

Joan Myers' Pie Town Woman Papers and Photographs

New Mexico Museum of Art Library and Archives

Extent: 1.83 linear feet

Dates: 1929 - 1999

Language: English

Related Materials: Files and catalogs concerning the exhibition of photographs by Joan Myers at this museum are stored separately by show.

The museum library also holds a biographical file on Joan Myers.

Scope and Content

This collection contains notes, interviews, photographs, journals, historical data, maps, and microfilm material compiled by photographer Joan Myers in connection with the writing and publication of the book *Pie Town Woman*.

Biography and History

Joan Myers was born 1944 in Des Moines, Iowa, and remained there until 1962 when she entered Stanford University. An interest in Renaissance and Baroque music performance led her to an M.A. in Musicology in 1966.

In the early 1970s, Ms. Myers turned to photography. In its technical history she discovered a plethora of silver precursors: carbon, gum dichromate, platinum-palladium and cyanotype, processed that fit her sensibilities and enhanced her contemporary expressions. Today she works primarily with the platinum-palladium process and continues her exploration of hand-applied color. She maintains her residence and studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

In 1995, Myers began photographing and interviewing the homesteaders of Pie Town, New Mexico who had moved from Sweetwater, Texas to settle on the Zuni Plateau in the area around Magdalena, in what are now Catron and Cibola Counties, New Mexico. Homesteaders on the Zuni Plateau were the last phase of a major movement that had started in New Mexico late in the nineteenth century and continued into the early 1930s. This project resulted in the publication of her book *Pie Town Woman*, by University of New Mexico Press in 2001.

Russell Lee was born on July 21, 1903, in Ottawa, Illinois. He attended Culver Military Academy (CMA) from 1917 until 1921, and then enrolled at Lehigh University, in Pennsylvania. He graduated in 1925 with a degree in Chemical Engineering and joined the Certainteed Products Company in Marseilles, Illinois. In 1928 Lee was transferred to Kansas City, where he became so bored with his job he resigned to pursue painting. Lee subsequently became increasingly frustrated with his limitations as a painter. In 1935, at the suggestion of a friend, he bought his first camera and his enthusiasm for photography quickly grew. He explored the technical aspects of the craft, experimenting with developing chemicals, exposure speeds, and flash photograph techniques.

Lee began taking documentary photographs in Woodstock, New York in 1935 and went to Pennsylvania to photograph bootleg coal miners. In 1936, Lee joined the photographic staff of the Resettlement Administration, later renamed the Farm Security Administration (FSA), where he worked under the creative supervision of Roy Stryker, Director of Photographic Projects.

His colleagues included Dorothea Lange, Arthur Rothstein, Walker Evans, and Carl Mydans. During his FSA years, Lee traveled throughout the United States, documenting life in rural and urban communities. He developed a flash technique that enabled him to take innovative and candid interior photographs. He also specialized in taking pictures in series, most notably those shot in Pie Town, New Mexico in 1940, documenting the life of the Homesteaders in this high, dry farming community as part of the Farm Security Administration's New Deal survey of American life.

Between 1949 and 1962, Lee conducted a photographic workshop at the University of Missouri. In 1965, the University of Texas at Austin presented an exhibition of Lee's photographs and he was invited to join the University's art faculty as an instructor in photography. He taught until his retirement in 1973. Russell Lee died on August 28, 1986.

Contents

Box 1

Section 1

Three-ring binder containing work product of Joan Myers donated to New Mexico Museum of Art.

- A. Russell Lee
- B. Notes/Interviews
- C. Doris Caudill Jackson
- D. Pie Town Articles
- E. Correspondence
- F. Miscellaneous History
- G. Maps

Box 2

Section 2

Homesteading on the Zuni Plateau. 1999 Article by Joan M. Jensen on the Historical and Economic Development of the Zuni Plateau of Western New Mexico in the area around Pie Town.

Section 3

Photographs of Homesteaders in Pie Town, NM 1929 - 1933

Section 4

Microfilm from the University at Louisville Archives & Records Center.

- A. The Roy Stryker Papers
Series I - Correspondence (Reel #2 of 5), 1938 - 1940.
- B. The Roy Stryker Papers
Series I - Correspondence (Reel #3 of 5), 1941 - 1945.