

ARNIE JARMAK

Photographing Chelsea in Transition, 1977-89

Edited by Ash Anderson and Diana Larsen

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College



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This publication is issued to accompany the exhibition *Arnie Jarmak: Photographing Chelsea in Transition, 1977–89* in the Monan Gallery at the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College, September 6–December 4, 2022. Organized by the McMullen Museum, *Photographing Chelsea in Transition* has been curated by Diana Larsen and Ash Anderson with major support from Boston College and the Patrons of the McMullen Museum.



McMULLEN
MUSEUM OF ART

BOSTON COLLEGE

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© 1977–89 Arnie Jarmak

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Front: *View from City Hall Spire*, plate [42](#)

Note to reader: All photographs are archival pigment prints by Arnie Jarmak (1949–) and belong to the artist unless otherwise noted. Other images appear courtesy of those listed in captions. Numbers in red refer to plates; click on them to view full-page images of photographs in the exhibition.

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Preface

AT THE ANNUAL CHELSEA ART Walk in 2016, Diana Larsen, the McMullen's Assistant Director for Exhibition Design, Collections Management, and Curatorial Affairs, discovered the work of a former photographer for the *Chelsea Record*. Captivated by the images, she and her friend Germaine Frechette were excited to find the photographer, Arnie Jarmak, present at the display and eager to share the stories behind his photographs. Jarmak explained how they document Chelsea's different immigrant populations in the 1970s and 1980s. Larsen immediately realized the significance of the corpus of Jarmak's work and the contribution it makes to understanding how and why local neighborhoods change. Her proposal to display a selection of Jarmak's photographs at the McMullen made it clear to colleagues that his work resonated with ongoing faculty research and student volunteer initiatives in communities with new immigrants in greater Boston.

When the Museum decided to proceed with an exhibition, Larsen invited Boston College faculty member Ash Anderson, an

art historian specializing in photography, to serve with her as co-curator and as co-editor of an accompanying catalogue. She also secured the participation of Professor Marilyn S. Johnson of the History Department, whose research focuses on urban social relations in America and whose most recent book examines new immigrants in Greater Boston since the 1960s. The exhibition resonated especially with Professor Johnson's ongoing digital history project, [Global Boston](#), on Boston area immigrant communities and with work of Boston College students in Chelsea under her supervision.

Larsen, Anderson, and Johnson shaped the narrative of the exhibition from different disciplinary perspectives and selected relevant images from the large body of Jarmak's work. Their knowledge, research, educated eyes, and dedication have guided this project from beginning to end. It is to them that the Museum owes its greatest gratitude.

The Museum also gratefully acknowledges the advice and support of Boston College colleagues, Associate Professor of Photography Karl Baden and Art and Architecture Librar-

ian Nina Bogdanovsky, and of anthropologist Dr. Ellen Rovner, whose research and publications have focused on Chelsea's Jewish community.

Of course, the exhibition would not have been possible without Arnie Jarmak's generous loan of photographs and commitment to recording hours of interviews with Diana Larsen. We thank him and his wife, Cathy, for their gracious hospitality and sustained support of the project throughout its planning. The Museum also extends special thanks to John Kennard and Elias Polcheira for digitizing and printing the photographs for presentation.

At the McMullen Museum, Manager of Publications and Exhibitions Kate Shugert has copyedited this e-catalogue with an eagle eye. Assistant Director for Multimedia and Design Services John McCoy has designed this volume to evoke the layout of twentieth-century newspapers, including a nod to the typography of the *Chelsea Record*, and edited Jarmak's audio recordings to make them available to exhibition visitors on mobile devices. Diana Larsen has designed the exhibition's installation, and Rachel Chamberlain, Manager of Education, Outreach, and Digital Resources, has created a series of programs and events to engage audiences across our community.

Jack Dunn and Rosanne Pellegrini of the Office of University Communications oversaw publicity; Anastos Chiavaras from the Office of Risk Management and Peter Marino from the Center for Centers have

aided, respectively, with securing insurance and budgeting. James Husson, Amy Yancey, Diana Griffith, and Ericka Webb of University Advancement have helped with funding.

The McMullen remains grateful for the following Museum endowments that provide vital support for all our projects: Linda '64 and Adam Crescenzi Fund, Janet M. and C. Michael Daley '58 Fund, Gerard and Jane Gaughan Fund for Exhibitions, Hecksher Family Fund, Hightower Family Fund, John F. McCarthy and Gail M. Bayer Fund, Christopher J. Toomey '78 Fund, and Alison S. and William M. Vareika '74, P'09, '15 Fund.

Once again, the McMullen could not have mounted this exhibition without ongoing support of the administration of Boston College and the McMullen Family Foundation. We especially thank Jacqueline McMullen, President William P. Leahy, SJ, Provost David Quigley, Vice Provost of Faculties Billy Soo, and Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences Dean Gregory Kalscheur, SJ. Major support for the exhibition was provided by the Patrons of the McMullen Museum, chaired by C. Michael Daley.

The Museum appreciates the contributions of all mentioned above and extends its gratitude to them.

Nancy Netzer, Inaugural Robert L. and Judith T. Winston Director and Professor of Art History

Charting a Course to and from Chelsea

A Biography of Arnie Jarmak

Diana Larsen

I FIRST ENCOUNTERED ARNIE Jarmak at the Chelsea Art Walk of 2016 where he was displaying a selection of his photographs in a shipping container in the main square. The poignancy of his work immediately drew me in and in the years since, I have had the privilege of getting to know this unique and wonderful man.

Arnie Jarmak photographed every day from 1977 until the late 1980s in the city of Chelsea for the daily newspaper, the *Chelsea Record* (plates 30, 32). This exhibition features a small selection from his oeuvre of over twenty thousand photographs of a specific moment in time in that city when it was undergoing fundamental demographic and social changes. In this catalogue, Ash Anderson situates Jarmak's work within the history of twentieth-century photography and explores his literary references while Marilynn S. Johnson contextualizes it with a history of Chelsea during that significant time of transformation. This essay will tell Jarmak's life story by tracing his trajectory from childhood up to the Chelsea years and from there until the present.

Moorings: 1949–72

Arnie Jarmak was born in Marblehead, Massachusetts, the second child of Ruth and Jerry Jarmak (fig. 1).¹ His mother grew up in Revere with an Irish father, Patrick Shanahan, whose family ran a moving company in the West End of Boston (he also drove a Metropolitan District Commission [MDC] truck for twenty-five years in Revere), and a Polish Jewish mother, Esther Miller. Ruth was an amateur oil painter and musician.



1. JARMAK FAMILY ATOP THE EMPIRE State Building, 1956.

According to his lifelong friend Joshua Resnek, “Arnie owed much of his heart and soul to his mother. . . . With her support and urging [he] was able to search out his dreams.”²

Jarmak's father, Jerry, taught him his work ethic. Son to Aaron, who emigrated from Ukraine in 1906 to become a successful merchant and real estate owner, and Mary, Jerry was orphaned at a very young age. The family of eight children, raised by a stepmother, was evicted from their home during the Great Depression. Jerry vowed never to allow his own family to face a similar fate.

After serving in World War II as captain of an ordnance company loading bombs onto airplanes, he founded the Jarmak Company in 1947. As a manufacturers' representative, he supplied furnishings for schools, universities, and hospitals throughout New England.

The most important lesson Jarmak learned from his dad was the value of honesty in business. He told me, “The Jarmaks were not the flashiest people in the world but they were the straightest.”³

Jarmak attended Hebrew school twice a week and became conversant in Hebrew. He recalls reading the Old Testament knowing in his heart that it was just a fable: a nice but fictional story. He was a quick learner in school but always questioned the relevance of what he was being taught. He was a voracious reader and had a disdain for convention. At the age of six Jarmak was fascinated by a photobook of Matthew Brady's Civil War images he discovered on a bookcase at his grandparents' home near a plaque com-

memorating his great-grandfather's sacrifice in that very war. The dramatic black-and-white photographs of this searing moment in American history captivated the young boy.

A little later, when he was sick at home at the age of eight or nine, he came across *Oliver Wiswell* by historical novelist Kenneth Roberts, which tells the story of a Loyalist family during the American Revolution. This eight hundred-page book so captivated Jarmak that he read it twice, and he credits it with changing his perceptions of those who opposed the Revolution. His young eyes were opened to unfamiliar points of view and he developed early on a sympathetic understanding of peoples' differences.⁴

Arnie Jarmak attended Marblehead High School. He was a member of a championship



2. JARMAK AS A LEHIGH UNIVERSITY Engineer, April 1970.

hockey team both there and in university (fig. 2) and recognizes the value of that time in his life to his later career as a newspaper photographer. "The ability to be a team player that I learned and lived helped me succeed at the newspaper, which was definitely a team endeavor. I learned in hockey to perform my role and then the team could flourish."⁵

Casting Off: 1972–74

Jarmak attended Lehigh University, an all-male private college in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He had originally wanted to study to become a doctor but ended up getting a BA in finance in 1972. For his graduation Jarmak asked his parents for a Nikon camera. In the late 1960s, photography had become all the rage on college campuses and many students carried their Leicas and Nikons around their necks to document the many changes going on politically and culturally around them. Twentieth-century American photographers like Ansel Adams became household names for the generation that Jarmak typified.⁶

Jarmak worked in his father's company full time as a union carpenter during the years 1972–74 (a job he had done in summers previously). In 1971, his parents sold the Marblehead home and bought a house in Moultonborough, New Hampshire, maintaining a rented townhouse in Peabody, Massachusetts. Living between Peabody and Moultonborough, Jarmak took a part-time photography course at Essex Community College—a rudimentary introduction to darkroom tray and film development and

black-and-white printing.

He later worked as a sales representative in northern New England (Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont) for the Jarmak Company. Too much skiing and pot smoking caused his father to transfer him back to the Boston area to keep an eye on him.

Setting Sail: 1974

After living for a short time in Peabody in his parents' house, he moved to Lanesville (Gloucester) in 1974–75. Needing time to "self discover," he gave up working for his father. One day in Gloucester, some nuns on the pier where a priest was blessing a boat caught Jarmak's eye. He learned from a bystander, who turned out to be the captain's wife, that the vessel *Lady of Good Voyage*, built in Essex in the 1940s, was about to sail to an island off Honduras. Jarmak immediately sought out the captain to ask if he could join the voyage; he and the owner of the boat agreed to it. They would be leaving the following day at high tide! Jarmak promptly packed up his few possessions and prepared to leave to his parents' chagrin; they feared he would be traveling with drug dealers.

That could not have been further from the truth. The sixty-year-old captain, Joe Novello, turned out to be an admirable man, having spent an entire life at sea around Gloucester. The whole trip lasted eighteen days, ten at sea and the rest at stops in New York and Miami before reaching Honduras. There were three crew members, each of whom took turns on watch: four hours on and



3. *LADY OF GOOD VOYAGE* DOCKED IN New York City, 1974.

eight hours off. Jarmak recalls the awesome experience of observing the moon and stars over the open sea on his night watches. At the time, he said to himself, “Arnie Jarmak, can your life be this much fun?”⁷

When docked in New York with the towers of Wall Street looming in the distance, Jarmak reflected on his good fortune (fig. 3). No doubt the classmates with whom he had studied finance were working conventional jobs in those buildings. He was, meanwhile, en route to Honduras in a beautiful vintage wooden boat with a seasoned sea captain on a true adventure. He never had a desk job after that.

For his trip, Jarmak’s mother had bought him one hundred rolls of Kodachrome so he could take color slides. The *Lady* landed on the island of Utila (plate 41) where Jarmak encountered some students embarking on an archaeological dig at the Mayan ruins of Copán. They asked him to join them on their expedition. At the magnificent Mayan site,

serendipity led Jarmak to José Cuevo whose prestigious family owned the entire valley; his uncle was the director of antiquities there. He was invited to work as a carpenter to fix up Cuevo’s family farmhouse. The work never materialized so Jarmak was able to live and fully experience life there, enjoying freshly baked corn tortillas made for them every morning and exploring his surroundings. He stayed for three months in Honduras until his parents flew him home from Guatemala when the money ran out.

Return to Port: 1974–76

Jarmak moved back to Lanesville to an off-the-grid house and built a darkroom at his parents’ Moultonborough home. Gloucester had a vibrant cultural scene that stimulated the young man’s creativity. He had his first published photograph on the cover of a volume of poetry by Vincent Ferrini (1913–



4. COVER OF FERRINI POETRY volume, 1974.

2007, fig. 4) whose frame shop was a meeting place for the city’s artists and writers.

Jarmak admired the work of Walker Evans who used a Deardorff 8 × 10 inch field camera and aspired to own one himself. He bought a camera for \$200 from George Garian, a retired photographer from Lynn (plate 29). It did not have a bellows so Jarmak called Deardorff in Chicago and mailed the camera to them to fix. It took three weeks to get there due to the Christmas rush. Because of this delay, Jarmak decided to drive out there to get it back himself. With a friend, he drove an eighteen-wheel truck to Chicago with fish from Gloucester on palettes that they distributed along the way. His destination was South Peoria Street where he met brothers Jack and Merle Deardorff. He found out that he had a pre-1942 camera, the front of which did not swivel and the Deardorffs added the missing pieces from their current inventory. Jarmak was pleased to learn that the lens was made of the same glass that Ansel Adams used.⁸

In 1974, Jarmak began taking photographs in Gloucester and fixed his lens on a significant event in that city’s history: the destruction of the Fishermen’s Institute (figs. 5, 6). Established in 1891, the Institute was an important meeting place for fishermen, some of whom stayed or even lived there. Its destruction marked the end of an era; although fishermen continued to gather in other locales, it was never the same. “Gloucester enabled me to step out of my skin and grow into a new one,” Jarmak said. “At the time, Gloucester harbor was



5. FISHERMEN'S INSTITUTE,
Gloucester, 1974.



6. DESTRUCTION OF THE FISHERMEN'S
Institute, 1974.

filled with fishing boats, all wood fishing boats when I was living there....Who knew in the 1970s that thirty-five or forty years later, they would all be gone. If I had known that, I would have only photographed fishing boats.”⁹

While in Gloucester, Jarmak began taking graduate courses in photography and economics at the University of New Hampshire, traveling over an hour a day to get there. Eventually he moved into a rented pre-1800 farmhouse on fifty acres of land in Durham, New Hampshire owned by his girlfriend's family. Jarmak describes their arrival there in a frozen winter wonderland as being reminiscent of the scene at Varykino in the film *Doctor Zhivago*. Jarmak lived there for eight or nine months studying history and economics and working part time, all the while reading as much as he could.

On the Right Tack (the Chelsea Years): 1977–89

Jarmak had first discovered Chelsea at the age of sixteen with his childhood friend, Joshua Resnek, whose family owned a drugstore there. The teenagers used to frequent Resnek's for ice cream sodas at the fountain before exploring the nooks and crannies of the city that he knew from childhood. Chelsea was shunned by the outside world at the time. Resnek writes, “The city was locked... in an ongoing deep and downward socioeconomic spiral,”¹⁰ and the boys' Marblehead friends all viewed it as a place without hope. However, Jarmak and Resnek were discovering its truth and allure.

By 1976 Jarmak decided to move to Chelsea from Durham, New Hampshire. Resnek had secured a position at the *Chelsea Record* as a journalist and shortly thereafter, in April 1977, Jarmak was employed there as photographer. Many people were making black-and-white photographs in Boston at the time, but nobody was photographing in Chelsea with the exception of Harry Siegel, a street photographer who charged twenty-five cents for a portrait (plates 37, 38).

The relationship that anchored the two young men in Chelsea was their connection to the *Record's* owner and publisher, Andrew Quigley, who hailed from one of the city's most notable Irish families (plate 31). His father, Lawrence, had been an eleven-term mayor and learned Yiddish to connect with the large Jewish immigrant population of the mid-twentieth-century city. Andrew himself

had been both a state senator and mayor of Chelsea by the age of twenty-five.

According to Jarmak, Andrew Quigley was an “unbelievably good guy”¹¹ who gave him a place to live (fig. 7) and a job at the *Record* with the freedom to go all over. The caveat to being the *Record's* chief photographer was that he also had to run their new graphic arts camera and offset printing press housed in a separate building. Jarmak had to build a darkroom and take a crash course at another newspaper to learn how to run the process camera and printing press. The advantage to “doing it all” was that he could perform quality control for his own photographs. After a year, Jarmak got to work full-time taking photographs of Chelsea night and day for the front page of the *Record*.

Jarmak recalls when his first front page photograph appeared in an April 1977 edition, just before his move from New Hampshire. The image was of the Tobin Bridge with the sun setting behind. He placed it lov-



7. FIRST APARTMENT, 26 BROADWAY,
Chelsea, 1977.

ingly on the passenger seat of his car so he could admire it on the drive. He enjoyed seeing his photographs prominently displayed on the front page at their most beautiful when surrounded by black type.

It was a stressful job with only ten employees producing a daily paper and Jarmak remarks that “everyone had the right to ‘throw a nutty’ every now and then.”¹² Sometimes Quigley would reject a photo of his; Jarmak recalled that in one case, he played a prank by reverse printing a group photo with names listed from right to left so that they appeared backward in the newspaper. Another occasion, when a different photographer’s print was chosen for the front page, Jarmak printed it entirely white. His punishment was merely a week at home; clearly Quigley appreciated his work and gave him the opportunity to redeem himself.

Quigley hired freelancers to work on specific assignments like high school sports or the city’s Polish events, but by and large, Jarmak was the *Chelsea Record*’s main photographer and it were his photographs that appeared on the front page of the newspaper every day for a decade (fig. 8). Jarmak was part of the last generation of photographers using film before the advent of digital cameras. When he was taking photos in Chelsea there was only one other newspaper in the country that had a photographer using a Deardorff camera; it was very unusual.

Jarmak recalls, “Nothing could stop me.”¹³ He was in his early thirties and able to run around the 1.8 square mile city. He did push



8. FOURTH STREET OFFICES OF THE “Chelsea Record,” late 1970s.

ups while developing his film and, with Resnek, ran several miles every day on Revere Beach after the paper came out around noon or one p.m. He remembers that after their daily run, they would go to the steam room at the Young Men’s Hebrew Association and follow that with a bowl of steamed noodles, shrimp, and peapods in Chinatown. They felt invincible and extremely lucky.

The young men had a unique role in Chelsea because, as journalists, they had the chance to get to know its residents and businesses intimately and to tell their stories with words and images. Resnek writes of this time, “This was our transformative experience, our trip to the moon or the bottom of the sea, to a land quite unlike any other for us.”¹⁴

Jarmak was inspired by the Depression-era photography of Walker Evans.¹⁵ During the time Jarmak and Resnek were at the *Record*, the city of Chelsea was in a depression of sorts with corrupt politics, decrepit housing stock, frequent fires, and pervasive poverty.

Jarmak captured it all with his camera (fig. 9). For Jarmak, Chelsea was a “profound visual reality—a train wreck—and an unrehearsed, unadorned picture of poverty.... The way people lived—this is what he wanted to capture.” “I saw clarity and truth. No one wanted to be reminded of this type of poverty and inequality. Powerful images were everywhere.”¹⁶

A familiar figure all over town, Jarmak made important connections with his subjects, often knowing them well. His poignant portraits of adults tell eloquent stories of their lives (plates 81, 91). Quigley’s favorite Jarmak photographs were the portraits of children that he took on porches, in playgrounds, and on the streets, documenting strong friendships and improvised games. Jarmak describes his role as a kind of pied piper where kids would follow him around asking him to “please take their picture” (plates 100, 104).

He told me, “I saw my role at the news-

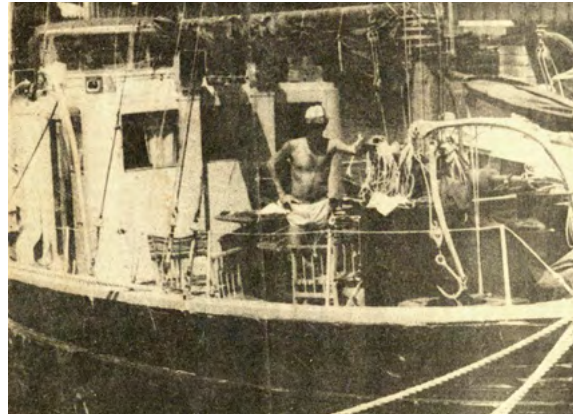


9. JOSHUA RESNEK, WALNUT STREET, 1978.

paper to bring beauty to the people of Chelsea in addition to record the events of the day. Not many people thought of Chelsea as a place of beauty. It was a role that brought joy to me and my publisher and fellow staffers at the newspaper. On days when I had a special image, large and prominent on page one, it seemed to bring joy to the entire city. I got instant feedback from countless people, some I knew well and some I hardly knew, who would say in passing, ‘Arnie that was a beautiful picture you had in the paper yesterday.’”¹⁷ Over time, Jarmak produced photographs for forty-five hundred issues of the *Chelsea Record*.

Working night and day, Resnek and Jarmak would sometimes find themselves at Pressman’s Deli in the wee hours of the morning at which time Sam Pressman (plate 76) would prepare some eggs for them. Jarmak also fondly remembers the delicious homemade soups made by Pressman’s wife that they would relish on their frequent stops there. The young men were part of the fabric of the city. One of Jarmak’s roles at the *Record* for a time was to deliver the daily newspaper to about eight locations around the city, each of which always had a handful of people waiting for it (plate 34). This interaction put him directly in touch with the people who took his photographs into their homes with them—something that always struck him.

Jarmak had bought a place on Pembroke Street near Winnisimmet Street, an area that his friend and local historian Ellen Rovner



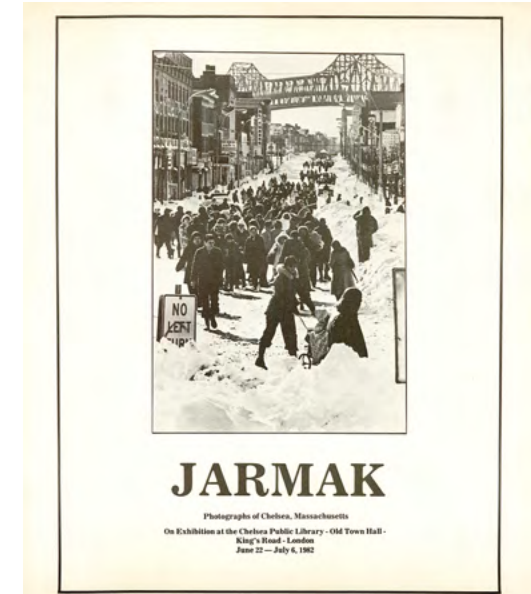
10. JARMAK ABOARD THE *FANNY ROSA* (*Chelsea Record*, July 30, 1981).

recalls from her 1950s childhood as being unsafe. Jarmak was there at the very beginning of the gentrification of that part of Chelsea. Friends used to sit on his roof with its spectacular views over the Boston skyline; it was there Rovner rediscovered her native Chelsea. She was surprised that Jarmak had such interest in and connection to the city having not grown up there. In Jarmak’s apartment, she remembers seeing the annual reports of major Fortune 500 companies that he would study to learn who formed the network of the top tenth of 1 percent in the country. This was part of his consciousness of Chelsea being the “refuse” of that system.¹⁸

In 1981, Jarmak chanced upon another opportunity to take a sea voyage. He got to know the captain of the *Fanny Rosa*: a sixty-two-foot wooden motor-sailer with the hull design of a North Sea fishboat that the British royal family had cruised on in 1949.¹⁹ It was sailing from Chelsea to Portugal and needed

a crew. Jarmak was a perfect choice (fig. 10), having taken the Honduras trip ten years earlier. Once again, he found himself with two other seasoned seamen, British captain John Moore and Roy Smith, who became a great friend, en route to Lisbon. He recalls being a thousand miles from land with water all around, feeling just how insignificant we are in the grand scheme of things. Jarmak took the helm to steer them into Lisbon’s harbor on the busy Tagus River full of oceangoing vessels.

On his way home after two-and-a-half months in Europe, Jarmak stopped in London. He visited an exhibit at the Chelsea Public Library where he sought out the librarian and showed her some of the fifty-odd newspaper



11. POSTER FOR JARMAK’S LONDON exhibition, 1982.

clippings and photographs of Chelsea, Massachusetts, that he had brought with him on his travels. She loved the images and agreed to his request to have an exhibition there the following year. Jarmak returned to London in 1982 for the opening of his exhibition (fig. 11), which was visited by the mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea himself.²⁰

In the early 1980s, Resnek and Jarmak began buying and selling real estate in Chelsea. At the time, Boston had the greatest rate of return on invested capital in the country and Chelsea had the greatest rate of return in the Boston area. They bought the Beacon Café (fig. 12), a barroom that was, according to Ellen Rovner, “a bit of a dive.”²¹ Jarmak spruced up the dark place, and with his love for old things, made it beautiful. The Beacon became a hip place to go.

Coinciding with the death of his father and his girlfriend, Jan Congden, who was murdered in California in 1984, Jarmak became “a ship without a rudder.” The real estate market collapsed, Andrew Quigley sold the *Record*, and it was time to move on.

Getting Bearings Back: 1989/90–98

Roy Smith, his friend from the *Fanny Rosa* trip, was moving to Pennsylvania and asked Jarmak to buy an old house in Lancaster with him. An Amish man named Chris Fisher hired Jarmak to drive them to and from work where they together built and renovated barns and farmhouses. Jarmak stayed working with the Amish fifty hours a week



12. BEACON CAFÉ, EARLY 1980S.

for four-and-a-half years. He remembers, “It was hard physical labor with the greatest people in the world; they were straightforward, honest, God-loving, beautiful, and righteous” and “I got my moral compass back.”²² To the relief of his aging mother, a job salvaging scrap metal from destroyers with an old Gloucester connection brought Jarmak back to Massachusetts.

Anchoring: 1998

This work prepared him for the next chapter of his life. He went into business salvaging industrial lumber in 1995 and formed the Jarmak Corporation in 1998, which he still runs today (fig. 13).

Arnie Jarmak’s life has been rich because he is open minded. His liberal arts education, both formal and informal, familiarized him with the greatest authors of history, litera-

ture, and philosophy and informed his work in Chelsea. He had the rare ability to recognize the humanity of the changing city and to depict its multi-generational residents with deep caring and respect. His appreciation for old things enabled him to capture the stark beauty of Chelsea’s streets and structures. His lifelong passion for economics and history informed his dynamic photographs of politics, firefighting, poverty, and changing businesses.

Jarmak acknowledges that the empathy he inherited from his mother was a skill paramount in creating his Chelsea portraits. The honesty and integrity that he learned from his father enabled him to gain the trust of his subjects. A good judge of character, it seems that Jarmak always gravitated to the inspirational mentors and friends who helped define his priorities: devoted sea captain, Joe Novello; “the Senator” Andrew Quigley, his supportive boss at the *Record*; Joshua Resnek, its eloquent storyteller; Roy Smith,



13. ARNIE JARMAK AT JARMAK CORPORATION, Oxford, Massachusetts, September 2020 (author’s photo).

who traveled with him on the *Fanny Rosa*; Chris Fisher and the hardworking Amish; and finally his wife, Cathy, who he married at age fifty-six and who brought him grandchildren and also shares his love of antiques.

Arnie Jarmak's Chelsea years were the highlight of his life. He told me, "When I think about the things I have done in my life—I have a nice house in Maine, I have a house in New Hampshire, I have a house in Chelsea, I have a business and some bank accounts—but...the thing that means the most to me and that I really, truly own myself, are these pictures: I took them myself and I saved them for forty years and am now opening them up to the world again."²³

In preparation to talk to me about his images, Jarmak wanted to get some historical perspective so he read *Plutarch's Lives*, the biographies of forty-eight famous men. Upon reading, he looked at his own pictures and said, "I gained insight that a thousand years from now, nobody will remember the names of places and things that we have today....What I get from Plutarch is a sense of humanity and a...desire to preserve their life in a very human way for generations to come. [With my work], what I would hope for is that I would create a record of life in an American city of the late twentieth century—a sum total of work, a Balzac *Human Comedy*. It is a collection that in its mass tells the story of life. I have always taken pictures with that in mind—to create a record for people in future generations to come back and say, 'Did they really do things that way?'"²⁴

Diana Larsen, Assistant Director at the McMullen Museum, has held curatorial positions at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Harvard University Art Museums. She has curated exhibitions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century decorative arts, and researched and coordinated the photography for *British and Irish Silver in the Fogg Art Museum* (2007). At the McMullen Museum, Larsen co-curated and contributed to the catalogues for *Rural Ireland: The Inside Story* (2012), *The Arts and Crafts Movement: Making It Irish* (2016), and *Eaglemania: Collecting Japanese Art in Gilded Age America* (2019). She has also taught exhibition planning and design at the University of Victoria, in her native British Columbia, Canada.

- 1 Jarmak's sister, Sharyn Jarmak (now deceased), was five years older.
- 2 Arnie Jarmak and Joshua Resnek, *Turbulent Years in Chelsea: Documenting Life in the '70s & '80s* (Charleston: History Press, 2020), 46.
- 3 Arnie Jarmak, interview by author, Sept. 15, 2020.
- 4 Jarmak, interview (Sept. 15, 2020).
- 5 Arnie Jarmak, interview by author, June 23, 2020.
- 6 Ellen Rovner, interview by author, Sept. 22, 2020.
- 7 Jarmak, interview (Sept. 15, 2020).
- 8 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 9 Gail McCarthy, "A Sea Change: Photo Essay Resurrects Memories of the Fishermen's Insti-

tute," *Salem News*, Aug. 15, 2019.

- 10 Jarmak and Resnek, *Turbulent Years in Chelsea*, 12.
- 11 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 12 Jarmak, interview (Sept. 15, 2020).
- 13 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 14 Jarmak and Resnek, *Turbulent Years in Chelsea*, 38.
- 15 See Ash Anderson's essay in this volume for an examination of Evans's influence on Jarmak.
- 16 Jarmak and Resnek, *Turbulent Years in Chelsea*, 47.
- 17 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 18 Rovner, interview.
- 19 The boat was designed and built in 1947 by Sir Frederick "Boy" Browning, comptroller to Princess (later Queen) Elizabeth and author Daphne du Maurier's husband.
- 20 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 21 Rovner, interview.
- 22 Jarmak, interview (Sept. 15, 2020).
- 23 Jarmak, interview (June 23, 2020).
- 24 Jarmak, interview (Sept. 15, 2020).

“This Is Worth Noting”

Art and Literature in Arnie Jarmak’s Photographs

Ash Anderson

PHOTOGRAPHY WAS BORN WITH an identity crisis, with even the most vocal and articulate among its various independent inventors unable to establish a fixed, coherent identity for the new medium.¹ This multivalent origin contributed to photography’s uniqueness among representational mediums, and to its wide adoption not just in diverse modes—expressive and applied—but by diverse professionals, amateur enthusiasts, and casual hobbyists alike.

Arnie Jarmak’s photographs remind us that it is more productive to treat photography’s complex identity as a set of expansive possibilities rather than an inherently contradictory existence. The photographs included in this catalogue and the McMullen Museum of Art exhibition it accompanies were for the most part made in the course of Jarmak’s work as chief photographer for the *Chelsea Record* in the late 1970s and 1980s. They picture the events and inhabitants of a small city during a relatively brief period. Thus, in their motivation and subject matter they represent a focus that is precise and narrow in geography, culture, and time. And yet, that

narrowness belies a rich array of influences and references. Jarmak’s approach to photography was shaped by both fine art and journalistic photography, as well as by literature and scholarly writing in a variety of fields.

Arnie Jarmak’s story is one that at some points reflects well-established developments in late twentieth-century history, and at just as many others departs from expectations in surprising ways. He was among the last generation of daily newspaper photographers responsible not only for virtually all the paper’s photographs, but also the printing and transferring of those photographs to the printing press. But following this period, on the cusp of radical transformation for photographers and newspapers, Jarmak left photography behind for other pursuits well outside the field, emphasizing the time-capsule quality of both his work and its situation in the pre-digital era. Jarmak’s years at the *Chelsea Record* were transformative ones for photography, as well as for newspapers and Chelsea. We can understand the changing demographics and politics of Chelsea—which both destabilized the city economically and simultaneously

introduced vibrant new communities, sowing the seeds for future growth²—as symbolically analogous to the rocky transformation from film to digital photography. They are likewise reflected in the transformation of the American newspaper as it was similarly destabilized and transformed by the rise of the internet.

Arnie Jarmak’s photographs of Chelsea were not made in an aesthetic void. His social and photographic interests were born out of a particular set of influences, many resulting from his autodidacticism. This tendency formed early and then took shape following his years at Lehigh University where, by his own admission, he was “not that focused on academics.”³ His voracious reading and looking during his early twenties resulted in a body of work that reflects a rich array of photographic styles and innovations, particularly those associated with documentary practices, albeit ones heavily inflected by fine art ambitions and practices. We see elements of Diane Arbus, Eugene Smith, and Henri Cartier-Bresson, as well as Lewis Hine and Jacob Riis. And, most prominently, we see the lessons of Walker Evans (1903–75), whom Jarmak recognizes as the most influential and inspiring photographer he encountered in his personal curriculum. He recalled, “Evans was the first, and the one whose work somehow touched something in me that nothing in my life had ever done in quite the same way.”⁴

Jarmak remembers being moved by Evans’s ability to capture a record of every-

day life through a medium that could tell difficult stories with beauty. That Evans's photographs were no less beautiful for including life's quirks and sorrows was similarly exciting for Jarmak, who was looking for alternative life paths, as the ones laid out for him by his family and society were made increasingly unappealing amidst the social upheaval of the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵ It was during the period following his graduation in 1972, working for his family's business, that he began to visit bookstores, where he was often drawn to books of photography.

Among those books was a volume on Walker Evans, recently published in 1971 by the Museum of Modern Art and edited by the museum's director of photography, John Szarkowski. Accompanying reproductions of work made over the preceding forty years was his description of Evans's contribution, one that might have helped inform Jarmak's future practice: "He thought of photography as a way of preserving segments of time itself, without regard for the conventional structures of picture building. Nothing was to be imposed on experience; the truth was to be discovered, not constructed."⁶ That is to say, Evans embodied a photographic practice that seeks to reflect living in the moment, rather than shaping the experience and its presentation through one's own set of expectations, which would necessarily be a reflection of the past. As part of a generation looking for new paths forward, this approach would have appealed to Jarmak, and served as encouragement for the spontaneity that defines much of



1. WALKER EVANS, *A GRAVEYARD AND Steel Mill in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania*, 1935.

his best work in Chelsea.

Among the photographs reproduced in Szarkowski's catalogue was Evans's well-known 1935 photograph *A Graveyard and Steel Mill in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania* (fig. 1), depicting the city in which Jarmak attended college. It fed the future photographer's growing interest in philosophy and sociology and the ways they could be embedded in photography. The photograph describes the attributes of a working life in the industrial city, encompassing Bethlehem Steel smokestacks, Saint Michael's Cemetery in South Bethlehem, and a strip of duplex row houses squeezed between the two. Grander dwellings look down from hills beyond, introducing shades of class tension in a picture otherwise devoted to the working lives and deaths of American laborers. A lone and blurry figure appears on a rooftop in the middle ground, with a vantage point that mirrors the pho-

tographer's, encompassing the strong verticals of the dark factory spires and brightly lit stone crosses that address viewers from the picture's foreground. While Jarmak's photographs tend to focus on individual experiences, he credits Evans with this model of a brilliant, beautiful image showing at once where people worked, lived, and died. This picture, and others like it, made Evans's work the biggest factor in Jarmak's desire to be a photographer.⁷ It comes as no surprise, then, that we can find in Jarmak's photographs different strands of Evans's work. This is not to suggest a one-to-one influence, but rather that Evans established an approach characterized by diverse subjects treated with a variety of formal means. This ended up being a workable and productive model for Jarmak.

While his photographs do not have the geographical reach of Evans's, Jarmak took a wide-ranging formal approach to picturing a small and evolving community. In Jarmak's closely cropped portraits, with their direct, frontal address, it is tempting to see echoes of Evans's similarly framed portraits of sharecroppers in Hale County, Alabama, in 1936 (fig. 2). They share, too, an interest in painted signage as evidence of a local vernacular.⁸ Jarmak's *Arrow Sign Service* (plate 65), which offers at once evidence of commercial decay and ingenuity, is among the best examples of this tendency.⁹ The cracked or dust-streaked windows, warped siding, and rampant weeds contrast with the care taken in the painting of sleekly crafted signage. The word *sign* appears five times here, each



2. WALKER EVANS, *ALLIE MAE Burroughs, Wife of a Cotton Sharecropper*, Hale County, Alabama, 1936.

articulated differently, with precise outlines or shadows or serifs, blocky capitals or playful flowing script. Even the street number has been carefully painted inside a bright rectangle on the peeling paneled front door.

In many of Jarmak's Chelsea pictures, determination and pride appear along with anxiety or resignation. During the transitional period in Chelsea that was ultimately the subject of his newspaper work, the city's toughness came up against a long series of declines. Thus, another quality is shared with Evans, who came into his own as a photographer as he witnessed the failed promise of the interwar years come into focus during the 1930s, and articulated in his photographs parallels with the similarly failed ambitions embed-

ded in the grand but crumbling architecture of the antebellum American South. Jarmak was enamored of Chelsea's human spirit and driven by a desire to reflect the distinct beauty of the community for the *Record's* readers, but he also intended to picture the city's difficulties, evidence of social inequality and struggle. Perhaps out of a desire to avoid associating the exuberant humanity of his portrait subjects with the city's economic plight, his pictures of Chelsea's urban spaces tend—like so many of Evans's pictures of related subjects—to be unpeopled (see plate 64 or 72). While his photographs of children especially teem with life, and still others depict an aging population patronizing or running traditional businesses, there is a distinct vein of facades that offer an impression of long abandonment. Despite the optimistic slogan on Joel Pressman's cheerful billboard: "Pardon the temporary inconvenience...but...we're turning a city around!" (plate 73), in Jarmak's Chelsea there is abundant evidence of blight. The eerie emptiness of his elevated and street views alike is in sharp contrast with the rich cultural life depicted elsewhere in his body of work.

Evans also provided a productive model for Jarmak in a number of ways apart from his photographs. Before Evans began making photographs in a committed way at the end of the 1920s, he was more focused on writers than painters or photographers, and spent a transformative year in Paris that included abundant time in bookshops reading Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Joyce. Flaubert's

realism and naturalism were especially influential, demonstrating a refreshing objectivity in the way he treated his subjects and, significantly, what Evans called "the non-appearance" of the author,¹⁰ both qualities he would apply decisively in his photographs. By the time Jarmak encountered the book of Evans photographs he was also making his independent way through the Western canon of literature as well as psychology and economic and social theory. In the late 1970s he read Sigmund Freud, Voltaire, Adam Smith, and Charles Darwin, among others, and found in each of their texts brilliant thinking, as well as the ability to express complex ideas with exceptional clarity. When Jarmak read an argument that was able, as he described it, to "pierce through the subject,"¹¹ he would copy down passages. It was during these years that he began to make his first photographs, and he started to notice relationships forming between the passages in his notebooks and his pictures. The meaning he found in his photographs "seemed somehow mixed with"¹² the content of his favorite texts, and the two began to serve and support one another. Images were infused with ideas and in turn supported new connections between text and experience. He began casually pairing excerpts from Smith and others with his own photographs, sometimes consciously making a photograph to illustrate a particular economic theory, at other times finding resonances that emerged later on. In particular, it was the photographs that drew a viewer's attention to something that did not look quite

as it should—and in so doing suggested that appearances and reality did not precisely align—that spoke most directly to his collection of quotations. He began to pair up small prints with typewritten lines or paragraphs, mounting them on sheets of black paper as the first step of a book project, one to which he has returned with renewed interest in recent years (fig. 3¹³).

Among the thinkers whose ideas Jarmak absorbed, Voltaire was the most important. He was inspired by Voltaire's intellectual



This monopoly has so much increased the number of some particular tribes of them that, like an overgrown standing army they have become formidable to the government and upon many occasions intimidate the legislature. The member of Parliament who supports every proposal for strengthening this monopoly, is sure to acquire not only the reputation of understanding trade but great popularity and influence with an order of men whose numbers and wealth render them of great importance. If he opposes them, on the contrary, and still more if he has authority enough to be able to thwart them, neither the most acknowledged probity, nor the highest rank, nor the greatest public services, can protect him from the most infamous abuse and detraction, from personal insults nor sometimes from real danger arising from the insolent outrage of furious and disappointed monopolists.

Adam Smith, *The Wealth Of Nations*, Book IV, Chapter II, of Restraints

3. MONOPOLY, C. 1977–79.

ambition, and the diversity of his interests, as well as his apparent fearlessness when it came to writing social criticism in a period of great social upheaval that eventually led to new democratic experiments and freedoms. Jarmak read as much of Voltaire's written work as he could find, and after he started working for the *Chelsea Record* found ways to “sneak in” his own social critique among photographs that simultaneously celebrated the beauty and tenacity of Chelsea and its citizens.¹⁴

He also credits nineteenth-century novelists including Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, and Herman Melville for ultimately helping to define his mission as a photographer. Their moving descriptions of the everyday lives of working people drove his desire to immerse himself in Chelsea and to develop relationships with its spaces, institutions, and inhabitants. Scott's novels were among the earliest to bring ordinary people into the field of representation and present them as fully realized, three-dimensional characters. He situated them in a realistic social world, built around historical references rather than fantasy. Instead of serving an ornamental purpose, the closely observed details that enlivened his novels were central to the ways their narratives unfolded.¹⁵ This approach was subsequently adopted by Dickens, who is similarly credited with accurately and objectively portraying poverty, albeit a version enhanced by a strong element of sentimentality. While Dickens wrote from a position outside the social sphere of his working class characters,

he also drew on experiences from his childhood, and his subjects retain their dignity. In *Moby Dick*, finally, Melville brings the social world of ordinary sailors alive through meticulously described detail, making his characters relatable and alive through the material aspects of their lives. If Evans drew on Flaubert's realism as a model for his photography, Scott, Dickens, and Melville, along with Honoré de Balzac and Victor Hugo, provided a similar literary model for Jarmak, particularly shaping his approach to picturing working-class subjects.¹⁶ This led him to represent Chelsea's inhabitants with dignity, taking care to present their individual stories with clarity, honesty, and respect.

Part of this tendency stems from the fact that Jarmak lived in Chelsea for ten years and developed friendships with his subjects. Although he had grown up elsewhere, and in different socioeconomic circumstances, his years in Chelsea gradually made him part of the city's fabric, and made possible the intimacy that is often visible in his portraits, both because the locals trusted him and because he worked so hard to understand the city and its people. This explains the openness we see in the eyes of his portrait subjects, a characteristic that distinguishes them from the wary gaze of Allie Mae Burroughs and other farmers photographed by Evans (fig. 2).

Indeed, despite a number of shared experiences, beliefs, and formal tendencies, Jarmak's approach departed from Evans's in important ways. Evans was suspicious of the term *documentary*, calling it “inexact,

vague, and even grammatically weak...a very sophisticated and misleading word” and around the time Jarmak discovered his photographs proposed *documentary style* to better describe his work.¹⁷ The term denoted art that had adopted the style of a photographic document. Jarmak’s work does not betray the same discomfort, nor Evans’s belief that “a document has use, whereas art is really useless.”¹⁸ Instead, Jarmak embraced the possibility of a photographic practice that drew on art to support social examination, and ultimately to celebrate humanity. The movement and life that animate so many of his pictures, particularly those depicting groups (plate 57 or 101), rarely appear in Evans’s body of work.

The evident joy and delight in humanity that characterizes so much of Jarmak’s work, and which appears even in the face of hardship, is a phenomenon more familiar from Humanist Photography, with its unembarrassed emotional affect. That international movement, closely associated with France in the postwar decades, was made up of warm, romantic, often poetic responses to the devastation of recent history. This work empathetically pictured and celebrated human behavior and relationships with all their idiosyncrasies. The movement, loosely defined and without official membership, encompassed a diverse group of photographers from Henri Cartier-Bresson to W. Eugene Smith.¹⁹ Even a figure like William Klein (1928–), whose often cynical approach might seem to prevent his association, presents a relevant model (see *Baseball Cards, New York, 1955* [fig. 4], or



4. WILLIAM KLEIN, *BASEBALL CARDS*,
New York, 1955.

Three Girls Laughing and Tongues, New York, 1955). When we look at photographs like Jarmak’s *The Counter at Riley’s Roast Beef* (plate 78), *First Communion* (plate 106), *Lower Broadway Cops and Robbers* (plate 104), or especially *School Kids* (plate 103), we see a similarly celebratory and delighted response to urban life. The photographs draw on dynamic composition to make a strong visual statement that undercuts any tendency toward the saccharine qualities viewers might typically associate with similar subject matter.

Viewers looking at Jarmak’s photographs for the first time are unlikely to be shocked by his early interest in Evans or Lewis Hine. But the books he found and brought home to study during his post-collegiate years introduce unexpected names as well. Among the influences that may be as surprising as they are illuminating is his early admiration for Diane Arbus, whose photographs of social outsiders and outcasts have been the subject

of both strenuous critique and celebration, inviting, on one hand, angry condemnation and accusations of exploitation,²⁰ and on the other, claims of extreme empathy and humanity.²¹ Jarmak likely saw the 1972 *Diane Arbus: An Aperture Monograph*, which was published in conjunction with a posthumous retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. He recalled of the eighty pictures it contained: “That work was just unbelievable. She took parts of society that people weren’t interested in and people tried to stay away from and she just brought it to life and said, ‘This is worth noting. This is a part of life that we have to be aware of.’”²² When we see Jarmak’s *Man in Bellingham Square* (plate 87) or *Man on Broadway, Blizzard of ’78* (plate 88), we are reminded of the difficulty photographers encounter in navigating these dynamics: Is it possible to photograph a person who—because of appearance or circumstances—is an outsider, without exploiting that person? Can a degree of photographic objectivity ever be reached wherein the responsibility for checking one’s judgment or tendency to voyeurism is shifted to the viewer from the photographer? Ideally the photographer would have the permission and cooperation of the subject, which is the case here, as well as an empathetic approach representing the subject, a recognition of their humanity made visible in the final print. Yet we also know that it is crucial to take stock of the power dynamics at play in the picture’s making and display. In her widely cited essay on this subject, Martha Rosler denies the possibility of

a photographer functioning as an objective observer, as well as the possibility that a photograph's meaning could ever be detached from the economic or institutional contexts in which it is seen and interpreted.²³ What invisible structures of social and economic power determine the relationships between subject, photographer, and subsequent viewer? For Jarmak, his sense of identification with his subjects defined the relationship. He was not a detached observer, but rather was granted access to his subjects through existing relationships built up over years. At the time, apart from its publication in the *Record*, there was little interest in his work, either from galleries or collectors, and this absence of external recognition resonated with Jarmak's assessment of Chelsea's own identity. For him, "It was a Chelsea thing. We're proud of who we are even though nobody wants us."²⁴ That shared identity shaped around the perceived absence of an interested audience does not answer all the questions introduced by social documentary photography. It does, however, help viewers understand the nature of Jarmak's practice and the dynamic with his subjects that made his portraits so successful.

Other expansions of traditional documentary photography had less of an impact on Jarmak. While he was inspired by Arbus's directness, he admired her fellow New Documentary photographers Garry Winogrand and Lee Friedlander without drawing from or building on their innovations. And when New Photojournalism began to emerge in the early 1980s, with the content of traditional

photojournalism presented using styles more closely associated with artistic than journalistic practices, and emphasizing the ambiguities of experience over traditional narratives, Jarmak retained a style defined by the presentation of unambiguous narratives and reliable human connection.

When Jarmak made these photographs, his audience was limited to readers of the *Record*: "My images were really important to me and they came out in the paper and my audience was the people of the city of Chelsea. They weren't that high up on the socio-economic ladder, but the people in Chelsea were very real and they could spot a phony a hundred feet away. They were down-to-earth, real people." When Jarmak returned to these photographs decades later, the potential audience had expanded, as had the perspective they provide as records of a defined period of time rather than the shifting and chaotic present. Some achieve Jarmak's goal of appearing out of time, as though they could as easily have been made decades earlier,²⁵ but all of them retain their formal power. The photographs in this exhibition and catalogue share the values of clarity, narrative focus, and—most importantly—empathy. In addition to their rich engagement with literature and myriad strands of American photography, Jarmak's love for Chelsea—quirks and sorrows included—remains potently visible four decades on.

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- 1 The first workable photographic processes were announced in 1839, each of them vying for precedence and cultural relevance. The irreproducible but stunningly precise and reflective daguerreotype, and the reproducible but comparably fuzzy calotype, based on a paper negative, were the most celebrated, but during the first few decades of the nineteenth century dozens of other independent experimenters in Europe, North America, and South America also made significant strides toward what we now call photography. The material form and application of photography was thus diverse from the beginning, and continued to change throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The best account of this period is in Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Concept of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997).
- 2 See Marilyn S. Johnson's essay in this volume for an examination of Chelsea's ever-changing demographics.
- 3 Arnie Jarmak, telephone interview by author, July 30, 2020.
- 4 Jarmak, interview.
- 5 See Diana Larsen's biography of Jarmak in this catalogue for more details on the artist's life.
- 6 John Szarkowski, ed., *Walker Evans* (New York:

- Museum of Modern Art, 1971), 12.
- 7 Arnie Jarmak, email to author, July 30, 2020.
- 8 See Andrei Codrescu, *Walker Evans: Signs* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1998).
- 9 Describing his exposure to Evans's photographs, Jarmak recalled, "I remember seeing storefronts with lettering and old hats in the window. All those signs. The hand-painted signage which was reminiscent of a bygone era. That was all apparent in Chelsea. There were a lot of images like that." Jarmak, interview.
- 10 Leslie Katz, "Interview with Walker Evans," *Art in America* 59, no. 2 (Mar.–Apr. 1971): 84.
- 11 Jarmak, interview.
- 12 Jarmak, interview.
- 13 Transcription of *Monopoly*'s accompanying text: "This monopoly has so much increased the number of some particular tribes of them that, like an overgrown standing army they have become formidable to the government and upon many occasions intimidate the legislature. The member of Parliament who supports every proposal for strengthening this monopoly, is sure to acquire not only the reputation of understanding trade but great popularity and influence with an order of men whose numbers and wealth render them of great importance. If he opposes them, on the contrary, and still more if he has authority enough be able to thwart them, neither the most acknowledged probity, nor the highest rank, not the greatest public services, can protect him from the most infamous abuse and detraction, from personal insults nor sometimes from real danger arising from the insolent outrage of furious and disappointed monopolists. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book IV, Chapter II, of Restraints."
- 14 Jarmak, interview.
- 15 The most famous example of this defense of Scott's accurate treatment of ordinary people comes from Georg Lukács in *The Historical Novel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983).
- 16 Arnie Jarmak, personal correspondence, Aug. 11, 2020.
- 17 Katz, "Interview with Walker Evans," 87.
- 18 Katz, 87.
- 19 Jarmak cites Smith as among those photographers whose work he encountered early on, and who provided a strong model for his own practice. Jarmak, interview.
- 20 Most famously Susan Sontag's 1973 essay: "She seems to have enrolled in one of art photography's most visible enterprises—concentrating on victims, the unfortunate, the dispossessed—but without the compassionate purpose that such a project is expected to serve." "Freak Show," *New York Review of Books*, Nov. 15, 1973.
- 21 See, for example, Sandra S. Phillips's catalogue essay accompanying the last major touring retrospective on Arbus: "Her refusal to patronize the people she photographed, her acceptance of this challenge of the encounter constitutes a deep and abiding humanism." In *Diane Arbus: Revelations*, ed. Doon Arbus and Marvin Israel (New York: Random House, 2003), 67.
- 22 Jarmak, interview.
- 23 Martha Rosler, "In, Around, and Afterthoughts (on Documentary Photography)," reprinted in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 303–42.
- 24 Jarmak, interview.
- 25 "When I get a picture that I took in the seventies but looked like it could've been in the forties, images like that really appealed to me. When I go through them now and I print images and I find one that could've come from decades earlier, it was something that I was looking for." Jarmak, interview.

Taking the Long View

Arnie Jarmak and the Evolution of Immigrant Chelsea

Marilynn S. Johnson

LOCATED JUST NORTH OF Boston across the Mystic River, Chelsea is a compact city of some forty thousand residents. For generations, it has been known as a city of industry—full of poor immigrants, overcrowded neighborhoods, blighted housing, and a poisoned environment. It is a place where history seems to repeat itself: once a land of poor but striving Irish, Jews, Italians, and Poles, today it hosts determined newcomers from Puerto Rico, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. But the transition from the old immigrant city to the new was not seamless; it was marked by sustained disinvestment and depopulation, political scandals and bankruptcy, profound impoverishment, and physical and environmental devastation.

Arnie Jarmak's photographs are rare and poignant records of this transitional era of the late 1970s and 1980s in Chelsea. They are remarkable portraits of a city in decline and crisis, but told with a deeply human sensibility and compassion for its hard-pressed residents. And the story he tells was hardly unique to Chelsea. Working-class communities across the country faced similar troubles,

but especially older cities and mill towns in New England and the mid-Atlantic. Yet few of them have such vivid documentation of that painful period and its human dimensions, a story that would have profound impact on the predominantly Latino migrants who would inherit the city by the end of the twentieth century.

To fully appreciate Jarmak's work, we need to see it in the context of Chelsea's history and its complicated relationship with Boston. Located less than three miles from downtown and just a stone's throw from East Boston and Charlestown, Chelsea originally served as a summer retreat for wealthy Bostonians. But its strategic location and open space soon gave rise to feverish industrial development. As Boston's immigrant quarters overflowed, many moved to Chelsea where jobs were abundant and housing more affordable.

But there was a downside to this relationship: as Boston flourished and grew more congested, it sloughed off its more noxious and dangerous enterprises and activities, shifting them to its neighbors like Chelsea.

The power wielded by these interests fostered exploitation and corruption, exacting a high cost from the city's residents. In the years after World War II, Chelsea would also fall victim to the needs of its northern neighbors, the burgeoning suburbs that required quick access to downtown Boston while syphoning off much of Chelsea's business, population, and vitality. Only in the 1990s, with a new immigrant population and leadership, would Chelsea begin to chart a new path.

Old Chelsea

Less than three miles north of Boston, the area known as Winnisimmet sat at the junction of the Mystic River and Chelsea Creek. Home of the Massachusetts Indians, it was incorporated as part of Boston in 1624 and became a separate town known as Chelsea in 1739. Over the next century, the town's rural farmland served as a summer retreat for Boston's elite, including Brahmin families such as the Shurtleffs, Williams, and Carys. Connected to the city by ferry, Chelsea developed an active shipbuilding industry in the early nineteenth century.¹

Over the next several decades, Chelsea's waterfront and rail lines attracted a host of new industries: foundries, machine shops, and manufacturers of paints, varnishes, stoves, rubber goods, and paper boxes. But shoemaking was the most important new industry, one that had outgrown its birthplace in nearby Lynn. By World War I, Chelsea was home to several shoe factories including the mammoth A. G. Walton and Company, estab-

lished in 1907, which employed some 1800 workers.²

As Chelsea industrialized, the character of the city changed. The old estates were sold off, old single-family homes gave way to rows of three-decker apartments, and green space dwindled as the population density increased (plate 47). Perhaps the biggest change, though, was in the ethnic and religious character of the population, as newcomers from Europe streamed into the bustling industrial city, causing alarm among the city's old-line Protestant residents.³

The influx had begun in the 1840s and 1850s, when a small stream of Irish Catholics fleeing the starvation and repression of the Great Famine arrived in Chelsea. These refugees formed a beachhead of Irish settlement in the city that would continue to attract migrants from the Emerald Isle for decades. Canadians from Nova Scotia were also among those who found work in shipbuilding and other Chelsea industries. Two of the city's Catholic parishes date back to these early communities. Chelsea's largest parish, St. Rose of Lima, was founded in 1848 to serve the city's growing Irish community. The Canadians, though mostly English speaking, also included a cluster of French-speaking Acadians who had settled in the Mill Hill neighborhood. They later founded Our Lady of the Assumption Church, an ethnic French parish. By 1890, more than a quarter of Chelsea's population of twenty-eight thousand was foreign-born.⁴

The acceleration of industrial activity in

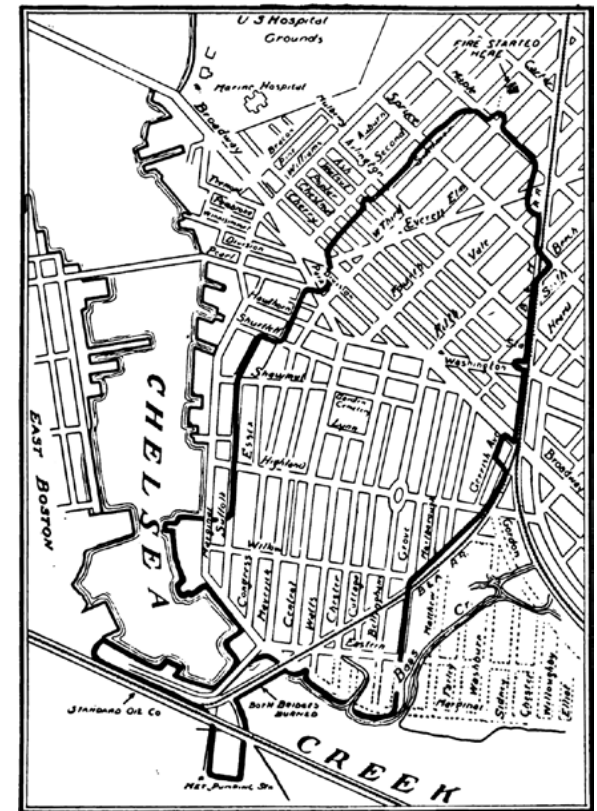
Chelsea around the turn of the century soon attracted thousands of new immigrant workers from Russia, Poland, and Italy. Among them, the largest percentage were Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe. While Chelsea was home to only a few dozen Jews in 1890, several thousand arrived over the next decade, settling mainly in the downtown area of Ward Two along Arlington and William Streets. Noted Jewish author Mary Antin lived here with her family shortly after immigrating to Boston in 1894:

In Chelsea, as in Boston we made our stand in the wrong end of town. Arlington Street was inhabited by poor Jews, poor Negroes, and a sprinkling of poor Irish....It was a proper locality for a man without capital to do business. My father rented a tenement with a store in the basement.⁵

By the early twentieth century, Jewish homes, businesses, and synagogues dominated Ward Two while its upwardly mobile families began moving to other parts of the city. Jews worked in the shoe industry but also took up garment work and rag and junk collecting, recycling the abundant waste produced by local industries. The salvage business had been growing in Chelsea since the late nineteenth century after Boston adopted stricter building codes in the wake of the great fire of 1872. The rag dealers, mostly Jewish immigrants who stored their salvaged materials in wooden sheds, could not meet the new

standards and relocated to nearby Chelsea. By 1920 the Jewish immigrant community had expanded to nearly nine thousand people—more than half of the city's foreign-born population.⁶

Ironically, this astronomical growth was the result of a major fire that swept through the city in April 1908. The fire broke out in the Rag District, incinerating highly flammable scrap piles housed in wooden structures.



MAP SHOWING BURNED DISTRICT

1. "MAP SHOWING BURNED DISTRICT"
(Pratt, *Burning of Chelsea*, 134).

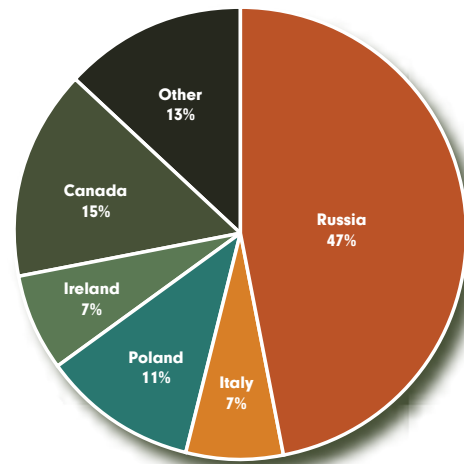
The fire spread quickly, destroying Chelsea's waterfront, the Jewish neighborhood along Arlington Street, and much of downtown (fig. 1). Some fifteen hundred buildings were destroyed, including eight schools and a dozen churches. With more than ten thousand people left homeless, there was a mass exodus out of Chelsea of both the working class and the city's more prosperous families. Among the latter were dozens of downtown shopkeepers who closed their burned-out businesses and relocated permanently to nearby suburbs.⁷

The immigrants, however, soon returned to Chelsea in greater numbers. Several thousand Italians and Poles settled in the city by the 1910s, but the Jewish community grew the most rapidly. Many came from older Jewish settlements in the North and South Ends, but especially from East Boston, just across Chelsea Creek. More prosperous Jews bought fire-scarred properties downtown and rebuilt them as kosher groceries, butchers, and other shops. Yiddish was the dominant language in these establishments and was frequently heard on downtown streets.

By World War I, Chelsea had become the largest Jewish community in Massachusetts outside of Boston, a distinction that gave rise to the city's nickname "the Jerusalem of America." At its heyday in the early twentieth century, the city had more than eighteen Orthodox synagogues (plate 69), a Hebrew school, a Young Men's Hebrew Association, and at least a dozen other Jewish social and charitable organizations.⁸

The turnover in Chelsea's population was also evident in the city's political institutions. While native-born Protestant Republicans had occupied the mayor's office since the mid-nineteenth century, the election of Melvin Breath in 1919 began a long string of Democratic Irish American mayors supported by the city's immigrant and ethnic voters. Among the best known and longest serving was Mayor Lawrence Quigley, an Irish American who ran Chelsea for much of the 1920s and early 1930s. Although Jews by this time significantly outnumbered the Irish, politicians like Quigley maintained their power by learning some Yiddish and regularly campaigning at the city's synagogues, Jewish businesses, and social organizations.⁹

The 1920s were halcyon years for Chelsea,



2. HOME COUNTRIES OF CHELSEA'S foreign-born residents, 1920 (*Fourteenth Census*, 445, 455–56).

as industry boomed, downtown businesses proliferated, and immigrant groups lay claim to much of the city (fig. 2). By 1930, Chelsea's population hit a historic peak of more than forty-five thousand—three-quarters of whom were immigrants or their children.¹⁰ But the next decade reversed some of these trends, as economic crisis, soaring unemployment, and grinding poverty devastated the city. The 1930s would prove to be the beginning of a long downward slide for Chelsea that would continue until the 1980s.

Chelsea under Fire

The new demands of World War II production briefly revived Chelsea's industrial sector in the 1940s, and the city's Jewish and other white ethnic communities remained strong into the 1950s. But the postwar era also brought major challenges to the city, sapping its economy, population, and infrastructure. As in many Northern cities, federal support for highway building and for housing construction under the GI Bill led to rapid suburban development north of Boston. The city's younger generation, including many white returning veterans who qualified for federally backed low-interest mortgages, began leaving Chelsea for nearby suburbs. Jewish home seekers, for example, headed to growing Jewish communities on the North Shore such as Marblehead and Swampscott—jokingly referred to as Chelsea's Sixth Ward.¹¹

The postwar rush to the suburbs caused even greater problems for the city as redevelopment scarred the landscape. As the state

made plans to develop a highway network connecting Boston to its suburbs, Chelsea was targeted as the pathway for a new six-lane, double-deck bridge over the Mystic River. Completed in 1950, the Mystic River (now Tobin) Bridge sliced directly through the heart of Chelsea, displacing 462 families whose homes were leveled (see fig. 3). The mammoth steel bridge removed some \$13 million worth of property from the city's tax base and ravaged the old Ward Two neighborhood, cutting off its impoverished residents from the town center. The other "Green Monster"—as residents dubbed it—carved up the downtown area with multiple approach and exit ramps, fouled the air, and literally cast a shadow over the city. As the *Chelsea Record* correctly noted about the bridge when it opened in 1950, "there is no doubting that it has and will bring about the greatest changes in the community since the disastrous fire of 1908."¹²

Residents' fears about the bridge's impact were soon borne out. As car and truck traf-



3. OFF RAMP TO CHELSEA.

fic increased and backed up around the Tobin Bridge, Chelsea experienced some of the worst air pollution in the state (and still does today). Moreover, by the late 1960s, the green lead-based paint on the bridge began peeling and falling onto surrounding Chelsea neighborhoods. This flurry of toxic paint chips, plus a later scraping and sanding of the bridge (before protective methods were required), resulted in the highest rates of child lead poisoning in the country.¹³

Chelsea's economic fortunes likewise declined as the A. G. Walton Shoe Company closed down in 1951, marking the beginning of an era of deindustrialization that would last for more than three decades. With the loss of industry in this small city (only 1.8 square miles), residents were burdened with one of the highest tax rates in Massachusetts. To replace the lost revenue, Chelsea officials recruited new industries, such as Gulf Oil, which built a tank farm (plate 45) along the banks of Chelsea Creek in the 1960s. These storage facilities later leaked into the water table, while other industries dumped sewage (plate 46) and chemicals into Chelsea Creek and the Mystic River, fouling the city's water.¹⁴

The development of fuel storage tanks also raised concerns about Chelsea's old nemesis: fire. In 1969 a fire started on the Gulf loading docks, producing a massive explosion that injured six people and destroyed much of the facility.¹⁵ The Gulf fire was one of many that had occurred in the city's industrial sector since 1908, but the danger was now more



4. CHELSEA'S EVERETT AVENUE ablaze, photographed from the Mystic River Bridge on October 14, 1973 (*Boston Globe*).

imminent. The presence of petroleum facilities, the deterioration of old wooden housing stock, a malfunctioning hydrant system, and an underfunded and poorly equipped fire department did not bode well in the event of a major fire. Unfortunately for Chelsea, that day came on October 14, 1973 (fig. 4).

In an eerie echo of 1908, the blaze began in the old Rag District, just two hundred yards from where the earlier conflagration had started. With dry and windy conditions, the fire quickly spread, consuming eighteen city blocks and some three hundred buildings. Ultimately it took nearly twenty-four hours and more than fifteen hundred firefighters to extinguish the blaze. When the smoke cleared, it had incinerated nearly all of Ward Two—a densely populated area of aging tenements and three-decker houses. More than eleven hundred people were displaced, many of them recent migrants from Puerto Rico who had replaced the former Jewish

residents. President Richard Nixon declared Chelsea a disaster area, and over the coming months and years, the city would receive roughly \$10 million in government aid to help recover and rebuild. But it would not be easy: capital flight, depopulation, political corruption, and racism would prove formidable obstacles.¹⁶

In the decade or so after the fire, some of the city's largest employers—American Biltrite Rubber Company, Sweetheart Paper Company, and Cabot Paints—left Chelsea, eliminating more than two thousand jobs. The fire also convinced some of the remaining Jewish business owners to retire or relocate. As the suburban exodus of white families accelerated in the 1970s, Chelsea lost 17 percent of its population. As longtime resident Jack Croucher explained, “Young people have no reason to stay here, and the middle class is moving out because the tax rate is backbreaking...and the schools are bad. My own parents moved out. They wanted to stay because they had ties here, but it wasn't worth it.”¹⁷

Economic decline and environmental destruction were accompanied by growing social problems. As the middle class left and manufacturing jobs dwindled, the city's rates of poverty, alcoholism, and drug use increased. Budgetary woes led to underfunded schools and services and a failing infrastructure. By the 1970s, most of the city's apartment buildings were owned by absentee landlords, and many were badly deteriorated or abandoned (plate 72). As younger residents left, the elderly made up a growing pro-

portion of Chelsea's population.¹⁸

This is the Chelsea that Arnie Jarmak encountered when he and his friend Joshua Resnek arrived in 1977. A few years out of college, the two found jobs at the local daily newspaper, the *Chelsea Record*. Joshua Resnek was the grandson of one of Chelsea's early Jewish settlers and had grown up in Marblehead with his friend Arnie Jarmak, whose Irish Jewish family also had roots in the old industrial communities north of the city. Their postwar suburban lives were a stark contrast to the crumbling neighborhoods and grinding poverty of Chelsea. But like many of their generation, they were anxious to distance themselves from their white, middle-class upbringing. “We traded Marblehead for Chelsea,” Resnek explained, “It turned out to be a good trade.”¹⁹



5. WINNISIMMET STREET.



6. BROVANICK.

Jarmak and Resnek initially rented an apartment in Chelsea, but later purchased a bargain-priced three-family near the waterfront (fig. 5). As part of a small staff at the *Chelsea Record*, they got to know everyone in town. Jarmak's photographs reflect the easy rapport and trust he developed with people in the community. His portraits of older native Chelsea residents are quirky and heart-rending. As Resnek described those subjects, “They looked like relics from another age walking the gritty streets of the collapsing city. Older folks, poverty-stricken, dressed poorly. Limping. On crutches....The veritable walking wounded of American society.”²⁰ While Jarmak's portrayals show all this, they also capture the sheer grit and resilience of these urban survivors (fig. 6, plates 81, 87, 89).

Documenting downtown life in a dying

city, Jarmak's photographs also give us an up-close view of Chelsea in the transitional years of the seventies and eighties. We see the last of the old Jewish businesses, the bargain stores plastered with ads for discount goods, and legendary locals like Sam Pressman holding forth in his Central Avenue deli (plate 76). From Bellingham Square to the foot of Broadway, we spot Chelsea's pensioners reading the paper, crossing the streets, passing the time at a local lunch counter (plate



7. SWIMMING IN THE CHELSEA CREEK
OFF CLINTON STREET BRIDGE.



8 FISHIN'.

78). There is a pervasive sense of a city winding down, waiting for a revival that failed to materialize (plates 35, 66, 67, 74).

But as we follow Jarmak down the side streets into the housing projects and three-decker neighborhoods, we see a much younger Chelsea. Here we find children hanging out on stoops, riding their bicycles, diving off bridges, going fishing—roaming freely in ways that middle-class kids rarely do anymore (figs. 7, 8, plates 101, 103, 104). Clearly, many of these children are the sons and daughters of working-class Irish and Polish American parents, but other faces tell a different story. Black and Latino, many of them are the children of Chelsea's newest migrants—Puerto Ricans, African Americans, and by the 1980s, newcomers from Central America. Whatever their background, they are young, feisty, and full of energy. They are Chelsea's future.²¹

The New Chelsea

Chelsea's Latino community dates back to the 1950s, when farm owners in New England were hiring Puerto Ricans to do seasonal agricultural work under a federal recruiting program. Soon, some workers moved to Boston and a handful of smaller cities where hard-pressed industries were seeking low-cost labor. By the 1960s, Chelsea was a key destination: it had plenty of jobs at produce wholesalers like Suffolk Farms Packing Company and the New England Produce Center (which relocated to Chelsea from Faneuil Hall in 1968 when the market was redeveloped). At

the time, companies like American Biltrite, Sweetheart Paper Company, and Cabot Paint were still operating in Chelsea and began hiring Puerto Ricans as they lost their older white workforce.²²

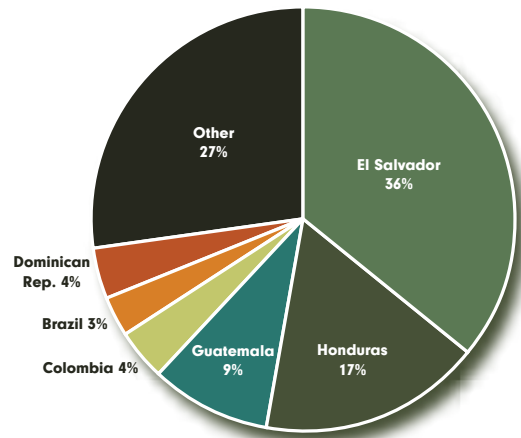
By 1970, the Census recorded more than sixteen hundred Hispanics in Chelsea, roughly half of whom were of Puerto Rican descent. St. Rose of Lima, the city's old Irish American parish, became the center of the emerging Latino community, ministering to both local Puerto Rican families and newly arrived refugees from Cuba who fled in the wake of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. Father Borges, a priest serving at St. Rose in 1972, explained that many Latinos came to Chelsea because they saw it as "a peaceful village" (fig. 9, plates 96, 98, 100). "Mostly it's family groups and here they can have a stable community."²³ Chelsea's stock of rundown but affordable family housing was another important draw. A study conducted in the 1980s found that 87 percent of the city's



9. KIDS ON THE PORCH, WARD FOUR.

Latino households had children under eighteen, compared to only 73 percent in Boston.²⁴

Chelsea's Latino population diversified in the 1980s, as new migrants arrived from Central America. Fleeing violence and civil wars in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, the newcomers first settled in the city's old downtown neighborhoods. As the US government was supporting military regimes in these countries, those fleeing violence were unable to gain refugee status, and many arrived undocumented. Some later won asylum under a legal settlement; others avoided deportation by applying for Temporary Protected Status under the 1990 Immigration Act. Since the 1990s, Central Americans have continued to arrive in Chelsea to escape political repression, poverty, crime, and



10. HOME COUNTRIES OF CHELSEA'S foreign-born residents, 2016 (American Community Survey, 2014–2018 ACS 5-Year Estimates).

youth violence.²⁵ Salvadorans were the single largest group, with more than five thousand residents counted in the 2010 Census. In recent years, thousands of Hondurans and Guatemalans have also moved there (fig. 10). By 2010, Chelsea had become a majority Latino city—with the highest proportion of immigrants in Massachusetts.²⁶

Although the rise of Latino Chelsea was clearly visible by the late 1980s, control of city politics remained solidly in the hands of the old white establishment. At the time, both the city council and the police department were all white; the school committee had one lone Latina member. Many of the old guard blamed Chelsea's Latinos for the city's woes—its sinking economy, high poverty and dropout rates, and growing crime and drug use. But these were hardly new problems in Chelsea. The Latino community inherited them, making their struggles as new immigrants even harder. And they had little power to address them through a political system that ran by its own rules.²⁷

In fact, a number of Chelsea's white political leaders were embroiled in scandal and corruption. The city's bars had long been hotbeds of illegal gambling and sports betting that were protected by kickbacks to local officials. Ongoing redevelopment schemes after the 1973 fire also presented multiple opportunities for bribery and favoritism. This shady political climate made for exciting mayoral elections, an ever-popular subject for the *Chelsea Record*. Arnie Jarmak's photos capture the rowdy politicking that charac-



11. IRISH HAPPY HOURS.

terized Chelsea in the seventies and eighties, hinting at the unseen rewards that resulted (see fig. 11). As Joshua Resnek described it, “The veneer of honesty expressed by the candidates hid the true nature of the cause: keeping the city hall gravy train on its track.”²⁸

While political corruption had long been tolerated in Chelsea, by the 1980s it was impossible to ignore. Just days before leaving office in 1983, Mayor Joel Pressman (fig. 12) was arrested and tried for bribery and perjury in connection with the development of a shopping mall in Ward Two, the old Jewish and Puerto Rican neighborhood that had been destroyed in the 1973 fire. As a later federal investigation revealed, Pressman's misdeeds were just the beginning. After the investigation concluded, the three mayors who succeeded him—James Mitchell, Thomas Nolan, and John Brennan Jr.—were all convicted of perjury and accepting kickbacks. The city of Chelsea, meanwhile, was left virtually bankrupt and could not meet payroll for police, firefighters, or teachers.



12. PRESSMAN WINS, 1977.

In September 1991, Chelsea went into receivership and Mayor Brennan turned over control of the city to a state-appointed overseer. In exchange for a fiscal bailout, Chelsea agreed to eliminate its now disgraced government in favor of a city manager appointed by a city council with limited powers. Three years earlier, frustrated Chelsea school officials had turned over control of the district to Boston University, an arrangement that lasted twenty years and brought new investment and reform to the city's tattered school system.²⁹

The Latino community was not pleased with these changes. While most had no love for the old white leadership and its monopoly on city governance, Latino leaders found the new state-appointed overseer to be unresponsive to their concerns. The newly created Chelsea Hispanic Commission was likewise opposed to the BU takeover of the schools, criticizing its closed-door proceedings and fearing the elimination of bilingual programs. These concerns helped to propel Latino orga-

nizing in the city, and in 1989, Chelsea elected its first Latina, Marta Rosa, to the school committee. Five years later, Juan Vega, son of a local Puerto Rican family, won election to the city council where he served for seven years. They would be the first of many Latinos to serve in city government.³⁰

These victories reflected the dynamic activism of what was fast becoming a Latino majority in Chelsea. Groups like Centro Latino, headed by Juan Vega, would play a critical role in fighting to empower and address the needs of Chelsea Latinos. His cousin, Gladys Vega, became the key force of another community group, the Chelsea Collaborative, where she started working as a receptionist in 1990. Becoming director in 2006, Vega transformed the Collaborative into a dynamic activist organization for immigrant rights, police reform, tenants' rights, and environmental justice. Working with the city manager and other local officials, the Collaborative also helped diversify the city's municipal workforce and establish Chelsea as a sanctuary city in 2007.³¹

Twenty-first-century Chelsea is a far cry from the city that Arnie Jarmak photographed some forty years ago. Since the 1990s, the city has reversed its economic decline, attracting a major hotel, government office buildings, healthcare facilities, and building more than a thousand new housing units. The once scandal-ridden Mystic Mall is now a successful venture, and Latino-owned shops and businesses line the downtown streets. Today, Chelsea's population has rebounded

to more than forty thousand (no doubt a substantial undercount), of which 46 percent are foreign-born.

But while much has changed for the better, the city still faces immense challenges. Poverty is widespread, housing is overcrowded and insecure for many, and school dropout rates are still among the state's highest. While the city is working to remove environmental hazards, health problems are pervasive among its working-class residents, many of whom lack access to healthcare. Since the election of President Donald Trump, sanctuary cities like Chelsea have also been targeted by federal immigration agents, spreading fear and uncertainty among immigrant communities.³²

Chelsea's vulnerability has been especially evident since 2020, when it quickly became the state's top hotspot for the coronavirus. By August 2020, Chelsea's infection rate had reached more than eight thousand per one hundred thousand—more than triple the rate of Boston, and significantly higher than the hardest-hit neighborhoods in New York City. Its record-breaking rates stem from the city's extreme population density as many extended immigrant families share small apartments, making social distancing impossible. Moreover, an estimated 80 percent of Chelsea's labor force work in essential industries, and most rely on public transportation to get to their jobs in food service, hospitals, retail, and other critical industries. The city's poor air quality and environmental hazards means that residents suffer high rates of respira-

tory ailments and other health conditions that make them more vulnerable to the virus. Among the undocumented, many were reluctant to seek testing or treatment for fear of deportation or eviction. In short, the COVID-19 crisis in Chelsea has exposed some of the profound inequities in our society that are ravaging immigrant and working-class communities of color.³³

Arnie Jarmak's photographs remind us of Chelsea's long history of inequality and struggle. As a gateway for new immigrants, the city has hosted vibrant ethnic communities even as it was a dumping ground for economic activities and environmental hazards shunned by its neighboring city of Boston. Yet that vulnerability has fostered enormous resilience and solidarity. As community organizer Gladys Vega put it, "I wake up every morning being very proud of Chelsea because we built this city, and what we have here is a community that cares about each other without borders, without caring if you're documented or undocumented.... We have something very special here."³⁴

Marilynn S. Johnson is Professor of History at Boston College where she teaches modern US urban and social history. She received her PhD at New York University and has taught at Southern Methodist University and the Consortium for Graduate Studies in Gender, Culture, Women, and Sexuality at MIT. Her research focuses on migration, urban social relations, and violence. She is the author of several books, including *Street Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City* (2003) and *The New Bostonians: How Immigrants Have Transformed the Metro Region since the 1960s* (2015). She currently directs a public history website called [Global Boston](#), which explores and documents immigration history in greater Boston.

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- 19 Jarmak and Resnek, *Turbulent Years in Chelsea*, 11–13, 17–19, 34, 46 (quote from 12).
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- 21 Of course, it is easy to romanticize the lives of these children who no doubt felt the sting of poverty and family hardships. For a raw and unsettling view of growing up in Chelsea in the 1980s, see Michelle Tea, *The Chelsea Whistle* (New York: Seal Press, 2002).
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Plates



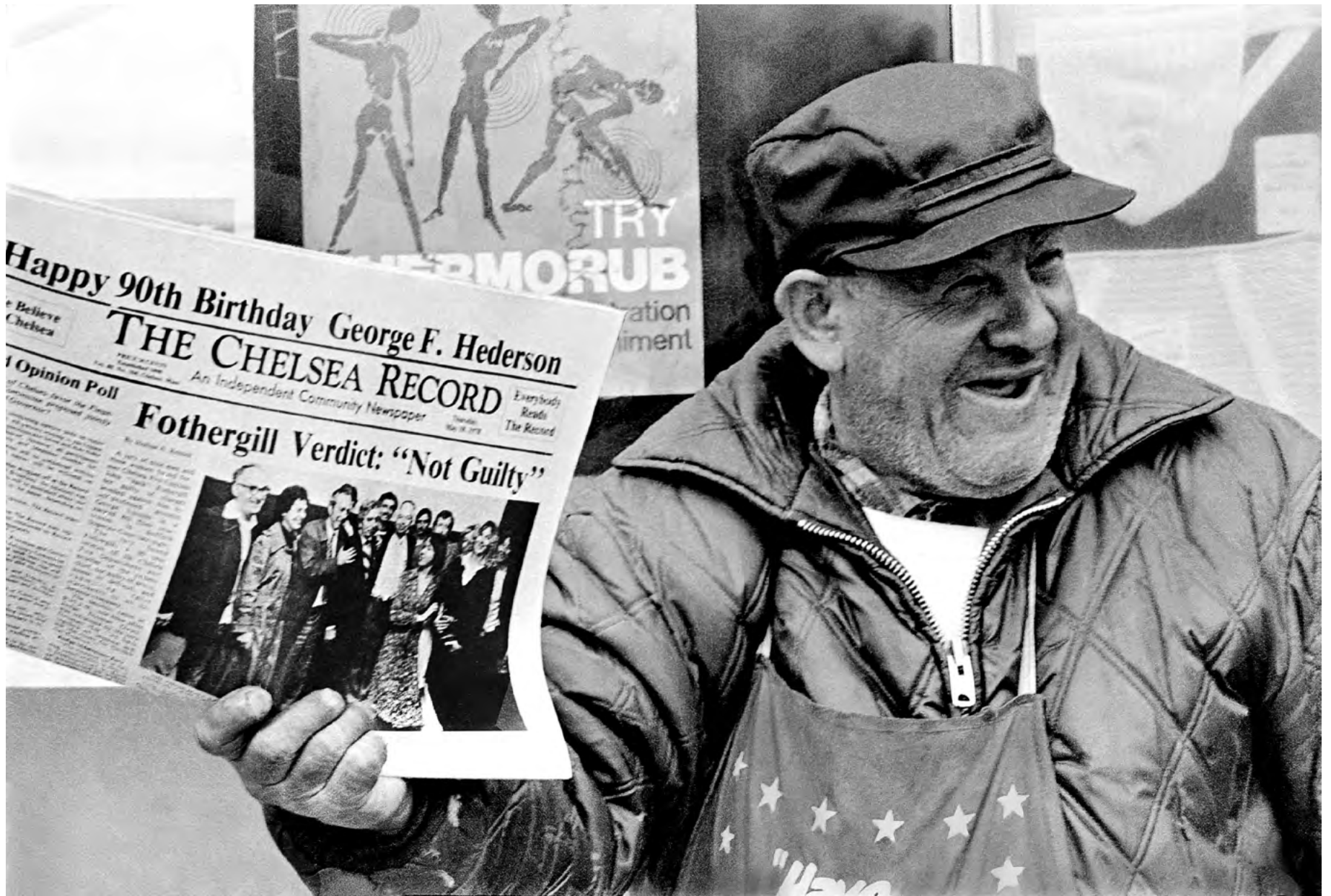
JOSHUA RESNEK, *ARNIE JARMAK WITH HIS DEARDORFF CAMERA, WALNUT STREET, 1978*



COPY OF THE "CHELSEA RECORD" ON THE SIDEWALK, 1976



ANDREW QUIGLEY AT THE "CHELSEA RECORD" OFFICES, 1980



AL GOLDMAN, 1978



"RECORD" READERS



GETTING THE "RECORD" IN THE SQUARE



READING THE "RECORD" IN THE SQUARE



READING THE "RECORD," 1979



HARRY SIEGEL



HARRY SIEGEL



HARRY SIEGEL PORTRAITS OF ARNIE JARMAK WITH ANDREW QUIGLEY AND JOSHUA RESNEK (FAR RIGHT), 1977



DEARDORFF, ADAMS POINT ROAD, DURHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE



MARY KOWALCZYK, *ARNIE JARMAK IN UTILA, HONDURAS*, 1974



VIEW FROM CITY HALL SPIRE



CIVIL WAR MONUMENT



TRIPLE DECKERS AND CITY HALL SPIRE



TANK FARM, CHELSEA CREEK



LOW TIDE, CHELSEA CREEK, AUGUST 1979



ROW HOUSES, BEACON STREET



CHELSEA CLOCK FIRE, 1978



POPLAR STREET FIRE



CHELSEA FIREFIGHTERS





FIGHTING THE FIRE



NIGHT FIRE



CHESTNUT STREET FIRE, OFFICER SULLIVAN



BETSY SIEGEL, POPLAR STREET



STATION WAGON WITH POLITICAL BUMPER STICKERS, EARLY 1980S



JOEL PRESSMAN ON ELECTION NIGHT, 1977



PRESSMAN MAYORAL HEADQUARTERS, 1977



ALDERMAN THOMAS J. NOLAN (MAYOR OF CHELSEA, 1986–87) IN FRONT OF CITY HALL, 1982



BALLOT BOXES, ELECTION NIGHT



PETITION TO RECALL MAYOR JAMES D. MITCHELL JR., 1984



JOEL AND THE DUKE



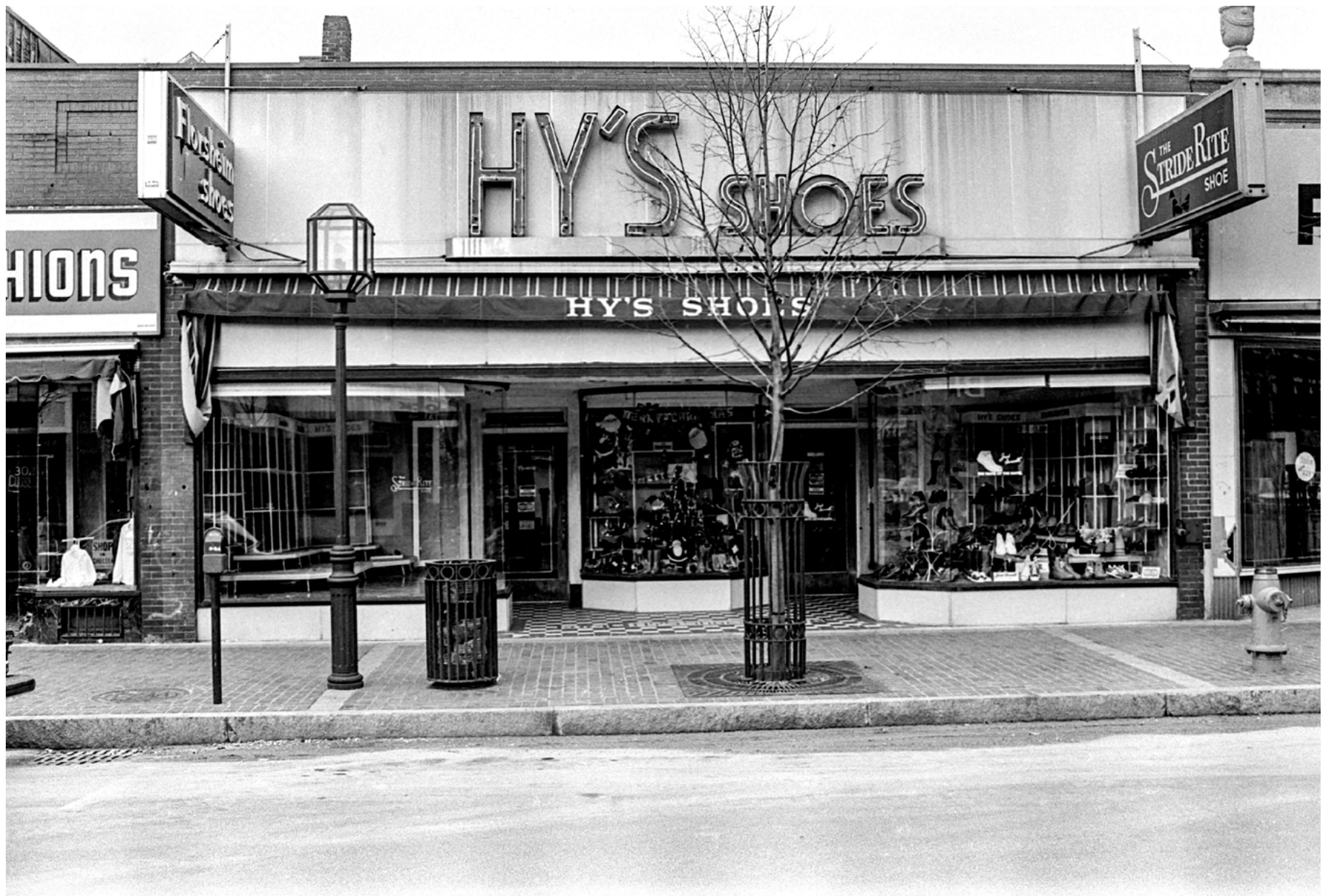
LET'S KEEP CHELSEA CLEAN, 1979



JOE'S QUALITY MARKET



ARROW SIGN SERVICE



HY'S SHOES, BROADWAY, 1980S



ALLEN'S CUT RATE, BROADWAY



SHOE SHELF



WALNUT STREET SHUL



IGLESIA DE DIOS



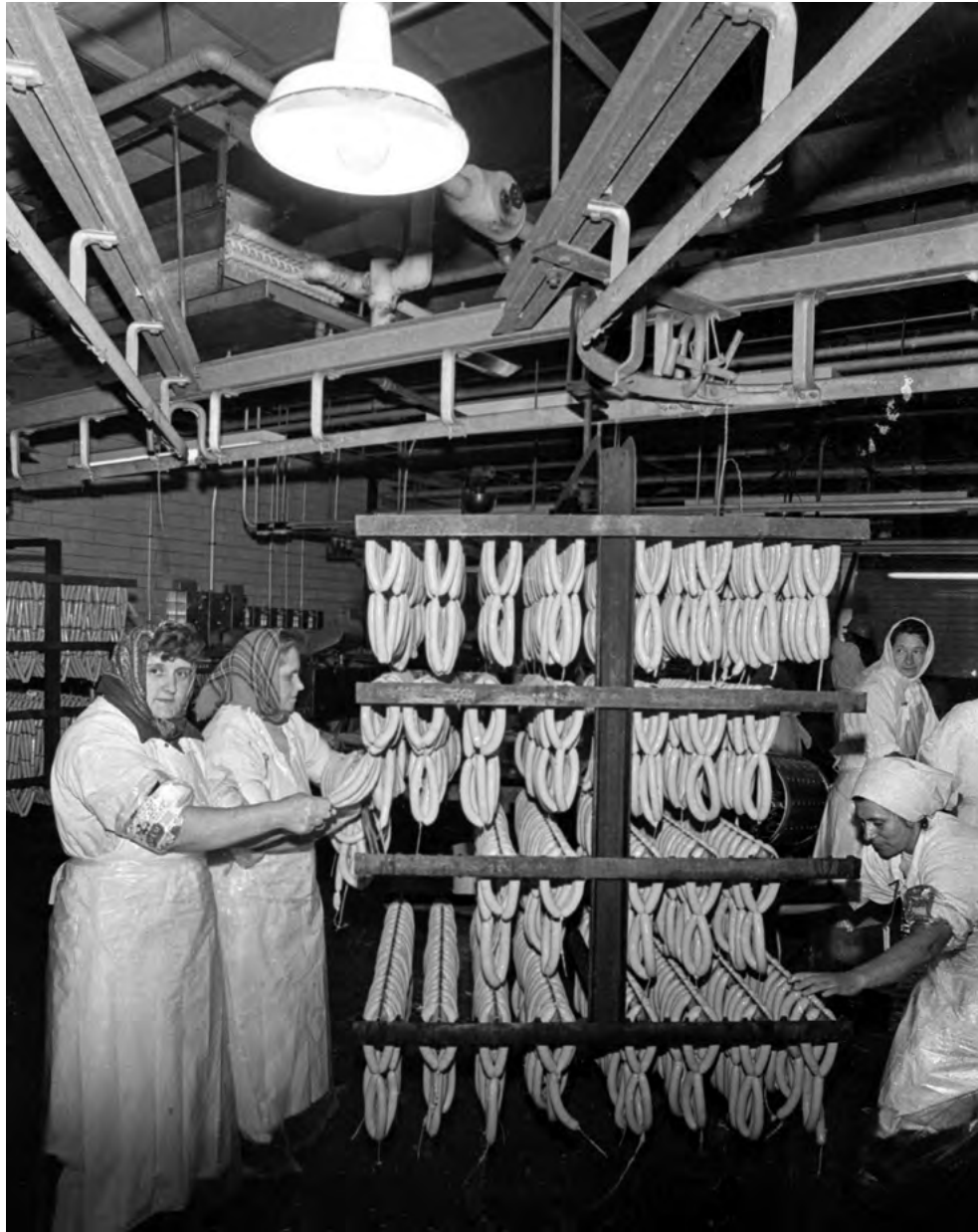
LAST HOUSE ON THIRD STREET



ABANDONED BUILDINGS, WALNUT STREET



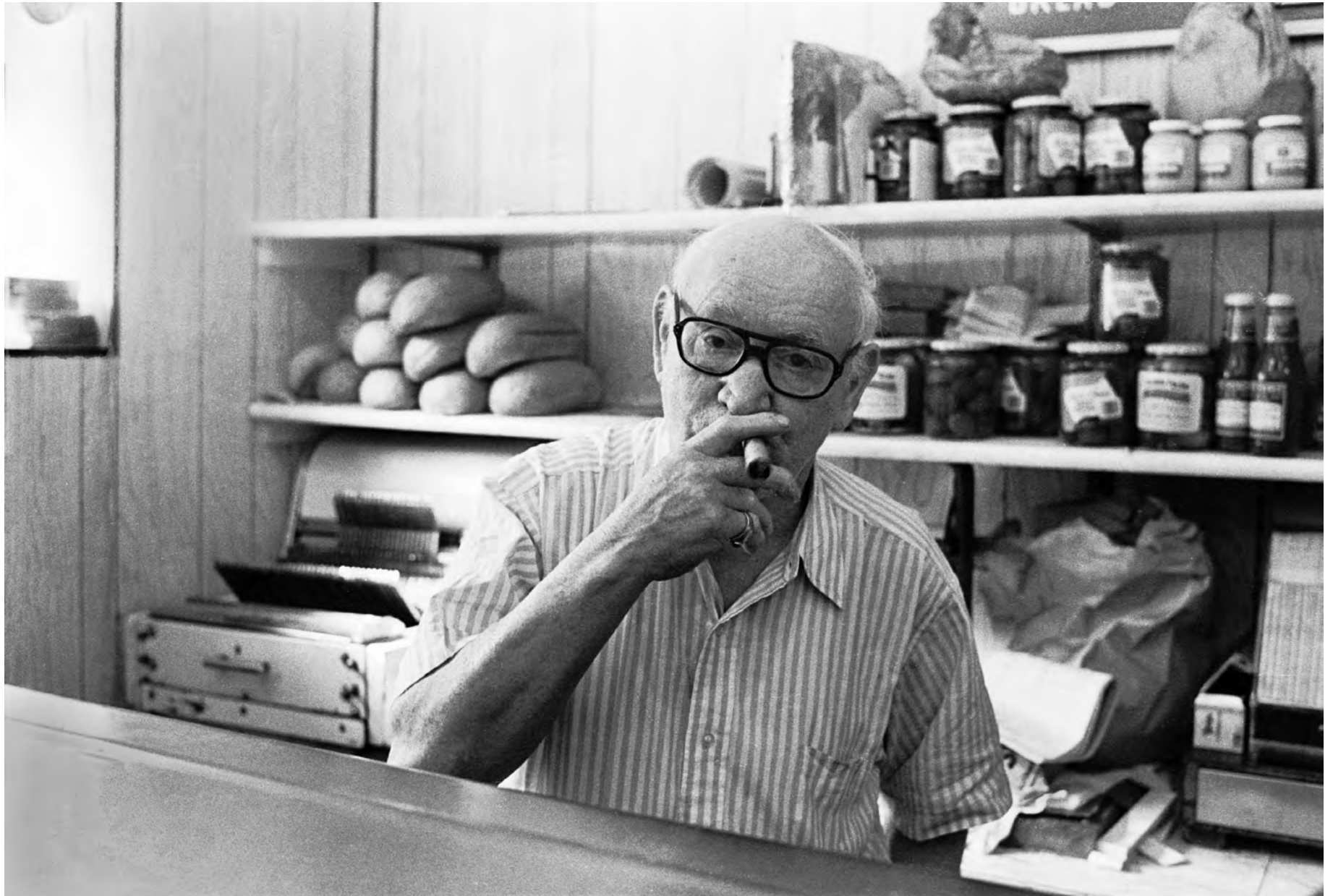
PARDON THE TEMPORARY INCONVENIENCE, 1976-77



SAUSAGE MAKING, KAYEM FOODS



MURRAY (LEFT), EDDY (CENTER), AND SAM ROSENBERG INSIDE THEIR DELI



SAM PRESSMAN, COUNTER OF PRESSMAN'S DELI, CENTRAL AVENUE



INDEPENDENT CAB



THE COUNTER AT RILEY'S ROAST BEEF



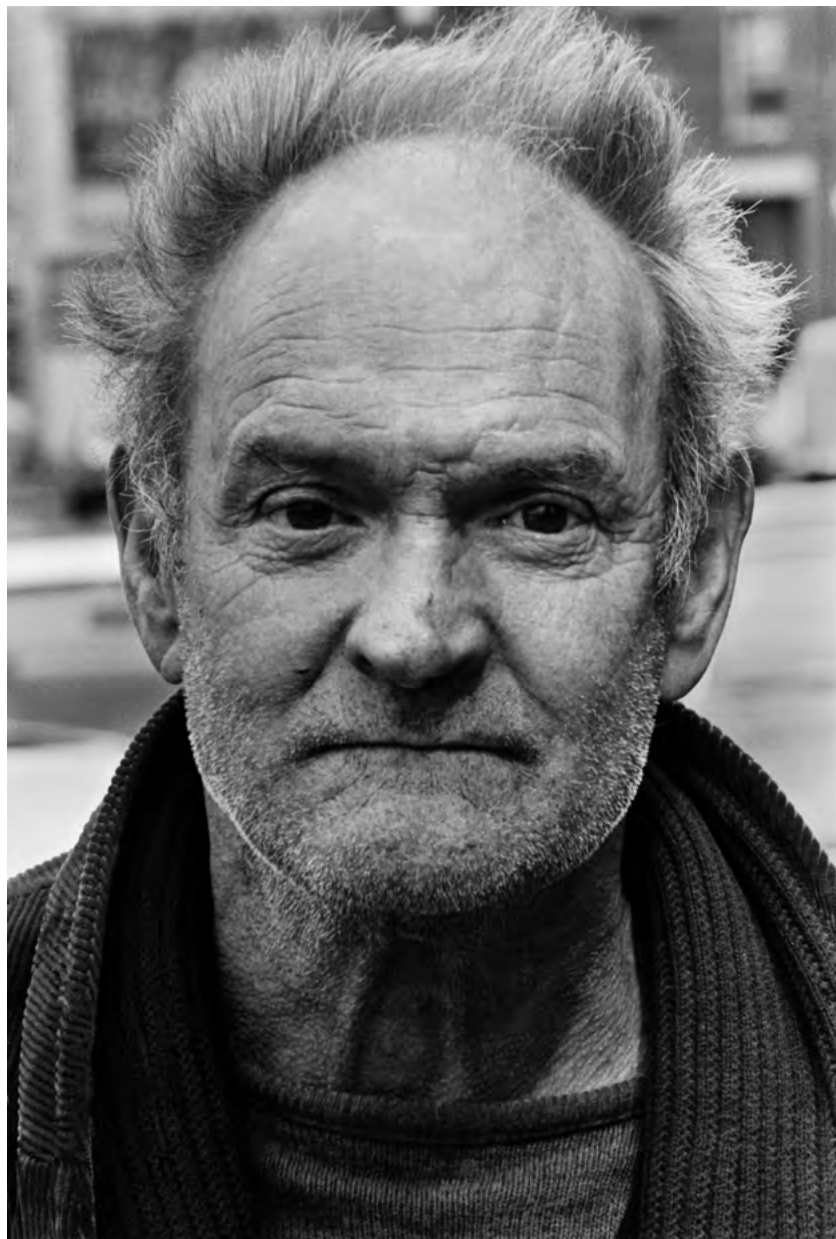
LADIES IN BELLINGHAM SQUARE



JACK SHORE, 1984



EDWINA



CHELSEA GUY



WOMAN (KERCHIEF AND GLASSES)



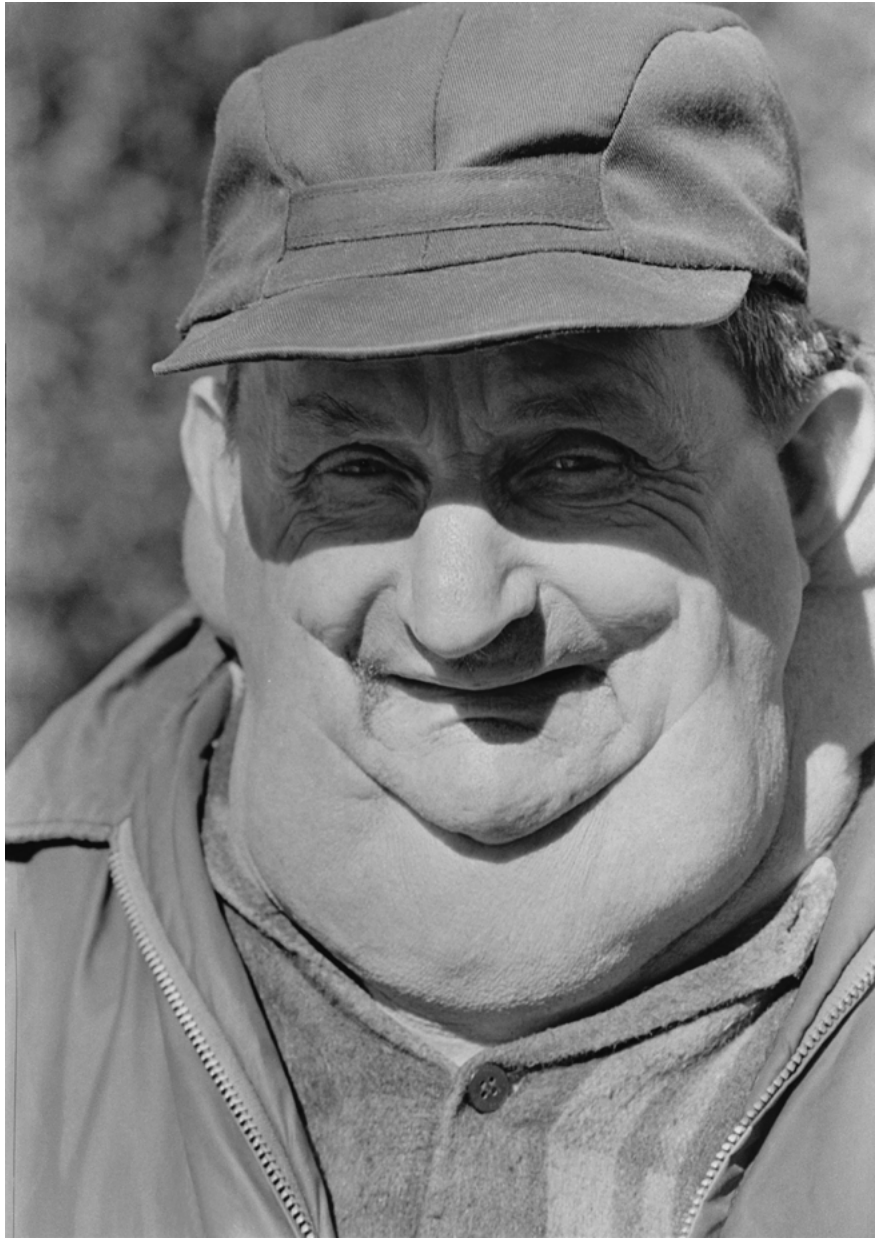
WOMAN ON MARLBOROUGH STREET



MAN WITH DERBY HAT



WOMAN ON HER BACK PORCH, WARD ONE



MAN IN BELLINGHAM SQUARE



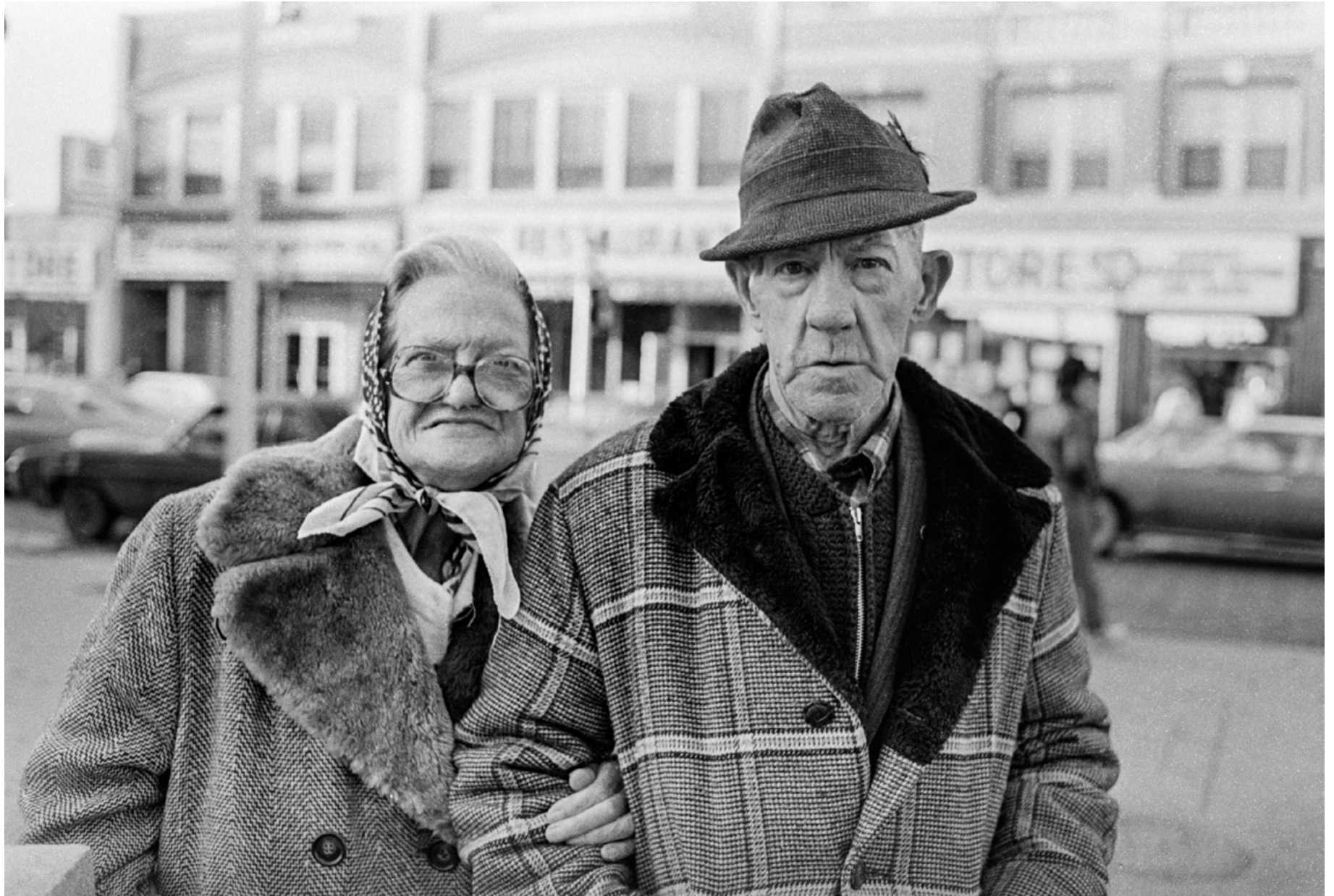
MAN ON BROADWAY, BLIZZARD OF '78



MISS FITZGERALD



MARY ARSENAULT, BELLINGHAM SQUARE



BROADWAY COUPLE



COTTAGE STREET COUPLE, WARD THREE



MEMORIAL DAY COUPLE, 1979



GIRL, CHELSEA



SHURTLEFF STREET ELEMENTARY KID



GIRL, POLONIA PARK



SNOW MASK, BLIZZARD OF '78



LIVING IN CHELSEA



YOUNG BOY, CHELSEA



NUMBER NINETY-NINE

100



JUMPING ROPE, QUIGLEY PARK



BACK PORCH

102



SCHOOL KIDS



LOWER BROADWAY COPS AND ROBBERS



BLIZZARD OF '78



FIRST COMMUNION



POLISH (PULASKI) DAY IN THE SQUARE