

August 8

Dear Laura -

I omitted questionnaire & included article in rough. Would you check it for facts, anything you want added or omitted etc & mail it back to me. I will leave here the morning of August 24 if you can gear the P.O. to that schedule, or write please forward. Here the address is Summer Ants Program, Goddard College Plainfield, Vt. 05667.

If you want to give the editor a choice of 2 photos OK. Otherwise please include one you think goes with article plus the one of you.

I hope we have better luck this time. I will write the editor that we'll be a little late but to count on us.

Many Thanks & best wishes

Lilly

To look forward to Canyon de Chelly
book - when? Where to buy?

Laura Gilpin, Photographer

Laura Gilpin is a photographer in the documentary tradition. The fact that she is an eighty-six year old photographer is interesting to you, possibly, but not to her. Nor is the fact that she happens to be a woman photographer, of any special concern to her. It is for her the way she has always made her living, beginning under the tutelage of Clarence White and Gertrude Kasebier. Her first New York show was in 1924. After travel to Europe and to Yucatan, the Library of Congress purchased forty two of the resulting prints ^{from Yucatan} as did Cranbrook Art Museum.

When war struck in 1941, Laura Gilpin became chief photographer for Boeing Aircraft, documenting the introduction of the B-29, the Flying Fortress of World War II. Perhaps it was this experience that helped to intensify huge cloud formations as important elements of her composition. ⁽¹⁹⁴²⁾ She flew constantly through, around, and above them.

Although she was born in Colorado, and settled permanently in Santa Fe, New Mexico in 1946, her family were eastern southerners. The Gilpins still live in Boyce, Virginia. She chuckles when she says her father went west and became an "instant cowboy". His love for the vastness and the freedom echoes in the work of his daughter. She published Temples in Yucatan in 1947, and it won the Award of Merit, Photographic Society of America. In 1949 she published The Rio Grande: River of Destiny. ^{This is as dear to the} book shows that ~~great river~~ ^{as dear to the} not only, folklore of this country as the Mississippi, but ~~how it touches~~ ^{its effect on} the lives of its inhabitants which inhabit its banks.

Her travels in Colorado and New Mexico led naturally to an involvement with the Indians living there. She accompanied Elisabeth Forster, a visiting nurse to the Navaho, on many journeys to the heart of the reservation. Perhaps she became associated with healing in their eyes, or perhaps, with that innate perception the Navaho seem to possess, she was recognized as ^{a person} ~~one~~ with sympathy and understanding. For which reason, she was accepted by the Navaho in a way few outsiders are.

Her photographs of the Navaho in every aspect of their lives are a chronicle of a great people. She went into their homes and we have proof of their lives in the summer hogans, with branches sheltering them from the punishing sun, their flocks gathered about the family, the food drying against the winter. She visited them in their winter hogans, and we see the smoke curling up to the center opening, their rugs spread upon the earth, the family gathered close. We see them in sickness and health, in all seasons, in festival and sorrow. She has been allowed to photograph their tribal rituals so that we have, indeed, a portrait of a people. These photographs are gathered in the book, The Enduring Navaho, published in 1969.

In contrast to the often studied portrayals of the Indians by Edward Curtis, these photographs capture them in their everyday life, and from 1930 to the present, so that changes are recorded. We slowly realize that she has traveled to them on foot, on horseback, in Model A and jeep, in wagons with Indian guides, and in planes. She and they have moved with the times. Both their values have endured. Now she goes back to show children their fathers as children, and they all nod and shake their heads together. The photos span ~~forty~~ years.

*mostly
Biff* — Currently she is working on a major book on Canyon de Chelly with the help of the School of American Research. In 1975 she was granted a Guggenheim Fellowship to assist in that project. Like Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly is in the Navaho Reservation. Both are sacred places, and clinging to the Canyon walls is one of the oldest dwellings for humans in our country, a rich place for a photographer, such as Laura Gilpin.

Now ~~she~~ lives simply in an old adobe house in Santa Fe. Its cool interior has fine furniture made by her father, and like the homes of most old ~~Time~~ *Time* residents, some ~~and~~ *fine* Indian rugs, baskets, and pots—gifts for the most part—from the Navaho.

There are new additions; a gallery where people come to see and buy her photographs in the afternoons, plus two young assistants. She is as delighted as a child with these new features. She is impatient that she is obliged to move about in a wheelchair after being on a cane for some time, impatient but not embarrassed. All ^{art} occupations have their hazards ~~in the arts~~, and she has carried heavy equipment slung across one shoulder for so many years that a hip joint gradually gave way. An 8 x 10 view camera plus tripod ~~and other~~ is a burden.

She was visited by two young women during a recent summer in Santa Fe. "They wanted to see my photographs," she says, "and I proceeded to show them when one asked me, 'What do you think of women's lib?'" She had a very simple answer, "I don't." And went right on showing the photographs, which she had thought was the point of the visit. Sometime that night a friend phoned to tell her she had received Gloria Steinem of MS ~~magazine~~ (who did ~~mention~~ include her in the magazine).

The anecdote reveals her as an artist of genuine simplicity and directness. Gregarious and with a sense of humor, she responds to people, not their status, ^{age, non-gender} ~~this way~~ ^{is} a quality which affects her interpretations ^{camera} ~~of them~~, and why ^{it is} not only the Indians ^{who} respond to her. Born ~~in~~ April 22, 1891, ^{Laura Gilpin's} ~~her~~ life has encompassed two centuries. She ends a conversation now with a twinkle and a strong voice, "I will work as long as I can." Anyone who knows her will agree, there's no doubt about ^{it} ~~that~~.