



We Sagebrush Folks:

Excerpts from a photographic reconsideration by

ALEXIS PIKE



Since we have not murdered a single bunny, we cannot have the face to hang around, hoping for a cone—or something that warms you up instead of cooling you down. We therefore start off, only to discover that our boy Joe is missing. Trust Joe for smelling out where the ice-cream may be. Rhoda is despatched to retrieve him before he can disgrace the family by accepting a cone. Joe stows himself in the car, very downcast during the necessary scolding. I cannot help feeling a little sympathy for him. It is a fearful trial to be dragged away from any spot where ice-cream cones are about to be given away. Such events make up the tragedy of childhood.

We continue to the east through miles of sagebrush. It is growing deeply dusk, and the lights of Sagebrush Liz refuse to work. She seems to have used up all her energy in pulling up that ghastly hill, when she dug her claws in the ruts and snorted like a dragon. It is like adding insult to injury to expect her to show a lively glow after having been given such exhausting drudgery. It would be like making a poet cook the breakfast and then demanding of her a poem, after she had burnt the bacon and her fingers too. I never thought of Sagebrush Liz as temperamental, but that must be the reason she refuses to light up.

We turn a delicious curve and start on the road for home. It is cool—cool almost to shivering, but as calm as a sleeping babe. The sage is black blobs on a background almost as dark. 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 fulfilment, a beauty almost too great to be borne.

Almost five miles to the farm-house with the toothpick-pillared porch. When we arrive there, we see from our hill that the cars are just leaving the Brooke ranch. They move like fireflies over the darkness of the valley, and there is the peculiar sweet smell, which no

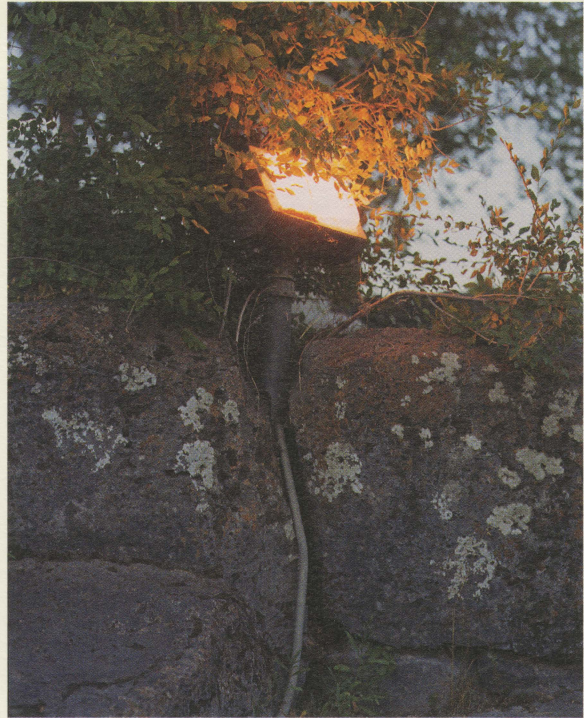
We Sagebrush Folks

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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We Sagebrush Folks

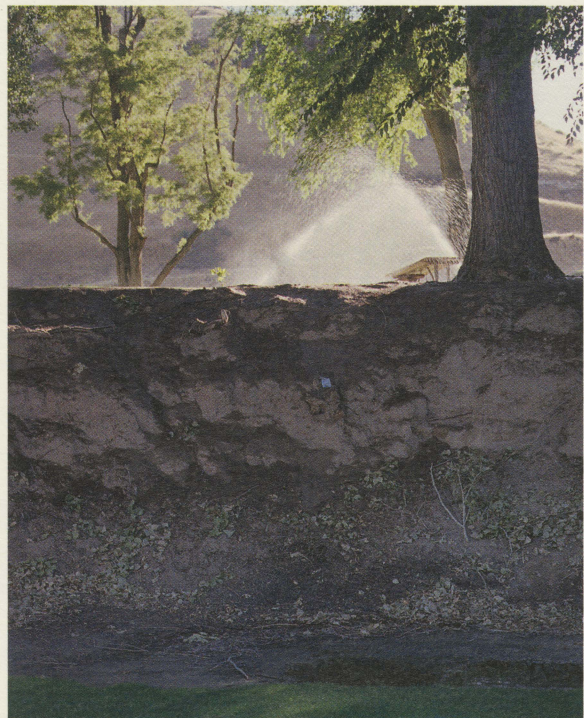
continuous wail, a mile long, from protesting infants. I seem to be the only woman there without a baby. Or, rather, my baby is in possession of a club as big as himself and is walking briskly in the rear of the army of hunters. I see his red sweater now and again as I peer ahead.

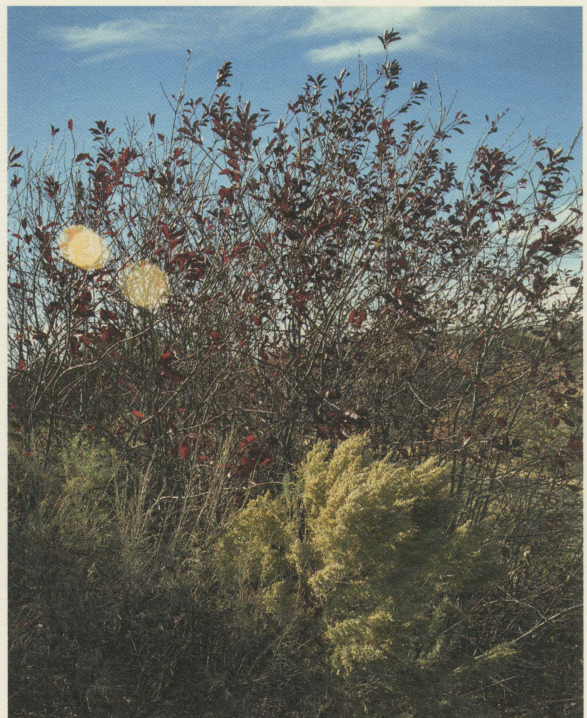
We come at last to a level field of wheat, cropped to the ground by the rabbits. I can see the men making their next-to-the-last drive into the pen in the corner of the far fence. It is all over, thanks be when Rhoda and I arrive at that point, but the odor from previous rabbit-hunts is prostrating. 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. Charley decides to go back after Sagebrush Liz, where we left her napping beside Jerome Canal, 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 dryad part of the poplar's trunk, I can see the jovial group around the lantern that is set on a table beside the ice-cream freezers. Two busy women are







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cañon 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 to where the patient farm pets await my coming—so glad when I shall take them the pans of separated milk from the kitchen . . . several pans, washed and kept sacred to them . . . they will all drink together, five dogs, fourteen cats, and Pretty, the magic. And how good bed will feel! And are we really going to lose the farm?



We sink into sleep as deep and peaceful as though there were no troubles awaiting any of us in this uncertain world. Toward morning the Baron will wake and lie there, eyes still closed, having what he calls "parades." Debts . . . debts . . . how to meet them . . . what is it all leading to? No! 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 forced out of symmetry.

Poor Charley lay there every dawn, having parades of debts, 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 torture to 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 load, where Walter already awaited him, there was no little red-coated baby. Not anywhere was he to be seen, although Charley climbed high on the load and looked all around, as far as eye could see. And then he began calling . . . calling . . . calling . . . Suddenly Walter burst into heart-racking sobs.

Down from the load 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 prey. 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 appeared 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 dun color, eyebrows shelved with it, skin thickly coated, eyes red and smarting, teeth gritty.

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**

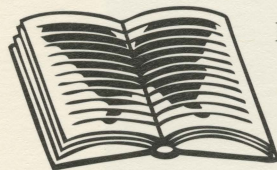
We Sagebrush Folks by Annie Pike Greenwood was first published in 1934 by D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., and was reprinted in 1988 by University of Idaho Press. The 1988 reprint includes a foreword and afterword by Jo Ann Ruckman, and an introduction by Susan H. Swetnam. Images of pages from the book which have been altered by the artist and reproduced here, are reproduced with thanks to all stakeholders. All photographs are copyright Alexis Pike, 2012.

Images

Front cover: Idaho Falls Dam. Inside panel 1: Milner Dam Canal; WSF page 24.7. 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.

Idaho Center for the Book* newsletter

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Idaho Booker's Dozen 2013 Call for Entries

To receive a paper or digital copy of the prospectus for Idaho Booker's Dozen 2013, email your request to IdahoCenterfortheBook@boisestate.edu; or contact us at the postal address listed above. Deadline for entries is September 14, 2012; no entry fee.

Idaho Book Artists Guild Initiates Residency, Invites Submission of Works for Exhibition

The 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 reading room and a Tom Trusky tribute area. Three of the studio spaces are used to conduct free book arts workshops on First Thursdays. The fourth studio is an interactive area where both guests and familiars may leave their creative contributions in a lovely blank book created by Marilyn Frasier. Covering an entire wall of this studio space is a Boise City water distribution map and a DOD map of Northern Europe, which are open to anybody's artistic manipulation; somebody has already divided Boise into three areas inhabited by Greeks, Romans and Philistines. The Reading Room is filled with artists' books, catalogs and book arts manuals. The concept for the space was unabashedly stolen from Tom Sowden and Lucy May Schofield of Bristol, England who created something very

similar a few years ago. The Reading Room is filled with comfortable chairs, end tables and eclectic reading lamps. The room allows the visitor to sit, study and enjoy the book arts. The Tom Trusky tribute alcove houses a large 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 stacks and piles of old 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. —Earle Swope



150th Anniversary,
Greenland Public Library
Service: Poet, teacher,
editor, and hymnist
Rasmus Berthelsen is
depicted in Training
College Library.
(Greenland, 1980.)

correspondence

Responses to 2011: Year of Idaho Food

Judy Austin writes, "As an historian (retired from the Idaho State Historical Society), I would add two books: Mark Kurlansky's **The Food of a Younger Land** (Riverhead Books/Penguin, 2009) in which Kurlansky draws from the Federal Writers Project's manuscripts on food and foodways, collected during the Depression and never used before; and Molly Wizenberg's **A Homemade Life** (Simon and Schuster, 2009), about her own life with food (she's also the author of the wonderful blog *Orangette*). Great books, both—with plenty of recipes as well as narratives, in Kurlansky's case from all over the country. ...I discovered Kurlansky after hearing him speak at the American Society for Environmental History's annual meeting...Both are fascinating books, oddly parallel—that is, Wizenberg's story could in some ways be a segment of Kurlansky's book."

And contributor VM adds, "I forgot to include the wonderful **Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden** (Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1987.) The book is narrated by a Hidatsa Sioux woman, Maxi'diwiac (Buffalo Bird Woman) who lived and farmed in the Missouri River valley, circa 1839 - 1932. Anthropologist Gilbert Livingstone Wilson gathered and edited the account in 1917, which describes traditional agricultural practices of the Hidatsa, crop selection and rotation, cooking, food preservation, and cultural practices. The book is sophisticated and enlightening; it provides useful information for the garden, sustainable living practices, and a whole new perspective on who the agrarian Native Americans were and are."