

Never-before-seen photos from 100 years ago tell vivid story of gritty New York City

By [Associated Press](#)

PUBLISHED: 08:31 EST, 24 April 2012 | **UPDATED:** 14:55 EST, 24 April 2012

Almost a million images of New York and its municipal operations have been made public for the first time on the internet.

The city's [Department of Records](#) officially announced the debut of the photo database.

Culled from the Municipal Archives collection of more than 2.2 million images going back to the mid-1800s, the 870,000 photographs feature all manner of city oversight -- from stately ports and bridges to grisly gangland killings.



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Bridges/Plant & Structures, Eugene de Salignac

Always moving: Workers dig in Delancy Street on New York's Lower East Side in this photo dated July 29, 1908. The historical pictures released online for the first time show New York in the late 19th and early 20th centuries



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Bridges/Plant & Structures, Eugene de Salignac

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A bridge too far? Painters hang from suspended wires on the Brooklyn Bridge October 7, 1914 -- 31 years after it first opened



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Bridges/Plant & Structures, Eugene de Salignac

Genesis of a icon: In this June 5, 1908 photo, the Manhattan Bridge is less than a shell, seen from Washington Street. It wouldn't be opened for another 18 months and wouldn't be completed for another four years



The main concourse of Grand Central Terminal, in New York, is seen from the Campbell apartment in this 1937 photo. The posh apartment, in one of America's grandest train stations, was the playground of financier John Campbell in the roaring 1920.

The project was four years in the making, part of the department's mission to make city records accessible to everyone, said assistant commissioner Kenneth Cobb.

'We all knew that we had fantastic photograph collections that no one would even guess that we had,' he said.

Taken mostly by anonymous municipal workers, some of the images have appeared in publications but most were accessible only by visiting the archive offices in lower Manhattan over the past few years.

Researchers, history buffs, filmmakers, genealogists and preservationists in particular will find the digitized collection helpful. But anyone can search the images, share them through social media or purchase them as prints.



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, NYPD Evidence Collection

Dead men can tell tales: When the New York Times wrote about elevator operator Robert Green, left, and Jacob Jagendorf, a building engineer, right, it reported that their bodies found lying at the bottom of an elevator shaft November 24, 1915, told the story of the pair's failed robbery attempt



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, DA Case Files

Notorious: This is the original April 18, 1936 booking photo for Charles 'Lucky' Luciano. Luciano is considered the father of organized crime in New York and was the first to divide the city sections controlled by five mob families



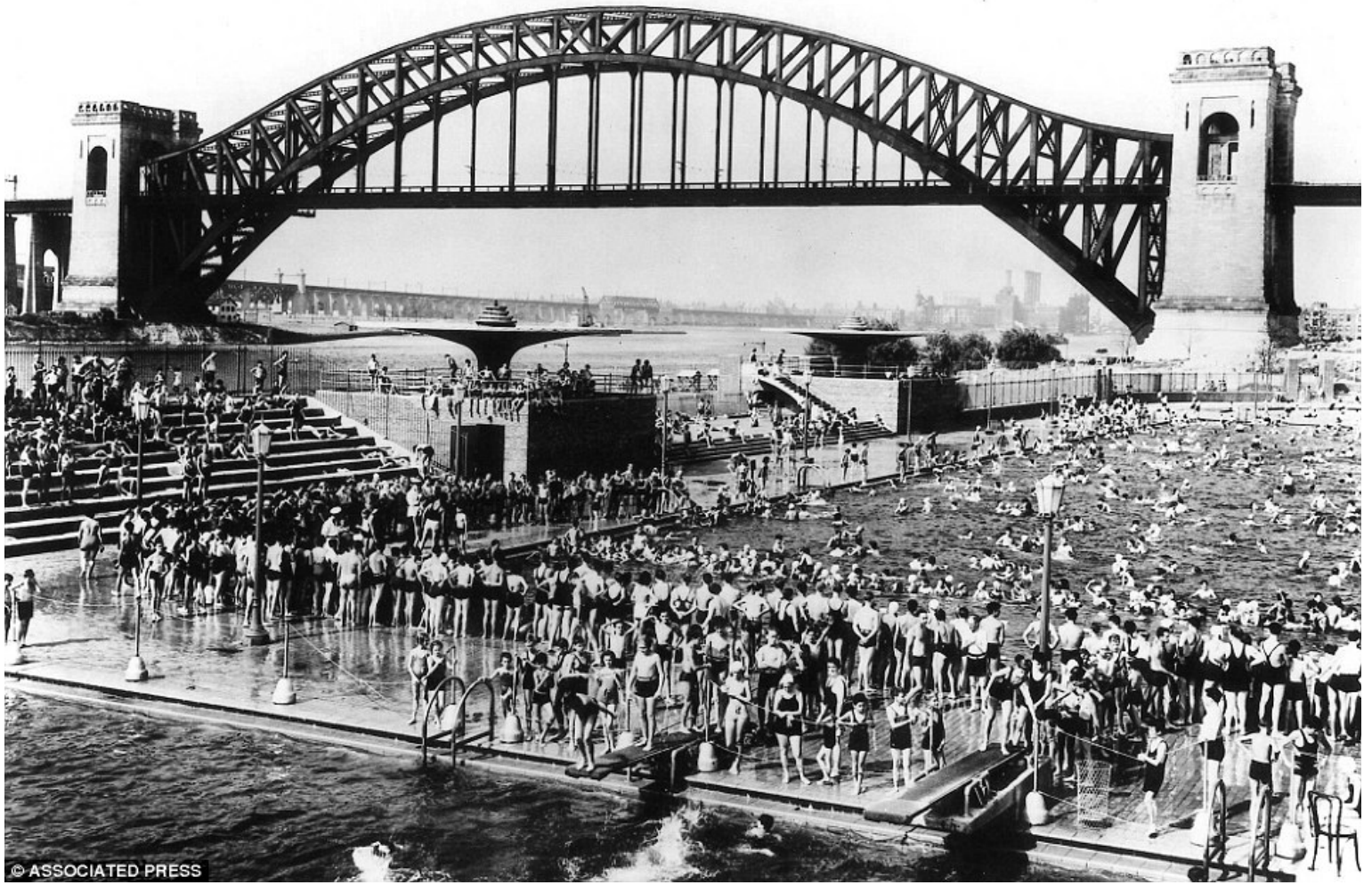
© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, NYPD Evidence Collection, Detective Charles A. Carlstrom

Murder most foul: A detective took this crime scene photo in 1918 after children found the body of Gaspare Candella stuffed in a drum and dumped in a field in Brooklyn, New York

The gallery includes images from the largest collection of criminal justice evidence in the English-speaking world, a repository that holds glass-plate photographs taken by the New York City Police Department.

It also features more than 800,000 color photographs taken with 35mm cameras of every city building in the mid-1980s to update the municipal records, and includes more than 1,300 rarely seen images taken by local photographers of the Depression-era Works Progress Administration.

Because of technological and financial constraints, the digitised gallery does not include the city's prized collection of 720,000 photographs of every city building from 1939 to 1941. But the database is still growing, and the department plans to add more images.



New Yorkers cool off in the Astoria public pool with the Hell Gate railroad bridge looming in the background in the summer of 1940.



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, WPA Federal Writers' Project

The Great Bambino: In this September 30, 1936, Works Progress Administration, Federal Writers' Project, photo provided by the New York City Municipal Archives, a man hands a program to baseball legend Babe Ruth, center, as he is joined by his second wife Clare, center left, and singer Kate Smith, front left, in the grandstand during Game One of the 1936 World Series at the Polo Grounds in New York



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, Borough President Manhattan

Moment in history: The headline of the newspaper the man in this May 18, 1940 photo reads: 'Nazi Army Now 75 Miles From Paris.' This picture shows the corner of Sixth Avenue and 40th Street in Manhattan



© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, WPA Federal Writers' Project, Jack Rosenzweig

The view from New Jersey: A man peers across the Hudson River into Manhattan from his perch on the George Washington Bridge on December 22, 1936

Among the known contributors to the collection was Eugene de Salignac, the official photographer for the Department of Bridges/Plant & Structures from 1906 to 1934. A Salignac photograph, taken on October 7, 1914, and now online, shows more than a half-dozen painters lounging on wires on the Brooklyn Bridge.

'A lot of other photographers who worked for the city were pretty talented but did not produce such a large body of work or a distinct body of work,' said Michael Lorenzini, curator of photography at the Municipal Archives and author of 'New York Rises' that showcases Salignac images.

One popular cache includes photos shot mostly by NYPD detectives, nearly each one a crime mystery just begging to be solved. A black-and-white, top-down image of two bodies in the elevator shaft is a representative example.

Although it did not carry a crime scene photo, the New York Tribune reported November 25, 1915, under the headline 'Finding of two bodies tells tale of theft,' that the bodies of a black elevator operator and a white engineer of a Manhattan building were found 'battered, as though from a long fall.'

The news report said the two men tried to rob a company on the fifth floor of expensive silks, but died in their attempt. The elevator was found with silk inside, stuck between the 10th and 11th floors.



The Third Avenue elevated train rumbles across lower Manhattan in this undated photo. City Hall can be seen in the background

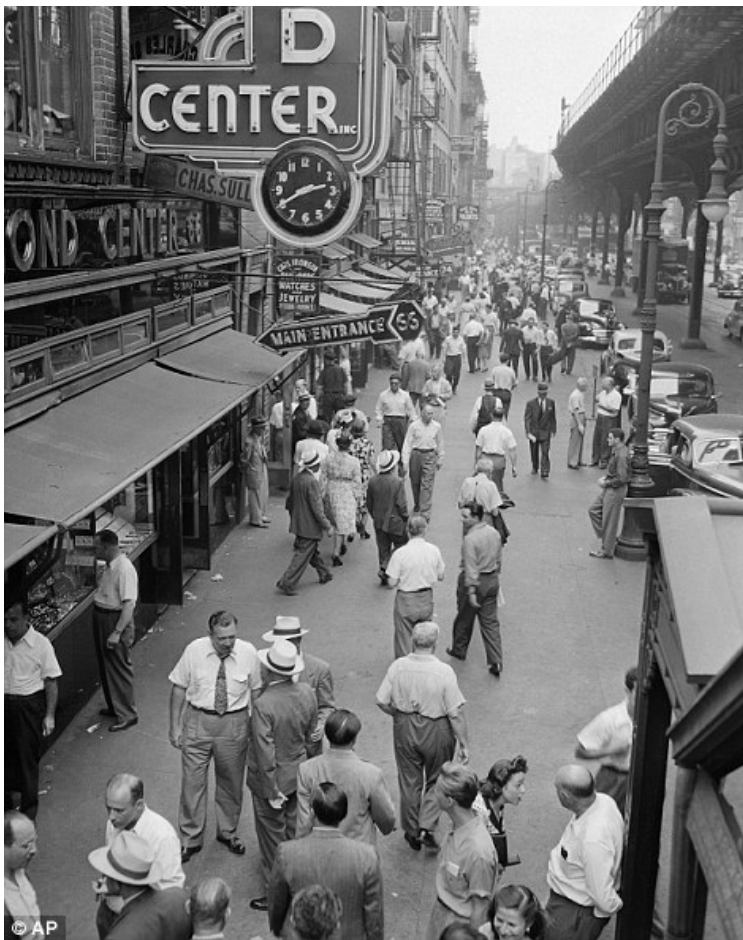


© Reuters

Hard times: An unemployed man in an old coat lays on a pier in the New York City docks during the Great Depression, 1935



In 1936, the Triborough Bridge, which links Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx, was not yet complete. The Hells Gate Railroad Bridge looms in the distance



Busy streets: Men and women stroll a row of jewelry shops on the Lower East Side (right) and stand in line for bread during the Great Depression (left)

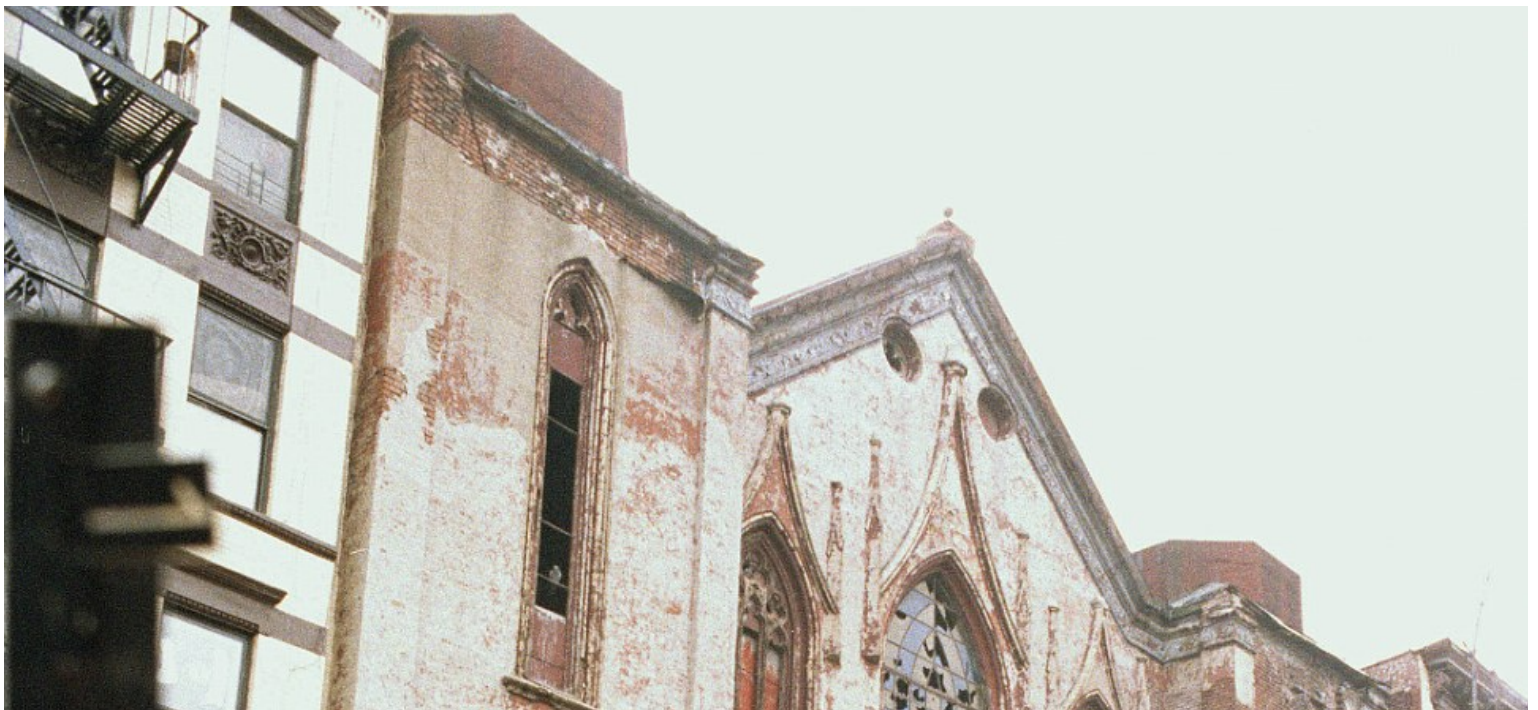


© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives, DeGregario Collection (New York Camera Club)

See how it's changed: In this circa 1890 photo, a pair of girls walk east along 42nd Street. Acker, Merrall and Condit wine shop delivery wagons are on the right and the C.C. Shayne Furrier sign can be seen on the roof overhead.



Building roads: Workers lay bricks to pave 28th Street in Manhattan on October 2, 1930





© AP Photo/New York City Municipal Archives

This circa 1983-1988 photo provided by the New York City Municipal Archives shows 172 Norfolk Street, which is now the Angel Orensanz Foundation, in New York. Over 800,000 color photographs were taken with 35-mm cameras for tax purposes. Every New York City building in the mid-1980s can be viewed in this collection.

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What an impressive collection. Everyone in those photos seems frozen in time, and yet so full of life. History at its best.

- [Carter Stokoe](#) , SPOKANE, United States, 19/9/2012 00:41

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Acker Merrall and Condit are still in business!

- [Mike](#) , London, UK, 27/4/2012 15:19

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Look on Google Street view at how the corner of Sixth Av and 40th St has changed, it looks so bland today compared with 1940. Amazing photos.

- [H E](#) , London, 27/4/2012 13:14

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The clarity of these pictures is amazing. How did they go about getting them digitized?

- [Mike](#) , Houston, TX, 27/4/2012 00:51

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There is a life to these photos ,which colour does not possesa simplicity which is now lost.....

- [gareth griffiths](#) , anchor.England, 26/4/2012 23:33

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1940 was not a hundred years ago. Neither were 1936 and even 1935. Not even close.

- [Mina](#) , Georgia, USA, 26/4/2012 21:27

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Really beautifull;-) But it's quite sad that 100 years ago in USA were so amazing cites, buildings which in Poland we haven't even today.

- [Mateusz](#) , Rzeszów, Poland, 26/4/2012 21:11

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Really beautiful;-) But it's quite sad that 100 years ago in USA were so amazing cities, buildings which in Poland we haven't even today.

- [Mateusz](#) , Rzeszów, Poland, 26/4/2012 20:59

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These photographs are amazing. I've seen the picture of Lucky Luciano several times (as one person noted above); however, it's still a good picture. After all, remember Eisenstadt's photo of Joseph Goebbels? I do notice how few cars were in NYC until the 1920s. The picture of the old church/synagogue shows how big the cars became in the 1980s. The new Triborough Bridge was an example of the over-investment in roads that began after GM and its consortium destroyed privately owned transit systems.

- [Bill Alpaugh](#) , Boston, MA, 26/4/2012 20:42

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Nothing says upcoming excess like these photos. Watch 'Surviving Progress' for a *hopeful* report on this. Great doc, produced by Scorsese.

- [Casey](#) , Washington, DC, 26/4/2012 18:00

Click to rate Rating 57

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