

# Indiana Farm Security Photographs



## Roy Stryker

Roy Stryker was born in 1893 in Great Bend, Kansas and grew up on a farm in Montrose, Colorado. After serving in the infantry in World War I, he went to Columbia University where he studied economics. After graduating in 1924, he stayed to teach at the invitation of his mentor, Rexford Tugwell. They collaborated on a book entitled, *American Economic Life*, which made extensive use of photographs to complement the text. He used these photographs to illustrate his economics lectures and writings, and they became powerful teaching tools that brought economic theories to life for his students.

As a member of Franklin Roosevelt's Brains Trust, Tugwell organized the Resettlement Administration, which later became known as the Farm Security Administration, and provided rehabilitation loans and resettlement opportunities to farmers impoverished by the Great Depression. In 1935, Tugwell asked Stryker to come to Washington, D.C. to head the Historical Section, where he set up the photography project. Stryker was very talented at getting the best out of his photographers. He briefed them on their assignments before sending them out, giving the photographers detailed instructions. Stryker did not tell his photographers how to shoot their photos, but he did give them lists of themes to photograph. He also made sure that newspapers and magazines, such as *Life* and *Look*, had access to Farm Security Administration photographs. After the World War II, Stryker resigned and went to work for Standard Oil of New Jersey's documentary project from 1943 to 1950. This project required the documentation of the corporation's operations in the field and other activities related to the oil industry. By the time the project was completed, some 67,000 photographs had been produced. The collection is now in the Photographic Archives at the University of Louisville. From 1950 to 1952, Stryker worked to establish the Pittsburgh Photographic Library, a project of the University of Pittsburgh designed to document the rebirth of Pittsburgh into a modern urban city. After Stryker resigned from the project, the Pittsburgh Photographic Library continued in operation for several more years. After leaving the Pittsburgh Photographic Library, Stryker directed a project at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation, as well as occasionally consulting and teaching classes on photojournalism at the University of Missouri. He died in Grand Junction, Colorado in 1975.

## **Roy Stryker Bibliography**

*The Highway as Habitat: A Roy Stryker Documentation.* Ulrich Keller. Santa Barbara, CA: University Art Museum, 1986.

*In This Proud Land: America 1935-1943 as Seen in the FSA Photographs.* Roy E. Stryker and Nancy C. Wood. New York: Graphic Society 1973.

*Portrait of a Decade: Roy Stryker and the Development of Documentary Photography in the Thirties.* Jack F. Hurley. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972.

*Roy Stryker: The Humane Propagandist.* James C. Anderson. Louisville, KY: Photographic Archives, University of Louisville, 1977.

*Roy Stryker: U.S.A., 1943-1950.* Steven Platter. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

## **Roy Stryker Websites**

Carnegie Library of Philadelphia: The Photographers: Roy Stryker  
<http://www.clpgh.org/exhibit/photog14.html>

Oral history interview with Roy Emerson Stryker, 1963-1965  
<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/stryke63.htm>