On the JOB

ON THE JOB IN ILLINOIS: THEN & NOW

A dramatic photographic exhibition of working men and women, past and present, creating the goods and services of modern society in one of America's greatest industrial states.

About The Project

Approximately 5,000 photographs were taken for ON THE JOB IN ILLINOIS from which the images in this Exhibition were selected. The entire collection has been placed in the archives of the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield, Ill., there to remain a permanent resource for future generations.

The Exhibition will travel throughout Illinois during 1976 through the courtesy of local groups and organizations. At the conclusion of the Bicentennial Year, it will join the collections of the Illinois State Museum in Springfield.

As a part of the Project, a number of American Issues Forums will take place in connection with the Exhibition. These Forums make possible a dialogue between academic humanists in Illinois universities and colleges and members of the labor community. The topic is: "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness in the Workplace of Tomorrow."

Sponsor of the Project, in cooperation with the Illinois State AFL-CIO, is the Illinois Labor History Society. The Society is a voluntary organization whose purpose is the promotion of public interest in the history of labor in the Illinois region. Offices of the Society are at 2800 Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60657, (312) 248-8700. This project was funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities; the Illinois Humanities Council, and the Illinois Bicentennial Commission.

Fig. 1 Lewis W. Hine "Old Time Printer at Foot Press," 1905

The Timeless Eye

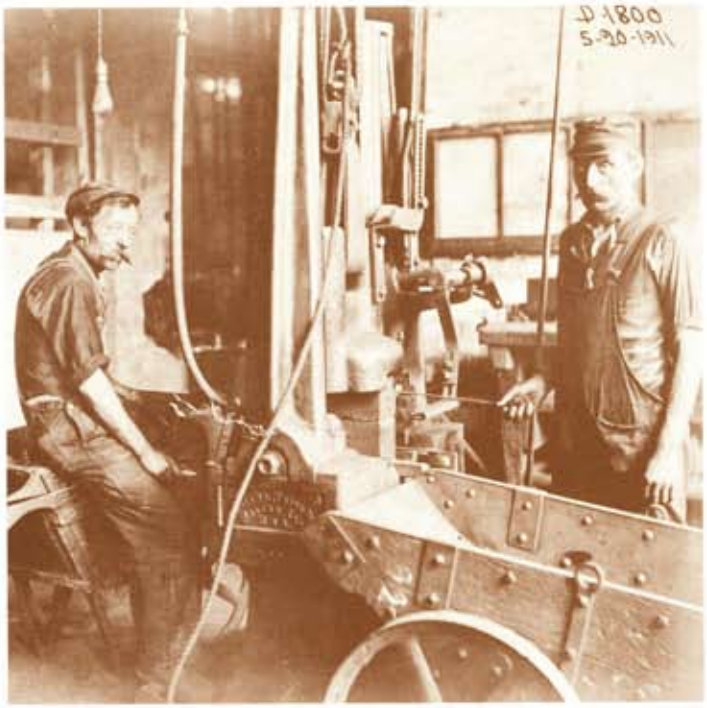
BY ROBERT DOHERTY

On the Job in Illinois: Then and Now follows in the photographic tradition established by Lewis Wickes Hine more than fifty years ago. After spending the World War I period documenting Red Cross War Relief in France and eastern Europe, Lewis Hine decided to try to show some of the more positive aspects of humankind and conceived the idea of photographing *Men at Work.*

The nobility of work became motive for the majority of Hine's work from the early twenties until his death in 1940. Although Hine thought of many individual facets of men at work, with each being a separate volume, the only published record of his efforts is *Men at Work*, Lewis W. Hine, New York; Macmillan, 1932.

Sometime in the early twenties, Hine planned a "Women at Work" also. While this volume never materialized, I suspect it was due to the reluctance of a publisher to accept it rather than anything lacking in Hine's conviction about the real role of women in the American social scene.

It is clear from examing Hine's photographs and reading the inscriptions he placed on the back of them how he felt about work and workers. He labeled some of his pictures with poetic titles such as "Song of the Shirt," *fig. 3*, or "Madonna of the Threads."



ON THE JOB IN ILLINOIS: THEN AND NOW

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Exhibition Producer: Mickey Pallas
Exhibition Design: Leo Tanenbaum
Catalogue Editor: Leslie F. Orear
Catalogue Design: Leo Tanenbaum
Design Associate: Pamela Rice
Photographic Consultant: Stephen Deutch
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Historical Researcher: Dr. George Tselos
Academic Consultant: Dr. Regina Holloman, Roosevelt University
Forums Consultant: Dr. John Keiser, Sangamon State University
Forums Coordinators: Barbara Herndon and Nick Cherniavsky, Springfield, Illinois
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On one photograph of a housewife, Hine pencilled, "The housewife should be considered part of the work force." Certainly, this kind of sentiment was not common in the mid-1920's.

Lewis Hine had his heroes. They were the railroad men, the crane operators and those who managed every kind of machine from the watch to giant turbines. While some machines dwarfed the men who operated them, Hine seemed to have always made it abundantly clear who was in charge.

He accomplished this with dignity, humility and a profound respect for the individual worker. Hine never became involved in the conflict of man vs. machine. It is an almost obvious conclusion from a study of Hine's photographs that the machine, without a man or woman to control it, would be a dead, cold entity.

Another of the books titled by Hine which never reached fruition was "Joy of Work." This proposed title appeared on one of the earliest known Hine pictures, an "Old Time Printer at Foot Press," *fig. 1*, taken in 1905.

When the "Joy of Work" title was conceived by Hine is uncertain, but it was probably well into the twenties before he ever formulated publishing plans. The significance of this title is simply the regard he held for work and workers. One almost senses the envy he held for "The Cowboy of the Railroad Yards" which he applied to a dapper railroad brakeman.

Fig. 2 Lewis W. Hine "A Pittsburgh Steel Worker," undated

Fig. 3 Lewis W. Hine "Garment Maker, Rochester, N.Y.," 1915

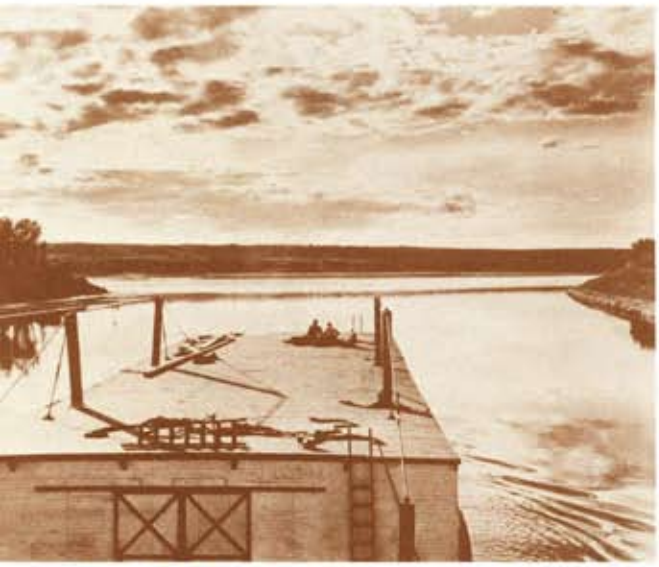


Fig. 4 John Collier "S.S. Northland Echo at mouth of the Clearwater River, Alberta, Canada, 1944. SONJ photo

Hine's almost prayerful regard for the Protestant work ethic is eloquently expressed with regard to a "Pittsburgh Steel Worker, *fig. 2*, when he states, "Something attempted, something done, hath earned a night's repose." This view of the steel worker washing up at a trough at the end of a day's hard work really inspired Hine, and the intimacy of his comments indicates the depth of his identification with his photographs.

Lewis Hine was not the first person to document the workers of America, but I believe he was the first photographer to combine in his photographs of workers, the elements of individual worth, humility and a pride in the task, rather than expressing pride in man's conquest of machines, other men, or nature.

During the past decade, numerous books have come to the market extolling the work of our forebears in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Most of what has come to light has been described by F. Jack Hurley in his forthcoming *Image of Industry* as the "hero rapist."

Like an invading army, we felled the forests, conquered the mountains, or built the railroad from coast to coast with bravado, devil-may-care and the devil take the hindmost. Rarely does Hine ever make this statement. Rather, Hine seldom shows more than one man or woman actively engaged in real work, displaying his or her craft or skill.

Before leaving Hine and his work, a brief word about his technique. Of all of the extant known work of Lewis Hine, there is no known use by him of anything but either a 5" x 7" or a 4" x 5" Graflex camera.

During the Red Cross days in Europe, Hine used the 4" x 5" camera exclusively and most of the Empire State Building construction documentary was also done with the 4" x 5" camera; but even on this project, he did use the 5" x 7" camera occasionally.

One of the peculiar aspects of the Graflex camera was that it was always held at or near waist level which gave Hine's work an unmistakable characteristic when people were a major element of the composition. Invariably, the center focal point of the one point perspective of Hine's pictures places this point below the eye level of the person pictured. Because of this, Hine almost always looked up to his subjects.

The efforts that Hine began in the early twenties were recognized and utilized by Roy E. Stryker in 1925 when he, together with Tugwell and Monroe, published *American Economic Thought*. At the time of Stryker's initial contact with Hine, he was a teacher of economics at Columbia University.

A decade later, Stryker launched his career as the Director of the famed Farm Security Administration (FSA) documentary project, which showed every aspect of life in rural America for nearly another ten years. Stryker's accomplishments with the FSA were great and the trend he established in documentary photography had far reaching effects on all that followed.

The relevant aspect of Stryker to the Illinois project is that Stryker again set the stage for what followed for another two decades in the documentation of American industry, by establishing and directing the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey (SONJ) documentary project in 1943.

I would not propose that Stryker or SONJ, had any of the lofty ideological goals that motivated Hine or the Illinois photographers, but he did learn the power of the photograph from Hine and he did learn to utilize photographs of high quality.

Interestingly, the entire SONJ project came about because of the negative reaction of the American people toward SONJ in the early years of World War II. In an attempt to reverse the negative image of SONJ, Stryker was hired to show that big business SONJ was really nice people.

With the theme, "There's a drop of oil in the life of everyone," Stryker set out to create the impression that oil (SONJ) was good for everyone. While the project failed in its objectives, as far as could be measured, it did produce an incredibly detailed and accurate statement about almost every aspect of American industry.

Even beyond the borders of America, in South America, the Middle East and in Europe, one can trace the role of those people involved in the process of work. The emphasis of the Stryker-directed project appears to have moved from the enobling of individual work to the enobling of collective work in the form of Industry - gigantic corporate industry. It is almost as though one shifted from the individual doing his job to the whole of the industrialized society in concert, shaping and manipulating the earth, *fig. 4*.

Photography was used as a powerful dynamic force to sing the praises of industry in the same manner Hine used it twenty years earlier to sing the praises of work. The difference between the two concepts is one of magnitude.

If redemption was necessary, in the sense that Stryker strayed from the path defined by Hine in the role of the individual worker, Stryker did redeem himself by capping off his career as a consultant to the Jones and Laughlin Steel Company where he directed their documentary project. The individual is again recognized, *fig. 5*, but at the same time the enormousness of industry is portrayed as a dramatic stagesetting for man.

This view of the efforts of two men involved with documentary photography is offered here as a foil against which one can view *On the Job In Illinois*.

The intent is not to compare; rather it is to take a brief look at where we have been and to see if the photographers of today have changed their attitudes about work, and if so, how. Certainly the attitude of this generation is different from that of 1925, when the symbol of productivity was the chimney belching forth black smoke.

Robert Doherty is Director of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Fig. 5 Photographer Unknown
"Jones and Laughlin Steel Worker at Home. N.D. J & L

Agricultural disc facility, Sandoval, Ill. 1890 (Ingersoll Products Div. Borg-Warner Corporation)

By The Sweat of Their Brows

Spanning the 60 or so years from the 1870's to the early 1940's, the historical photos in this exhibit give us a feeling for the atmosphere of the workshop and the style of industrial life known to our parents and grandparents.

A part of the appeal of these pictures is their strangely static, posed appearance. This is a reflection of the photographic technology of the time. The subjects of these pictures were themselves caught up in the whirlwind of change that was revolutionizing not only the means of production, but the relationships of worker to worker and man to machine in the generations after the Civil War.

The period which brought America to economic maturity began in the 1850's when railroads began to replace canals and turnpikes as the principal means of transportation. The Illinois Central was the first railroad built in the nation under the new land grant railroad act. That period in our history was dominated by the opening of the West, and the tying together of the new agricultural and industrial areas with the older parts of the nation.

In this new era, Illinois occupied a unique position. From the Civil War until 1900 it was the fastest growing industrial state in the nation. The northern and southern parts of the state were a uniquely balanced economic unit, with the downstate area supplying coal and agricultural products for the Chicago metropolitan area; and the city and its industries providing jobs during the decades of population movement from farm to city.

Chicago became the hub of the nation: it was the commercial outlet and center for trade for the northern Mississippi Valley; its iron and steel mills processed ore brought by boat from the mining regions around Lake Superior; it serviced the agricultural heartland of the nation through its meatpacking and farm implement manufacturing industries.

For the Illinois worker this was a period of vitality and challenge. The numbers and kinds of industries multiplied rapidly as a result of a series of major inventions: the telephone, typewriter, linotype, phonograph, electric light, cash register, air brake, refrigerator car and the automobile.

Petroleum, gas and electricity replaced earlier power sources. Business organization itself changed, reflecting the overall growth of the economy. The corporate form replaced family businesses and partnerships because of the advantages it offered for large-scale financing.

In this arrangement of things the artisan became the "operative," and the workers themselves became a commodity to be exploited and turned into value, like fuel, raw materials and other elements of production.

The more personal relationship between an owner-manager and a few score workers which we see in the "family portrait" photographs, gave way to situations in which workers became numbers carried on payrolls, to be hired or laid off with the shift of seasons or of market forces.

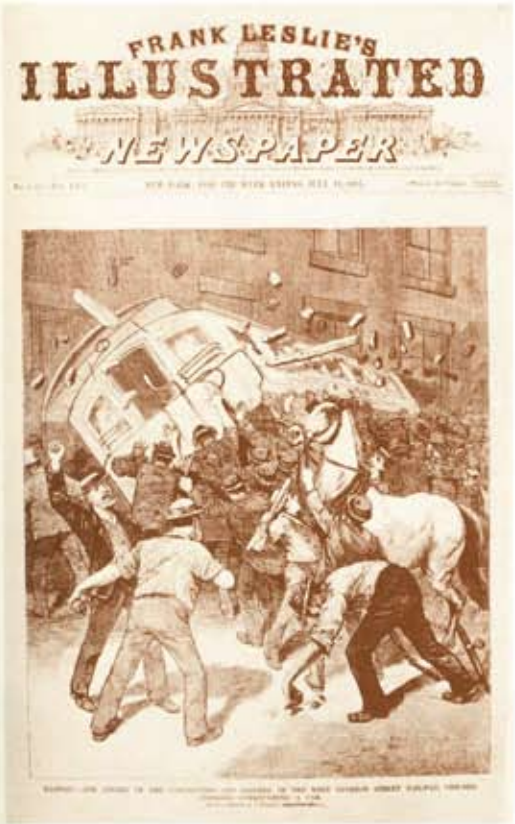
It was a raw era, marked by periodic economic crises and growing tensions. Industrial accidents were frequent and severe. Machinery was unguarded, protective garments were rare and primitive at best. The average work week in 1870 was 55 hours. Into this burgeoning workplace came the migrant millions, the perfect raw material for empty slots at the workbench: hard-working, accustomed to even longer hours in Europe, and not yet caught up in the ideology of a society without a heritage of sharply drawn class lines and social distinctions.

The problems which accompanied industrial growth spurred the organization of labor. The Knights of Labor was formed in 1869 and reached a peak of strength in the 1880's. Chicago was a strong union town from the beginning. 1886 was a year of tremendous industrial strife. Chicago was the keystone of a great

"The average work week in 1870 was 55 hours."

Unloading lumber, Deering Works, circa 1910
(International Harvester Co.)

Casting wagon wheel hubs, West Pullman Works, circa 1912
(International Harvester Co.)



Chicago street car strikers overturn a car during strike of 1885. Cover illustration from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper. (Chicago Historical Society)

nation-wide movement for an eight-hour day culminating in a national strike on May 1, 1886.

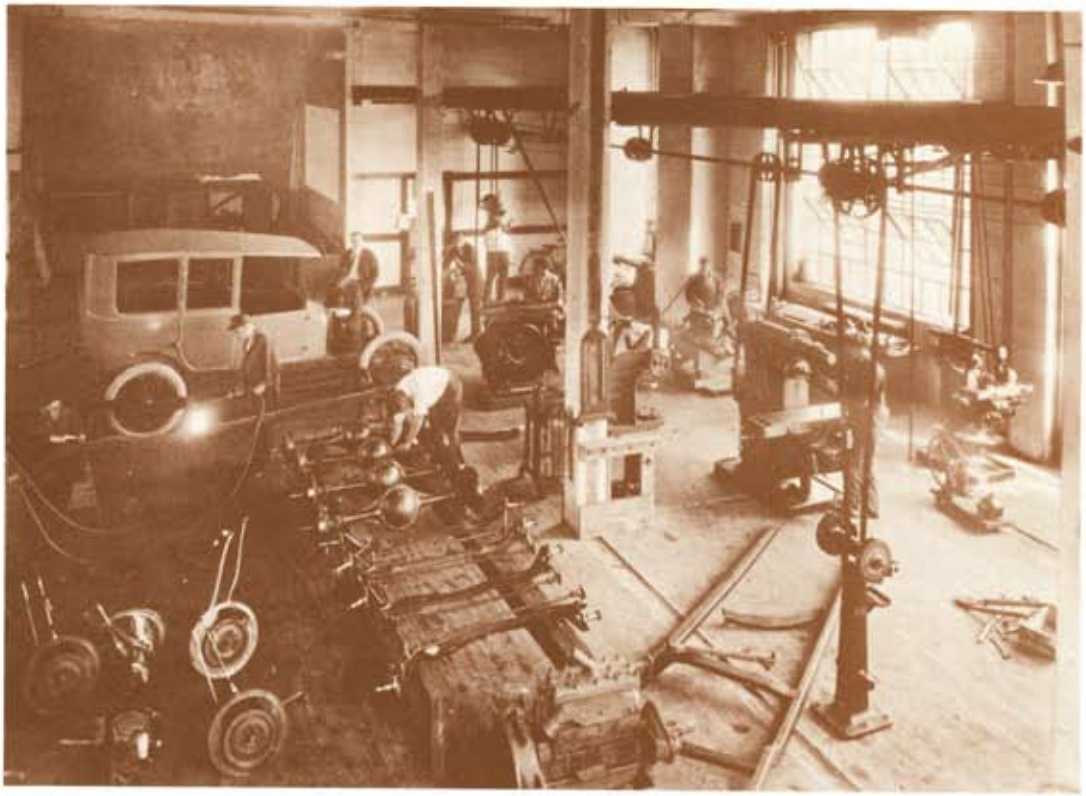
Eighty-thousand were involved in Chicago alone, but the movement was aborted in the aftermath of the so-called Haymarket Riot of May 4, 1886. The Knights never fully recovered from this set-back and labor leadership passed to the rising American Federation of Labor.

The new century began on a wave of optimism. Farm and industrial prices were up and a new period of rapid industrial growth began. This new era was characterized by the emergence of the great mass production industries. This was also the period when blacks from the rural south began to move north and take their place in the industry of Illinois and other northern states.

But the rapid expansion of production was not solidly organized — the world market did not grow at a rate sufficient to absorb American production; despite an impressive rise in per capita income, the new wealth of the nation was unevenly distributed; speculation in the stock market was largely unregulated. The result was the ' thirties, a decade of Depression from which emerged a new wave of union organization under the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), with its concentration on the great mass production industries. The CIO later merged with the AFL to form a united body of labor.

From that time the story is our story. We are the generations of World War II, of the tranquil fifties, and Vietnam. The workers of the last half of the 20th century, face new changes. Industry is increasingly sophisticated and it may be that the era of the mass assembly line is passing. Earlier retirement and shorter work weeks are surely coming. The right to a job and job enrichment are major issues of the new era.

Are we also at the end of the era when ideals of mass consumption dominate our goals? The story of the past is of man's effort to cope with the dehumanizing power of machines, and to secure a fair share of the products of his labor. Perhaps the story of the future will be of the working man's conquest of a peaceful, yet varied life made possible by a stable, more slowly changing world of work in an economy at equilibrium.



Model T assembly, circa 1920 (David R. Phillips Collection)

On the Job: Today and Tomorrow

As we enter the third century of the American experience it is appropriate to reexamine the idea of work itself and its place in the social and psychological framework of modern life.

Work has always commanded a central position in adult life, but it has not always been valued. To the ancient Greeks work was a curse because it was done by slaves. To the ancient Hebrews it was a punishment from God. Early Christians thought work of benefit to spiritual growth, and by the time of St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century, it was both a natural right and a duty. In Luther's view, work was a man's highest duty, the only way truly to serve God.

Building on this foundation, laissez-faire liberalism and social Darwinism developed what we now call the Protestant Ethic. Increasingly, religious interpretation gave sanction to achievement in the market place as the measure of a man. Much of the American Dream is associated with the right to work to better one's own and one's children's lot in life.

Yet, as we celebrate the Bicentennial, millions are out of work in America. The problem of unemployment is complicated by the legitimate demands of minorities for a fair share in the "system," and by the search by women for a new identity expressed in work.

If our goal is the improvement of the quality of our lives, we must understand the role of work as one of the crucial institutional forces determining the character of our society. Our capacity to

Laying track in Grant Park, Chicag

make wise decisions in this critical area of our national life will depend in large part on how we define work, what we want it to become.

It is through the work of each of us as individuals that, together, we provide the goods and services we and our society require. But the workplace is not just an economic center. It is a setting for meeting people, for exchanging ideas and forming friendships. At work we form habits, focus opinions and develop and reinforce standards of behavior. The individual's self-esteem is enhanced by his capacity to master the objects and processes of his work. We judge ourselves and others using a scale of social value put upon the products of our work. We identify ourselves and others by occupation: this one is an automobile worker; that one is an insurance salesman; this one is a nurse.

Because of the relationship between work, identity and self-esteem, a person out of work is in limbo. Someone receiving welfare is a nobody. Those in retirement are has-beens. People in low status jobs, or those in which the individual's contribution is anonymous can find little with which to identify. During the Great Depression studies made of the long term effects of unemployment showed that the lack of a job is disorganizing to families. Work lends vitality to existence and contributes to the rhythm and regularity of life.

As we look forward to the 21st century, we can state with confidence that workers will place increasing emphasis upon winning a more important voice in the control of their work. It would be a mistake to assume that job dissatisfaction exists only among blue collar workers. White collar workers, managers and professionals feel the strains of the contemporary situation as well. The fragmentation inherent in complex, highly specialized work organization is felt throughout the economy. Increasingly, decisions about production and product are not made in the "front office" but in the international headquarters of a multinational corporation.

Work must be reorganized to provide more satisfaction and more local control. Our response cannot be more of the same. The primacy of the welfare of the individual must be acknowledged.

As we turn to the future we can feel that in the past we have done both well and badly. We Americans have created great wealth and have benefited mankind in many ways. But we have also been wasteful of our vast land and our natural and human resources. The artisans and artists among us have dreamed and formed images out of stone and wood, out of steel and glass. We who are the American workers have helped to shape the nation. We can shape a better nation tomorrow.

This essay was prepared in cooperation with Ralph Helstein, President Emeritus of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen, AFL-CIO.

Canning meat, 1917 (Chicago Historical Society)

86 (David R. Phillips Collection)