

## **Margaret Bourke-White: Eyes on Russia (1931)**

### **Presentation by Gary Saretzky**

#### **Abstract**

*Eyes on Russia* (1931) was the first of ten major books by or coauthored by Margaret Bourke-White (1904–1971); the last was her autobiography, *Portrait of Myself* (1963). Due in part to recognition for her Russian photographs, Bourke-White earned a spot on a 1936 roster of the ten most notable women in the United States and probably was the most famous photographer, male or female, of the decade. Some of the forty photographs in *Eyes on Russia* are among her best known today.

Consequently, it is somewhat curious that, except in a list of works facing the title page, *Eyes on Russia* is not mentioned in her autobiography, although she did devote a short chapter to her three trips to the Soviet Union in 1930, 1931, and 1932. What can account for this anomaly? Had she come to view the book as unimportant or, for some reason, embarrassing? To address this question, this presentation explores Bourke-White's previous experience, the book and events surrounding its publication, and concludes with a discussion of Bourke-White's subsequent career as it relates to her first photographs of the U.S.S.R.

#### **Bio**

Gary D. Saretzky, archivist, educator, and photographer, worked as an archivist for more than fifty years at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Educational Testing Service, and the Monmouth County Archives. Saretzky taught the history of photography at Mercer County Community College, 1977–2012, and served as coordinator of the Public History Internship Program for the Rutgers University History Department, 1994–2016. He has published more than 100 articles and reviews on the history of photography, photographic conservation, and other topics, "Margaret Bourke-White: *Eyes on Russia*," *The Photo Review*, 22:3&4 (Summer & Fall 1999). In 2006, he co-curated the exhibition, *Margaret Bourke-White: In Print*, at Alexander Library, Rutgers University, and prepared the exhibition catalog, available on his website, [saretzky.com](http://saretzky.com).