

Indiana Farm Security Photographs



John Vachon

John Vachon was born in 1914 in St. Paul, Minnesota. He graduated from St. Thomas College in 1934. While enrolled in graduate school at Catholic University he was looking for a job in Washington, D.C., when he heard of a possible opportunity with the Resettlement Administration. He interviewed with Roy Stryker, who told him the job was temporary and consisted of the “rather dull work” of copying photo captions onto the back of prints done by the Historical Section’s photographers. Vachon began studying their photographs as he worked and in 1937, with encouragement and assistance from Stryker and other senior photographers, he began taking his own photographs around the Potomac River area using a borrowed Leica. In 1938, Stryker gave him his first solo assignment in Nebraska, and until 1941 Vachon both photographed and continued to classify the FSA photo file. Vachon continued working with the FSA until it was disbanded, and after he finished his service in World War II he worked with Stryker at Standard Oil. He later worked for both *Life* and *Look* magazines. After *Look* ceased publication in 1971, he became a freelance photographer and completed a visiting lectureship at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. Vachon’s hallmark became the use of natural light and black-and-white film, though many of his later and more well-known photographs were in color. He died in 1975 at the age of 60.

John Vachon Bibliography

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John Vachon Websites

FSA-OWI Photos, Documenting America, Omaha: Photographer: John Vachon, Omaha, Nebraska, November 1938, Farm Security Administration, Lot 412
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/fsahtml/fachap02.html>