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Review of Wyoming Time and Again: Rephotographing the Scenes of J. E. Stimson

Phil Roberts

University of Wyoming, philr@uwyo.edu

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Wyoming Time and Again: Rephotographing the Scenes of J. E. Stimson. By Michael A. Amundsen. Boulder: Pruett Publishing Company, 1991. Appendices, bibliography, index. 225 pp. \$24.95.

From 1889 until his death in 1952, J. E. Stimson photographed Wyoming scenes. A year after he died, the state of Wyoming purchased the 7526 photographs, many of which were 8" x 10" glassplate negatives. Although he seems less well known, Stimson was to Wyoming photography what Solomon Butcher was in Nebraska or L. A. Huffman was in eastern Montana.

Michael Amundsen, in this unique approach to Stimson's photographs, rephotographed some 150 sites from exactly the same angle as Stimson had done eighty years earlier. The results are reproduced on the page opposite the original Stimson photographs. The descriptive titles to the photographs provide significant historical information.

The scenes in which human made objects appear are the most interesting because it is here where the passage of time has brought the greatest changes. Generally, the Stimson photographs seem more empty of human intervention than those rephotographed by Amundsen years later. But there are some surprising exceptions. Stimson's views of Sheridan County coal camps chronicle intense activity while the same sites reproduced from Amundsen photographs show little evidence of humans having ever occupied any of the sites. So much for the permanence of human imprint on the environment.

Main street scenes of several county seat towns demonstrate the opposite result. Stimson's dusty, nearly deserted streets of Newcastle and Worland in the first decade of the century are now shown as bustling, car-lined, paved centers of commerce. In some cases, the scenes are so radically different that it takes careful viewing to see that Amundsen was being true to the Stimson original by shooting the same scene from the same angle.

The book is divided into three sections: the natural landscape, the forgotten past, and the dynamic townscape. The most disappointing section is the first. Stimson's originals seem little more than tourist vistas although the photographs appear to be sharply focused and nicely composed. Amundsen's rephotographs in this section might have easily been done at the same time Stimson made his pictures. As Amundsen admits, here he was attempting to show that "man's impact on the environment is slight." (p. 207).

The book is a dynamic demonstration of how photographs can be used to raise important questions about human impact on the environment, how the prosperity in a boom-

and-bust economy is often illusory, and how technology has changed the built world. The book is important, not only for its unique methodology but to remind the reader that "progress" might not always be long-lasting or desirable.

PHIL ROBERTS
Department of History
University of Wyoming