We Sagebrush Folks:
Excerpts from a photographic reconsideration by
Alexis Pike
Outdoors

Then we see the canal. There is something spiritually beautiful about placid water. It gathers unto itself every bit of light and color of the sky, and it lies there smiling, like a lovely woman dreaming, awake, of her lover. It always grips my heart to see water like that. There is some ecstasy of which I am capable that I have never experienced, and perhaps never may experience, and placid water reminds me of it, without revealing what it might be. It is, even so, though it lack fulfillment, a beauty almost too great to be borne.

We Sagebrush Folks

Excerpts from a photographic reconsideration by ALEXIS PIKE

"This body of work is inspired by the book We Sagebrush Folks, a memoir written by Annie Pike Greenwood, detailing her time spent in an early Southern Idaho farming community from 1906-1928. The Greenwoods, along with other families, migrated to Idaho because of the allure of the Carey Act of 1894. This land grant program encouraged settlement of federally owned arid lands that may have had the potential to become prosperous farms with the development of irrigation systems. The Carey Act thrived on promotional propaganda, suggesting that fields of sagebrush could magically be transformed into irrigated Edens; it was a farmer's gold rush—enticing dreamers to move to wilderness regions. Greenwood's book explores these dreams of cultivation, the hope of prosperity, and the difficult reality of trying to harness a landscape to suit the needs of the farmer. The book is an eclectic personal journey, calling on Greenwood's experiences as a mother, wife, and educator.

"My imagery acts as a verse of bittersweet optimism, exploring the culmination between the conventional and the sublime. Annie Pike Greenwood formed an acceptance of how the two balanced one another in this paradox of a place she considered to be the last frontier. She writes in her final chapter, 'It was not right that we should fail, Charley and I, and yet it was right. It was not our just reward, but it was our best reward. There is a saying among the sagebrush farmers that the first settlers clear and plow the land for those who are to own it.' One hundred years later, I've been retracing Annie's steps, creating a photographic survey of the Snake River Plain where We Sagebrush Folks are still striving to turn the desert into a promised land." —ALEXIS PIKE

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outside wall, a mile long, from protesting infants. I seem to be the only woman there without a baby. Oh, rather, my baby is in possession of a club as big as himself and is walking briskly in the rear of the army of hunters. I see his red sweater now and again as I peer ahead.

We come at last to a level field of wheat, cropped to the ground by the rabbits. I see the men making their next-to-the-last drive into the pen in the center of the far fence. It is all over, thanks be! when Rhoda and I arrive at that point, but the odor from previous rabbit-hunts is proverbial. The men drive the next field, and then we all become aware that darkness has fallen. A short distance up the road is the farm-house where Hen Turner and his wife live. We all move in that direction, as it is there that the ice-cream is to be served. Charity decides to go back after Sagebrush Lix, where we left her moping beside Jerome Canz, and Rhoda and I go into the yard surrounding the house. It is now so dark that we cannot discern the features of a face three feet away. I decide to rest on a piece of lava rock which has been placed under a tree.

You cannot appreciate what a tree means until you have lived in this treeless desert country. I well remember the first time my young children ever saw fully grown trees. Little Charles was looking out of the train window as we drew slowly into Salt Lake City. We passed close to some big trees. Excited and awe-struck, Charles pointed out of the window and asked, "Mama, what are those things?" It took me some moments to understand that he meant just big trees.

Trees always seem to me so compassionate. As I lean my head back against the trunk of this tree, which with a few of its fellows makes an oasis in this part of our desert, I gain a sense of calm detachment which is heightened by the obscurity of the night. Out of my cave of darkness, in which I have become a dryly part of the peoples' trunk, I can see the jovial group around the lanterns that is set on a table beside the ice-cream freezers. Two busy women are...
Outdoors

canon lava masonry, chorusing weirdly together and somehow adding to the savage beauty of the whole.

And at the same time with these impressions of the present and the past, my mind goes ahead in where the patient farm tends to my coming—so glad when I shall take them the guns of separated milk from the kitchen... several paws, washed and kept sacred to them... they will all drink together, five dogs, fourteen cats, and Pretty, the magpie. And how good bed will feel! And are we really going to lose the farm?

We saw into deep and peaceful as though there were no troubles awaiting any of us in this uncertain world. Toward morning the farmer will wake and lie there, eyes still closed, having what he calls "paradise." Delia... Delia... have so many them... what is it all leading to? Not God Almighty Himself could not live the life of mortal man, happily, without some higher being to rest upon. We must have faith that all is ultimately well. I did not know that then. I was still struggling, still determined to trust only in myself, still trying to reshape the pattern of my life, which I thought had been fated out of symmetry.

Poor Charley lay there every dawn, having parables ofdebt, mortgages, nothing ahead but more debts, more mortgages. I had ever with me the sense that I was not where I belonged, which was false. We are always where we belong. When we have done the best that can be done with one environment, either we will no longer desire to leave it, or it will be rolled away from us like a painted scene upon a stage. But Charley's dilemma was worse than mine. You cannot say that debts and mortgages are right, because they are not right. No man can stand up and look the world in the eye when he owes money that he cannot pay and can see no prospect of paying. It is a form of dishonesty which is the core of a real man, for whom it is so often involuntary.

Charley was a brilliant man in the wrong place, for brilliancy
We Sagebrush Folks

Then it happened. One day, when the last brush was stacked on
the rack and Charley was about to climb onto the lead, where Walter
already awaited him, there was no little red-coated baby. Not any­
where was he to be seen, although Charley climbed high on the lead
and looked all around, as far as his eye could see. And then he began
calling... calling... calling... Suddenly Walter burst into
heart-recking sobs.

Down from the lead Charley lowered himself. Then he began
circling the wagon, ever a little wider and a little wider. It seemed
appalling that a baby could be swallowed up like that, but there was
not a sign of little Charles. It was growing dark, and unless they
could find him soon, the cowardly coyote would make him pray.
That skulking wild dog-wolf would not fear to attack a baby.

And then Charley saw the little red coat gleaming in patches
through the thick, tall, dark-gray brush... Charles! They did not
tell me at once; they were too shaken by the experience. Even when
I knew, the canal was still my greatest fear.

I loved Idaho. I loved the vast, unspoiled wilderness, the fabulous
sunsets, lakes of gold, and the dreamy, purple mountains that ap­
peared in the sky along their rims; and when these gradually dimmed
and vanished, a million stars in the dark-blue sky—a million stars,
seen at a breath.

It was not all beautiful. Idaho's wild winds raged for days at a
time, lifting the earth in great clouds of dust. Fields were literally
transferred by the power of those winds, some of the land having
to be sown over again. On everything within the house lay a thick
gray powder, like that on a moth's wings exaggerated ten thousand
times. Hair was transformed to dust color, eyebrows shielded with
it, skin thickly stamed, eyes red and shining, with grins.

The soul of the desert, I used to think that wind, making its last
protest against being tamed. Through my kitchen window I could
see an enormous cloud of dust pass, two pairs of horses' ears just

Credits

We Sagebrush Folks by Annie Pike Greenwood was first published
in 1934 by D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., and was
reprinted in 1988 by University of Idaho Press. The 1988 reprint
includes a foreword and afterword by Jo Ann Ruckman, and an
introduction by Susan H. Swetnam. Images of pages from the
book which have been altered by the artist and reproduced here,
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Images

Front cover: Idaho Falls Dam. Inside panel 1: Milner Dam Canal;
WSF page 247. Panel 2, clockwise from upper left: Tree by Greenwood
Homestead; Lava Lamp; Hagerman Bluff; WSF page 254. Panel 3,
clockwise from upper left: Irrigation Geyser; Johnny, Bliss Idaho;
Red Bush at Milner Dam; Woman Crying in Print. Panel 4, clockwise
from top: Fort Hall Kids in Truck; WSF page 269; Crates. Left exterior
panel: Sagebrush in Eden; Kasota Farm. This panel, clockwise from
upper left: WSF page 26; Twin Falls Snake River Canyon;
Arco Irrigation Pipe.
To receive a paper or digital copy of the prospectus for the postal address listed above. Deadline for entries is June 15th; no application fees are required, although artists accepted will be responsible for shipping costs. If you are not a Facebooker you may be placed on our direct e-mail list by sending a request to earleswope@gmail.com.

Idaho Book Artists Guild (iBag) currently inhabits Suite 295 of the Northrup Building of the 8th Street Marketplace conglomeration of buildings in Boise. The space was awarded to the group after applying via Boise City's Artist in Residence (AIR) program. iBag moved into the space mid-March, and held a well-attended April First Thursday.

The cavernous space is actually a grouping of offices on the second floor of the old brick and heavy timber converted warehouse. The space is composed of six offices linked by two lobby areas. The group has divided the areas into four public studio spaces, a general area with guest book and snacks, a private studio, a book arts interactive area where both guests and familiars may leave their creative contributions in a lovely blank book. The desk is covered with stacks and piles of old editions of the ICB newsletter. The space still needs to be filled with desk flanked by two directors chairs. The desk is covered with works influenced or created by Tom, including James Castle facsimiles and various catalogs; discarded Starbucks coffee cups, and walls displaying his writings and writings about him. The space still needs to be filled with editions of the ICB newsletter. The residency is open to the public on First Thursdays from 5 - 9 pm and every Saturday from 12 - 5 pm. Photos and additional information are available on the iBag Facebook page (search Facebook groups for “Idaho Book Artists Guild.”)

iBag to this point has primarily been a Boise book artists' group. The availability of this space allows the guild to reach out to book artists throughout the state, with a call to Idaho book artists. Any artists' books created by Idaho book artists (regardless of theme or creation date) are eligible. A full prospectus is available on the Facebook page. The deadline for entries is June 15th; no application fees are required, although artists accepted will be responsible for shipping costs. If you are not a Facebooker you may be placed on our direct e-mail list by sending a request to earleswope@gmail.com.

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* Book, construed to include all forms of written language.