



Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum

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Press Release

For Immediate Release

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***Picturing the Century: One Hundred Years of Photography* a Major Exhibition at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum**

Grand Rapids Mich. . . *Picturing the Century: One Hundred Years of Photography from the National Archives* is a unique selection of color and black and white photographs celebrating 100 years of American life, drawn from the National Archives and Records Administration vast archives of more than 8 million images. This major exhibition opened in the National Archives Circular Gallery in Washington, DC, on March 12, 1999 and is now traveling the country. **It will be on display beginning September 12, 2009 through January 9, 2010 at the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum.** The photographs in this exhibition touch on all aspects of 20th century life. Along with the pictures one expects the government to keep -- images of Presidents and their families, of major wars, and of international diplomacy -- there are also many surprises -- breathtaking vintage prints by Ansel Adams, heartbreaking vignettes of abject poverty and despair by well-known photographers such as Lewis Hine and Dorothea Lange, and snapshots of Americans at work and play by anonymous photographers. Taken as a whole, these 190 images reflect the kaleidoscopic nature of American life -- the ever-changing fabric that characterized this century. These photos capture fleeting moments in the rush of 20th-century events.

The exhibition opens with a portrait of American prosperity--Easter Sunday on Fifth Avenue in New York City, 1900, by an unknown photographer. The photograph reflects the innocence of the age -- pedestrians and horse-drawn carriages mingling together on New York's most fashionable street. There is no inkling of the first airplane, much less the first manned space flight, the two world wars with the intervening depression, racial unrest or the search for equality, all of which played major roles in shaping the 20th century and are pictured so strikingly in this new exhibition. Only a few miles away, but worlds apart, the hustle and bustle of Hester Street life is depicted in a 1903 photograph. A third photograph, thousands of miles away, shows another street scene at the dawn of the new century--this time Steadman Avenue in Nome, Alaska, painting a raw, frontier state.

In *Picturing the Century*, as the years fold into decades, street scenes reflect the change of pace and complexity of life. A vintage 1942 print by an unknown photographer shows a shopping district in Harlem, newly recovered from the Great Depression. Frankfurters are selling for 5 cents, fish lunches for 10 cents. Four years later, a 1946 Russell Lee photograph of Welch, West Virginia, shows bumper-to-bumper traffic on the main street. Long lines of patrons snake down the block, waiting to see Van Johnson starring in the movie, *Born For Trouble*. Fast-forward another five years, to post-war prosperity in Chicago's burgeoning skyline. Oliver E. Pfeiffer's photograph pictures pedestrians hurrying to avoid oncoming traffic on Michigan Avenue with the

Carbon and Carbide Building, the London Guarantee & Accident Building, Lincoln Tower, Pure Oil, and the Wrigley Building in the background.

Picturing the Century is arranged chronologically and depicts many of the momentous events of the century, as well as larger social trends. The initial section on the early twentieth century, for example, includes historic photographs of the Wright Brothers' first airplane flight, an early automobile assembly line, and immigrants arriving at Ellis Island in New York City. From the era of World War I and the 1920's come images of Liberty Loan rallies, suffragettes protesting in front of the White House, and the construction of the Empire State Building. Views of the Great Depression and New Deal include the effect of the Dust Bowl, public works projects, and portraits of personalities such as President Franklin Roosevelt, aviatrix Amelia Earhart, and actor Orson Welles.

World War II saw a tremendous growth in the numbers of photographs taken by the government. The exhibit features combat photography of the Normandy invasion, the battle of the Atlantic, and the war in the Pacific. Homefront images show the country's industrial mobilization. Postwar photographs illustrate the economic boom of the 1950's, the cold war, the Korean war, and the social ferment of the 1960's. The final sections of the exhibit features many photographs from the collections of NARA's Presidential libraries as well as images of the Vietnam war and spaceflight photography from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Also showcased in the exhibition are eight portfolios of noted photographers, well represented in the holding of the National Archives. Among their works are images so famous that they are permanently etched in our minds and many have become interchangeable with the event or place itself. Other images are little known, some never having been publicly displayed before. The portfolios are of:

- Lewis Wicks Hine (1874-1940) whose famous photographs of children became an instrument of social reform;
- George W. Ackerman (1884-1962) whose 40-year career at the Department of Agriculture yielded more than 50,000 photographs of rural America;
- Walter Lubken (1881-1960), a photographer for the U.S. Reclamation Service who documented technological and social advances in the west during the early 20th century;
- Dorothea Lange (1895-1965), a photographer for the Farm Security Administration, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, the War Relocation Authority, the Office of War Information, and the State Department, whose photographs became synonymous with the Great Depression;
- Charles Fenno Jacobs (1904-1975) who became part of Edward Steichen's Naval Aviation Photographic Unit in World War II that documented the aviation activities of the U.S. Navy, including female factory workers in California, and life aboard the battleship U.S.S. New Jersey;
- Ansel Adams (1902-1984), one of the most celebrated photographers of all time who photographed the American West for the Department of Interior;
- Yoichi Okamoto (1915-1985), who began his government career in the Army's Signal Corps, then joined the United States Information Agency, and eventually served at White House photographer for President Lyndon Johnson.
- Danny Lyon (1942-), one of the most creative documentary photographers of the late 20th century, photographed the Rio Grande Valley and the Chicano barrio of South El Paso, Texas, for the Environmental Protection Agency's DOCUMERICA project.

The exhibition also highlights a variety of documents that show how the Federal government used the images taken by its photographers over the course of the century. For example, one case describes the relationship between photography and social reform in the early twentieth century. Other cases present photography and censorship practices during World War II, the United States Information Agency's use of photography during the cold war, and EPA's short-lived but fascinating DOCUMERICA project.

Picturing the Century is made possible, in part, by the generous support of Eastman Kodak Company. **Photographs on the web at:** <http://www.archives.gov/press/press-kits/1930-census-photos/index.html>

The Gerald R. Ford Museum is open 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily. It is closed New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day, and Christmas Day. Admission is \$7.00 for adults, \$6.00 for senior citizens, \$3.00 for 18-6 years, and free for those 5 and under. For information please call (616) 254-0400 or visit us on the web at www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov .

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