Bean Farmers and Thunder Mugs: Russell Lee's 1940 Farm Security Administration Photographs and Letters of Pie Town and Catron County

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In April 1940, as a stricken America struggled into its eleventh spring of the Great Depression and war clouds engulfed Europe and spread across the Pacific, a thirty-six-year-old photographer for the Historical Section of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) named Russell Lee steered his two-door Plymouth touring sedan around the cottonwood-shrouded plaza in Socorro, New Mexico, and turned west into the mountains. Loaded with cameras, photography equipment, and boxes of flash bulbs, the 1939 Plymouth rattled and climbed steadily on the narrow ribbon of asphalt called U.S. Highway 60, past the Water Canyon Lodge and the naked northern flank of the Magdalena Mountains, to the bustling railhead town of Magdalena. Continuing west, as the asphalt gave way to gravel, Lee passed the Civilian Conservation Corps camp on the eastern edge of the vast windswept Plains of San Augustin and pulled into the crossroads hamlet of Datil. Here, he paused to ask questions, snap a few photographs of the Eagle Guest Ranch, and spend the evening at the Navajo Lodge, a picturesque inn Lee called an “old ranch house.”

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Lee and his bride, Jean Lee, continued west and climbed steadily through dark canyons of juniper, ponderosa, and piñon pines. The couple topped the 7,796-foot Continental Divide and pulled into a small community with the strange name of Pie Town. All the principal buildings in the small community, Lee noticed, were painted a patriotic red, white, and blue, thanks to the Standard Oil Company. While Lee was eating a sandwich at Lois Stagg's Pie Town Café, the local store proprietor, Jack (Joe) A. Keele, introduced himself. Keele said that within fifteen miles of the settlement, high on the wind-swept southern fringes of the Colorado Plateau, two hundred and fifty Dust Bowl refugees were eking out a living by dry-land farming pinto beans and corn and raising small herds of cattle. Small makeshift satellite communities, often with schools and a post office, had sprung up north, south, and west of the town.

In the high country, where the growing season was less than ninety days and the winters were long and intensely cold, the farmers claimed plots of land ranging from thirty to six hundred and forty acres, and lived in log cabins or dugouts. The Dust Bowl refugees, and at least seventy-five families who came before them in the 1920s, used the Homestead Act (1862) to claim up to six hundred and forty acres of designated grazing lands, which they promised to improve and farm. Local ranchers disapproved of the influx of homesteaders who took advantage of the Homestead Act. By 1934, however, much of the Homestead Act had been revoked by the Taylor Grazing Act, "a complex and far-reaching law which gave the Department of Interior absolute control over the Western rangelands of the public domain," forcing "latecomers" to purchase the land on which they settled.

In northern Catron County, there were no paved roads, banks, telephones, or indoor toilets; and there were only a few battery-operated radios. The nearest physician was twenty-two miles west in Quemado, and the nearest railroad was fifty-nine miles to the east, in Magdalena. In fact, Catron County was the only county in the state that had never seen a railroad. This region was truly, as Keele said, the "Last Frontier." Somehow, however, the individualism so characteristic of frontier America had given way in Pie Town to a sense of community Lee had not seen in either the Midwest or the South. The more he learned, the more he became fascinated with the town. Lee wrote his supervisor in Washington, Roy Stryker, that this area was "one community we must cover."

By the spring of 1940, photographers for the FSA, including Lee, sent to Washington enough photographs of suffering Depression-era citizens to
shock a nation. Now Lee's supervisor in Washington wanted images that would positively reflect on the successes of the New Deal and how people began reshaping their lives. Pie Town was, perhaps, such a place.

Little did Lee know that the images he would take of Pie Town and its beleaguered homesteaders would become the most famous of his Depression-era photographs, would be exhibited in numerous museums and studios, and would grace the pages of hundreds of books and newspapers. Already one of the more accomplished photographers in the Historical Section of the FSA, Lee made striking images that would add luster to his already promising career and forge a new chapter in the social history of documentary photography in the United States.

Russell Werner Lee, the most prolific and long-lasting of the FSA photographers, was born on 21 July 1903 in the elm-shaded midwestern town of Ottawa, Illinois, eighty miles southwest of Chicago. Lee was only five when his parents divorced. Five years later, he watched in horror as his mother was struck and killed by a car on a rainy Illinois afternoon. Shuffled from one guardian to another, Lee was educated at Culver Military Academy in Culver, Indiana, and at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, where he graduated in 1925 with a degree in chemical engineering. Two years later, he married Doris Emrick, a talented painter and, after a six-week honeymoon in Paris, the newlyweds settled at Lee's hometown of Ottawa before moving to Kansas City. Shortly before the onset of the Depression in October 1929, Russell and Doris moved again, this time into the wonderful world of West Coast art in San Francisco, where they found new friends including the Mexican muralist Diego Rivera. With the Depression gripping the nation in 1931, the two aspiring painters moved to the artists' colony of Woodstock, New York, in the foothills of the mythic Catskill Mountains. Although Lee retreated one hundred miles south to New York City in the cold of winter, the Woodstock years were ones of education and social awakening. Exposed to some of the best art in the country, Lee realized he was not a painter, and in 1935, at the age of thirty-two, he purchased a small 35mm Contax camera. "As his interest in photography bloomed," Lee's biographer, F. Jack Hurley, observed, "Russell came alive. Every phase of the process fascinated him. The artist in him found expression in the quick-caught images."

Among Lee's first photographs were those of poor families selling their farms and household goods at heart-wrenching public auctions. Continuing to develop as a photographer, and experimenting with the open flash,
Lee also captured grim-faced Pennsylvania coal miners and their bleak surroundings. In the frigid winter of 1935, he walked the streets of New York City, photographing the poverty and misery that seemed to be everywhere. Still finding his way into the world of serious photography, Lee heard about the work of a small but dedicated team of documentary photographers in an obscure agency of the New Deal known as the Resettlement Administration (RA), and he "bundled a portfolio of prints into his car and headed down to Washington to see if he could fit in."9

In Washington, D.C., Lee met a man who would change his life forever. An economics professor at Columbia University, Roy Stryker had been brought to Washington by one of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s "Brain Trust," Rexford Guy Tugwell. After working in the Agricultural Adjustment Administration as a "Specialist in Visual Information," Stryker had moved on to become Chief of the Historical Section of the FSA. Stryker liked Lee’s photographs and he liked the man himself; by October 1936, Lee was working part-time for the Historical Section. In the next five years, the two would form a close working relationship and deep respect for one another.10 Before Stryker’s career with the FSA ended, he had assembled the finest collection of American documentary photographs ever amassed.11

Stryker realized that Lee, of all the FSA photographers, most had a special way with people. In the late spring of 1937, Stryker had joined Lee, who was now working full-time, on an extended trip in the Midwest. Spotting a "very nice looking little old lady with her hair done in a little top knot sitting beside a log cabin," Lee slammed on the brakes, got out of his car, and approached the lady, as Stryker quietly watched and listened. "May we take your picture?" Lee asked. "What do you want my picture for?" the lady bristled. "Well, we’re with the government," Lee responded. "Oh, you’re with the government," the woman replied. "Well, I don’t want you to take my picture." "Well now, look," Lee retorted, "there’s a lot of people think that you represent a bunch of lazy good-for-nothings. We don’t think so. And we’d like to tell ’em a little bit more about who you are, what your problems are."12 The lady began to talk, eventually inviting her new friend to lunch; and Lee and Stryker stayed the afternoon. It was obvious Lee was unlike other FSA photographers. When Lee ran into opposition, Stryker observed, "He soon conquered it by his honesty, his forthrightness, his sympathy and a certain warmth."13

Although Stryker was no photographer, he knew what he wanted from Lee and he was not hesitant to ask.14 Stryker would help to hone Lee’s skills,
expertise Lee would later perfect and put to work in places such as Pie Town. When Lee was first working in Iowa in early December 1936, Stryker urged him to “cover the tenant situation . . . thoroughly,” and stay “as long as is necessary to do the job right.” Later, as Lee worked in Illinois, Stryker urged him to “spend more time on a given family, photographing all phases of their life and activities.” In April 1937, Stryker wrote Lee to “get some interiors of school houses with school in session, and some shots of churches.” While Lee was working in the Iron Range of Minnesota a week later, Stryker asked him to “get the stores in which these people have to shop . . . the type of goods on the shelves . . . pictures of families on the move with their meager goods piled on trucks and wagons.” While Lee was in Minnesota and North Dakota, Stryker urged him to “be sure to get details of construction, roof structure, interiors, everything that would give a rounded story of the sod house—its construction, as a place to live, etc.” At the same time, Stryker wanted images of the “great sweep of open land—meadows, trees, hills . . . kitchen in the dust area with the window sealed with towels, church falling down, the store caved in, and the fences falling.” Lee was also encouraged occasionally to shoot a roll of experimental color film called Kodachrome. But Stryker was careful not to be overly authoritarian and always to provide a bit of humor. As Lee prepared to photograph Hurley, Wisconsin, “one of the toughest towns in America,” where prostitution was known to be rampant, Stryker urged Lee to “keep an eye on your virginity.”

Along with providing guidance, Stryker could also be critical. While his images were “very sharp and very excellent from a technical standpoint, they tend,” Stryker told Lee, “to be a bit too factual. In other words, there aren’t enough pictures which sort of catch your breath.” Stryker, however, was often complimentary and greatly motivating. When Lee made his way into eastern Montana in the frigid early winter of 1937, Stryker wrote from Washington, D.C.: “It is needless to ask you to get me another Russell Lee, because there are no such persons. I wish to god, however, that I could get another like you, but I know that is out of the question.” After watching several of Lee’s images emerge from the FSA lab in Washington, D.C., Stryker wrote Lee that the prints were “very, very excellent.” A little over a week later, Stryker told Lee his “saloon pictures” were “superb.” A month later, Stryker was even more complimentary: “My god, man, how do you do it? Just like receiving a Christmas box from home, I was even late for a luncheon appointment because I had to see every negative before I went
out . . . the subject matter pleases me to no end." The "pictures will be for the private files of Americans, of which you are a stock holder," Stryker reminded Lee.

As Lee crisscrossed the Midwest, he saw abandoned farms everywhere. "The soil has been overworked terribly and the erosion is unusually severe," Lee wrote Stryker from Mount Ayr, Iowa, on 2 January 1937. He was particularly alarmed at the undernourishment and near starvation of the children he saw. Many families had been forced to sell their farm animals and were living on nothing but potatoes, bread, and gravy. Threats of an armed rebellion were common. People had simply lost faith in themselves and their government. There is little doubt that the farmers, sharecroppers, and the homeless migrant workers Lee met and photographed were desperate. One of his most striking images that attracted wide-scale attention was titled simply "The Hands of an Old Homesteader, Iowa." The hands were those of German-born sixty-six-year-old Statia Ostermeyer, the wife of a homesteader in Miller Township, Woodbury County, Iowa. "The knuckles are gnarled, the fingers are deformed from work; this woman, one knows, has worked hard all her life, fighting off the taxes, fighting off the mortgage, fighting off the sheriff. Her hands are the story of her life, her heroism," one newspaper would comment. Lee moved back into Illinois and then on to Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and North Dakota, photographing the people and the land as he went. The Museum of Modern Art in New York exhibited and circulated many of Lee's photographs.

In the winter of 1939–1940, Lee continued to witness the suffering of a displaced population at Raymondville, Robstown, and Sinton, migrant camps in Texas. Lee observed and vividly recorded some of the worst conditions he had seen in Crystal City, Texas, a predominantly Hispanic community ninety miles southwest of San Antonio. Half of the people in the sunbaked town had moved away in desperation, and the suffering was particularly acute among those remaining. Many people in Crystal City were on the verge of starvation and, Lee estimated, 30 percent were inflicted with tuberculosis, while countless others had pneumonia. The living conditions Lee found on the west side of San Antonio were just as appalling. He was hoping Stryker could get some of the photographs to Eleanor Roosevelt, "to give her an idea of what a really bad state the Mexicans are in down here." On the banks of the Mississippi River in the Missouri boot heel, Lee found a "lot of [people] near starvation." Lee was giving the nation photographs that seemed to rise up and cry for a better life for
the whole nation. He and his colleagues quickly became a powerful political arm of the New Deal.

Lee's dedicated and exhausting work with the FSA took a toll on his already shaky marriage. Doris had occasionally joined him in the field, but it was obvious by 1939 that the marriage would not survive. Although the two would remain friends and correspond occasionally, they separated and eventually divorced. While working in Louisiana in 1939, Lee met and fell in love with a strong-minded Dallas journalist, Jean Smith. Jean soon began traveling with him and the two quickly became a team.34 With Jean by his side, Lee came to be recognized as not only one of the best and most productive of the FSA photographers, but also one of the most trusted.35 In fact, a large part of his success was attributed to Jean, who helped persuade people to talk about themselves and their situations. At the same time, she kept fastidious notes and helped to caption thousands of photographs.36

While Lee was beginning to work in San Augustine, Texas, in early April 1939, Stryker suggested he move on to New Mexico, where he was certain to find "a hell of a good thing."37 In the Land of Enchantment, Stryker wrote, "we are going to have a lot of most interesting work for you. I know you are going to get quite excited about that part of the country, and [we] will want you to stay there for a long time." In particular Lee was to "do some small town pictures." With few areas of the country the FSA had not covered, Stryker wondered if "we should now start a series of pictures showing ... life on somewhat better farms in the area in which you now are. We need these very much, and they will serve a most valuable purpose, to work in with the bad conditions which you have already covered very successfully." In New Mexico, Lee was to "put on the syrup and white clouds and play on the sentiment."38

Although Lee had planned to arrive in New Mexico by mid-May 1939, his schedule was interrupted by the release of John Steinbeck's epic The Grapes of Wrath, one of the best books Lee said he had ever read. Stryker was "bubbling over with ideas about how we can exploit the public excitement over this whole thing."39 Consequently, Lee was off to Oklahoma to get some shots of "families departing ... and Hoovervilles."40 New Mexico would have to wait. By late July 1939, after several weeks of work in eastern Oklahoma around Muskogee and Eufaula, Lee finally headed west to Amarillo, Texas, and across the Llano Estacado to scout the high country north and south of Taos, New Mexico. Here he would photograph Costilla and Questa and return later in the spring of 1940 to cover Chamisal and Peñasco.41
After his trip through New Mexico, however, Lee returned to Oklahoma and South Texas, where he and Jean headed into Mexico in December for a badly needed month-long vacation.

It was at Cuernavaca in late December 1939 that Russell Werner Lee and Jean Smith were married. After visiting colonial villages and relaxing in the warm winter sun, Lee thought Mexico was “a wonderful country.” During his month’s respite, however, Lee took only two photographs. “We were crazy about Mexico,” he wrote, but there “is so damned much to see.”

Back in the United States, at Laredo, Texas, the couple paused before heading north to San Antonio, Waco, Dallas, and then on to Oklahoma City and back to Texas. After shooting a series of images around San Angelo, Lee was ready to return to New Mexico, telling Stryker he would “polish up the deep yellow & red filters and give you a few [Edward] Westons & [Margaret] Bourke-Whites.” Once in New Mexico, Stryker urged Lee to get his “red filter out” for the spacious “skies filled with white clouds.” Moreover, Lee should “find a good spot, sit down, and do a little thinking about this whole area in which you are going to work.”

By March 1940, Lee had arrived at the windswept “oil town” of Hobbs, New Mexico, where he snapped a few photographs before pushing on to Carlsbad to meet with the local FSA supervisor and relax with a few days of fishing. Moving west past the Guadalupe Mountains, Lee arrived in El Paso, Texas, and headed up the valley of the Rio Grande to Albuquerque, where he met with George I. Sánchez at the University of New Mexico. Sánchez’s recently published book on Spanish Americans, Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans (1940), was thought by many in the FSA to be the best book ever published on the subject. Using the holdings of the University of New Mexico library, Lee worked on a general plan for photographing the entire western United States. At the same time, he took time to make his way to Sandia Crest above Albuquerque to snap an image of “the crescent shape of the sun as it appeared among the shadows on the snow.” Around the city, Lee took other “pix,” as he called them, “of spring activity around the irrigation ditches,” before heading downriver to Socorro and then west to Pie Town and Phoenix, Arizona.

Historians are not certain how Lee first heard of Pie Town. In an article that he later published in the magazine U.S. Camera and that featured a number of what he perceived to be his best Pie Town photographs, Lee remembered first hearing of the community at the FSA regional office in Amarillo, Texas, and he wrote Stryker “for permission to undertake a photographic
survey of this Pie Town section." In a much later interview, however, Lee said he became interested in Pie Town when he and Jean saw the name on a road map. "I wondered what sort of place would call itself Pie Town," Lee recalled forty-three years later. Parts of both versions are possible.

Regardless, the Lees "crossed the Continental Divide going west on U.S. Highway 60 and in a few minutes they were eating a sandwich at the café in Pie Town." Lee "began to ask questions of the café proprietress, Lois Stagg, when a stranger [interrupted and] introduced himself." This bespectacled individual was a transplanted "busted" Texan named Jack (Joe) Keele, one of the owners of the adjacent mercantile store, Craig and Keele General Merchandise. Originally from Tennessee, Keele had moved to Dimmitt, Texas, but when black northerners (massive dust storms) engulfed the Texas Panhandle in 1933, Carrie and Joe Keele headed west in a worn-out 1928 Chevrolet truck. With only six cents to their name, the Keeles settled on six hundred acres of land in the Mountain View community, fourteen miles northwest of Pie Town. While Carrie taught at nearby Mesa School, Keele tried farming but complained he "couldn't keep the neighbors' cows out and they ruined his crop." It was about this time that Keele went to work in Pie Town as a carpenter for Harmon L. Craig. He helped construct a large two-story bean warehouse, the largest building in town, and several other structures. Craig was so impressed with Keele that he brought him in as a business partner. In time Keele became president of the Catron County Farm Bureau and a vibrant and active pillar of the local community.

The kind and gentle Keele told Lee the history of Pie Town. At the turn of the century, much of the land in western New Mexico was devoted to ranching and was sparsely settled. In February 1921, the state legislature agreed to create a county out of the remote western part of Socorro County and name it for the controversial lawyer and politician Thomas B. Catron. Shortly thereafter, in October 1922, a World War I veteran named Clyde L. Norman filed the forty-acre Hound Pup Lode mining claim along what became the U.S. Highway 60 on one of the two dikes that ran southeast-northwest through the north-central part of the county. Norman constructed a small log cabin with a lean-to kitchen and purchased a hand-siphon gasoline pump he called a filling station. There are many different versions as to exactly how Pie Town got its name, but most versions agree that to supplement his meager income, Norman began selling doughnuts he purchased from a small bakery in Datil to cowboys, sheepherders, or anyone traveling along the dirt tract that ran across the Continental Divide. Norman also
started selling dried apple pies, and soon everyone was calling Norman's place "Pie Town." In 1923 Craig, a redheaded cowboy and Spanish-American War veteran from Jacksboro, Texas, who had come west after World War I, joined Norman and eventually bought him out. In addition to raising pinto beans, corn, and vegetables, Craig opened a general store, café, and three-room log hotel. In 1927 he obtained a post office.

After spending the night at the Pie Town Hotel, Lee headed west to Quemado, a lively village on the windswept east bank of Largo Creek, before continuing west, past vast vistas, rough volcanic mesas, and squeaky windmills to Springerville, Arizona. Here, Lee watched cattle graze the irrigation-flooded meadows along the Little Colorado River, before being driven south into the White Mountains for the summer. Lee hoped to photograph the rough lumber and sawmill town of McNary, Arizona, in the heart of the White Mountains on the Fort Apache Indian Reservation, but the snow was deep in the high country, he was told, and the roads were impassible. Pressing west and south through the "magnificent country" of the Salt River Canyon, the Lees arrived at the mining towns of Globe and Miami, where small miner's shacks were perched precariously on the hillsides, and the bleak landscape was dominated by a "tremendous" smelter and scarred by a giant slag heap. After taking a few pictures, Lee headed northwest along the Apache Trail to the Tonto National Forest and Roosevelt Dam, before turning west to Phoenix. From Socorro to Phoenix, Lee had traveled through "about all the extremes you could imagine—sandstorms, rain, dust storms, sleet, driving snow, and finally, tropical heat." They "term this the 'Valley of the Sun,'" he wrote from Phoenix, "and it's a damned good name."

Checking into the Sea Breeze Tourist Village, Lee photographed the model farm of Casa Grande at Coolidge and the migrant camp of Agua Fria near Chandler, Arizona. He also took time to visit and photograph Taliesin West, Frank Lloyd Wright's "winter camp" in northeast Scottsdale, which consisted of residential spaces, theaters, a shop, and an architectural studio and drafting room. A few weeks later, with Pie Town still on his mind, Lee continued on to Tucson, Tombstone, Bisbee, and Douglas, before driving northeast by way of Willcox, Safford, Clifton, Duncan, and "the amazing mining town" of Morenci, to Silver City, New Mexico. Lee wanted badly to be back in Pie Town by the latter part of May. He especially wanted to be there on 1 June, the first Saturday of the month, where there would be a "meeting of the whole community."
Driving north, past the towering western summits of the Mogollon Mountains and the Gila Wilderness, the largest designated wilderness area in the United States, Lee paused in Glenwood, New Mexico “for a little fishing.” After climbing along a frightening tract of road that seemed to be carved out of sheer cliffs and consist of one hairpin turn after another, he also visited the old gold and silver mining town of Mogollon. Nestled along a deep gorge on the western slopes of the Mogollon Mountains, with rickety miners’ cabins climbing the hillsides, the community dated back to 1889 when gold and silver were discovered in the area. Lee chatted briefly with one of the storekeepers and a saloon owner and became convinced he should return. “I might get back for a real picture story of the town,” he wrote, continuing: “They say that pay-day was by far the best time to be there—there were fights, drunks in the gutters and everything else you might associate with a mining town. I believe I can get a real story here of the life of the miner and the mining town and it should take 4 or 5 days to do it right.” The next payday would be 15 June, Lee was told, and he began making plans to return. When he revisited Mogollon to photograph the miners on payday, it was widely reported throughout the county that he was a German spy.

Pressed to be in Pie Town, he continued north to the Catron County seat of Reserve at the confluence of Tularosa Creek, the San Francisco River, and Stark Weather Canyon. Located over one hundred miles from any railroad, Reserve was, Lee said, “looking every bit like you might expect it.” While in Reserve, a rough and tough community if there ever was one, Lee saw a poster for a rodeo in Quemado, twenty-two miles west of Pie Town, to be held on 9 June. He began making plans to attend. “No professionals are allowed and from various inquiries around western New Mexico, it seems as if it will be well attended by people from a large area.” The rodeo would be held on Largo Creek, a few miles south of the community, where there would be camping in a large grove of cottonwood trees. “I believe it should be the closest approach to an old fashioned country gathering that we could find out here,” Lee reported.

Back in Pie Town, Lee rented two rooms at the three-room Pie Town Hotel, using one of the rooms as a darkroom and covering the windows with a blanket. The small log dwelling, perched atop one of the dykes, had once been the community’s only store, before Harmon L. Craig built a larger dwelling fifty yards to the east. Rooms had no running water, no baths, only a bed, a wash basin, a table, a chair, and a “thundermug.” “I think there’s going to be a good story here—it certainly looks like the last frontier,” Lee wrote.
The most important person in Pie Town's social experiment, Lee learned, was Harmon L. Craig. In 1924, about the time he joined partners with Norman, Craig married a divorced mother of two, who was cooking for Bill Dahl's huge W-Bar Ranch, headquartered a few miles south of Pie Town. Theodora Baugh Craig would recall many years later how her cowboy husband, "cussed a lot, but he cussed nice clean cussing." Perhaps more importantly, she continued, "Old H. L. Craig could make a little money." It was indeed Craig who had made the town what it was. While his wife and step-daughters turned out as many as fifty apple, cherry, and raisin pies a week, Craig put in gas pumps, built a small hotel, garage, tourist cabins, and, with
Keele's help, a large bean house, where pinto beans could be cleaned and stored. He also put in a well near his store and gave the farmers free access to water. The Republican in overalls also sold town property at fair-market prices, loaned greenbacks, and sold groceries on credit. Undeniably, as Lee observed, the underlying principle that allowed the village to function was the homesteaders' determination to improve themselves. “For the first time in their lives these people own their land, and they feel they’ve got a future here,” Craig told Lee. “Sure, it's hard going, but a man can make it if he's willing to work.”

The homesteaders Lee met in and around Pie Town in the weeks to come were, as one scholar has observed, “characterized by rugged individualism, hardiness, materialism, need to master nature, love of personal freedom and low regard for races and religions not their own.” Most were Texans, but a few were Oklahoma cotton, soybean, and corn sharecroppers. Fleeing drought and unemployment, many had visions of jobs in the orchards of the golden state of California but found themselves in this remote corner of the Southwest instead. “They came in family groups,” a rancher observed, “in any sort of conveyance that would roll, their household furnishings piled high and the overflow—washtubs, baby buggies, chicken coops—wired to any anchorage that would hold. In trucks, in automobiles, dragging heavy trailers, the rare exception in horsedrawn wagons, they came, and with them a new order.”

It was the “Great Depression and we had decided to get out of Texas,” Ed Jones, one of Pie Town’s legendary homesteaders and storytellers, recalled. “High dry winds blew from the West. Clouds of red dust filled the skies. Blue Northers came day after day. Cows lay dead everywhere. Banks foreclosed on farms and ranches. We lost almost all. My father, mother, me, and Jess, the family bull dog, left in a Model A, off to what promised to be a new life for all. . . . We arrived in Pie Town on July 4, 1933.” Most of the people arrived in Pie Town without any money,” Craig told Lee. “Usually they brought their kids, their personal belongings, some articles of furniture, some family heirlooms. They came in cars which barely made the grade. Once they arrived, our people helped them to locate the land to be homesteaded. They’d get together and build them a dugout; give them some canned goods if they needed them.” They arrived “with the damndest things,” a resident of Datil recalled, “cows tied behind their Fords, wash tubs strapped on top. . . . Poor damn fools!” Homesteader Roy McKee pulled a sixteen-foot wagon, loaded with household goods, with his 1929
John Deere tractor four hundred miles, all the way from La Mesa, Texas.\textsuperscript{70} Putting along at sixteen miles an hour, "I had everything we owned—which wasn't much—in that trailer," McKee remembered years later. "The tractor ran on gas or coal oil and it didn't have any lights so I just stopped and camped at night."\textsuperscript{71}

In addition to Craig and Keele's general store, the small community boasted of a gas station and garage, a curio shop, a taxidermist, a post office, a bar, tourists' cabins, and the large beanery. Craig donated the lumber and land for a Farm Bureau building that was erected by the men in the community. Local farmers also built a Baptist Church. Not to be outdone, the women in the community constructed a large privy for the church. Amazingly, the community had no formal government but was "thoroughly democratic." Craig "was the unofficial representative of the community in county and state politics," Lee observed. He "was in a perfect spot to become the economic dictator," but he was not authoritarian "in spirit or fact." His motives, Lee went on to say, "do not seem to be
economic, nor completely altruistic. The only way to describe his motives is to compare them to his bookkeeping system, which consists of two old fashioned spelling tablets. In one he puts down what he spends, and in the other what he takes in.\textsuperscript{72}

The more time Lee spent in Pie Town, the more he came to admire the homesteaders and their determination to survive. In turn, the settlers came to accept him and invite him into their homes and lives. Accustomed to working from sunup to sundown, the refugees talked freely of having left a land of great sorrow and suffering to find hope in the bean fields they grubbed out of the rabbit brush and carved out of the woods atop the Continental Divide, far from the black blizzards and the deadly dust pneumonia of the Dust Bowl.

As Keele said and Lee witnessed, many of the farmers in the small hamlets around Pie Town lived in dugouts. These dugouts were little more than a big hole in the ground, anywhere from three to six feet in depth, and lined with piñon or ponderosa siding. “The dugouts,” Lee recorded, “are quite light and airy and are cool in summer and warm in winter. Men have utilized all sorts of things in home construction; windshields from automobiles have been used for windows; automobile doors have been used in houses and sheds; slabs which are given to anyone who will haul them away are used for fences and barns.”\textsuperscript{73}

The depth-of-the-Depression years 1935 and 1936 had been hard on the homesteaders, but conditions were better in 1937 and 1938, and many of the farmers had produced a bumper crop of pinto beans. Taught by the Navajos how to harvest piñon nuts, the settlers had also shipped several thousand pounds to the railhead at Magdalena.\textsuperscript{74} There was also work with the sawmills that had commenced to devastate the forests, especially those on private lands, in the nearby mountains. Other homesteaders found work with the Works Progress Administration, constructing a road south from Pie Town to Greens Gap. The Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture provided some seasonal work with fire suppression and in the mountain lookouts that were constructed in the 1930s in the Apache and Cibola national forests.\textsuperscript{75}

Perhaps the most remarkable quality about Pie Town was the rich social life of the community. The local Baptist Church was well attended, and several of the small satellite communities had itinerant preachers. Pipe Springs, southwest of Pie Town, for example, had several evangelists. Pie Town also boasted a literary society. The Farm Bureau met once a month, with as many as 150 farmers congregating to discuss everything from farming to
county, state, and national politics. Pie suppers, house- erecting parties, quilting parties, community singing contests, Forty-Two (a type of dominoes common in Texas) parties, and summer picnics in the nearby mountains were all common. In the cold winter months, there were all-night square dances. In the summer there were softball and baseball games.76 After their fields had been harvested in September, entire families caravanned to Farmington and Aztec in the northwestern part of the state, where they purchased fruit for canning. The entire trip, Lee recorded, "became a festive occasion."77

When the nesters, as the homesteaders were known, asked Lee why he wanted to take their photograph, he said, as he told others who had asked the same question, "I want to show people in other parts of the country how you live." He continued, "We Americans seem to understand that in our democratic society, people in a far part of the country have a right to know and need to understand how the other 130,000,000 live and act, so that we can all get along together."78

Lee commented on the importance of Pie Town as a frontier farming community:

The nature of the land itself was an important element in the life of its people. I had to picture the land in long shots, middle distance shots, and close-ups that would show what it was like. . . . I had to show this in portraits and action shots that would speak of character. I had to portray the things that would suggest where they came from and why. I had to show those people's relation to their geographical environment, how they made a living on the land, how they cultivated it, depended upon it, were its masters and victims by turns.79

At a small homestead, less than a half mile south of Pie Town, Lee took several photographs of Jack Whinery and his wife and five children. Whinery said that he had built his dugout in ten days and that his cost had been 30 cents for nails. Like many of the homesteaders, Whinery had established a garden and built a yard fence from the ponderosa log slabs given away by the saw mills operating in the area.

Lee also took considerable interest in one of the more successful of the homesteading families—the Huttons. In 1931 George Hutton Sr. led the family west from Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, to claim eighty acres eight miles northwest of Pie Town, where he built a comfortable home.80
Hutton had grown cotton near Maud, Oklahoma, but simply wanted to get away. “I just couldn’t stand the noise and all the people,” Hutton told Lee. “We’ve liked it out here and now there’s nothing I’d rather see less than an oil field or a cotton field.” With the help of his son, George Hutton Jr., Hutton had built a small machine shop, a cistern from which the family drew water, and a wind charger to generate electricity. Lee spent an entire day with the Huttons, snapping images of the family at dinner and of Bessie Hutton washing with a makeshift electric washing machine and working in the family garden. Lee even snapped a shot of the family’s fireplace. Forty years later, George Hutton Jr. would remember the occasion: “Russell Lee was all over this country. He come out here and spent almost one whole day with us. Made all kinds of pictures. He had a 35-mm camera and he had a four-by-five, regular photographer’s camera. . . . I can say one thing for him—he was one hell of a good photographer, that man was. Russell and his wife was very, very likable people, very likable.”

Years later, other homesteaders would fondly recall Lee. Ed Jones remembered Lee as a “great big . . . real jolly fella.” “I’d be cooking in the café when I’d look up and see ol’ Russell come down from the hotel for his breakfast. He was a real nice gentleman,” Jones remembered. Colita Schalbar, who was depicted in one of Lee’s photographs and who taught elementary school at Pie Town for many years, remembered Lee as a “really nice person. . . . not snobbish or stuck up.” It was a Texas journalist and friend, Maury Maverick Jr., who perhaps put it best: “Of all the people I have ever known in my life, I do not know of a single one better liked than Russell Lee.”

The homesteaders who captivated Lee’s imagination more than any other were Doris and Faro Caudill and their five-year-old daughter, Josie. Lee had obtained the names of several homesteaders from Keele, and “armed with a crude map,” Lee recalled, “I put the cameras in the car and drove into the country in the general direction of one of the farmers. The lighting happened to be good for some general long shots of the terrain and countryside, so I took a few pictures. As I was driving down one side road, I noticed a farmer and his horse, resting from plowing his field, and looking in my direction. I stopped the car, waved to him; he waved back, and I walked across the partially-plowed field and introduced myself. He was a young man, about thirty, named Faro Caudill—a homesteader.”

Caudill, whose father and uncle were said to have been cattle rustlers in Texas, showed Lee around his property and introduced him to his wife of
seven years, Doris, "a tall Texas girl a few years his junior." Inside the Caudill
dugout, Lee heard a remarkable story of survival and perseverance. "We don’t
have too much to do with. We came without money, we’ve had to grub and
clear out land, dig our wells, build our corrals and barns as well as our houses.
But we don’t go hungry, that’s one thing," Caudill said. "Plowin’ always was
the easiest work for me . . . it gives me time to think," he told Lee.

Besides several family portraits, Lee photographed Doris on her knees in
the garden, ironing, milking, sewing, straining milk for cream, and carefully
examining the prized family stores of canned vegetables. Later in a book that
would chronicle her life, Doris remembered how Jean and Russell Lee would
“come early and stay all day.” Doris said she “loved both of them. They were
just real nice people. They were so down-to-earth, our kind of people. They
weren’t snobbish or high-toned. . . . The Lees were just real good people.”

Lee also photographed Faro Caudill planting beans and constructing a
new dugout on a site he found closer to water. But Lee was particularly
taken with Josie, a “pert and pretty five year old.” Perhaps his most poignant
images are those of Josie playing with several small dolls on the floor of the
dugout in front of the family’s worn-out couch. Of Lee’s 619 black-and­
white photographs of Pie Town and its environs, almost 100 are images of
the Caudill family.

During one of his last visits to Pie Town, Lee carefully observed and
photographed the community singing contest at the Baptist Church. “‘Safe
in the arms of Jesus,’ rang out in the small frame church building during
the all-day sing, despite the pounding rain and clap and roar of thunder
outside,” he recalled. “They had come in from the surrounding farms—
afoot, on horseback, in wagons and cars,” Lee wrote. There were “group
singing, duets, quartets, and solos until noon, when all would adjourn to
the grove outside for dinner and then back to the church [where] they would
sing again until early evening.”

Lee was also back in Pie Town in time for the two-day North Catron
County Fair that included agricultural exhibits from the 4-H Club and the
New Mexico College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, as well as indi­
vidual farmers and ranchers. On display were embroidery; quilts; rugs; vege­
tables, fresh and canned; and, of course, pies. Those attending also took
in a rodeo and free barbecue. By this time, the summer monsoons had left
the countryside green and inviting. One observer wrote that the “valleys,
the hillsides, and even the tops of the mountains, where rocks usually abound
. . . are covered with generous covers of green verdure.” It was perhaps the
wettest summer in at least twelve years, a pleasing respite for the people of Pie Town after years of suffering. The big puffy white cumulus clouds that Stryker had promised are also visible in a few of Lee's images taken at this time.95

During Lee's last visit to Pie Town, he displayed some of his photographs at the Farm Bureau. He seemed to be happy when people gathered to gawk and glow at the images and ask how they could obtain copies.

During much of that summer of 1940, in what would later appear to be the calm before the storm of war, Lee had observed the Pie Towners at work and at play. He photographed them in their fields and in their homes, meeting at the Farm Bureau and at school, singing and dancing, playing Forty-Two, praying at church, and eating their Sunday dinner by the light of kerosene lamps. "I wanted to show people in other parts of the country how Pie Town lived," Lee would say. "The people of Pie Town had character, the same kind of character Americans showed one hundred years before. The people of Pie Town were true pioneers."96 Before he was through with Catron County and Pie Town, Lee had taken almost one thousand photographs. Today they are among the 270,000 negatives of the FSA preserved in the Library of Congress.

After seven years, and well over one hundred thousand miles crossing and re-crossing the nation, using his 35-mm camera as a social and political instrument, Lee's Pie Town photographs may well be his greatest single achievement. Lee carefully selected forty-six of what he thought were the best images to accompany an article on Pie Town in the magazine U.S. Camera that was published in October 1941. "I am a photographer hired by a democratic government," Lee wrote, "to take pictures of its land and its people." He was hoping his images would "endure to help the people of tomorrow understand the people of today, so they can carry on more intelligently."97

In the decades that followed, Lee's photographs appeared in hundreds of books and magazines, and were displayed in museums all around the world. Over time, however, Lee became somewhat irritated with what seemed like an endless discussion of Pie Town. Somehow, the photographs, regardless of their excellence, had come to overshadow his other work. "I wish I had never heard of that damned town,' because it attracted too much attention, more than it deserved," Jean Lee recalled Russell saying.98 This group of photographs "loomed too large in Lee's career," one scholar, Mary Jane Appel, agreed in 2003. "This single assignment has been emphasized and analyzed in detail in almost every discussion of Lee's work. The attention garnered by these images was, in part, Lee's doing, an attention he did not
Regardless, there is little doubt that Lee's photographs of Pie Town are among his best, a reflection of his deep love of the land and the rural people that he came to admire. Lee's photographs of proud but ailing Dust Bowl refugees and bean-farming homesteaders in that remote corner of New Mexico continue to amaze us. Even a casual glimpse indicates the images were composed with compassion, skill, and tact. Lee clearly demonstrated that a camera could be used "to dissect the social and economic forces at work in a town." Today, these images of Pie Town, as well as of Datil, Quemado, Reserve, and Mogollon, provide a remarkable and lasting glimpse into a world that has long since disappeared.

Russell Werner Lee's letters to Roy Stryker relating to Pie Town and Catron County serve to complement his black-and-white and color images and provide a rare window into the everyday thoughts and life of one of the most famous and dedicated photographers of the Farm Security Administration. These invaluable letters are carefully preserved today at the University of Louisville and are published here for the first time.

First Letter, Dated 20 April 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

Genl Delivery
Phoenix, Arizona
4/20/40

Dear Roy—

Arrived here yesterday evening after a trip thru about all the extremes you could imagine—windstorms, rain, dust storms, sleet, driving snow, and finally tropical heat. From Albuquerque we went to Socorro to Datil, N. Mex. where we stayed in an old ranch house that had been disassembled piece by piece and rebuilt about ten or fifteen miles from the original site. I took quite a few interiors and exteriors there. Then we crossed the continental divide and on to Pie Town which is a settlement of migrants from Texas and Oklahoma—dry land farmers raising Pinto Beans and corn. Talked with the store owner there and I believe it should be one community we must cover. He called it the "last frontier" with people on farms ranging from 30 to 200 acres—some living in cabins with dirt floors—others better off, but all seemingly united in an effort to make their community really function. Near there also are some cattle and sheep ranches
should you want some of that. Was not able to get to McNary on this trip as the snow had made the roads rather doubtful—that is where lumbering operations are very extensive. At Springerville they were flood irrigating the valley meadows—a little later they drive the cattle to the mountain ranges. There should be a fine story on Arizona cattle and the small town here. From Springerville we went to Globe thru some magnificent country—sparsely populated but most scenic. Globe and Miami are full of pictures of the mining town houses perched in groups on the hills dominated by the tremendous smelter and waste piles. I took just a few pix there and will go back for more later of course. We went to Phoenix via the Apache Trail which is again magnificent but with its thousand or more curves and turns is very difficult to drive—took about 3 hours for 50 miles of the worst stretch. We passed Roosevelt Dam and I got some good shots around there—the country is faced with a serious water shortage and it certainly was apparent there. Altogether I took about 125 pictures with the Linhof on the whole trip varying from interiors of the old ranch house, snow scenes, mountain valleys, irrigation, flood and ditch, cliff dwellings, etc. Last night I discovered another pinhole in the bellows and have sent in the negatives air-mail—you should receive them Monday morning. This pinhole is repaired and there are no signs of any others. Please have the film developed at once and wire me a report at Sea Breeze Tourist Village, Phoenix, if they are OK. There may be a few shots—interiors—that my flash was temporarily off but that’s OK now, too. If you could have Roy [Dunn] make a few prints at once to check for sharpness. I would sure appreciate it. Would like to have your comments of this set as quickly as possible. I have definitely gone after the pictorial in the great majority of these. If any important shots should have to be retaken I might be able to get some of them in my travels around. I am sorry this whole matter of cameras seems to have arisen but believe that it was caught in time before there was any serious damage to the negatives.

There is going to be plenty to take around Phoenix—they term this the “Valley of the Sun” and it’s a damned good name. It seems to be a most modern community—beautiful schools, lawns, stores, swimming pools, etc., with all the irrigated crops. Some carefully chosen shots will do a great deal to add to our story of water—the final result of water when used to irrigate the desert.

Talked with the FSA district man in charge of projects—Casa Grande, Chandler, Camelback are the main ones here and Agua Frio is the migrant
camp. From what I could gather Casa Grande & Chandler are the two most important and of course Agua Frio from the migrant angle. He also advised that Dorothea [Lange] was thru here a year or so ago and took pix at all three. If you feel that there are enough pictures of Camelback please let me know at once. Also what coverage will you want on all these projects? Unless you specify I will give full coverage—perhaps even following one family thru a day (as a symbol of all the others) on each of the three projects. Please let me know how long you want me to devote to Southern Arizona—two weeks, three weeks or a month? There is material available, of course, for many months work, but I know that is impossible. If you could list the states you want covered most intensively and total time available it should be a good guide. If there are six months available for this area I would suggest the following:

- New Mexico—2 months—rating 1st
- Colorado—1½ months—rating 2nd
- Arizona—1 month—rating 3rd
- Utah—3 weeks—rating 4th
- Nevada—3 weeks—rating 4th

Of course I know it is impossible to make any hard and fast rule, but with some sort of rough idea it will be possible to regulate the intensity of work in a particular state.

I mentioned in my last letter the talk I had with George Sanchez in Albuquerque. He certainly knows the problem of the Spanish Americans. He suggested that concentrated work in one of the isolated Spanish American villages would be very representative of them all. He has given me the names of key-men who will cooperate in several areas he mentioned. He is most interested in attempting a clearing house for sociological study in the Southwest similar to [Howard W.] Odum’s setup at Chapel Hill. He will be at University of Texas located at Austin this coming year. I have given him your name and told him briefly about the work we have done with the University of North Carolina & Odum’s group. I also mentioned Dr. Park at U. of Oklahoma as one with whom he could possibly count on for full cooperation in such a study. Sanchez next study will be among the Mexican minority groups at San Antonio. Will see him again in Albuquerque when I return there.

Have you had any more reports from the University of Oklahoma exhibit? How’s Arthur [Rothstein] getting along with “Look?” What is his address? I’d like to drop him a note?
Did you see sometime ago in Eleanor Roosevelt’s column where she had dinner with Dorthea [sic] and Paul [S. Taylor] and where she gave their book a big hand?

Let me hear from you soon, Roy. Jean sends her best and remember us to Alice Phyllis and everybody.

Best regards,
Russell

P.S. Address letters General Delivery, telegrams care of Sea Breeze Tourist Village. Your telegram came thru the Signal Corps here and was mailed one full day after it was received.

R

Second Letter, Dated 9 May 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

Gen Dely
Pie Town, N. Mex.
Sunday 5/9/40

Dear Roy—

Just a note to tell you of a slight change in plans. I am leaving for Mogollon tomorrow morning. After a day or so rest will start on the mining story which I should finish Saturday night. Next Sunday at Pietown they are having a big community sing—with food and drink as well—it lasts all day so I’m going to be sure to be there for that. Have also discovered that they are cutting ties in these here mountains by means of the old broad-axe, so I’ll get that when I return. Also there will probably be a big square dance a week from Tuesday here.

Everything’s going fine—there will be more pictures of Pietown to follow—most of the work I’ve done so far has been in the country—there are a few more shots needed in the town here which I’ll get next week end. Haven’t had a bath—outside of sponge bath—for ten days—so I’m sure going to welcome a shower.

Will write again soon

Best regards
Russell

P.S. How does the enclosed sound to you? Has the New Mexico guide book been published yet?
Third Letter, Dated 30 May 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

Dear Roy—

Arrived here in Pietown this morning after stopping at Glenwood for a little fishing. Mogollon—an old gold & silver mining town and Reserve—a town over 100 miles from a railroad and looking every bit like you might expect it.

Am getting my lineup on work around here this afternoon and expect to have about 5 full days work here—there is a big meeting of surrounding farmers here Saturday night (Farm Bureau) and on Sunday there should be church services. I think there’s going to be a good story here—it certainly looks like the last frontier here—even the hotel rooms are furnished with only a bed, a table, a chair and a “thundermug.” No baths are available.

Mogollon is by far the best of any mining town we’ve seen so far and from all accounts it should be really something on pay day. The town looks very much like the shots I’ve seen of the real old timers (this is very old, too, having been founded in 1889 and producing ever since). I met the storekeeper and saloon owner and they seemed very cooperative about my statement. I might get back for a real picture story of the town. They said that pay-day was by far the best time to be there—there were fights, drunks in the gutters and everything else you might associate with a mining town. I believe I can get a real story here of the life of the miner and the mining town and it should take 4 or 5 days to do it right. Next pay day is two weeks from this coming Saturday which would make it June 15th. I would consider going there this Saturday which is also pay day except for the importance of the Pie Town job.

Am enclosing a typewritten sheet of a poster for a rodeo at Quemado, N. Mex., about 20 miles west of here a week from this Saturday. No professionals are allowed and from various inquiries around Western New Mexico it seems as if it will be well attended by people from a large area. As you notice there is camping in their cottonwood grove and I believe it should be the closest approach to an old fashioned country gathering that we could find out here.

Here then is a suggested schedule for the next two weeks work unless you want me to drop all this and get on to the Rio Grande Valley.
May 30 to June 4—Pietown
June 4 to June 8—Springerville & McNary, Arizona about 50 & 100 miles, respectfully, west of here for story on the big lumbering operations at McNary or cattle around Springerville. McNary would probably be better if there is much going on. McNary is quite difficult to reach in the winter time on account of snow.

June 8 & 9—Rodeo at Quemado, N. Mex.
June 10 and 11th—Glenwood, N. Mex.—two days leave or rest
June 12th to 15th inclusive—Mogollon mining story
June 16th—Enroute to Albuquerque & Spanish American story
Let me know by return air-mail or better by return telegram if this is OK or if you want me to go to Albuquerque.

Have received the Agfa Supreme today and am well supplied now with film & flashbulbs. I wrote Roy Dixon recently about what appeared to be the lack of brilliance in some of the prints recently sent out. He advises that it was due to the color of the paper stock & that he now is using a much whiter paper.

How's everything going in Washington? Let me hear from you soon, Roy.
Best regards,
Russell

Fourth Letter, Dated 14 June 1940
Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker 6/14/40

Dear Roy—
Just a very hasty note. Was mistaken for a German spy at Mogollon but available credentials were apparently satisfactory. However the deputy sheriff there reported it to Glenwood and Silver City. Everything has been satisfactorily arranged and they are all satisfied I'm working for the govt.
This brings up a point however that we are all undoubtedly going to run into. What do you think about adding finger prints to our new photo identification cards?
I may or may not be able to get the complete set of pix at Mogollon because the plant supt. is out of town but may return tomorrow. I feel sure I can get his permission for the necessary underground shots. At any rate he'll be back next week and I could run back to Mogollon (120 miles from
Pietown) and get the shots then. Going to Pietown early Sunday, there until Tuesday.

Best regards,
Russell

Fifth Letter, Dated 17 June 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

General Delivery
Pietown, N. Mex.
6/17/40

Dear Roy—

Just a very short note to tell you where I am.

Had a piece of good luck at Mogollon — the supt. arrived Saturday A.M. — I was able to get shots in the gold mine — shots of the miners & their clothing — bar room scenes Saturday night — just about everything except interiors of miners' homes and there just wasn't time for that. The mine interiors were rather difficult & some may be doubtful due to presence of an oil fog from the pneumatic drilling machines.

Arrived here yesterday A.M. and got a good set on the community singing. Tonight am going to a square dance — tomorrow broad axe work. Will leave here Thursday A.M. for Albuquerque — arriving there Thursday noon. Will be there two or three days at most. Telegraph address will be El Vado courts.

Would like to take a few days off about June 29 to July 4th or 5th. Jean's folks are going to Denver and we would like to see them very much. During the week of June 24th will probably work on the Spanish American town.

Let me hear from you at Albuquerque, Roy. In haste.

Best regards,
Russell

Sixth Letter, Dated 20 June 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

General Delivery
Albuquerque, N. Mex.
6/20/40

Dear Roy—

Arrived here this morning from Pietown. Have sent in 21 dozen cut film — and 6 rolls of Contax — you should receive them Monday.
The community sing was really grand and the square dance had one of those fast rhythms with a great deal of abandon. I hope my pix show it. Also got the pix of use of the broad-axe in hewing ties.

Just had another repercussion on the Mogollon incident. The storekeeper at Pie Town said that a tobacco salesman who had been in Mogollon said the F. B. I. was looking for me—that they had caught a spy who had been taking pix of the mines and streets of Mogollon and wanted to question me. I believe this is one of those elaborated rumors inasmuch as I think I'm one of the few people who have taken pictures of Mogollon and—I'm almost positive—the only one who has taken them recently. So I discount this story absolutely—everything was perfectly OK when I left Mogollon and there was no objection to taking the pictures after the superintendent of the mine returned. However, do you think I should contact the F. B. I. here or should we leave it absolutely unofficial—I will do nothing until I hear from you.

Am having my picture taken this afternoon (for the identification card) and will air mail three of them in to you.

Did not receive the cut-film I asked you to send to Mogollon—it should have been forwarded to here by this time? By any chance was it sent to Silver City? Are any prints enroute to Albuquerque? I received the small set of M's sent to Pietown. Will caption these here and return them as soon as possible. Expect to be here until Monday morning. I shall wire you just as soon as I find out what Spanish American town I shall cover and where my headquarters will be for [the] next week. Let me hear from you at once, Roy. My telegraph address here is Wigwam Courts instead of EI Vado Courts as formerly advised.

Best regards,
Russell

Seventh Letter, Dated 27 September 1940

Letter from Russell Lee to Roy Stryker

General Delivery
Pie Town, New Mexico
Friday 9/27/40

Dear Roy—

Arrived here about noon today and found Pie Town getting all set for its annual fair. It is a small one but there is a fine spirit here. Just after lunch it started to rain and rained hard all afternoon. The community is in the midst
of its harvest season—they’ve had good crops of beans & corn and the vegetables they grow are really amazing for their large size and quality. Amarillo sent one of our displays out here and it looks very good, but the pix you sent out are certainly appreciated by the community. I don’t believe that you could ever get a more enthusiastic crowd for an exhibit. I tacked them on the walls for everyone to see. The Farm Bureau is going to keep them intact so they may have a good historical record of what Pie Town looked like in 1940. Several people have asked for prints in which they appear but I have given them no information about how to get them, because I was fearful that the lab might be very busy. Toots said when she was in Albuquerque that it was now possible for anyone to buy prints at 50 cents apiece for 8 X 10 and 35 cents for a 5 X 7. If you would like some orders and it wouldn’t be too inconvenient for you, I can write back a letter from St. John’s advising them how to get them. Please let me know at St. Johns.

I sent you a telegram after our telephone conversation the other night asking you to send on some Kodachrome via air-mail. I thought it advisable to have a little extra stock. I also mentioned that none of the Contax prints were in the Pie Town set and for you to send some on if they were available. I believe the people here are quite satisfied with what we have given them after seeing their reactions today although it might be wise to send, say 20, of the Contax negatives to them to fill out the story just a little more.

Yesterday morning I drove to Santa Fe with the Pie Town pix to show to Mr. [Charles Ethridge] Minton. He was very much pleased with them but said that it was his idea to include but eight or so of them in the New Mexico picture book put out by the Writers’ Project. I do not believe they are interested in doing a book devoted to Pie Town. The picture book will contain about 65 shots and will be quite different than those in the New Mexico guide book. The emphasis will be on groups—group activities—work and recreation—with some shots on architecture and the like. He asked me to make a selection of about 20 pix which might show the Pie Town story with emphasis on groups. He is also anxious to have group shots from other sections of New Mexico and a church or two. All unused pictures will be returned to you.

Other shots of N. Mexico that might interest him:
Mogollon—miner’s sitting on sidewalk, one underground shot, main street—bar room scene
Penasco & Chamisal—Women plastering house, Catholic procession. Traveling show entertainment at Penasco.
Taos—Crowd and native dances at Fiesta at Taos. Merry-go-round pix. Bread baking.
Llano de San Juan—pix showing subdivision of land by families
Costilla—weaving pix—group if possible
Pinos Altos—Eugene Davis—gold prospector
Catron County—Sheepherders—sheep

I believe that a maximum of 40 or 50 shots including Pie Town would be OK.
His address is Charles Ethridge Minton
New Mexico Writers Project
418 College St.
Santa Fe, N. Mex.

He is also planning a book on “Grandmothers” with biographies of each. It seems that there is a great deal of witchcraft—folk lore, old recipes, superstitions, etc., that these old women know about—that may pass away and be lost when they die and he wants to record them. Three Spanish-American women that I think he might find very interesting are:

1. Old women who made bread at Arroyo Seco (name can be supplied by SA supervisor Taos.)
2. Two old women at Chamisal—one washing wool, the other well wrinkled but standing against wall (Names can be supplied by Postmaster at Chamisal). I would suggest that you send pix of these 3 as a sample. Would also suggest that you send Contax shot of Mrs. Beason (old lady with dark dress in the yard with grandchild in lap) of Pie Town. This would represent the emigrant from Oklahoma to New Mexico.

Be sure to let me know at St John’s when Ed Locke is coming thru Salt Lake City. We will undoubtedly stay there at New American Tourist Lodge in the 400 or 500 block of South Main Street, S. L. City. If his coming is by train have him wire or write to me there at Gen. Delivery and we’ll give him a welcome at the station. And I sure hope you can get out here soon, too. Let me hear from you soon, Roy.

Best regards,
Russell
ILL. 1. A SATIRICAL SKETCH OF
FARM SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
PHOTOGRAPHER RUSSELL LEE AT
WORK
Drawn by Lee's friend and
colleague at the Farm Security
Administration, Lithuanian-born
Ben Shahn.
(Image courtesy Roy Stryker
Papers, Special Collections,
Ekstrom Library, University of
Louisville, Kentucky)

ILL. 2. RUSSELL LEE, CA. 1942
(Photograph courtesy The
Wittcliff Collections, Albert
B. Alkek Library, Texas State
University—San Marcos, San
Marcos, Texas)
"I believe it should be one community we must cover," Lee wrote his boss in Washington, D.C., Roy Stryker. On the south side of the Main Street stood the town’s beanery, a curio shop, J. B. Wyeth’s taxidermy “studio,” the town café, and the general store of Jack A. Keele and Harmon L. Craig.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036796-D)

Price of gasoline in the small village in 1940 was 20¢ per gallon. Most of the buildings in Pie Town were painted red, white, and blue, thanks to the Standard Oil Company.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036721-D)
ILL. 5. THE PIE TOWN HOTEL
Setting atop a small dyke, the log structure had once been the town's only store. Lee rented one of the rooms for a dark room to develop his photographs. The rooms were "furnished with only a bed, a table, a chair and a 'thundermug.' No baths are available," Lee wrote. Two Delco plants in the community provided electricity.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036875-D)
ILL. 7. A LOCAL HOMESTEADER, PETER MARSHALL LEATHERMAN, WHO LIVED IN A DUGOUT THREE MILES SOUTHWEST OF PIE TOWN, ARRIVES IN THE COMMUNITY TO AIR UP HIS TIRES ON HIS BURRO-DRAWN CART AT THE LOCAL GARAGE. Few of the homesteaders in the vicinity of the community had tractors and many had no automobiles.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012726-M5)

ILL. 6. PIE TOWN’S COMMUNICATION TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD WAS THE SOCORRO-TO-SPRINGERVILLE STAGE. The stage arrived at the community around ten in the morning, Monday through Saturday, and carried everything from passengers and luggage to baby chicks. Arch McPhail stands in the doorway of the local post office.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036739-D)
ILL. 8. CHILDREN, MANY OF THEM SHOELESS, ARE PART OF A GRADUATION CEREMONY AT PIE TOWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Until the community was officially granted a school a few years later, classes were held in the Farm Bureau Building. An older student, Luther Barnett, guides the students in song as the teacher, Grace Lucas, looks on. Many of the students walked from as far as three or four miles to attend the school. Those attending high school rode a bus twenty-two miles to Quemado.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036684-D)

Facing page, bottom  ILL. 10. PETER LEATHERMAN UNLOADS SACKS OF BEANS AT THE TOWN'S BEANERY AS HARMON L. CRAIG, THE TOWN'S BENEVOLENT AND UNOFFICIAL MAYOR, LOOKS ON

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012725-M5)
ILL. 9. JOHN ADAMS IS AT THE REINS AS TWO MULES DRAG HEWN CROSSTIES FROM THE NORTH FACE OF BIG ALEGROS MOUNTAIN

In Pie Town, Lee learned a few Dust Bowl refugees were making a living by “cutting ties in these here mountains by means of the old broad-axe.” From the base of the mountain, the ties were trucked to the railhead town of Magdalena, sixty-three miles to the east.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012779-M4)
ILL. 11. USING BURROS AND HORSES, FARO CAUDILL AND HIS FRIEND, JOHN ADAMS, SKID LOGS INTO PLACE FOR A NEW DUGOUT
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036905-D)

ILL. 12. FARO CAUDILL PLANTS BEANS NEAR THE SATELLITE COMMUNITY OF DIVIDE, JUST NORTH OF BIG ALEGROS MOUNTAIN
Lee snapped more photographs of Caudill than any other Pie Town homesteader. To help cover the seeds, a small board is dragged from the planter.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012718-M5)
ILL. 13. JOSIE CAUDILL, FIVE-YEAR-OLD DAUGHTER OF DORIS AND FARO CAUDILL, PLAYS WITH HER DOLLS IN THE FAMILY DUGOUT, SOUTH OF PIE TOWN
Viewing the images of herself and her parents many years later, Josie found the images painful. She died in 1998.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036561-D)

ILL. 14. “GRANNY” BEASON AND HER GRANDSON, BILLY JOE FOWLER
Lee thought this photograph was one of the best of his Pie Town images.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012754-M1)
"Good God, take a look at those people and you could see those people were having a ball," Lee would say many years later. The man on the extreme left (face only) is Wayne Bennett. The three women looking on are Louise Engle, Colita Schalbar, and Beaulah Thomas. Colita Schalbar went on to teach school at Pie Town Elementary School for more than a decade. Few had as big an impact on the community as did Schalbar. This is one of Lee’s more famous and frequently reproduced images.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036912-D)
ILL. 16. SIMON POTTER JR., LEADING HIS HORSE WESTWARD, ABOUT HALFWAY BETWEEN PIE TOWN AND QUEMADO, FOURTEEN MILES NORTH OF THE HISPANIC COMMUNITY OF MANGAS

At 10,244 feet, Big Alegros Mountain, the highest mountain in the northern part of the county, looms on the southern horizon. The mountain that dominated the Pie Town landscape was a favorite picnic site for many homesteaders. Appearing as a mesa from a distance, the fir and aspen summit was really a rocky volcanic ridge less than twenty feet across in places. Lee mistakenly thought the mountain to be 12,000 feet in elevation.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012730-M5)

ILL. 17. AN UNNAMED HOMESTEADER ON HIS WAY HOME FROM THE PIE TOWN POST OFFICE

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012709-M4)
ILL. 18. THE W-BAR RANCH, ONE OF THE LARGEST RANCHES IN CATRON COUNTY

Only a few miles south of Pie Town, the ranch was owned by Bill Dahl, before his death at the age of fifty-two in December 1939. A wash tub hangs on the wall. Also visible are a privy, barn, windmill, corrals, and a log bunkhouse. The rugged Sawtooth Mountains, between Pie Town and Datil, are visible in the background. Many of the ranchers in Catron County, although they had carved their ranches out of public lands, resented the homesteaders.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036818-D)
ILL. 20. AN ALL-DAY SING AT THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN PIE TOWN
Lee snapped several images at this event. Those performing include Oscar Nickelson on the far left.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036745-D)

ILL. 21. LADIES QUINTETTE AT THE ALL-DAY SING IN PIE TOWN
INCLUDED LILLY MAE DUGGINS, LILY LEATHERMAN, AND MRS. DONALDSON
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036955-D)

Facing page, bottom  ILL. 19. A SMILING PETER LEATHERMAN MAKES A SMALL PURCHASE FROM HARMON L. CRAIG AT CRAIG AND KEELE’S GENERAL STORE IN PIE TOWN
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036750-D)
ILL. 22. THE GEORGE HUTTON FAMILY
Lee spent an entire day with the Hutton family. Here, the family enjoys an evening meal. Left to right, George M. Hutton Jr., Bessie Hutton, Ollie Eugene Hutton (George Jr.’s son), and George Edward Hutton Sr. The Huttons settled on a homestead eight miles west of Pie Town, hoping to get away from the hustle and bustle of the Oklahoma oil fields.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036600-D)

ILL. 23. THREE MAILBOXES STAND BESIDE U.S. HIGHWAY 60, APPROXIMATELY EIGHT MILES WEST OF PIE TOWN
The size of the Hutton and Burnett mailboxes reflect residents’ dependence on mail services for many of their clothing and household items.
(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-035863-D)
Twenty-two miles east of Pie Town and 2,450 miles west of New York City, the Eagle Guest Ranch at Datil was a way station for weary travelers along U.S. Highway 60, or those heading into the southern part of the county by way of State Highway 12.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF33-012829-M5)
Jean and Russell Lee spent the night at the lodge in April 1940. Impressed with the "old ranch house," Lee took several interior shots. Ray Morley moved the structure, log by log, from White House Canyon in the mountains west of the community to Datil. The structure burned in 1944. (Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-035886-D)
Lee spotted two Hispanic sheepherders and their dog along State Highway 12, not far from Tularosa Creek, near the small settlement of Aragon, the second largest community in Catron County in 1940. (Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036616-D)

Lee snapped this view while on his way to Mogollon. More than 100 miles from any railroad, the small community of Reserve “looked every bit as you might expect it,” Lee wrote. (Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036651-D)
Lee was inspired by a flyer advertising a rodeo at Quemado. "No professionals are allowed and from various inquiries . . . it seems as if it will be well attended by people from a large area," he recorded. The hastily constructed rodeo arena was on the Heacock Ranch about seven miles south of Quemado on the east bank of Largo Creek, near a large grove of cottonwood trees where visitors could camp for the night.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration-Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036948-D)
Nestled along Silver Creek on the northwestern flank of the rugged Mogollon Mountains, Mogollon was the largest community in Catron County in 1940. Lee heard that on payday in the town, "there were fights, drunks in the gutters and everything else you might associate with a mining town." During his travels for the Farm Security Administration, Lee photographed several mining towns, but none was as picturesque and as interesting as Mogollon. Unlike Pie Town, Mogollon featured conveniences such as telephones.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036528-D)
In Mogollon, Lee expended considerable effort taking a number of interior shots at the Little Fanney Mine, but the images were ruined by the “oil fog from the pneumatic drilling machines." Following his visit to the town, rumors spread throughout the county that Lee was a German spy.

(Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036809-D)
ILL. 32. SOMEONE APPEARS TO HAVE CENSORED GRAFFITI FROM A SIGN ERECTED ON BEHALF OF THE “MOGOLLON SCHOOL KIDS” (Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036946-D)

ILL. 33. LULA MAY ROOKS FORD CASHES THE PAYCHECK OF MINER MAX DUNCKHORST ON PAYDAY, MOGOLLON, SATURDAY, 15 JUNE 1940 (Photograph courtesy Farm Security Administration–Office of War Information Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, LC-USF34-036920-D)
Notes


2. Marta Weigle, *New Mexicans in Cameo and Camera: New Deal Documentation of Twentieth-Century Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 65–69. The Eagle Guest Ranch consisted of several tourist cottages, a store, and the post office. The large log edifice known as the Navajo Lodge was originally
constructed by Henry Davenport for the Morely family in 1886 in White House Canyon northwest of the community. Ray Morely dismantled and moved the lodge, log by log, to Datil during World War I. The frequently photographed inn burned in 1944. The name Sierra del Datil first appeared on Bernardo de Miera y Pacheco’s map of 1779 of the Dominguez-Escalante expedition from 1776 to 1777. The name evidently came from the seed pods of the broad-leaved yucca that resembled dates. From October 1885 until September 1886, the Sixth United States Cavalry maintained a camp along Datil Creek, one of the few live streams in the area. Datil later became a stop along the northern branch of the Beefsteak Trail and wagon road that stretched from Springerville, Arizona, to Magdalena, New Mexico. By the time Lee arrived in 1940, the small community included a population of several hundred. Susan E. Taylor Lee, These Also Served: Brief Histories of Pioneers; Short Stories and Pictures Relative to Catron, Grant, Sierra, Socorro, and Valencia Counties of New Mexico (Los Lunas, N.Mex.: S. E. Lee, 1960), 71-72; Jerry W. Thompson Jr., interview by author, 24 December 2005; Robert Hixson Julyan, The Place Names of New Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 281; and Post Returns, Camp on Datil Creek, New Mexico, 1885–1886, Records of the Adjutant General’s Office, Record Group 395, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

For information on the ranchers’ disdain of homesteaders, see Agnes Morley Cleaveland, No Life for a Lady, Life in America series (1941; repr., Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), 331-39.


Lee to Stryker, 20 April 1940, Stryker Papers.


Ibid., 14.


Hurley, Portrait of a Decade, 34.


Ibid. See also Hurley, Russell Lee, Photographer, 19.
17. Stryker to Lee, 10 April 1937, Stryker Papers.
27. Stryker to Lee, 17 April 1937, Stryker Papers.
31. Lee to Stryker, 28 February 1939, Stryker Papers.
32. Lee to Stryker, 14 March 1939, Stryker Papers.
35. Carl Mydans had left the FSA for Life magazine, Ted Jung departed for Consumers Guide, Arthur Rothstein moved over to Look magazine, Walter Evans left to freelance, and Dorothea Lange was politely forced out, yet Lee stayed on.
38. Stryker to Lee, 7 April 1939, Stryker Papers.
40. Lee to Stryker, 27 May 1939, Stryker Papers.
42. Lee to Stryker, [December 1939 or early January 1940], Stryker Papers; and Stryker to Lee, 6 January 1940, 11 January 1940, Stryker Papers.
44. Lee to Stryker, 10 March 1940, Stryker Papers. Born in the Bronx, New York, Margaret Bourke-White became a forerunner in the newly emerging field of photojournalism and the first female photojournalist for Life magazine. In collaboration with her husband-to-be, Erskine Caldwell, Bourke-White's haunting photographs of the Depression appeared in the book You Have Seen Their Faces (1937). She also achieved many firsts: she was the first photographer for Fortune magazine, the first Western photographer allowed into the Soviet Union, the first female war correspondent, the
first female to work in combat zones, and she was one of the first photographers to document the Nazi death camps. She died in 1971.

Born in Highland Park, Illinois, in March 1886, Edward Weston is considered to be the most influential photographer of the twentieth century. He was especially noted for his natural-form close-ups, nudes, and landscapes. In Mexico in 1923, he became friendly with the artists of the Mexican Renaissance, including Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco. He was the first photographer to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship and, in 1933, worked for the Federal Arts Project of the Works Progress Administration in New Mexico. In 1937–1938, he worked extensively in the West and Southwest. Suffering from Parkinson’s disease, Weston died in Carmel, California, in 1958.

45. Stryker to Lee, 19 March 1940, 27 March 1940, Stryker Papers.
46. George I. Sánchez, Forgotten People: A Study of New Mexicans (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940). The book was republished by Calvin P. Horn in 1967. Sánchez was born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on 4 October 1906. Educated at the University of New Mexico, the University of Texas, and the University of California at Berkeley, Sánchez was teaching at the University of New Mexico when he directed a Carnegie Foundation survey of Taos County, which resulted in his book Forgotten People. Shortly after Lee met with Sánchez, the educator moved on to the University of Texas, where he was elected president of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and continued his struggle for equal educational opportunities for Mexican American children. A prolific writer, Sánchez also photographed a number of Mexican American labor camps. He died in Austin, Texas, on 5 April 1972. Américo Paredes, ed., Humanidad: Essays in Honor of George I. Sánchez (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Center Publications, University of California, 1977); and Guadalupe San Miguel Jr., “Let All of Them Take Heed”: Mexican Americans and the Campaign for Educational Equality in Texas, 1910–1981 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).
47. Lee to Stryker, 8 April 1940, Stryker Papers.
51. Kathryn McKee-Roberts, From the Top of the Mountain: Pie Town, New Mexico and Neighbors ([N.Mex.]: Bishop Printing, 1990), 17; and Kathryn McKee-Roberts, From Dust to Dust: Cemeteries in Northern Catron County (Bosque Farms, N.Mex.: privately published, 2006), 127–67.
52. McKee-Roberts, From the Top of the Mountain, 17.
Catron County, New Mexico, had grown from a population of 3,282 in 1930 to 4,881 in 1940. Except for De Baca and Harding counties, it was the least populated county in the state at the time. Today it is the largest county by area in the state. Richard L. Forstall, comp. and ed., Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990 (Washington, D.C.: Records of the Bureau of Census, Population Division, 1994).


Lee to Stryker, 20 April 1940, Stryker Papers.

Lee to Stryker, 11 May 1940, Stryker Papers.


Ibid. A farming, ranching, and lumbering community, Reserve had evolved from Upper, Middle, and Lower Frisco (San Francisco) plazas. The Upper Frisco Plaza, also known at one time as Milligan’s Plaza, had become known as Reserve after forester John Kerr established a U.S. Forest Service headquarters in the small community. Reserve is best known today as the site where Elfego Baca held off a mob of Texas cowboys in a thirty-three-hour gun battle in 1884.

Lee to Stryker, n.d., Stryker Papers. About 1880, José Antonio Padilla moved his family from Los Padillas to what was called Rito Quemado, about five miles east of the present community. Here a post office was established in 1886. Padilla allegedly found the sage and rabbit brush along a small creek burned by Apaches or Navajos. About this same time, Francisco Padilla, José María Baca, and a number of other Hispanic families had commenced farming and raising sheep along the headwaters of Mangas Creek, some fifteen miles to the southeast. The name Mangas originated with the great Mimbres Apache chief Mangas Coloradas who had frequented the area and who was executed by the army at Fort McLean in 1863. Not to be confused with the town of Mangus in Grant County, Mangas was first known as Pinoville. Eliseo Baca, interview by author, 27 December 1999; Julian, The Place Names of New Mexico, 250, 281; and T. M. Pearce, ed., New Mexico Place Names: A Geographical Dictionary (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1965), 135.
62. Lee to Stryker, n.d., Stryker Papers. A thunder mug was a bowl-shaped chamber pot and was common in homes without running water and flushable toilets.
63. Theodora Baugh Craig, quoted in Meyer, “Pie Town,” 76.
66. Cleaveland, No Life for a Lady, 332–33.
67. Wood, Heartland New Mexico, 51.
69. Faith Morley Reed, quoted in Meyer, “Pie Town,” 75.
70. McKee-Roberts, From the Top of the Mountain, 86.
72. [Lee], “General Caption[s] on Pie Town,” n.d., Russell Lee Papers, Texas State University, San Marcos, Texas [hereafter Russell Lee Papers]. All those interviewed for this article agree that Craig was far from the “old buggard” who never gave “anybody anything,” as homesteader Doris Caudill asserted many years later. Myers, Pie Town Woman, 69.
73. Ibid.
74. [Lee], “General Caption[s] on Pie Town,” n.d., Russell Lee Papers; and Weigle, New Mexicans in Cameo and Camera, 76.
75. Fire lookouts in the vicinity included Mangas Mountain and El Caso, both in the Apache National Forest to the southwest. Lookouts at Davenport Mountain, east of Pie Town, in what is today the Cibola National Forest, and Fox Mountain, southwest of Quemado in the Apache National Forest, were built later.
76. Besides being known for the quality of its pinto beans, Pie Town quilts were also prized. The best known quilt designs, Lee wrote, were the Double Wedding Ring, Dresden Plate, and the Bursting Sun and Shining Stars. [Lee], Untitled Typescript, n.d., Russell Lee Papers. This typescript may be a copy of Jean Lee’s article on Pie Town that was rejected by the magazine Collier’s. Stryker also tried to pitch the Pie Town story to Reader’s Digest and interest the New York Times in publishing several of the Pie Town images, but without success. Stryker to Lee, n.d., Stryker Papers; Lee to Stryker, 20 September 1940, Stryker Papers; and Appel, “Russell Werner Lee: The Man Who Made America’s Portrait,” 27.
79. Ibid., 46.
83. George Hutton Jr., quoted in Bill Ganzel, Dust Bowl Descent (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 84.


89. Ibid.


94. Catron County (N.Mex.) News, "Country Never Looked So Well: Moisture Has Been Plenty in This Section of State of Late," 2 August 1940.


100. Eighteen of Lee’s color images of Pie Town and its environs were reproduced in Hendrickson’s *Bound for Glory: America in Color, 1939–43*. Doris and Faro Caudill grace the jacket of this publication.

101. Hurley, *Portrait of a Decade*, 120. Lee reported in early September that the Tolan Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives was interested in the testimony of some of the Pie Town homesteaders. The committee, headed by John H. Tolan, congressman from Oakland, California, was studying the plight of migratory workers. Lee suggested that Joe Beason, Jack Whinery, Peter M. Leatherman, Bill Staggs, or perhaps Faro Caudill might be willing to testify. Lee to Stryker, 7 September 1940, 9 September 1940. Stryker Papers.

102. Dorothea Lange was one of the most famous documentary photographers and photojournalists of the era. Her photograph of a hungry and desperate thirty-two-year-old
Florence Owens Thompson, the "Migrant Mother," may well be the most famous of the Depression Era images. Lange, a polio victim, divorced her first husband in 1935, and married Paul S. Taylor, a professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley. She was forced out of the FSA in late 1939. Dorothea and Paul were friends with Lee. Lange died on 11 October 1965. For a full-length biography, see Milton Meltzer, *Dorothea Lange: A Photographer's Life* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1978).

103. After completing a PhD in psychology at Clark University and a second PhD in sociology from Columbia, Howard W. Odum served as dean of liberal arts at Emory University before directing the School of Public Welfare and the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Shortly after his arrival, he established the Institute for Research in Social Science and the journal *Social Forces*. He toiled incessantly to improve race relations and authored several books. Odum died 8 November 1954.

104. Lee may be referring to Robert E. Park, who was influential in developing the theory of assimilation as it pertained to immigrants in the United States and who was at one time president of the American Sociological Association and the Chicago Urban League. Park, however, had retired from the University of Chicago in 1936.

105. The New York-born Arthur Rothstein studied with Stryker at Columbia University before joining the Resettlement Administration in 1935. Rothstein's striking images of an isolated Gee's Bend, Alabama, eleven of which accompanied a lengthy article printed on 22 August 1937 in the *New York Times Magazine*, have been compared to Lee's Pie Town photographs. Both were able to depict the poverty of the communities while lending dignity to the people. Rothstein died in 1985. Arthur Rothstein, *The Depression Years* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978).

106. None of Lee's images appeared in the picture book. Federal Writers' Project, *New Mexico, New Mexico: A Guide to the Colorful State* (New York: Hastings House, 1940). This guidebook was reprinted by at least four different publishers over the next fifty years.

107. Lee listed the following images:

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108. Tey Diana Rebolledo and Maria Teresa Marquez, eds., *Women's Tales from the New Mexico WPA: La Diabla a Pie*, Recovering the U.S. Hispanic Literary Heritage series (Houston, Tex.: Arte Publico Press, 2000).

109. Edwin A. Locke was Roy Stryker's trusted assistant at the FSA, for which he worked primarily as a writer. Although not as talented as Lee and other photographers in the FSA, Locke did do some photography, especially in 1937, during flooding along the Mississippi River.