the Colorado School of Mines again. I had gone there, as I said, not because I thought that was the place where I wanted to go but because my professor talked me into it. In the meantime I ran across -- well, that summer I was helping one of my cattle outfit -- a sheep man nearby. And one of the old gals that was in high school came up for the Fourth of July. To make the story short, I decided that I was in love. I thought I had been a woman-hater. I decided that I was going to get married and I needed a wife. The restlessness was still there, still dormant. In some strange way, without her having put it into words, I think she offered that incentive. We decided to go back to New York to school. My brother was disturbed. We sold out. And I had around six thousand dollars coming to me for my seven years' work. The slump of '21 came along. Along late in the summer when we were getting closer and closer to marriage time, and time to go, old Larry Finch, the old sheep man who had bought our acreage and our cattle got a hold of me and said, "Roy, I have no money, things are very bad, as you

know. Why don't you take your share of the land and cattle back?" I have some pride, or vanity, I should say, not pride, it was vanity, and I said I was going to New York and I couldn't very well face not going. My wife and I decided to go. She had been teaching school and she had saved some money. So we got as far as Denver. And I had got -- not like they had after World War II -- but I had gotten some kind of veteran's compensation for a very bad case of flu that I had in Europe. I don't know that I was justified but at least I wangled it. When I got to Denver they had fouled it up and I didn't have it; they couldn't transfer it. We looked at our money. We had enough to buy the tickets. So we headed East. Got to Buffalo and I explained to my wife that no young married couple can afford not to go to Niagara Falls. Late in the afternoon we went up to the falls and we came back. She got the conductor to hold the train while I got the bags, and we headed for New York. I was bug-eyed, country boy going in to New York, just couldn't think of anything else. She later confided that it was the bluest night that she ever spent in her life, with no money, and I was a damn fool sitting there starry-eyed looking down on the great city. We arrived. I hadn't the vaguest idea what to do or where to go. I saw something "Travelers Aid". And again my vanity said, "That's a woman's job, ask where we can go." They Murray Hill Hotel at that time was down the street a short distance from Grand Central. WE could have walked it, I could have carried the bags. I knew you were supposed to ride a cab, so we went in a cab. This story I didn't tell for long years but I'll tell it now. In my complete greenness, I saw a man reach for my bag and I leaned over and said, "Get your damn hands off." He said, "I'm taking you to your room." We got in there, I had a shower bath, we settled back, and all of a sudden it dawned on me, what the hell do we do for money tomorrow and the next day? I had met a young minister at Iliff Seminary in Denver and he was a New Yorker...I might digress just for a moment and bring in another name. At the Colorado School of Mines there was a man by the name of George Collins who represented four church boards. I was sore at the Army and resentful at the Army and he had -- he introduced me to the New Republic, the Nation, Rauschenbusch, the very famous theology from Rochester Seminary, a liberal, probably almost a Socialist. So I got a taste of that and decided I was going back to Columbia. That was really where I got my start to go back. I wanted to go back to Columbia. And I had met this man from Iliff who needed, who would like to have some help in some boys' clubs he was running. So I got some of the chaps from the Colorado School of Mines, football players and others, to go and become coaches and counselors for the boys clubs. This Mr. Collins arranged the thing. He was smart enough -- gave a course in economics -- I told him I wanted to take the course. He asked me why I wanted it. I said, I could probably make more money. Anywa, I think it was a very important -- meeting him was a very important -- part of this, my life. It was the thing that turned me from my chemistry to the social sciences. So when the young theologian said, when you go back to New York City why don't you contact Union Settlement which was a part of Union Seminary -- on the East Side, they might just have a place for you. So that night when we were thinking about it I said I guess I'd better see if I can find their name; at least I knew enough how to use a telephone. So I called and the assistant head director said, "We've been looking for you, you'd better come up." I didn't even know how to get to a subway but I got up there and we had a job. They had a place for us. Meantime Wills William Sweet, a financier in Denver, a banker, head of the Y.M.C.A. there, and a very, very liberal man, was in New York. He was there on the Tammany Convention. I went to see him and he said, "Roy, I don't like to loan money to boys. I've lost all my friends because they get the money and never pay it back and they always duck down alleys. Now I'll loan you some money. It'll have to be paid back if it's only ten cents every few months, but you've got to pay it back. We got started, we went to the Settlement and got under way there. And again, one of those strange experiences that contributed to my background, all these things were contributors. I got a chance to live near the markets. The City was there at my doorstep. And I spent more time running around down the back streets seeing what was going on that I should have. But I did. That one year at the Settlement I thought was about enough. I didn't like social work. There were some things about it that didn't suit me. I was basically a radical. I was basically from a Socialist home. And there were a lot of things that I didn't think they were doing as they should have. So the second year we moved up near the University. And that was the end of Settlement work. But the Settlement work was an imprint.

RICHARD DOUD: I can see where it would be.

ROY STRYKER: Very definitely. Just the same as the mining and the cow industry, and all those things give you a lot of information -- not through -- but about a lot of things that are very useful later. My first year up there I ran into Tugwell. He was an instructor, he was giving courses in Utopian Socialism and various things. I haven't forgotten yet the time I had to write a paper. He said, "If I don't like it, you'll get a D." And he said, "If it isn't on time I'll give you a D." I was late but the paper came back. It said "You're late but I'm giving you an A minus, but I'm going to give you an A because it's typed and that's progress." So I took several of his courses. Tugwell was a very curious teacher, a magnificent teacher when he felt like it. But he got this paper that I had written and he said, "I wish you'd expand it." I found myself taking over three sessions of the class reading it, because Tugwell didn't want to come to class. But one of his students said, "I don't care how many times Tugwell doesn't come if he'll just come often enough. Because when he gives one of those lectures I flunk out." That was my introduction to Tugwell; I bring it in to you at this stage of the game. I had another very fine professor, William Weld, who had been a missionary -- he was an economist -- in the Near East and India. He had a great deal of interest in visual things. And I found myself making charts, helping him out. Also in my work in economics there I got interested in the bulletin board. Why, God knows. We were talking about trade associations and monopolies and the librarian was an interesting guy and he said, "Why don't you put some of these things on the bulletin board?" So I'd go



through the papers, cut this out, make a paste-up and first thing you know there'd be a presentation on monopolies which I'd collected. So I kept that up. Then we that we could make a little money by making statistical charts. Mrs. Stryker and I worked at this for people. We made them for class use. They decided they wanted them so that was a business. We made part of our money that way. And I suppose that was a contribution to my visual interest. When I landed in Columbia I was an older guy; I had a lot of credits from the Colorado School of Mines. I went over to see what they would accept. Well, the man there said, "Are you planning to go ahead in physics or chemistry?" I said, "No." He said, "Oh, well then we can give you a lot more than this." But I went for all purposes a freshman. I didn't get hazed and I didn't wear a cap; and I said, "Try it and I'll get the hell beaten out of me but three of you guys will get it!" That period was one of Columbia's most interesting times. They were reorganizing. They had what is known as the famous contemporary history, the contemporary civilization courses. The freshman year it was philosophy, art, morals. I had a wonderful professor by the name of John Coss, bachelor, philosopher, marvelous teacher; and I think that class had a terrific effect on me. I remember one day when Coss said, "Stryker, Roy, I want to ask you a question. What are you doing tomorrow morning?" Saturday. Nothing. "Could you meet me at five o'clock at my apartment over on Fairmount?" "Yes." We went to the markets and it was quite a trip. I saw peaches from Chile. I saw a lot of things. It was the start of a very strange friendship. But I was also very obstreperous. And I always started an argument in class, because I had great chips on my shoulders on both sides. As I said, I resented the Army, I resented a lot of things. I can remember so well starting fights that I wasn't bright enough to carry off my end of it. There was a lad there was a real sharpie and he loved to argue so he'd pick it up and carry it on. One day Professor Coss said, "The New Republic and the Nation are bad magazines." And I was so brash as to speak up and say, "Doctor Coss, I resent that. I don't think that's the right kind of education." So for some two months he got marked copies of the paper, but still -- as I say -- I bring up Coss' name because he again taught me to look for experience, to savor the things with a new aspect. It was an organized approach. Then, the second year I went into the second orientation year which was economics, mainly, and I got my degree ahead of most of those fellows and they gave me an instructorship. And that was really quite a raise. I look back with a good deal of interest on that period. It's dangerous looking back, you know, always. I remember so well going to an instructor, a man who had been one of my instructors in a course in economics, and I would say to him -- he shared his office with me -- "Did you read that article this morning in The Times about Federal Reserve System?" He said, "Look, I'm teaching economics and I haven't got time to read the paper." Then I blew up and I said...I forget his name -- I'll get it -- "Well," I said, "Maybe you haven't got the time but as I remember the classes I had, you could afford to do a little of this because you've got the dullest classes I've ever known." He said, "Let me give you some advice. If you want a doctor's you'd better tend to your economics and don't worry about contemporary history." I think that marks the difference of what my -- I never was cut out to become an economist, I was not cut out to get a doctor's, I was not ever going to be a scholar. And I ran these classes because I carried to them my interests, I carried to them a superficial background, but I also want to mention that Tugwell was primarily, basically a descriptive economist. So often he said in his classes, "How can you talk about the economic system if you don't know what a bank looks like? How can you do this if you haven't some idea of what -- how to describe this institution; not how it works, but principally you have to know what it looks like. You ought to know what the horse looks like before you dissect it later on, because it doesn't look like a caterpillar." And I don't think that changed me. I think it just fitted something. So I found more and more that my classes were -- I regaled them, I said, Have you read this, have you read that. I guess they learned. I'm sure they did because the classes were popular. I found so often that bright boys from the city -- they had been to Europe -- I remember asking one of them, did you ever get off the subway as you came and go around? He didn't know what the slums were. I found myself borrowing photographs and digging -- that was part of this business of putting up these exhibits. I took a newspaper clipping into class. And again I'm sure this was all part of my direction and my formation -- where I was headed. It wasn't long before I was so taken with Professor Coss' idea of taking me on a tour that I said, "Hey, why don't you guys first go down on the lower East Side?" One wealthy kid said, "You know, it's funny I've lived around here all my life and have never been down to the Bowery in my life." So I found myself taking trips, taking these groups down. First, because I liked it, secondly, maybe I was lazy, maybe it was the way to do my teaching, I don't know. Anyway my education went on and on. I did the third hour. In the College a student was given three credits. In the graduate school he got two credits. And he was allowed to take certain courses in the graduate school. Some of them took labor problems. Labor problems was what I thought I wanted to do, the field of labor problems. A very wonderful professor, her name was Doctor Seegar, taught it. And I became -- I handled the third hour. And the third hour was the quiz section. So they read and did that. And this propensity to have trips came in and I said, "How'd you like to go down and go to a labor meeting?" We went to a labor meeting. But I noticed my group was growing and I looked around and we had some graduate students. And one night one of my labor friends said, "Why don't you bring some of those boys down to the picket line? We could use them." And graduates and undergraduates were on the picket lines. So my professor, head of the department at that time, William Wells, who did a lot for me, called me in and said, "Roy, are you getting along with Seegar in the third hour?" "Oh, fine!" "What do you do?" "The usual, quiz them." "Anything else?" "No." "You talk about outside things?" "Yes, oh yes, I've been taking them on trips." "Oh, you have! That's nice. Where do you take them?" I told him. "Just the undergraduates, of course?" "No, there have been some graduates coming lately." "Oh! Yes, well let me tell you something. You're planning to take your doctor's with us, aren't you? Well, you'd better watch out because Seegar is sore." "Why?" "Because the rumor has gone around

among the graduates that you ought to be teaching the whole course. You're a damn sight more interesting." "So," he said, "You'd better look out!" Then later on Tugwell became head of the department. Among the classes I was giving, he knew I was taking groups down to visit in my economics class. That was first year economics. I took some of his boys -- I was helping him in an advanced course -- and I took some of those boys to a couple of places. And one day he said, "You know, why don't we give a course here, why don't we give a sort of laboratory course in conjunction with our contemporary civilization, give it in the sophomore year, economics and government?" So it was organized, the trips, and I was put in charge of the trips. Every member of that sophomore class had to go on six visits. And basically I am organizer. I like to organize. This was wonderful. So they had a choice. There were certain requirements they had to go to. And this was right up my alley because I could see more of the city and I loved it, and I didn't have to use brains that I didn't have. I didn't have to be the bright scholar. And I taught right along as I had always taught. So we had trips to the Federal Reserve Bank and we had trips around the Island. We got the Pennsylvania to take tours for us on their tugboats. We went to Bellevue, and we went to the morgue, we went to clothing factories, we went out in the country to the famous Walker Garden farm where they made certified milk, and milked the cows on a roto-electric. I'll tell you a side story on that. One of the instructors said, "My God, Roy, you're sure wrecking our students around here. One man said, "Why is there a farm problem when farmers have got fancy machines to milk cows?" So, it was a rough job. We finally had the 57 varieties. We had an enormous number of trips. They all had to take them. And I did most of them, although I had a couple of student assistants. Again, I was seeing the world, my curiosity was being satisfied and sharpened. I had a wonderful colleague at that time, a man, Joseph McGoldrick, who was a New York City boy, a little, short, sawed-off Irishman, one bad eye that he had lost because his father stuck a Christmas tree, a piece of steel, in it. But Joe was a real New Yorker and would go with me anyplace, night or day. So I had that double advantage of having a man like that who would help me find places I didn't know about. And the trip courses went on. Then Tugwell called me in one day and said, "We're doing a book called American Economic Life, and I want it illustrated. Would like to -- we'll pay you for the job or you can be a joint author." I thought about it. I said, "I want to be a joint author; I'll let you do the writing, though." I never wrote anything although I read proof for them and chased down information. Well I spent a lot of time on the illustrations for that book. It's around, you'll see it. By the way, I think I can get a copy up to the Archives. Mrs. Stryker did the charts for it. I did the research work. I hunted pictures. As you look at it today I'm a little ashamed of the layout, the treatment of the pictures, because the publisher figured that he'd tear the picture down to postage stamp so he wouldn't have to take up space. But it's a very interesting book. It was one more year that I didn't even work on my doctor's. Then we did a revision of it. Another year I didn't -- but I had a great education. Now Mr. Tugwell did me one of the greatest services he ever did -- two things for me. Number one, he said, I want you to get a copy -- I'll get it for you -- of J. Russell Smith's North America. It's one of the famous books on economic geography. Extremely well-illustrated, wonderful captions. He said, "I think this ought to be the model for the job we're going to do." So I went straight to the library, read books, looked. And that was my first introduction to visual materials. And it was a fantastic experience and I, that I can never get over. The book came out. I had my name on it. I wrote nothing; but I must say I am proud of the job of illustration that we did. As I say, it came out I think in a second edition, a revised edition to be made for the schools, but by this time the witch hunt was on. There was some material that was too liberal and it was never used much more.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, Roy, can I ask a question?

ROY STRYKER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: In illustrating this book did you use pictures that had already been taken, or did you people take pictures?

ROY STRYKER: No, no. The pictures had already been taken. I used those that had been taken. It was here that I met Lewis Hines. Bourke White was in Cleveland taking pictures for one of the big banks. She was taking pictures of industry. Tugwell had found them and given them to me. Soon afterwards, when she first came to New York I met her, I went down to the station, my friendship with her grew. I met Lewis Hines. It was one of my great experiences. I was already used to The Survey and the Survey Graphic: Lewis Hines -- that was probably -- had the impact that I never realized how great it was going to be on me. And the book was illustrated. My experiences down at Harcourt, Brace I said were fascinating. They'd never let them get by. "Oh," they say, "We can cut this a little smaller." But we were proud of the book. But it was a great experience. It had to be revised and so I spent another year doing it, and enjoying it. But I was supposed to be getting a Doctor's. I never even got my Master's. Tugwell called me in one day. Sometimes in life a real kick in the pants is the greatest thing that can happen to you. He said to me, "Do you want a Doctor's?" Well, of course I had to say, my tradition, why I was there, "I suppose I do." "Are you sure?" "No, I'm not." Well he said, "Damn it, why don't you go and do what you want to do and forget it?" There was a lull, because I suddenly waked up to the fact that I was being told I wasn't scholar and I wasn't going to be. I thought I was. I walked along the Hudson, not with, by any stretch of the imagination, any attempt to commit suicide, for I'm a coward; but I walked and thought. I said, "My God, I am a failure." But, being the stupid guy I am, I soon forgot all about that. And it was very shortly after that that Tugwell went to Washington, and said, "Why don't you come down?" I went down. Oh, that summer I was teaching in Columbia. I was teaching over in Brooklyn and he said, "Why don't you come on down and do some

summer work?" I went down and went to work for the Agricultural Adjustment Administration. And I worked for a wonderful, wonderful old guy by the name of Reuben Brigham. Reuben had been with Extension Service and he was sort of in charge of this visual department. Reuben was a great, long, lean Lincolnesque type of a guy. I'd go down for, say, a week at a time, and then even during the winter I went down. After I was teaching I took advantage to go down and spend some time there. Exhibits had to be made for the three A's. And I would try to wangle it out of the exhibit division. And a lot of things had to be done. This summer, incidentally, another thing, I have to keep coming back to Tugwell. He was staying alone. His wife and kids were gone, so he stayed with me. Tugwell, by the way, is not a very communicative person. Very quiet. One of the things I learned early in my career with him was not to bother him with a lot of unnecessary talk. If he didn't want to talk we didn't talk. We never went in and asked him, "How am I doing?", or, "What do I do?" You were expected to do it. But in the course of this I was thinking back on my days at Columbia when I was still teaching there. I used to think -- again let me digress just slightly on this -- I used to be disturbed because my classmates so often were the bright boys from Lincoln School and I said, "Oh my God, those boys are so much brighter, have so much better background than I've ever had." Yet at times I was shocked at how little they knew about the country. They didn't know a disc harrow from the steeple of a church. Particularly of things rural they didn't seem to know anything; and something came to my mind: wouldn't it be interesting to have a sort of a picture book on American agriculture? And one night I talked to Tugwell about it and he said, "Well it isn't a pictorial history of agriculture; it would be a pictorial sourcebook." Well, that stirred me up. So I spent all my evenings I could get into the extension files. It wasn't long before I had this book in mind. I was still teaching one more year. This, by the way, was where Rothstein came in. I went back up to Columbia and I began to write outlines for this thing and I carried it in my pocket, always with me, on little 3 x 5 slips of paper. And my pockets were bulging with notes I made. I ran across Rothstein in some way and he was using a camera and I wanted to copy things out of old magazines, early journals, old agricultural journals. And Rothstein -- he was the National Youth Project boy. The first thing I knew everybody who had a National Youth assignment was given to me. So I had about twelve of them going. And Rothstein was taking pictures for me, making copies out of the library. We assembled, by the way, ...the thing moved along and Harry Carman, who was professor of history and later became dean of the college, and Carman, Tugwell and I, they were the masterminds, and we decided to try to get this book out, to be called The Pictorial Sourcebook of American Agricultural History. We needed a grant of money, so we went to the university of Columbia Press and decided it would be a good idea to talk to Nicholas Murray Butler. We had a conference with Nicholas Murray Butler and he regaled us with the time that he spent with Theodore Roosevelt out in the Bad Lands. He went into his files and brought out a series of stereoscopes taken at that time, and we had to see those. They were wonderful. But we didn't get any information where we could get money or anything else. Alexander Legg of International Harvester had just recently passed away before that, and there was a fund, a foundation, called the Alexander Legg Foundation or Fund. So Nicholas Murray Butler said, "I will try to see if I can formulate something." So on my next trip to Washington I shared the office with a man who was a sort of assistant to Milton Eisenhower, who was then -- that was the Information Division. The man was Jack Fleming who is now with Dave Lawrence's magazine. And I arrived at my desk down in his office. He said, "I have an interesting letter for you." And there was Nicholas Murray Butler's letter to Mr. Ross saying, "It's a great idea, and you ought to do it." The book never got done. I collected some three thousand pictures, they were placed in the file in Harry Carman's office, and then it wasn't too long after that till the Farm Security was about to be born. We didn't know when it was. Professor Tugwell's assistant, a secretary if you will, was Grace Falke, who was his secretary at Columbia. She later became Mrs. Tugwell and became a factor in the development of that file, which I shall have occasion to mention to you later. I remember sitting in the office a few times listening to those two people plus three or four more, talking about it. Tugwell said, "Why don't you come down?" He said, "You may not make much money, we may both be out on the street, but we can drink our soup together." I went back to Columbia. There was resentment on the part of my old friend, John Coss, at my going into any other study. He resented a lot of his students going to the New Deal. He didn't like the New Deal. And he gave me the devil. I went back to Tugwell and asked him two or three times. I needed reassurance and Tugwell didn't take kindly to having to live your life for you. He expected you to be a mature guy. And he said, "Well, damn it, make up your mind. If you want to come, come. If you don't, don't. I just want to tell you one thing. You may do far more education here than you'll ever do if you stay at Columbia." So the decision was made. And I went back to this wonderful old guy, John Coss, and I told him. It was in the evening and he said, "We're having dinner together. Now, all right. That's fine. Now let's forget it and quit quarreling." Later on, after we'd worked for a period of time, we had a lot of negatives, a lot of pictures, already collected, confused, not organized, he came down (this is a very curious story, a sort of footnote) and Coss looked at them and said, "My God, you have to get these negatives out and get them copied, these people will steal them from you, they'll wreck them." He then became my mentor to be sure we held these things. When the thing was ready to go I was supposed to move down for my job. I had developed corneal ulcers suddenly, I was still teaching, and I wore my black patch for so many months while I was still teaching. I then followed that with iritis which was a terrible mess that nowadays would be easy to handle -- all these things with antibiotics. So I came down telling Tugwell I thought I had better resign, I couldn't be of much use. Again I got one of Tugwell's terse statements that had an effect on my life. He said, "Why in the hell don't you go out and walk around a little? If you can't read, maybe it will do you good to think, but don't resign." And by the time I got there I had to through some treatments, was going to have my tonsils out and one thing after another. When I got through with that it was all under way, they already

had it organized and set up. My job description was there but I wasn't there fill the place. Pare Lorentz had come down to do the movies. Tugwell, for some reason -- sometime I wish some way, somehow, we could get out of Tugwell what did he really think. I don't know, I'll never know, but some time maybe he'll say what he thought. Maybe he didn't know what he thought. I don't know. Anyway, he wanted movies. I'm getting this a little bit mixed up now but I think it will be all right to put it in now. I was supposed to be head, chief of the Historical Section, to gather the documents because Tugwell, like Ickes and others, had a sense of his importance. It's better to have the records now. But I was late getting there. He wanted -- why did he want movies? He wanted pictures but didn't think they were as important as they later turned out to be. He brought in a very woman who made platters, (radio was strong), documentary platters, very wonderful ones. They ought to be found. I hope they haven't been destroyed, my God, I hope they're around. But I'm afraid they're gone. Documentary platters that went out and were played on little radio stations out in sections on the Depression, on the farm problem, on the people. It was a very fascinating thing. And Pare had made his famous "The Plow that Broke the Plains". He sort of took over my place. But when I finally got there something had happened. Different places were already in photography. We had a thing called Suburban Resettlement. It was the famous Green Belt towns. We had two or three other divisions and they were already setting up their photographic operations. It was a sad experience. I didn't think it was going to work. I went over to Suburban Resettlement. Carl Mydans was there. John Fisher was over there working. He is now editor of Harper's. A very curious group of people. They were doing reports involving the experimental farm, involving the Green Belt. Carl Mydans was there. Carl had become involved with 35 millimeter and a man by the name of Bob Thorpe, or his name at that time was Bob Schmuck. And he was in charge of the division. He changed his name later. He went from there to New York and...But a man named Wallace Richards was the assistant to a man named Lampl. Richards -- later I ran across him out in Pittsburgh. That's another story I'll have to tell some other time. But here was Carl out there photographing around the Green Belt background, which was urban living with some space, and also at the experimental farm. And they probably produced two of the most expensive books ever made, layouts, they were never printed but there were these great volumes. Thorpe, or Schmuck, had been in Europe; he had gotten the feeling of the German technique with the camera, the new magazines, the new layouts, the new format, but particularly the wonderful angles of the camera, looking up, looking down, looking through. And Carl was involved in that. I was greeted, "How are you?" Is there anything we can do for you?" "Sure." "Let us know." There's another...I went over to one of our units, the engineers, and they wanted a Leica so they could take pictures of the buildings before and after -- the barn, shed, when it was worked out. I went to another place and they wanted Leicas because they wanted to take the client, the rehabilitation unit, so they could take the clients in their old clothes and after they were rehabilitated. I went back pretty, pretty discouraged and pretty blue. I see Rex and Miss Falke was there, and I said, "Rex, I think it's ditched. I don't think you're going to get anything at all out of it." "Why?" I told him my experiences. I said, "The damned engineers want to buy Leicas, and they shouldn't have them. They should have box cameras." I said, "It will cost you some money -- a lot of money." He didn't say any more to me. Oh, John Franklin Carter was head of Information; that was another piece of luck. A very able guy who was very busy, who let me alone. And, as you already know, because you read my job description -- which lots of people didn't know -- I was under the direct supervision of the Administrator attached to the Information Division. That came in very handy later on. It saved our life too. But J. Franklin left us alone because he was busy with other things. So I had a good deal of free wheeling. I didn't really at that moment need to be under a director but it was nice. So practically unbeknownst to me J. Franklin said, "I want you to come to a meeting in my office." There I sat in the office with the heads of the units of the various places that had charge of photography. J. Franklin Carter read an administrative order: "As of today, all photographers, all cameras, all negatives, everything to do with this, will be transferred to the Division of Information." Then they were frantic, and that was the changeover. I must admit to you that I didn't know for sure what my job was, except to collect the documents. It was a logical thing. I had never had a formal course in history all the time I was at Columbia but I was a historian. And my title was Chief of the Historical Section. Tugwell's only advice to me, only direction to me -- he never said, "Take pictures." He said, "We need pictures." He never said how to take them. He said, "Remember," -- and this is the only thing that I can remember -- "remember that the man with the holes in his shoes, the ragged clothes, can be just as good a citizen as the man who has the better shoes and the better clothes." Now I must go back to my Pictorial Sourcebook of American Agricultural History. That, I was deeply involved in. I saw -- had visions of using these people to take a hell of a lot of pictures that could be useful in that book. And I had outlines and I had all these cards, unfortunately I never saved the cards, but I have got the outlines. When I saw Dorothea Lange's migrant pictures I thought of my job with the migrants, my job with this organization; but, "Back behind here," I said, "this is agriculture, these would be wonderful, this is a migration." So it was this strange business going on. So when the transfer came, I'll never forget this as long as I live. My office was a partition in the Agricultural Building on the second floor. They had made partitions up there. Our laboratory for the department, very graciously said, "We'll let you work in here." I hired a guy to head all this up, and said, "We'll order film and cameras and stuff." I wish I could go back and find the story of that episode, but that's forgotten and gone. When it was all transferred in, we worked through the night about three nights. Carl Mydans shot 35mm. Film by the mile, it seems like. We laid it on the floor. We learned how to file. We developed our own filing system, we collected them into sets, we had envelopes made, and it came to us by instinct, by talking among us. Arthur came in, I think Arthur and Carl were the two major ones, and we worked on a filing system. How we ever got through I don't know, how we ever got any order put of it. Dorothea Lange's pictures

intrigued me and the first thing we knew we could get her. The Rehabilitation Division of the Department of Interior -- Walker Evans was working over there, a very interesting woman by the name of Ernestine Evans was attached to the Farm Security. She was interested in housing, one of those curious minds that was fertile, she was afraid of J. Franklin's, and she could stimulate lots of things. She wanted us to bring Walker over because they were transferring some of the work of the Rehabilitation Division to us; so Walker Evans came over. Now Rex had met a man named Adrian Dornbusch of Florida. He was working for the WPA. Able and curious, a wild man, who wanted to set up -- and Miss Falke was instrumental in that too -- in setting up something called Special Skills to design, to set up projects out in the field, to weave, and one thing and another. Ben Shahn came down on that. And I got acquainted with Ben Shahn at that time. And I don't know the details, I don't know, I couldn't possibly give you the step-by-step transition how Ben Shahn came. I don't know. But all of a sudden he was on a trip. Ben's shrewd -- he gave himself a trip out of this business through the South. I was delighted because more pictures. By this time we were getting pictures in, and I began to, you know, like a hungry man who got water, got different mineral water, and I said, "John, this is wonderful. Let's have Ben Shahn go." So Ben took a trip down through the South as a special job. Incidentally, that was one of the great factors in my education with Ben with his camera. By the way, when Walker came over, Walker and I came very close. We spent lots of time together. In the evenings we'd walk the streets of Washington and talk, talk, talk. He was very much a part of my education. I learned much about his type of photography. Remember, I had no basis at all for the graphics of what I was going to do. As I told you back at the start of this tape, we had stereoscopes, we had the old Cabinet photos, my second brother from the top had a camera, I still have got his pictures around of the family on the walls here at Montrose, I've still got a lot of his pictures. I started working with his camera. Later on I had desire for a camera, I became, I suppose, a gadgeteer. But how did it happen that this all came about? I don't know. I'm trying to give you a lot of diverse factors, that took place. Anyway, we were in business. The stuff began to come in. It began to be used. And, we were in business. The stuff began to come in. It began to be used. And it was at this time that Mike Cowles came down. His brother-in-law, who is now deceased, married to one of Cowles' girls. Jim McDonald was the top assistant to Secretary Wallace, also played tennis together. Jim had said to me, "I'm going to tell my brother-in-law about what you're doing, and I think he ought to come down." The correspondence is here in the file. Now that first episode, I remember, (it's terribly amusing), later on I was brash enough to write a criticism of the first issue of Life. I've got it. So Mr. Cowles came down. Life was getting under way. Carl Mydans came in and said he was offered a job on Life and wanted to leave. Russ Lee had been in to see us. He had come across Special Skills because he was an engineer married to an artist, Doris Lee, and came down to see the Special Skills because he didn't know where he belonged. He didn't know what was going on down there. He was sent over by Ben to see me. I had nothing for him. He had three or four sets of pictures -- Father Divine, the bootleg coal business, and I couldn't think of anything but the Forest Service at that moment. He came back and laughed and said, "They didn't need any photographers but they wanted somebody to tint prints."

RICHARD DOUD: He told me about that.

ROY STRYKER: So when Carl came in from the trip and said, "Roy, I'm going to leave you. I've been offered a job at Life, I can't afford not to take it.", I didn't wait to write Russell. I said, "You're hired, come on down." And Russell went out into Iowa out through there and started his career out there. As I say, by this time you see we getting a lot of pictures in. The newspapers were coming over; we were peddling pictures; we were pushing them. Still unsophisticated, still pretty disorganized, we were learning fast. We had one curious experience which I will tell you because I think it will be an indication of how green we were, and yet how by instincts, by luck, for some reason we fell into good habits, we fell into good devices. A very famous picture outfit in Washington, portrait and news pictures, sent a boy over one morning with a series of prints. "Could you please give us the caption?" Now the back was stamped with their name. And I called this guy and I said, "What the hell, do you think we're running captions for your damned outfit?" "Why?" "Well, these pictures look so suspiciously like ours that you can't tell the difference, and, by God, you don't put your credit lines on our pictures or I'm going to have the law on you."

RICHARD DOUD: Were they your pictures?

ROY STRYKER: Certainly! They cam racing over, and I said, 'By God, you're stealing government property and that is quite a heinous crime, and, by God, you guys cut it out.' It's one of those things that I, in my selfishness... and it worked. So we got by. We got our lines on all our prints after that. Anyway, I tell that because it was that type of thing, I don't tell that because of that story, I tell that because it was this thing that helped us grow up. It was the experience with Mike Cowles; it was the experience with this thing and that thing; of seeing our pictures used; of finding how pictures, how you could get them out. And suddenly we had something they didn't have. The Depression was on, conditions were bad, they needed pictures, we had them, and they were used. Now I think that was primarily one of the biggest factors on our start. But there are two elements here. Don't ever forget it. And I cannot separate them out in detail. I cannot separate them out in proportion to you, I can't separate them out in time. They were running side by side. The job of doing what needed to be done, saving the document, I didn't have time, I had forgotten. And the other thing was this damned agricultural book I was supposed to do. Those were the first elements that entered into this thing. Then, when the file began to grow,

Walker lectured to me, Walker talked to me. Ben's talk, Arthur's -- the things he brought in were fresh and exciting, the Dorothea Lange stuff. I was particularly interested in pictures. And the files grew because pictures demanded more pictures. It was like a man who starts taking heroin or some other narcotic. It was a narcotic, God damn it.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: I began to take it, I liked it, and I needed more. I learned. I had an education, as I said so many times. I had an education. I was paid to get an education that was fantastic. And sure, sure, I had my limitations. I look back and I don't see how in the hell I ever survived, or how we ever got where we were. I didn't go out much. Now, and I will never forget, and this is a thing I was trying to remember, I want to point out, we came, we did not start with any nice, preconceived plan. And that's what so many people think today. Number one. Number two: we had a very intelligent administrator who gave you a great deal of freedom and had very great confidence in me and he let us grow like Topsy. Because it served his purpose. I remember so well going in to say, ask a question. You know, a feeling of insecurity, whether you ought to ask, maybe you ought to ask your boss. "Rex, are we doing all right?" He was busy, he looked up and said, "I don't know, I guess you are. I haven't any complaints. Why in the hell don't you go back to work. I haven't got time to talk to you, I've got other things to do." I did, I went back. I didn't bother him much. I knew this about Tugwell because when I was working with him at Columbia, he said, "There's a couple of guys -- if you don't mind, see if you can keep them out of here, will you, for me? They always come in crying and want me to hold their hand. I don't like to hold hands. So if you can keep them out, keep them out for me." I learned when I was doing the book with him that I didn't ask any silly questions. I either came in and took my beating, or I fired back at him. And that's what I learned about Tugwell. He was not a demonstrative person. He had had a very bad strep throat, and he damn near died. And I rushed down to him. He was so pleased to see me, so deeply pleased to see me. And he suddenly pulled the blind up for a moment and let his emotions out. Then bang! Went the curtain down and he brushed me into his office. At the end of the year we all told everybody goodbye. We knew Tugwell was in his office. We opened the door, we were going to tell him goodbye, and he wasn't there. We feel it was the rope trick. We feel he went down the window. We don't know. That summer I worked with him in Washington. He and his wife were going abroad. And he said, "Well, I'll probably see you, you'll be telling me goodbye." I said, "Well, I thought you'd be busy and I didn't think I'd bother..." "That's right, that's right, don't bother." His experience with the newspapers was revealing that way. Tugwell is not a man who gives out. He's shy. And one newspaperman, who I later got very well acquainted with, said, "I must tell you about a press conference we had. Two young guys stills we behind the ears sounded off sometimes and he annihilated them. Some of us were delighted but we had to defend our boys." The press took after him. He got a very bad name. He wanted to meet Rex. He came back captivated and then he told me this story. It happened several times. It wasn't arrogance, it was s shyness, a peculiar trait. He sat in a private car in Montana. He wouldn't get out to go down to the state fair. He sat in the dining room where some of his people in one of his regional offices were having a dinner and could see him and he wouldn't walk out and say hello to them. It wasn't cussedness, it wasn't superciliousness, it was a peculiar shyness. And I had learned that, thank God, before I came down there, so I left him alone. Also, this is the next important thing: we survived probably like no other organization of this kind ever survived in government, or ever will survive, because we were fair-headed kids. I don't know what he ever did to protect me, except in a few instances. When there were changes in personnel in the Information Division, I remember so well a man named Guilfont, who had been down in that project that more or less grew into the, among other things, into this Special Skills, and I was on a brief vacation in Vermont, and I had taken my cut in budget before I left. I had no assistant but I had a lad who of sat in, Ed Locke; and Ed called me long distance, he got me on the phone and said, "Roy, you're going to get you throat cut, they're taking you on again." So I came down and found that -- went to see Grace Falke -- and it was stopped. Well, you know when the lion tastes blood for the first time he likes it. And I didn't forget that taste. Later on, a very nice guy by the name of Kenneth Clark came in as head of the Information Division. Again, the same old thing happened. The Administrator sent out an order to cut budgets. Well, I took my cut. Went back up to Vermont for vacation and got a second call from my secretary who said, "For God's sake, you'd better get down here." So I took the night train down. This time I took seriously the administrative order, it was an administrative order, I knew that -- they're allowed to cut the budget. Why shouldn't I take mine? I'd already let some people go, and they were giving me a real rocking. I walked into Miss Falke's office to see Tugwell. I didn't know where he was, I said, "Well, Grace, it's been fun." I bring her name into this because there were times when she had been very helpful seeing that things got done. She saw things, she had a strange way of watching us there, something about it. I said, "Grace, you know, it's been fun, but I guess the end has come." She said, "What do you mean?" "Well," I said, "you folks gave the order, we cut the budget..." (We'll stop and I'll pick it up.)

RICHARD DOUD: Okay, I'll turn it over...

END OF SIDE 1

SIDE 2

ROY STRYKER: We changed the tape. We were just talking about our difficulty on budgets with Kenneth Clark,

who was at that time head of the Division of Information. As I was saying, I stopped in at Tugwell's office and was talking to his executive assistant, who was Miss Falke, Grace Falke Tugwell later, and I had made a remark to her that I thought we'd had a great deal of our fun and I guess we had to pay the price, which was that a man who was ordered to cut budget had a right to cut budget. Grace questioned me and she said, "Well I don't know that you're right about that." About this time Tugwell came in -- well, I talked to her a little bit about where we stood and reminded her of course that he didn't understand that we were not under his jurisdiction exactly. But if we wanted to go ahead, I couldn't take any more cuts than I had at that moment because it was going to cripple us pretty badly. Tugwell came in and Grace said to him, "Dr. Tugwell, I think the Photographic Section is in a bad position, a bad situation right now. Roy says that he's taken his budget cut, his proportion he thought was just, and it was accepted. He came back down from his vacation and he's perfectly willing to take it because he thinks the order to cut was the order." Rex said nothing at all to me, and said, "Tell Ken Clark I want to see him this afternoon." That evening, as I was working around my office and finishing up, Mr. Clark came in. He was a terribly nice person, a man who I was very fond of. He said, "This is a hell of a God-damned outfit, when a son of a bitch can go up and cut your throat with the boss when he works for you." Well, my experience with Guilfont taught me a slight amount and I reminded him, I said, "Well, of course, Ken, I don't believe you ever took the trouble to read my job description. I don't happen to be on your staff." There was silence, and then he said, "This is a hell of a God-damned thing." And I was left alone. He resigned shortly after that, for some other reasons, and went back to the newspaper business. Well, this stood me in good stead; and it also reminded me of the fact that we were watched over. We did survive. What so often happens in a bureaucracy, you can't survive. A thing of this kind is extraneous, it is unusual, it's peripheral, whatever word you want to use on it, it's not in the mainstream of the work they do, it's not understood. We did work in the field, we did have friends in the field, we did do the routine. But when they wanted us to take a whole flock of pictures of the "before and after", of people who were getting rehabilitation, of overalls and then with a pair of white coveralls, we told them to get to hell, because we thought we knew more about this than they did. On the other hand, we supplied them with material they used. And we were depended on. Tugwell was a -- listen, he was a lightning rod, he was a lightning rod. Suburban Resettlement was in the old Walsh McLean home, and you couldn't think of anything more that would attract the Congressmen and the newspaper boys than that. So Rex left, and it became Farm Security. But he came over to the office for a visit, walked around, pulled out drawers, asked a few questions, looked more than I realized, turned to me and said, "We did better than we thought, didn't we?" That's all, virtually all, I ever heard from him after that time. But I know that -- then later on Dr. Will Alexander came there as head -- Dr. Will Alexander, a Southerner, foreign policy, I mean the Foreign Policy Committee, and George Mitchell. George Mitchell was an instructor, brother of Brodis Mitchell who taught economics and labor problems at Johns Hopkins. George came down, was special assistant to the Administrator, a very close -- one of my old buddies from Columbia days, was an instructor there when I was an instructor. We were very close when he was there in Washington. He called me and said, "Roy, I'm sorry I've got a dirty job to do and I'm afraid I'm going to have to treat you roughly, too. I've got to do some budget-trimming all through the place." He said, "It's because you're my friend I treat you even worse than the others, I don't want to be accused of nepotism of any variety." A few days later the telephone rang and he said, "My God, what kind of charmed life have you got? I was told by Dr. Will and C.B. Baldwin to touch nobody over there and leave you alone." Later on -- I'll put this in this sequence -- later on when Dr. Will was out, C.B. Baldwin, "Beanie" Baldwin, became the third and last administrator. And I was again in Vermont on my vacation. I had no assistants, but Ed Locke, who watched over things while I was gone, was leaving the government and going to work for Ken Magazine, the Pageant outfit. And when he left he said, "Roy, I want you to keep your teeth sharp, never let your teeth get dull, keep up the front, don't let anybody come near without biting them." I said, "Why?" "Oh, just on general principles." I remember so well coming down we were driving back from Vermont, I said to my wife, "You know, I've got to cut out being such a son of a bitch and try to get along with people." We had a new head of our Information Division, Jack Fisher. "Well," she said, "that's up to you." But Russell and Arthur were my only two photographers, at this time we were down to just two, and Russell is a worrier. He kept saying, "Are you doing this, are you sure your budget is all right, are you doing this?" "Well what's eating you, Russell?" "Nothing, I just wondered how we're coming along." And one day a telephone rang and the man that was assistant to Milton Eisenhower, his secretary said, "Mr. Fleming wants you to come over, just don't rap, come on in, he wants to see you in a hurry about something." So I grabbed a cab and went over, I was over in the Barr Building on the other side of Connecticut Avenue. I opened the door and walked in. There was a meeting going on. Jack Fisher, my new boss, was sitting there, or was in charge, he was talking. And I didn't say, "Well, we can give you so much of this service of our Photographic Section..." "Oh, Roy," he said, "I'm glad you came. Sit down." And I listened for a while and I thought -- pretty soon I realized that Jack Fisher was selling far more than the whole apple. I said to Jack, "I want to make a statement. In my school days I was taught that the apple has four parts, or eight parts, depending on how you divide it. And you've got three apples, you've already sold three apples, and we ain't got it. It can't be that because there's only one apple." Well it upset the meeting. So that was that. And I told him afterward, he was with me, and I said, "You can't do that. We can't scatter ourselves this way." Very shortly after that we were working -- I take it back, we were at L Street then up on the second floor -- and he brought over a field man, one of our Information men from the field. And this is a part of my nasty, cantankerous disposition which paid off at times. This was shortly after we had put on probably our most famous exhibit at the International Photographic Exhibition at Grand Central Palace. We put that on, Arthur and Russell had designed it. It made a great hit. The

Oval Table and the old pictorialists threatened to leave it unless we were taken out. We put up a show there and Ben Shahn said, "You should never have been quite as wicked with it as you were; you should give people a chance to smile once." And I learned, also, some things to do -- that you don't give anybody too much chance to criticize. So just about an hour before -- we had the pictures in little bunches so the boys could put them together -- I got them a travel order. They had the printed pictures in the back of their car. They were ready to take off in about -- they weren't in the car yet -- but they were going to leave in about four hours. I said to Mr. Fisher, "You'd better come over and take a look at these because we're going to New York." He thought they were wonderful. We took the pictures up. Later on we'll be talking about this exhibit. But when it came back, we had five hundred and some comments that people had made about it. Henry Wallace took a copy of these comments with him and read part of them to a dinner. Well, Fisher became very pleased with it all. So when this evening, this afternoon, he came over with this man from Nebraska, a very nice man, and Fisher had a sort of quiet voice. He said, "Roy, I want you to send Russell or Arthur or maybe both of them out to Nebraska with this man." I said, "For what?" "We need more pictures of our rehabilitated clients" and so on. Well, fortunately, my temper was right and it's a good thing. I said, "We'll do nothing of the sort." Well that was pretty bad to tell a man who was theoretically your boss right in front of one of his men that you weren't going to do it. I said, "Look, Jack, you could buy these for a dollar apiece, or less, with a box camera. Do you think for one minute I'm going to ask Arthur or Russell to go out and stoop to that kind of stuff when we can do it cheaper?" I said, "You wouldn't do that with one of your writers, would you?" And I said, "By the way, how in the hell do you think we got that show up with this kind of crap?" I said, "I'm not doing it!" Well, it was a very curious experience. My little secretary who sat outside the door said, "That was one of the most wonderful meetings I've ever sat on the edge of and looked in on." And it was. I was being a son of a bitch which I had told my wife I wasn't going to be anymore. That was that. So then I got concerned. Russell was nagging me. Arthur was nagging me and I decided we'd better find out if we had any future or not. I went to Fisher and I said, "I wish you would ask Dr. Will if we're useful, are we doing our job, does he need us, okay; if not, I think we ought to disband." Fisher came back, "Wonderful where you are." One day I decided I was going to go to see Baldwin. Dr. Will was gone; Baldwin was the administrator. So I went by Fisher's office. "I'm going in to see Beanie Baldwin; I haven't seen him for a long time." "I'll go with you." "Sure, come on." Baldwin was quite a wonderful administrator, he had a remarkable memory for everything, knew my photographers by name and he said, "Roy, should you have more photographers? You've got Russell and Arthur now, are you sure you should have...?" And then Fisher started to speak up and say something to interfere with this and I said, "Shut up! And keep out of this. You don't have to be my boss, anyway, you know." I took on another photographer and pretty soon I had two more, and we were back in business again. That was one of our crises during this period. I might say in passing that Jack Fisher is a man whom I admire. We talked over this experience, when Ed Locke got back from Ireland where he'd been. I said, "What the hell did you talk about? My future?" He said, "Roy, I was worried about you. Fisher called me and said, 'We'll soon be rid of Stryker and you can have the job.'" Well, I don't blame Fisher for hating me at the time. He was a new man, he was married, and he had a right to worry about himself. He couldn't see what the hell we were doing. He was a writer. We've talked it over since that time. And I grant him all the rights to do what he did. He said, "Well, I guess you had the right to do what you did." And he's one of my good friends, my good defenders, and one of my dear friends. So that anything I say in this case about that relationship...it comes largely because it gives you a picture of how our protection saved us time after time. We could go on -- which is a thing that just isn't going to happen -- very often in agriculture, a thing that seems as useless, as unnecessary as a thing of this sort. And this is of prime importance to be understood: that we grew because the climate was right in its broadest way of stating it. The times could stand pictures, we were a year ahead of Life and Look, ferment was on, we came at the right time in the picture business, the right time for this stupid word called "photo-journalism" if you will. We rode that wave and by a strange set of coincidences we then began to broaden our scope. (We did not worry the -- Steichen's most recent caption, if you will, most recent title -- we did "The Bitter Years".) We supplied our regional people with things they needed; we were cooperative in our nasty sense, in our nasty method. We had awfully good friends in the field and I think they began to understand that we had things for them. We did help them. Then something else happened. We began to -- I don't know how we fell into this. Walker Evans' pictures, Ben Shahn's trip, all those things began to come back in and we began to see the need for doing this, doing that. I had a sort of a circuit into New York; and one of my people that I used to go and have lunch with, a Mrs. Ruth Goodhue, I think it's Miss Goodhue, her married name, was at that time Managing Editor of Architectural Forum. She was a charming woman and very bright and very proactive. And she said to me, "Are all little towns in America alike because they read the same boiler plate, listen to the same radios on the air, and because they eat the same breakfast food?" Proactive questions, just what I needed. I have a very bad habit of writing memos to myself; I love to put things down, write a page after page and take it home. By the time I got back to Washington, the photographers hadn't been taking pictures of the little towns they went through. So then there grew an outline -- a perfect bombardment of twenty-five pages, I guess. Did you stay overnight? Did you go through...Let's begin to cover the main street of America, you know, just to see what the heck occurs on it. And this is one of many, many things that they did, either because they were special to them because they were in one place, or generalize because everybody should be doing this. And a lot of things like this happened because the highway fascinated them. Photographers took pictures of filling stations, a wonderful picture that Walker Evans took of old tires that had been piled, not like they are today, they were piled on posts. Migrants came in and bought these old tires. These things all begin to stir, you



tasted this, let's have some more of it, you tasted this. Then this stirred me to write memorandums and when the photographer was going out some place, he wanted to know what he was supposed to do. And then it grew, more and more of it, better organized. After all, I came from the West and I grew up with cattle in cattle country and I wanted...Again, you know, my book on the Sourcebook of American Agriculture, agricultural history, the cattle industry, so Arthur was my man. And the indoctrination methods were curious. You talked cattle, I talked it, talked about the pictures that we ought to have. We went to luncheon with a cow man here and a cow man there. You read some books and you read about the history of the West land. I think he got an education out of me in a way. And I don't know whether he's ever going to give me credit, I don't care, but I think he got more education than he realized...

RICHARD DOUD: I think he gives you credit...

ROY STRYKER: Oh, of course, he does. Damn right he does. But it was a very curious education because sometimes he must have been fed up with Stryker taking him to lunch, and bringing him home. And we needed a place to go and we went to the 3A's and they sent us to this ranch. I think we got this before already in your notes. But Arthur arrived and told what he wanted: Brewster's; the Brewster's ranch. It was a half damn good cattle ranch and also a bit of the tourist...

RICHARD DOUD: Dude ranch?

ROY STRYKER: Dude ranch. And it wasn't long before the pictures began to arrive and they were good. Arthur said, "You know, the family couldn't believe it. Then they got interested. They began to get enthused too." Mr. Brewster came in and it was a very wonderful experience because they were intrigued that a boy from New York could have as many ideas, living in a large town, as Arthur did. They, in turn, got in the act. He said they were so delighted because they guessed they'd been quite anti-Semitic and they had found that Semitism had nothing to do with people's personality, whether it was good or bad and all that. But it was quite an experience for Arthur. It was the time he got his famous picture of the cattle charging down -- of the white faces, the clouds. That was one of my first set-ins with Walker. Walker said, "That silly, sentimental picture." That was also part of my education -- what is sentimental and what's good photography? Arthur took a picture of Main Street and Walker said, "You've got a picture a Main Street there; there'll be no other one. I took it." But, with all of that, I had to admit that Walker had taken an awful good one. His viewpoint was significant and had its effect; but it didn't stop Arthur or anyone else from taking Main Street. Because it wasn't the same Main Street and the picture was still important. In case that I didn't mention these books earlier in the tape, I would like to mention one or two, and if it's repetitious it won't hurt. I think I did mention Tugwell's suggestion that I take J. Russell Smith's North America and it did have a big influence on me. And later on, that was practically "must" reading for the photographers, and we bought several copies and they carried them with them. And it was extremely useful to them because it hit a new area, it was more than just economic geography, it was economic history as well. The books I want to mention particularly -- I want to go back -- are the Pageant of America in fourteen volumes, a visual history of America. And when I first went to Columbia, Professor Corman, professor of history in the college, had a series of these on his bookshelves and I was allowed to run with this series. And I'm afraid that I'll always have to pay me debt to that series of books. Specifically, nothing that I could put my fingers on; but just as part of my broad education, very important. The bond volumes, the current issues of the bound volumes of The Survey, and Survey Graphic. They had been heavy users of Lewis Hine pictures and others, other drawings and that magazine affected me. The mid-week pictorial of the New York Times was another thing that I think I would have to put on the list that I came in contact with. The rotogravures, all of them, affected me. I just thought it would be interesting to throw that in here in case somebody wondered what...That's all I have.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, Roy, we have sort of gone over now your background and the background of Resettlement Administration and FSA business. Before we go on to any specific questions on this thing, would you mind sort of going on giving a general background, the closing up, as far as you were concerned, the windup of this thing when you finally left? Then after this, I think would be a good time for specific questions.

ROY STRYKER: All right. The move was in the cards. Farm Security was coming to an end. Politically, the Farm Security was, as it had been for many years, a lightning rod. And I knew that photography has a strange way of being the rod. I was ready to quit because -- you see, we had -- let me give you a little background. We had been under assignment, on transfer of budget, doing OWI overseas work before we were ever transferred. There was no work that we could do for Farm Security. We were not going to be allowed to do that broad, general coverage of the American scene and there was no justification for it. Although OWI used us -- drew heavily upon our files for that kind of material, that was the stuff we had already taken, they were not going to commission or allow us to do it. I had realized that my time was coming and I was going to get out. In fact, Jonathan Daniels called me one time and wanted to have lunch with me. He raised this question: "Roy, you're not a writer, you're not a speaker. What are you going to do? I think your time is getting limited." And then I told him a brief story. I had been called to New York by Ed Stanley, one of my old mentors who was with AP and then with PM, and he was in the OWI overseas. And Ed had called me to New York to tell me about a very interesting development. He had left the Government completely and had gone over to Earl Newsom, a big public relations firm. He said, "I

wish you'd come up, I'd like to talk with you and I'd like to have Earl Newsom meet you." I met him in the afternoon having come up from Washington and we had dinner. We went back up on Madison Avenue and I guess up on the twenty-second floor. I sat there reading, looking out the window at the lights, it was cool and very pleasant. And Ed came in and put his feet up and looked out the window and said, "Roy, wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to hire photographers, pay them a good salary, send them around all over the world? American Locomotive wants a story done on locomotives in China" and so on. My comment was, "Get thee behind me, Satan, but don't push too hard." So the next day I was to see Mr. Newsom. I came in and Newsom had this tea account. So in the middle of the morning we had tea. Newsom was a Missouri boy and he found that I was a country boy, so he said, "Roy, you and I have a great deal in common." He said, "Our big account is Standard Oil." And I explained to Mr. Newsom that my father, having been a Populist, and there were great evils in the world: railroads, Wall Street, and the greatest of these three was Standard Oil. I didn't think it would altogether wise, I might have to meet my father in hell and I didn't know whether it might...Anyway I left. And Ed got a hold of me afterwards and said, "Earl Newsom wants to see you again." I said, "Well you tell Earl Newsom to go to hell. I'm not being seen." I went back to Washington and I could see that things were tightening, tightening. We'd had a domestic photographer shifted to us. A lot of things were happening. So at the time I was having lunch with Jonathan Daniels, I told him my story. He said, "Well for God's sake, what the hell are you staying down here for? Why don't you take it?" Well I said, "Jonathan, after all, there's some liberals down here, things have to be done, and I'd like to have a part in it." He said, "I don't know anything can be worse than a liberal sometimes. (Can't make this out). Now, Roy, why don't you take this job? I may need free lunches for a while and I may want to call on you. I may need your help. You go and get the money and I'll help with lunches!" Well he talked on. And the next day I called out and told Ed Stanley I would be up. And that was the move that I made to get out. It took a little time to get out. In the meantime I went to see Baldwin. This was wonderful -- see this goes back to my telling you that the administrative people in Farm Security did help us -- and I was quite close to Beanie, and I went to him and I said, "Beanie, the time has come where we've got to move this out, for your sake, for everybody's sake." This was his statement, which I shall never forget, "Roy, are you sure? Well, now if there's any doubt about it in your mind you stay, no matter what the consequences are. I will do my best to save you, to protect you. And even though the price is pretty high to us I think you're a terribly, terribly important organization. Read the letter now." And I said, "No, Beanie, we're not doing enough of the thing we used to do. We're being a service agency. And you must not jeopardize yourself for this thing out here in the open. We have protected ourselves by writing security legislation." Frank Lee was a genius at telling them everything and telling them nothing. If you'd see those letters you wouldn't believe it. And with tears in his eyes finally he said, "Well, I want you to understand I don't care whether we're caught, I'll take care of it." I said, "we've got to go." So this had just been negotiated when Frank Lee called and said -- (I can't remember his name -- he was in charge of photography for the overseas group) had come down with an order to move the file to New York with him. I got on the train and went down to Washington, took some time off Standard Oil, looked over the thing and went to Jonathan Daniels to cover ourselves. The story is being shortened, but we did transfer. But it was a logical thing and there was nothing peculiar about it. Just as we did so much work for them it was a logical thing and Farm Security was a dying thing anyway. It died shortly afterwards. Farm Home took its place. And we got our file transferred to Library of Congress thanks to Jonathan Daniels, thanks to "Mr. Big," the President, and Bob Sherwood. Everything was cleared. Paul Vanderbilt moved lock, stock, and barrel, and went with it. Everyone had all the use they wanted of it, but it was no longer under their jurisdiction. Archie MacLeish was there at the time and he had quite a respect for it. Mr. Roosevelt said, "Talk to the archives, talk to Connor, talk to Archie MacLeish." It was transferred, Bob Sherwood finally came home from abroad -- Paris or London. It had his approval. Otherwise it would be scattered to the four winds today. Again another piece of -- another piece of curious circumstances -- another piece of luck, if you will. Another piece of luck. We moved at the right time to the right people.

RICHARD DOUD: How long were you there after the file moved to the Library of Congress?

ROY STRYKER: I was already at Standard Oil.

RICHARD DOUD: I see.

ROY STRYKER: Frank Lee was in charge; and Jean stayed on and helped in the file. Some of the staff were there. It stayed in the same building for a while, but it was transferred in name and control to Library of Congress jurisdiction.

RICHARD DOUD: Well I think it might be of interest and of some importance to have you say a little bit about your work with Standard Oil, how you operated there in comparison with how you operated with Farm Security.

ROY STRYKER: Strangely similar. Only, this is the strange...you see, the differences come up to my mind several times. I went to Standard Oil with complete knowledge that I was going to organize a file. My friend, Ed Stanley, again, who had been very close and very much involved, got me in to Newsom. One of Newsom's accounts was Standard Oil. So I finally arrived. Ed said, "we're going to transfer you over to the Standard Oil file." Now remember that Standard Oil had been nicked pretty badly by the I.G. Farben thing. They had been accused of

being treasonable and their image was bad and they wanted help. And Ed Stanley had sold Newsom and Newsom had bought it. So I went over there. I have to dig out -- they're all -- that's a separate collection in a box in there -- I'll have to dig out my original letter. Roskam took a hand in it and helped me write it -- he wrote a wonderful letter, that said, "The file won't begin to work until there are twenty thousand pictures in it." When I first went there public relation was brand new. They had never had public relations. The man who ran public relations was in the secretary's office and he just phoned the business newspapers, business editors and people like that. This was the first big move. And it didn't take long to get under way. I had a staff in a short time. I brought in some of the same people, you'd be surprised: Vachon, Collier, Delano. Delano's wife worked in the office and did designing and did work of that kind. But those are the few major ones that did move over. We picked up other photographers. But the important thing was we started off with a premise right away. My premise was a very interesting one: there's a drop of oil in everything. We were allowed terrific freedom. We went immediately to our laboratory, we set up our negative control there, we numbered our negatives. The experience that we had in Washington was suddenly put to work immediately. Bill Nichols, the publisher now, I believe, of This Week Magazine, came over and looked around. He said, "My God, Roy, what have you done? Did you move Farm Security up here?" If you would go and look at the file you would be astounded at the similarity. When Tod Webb went out I said, "Let's route you through the New England states. We ought to catch the facade of some of the wonderful old factories, the long windows, the cut stone that made up beautiful, the brick and the frame." John Vachon took a tour down through West Virginia and came around and he said, "Look at these pictures." Well there's the Farm Security, the same thing. A drop of oil in everything, but damn few Esso signs. And the results were similar. What you use it for had some parallel. They were having a big party for the agricultural magazine editors from all over the United States. And they were going to feed them their lunch over in Elizabeth near the refinery. And they needed some decor. We mounted, by the way, our pictures on aluminum. So we mounted up a bunch of 30 x 40's of rural scenes. There wasn't an Esso sign in the whole damn place. Beautiful pictures! We prepared 11 x 14's in mats, prepared 8 x 10 releases for editors. After they got all through they flocked into the office and gathered up more. My boss came in. I tell this story because it again tells you why the file first began, and the figuring that took place down there. Cy Lewis (?) who was head, an engineer, by the way, a chemist, rather, said, "Roy, how did you just happen to have these pictures? Did you buy them?" "No, they're in the file." He said, "I don't believe it." So I showed them to him. I said, "George, I knew you were going to have this meeting." He said, "You did not." I said, "Look, sooner or later you had to hit the agricultural press. The thing we have here are what any agricultural press member would love to see." And there we were. Well, he said he was astounded. The result was that that file room became the gathering point for the girls who did research for the book publishers, magazines, newspapers. Before he got through the girls had sold him a whole series of pictures of everything. We sent our girls around New York to the picture files -- they got acquainted with the people who ran them. They came back with resumes of what's in the file, we made mimeographed sheets. A man who was doing his book for one of the publishers on economic geography, she said, "We'll call for you, here's a list of the places, here's what you can find." One woman came in (who had never worked lately) and said, "Mr. Stryker, as soon as I get in Congress I'm going to pass a law that you folks are in charge of all the photography in the U.S." But you see it was the same, only this time there was no doubt about what I was doing.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. You knew, when you started.

ROY STRYKER: I knew exactly how it was. There are people who say that it lacked the spontaneity, lacked the freshness, lacked the artistry. I go back up there and look at it, and I'm proud of it. I'm proud of it. We paid more, we had a little more internecine quarrels, a little more jealousies. But...same thing.

RICHARD DOUD: Well what was the biggest advantage of working for, say, a private industry than working for the Government? Other than, perhaps, pay?

ROY STRYKER: Well I was allowed a freedom -- you see, under ordinary circumstances I would never have had the freedom and protection in the Government. But if I would have had to work in the ordinary place, like the Department of Agriculture, which was worse than Standard Oil at that time, I would have taken Standard Oil. But I might tell you that I couldn't go to Standard Oil at this time under any circumstances and duplicate that job. Not under the present administration. It's an entirely new...first, they aren't running scared. They are perfectly happy about their public image.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. They don't have to worry about it.

ROY STRYKER: A thing like this could happen and they had sense enough to see it. At Springfield, the Springfield Museum, up in Springfield was the plant that made pumps and oil burners. When Gordon was up there, Gordon Parks and Esther Bublely, they each of them wrote to the museum. They got in touch with the man who was the Director and told him about the work. He finally decided he was going to have an exhibit of New England stuff. And this is the nice part of the story: The head of public relations came down, and laid down an ultimatum, "Don't you dare put up an Esso on that exhibit." I arose from my desk and said, "Brother, may I shake your hand and put my arm around you?" The exhibit was shown, the Director of the Museum wanted to know if he could

have the exhibit. We gave it to him. It was up, I understand, for three years, every year.

RICHARD DOUD: Is that right?

ROY STRYKER: Well, we did it because we did the same kind of integrity, the same kind of honesty, the same kind of forthrightness, and freshness, and decency...

RICHARD DOUD: Did you have the same spirit? The photographers -- was there this? I keep running across this, you know, the big happy family feeling in Farm Security. I'm not sure it was really there, it probably was...

ROY STRYKER: Yes, we -- there's no use trying to say we had the same thing, but days were different, times were different, the money was different. No. Something came out of the austerity that we worked under. They worked on five dollars a day.

RICHARD DOUD: Sure. Makes a difference.

ROY STRYKER: There was a difference. I think the pictures suffered somewhat. Dick, it's so much easier to take poverty, tragedy, sorrow -- I mean to take ragged clothes than it is to take -- it was easy to do the driller. He's a fantastic guy. It's so easy to do him. But you get the man in the office, he's already a stuffed shirt. You can't handle this type of thing in an "atmosphere". It's the same thing when I went over to Jones and Laughlin in the steel business. It's easy -- again, if I may jump quickly to an entirely different kind of thing. I was at the brass works. I'm an excitable guy. I am very sensitive to these things and I was just going ga-ga over a blast furnace floor. And the general superintendent of the blast furnace was sitting down listening to me get excited. He'd been there for years, a blast furnace was a blast furnace. He didn't say anything. And I was waving my arms, emotional about it. There was a kid standing there. I learned later that he had never even been in high school. He had a Polish background. And he made a statement that I shall never forget as long as I live, and I think those pictures are as exciting in terms of what he said. He said, "You know, Mister, it's Fourth of July every day down here." There's something to be said about it. Now oil didn't have Fourth of July, it was the things where oil fitted in. It was the drillers, yes. Drillers are like the steel workers, like the bridge builder, like the truck drivers. They are a breed that you can't get excited about any place. Same as the people we had at...? They had their troubles. They needed help. And yet they weren't busted. They were fighting back. I think that the Farm Security file has more of the human juices flowing through it than the others. But the whole thing -- if you take the Jandl (?) file, the Standard Oil file, the Farm Security file, they all blend together, you see, to always reach the human being.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, why don't I stop here just a minute and I'll organize a few particular questions.

ROY STRYKER: All right.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm a little concerned about the happy accidents of this whole thing. The whole Farm Security picture has seemed, to me at least, a series of coincidences where everything has worked out for the best. One of these things was the acquiring of Paul Vanderbilt to organize your file. A number of people have told me that Vanderbilt was probably the only man in the world that could have done the job and done it right. And I would like for you to tell me what you knew about Paul, how you came in contact with him, how he became associated with you, and how he proceeded on the job. And why...?

ROY STRYKER: Why? It's a very simple story to tell you. Paul was with the Philadelphia Museum and a man named Emanuel Benson. Paul was working as a sort of librarian. You know he is a trained librarian. He also took work for the White School of Photography. Paul came in with Benson. Benson heard about the file and he came down to see what was there. He wanted to do a series of slide films; he wanted to get pictures. I never quite knew how Benson got here, but I knew that he had heard about the file, and he suddenly appeared. He brought Paul with him and they worked in the file. And this point I couldn't give you any sure statement on what actually took place in this instance. I got acquainted with Paul; I knew that we had troubles in our file; I knew it was growing bigger. In the course of our conversation he told me about his training, he gave me some ideas about what should be done. And just when it took place or where the detail was that it took place, I don't know. And I haven't any idea of telling you. I don't remember. But finally I made a proposition to Paul and this is a very, very interesting part of our story. We were then working for the OWI. Mike Cowles was head of the domestic OWI, no he was in the Overseas -- he was down below -- yes, domestic -- he was just down below Bob Sherwood. I went to him and told him my troubles. Paul agreed to work if I could get a budget. He would work for nothing. He didn't need a salary. I pleaded with Mike Cowles and told him my problem and Mike got the money. He went on and catalogued and set it up and he probably -- I'm not prepared to say he's the only man that could have made a file. I think he was a rare, rare find with his willingness to sacrifice, with his indefatigable ability to hang on, with his tenacity to work by the hours, to organize, it was a fabulous job of organization, a tireless job of organization, a man who had to carry detail, a man who had to never let down, a man who had to drive. He was difficult to work for. The girls practically went berserk. He called me one night and said, "I wan to talk to you. I don't know what's the matter with all these girls. They don't want to work." "Well," I said, "Paul, they work till 8

or 9 o'clock for you, don't they?" "Yes", he said, "but I work till 12 and come in the next morning before breakfast." "Does it ever occur to you that these girls in many instances are married and have babies? They're not nuts like you and me." Well, he supposed that was right. But his persistence, and this -- now I am convinced, and I'll say this, that there are probably few other people in the United States, the file that was actively tailored to what we were doing. But here is another one of those incredible things. In other words, it was Paul's mind, his mind was as sharp as a razor blade. It was a mind, goddamit, as I look back today, it was a mind like a computer.

RICHARD DOUD: Now was Paul hired specifically to arrange the file...?

ROY STRYKER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: ...for the Library of Congress?

ROY STRYKER: No. We were trying to get him in there to start with -- we didn't know it was going to the Library. We were trying to get him to make some sense out of the file. Look, the file was working nicely, but it wasn't a well-organized file, it was working around projects; it was working around states. Like so many files it depended upon - you run it by the seat of your pants, by the seat of John Vachon's pants, by the bottom of Mary Reader's skirt. It was run that way. It was run because they lived with it, they knew it, they knew it so thoroughly but it wasn't run, it wasn't organized, like it could be moved on to some other place. Paul gave that extra something to it, so that it could be moved on and still carry an organization which you could understand, that you could really feel. Now there were people in the outfit who raised hell. Ed Roskam was sore as a boil. Other people weren't happy with it. I just said, "It's got to get organized." Even John wasn't happy...

RICHARD DOUD: I know that.

ROY STRYKER: Even John wasn't. I said, "I'm just as sorry as hell, but this has got to be organized." One thing we never got done in that file, one thing we missed, that I to this day regret. I could not finance it, I could not say this is the thing that I knew in my own heart how vital it was: the captions. That file will never be as good as it ought to be if we had had the budget. If we could have had had the budget to get the captions, if we could have taken one man on who said he would like to do it. There was a man by the name of Paul Johnson. He taught economics, he had a class in, you might say, anthropological economics. I don't know what the hell his title was, but he used to come over and get pictures because of his classes. He used to say, "Look, this is a farmstead here. This is a farmstead out there." ? He came to get pictures for slides. He came here one day and he said, "You know, Roy, the job I would like more than anything else? I'd like to have myself a topgrade secretary, I've got one now, two very competent researchers and I'd like to caption this file." And I said, "You make me drool. They'll never do that." And that is the thing, that's the one place where our luck didn't hold. We're paying for it today. Dorothea's captions are extremely beautiful because they represent a strange personal tone. There are times when I think she wrote the captions herself and people didn't always say them. But they are close enough to what she heard that, for all practical purposes, I haven't the least quarrel with them. Some of the captions are pretty inadequate. But I'm a believer, you see, a through believer that the picture is not the end, that the word and this thing, this photograph is the little brother, as I said on that other tape, is the little brother, the little relative.

RICHARD DOUD: Speaking of this file and people using it, I was asking John whether or not you ever refused access to people, were there ever any refusals on the pictures...?

ROY STRYKER: No, Sir. We did some subterfuge but no refusals. We used our ingenuity a few times. We damn well didn't refuse. If anybody said we did, they lied in their teeth. I'll tell you that we did some fast legwork a few times. The story went the rounds about the German who came in. Nuts, it's so stupid. If they didn't get it directly all they had to do was send in somebody with the right color hair who spoke good English and he had the pictures of such and such a thing. What the hell are they talking about? The sillystories that got started!

RICHARD DOUD: Cloak and dagger.

ROY STRYKER: No. I remember one other story where a man came in from Chile. He was buying a pipe organ for a church in the town and he was a businessman and he was interested in social problems and he happened to land in our file and he got excited. He said, "You know, I'm stirred. Gee, you got some of the same problems we've got." He said, "Could I have pictures of these?"

END OF INTERVIEW

Interview with Roy Stryker  
Conducted by Richard Doud  
At the Artist's home in Montrose, Colorado  
January 23, 1965

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Roy Stryker on January 23, 1965. The interview took place in Montrose, Colorado, and was conducted by Richard Doud for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Interview

### TAPE 1

RICHARD DOUD: This is an interview with Roy Stryker at his home in Montrose, Colorado, January 23, 1965. The interviewer is Richard K. Doud. What I wanted to get the first thing this morning to sort of give us some points and some common references -- I have a list of names of people I keep running across here and that keep coming up in correspondence and all that sort of thing, and for my benefit more than anything else I want you to sort of clarify the positions of some of these people and perhaps their contributions and how they fit into the whole thing. Some of them may not be important, I don't know, but since they did pop up, some of them you mentioned before but more or less in passing, and I would just like you to go down a list here and have you comment on these people to whatever extent you feel they're worth.

ROY STRYKER: All right.

RICHARD DOUD: I have them sort of separated into Staff and Administration and we'll start with the staff because it's at the top of the list more than any other reason: Royden Dixon, had a lot to do with the lab.

ROY STRYKER: Royden Dixon was in charge of the lab after we moved to the Auditors Building and he stayed on through to the end of the period. He is now deceased.

RICHARD DOUD: Do you know anything about his background?

ROY STRYKER: Yes. He went to Winoa, to that school of photography, mostly a portrait. He was extremely competent head of our laboratory, quiet, kindly, the boys were very fond of him, and he offered a spirit in there that made -- was a contribution to the work our lab did.

RICHARD DOUD: Did he take pictures?

ROY STRYKER: No. He may have taken a few things. He was a portrait photographer. He went to that school at Winoa, Wisconsin. No.

RICHARD DOUD: But he was in charge in the laboratory?

ROY STRYKER: I think, if I remember correctly, he had just joined us on L Street, and then took over when we got to the Auditors Building where we remained. By the way he continued and he went in with Russell and Pare Lorenz in the Air Transport Command project, came out of that and I believe was on the U.S.I.A. in the old laboratory, and had a heart attack in the laboratory.

RICHARD DOUD: OK. What about Milton Tinsley?

ROY STRYKER: Milton Tinsely was an artist and a designer, and he came in when we needed somebody to work with the slide films, exhibits, and other things, and he stayed with us for most of the time we were in the Auditors Building, he set up in the basement of the Auditors Building an art department. We did a lot of things in our work there.

RICHARD DOUD: Was he working exclusively for your section?

ROY STRYKER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: Did he ever have anything to do with Special Skills?

ROY STRYKER: No, he did not. Are you getting your question in here too so -- are your questions coming through so when you ask me a question it picks up here?

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: Oh, all right. Maybe you ought to turn around a little bit.

RICHARD DOUD: Remember that lead in; you heard me?

ROY STRYKER: Yes, all right.

RICHARD DOUD: Sheldon Dick?

ROY STRYKER: Sheldon Dick was one of the offspring of the A.B. Dick Company and once upon a time when I was in New York Willard Morgan and the man that was with Willard -- I'll think of his name and give it to you later -- they were partners in that, and by the way he edited the -- will you stop the machine a minute and I'll get it for you. It was Henry Lester. Henry Lester was a partner of Willard Morgan in the early days of their book publishing. And Sheldon Dick was a rich man's son and he had a desire to do things, and I went up one time and they wanted to know if I would take Sheldon down to Washington on more or less a dollar a year, he would like to work, and I agreed to it. Sheldon came down on his dollar a year, virtually. His first job was to go up to Shenandoah. You may remember the job that Harper's did on the several states of the United States and one of them was at Shenandoah, it was a hard coal area that had lost its coal. It was a fantastic little town and you could practically set your cameras up and triggered them and have them on rotate, and gotten pictures. Sheldon went up, a terribly nice boy, but was a little worried about the fact that he was a checkbook -- he was a checkbook for the left-wingers at the time. So he went up with a shooting script from me and a lot of excitement and he came back with some pictures but he wouldn't let me see them until he had them printed, and he came down to Washington on a Sunday with his books, the pictures had been printed, the captions had been written, type set, and pasted on. I tell you this experience, because it's a very curious experience, I went through the books twice, the pictures were lousy, just plain lousy, I was rather shocked that all the energy had been spent on typescript, I mean typeset and paste ins. And finally Sheldon said, "Roy Stryker, don't you dare start talking about out of focus pictures because you've got plenty of them in here." Then we went at it, two thousand dollars worth of fancy cameras and fancy cases. It was rather tragic because, as I say, he was a rich man's son who got rather worried about not having something that he really could do. It didn't work out. He tried two or three other things for us and it didn't work. Sheldon then went on his own, tried to do a movie down in the tri-state area down in the zinc mines, he would up very, very tragically. He shot himself, or he shot his wife, and one of the kids and himself. But it's one of the things I'm sorry didn't happen because I looked forward to it, I mean it would be a wonderful thing that you could help a guy. I saw him many times afterward and I saw the resentment that he had toward having been the checkbook for some of the leftwingers and others. He never had a chance to be himself. It was one of the worst cases I've ever known in my experience of the wealthy son who couldn't get away from it. It's a long story but I made too much of it but at least I thought you'd be interested in it.

RICHARD DOUD: What about Gerald Hanson?

ROY STRYKER: Gerald Hanson came in and worked around our file mounting pictures and didn't stay too long, was a nice Northwest boy. He was a good worker and everything he did was effective but he doesn't -- there's no residue that you look back and say, that's Gerald Hanson.

RICHARD DOUD: I see. I don't have this name on my list...

ROY STRYKER: By the way, I wish you'd stop and check that back to see...

RICHARD DOUD: It seems to me that I recall an early photographer or something by the name of Elmer Johnson or Thompson or...

ROY STRYKER: Elmer Johnson was the head of our laboratory in the -- when we first set our laboratory up after we left the Department of Agriculture Building -- you see we had used the Department's laboratory when we first started after the famous administrative order which said, "All photographers, all cameras, all stuff will have to come over here." That's when our office was on the second floor of the administration building. We used the Department's laboratory, and Mr. Blake at that time was in charge of that, was very decent to us. Then we went over to L Street and set up a laboratory over there. Elmer Johnson organized it, ran it. Interesting fellow, competent, and we picked up people here, hither and yon, some of them were news photographers who needed jobs, and came in, not a Roy Stryker Dixon, but he did good work. But I don't look back upon it as a high point but still they did good work and it was effective. The laboratory wasn't well built, a few times the sewers backed up into the tanks. One man who worked for us was spending his evenings going around peeping with his cameras over transoms and so on, on naked women. Johnson caught him and came over and said, "I fired him," and I said, "Well you know, Ted, it isn't as easy as that." He said, "I can fire any man that does that in my laboratory." That's a passing story. When we moved then to the other building we moved into a really fine laboratory, Ted was restless and was on the way out, he was an ex-newspaper man.

RICHARD DOUD: What about Paul Carter? He was a photographer I believe.

ROY STRYKER: Paul Carter. Let me go back. Our first Information head when I went in was John Franklin as he was known, had a column, John, or Jay Franklin Carter -- not John Franklin, but Jay (J A Y) Franklin Carter. Paul Carter was his brother and Jay Franklin was very much our friend and we can be very thankful for him because as Information Chief he was the man who let us alone mostly, cooperated with us mostly, understood us mostly,

and understood Rex. A very able man, he came and wanted Paul Carter, his brother to have a job. We took him, and Paul was decent, nice fellow, went out for us on several trips, never turned in too much, recognizing he was there more or less because he had some influence used for him, decided to leave, went up to Dartmouth, and opened up a camera shop, a sort of hangout. He was quite successful at it, had some malady, he was large, overweight, oversized, and something which I don't know happened and he died during this period, because some internal thing in his makeup didn't stand the shock of this particular disease. It was rather tragic. It wasn't pleasant exactly for the boy around because he was there, he knew he didn't belong, his pictures have never showed up, it would be quite a job to find a picture today that you can put in the collection as Paul Carter's. And it was tragic for him because he had to suffer under the thought that he wasn't delivering.

RICHARD DOUD: There were some other photographers I think maybe came in late, or were sort of peripheral and all, people we haven't contacted, probably won't, you might want to mention. Esther Bubley comes to mind.

ROY STRYKER: Esther Bubley came down at the behest, at the recommendation of Edward Steichen. We had no place as a photographer so she worked in the laboratory for a while. By this time we were O.W.I. You see we had become O.W.I. at the last. So there were photographers who were never Farm Security people who did work on the Farm Security file, or who were on the payroll of Farm Security as Farm Security. Esther was one of these. And she came down and worked in the laboratory and worked around, and about the time, shortly before I left she went out and did several jobs and some very interesting jobs. She did a trip on a bus, she did the famous thing on Memorial Day over on the cemetery just across the bridge...

RICHARD DOUD: Arlington?

ROY STRYKER: Arlington. Take on by some D.A.R. people because they thought she was unpatriotic taking pictures around. Esther turned her camera on these ladies and came out with a superb set of pictures, quite something. But she was there a short time, and what she did was very good.

RICHARD DOUD: Can you think of any others that should be mentioned?

ROY STRYKER: Stop it (the machine). (INTERRUPTION) Would you like to go down there with me and I'll give you the high sign and you can pick it up, or do you want me to go and find something and tell you who they are?

RICHARD DOUD: You go over it.

ROY STRYKER: All right.

RICHARD DOUD: Let's start, let's carry on with the photographers first since we're sort of on that.

ROY STRYKER: Well you better hold up then -- oh, all right. Now you come down to Arthur Siegel. Arthur Siegel came on after the OWI he came in. Arthur Siegel is a Detroit boy, very brilliant young sociologist, he's now in Chicago and has done remarkably well. He was a curious person in many ways. You'd send him out on a job and he'd blow up on it, but he came down and worked out of the office, he did wonderful things for us. But he was never -- I never seemed to be able to hit with him, to send him out on projects. I gave him a Standard Oil job and sent him out to do the highways for me. It didn't work. I know why it didn't work; we know that the trouble was, but it didn't work. But he's a very brilliant guy, and he did a few things. Esther Bubley we talked about; John Vachon; and Paul Vanderbilt. All right, now that's all that are listed under photographers.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I might are you to say something more about Jack Delano, in case we don't get ahold of him, and we may not...

ROY STRYKER: We will, we'll get him, don't worry, we'll get him. Well, Jack, as I told -- I'll start repeating from scratch -- Jack is from one of those Jewish homes that has left its imprint, not too much money, but left its imprint on its two boys -- I think it was two boys, one of them is a very fine violinist, was concertmaster for two or three of the big -- I believe the New Orleans Symphony. And Jack has a good musical training, he's got a fine musical background, he has a feel for it, it's in his fingers. He changed his name to Delano because the name is a very difficult name to understand, he changed it largely for reasons of trying to get along. He came to us, he'd been on the WPA, doing work for the WPA.

RICHARD DOUD: What kind of work?

ROY STRYKER: Well, I think he'd done some photography for them; that I don't know, you'll have to check up on that. Now these are things -- I asked Jack time and again to do a biography and it's never come in. Now I'm going to write him hard and get it now. When he went out he took to it very quickly and very fast, moved in to what we wanted to do, and has a very fine personality; wherever he went he got cooperation, and he cooperated. He went into the South with Arthur Raper. Jack did a book with Arthur Raper who is a Southern writer and teacher on certain areas in the South and did the photography for it. I know I've got it, it was



incorporated as a photographic essay in that book. And that was one of his nicest pieces of cooperative work. Wherever he went he got along extremely well. And he quickly fell into the pattern of people. I told you once before there's a curious contrast between Jack and Russell. Jack was the artist and being the artist would say, "What one picture could I take that would say Vermont?" Russell was a -- what is it in botany they call the man who classifies? -- is that taxonomy? -- No. There's a word for it, he takes apart and gives you all the details of all the plant. Russell is the engineer who wants to take it all apart and lay it on the table and says, "There sir, there you are in all its parts." And it was interesting to see two competent guys, a great deal alike, warm, friendly, energetic, fitting like gloves into the thing, you know, hand in glove, and yet utterly different. And I said to them one day, "Jack, for God's sake, why don't you take a little of Russell, and Russell, why don't you take a little of Jack?" It was interesting contrast between the two people. Later, when he was there, he married his present wife, a charming girl, very able girl, and I think again it was one of those cases where the wife contributed very much when she traveled with him. First, he had a companion, his home was on wheels and she contributed her part too. She was a trained pianist, by the way, but cold as a fish. She said, "I was given a fine training, a far better training musically than Jack had, but Jack was a musician and I was just an automation." She, by the way -- Irene, was one of my assistants at Standard Oil and did that little thing called, developed that line called 'photo memo'. She, by the way, did one of the Christmas cards for Unicef this last period. But they were a very, very wonderful team, she was in that series of pictures that I showed you here. Well, there's a lot more I could say about Jack, but I think I've given you in a quick, easy way that he fitted the pattern, and he delivered the product, and his pictures are Jack's pictures and he had his own stamp on them, but they fitted.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, let me cut this off now, I'd like to go down this other list: Harold Ballou.

ROY STRYKER: Harold Ballou was the information man in Region One, which was the New England area: Pennsylvania, New England and I believe, New York. Harold was an old newspaper man, had been in Spain, spoke Spanish fluently, came back and taught Romance languages -- spoke Italian -- I believe at Cornell taught Romance languages for a while. An excellent regional man, again a man who understood what we were doing, used our photographers intelligently, worked with us intelligently, and was a pleasure -- like George Stoney -- was a pleasure to work with. He is in Washington, he is retired now, and is doing some parttime work. But he had quite an understanding of what we were trying to do, was sympathetic, didn't always want us to do all the little trifles and yet we were very happy to cooperate with him because it was a quid pro quo and very vocal, is probably a little mellow now, and will probably be a little bit of the fan club, but might just give you some significant things. It was a pleasure to send our people up because he would think through a project for you, he would see what ought to be done, and he saw it in its broader terms what we wanted, and we in turn gave him the things he needed. But it was one of those fine cooperations. Now I will give you, if you want to stop that, I'll give you his address. Harold was a man with a good deal of imagination, very much like George Stoney. And of the three or four, those are the two outstanding ones I did -- there were three or four or five really outstanding men that we worked with, but those two particularly were. Now those are the only two people that I recommend you try to get. There is still in Washington Phil Brown, who is now Information Chief of the Farm Home Administration, which is the residue or replica -- I don't know -- a very nice guy, and an intelligent guy, I don't know whether you'd want to see him or not, I can't be sure, he's a very close friend of Arthur's. And he lived near Rex in Wilson, New York, came in was an assistant for information. Likeable, I have nothing but the warmest feelings for him, but I don't know if you could get enough out of him or not; I really don't know. It would have to be up to you to try it out. It might be interesting to see, I know he gets very impatient, wishes that some of the old days were back and that they had a photographer. I don't think -- he's not bitter, he's an older guy now and has settled in, and said, "Hell! I'm going to retire some day and I've got a job and I'll make the best of it." You'd have to make up your own mind whether you want to see him or not, I can't tell you.

RICHARD DOUD: He's worth considering anyway.

ROY STRYKER: But you see he's in a strategic spot in many ways because he's carrying on.

RICHARD DOUD: Continuation, yes.

ROY STRYKER: Yes. Bill Staats again was one of our friends. He was in the Northwest and we had fine cooperation from him and he got good cooperation from us. But Bill Staats, I haven't any idea where he is and I don't think you could find him, and I'm not going to push him any farther.

RICHARD DOUD: He was regional director?

ROY STRYKER: He was regional information man in the Northwest region out of Portland. A man with a fine sense of humor, the photographers got along extremely well with him, and he again was one of the men that understood what we were doing, and we liked him, and we helped him and he helped us. And if he were around, and I knew where he was and what he was doing now, I would say yes, see him. But I don't think you should bother. Now Jack Fleming is now with Dave Lawrence's magazine "U.S. News and World Report", he is head of foreign operations. I'll tell you a little bit about Jack. When I first went down I had no office and I sat in the office

with Jack Fleming. That's when Arthur Rothstein went down -- Arthur used a chair in there too. Jack was very tolerant of us, very understanding of us, and to this date had a very warm feeling for what we were doing. He was Milton Eisenhower's assistant in the Information, that was the information office of the Department of Agriculture. I think Jack was one of the men who blossomed a great under this new climate that came in. Milton didn't. But Jack blossomed under it. And he has a very warm spot for Farm Security, I think he liked it, and I'm not sure but what Jack Fleming might be worth talking to. He has a very warm feeling for me, and he just might be worthwhile, because Jack is a very bright guy. Just might be. Some of his observations of our early operations. He saw much of how the thing as it went by, he is an information man and he would see it as from Information. And I'm not sure. You'll find him over at Dave Lawrence's place. I could write him and tell him that you might be over but I don't know, I could drop him a note, I don't know what you need to. Jack is enough on his own feet there's no reason why you couldn't go to him. Some of these people you sort of have to prepare the way but you don't need to with him.

RICHARD DOUD: Good.

ROY STRYKER: I can tell you a little which I don't think you'd want to bring up again. I'll tell you two things. Shut that off. Jim McCamy was one of the bright boys out of Wisconsin who came down to be an assistant, special assistant in Wallace's office. You see, they always had these offices, like they always do, some bright boys who do various things. And Marion Post's husband, Wolcott, was one of those boys, very bright, very competent. Jim McCamy came, he was very bright and very competent. He now teaches up at Wisconsin, head of government, was at Bennington for a while. A man whom I was deeply fond of, and a place where I could go and spill my troubles, not that I expected him to do everything, because he was too smart and I was smart enough not to expect him to, but I could pour out my troubles and he'd listen to me. There was a nice rapport between us. And Pare Lorentz whom you know. I'll tell you a little bit about Pare. Pare, you see, when Rex set this up he decided the newspapers were against him. There were new means of communication, the movies, and pictures, and they did something else extremely interesting, they brought in a woman, by the name of Marion Carter, and she made documentary platters for radio, and they were extremely interesting. I wish to damn we could find some of them.

RICHARD DOUD: I asked Tugwell about those and he said he doesn't remember them.

ROY STRYKER: They're gone now, they're finished. It's a shame nobody saved them. I had four or five of them in our office and some damn fool threw them out. Well, those were things that Rex did think about. Lorentz came in to make, of course, as you know, he had been with McCall's, a very brilliant guy, in some ways one of the most American guys I've ever known; he came down to do this movie. Jay Franklin understood him, and it was Jay Franklin's great forte. He understood these things, he was an information man, wasn't trying to block it like some of them later, like the usual kind of government bureaucrat. And Rex understood, but Rex had a great trait. I'm going to tell you this little story. I told you I was late getting down there on account of this eye trouble. And Rex or Jay Franklin told Pare to get things going. By the time I got down there Pare was -- money was no item -- he just took off in a jet plane and just flew high, wide and handsome. Well, he didn't have much time to get me fouled up. Then he had his movie to do, so he took over on that, and I went with one day when he talked to Rex about his movie. He had given Rex the script and this you see was a very interesting example of how Rex operated. He wanted Rex's comments, what he had to say, and Rex finally said to him, "Well, Mr. Lorentz, you know I've never made a movie in my life, I never expected to, and you are down here because we are convinced that you are extremely competent. Now why don't you go out and make the movie. If it isn't good you won't make another one; if it is good we don't know what'll happen. But I think you had better go on, on your own and not let nobody bother you." You see that was when he was going to do "The River" -- his first one was the "Dust Story"...

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: The second one was going to be "The River", -- "The Flood and the River". So the boys from the region down in Little Rock came up and said to Rex -- I was in on that meeting -- "You know, we think we can be of great help to him, and we ought to check with him carefully and keep an eye on him, because he's down there, we know the river." And they made a big play, the Information Chief and his assistant, and Rex said to them, "Men, I'm sure you know all about the river, but I don't think that you have any supervision, I don't think any of you ever made a movie. Have you? But I'm sure that Mr. Lorentz will come to you for help that he needs, I think he's that intelligent." I can almost remember most of the words, I think I can. And they persisted, and he said, "By the way, I believe you've been putting through some very strong memorandums that you need more help. I think you'd better take some of this help of yours and do what you've got to do and don't worry about any more help. I think you'd better take some of this help of yours and do what you've got to do and don't worry about any more help, but let's leave Mr. Lorentz alone." See, there was a sample. I don't know whether you ought to see Pare or not. I think you might enjoy seeing him.

RICHARD DOUD: I know personally I'd like to see him.

ROY STRYKER: I think you ought to go see him. I think it would be a very smart idea for you to go to see him. I haven't any idea what you'll get out of it frankly. I must tell you a little bit about Pare. A brilliant guy, a guy whom I look back on with the warmest feelings, a man who never produced as fully as he should have, a man whom Bob Flaherty, the great old documentarian himself, said he was one of the great movie makers of this United States. He made two pictures for the government, and the third picture which was based upon the famous medical complex up in Chicago. When he got involved and went to Hollywood to make another movie and fouled everything up because he had no business being out there. My friend Ed Locke, went to work for him and I'm afraid that was part of the triggering off of Ed's downfall. I'll digress a little bit and tell you about Pare because I think you'd like to know. Pare was a heavy drinker, particular, and I will give you a little story about one evening I had with him. Pare started early at "21", I didn't go there, I didn't want to, I didn't want to meet him -- I didn't want to be involved in "21", but I met him along around 11 o'clock at night when he'd reached about a third of his bars, and the rest of the night we spent talking, meeting people, and Pare drinking. It never seemed to faze him, but I told you I think he was one of the grandest Americans I've ever known. And I think it's a tragedy, I agree with Bob Flaherty, it was a tragedy that Pare Lorentz didn't make more movies. He made footage for his great American movie, it was never produced, the footage lay around, it was in the government. It was picked up during the OWI days, and the footage was taken back and tried to put in another movie; he had a brilliant cameraman from down on the West Coast. And Jonathan liked him, you see Jonathan wrote for him when he was at McCall's, he did that -- he did one -- I'll give you a copy that can go in the Archives. I think he went and did a special one when we started in the Army about camps for soldiers, what are they doing to our complex, and several of our photographers went out and photographed for him and the pictures appeared in there. But Jonathan was doing a series of articles for him -- Jonathan Daniels -- and Jonathan would be down there early in the morning, you know, and Pare wouldn't arrive till noon. But I give you this background of the guy because he married -- his first wife and he were divorced -- and he married one of Myer's daughters, you know, the Washington Post, a pile of money, and he never did anything afterwards. I could tell you story after story, and I have still the greatest respect for this guy and deep feelings of remorse that the guy never produced more. His two movies are terrific. Have you ever seen them? Terrific! This third movie he did on that Chicago medical situation was quite something and that's where Ed Locke worked with him. He fouled up the job to be around the TVA, he fouled it all up because he tried to make a 'boy meets a girl' out of it, and the whole thing just looked awful. But Pare would come in town and call me up, "Roy Stryker" -- he stayed at the Carleton -- "Roy Stryker, get the guys and come on over. I've had religion. I just came from TVA." And by God, he had had religion, and he was like a man who had religion. It was something. I tell you I never hesitated to take a night with him although I tell you it was rough. But he respected my drinking habits when he drank. And many a night I've gotten in finished because -- but it was worth hit. Now my friend Peter Odegard wanted to meet him. Peter was at the Treasury Department. So we were in New York and I told Peter what we were up against, and Peter and Pare were just about like that. But we got back to the hotel where we were staying at around three or four in the morning, and I said, "Peter, for God's sake help now, when I tell you 'get in that elevator' you get in and stay in there, I'll hold Pare out until that elevator closes, and I'll get in, but for God's sake don't let him in the room." But Peter never got over that night. He was fantastic. And Peter mentioned some names of people in the Treasury and Pare hated them and had trouble with them -- and I thought he was going to hit Peter. The guy was fantastic, he's a character. But he never produced anything since. When he married I was at Standard Oil and I went up to meet him, he wanted to talk to me, he'd been drinking very heavily, he poured himself out as usual, and I finally got downstairs -- his wife, Elizabeth, was gone -- I got downstairs around 3:30, I was trying to get a cab, he held me up and I had to let that cab go. He said, "I'll give the man some money, go on, I want to talk to you." I got through at five that morning after an hour and a half but I had a hell of a day coming. The man was fantastic.

RICHARD DOUD: Is he still living in New York?

ROY STRYKER: Oh, he's up in Westchester County. I am not -- Russell knows his address, I can get it from Russell. Just wait a second. Hold the machine just a moment. Jack Bryan. Oh, we go back. Well, now of course you got the Information people. Jay Franklin Carter. The next man was -- well, there were several others, but I'll -- Jack Bryan came in, no use going to him, he was a terribly nice person, very understanding and very good. Arch Mercey was the assistant administrator under, came in with Jay Franklin, was there for a short time and then went on over and he was there with some of the others and an all right guy but a little operator, not as astute as he should have been, got me in several difficulties. He was the guy that wrote the caption for the two -- the girl and her brother who sat on the bed -- and called them "Tenant Madonna," and mailed it out and we didn't know it had gone out. Then of course Jack Fisher was the last man that was there when I was there. And Jonathan Garst was another extremely competent guy. Jonathan Garst was a geographer, was the regional information man in San Francisco, and a surprising character. I don't think you could find him now. He, by the way, he is the brother of the famous corn grower in Iowa where...

RICHARD DOUD: Oh! That's where that name comes to mind, yes.

ROY STRYKER: But Jonathan was quite something - bull voice, burly guy, trained in geography in Scotland, very likable guy who I again had warm feelings for. And he took his place out there, he was one of the leaders. And I

came in one day, my secretary, a nice little Jewish girl, came in one day and get me out of this...this is a story I want on the tape. George Barnes is somebody I don't think you need bother with, a very good friend, and he was very interesting. He was head of information for Soil Conservation Service, and he was not a competitor of ours, but he was a complement to it, and we worked together a lot, and he was one of the very intelligent guys around, so there was a great pleasure in having another operation going on like that. But he isn't worth -- you shouldn't need to...Ernestine Evans is a woman that I think I mentioned to you once. And I don't know just where you'd come out now. Ernestine Evans was an editor, a children's book editor in New York, she did a lot of editing work, a rather brilliant woman, she had a lot to do with getting Walker Evans on this feet. She got him the job of doing the pictures for "Crime in Cuba", which was one of his first big jobs. As I told you, he has become a very snotty... She was interested in rammed earth houses and she wanted to know if Walker could do a series to present a report to the Farm Security, and he did a filthy job, a terrible thing for her. She married a man down in Albuquerque or Santa Fe, and it turned out very badly and she's lived since that time there's a breakup of that home. But she has fantastic connections in England. She was very involved with the whole documentary movie complex, knows everybody. If somebody were going to Europe and they talked to Ernestine and she gave them a series of letters and this man came back -- he was with the government -- he said, "My God, I got nothing -- even the President's letter weren't as good as a couple of her letters." He went to England and Scandinavia. She is an incessant letter-writer and a very strange letter-writer and I didn't answer letters as well as I should. She's a very good friend of Ernestine Evans. I don't know what condition she's in now. But you might ask Miss Javits, would she think that it would be worthwhile talking to Ernestine Evans, and you can tell her if you want, that I raised the question: how is Ernestine, and could she be reached, and would it -- she may be in bad condition now, but just say that, if you want, that Roy Stryker is very much of the opinion that she could contribute considerable to the background of this documentary thing, that maybe too much, I don't know, but you ask Miss Javits. A very interesting person. Now she's not one. The next person is Adele Ford. She was Beanie Baldwin's secretary and she is not -- you needn't bother her. I ran my own political life on my level, and I took care of myself and did my throatcutting, but I always wanted to be sure I was not going into something that I had better keep out of, so I would call Adele Ford and say, "Adele, unless I get a telephone call from you which says No, I'm going to do so and so, and I'm going to see so and so, and somebody is going to get hurt." Well sometimes my secretary, Mrs. -- you know the girl, the secretary you interviewed would say, "Miss Ford says No." One day the phone rang and Miss Ford said, "Could you drop by for a minute?" I said, "Yes." "Mr. Baldwin wants to know if you'd mind going by and having lunch with Mr. Daniels fairly soon and quietly raise the following issue as you personal one?" That was a very interesting relationship. But you have nothing to worry about here, you needn't worry about it. The Kuhns had nothing to do with us Farm Security-wise. At the time the big mural was made it was Ferdinand Kuhn and Peter Odegard were working with the Treasury and they were both smart enough to know how to handle it. So when the thing was all ready to go, when Roskam had it all ready, they found out that he was due in the White House at a certain time, they planned to get over there so that his time was so short -- his secretary was on their side -- and he was just in the midst of telling them what ought to be done with this thing, and his secretary came in and said, "Mr. Morgenthau, you know you are almost late for the White House." "Oh, my God, well go ahead and make it. That's all right, it's all right, it looks good to me." That's the kind of things you learned how to do. Jonathan Daniels we've talked about. Archie MacLeish we've talked about. Luther Evans, by the way, was in the Library with the librarian when we moved the negatives over there, was very understanding of Paul, and I think Paul Vanderbilt's life would have been far different if Luther Evans had stayed on. But it took somebody like Luther to understand Paul. Luther Evans was down at the time the Senators attacked the file and the pictures, which you know. He called me one day and he said, "Roy Stryker, I don't want you to worry one bit, you have nothing to worry about, because, you know, once this stuff comes to the Library it's sacred, if they come over here messing around looking for anything I'll sic my policemen on them, and I can do it." Eisenhower, no. Peter Odegard I've told you about. Harold Lasswell who is at Yale Law School got very enamored of our operation and I have something that's either in or going into the file. Lasswell got so excited he wrote a little report, a little memorandum about the place of photography. You see, he was very much involved in early propaganda, if you will, very intelligent, very high-class propaganda, the facts and figures outfit, and the OWI. He later came into OWI. But I'm sorry we didn't see more of him. Now Willard Z. Park was a professor of anthropology at University of Oklahoma. And he and Russ hit it off very well. And Russ was taking pictures of the immigrants. And Willard Park got so enamored that he wanted an exhibit, and we made one. And some local hierarchy there, and some of the newspaper boys and so on, got real indignant and took him on. We made the exhibit and they had a formal affair, it was quite a show down there. They raised hell about it. And so Willard Park rounded them up, and got some cars, and took them down on the bridges with the pictures in his hand, and said, "There you are." And they backed down and two newspaper men more or less wrote an apology more or less and things like that. Those are the photographs I'm trying to find. I'm trying to find anything we've got on that. Russell has nothing. That's part of the stuff that has been lost, because it was a very interesting exhibit. It's lost. Robert Thorpe was at that time Robert Smuck, and he was over at the Public Health Service and worked with Phil Brown and others, and we worked very closely. See, we had to earn money and under the act, a special law in Farm Security, we could do work on reimbursable basis. Normally you couldn't do that. So we were doing quite a little work for the Public Health Service, photographic work. And Robert Thorpe was over there and he had been over for a while on Suburban Resettlement where Carl Mydans was. He had been in Europe, he got enamored with all 35 millimeter cameras, you know, the blowups and the...But he is now known as Robert Thorpe,

and he's down with the Cancer people.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, let me ask you something about Thorpe. Somebody mentioned...

ROY STRYKER: Remember his name was Robert Smuck, it later became Robert Thorpe. He's now with the Cancer people more or less doing their design and publicity.

RICHARD DOUD: I think Mydans mentioned...

ROY STRYKER: Yes. He worked over there. You see, Mydans was hires over at Suburban Resettlement and Bob was over there.

RICHARD DOUD: Did Thorpe have anything to do, though, with starting to set up this project that you later came in on?

ROY STRYKER: No, you see...

RICHARD DOUD: This is a misunderstanding on my part.

ROY STRYKER: No, you see, what happened is -- Jack Lansel was head of Suburban Resettlement. He also had a man named Wallace Richards who was my nemesis out in Pittsburgh, later went to Pittsburgh and became quite a character out there, a very able guy, and they were going full blast out there, and they hired a photographer, and Thorpe apparently knew Carl and they brought their photographers. And that was before I got in there to get the thing started to the moment, and here's one of the things that had me worried that we'd probably never get off our feet, so they were involved with Greenbelt. Greenbelt was out at the experimental farm. So they were doing two very fancy books, and Carl was taking all the pictures for Thorpe because that was the kind of thing he wanted. And Jack Fisher worked for him a while. And they had quite an interesting little group over there. They were doing these books and I would like to have captured one of those dummies. That was one of the most expensive books ever made in the government or out. And Bob was designing it. He'd been in Germany and caught fire with all that new -- the Bauhaus and all that new, which he didn't completely understand, he hadn't enough of it, he have it the touch of a boy in this country who also was an advertising man. I admit in all it was a very interesting job. So they had a photographer and that was Carl, and when I got down there, there was Carl Mydans over there; there was another operation headed over here with no photographer yet, but they were going to buy thirty-some Leicas for their field people and all these things, and I went around, I went over to see the boys over at Suburban, "We're certainly awfully glad to have met you, Roy Stryker, and anything we can do for you we'll be glad." So after two days of this going around finally I went in to see Grace, and rex came in, and well, I said, "Well, it was a lot of fun, I'm sorry I'm late because I don't think we'll do much." Rex said, "You don't? What do you think it will cost?" "Plenty." So he asked a few simple questions, he walked into his office and shut the door. Two or three days later orders went out and they all gathered in Jay Franklin Carter's office and he read a nasty thing. I wish I could find that administrative order, I didn't have brains enough to get myself a copy of it, God damn it. And they all arrived and when that order was read -- it read "all photographers, all negatives, all cameras, anything to do with photography will be transferred to the Information Division over here."

RICHARD DOUD: I bet you felt ten feet tall about then.

ROY STRYKER: It saved us. That saved us. Otherwise we would have been in all directions. Lansel wanted progress photographs taken not quite, but damn near every time they laid a brick. He was going to put the heat on me, and I said to Rex, "All right, this is the bill, this is what it will literally cost." There was a time when it cost us \$3,000 a month to do his progress photographs. And Rex said, "All right, have you got the budget to pay for it?" Lansel said, "No." I said, "For God's sake, Rex, you don't have to photograph the making, the putting up of a window in a building. Let's be realistic. You don't have to give the engineers Leicas; in fact a simple box camera is better." They all hated me for it but I saved them money and got the products. Well, that's just -- so Bob Thorpe was over there. He later transferred to Public Health. I worked with him over there.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, can I ask you something now before we go down the list?

ROY STRYKER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm a little confused about the relationship between the Resettlement Administration, and Suburban Resettlement and Rural Resettlement. Were they all parts of the parent Resettlement Administration or not?

ROY STRYKER: Stop that for a minute.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I guess then...

ROY STRYKER: Go on down, now you're getting down to staff people, and we're pretty well trimming everybody.

You've got your list there, you've got...

RICHARD DOUD: Mark Adams is there, Mark is sort of an unknown name to me.

ROY STRYKER: Well, Mark Adams came in to, he was from Waterfield, Texas, he was one of the Texas breed that came up there to get jobs, and was a young newspaper man, a very brilliant young guy. He got routed over to us, he was of an editor. You remember you have one little statement he made, typed pages of "What is Farm Security?", he was very colorful, quite nice, and Mark stayed for a while and served as an editor down there, getting picture ideas out, didn't do too well at that because he wasn't used to that kind of stuff but he was a nice person to have around to give a certain flavor to the place and did quite a little around the file. But he went back to Texas and I've heard no more of him since. I hear of him by way of Russ, they're very good friends. But he had all he wanted of Washington so he just...Walter Payton was the boy that I told you was the Negro boy that became an obstetrician. Reginald Hotchkiss was the not-too-bright a guy from a nice family down in Virginia, he took care of, checked the cameras, was in charge of the negatives, and absolutely trustworthy, nothing ever got by him. And when everything was all over I told one little story of the spirit of that place, and it got one of the nicest illustrations of, it was Reginald Hotchkiss -- I went back down after I had gone to Standard Oil, he said, "Could I talk to you, Mr. Stryker? I'd like to see you for a minute." I thought perhaps he was looking for a job or wanted some help. "What do you want?" "What's going to happen to these negatives?" To me Reginald Hotchkiss, that was the nicest thing that was ever said by anybody because he didn't think he had those kind of feelings. But those were the things he had to protect. Frank Lee, I told you about Frank Lee. Ed Locke, you know about Ed, a wonderful guy that's gone. Barbara Wright was a girl around town, a strangely erratic brilliant gal who worked for us for a little while and...she was all right. Louis Gitler was another boy who came back from Germany and came over, figured he was another one of those guys that would be an editor and help keep the file going...had been in Germany for some time and I told him...I'll digress for just a slight amount, I had one little girl called Mrs. Wakeham, she was my first secretary, she was beloved by everybody, and John Collier knew her very well. And she, by the way, if she'd been around, she'd give you more information than all the rest of the girls put together. Her husband was drowned, she went out on her own for a while, went to New York, went to Alaska, and did a job up there -- not for us -- came back, married some guy from up there, told John Collier, she said, "My life will be changed, I married a man that probably isn't like the rest of them, but I'll have to wash my hands of all of them and I want to tell them goodbye and I'm going to disappear into a new life." And nobody ever heard any more about her. She was the little girl that said to me one day when she was taking dictation, "You know, Mr. Stryker, I work for you from the time I get out of bed in the morning till the time I go to bed at night." I said, "Oh, come on Clare -- or Toots -- what the hell are you telling me?" "What makes you think I don't?" I said, "I don't believe any such damn nonsense." She said, "Let me tell you something. This is for two weeks. This is the number of book you suggested I might like to read. You gave me so many clippings, I ought to read this magazine." I said, "Well, I didn't realize I was imposing on you." She said, "I love it and please don't stop." But she also -- Gitler came down there to work and he said to her, "Well, Mr. Stryker is suggesting that I read this and that." And she said, "Well, if you're not a damn fool you'll read it, you'll get an education that won't cost you anything extra, and if you don't read it, you're going to catch hell." Gitler told me about it. Gitler didn't do very well, he didn't understand us and he didn't last, he didn't know what we wanted, and he didn't settle. He was very clever, very bright. Vernon Pope had nothing to do with -- Vernon Pope was in the early days of Look; he was one of the editors. Gerald F. Winfield was with the old -- what is the outfit that followed "Point Four?" -- Gerald Winfield was a missionary and was in Cornell and I got a job to go to Cornell to talk to them about visual education, visual things. I think there were 75 missionaries in special courses up there. I went up, and I carried with me some very fantastic things, that's one of them there, it's a sound record built around the use of the government initials, piece of propaganda, and then I showed slides, and one thing and another, and I had all kinds -- I had a wonderful evening. One man said, "What do I do? Out in my country they haven't even seen photographs yet."

RICHARD DOUD: What about a guy named Harry Coleman?

ROY STRYKER: Harry Coleman. Well, as we were coming down to the end of our -- we were OWI, and we were coming down to close to the time of my going -- and OWI -- we survived even as Farm Security and worked for OWI under our own jurisdiction. Harry Coleman had been over at the domestic OWI across the way over in the building over across one of the other -- it wasn't the Treasury Building, I've forgotten what it was -- it's where Social Security finally landed. There had been a big battler earlier about who was going to have jurisdiction. We were supposed to have been taken over lock, stock and barrel, and have our back ends kicked, and they were going to put us under -- but we didn't do it because thanks to Frank Lee we managed to survive for quite a while, and they had a little guy in charge of photographers over there and he was a little twirp and he got to playing with the girls' garters one night, one late afternoon and he played with the wrong girl's garters and she went in and reported him to some high up, and hell broke loose and they had to fire this guy. So I had a call at the house just before I was going -- I was working late, and the top man of OWI said, "Tomorrow morning we're going to transfer all the photographers and everybody to you, and Mr. Harry Coleman will come over and be in charge of it and will be your assistant..."

End of side 1

RICHARD DOUD: Did he take over then when you left in any sense?

ROY STRYKER: No, and things got very badly snarled up over there and the photographers were transferred out and they went on to New York and were hired most of them for overseas work and to tell you the truth I couldn't give you a very clear picture of what happened after I left town. But I know it was an unhappy situation there. Some of the photographers got out. It was a very stupid thing to suddenly throw all those people back onto us, it was unfair to their photographers, and it wasn't very fair to us. I was glad I was getting out.

RICHARD DOUD: Now I have a man named Elmer Davis down. I don't know where I got the name.

ROY STRYKER: Oh! Oh! Oh! Oh! Elmer Davis! Good Lord, he was the Elmer Davis. The newspaper man. He was head of, was the OWI man, yes, he was head of OWI.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh!

ROY STRYKER: It was that Elmer Davis. He was the man that approved -- when we went to Jonathan Daniels and the man came down from domestic, or overseas, and gave orders that the file was to be moved to New York because they were in the saddle at that time, and we went to Jonathan Daniels who went to the White House and finally got the approval to make a firm and absolutely unbreakable -- it didn't need to be but that's the way they said it to me -- when Elmer Davis finally gave his okay, that was the last one. No, I'll take it back, Bob Sherwood was then -- Elmer Davis had gone, Elmer Davis headed it up before Bob Sherwood came in. But he was head of OWI. That was the great columnist and newspaper man.

RICHARD DOUD: What about George Barnes?

ROY STRYKER: George Barnes was the man I mentioned...

RICHARD DOUD: Was he on our list?

ROY STRYKER: George Barnes started out as Head of Information for the Soil Conservation program. He then came over to OWI as Milton Eisenhower's assistant and he headed up the information floor of OWI.

RICHARD DOUD: Okay.

ROY STRYKER: You came down to this list and you see there outside of government Mrs. Florence Kellogg was -- the Kelloggs were the major-domos on The Survey and The Survey Graphic and my contacts there were very good and it was one of my regular routine spots for more reasons than one: First, because I always had something to sell; second, and probably more important, as I said with many people you've got to get your battery charged up again, you went up for new inspiration. And many things happened because Florence always took care of, most of the time took care of them, her husband was too busy, but suggestions, criticisms, ideas, corrections from her were always very interesting, and some of them were specific, a picture story in a magazine but more often, and this was one of the indirect -- if she talked to you you didn't go back and report the words, you went back because you had changed yourself, you had dropped something, you had gained something. So that was her function, and it was a very important function. She is still alive, but I don't think you'd get too much out of her, not now. She's still pretty bright and sharp. Yes. Emma Little. Emma Little was sort of a picture researcher and a picture getter and extra hand at all kinds of things on the New York Times Magazine. Very often down in Washington I'd get a long distance call just at quitting time, "Roy Stryker, this is Emma. You couldn't get a series of pictures out as follows?" "Well, I'll do my best." Hold a laboratory man, we'd get through around 7 o'clock. We worked. Emma was a very shrewd picture woman, and it was a real pleasure to make the circuit. Emma was always on my circuit because I liked her comments. Quite different than Romana. It was always worth the effort.

RICHARD DOUD: Now, let's see...

ROY STRYKER: Romana Javtiz.

RICHARD DOUD: I've talked to Miss Javitz.

ROY STRYKER: And Cap Pierce was over at Duell, Sloan & Pierce. He came from Harcourt, Brace originally. John Gaus was the head of government, he was, and he came back and forth a lot, did a lot of work for the Department of Agriculture, and John for some reason or other had developed -- he wasn't a photographer -- but he had a lot of interest in our operations and he carried his interest over to Standard Oil. A very brilliant guy and a very interesting guy. He was central to us and very much our friend. John Gaus. And Henry Allen Moe is Guggenheim. Dave Lindsay was with Look magazine, he was the Washington representative, a real bright guy, a real bright guy, very friendly to us and we all liked him, and he made suggestions. Tom Maloney, you know. Russ

Cameron. Willard Morgan you know. Hartley Howe was the son of the old Howe, that was the left hand of the President, and he was the one that did the article in the "Survey Graphic." Well, you've got a copy of it.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: He got very enamored with us. Willard Morgan you know. And Hartley Howe, I'm trying to think about Hartley, I'm trying to think about Hartley Howe -- I've forgotten, I'll be darned, isn't that funny. Hartley Howe. Gosh, I'll think of his name on about two seconds. Edward Steichen you know. Ralph Steiner is a photographer with "PM", their foreign editor, back now doing all kinds of odd jobs and some photography. Ruth Goodhue was the managing editor of "Architectural Forum." Her father designed the very famous Nebraska capitol, a very unusual building. She was another one on my circuit. But I stopped to have breakfast with her, she was over at that time in the Chrysler Building with the Life complex there and I had breakfast with her and I went up to her office. She was the one that said -- I'll tell you this story because it's how I reacted so often -- "Roy Stryker, I wonder if all towns of 5,000 are alike, because they have the same boiler plate, they have the same radio programs, and so on?" Well, I had to go on a trip and when I got back I had an outline on small towns. I was already thinking about it. Paul Taylor you know who he is -- he's Dorothea's husband.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: Gardner Cowles is Mike Cowles. He was Look and he was our boss for a while at OWI. Hank Brennan was at one time the picture editor for Look magazine and he went over to Fortune and was there for a while and then where he is I don't know. Otis Weise was with Ladies' Home Journal, the editor for many, many years, a very close friend of Pare's. And Pare did many jobs for him. He and Pare were quite a pair; Pare could out drink him by far but Otis lived well. Nelson Rockefeller I don't need to tell you. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. Now have I missed anyone on the list that you wanted to know about? Ken Clark and Gilfond were two additional people, were Information people. Gilfond was the boy that was -- I had been down in Florida. He was one of the first guys to give me trouble because I had taken my cut in the budget and I had to hurry back to Washington to protect myself against more cuts. Ken Clark was a very bright and very nice newspaper man. He came in and headed up for a period there before Jack Fisher came. And he was the one I had the most trouble with. Really a terribly nice guy. But I had taken my cut, I knew it was coming, I had to go to some place and when I got back he had cut some more people on his own, and I blew up. Well, I didn't think I could do much, that was the time I told you I went to Grace and said, "Tell Ken Clark I want to see him." I was working in my office and he said, "Could you come in a minute, I want to talk to you." He said, "It's a goddamned funny place when a man can't run his own organization." You see I said to Grace -- she told Ken to cut his budget and I guess he had to do it, there wasn't much choice -- she said, "Of course you're not on his budget, not under his jurisdiction." And so I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, what did you run Tugwell for?" I said, "Well, I didn't exactly run to him," but in a way I did. And he gave me another blast and I said, "There's one thing you forgot to check on, Ken, you never took the trouble to find out how I'm organized in this place. I don't answer to you." He resigned shortly after. But you see that was the difference between success, and that was about two-thirds of our way through, or we would have been in dire straits, if it hadn't been for that. Those are only Information -- well -- now there they are: Franklin, Bryan, Gilfond, Clark, Fischer, that's all. I'll tell you a funny thing about it. Alice and I had been in Vermont. I said, "You know, Alice," you see, I'd learned the taste of blood with Gilfond and I really got myself a good bite out of Clark and I loved him. So I said coming down, "Alice, now I've got to change my ways, I've got to quite being a real son of a bitch, and get along with this guy Fischer, he seems like a decent guy." I think I told you this story.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

ROY STRYKER: Well, I got along with him, and the funny part is, we're very good friends now; we talked about this. He said, "You were damned disagreeable, you were awfully hard to handle," I can understand it now. I never did tell him what Ed Locke told me, "If you stay around, Locke, you can have the job when we get rid of Stryker, he's so difficult to handle."

RICHARD DOUD: Now I want you to tell me something about the exhibits of all things. We're getting the material from you concerning the physical fact of the exhibits, and some of the response to exhibits and all, and what I'm trying to find out, a number of things, one is: who conceived of the type of exhibit, where it would go, what it would do, who planned it, who made it, who was responsible for it, and the problems involved with it.

ROY STRYKER: There is no simple answer.

RICHARD DOUD: Good. A complex answer, then.

ROY STRYKER: But first of all it wasn't one person who conceived, well, there was no one person who decided where they were going to go, we had requests, we promoted some, we worked till we got some where we wanted them. Who designed the? Well, later on when Roskam came, he helped. Milton Tinsley helped design them. Sometimes the people themselves came in that wanted them and gave you ideas of what they'd like.



There was no simple answer for the questions so far that you've asked me.

RICHARD DOUD: It's all right.

ROY STRYKER: We saw a need, we had a lot of purposes, one, we were promoting ourselves by being useful, we were promoting Farm Security in strategic places, we were taking care of our friends, in some places I was selling the photographic file indirectly and roundabout. And sometimes even Grace Falke didn't know exactly why we were doing it but it sounded good. Ben Shahn did a very interesting exhibit at the Democratic Convention in Philadelphia one year; fast, furious and very effective. He built tables sloped like this, that peaked up in the middle, he made a running exhibit for that thing, it was fantastic, cheap, easy to put together, and attracted no end of attention. Some exhibits we had to do, and none of us were very happy about them, they weren't well designed, they met somebody's specifications. They were for a purpose; we cooperated a lot in exhibits, we supplied the pictures, we made things for people who more or less told us what they wanted, and how they wanted it; we gritted our teeth and we made them. Now roughly that is exhibits. Now I would have to see, I would have to go back and see a lot of the exhibits because my mind isn't too clear. We did an awful lot of it and I'd have to be reminded, I'd have to go back -- a lot of things would come back to mind, what happened when we did that, why did we do that, who did we get involved with that was what we liked to do, and I can't do it, that's about as far as I can go.

RICHARD DOUD: In general was the exhibit program, if you could call it that, a successful means of showing your wares?

ROY STRYKER: Yes, I guess so. I never -- I wasn't too happy with a lot of our exhibits and I wasn't too enthusiastic or happy and the result is I don't think there were many exhibits that I remember. I remember Ben Shahn's exhibit so well because it was so unique in design, so effectively selected and so successful in the amount of people that stopped to see it. And the exhibit that we prepared for the University of the North Carolina at the time our famous geographer down there was working on his sample ten countries and we went down and Dorothea and Marion Post photographed and we made the exhibit and took it back down for them. It was very successful, one that we liked, one that was very enthusiastic about, that had a great reception down there. It was an intelligent exhibit. I'll be honest, extremely honest with you, I have not much recollection of what we did at this moment. Of course some of them...

RICHARD DOUD: I found a while ago that I...

ROY STRYKER: I want to add one more thing, I've learned an awful lot about exhibits since I was down there. I wouldn't make some exhibits that we made, if I could help myself, that we made and accepted, and were quite satisfied with because I've become more sophisticated now. Why shouldn't I? I've had a lot of experience doing it since.

RICHARD DOUD: This thing just came up a bit ago. In one of your International Harvester interviews I jotted down a quote that struck me as being rather nice and then I happened to be thinking about it and you said -- pardon me for throwing your own words back at you --

ROY STRYKER: That's all right.

RICHARD DOUD: "There are not many great pictures in the file, there are not many great pictures anywhere." Now I'm not agreeing or disagreeing, but what do you call a great picture?

ROY STRYKER: A great picture. Well, I'm not trying to hedge -- a great picture is, let me see, back up a little. There are great pictures today and they are not great tomorrow. There are great pictures today and they are going to be great pictures right on down through time, not because they've been used a lot, but because they were great pictures probably and it took many, many people keep sensing the same thing. Let me give you a strange example of picture that I don't think was great, that became very, very popular and very much sought after, because I'm curious, I don't know what makes a great picture. I can't tell you for sure. Why do pictures appeal and others don't? What makes a picture appeal time after time, after time, after time? Now this is a little out of the really great pictures. There is a picture that John Vachon took of the oil derricks in the Bay of Venezuela, coming up out of the water. Time after time, and time and time and time again nobody ever refused -- "Well, but that's been used many times -- " the man said, "I don't care, I want that picture." Another reason why. Another man said, "I think I know why: it is so startling and so unusual -- it isn't as much so now but at that time to think that you could get derricks coming right up out of the water and bringing oil up." See that was one element. Now let's go back to Dorothea's picture. It's first of all a deeply involved human picture, of the mother and kids -- there was a certain amount of -- not poverty in the sense that poverty -- there was trouble there, there was a woman who had dignity, there was a woman who looked you in the eye, but you knew she had seen hard times and you went out to her, almost the Virgin -- almost the Mother Mary. We have certain clichés -- I don't like to use the word cliché -- but the mother and child is a very, very powerful and dominant picture, and this was a new version of mother and child. Why Arthur's picture of the man and two kids running? I don't know. I

wish I knew. It lived. Certain pictures that Ansel Adams has taken are going to live down, down, down. He's done a picture of a redwood tree, a beautiful tree and down at the bottom are charred, is a charred area, beautiful pattern. Why do so many people like that? There's something about the tree that just startles you. But there's that beautiful pattern, the color of that (?) and black. I'm sure that's what it is. I don't know whether that's a great picture or not but that picture is extremely popular. People love it and all people who look at it -- it never fails when people see that picture: "Ohhh!!! My, that's a nice picture. Say, I like that picture." We showed it time and again. I think it is very difficult because there is no definition what is a great picture, whether or not it is great, or will it last, I'm convinced that not many pictures are going to be great. And I think the fortuitous enters into it very often; I think if it starts well and gets momentum, it'll be great. But I think in the long pull it won't survive greatness if it doesn't have the elements in it. I think it will have it -- six pictures lined up here on the wall in an exhibit and one of them starts bringing -- the people keep gathering -- and pretty soon it's published in the paper or magazine "this was the most accepted picture at this show." It gets greater. But ten years from then it is a forgotten picture. Another one was a much looked at picture and ten years from then it was just getting momentum, because it had a mother, it had the suffering child, the child that you just wanted to get your hands on, those are the elements that are common, those are the answers to what makes great pictures. I think it's very complex, I think it's as wide as human experience but out of that certain things will come out. I may be wrong. I had a request from--once -- now this is not pictures but photographers -- would I -- they gave us a whole page of photographers' names -- would I pick the world's ten greatest photographers out of that list? And I called up and said, "Are you that hard up that you need to sell this idea? I'll send you my tithe for two months." He said, "Would you write me something?" I said, "Yes, I will." And I wrote Bruce back and said, "Bruce, I can give you my ten at this moment but if I had to do it next week, it's likely to be different because my glandular reactions will be different. Maybe I ought to remember that I didn't like some son of a bitch in there anyway, or something else. Don't be stupid. I'm not communicating a thing. It's like why I don't like to judge pictures. I don't like to go to an exhibit, and in fact I will not be a judge any more under any circumstances for whether -- for their winners of first, second or third prizes. I will go and hang pictures, but I will have nothing more to do with the granting of prizes. Never!

RICHARD DOUD: Did you do much of that while you were at Farm Security?

ROY STRYKER: I've done very little of it in my lifetime, very little, and every time I do it I vow I will never do it again, and I have never done it for a long time.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm bringing this up -- maybe you can't help me on this -- it's quote -- Vanderbilt gave sort of a slide lecture somewhere...

ROY STRYKER: Oh, that's the one he can't tell me where he did it and he gave me a copy of it...

RICHARD DOUD: He's quoting Stryker on Johnston...

ROY STRYKER: Yes.

RICHARD DOUD: Now where would he have found that quote? I would like to know. I have the quote here if you're not...

ROY STRYKER: I can get it for you, I do not have the full quote, I have read it, it's in a magazine, I had forgotten that I did it. It's in that box.

RICHARD DOUD: Oh well, good.

ROY STRYKER: It's in there and the reference is in there, it's the "Social Stories" -- the "Magazine of Social History" something like that. Johnston wrote most of it. Johnston, by the way, was a very interesting, he was in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, he used our file a lot in giving his lectures, he was giving lectures I would say about the farm complex, the type of farms. He said one day a statement that I will never forget, I wish I didn't have to forget it, I wish we could have done it, "Roy Stryker," he said, "You know the job I would like more than any other job that I can think about? Well, I would like to settle down on this file and caption all your photographs." When he said "caption" I knew just what he meant. And I looked at him and I said, "Paul, there is nothing in God's world that I would rather see done than that. It would be the happiest moment of my life to see you starting in." Then that file would have been about three times more than it is now. Then we would have had something, it would have been complete. Then we could lean back and say, "Boys, this is it." But Johnston had done that article and he talked a lot with me, and Paul told me one time when I worried about it, he said, "Well, remember, Roy Stryker, that you talked that incessantly so you may not remember saying those words but it was part of your make-up." And Johnston was a part of it too. So when you get to that you will see the reference, I have been trying to get to that you will see the reference, I have been trying to get the complete copy, I didn't have anybody that could copy when I got the book from the Denver library and I think I will ask John Foote to go to the Pittsburgh library and get the book out and see if he can't copy it because it wasn't a bad job, it ought to be there, but anybody could always find it.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, it disturbed me that -- I mean I liked what was said and I couldn't find the reference to the...

ROY STRYKER: Well, it's in there.

RICHARD DOUD: Okay. That's good enough. I'm disturbed a little bit about all these shooting scripts that -- some of those are in there, too, I think.

ROY STRYKER: Practically all of them, except a little bit so badly typed that I'd have to re-edit them and try to get them straightened out so you could read them. Otherwise they're in there.

RICHARD DOUD: I'm concerned as to the importance of those things. Were they important? Were they followed?

ROY STRYKER: They weren't meant to be followed precisely, and they were really not shooting scripts in the sense of them word.

RICHARD DOUD: Good. That's what I wanted to hear you say.

ROY STRYKER: We used the word shooting, they were outlines of ideas.

RICHARD DOUD: That's more like it.

ROY STRYKER: They were not shooting scripts. A shooting script is a very precise thing - one long shot taken from such and such a position with the left side of the face, have the light overhead. No. You'll look at it and there's nothing of that kind. Look, they are only guides to an area. And as I've said so many times, even as precise a thing as the setting up of a certain kind of plan that's going to be set up, the engineers arrive with blueprints, the pieces all come and they take them out, and one engineer says "There's something wrong here, we've got to change some things, they won't work." Many a time I've seen something and when a photographer sees it with his camera in mind, and what he sees in the camera -- it's completely different, and he's right. And that's what you expect.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes. Good. I fell better about it.

ROY STRYKER: We sometimes wrote them. He said, "Look, Roy Stryker, it isn't worth a damn and I didn't take it." I had an idea but it didn't work out. It wasn't a picture. And he had -- see, that is the terribly important thing; he's the man on the ground in the end, and we used his judgment because all those photographers I got to know I could trust their judgment. Some proofs came back and said it wasn't theirs or something -- are you sure? -- and he'd have to justify it. All right.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, this is just one of the number of myths that have grown up about this thing, you know, that these scripts were all prepared and people went out. And another one, I'd like to have your opinion on this. I've got two opposing views from photographers; one is the big roundtable seminar discussions with photographers and all. One photographer said this is the way it happened; another photographer said, "We seldom ever saw each other, how could we possibly..."

ROY STRYKER: Neither is right. Neither is right. There were photographers who spent a lot of time -- there were jobs where each photographer -- sometimes we had a lot of talk a lot of times. There were times when he found some of them himself and I never saw the place. They're as far apart as that. When Arthur Rothstein went out on the cattle story he had lived cattle with me because it was in my blood. He had gone to luncheons with me when I had lunch with cattlemen. He had an outline of ideas, of these suggestions of things to watch for, if you will. When he got out there at this big ranch they said, "Where did you get all these ideas? It's a damned good idea." "Well, my boss grew up in the cattle country." They said, "We thought somebody had been around cattle." Then they began to give ideas to him -- "you ought to get this, don't miss this, don't miss this." Arthur then took the famous picture of the white face coming down hill, first, because he had certain talents as a photographer, he recognized certain pictures, and he was -- it makes him mad yet. "God damn Bronx boy still wet behind the ears." Probably never would have got it if he'd been used to...No. There was a lot of talk. Ben Shahn didn't get much because he was going out on his own ideas. He was after something that I couldn't have told him anything about it. He was a selfish, he was going out on a selfish project, and sometimes selfish projects, selfish operations are the finest things that ever happen because he was going out to get himself, let's face it, a wonderful collection of pictures that would be useful in making murals. But we had a very wise man, a very experienced man, and what he wanted and what he visioned when he saw it, how he picked it up was something that nobody could have told Ben and you didn't need to, and a guy everybody got used to -- there was all kinds of talk -- we talked of all kinds of angles, it was never the same, it was varied. Maybe we got talking about something between the two of us, maybe a man had seen -- pretty soon it grew something we're going to do this. As time went on we ought to do more of this -- let's do more on the highways. Maybe it came -- three or four photographers said, "Gee, we ought to do more on the American highway, it's a great institution." Maybe it

grew like that. A small darn thing, a very specific thing -- Ruth Goodhue said at breakfast one morning to me, she had seen some of the things we were doing, I had talked to her about some ideas and she said, "Roy Stryker, are all towns of 5,000 just alike? Do you think so because they use the same boiler plate, because they listen to the same radio programs, because they eat the same brand of breakfast foods, the same labels on them? I didn't know. I haven't been in enough small towns of 5,000, I don't know. I went from New York to Chicago by train. By the time I got to Chicago I had several pages filled with ideas, what is a small town, what does it look like, not whether they're different, what's in a small town, what is the whole idea of a small town. By the time I got back I had 15 or 20 pages of notes. That is my vicarious trip to the small towns of America -- my satisfaction. When I did the outline of the damn steel show I was having fun going back there and getting into the middle of this thing I got pictures, do a great show, a great sign show. It was a satisfaction to me because I could just smack them and I'm just egotist enough to want to do the Goddamned thing. Some other place my mind went to mining towns. I said to Russ, "You know it's pretty tragic what's happening now, we're going to lose some the beautiful millwright work there in the mills of the tipples, in the head frames, in some of the other things, we ought to get some of them before they're taken down or burned or rot or knocked out." I said, "You know there's some very beautiful stuff up there" because you see what was happening: nostalgia for me. I wanted to get back to my mind wanted to get back to my boyhood. As a boy I had grown up -- I wanted to put that in the files, see that was something I know. Other times I read and this was strange. I read and got excited about a certain place I have never been there, I haven't been there to this day. And some woman came in and I got talking to her, she happened to be from there and she said, "You must have spent a little time there" and I looked at her, I said, "I have to hang my head, I have never been there." She said, "What?" "I have never been there." She said, "Are you fooling me?" I said, "No, I am not." She said, "I don't believe it." I said, "Well, it's true." "Well, how can you talk like this?" "Well," I said, "first of all I got involved in your town because I had read a little bit about why it was important, and its importance meant something to me as part of this overall thing we're doing." And I met a man from there and after the photographer's contacts with him I went and talked with him and I said I have about five sets of contacts, I have been there in a strong way. Most interesting. Curious. And that's true. You see, when the photographers went out to all these places, it was the Goddamnest vicarious travel that one man ever had the privilege of doing, the excitement, the fun of seeing their faces because they were seeing these things by this time with a pattern that was already formed not that the picture looked like this but it fitted into "this is America" for some reason or other I liked it, as a matter of fact. So I still -- I can't go any place, I can't, couldn't go on the train coming back I was seeing pictures, having photographer take pictures all the way out to California and all the way back again.

RICHARD DOUD: Frustrating.

ROY STRYKER: Yes, in a way, but not any more. It was pleasurable, to tell you the truth, because I knew they couldn't take them, but I had fun thinking about it, well wouldn't it be wonderful? We came out of the desert into the foothills. Beautiful! It had rained, it was green, beautiful curves, live oaks, and I said, "You know," -- mostly we were black and white -- "wouldn't it be wonderful to get that really top photographer" -- I named two or three of them -- "on this, wouldn't that be something?" I didn't want the picture, it was just fun thinking what you could do. It's quite a different thing, it's changed, see that's another thing. I told you about this before, this is another variant of this thing. You see, I don't take pictures, but my life is turned also to rectangles but my rectangles aren't as accurate as the man with the camera because he has to deliver something that makes a good picture. I just look and I can be fuzzy, but I see something that looks good. And many a time, Dick, I've had in New York City, many a times to apologize to a luncheon companion and say, as I was heading into Standard Oil office and he was going across town, or downtown, or uptown, "Well, I'm sorry I heard just what you said the first time, but I had to look at those women. Aren't they wonderful? Look at those faces." Well you can't help it. In Pittsburgh in days and weeks when I wasn't involved -- sometimes I wasn't on a job -- I started downtown and all of a sudden I got involved, I was allergic to the people that day. I walked in the streets from around noontime until time to go home at night, leisurely, standing against a telephone pole, waiting at a crossing, standing in front of a store, going into the store because I suddenly became -- wanted to see people. I was seeing pictures. And some days I didn't want to see anybody. I hated the goddamn people. I didn't see any pictures at all. Once in a great while -- I'm not a sound man but there have been times when I got so damned enamored of sound that I couldn't contain myself. I wasn't trying to eavesdrop. I was listening to a wonderful conversation ahead of me, it was just as interesting, and only a document, as those pictures were document. And these things ran in cycles. So I didn't have much to do, so I would stop at the street corner waiting to go across, or I'd find an excuse to stand by and hear. Then you became enamored with the play of sound and words. They failed to mean anything to you then, you didn't get the gist of it, you never were eavesdropping, you never were trying to get a secret. But there was that wonderful phenomenon of human beings.

RICHARD DOUD: Sort of an abstraction of...

ROY STRYKER: Yes, a near abstraction, yes it was. So you see it's taken me quite a ways, it was unusual, and I couldn't tell many people about this because they wouldn't understand me. When I stopped in a little jewelry store down here, and a boy came over and said, "I'm Dave Deviney." I knew there was a Dave Deviney, and I shook hands with him. And he said, "I just got this. Do you know about this?" It was that copy of 'Focus on

Stryker." "Yes," I said, "I know about it. My copy just came in yesterday." So we got to talking. I said, "Are you interested in photography?" "Well, yes." So we talked for a few moments. And I said, "What are you doing for the next twenty minutes? I have to make a walk. Would you like to go with me?" I said, "I'm going to start you early on my weakness. I want to go some place but while we're walking let's talk about pictures." So we hadn't gone but a short distance when there was a barber shop. I stopped cold in my tracks. "Don't say anything, don't look too hard, look at that kid." A little red-headed kid sitting waiting for his haircut reading the comic strips but reading it like an old man who reads his newspaper. I said, "Isn't that wonderful?" "Gee," he said, "I hadn't noticed it until you mentioned it." We pulled over and had a coke, and I said, "Dave, you said you're interested in photography. I want to see how you see, and what you see, and how alert you are." He didn't see anything, he wasn't trained, he never did get it, he hasn't got it yet. He went in the Army, and told them he could type, he's still typing instead of learning anything about pictures. His brother is an artist, he's over in Fort Collins now, and his brother will probably do something, but David I don't think will ever do it because he's sacred. But I took him out three or four times and I said, "Why don't you get notebooks and write memorandums of what you see?" Well he finally took his camera out and got me some nice pictures. But when we did our first workshop in Columbia, Missouri, when Cliff started that famous workshop, he didn't know what the hell -- Cliff has a wonderful ability to think of new ideas but he doesn't know how implement them. And I had John Morris, at that time he was with Ladies' Home Journal; myself, and one or two other people. And it was desperate. I was just sick, I couldn't see how many were coming out. The next day the time was ours. There was an older woman there, she was a portrait photographer, she said, "What am I supposed to do?" I said, -- I walked from the University down to the business section, the old town -- "Would you go with me for a walk?" "What for?" "I just want to see some things and I want to talk at you while I go." And I walked fast, I said, "Isn't it interesting? Look at those things in the window. Hey, look at those two people over there. That's wonderful, look at that corner..." And I just talked, talked, talked as fast as I could. I said, "Let's go back." She said, "Please, I can't take this on my way back." "Well," I said, "I want to tell you that there are pictures in this town, I don't know if you've taken this kind of pictures." "I'm a portrait person." I said, "Well, get your damn camera out, go it on your own, and don't let me bother you again." She took the best pictures taken. They looked like nothing I had ever seen. She said, "They don't look like yours." I said, "Thank God, they don't. That's yours. You've done a wonderful job on pictures." And she said, "Thank you for that trip. Life takes on a new meaning to me." Well this has been a wonderful thing about photography. Alice -- I'm a lousy driver, you know. I see too many pictures. And lately I've had to stop and absolutely tend to my driving. I'm 72 and our insurance rate was dropped on us the other day because I'm 72, in other words I can't carry as much insurance as I used to. And Alice sweet-talked, "Roy Stryker, you're going to have to be a damn sight more careful." But I have got to stop looking. A bad feature of this business.

RICHARD DOUD: It would be better to stop driving.

ROY STRYKER: Well, I'm not going to stop looking, I'm going to stop the car and pull over to the side of the road. It's as simple as that. I just can't look and drive. Not like I was.

RICHARD DOUD: I have a problem that I want to go back now with you...

ROY STRYKER: I took you a long way afield in this business.

RICHARD DOUD: That's alright, that's all right.

ROY STRYKER: It happens to be pretty basic to the whole thing, so I went probably farther than I need to have gone.

RICHARD DOUD: Better that than not far enough.

ROY STRYKER: I think that'll be useful in your collection, because I'm sure there have been a lot of misstatements, understatement, wrong directions and stop at the wrong point, or rather right direction but they didn't go on around. That's what I want to say. All right.

RICHARD DOUD: I have no objections to it. I hope you talk as long as you want. I've got more tape here.

ROY STRYKER: All right.

RICHARD DOUD: But I want to get back to something that you have more or less tried to get the photographers to answer for me, and probably nobody can do it but you. I want you to talk some about how this business did grow, and how and why it did develop, and when I say this, here's what I mean: when you went to Washington and you had a job description that was written by Hewes, it said very little about photography, what did you have in mind as far as your job was concerned? And how did you grow beyond what you started doing?

ROY STRYKER: Well, my first answer, the first part of this I'm going to answer. I did not have a sharp, clearly-defined idea of what my job was. I took my job description somewhat literally, being a collector, recognizing the

value of documents, having collected this kind of material, understanding Tugwell's viewpoints, felt that I should follow somewhat this job description. I took it quite literally. Now let's take the next step. I find, and it has happened to my own thinking because I was trying to project it to this possible book, was the line sharp between the collection of documents and saying we'll take pictures on the side or -- why did I get involved? Now I knew I was going to take pictures before I went down, I had to know. You see, I'm going back now to try to find out about some things for myself because I'm not too sure about -- I'm being honest with you -- I'm not too sure of all these things. Why did I take Arthur down if I wasn't going to take pictures? He was a photographer. Why did I talk him into -- he didn't make medical school because there was a lot of anti-Semitism -- I said, "Come on down and take pictures." I didn't know what he could do, I wasn't sure what kind of pictures we were even going to take. But Arthur went down specifically to be a photographer. Now I certainly didn't go down on purely the idea that I was to be a collector of documents. And then I began to think -- where did I get all these ideas? Why did I want him to take pictures? And what did I think I wanted? I told you, and I told lots of people, I had an idea that damn book we were going to do, which turned out to be a lot of books on American agriculture, for one thing -- was there some -- I think a lot of this is vague, I don't know that I'm ever going to be able to answer it for you. I wish I could. I wish I could give you a clearcut decision and tell you the answer to when this came in. It did not. It's as clear as that. Now let's see, let me think. There was Arthur. I saw Carl Mydans' stuff. I was interested. I didn't like all of it but there was a guy that was taking unusual pictures, I was intrigued by his angles, I was intrigued by what he was doing out at the farm. All the time I saw myself I knew something of what Tugwell had to do, there was a problem here that he had to meet, he had to meet the problems the newspapers weren't going to cover. What were these people doing? What were some of the problems all over the country? I was very, very conscious of the depression. It hit us before I went down. Then along came Dorothea Lange's pictures very shortly after that, and there were two elements, I didn't know how good they were, I had to grow into that recognition of her pictures, but on the other hand -- and this is very curious -- I say this with all honesty but I'm going to say it -- that before I saw the great feelings of humanity I saw certain agricultural elements and I said this kind of stuff will do well, we can use this to get ourselves a lot of pictures for our encyclopedia. I knew about picture, I grew up with them, I read, we had on our table and around our house stereoscopes, we had two or three basketsful of stereos, we had pictures that my family had collected, the so-called "cabinet" pictures taken by these transient photographers, of Box Canyon, Bear Creek Falls, the tramway, and so on. And I saw those and I was intrigued. My own brother took pictures, I didn't know whether they were good or bad. I had no consciousness of that, but I grew up with -- I had books, nobody talked photography to me. But it was part of a strange desire to know more and to see more and I saw with a good deal of modesty, I was going to have an education, I was going to get knowledge, it was just basic curiosity. And so little by little -- oh, Walker Evans came along. He was my next early man. He was there before. Walker had a great effect on me, he showed me pictures he had, and we walked and talked, and he talked about, without being too conscious of it, it never was said, but you must see things and tried to tell me why he saw things, a great piece of education for me, terrific piece of education. Walker won't believe that I would say this about him but, by God, he gave me a piece of education that had terrific impact and to this day I love Walker's pictures. I like -- I want those as well as I want these others and Walker imprinted that upon me. And then I saw Ben Shahn's first pictures began to come in. They were new and by this time my pores were very well open and I didn't understand the great value of them, I didn't understand the great value of them, I didn't understand all these things, I was still naïve, I'm still naïve to this date. And when Arthur's first pictures came back I saw the little kid sitting in that doorway that we saw last night. I wasn't conscious of what an important picture it might have been or its sociological implications or its humanity. It was just I liked it. It made me feel kind of sad and kind of good. I was getting back to my countryside again, I guess, but my taste had to change a lot, I would have accepted pictures then that I wouldn't accept now. I would take a snapshot then that I would -- "it's all right, it's just a picture." I never in the world would have picked this picture up and wanted a copy of it; now I want the damn picture because I've got -- a new element entered in to it, that passing thing that a picture of that kind can represent something that isn't. Never in God's world would I have picked up that little book on Switzerland and read it as I did to you last night because that is the result of a lot of experience, a lot of sophistication, a lot of contacts with a Ben Shahn, all kind of people, all kinds of things, that is maturity. I couldn't have taken the African book and have the excitement I had over it. I would have liked it, I never would have accepted it. I never would have pulled that thing out time and time again for people that come in here, that copy of you know that magazine here -- it's a bound magazine here -- this is important what enters into this -- it's "Horizons" -- I never would have pulled, I would have been intrigued, I would have looked at these, "Gee, that's interesting." Now I see the continuity of it. Now you see I'm helping other people because I get that out and rave. Dick, you had to grow into this. I had none of this when I started in, and this has happened and your sophistication, your knowledge, your experience and you grow tremendously. I'm a far, far different guy than if I hadn't been -- if I weren't a different guy, I mean there would have been something wrong with me if I hadn't turned into a different man. The other day -- I'll show it to you -- Arthur sent me a Christmas card, it's in three dimensional color, it's Christmas ornaments, it's not bad, it's far better than some other stuff that's he sent me. And I wasn't going to lie to him, I said, "Well, it was a great improvement over what he had, I'm not very excited about it." See, I get his Christmas pictures every year of his kids. I said, "I still like your Christmas card the best." And there was a woman down the other day, Mrs. Morrison and she's a curious -- she's the wife of the veterinarian, and she went all gaga over it and she said, "Don't you like it?" And I said, "No, I don't." "Isn't it good? You can see the dimension." I said, "Look, there

are so many more important things in the world than that." Well she needled me till she got me riled. I said, "Look, dammit, Lady, what the hell! I'm disgusted with most television, so I have to tell you that I'm disgusted with this kind of crap the same way, it's superficial, it isn't important. Now why in the hell don't we develop it and lay it aside?" So she said, "Sometimes we can't understand you." Well, that's another aspect of me that sometimes I worry about, because I'm very opinionated and very apt to be dominant and stubborn and disagreeable as hell if I don't like something in this field because I've tried to keep...and that's one of the dangers I face all the time. I try not to, but I do it.

RICHARD DOUD: Have you been this way since you started, or...?

ROY STRYKER: Oh yes. That's basic trait of mine, that's a basic trait -- opinionated, quick-tempered.

RICHARD DOUD: But it has been said about you by some of the people who worked for you that you weren't so opinionated that you wouldn't listen and weigh the opinions of other people?

ROY STRYKER: Oh, I...

RICHARD DOUD: To me, this means you're not really opinionated.

ROY STRYKER: All this -- look, I can be awfully decent if I think a person is honest on the other side, I'll listen to no end, I can't tolerate bettlebrains who try to sound off. No, I usually either shut up and get out of their way, or I fight. No. I respect and -- Dick, I must tell you something else about myself. I am not a very well educated man; I'm not a particularly bright guy, I know a little about a lot of things, and I can go back, I have never shown cowardice, I have never had to back down on a fight, I've never had my nose punched. I have an uncanny ability to climb out of every situation that I think might get me into a hole. I can do it, I can almost smell when to pick a man up and when not to talk. This is a strange form of cowardice, at the same time a form of self-protection. If I'm really deeply involved I'll take anybody on. I showed my fangs several times around here around the election. I made up my mind I wouldn't talk, but I have been cornered a couple of times and I let fire, and somebody later who was with me said, "You damn fool, you're going to stir yourself a lot of trouble, this is a Goldwater town." I said, "I don't give a Goddamn what it is, anybody that makes that kind of a statement to me I will stand my ground." But on the whole I don't get into trouble. I don't fight. I'll fight if I want to, if I have to for my own protection, I mean they won't back me into a corner, but I've never let myself get in this position where I'm in a corner and I'm going to have a way out. It's a form of cowardice. I know this about myself. And I know full well when to keep my mouth shut. I don't know why I know it, but, by God, I've never been caught yet in a stupid situation. I think so well of -- there was a young man who was in one of my classes, his father was a -- Hindu -- he was an importer -- his mother was English. Jack -- his name was Ola but he changed it to Ollason -- his family changed it because of the difficulty of using it. Jack later became -- he went to Boulder, he did his physics in Boulder, he did his engineering in some other place, and he was a brilliant guy, just brilliant guy. He came to a lot of our parties, he also took pictures, he also worked during the war on lenses, he knew a great deal, he knew lenses more than all the photographers I had put together. I had another photographer named Harold Corsini, he's in Pittsburgh making himself around a thousand dollars a day taking fancy advertising pictures for U.S. Steel and others. He doesn't make a lot of money because he carries two assistants. Well Harold didn't know when to shut up. And Jack was so pleasant and he was never one to fight very tolerant. And Corsini sounded off. And Jack was in a discussion with him he didn't think was quite right. And finally the rest of the crowd saw he was -- Corsini knew he was in a real trap, and he went off in a corner and got a book and sulked the rest of the night. But Jack enjoyed him, he didn't try to force him into a fight. You see there was a difference. I never was caught that way. I don't know why, but I can smell when a guy -- you just know when the guy knows what he's talking about. I'm not given to starting arguments. I don't go around looking for arguments. If there's something I don't like, I say so. I had to guard myself like the devil to stay away from the word "mortician" because I've got myself so close to trouble three times, to me mortician just GRRRRR! A family up here, a young lawyer and his wife, mother-in-law -- her mother and father and something was said and I said, "Stryker, this is no time to start," because I can go off like a rocket, and I shut up. And he was out at that famous cemetery out there. I told her later on, I said, "You know how close I came to..." -- she had mentioned something to me and they had gotten the famous book, you know, on morticians, and she said, "Well, you'd have been all right this time..." And I said, "Well..." Well, those are the strange things that happen to you. But I know I am opinionated and I am dogmatic but I have made concession. Listen, I'll listen to the other guy very fast. I know my own...

END OF TAPE 1

TAPE 2

RICHARD DOUD: This is a continuation of the interview with Roy Stryker, January 23, 1965.

ROY STRYKER: As I started to tell you, I have another trait which is very valuable, it's been cultivated, and it grows, and I do it better than I used to. I'm in a peculiar kind of way, a very good listener. Now there are various

kinds of listeners, there are silent men who listen eternally, and they are like great sponges who soak it up in a great wonderful organization system, and they know all they have heard and it's all organized, and when the occasion arises they can give it back to you. I'm a bit superficial about it, but as I say, I'm a listener, I'm a good questioner. This is cultivated. It's not done with any malicious intent but I've learned how to reach people that want to be listened to even down in town. I'm out here and I have to get along and I can listen to all kinds of people, I can be patient with them because the other night a man pulled in, he said, "My name is Barr." I said, "Am I supposed to know you?" He said, "Well, I thought you did." I said, "Well, I'll be honest with you, I don't remember you. Come on in." When my brother was having his trouble with loss of memory, he stayed in a nursing home. He said he ran the nursing home. I said, "Well, I'll be honest with you, I was so involved the week I was helping his daughter that I don't remember who you were down there, I'll be honest with you." He came in. As it turned out he was trying to find out where they were. He was a partner in a big nursing home up here and I think he was after some more business, but that's beside the point. So he hadn't been here very long before I finally got going, and this is a trait I've developed, and it isn't a conscious development, it's been one of those things that's grown, and in some ways I've been fearful that people will think "Well you nose so and so" but I've learned if you do it the right way and it becomes natural to you people like to have you ask. I said, "How did you get into this business?" He said his wife is a nurse and he went to Fort Collins to be a doctor -- and I can understand why he wasn't a doctor -- he's a dumb, really a dumb guy, he can't speak even common English. He said, "I tried two or three times and I didn't even make pre-med. So I took hospital management." But I kept on talking and Alice said afterwards, she said, "Roy Stryker, I sometimes can't figure out how you do it. I was shocked at times at the questions you asked him." Yet he liked it, and he opened up and he told me for almost an hour his problems. The parents that are in that place and the children never come till they're dead and they get word of the death and they bawl out for having done so little for their father. And so on. He went on over all these things. But it turned out to be a very interesting evening. Alice said, "You know you were almost nose at times." "I was? Well if you stop to think about it, did he mind it?" "No, that's the funny thing, he didn't mind it at all." Well that is one thing I've learned and I am honestly interested in all kinds of people, and I'm very apt the first thing I want to ask everybody I meet, "Where are you from?" "How did you get this way?" -- that's the first thing I want to know about people. I have to watch myself that I don't do it. And I don't think you'd been here very long before I --. Now I'll have to watch when Krick comes -- "what got you into this thing? what's your background?" Because he's going to pick my brains, I'm going to pick his brains because I can't talk intelligently to him without finding out what his quirks are, what he's interested in. Well, this is a thing that's grown on me. The answers to some of these things, how did it happen, and so on, is a complex situation. It's complex in me because there's no simple answer to my part of it, my answer is I grew up, I got excited, I saw this and this and this. The table was rich, you tasted this and you continued tasting, first thing you'd go down here and taste more, and pretty soon life is a bowl of cherries, all kinds of color cherries, and it grows. And I'm deeply sincere when I tell people I can't think of any job that would be more interesting than the one I've got, to sit and wait, I mean there's no unpleasantness, you kept the store and you kept the sheriff out and you watched the burglars and you kept the windows barred. But night came and the boys in the laboratories brought you in three packets. Ahhhhh! Lee, Lange and Marion. Let's see what they got. You go home. Wow!! A new experience, didn't have no pain, no fatigue, no heat and smell. Wonderful. Well that was interesting. You had -- you're in a strange trough. We're all egotistical, we all have egos, selfish egos, I have one. And little by little I began to sense the value of this thing, the unusualness of it, the little praise came in, my ego responded to it. And quite different, this is another, a quite different statement over here. You go into town -- New York -- with your pictures, you take them to Mrs. Kellogg. "They're wonderful! How do these people see things like that, I wonder." You don't try to tell them you did it, it's your boy, it's your girl, it's you and your project. I'd go back up to see Ellsworth Middletown, who was a professor of sociology at Columbia at the time, and I had an awful lot of pictures, I had lunch with him, I didn't know him too well but I knew him a little. So he said, "Are you in a hurry?" I said, "No." "Let's go in the lounge and sit down." He looks at the pictures, enamored, all excited. This is part of my education, of another kind of education. He looks and gets pleased and he's got -- he isn't a judge a great photographs, he's a judge of somebody or several somebodies who saw all the things that a sociologist is used to but never turned it in that form. So he's sitting there and he said, "Gee, these are wonderful, I wonder how many people know what's down their street? They probably never learned to see, have they?" A brand new idea, I've never forgotten that phrase, never! Now what happened was, I went back to the photographers and they got distilled out a new idea and they got it from this man but the first thing they got variants of it. People have had it from me. Young photographers would come in to talk to me and I'm trying to reach him and I'm very apt to turn on him suddenly and say, "Where do you live? What's your name but tell me quickly what do you see when you walk on your street when you went to school or any place you want to tell me, tell me." He stumbles. I said, "You don't mean to tell me you could be a good photographer if you can't answer that." I told you about the experience of Gulf Oil when the girl heard me talking there, they were around up on their overlook, they wanted pictures to put up and they were stupid enough to want the same pictures people could see. I said, "For God's sake, don't do that, use the things that they can't see that's down there." Anyway we were putting them up but I was having a big argument with the men there, and she said finally, she was a very bright little secretary, and a painter -- she painted on the side -- and she said, "Mr. Stryker, what's a good picture, what's a bad picture, why do you say...?" "Well," I said, "I've got about 20 minutes and I've got to finish a job." "Oh," she said, "by the way, I want to ask you a question." Gene Smith's pictures had appeared in the U.S. and Photography Annual of



Pittsburgh. She said, "Do you like Gene Smith's pictures?" I said, "It's none of your damn business whether I like them or not. But I want to tell you something, that Gene Smith probably sees at least a hundred times, and might see five hundred better than you do. I'll bet you're blind as a bat, you're just like all the rest of people, you can't see anything for the confusion. You paint but I bet you're not very much better than some of the other people." She bristled. I said, "I'm leaving very shortly, I want to ask you one simple question, and I'm coming back to finish this argument. How long have you been living where you are?" "About ten or fifteen years." I said, "Fine, what -- give me quickly -- tell me a few things that are outside on your street. All right, come on, quit stammering, what are they? Hurry up. Well, I'll make it simple: do you go to church. What's it like, a big one or a little one, or what?" "I don't believe I can." I said, "I didn't think you could. Don't talk to me about Gene Smith's pictures. I'll be back to see you." I was gone two weeks and I opened the door and she said, "Good morning, Mr. Stryker, I still don't like Gene Smith's pictures, but I appreciate more than I can tell you what you've done for me. You were sure right, I'm blind." You see, it's interesting, it's the exciting thing about this business. It's a thing that this man gave me that never left me, it's a thing that Walker gave me, not as sharp, not as distinct as that. But what he gave me grew into much more things because he talked about -- wouldn't it be interesting to put a photographer into homes, kind of hidden half away, this set of picture in this home, this set of pictures --. You see, here was a man who was trained in thinking and he was smart enough to see what we had done in the pictures and turn the pictures back to his work. So you see I got a piece of education, I grew out of that more than -- Walker gave me my help in pictures per se; but this man gave me something in the use of the picture in the field. It's the same thing Harold Lasswell did for me, many a man did it for me. That's the exciting thing. And that's why it's exciting to show somebody a set of pictures, or to give him an article or something, and it's the interesting thing that you then learn to ask these men who know something awfully well to have him tell you about his life there, what he does, about what goes on, what happens here and there. And that's the thing, and that's what the shooting script is. So you then go back and try to tell your photographers what you got from this man or somebody else, you don't say so, you do sometimes, you say someone told me in so many words. Well, I've rambled a long way, but that is the way the file grew, that's the way my part of the file grew.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I think there's another thing that I probably haven't mentioned it, that might have something to do with the making it possible for the file to grow and as part of your personality and then I'd like to just bring it up to see what you have to say about it. I don't remember who was talking, but the subject came up about you going out in the field with photographers and the party -- whoever it was -- said, well not too often, he went out occasionally but not too often.

ROY STRYKER: I couldn't go very often, at least I didn't think I could.

RICHARD DOUD: Here's what they said: they said he didn't want to leave that desk, he didn't want to leave that telephone, he'd sit there hoping it would ring, he'd pick it up and he'd say, "Stryker speaking" and he was hoping there was a fight on the other end of the line.

ROY STRYKER: I don't -- that's very strange -- I didn't realize that -- if that's true -- that was what John Collier said in the tape and that's what several other people said and it has come back to me. It's very strange, it's very interesting to me. It's quite possible. I don't know how to answer that, I've been thinking about it ever since I ran into it. The telephone does mean a lot to me, it's come to mean more and more, I like to have the phone ring, I like the voice on the other end, you'd be surprised how the long distance call pleases me here. That's different situation, it ties back to -- Bennie Spiegel called the other day about something. But it wasn't that I didn't want to go, I did want to go out in the field, there was a reason, and I don't think they fully understood it, I'm not trying to defend, I'm not trying to say that I was dodging something. Listen, that was a precarious place, and by God, you didn't go too far away. I tried it a few times and had to come back to protect ourselves. And that is of some rationalization and I just don't know, Dick, I don't know whether I can - I think that would take a good psychologist who had watched me, and I think I could not answer that myself. I don't think that's quite correct but I don't think that's the answer.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, put it this way, did you -- were you looking for a fight, did you enjoy the contest here, the telephone contest?

ROY STRYKER: No. Not as much as they thought I did. They probably heard me so infrequently that they heard the fights. Yes, I could pick a fight when I wanted, but the phone call was so many times had nothing to do with that at all. That's why I think they were not quite right. You see, I think I would have to have been observed much longer, much more carefully, much more thoughtfully by someone who was watching to see what my traits were. See, I think there are a lot of things we tell about people and sometimes these observation are right. Dorothea was so right the other day when she said, "Well, you know, Roy Stryker, I'm awfully glad you're doing it, but it helps you put off the book." So I laughed and said, "Yes, that's right." And you asked me the same damned question. And I said, "Yes, that's true." But I wouldn't accept that statement that I didn't want to go out. There were times when I didn't want to go out. There were times I built additional fears in there, I had bogies that probably didn't exist. But I had enough of them that did exist.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, I think Tugwell hinted at this anyway, that you were in a sort of precarious position and perhaps you were hypersensitive to this...

ROY STRYKER: Well, maybe I was.

RICHARD DOUD: Because, as he said, Roy Stryker had photographers in the field and this made him particularly vulnerable and he sort of, you know, like an octopus he couldn't really protect all of his arms anyway.

ROY STRYKER: And this is one of many pieces of superb luck. Let's face it, I had a group of people who I learned I could trust implicitly, they all had that fine sense of judgment and taking care of themselves. One, the greatest thing that I can say is that at no time, no picture that I have any recollection of did any photographer try to be cute, to ridicule, to take advantage, to in any way show anything that didn't show respect for the person he was having the camera on. And believe me in this day and age that's something. But I can think of photographers that I had to kick the hell out because they were young and cussed and tried something funny. There isn't one picture in that file, there may have been pictures that didn't come out well, and pictures that shouldn't have been taken, but they were never taken with the intent to be cute, to do something. You see we're getting an awful lot of these pictures taken today because I want to get a different angle. Now I've been criticized -- -- has criticized that old woman with those gnarled hands. She thought it was unfair. Dick, look, there have been times when I wanted to throw the whole Goddamned thing up and get out. That's a horse of another color. There's times when I said, "Jesus Christ, is it right to be taking these pictures?" And sometimes I couldn't control what happened to the pictures. But on the whole we had, Dick, incredible luck. When the photographer took the right pictures and I don't think in hardly any instance they were used incorrectly. We had a respect for those pictures and I don't know to ever hope to have it again; it terrifies me. We had no releases; not until the lawyer got ahold of this famous woman with her kid did that woman begin to worry there's some trouble now brewing. But you see we had terrific luck. But there was apprehension and I suppose that after a few times at that I didn't go very far because, look, I was the old hen, you know, and by God, I was going to fight the hawks off. I guess I did have -- but I don't know. Listen, I lived my life -- but I don't think it's quite as much as they say it was. No, it wasn't. Look. It wasn't, "HELLO!" No, not that much; that is too strong.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, that's the picture it's pretty easy to call to mind for some reason.

ROY STRYKER: Nyaw. You see they may have been in there at the time they heard a few of those, and that thing starts going. I know I have a reputation for being fast on the trigger. I know it. Yet I didn't hesitate to call some people -- I'll tell you there's one thing I do pride myself on, I never kicked they guy below me, never!

RICHARD DOUD: That's unusual too.

ROY STRYKER: Well, somewhat. I took the people on below me for some things, but I never kicked him when I should have kicked the guy above me. I was never afraid of the guy above me. I can play politics but I've never prostrated myself that I was ashamed of, and there were a few times when I had to, when I thought it was wise. No. As I told Bob Ross at Standard Oil once -- I had a wonderful secretary and a wonderful staff, I came down and Carol said, "Mr. Stryker, there was a man over here from the marketing company and he was after pictures and I think he was very insulting to the girls. I don't think he had any right to say what he did." She told me, she remembered very distinctly. I called and I said, "Mr. So and So..." He became obsequious, you know. I said, "...I wish you'd be careful, these girls are -- listen, it's a wonderful office, they'll do anything in God's world for you, you didn't need to do that. Maybe you were misunderstood but please..." Within three weeks it happened again. And I called him again. He put on the -- I never met him. And some two months later it became a very nasty and very obnoxious affair, and I was this time and I didn't give him a chance, and I said, "God damn your dirty soul, I asked you to be careful, I asked you to be reasonable, I asked you to be decent, and by God, if you ever come in this place again and do what I heard you did today -- and I'm not asking you because I think it's probably true you did do it, if I'm not big enough -- I don't know how big you are -- if I'm not big enough I've got two photographers that will just kick the shit out of you. By God, you don't -- do that to me, but you don't do it to them, I'll take my chances with you but don't you ever do that to my girls again." He said something. I said, "Aw, go to hell." I hung up the phone. I had no more than got off the phone within five minutes Virginia Leitbaum said, "George wants to see you." I wasn't even thinking. He said, "My God, what's going on?" I said, "What do you mean what's going on?" "Why, what?" "God what you said to so and so." I said, "I told this son of a bitch if I wasn't big enough I'd hire somebody big enough to kick the shit out of him." George said, "Do you know who you were talking to?" I said, "I haven't the vaguest idea, he's a son of a bitch, a stupid bastard." I told him what had happened. He said, "Look, he's an important man, he's high in the Company." I said, "George, I want to tell you something right now. Nobody, nobody, not even a director can come into my office and say what he said to my girl. I run that office. They are my people. I am the only person that makes a mistake." He said, "You're kidding." I said, "What goes on behind our door is my business but all mistakes are mine." "You mean to say you never go after them?" I said, "That is my business. I have their respect and they will live up to it, and I will live up to my respect to them." And so he got real hot. And I said, "You damn well better not come down and do it, and no director better try it," and I said, "the directors wouldn't do it and I don't think you would either, but that son of a

bitch will never do what he did again." He said, "You've got the wrong idea about the secretaries. Do you realize those are only assigned to you. There's an Office Manager responsible." I said, "I'm not talking about that." I said, "George, when you run an army, you run your own company, your own regiment to the point you're out leading them and you know nobody is going to shoot you in the back. And, by God, you respect them to the last ditch." He said, "Well, it's not exactly running a company." I said, "I'll call any son of a bitch that does that again, including you." That ended it. That ended it. They didn't run that way. They didn't understand it. They were shocked. He told somebody else, he said, "Roy Stryker is never going to understand this office." The man who was a director told me, he said the story...he said Roy would probably have some of the other people. It was so obvious. Well, it's the same thing all the way around, it's the same thing maybe -- well, it also worked. No. I could be a tyrant in my own office. I had a reputation in my own office for this. I'll never forget when Dick Saunders came out to work for us in Pittsburgh, and he was doing a job and he fouled up something, it was his own carelessness, he didn't attend to business and got me into a hole. And he went off and took a train some place for the rest of the day because he thought it was fun and he came in the next day. I called him in and I landed in the middle of him. And Dick is a wonderful Negro boy about six feet two, from Bermuda, a very, very charming guy, he leaned back and looked at me kind of smiling, and he said, "Roy Stryker, I guess I deserved this, but you know it makes me feel good." I said, "What?" He said, "I have arrived." I have said, "You've what?" He said, "I think I've made the team now." But I knew what he was saying, he had got the hell bawled out of him and I said, "Buddy, you haven't begun to make the team yet, you've only got the first degree, which is a very minor one, it's just a little one, watch your step, you've got several coming yet." I said, "Now get the hell out of here." But he left. The photographers later said, "Watch it out, when you go in see if you can see if the belt buckle -- see if the old man's pants are tight because you've got to watch out for Mondays and Tuesdays." I know, it wasn't -- it just happened this way. But I'll never forget when I took Gordon over. Gordon was doing a book; it was Gordon in his bad days. I'll take this off.

RICHARD DOUD: Yes.

(INTERRUPTION)

RICHARD DOUD: Well now I want to touch in something that might be a little sensitive.

ROY STRYKER: No, I don't think you need to worry.

RICHARD DOUD: Since chances are I won't get to see Walker Evans -- he's in Europe -- don't know when he'll be back, I want to know a little more about him, I want to know why he didn't stay on the project, and what influence he might have had on...

ROY STRYKER: It was very simple. He didn't stay on the project because I had to cut down staff, and Walker wasn't going to cooperate, much as I would like to have had him go on. I liked to have his pictures but I had to have people who would not only take the pictures they wanted, they were contributions, but all of us had some routine jobs that had to be done. And I presume in all fairness and all honesty that I got just a little bit fed up with his temperament, which I didn't think was very sensible, I think he did some pretty stupid things, and I didn't think it was worth the trouble fighting with him any longer. It was as simple as that. I had grown up considerably and despite the fact that he told me that time I needed a photographer, I didn't just quite agree with him. And I imagine some of Striker's personal feelings were involved in this, it's just as simple as that. A combination of on Stryker's part and the need for a little more realism, a little bit more cooperation, a little bit more participation on his part. And we were beginning to cut down. That was that. Does that answer?

RICHARD DOUD: Yep.

ROY STRYKER: I wasn't sensitive at all, it wasn't very difficult. It's regrettable, it's regrettable that an acquaintanceship, if I may say that, has deteriorated completely and utterly, but it's not surprising, it's not surprising. He's a very strange guy.

RICHARD DOUD: Did he have much influence, I know he had influence on -- well, I say I know it -- John Vachon told me he was strongly influenced by Walker...

ROY STRYKER: Oh, sure...

RICHARD DOUD: Did Walker have any other influence in this thing?

ROY STRYKER: I don't think so. He treated Arthur very snottily, very nasty, and Arthur reacted against him, and Arthur wasn't his boy anyway, you see, he wasn't his kind. He and Ben were old cronies and were as far apart as that photographically, but as close in ideas many times as that. Marion Post didn't know him, had her own way of going about things. Jack Delano was Jack Delano. And Russell was Russell. I think that's the answer.

RICHARD DOUD: Well now, tell me something. Have we missed anything significant that you think ought to be

on this?

ROY STRYKER: You'd better stop the tape a little while we do a little...

RICHARD DOUD: John was right about...?

ROY STRYKER: Yes, John's criticism in that particular tape was partially right. I did pick Corsini and take him out to Pittsburgh -- that was Standard Oil, not Farm Security -- and my judgment wasn't too good. Why I was as blind as I was about that man around Standard Oil I'll never know, but we all have our blind spots. I don't think John knew what he was talking about in his comments about my relations with Roskam. I doubt even if Roskam would admit that. Now down in Farm Security I did keep Roskam off a little bit at arm's length and this is an admission personally of fault. I did maintain a relationship with the photographers. I told Ed, I said, "Ed, I'm not trying to stop you -- don't give them shooting scripts, don't give them jobs without talking to me, because you just can't have them answering to two people." And he wanted to go take some pictures one time, and I said, "Ed, you didn't hire out here to take pictures." He said, "Well, I would be much better if I did take pictures." I said, "I've got staff to the point where I can't take on another photographer. You can go out and take pictures if you want, but I'm not going to encourage you to, and if you're going to be in the position of telling photographers what to do, as I want you to do but knowing how -- " Later on he said I didn't do a very good job of giving permission to do, which I admit maybe I didn't, but I said, "...if you're going to do that, I don't want you going out and saying 'I want you to do it the way I do it' because I have a very keen feeling about them, I don't tell photographers to do it like I do it, I don't take pictures, and I don't think you have any right to do likewise. I think your idea is to talk to them about ideas, concepts, what the photograph is, but not on techniques. Now if you want to talk technique to them, if you want to exchange technique, that's fine, I don't give a damn, but you're not going to direct them how to use technique, because I don't think that's the way to go about it whatever." And I don't think it was a very clear statement and I don't know, maybe John is right, maybe there was more resentment there than I think there was. Now at Standard Oil our relations were entirely different up there. I admit that John had one strong point; I tend to run a one-man show. I tended to do that quite a lot, I'm surprised how much I did it, I had no -- I began to wonder if I'd had the budget and I'd had the position, whether I would have hired an assistant, if I would have given him anything to do. An assistant to me would have to be quite close to me.

RICHARD DOUD: Well, John also said, as I recall, that you attracted, and were attracted by people of brilliance and special talent, and yet you were afraid of people of brilliance. Were you?

ROY STRYKER: I remember that. I don't know, I mean I couldn't answer that. I don't think I was. I didn't think so. After all Dorothea, John has brilliance, Jack Delano has brilliance. I don't think I'm afraid of them. I don't know. I'd have to have that explained to me and again it's a thing I couldn't answer, it's a thing that a better man than John will have to answer, it's a job for a pretty shrewd psychologist to answer a thing of that kind, with very quiet observations, and he'd have to tell you. I'm sure that these things have a basis in fact to them, but I wouldn't want to try to answer it, and I can't. That's the thing about yourself you can't answer. It has to be pretty willing and a pretty able person to analyze yourself to that point. I'd say no, I didn't think it was true but I wouldn't want to carry in any farther. I'd be willing to accept that judgment on more than one person's viewpoint, but not John's. You see, having read that at that time I would question several things John made because he was in a belligerent mood and he was reeking out and clouting me because he wanted to clout a lot of things in his relationship. That's why I question some of them. I didn't question --. Some of them he just didn't know what he was talking about. In some things he just plain didn't make sense. He just went off the deep end. But that's all right. Some of this is because John wasn't in a position where he could know, and he didn't listen, and he didn't -- but some things -- see, I've listened to a lot of things John said even about me. I'm quite sure that I would be fearful of some people, very brilliant people, I wouldn't understand them and I would dodge them because, not understanding them I would find ways to draw back for them. I think that's a pretty logical human trait. And I wouldn't be ashamed of it, I'd wish that I didn't do it, I'd wish that I was better able to -- I know some people I would because those people would have a device to put me at ease; some of them wouldn't.

END OF INTERVIEW

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