

DIGITIZED BAILEY PHOTOGRAPHS HIGHLIGHT HOUSTON

Submitted by Zach Vowell, Center for American History



"Exterior view of Houston's City Auditorium, December 1936." File e_bb_0714, courtesy of Center for American History.

The Center for American History's Photographic and Digital Archives is pleased to announce that the department has completed work on digitizing 5,000 images from the Bob Bailey Studios Photographic Archive. These images, taken from the Baileys' most memorable and representative negatives, visually document the rapid growth of the Houston metropolitan area from the early 1930s up until the 1990s. All 5,000 images are now available for reference through the Center's Digital Media Repository, which can be accessed through selected entries within the Bailey Archive's TARO finding aid at <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/taro/utcah/00451/cah-00451.html>.

A long line of the Center's staff has worked on the Bailey Archive, both in preparing the materials for this digitization project and also in the digitization efforts themselves.

Particular recognition should go to Linda Peterson, Head of Photographic and Digital Archives, as well as former project head Amy Bowman, library assistant Hal Richardson, and Image Assets Coordinator Steve Williams for their dedication and hard work in the face of many obstacles. Everyone involved feels confident that the expansive scope of the project's end results reflects the time and energy invested in it.

And as anyone who's ever visited the Bayou City knows, Houston is nothing if not expansive. Bob Bailey and his studio captured an impressive portion of the city's 20th century history, such as life in Houston during World War II, aerial views of the city's burgeoning skyline, campaigning politicians and visiting celebrities, revealing advertisements, large gatherings and crowds for parades on Main Street, and the Texas City disaster, among countless other momentous events and quotidian occasions.

The Bailey Studio also scrupulously organized their negatives with a simple job number system (where each job was assigned a unique number, in sequential order), and, once digitized, each image carries in its metadata the subject ascribed to it by the Baileys and the job number, as well as a Library of Congress subject heading and other descriptive information as provided by the photographers and found within the images. All of this descriptive information is searchable through the Digital Media Repository (DMR). The selected entries in the TARO inventory are linked to the relevant images in the DMR, and from there researchers (or interested archivists) can further browse or search the archive using the DMR's interface.

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This digitization project, funded through a University of Texas System grant, also overcomes a common problem confronting photographic archivists, in that it makes a substantial sampling of the Bailey studios' transparent media widely available for the first time. Before the digitization project, access to Bailey negatives was restricted and researchers were required to make an appointment to view the negatives in Austin. Even then guesswork and imagination were involved to determine the photograph's positive image.

While researchers wishing to delve deeper into the more than 500,000 Bailey images must still come to Austin to search the Bailey log books and view negatives, the most popular and best-loved Bailey work is now available at your nearest computer terminal. To be clear, we never mind making appointments with researchers seeking to examine transparent media. We just wish it weren't their first exposure, so to speak, to the Bailey archive. Now with 5,000 images at their fingertips, researchers in Houston and elsewhere can conveniently examine a wide-ranging representative sample of this immense historical resource before committing themselves to an appointment with our portable light table.



"Pool at the Shamrock Hotel, May 12, 1949".
File e_bb_1478, courtesy of Center for American History, Bob Bailey Studios Photographic Archive.



"War bond promotion with tank in lobby of Loew's Theater, June 1942"
File e_bb_1118, courtesy of Center for American History, Bob Bailey Studios Photographic Archive.



"John Wayne and Red Adair (left of Wayne) during filming of Hellfighters, 1968".
File e_bb_3686, courtesy of Center for American History, Bob Bailey Studios Photographic Archives.

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