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I, **Katie Esther Landrigan,**

hereby submit this work as part of the requirements for the degree of:

**Master of Arts**

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in:

**Art History**

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It is entitled:

**The Photographic Vision of John O. Bowman, "The  
Undisputed Box-Camera Champion of the Universe"**

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This work and its defense approved by:

Chair: **Theresa Leininger-Miller, Ph.D.**

**Mikiko Hirayama, Ph.D.**

**Jane Alden Stevens**

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**Abstract** In 1936, John Oliver Bowman (1884-1977) purchased his first box camera with seventy-five cents and six coffee coupons. In his hometown of Jamestown, New York, located in the Chautauqua Lake Region, Bowman spent his free time photographing a wide range of subjects, including farmers plowing the fields or the sun setting over Chautauqua Lake from the 1930s until the end of his life. He displayed a Pictorialist sensibility in his photographs of small town living and received worldwide recognition with a solo exhibition of ninety-nine prints at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940, as well as nationwide praise in the popular press. Within forty years, Bowman produced an estimated 8,000 gelatin silver prints. This thesis marks the first in-depth, scholarly study of Bowman's life and work. I describe the path that Bowman took to become a photographer and explore the influence that Chautauqua County's artistic community had on his vision. Next, I analyze photographs that are representative of Bowman's body of work. His images provide evidence that he was influenced by Pictorialism as well as straight, modern photography. Lastly, I examine a sample of Bowman's prints that were exhibited at the New York World's Fair and discuss the impact that this international exposure had on his photographic career. I argue that Bowman made a significant contribution to the history of twentieth-century photography through his pictorial depictions of the natural landscape and rural life.

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**The Photographic Vision of John O. Bowman (1884-1977),  
"The Undisputed Box-Camera Champion of the Universe"**

A thesis submitted to  
the Art History Faculty  
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University of Cincinnati  
In candidacy for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Art History

Katie Esther Landrigan  
B.A., Ohio State University  
April 2006

Thesis Chair: Dr. Theresa Leininger-Miller

## Abstract

In 1936, John Oliver Bowman (1884-1977) purchased his first box camera with seventy-five cents and six coffee coupons. In his hometown of Jamestown, New York, located in the Chautauqua Lake Region, Bowman spent his free time photographing a wide range of subjects, including farmers plowing the fields or the sun setting over Chautauqua Lake from the 1930s until the end of his life. He displayed a Pictorialist sensibility in his photographs of small town living and received worldwide recognition with a solo exhibition of ninety-nine prints at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940, as well as nationwide praise in the popular press. Within forty years, Bowman produced an estimated 8,000 gelatin silver prints. This thesis marks the first in-depth, scholarly study of Bowman's life and work. I describe the path that Bowman took to become a photographer and explore the influence that Chautauqua County's artistic community had on his vision. Next, I analyze photographs that are representative of Bowman's body of work. His images provide evidence that he was influenced by Pictorialism as well as straight, modern photography. Lastly, I examine a sample of Bowman's prints that were exhibited at the New York World's Fair and discuss the impact that this international exposure had on his photographic career. I argue that Bowman made a significant contribution to the history of twentieth-century photography through his pictorial depictions of the natural landscape and rural life.

## Acknowledgements

In the fall of 2006, photographer, Chautauqua County historian, and friend of my family, Jane Currie, introduced me to the life and photography of John O. Bowman. Ms. Currie has co-written a series of books about the history of Chautauqua County, and her knowledge of the local historians and resources has helped me immensely in my research. I am grateful to Ms. Currie for believing in this project from the start. I would also like to thank Ellen Schwanekamp, secretary of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, for providing me with access to the Bowman Collection of 8,000 prints and negatives. This thesis would not have been possible without Ms. Schwanekamp's willingness to let my parents and me sit in her office for hours at a time looking through Bowman's archives. Her kindness, good humor, and enthusiasm for this project will not be forgotten. Additionally, I am thankful to Nancy Nixon of the Patterson Library in Westfield, New York for allowing me to use the library's collection of Bowman's personal documents and letters. Without the assistance of these women, I would not have had the opportunity to become acquainted with Bowman and his impressive body of work. Bowman's positive nature and peculiar, yet endearing sense of humor kept me going through the most stressful times.

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I dedicate my thesis not only to my parents, whom I love very much, but also to my Dad's dad, Grandpa Bob, who was from Chautauqua Lake, New York, and lived there until the day he died. Without him, I may have never come to know and love the beauty and charm of the area. Grandpa Bob would have been proud of this project, and I like to think that he would have raised his mug and said "first of the day" to a job well done.

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## Introduction

In 1936, John Oliver Bowman (1884-1977) purchased his first box camera with a mere seventy-five cents and six coffee coupons.<sup>1</sup> The box camera is a basic, hand-held camera shaped like a box that George Eastman (1854-1932), founder of the Eastman Kodak Company, popularized during the late nineteenth century. Ordinary people, such as Bowman, who had little or no experience with photography could purchase and use the box camera because it was inexpensive, simple to operate, and easy to transport anywhere.<sup>2</sup> In his hometown of Jamestown, New York, located in the Chautauqua Lake Region, Bowman spent his free time photographing a wide range of subjects including farmers plowing the fields or the sun setting over Chautauqua Lake from the 1930s, when he was in his fifties, until the end of his life. Although some may classify Bowman as a typical "Sunday photographer," he displayed a pictorialist sensibility in his photographs of small town life in Chautauqua County and received worldwide recognition at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940, as well as nationwide praise in the popular press. This thesis marks the first in-depth, scholarly study of Bowman's life and work. I argue that Bowman made a significant contribution to the history of twentieth-century photography through his commendable pictorial depictions of the natural landscape and rural life. Even though Bowman did not receive much critical acclaim, national audiences related to these images because they created a sense of nostalgia for a simpler, more peaceful time in life. People who lived outside of

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia C. Richardson, *The Chautauqua County Historical Society: Telling Our Stories, 1883-2000* (Westfield, NY: Chautauqua County Historical Society, 2002), 163.

<sup>2</sup> In 1888, the Eastman Dry Plate and Film Company introduced the "Kodak" box camera, which came loaded with film for one hundred exposures. The "Kodak" box camera had a profound impact on photography's growth during the late nineteenth century because it led hundreds of millions of people to adopt photography as a hobby. The box camera was popular not only because it was easy to manipulate, but also because it contained a roll-holder mechanism that made it easy for photographers to advance the film for a new exposure. The advent of roll film helped to revolutionize amateur photography as well because it eased the process of photofinishing and printing. The box camera and roll film also contributed to the growth of camera clubs throughout the United States and Europe. S.F. Spira, *The History of Photography As Seen Through the Spira Collection* (New York, NY: Aperture Foundation, 2001), 100-102.

the cities also responded positively to Bowman's photography because it depicted moments that they had witnessed or experienced on a daily basis.

During the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940, ninety-nine of Bowman's pictures, which measured 8 x 10 inches, were included in a solo exhibition at the Hall of Industry and Metals, and eight of his photographic murals were displayed at the New York State Building.<sup>3</sup> The photographs and murals featured the scenic landscapes of western New York as well as other picturesque settings that Bowman recorded while on vacation in Canada. Many of the images were later displayed at the Buffalo Museum of Science (1940-1941) and in the State Museum in Albany (1951).<sup>4</sup> Some were also exhibited at galleries, studios, and camera clubs throughout the United States and Europe between the 1940s and 1950s. During the 1930s and 1940s, Bowman's work was recognized in well-known publications, including *National News Photo Weekly*, the *New York World-Telegram*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *Popular Photography*, *U.S. Camera*, and *Collier's Magazine*, among other newspapers and periodicals. Bowman won several local and national newspaper awards, including the National Newspaper Snapshot Award in 1938 and a national prize from the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1940. Bowman also received an award of merit in 1941 at the Fourth Annual Salon of the Photographic Guild, and his prize-winning prints were hung at the Albright Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York in the same year. After Bowman's death in 1977, his relatives donated over 8,000 of his prints and negatives to the Chautauqua County Historical Society of Westfield, New York. The majority of Bowman's pictures are in the archives of the historic James McClurg Mansion and Museum in Westfield, New York, which is the headquarters of the historical society. Between 2006 and

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<sup>3</sup> The dimensions of these murals are unknown.

<sup>4</sup> I have not been able to determine the amount of time that the murals were on display at the State Museum in Albany. John O. Bowman, list of achievements, date unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

2007, twenty of Bowman's prints were displayed at the Chautauqua County Courthouse in Mayville, New York.

Despite Bowman's many accomplishments, there is limited information concerning his photographic work. Over the past six months, I have conducted research on Bowman and his photography in Chautauqua County. In my thesis, I analyze Bowman's range of work to determine what distinguished his images from those of other photographers of the early twentieth century. Although Bowman identified with pictorialism, which was an outdated approach by the 1930s and 1940s, he was also influenced by the direct, unmanipulated qualities of straight, modern photography. He expressed an interest in the formal elements of the rural and urban landscape through his pictures. He also conveyed some very modern ideas about photography in his personal writings and letters to colleagues and friends. Thus, he possessed a pictorialist vision with a modern edge. In addition, I attempt to explain why so many of Bowman's photos were displayed at venues such as the New York World's Fair and why his images captured the attention of numerous nationally known publications. While the World's Fair looked at the future with confidence and promoted the theme of "Building the World of Tomorrow," Bowman's peaceful, pastoral photographs referred to a world that was changing. I argue that Bowman wanted to create a sense of hope and nostalgia for audiences through his pictorial photographs at a time when the United States was still dealing with the effects of the Great Depression.

Within the Chautauqua Lake Region, local scholars have written brief synopses of Bowman's life and accomplishments not only as a photographer, but also as an auditor, purchasing agent, county clerk, and curator of the James McClurg Mansion and Museum. Most of all, Bowman was admired for his photography because he captured simple, yet striking scenes of the natural landscape and small town life that could be enjoyed by everyone. In a memorial,

friend and colleague from the Chautauqua County Historical Society, James M. Wheeler, remembered Bowman once explaining, "Pictures are no good unless they are seen."<sup>5</sup> So far, however, few people outside Chautauqua County have seen many of Bowman's pictures since the 1930s and 1940s. With access to the historical society's large collection of Bowman's photographs, I examine a variety of images in my thesis that are representative of his body of work.

There are very few books that acknowledge Bowman's achievements. The historian Virginia C. Richardson provides a two-page summary of his life and legacy in *The Chautauqua County Historical Society: Telling Our Stories, 1883-2000* (2002). However, there are many publications that focus on the rich artistic traditions of Chautauqua County, and the Chautauqua Institution in particular, such as *Chautauqua: An American Place* (1943) by Rebecca Richmond and *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas* (2002) by James R. Schultz. These publications do not mention Bowman, though. The Chautauqua Institution, an intellectual and artistic community that was established in 1874 and thrives to this day, had an impact on Bowman's development as a photographer. I have also gleaned information from various local and national newspaper and magazine articles. With the assistance of institutions such as the Chautauqua County Historical Society and the Patterson Library, which are both in Westfield, New York, I have used primary resources such as personal papers and letters of correspondence. The Bowman Archives has provided me with a wealth of personal information about Bowman's photography as well as his character and work ethic. There is a lack of critical attention related to Bowman. Hence, I am breaking new ground in this area of study.

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<sup>5</sup> James M. Wheeler, "A Memorial to John O. Bowman" (Read at the Annual Meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, NY, 6 August 1977), 2, transcript in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

This thesis consists of three chapters. Since there are no biographies on Bowman, I flesh out the path he took to become a photographer and explore the influence that Chautauqua County's artistic community had on his work in the first chapter.<sup>6</sup> In the second chapter, I discuss and analyze photographs that are representative of the themes that Bowman addressed in his work, particularly those presented in national journals. The majority of the photographs I have examined feature idyllic rural scenes of Chautauqua County as well as depictions of common laborers that appear content to be working in the fields. It is unclear whether Bowman had any social or political motives in taking his photographs of farmers, but it is possible that he chose to focus on picturesque scenes of rural life at a time when the Great Depression was taking its toll on the United States because these images show progressivism, stoicism, and nostalgia. They are also hopeful and reassuring. Although Bowman photographed until his death, I focus on pictures of the 1930s and 1940s because the bulk of the 8,000 images included in his archives at the Chautauqua County Historical Society are from this time. That is when he received the most attention in the press. I also examine the development of his photographic style and the influence that prominent twentieth-century photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz (1864-1946), Philip Henry Emerson (1856-1936), Paul Strand (1890-1976), and Edward Weston (1886-1958) may have had on it. Lastly, I examine the path that Bowman's collection of prints took to get to the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940. I then look closely at a sample of Bowman's photographs that were exhibited at the fair in an attempt to determine why such a large number of his works were featured at this international exhibition when no other photographer achieved that distinction. Furthermore, I discuss the impact that Bowman's participation in the fair had on his photographic career.

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<sup>6</sup> Bowman's background is briefly discussed in newspaper and magazine articles that were published during the 1940s. Bowman also addressed his life in personal writings.

Although there is little scholarship that acknowledges the significance of Bowman's photographic work outside of local histories, his artistic images that captured the beauty and charm of Chautauqua County clearly caught the attention of national and international audiences during the early twentieth century. With his easy-to-use box camera, Bowman took idyllic photographs of the Chautauqua County Region that may have provided a sense of tranquility and hope to a country plagued by the Great Depression. He produced a large body of work over a long period of time, but he chose not to seek a living through the medium. His primary goal as a photographer was to interpret the beauty of the natural landscape. Since the 1940s, the interest in Bowman's work has diminished outside of Chautauqua County. Through an in-depth examination of Bowman's body of work, I will highlight the contributions that he made to the history of photography. Furthermore, I intend to establish a deeper appreciation for the photographic vision of the man that *Collier's* magazine described in 1946 as "the undisputed box-camera champion of the universe."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Wheeler, "A Memorial to John O. Bowman," 1.

**Chapter 1**  
**Making the Box Camera His Own:**  
**John O. Bowman's Development as a Photographer in Chautauqua County, New York**

Whatever your hobby may be, stick to it and you will live longer, be happier, and make lots of friends.

—John O. Bowman<sup>8</sup>

When John O. Bowman (1884-1977) purchased his first box camera in 1936, he unknowingly made an investment that would forever have a positive impact on his life and the way in which he viewed the physical world. Bowman may have had little photographic experience prior to acquiring his first camera in 1936, but within three years, he was highly regarded for his innate ability to compose excellent pictures using nothing more than his box camera and available sunlight. Amazingly, by 1940, a solo show featuring ninety-nine of Bowman's photographs was held at the New York World's Fair. In addition to possessing natural photographic talent, Bowman had the good fortune of residing in Jamestown, New York, which is in the Chautauqua Lake region that is well-known partly because of its picturesque landscape and partly because of the Chautauqua Institution, an intellectually and artistically rich community of western New York (fig. 1).<sup>9</sup> Bowman also lived less than 120 miles away from Rochester, New York, the original home of the Eastman Kodak Company. Therefore, the cultural richness and the physical beauty of the Chautauqua region undoubtedly fostered his artistic development.

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<sup>8</sup> James M. Wheeler, "A Memorial to John O. Bowman" (read at the Annual Meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, New York, 6 August 1977), 1. Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>9</sup> Chautauqua is a word that was originally used by the Seneca Indians to describe the small lake they came upon in southwestern New York state. Although no one is certain what the true definition of Chautauqua is, there is a number of imaginative definitions for the word including "a bag tied in the middle," "two moccasins tied together," or "place where the fish leaped out." James R. Schultz, *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2002), 8.

Before he put his free time and energy into taking pictures, Bowman was well known throughout Chautauqua County for the public services he provided to the area. From 1919 to 1964, he worked simultaneously as an auditor, purchasing agent, and deputy county clerk.<sup>10</sup> In addition, he was highly recognized for the volunteer service he did between the late 1930s and 1970s as curator and director of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, which is currently housed in the historic James McClurg Mansion and Museum (built c. 1818), located in the village of Westfield, New York.<sup>11</sup> In 1950, Bowman was involved in negotiating a seventy-five year lease that allowed for the Chautauqua County Historical Society to be headquartered in the former mansion of McClurg, the wealthy son of a Pittsburgh industrialist who moved to Westfield around 1818.<sup>12</sup>

Prior to settling in Jamestown, New York, Bowman enlisted in Company E, 74<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He defended the Mexican Border against the incursions of Poncho Villa in 1916 and fought on the frontlines of World War I in France and Belgium between 1917 and 1919.<sup>13</sup> Following his military service, Bowman became National Commander in Chief of the United Mexican Border Veterans and was active in the American Legion.<sup>14</sup> He had a strong interest in the McClurg Museum's military exhibits and organized many documents for the historical society. He is credited specifically for assembling Civil War records for the museum's library.<sup>15</sup> Bowman was also active in the Chautauqua Coin, Stamp, and Curio Club and referred to himself as a "glorified junk collector."<sup>16</sup> He truly loved collecting and studying historical artifacts.

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<sup>10</sup> It is unclear whether Bowman held these positions simultaneously or during different periods of time between 1919 and 1964. Richardson, *The Chautauqua County Historical Society: Telling Our Stories, 1883-2000*, 163.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ernest D. Leet, ed., *History of Chautauqua County New York, 1938-1978* (Westfield, NY: Chautauqua County Historical Society, 1980), 160.

<sup>13</sup> "John O. Bowman," *The Temple Guardian* (November 1935): 5.

<sup>14</sup> The dates of these services are unknown. Wheeler, "A Memorial to John O. Bowman," 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Leet, *History of Chautauqua County New York*, 161.

<sup>16</sup> Bowman, letter to Mr. Bruce Horton (13 September 1938), 3, Patterson Library Archives.

Bowman possessed a broad knowledge of the county and dedicated his life to preserving and promoting its history.

Bowman also worked hard to please the people of his community, whether it was through his public duties or through his photographs. Among his many services, Bowman sometimes played Santa Claus at local nursing homes. In a memorial, friend and former secretary of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, James M. Wheeler, quoted Bowman as saying after one such performance, "I realized again, that if we want to know real happiness, we've got to be doing something for somebody."<sup>17</sup> Bowman lived by this ideal throughout his life as both public servant and photographer.

### **The Chautauqua Institution**

Through his involvement with Chautauqua County as a public servant and active member of the historical society, Bowman was almost certainly aware of the region's cultural richness. Chautauqua County is home to the Chautauqua Institution, an intellectual community founded in 1874 by inventor and manufacturer Lewis Miller (1829-1899) and Methodist minister John Heyl Vincent (1832-1920).<sup>18</sup> It was originally established as a summer school for Methodist Sunday School instructors. The institution grew out of the lyceum movement that thrived at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. The term "lyceum" was first associated with isolated scientific and literary groups that worked to promote the diffusion of useful information in communities throughout the United States.<sup>19</sup> This movement was unique to America. Prominent politicians, authors, statesmen, theologians, poets, and artists offered their views on current events and public concerns through lyceum lectures. Celebrities such as educator Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) and poet Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) spoke on

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>18</sup> Rebecca Richmond, *Chautauqua: An American Place* (Binghamton, NY: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), 33, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 17.

lyceum platforms across the country with the intentions of enlightening and entertaining American audiences.<sup>20</sup>

As the Chautauqua Institution evolved into a nationally known intellectual community, traveling circuits that offered high quality lectures in addition to other forms of entertainment were referred to as "chautauquas" because they were modeled after the institution itself.<sup>21</sup> As it developed and grew, the Chautauqua Institution began to hold summer-long programs that were devoted to lectures, seminars, and workshops on theology, economic and social issues, science, literature, and the arts. In time, the institution had its own opera, symphony, and summer theater. During one of his many visits to Chautauqua in 1905, President Theodore Roosevelt described the institution as "the most American thing in America."<sup>22</sup> In the book, *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas* (2002), historian James R. Schultz referred to the institution as "still one of the most active and diverse cultural centers in America."<sup>23</sup>

During the first decade of the twentieth century, the institution's "Arts and Crafts Village" became one of the major attractions for visitors. The "village," which historian Rebecca Richmond described as "a sort of rustic Greenwich Village," was composed of several small, secluded cottages.<sup>24</sup> It promoted the concept that art should be a fundamental part of everyday living and it offered classes in industrial arts such as woodcarving, weaving, and pottery.<sup>25</sup> One well-respected teacher and artist who worked in the village between 1907 and 1916 was Henry Turner Bailey (1865-1931). He spoke enthusiastically about the history of art and believed that the creation and understanding of art would lead to a lifelong interest in almost anything.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Schultz, *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>22</sup> Richmond, *Chautauqua: An American Place*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> Schultz, *The Romance of Small-Town Chautauquas*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Richmond, *Chautauqua: An American Place*, 125.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 126.

Undoubtedly, the Chautauqua Institution's emphasis on fine art and the positive impact it could have upon individuals and society as a whole would have appealed to Bowman.

Although it is unknown whether he participated in any of the institution's lectures, seminars, or workshops that focused on the fine arts, Bowman did take numerous photographs of the institution. The Chautauqua Institution was, and still is, recognized not only for its academic programs, but also for its peaceful and beautiful physical surroundings.<sup>27</sup> Located on the west shoreline of Chautauqua Lake, the institution has served as both an intellectual haven and a pastoral summer retreat since the late nineteenth century. Bowman photographed the institution's famous bell tower reflected against the clear, smooth water of Chautauqua Lake (title and date unknown) (fig. 2). This photograph was featured in an issue of the *Christian Science Monitor* with the caption, "Lake Chautauqua, New York, is one of the beauty spots of the world."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps Bowman was drawn to the buildings of the institution because of their physical beauty as well as their historical significance. Nevertheless, Bowman was unmistakably aware of the institution's cultural influence upon the nation and chose to produce images of the community that has been described by some as an intellectual and artistic utopia.<sup>29</sup>

### Early Photography In Chautauqua County

Throughout Chautauqua County, the art of photography in particular became extremely popular within a year or so after 1839 when French artist and chemist Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) invented the Daguerreotype process, the earliest form of practical photography.<sup>30</sup> A Daguerreotype consists of an image that rests on a highly polished copper plate. It is produced through a direct positive image making process and therefore has no original

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>28</sup> *Christian Science Monitor* (date unknown), page unknown, clipping in the Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Richmond, *Chautauqua: An American Place*, 129.

<sup>30</sup> John M. Cushman, "Early Photography in Chautauqua County" (read at the Annual Meeting of the Chautauqua County Historical Society, New York, 3 October 1936), 1, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

negative. The uniqueness of the daguerreotype made it popular in Chautauqua County and throughout America. By 1846, itinerant daguerreotypists stopped within the county for weeks at a time to take people's portraits. Some of the traveling photographers even set up shops in the area and advertised regularly in local newspapers such as the *Jamestown Journal*.<sup>31</sup>

By the early to middle 1850s, the collodion or wet plate process, introduced by Frederick Scott Archer (1813-1857), changed the direction of photography. Photographs, such as the ambrotype, were produced more efficiently through this wet plate process that involved coating glass plates with a collodion emulsion. New forms of photography arose because the glass plate negative allowed for printing unlimited numbers. The carte-de-visite, or visiting card, which originated in France, was a 2 ¼ x 3 ½-inch photograph mounted on a paper card that became popular between the 1850s and 1860s in America. Bowman studied these early types of photographs and collected daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and cartes-de-visite.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, he was familiar with the history and evolution of photography.

In Jamestown, New York, the city where Bowman lived his entire life, the American Aristotype Company put the small industrial city on the map for producing the first sensitized photographic paper in the United States. Porter Sheldon and Charles S. Abbott founded the company in 1889 and developed a type of collodion paper by 1899. According to the historical marker that stands in front of the company's original office, the manufacturing of this paper "helped revolutionize the photographic industry."<sup>33</sup> Initially, the product was imported, so the production of the paper in Jamestown helped to diminish the foreign market.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup> Although it is documented in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives that Bowman owned these early types of photographs, I have not yet come across examples of them in my research.

<sup>33</sup> My source refers to this photographic paper as "collodion paper." Kathleen Crocker and Jane Currie, *Images of America: Jamestown* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 37.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

This invention brought acclaim to the city and drew the attention of George Eastman (1854-1932), the founder of the highly successful Eastman Kodak Company. This company was and still is headquartered in Rochester, New York, which is approximately 120 miles from Chautauqua County. Eastman realized the value of the unique collodion paper invention and purchased the American Aristotype Company between 1899 and 1901. Subsequently, he relocated the operation to Rochester, New York in 1920.<sup>35</sup> Considering that Bowman grew up in Jamestown, he would have been aware of the American Aristotype Company's revolutionizing invention and the company's ties with Eastman Kodak. This exposure to the photographic industry undoubtedly broadened Bowman's knowledge of photography. However, what Bowman did not know at the turn of the century was that he would someday become engrossed in photography and that his unique body of work would draw the attention of the Eastman Kodak Company.

#### **Bowman's Development as a Photographer**

Although Bowman grew up in an artistically rich and profoundly beautiful region of the country, he was over fifty years old before he decided to purchase a camera and take pictures of the scenic Chautauqua County landscape. In a letter written in 1942 to A.B. Hecht, managing editor of *Popular Photography Magazine*, Bowman recalls his childhood desire to take pictures:

Ever since I was a youngster I have loved the great out-of-doors and God's scheme of Things in nature. As a kid in Jamestown, New York my big longing of the week was for Saturday and Sunday when I could get out in the country on some bit of trout stream where I might be out in the open. Cameras in those days were out of the question for my family and in fact I never saw more than one or two that I can remember. I always wished for some way that I could capture the beauties of spring along my favorite trout streams.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht (23 January 1942), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

Thus, Bowman had the desire early in his life to portray the magnificence of his natural surroundings through some medium. However, it took him half a lifetime to fulfill the desire.

As a young man, Bowman finished public school and went on to receive two degrees from the Jamestown Business College by 1914, which he referred to as the "local Farmer's Institution."<sup>37</sup> Before settling down in Jamestown with his mother and starting his job as county clerk in Mayville, New York, Bowman worked briefly as a bookkeeper in 1913 in Casper, Wyoming, and spent some time in California. Bowman journeyed to Mexico and South Carolina as well as France and Belgium while he was with the National Guard between 1916 and 1919. By the age of thirty, Bowman was a world traveler. Despite experiencing life outside of Chautauqua County, Bowman had an incredible fondness for his home and he chose never to make a permanent move.

As county clerk, auditor, and purchasing agent, Bowman spent a good deal of time at his desk in the County Courthouse in Mayville.<sup>38</sup> After working for the county for twenty years, Bowman decided that he needed to find something new and exciting to do in his free time. In a letter that Bowman wrote in 1945 to a magazine called *Minicam Photography*, which was based in Cincinnati, Ohio, he explained how he decided to adopt photography as a hobby:

It all started back in 1936 when I was just bubbling over with the want to do something different in the hobby line. I had already made some strides in the collecting of stamps and coins and was in my third term as president of the Chautauqua Stamp Coin & Curio Club of Jamestown, N.Y. But even though I also had quite a sizable hoard of beer and liquor labels and coasters not to mention an [sic] sizeable accumulation of early transportation paper and metal tokens I still felt in the need of another outlet for maybe an artistic bent. I'd been long wanting to do something, some one thing, better than the best. Through the medium of seventy-five cents and six coffee coupons my prayers were answered

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<sup>37</sup> Bowman, letter to Mr. Bruce Horton, 2.

<sup>38</sup> Bowman was married for a brief amount of time, but he never had any children. Thus, he dedicated most of his time to work and to his photography.

when I found myself the proud possessor of a 616 Hawkeye Eastman Target box camera.<sup>39</sup>

Photography filled a void in Bowman's life. From the moment that he started snapping pictures, there was no stopping the man with the box camera.

Bowman immediately developed an attachment to his 616 Hawkeye Eastman Target box camera that would last until the end of his life. Like the many box cameras Eastman Kodak manufactured during the 1900s, Bowman's version was also known as a "Brownie." Kodak's Brownie cameras remained popular throughout the twentieth century because they were inexpensive, simple to operate, and easy to transport anywhere.<sup>40</sup> Bowman felt that every amateur photographer should get a simple camera like the Brownie box camera. He stated in his letter to *Minicam Photography*, "I know of nothing better than the lowly box camera. It has no fancy shiny, flare to it, is always ready and does take good pictures."<sup>41</sup> He also enjoyed using the camera because he did not have to fool with the technical side of photography; a good friend did the developing.

Within a few months after purchasing his first box camera at a local grocery store, Bowman followed the advice of a friend and proprietor of a Jamestown camera shop and bought a yellow K-2 filter for seventy-five cents. Bowman believed that the filter truly made his pictures come alive because it brought out more tonal definition. He was especially excited that he could capture cloud effects with the yellow filter.<sup>42</sup> In his essay from 1950 entitled "My Box Camera," Bowman explained, "believe me when I say that that 75 cent Box Camera and that new 75 cent

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<sup>39</sup> I have been unable to determine what kind of degrees Bowman received. Bowman, letter to *Minicam Photography* (28 May 1945), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography* (Boston, MA: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc., 2000), 172-173.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>42</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera" (21 October 1950), 4, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

yellow filter changed my whole life. My pictures now started to live and so did I. I'd found a new enchantment in a world all my own."<sup>43</sup>

Bowman possessed strong convictions concerning photographic equipment. In the essay "One Man Show Shot With a Box Camera," Bowman proudly stated his beliefs:

I feel that the gadget-demons have so cluttered up the prospects of the average would-be photographer that either he gets lost in his baggage or becomes a "hot photographer" without pictures. I'd say the simpler the equipment the better it is. I feel that we should forget as much as possible the vehicle of expression and concentrate upon the subject matter.<sup>44</sup>

By the 1940s, Bowman's photographic equipment consisted of three 616 Eastman box cameras, two yellow filters, and one red filter. Bowman liked to use the red filter because it helped to bring out whiter clouds contrasted against a darker sky.<sup>45</sup> Instead of constantly changing filters, Bowman would keep one filter on each camera all of the time. Bowman always kept his three cameras in his car. In the article "Box Camera Magician" that was written by Robert W. Brown of the Eastman editorial service bureau, but published by *The Mayville Sentinel*, Mayville resident Bill Habicht explained, "John never goes anywhere without his camera. Regardless of weather you'll find him out in it as long as there are good cloud effects. Why, he'd rather go out without his nightshirt than leave his camera home."<sup>46</sup> When needed, Bowman also used a tripod and a reflector with a photoflood bulb. Images of Bowman sitting in his car with his box camera by his side are included in the article "Capturing Beauty With a Brownie" (figs. 3 and 4).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>44</sup> Fredrik Kosslow, "One Man Show Shot With a Box Camera," *Buffalo Evening News* (16 August 1941): page unknown, clipping in the Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>45</sup> "The Box Camera of John O. Bowman," *American Photography* (August 1951): page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Robert W. Brown, "Box Camera Magician," *The Mayville Sentinel* (8 August 1946), page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>47</sup> "Capturing Beauty With a Brownie," *Buffalo Courier-Express* (14 July 1946), page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

Bowman spent much of the free time he had before and after work and during the weekends taking pictures. Like many amateur photographers, Bowman did not have a private darkroom in which to develop his pictures. He simply did not have the time to work in a darkroom and proudly admitted that he always turned his film over to a good friend to process and print.<sup>48</sup> Bowman was primarily interested in taking good pictures and he was not concerned with the equipment or mechanical processes of photography.

Throughout his career as an amateur photographer, Bowman always contended, "it isn't so much the camera as it is the person who takes the picture. In fact I feel the ratio is about 10% Camera and 90% Individual."<sup>49</sup> Bowman truly believed that if he put his soul into his work that his photographs would reflect his character.<sup>50</sup> In his letter to A.B. Hecht, Bowman briefly discussed his photographic approach:

What a heap of fun there is in knowing that you can do a good job if you put yourself into it...All we've got to do is learn our camera and know what it will do under all kinds of conditions. And then we've got to have a knowledge of light. But maybe most important is the ability to see a picture. I came just naturally by it, I guess, for I never studied composition.<sup>51</sup>

Bowman liked to visualize what he wanted in his photographs because he knew that sooner or later he would find what he was looking for. He once said, "If we hold the right kind of thoughts long enough things will shape up for us."<sup>52</sup> This statement not only applied to Bowman's photographic vision, but also to his outlook on life.

Within two years after adopting photography as his new hobby, Bowman was actively involved in the Westfield and Jamestown Camera Clubs. He is included in a photograph of the Westfield Camera Club taken by the *Dunkirk Evening Observer* in 1938 (fig. 5). In this

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<sup>48</sup> I was unable to determine the identity of Bowman's friend. Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Bowman, letter to Mr. Bruce Horton, 1.

<sup>50</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (8 February 1941), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>51</sup> Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht, 3.

<sup>52</sup> Bowman, letter to *Minicam Photography*, 3.

photograph, Bowman stands second from the right in the second row. During the early decades of the twentieth century, an enormous network of camera clubs, publications, and exhibitions developed in the United States and Europe. Groups of amateur and professional photographers interacted extensively with each other as a result of the formation of these clubs.<sup>53</sup> In 1937, the Jamestown Camera Club displayed seven of Bowman's prints.<sup>54</sup> This is probably the first time his work was exhibited. Bowman was considered one of the most talented members of the joint clubs, but he worked with other amateurs who produced photographs that were quite different from his landscape scenes.<sup>55</sup> Chautauqua architect Joseph Wertz was a member who received praise for his character studies.<sup>56</sup> Bowman also corresponded with Wilbur H. Porterfield (1873-1958), a popular newspaper photographer who worked out of Buffalo, New York. At the start of the twentieth century, Porterfield became well known in western New York for his landscape photographs. He, like Bowman, chose to use the same photographic equipment throughout his career and believed that amateurs were too engrossed in the type of cameras they used. Bowman admired the work of Porterfield because he was primarily concerned with the composition of his photographs.<sup>57</sup>

In a letter inviting Porterfield to speak for the Westfield and Jamestown Camera Clubs, Bowman expressed his frustrations about the lack of cooperation amongst the club members. According to Bowman, they constantly argued over trivial matters such as what type of developing and printing papers should be used. Bowman found that only a few peers had an

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<sup>53</sup> *California Dreamin': Camera Clubs and the Pictorial Photography Tradition* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>54</sup> The specific location of this exhibition is unknown. My research has not revealed further details about the exhibited photographs.

<sup>55</sup> Billie Dibble, "Local Camera Club Inspired By Fledgling Photographers," *Westfield Republican* (19 June 1986),

n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> "Gallery Show to Honor Buffalo Camera Artist," publication unknown (29 January 1941): page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

understanding of composition. He also believed that several of them carried around too much complicated equipment. Therefore, instead of joining in "their chewings," Bowman chose to focus on his photography.<sup>58</sup>

Despite the turmoil that went on at many of the meetings, Bowman truly benefited from his membership in the clubs because they provided him with the opportunity to present his work to the public. His photographs were exhibited not only in Jamestown, but also in galleries and camera shops throughout the region and the state. Between 1938 and 1939, Bowman succeeded in selling approximately eighty prints to the *Christian Science Monitor*.<sup>59</sup> My research has shown that *A Cloud Study* was probably one of Bowman's first photographs included in the newspaper in February of 1938 (fig. 5). In this image, Bowman captured the beautiful effects of sunlight against the clouds and the dramatic silhouette of a tree against the sky. By 1938, Bowman was also a prizewinner in the Newspaper National Snapshot Award for his print, *Tone Poem* (before 1938) (fig. 7). I will discuss this photograph in more detail in the second chapter. In 1939, a solo show featuring twenty-one of Bowman's prints was held in Erie, Pennsylvania at Lynch Camera Shop. In the column from *The Erie Daily Times*, "Candidly About Cameras," Walter Jack describes some of the images included in this show:

"The Farm on the Hill" is a typical Chautauqua county farm home. The viewpoint and the cloud effect add to the beauty. "Alone" is the picture of an old farm house silhouetted against dark billowy clouds in the sky. Other unusual pictures include: "Where the Creek Turns" and "Water Sunshine." These are unusually beautiful snow and water scenes.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Bowman, letter to W.H. Porterfield (5 November 1938), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Walter Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (2 April 1940): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>60</sup> I have not yet come across these photographs in my research. Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (11 April 1939): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

Within a year after this exhibition, ninety-nine of Bowman's photographs would be displayed at the New York World's Fair.<sup>61</sup> Thus, four years after purchasing his box camera, Bowman was already receiving nationwide recognition for his photography. People were amazed by the results that Bowman achieved with his "lowly box camera" and wanted to learn about his approach.<sup>62</sup>

While Bowman was excited about the attention he was receiving for his pictures, he was also grateful for the friends that he made across the country as a result of adopting photography as a hobby. Many people wrote Bowman after seeing his pictures on exhibition or in publications such as the *Christian Science Monitor*. Bowman maintained correspondence with those who developed a fondness for his work and often sent them prints he had produced. He also wrote letters to other amateurs throughout the country in order to exchange ideas about photography.<sup>63</sup> Bowman corresponded with one woman in particular named Alma Zoe Clausen from Roundup, Montana for quite a long time. Although she lived on the opposite side of the country, Bowman developed a lasting friendship with Clausen because they shared a common interest in landscape photography.<sup>64</sup> Bowman cherished the friends that he made so much that he often hung their pictures on the courthouse wall above his desk so he could look at them while he worked (fig. 8). He also kept several of the letters he wrote and received from his friends throughout the years. Bowman once stated, "Whatever your hobby may be, stick to it and you will live longer, be happier, and make lots of friends."<sup>65</sup> Once he purchased his first box camera, Bowman endeavored to live by this philosophy throughout the rest of his life.

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<sup>61</sup> "Local Amateur Has Photographs on Display," publication unknown (20 April 1939): n.p. Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>62</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 4.

<sup>63</sup> Bowman saved many of the letters concerning his photography that he sent and received throughout his life. They are located in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives as well as the Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>64</sup> Bowman, letters to Alma Zoe Clausen (1938-1950), Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Wheeler, "A Memorial to John O. Bowman," 1.

When Bowman took up photography as a hobby in 1936, he quickly realized that he had the ability to take striking pictures of his natural surroundings. Although Bowman gradually gained national recognition for his photographs, he chose never to leave Chautauqua County permanently. The cultural richness and physical beauty of the region had an enduring impact on Bowman and his photography. He demonstrated a lifelong commitment to Chautauqua County through the public positions that he held and through his many photographs that emphasize the charm, beauty, and diverse seasons of the area. In a letter that Bowman wrote to friend and writer Walter Jack in 1953, he explains his love for the region:

Like yourself [,] Walter I believe our good ol' Chautauqua County is the finest in the land. We have the grandest year 'round climate, scenery exceeded by none and a prosperity that makes all of us happy. I drive thru it every day and I thank God for the privilege of being a part of it.<sup>66</sup>

Bowman truly wanted to share his idealistic vision of Chautauqua County with everyone, and as he became more comfortable with his box camera, Bowman's hobby turned into a lifelong passion.

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<sup>66</sup> Bowman, letter to Walter Jack (20 July 1953), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

## Chapter 2 The Modern Pictorialist

I've always felt if a person really wants to be doing something, he'll be doing it. Particularly this is true of a hobby. In photography we can be just as good as we want to be. The sky, the earth and the sea are the limit. Let's you and I use 'em [*sic*] in getting good pictures other folks will like to look at.

—John O. Bowman<sup>67</sup>

Less than a year after Bowman had purchased his first box camera, he realized that he had found his niche in amateur photography. In a letter that Bowman wrote in 1942 to A.B. Hecht, the managing editor of *Popular Photography*, he explained that photography was not a fad for him, but was his “vehicle of expression” that kept him in tune with nature.<sup>68</sup> Bowman also believed that photography had provided him with the privilege to “interpret nature to those who might not otherwise see it.”<sup>69</sup> In 1936, he began referring to himself as a pictorialist photographer because he specialized in photographing natural landscapes, including cloud and sunset scenes.<sup>70</sup> However, by the 1930s, prominent fine art photographers such as Alfred Stieglitz (1886-1958) and Paul Strand (1890-1976) regarded pictorialism as outdated and experimented with what they believed to be more modern approaches and themes that concentrated on urban and industrial landscapes. While Bowman was primarily interested in photographing natural landscapes, he, too, expressed an interest in elements of the urban landscape through his photographs. Bowman also conveyed some very modern ideas about photography in his personal writings and letters to colleagues and friends. Thus, although Bowman considered himself a pictorialist, he produced a wide range of images and writings that reflected a more complete comprehension of modern photography and its philosophies.

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<sup>67</sup> Bowman, “My Box Camera” (21 October 1950), 6, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht (23 January 1942), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>69</sup> Bowman, letter to Ed Hammigan (7 August 1946), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>70</sup> Bowman, letter to Wallace Nutting (16 October 1936), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

## Pictorialism and Its Influence on Bowman's Photography

With the introduction of the handheld camera by Kodak in 1888, ordinary people had the chance to take their own pictures without having any prior knowledge of photography. Many professional photographers struggled at this time because the general public questioned the level of skill and intelligence they needed to take good photographs.<sup>71</sup> Some people viewed the medium as a purely scientific, mechanical process. In an attempt to distinguish their pictures from common snapshots of everyday life, some photographers endeavored to elevate their medium's status as a fine art. During the late 1880s, the photographic movement known as Pictorialism became popular in both Europe and the United States because it subscribed to the idea that photography, like painting and sculpture, should be regarded as a fine art. Many pictorialists believed that photographs should emulate impressionistic paintings and etchings, so they used a variety of methods to achieve this goal in their pictures.<sup>72</sup> To create a more painterly and expressionistic effect, photographers often used special filters, lens coatings, and soft focus. Pictorialists also attempted to express their artistic vision through hand-manipulation of the print and through the use of various photographic processes that allowed them to interpret the negative in a number of unique ways. Photographers favored the platinum, gum-bichromate, and carbon processes because they produced less detailed, yet more artistic images.<sup>73</sup> As Pictorialism developed, certain photographers desired to assert more control over their craft and to express their visual information emotionally through an emphasis on texture, tonality, and the manipulation of photographic detail.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography*, 185.

<sup>72</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, ed., *Classic Essays on Photography* (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 99.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Bunnell, *Degrees of Guidance: Essays on Twentieth-Century American Photography* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4-5.

<sup>74</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 188.

The English photographer Peter Henry Emerson (1856-1936) was one of the first artists who had a major influence on the pictorialist movement in the 1880s.<sup>75</sup> He worked hard to promote photography as an art form through his pictures as well as his writings. Emerson was a true advocate of naturalism in photography and believed that enduring art should be made directly from nature. Emerson discussed a method for creating artistic photographs based on principles of vision similar to those proposed by impressionist painters in his book, *Naturalistic Photography* (1889).<sup>76</sup> He aimed to produce images that were genuine representations of visual experiences.<sup>77</sup> Primarily, Emerson photographed landscapes along with people working within their natural environment. Unlike other photographers of the time who manipulated their images to some extent, Emerson relied only on the selection of his subject, framing, lighting, and selective focusing to produce an artistic photograph.<sup>78</sup>

During the 1880s, Emerson successfully demonstrated his ideas concerning naturalist photography through the multiple series of photographs he took of peasant life on the Norfolk Broads in East Anglia. These prints were often accompanied by text that described the landscape and documented the life of the peasants.<sup>79</sup> The photograph, *Throwing the Cast Net, Norfolk Broads* (ca. 1886), reveals Emerson's ability to produce a formally composed image that focuses not only on nature's all-encompassing environment, but also on the subject working within that environment (fig. 9).<sup>80</sup> While some details of the image are blurred, the fisherman casting the net in the center of the image is in sharp focus. Emerson believed that humans did not visualize the world in clear focus, so he often produced photographs such as this that were sharply defined in

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<sup>75</sup> Bunnell, *Degrees of Guidance*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays on Photography*, 99.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 186.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 186-187.

the center and fuzzy at the edges.<sup>81</sup> Thus, he created an impressionistic effect in many of his naturalistic photographs.

Emerson offered practical advice about photography and art in general in the essay entitled "Hints on Art," which is included in his book, *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (1889).<sup>82</sup> Through his various "hints on art" Emerson not only expressed his personal ideas about photography, but also his beliefs about life in relation to photography. In this essay, he motivated people to work hard and to have confidence in nature's teachings.<sup>83</sup> He also suggested that photographers should remain true to themselves if they want to express individuality in their work. Emerson emphasized the idea that it is not the camera, but the person who chooses the picture.<sup>84</sup> In addition, he expressed his firm belief that the photographer did not have to travel far to find inspiration. He explained, "Art is not to be found by touring Egypt, China, or Peru; if you cannot find it at your own door, you will never find it."<sup>85</sup> Throughout the essay, Emerson also stressed the importance of naturalistic photography. He stated, "Nature is full of surprises and subtleties, which give quality to a work, thus a truthful impression of her is never to be found in any but naturalistic works."<sup>86</sup> Overall, Emerson provided valuable photographic advice that amateur photographers like Bowman undoubtedly benefited from during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in some way.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 99.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Henry Emerson, "Hints on Art," *Naturalistic Photography for Students of the Art* (1889); rpt. *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 100.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>87</sup> There is no evidence in Bowman's letters or personal writings that he directly studied the photography of Emerson. However, considering that Bowman was an active member of local camera clubs throughout his career as an amateur photographer, he was most likely exposed to the work and writings of influential figures such as Emerson.

By 1891, Emerson renounced his strong beliefs concerning Pictorialism because he discovered that photographers could not have complete control over the medium. Hence, he publicly announced that photography was a limited art form and claimed that photographers could not be artists.<sup>88</sup> Despite his shift in opinion, Emerson had a profound impact on the development of fine art photography and Pictorialism. In *Seizing the Light: A History of Photography* (2000), scholar Robert Hirsch states, "Emerson's ideas marked the beginnings of a modernist aesthetic philosophy, modeled on human vision instead of the mechanical objectivity of the camera."<sup>89</sup> As a result of Emerson's innovative ideas, amateur photographers working in Europe and the United States embraced Pictorialism, and the movement flourished between 1889 and the beginning of World War I.<sup>90</sup>

Alfred Stieglitz (1886-1958) was among the many artists who adopted Pictorialism during the late nineteenth century. Emerson actually judged one of Stieglitz's earliest photographs in a competition that was sponsored by the British Amateur Photographic Society in 1887, and he praised Stieglitz's work for its honesty and spontaneity.<sup>91</sup> Thus, Stieglitz initially received recognition as a Pictorialist. In the essay Stieglitz wrote in 1899 entitled "Pictorial Photography," he explained that pictorialism was pursued by those "who loved art and sought some medium other than brush or pencil through which to give expression to their ideas."<sup>92</sup>

At an early stage in his photographic career, Stieglitz gained a reputation for using a simple, handheld camera to photograph observed moments from time.<sup>93</sup> He was first known for producing impressionistic photographs of life on the streets of New York City. Stieglitz's *Winter*

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<sup>88</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 99.

<sup>89</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 188.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 115.

<sup>92</sup> Alfred Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," *Scribner's Magazine* (Nov. 1889); rpt. *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 116.

<sup>93</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 194.

on *Fifth Avenue* (1892) is a prime example of his ability to emphasize the mood of a spontaneous moment through light and atmosphere (fig. 10).<sup>94</sup> The photograph depicts a man struggling to drive a horse-drawn carriage down Fifth Avenue in the middle of a snowstorm. Stieglitz was clearly not deterred by harsh weather conditions while taking a picture.<sup>95</sup> He waited for hours to capture this scene because he realized that it often took time and patience to get the best images. After developing the photograph, Stieglitz cropped what he felt were unnecessary elements out of the image. Thus, he did not hesitate to manipulate a negative to produce the final photograph.<sup>96</sup> Even though he used a handheld camera to capture images such as *Winter on Fifth Avenue*, Stieglitz thought that only inspired artists could create beautiful pictures.<sup>97</sup> Stieglitz contributed to the development of fine art photography and, more specifically, pictorialism through his photographs as well as the founding of the publication *Camera Work* and the Photo-Secession Movement in 1902.<sup>98</sup>

Although there is no indication that Bowman studied the photography and writings of Emerson or Stieglitz, among other influential pictorialists, he was almost certainly influenced by their work. Like Emerson, Bowman was primarily interested in interpreting nature through his photographs, and like Stieglitz, he chose to use a handheld camera to capture images of landscapes and seascapes. Bowman readily admitted that he had an affinity for his box camera because it allowed him to concentrate more on the subject matter of the picture than on the photographic equipment. He also liked to use the box camera because it was simple to operate, always in focus, and instantly active. He felt it was important to know his camera intimately and

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<sup>94</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 116.

<sup>95</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 194.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> Steven C. Munson, "The Eye of Alfred Stieglitz," *Commentary* 108 (November 1999): 52-54.

to know what it could do under all kinds of conditions.<sup>99</sup> As previously discussed, Bowman carried three box cameras with him wherever he went including one with a red filter and two with yellow filters. However, regardless of the equipment he had, Bowman felt that the person behind the camera was the most important factor in photography.<sup>100</sup> This was a belief that was also expressed by Emerson.

Even though Bowman had no real training in technical photography, he quickly developed a strong understanding of the medium and what he was looking for in a good picture. Firstly, Bowman identified with the Pictorialists because his main purpose was to capture the true beauty of nature through his photographs in an attempt to interpret nature to others. In a letter to his friend and writer Walter Jack, Bowman said, "Art in all of its forms is purely God-given; the protractor [sic] being sensitive to his finer, higher God [,] nature. I calls [sic] it being in tune with the infinite."<sup>101</sup> Bowman relied primarily on natural lighting when photographing the landscapes of Chautauqua County, as well as other scenic areas outside of western New York. According to Bowman, "Light is the basis of any good picture, so you've got to watch it, study it, and make it work for you."<sup>102</sup> He again emphasized the importance of lighting in a letter he wrote to Mabel Scacheri, photography editor of the *New York World-Telegram*:

The light must be right. (After all that is all you've got in [a] photograph, for all it is is a study of light tones, blacks and whites, lights and darks; tones of harmony; tones of pleasing composition and harmony of arrangement [,] one with the other.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht, 3.

<sup>100</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 4.

<sup>101</sup> Bowman, letter to Walter Jack, *Esquire* (20 July 1953), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>102</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 6.

<sup>103</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (21 April 1944), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

Except for Bowman's sunset studies, he took all of his pictures in the sunshine because he wanted brilliant lighting, shadows, clouds, and tonal contrast.<sup>104</sup> He found that he had the best lighting in the morning before ten o'clock and in the afternoon after four o'clock.

In addition to lighting, Bowman also realized the importance of selecting the right subject matter. He preferred to photograph simple material including the peaceful farmlands of western New York and the picturesque shorelines of Lake Chautauqua and Lake Erie. Bowman frequently went camping and fishing in Ontario and Quebec, so he also photographed the Canadian landscape on a number of occasions. Although Bowman was not a portrait artist, he took pictures of people if they were necessary in telling his "camera story."<sup>105</sup> When people such as farmers or young children were included in Bowman's photographs, they always appeared unposed, natural, and quite comfortable within their surrounding environment. Bowman firmly believed, like Emerson, that he did not have to travel far to find inspiring subject matter. In the unpublished essay, "WHATCHA goin' to do this summer vacation?" Bowman advised photographers to take pictures of their local surroundings:

When winter's finally over and we've grabbed plenty of good snow pix, we've got the farmers coming on in their spring plowing. All nature will be taking on new life. Planting's being done. Summer sneaks up on us with her warm sunshine, and the beaches will be full of folks partly naked or needing a bath. City kids will be sleeping on the fire-escapes and those what can't get out in the country will be lollin' round in the parks, some with their shoes off. Grab 'em, there'll be pictures a plenty.<sup>106</sup>

Bowman proved time and time again that he could take beautiful pictures in the comfort of his own hometown.

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<sup>104</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 2.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>106</sup> Bowman, "WHATCHA goin' to do this summer vacation?," date unknown, 8, Chautauqua County Historical Society.

While Pictorialists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looked to impressionism for inspiration, Bowman also closely studied oil paintings that he collected or saw on display at art galleries. In the article, "Box Camera Magician," written in 1946, Robert W. Brown of the Eastman Kodak editorial service bureau discussed Bowman's interest in painting:

On the wall of his office four oil paintings hang, one a superb seascape by his friend, Charles Duncan Baker of Dunkirk, N.Y. The others, outdoor scenes of the far North and old West, also serve to keep him in a perpetual state of expectancy and eagerness to match their beauty and quality through the only medium open to him—his camera. He literally dreams of fine pictures, of scenes he would like to find and record in the full beauty of photographic prints. And as a result of his appreciation of things beautiful, and from his awareness of what makes a good picture, he has developed a sense of pictorial intuition [,] which is practically phenomenal.<sup>107</sup>

Bowman thought that he possessed this "sense of pictorial intuition" because he got a "hunch, a feel" when there was a picture around.<sup>108</sup> According to Bowman, as he became more comfortable with taking pictures, he also developed a "sense of proportion, harmony of arrangement and feeling of composition," which allowed him to create thousands of truly beautiful photographs.

In 1946, *U.S. Camera* featured Bowman's photographs in a two-page spread entitled "Brownie Landscapes." The seven photographs selected for the article provide a variety of examples of the way in which Bowman was able to produce brilliantly lit, harmonious compositions. One of the photographs, which has no title, presents a picturesque scene of a car moving down a long, winding road (before 1946) (fig. 11). Bowman stated that this image was one of the finest things he had ever captured in his lens, and he described it quite beautifully in a letter that he wrote to Scacheri in 1944:

<sup>107</sup> Brown, "Box Camera Magician," *The Mayville Sentinel* (8 August 1946): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>108</sup> "The Box Camera of John O. Bowman," *American Photography* (August 1951): page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

I wish you could see the newly framed picture I have on the wall ahead of me. A shadow greets you in the immediate foreground underneath a down-hanging tree branch. As you start up the country road past the mail-box, two bushes one on each side of the road sort of keep you in the picture. A car comes towards you down the winding road that disappears over the brow of the hill. Soft, chunky clouds drift on the horizon of the lazy Sunday Afternoon [sic]. It is a pleasing study that grows on you in its quiet, rural setting. Maybe your City Slickers never see these things but I'd bet you'd like to.<sup>109</sup>

Bowman tried to visualize his photographs before he took them, and he claimed that he knew exactly what he wanted prior to taking this particular picture. In a letter to *Minicam Photography*, Bowman explained that he intended to keep the observer's eye from wandering out of the composition by framing the picture on both sides with bushes and trees. He also wanted to include "pleasing clouds harmoniously arranged" in the sky.<sup>110</sup> Ultimately, he aimed to create a sense of balance in the photograph, and achieved it by emphasizing horizontality. The branches hanging down from the top of the frame also enhance the sense of symmetry and balance in the image. In reference to his photography, Bowman admitted in the letter to *Minicam Photography*, "You might say I want everything and I do. I have a right to expect it and if I am patient I get it."<sup>111</sup>

With a great deal of patience, Bowman was able to capture unique images of the Chautauqua County landscape under diverse weather conditions. Like Stieglitz, Bowman was not easily deterred from taking the picture he desired. He was often willing to camp outside at night, regardless of the temperature, in order to wait for the sun to rise so he could get the best shot with his box camera. The photograph entitled *Snow Scene*, which was featured in the *Buffalo Courier-Express* in 1946, is a somewhat abstract, close-up image of the ground covered

<sup>109</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (21 April 1944), 2.

<sup>110</sup> Bowman, letter to *Minicam Photography* (28 May 1945), 3, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

in a thick blanket of freshly fallen snow (fig. 12).<sup>112</sup> A narrow creek meanders through the center of the photograph, and the reflection of the morning sun can be seen in the water of the creek. The snow is so heavy that it has covered the bank, nearly obscuring the creek. Small bare branches and twigs peek out of the ground and create several thin shadows that stand out against the sparkling white snow. Bowman shot this image from a low angle; only the ground is visible in the photograph. By using a low angle, he succeeded in capturing an abstract picture of nature that consists of several rounded, organic shapes that are harmoniously arranged.

Like Emerson, Bowman also had a gift for producing romanticized images of people working within a rural setting. He mainly photographed farmers working in the fields with animals as well as machinery. *Veteran of the Field* (before 1951) is a photograph that was reproduced in *American Photography* in 1951 (fig. 13).<sup>113</sup> This image features a farmer with his reaper silhouetted against a bright sky filled with fluffy, white clouds. There is a remarkable contrast between the black silhouette of the farmer driving his reaper in the foreground and the white and gray tones of the sky in the background. Bowman achieved this contrast by facing the sun when shooting the picture. He also shot the image from a low angle to give the farmer and his reaper a monumental presence in the photograph. The various elements of the reaper look like abstract lines and circles and bear a resemblance to a Ferris wheel. Although the farmer and the machine clearly stand out, Bowman succeeded in creating an image of a person who appears comfortable working within nature. The photographer possessed the ability to transform an ordinary picture of the natural landscape or someone laboring in the fields into a beautiful work of art because he was always in tune with nature and possessed the desire to interpret its brilliance to others.

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<sup>112</sup> "Capturing Beauty With a Brownie," *Buffalo Courier-Express* (14 July 1946): page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>113</sup> "The Box Camera of John O. Bowman," *American Photography*, page unknown.

### **Bowman's Relationship With Modern Photography**

Although Bowman was recognized as a Pictorialist, he distinguished himself from many of the Pictorialists who worked during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because he chose not to manipulate his photographs before or after exposure. As discussed in the first chapter, Bowman never actually developed his negatives or printed his photographs. He did not have the time to work in a darkroom, so he always sent his film to a good friend to have it processed and printed.<sup>114</sup> Thus, Bowman only relied on his hunches, as well as his selection of subject matter, knowledge of lighting, and keen sense of proportion and composition to produce artistic photographs. His approach reflected the "straight," modernist movement that developed in photography during the early twentieth century.

By World War I, fine art photographers were introduced to modern, abstract works of art that were produced in both Europe and the United States. As a result, Stieglitz and other photographers moved away from Pictorialism and expressed an interest in "straight" photography that was both direct and unmanipulated.<sup>115</sup> Paul Strand (1890-1976) was one of the original proponents of "straight" photography. Like the pictorialists, Strand promoted photography as a fine art, but he aimed to distinguish his work from impressionist paintings. In his essay entitled "Photography" (1917), Strand explained, "The full potential power of every medium is dependent upon the purity of its use."<sup>116</sup> Although he chose his subject matter from everyday life, he wanted to depict detail more clearly than the pictorial photographers did

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<sup>114</sup> I have been unable to determine the identity of Bowman's friend. "Capturing Beauty With a Brownie," *Buffalo Courier-Express*, page unknown.

<sup>115</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 215.

<sup>116</sup> Paul Strand, "Photography," *Seven Arts* (August 1917); rpt. *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven, CT: Leete's Island Books, 1980), 142.

through the use of sharp focus. In addition, Strand stressed abstract elements of design in his "straight" photographs, while preserving the identity of the subject matter.<sup>117</sup> One of Strand's earliest "straight" photographs, *Wall Street* (1916), presents diminutive human figures moving within a monumental urban landscape (fig. 14).<sup>118</sup> In reference to *Wall Street*, Strand explained, "I was trying to re-create the abstract movement of people moving in a city; what that kind of movement really feels like and is like."<sup>119</sup> Even though this is a realistic depiction of city life, Strand succeeded in capturing an abstracted image that consists of a combination of organic and geometric forms.

As Stieglitz's photographic approach evolved, he came to believe that a "straight" print could reveal the personal spirit and "inner truth" that he was ultimately seeking in all art.<sup>120</sup> The path that Stieglitz followed in search of highly spiritual, abstracted forms of nature led him to photograph the clouds. When Stieglitz pointed his camera towards the sky, he eliminated the narrative aspect of the photograph and reduced the content to a structure of form, line, and plane.<sup>121</sup> According to Hirsch, clouds for Stieglitz became "abstract, metaphoric equations of his emotions and psychological states, a personal testament that the universe is a comprehensible component of the self."<sup>122</sup> Stieglitz produced hundreds of photographs of clouds between the 1920s and 1930s that came to be known as "Equivalents" (fig. 15). He hoped that through his straightforward photography of the clouds, spectators would feel a profound spiritual relationship with the images.<sup>123</sup> This series confirmed Stieglitz's symbolic power to recast everyday life with

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<sup>117</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 141.

<sup>118</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 222.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>120</sup> Dorothy Norman, *The Aperture History of Photography Series: Alfred Stieglitz* (New York, NY: Aperture, Inc., 1976), 5, 18.

<sup>121</sup> Peter Cornell-Richter, *Georgia O'Keeffe and Alfred Stieglitz* (New York, NY: Prestel, 2001), 74.

<sup>122</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 239.

<sup>123</sup> Norman, *Alfred Stieglitz*, 11-12.

spiritual significance.<sup>124</sup> Through “straight” photography, Strand and Stieglitz, as well as other influential fine art photographers, laid the groundwork for modernist aesthetic principles of photography that would endure for the next sixty years.<sup>125</sup>

In view of Bowman’s more abstract, sharply focused, and unmanipulated photographs, he had more in common with the “straight” photographers than he probably realized. Although Bowman mostly gained recognition in newspapers, magazines, contests, and exhibitions for his studies of the natural landscape, he also took numerous pictures of urban landscapes and industrial workers. In the photograph entitled *Things To Be Done* (date unknown), Bowman captured an image of a worker standing on top of a facade of a brick building (fig. 16).<sup>126</sup> The worker, who is in the background, appears to be looking at the skeletal roof supports that likely connect the building in the photo with another wall that is not visible. A ladder also rests against the building. Like the insect-sized people in Strand’s photograph, *Wall Street*, the worker in this image is miniscule in relation to the building and the roof supports. Although the photograph is vertical, *Things To Be Done* is dominated by the series of diagonal lines created by the ladder as well as the roof supports and their shadows. These lines seem to create a syncopated rhythm in the image. Heavy planks dominate the top third of the photograph. There is also a major contrast between the dark silhouettes of the roof supports and the white sky. By shooting this photograph from a low angle, Bowman succeeded in producing a somewhat disorienting, geometrically abstract image of the urban architecture dwarfing a man. This photograph is especially remarkable because he did not manipulate it in the darkroom.

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<sup>124</sup> Hirsch, *Seizing the Light*, 239.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>126</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

In *The Lineman* (date unknown), Bowman photographed an individual mounting a telephone pole with a strap wrapped around the pole and his back (fig. 17).<sup>127</sup> Both the figure and the telephone pole are silhouetted against a bright sky filled with fluffy, white clouds. Bowman was directly facing the sun when he took this photograph. Although it is assumed that the telephone pole is connected to the ground, Bowman took the picture from a low angle to create the sense that the pole is stretching vertically toward the heavens. The thin silhouettes of the telephone wires extend from the top of the photograph to the bottom, emphasizing the verticality of the image. Yet again, Bowman produced a disorienting, abstract photograph. However, he presented a unique contrast between elements of the city and elements of nature by capturing the geometric forms of the telephone pole juxtaposed against the organic shapes of the clouds and the bare tree branches in the lower right. Through images such as this, Bowman expressed his ability to combine the beauty of nature with the intriguing quality of urban forms.

Considering that Bowman truly believed he possessed a deep connection with nature, he produced some very powerful, abstract images of the natural landscape. In 1952, Bowman's photograph entitled *Little Man* was featured in an edition of the *Photography Annual*, a catalogue that included images compiled by editors of *Popular Photography* (fig. 18).<sup>128</sup> In *Little Man*, Bowman presented a striking scene of a small figure standing in the lower right. With his back turned towards the viewer and his arms opened wide, the man is silhouetted against a vast, enveloping sky. There are clouds that appear perpendicular to the man's torso. Overall, this is a darker photograph, but there is still a dramatic contrast between the dark silhouettes of the man and the flat horizon that fills the lower fifth of the composition and the range of gray tones of the clouds and the sky. A large, backlit cloud also dominates the left half of the photograph and

<sup>127</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>128</sup> *Photography Annual* (Chicago, IL: Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 1952): 28, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

seems to hover over the ground. While this is a realistic depiction of a person observing elements of the natural landscape, the photograph can be broken down into organic and geometric forms. Although Bowman did not discuss the meaning behind this photograph in any of his personal writings, it is possible that he wanted to present an image of a man who, like himself, had a spiritual connection with nature and understood its overwhelming beauty as well as its unpredictability.

Like Stieglitz, Bowman captured some very unique, abstract photographs of clouds, but he did so from a completely different perspective. Bowman often traveled by airplane during his vacations to Canada and sometimes flew in the vicinity of Chautauqua County, so he frequently brought his box camera with him to take aerial photographs while flying. In the article, "Box Camera Magician," Bowman discussed his aerial picture making:

Most people say it can't be done with a box camera...But that's just poor thinking. A yellow filter is the secret. I just clean off the window, keep the camera away from the glass, and shoot away.<sup>129</sup>

The photographic results that Bowman achieved while flying among the clouds were quite remarkable, and he received recognition on a number of occasions for his aerial pictures in publications such as the *Christian Science Monitor* and *U.S. Camera*. In one of Bowman's aerial pictures, which is untitled and undated, a gray sky is suspended above a blanket of white clouds that stretch across the bottom third of the frame (fig. 19).<sup>130</sup> The clouds appear to separate the earth below from the heavens above. The wing of the airplane is barely visible in the middle left of the composition. Through this image, Bowman highlighted the abstract elements of the natural world. Bowman's aerial photographs, which are comparable to Stieglitz's "Equivalents,"

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<sup>129</sup> Brown, "Box Camera Magician," page unknown.

<sup>130</sup> Thus far in my research, I have been unable to determine whether this specific image was published or not. However, other aerial photographs comparable to this image have been acknowledged or featured in the *Christian Science Monitor* and *U.S. Camera*.

emphasize his deep connection with nature. He had the ability, like Stieglitz, to recognize the beauty of nature's simplest forms and to interpret that beauty through photography.

Whether Bowman was photographing the natural landscape or cityscapes, he always attempted to visualize a picture before taking it. In a letter written to Scacheri in 1941, Bowman briefly discussed his method of visualization:

I felt that of first importance was a good negative, and I was determined to get them. I visualized my pictures and followed up my hunches. I gained a sense of intuition that there was my shot. Really [,] I marveled at the results as time went on.<sup>131</sup>

Bowman believed that the final picture would reflect his character if he first visualized the image in his mind. Journalist James A. Williamson acknowledged Bowman's talent for "pre-visualization" in the article, "Camera Is Only Phase In Getting Good Photos; John Bowman Has Proof!" which was featured in Jamestown, New York's *Post-Journal* in 1940:

As an impartial observer, scanning hundreds of prints taken by Mr. Bowman, it is quite evident that his pictures are not made by the camera. They are made in his mind. They are conceived before they are brought forth. The mechanical process is but the means to an end.<sup>132</sup>

In various publications including the *Christian Science Monitor*, *U.S. Camera*, and *Popular Photography*, as well as his personal writings, Bowman often mentioned the photograph, *Tone Poem* (before 1938) (fig. 7), which he visualized before taking. Bowman won a Newspaper National Snapshot Award for *Tone Poem* in 1938.<sup>133</sup> In the article, "Box Camera Magician," Robert W. Brown effectively described the photographic procedure Bowman took to produce *Tone Poem*:

In his general picture making he once conceived the idea of picturing a lone tree, projecting over a still lake, with the sun just beginning to break through a fog.

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<sup>131</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (8 February 1941), 2.

<sup>132</sup> James A. Williamson, "Camera is Only Phase In Getting Good Photos: John Bowman Has Proof!" *The Post-Journal* (1940): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauque County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, "Box Camera Magician," page unknown.

Sun-brightened fog scenes invariably set him to hopping as excitedly as a pup with a new-found playmate, and the day he found what he was looking for was no exception. "I knew exactly what I wanted," he explains, "and I was so excited I could hardly hold the camera still."<sup>134</sup>

The photograph features a tree with long, delicate branches suspended over a calm, smooth lake. Although verticality is emphasized in this image, the thin branches that stretch horizontally across the picture create a sense of balance. While the sun is hidden behind the tree, its reflection on the lake below is clearly visible. The white reflection of the sun contrasts dramatically with the dark tones of the lake. There is also a strong contrast between the dark silhouette of the tree and the sky. However, it is difficult to distinguish the sky from the lake in this image. Thus, the photograph possesses a mystical, dreamlike quality. The picture *Tone Poem* is one among thousands that exemplifies Bowman's innate ability to create a truly beautiful photograph that reflects an image he originally envisioned in his mind.

During the 1920s, the "straight" photographer Edward Weston (1886-1958) who would eventually become a member of the famous "Group f.64" (1932-1935) introduced the modern concept of "pre-visualization."<sup>135</sup> To produce truthful works of art, Weston urged photographers to engage in the act of visualizing a photograph before exposing the film. Thus, he firmly believed that final prints should not be manipulated. In his essay entitled "Seeing Photographically," Weston emphasized the importance of "pre-visualization":

Until the photographer has learned to visualize his final result in advance, and to predetermine the procedures necessary to carry out that visualization, his finished work (if it be photography at all) will present a series of lucky—or unlucky—mechanical accidents. Hence the photographer's most important and likewise most difficult task is not learning to manage his camera, or to develop, or to print. It is learning to *see photographically*...<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Trachtenberg, *Classic Essays On Photography*, 169.

<sup>136</sup> Weston first discussed this concept in his personal writings during the 1920s. Edward Weston, "Seeing Photographically," *Encyclopedia of Photography*, vol. 18 (1965); rpt. *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg, 172-173.

In this essay, Weston also advised photographers to simplify their equipment and techniques and to keep their approaches free from all rules and formulas. "Only then," explained Weston, "can he [the photographer] be free to put his photographic sight to use in discovering and revealing the nature of the world he lives in."<sup>137</sup> Although there is no evidence that Bowman was familiar with the photographic philosophies of Weston, Bowman's method of visualization clearly reflected Weston's concept of "pre-visualization."

Thus, Bowman's pictorialist approach to photography paralleled the modern ideas and practices used by some of the most influential photographers working during the first half of the twentieth century. Although he remained a pictorialist throughout his career, Bowman succeeded in broadening the use of the box camera by producing thousands of high-quality Pictorial photographs that possessed elements of a "straight," modernist edge. By 1946, ten years after Bowman became involved in amateur photography, he had taken over 4,000 pictures, proving that the medium was more than just a hobby for him. In the essay, "Pictorial Photography," Stieglitz discussed the characteristics of a true amateur photographer:

As a matter of fact nearly all the greatest work is being, and has always been done, by those who are following photography for the love of it, and not merely for financial reasons. As the name implies, an amateur is one who works for love...<sup>138</sup>

Bowman worked very hard to demonstrate the love he had for both the natural landscape and photography through his pictures and writings. When ninety-nine of his photographs were featured at the New York World's Fair in 1940, he gained the national and international attention he deserved. I will focus on Bowman's participation in the fair and the impact that it had on his career in the third chapter. In view of his notable body of work, Bowman was not just an

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>138</sup> Stieglitz, "Pictorial Photography," 117.

amateur; he was an artist who made a significant contribution to modern photography. And to think he did it all with a "lowly box camera!"<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 4.

**Chapter 3**  
**"Box Camera King" of the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940**

You know I like to be with winners. They do things.  
—John O. Bowman<sup>140</sup>

Although Bowman tended not to travel too far outside of western New York unless he was vacationing in Canada, his photographs started appearing at camera club exhibitions across the country by 1939. In addition, local publications such as Jamestown's *Post Journal* and national newspapers such as the *Christian Science Monitor* began featuring reproductions of his pictures more frequently.<sup>141</sup> Initially, Bowman aroused the anger of fellow amateur photographers because he used a cheap box camera and repeatedly won praise for his pictures while they used expensive cameras and often did not achieve similar high quality results in their photographs.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, most viewers admired Bowman's prints not only because they were beautiful, but also because he took them using a simple camera. After first gaining attention at studios in western New York and Pennsylvania, a large number of Bowman's photographs made its way to galleries and camera clubs in New York City. Upon the request of the Photographic Society of America, Bowman's traveling collection was exhibited at the New York World's Fair in 1940.<sup>143</sup> The Photographic Society of America, which was established in the 1930s, brought together professional and amateur photographers from all over the world. Its mission was to promote the art and science of photography through camera clubs, publications, and exhibitions. With ninety-nine prints, Bowman had the largest solo show of art work at the fair.<sup>144</sup> Within four

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<sup>140</sup> Bowman, letter to Mrs. Mitchell (10 November 1938), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>141</sup> As previously mentioned in chapter one, Bowman sold approximately eighty prints to the *Christian Science Monitor* between 1938 and 1939. Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (2 April 1940): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>142</sup> Williamson, "Camera is Only Phase In Getting Good Photos; John Bowman Has Proof!" *The Post-Journal* (1940): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>143</sup> Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *Erie Daily Times* (8 March 1941): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

years after purchasing his first box camera, his body of work received the attention of millions of people from the United States and abroad. The exhibition not only brought him both national and international visibility, but also earned him the title of "box-camera champion of the universe."<sup>145</sup>

### **Bowman's Path to the New York World's Fair**

Before reaching the New York World's Fair in 1940, Bowman started to receive prizes from various camera clubs in addition to magazines and newspapers. In the unpublished essay, "My Box Camera" (1950), Bowman discussed his early success with photographic contests:

I discovered contest notices in magazines and newspapers and figured I'd try 'em [sic]. I sure grabbed off my share of prizes. I later joined a camera club and got more prizes there. I sure was enthused to the quick. I knew I could be doing something better than the best, and this was the answer.<sup>146</sup>

In 1938, Bowman won a Newspaper National Snapshot Award after submitting his photograph, *Tone Poem* (before 1938), to the *Pittsburgh Press* (fig. 7).<sup>147</sup> This print was then included in an exhibition of prize-winning photographs in the lobby of the *Washington Evening Star's* building in Washington, D.C. Bowman was unable to attend this exhibition, so he arranged for one of his friends there, Fred L. Sharp, to take pictures of the display.<sup>148</sup> Bowman made a conscious effort to document every award or honor that his photography received.

In addition to the National Newspaper Snapshot Award, Bowman received a prize from the *Pittsburgh Press* in 1940 for the print, *Sunday Afternoon* (before 1940).<sup>149</sup> In the same year, Bowman's print, *Shadows and Angles* (before 1940), was one of 120 photographs included in the

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<sup>145</sup> Mabel Scacheri, "Take it Easy," *Collier's Magazine*, 9 March 1946, 32.

<sup>146</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera" (21 October 1950), 2, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>147</sup> Fred L. Sharp, letter to John O. Bowman (21 December 1938), 1, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Thus far in my research, I have been unable to find a copy of the photograph, *Sunday Afternoon*. "John O. Bowman Wins National Award in Photography Competition," publication unknown (21 June 1940): n.p. Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

Fourth Annual Salon of the Photographic Guild.<sup>150</sup> It was hung in the Albright Art Gallery between April and May of 1940. Two of the judges, Chester Wheeler (dates unknown) and Wilbur H. Porterfield (1873-1958), were well-known pictorialists who gave Bowman an award of merit for his work in this exhibition.<sup>151</sup> The image was also selected for the Photographic Society of America's show at the New York World's Fair.<sup>152</sup>

One of Bowman's earliest solo exhibitions was held in 1939 at Lynch Camera Shop in Erie, Pennsylvania. As discussed in the first chapter, the show featured twenty-one of Bowman's scenic photographs of Chautauqua and Erie counties. According to Walter Jack, a writer for the *Erie Daily Times* in 1939, many of the prints had hung in American and foreign salon exhibitions, but he did not specify which ones.<sup>153</sup> Some reproductions included in the show had also been sold to the daily press and magazines such as *Life*.<sup>154</sup> The owner of the camera shop, Al Lynch, was astonished by the high quality of all Bowman's photographs. In Jack's column entitled "Candidly About Cameras" (1939), Lynch expressed his admiration for Bowman's pictures. He said, "They grow on you, the more you study them, the more you like them. They are the work of a great artist."<sup>155</sup>

In January of 1940, Bowman's prints were exhibited at Kelly's Studio in Erie, Pennsylvania.<sup>156</sup> This studio was the starting point for the photographs that would eventually make their way to the New York World's Fair. In 1941, Walter Jack described in detail the journey that Bowman's pictures took:

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<sup>150</sup> I have not yet come across this photograph in my research. "Albright Salon," *Camera Council Chronicle* (May 1940): page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (11 April 1939): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (8 March 1941): page unknown.

It was in January, 1940, that the Kelly's Studio of Erie asked Mr. Bowman if he could get together a collection of his photographs for their window display. Mr. Bowman ever obliging sent on the collection. It was while the display was on that a representative of the New York Central railroad saw them and asked that he might be allowed to take them to New York City for exhibition there. They were shown there in the Metropolitan Camera Club, the New York Central Camera Club, and many other camera clubs and galleries in greater New York and on Long Island. The Photographic Society of America next requested that they be allowed to take over the collection for exhibitions at the World's Fair. Their display there gave Mr. Bowman the honor of having the largest individual collection of pictorial photographs on exhibition.<sup>157</sup>

Although the collection initially consisted of twenty-one prints, it grew to ninety-nine. Prior to being presented at the World's Fair, the photographs were exhibited at an Eastman Kodak Store in Babylon, Long Island, New York.<sup>158</sup> Bowman had some pictures taken of his "Box Camera Salon" while it was on display at the Eastman Kodak Store in 1940 (fig. 20). He was extremely pleased with the positive reception of his work. Bowman gladly sent his pictures "down to the big city" because, as he said in a letter to *Minicam Photography* in 1945, "pictures are no good to anybody unless somebody sees 'em [sic]."<sup>159</sup>

#### **Going Solo at the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940**

When the New York World's Fair opened in 1939, it was described in the fair's official guidebook as the "greatest international exposition in history."<sup>160</sup> The theme of the fair was "Building the World of Tomorrow" and the futuristic symbols that dominated the fairgrounds were enormous architectural elements of an obelisk and sphere, the Trylon and Perisphere.<sup>161</sup> In the essay, "The Last Great Fair," published in *The New Criterion* in 2005, Jeffrey Hart described the Trylon as a "triangular spire fifteen stories high" and the Perisphere as "a gigantic globe a

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Bowman, letter to *Minicam Photography* (28 May 1945), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> *Official Guidebook of the New York World's Fair, 1939* (New York, NY: Exposition Publications, 1939), 7.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 5.

city block across.”<sup>162</sup> The purpose of the fair was not only to portray the “World of Tomorrow,” but also to commemorate the First Inaugural of George Washington. According to the official guidebook of 1939, the New York World’s Fair was planned to be “‘everyman’s fair’— to show the way toward the improvement of all the factors contributing to human welfare.”<sup>163</sup> In the catalogue, *Remembering the Future: The New York World’s Fair From 1939 to 1964*, which was published in 1989 to accompany the exhibition of the same title held at the Queens Museum in New York City, the show’s director Janet Schneider explained that “despite harsh realities of the Depression years and the ominous threat of World War II,” the fair was optimistically promoted as the “Dawn of a New Day.”<sup>164</sup>

In 1939, Bowman visited the fair. While wandering around one rainy night on the grounds, he had an encounter with a fellow amateur that inspired him. Bowman described this experience in a letter to A.B. Hecht, managing editor of *Popular Photography*, in 1942:

I’ll never forget the little, old chap who stood in under an umbrella near the lagoon of the Ford Building in the World’s Fair in New York a couple of years ago one rainy night when I was plodding around in the mud. He was protecting one of the most delapidated [*sic*] bits of a [*sic*] ancient box camera I had ever seen. I crawled in under his umbrella and asked him what he was up to. I can never forget his sweet look of confidence and pride as he patted his camera. I had never seen him before but he knew that I knew pretty well what it was all about...I asked him about his camera and he lifted it off a homemade tripod and handed it to me, carefully. It was tied together with black shoestring in two places from front to back. Adhesive tape held the sides together. It was an old Eastman 116 Box Camera with the hinged back he said his father had left him many years ago. He picked up his tripod as we sought shelter in a nearby building. There in better light he pulled out of his pocket two certificates of award and [*sic*] he had received that day, one for fifty dollars and the other for twenty-five dollars; prize money for pictures he’d taken at night. He said he had some more to take and we

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<sup>162</sup> Jeffrey Hart, “The Last Great Fair,” *The New Criterion* 23, no. 5 (2005): 75.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>164</sup> *Remembering the Future: The New York World’s Fair From 1939 to 1964* (New York, NY: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), 6.

parted. It was under the skin with him too. Photography was his life...I resolved then to do better.<sup>165</sup>

Considering that a collection of his work was featured at the World's Fair the following year, Bowman did better with his photography than he may have expected.<sup>166</sup>

Bowman was one among several photographers who had work displayed at the New York World's Fair. Many of the pavilions exhibited photographs and photomurals that reflected the fair's theme of building a better "World of Tomorrow." Pavilions sponsored by states such as the New York State Building featured pictures that highlighted the scenic beauty and vast resources that each state had to offer.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, corporate-owned buildings held photographic exhibitions. According to the official guidebook of 1939, the Eastman Kodak Company Pavilion held shows in the "Hall of Light" where "practice and results of amateur, professional, and commercial photographers" were "graphically demonstrated."<sup>168</sup> Unfortunately, the names of those photographers who participated in the fair were not well documented. Although the work of national and international photographers was displayed at the event's numerous venues, it was not recognized as a fine art by the fair's organizers. Major art exhibitions held at the fair including "Masterpieces of Art" and "American Art Today" featured painting, sculpture, and the graphic arts.<sup>169</sup> However, these shows did not display photography. Therefore, it is likely that the work of photographers such as Bowman was viewed primarily as a form of documentation.

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<sup>165</sup> Bowman did not identify the man in his description. Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht (23 January 1942), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>166</sup> The New York Public Library has the primary collection of documents related to the New York World's Fair, 1939-1940. I contacted the library to find out if they had any information about Bowman and his solo exhibition at the World's Fair, but they were unable to discover any documentation. Due to a lack of time, I was not able to visit the library to conduct my own research. Thus, I am basing my research on the documentation I found in the archives of the Patterson Library and the Chautauqua County Historical Society.

<sup>167</sup> *Official Guidebook of the New York World's Fair, 1939*, 159.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Harris, *Federal Art and National Culture: The Politics of Identity in New Deal America* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 108.

Upon the invitation of the Photographic Society of America, Bowman's ninety-nine prints were sent to the World's Fair to be exhibited at the Hall of Industry and Metals. In a letter written to Bowman in 1940, a friend named W.J. Pasfield described the location of the Hall of Industry and Metals so Bowman could get an idea of where his work would be displayed:

This building is directly across from the roadway from the entrance to the perisphere – right in the middle of the Fair. The location suggested for your prints is really swell, so I truly hope that a satisfactory arrangement can be worked out for hanging them.<sup>170</sup>

At first, the director of photographic activities, F. Quellmalz, Jr., had difficulty trying to decide how to hang ninety-nine 8 x 10 inch prints behind glass so that they would not be damaged.

Pasfield explained in his letter to Bowman that Quellmalz really enjoyed his photographs.

Pasfield wrote, "You ought to have heard all the nice things he had to say about your prints. He is very eager to get your pics up so that the public can oggle at them."<sup>171</sup> Pasfield also expressed excitement about Bowman's solo show at the fair. He referred to Bowman as "Mr. Expert," and said in the letter, "Maybe some day when I see the name of John O. Bowman in print [,] I can say 'I knew him when---'."<sup>172</sup> According to Bowman, the prints remained on display for three to four weeks at the Iron and Metals Building.<sup>173</sup>

The majority of the photographs featured picturesque landscapes of western New York. The pictorial works emphasize Bowman's ability to interpret nature through his photography. I will analyze a handful of images that are representative of the whole collection.<sup>174</sup> Furthermore, I will discuss some unique photographs that possess a straight, modernist edge. As previously

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<sup>170</sup> W.J. Pasfield, letter to John O. Bowman (July 1940), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Bowman, letter to *Minicam Photography*, 2.

<sup>174</sup> I did not have direct access to all of the prints featured at the fair. I used the photographs that were taken of the solo exhibition at the Eastman Kodak store in New York City to determine what images were included at the fair. Then, I looked for the prints that matched those at the exhibition in the archives of the Chautauqua County Historical Society. I was able to find approximately one-fourth of the photographs that were displayed at the fair in 1940.

discussed, the print, *Tone Poem* (before 1938), was exhibited at the fair (fig. 7). Like *Tone Poem*, the pictorial photograph entitled *On the Big Inlet* (before 1940) possesses a mystical quality (fig. 21).<sup>175</sup> In this work, Bowman captured a series of thin, tall standing trees that line an inlet. The ground upon which the trees stand is barely visible, so it appears as if they are rising from the body of water that dominates the bottom third of the composition. Although white sky and clouds are visible in the background, the dark, repeated silhouettes created by the trees and their branches overpower the composition. The trees also produce dark reflections on the water. These reflections cause the trees to appear elongated and help to emphasize the verticality of the image. In the center of the photograph, two smaller trees lean over the body of water that separates them to form a sort of passageway that leads the viewer out of the dark shadows into bright, natural light. This photograph was one among many at the fair that accentuated the beauty of nature's tranquil elements.

In *The Clothes Line* (before 1940), Bowman captured a simple, yet striking scene of two young children relaxing on a shoreline as the sun sets over a calm body of water behind them (fig. 22).<sup>176</sup> While a young boy stands, a little girl sits on a swing that hangs from a thin, twisted tree with bare branches. A taller tree leans to the right, and a thin clothesline that is barely visible connects the two trees. Four articles of clothing are pinned to the line. Bowman took this photograph facing the sun, so the children, the swing, the bare trees, and the clothes are silhouetted against the gray sky. The dark silhouettes contrast dramatically with the gray tones of the lake and the vast sky. Although the foreground, the horizon line, and the clothesline emphasize the horizontality of the photograph, the trees, the ropes of the swing, and the children

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<sup>175</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>176</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

create a sense of verticality. Bowman succeeded in producing a balanced composition that conveys innocence and serenity.

Bowman also presented images of laborers working with their equipment in the fields. The picture, *Get Out of Here* (before 1940), features a farmer working in the countryside using a horse-drawn plow (fig. 23).<sup>177</sup> While the farmer stands in the middle left of the frame, a team of three horses is in the center. There is also a dog, which may be a mutt that stands eagerly with his tail wagging in the lower right. He looks directly toward the viewer. It appears as if the dog is trying to lead the farmer and his horses across the field. Bowman shot this photograph from a low angle because the tilled soil is visible at the bottom of the frame and the horses appear monumental. However, the heads of the worker and the animals are below the horizon line, which emphasizes their ties to the land. The horses' dark fur contrasts with the clear, white sky that dominates the top half of the image. Although Bowman emphasized horizontality in this picture, there are two telephone poles with wires connecting them that tower over the farmer and his horses. A bare tree, which stands between the horses and the dog, also interrupts the strong sense of horizontality in the composition. Perhaps Bowman was calling attention to the distinction between the outdated machinery used by the farmer and the advances in technology as evidenced by the telephone poles in this photograph. Unlike images such as *On the Big Inlet* or *The Clothes Line*, which are calm, harmonious compositions, *Get Out of Here* is a picture in which Bowman emphasized movement.

In *Thru the Hayrake Wheel* (before 1940), Bowman captured two farmers preparing to work in the fields from a disorienting perspective (fig. 24).<sup>178</sup> Four years after the photograph was displayed at the World's Fair, it was enlarged and used as a photomural at a local restaurant

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<sup>177</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>178</sup> John O. Bowman Archives, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

in western New York named Gretchen's Kitchen. At this time, Bowman wrote a description of how he took *Thru the Hayrake Wheel* to accompany the image:

It was early one Saturday afternoon that I came onto this harvesting scene. The farmer was just driving up to the threshing machine with his load of oats. I spied the hayrake standing nearby and I got the hunch to take it through the wheel. The vehicle was still in motion and I had to work fast. The result was indeed pleasing. If you will look carefully you will see two of the hayrake's tines are missing, but here's where the two figures on the load just happened to come. A coincidence indeed.<sup>179</sup>

By taking the picture from a low angle, Bowman managed to make the wheel appear monumental in relation to the two farmers, the pile of hay, and the automobile that are barely visible in the background. Bowman was facing the sun when he took this picture, so the straight and curved elements of the wheel are silhouetted against the bright sky. While the straight lines create a series of diagonals that extend in different directions, the curved lines of the wheel are arranged rhythmically in the composition. The sleek curvature of the wheel contrasts with the rectangular copse of trees that rests in the middle right of the photograph. The image presents a distinction between the old and new tools used in farming. Perhaps Bowman gave the hayrake wheel a place of prominence in comparison with the farmers in an attempt to emphasize its importance in relation to farming. Although this is a realistic depiction of farm machinery, the elements of the hayrake wheel could be interpreted as abstract forms. *Thru the Hayrake Wheel* stood out at Bowman's solo exhibition because it exemplified his willingness to experiment with formal elements and unique perspectives in his photography.

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<sup>179</sup> Bowman, "Snacks and Snickers From Gretchen's Kitchen" (16 November 1944), 2, clipping from the Patterson Library Archives.

In addition to the photographs that were exhibited at the Iron and Metals Building, Bowman had eight mural prints in the New York State Building at the World's Fair.<sup>180</sup> These murals were hung in 1939. As the host state of the fair, New York appropriated the largest amount of money for its building and exhibits. The complex was located on the Great White Way in front of Liberty Lake.<sup>181</sup> According to the official guidebook of 1939, the New York State Building housed "graphic and arresting displays of New York's vast resources and its social progress."<sup>182</sup> Although the subject matter of Bowman's murals seems not to have been discussed in newspaper and magazine articles or his personal writings, it is likely that the murals featured scenic landscapes of western New York. Reproductions of several of the prints that were made into murals were also on display at Lynch Camera Shop in Erie.<sup>183</sup> Thus, those who were unable to go to New York City between 1939 and 1940 had the opportunity to see smaller versions of Bowman's World's Fair murals.

At a time when the country was coming out of a Depression and facing the possibility of war, Bowman's photographs of the western New York landscape and people laboring in the fields provided audiences at the World's Fair with a vision of progress and a sense of hope. In the essay, "The Last Great Fair," Jeffrey Hart suggested that the New York World's Fair "was a luminous assertion of optimism in the face of Depression."<sup>184</sup> Hart also explained that it was the "last great Fair, innocent in its faith" because it "believed in Progress as a comprehensive idea" and based its purpose on the theme of "Building the World of Tomorrow."<sup>185</sup> Bowman's

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<sup>180</sup> I was unable to find any reproductions of the murals included at the fair. Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (12 October 1939): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>181</sup> *Official Guidebook: The World's Fair of 1940 in New York* (New York, NY: Rogers, Kellogg, Stillson, Inc., 1940), 92.

<sup>182</sup> *Official Guidebook of the New York World's Fair, 1939*, 159.

<sup>183</sup> Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (11 April 1939): page unknown.

<sup>184</sup> Hart, "The Last Great Fair," 74.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*

picturesque scenes of rural life and positive representations of farmers working in the countryside reflected the fair's brilliant declaration of hope. However, photographs such as *The Clothes Line* and *Get Out of Here* seemed to reflect a simpler, more innocent time in life when people were more in tune with the natural landscape. While the World's Fair looked at the future with confidence and promoted "Building the World of Tomorrow," Bowman's peaceful, pastoral photographs referred to a world that was changing. Thus, after the Great Depression had taken its toll on the United States, it is possible that Bowman wanted to create not only a sense of hope, but also a sense of nostalgia for audiences through his pictorial images.

Bowman was extremely happy to contribute to an event that showcased the work of a wide range of artists from the United States and abroad. In a letter to Scacheri, Bowman humbly admitted, "It pleased me greatly to have the largest individual exhibit at the New York World's Fair in 1940 with ninety-nine prints on display."<sup>186</sup> He considered his solo show to be the ultimate reward for his work as a photographer. In a letter to A.B. Hecht, the managing editor of *Popular Photography*, he declared, "How I still love the Blue and Gold Stickers on the back of these prints. Money can't buy 'em [*sic*]. It's under the skin."<sup>187</sup> Bowman was extremely appreciative for being invited to participate in the event because the national and international exposure that he received created new and exciting opportunities for him and his box camera.

#### **The Emergence of the "Box-Camera Champion of the Universe"**

Following his participation in the New York World's Fair, Bowman's collection of photographs was in great demand. Camera clubs, galleries, and museums in the United States and abroad sought his work. In 1940 and 1941, the Buffalo Museum of Science held solo exhibitions of Bowman's pictorial photographs, and distributed press releases such as this:

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<sup>186</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (8 February 1941), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>187</sup> Bowman, letter to A.B. Hecht, 3.

Special interest is created by this scenic collection because every photograph was "shot" with the garden variety of box camera such as beginners invariably start with. Looked on as a "child's" camera, most advanced amateurs look down their noses at box camera addicts, but the results that Mr. Bowman produces with his box bring forth envy and enthusiasm from all. All of which goes to prove that "it isn't the camera that counts but the man behind it."<sup>188</sup>

The exhibition of 1941 was well received by audiences. Matthew T. Gedge, a fellow amateur photographer from western New York, sent Bowman a letter of praise for his work. Gedge wrote, "The prints are very beautiful and an inspiration to we amateurs who are just beginning and trying so hard to reach the goal you have unknowingly set."<sup>189</sup> Publications such as the *Buffalo Evening News* also gave Bowman's work high marks. In the article, "One Man Show Shot With a Box Camera" (1941), the picture editor of the *Buffalo Evening News*, Fredrik Kosslow, referred to Bowman as "a master of counterlighting, of using the foreground object to contribute to his picture rather than distract from it, of viewing nature at her black-and-white best."<sup>190</sup> After the World's Fair, Bowman's work was exhibited at camera clubs and galleries throughout the United States. He even sold a print to the Ford Company that was turned into a mural and hung at one of Ford's plants.<sup>191</sup> By 1951, Bowman also had eight enlargements hanging in the New York State Museum in Albany.<sup>192</sup>

In the early 1940s, a collection of Bowman's photographs was on a world tour that lasted approximately two years. According to James A. Williamson of Jamestown's *Post-Journal*, when Bowman's prints returned from the tour, they probably bore "more stickers than Hitler has

<sup>188</sup> News Service from the Buffalo Museum of Science (4 August 1941), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>189</sup> Matthew T. Gedge, letter to Mr. John O. Bowman (8 September 1941), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>190</sup> Fredrik Kosslow, "One Man Show Shot With a Box Camera," *Buffalo Evening News* (16 August 1941): page unknown, clipping from the Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>191</sup> The identity of this print is unknown. Jack, "Candidly About Cameras," *The Erie Daily Times* (2 April 1940): page unknown.

<sup>192</sup> It is possible that these enlargements were reproductions of the photographic murals featured at the fair, but the identity of the images is unknown. Bowman, "You know I feel sorry for the chap who hasn't got a hobby" (1951), 3, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

medals and twice as deserved.”<sup>193</sup> In the article, “Box Camera Magician” (1946), Robert W. Brown of the Eastman editorial service mentioned that Bowman’s work was included among the permanent exhibitions at the famous Nordiska Museet, or Northern Museum, in Stockholm, Sweden.<sup>194</sup> Thus, Bowman had gained international respect as a photographer by the middle of the 1940s.

Furthermore, a large number of local and national publications highlighted Bowman’s accomplishments. While the *Christian Science Monitor* continued to showcase Bowman’s pictures, newspapers such as *National News Photo Weekly* (1940) and the *New York World-Telegram* (1943) featured his work in full-page spreads.<sup>195</sup> In 1942 and 1944, *Popular Photography* published two-page spreads of Bowman’s prints. By 1946, his images appeared in magazines such as *Comet*, *Think – IBM Magazine*, *Progress Magazine*, *True Magazine*, *Look*, and *Collier’s* magazine.<sup>196</sup> An article entitled “Seventy-Five Cent Magic,” which was an abbreviated version of the essay written by Robert W. Brown, was featured in the magazine *This Week* in 1946. This publication was distributed in newspapers across the United States, and cities such as Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Washington, D.C., and New York were introduced to Bowman’s photography.<sup>197</sup> Moreover, *U.S. Camera* featured Bowman’s work in addition to a write-up about him in 1946.<sup>198</sup> Many of the photographs that these newspapers and magazines published were reproductions of the prints that had been exhibited at the World’s Fair. Images such as *Tone Poem*, *The Clothes Line*, *Get Out of Here*, and *Thru the Hayrake Wheel* were included in the publications.

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<sup>193</sup> Thus far in my research, I have been unable to determine where in Europe Bowman’s work was exhibited. Williamson, page unknown.

<sup>194</sup> Brown, “Box Camera Magician,” *The Mayville Sentinel* (8 August 1946): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>195</sup> Bowman, list of achievements, date unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>196</sup> The dates that Bowman’s work was featured in these publications are not documented. Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Bowman, letter to Robert W. Brown (3 April 1946), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>198</sup> Bowman, list of achievements.

While Bowman was showered with attention from popular newspapers and magazines, he seems not to have received critical acclaim for his photography from fine art periodicals. Even though his work was displayed at the New York World's Fair, among other exhibitions held in the United States and abroad, art critics most likely considered Bowman to be an outsider for several reasons. Firstly, Bowman was a self-taught photographer who only used a simple box camera to take pictures. He also considered himself a Pictorialist throughout his career, and by the 1930s, this photographic approach was considered outmoded. Critics were mainly interested in the avant-garde, modern approaches to photography. They were often prejudiced against individuals such as Bowman who adopted photography as a hobby. Additionally, Bowman chose to remain in Chautauqua County throughout his life, and he never lived in major metropolitan art centers such as New York City. He also had no significant connections with art dealers or galleries that could have promoted and sold his work to fine art collectors. Despite the lack of critical attention that Bowman got, the general public admired his pictorial photographs not only because he produced them with a box camera, but also because they were pleasurable to look at and created a sense of nostalgia for viewers. Folks who lived in rural areas related to the images as well because the depictions of small town life were familiar to them.

Although Bowman was appreciative of the attention and praise he received from national publications, he was most proud of the acknowledgement that the Eastman Kodak Company gave him for his photography. After the Eastman Kodak store in New York City displayed Bowman's prints in 1940, he developed correspondence with the company. In 1942, he received a letter from Les Whittenberg, who worked in the sensitized good sales division of Eastman Kodak. Whittenberg expressed admiration for Bowman's photographs, but he also advised Bowman to use Eastman Super-XX film if he wanted to get "some real good shots on some real

good film."<sup>199</sup> However, Whittenberg admitted, "I am certainly pleased to see that the Box Brownie King is still on the ball."<sup>200</sup> Bowman was undoubtedly pleased to receive a compliment such as this from an employee of Eastman Kodak, but he continued to use a variety of film including Eastman Kodak and Agfa.

Bowman also developed a friendship with Brown between 1945 and 1946. Bowman looked to Brown for advice about his photography. He also corresponded with Brown about having a book of his prints published, but this idea never materialized.<sup>201</sup> In 1946, Brown focused on the life and photography of Bowman in the essay, "Box Camera Magician."<sup>202</sup> Bowman thought Brown offered a sincere description of Bowman and his work. In a letter written to Brown in 1945, Bowman wrote, "I do thank you for everything. I am glad that Eastman found me."<sup>203</sup>

Furthermore, Bowman developed a strong relationship with Mabel Scacheri, photography editor of the *New York World-Telegram*. After reading an article by Scacheri in 1941 about an amateur photographer who only used a box brownie to take incredible pictures, Bowman wrote a letter to her discussing his fondness for the box camera.<sup>204</sup> In 1943, Scacheri mentioned Bowman's work in the article, "City Has Unlimited Shots For the Box Camera Tyros":

In the file drawer of my desk I always keep a handful of prints by John O. Bowman of Mayville, N.Y. to exasperate visitors. Just let them get going about the incomparable merits of their collapsible reflex with the built-in self-winding composition calculator, and I show them the Bowman pictures.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Les Whittenberg, letter to John O. Bowman (19 June 1942), 1. Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Bowman, letter to Robert W. Brown (26 January 1945), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>202</sup> Brown's full story did not appear in the press until *The Mayville Sentinel* published it in August of 1946.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Bowman, letter to Mabel Scacheri (8 February 1941), 1.

<sup>205</sup> Mabel Scacheri, "City Has Unlimited Shots For the Box Camera Tyros," *New York World-Telegram* (14 October 1943): page unknown, clipping in the Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

Following Scacheri's acknowledgement of Bowman in her column, he continuously wrote to her to talk about his progress as a photographer and to seek guidance. He also sent her prints.

Scacheri was deeply impressed with Bowman's work. Within five years after she had been introduced to him and his photography, Scacheri referred to Bowman in the article, "Take It Easy," featured in *Collier's* magazine (1946) as "the undisputed box-camera champion of the universe."<sup>206</sup> Through this article, Scacheri hoped to convince audiences that they could take good pictures with a box camera. Thus, she cited Bowman as an amateur who used the simplest box camera to make pictures that had the power to "startle the photographic world."<sup>207</sup> Although Bowman's accomplishments were only discussed briefly in Scacheri's article, the title of "box-camera champion of the universe" stuck with him throughout the rest of his career. It also generated more interest in his work. Subsequently, Bowman was forever grateful to Scacheri for the recognition.

In 1947, Bowman spoke at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Salon of the Photographic Guild of Buffalo, held at the Albright Art Gallery, and served on the Jury of Selection at this salon.<sup>208</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Houck, Bowman expressed his appreciation for this opportunity.<sup>209</sup> He said, "It made the boy from the country beam all over when you selected him as one of your judges to fill the gap left by his friend Wilbur H. Porterfield being ill."<sup>210</sup>

Although Bowman's work was well received throughout the United States and abroad, Chautauqua County offered the greatest amount of support for his photography following the New York World's Fair. Beginning in the 1940s, Bowman's photographs and murals were

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<sup>206</sup> Scacheri, "Take it Easy," 32.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Bowman, list of achievements.

<sup>209</sup> I have been unable to find more information about Mrs. Houck.

<sup>210</sup> Bowman, letter to Mrs. Houck (29 April 1947), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

displayed at several local hotels and restaurants.<sup>211</sup> In 1944, thirteen 26 x 49 inch murals and one 40 x 50 inch mural hung in Gretchen's Kitchen, which was the main dining room of Samuel's Hotel in Jamestown, New York. According to Bowman, these murals gave him a great deal of publicity.<sup>212</sup> By 1951, Bowman had twenty-one big enlargements on display at the Town Club in Jamestown. He also had nine 16 x 20 inch murals and one 48 x 63 inch mural hanging at the Peacock Inn in Mayville, New York.<sup>213</sup> In reference to the murals, Bowman explains in his essay, "My Box Camera," "Hardly a day goes bye [sic] but someone speaks to me about how they love 'em [sic]."<sup>214</sup>

During the late 1940s, Bowman was asked to help promote the Chautauqua Region through his photography. In 1949, fifteen of Bowman's prints that featured the picturesque landscapes of Chautauqua County and people participating in leisure activities were included in a Vacation Land Brochure. In one of the panoramic shots, which is untitled (before 1949), Bowman captured three sailboats floating across Chautauqua Lake on a beautiful summer day (fig. 25).<sup>215</sup> The triangular sails of the boats stand erect against a sky filled with fluffy white clouds. The dark water contrasts dramatically with the white sails and clouds. Although Bowman emphasized horizontality in this image, the upright sails of the boats create a series of vertical and diagonal lines in the composition. Thus, Bowman created a sense of balance and serenity in this photograph in an effort to highlight the outstanding scenery and recreational activities that Chautauqua County had to offer tourists. In "My Box Camera," Bowman stated, "Twenty thousand of these booklets have been sent all over the country advertising our fairy [sic] land,

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<sup>211</sup> The identity of these images is unknown. I have been unable to determine if they are still in existence.

<sup>212</sup> I have not seen any reproductions of these prints. Bowman, "My Box Camera," 5.

<sup>213</sup> Bowman, "You know I feel sorry for the chap who hasn't got a hobby," 3.

<sup>214</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 5.

<sup>215</sup> Chautauqua County Board of Supervisors, Vacation Land Brochure-Chautauqua County (1949), page unknown, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

and I hear from so many folks."<sup>216</sup> In *Weston's Record*, a publication committed to the interests and hobbies of county officials throughout the country, Bowman's dedication to Chautauqua County was discussed. According to *Weston's Record*, despite the fame Bowman acquired as a result of his photography, he continued to "devote his greatest energy to furthering the interests of Chautauqua County."<sup>217</sup> Thus, he delighted in promoting the beauty of his home through his photographs.

After having his prints featured at the New York World's Fair in 1940, Bowman earned visibility in the United States and abroad as the "box-camera champion of the universe." Although Bowman had achieved success mainly because of the amount of time and effort he put into his photography, he truly believed that his friends had brought him where he was as an amateur by 1946. In a letter to his friend, Kay Stanley, Bowman expressed his appreciation for those who had helped boost his photographic career:

Yes, the camera magazines and papers have been good to me. But I lay it largely to my friends. You know life is sweet for the friends we have made. Without friends I just wouldn't want to be here or anywhere. And it[']s these friends who got Eastman interested in me, and then along came Collier's, Popular Photography, U.S. Camera, This Week, Progress, Buffalo-Courier-Express, the local papers and many trade-magazines who gave me write[-]ups with pictures.<sup>218</sup>

Bowman felt that if he surrounded himself with positive people who were successful in life, he, too, would find success. Each day, while Bowman was working at his desk at the county courthouse, he was inspired by the words he wrote on a piece of paper, "You know I like to be with winners. They do things." Even though he never bragged about it in personal writings or letters to friends, Bowman was a winner himself. He was proud of his many accomplishments as

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<sup>216</sup> Bowman, "My Box Camera," 5.

<sup>217</sup> "Cultivate Your Hobby Like a Beautiful Garden," *Weston's Record* 27, no. 1 (1950): 1. Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>218</sup> Bowman, letter to Kay Stanley (5 September 1946), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

a photographer, but he took the most pleasure in sharing them with those friends who had helped him along the way.

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## Conclusion

Think big. Work hard. Have a dream. When you meet a man without a smile, give him one. All flowers of tomorrow are seeds of today. Some men grow, others swell.

—John O.

Bowman<sup>219</sup>

Despite the attention he received in the United States and abroad as a result of his solo exhibition at the New York World's Fair in 1940, Bowman remained an amateur regionalist artist, albeit a highly successful one, throughout the rest of his life. Although Bowman received widespread popular attention during the 1940s, his photography never achieved the widespread critical acclaim it deserved. In relation to the fine art photographers who moved to major art centers such as New York City and embraced more avant-garde approaches to the medium, Bowman was undoubtedly viewed as an outsider. He was a self-taught photographer who used the simplest of equipment to take pictures of the natural landscape. He also referred to himself as a pictorialist, and by the 1930s, this photographic approach was considered old-fashioned. Furthermore, Bowman chose to live in the small town of Jamestown, New York instead of moving to a large city to pursue his photographic career, and he never developed relationships with major art dealers or galleries that could have promoted and sold his work.<sup>220</sup>

However, general audiences expressed a deep admiration for Bowman's photography for the same reasons that art critics overlooked it. Viewers were impressed with the fact that Bowman was an accomplished, self-taught photographer. They were also taken with the beautiful, harmonious compositions that he could produce with a basic box camera. Additionally, Bowman's pictorial photographs were popular because they provided folks with a sense of nostalgia for a simpler, more peaceful time in life. People who lived outside of metropolitan

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<sup>219</sup> Bowman, letter to Gene Roberts (9 January 1968), 1, Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives.

<sup>220</sup> Although Bowman sold some of his prints, he never earned enough money to make a living from his photography.

areas related to his prints because they depicted scenes and moments that they witnessed or experienced on a daily basis.

Bowman was pleased with the popular attention that his photography received during the 1930s and 1940s. The lack of critical interest in Bowman's work did not destroy his high spirits. In 1945, however, he expressed his frustrations about the art world to Scacheri:

My other pal Dan Muller who lives in Wisconsin is the Cowboy artist who was brought up by Buffalo Bill...He says I will go far with my talent in making still life breathe and live, but that real art is not appreciated, and that one must pass on to win fame. A truly unjust world. Folks will scamper to an exhibit of so called "Modern Art" that is hardly understandable and rave about something they know nothing of, but it[']s fashionable and smart to rave, but for the legitimate pictures that have true art in them the American people know nothing.<sup>221</sup>

It is clear Bowman was aware of the modern photography that critics classified as "real art," yet he remained loyal to his pictorialist vision because he felt that it was the most effective way to "interpret nature to those who might not otherwise see it."<sup>222</sup> He also believed that the photography he produced was "true art" regardless of what certain art critics and audiences had to say about it. Given the high number of articles written about Bowman and the numerous solo exhibitions of his work held during the 1930s and 1940s, there were many people who believed that his photography was significant.

Although Bowman continued to take pictures throughout the rest of his life, nationwide interest in his work waned during the 1950s. Yet, Bowman's photography remained popular in Chautauqua County because he produced images that truly captured the beauty of the area's natural surroundings. People in the region regarded Bowman as an artist and respected his photographic talent. Upon his death in 1977, his family donated over 8,000 images to the Chautauqua County Historical Society. Because of a lack of exhibition space and funding,

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<sup>221</sup> John O. Bowman, letter to Mable Scacheri (6 January 1945), 2, Patterson Library Archives.

<sup>222</sup> Bowman, letter to Ed Hannigan (7 August 1946), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

Bowman's work is rarely displayed at the James McClurg Mansion, which is the headquarters of the Chautauqua County Historical Society. However, in the winter of 2006, the Chautauqua County Historical Society newsletter, *Timelines*, published a two-page spread entitled "John O. Bowman: Undisputed Box-Camera Champion of the Universe," which featured a sample of Bowman's pictorial depictions of common laborers working in the fields of Chautauqua County. In the article, the Director of the historical society, James O'Brien, referred to Bowman as a "remarkable genius," and described his collection of photographs as "one of the Society's most valuable assets."<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, twenty of Bowman's photographs from the Bowman Collection were displayed in an informal exhibition during the past year at the Chautauqua County Courthouse in Mayville, New York, which is where Bowman worked for more than forty years. In March of 2007, they were taken down because the facility underwent renovations. Thus, until recently, citizens who conducted business at the courthouse had the opportunity to view a sample of Bowman's prints. Outside of those involved with the Chautauqua County Historical Society and the Chautauqua County Courthouse, though, very few people in the region are familiar with Bowman and his accomplishments as a photographer.

While a handful of brief synopses have been written about Bowman in the past thirty years, this is the first comprehensive art historical study of the man's life and photographic work. In this thesis, I examined Bowman's distinctive pictorialist vision and emphasized the significant contributions that he made to the history of twentieth-century photography. I also endeavored to reveal Bowman's wisdom, charm, optimism, and endearing sense of humor through this thesis. Although Bowman was proud of his accomplishments, he was modest about his photographic success. In a letter to his friend, Kay Stanley, he humbly described his talent:

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<sup>223</sup> Chautauqua County Historical Society, "John O. Bowman: Undisputed Box-Camera Champion of the Universe," *Timelines: The Newsletter of the Chautauqua County Historical Society* (Winter 2006): 4-5.

You know I'm nothing but a common garden variety of picture-snapper, with nothing but good pictures; no frills, hickies or gadgets; no arguments, jealousies or ill feelings towards anybody. I just take pictures for the love of it, and when we love a thing [,] we are generally good to it. I have no ambitions towards the high-geered [*sic*] technicalities of photography and know nothing about them. I am happy in my simple box camera way, and folks seem to like it.<sup>224</sup>

After closely examining Bowman's life, work, and personal writings, it is evident that his passion for photography was far greater than that of the average amateur, and it remained strong throughout the rest of his life. Although it was generally believed by the 1930s and 1940s that anybody could take pictures with a box camera, Bowman (fig. 26) proved through his pictorial photography of the Chautauqua Lake Region that nobody could use a 616 Hawkeye quite like him.

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<sup>224</sup> Bowman, letter to Kay Stanley (5 September 1946), 1, Patterson Library Archives.

### Chronology of Bowman's Life and Photographic Work

- 1884 Bowman born in Jamestown, NY.
- 1914 Bowman received two degrees from the Jamestown Business College.
- 1916 Bowman enlisted in Company E, 74<sup>th</sup> Infantry.
- 1917 Bowman fought on the frontlines of World War I in France and Belgium.
- 1919 Bowman employed by Chautauqua County to serve as auditor, purchasing agent, and deputy county clerk.
- 1936 Bowman purchased his first box camera.  
He began referring to himself as a Pictorialist photographer.
- 1938 Bowman joined the Westfield and Jamestown Camera Clubs.  
He sold approximately eighty prints to the *Christian Science Monitor*.  
He was a prizewinner in the Newspaper National Snapshot Award for *Tone Poem*.  
*Tone Poem* exhibited at the *Washington Evening Star's* building in Washington, D.C.
- 1939 A solo show featuring twenty-one of Bowman's prints held at Lynch Camera Shop in Erie, PA.  
Eight of Bowman's mural prints displayed at the New York World's Fair in the New York State Building.
- 1939 Bowman's prints exhibited at Kelly's Studio in Erie, PA.  
Prints displayed at the Metropolitan Camera Club, the New York Central Camera Club, and several other clubs in greater New York and Long Island.  
Upon the request of the Photographic Society of America, his traveling collection of ninety-nine prints displayed at the New York World's Fair in the Hall of Industry and Metals.  
Bowman received prize from the *Pittsburgh Press* for *Sunday Afternoon*.  
His print, *Shadows and Angles*, was included in the Fourth Annual Salon of the Photographic Guild and hung in the Albright Art Gallery.  
Buffalo Museum of Science held solo exhibition of Bowman's prints.  
*National News Photo Weekly* featured Bowman's work in full-page spread.
- 1940 Buffalo Museum of Science held second solo exhibition of Bowman's prints.
- 1942 *Popular Photography* published two-page spread of Bowman's prints.
- 1943 *New York World-Telegram* featured Bowman's work in full-page spread.
- 1944 *Popular Photography* published two-page spread of Bowman's prints.
- 1946 Bowman's images appear in *Comet*, *Think - IBM Magazine*, *Progress Magazine*, *True Magazine*, *Look*, *Collier's*, and *U.S. Camera*.  
Robert W. Brown of the Eastman Kodak Company wrote the article, "Seventy-Five Cent Magic," which was featured in the national magazine *This Week*.  
Bowman referred to as "the undisputed box-camera champion of the universe" in *Collier's*.
- 1947 Bowman spoke at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Salon of the Photographic Guild of Buffalo, and served on the Jury of Selection.
- 1949 Fifteen of Bowman's prints featured in the Vacation Land Brochure - Chautauqua County.
- 1951 Eight of Bowman's enlargements hung at the New York State Museum in Albany.
- 1977 Bowman dies in Jamestown, NY.  
Over 8,000 images donated to the Chautauqua County Historical Society by Bowman's Family.
- 2006 Twenty of Bowman's prints displayed at the Chautauqua County Courthouse in Mayville, NY.

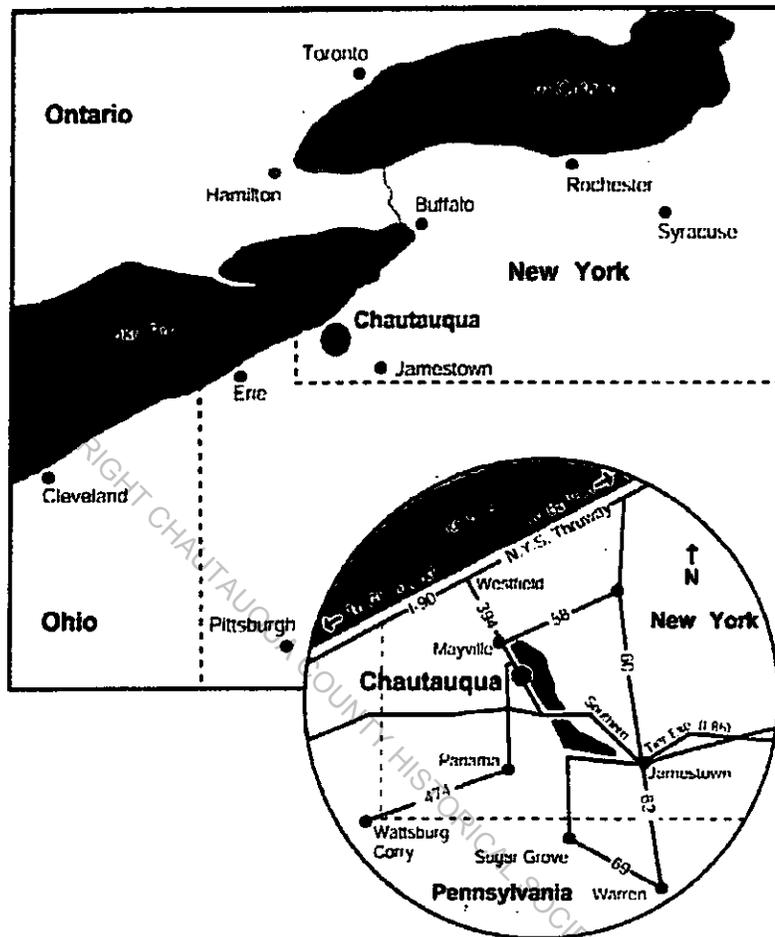


Figure 1  
Map of the Chautauqua Lake Region

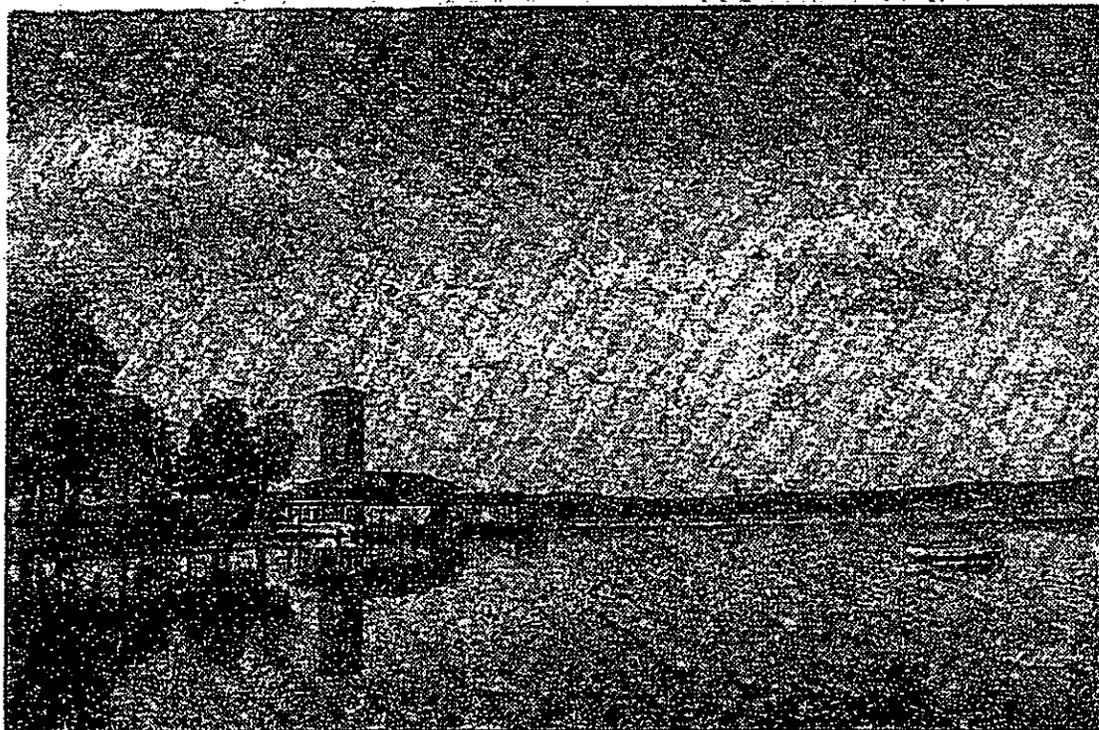


Figure 2  
John O. Bowman, untitled (Miller Memorial Bell Tower), date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Patterson Library Archives  
Published in the *Christian Science Monitor*, date unknown

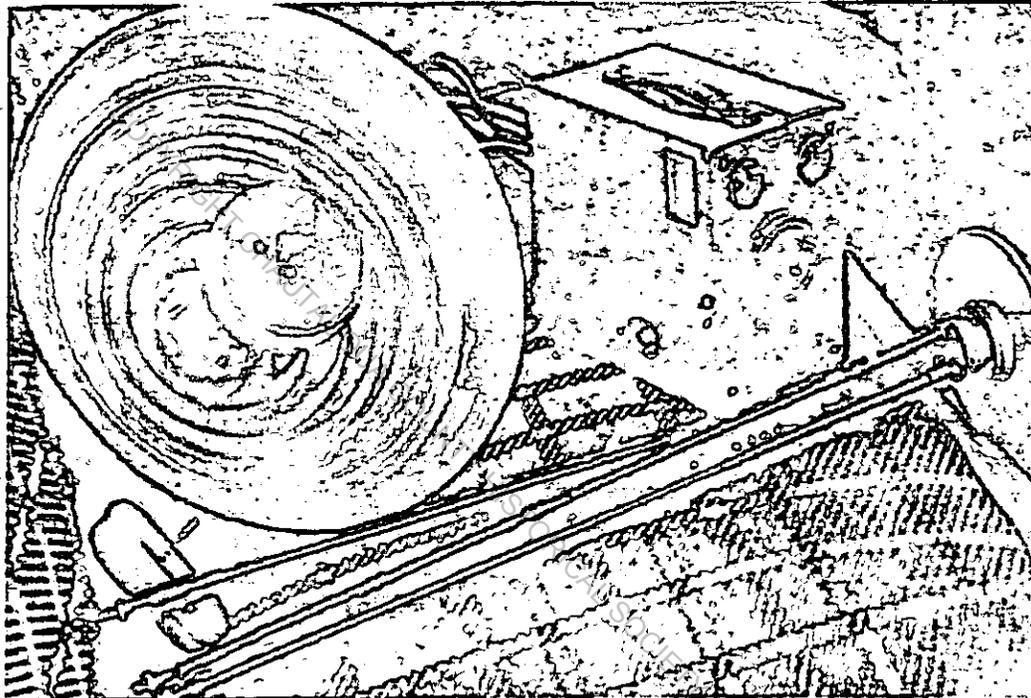
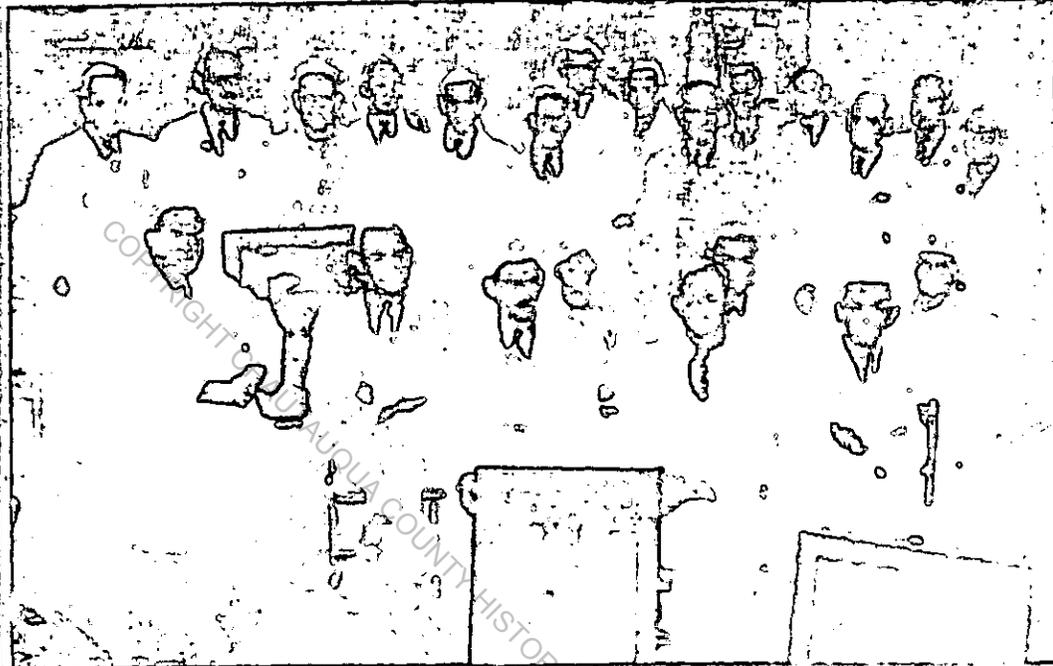


Figure 4  
Photographer unknown, "John O. Bowman's 616 Brownie box camera, tripod,  
photoflood bulb, and reflector" (caption), 1946  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives  
Published in the *Buffalo Courier-Express*, 14 July 1946

**WESTFIELD CAMERA CLUB POSES FOR ITS PICTURE**



Westfield's picture snappers looked into the lens of the OBSERVER reporter's camera after they had meeting and here is the result. The members from left to right seated are: Harry M. Eaton, Everett Allen, Kephik Eaton, Edw. E. T. Judd, I. Robert Oake, Lester A. Graf, Charles V. Flagg, president; Mr. Grace Maho. Standing: George C. Latta, F. X. Dettlerwach, Rt. Russell McLaren, Alfred Randall, F. W. Bedford, John Alexander, James Valone, Joseph B. Wertz, Robert McLaren, William F. Oake, Clyde Halliday, Edward A. Maho, Vance Haggood, John Bowman, E. F. Judd.

**Figure 5**  
 Photographer unknown, "Westfield Camera Club Poses For Its Picture" (caption), 1938  
 Gelatin silver print  
 Dimensions unknown  
 Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives  
 Published in the *Dunkirk Evening Observer*, 20 January 1938

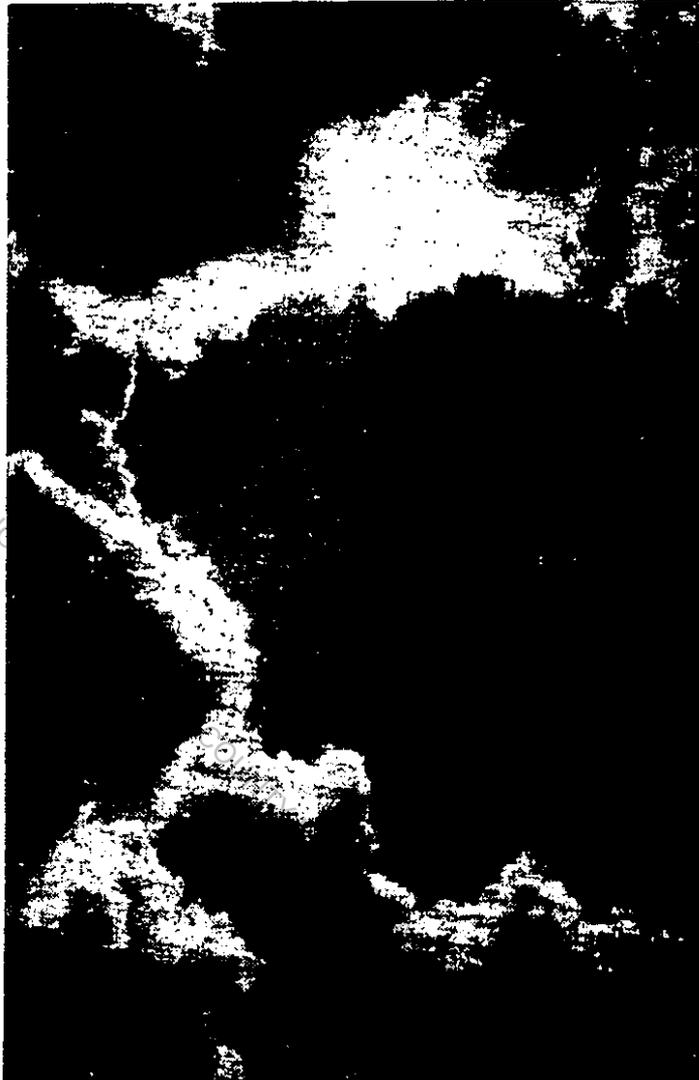


Figure 6  
John O. Bowman, *A Cloud Study*, 1938  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Patterson Library Archives  
Published in the *Christian Science Monitor*, 2 February 1938



Figure 7  
John O. Bowman, *Tone Poem*, before 1938  
Gelatin silver print  
4 ½ x 2 ¾ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives



Figure 8  
Photographer unknown, *John O. Bowman*, date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
5 1/2 x 10 inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

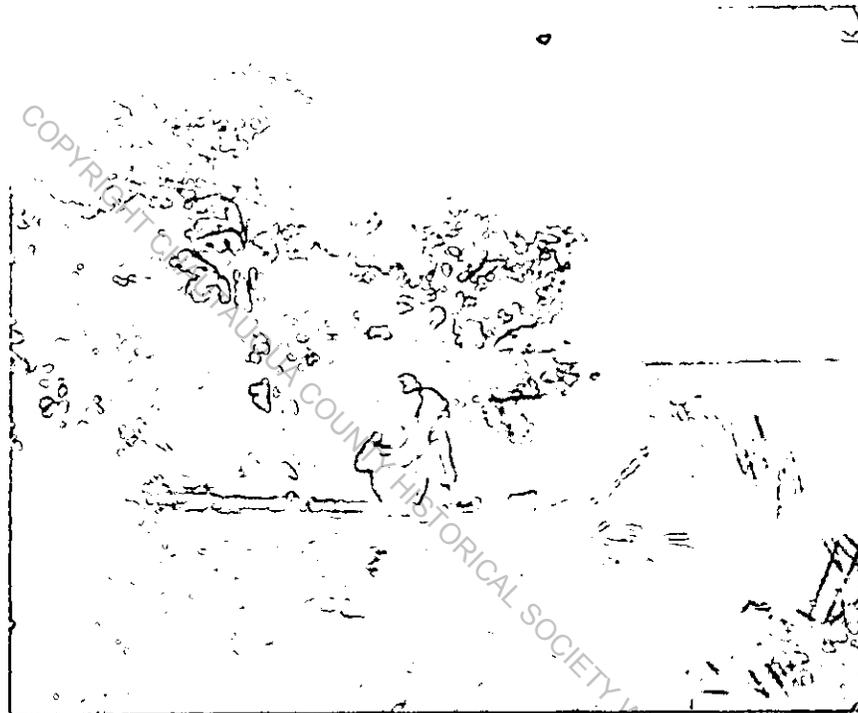


Figure 9  
Peter Henry Emerson, *Throwing the Cast Net, Norfolk Broads, ca. 1886*  
Platinum print  
9 7/8 x 11 1/2 inches  
George Eastman House, International Center of Photography



Figure 10  
Alfred Stieglitz, *Winter on Fifth Avenue*, 1892  
Gelatin silver print  
15 ¼ x 12 7/8 inches  
George Eastman House, International Center of Photography



Figure 11  
John O. Bowman, untitled (Country Road), before 1946  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauqua County Historical Society  
Published in *U.S. Camera*, 1946



Figure 12  
John O. Bowman, *Snow Scene*, before 1946  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives  
Published in the *Buffalo Courier-Express*, 14 July 1946

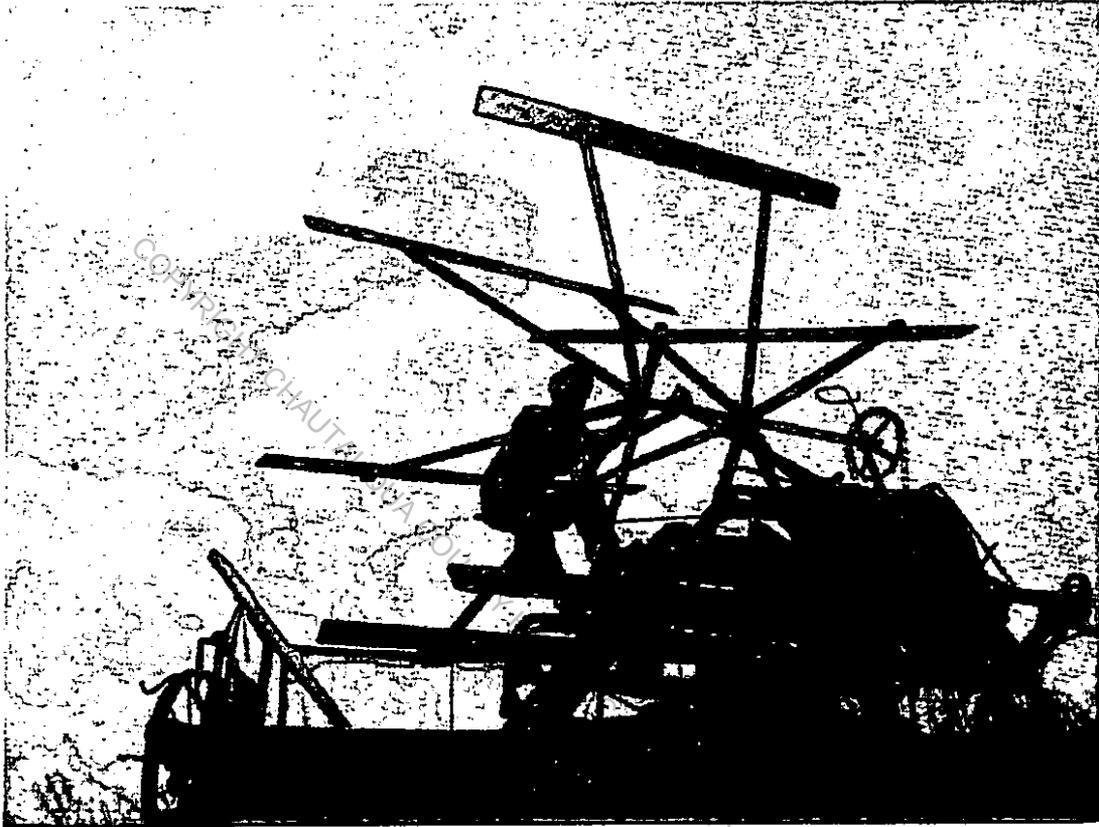


Figure 13  
John O. Bowman, *Veteran of the Field*, before 1951  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauque County Historical Society Archives  
Published in *American Photography*, August 1951



Figure 14  
Paul Strand, *Wall Street*, 1916  
Photogravure  
7 1/8 x 4 1/2 inches  
Aperture Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive



Figure 15  
Alfred Stieglitz, *Equivalent*, 1927  
Gelatin silver print  
3 7/12 x 4 7/12 inches  
George Eastman House, International Center of Photography

WESTFIELD, NY 2012

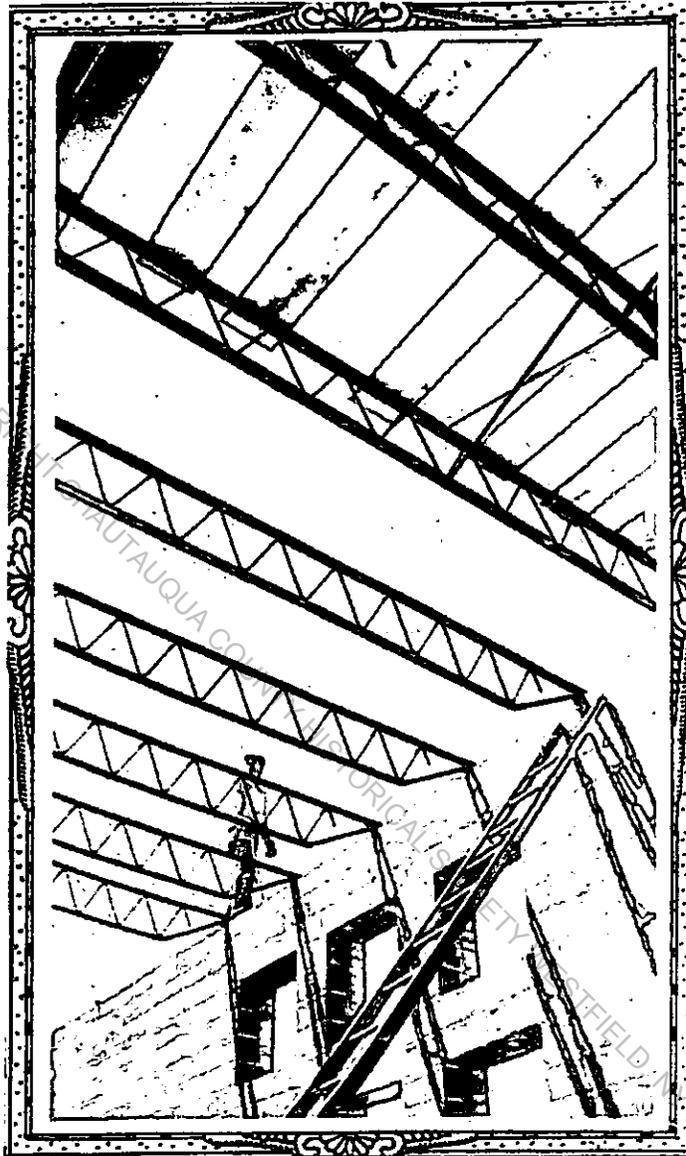


Figure 16  
John O. Bowman, *Things To Be Done*, date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
4 ½ x 2 ¾ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

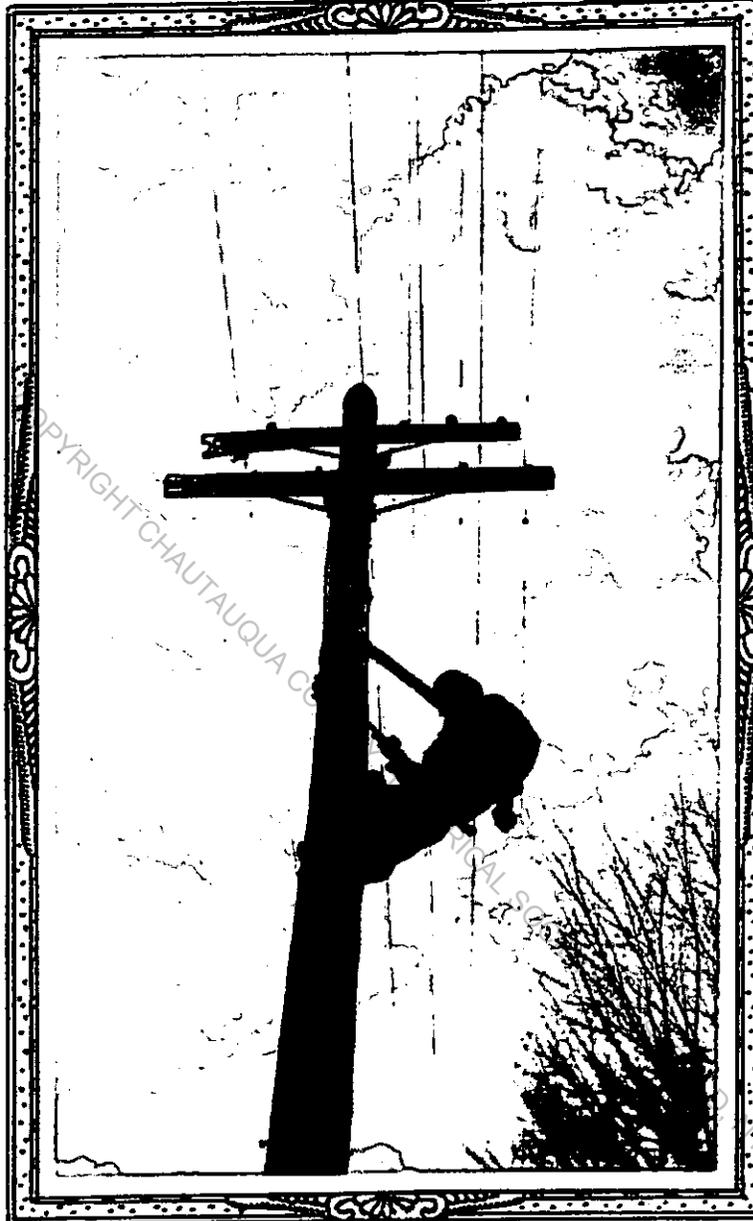


Figure 17  
John O. Bowman, *The Lineman*, date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
4 ¼ x 2 ½ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

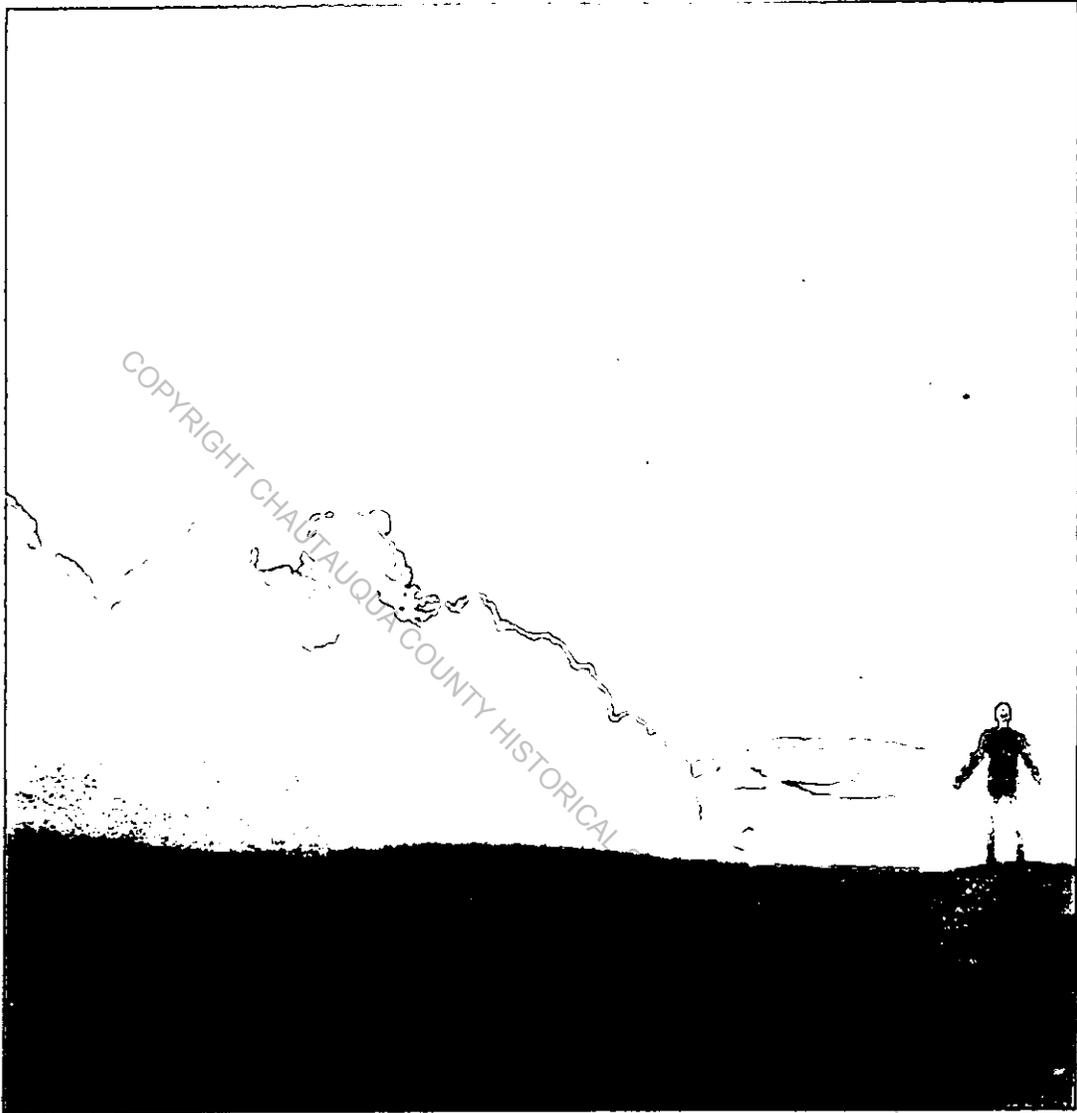


Figure 18  
John O. Bowman, *Little Man*, before 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives  
Published in the *Photography Annual*, 1952



Figure 19  
John O. Bowman, untitled (Aerial Shot, Cloud Scene), date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
2 3/8 x 4 1/8 inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

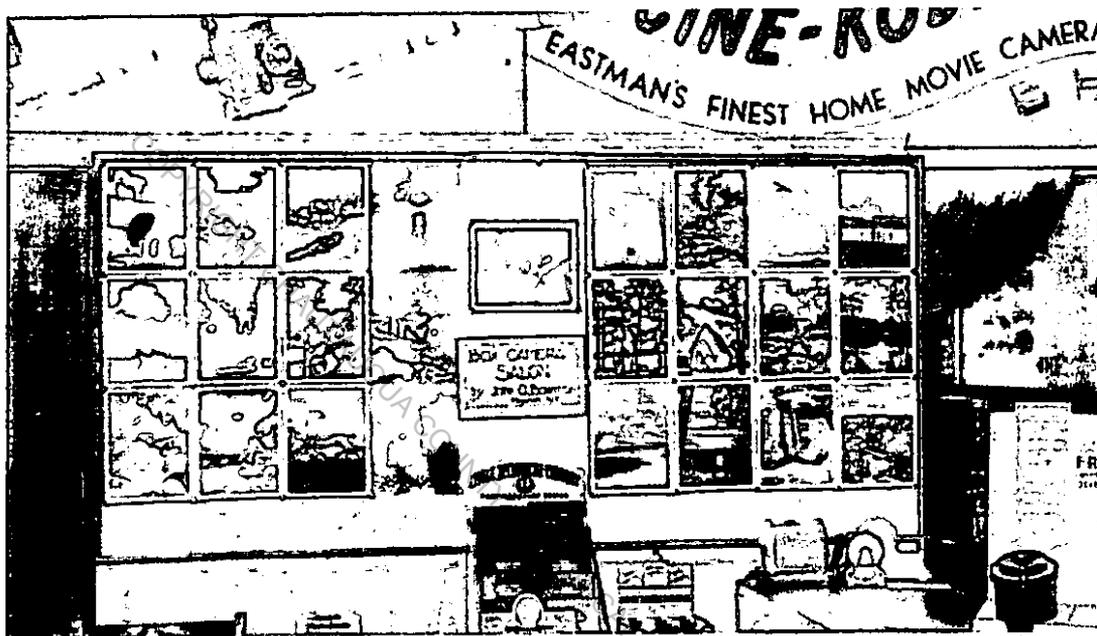


Figure 20  
John O. Bowman, *New York City* – 1940, 1940  
Gelatin silver print  
5 ½ x 10 inches  
Chautauque County Historical Society Archives

CHAUTAUQUE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY WESTFIELD, NY 2012



Figure 21  
John O. Bowman, *On the Big Inlet*, before 1940  
Gelatin silver print  
4 ½ x 2 ¾ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives



Figure 22  
John O. Bowman, *The Clothes Line*, before 1940  
Gelatin silver print  
2 ½ x 4 ¼ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

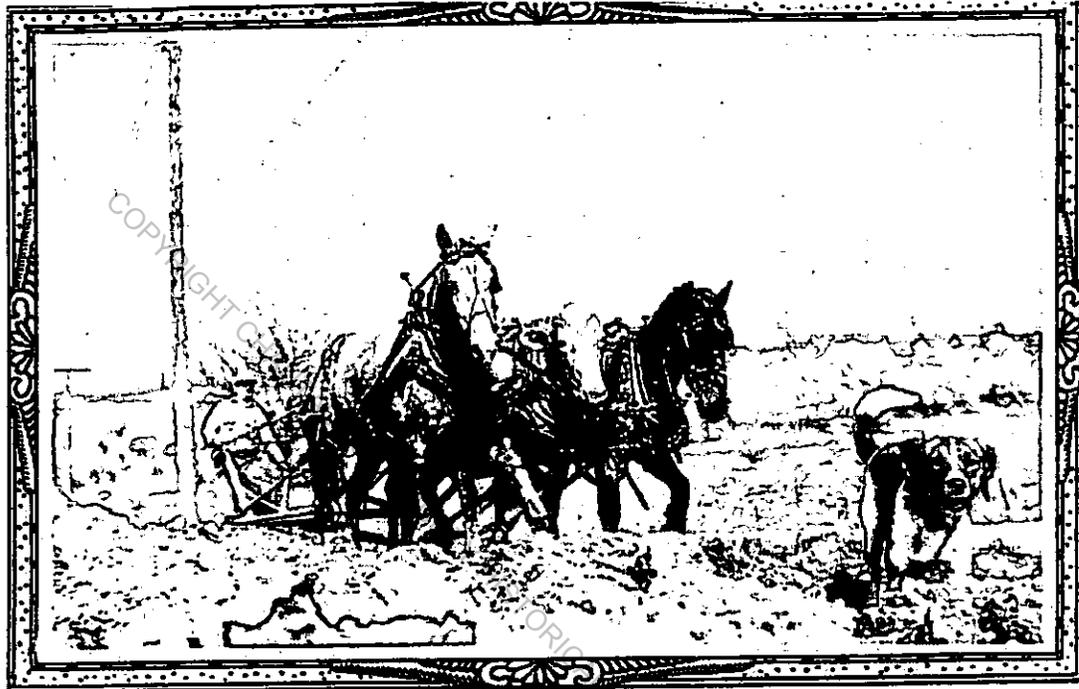


Figure 23  
John O. Bowman, *Get Out of Here*, before 1940  
Gelatin silver print  
2 ½ x 4 ¼ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

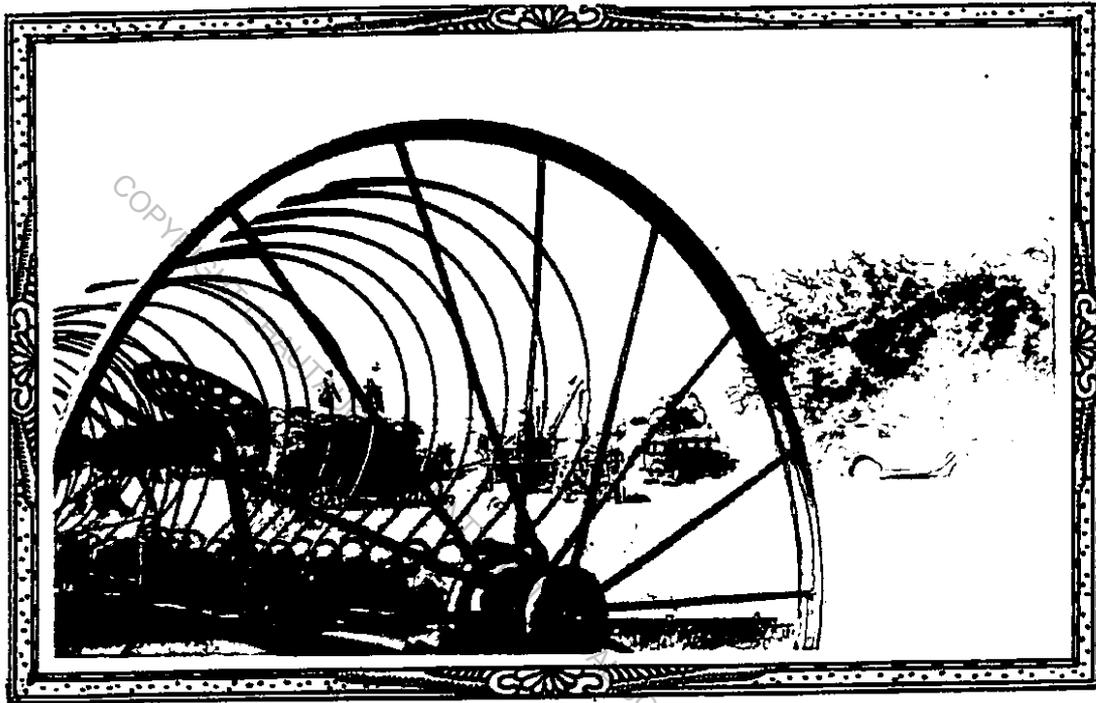


Figure 24  
John O. Bowman, *Thru the Hayrake Wheel*, before 1940  
Gelatin silver print  
2 ½ x 4 ¼ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

SOCIETY WESTFIELD, NY 2012

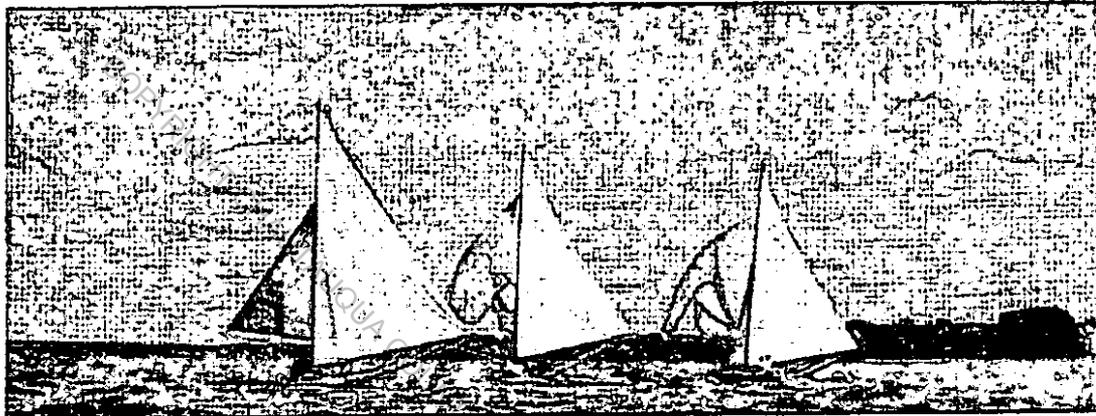


Figure 25  
John O. Bowman, untitled (Three Sailboats), before 1949  
Gelatin silver print  
Dimensions unknown  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives  
Published in the Vacation Land Brochure - Chautauqua County, 1949



Figure 26  
Photographer unknown, untitled (Bowman With His Box Camera), date unknown  
Gelatin silver print  
4 ½ x 2 ¾ inches  
Chautauqua County Historical Society Archives

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