



Jack Delano

Jack Delano was born August 1, 1914 as Jacob Ovcharov in Voroshilovka, southwest of Kiev in the Ukraine. His parents and family moved to Pennsylvania in 1923. He studied graphic arts, photography and music at the Settlement Music School. Upon receiving a scholarship, he attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. There he continued his studies of illustration and music, graduating in 1932. After graduating he was awarded a Cresson Traveling Fellowship, which allowed him to travel throughout Europe. He went to France, Italy, England, Italy Austria, Holland and Spain, visiting museums such as the Prado and British Museum. In 1939 he received a grant from the Federal Arts Program. He produced a series of photographs about mining conditions in Pottsville, in the Schuylkill County, Pennsylvania coal area, where illegal workers were employed. Subsequently, he sent some photographs to Roy Stryker at the Farm Security Administration (FSA). He applied for a position, but none were available. Around that time he changed his name to Jack Delano. Stryker did hire him in 1940 for the Historical Unit of the FSA to replace Arthur Rothstein, who was leaving. His first assignment was to photograph workers and small towns along the Eastern Seaboard, from Maine to Florida. He travelled to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in 1941 for the FSA. Puerto Rico affected him so deeply that he and his family settled there in 1946. He returned to the mainland in 1942 and photographed the railroads for the Office of War Information (OWI). He pictured how the railroad industry worked and the people who did the work. He worked in Chicago and then the Pacific Coast, and started using color. The striking color photographs he took at rail yards during the 1940s are especially well known. Delano's photographs are known for their elegance and empathy. He also made the concept of *place* an important dimension of his photos. His straightforward photographs of small towns convey a sense of national identity and the dignity of the individual. Between 1943 and 1946 he served in the U. S. Army Air Corps as a photographer in the Pacific and South America. In 1945 he was awarded a Guggenheim Grant to return to Puerto Rico on a photography project. His earlier work in Puerto Rico led to a lifelong love of the landscape, people and culture. In 1946 he returned and began a long career that included working as a freelance filmmaker and independent photographer. He was also a composer, including music for ballet, orchestra, chamber groups and chorus and solo vocal. His vocal music incorporated Puerto Rican poetry, especially the works of Tomás Blanco. He, along with Blanco and his wife Irene were also collaborators of illustrated children's books. *The Child's Gift: A Twelfth Night Tale* by Blanco, with illustrations by Irene Delano and music by Jack Delano is a classic in Puerto Rican literature. He also created and directed Puerto Rico's public television network. He and his wife Irene worked in the Community Division of the Department of Public Education. There he produced films and composed many of the scores. He directed *Los Peloteros*, now a classic film about rural kids and their love of baseball. In 1979 he received a

Indiana Farm Security Administration Photographs Digital Collection

<http://www.ulib.iupui.edu/IFSAP>

Puerto Rico Foundation for the Humanities grant to put on an exhibit entitled, "Contrasts: 40 Years of Change and Continuity in Puerto Rico." In 1990 he finally published *Puerto Rico Mio: Four Decades of Change*. He and his wife were intimately and actively immersed in the cultural life of Puerto Rico. He died in 1997 at the age of 83 in Puerto Rico, where he lived since 1946.

Jack Delano Bibliography

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Smithsonian Archives of American Art: Interview with Jack Delano

<http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/oralhistories/transcripts/delano65.htm>