

Finding Photographic Recognition in the City: The Chicagoland-in-Pictures Amateur Historical Photography Project

Gagner une reconnaissance photographique dans l'espace urbain : le projet de photographie historique amateur Chicagoland-in-Pictures

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Summary

This article examines a vast body of photographs of Chicago that were produced in the postwar decades by amateur photographers and were destined to research and publications about the city. It examines how middle-class photographers collectively defined a form of urban documentation across heterogeneous norms coming from historical and camera club culture. It contributes to an expanded history of documentary photography, as defined and practiced by diverse individuals and institutions.

Résumé

Cet article étudie un vaste ensemble de photographies de Chicago produites par des amateurs dans les décennies d'après-guerre et destinées à la recherche et la publication sur la ville. Il examine la façon dont des photographes de classe moyenne ont collectivement défini une forme de documentation urbaine entre des normes hétérogènes venant de la pratique historique et de la culture des *camera clubs*. Il contribue à une histoire étendue de la photographie documentaire telle qu'elle a été définie et pratiquée par divers acteurs individuels et institutionnels.

A large file cabinet filled with photographic prints stands in the reading room of the Chicago History Museum (formerly Chicago Historical Society). Organized mostly by address, it is consulted daily for research projects about specific Chicago locations. It contains part of the “Photographs of neighborhoods and buildings from the Chicagoland-in-Pictures project affiliated with the Chicago Area Camera Clubs Association (CACCA), 1948-2005,” one of the larger bodies of images that are held by the History Museum (such as photographic collections coming from local newspapers). While it is much used, this collection has never been the object of a specific study. This may be understood partly by the fact that it took shape between two types of institutions that until quite recently did not have canonical status in the history of photography: a historical society and a federation of camera clubs¹.

The project “Chicagoland-in-Pictures” (hereafter CIP) started in 1948 on the heels of a first collaboration between the Chicago Historical Society (hereafter CHS) and the local camera club ecosystem. The latter had federated itself in 1936 as the Chicago Area Camera Clubs Association (hereafter CACCA). Between 1942 and 1947, the CHS had been hosting the local photographic salons, a role it had taken over from the Art Institute of Chicago (Viskochil, 209-210). With the CIP project, initially called the “Chicago Project in Historical Photography,” the CACCA entered into a more specialized partnership with the historical society, with the objective of feeding the society’s image collection with photographs of the city produced by members of city clubs in Chicago and the surrounding area (“Chicagoland”). The project gave a specific role to the federation, defined a long-term common endeavor for all photographers gravitating around Chicago, and offered amateurs the possibility of entering a collection under their own name². Meanwhile, the historical society acquired visual resources with little expense, and was helped by the CACCA both for liaising with photographers and selecting images.

[p. 29] The photographic work was done for free by (mostly) non-professional photographers. In contrast, the project of a photographic library in Pittsburgh in the 1950s, headed by Roy Stryker, was based on the hiring of photographers on the model of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and Standard Oil projects—and Stryker asked for professional formats such as photo essays (Schulz and Plattner). The usually non-professional status of the CIP participants and the absence of a funder beyond the historical society and CACCA are also major differences with two later collective photographic portrayals of Chicago, “Changing Chicago” in 1988 and “City 2000” in 2000³. Another major difference is the longevity of CIP, which ran for nearly sixty years. This distinguishes the Chicago project from another enterprise that mobilized amateur photographers to produce a photo collection for a local historical society, the “C’était Paris in 1970” competition organized by the FNAC stores in association with the Bibliothèque historique de la ville de Paris (Clark, 165-214). While this [p.30] Paris project was a onetime enterprise, CIP shaped participation over the years with activities such as the regular exhibition of selected images at the historical society and other places like shop windows (fig. 1), the publication of articles about the project in the local press, amateur photographic journals and club newsletters, or the diffusion of lists of

¹ On the historiography of camera clubs as a way to move beyond the canon of photographic history, see Carolin Gørgen, “‘Out here it is different’: The California Camera Club and community imagination through collective photographic practices. Toward a critical historiography, 1890-1915.” PhD diss., Université Paris VII Denis Diderot and École du Louvre, 2018. Important work on camera clubs and local photography includes Elizabeth Edwards’ *The Camera as Historian* (2012) and Christian Joschke’s *Les yeux de la nation* (2015). The CIP project began a few years after the 1839-1939 century of urban photography studied by Peter B. Hales (2005).

² If the images are individually credited, they are indexed by subject and cannot be searched by photographer name, except recently for the part that is now digitized.

³ “Changing Chicago” was commissioned by the Focus/Infinity Fund, an organization created by businessman-turned-photographer Jack Jaffe; it involved thirty-three professional photographers (Rosenblum and Heinemann). “City 2000,” which involved one hundred photographers, was funded by businessman Gary Comer at the cost of one million dollar.

recommended subjects emanating from the CHS. All this aimed at drawing in new participants but also at informing what current contributors were producing.



Figure 1. E. R. Mitchell, “Edison Company Clark St. Window,” October 1957. Chicago History Museum, CACCA, box 1, folder 8.

Indeed, over the first decades of the project, various actors tried to define for amateur photographers and non-historians what could be deemed good “pictorial records.” This ongoing process of definition even got to the point where contacts were taken with the Library of Congress for an updating of the FSA archive, through the launching of a national documentary project to be pursued by camera club members after what was being done in Chicago⁴. Yet this did not go through, [p. 31] and the project remained city-based, with the involvement of local institutions and organizations. The collection was also never exhibited as such in an art museum, and it does not appear to have had significant posterity, beyond the use of its images as historical documents (an example of recent use being the *Encyclopedia of Chicago*). Still, it is part of the history of urban documentary photography in Chicago, and an example of the many collaborations between photography and history (Brunet), especially in the project’s most active decades in terms of discursive practice, from the late 1940s to the 1970s. Starting from the lack of recognition of CIP as a photographic project (and not just as a repository of images), and from the often modest status, in terms of photographic standing, of its contributors, this article considers how the project defined local standards for an urban

⁴ Letter from Edgar Breitenbach to Robert Keith, October 19, 1964, and Robert Keith, “PSA P-J National Historical Project,” Chicago Area Camera Clubs Association records [manuscript], 1951-1984 (hereafter CACCA), box 1, folder 16, Chicago History Museum.

photographic practice out of two distinct discursive environments, each with their respective systems of value—that of historical practice (understood as archiving, research, and publication) and that of photographic salons.

“Pictures considered important from the historical point of view”⁵

The project offered photographers the recognition derived from being part of the collection of “an institution of civic importance” (Rice, 129) and from having one’s name cited in all published uses of the images. All that was required was to produce images that functioned as valuable historical records, providing a “pictorial recording of contemporary Chicago for the benefit of the future,” as formulated in the article that announced the project in the CHS’s journal in 1948. The text listed a few requirements: an equilibrium between the “factual” and the “pictorial”; detailed identification (photographs submitted to the project had to be individually and precisely captioned); and technical printing specifications to ensure long-term storage (“Photographing for the Future”). As former curator of prints and photographs Frances Rhymer would put it in 1975 in defense of the project (after an exhibition of prints had been criticized as drab and unimaginative in the photographic publication *Afterimage*): CIP prints were “dated, informative, factual, cool, unemotive, and unbiased. Just what the historian seeks” (Rhymer, 11). The project’s archival requirements listed above correspond to the main principles (including the vagueness regarding style) that Elizabeth Edwards has identified in her study of the late-nineteenth-century amateur photographic survey [p. 32] movement in England (Edwards)⁶. When the Chicago project mentioned inspirations or models, in documents dating from the 1960s and 1970s, the references were markedly American—such as Robert Taft and the FSA. But a 1976 document entitled “Guidelines for ‘What to Photograph’” made reference to an 1888 article by George E. Francis in a volume edited by the American Antiquarian Society, entitled “Photography as an Aid to Local History”—and this reference was made in terms that suggest that the text, already quoted in Rhymer’s 1975 article, may well have been circulated to the participants⁷. This 1888 text laid out a vision of amateur historical photo-documentation that was an American counterpart to the British survey movement (Francis).

A major difference with the British survey movement, both in Francis’s article and in the CIP project, lay in the definition of what urban material is historical. The CIP project welcomed photographs of older buildings—in fact this was an important focus of the amateur practice it elicited—as well as older photographs of the city that people might have (examples of such older photographs, on the theme of transportation, are visible at the bottom of the 1957 shop window exhibition) (fig. 1). And yet, the core of the historical photography it envisioned was focused not on the old, on the materiality of the past-in-the-present driving the “historical imagination” studied by Edwards, but rather on what was currently there as material laden with historical potentiality, a future past. If we compare the British survey movement with the vision proposed by Francis in the United States in 1888, the difference in temporal orientation must of course be related to the difference between built environments in both countries—in terms of the density of old structures and what “historical” could mean. But the focus on the present as what will become the past, on the part of Francis as in the case of the CIP project in post-war years, was also linked to a sensitivity to change (rather than just to a relative paucity of vestiges), itself corresponding to a specific type of historicity and historical imagination. Such a definition of the urban present as urban change, and urban change as urban history, was in fact a distinct part of the civic culture of post-war Chicago.

⁵ Rice, 130.

⁶ The British survey movement studied by Elizabeth Edwards corresponds to a collective enterprise, across Britain, to use photography in order to archive buildings and sites that materialized a local and national past, at a time of great socio-economic change.

⁷ “Guidelines for ‘What to Photograph,’” May 1976, CACCA, box 4, folder 5.

In 1948, when the legislative framework enabling large scale urban renewal was being put into place with the 1947 Illinois Blighted Area Redevelopment Act and the 1949 Federal Housing Act, the idea of a pictorial recording of the city was overdetermined by urban renewal, which was set to radically transform the face of the city. It was clearly evoked in the presentation of the project by the historical society in 1948: [p. 33] “Any region that is likely to change radically in appearance—the site marked for a new housing project or the route of a proposed superhighway—will naturally be pointed out [as an interesting subject]” (“Photographing for the Future,” 173). Images published in the press or “housing exhibitions” held in 1948 and 1954 at the Chicago Public Library showcased to ordinary Chicago citizens the transformations at play in the city (Larminat, 69-109). And when photographers captured a certain urban state before it disappeared, or urban transformation as it happened, they were influenced by, and taking part in, a “coordinated vision” (Hunt 76) of urban change that drove local politics⁸. The juxtaposition of older housing and high rises in the background is one of the formulas in CIP images that specifically focus on the urban landscape as it was being “renewed,” as is visible in the 1957 shop window exhibit (on the right) or in a photograph by Clarence Hines (fig. 2) that with hindsight provides a striking visualization of the construction of a “second ghetto” (Hirsch) of public housing on the site of the old privately-owned one. Demolition and construction sites were other important subjects.



Figure 2. Clarence W. Hines, “Stateway Gardens looking north onto Dearborn Street,” January 12, 1959. Chicago History Museum, ICHi-035845.

[p. 34] In 1963, Betty Hulett, then head of CIP, was clearly pointing to the cultivation of a sensibility to urban change when she proposed a geographical translation of the passing of time in the opening of her article about the project in *PSA Journal* (the magazine of the Photographic Society of America, itself the national organization for amateur photography):

How many years since you graduated? Got married? Bought your first car? Made the down payment on your home? Watched Johnny start off for kindergarten? Is there a big apartment building where your grandmother’s house once stood? Has the new civic center swallowed up your childhood playground? Can you drive into the city faster on the new highway than you used to be able to get there by train? How time flies! And how things change!

⁸ Christopher Klemek describes the “urban renewal order” as a concatenation, a convergence of forces between electoral mandates, professionalized expertise, and popular culture (Klemek 12). About the visual culture of urban renewal in Detroit, see Aelbrecht.

Beyond its general positive tone about the drastic transformations wrought by urban renewal, Hulett's string of "homely" questions evokes a pedagogy of urban documentation, defined here as a transfer of one's attention from one's own life to one's surroundings. All this is described as taking place from one's ordinary urban position, which might well be becoming suburban, as suggested by the real estate reference and the mention of commuting by car. This, by the way, clearly codes participation to CIP in terms of race and class, given that having moved to the suburbs was a hallmark of the white middle-class. As a CACCA document addressed to participants put it in 1952, "What is the 'picture' in the area in which *you live or work?*" (emphasis in the original)⁹. At stake was the capacity to see the structural changes affecting a cityscape that was navigated through a personal relationship to the city—be it residential, professional, biographical, or based on special interests.

The process of selecting the images allowed for some individual feedback on issues of subject matter but also photographic technique, including printing, as was fit for a camera club organization; there were indeed three types of responses to submissions—accepted, rejected, and conditionally accepted, which usually involved reprinting. But the instructions that were collectively provided over time focused mostly on subject matter, which appeared to be the crux of historical value. There is little detail about style or practical ways in which photographs should be taken in the articles about the project published by CACCA members in the amateur photographic press, or in the guideline-style documents that have been kept in the association's records. But these guidelines always define [p. 35] categories of subjects, sometimes in the form of lists emanating directly from the historical society. (Roy Stryker's production of "shooting scripts" for specific missions by FSA photographers in the late 1930s did exist as a reference in the CACCA's 1970s files, although the lists given to CIP participants were never as detailed nor structured.) The lists were of three sorts, lists of the subject headings of files where CIP photographs had already been inserted (from "beaches" and "bridges" to "waterways" and "Wolf's point" in one, from "Advertising" to "Strikes" in another one), lists of subjects that were of interest to the society (such as "typical offices" or details of street lights), and lists of common requests that were made for photographs (such as "all of the larger stores in the loop; traffic included")¹⁰. Such lists might include specific landmarks to be documented, but they mostly introduced general categories that together suggested coverage of the entire built landscape, outside and inside as much as possible. In the same logic, participants were regularly advised to focus not just on what was on the verge of being demolished, most immediately historical in its quasi-pastness, but also on the quiet, static and ordinary, on places where change was less obvious, and on environments that were simply representative of the existing cityscape. As CIP chair Frank Rice put it in 1952, there were indeed two categories of built structures to be documented, "the old homes and public buildings dating back two or more generations and which are rapidly being destroyed [...] [and] those that are typical of present day architecture" (Rice, 129).

CIP photographers did heed the call for pictures of small theaters, streets, homes and bridges. But documenting the very ordinary required a relatively trained eye. While the raising of bridges on the Chicago River downtown was an attractive subject for many an amateur photographer, pulling aside on the highway to photograph a new toll plaza in 1964 was a documenting move typical of more active contributors like Casey Prunchunas¹¹. And it took a solid participant like Sigmund Osty to produce photographs of nondescript street

⁹ "Chicagoland-in-Pictures, Project jointly sponsored by the Chicago Historical Society and CACCA", undated, CACCA, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁰ "Chicago Historical Society / Chicago Area Camera Clubs Project," c. 1951, CACCA, box 1, folder 1; "Chicagoland-in-Pictures, Project jointly sponsored by the Chicago Historical Society and CACCA," undated, CACCA, box 1, folder 1; "Photographs requested for Chicago Historical Society Files," September 11, 1952, CACCA, box 1 folder 2; "Subject headings as of September, 1967," CACCA, box 2, folder 3.

¹¹ Casey Prunchunas, "83rd Street Toll Plaza, Tri-State Tollway (I-294)," 1964, <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/3647.html>. Accessed October 18 2022.

corners in various neighborhoods in the 1960s, with a wide geographical reach and a systematic approach (he was shooting on the angle from across the intersection) (fig. 3). Osty [p. 36] remained an amateur photographer, and his relationship to the CHS collection was first through the CIP, to which he was a major contributor—yet his proficiency may be measured by the fact that he is the only CIP participants without a professional photographic activity who later had his photographic archive (1750 black-and-white prints) deposited at the CHS¹².



Figure 3. Sigmund J. Osty, “Northwest corner of West Superior St. & N Armour St.,” May 27, 1967. Chicago History Museum, IChi-062634.

Beyond the analysis of the output of specific photographers, one way to assess the success of a project which was primarily oriented toward historians is to consider how it was actually used by the latter. A major early use of CIP photographs was in the book *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*, by geographer Harold M. Mayer and historian Richard C. Wade, published in 1969 by the University of Chicago Press. The book devoted a considerable amount of space to visual documents, and the introduction called for photographs to be treated as evidence for urban history rather than as mere illustrations (Mayer and Wade, vii). In fact, the historian who gathered the book’s iconography, Glen E. Holt, had [p. 37] been consulted in 1965 by the curator of prints at the CHS for what photographs could be useful to historians. Holt had called for more photographs of alleys, mixed housing and remodeled homes, or land use along the Chicago River, among other subjects, and for more high angle shots and interiors¹³.

In Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis, CIP photographs are the main iconographic resource for the last chapter, covering the years 1945-1969. They are used alongside

¹² Mildred Mead also had part of her photographic archive deposited at the CHS, but her considerable work for many public and private institutions in Chicago, beyond her CIP participation, made her a more obvious candidate for this type of civic archiving.

¹³ Glen E. Holt to Mrs. Paul Rhymer, July 9, 1965, CACCA, box 1, folder 17.

professionally produced photographs (a number of them aerial views) provided by architectural firms, specific companies like railroads or hotels, and local economic organizations such as the Chicago Association of Commerce and Industry. The CIP photographs often hold a middle ground between general urban views and photographs of specific buildings, and the space they capture is often characterized by the heterogeneous information it holds— real-estate signs on old mansions; the juxtaposition between modern and older housing; the presence of empty lots; residential segments that have changed as part of racial transition across Chicago’s neighborhoods. This last situation, a [p. 38] central racialized narrative in postwar Chicago, could for instance be visible in the physical decline of the housing stock and the presence of African American pedestrians in Sherwin Murphy’s photograph of a row of houses in the central South Side (fig. 4) (Mayer and Wade, 379).



Figure 4. Sherwin Murphy, “Northwest corner of Vincennes Avenue and 37th Street,” June 7, 1953. Chicago History Museum, ICHi-001405.

One page in the book juxtaposes two photographs of architect-designed modern low-rise housing in the Hyde Park neighborhood (Mayer and Wade, 405). One, with graphic play on the shadow of a leafless tree on the sun-lit brick façade, is by Hedrich-Blessing, the leading architectural photography firm in Chicago. The other, drabber in graphic terms but arguably more representative of an everyday experience, is by CIP-participant Marian Celander. From the early 1950s, Marian Celander owned a photography studio in the neighboring area of South Shore with her husband, a lawyer turned legal and then portrait and wedding photographer; they both contributed to CIP as part of their non-professional practice of documenting the neighborhood and the surrounding area “with friends and colleagues,” as their son phrased it in a 1999 book of photographs of South Shore that he published with his father’s photographs (Celander, 6-7). Another image in the book allows for further comparison between professional and non-professional architectural photography of modern housing, by extending the coverage to less remarkable subject matter (Mayer and Wade, 401). Taken by M. J. Schmidt in a northern Chicago neighborhood in 1955, it shows anonymous modern low-rise housing with a classic brick triple-decker standing behind it. The extended caption in the book draws attention to how this building in the back has had “part of its

porches enclosed to make an additional room.” Such a contextual and heterogeneous view, dealing with anonymous architecture and the layers of urban space, may be seen as emblematic of a broadened view in both CIP and *Chicago: Growth of a Metropolis*.

If such a book drew on the photographic documentation of buildings and infrastructures that featured so prominently in CIP, amateur photographers were also encouraged to photograph social activities beyond “the relatively static things in our environment,”¹⁴ with calls for photographs documenting how “this generation,” “people,” or “we” live, or just for keeping in sight “the ‘people factor’”¹⁵. The “people factor” appears in photographs showing pedestrians, customers in shops, beachgoers, street musicians, participants in parades organized by ethnic groups—among other urban activities. It was also conceived in terms of [p. 39] proximity to private life. In 1951, the historical society was trying to put together a large photographic show about Chicago “at work,” “at play” and “at home”; it was planning to draw on the photographic resources of private firms or the Chicago Park District for the first two themes, but stressed that the amateurs would be key for the last theme¹⁶. And it is probably in reference to such a theme that Mildred Mead, who then worked for the Chicago Housing Authority among other local institutions, and who recycled part of her professional work as a contribution to CIP, submitted a photograph of a mother and daughter seated at a piano in a public housing apartment (fig. 5). It was precisely Mead’s professional work involving other people’s housing that led her to cross Chicago’s entrenched racial lines, allowing her to submit such photographs of an African American middle class finding access to decent housing, and that determined her attention to the décor (visible in the framing of the photograph showing all the living room’s furniture beyond the piano area)¹⁷. And yet, the CHS probably hoped for images from the amateurs’ own social sphere when it launched the “Chicago at Home” theme. Securing such images, which were much rarer than architectural and street images, remained a sustained focus of the CIP organizers, who even created in 1972 an award named after the late chair of the project, Betty Hulett, for photographs documenting “The Way We Live.”¹⁸ The value ascribed to such photographs was also reflected in an 1984 article about the project in *PSA Journal*. Along with six “classic” CIP pictures showing buildings or railroad tracks, the article featured a large reproduction of an 1948 photograph by M. J. Schmidt, depicting a woman and three children at a breakfast table (shot from a standing position which gives a good view of the material elements of the scene) (fig. 6) (Vilven, 12).

¹⁴ Bob Mark, “Storyline on new CIP competition,” c. 1950, CACCA, box 3, folder 13.

¹⁵ Glen E. Holt to Mrs. Paul Rhymer, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ Letter to Frank E. Rice, August 9, 1951, CACCA, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁷ It is striking that Russell Lee and Jack Delano’s FSA work in Chicago in 1942, documenting African American urban living and the railroads, is never mentioned by CIP organizers in relation with this local documenting work. Arguably, it would have implied more conscious addressing the racial issue in Chicago. On this FSA work, see Stange.

¹⁸ Printed note, December 13, 1972, box 2, folder 7.



Figure 5. Mildred Mead, "Mother and child sitting at a piano in their home at Brooks Homes public housing complex [Girl with mom at piano]," 1954. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-024561.



Figure 6. M. J. Schmidt “Breakfast in the kitchen, 3850 N. Leavitt,” c. 1948, Chicago History Museum, ICHI-03102.

But if the CHS put hope in amateurs as home-based photographers, this may have been the most difficult type of photography to elicit, as it implied going back to the private sphere evoked at the very beginning of the 1963 article by Betty Hulett, instead of expanding the perspective from the home outwards. It also went most frontally against the standards of camera club culture, as a space where amateurs went beyond [p. 41] domestic practice. It therefore begs the question of how CIP photography, as an activity emanating from camera clubs, related to the salon culture that was so central to that world.

Legitimizing documentary photography in a camera club context

In fact, the family photographed with flash at the breakfast table would have been unimaginable in photographic salons in the 1950s, just as the overwhelming majority of the project’s pictures of buildings. M. J. Schmidt’s contributions to CIP were diverse, including both architectural shots and human-interest images that could have featured in public relation material or *Life Magazine* (like a dual portrait of flutists from an interracial youth orchestra in 1954¹⁹). Schmidt was a very active member of the Photographic Society of America and a notable Chicago amateur; by submitting the breakfast photograph, he was skillfully responding to what made CIP different from other photographic spaces.

The CIP project was always defined very much against the grain of salon aesthetics. The articles about the project published by Rice and Hulett in 1952 and 1963 in *PSA Journal*, stressed the discredit such images would garner in club environments. According to Rice, within CIP, “‘record shots’ not acceptable to a salon jury may become ‘documentary’ and the pictures of preference” (Rice, 131-132), while Hulett wrote in her article entitled “The Case for the Documentary” that “this type of project affords great satisfaction for the capable amateur who does not aspire to salon work. [...] [H]e is not disheartened by the remark often heard in club competitions—it’s ‘just a record shot’” (Hulett, 133). The contrast between the photographic practice holding sway in photographic salons and what was described as the “factual” style of CIP’s urban documents may be gauged from looking at the urban photographs celebrated in salons. Photographs by prominent members of the Chicago amateur photography scene tended to follow earlier pictorialist codes, with the use of night atmospheres and effects of light in the mist, as in a photograph of a couple on a staircase above the Chicago River by William Sminkey, included in the “pictorial portfolio” of the June 1948 issue of *Popular Photography* (“It’s Spring in Pictures,” 72). Salon culture also involved aiming for a poetic effect in titles, as in the title “Night must fall” chosen in 1950 by Anne Pilger Dewey for a photograph of a small train station with its sash windows lit from within, detaching itself against [p. 42] a cloudy sky at dusk. Ward Pease, a fellow Chicago amateur and chronicler in this amateur photography journal, described such a formula as being able to “convey something of a mood or feeling,” in contrast with “Railway Station—Conover,” which as a matter of fact would typically have been chosen for a CIP submission (Pease, 30).

The distinction between salon photography and the CIP version of documentary can be observed in the production of major contributor and project leader Betty Hulett, who was herself active in the salon scene. One of her photographs is part of the collection of a fine arts museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Art. Entitled “Ode to an Omelet” (1949), it depicts an egg and an eggshell among sheets of white cardboard, skillfully playing with effects of light and shade on volume and texture²⁰. This visual composition is arguably as distinct from the urban structures photographed in broad daylight in the average CIP contributions as the mock poetic title is from their factual captions with precise addresses. There are of course

¹⁹ M. J. Schmidt, “Flutists in the Chicago Youth Symphony Orchestra,” 1954, CHM, ICHI-037989.

²⁰ <https://collections.artsmia.org/art/28313/ode-to-an-omelet-betty-henderson-hulett>. Accessed October 18 2022.

connections between the various photographic practices of Betty Hulett. Her contributions to CIP show her capacity to compose urban volumes and play with angles and light effects, in order to produce legible images with strong lines. In this, she was in fact responding particularly well to the expectations mentioned in 1965 by Glen Holt in the only form-oriented part of his advice on “What to photograph”: “the historian is interested in architecture, good photographic lines, and clear lighting”²¹. But formal elements never take center stage in Hulett’s CIP work; her photograph of a metal stairway, shot with available light in the Monadnock building (fig. 7), is not a pure play on light and volume, but a document that informs on the general structure and detailing of a relatively hidden part of one of Chicago’s most important modern buildings. Hulett’s CIP photographs always prioritize legibility, and capture in a straightforward manner specific architectural features, precisely identified streets, or well-defined activities such as waiting in a train station or skiing on an artificial ski slope built in Soldier Field’s stadium, always in the logic of the record.



Figure 7. Betty Hulett, “Stairway in Monadnock Building,” May 2, 1968. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-051603.

Lillian Ettinger, a CIP participant who was also involved in the direction of the most important camera club in Chicago, the Fort Dearborn Camera Club, is another photographer who bridged both salon and CIP work. In an article published in *PSA Journal* in 1958, she defined CIP photography against dominant categories of salon photography when she [p. 43] related the project to a new category of competition in her own camera club: “nature and documentary” had been introduced alongside the “pictorial” competition (Ettinger). When

²¹ Glen E. Holt to Mrs. Paul Rhymer, July 9, 1965, CACCA, box 1, folder 17.

Ettinger referred to CIP pictures as “documentaries,” the plasticity of the term (a noun commonly used for films and not for photographs) confirmed that the local definition of documentary photography, outside the confines of art museums like MoMA, was still fluid. It is as if the term was unburdened from any artistic or transatlantic associations, what Olivier Lugon studied in his work about the 1930s moment and on the longer history of documentary photography (Lugon 2001 & 2007), and referred in a simple way to non-aesthetic, non-expressive practice, related to objective depictions of facts. But it was also connected to a specific type of subject matter; indeed, defined in opposition with “nature” in the competition mentioned by Ettinger, “documentary” corresponded to the city, man-made structures, human activity.

And yet there is a certain porosity between the “pictorial” and the “documentary” within the urban photography of CIP, especially for pictures that received individual recognition. If we turn again to the photograph of the 1957 “October display” in the Edison window (fig. 1), we [p. 44] can make out images that seem to aim for the atmospheric and the formal beyond and sometimes against precise urban information, with views of the illuminated skyline of Chicago photographed at night from lake Michigan (in one case with a full moon); a picture of a metal industrial structure swallowed by dark smoke billowing against brightly lit clouds; a picture of big round-shaped tanks photographed as pure volumes in the sun; and a tightly cropped photograph, printed with large white margins, of a lighthouse standing dark against the sky at dusk. It is clear that the selection was done by camera club members who shared a certain taste and notions of what photographs were worthy of exhibition. If such photographs do not make up the majority of the submissions to CIP, the selection reveals both how the clear, identifiable, “factual” records that were demanded by the CHS diverged from ingrained standards of “pictorial qualities” (to quote the 1948 CHS article about the project (“Photographing for the Future” 373)), and how the different practices could overlap, accommodating different photographic norms. The effect of this preexisting taste, competing with the informational value of “factual” urban views, also appears in the CIP photographs that won monthly awards from CACCA. For instance, it is visibly a rich geometrical patterning of brick and stone buildings, as it was captured in a frontal and close framed photograph of shop fronts, that won Glenn Dahlby an award in the late 1950s or early 1960s²². And the strong perspective effect, along with the striking contrast between the dark old wooden houses and the bright high-rises in the background, suggest that it was also a recognition of compositional qualities that led to the celebration of Clarence W. Hines’ “Stateway Gardens” picture in 1959 (fig. 2) (“‘Slum Clearance’ Wins Praise of Camera Clubs”).

Hines, who worked as an engineer, does not appear to have been active within the Photographic Society of America. The CIP project, of which he became chair in 1959 just a few months before his death in 1960, seems to have been his main photographic enterprise. He documented large parts of the city, from the South Side to the suburbs, and focused both on spaces and on activities—even starting a “methods” series (“method of moving dirt”), which may be traced to his professional activity²³. But in contrast with such a methodical outlook, in his photographs of the Maxwell Street market, he used several humorous captions that gesture to the late-nineteenth-century tradition of photographing street characters (Hales, 354-371). Maxwell Street’s open-air market was an interracial space as well as a central scene of Delta blues in Chicago; [p. 45] Hines entitled his series of fifty photographs shot there “Fabulous Maxwell Street.” He captioned his photograph of African American children selling wares off a small stand “The kids of Maxwell Street catch on quickly,” and the picture of an old musician playing guitar and harmonica among spare parts “Jazz with junk” (fig. 8)—turning what was obviously blues into jazz for the sake of a play on sound and a picturesque street vignette. In the CHS photographic collection, those captions were retained

²² “Picture of Shops Wins Award,” *Chicago Daily News*, undated press clipping, 1961, CACCA, box 3, folder 8.

²³ Entry record, Clarence W. Hines, January 30, 1960, CACCA, box 6, dossier 2.

as an addition to the descriptive caption that was likely added by CHS cataloguing staff.²⁴ This meeting of two registers of identification corresponds more broadly to two photographic languages.



Figure 8. Clarence W. Hines, “Daddy Stovepipe on Maxwell Street [Jazz with Junk],” November 1959. Chicago History Museum, ICHi-012834.

[p. 46] Maxwell Street was a storied urban space on the West Side of Chicago, which featured prominently both in the history of blues music in Chicago and in the city’s documentary photography. At the intersection between these two histories, it was the subject of the documentary film *The Church on Maxwell Street* by Institute of Design photography students Marvin Newman and Yasuhiro Ishimoto in 1951. Unsurprisingly, it was a frequent subject for amateur practice in CIP—to the point that someone wrote “No more Maxwell st[reet]!” on a submissions record for Worakit Mitradul in 1961²⁵. Maxwell Street functioned as a place of excess of picturesque; it is also striking that Hines used picturesque titles specifically to label social and cultural practice of African Americans, in a rare interracial space, at a time of entrenched racial segregation. Betty Hulett took a similar direction when she chose a formula-type title, which was uncharacteristic of her, for a photograph of the

²⁴ The descriptions for these two 1959 photographs by Hines on the CHM image website read as follows: “View of young children at the Maxwell Street market, Chicago, Illinois. Clarence W. Hines’s caption on verso reads: The kids of Maxwell Street catch on quickly,” September 1959, CHM, ICHi-018730; “Daddy Stovepipe wearing a top hat, sitting in chair with a guitar and harmonica on Maxwell Street, Chicago, Illinois, November 1959. The view also includes two men who are looking at small metal parts and other items for sale on the street. Photographer Clarence W. Hines’s caption on verso reads: Jazz with junk,” November 1959, ICHi-012834.

²⁵ Entry report, Worakit (Mike) Mitradul, May 20, 1961. CACCA, box 6, folder 6.

recently built and already segregated Cabrini-Green housing project. In front of the building rising slab-like from the empty ground, small figures of children are flying or mending kites. Hulett, gesturing to recent categories of documentation for CIP (“Chicago at Home”), but also showing her alignment with the discourse of urban renewal, captioned the photograph “Space to Live, Space to Play”²⁶. Such instances of less factual captions indicate a tendency to grasp for the known when trying to bridge social and racial distances in the city of Chicago. Such rhetorical movements, which were also attempts at classification, are a reminder of how the CIP project was located in the urban world of Chicago—in a white middle-class position. Indeed, while there was a significant presence of women in CIP practice, in terms of who contributed to, chaired, and wrote about the project, there does not appear to have been any significant contribution by African American photographers. In this respect, CIP was as segregated as the city it documented.

In the end, those “explorer[s] with a camera” (Hulett, 33) were also locating themselves in the cultural and social field of the city, staking claim to a distinct form of urban belonging as well as photographic legitimacy through collective practice. In that respect, one striking category of documentation that was described by Rice in 1952 was the self-documentation of the activities of camera clubs, to be inserted within a civic archive as a subject, and not just as a source, of images (Rice, 130). One category is of specific interest, as it projects an artistic belonging in the city: photographs of street art fairs, produced among others by Mildred Mead and [p. 47] by Lil and Al Bloom. Street art fairs in postwar Chicago were literally and figuratively open forms of art markets organized by local volunteers and organizations from the late 1940s, both in the Old Town neighborhood north of the Loop and in Hyde Park on the South Side (fig. 9)²⁷. They were spaces where the amateur photographers could mirror other visual practices building their own space of legitimacy beyond established professional and institutional environments. Lil and Al Bloom and Mildred Mead represent two cases of urban photographic practitioners exceeding the dominant, masculine norms of authorship in 1950s photography, with on the one hand a husband-and-wife pair submitting their images under a joint authorship, and on the other hand a professional photographer who rose from camera clubs and made her name through [p. 48] working with women’s organizations around urban and housing problems. Their images of art fairs converge in defining a specific category of photographic practice: the production and publicization of images not just of the city but also in the city, as an inseparably creative and social scene.

²⁶ Betty Hulett, “Space to Live, Space to Play,” 1959, CHM, ICHI-24626.

²⁷ The “Art Fairs” entry in the *Encyclopedia of Chicago* is illustrated by Mildred Mead’s 1950 photograph “Fifty Seventh Street Art Fair,” CHM, ICHI-38264 (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/77.html>, accessed October 18 2022). The online version of the *Encyclopedia* also includes Louis F. Zimmermann, “Old Town Art Fair,” 1954, CHM, ICHI-29891 (<http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/10440.html>, accessed October 18 2022).



Figure 9. Lil and Al Bloom, “57th Street Art Fair near Kenwood Avenue,” 1951. Chicago History Museum, ICHi-068443.

A final anecdote will provide a more explicit, if maybe caricatural, vignette of the civic “value” of such an urban documentation project, beyond the individual recognition that could be accrued by images selected, exhibited or prized for the specific way in which they balanced the factual and the pictorial. In 1963, an editor of *Popular Photography* presented Mayor Richard Daley with an album of CIP photographs on Chicago’s 125th anniversary (Downe). City Hall, in this case, was an institution of local power overarching the historical and photographic discourses and practices across which this photo-documentary project was unfolding, and symbolizing its local relevance. Beyond the banal character of such a public relation move on the part of all the actors involved, this anecdote is revelatory of the layers of legitimacy and recognition that could be sought in such a project of urban documentation, and of the civic ambition that CIP participants adopted when they stepped out of both living rooms and salons into the city. The project was the promise of a durable form of authorship for photographers who might have felt unrecognized in the institutional circles of creative photography, with the archiving and potential publishing of their images under their own name. In the present, participants in this local documentary project also staked a form of urban citizenship through photography—based in historical narratives, enacted on the streets, and sanctioned by various institutions.

For several decades, numerous CIP participants thus carved out visibility for their photographic work, in their city, inside and outside their own photographic milieu, and most importantly both in the present and the future. The “historian of the future”(Rhymer, 11) for which such a visual record was meant must now also be conceived as a historian of photography, with photography defined as an urban practice.

Illustrations

- Figure 1. E. R. Mitchell, "Edison Company Clark St. Window," October 1957. Chicago History Museum, CACCA, box 1, folder 8.
- Figure 2. Clarence W. Hines, "Stateway Gardens looking north onto Dearborn Street," January 12, 1959. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-035845.
- Figure 3. Sigmund J. Osty, "Northwest corner of West Superior St. & N Armour St.," May 27, 1967. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-062634.
- Figure 4. Sherwin Murphy, "Northwest corner of Vincennes Avenue and 37th Street," June 7, 1953. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-001405.
- Figure 5. Mildred Mead, "Mother and child sitting at a piano in their home at Brooks Homes public housing complex [Girl with mom at piano]," 1954. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-024561.
- Figure 6. M. J. Schmidt "Breakfast in the kitchen, 3850 N. Leavitt," c. 1948, Chicago History Museum, ICHI-03102.
- Figure 7. Betty Hulett, "Stairway in Monadnock Building," May 2, 1968. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-051603.
- Figure 8. Clarence W. Hines, "Daddy Stovepipe on Maxwell Street [Jazz with Junk]," November 1959. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-012834.
- Figure 9. Lil and Al Bloom, "57th Street Art Fair near Kenwood Avenue," 1951. Chicago History Museum, ICHI-068443.

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