

Picture This: Capturing DEP History In Photographs

"In the conduct of so large an engineering undertaking, thousands of photographs for information and record will be required." (Annual Report of the Board of Water Supply, 1906)

From the outset of its creation, the Board of Water Supply understood that meticulous documentation would be needed to build, operate and manage the immense water supply system under its charge, both during and after construction. The Board produced and maintained copious records of different types—design drawings, boring logs, reports and correspondence are only a small sampling of the diversity. They also took full advantage of the relatively new medium of photography, which had been developed in the mid-19th century.

During the 19th century, photography was utilized for many purposes: personal portraits,



landscape scenes, to document military events like the Civil War, and as a force for change by social reform photographers. However it was also used for the building of infrastructure.

Realizing the value of the photographic record, the Board needed to be sure that the work was done "systematically and the plates and films properly preserved." As part of this investment, \$2,278.16 was

(Continued on reverse side)

Spotlight on Safety

Drink Up – NYC Tap Water

With warmer weather approaching, it is important to keep hydrated, especially if your job is working out of doors. The best way to do this is drinking award winning, high quality, great tasting, and healthy NYC tap water. DEP's successful efforts in watershed protection and water quality management continue to make NYC's drinking water supply the largest unfiltered system in the United States.

Data shows that since 2007, consumers are beginning to cut back on the purchase of bottled water, in part due to the economic recession and the need to cut back on expenses. Many consumers are also becoming more aware of the environmental, economic and potential health concerns associated

with bottled water. The production of bottled water creates environmental impacts including the use of large amounts of energy and petroleum resources used in plastic production and transportation. In addition, independent testing of bottled water reveals contaminants that some might consider not ideal for their drinking water. Finally, most bottled water does not offer the benefit of fluoride protection.

NYC tap water is subject to the stringent regulations of the EPA and DEP's excellent water quality testing program. Drinking plenty of water is critical to staying properly hydrated and can aid in weight reductions. So drink up—NYC water is good for you and the environment.

Commissioner's Corner

The first day of spring arrived on March 20, and here in New York the signs of the season are unmistakable. The trees are in bloom, the temperatures have risen, and, as always, New York City water continues to flow.

As an avid fisherman, I was thrilled to announce before the start of trout season on April 1 that DEP has opened up 33,500 acres of fishing habitat on our reservoirs for shoreline or boat fishing. (Our reservoirs offer both cold and warm-water species ranging from trout to largemouth bass). According to a survey of more than 10,000 access permit holders, fishing is the top recreational activity for visitors to city-owned watershed lands. In fact, the watershed is a growing tourist destination, with thousands of visitors now enjoying its natural beauty on an annual basis, and DEP has opened up 108,000 acres of land for recreational use, including hiking, fishing, and hunting. In February, we announced a broad expansion of our recreational boating program to include the Cannonsville, Neversink and Schoharie Reservoirs, making more than 12,000 additional acres available for boating starting Memorial Day weekend. This was made possible through our partnership with the Catskill Watershed Corporation (CWC), which has helped support the region's tourism and hospitality industries by assisting hundreds of watershed businesses over the last 13 years.

Our multifaceted approach to watershed protection encourages sustainable economic and recreational development while continuing to provide world class drinking water for more than nine million residents. For example, we promote environmentally sustainable economic development in the watershed through our partnership with the Watershed Agricultural Council (WAC). WAC has worked with nearly 1,000 farm and forest landowners to protect farmland and clean drinking water through conservation methods that support working landscapes. This includes installation of stream buffers, relocation of feed lots for livestock and covering manure to prevent bacteria and chemicals from entering tributaries. Along with in-city partners such as GrowNYC, we work with WAC to promote regional agriculture and especially family farms to make the freshest, most nutritious foods available to New York City



residents and watershed communities alike. I strongly encourage you to visit our watershed communities this spring to witness the effects of our efforts firsthand.

The effects of spring aren't limited to the watershed. Once temperatures start to rise at our in-city treatment plants, BWT process engineers make critical alterations to secondary treatment. Secondary treatment uses the biological processes of naturally-occurring microbes that are cultivated by BWT staff. The metabolism and reproduction of these organisms are higher in warmer weather, and if their populations get out of balance wastewater can foam excessively, causing problems with digestion and sludge processing. This requires that we send more microbes to the thickeners rather than reusing them, and we do this until the microbe levels rebalance. In this way our treatment processes must adjust and follow seasonal adjustments.

As always, we must be ready to respond to system emergencies. Early last Thursday morning, our BWSO crews responded to a water main break on West Broadway between Murray and Warren streets in Manhattan. The 12-inch main was installed in the late 1800s and crews were able to make a shutdown after arriving on scene. The 1, 2 and 3 subway lines were stopped for a couple of hours in the early morning—ahead of the busiest commute time—but the MTA pumped out the water to restore service. Water was quickly restored to several buildings near the break and DEP crews and contractors worked to replace the main and restore the undermined roadway, with work being finished on Saturday afternoon. Kudos to BWSO Deputy Commissioner **Jim Roberts**, District Supervisor **Eduardo Hernandez, Jr.**, Supervisor **Julio Nunez**, Evening Manager **Richard Quick**, and Emergency Manager **Paul Vilella** for their great response and coordination with other agencies.

At DEP, everyone is responsible for safety. If you or anyone on your team is concerned about your working conditions, it's okay to ask your supervisor or your bureau's EHS liaison how they can help. If you've still got questions, you can call the EHS Employee Concerns Hotline. It's DEP's responsibility to acknowledge and fix unsafe situations, procedures, and practices. With your help, we'll not only get the job done, we'll make it safer for ourselves, our coworkers, our families, and our city.

CALL (800) 897-9677 OR SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH PIPELINE. HELP IS ON THE WAY. 🐱

(Picture This: Capturing DEP History In Photographs... continued)



spent on photographic supplies, books and maps during the first year and a half of the Board's existence. These funds were used to establish a photographic laboratory for making prints and filing negatives (which at the time were 8x10 inches and made of glass). In addition, equipment was purchased in order to photograph working drawings and create small, blue-print versions for engineers to carry in the field. They also needed someone to operate this equipment and on July 19, 1906 the Board appointed **Harry Coutant** as full-time photographer, at a salary of \$1,200 per year. As official photographer, Mr. Coutant was responsible for routinely documenting construction, but field departments were also given cameras and developing equipment in order to provide additional coverage over the vast construction area.

The identity of the individual who replaced Mr. Coutant when he resigned in November 1908 is unknown, but on April 29, 1909 he was joined by **William Bresnan**, who would become a mainstay of the Photography Unit for forty years. Born in 1877, Mr. Bresnan started working with photography at the young age of 15. He was employed by a large commercial photography company for several years and then opened his own business, his primary client being the Fuller Construction Company in New York City. By 1915 he was the sole photographer at the Board of Water Supply and his "treks along the line of the tunnel, taking the thousands of photographs that make up the pictorial history of the Board's activities, gave him a knowledge... of the work possessed by few others in B.W.S. employ." According to his obituary, many of Mr. Bresnan's photographs were regarded as "photographic masterpieces." An image of the Ashokan Reservoir Headworks taken in 1917 was particularly popular and reproduced in all manner of publications. Construction is a

dangerous undertaking, even for photographers, and Bresnan had a number of accidents on the job. The most serious was when he nearly lost his eyesight while taking a photo from a raft in a section of the Catskill Aqueduct known as the Garrison tunnel—the flashlight powder flared up in his face and he was badly burned.

While there were two employees with the title of Photographer at the time of Mr. Bresnan's death in June 1949, by 1951 there were no employees with that civil service title. However the Photography Unit continued to exist and played an important role by developing and reproducing prints, making lantern slides, reductions and enlargements for presentations, and photographing construction operations of the Delaware system. In fact, the Board's Photographic Unit was designated the official engineering photographers for the Public Works' Emergency Division of the Office of Civil Defense.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s the Photo Unit continued to document the construction of the Delaware water system and in-city work such as the Richmond Project. In 1968, current DEP Photographer **Carl Ambrose** took the two-day civil service test for Photographer, which included a practical section that required photographing various subjects (architectural, portraiture, etc.) and then developing the film. Carl passed the test and joined the Board's Photo Unit in 1969, then under the direction of **Everard Marius**. Along with **Frank Tartaglia**, the third member of the unit. They each went out to a different job site accompanied by engineers who provided information about each photograph, including the location, description of the work activity being shown and technical information. This information was carefully logged and formed the basis of detailed captions which would

become an important part of the construction record.

Back at the lab, the photographers developed their own film and made contact sheets in order to select the best shots to develop prints. At the time Carl was hired the Photo Unit was using press cameras which used 4x5 inch negatives, but during the early 1970s he suggested the Photo Unit make the switch to 35mm film, which was easier to carry on construction sites and did not affect the overall quality of the prints being developed. Unfortunately, during the city fiscal crisis of 1975-76 the Photo Unit was reduced once again to two photographers. Despite the decrease in staff, Carl and Everard Marius continued to photograph the monumental construction of City Water Tunnel No. 3. In 1978, the Board

of Water Supply was merged into the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), which had been formed in 1977, and the Board of Water Supply photographers were joined by their DEP Bureau of Water Supply counterparts.

The time and effort put into the creation, documentation and maintenance of the Board of Water Supply's photographic legacy has been well-rewarded. The DEP Archive holds more than 25,000 photographs that were taken by the Board (and later DEP) during its existence, ranging from large-format glass plate negatives to photographic prints to 35mm color transparencies. These photographs continue to be valuable to DEP - not only as significant historical artifacts - but also critical sources of information for fulfilling its mission.

Focus on the Field



If it is true that a picture is worth 1,000 words, longtime DEP Photographer **Carl Ambrose** is responsible for millions of words during his many years at the agency. He has travelled throughout New York City and beyond photographing the reservoirs that supply drinking water to city residents. He has taken his camera 900 feet underground to tunnel sites as well as 700 feet to the top of the Verrazano Narrows Bridge to photograph the banding of peregrine falcon chicks by DEP wildlife studies staff.

Carl's interest in photography started as a child on the Lower East Side when he got a Kodak Brownie camera handed down to him by his older brother. His love of pho-

tography deepened in the Army while stationed in Germany. There Carl photographed the base's theater group and produced publicity posters of upcoming productions. He returned to New York, enrolled in photography school (thanks to the GI Bill) and landed a job at a commercial photo studio.

His introduction to DEP started as a suggestion by his wife, who thought that taking a civil service exam would be good "just in case." A year later, after the studio closed, he became a photographer for the Board of Water Supply, DEP's predecessor agency. Carl's enthusiasm for his work is matched by his modesty. As he puts it, "I just love my job entirely. I was told that my job would be to document the construction of the City Water Tunnel No. 3. Years from now, students, engineers, and others will be able to look at photographs to see how the tunnel was created." Documentation also extends to countless other DEP projects and facilities.

Carl's passion for photography extends to his free time when he is traveling with his wife or taking family photos of his son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren.

SEMINAR ON THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF CANCER: Wednesday, April 11, noon – 2:00 pm (2 sessions)—sponsored by DEP's Quality of Work Life CAT Committee, Lefrak 3rd Floor Cafeteria. For more information [📞](#).

We welcome your feedback! To submit an announcement or suggestion, please email us at: newsletter@dep.nyc.gov. [📧](#)