



Adobe Church

Date

1940

Primary Maker

Wright Morris

Medium

Gelatin silver print

Description

Wright Morris aspired to be a novelist and was profoundly influenced by a road trip on which he embarked in 1938, from California to Cape Cod. On the trip, which he later called an “eye-opener,” he returned to Middle America—he had been born in Nebraska—and encountered a culture still burdened by the Great

Depression but blessed with great natural beauty. “I saw the American landscape crowded with ruins I wanted to salvage,” he said. “The depression created a world of objects toward which I felt affectionate and possessive. I ran a high fever of enthusiasm, and believed myself chosen to record this history, before it was gone.” He went on to do so in both text and image. Morris’s initial trip had such a creative impact that he replicated it in reverse in the fall of 1940, traveling west for nine months to collect material for a novel as well as to make photographs. The result was *The Inhabitants* (1946), a collection of prose paragraphs paired with images. He shot Adobe Church at this time, and it is typical of Morris’s technique and style. “There is a vein in my taste, we might call it classic,” he noted, “which seeks for an ordered, harmonious resolution of all pictorial elements. . . . I love the way the object stands there, ineluctably, irreducibly visible.” Morris’s practice of incorporating images into his books as a parallel to the text, rather than as subsidiary illustrations, was progressive for the time. Of his working method and intention, he wrote, “Rather than ponder the photograph, then describe my impressions, I found in what I had written the verbal images that enhanced, and enlarged upon, the photograph. The unexpected resonance and play between apparent contraries, and unrelated impressions, was precisely what delighted the imagination.” Although he again paired image and text in his novel *The Home Place* (1948), his publisher advised him that readers felt the photographs interrupted the narrative and had trouble understanding the concept of the book. Morris therefore dropped his interest in photography to focus on writing and did not produce another “photo-text” until 1968. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017)

Dimensions

Image: 2 15/16 in. × 4 in. (7.5 × 10.1 cm) Sheet: 3 15/16 in. × 5 in. (10 × 12.7 cm)