

*Wisconsin Revisited: A Rephotographic Essay*, by Nicolette Bromberg. Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1998. 80 pp. Illustrations, map, index. \$20.00 paper.

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Photography and "rephotography" constitute the twin modes of this catalog of black-and-white images commissioned and created as a part of Wisconsin's sesquicentennial celebration. In 1848, when Wisconsin entered the Union, photography was less than a decade old. Within another decade's time, however, the photograph became the preferred medium of family portraiture. By the twentieth century, photography figured prominently in the dissemination of news, in advertising, and documentation. Throughout its history photography has been practiced as a profession, as an art, and as a leisure pastime; and photographs have been dutifully collected, privately and publicly, for a variety of reasons.

Curator Nicolette Bromberg and her colleagues at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin culled a number of historic photographs from that great state history collection, and asked a number of photographers to choose images of places that they would locate and rephotograph. These "rephotographers" were allowed latitude in their interpretations. Some chose to replicate precisely the place and pose of the historic image, others to interpret broadly the theme or the mood of the original image.

Modernization had wrought many changes, sometimes in ways that defeated these rephotographers—original sites obliterated by progress or overgrown with trees or even flooded. Despite these seeming obstacles, the images produced, paired with their original counterparts, allow the viewer, through comparison, to see change and continuity in specific places over time. These are not true "before and after" pictures; the time of each image may be known, but it is time itself that is charted, along with places and people, in these paired photographs.

Rephotography projects of this sort both reclaim and expand our understanding of the past. As Bromberg observes, "the aim of this photographic technique was not merely to mimic an earlier picture but to create something that was more than the sum of its parts" (5). The Rephotographic Survey Project, made up of five photographers who in the mid-1970s traced the nineteenth-century government surveys of the American West, sought out the original locations, points of view, and timing of well-known expeditionary photographers—Timothy O'Sullivan, William Henry Jackson, Alexander Gardner, to name a few. Through such a method these "rephotographs" allow for contempla-

tion of historical change. But the method provides much more. The techniques and choices of earlier photographers may be analyzed, offering historians a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and political sensibilities of those photographers. Such an undertaking offers historical societies a controlled means by which to expand their photographic collections.

Yet the greatest benefit of such a project is to the public, who must be involved in such a project. Throughout her introduction Bromberg quotes "rephotographers" and Wisconsin citizens who together sought the locations and reenacted the activities suggested in the original images. With the photographic record came the oral testimony of the state's citizens, another record of transformation. How better to engage the public than by allowing its members to participate in its transformation, however symbolically, and celebrate its shared past?

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