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**NEW EXHIBITION FEATURES 100 YEARS OF REMARKABLE  
PHOTOGRAPHS – BOTH VINTAGE PRINTS AND CONTEMPORARY WORK  
-- AND STORIES ABOUT LIFE IN RURAL CALIFORNIA**

- ***“I See Beauty in this Life: A Photographer Looks at 100 Years of Rural California” Features Photographs from the Collections of the California Historical Society Selected by Photographer Lisa M. Hamilton***
- ***Five Month Exhibition Officially Launches “Curating California” – A Series of Exhibitions at the California Historical Society through which remarkable Californians explore the rich collections of CHS***

**SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. (October 28, 2012)** - In many people’s experience, California consists of Los Angeles, Sacramento and San Francisco, and the highways that connect them. In reality these urban centers make up only a fraction of the whole. According to the 2010 Census, geographically the state of California is more than 94 percent rural. Surprise Valley, Lost Hills, Raisin City, Mecca -- these are the communities that make up “the rest” of California.

Over the past two years, writer and photographer Lisa M. Hamilton has been telling the stories of these rural communities in her multimedia work *Real Rural*. Lisa has delved into the collections of the California Historical Society to connect these present-day stories with the past to create *I See Beauty in This Life: A Photographer Looks at 100 Years of Rural California*.

*I See Beauty in This Life*, which officially opened today with a community celebration at the California Historical Society, features approximately 150 photographs, is a combination of large-scale color prints by Hamilton and her selections from California Historical Society’s vast photography collections -- material dating from the 1880s through the mid-twentieth century, much of which has never been exhibited before. Hamilton has selected images that are not predictable views of pastoral windmills or heroic mule teams, but rather images that reflect her own keen interest in revealing the unexpected.

“This is a remarkable exhibition that helps connect rural California to urban areas with photographs that tell unique stories about the beauty, struggles and contributions of rural California to our rich history,” said Karen Ross, Secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture. “I applaud the California Historical Society and the supporters of this project for bringing these stories and photographs forward and sharing them in such a unique way that is both provocative and educational.”

Hamilton, who focuses on agriculture and rural communities, is the first scholar in a new program of the California Historical Society called *Curating California* through which artists, writers, historians, poets, activists, and other remarkable Californians are invited to explore the rich collections of the Historical Society with the goal of inspiring a project or exhibition.

“We are proud to inaugurate our Curating California program with Lisa Hamilton, whose keen eye, sharp mind and embracing spirit embody CHS’s new vision for an open, accessible sense of history,” said Anthea Hartig, Executive Director of the California Historical Society. “Taken by amateur and mostly unknown photographers, the photographs Lisa selected are remarkable for their beauty and unusual perspective and the meaningful, everyday stories that each tell.”

“These press prints, snapshots, and publicity stills are intimate records of struggle, celebration, community, and the endless work required to wrest a livelihood from the land,” added Hamilton. “Together, they tell a complex -- and sometimes humorous -- story of the many different individual lives and landscapes comprising the vast mosaic that is the Golden State. It is an honor to work with the California Historical Society to help tell these unique stories through a different lens.”

The title of the exhibition, *I See Beauty in This Life*, is taken from an interview that Hamilton did with Modoc County rancher and poet Linda Husa who says, “*If your poetry isn’t based on something that’s important to you—family, place, the purpose of your life -- well then it’s kind of empty isn’t it? Because it has to have that passion to affect other people, to make other people care about what you are saying. They have to hear that there is something there... I always wanted people to understand what was going on in the rural routes. And that there certainly should be some regard for the people there. Because I see beauty in this life, I don’t think it is lonesome. And I don’t think it is dumb.*”

According to Hamilton, there are many ways to define what is “rural.” For the purpose of her work and this exhibition, she has used the term to describe “places where the culture and the economy are defined by the direct use of natural resources.” This manifests in myriad ways, something reflected by the works in *I See Beauty in This Life*. We see gushing oil spouts and the faces of the men who work them, as well as graffiti left by trapped miners who were not rescued in time. A 4-H girl guards her prize sheep under the scrutiny of a Los Angeles television camera, and a rodeo queen applies lipstick from the make-up kit in the horn of her saddle. Given the great range of experience presented by these photographs, even those familiar with rural California are likely to be surprised.

The *I See Beauty in This Life* exhibition will be featured in the galleries of the California Historical Society located in San Francisco at **678 Mission Street from October 28, 2012 to March 24, 2013**. A tour is planned afterward to bring this exhibition to venues across the state. The CHS gallery and store are open to the public Tuesday through Sunday from 12:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. **Admission is FREE** with a suggested donation of \$5.00. For more information about the exhibition, school tours and events visit [www.californiahistoricalsociety.org](http://www.californiahistoricalsociety.org) or call 415-337-1848.

This exhibition has been generously supported by our partners and sponsors: Stephen and Barbara Hearst; California Rangeland Trust; Bill Lane Center for the American West; Julie and Craig McNamara; California Bountiful Foundation; the California Department of Food and Agriculture; California Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom; California Wool Growers Association; Center for Urban Education about Sustainable Agriculture (CUESA); Community Alliance with Family Farmers; Cowgirl Creamery; Full Belly Farm; Hafner Vineyard; Herglotz Public Affairs; Lagunitas Brewing Company; Sherwin-Williams; and T & D Willey Farms.

**About the California Historical Society:** Founded in 1871, CHS is a membership-based, non-profit organization that inspires and empowers Californians to make the past a meaningful part of their contemporary lives. CHS was designated the official California State Historical Society in 1979. Headquartered in San Francisco, CHS is home to one of the four major research collections on California history in the state, including over 35,000 volumes of books and pamphlets, more than 4,000 manuscript collections, and some 500,000 photographs documenting California’s social, cultural, economic, and political history and development. In Los Angeles, CHS also maintains an incomparable photograph collection at the University of Southern California and a remarkable fine art and costume collection at the Autry National Center.

**About Lisa M. Hamilton:** Hamilton, an author and photographer, is the author of *Deeply Rooted: Unconventional Farmers in the Age of Agribusiness*. Her work has also been published in *The Nation*, *The Atlantic*, *McSweeney's*, and *Orion*. In 2011 she turned her focus to California, traveling over 10,000 miles around the state, exploring its rural communities and landscapes in the multimedia work *Real Rural*. The work has many forms, including an ad-art campaign on BART and a storytelling website ([www.realrural.org](http://www.realrural.org)) that weaves portraits from photographs, audio, and text. As with all of her work, Hamilton considers questions of identity and community in *I See Beauty in This Life*, using photographs from throughout rural California’s rich history.