

Picturing MINNE

DURING THE LATE 1930S and early 1940s, photographers on assignment from the New Deal's Farm Security Administration fanned out across America to document the daily life and activities of the nation's people. More than 164,000 black-and-white prints taken by FSA photographers such as Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans between 1935 and 1943 are now preserved in the Library of Congress. At least 1,500 of the captioned images capture mostly unfamiliar Minnesota scenes, places, and faces.

FSA programs targeted rural rehabilitation and resettlement, and northern Minnesota in particular received its share of attention. One well-documented region was the cutover, a vast acreage of scrub forest, struggling homesteads, and tiny towns dying along with the once lucrative lumbering industry. Six government photographers—John Vachon (a Minnesota native), Russell Lee, Paul Carter, Marion Post Wolcott, Jack Delano, and even Roy E. Stryker, the administrative genius behind the FSA Historical Section's

The MHS library has three microfilm rolls of FSA images of Minnesota, originally produced in 1944. Included are rarely seen views of farming (including farm auctions and machinery), haying, small towns (for example, Milaca, Litchfield, Hibbing, and Winton), people, and city views. Also available are 14,000 captioned Midwest (Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin) microfiche images and a printed index.

About 55,000 black-and-white FSA photos may be viewed online at the Library of Congress's American Memory site: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsowhome.html>. To date some 1 million items in 43 collections have been digitized for online viewing.

*The information in this article is taken from the website and from Robert Reid's book, *Picturing Minnesota, 1936–1943: Photographs of the Farm Security Administration*, published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1989 and available from the MHS Press. All photographs, including the background image of the Bendix schoolhouse, 1936, by Paul Carter, are courtesy of the Library of Congress.*

S O T A ' S C U T O V E R

vision—found their way to or through the state.

Early FSA images dramatized the needs for government assistance to the nation's rural poor, the "lower third" of the country, as they were called inside the organization. Later assignments shifted to photographing less needy inhabitants of farms, small towns, and cities.

Photographers sent to the Great Lakes cutover region were told, according to Robert L. Reid's *Picturing Minnesota, 1936–1943: Photographs of the Farm Security Administration*, to document "the people, the way they live, their isolation" and "the look of the country." They were to capture, Stryker wrote Lee in 1937, what was "left

behind after the empire builders had taken the forest, the ore, and the topsoil."

What follows is a sampling of Minnesota cutover images that complement the people and places described in the preceding account of the 1937 timber workers' strike. The captions are based on the photographers' original field notes.



County FSA supervisor visiting the family of an FSA borrower, Lake of the Woods County, 1939. John Vachon



A man at the bar on Saturday night, Craigville, 1937. *Russell Lee*



FSA photographer being pulled out of the mud by a tractor
near Little Fork, 1937. *Roy Stryker*



Lumberjacks in a bunkhouse, logging-camp near Effie, 1937. *Russell Lee*

Woman entering home
that she and her daughter
built on cutover in Aitkin
County, 1939. *John Vachon*



Steam baths are very popular among the lumberjacks, Craigville (vicinity), August 1937. *Russell Lee*





Card game in the Northern Minnesota Pioneer Home, established by the government to care for the former squatters and lumberjacks displaced from their homes in the Beltrami Island reforestation area, Spooner, September 1939. *John Vachon*



Family of an FSA borrower in the cutover area, Itasca County, August 1941. *John Vachon*



Children ready to leave for school in an old wagon, Beltrami Island reforestation project of the Minnesota state forest service, July 1936. *Paul Carter*



Lumberjack turning handspring, Little Fork (vicinity), June 1937. *Russell Lee*



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