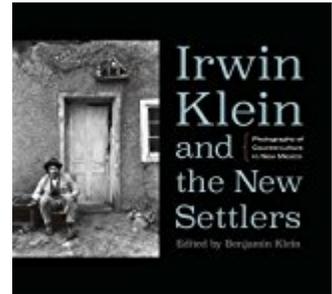


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Benjamin Klein, ed. *Irwin Klein and the New Settlers: Photographs of Counterculture in New Mexico*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016. 192 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8032-8510-1.



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I was vaguely aware of the presence of counterculture individuals in New Mexico in the early 1980s. But I never learned much about them, and even today, I find that this aspect of the state's history remains sparsely documented. Therefore, Benjamin Klein's *Irwin Klein and the New Settlers* gives us a welcome new window through which to view these people and their cultural role in the history of the state.

Irwin Klein and the New Settlers is edited by Klein's nephew, Benjamin Klein, who presents an in-depth view of his uncle's photographic work on the subject. Born in 1933 in Brooklyn, New York, Irwin Klein received a Master's degree in English from the University of Chicago in 1956 and was later a PhD student at the University of Minnesota. His first photos appeared in *Modern Photography* in 1964, and he was represented in a series of exhibitions thereafter, mainly in New York. Irwin Klein passed away in New York in 1974 and left a legacy of images of America in a time of transition—among them, photographs of people and places of the counterculture in northern New Mexico from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s.

The work is not comprehensive and the photos chosen are not strictly documentarian, nor are they meant to be. The book is, in many ways, a reflection upon the

timeless ethos of growth and reinvention, played out on a national level but experienced locally. As Benjamin Klein himself states in his introduction to the photos, "the adventure I depict is part of a timeless movement, the perennial attempt of human beings to renew the pattern of their lives" (p. 39). For that reason, perhaps, Irwin Klein eschews the use of the word "hippie" to describe the people he photographed, preferring instead the term "new settlers." These new settlers were, predominantly middle class, white, mostly younger individuals from larger cities who came to rural northern New Mexico to try a new way of living. This new way incorporated practices of nearby traditionally Hispanic villages and Native communities, blended with their own new ideas for social order.

Five essays along with a preface and an introduction contextualize the work and provide sufficient background to appreciate Klein's photographs. The essays discuss the ideas and ideals of a countercultural movement, Irwin Klein himself and his photography, and the world of northern New Mexico. They elaborate specifically on the village of El Rito, where many of the photos were taken—in the 1960s and 1970s. Among the essays is one by Benjamin Klein and Tim Hodgdon, "From Innocence to Experience," which provides insight into Irwin

Klein's life, his early work in street photography in New York, and the sympathetic approach he took to his subjects. Particularly helpful is Lois Rudnick's essay entitled "The Great Hippie Invasion," which offers thumbnail sketches of the communes that formed in northern New Mexico during this time. (This essay alone would be a good introduction to anyone exploring this little-known era of New Mexico history.)

It is the photos, however, that form the core of the book. Klein ordered them purposely in a sequence that reflects "a rite of passage from innocence to experience," so as to mimic the journey of the new settlers from idealistic youth to "older American archetypes like the pioneer and the independent yeoman farmer" (p. 39). Indeed, as noted by Benjamin Klein and Tim Hodgdon in their introductory essay, the images are perhaps not out of place when compared to the work of Depression-era Farmers Security Administration photographers—further confirming the validity of the choice of the term "new settlers."

The photos are black and white, stark, and impeccably composed. Some are portraits, humanizing the lives of the new settlers, and none more poignantly than the portrait of Donna Elliot and her daughter, Alena: a mother cradling an infant in her arms while standing before a window, the word "baby" written on the wall behind them (photo 5). Others capture moments—like a playful romp in the grass between lovers (photo 12); or

two men repairing a fencepost (photo 56). A few document the landscape, natural and architectural.

Several photos stand out for their aesthetic beauty. In "Setting up the food co-op, Vallecitos" (photo 38), a man sits atop a large, open window counter, smoking a cigarette, while a young boy stands at the edge of the window, his arms extended above him. A strong vertical provided by the window frame divides the photo, separating the man and boy, while a dangling pair of legs from an unseen person sitting on a partition or shelf just above further splits the scene and suggests, perhaps, another, more metaphorical division. "Karla at the waterfall, Carson National Forest" (photo 15) shows a woman standing at the rocky base of a pond while a flow of water from atop a boulder cascades through her hair. Her soft nude figure against the ragged boulder in a scene drenched in sunlight and shadow has the feeling of a classical figure painting.

Klein lived with the people he photographed, participated in their lives while also capturing them on film. That familiarity gives the photos a tenderness that is often in contrast to the turbulence so often associated with those years and makes his work, then, a rare insider's view. *Irwin Klein and the New Settlers* contributes meaningfully to our understanding of how the counterculture movement played out in New Mexico, its successes and failures, and the people who formed it.

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