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Images in Struggle: Photographs of Colorado Coal Camps

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Visual images produced as elements of material culture constitute a remarkable and under-utilized resource for sociological investigation. This investigation of historic photographs of Colorado coal-mining communities develops methods to analyze photos as sociological data. The coal industry was the site of sometimes violent struggle between workers and management. The labor intensive nature of mining and its location in under populated areas led to the development of company towns. Miners homes became contested terrain. Cameras were employed to create images to correspond to existing beliefs, values, and ideological definitions. By carefully examining photographs of miners houses we discover new meanings of the social facts governing the coal-miners' world.

Historical photographs are often used to illustrate books and documentary films. Unfortunately, they are almost always employed naively, as the most obvious kind of illustration. Few historians utilize them as primary source material or subject them to the critical interrogation to which they routinely subject written documents. Most scholarly work on photography focuses on a few star photographers.[1] Certain "founding fathers" of landscape (Timothy O'Sullivan, Carleton Watkins), portrait (Matthew Brady, Edward Curtis), and social life (Jacob Riis, Lewis Hine) have been examined in detail and a veritable industry of critique has developed around 1930's documentary photography. This literature on "important" photographs lays the groundwork to attempt the far more difficult investigation of America's multitudinous, commonplace, yet obscure legacy of historic photos.

Millions of photographs survive from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Archives preserve heterogeneous collections of local shots of local interest that pretend to little more than authenticity. Unlike the expeditionary records surrounding Timothy O'Sullivan's photographs or the publications and scripts left by Riis and Hine, most historic photos were preserved without provenance, context, or the textual back-up that provide data for interpretation. "Generic" historic photos occur singly or clustered in folders identified by the locale, the subject, the event, the studio, or donor. Frequently the negatives are lost. Prints may have a note scrawled of the back, or a caption, but most lack written text. Sometimes they appear isolated from all context, other times they have been torn out of place and the context is itself misleading.

As an example, despite the fact that Patricia Limerick is one of the most accomplished of the new generation of western historians, she has not yet moved beyond the obvious uses of photographs as superficial illustration. In her ground breaking work, *The Legacy of Conquest: the Unbroken Past of the American West* (Limerick 1987:98), she reproduced a photograph of an African-American coal miner. Instead of the original identifier written on the back of the print in pencil, "Negro coal miner at Starkville," Limerick invented the caption: "The West of work: coal miner's residence, Colorado." While not addressing the image directly, she offered the photograph as a powerful illustration of two of her central theses about previous renditions of western history that ignored: 1) the contributions of Native Americans, Blacks and Mexicans, and women of all backgrounds, that is, of the "other" and 2) the central importance of labor, "...the elemental fact obscured by the myths and romances: in its essence, Western expansion was a lot of work" (Limerick, 1987:97). (*see photo 1*)

In some ways the photograph, taken from the Mitchell collection in the Colorado State Historical Society, was an predictable choice. The photographer composed a black man and woman standing in front of a shack, in the background we see an arid hillside and Fisher's Peak, a flat-topped mesa which marks the location as "the

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Photo I

"Negro Coal Miner at Starkville." Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Trinidad Collection

West." The original text tells us to read the image as an example of a negro coal miner, and locates the place precisely as "Starkville" a company town outside of Trinidad, Colorado. Limerick's caption assumes we see the people's race but draws our attention to the house and Colorado. The image plays on the "lo the poor coal miner" stereotype of "otherness" and exploited labor. Curiously, however, the photograph of an isolated miner's shack does not support Limerick's thesis about the magnitude of contributions of "others" as well as, for example, *photo II*, from the Colorado Fuel and Iron Corporation (CF&I) collection showing well-dressed African-Americans at CF&I's mine in Walsenburg, Colorado. The photographic evidence of a thriving *black* community might better have supported Limerick's thesis that "others" made important economic contributions to the development of the western frontier. Blacks were not just "present" on the frontier; beginning in the early 1880's, an African-American community contributed to the growth of Walsenburg. Had Limerick dug a little deeper, she might have discovered the possibilities that run-of-the-mill historic photographs offer for analysis as texts and discourse.

The photographs found in archives are paradoxical: they are images about which we know little and they are among the type of "document" that we take to be the most "true." On the one hand "truth" comes from being grounded in sense certainty and indexicality - we trust our eyes and we "know" that what appears in the image actually appeared before the camera. Thus, photographs have the quality of being undoubtable, apodictic. On the other hand, in most cases very little supporting evidence exists to evaluate the photographic record. Meaning becomes problematic when documentary material has not been preserved to allow the investigator to make valid and reliable assessments about the photograph:

> ...without an encompassing structure, individual images remained dangerously isolated and misleading. The structure endows each image with what Foucault calls "enunciability," the power to make a meaningful statement.... Organized into a category or sequence, single images can be viewed as part of a presumed pattern, an order, a historical totality (Trachtenberg, 1989:87-88).

The meaning of photographs is problematized by lack of documentary support. As early as 1909, the sociologist and documentary photographer Lewis Hine grappled with the question of anchoring photographic meaning - that is, what words to attach to the image to avoid what Trachtenberg (1989:225) called "the

Photo II
Miners and their families, Walsenburg, Colorado. Courtesy of CF&I Corporation

dangerous indeterminacy of unadorned images." Researchers digging through photographic archives rarely have the kind of connotative map provided by a master documentarian like Hine who conducted "surveys" motivated by sociological concern for child labor, immigrants at Ellis Island, men at work, etc. Moreover, Hine grouped photographs into "stories" in which captions and sometimes extensive text and quotes were used to contextualize the images and provide connotative meanings. Without such a "story," how are we able to draw meanings from groups of historical photographs?

The importance of words as tools for the interpretation of photographs cannot be overemphasized. Look again at the "Negro coal miner at Starkville." While it is clear that we are in a coal town (there are coke ovens in the middle ground), the "miner" is without tool or workclothes. Only the caption tells us he is a miner; for all the image itself reveals, he might work in the coke plant, be a laborer, a gambler, or unemployed. For more than a decade I examined this photograph carefully, and used it in slide shows and video documentaries. I did so without seeing it. The most obvious laborer in the photo is the "invisible" woman of color; neither the photographer, the person who scrawled the caption, nor Patricia Limerick saw her either. But the woman's tools and the products of her labor are everywhere visible: two wooden wash buckets, the galvanized washtub, washboard, and piles of heavy wrung-out clothes compose the immediate foreground. In fact the "negro coal miner" is partially obscured by piles of laundry. Few examples could provide better support for the importance of words in over-determining the meaning of photographs. The social facts surrounding woman of color were invisibility, or more precisely, our blindness to their existence and their labor. Perhaps a 1990's caption should read: "African-American Laundress Starkville, Colorado" or "Two income family, Colorado coal camp."

Images in struggle

This paper will examine historic photographs of Colorado coal mining communities. For more than a decade, from the mid-seventies to the mid-eighties, I conducted ethnographic field work in the coal fields of the western states. As part of the work, I systematically collected historic photographs from personal scrap books, small town libraries or museums, public archives, and private or corporate collections. To date, the collection totals more than 10,000 images. The coal photos are obscure in that little documentary information exists that would provide a "ready-made" understanding. We may not even know critical information like the date, the location or the photographer's

name. The photographs are fascinating, but raise two questions:

1) Can we use such problematic documents in the construction (re-construction) of social history? (And more importantly, should we bother.)

2) Do photographic records inform us of things that other sources cannot?

At the turn of the century, Colorado was the sixth largest coal producing state in the nation. Railroads and steel corporations wielding vast economic power, developed industry in underdeveloped areas, accumulated capital, established and fought to maintain vertical and horizontal integration, developed economies of scale, and took aggressive steps to reduce costs, mechanize the workplace, and prevent union recognition. In opposition, miners fought for a union to counterbalance corporate power. They demanded abolition of company stores, company housing and payment in scrip; they sought checkweighmen to ensure fair weight, improved safety and working conditions, and an end to corporate control over local politics, social and living conditions. Dissent and discontent smoldered long and low in the coal fields and conflict occasionally burst into open flame. For six decades a struggle was waged, sometimes hidden sometimes open. The struggle came down to a single issue: the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) demanded recognition, the companies refused.

Photographs functioned as strategic weapons in the coal wars, creating images to impose or reinforce various meanings of the coal miners' world: press photographers made images of "newsworthy" events; company photographers recorded model coal camps and modern equipment; union photographers documented strike related activities; local studios made miners' portraits, took commercial work, and photographed scenery for sale as prints and post cards; town photographers recorded growth as well as major events like floods, fires, and community celebrations; some local photo-graphers even made "documentary" or "art" photos portraying the region from humanitarian or aesthetic perspectives.

The world of the miners has been buried by history, but thousands of photographs survive in historic collections and archives. Significant numbers of mining photos have been collected, cataloged, and preserved by centralized public archives like the Denver Public Library and the Colorado State Historical Society. Such archives hold individual shots acquired from a variety of sources; some were filed topically in folders with titles like "Militia-Strikes," "Coal Mining Northern Field," or were labeled with names like "Mother Jones," "Hastings Explosion." Archival organization is characterized by an equivalence of image which tends to submerge differences between individual photographs and impose a common meaning. Another organization scheme is also present. Certain collections were preserved in the archive intact: "the Welborn collection," and the "Dold Collection." Outside of public archives, additional collections were preserved by individuals and companies. Collections are more likely than individual photos to retain stamps of meaning intended by their creators. In a collection, images tend to reinforce each other and suggest meanings unified by theme or event, by location, by political intent, etc. Such collections may provide additional frameworks for interpretation which individual images lack. If photographs are data, then the homogeneity of collections speaks to issues of validity.

The researcher's first experience of the photographic archive is the enormous variety of material. There are a great many photos of the industrial environment depicting mines, company towns, and the hub cities of the coal fields. There are pictures of everyday life showing miners at work underground, families, kids and schools, shoppers in company stores, holidays, field days and company picnics, the arrival of the first Model T. There are photos made after explosions and accidents showing dead miners and grieving families, and there are shots of union meetings, picket marches, armed militia men, armed miners and the aftermath of strike violence. At first glance it seems like everything was photographed and one feels they can almost enter the miners' world through the multiple imagery. With continued exposure, however, a different view takes hold. Like an archive of written documents, some of the items confirm one another, others are contradictory. Without an adequate framework of words to establish reliability, the images may remain mute or indeed be

"dangerously isolated and misleading." Nevertheless, methods can be developed to overcome inconsistency. Careful research, analysis, and procedures like comparison and juxtaposition, while not guarantors of truth, can be used to glean meanings from photographs and collections that exist without sufficient written documentary material, structure, or sequence to establish enunciability.

Looking through archives of historic photographs is very similar to the experience of montage that the revolutionary Russian film maker Sergei Eisenstein credited with "Giving birth to concepts, to emotions by juxtaposing two disparate events ... the montage principle obliges spectators to create" (Eisenstein, 1947:31-36, cited in Trachtenberg, 1989:259). Trachtenberg described further the perception of montage, in describing intellectual effects of viewing the photo assemblages created by Walker Evans as:

> ...a dialectical process of thesis giving rise to counter thesis, together producing as feeling and/or idea an unseen, unstated synthesis. Each picture discloses a link to the next, a hint or a germ of an antithetical image to follow. The reader is expected to remember each image fully, in all its details and nuances, for the most inconspicuous details become significant in echoes and allusions further on. What the pictures say they say in and through the texture of relations which unfold - continuities, doublings, reversals, climaxes and resolutions (Trachtenberg, 1989:259).

Examining images of coal mining, sorting and viewing the images in a variety of sequences and juxtapositions, I was struck not only by continuity and reinforcement but by conflict and contradiction. The overall perception of variety gave way to the view of individual photographs and collections co-existing uneasily in a struggle to assert meanings.

Alan Trachtenberg's study, *Reading American Photographs* (1989), contributed important new understanding of ways to utilize photographs in social history. In developing a critical discourse on photographs, Trachtenberg frequently referred to photographs as "social facts." I will return to the methodological implications of this observation at the conclusion of this paper, for now let us simply recall Durkheim's definition of social facts as widespread social relationships that exercise "coercive" power over the individual:

> ...(the) source is not in the individual, their substratum can be no other than society, either the political society as a whole or some one of the partial groups that it includes, such as religious denominations, political, literary, and occupational associations, etc. (Durkheim 1938:3).

The coercion exercised by social facts is powerful enough to militate what can be seen: what we "see" and what we are blind to is as socially determined as what beliefs we hold or how we think, feel and act. One can only photograph what one can see, thus we can take "things photographed" as evidence of things seen.[2] Examining photographs from this perspective reveals taken-for-granted realities as well as disputed aspects of the coal miners' world.

Impulses to record the miners' world were not individual, but social. Webs of social facts dictated what the various photographers of the miners' world saw and photographed. The question of how to photograph that world involved ideological decisions, politics, economics and aesthetics. Some of these decisions were grossly political, like company decisions not to photograph (or circulate) photos from explosions. But even mundane photos of coal camps reveal the coercion and constraint of vision exercised by social facts. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1973:365) were implicitly referencing aesthetic social facts when they noted that the requirements of photographic "style" introduce an element of untruth "...even in the admirable expertise of a photograph of a peasant's squalid hut." Their comment on "huts" reminded me of the large number of housing photos that are among the most common images in archives of mining photographs.

Examining photographs of coal camp housing reveals ways that photographers, as persons-in-society, coerced and determined by social facts, composed and organized images to yield certain meanings of "house" or "home," meanings which in turn reinforced and became part of the social facts of the miners' world. Curiously, miners did not take many photos of the houses they lived in. While I collected many photographs from individual miner's albums, they

were for the most part pictures of people, houses appeared only as background. However, photographers working for coal companies, unions, and the government among others did make a great many photographs of the miners homes. These photographs reveal what Allan Sekula (1984:77-78) termed a "discursively-born ideology." Ideologies, among which Sekula included "sexuality," "production," "technology," and "history" and to which I will add "home," are contested terrains.

Earlier, I suggested that collections seemed to have a unifying thread, a connection between images. To begin, I will analyze images of coal camp housing drawn from five intentionally assembled groups of photos: the Mitchell collection, the Aultman collection, the CF&I collection, the UMWA collection, and a collection of photographs made in 1947 by Russell Lee. Each of these groups of photos includes clearly identifiable "ideal types," that is reinforcing clusters of similar images. I selected a small number of photographs to represent these broad classes of images from the collections and I offer the ideal types as representations of social facts.

The Mitchell Collection

Several hundred prints were preserved by Arthur Roy Mitchell, curator of the Pioneer Museum in Trinidad. Mitchell, a western artist whose paintings and drawings were often used as cover art for "westerns," came from a family of Southern Colorado ranchers. He mounted many museum exhibits celebrating the farming and ranching community, but none on the coal industry which dominated the local economy. Nevertheless, Mitchell acquired photos of the miners; some were kept in files at the museum, others at home. After his death an important box of pictures was presented by his sister to the Pioneer Museum. Within a few years of his death, the Colorado Historical Society, which operated the Pioneer Museum, removed the photographs to the main archive in Denver.[3]

Whether Mitchell actively photographed, or just collected prints is not clear, however one group of images seems connected in style and substance.[4] They appear without sufficient interpretative material, making their enunciability problematic. Apparently taken around the turn of the century, most have no captions; those that do indicate that they were made near Trinidad, Colorado. The ideal type consists of several dozen shots of miners' families posed in front of the type of dwelling termed "vernacular housing" by historians. Vernacular housing refers to homes built by the miners, perhaps on land rented from the company, in contrast to company housing projects where the houses were rented. *(photos III, IV, V and VI)*

As a collection, Mitchell's photographs have elements of a survey: they were apparently taken by the same photographer, there is a superficial "ethnographic" texture as if images were chosen to represent different ethnic groups, and only vernacular housing was pictured. The collection includes photos that appear to be of Eastern and Southern European families, the image of an African-American miner discussed above, several of Mexicans or local Hispanos, large families and women with babies and children, a group of barefoot boys, a young girl in front of a canvas house with the caption "The flower of Trinidad's white trash," women, perhaps widows as they are dressed in black and posed without men, groups of single young men in front of what might be a boarding house - some of them holding whisky bottles, and so on. The photos seem to confirm certain fundamental facts of the miners world: the variety of ethnic and racial groups, large families, boarding houses for single men, poor sanitation, hardship for women and children, makeshift housing, alcohol consump-tion, and so on.

Some of the Mitchell photographs remind one of the photographs of Lewis Hine, whose work was pathbreaking both photographically and sociologically. Between 1904 and 1909, Hine photographed immigrants at Ellis Island; in 1907 he enrolled in the Sociology program at Columbia University and in the following year began to photograph for the Pittsburgh Survey documenting immigrant labor including the "breaker boys" series published in the *Child Labor Bulletin* in August 1913 (Brooklyn Museum, 1977:17-19, 58). He used the camera as a tool in sociological survey working within the bounds of the progressive reform movement which emphasized systematic investigation of social problems (Trachtenberg, 1989:177). Hine presented his

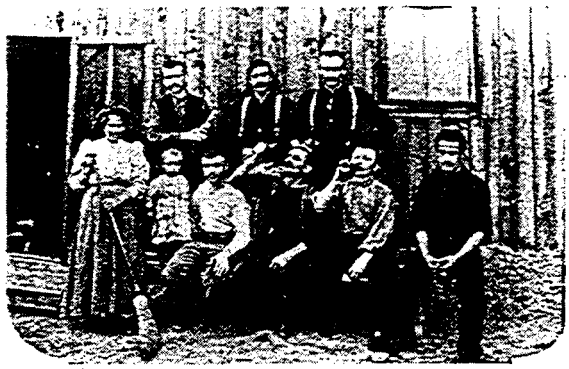


Photo III (no caption) Boarding house, Southern Colorado coal camp. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Trinidad Collection

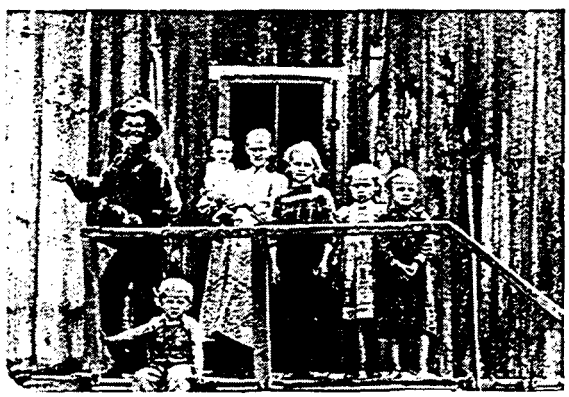


Photo IV (no caption) Woman and children, Southern Colorado coal camp. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Trinidad Collection

Photo V (no caption) Miner, family and St. Bernard Southern Colorado coal camp. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Trinidad Collection

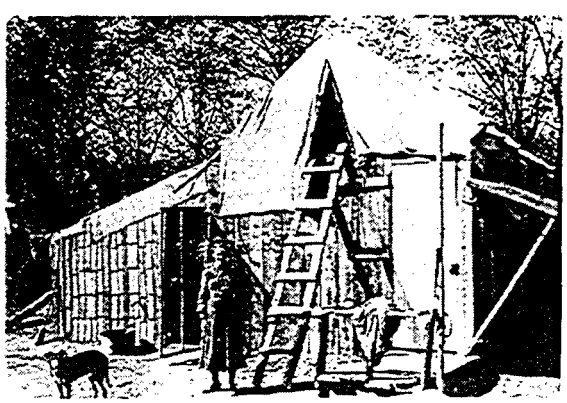


Photo VI "The Flower of Trinidad's White Trash." Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Trinidad Collection

photographs in the form of "stories," anchored with pictures and text (Ibid:176).

However "documentary-like," Mitchell's collection of miners' families in front of their homes was not a survey because no text was recorded to support meaning. Nor do these photos meet Beaumont Newhall's (1938:190) definition of "documentary" photographs as "factual" records made for "definitive sociological purposes." The collection manifests telling over-significations and lacks - shacks and large families were photographed over and over again, other things were not recorded. Not included, for instance, were interiors of miner's homes, street life, recreation, or schools. It is important to note that miners' families were not posed in front of "modern" company housing. Similarly, there were no photos from accidents or explosions, something no sociologist or reformer would likely omit. Moreover, despite the fact that the 1913-14 strike and the "Ludlow massacre" (which George McGovern (1972) termed the only incident of class warfare in American history) left a rich photographic record, the Mitchell collection does not contain any of these photos. He did not preserve images of picket marches, miners' tent colonies, militia troops, fortified coal camps and armed miners, strike violence, and so on.

In the Mitchell collection, individual ethnic families were shot like specimens in a manner similar to Jacob Riis's work. Of Riis's book, *How the Other Half Lives*, Sally Stein observed:

> ...Riis gave more extensive treatment to national idiosyncracies by devoting discrete chapters to each of the ethnic neighborhoods. This structure in itself reassured the reader by picturing the "other half" as perfectly atomized. The general subject was not only more easily apprehended according to ready categories but also more easily contained given the evident internal divisions (Stein, 1983:13).

In the same vein, the photos that Mitchell preserved emphasize separation and the "otherness" of the miners: their squalor, ethnicity, alcohol use, the irresponsibility of large families and big dogs. In these photos we glimpse an ambivalence of meaning critical to understanding the position of coal mining in the West. Despite the fact that the coal industry was central to the development of the West - producing wealth, fuel for development, and raw material for basic industries - large workingclass populations contradicted the dominant ideology of the frontier. The companies sent labor agents to recruit groups of workers from different racial and ethnic groups at first as cheap labor, later as strike-breakers, and finally because a polyglot labor force made union organizing difficult. Mining companies on the western frontier brought a proletarian workforce. As Limerick noted in her critical re-evaluation of western history:

> Westward expansion was supposed to create a land of independent, agrarian landowners and to prevent the rise of a wage-dependent laboring population. In mining the opposite happened (Limerick, 1988:124).

Even though coal dominated the economy, Mitchell along with other pioneer members of Trinidad's cowboy bourgeoisie, felt strongly that mining was a temporary perturbation. The soul of Southern Colorado remained with pioneers on the Santa Fe trail and longhorns on the Goodnight Loving Trail. Despite the fact that the deaths of women and children in the strikers' tent colony was an event of national significance, many residents refer to it as the "so-called Ludlow Massacre" and believe that much of what has been written is propaganda. This provides the context for understanding the social fact (re)presented in Mitchell's coal camp shots. Unlike Lewis Hine's surveys, the Mitchell photos should not be read as images of exploitation leading to reforms. The social fact that they depict is the foreign element on the frontier.

The Aultman Collection

The Aultman studio in Trinidad held tens of thousands of prints and negatives compiled since October 1, 1889, by a father and son who operated a commercial photography business. They acquired negatives made by other photographers, made thousands of studio portraits, photographed weddings, took photographs under contract with coal companies, and did a certain amount of freelance "documentary," landscape, and "art" work.[5] (*see photo VII*)

The first Aultman photo I have chosen is reminiscent of the Mitchell photos. We see people posed in front of vernacular housing, in this case an adobe. The women are clearly members of the indigenous Hispano community of Southern Colorado and Northern New Mexico. Local Hispano's were among the first workforce in the coal mines, and this may have been a miner's house (notice the "modern" house in the background, typical of coal camp housing) but this is not a mining picture. Much like western photographers living near reservations who photographed Indians to make prints for sale to the dominant population as post cards or "art," the Aultmans photographed the Hispano community as "local color." This suggestion is confirmed both by the two burros and the women's elaborate dress which lend an exoticism to the scene. More telling is the fact that, unlike the Mitchell collection, the Aultman collection does not include similar photos of other ethnic groups. To be precise, this "squalid hut" photograph, like similar photographs of burros piled high with kindling and women baking bread in the outdoor ovens called hornos, was made by Anglo photographers to celebrate the social fact of an exotic and vanishing way of life. (*see photo VIII*)

The second shot, also representative of a number of similar images in the Aultman collection, is a long shot of the kind of neighborhood where the Mitchell photos were made. No people are visible in the shot, and enough documentation exists to help understand the social facts surrounding these depopulated images of shanty towns. From time to time the Aultman studio was contracted to take photographs for coal companies (Aultman, 1978). This photograph, and the next, are examples of contract work. They

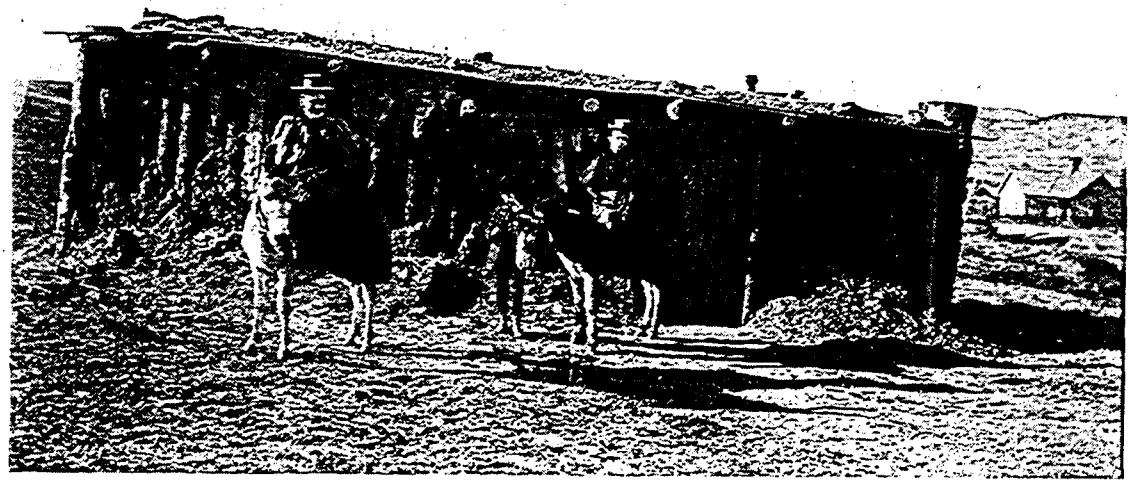


Photo VII (no caption) Hispanic family, burros, and adobe house, Southern Colorado. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Aultman Collection

have been identified as long shots of the CF&I town of Sopris, which was founded in 1887 and closed in 1928. The first photograph shows the first town on the site, a collection of vernacular homes built by the miners' themselves.

The companies benefitted when they did not have to figure the cost of housing into the initial costs of opening a mine, but they quickly discovered that private homes created real problems during strikes. Miners' shanties may not have looked like much, but they were home and families could not be evicted easily. The significance of ownership is apparent in the account of Emma Zanetell (1978), one of the people that I interviewed in Southern Colorado. She was born in 1892 to German and Austrian immigrant par-

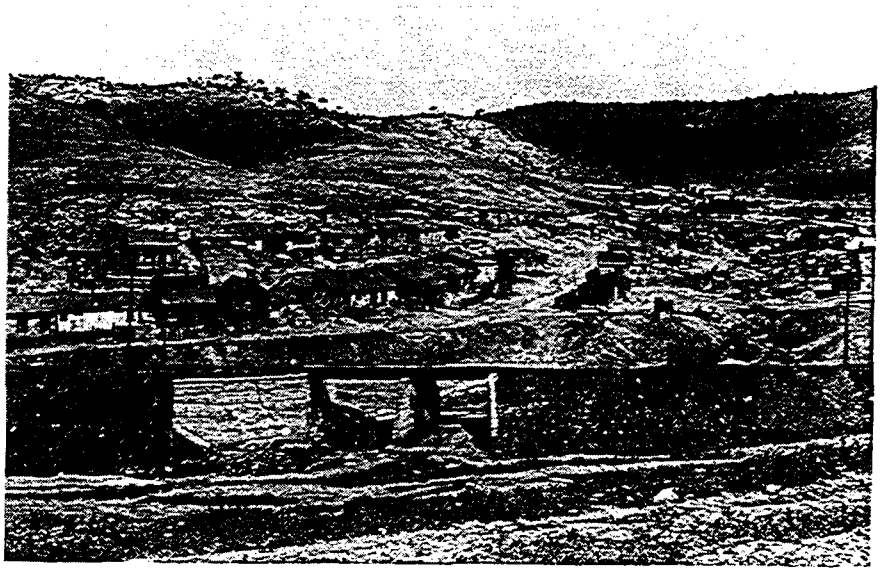


Photo VIII (no caption) Old Sopris. Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Aultman Collection

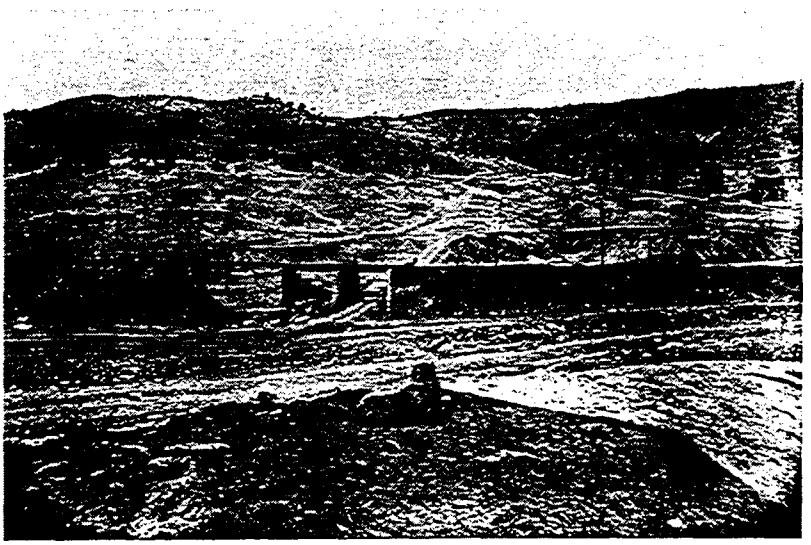


Photo IX
(no caption) New Sopris.
Courtesy of Colorado
Historical Society
Aultman Collection

ents. Her father was a union man and her earliest memories are of the 1893 strike when the family lived in Sopris:

> EZ: When I was a year, well say 13 months old at Sopris, that big strike they had then. Well I was a year and two days older than she was. And they, well, they beat my dad up and they locked him up and mama said his hands was all swollen where they beat him up. And they come in and they grabbed the cradle Mary was in. Mama screamed and grabbed it. She had me in her arms. They was gonna throw her out and then they blew the house up. Lost his home...

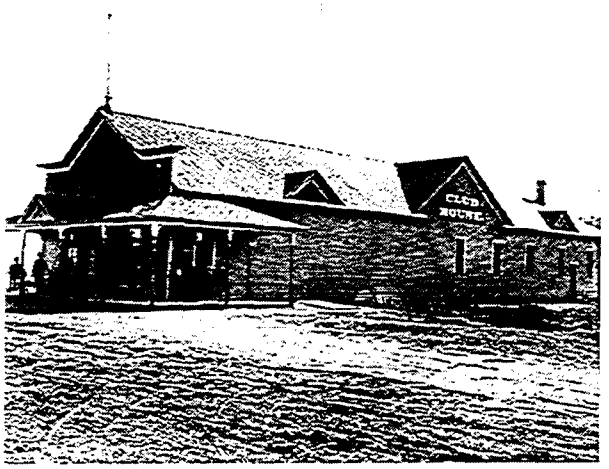


Photo X (no caption) Club House Courtesy of Colorado Historical Society Aultman Collection

> I: Was it a company house?
> EZ: No, he built — It was his own house...

Colorado Fuel & Iron Corporation owned Sopris. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. was the majority stockholder, and was held responsible by public opinion for the corporate intransigence that in 1914 led to the deaths of strikers' wives and children at Ludlow. Testifying in two separate federal investigations, John D. Rockefeller Jr. claimed ignorance as to how the miners in Colorado lived, what their working conditions were, or even how much they were paid. Two years after the hearings, he made a public relations trip to Colorado, went down in the mines and saw for himself the conditions in his company towns. Sopris was one of the stops on his tour. Rockefeller's notes from the trip described the housing situation as follows:

> Up to date these have largely consisted of little hovels, built by the residents, who are all Italians, on company land which is rented at a nominal figure. These houses are thirty years or more old. When one tenant leaves, he sells his house to the next tenant. It has been impossible heretofore to dislodge the tenants, who thus secured homes for the least possible sum and are living just about as in their native land. After Mr. Murphy's visit, the importance of doing away with these shacks was generally recognized, and thirty-four new concrete houses are being built, all well located and nicely arranged (Rockefeller, 1915:28).

The "hovels" were bought by the company and replaced with uniform cement block company housing. CF&I spent $500.00 to $800.00 on each new building, and in 1915 rented a typical miner's house for $2.00 per room per month.[6] The company was proud of what were termed "model coal camps" and they commissioned Aultman's studio to capture the transition on film. This explains the second photograph, taken from the same vantage point, to show "New Sopris." (*photo IX*)

Taken together, the picture of a neighborhood of "peasant's squalid huts" turned into neat rows of company houses illustrates yet a third social fact of the miners' world. Aultman employed re-photography to accomplish a direct comparison between the housing that the company built and rented to the miners and the vernacular housing that miners' provided for themselves. In the visual comparison, the vernacular housing appears old and tattered, messy and unclean. Asymmetry and disorder are metaphors for moral disorder, for the fragmented, unassimilated, angry and perhaps even revolutionary immigrant community.[7] Keep in mind that only two years before the photo was made, miners from this town engaged the company in a protracted strike, fought pitched gun battles with company guards, dynamited company property, and forced the government to send the U.S. army in to maintain order. In contrast, the rows of company housing appear modern, clean, orderly. Architectural symmetry suggests discipline, progress, prosperity, peace, and harmony. With the photos the mine company projects its image as an agent of progress, modernization, and assimilation while simultaneously blinding the viewer to alternate possibilities. Architectural and photographic images of order make it impossible to visualize the company as either the labor agent that imported ethnic strike breakers, or as itself the "foreign element on the frontier" - the absentee landlord. (*photo X*)

The lack of people in the Aultman photographs was critical in maintaining the corporate social facts. From the coal miners' point of view, which the viewer might take if miners were in the picture, rents were higher in company housing, strikers and union sympathizers were more easily evicted, children had to attend company school, and miners had to shop at the company store. The company town was a total institution; social control was tight. Model coal towns did not have public spaces, not even town squares or plazas. Union meetings took place in the hills at night because what passed for public space, like the clubhouse photographed by Aultman, was tightly controlled by marshals employed by the company and deputized by the sheriffs of the county. While projecting photographic representations of "model" towns, companies fought to prevent the creation of community - or more precisely, to shape and control the community that developed solely to further the productive ends of capital.

In the end, then, the social fact captured in Aultman's rephotographs is the transition from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*, from community to society, from the "home" you built yourself to the "house" you rented from the coal company. According the Oxford English Dictionary, in Old English and early Middle English "Home" meant "a village or town, a collection of dwellings or a village with its cottages." Later it came to mean "the fixed residence of a family or household;" or "one's own house." Home has the important connotation of "The place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings which naturally attach to it..." A "house," on the other hand is merely "a building for human habitation," especially, "a building that is the ordinary dwelling place for a family." Thus home is a social place; a house is architecture.[8] This may well explain why the miners' own photo albums contained so few photographs of the coal camp houses.

The United Mine Workers Collections

Immediately after Ludlow, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) assembled a set of prints related to the 1913-14 Colorado coal strike. Copies of these collections were held by Adolph Germer, Edward Doyle and Van Bittner, who were officials or organizers for the union. Germer's photos were left to the Colorado Historical Society, Doyle's are at the Denver Public Library and Van Bittner left his papers to West Virginia University. Some of the photographs were

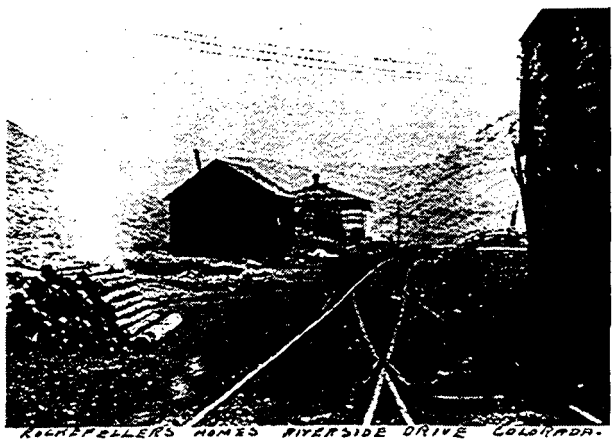
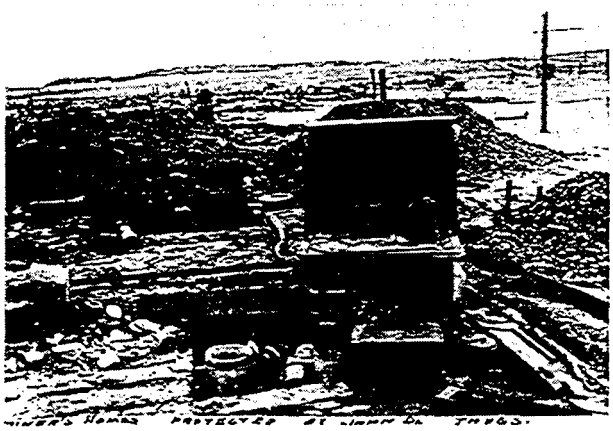


Photo XI
"Rockefeller's homes Riverside Drive Colorada" (sic.). Courtesy United Mine Workers of America

Photo XII
"Miner's homes protected by John D's Thugs." Courtesy of United Mine Workers of America

Photo XIII
"Machine gun at Water Tank Hill, Ludlow, Colorado 1913-14." Photo by Stuart Mace, Staff Photographer Denver Times. Courtesy of Western History Department Denver Public Library



taken by Lou Dold, a Trinidad, Colorado photographer who made a detailed photographic record of the strikers, tent colonies, and strike related events including the funerals of the Ludlow victims. Dold's work is distinctive; on most of the negatives he wrote "Dold Photo" to establish copyright. He also numbered the sequences and put simple descriptive captions, e.g., "Showing Coffins of Victims in Front of Catholic Church, Trinidad Colo."[9] He had remarkable access to the strikers and several of the photos in the UMWA collections that do not have Dold's copyright have the look and style of Dold's work. The UMWA collections include many shots culled from other sources, most notably photographs of the Colorado Militia striking heroic poses made by a photographer named Stuart Mace, a staff photographer for the *Denver Times*. Like Dold's photographs of strikers, Mace's militia portraits could only have been taken with the full cooperation of his subjects.

The UMWA photos are different from Dold's or Mace's originals. The images have been changed by the addition of explicitly political and pro-union captions neatly written in black ink on the front of the prints. For example, a shot of a dead militiaman lying on the railroad tracks is captioned: "At last the devil has his own - a dead thug," and a commonly reprinted shot showing a hand emerging from the Ludlow

"death hole" has written on the bottom "The hole where 11 children and 2 women burned alive" and on the top of the photo: "Vengeance will be mine."[10] (*photos XI, XII*)

Two of the less dramatic UMWA photographs are of particular interest in the "squalid huts" discussion. The first is a smoky and visually uninteresting shot of shacks alongside railroad tracks going up a canyon. The caption reads: "Rockefellers homes Riverside Drive Colorado." The other shows the burned ruins of the Ludlow tent colony, a cook stove stands in the right foreground, one of the "death" cellars is visible in the middle ground, the ruins recede into the distance. The shot is captioned: "Miner's homes protected by John D's thugs." The UMWA prints present us with alternative social facts. We are offered the contradictory view of company power. The word "home" was used ironically, precisely because it connotes family, safety, and security. Obviously the miner's shacks are not at all like Rockefeller's home, presumably a mansion on Riverside Drive in New York City. (*photo XIII*)

The social fact evident in the UMWA's photographs is actually the Union's remarkable success in winning the propaganda battle. They employed photographs and public testimonials by survivors of the tent colony blaze to forever brand the event "The Ludlow Massacre" and to associate the name of Rockefeller with violence and a callous disregard for the families of its employees. In an adroit dialectical reversal, the Union appropriated the images by adding captions, and thereby accomplished a remarkable transformation in meaning. Home became its opposite. A photograph of the Colorado Militia practicing with a machine gun at Ludlow before the tent colony was destroyed, taken by Stuart Mace with the obvious cooperation of the militia, was employed by the Union to represent violent out-of-control thugs thirsty for the blood of innocent women and children. Even without the Union's caption, "Thugs using machine gun at Ludlow," the image, reprinted in the press and in books, came to mean "massacre," and nothing else. The Union lost the strike, but in the photographs and in the popular imagination, the victims became the winners.

The Colorado Fuel and Iron Collection

The Aultman, Mitchell, and UMWA photos can fruitfully be compared with images culled from the archives of CF&I. In the ongoing comparisons we are coming to understand something about each collection which is not apparent when they are considered in isolation or in aggregate. This "peasants squalid hut" (*photo XIV*) was reprinted in a publication produced by CF&I's Sociological Department; *Camp and Plant* was published from December 14, 1901 to April 30, 1904. The magazine celebrated the growth of the company and featured images of order and improvement.[11] The photo of vernacular housing included the caption "Camp at Berwind, Colorado. The sort the men build for themselves." The caption is critical in contextualizing the social fact of how the viewer is to read the image. Trachtenberg reminded us that:

> Somewhere between what the lens depicts and what the caption interprets, a mental picture intervenes, a cultural ideology defining what and how to see, what to recognize as significant (Trachtenberg, 1989:80).

Photo XIV "Cabin at Berwind, Colorado. The sort the men build for themselves" Camp and Plant. *Courtesy of CF&I Corporation*

The *Camp and Plant* photo pre-dated by a decade the Sopris shots discussed above. CF&I was then under no compulsion to modernize its towns. The social fact of the "squalid hut" visible in the published image was therefore different from Sopris. The company had become a

Rockefeller enterprise in 1903 and was employing the influx of new capital to develop as a total institution. Consolidation meant extending control along the periphery of is property. In 1905, Lawrence Lewis, Editor of *Camp and Plant*, wrote an article for the business publication, *World's Work*. The remarkable title: "Uplifting 17,000 Employees: The human story of workers who were led by the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company from conditions of drunkenness and dirt to well-ordered living - a local betterment effort reaching 70,000 men, women and children in four commonwealths," sets the stage for understanding additional social facts signified in the Berwind "squalid hut." Lewis provided additional meaning by describing a place visited by the company doctor:

> ...a bunk-house built on ground not owned by the company and maintained by a padrone ... In this noisome place, in addition to millions of vermin of all sorts, lived thirty-eight Italian workmen each drawing $60 to $80 a month (Lewis, 1905:5939).

For twenty or more years CF&I had employed immigrant labor as strikebreakers. The practice was beneficial in keeping the United Mine Workers out of Southern Colorado but the side effect was that the policy had created a polyglot community increasingly difficult to control. "Foreign" labor agents, outside landlords, gambling halls and prostitution, liquor sales, and shops other than company stores reduced profit and created outside allegiances that threatened corporate control. Poor sanitation might lead to epidemic or at least increased absenteeism, and, in addition, unskilled and non-English speaking labor were difficult to control in the mine. As mechanization developed, training and safety became more critical in maintaining increased production. These social facts led to the first spurt of "model" town building.

The next two images (*photos XV, XVI*) are striking panoramas made with a "Circut" camera. Several of these prints were given to me in 1974 by the company public relations officer.[12] The two to three foot long panoramas were an expensive "modern" medium whose message was itself the triumph of industry. Circut photos celebrate the essential structures of production. There were two ideal types: panoramas of mine-town complexes displayed land and capital, and crew shots showed the other essential ingredient in production, labor. The panorama showing the company town called Segundo was made between 1914 and 1918. The crew shot of miners at the Sopris Mine was taken in November 1926. Photos like these were part of the company's "presentation of self" and were frequently displayed in public quarters at the mine - YMCA meeting rooms, club houses, or the Superintendent's office. In that setting photographs testified to and reinforced the power of the coal company, at the same time they portrayed the extent of ownership and control. However, the real consumer of the image, the one whose implied gaze is reproduced, is the coal baron himself, lord of all he surveys. The panorama reproduces the privileged judgmental position of capital because it is taken from on high, omniscient and all seeing, controlling. The photographer flatters his patron by re-presenting the scene as capital's enormous accomplishment.

Trachtenberg drew our attention to another of the meanings of this type of photograph in a discussion of views made by Timothy O'Sullivan at Virginia City hard rock mines which depicted a "distinct economic community" while omitting:

> ...the information that the industry was controlled chiefly by San Francisco financial interests, absentee landlords who sought the quickest returns on their investments, that Virginia City had burgeoned into an industrial city with a predominantly foreign-born work force and a militant union movement... (Trachtenberg, 1989:146).

The same social facts lurk behind the industrial photos taken by the CF&I company. Panoramas present coal mines and towns as complex yet orderly machines. Railroad tracks, steam engines, tipple and washery, portal, miners' houses, company store, even the YMCA and club house are the "distinct economic community" united in the purpose of production.

Industrial discipline is further emphasized by crew shots showing the industrial army standing quietly in rank. No hint of conflict is visible. Yet barely one year after the Sopris crew shot was made almost all the coal mines in Colorado were shut down in a protracted and bloody strike called by the Industrial Workers of

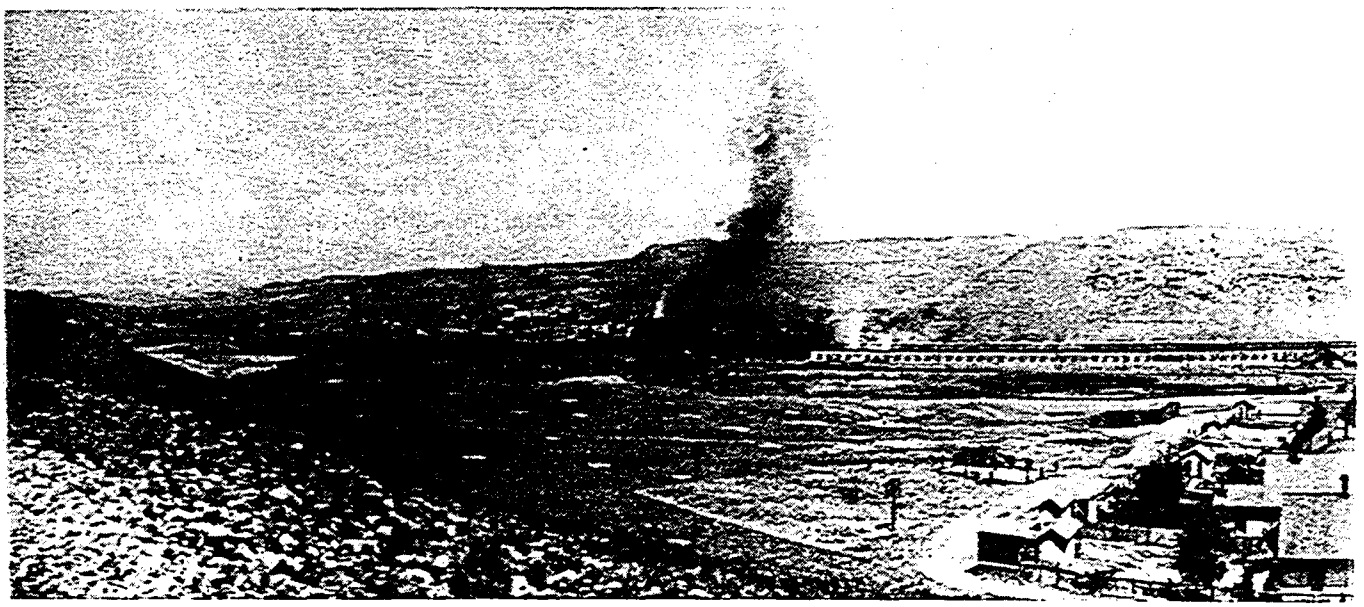
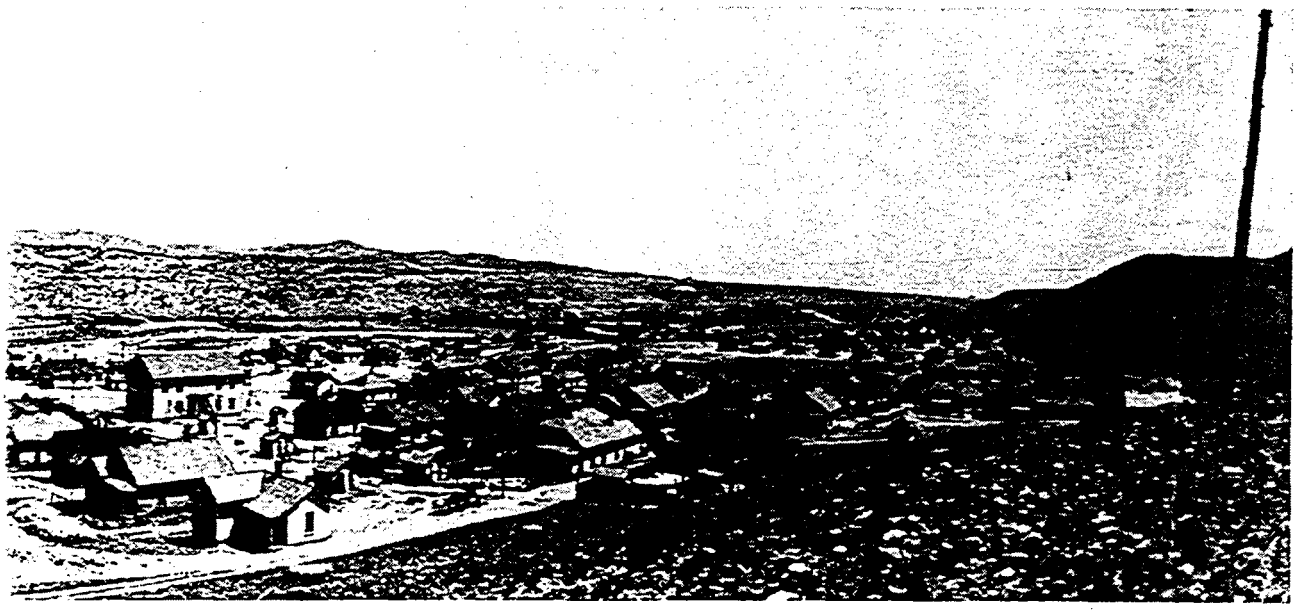


Photo XV Panorama of Segundo. "Taken from hill so. of camp looking No. Most bldgs. shown - including school house, coke ovens, washeries - plus some bldg's in old Segundo which are partially obscured by washery." According to residents this was taken before 1918. Fromm Photo, Courtesy CF&I Corporation

the World. The corporate image imposed in the crew photograph was a fabrication. The Wobblies were successful in organizing the field precisely because companies like CF&I had defeated the United Mine Workers in all previous strikes. (*photos XVII, XVIII*)

In the early 1920's, the CF&I made hundreds of photos of company stores, company housing, YMCA's, garden contests, company picnics, ball games and field days. While the company photographer also documented the industrial process showing mining equipment, the work force, safety innovations and so on, the huge number of "social" images was remarkable for an industrial photography department. Much of this photographic effort may have been precisely an effort to counter the images of exploitation and death that the Union trafficked in with telling effect. Like the Mitchell collection, the CF&I collection contains many views of miners, their wives and children posed in front of their houses. Here too, documentary support is skimpy, captions do not usually provide the date or names of the people but interestingly, the photos were identified by house number and location: "Berwind 283," or "6 room house Berwind." Miners wives and children appear in these shots as props for the company property which is the real subject.

Again it is important to remember the photographs that either never were made or, more likely, not made available to the public. Here too we can highlight the collection's lacks and the overrepresentations. Despite several sequences documenting damage from floods, and above ground fires, the company archives did not yield even a single photograph from accident or explosion. Such events were not uncommon, and we can presume that they were documented, at least for tax and insurance purposes, but the photos were not made public. What photos we have of these events come from news organizations or local photographers. Nor did the company offer photos of strikes, picket marches, armed company guards, the barbed wire fences that surrounded closed camps, and so on. The social facts depicted in the CF&I photographs are a world that is orderly, peaceful and productive: endlessly replayed images of baseball teams, happy school kids, miners waving from company houses and from the steps of the YMCA's built by the Rockefellers after Ludlow.



The Russell Lee Collection

During World War II, John L. Lewis called the miners out on strike. This was not a popular action, but the Union was strong and the miners were united in part by the desire to improve their living conditions. As part of the Krug-Lewis agreement that settled the strike, the government agreed to conduct an investigation of health, safety, and living conditions in the nation's coal fields. When the war was over a team of Navy doctors under the command of Rear Admiral Joel T. Boone were assigned to undertake "A Medical Survey of the Bituminous-Coal Industry" (Coal Mines Administration, 1947). They employed a photographer, Russell Lee, who had worked on the Farm Security Administration project. Lee's eye for social conditions had been trained by Roy Stryker who led him to make sequences of photographs as community portraits. Unlike other FSA photographers like Arthur Rothstein, who worked like a war correspondent capturing dramatic photographs of dust storms and refugees, or Dorothea Lange whose proof sheets reveal an artistic drive for the single great image, Lee functioned as a consummate visual sociologist. He sought community life in mundane activities and described them with his camera. The fruits of Lee's approach can be seen in his FSA series on the lumber town of Craigsville, Minnesota and the now famous portrait of Pie Town, New Mexico (Curtis, 1989:18-20).

In the 1946 project, Lee again employed the method and ideological approach that he had used in the FSA. He crisscrossed the nation with his wife, Doris, who took field notes and wrote captions for the photographs. Arriving in town with a check list of aspects of community life that he wanted to photograph, Lee expressed his sense of time and mission in an interview conducted in 1964:

> ...Whenever they asked me "What are you doing out here taking pictures?" I said, "Well, I'm taking pictures of the history of today." And they understood this. And this was an entree to the people that were difficult to communicate with... I sort of felt, too, that by means of these pictures we were helping some... parts of the country understand what the other parts... were like (Fern and Wroth, 1985:121).

Lee's approach was "documentary" in Newhall's sense of making photographs for sociological purposes. In fact, Curtis (1989:18) traced Lee's sociological imagination through Roy Stryker

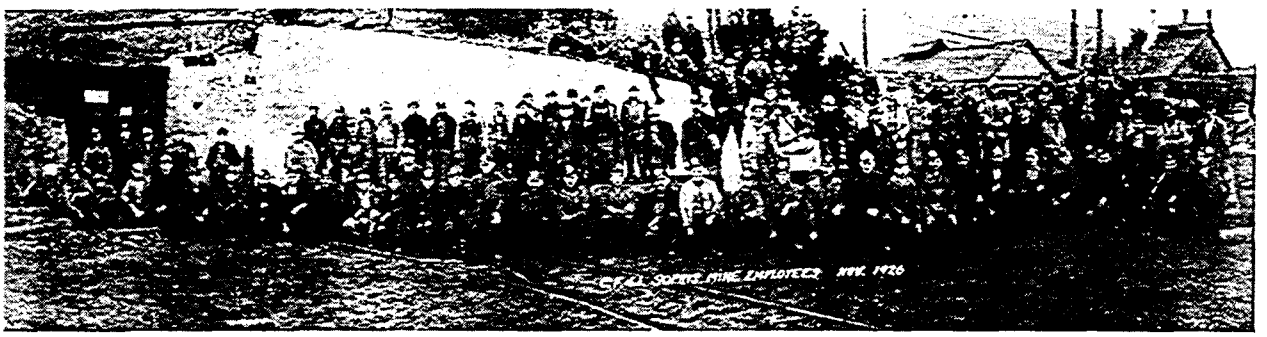


Photo XVI "Sopris Employees Nov. 1926" Courtesy Glenn Aultman

directly to Robert Lynd whose 1929 "Middletown" studies helped form the small-town ideology which was the prominent social fact represented in Lee's photographs. Lynd suggested the use of a "shooting script" to guide the FSA work.[13] The practice Lee developed under Stryker's direction was to make community portraits drawing our attention to small problems that needed fixing while simultaneously emphasizing the strengths and virtues of small town America. Lee repeated this throughout the coal mine study. His camera precisely recorded health, sanitation, and social conditions, including outhouses, communal pumps, shabby medical facilities, lack of recreational opportunities for children etc. He also aimed it at families in kitchens and living rooms, at churches and school yards. Lee's pictures show living communities: kids go to school, women sort mail, a man buys a watermelon, a young girl breaks coal for the stove. Some of the pictures draw our attention to problems: women fetching water at an outside pump and outhouses, a Union Pacific boomtown where families live in boxcars, a filthy shack inhabited, according to Doris Lee's caption, by the family of an alcoholic miner. However, as Curtis (1989:20) also noticed: "Lee studiously avoided compositions that might convey worker dissatisfaction, loneliness, or despair." (*photos XIX XX XXI XXII*)

Consider these shots as one of Lee's many contributions to the "squalid hut" discussion. Standing at the site of the Ludlow tent colony one can still see a black streak down the hillside, the tatoo left by coal bouncing out on the fast trip from the drift mouth down to the Ramy tipple. Ramy was a small camp run by an independent coal company and the miners' houses looked pretty tattered when Lee made this series of pictures on June 29, 1946. He documented the shabby camp, scattered junk and mine, the unpainted weathered housing. Lee made a portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Camillo Gasperetti. A heart and the letters C.G. are carved on the wall between the old couple who are described in Lee's caption as: "An old miner and his wife living in a company housing project." Lee made photographs to show the kitchen, grandchildren, the living room. Included in the images are photographs of sons in their uniforms. One of the grandchildren looks (expectantly?) out the back door. Family ties triumph over coal camp squalor.

Lee's photographs, in conjunction with the survey of health in the coal regions, sought to represent two social facts: 1) the vibrant strength of community built by the miners in their small towns and, 2) the company town infrastructure as backward and neglected. The question raised in Lee's photographs is: why should miners live this way in our modern world? However, while Lee hopefully focused his lens on things in need of repair, his photographs reveal a world that was all too tired and broken to be fixed. He left a beautifully detailed photographic archive of coal camps teetering on the brink of oblivion. Unlike the photographer Edward Curtis, who thought he was taking pictures of Native Americans to preserve images of a vanishing way of life, Lee apparently was not aware that he was working during a great cultural extinction. Instead of renewal, the entire complex of coal mine and company town blew away like tumbleweeds. The company town was never a community, merely an extension of the coal factory that was its *raison*

d'etre. Miners and families struggled to create and maintain community but the attempt failed in the end. In the early 1950's new energy sources came on line, the railroads abandoned steam for diesel, and mechanization dramatically reduced the size of the coal mine workforce. Automobiles made the coal camp a thing of the past.

Photographs as social facts

When photography was young, people were convinced of the technology's ability to accurately reproduce images of things in the world. John Berger noted photography's connection both to the project of positivism and to our own discipline of sociology:

> The camera was invented in 1839. August Comte was just finishing his *Cours De Philosophie Positive.* Positivism and the camera and sociology grew up together. What sustained them all as practices was the belief that observable quantifiable facts, recorded by scientists and experts, would one day offer man such a total knowledge about nature and society that he would be able to order them both (Berger, 1982:99).

Lewis Hine, who documented the exploitation of labor at the turn of the century, retained faith in photography's ability to faithfully reproduce the world, but introduced a healthy skepticism of the person behind the lens: "While photographs may not lie," he explained, "liars may photograph" (Hine, 1909:111). Long ago we should have added photographs to the list that includes: "Lies, damn lies and statistics." Like statistical representations, photographic images are at best partial visions, shaped by the photographer who chose equipment, selected the direction in which the lens was pointed, and decided when the time had come to release the shutter. Moreover, photographers are not machines; they have race, gender and social class. Like all of us they are historically, culturally and socially situated.

Despite the inextricable mix of lies and truth, photography became ubiquitous. We live in a world which the French sociologist Baudrillard named "semiurgic," a material culture literally drowning us in images. The phenomenal world itself is dissolving in photographic evidence that is inevitable, indispensable, false, persuasive, and powerful.[14] As Adorno and Horkheimer (1973:369) stressed: "Photological proof is not stringent merely overpowering." Roland Barthes and others have observed how photographs function as indexical expressions, signs that we assume to be causally related to the objects that they reflect. It is for this reason that, while photographs cannot be accepted strictly speaking as "proof" of the existence of the object reflected, they tend to overpower our critical facilities and the ability to interrogate the image before us. The suspension of disbelief is total; photographs have a life of their own. However much we believe on an intellectual level that cameras (or photographers) lie, we take photographs at face value. And the effect is doubled when the image is backed by words.

To understand the grand and self-referential simulacrum that is the media world, close examinations of photography's origins are helpful. Our examination of photos of "squalid huts" has taught us to see that even such a simple thing as miners' housing is contested terrain. What was seen by photographers is problematic, something inevitably freighted with social, cultural, and ideological meaning. Like all photos, photos of houses are part of the social construction of reality. They draw on existing social facts for meaning, and in turn reflect (and refract) those facts back to the culture. The notion that photographic images are social facts, returns us to Emile Durkheim and four different ways of investigating photographic images.

First, in *The Rules of Sociological Method* originally published in 1895, Durkheim (1938:13) described two overall properties of social facts, at any moment of social development they are: 1) "...general throughout the extent of a given society..." and, 2) "...capable of exercising over the individual exterior constraint..." Thus, one recognizes social facts by the "coercive power" they have to influence individuals (Durkheim, 1938:10). Durkheim admonished us to consider social facts as things. (Though, as Sartre remarked in *Being and Nothingness*, social facts are things only to the extent that all things are social facts.[15]) Durkheim's definitions of a "social fact" would lead us to examine photographs as things with widespread socially established meanings that have a "coercive power" to influence

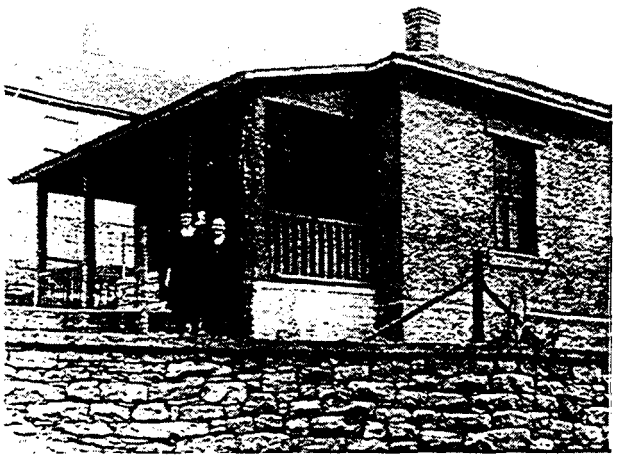


Photo XVII
(top) "6 Rm House Berwind Cone Block & Stucco, $15, Bath and Sink" Courtesy of CF&I Corporation

Photo XVIII
Berwind baseball team. Courtesy of CF&I Corporation

individuals. This is not, however, to make the argument that photos *by themselves* have the power to legislate meanings or impose social hierarchy. Rather as Abigail Solomon-Godeau observed in a discussion of erotic photography:

> Images, in other words, do not causally produce a world of female objects and male subjects; rather, they may articulate, naturalize, and confirm an oppressive order whose roots lie elsewhere (Solomon-Godeau, 1991:221).

Second, Durkheim offered currency and language as examples of social facts. Like language, photographic representations have become part of what Durkheim (1938:2), described as "The system of signs I use to express my thought." Photographs are a form of discourse and as such depend upon cultural literacy. Regardless of what they denote, they connote (at least) socially established ideological and aesthetic meanings abroad in the culture and held by the photographer and the viewer. Thus, for instance, Andreas Feininger (1955: 181-184) in his book, *The Creative Photographer*, could offer a partial dictionary of photographic symbols: lightness symbolizes happiness, darkness suggests tragedy or misery, black and white photography can be used to portray "what is typical" as opposed to color photography which is better at capturing "a momentary situation," perspective is manipulated to depict illusions of three-dimensionality in a two-dimensional form, and so on. At this point, I will add recently crystallized meanings, themselves byproducts of color photography, that associate black and white photographs with history, documentary, or art.

A third meaning of photographs as social facts lies hidden in the Durkheim's use of currency as an example. Of course, currency has only a single meaning while photographs (like language) have myriad meanings. However, both currency and photographs are exchanged and thus are subject to social laws governing the circulation of commodities. The detailed understanding of money left undeveloped by Durkheim was explored by Marx and his followers. Included in Marxist analysis of commodities are such relations as use value, exchange value, and fetishism. For example, Allan Sekula observed that photo archives involve:

> ...the subordination of use to the logic of exchange thus not only are the pictures in archives often *literally* for sale, but their meanings are up for grabs... This semantic availability of pictures in archives exhibits the same abstract logic as that which characterizes goods on the marketplace (Sekula, 1983:194).

Unlike the great masters analyzed by students and critics of photography, "small time" photographers who produced the bulk of our legacy of historic photos were driven by questions of how to make a living with a camera. Portraits, weddings, and landscapes that could be sold, commercial work, occasional shots of

Photo XIX (left) Ramy Tipple. Huerfano Coal Co. 6/29/46, Ludlow Mine, Ludlow, Las Animas Co. Colo. "Mine and Tipple." Photo by Russell Lee for the Coal Mines Administration, 1947. Courtesy of National Archives

PHOTO XX (below) Huerfano Coal Co. 6/29/46, Ludlow Mine, Ludlow, Las Animas Co. Colo. "Mr. and Mrs. Camillogasperetti, Residents of Co. housing project." Photo by Russell Lee for the Coal Mines Administration, 1947. Courtesy of National Archives

local tragedies bought by newspapers or photo services, and the like dictated choice of view, equipment, and even such things as ideological perspective. Many photographic decisions were directed by clients rather than "professional" or "artistic" decisions made by photographers. Under capitalism, photographers are constrained by the social facts of commodity production.

The fourth meaning of photographs as social facts is that they depend on changing social relationships for meaning. Social facts are not static, nor can ideology or aesthetics be legislated by the photographer. Like the meaning of words, the meaning of photographs depends as much on the viewer as on the producer. Knowledge, beliefs and intentions brought by the viewer make

Photo XXI Huerfano Coal Co. 6/29/46, Ludlow Mine, Ludlow, Las Animas Co. Colo. "Mrs. Camillo-gasperetti, Resident of Co. housing project." Photo by Russell Lee for the Coal Mines Administration, 1947. Courtesy National Archives

Photo XXII "Huerfano Coal Co. 6/29/46, Ludlow Mine, Ludlow, Las Animas Co. Colo. "Grandchild of Mr. and Mrs Camillogasperetti, Residents of Co. housing project." Photo by Russell Lee for the Coal Mines Administration, 1947. Courtesy of National Archives

the study of photographs an exercise in hermeneutics - an interpretation of interpretations. Thus, it is within my power to see "Negro Miner at Starkville" as "African-American Laundress at Starkville." In arguing against essentialist notions that photographic meaning "...resides entirely in the image itself...," Trachtenberg emphasized that:

> Like money and other commodities, photographs shift and slide in meaning. ...what an image shows depends on how and where and when and by whom it is seen (Trachtenberg, 1989:19-20).

In the end then, photographs must be understood in the same way as one would come to understand any other social fact. In an earlier article (Margolis, 1988), I described the kind of research necessary to "situate" the photograph: to discover what the image is a representation of; to date the exposure precisely; to reconstruct technique (how the photograph was produced); to name the photographer; to determine why (and for whom) the image was produced; to investigate its circulation; and to discover why of all the millions of exposures made, this photograph was preserved. A major element of "situating" is describing the systems of discourse that the image draws on for meaning. To be precise, however, such necessary research can only describe the frame, or to paraphrase Sartre, describe an empty position which the photograph might occupy. It may or may not tell us what the intended meaning was, what the received meanings are, or how these meanings may have changed over time. To approach these questions, we must consider the viewer, the image and the producer as a triplet:

> A photograph is a meeting place where the interests of the photographer, the photographed, the viewer and those who are using the photograph are often contradictory (Berger and Mohr, 1982:7).

Endnotes

[1]One who does not fit the mold is Allan Sekula whose study of the Leslie Shedden Studio's photos of coal miners in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia was a ground breaking use of non-famous photographs. Cf. Shedden, Sekula, Macgillivray, (1983).

[2]In fact, part of the charm and interest in photographs is that the photographer is able to share their

vision, to show us things we would not have seen otherwise. This does not, of course, mean that we will read the photos in the same way as the photographer. The social facts of our own existence constrain and persuade our vision as they did the vision of the photographer.

[3]Unfortunately, the collection has been filed at the Colorado Historical Society as the Trinidad Collection which does a good job to identifying where the images came from but omits the critical "authorship" of A.R. Mitchell who selected the images for preservation.

[4]The fact that the collection did not include negatives, and the fact that Mitchell could not have been old enough to make some of the photos, suggests that Mitchell was collecting prints. There is circumstantial evidence that many of the shots were made by Almeron Newman, a Trinidad photographer whose company, called The Great Western View Company, specialized in outdoor shots and panoramas. Newman left Trinidad for New Mexico and Texas in 1916. Newman made other prints with decorative borders like those in the original Mitchell photographs reproduced here. It is also likely that, under contract with the company, Newman made some panoramas of CF&I camps.

[5]Glenn Aultman sold his collection to the Colorado Historical Society.

[6]John D. Rockefeller, Jr's. notes can be found at the Rockefeller Archive Center, Pocantico Hills, N.Y. Collection III, Record Group 2, Series C, Box 22, Folder 198:28. Details of housing costs were obtained in personal correspondence with the historian of CF&I, H. Lee Scamehorn, September 25, 1987 (see also, Scamehorn 1976:60). Rockefeller's testimony is found in *Conditions in the Coal Mines of Colorado*, Part X, 6 April 1914, Op. Cit:2841-2916; and, U.S. Congress, Senate, Industrial Relations: *Final Report and Testimony Submitted to Congress by the Commission on Industrial*, Created by the Act of August 23, 1912, 64th Congress, 1st Session, 1916, Document 415, VII-IX.

[7]This discussion is not only about photographic "texts" and discourse; the old town had to exist and the new town had to be built in order to make the photographs. The symmetry and order was created as architecture first.

[8]The idea of "home" has been wonderfully explicated by Witold Rybczynski (1986).

[9]Ink on the negatives shows up as white letters on prints.

[10]For a more detailed discussion of this image see Margolis, 1988.

[11]The first "Sociological Department" in Colorado was not at the university. In 1901, after a protracted strike CF&I created the sociological department to deal with all matters related to education, sanitation, and the welfare of miners and their families. Under the direction of the company's chief surgeon, this branch of the company improved community facilities, built model company towns, offered courses in hygiene, published *Camp and Plant* and so on (Cf. Scamehorn, 1976:148-155).

[12]In the early 1970's CF&I was still a functioning steel mill and operated a coal mine; it has since declared bankruptcy and been reorganized by the Oregon Steel Company. Coal is no longer mined or consumed; the mill in Pueblo uses an electric furnace to melt scrap and produce a variety of products including rails and fencing.

[13]I met Russell Lee in 1978 when he came to Washington to speak to the President's Commission Of the Coal Industry and initiate yet another generation of photographers about to document the nation's coal fields. He distributed copies of the script that guided his work in 1946. Some of the work of that generation of photographers appears in *The American Coal Miner: A Report on Community and Living Conditions in the Coal Fields*, (1980) the President's Commission on Coal, John D. Rockefeller IV, Chairman.

[14]The natural world, for instance, is nowhere as vivid, detailed, or revealing as the images of it broadcast on television "nature shows."

[15]"Presumably alluding to Durkheim, (Sartre) remarks that social facts are things to the extent that things are social facts" (Laing and Cooper, 1971:10).

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