

New York Journal-American:

Photographic Morgue at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	<i>New York Journal-American</i> , 1895-1966
Title:	<i>New York Journal-American</i> Photographic Morgue
Dates:	1895-1966 (bulk 1940-1966)
Extent:	Approximately 2,000,000 prints and approximately 1,000,000 negatives
Abstract:	The photographic morgue of the Hearst newspaper the <i>New York Journal-American</i> consists of photographic prints and negatives published between 1895 and 1966.
Call Number:	Photography Collection PH-00378
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Gift, 1968
Processed by:	Cliff Farrington, Christian Kelleher, Richard Workman, 1999-2001; Alexis Castro, Roy Flukinger, Franki Hand, Mary Alice Harper, 2007-2010
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), after surprising his family with his success in running his first newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*, established a presence in New York newspaper publishing when he purchased the *Journal* in 1895. The *Journal* was founded in 1881 by Albert Pulitzer, the estranged brother of the *New York World's* Joseph Pulitzer. In 1894, Pulitzer sold the paper for \$1 million to John R. McLean, publisher of the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. McLean found it difficult to expand in the New York market and one year later sold the paper to Hearst for \$180,000. Hearst's name began to appear on the masthead in November 1895.

Over the next seventy years the paper underwent many changes of title and schedules of publication. The final form of the name, *New York Journal-American*, first ran on May 19th, 1941. A history of the exact changes is described on the Ransom Center's *New York Journal-American* [website](#). Blaming a decline in circulation on the rise of television, the paper's publishers halted its operations after April 24th, 1966. Editorial forces were combined with two other papers that were also experiencing financial difficulty, the *World-Telegram* and the *Herald Tribune*, and resulted in the morning *Herald Tribune*, the evening *World Journal*, and the *Sunday World Journal Tribune*.

From its beginning, the *Journal-American* was heavily illustrated, and in March 1897 reportedly printed the first halftone photographs ever to appear in newsprint. From that time on, photography played an important role in Hearst's competition with his New York rivals. The *Journal* was one of the earliest newspapers to adopt the practice of crediting photographers by name; as early as 1901 some photographers were given credit lines. The Ransom Center's *New York Journal-American* [website](#) includes a partial list of the photographers whose work is identified in the photo morgue.

Sources:

50 Fighting Years. [New York Journal-American, 1946.]

Heart-to-Heart with New York for 60 Fabulous Years. [New York Journal-American, 1956.]

Nasaw, David. *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

O'Donnell, James F. *100 Years of Making Communications History: The Story of the Hearst Corporation*. Hearst Professional Magazines, 1987.

Scope and Contents

The photographic morgue of the Hearst newspaper the *New York Journal-American* consists of photographic prints and negatives published between 1895 and 1966. The collection is divided into two series, I. Prints and II. Negatives. Due to the size of the collection (approximately three million items), only the Prints series is cataloged; it is accessible through an [online database](#). The negatives (approximately one million items) are not available for patron use.

Series I. Prints consists of approximately two million original photographic prints maintained in over 64,000 file folders. The files are arranged into five subseries, A. Biographical, B. Subject, C. Geographical, D. Geographical—Greater New York, and E. Jumbo (i.e., oversize), which reflect the original arrangement devised by the *Journal-American* photo editors. The bulk of the photographs are gelatin silver and made to the conventional American standard dimension of 8 x 10 inches. Although they range in date from throughout the newspaper's lifetime, the vast majority date from the mid-1930s to the paper's demise on April 24, 1966. A few hundred gelatin silver prints and a handful of albumen prints, all of which pre-date the 1930s, are scattered throughout the collection. It was common practice for newspapers to weed their morgues from time to time to remove images, both photos and negatives, that were judged to have lost their news value. Much weeding likely occurred during the multiple mergers, between 1937 and 1941, of several Hearst newspapers, which ultimately resulted in the formation of the *Journal-American*.

Roughly half of the photographs were taken by *New York Journal-American* photographers and nearly all of these were subsequently reproduced in an issue of the paper. In most instances, the backs of these prints bear either the stamped date of publication and a pasted-down clipping, or a report sheet, generally filled out by the photographer himself, which provides valuable contextual information such as the date, the photographer's name, and any pertinent information that they supplied about the shoot itself and/or the subject of the photo. In rare instances, prints of an amateur or freelance photographer were used. These were clearly labeled as such and subject to the same thorough contextual processing as all the other prints. Nearly all the remaining prints came from wire services, such as the Associated Press or Hearst's International News, and are identified with the wire service name and a caption on either the fronts or the backs. A small number of the prints are publicity photos from such sources as airlines, night clubs, public relations firms, and movie studios; these usually have a caption and source information on the back. The wire-service and publicity photos may or may not have appeared in the newspaper.

The prints in the collection formed the original working files for the editors and photographers of the *Journal-American*. They were subjected to all of the traditional uses of a very active and long-term photo morgue and subsequently show signs of rough handling, bending, creasing, tearing, marking, rapid chemical processing, deterioration, and the advanced wear-and-tear of possible multiple uses. As such, although their historical and cultural worth remains high, their condition is not comparable to those of most fine art prints. Items in a print file such as this were intended to be *used* and, despite standard archival practices of housing and conservation, continue to reflect their original state. Likewise, many of the prints bear evidence of their use in publication: some show crop marks, or portions whited out, or outlines reinforced and features emphasized with pencil or pen. In some instances people were painted onto prints to

recreate crime scenes. These are the traditionally integral and standard alterations of a working newspaper morgue and have been preserved as part of the history of the morgue. In the case of images produced by *Journal-American* staff photographers, there is the likelihood that an original untouched negative exists in the Negatives series.

The Biographical subseries consists of both formal portraits and snapshots of people. Prominent New Yorkers, as well as most historical figures from the worlds of business, politics, sports, crime, science, literature and art, are represented. There is extensive coverage of presidents Franklin Roosevelt, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. In addition to celebrities, thousands of otherwise obscure New Yorkers are represented in these files as the victims of crimes or accidents, the winners of sweepstakes, participants in *Journal-American*-sponsored symposia, combatants returning from war, immigrants to America, or ordinary citizens involved in daily activities that caught the interest of staff photographers. Perhaps the most significant feature of the Biographical files is its sheer democracy of subject.

The Biographical subseries is arranged alphabetically by subjects' surnames. Depending on the quantity of images and/or the notoriety of any given subject, subjects either received their own folder(s), or were placed into broad letter and/or name folders. For example, images of baseball great Hank Aaron are located in the "Aaron, Hank" folder, whereas images of less well known Aarons are located in the "Aaron / Aarons, A – Z" folder. Regardless, it is still worth looking in the broad letter and/or name folders for additional photographs of well known subjects as photographs were sometimes misfiled, and individuals rising in notoriety during the last decade before the paper folder may not have warranted a folder of their own at the time. For example, there are a number of photographs of Raquel Welch filed in the "Welch, J – Z" folder. Images of subjects with less common surnames are located in letter-range folders; for example, images for the surname Abelson are located in the "ABC – ABEQ" folder.

The Subject subseries consists of files arranged by topic as assigned by *Journal-American* editors. In all likelihood, these folder headings were created along general topical news or feature dimensions and then evolved further through the growth of the file itself. Throughout the series are large groups of photographs arranged in various subjective categories including railroads, housing projects, paintings, sculpture, opera, plays, plane crashes, ships, World Wars I and II, theatrical teams, maps, basketball, baseball, boxing, football, dogs, horses, strikes, fires, floods, explosions, hurricanes, buildings, bridges, hospitals, and corporations, to name but a very few. Hundreds of other subjects are represented by smaller groups of images.

The Geographical subseries consists of images from around the world, with the exception of the greater New York City area. These files are arranged alphabetically, first by state name (if in the United States) or country name and then, when applicable, by city name and/or topic, such as "Oklahoma--Enid--Army Flying School and Ethiopia--Newspaper men at." Topics for the regions represented in this subseries are diverse and include events, man-made features, people, and military themes. Events include wars, raids, openings of bridges or roads, strikes, riots, demonstrations, and natural disasters. Man-made features or landmarks include structures such as businesses, plants, observatories, museums, hotels, hospitals, railroads, dams, schools, streets, churches, and miscellaneous buildings. Natural features include rivers, mountains, and lakes. While the U.S. Military section is included within the Subject subseries, military

forts, ships, and other military subjects for foreign countries are arranged within this subseries. Much like the Biographical subseries, subjects in the Geographical subseries range from obscure, local people, landmarks, and events, such as the Holy Sepulcher Cemetery in Totowa, New Jersey, to more widely known locales and events, such as Arlington Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

The Geographical: Greater New York subseries is largely devoted to images of the streets, neighborhoods, landmarks, and buildings of the greater New York City area, including Long Island. This subseries includes similar coverage of landmarks and events as the Geographical subseries, but it is arranged alphabetically by a larger topic or category and then by the more specific subject. Some of the larger categories include churches, museums, parks, banks, fire departments, the Health Department, the Police Department, schools, streets, and theatres. In addition to these categories, some images are further arranged alphabetically according to neighborhood, such as Brooklyn, Bronx, and Long Island/Queens. The borough of Staten Island is also included as a topic, but has a much smaller selection of photographs than the other major boroughs of New York City. Manhattan is not represented as a category within the subseries. In addition to these major subjects covered within the subseries, the 1939-1940 World's Fair is also included. The 1964-1965 World's Fair, on the other hand, is included in the Jumbo subseries. The *New York Journal-American* is also a major topic within the subseries, with photographs pertaining to contests held by the paper; editorials, features, and other stories included in the paper; as well as more operational topics such as photographs of the building, employees, offices and departments, and visitors to the building.

The Jumbo subseries consists of files created by *Journal-American* staff to accommodate prints too large to fit in standard 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 inch file folders. The folders in this subseries are arranged and titled to reflect the other four subseries titles: Biographical, Subject, Geographical, and Geographical: Greater New York. Prominent in this subseries are sports photos and documentation of the 1964 New York World's Fair.

In processing this collection, the *Journal-American's* original folder titles were maintained whenever possible. However, due to inconsistencies in abbreviations, punctuation, and word choice, some reformatting and standardization was undertaken for better clarity and to facilitate indexing and sorting capabilities in the collection database. Examples are:

- File titles containing abbreviations for states (e.g., Conn.) were expanded to include the full state name.
- Colons, parenthesis, commas, and other forms of division between subtopics were replaced with double dashes to offset subtopics, for example *Acheson, Dean: Heads & fulls* was changed to *Acheson, Dean--Heads & fulls*.
- Spaces in between initials were removed, and periods were inserted in between initials previously unseparated.
- *LI*, *L.I.*, and *L. I.* were standardized as *Long Island*.
- *LIRR* and *L. I. R. R.* were standardized as *L.I.R.R.*
- *US*, *USA*, *U. S.*, *U. S. A.*, and *U.S.A.* were standardized as *U.S.*

- Folder titles in the Geographical subseries that began with nationalities were changed to begin with the names of nations. For example *German Army Troops Parachute Army* was changed to *Germany--Army--Troops--Parachute Army*.
- As a subtopic, the abbreviations *Bldg.* and *Bldgs.* were standardized as *Buildings*.
- Where appropriate, *Co* was changed to *County*.
- Various spellings of countries were standardized. For example *Porto Rico* was changed to *Puerto Rico*, and *Jugo Slavia*, *Jugoslavia*, *Jugo-slavia*, and *Jugo* were standardized as *Yugoslavia*.

Due to the age of the collection, and the years of handling and the acidic nature of the original file folders, a number of file tabs bearing folder titles were lost or simply disintegrated. In these instances, the cataloger devised a title based on the contents of the folder. Because many of the backs of photographs contain clippings or captions with one word or phrase circled, a folder title was easily created.

A number of loose images were found outside of the file folders. When possible, they were integrated into existing folders, but on occasion new folders were created to accommodate them.

Related Material

The Photographic Morgue is supplemented by a microfilm set of the entire run of the *New York Journal-American* and its predecessor newspapers, beginning in 1895. The set is complete except for several issues missing from the early years of publication. The microfilm is available through the Ransom Center's [Periodicals Database](#).

Separated Material

In addition to the photographs and negatives, the morgue also included several hundred zinc plates used for printing images, many of which were badly deteriorated. The bulk of these plates were removed, although a small selection was retained for artifactual documentation. Original artwork for editorial cartoons, for illustrations published with reviews of Broadway plays, and for illustrations for prominent news stories--particularly the Lindbergh kidnapping--was transferred to the Ransom Center's Art Collection.

The original gift to the Ransom Center included the *Journal-American's* clippings morgue of over 9 million items. In 1997, these files were transferred to the [Briscoe Center for American History](#) at The University of Texas at Austin.

Index Terms

Subjects

New York (N.Y.)--Newspapers.

New York County (N.Y.)--Newspapers.

United States--New York--New York--New York.
