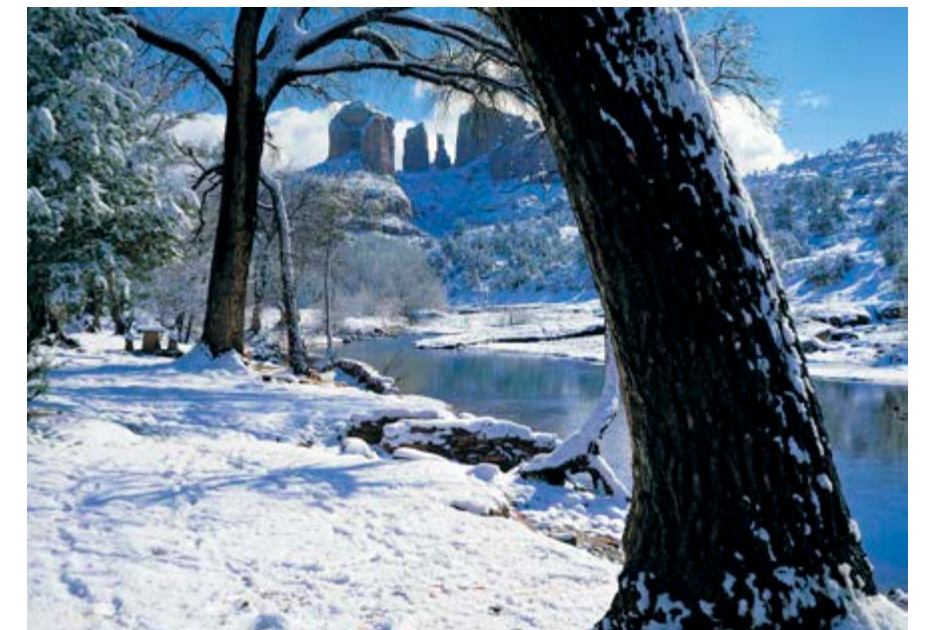




THE EARLY PHOTOGRAPHERS

Arizona Highways has been around since 1925, but it didn't make much noise until it started showcasing the work of Esther Henderson and Josef Muench. They were the earliest of the early photographers, and they launched an era that ran through the mid-1950s, when David Muench, Josef's son, set the bar for all who followed.

BY ROBERT STIEVE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE EARLY PHOTOGRAPHERS



LEFT: Bob Bradshaw, pictured in front of his Sedona photo shop in the 1950s, was among the early contributors who turned *Arizona Highways* into a showcase for photography. *Courtesy of the Bradshaw Family*
ABOVE: Snow blankets Red Rock Crossing beneath Sedona's Cathedral Rock in a Bradshaw photo.

“There’s such power in the landscape in Arizona. And *Arizona Highways* has held on for a long time. It’s an honor to have some of my best work in the magazine, especially on subjects that haven’t been done that much, and that’s why I come back to the magazine. I want it to hold up through time.”

— DAVID MUENCH, DECEMBER 2015



In television, the big change began with *Bonanza* — 60 years ago this month. It wasn’t the first color broadcast, that distinction goes to the Tournament of Roses Parade, but to Baby Boomers and their parents, the debut of the feel-good Western on September 12, 1959, marked the transition from the Paleozoic era of black and white television to an age when the vivid blue of Lake Tahoe and the brilliant green of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest could be splashed into living rooms around the world.

Our bonanza began two decades earlier. In 1938.

Before that, *Arizona Highways* was a trade journal aimed at road engineers and intrepid travelers trying to get from Point A to Point B. Along with mileage charts, maps and reports on road conditions, the pages included ads for road graders, asphalt paint and corrugated culverts. Reading it was like watching ink dry. Until Raymond Carlson came along. He changed everything.

The first thing to go was the tedious jargon, which was replaced by evocative travelogues. Then, in July 1938, Mr. Carlson added some pizzazz. “How can we,” he wrote, “through the medium of black and white, paint a picture of the gold in an Arizona sunset, portray the blue of an Arizona sky, tell the fiery red and green of an Arizona desert in bloom? We therefore resort to color photography in this issue’s cover page to faithfully portray one colorful portion of the state.”

It was a shot of lower Oak Creek Canyon by Norman G. Wallace — the first-ever color photograph in the magazine — and Mr. Carlson liked what he saw: “The faithful photographer has caught the deep red of the cliffs, the purple hue of the mountains in the background, the extravagance and richness of one of capricious Nature’s finest paintings in the state.”

To solicit even more photography, Mr. Carlson launched our first-ever amateur photo contest. The prize money was \$15, \$10 and \$5, which was considered a lot of money in the late 1930s. It was the infancy of our renowned archive, which by 1939 included the work of Esther Henderson, Barry Goldwater and Josef Muench. They were the earliest of the early photographers.

As the 1940s got underway, the momentum was building and the magazine was evolving into something special. Unfortunately, that evolution coincided with the escalation of World War II, and by 1943, Mr. Carlson and George Avey, the magazine’s visionary art director, had stepped away from their driver’s seats to join the war effort — Mr. Carlson enlisted in the Marines, and Mr. Avey went to work for the Navy. Three years later, when they finally came home, they picked up where they’d left off. And then some.

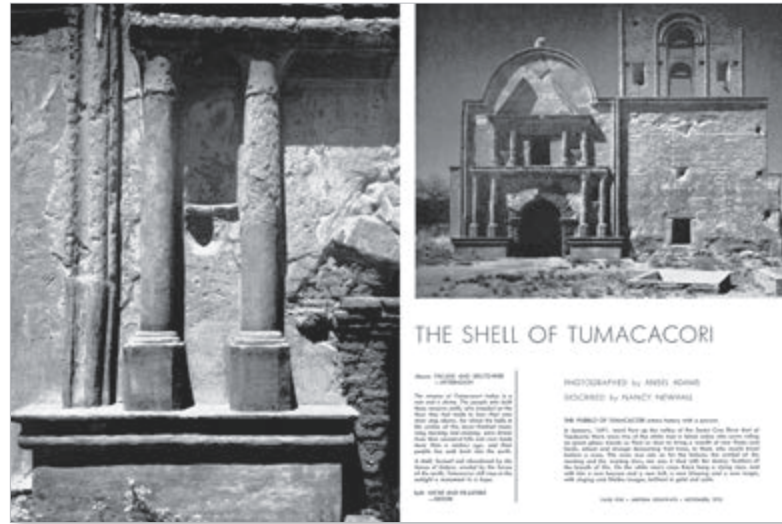
ABOVE, LEFT: Two members of the Muench family contributed photos to *Arizona Highways* in the 1950s. Josef Muench’s harvest scene (top) graced our November 1952 cover; later, in January 1955, our cover featured a shot of Sonoran Desert saguaros (bottom) by Josef’s son, David. It was the younger Muench’s first contribution to the magazine.

RIGHT: Laura Gilpin photographed this Navajo family in a covered wagon in 1934. Gilpin is best known for her photographs of Native Americans.



“I am PREGNANT with ideas!!!
Maybe there will be a multiple birth!!!”

— ANSEL ADAMS TO RAYMOND CARLSON,
MARCH 14, 1953



In their first issue back, March 1946, they welcomed Ansel Adams to the pages of *Arizona Highways*. By that time, he was already considered one of the world's great landscape photographers. However, despite his reputation as the master of black and white composition, his first photograph in the magazine was a two-page color spread of Monument Valley. It was the first, but not the last. “I have a far-flung reputation now, which I am anxious to cash in on in a thoroughly dignified (and profitable) manner,” he said, tongue-in-cheek, to our editor.

Over the years, Mr. Carlson and Mr. Adams developed a deep friendship and a mutually beneficial professional relationship. And whenever the photographer would pass through Phoenix, he'd stop by the magazine. During one of those visits, he suggested that *Arizona Highways* purchase a large collection of his photographs — at a good price — to be used whenever.

Like finding a Maynard Dixon behind a velvet Elvis, Mr. Carlson must have thought, *Hell, yeah!* It was a deal too good to pass up. And with hindsight, it was more like highway robbery. *Highways* robbery. According to a series of letters between the two men, Mr. Adams' bill to the magazine for that collection, which turned out to be 150 original, mounted photographs, was \$1,500. Do the math.

In addition to the arrival of Ansel Adams, the magazine made history in 1946. In December of that year, *Arizona Highways* published the first all-color issue of a nationally circulated consumer magazine — we beat *Life*, *Look*, *National Geographic*, *The Saturday Evening Post* ... we beat them all.

“It may or may not be an achievement,” Mr. Carlson wrote in his column, “but as far as we know, this is the first time in American publishing history that a magazine of general circulation appears completely illustrated from ‘cover to cover’ in color — that loud ‘crick’ you just heard is a sprained elbow

Ansel Adams' black and white photographs of Mission San José de Tumacacori were paired with a Nancy Newhall story (above) in our November 1952 issue. Before that, in March 1946, Adams' iconic shot of Monument Valley (right) appeared in the magazine.

caused by patting ourselves on the back.”

Like The Beatles after Ed Sullivan, *Arizona Highways* had become an international phenomenon. And the roster of photographers was growing. Joining Norman Wallace, Esther Henderson, Josef Muench, Barry Goldwater and Ansel Adams in the early years were Chuck Abbott, Forrest Alexander, Earl Anderson, Norton Louis Avery, Pietro Balestrero, William Belknap Jr., Somers Blackman, Catherine Boyd, Bob Bradshaw, Jack Breed, Margaret Bundren, Hulbert Burroughs, Ruth Crockett, Wayne Davis, Don DeMuth, Duncan Edwards, Carlos Elmer, Ferenz Fedor, Virginia Garner, Norman Rhoads Garrett, George Geyer, Laura Gilpin, Charles W. Herbert, A.H. Hilton, Lyle Hiner, Richard Jepperson, Max Kegley,



Martin Litton, Hubert A. Lowman, Willard Luce, Ray Manley, Robert Markow, Jerry McLain, Herb McLaughlin, Nelson Merrifield, H.H. Miller, Gene Morris, Lyle A. Morse, David Muench, Tad Nichols, Willis Peterson, Claire Meyer Proctor, Frank Proctor, Fred H. Ragsdale, John Anthony Randazzo, Allen C. Reed, Art Riley, H. Armstrong Roberts, Mike Roberts, Bill Sears, Robert Upton and Harry Vroman.

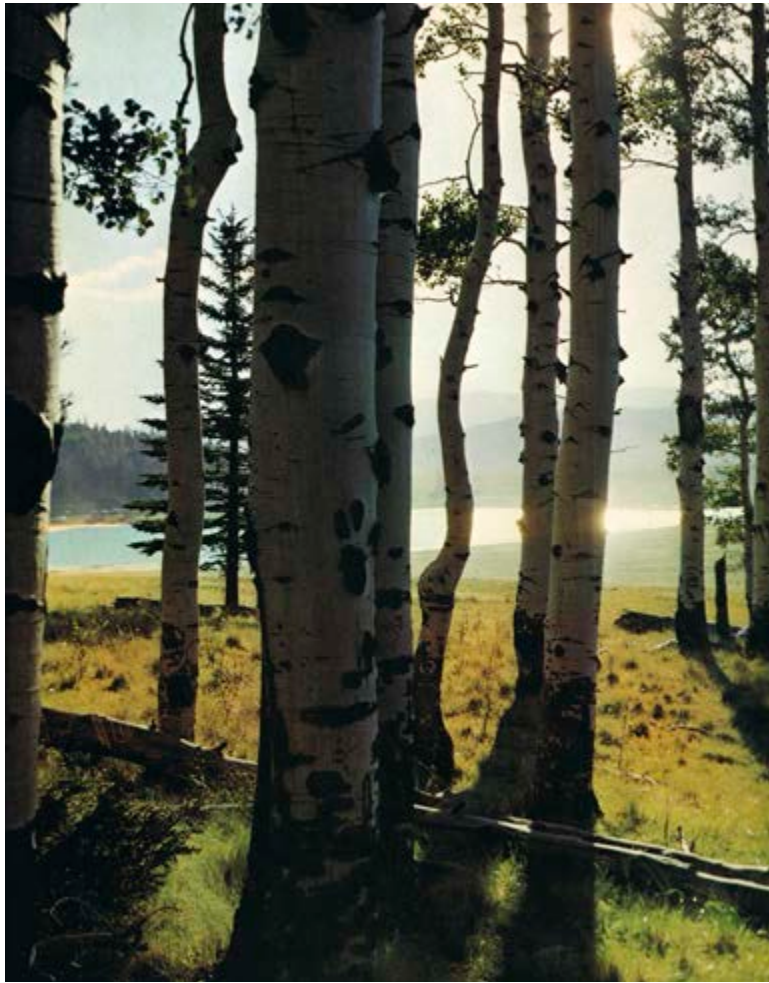
Some of those names you may have seen before, including Chuck Abbott, who was married to Esther Henderson (see page 22). Ms. Henderson was our first paid contributor.

“Years and years ago,” Raymond Carlson wrote in January 1968, “we learned of a photographer in Tucson by the name of Esther Henderson, whose creations with a camera, we were

told, were outstanding. They were and are! Hers were the first photographs we purchased. We always contended she is one of the best.”

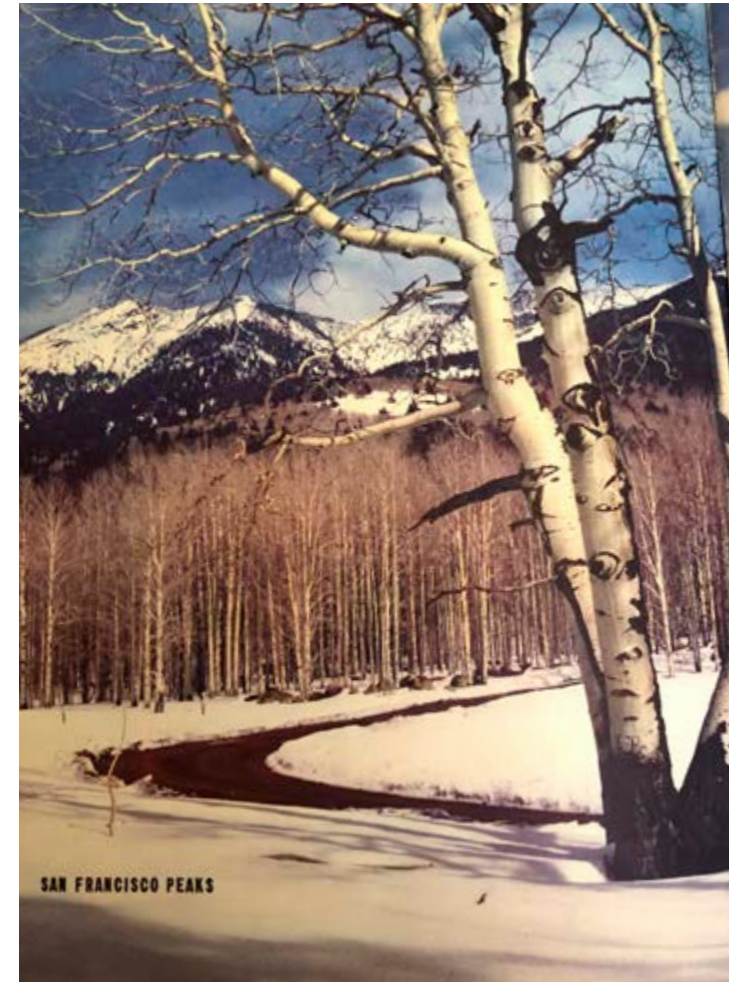
Ray Manley was another talented contributor. As a young man, he dreamed of “capturing a few nature photographs worthy of being printed” in a fledgling magazine called *Arizona Highways*. “In 1939,” he told us, “I bought my first 10-sheet box of Kodachrome. I studied my subjects well before exposing that film because a dollar a sheet was a lot of money to pay for film in those days.”

Nevertheless, the investment paid off. Of those 10 shots, three would become covers for us. The first, a beautiful photograph of the San Francisco Peaks, appeared on our back cover



“In the past ten years my work has been accepted by just about every American publication that uses photographs, but even if *Arizona Highways* did not give the photographer such consideration and so superb a showcase for his wares, I would still follow my rule of offering its editors first refusal on any shot of mine they can possibly use. This magazine not only stood godfather to my professional career when it accepted the view of the San Francisco Peaks [October 1944], but without its unwitting aid at a turning point in my life, photography would probably be just a sometime hobby instead of my absorbing interest and means of livelihood.”

— RAY MANLEY, AUGUST 1956



in October 1944. A decade later, in August 1956, Mr. Manley picked up a pen and shared some of his thoughts on being a full-time photographer.

“I’m a very fortunate fellow,” he wrote. “That’s what people tell me often, and that’s what I often tell myself; although, we may not be looking at my professional activities as a scenic photographer in exactly the same way. ‘My, but you must lead an interesting life,’ folks will comment. ‘Just traveling around taking pictures of beautiful scenery and getting paid for it.’ ‘Yes, indeed,’ I agree, remembering the time I waited out a 3-day wind-and-rain storm in Monument Valley to take a 1/10th second exposure, and the time I traveled seven hundred miles to shoot a round-up of three thousand Herefords for a breeder’s journal and the picture couldn’t be used because there were three or four Brahmas in the herd, and the time ...

“No, there are just as many disappointments in scenic photography as in any other creative profession; perhaps more, since so many of the elements in this work — light and shadow, weather and temperature — are variable and beyond human control. I am not surprised that fewer than a dozen people in the entire country make their living solely from scenic photography. But you can judge how I weigh the disappointments

against the rewards when I say that I hope someday to be one of them. So far, I have had to rely on commercial photography to finance the scenic expeditions.”

His 1956 story is titled *Arizona Is My Studio*, and it’s a wonderfully written piece. Many of our early photographers shared that ability. Chuck Abbott, Esther Henderson, Hubert A. Lowman and Josef Muench all wrote what Raymond Carlson described as “valuable and informative dissertations on the art of taking pictures.”

And it is an art, the exalted editor continued, “the wonderful and satisfying art of translating into and capturing on film the imperishable beauty of the world about us. The beginner has found these photographic essays invaluable and, we feel, even experienced practitioners have found them worthwhile.

ABOVE: Arizona’s mountain lakes have attracted our photographers for decades. Willis Peterson photographed the aspens of Big Lake (left) for our May 1973 issue; earlier, in December 1962, we published Charles W. Herbert’s shot of pines and wildflowers at Hawley Lake (right).

OPPOSITE PAGE: Ray Manley’s photograph of the snowy San Francisco Peaks, near Flagstaff, appeared on the back cover of the October 1944 issue of *Arizona Highways*. It was the first of hundreds of Manley photos the magazine would publish.

The photographers we have featured in the past, to say the least, know their cameras thoroughly and are adept in their use. Witness their consistently fine contributions to these pages year after year.”

Like so many others on that long list of early photographers, Ray Manley was a contributor for many years. No one, however, has done it longer than David Muench. He’s been sharing his award-winning images with us for parts of seven decades. His beginning, however, goes back even further than that. As a child, David traveled with his father, Josef, and his mother, Joyce Rockwood Muench, on story assignments for *Arizona Highways* to Northern Arizona and beyond.

“We did Colorado River trips and hiked up to Rainbow Bridge,” he says. “I was 12 when I hiked the 6 miles to Rainbow Bridge the first time — of course, before Lake Powell. I have a picture on my wall. I’m sitting on the river and just enjoying it. I was becoming familiar with the country. But I really wasn’t thinking of photography.”

It was inevitable, though. Sir David was destined to join the family business. Like Titus, Edsel Ford and Jakob Dylan. “He showed me much of the country and got me enthused,” David says of his father. “It wasn’t too long before I had to see some of

these places myself.” And so he did.

Then, in the early 1950s, David and his father made a trip to *Arizona Highways*. “As soon as you feel like you’ve made a good picture, I’ll publish it,” Mr. Carlson said to the prodigy. In typical David Muench fashion, his first photograph ended up on a cover — it was our January 1955 issue. He was 18, and the image was titled *Saguaros*.

“Ever since my first visit to Arizona, when I was six years old,” the caption reads, “these big desert fellows have spelled exciting scenery to me. This grouping, backed by towering clouds, west of Tucson, was one of the first pictures I took on Ektachrome with my Speed Graphic.”

The caption continues: “David is the son of one of our favorite contributors, Josef Muench. We are proud to welcome him to our pages for the first time this issue.”

Today, at the age of 83, David Muench is as passionate about the art of landscape photography as he was in the middle of the last century. And it’s not an exaggeration to say that his images influenced not only this magazine, but also the entire direction of landscape photography. What Ansel Adams is to black and white photography, David Muench is to color. He set the bar for all who followed. Like *Bonanza* did back in 1959. [AH](#)