Lange later described her impressions as she walked into [Roy] Stryker’s office for the first time, during the summer after she began working for the FSA: “You speak of organization; I didn’t find any. You speak of work plans; I didn’t find any. I didn’t find any economics professor. I didn’t find any of those things. I found a little office, tucked away, in a hot muggy summer, where nobody especially knew exactly what he was going to do or how he was going to do it. And this is no criticism, because you walked into an atmosphere of a very special kind of freedom.” It was this quality of freedom and the sense of responsibility shared by the staff—a responsibility to themselves as photographers, to the people they photographed, and to all those who would ever see their work—that enabled them to make photographs of lasting power.

*Dorothea Lange and the Documentary Tradition*, Karin Becker Ohrn, pgs 51-52
There is no attempt to conceal her apparatus, Miss Lange merely appears to take as little interest in the proceedings around her as is possible. She looks at no individual directly, and soon she becomes one of the familiar elements of her surroundings. Her subjects become unaware of her presence. Her method, as she describes it, is to act as if she possessed the power to become invisible to those around her. This mental attitude enables her to completely ignore those who might resent her presence.

Perhaps we can arrive at a better evaluation of her work in terms of a future observer than as contemporary critics. We ourselves are too poignantly involved in the turmoil of present life. Much of it is stupid, confused, violent, some little of it is significant, all of it is of the most immediate concern to everyone living today—we have no time for the records, ourselves living and dying in the recording.

We can assume the role of the future critic by looking back to the work of Matthew Brady, who in the dawn of photography made a heroic record of another crisis in American life. Brady and Lange have both made significant use of their common medium—they differ mainly in terms of the technical advancement of the medium itself. Lange can photograph the split-seconds of the dynamic surges about her—Brady, carrying a complete darkroom about with him on the northern battlefields of the Civil War, sensitizing his own plates before each shot, making twenty-minute exposures, had to wait for the ample lulls between engagements. The implications of his record are retrospective, the scene after the battle, the dead that were once living, the ruins that were once forts, faces still and relaxed. Both Lange and Brady share the passionate desire to show posterity the mixture of futility and hope, of heroism and stupidity, greatness and banality that are the concomitants of man’s struggle forward.

Willard Van Dyke in an article on Lange for Camera Craft, October, 1934

She was engaged in propaganda photography, yes, but she reasoned there was nothing wrong with it in this case. She knew conscientious people had to draw a fine line when it came to propaganda: “Everything is propaganda for what you believe in, isn’t it? I don’t see that it could be otherwise. The harder and the more deeply you believe in anything, the more in a sense you’re a propagandist… But at any rate, that’s what the OWI [Office of War Information] was.”

For me documentary photography is less a matter of subject and more a matter of approach. The important thing is not what’s photographed but how… My own approach is based on three considerations.

First—hands off! Whatever I photograph, I do not molest or tamper with or arrange. Second—a sense of place. Whatever I photograph, I try to picture as part of its surroundings, as having roots. Third—a sense of time. Whatever I photograph, I try to show as having its position in the past or present, But beyond these three things, the only thing I keep in mind is that—well there it is, that quotation pinned up on my darkroom door.

It was the passage from Francis Bacon: “The contemplation of things as they are, without error or confusion, without substitution or imposture, is in itself a nobler thing than a whole harvest of invention.”

I find that it has become instinctive, habitual, necessary, to group photographs. I used to think in terms of single photographs, the bulls-eye technique. No more.

A photographic statement is more what I reach for. Therefore these pairs, like a sentence of 2 words.

Here we can express the relationships, equivalents, progressions, contradictions, positives, negatives, etc. etc. Our medium is peculiarly geared to this. (I am just beginning to understand it.)
Your comments here (#3 WA County Museum)

Amazing photos!

Wondrous example of early sewing techniques!

Fabulous exhibits—Squeaks & D. Lange—very well done—best place here.

Fascinating photos. Such humanity, expressive faces. Fascinating and interesting photos!

I hope someone could find similar subjects in these times. Thanks!

I remember these days—no weight problems.

Such rich photography—can’t beat black & white—such expressive people. I was drawn to the condition of their feet, shoes, clothing, cars & shoes. I think we have a hard time now.

Thank you for sharing such wonderful photos with us. What a reminder of our history.

Dorothea Lange in Oregon
Your Comments.

This is a very poignant exhibit of historic photography. Reminds me of life on the farm at Cooper Mtn... 

Marta de Leon

Great Pictures of a terrible period of our nation's history.

M. Garvey

My mother was one of the "Okie" who migrated to Oregon from Oklahoma in the 1930s. Her mother carried the family sewing machine on her lap all the way. Scared imagines the poverty, the despair, yet the hope in the human spirit to "keep on, keep on." Thanks for this glimpse of a desperate time.

I find it fascinating to look into the faces of people who lived in a world less dominated by mass media. In contemporary America we are so accustomed to the camera's lens that we unconsciously adopt photogenic poses - with or without a photographer. Here the posing is minimal or nonexistent, which lends to a sort of candid with the viewer. I really like it.

I really like historic stuff.

I applaud your efforts to make this possible. I will spread the word.

[Signature]
A wonderful exhibit! Both of the quilts and paintings in Pictures is the 1930s at

I wish the captions were placed adjacent to the pictures so we go up and also could read without bending.

6/28/10
What a wonderful exhibit! Great Job!
Macy Yoder

7/1/10
The photographs are amazing. They make me want to go to Japan. The quilts are beautiful, too.

7/9/10
1. Would like to see a map on the regional tags.
2. Did the photographer call Japanese farmers.

7/11/10
It's very wonderful for me and all to see so many of D. Lang's prints in one room. Thank you!

7/15/10
Very well done exhibit.

8/13/10 So cool! I loved it.

8/13/10 Totally killer dude! @

8/13/10 The art is very interesting! First time at a place like this. Glad I came. It was good.
August 16, 2010 - Beautifully presented magnificent photography.

June 27, 2010 - Reality. Thank you.

Where are all the Chinese / Japanese Farm Family?

Great pictures and Great History Lesson.

Thank you for helping us to see how fortunate we are today.

Very moving exhibit.

Great pictures. Would have loved to have had the descriptions between rows of pictures... easier to read.

Keep up good work.

July 22, 2010

What a privilege to see such stunning prints.

Thank you.

Kay Griswold

Haunting photos, beautifully printed, a wonderful history. Jim Yasutomi.

Great insight of this time period and the people.

Nina Pollock 7/23/10

Wonderful exhibit. Such great insight into the times of these people.

Debby Volkwein 7/23/10

Wonderful collection - privilege to see these photos.
July 29th - Grew up in Pendleton County - This exhibit brings back lots of memories.
July 29th - We talk about their recession as being so bad - we have nothing to complain about.

August 3 - Very interesting. It gave me a feeling of warmth (Holly).

Aug 6 - Thank you for sharing. It’s a reminder of strong people and bad times.

Aug 6 - Let’s stop complaining about hard times.

Our families are these people who made our strong America.

It is cool.

Beautiful work by Dorothy Lang... see into their lives...

8/18/10 Interesting text/position of exhibits! The colorful parts of the B&W photos of Dorothy Lang...

Very cool and I loved quilting.

8/19/10 Quilting is cool.
8-19-2010

I love quilts... really, I do. Absolutely magnificent museum you've got here.

— PCC History

I was directed here by the Sandy Historical Society to see the quilting exhibit—yep!!

Yes, the quilt display is nice—

But the memories of the 30's are incredibly poignant to those of us in our 50's. Materials goods were more rare and life was hard but the interpersonal relationships were much more common and lots more frequent than we see today.

Fabulous, down to earth! Jen, age 58.

Both large photos of the quilts show it just AHH! And we groaned...
Hi, I'm Reagan and I am 13 years old. I love your FREE patch quilts! I can't wait to get home and start.

August 21, 2010

I've learned about quilts before and wanted to try, now I can!.

August 21, 2010

There are a lot of cool quilts here. And a lot of pictures of where I grew up from.

August 23, 2010

I love the olden pics.

August 23, 2010

It's a wonderful exhibit!

5/25

I've been looking at D. Lange prints for years. Read two books about her, and never knew she photographed for the FSA in Oregon. Some great images! Many thanks for mounting the exhibit. Awesome! Many thanks.

<And we think we have it tough!!>

Wow. Be thankful.
September 1st -
This is so fun! Never had such a good time at a museum!
-Nicole, Cindy & Julia

Wonderful photos. Keep up the great work here.

Just Amazing Photography Amazing!
Wonderful exhibit!! Love the pictures!

I really enjoyed the photographs brought back salat of memories!

Thanks, I just love this exhibit. My mother picked Hpaa in Silvanon, OK.

Great show. Thanks for entering it.

I'm so glad this place is here its Wonderful

9/11/10 Lori from Tulsa

The pictures are cool. From Ireland

9/11.10

Excellent photography! It really expresses how the people must have been feeling.
I love it! Thank you & keep up the fabulous work! Cherisse from Hillsboro room & raised ("
I love it so much!

Love the display, but picture info is hung too low!

Yes, agree - can't read info

9-11-10
Wonderful photographs. Thank you.
(like the large format)

9-11-10 GREAT PHOTOS — THANKS
I would have moved TOP PHOTOS UP
about 1/2 in. LOWERED BOTTOM ONES
a little to make room for the captions,
which are too low.

This is a wonderful black & white photo display.
However, unless you are sitting in a chair or play
on the floor, it is difficult impossible to read the captions.
Plese place above suggestion. The captions should be
between the pictures.

9-13-2010 Wonderful & revealing photos. I'm
glad took time to really look —

9-21-2010 GREAT PICTURES! I would have
like to have seeing circled dates
on the picture information.

Very cool museum!

9-24-10 Very thoughtful providing exhibit of historical Oregon.
Compared to these farmers and homesteads, we don't have
it so bad after all! Enjoyed the write here — will come back.
May 4th, 1972

Gretchen's exhibit but too much repeated package.

Thank you for being it to Wash. Co.

10-5 Very moving experience—to see how close + real was Dorothea Lange's work—and how strong the human spirit when up against a very thin line. Important history + heritage especially the comment in the market.

This is a wonderful exhibition of Oregon history. I'm glad I happened upon it.
Thank you to everyone who put it together.

Anna (Richardson)

What an exciting show—Well put together and informative. Thank you, Nancy.

I think it's pretty cool how people washed things in the old day!

Gretchen, age 9!

10-13-10. I have admired Dorothea Lange's work for years. She had a wonderful eye for catching the human experience.

I am also struck by how history is repeating itself. Now, unemployment and poverty are huge issues once again.

May common good prevail so people can have jobs and homes once again. Amen.

0-13 Enjoyed photos very much. I would have liked the date (year) on placard and placards hung higher up.