

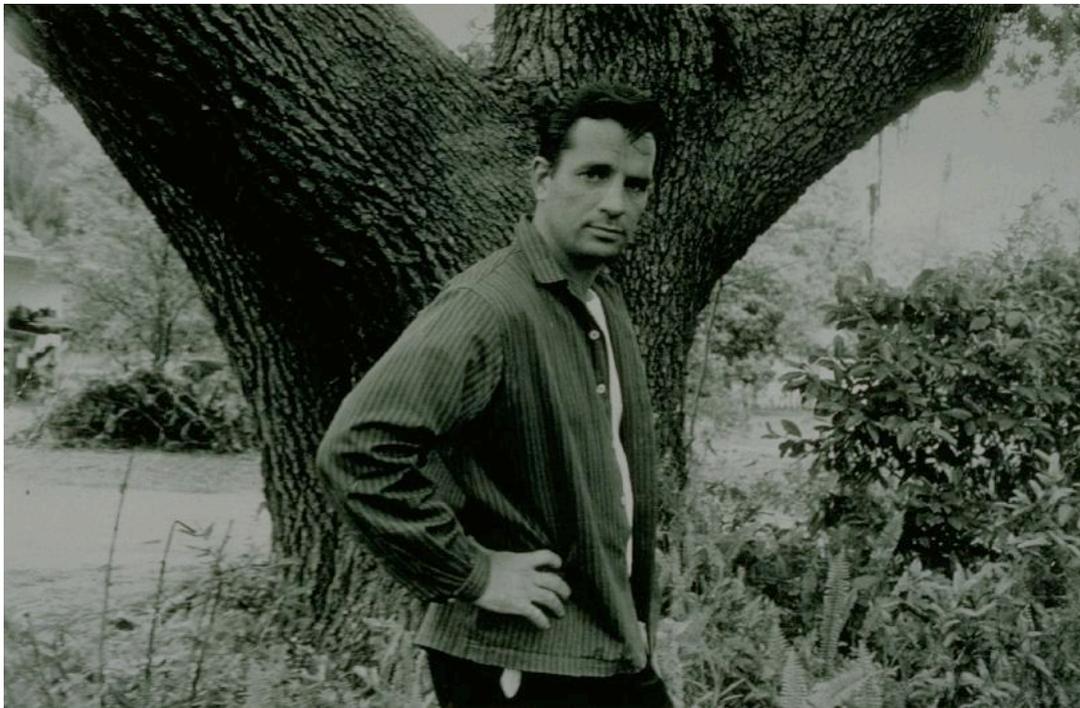
The Sandor Family Collection

Robert Frank: A Collector's Personal View

Richard L. Sandor

Photography Collector

That crazy feeling in America when the sun is hot on the streets and music comes out of the jukebox or from a nearly funeral that's what Robert Frank has captured in the tremendous photographs taken as he traveled on the road around practically forty-eight states in an old used car (on Guggenheim Fellowship) and with the agility, mystery, genius, sadness and strange secrecy of a shadow photographed scenes that have never been seen on film.



Jack Kerouac, *The Americans*

ELLEN AND RICHARD SANDOR

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I grew up in Brooklyn, New York in the fifties, with a father who loved vaudeville and movies and a mother whose memories of her wealthy upbringing in Antwerp and finishing school in Brighton, England seemed to dominate our home. I left New York after completing Brooklyn College, got married and moved to Minnesota to study economics, This was followed by six years of living in Berkeley while teaching at the University of California. My wife Ellen, my two daughters Julie and Penya, and I then moved to Chicago where we have lived since that time. I didn't know it at the time but all of these personal experiences explain both my passion for Robert Frank and the particular images which are in the Sandor Family Collection.

Robert Frank was an outsider. He lived in a country that was neutral during World War II, the son of Jewish parents. Frank began studying photography at eighteen. His teachers were Bauhaus trained but he appears to have been heavily influenced by Jakob Tuggeneer, a Swiss artist that used sequence photographs in his work, He was admired by Frank for his unsentimental view of his country.

When we moved to Chicago in 1972 my wife went to graduate school at the School of the Art Institute. She was always fascinated by all things new which has lead her to pioneer virtual photography. Ellen started out in sculpture and was advised by Professor James Zanzi. I vividly remember his arriving at our apartment all prepared to cook us a catfish dinner. That was the beginning of

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a friendship that has lasted well over thirty years. Jim suggested I start taking photographs and study the field. Its fun being a student and this began to dominate my interest. Ellen could innovate as an artist and I could focus on attempting to grasp the history of photography. It turned out to be a great partnership that would help form the Sandor Family Collection.

This history of photography seemed very accessible. It had a clear beginning in 1839 with the work of Fox Talbot and Daguerre. It also appeared to be in its final stages of black and white during the 1970's. I endlessly looked at photography books and tried to view as many images as possible. The first photograph in the collection was Walker Evans Plantation at Belle Grove. Other earlier acquisitions were photographs from Bill Brandt's the English at Home as well as images by Man Ray, Kertész and Southworth and Hawes. Collecting occurred at a furious pace with no apparent theme.

In 1982, I bought "The History of Photography" from 1839 to the present. completely revised and enlarged edition by Beaumont Newhall. The last chapter was entitled New Directions. Among those featured prominently in this chapter was Robert Frank, along with Siskind, Callahan, Winnogrand, Arbus and others. That naturally led to reading "The Americans". It all began to fall into place. History and exhibition. Ironically, the last chapter perhaps should have been titled something like the beginning of the end. It became clearer to me after Ellen pointed the collection toward Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman that a structural change was taking place.

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Robert Frank emigrated to America in 1947. He spent his early years as a very successful photojournalist for *Harper's Bazaar* as well as freelancing. In a 1950 Ford he spent 1955/56 tirelessly shooting 500 roles of film. He was indefatigable. (New Orleans Trolley). Frank used a Leica to document Americana as it never had been seen before. Popular images of parades, politicians, bars and Hollywood were among the many photographs. The flag intermittently reminds us of his mission. These images were eventually published in Paris in the book entitled "Les Americans" It was subsequently published in American to almost universally bad reviews. It was seen as unsentimental, loose and casual: focusing on the sordid and neglected. My reaction, "Fantastic" He most admired Walker Evans and Bill Brandt. You can see it all in this work. It is an incredible narrative of America during the fifties.

On a personal note the images in the collection may or may not be icons but more importantly represent personal experience. Brooklyn candy stores and Rock and Roll concerts. rodeo's in New York City, time spent in seedy bars with fellow graduate students, visions conjured up by my mothers sometimes bittersweet memories of England and the personally unfulfilled dreams of my father as an entertainer. What better way than art to stir the memories of early life.

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