

The Albany County Hall of Records Celebrates

Black History Month 2025: African Americans and Labor

In recognition of Black History Month 2025, the Albany County Hall of Records is proud to feature collections which highlight the important work of Black laborers who helped build and maintain Albany's infrastructure. These images capture their contributions to the built environment, honoring the vital role African Americans have played in the labor force and the lasting impact of their efforts.



*Photo from Albany Public Works Negatives Box #6
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 0504811000*

The 2025 theme for Black History Month was established by the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH). As stated in the ASALH Executive Summary of the 2025 theme, "work is at the very center of much of Black history and culture. Be it the traditional agricultural labor of enslaved Africans that fed Low Country colonies, debates among Black educators on the importance of vocational training, self-help strategies and entrepreneurship in Black communities, or organized labor's role in fighting both economic and social injustice, Black people's work has been transformational throughout the U.S., Africa, and the Diaspora. The 2025 Black History Month theme, 'African Americans and Labor,' sets out to highlight and celebrate the potent impact of this work."

The full Executive Summary of the 2025 theme can be found on asalh.org.

Building the Future

These photographs offer a glimpse of the racially diverse groups of laborers who worked to install sewer systems in Albany's Seventeenth Ward in 1940 and 1941.



*Photos from Albany Public Works Negatives Box #7
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 0504812000*





The presence of a WPA (Works Progress Administration) "Street Closed" sign above the sewer tunnel suggests that this essential infrastructure project may have been funded by the federal New Deal program.

*Photos from Albany Public Works Negatives Box #7
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 0504812000*



The WPA played a significant role in providing jobs and support during the Great Depression, particularly for Black Americans, while also improving municipal infrastructure across the country.

Connecting Neighborhoods

In these photographs, Black workers repave the surface of the Hawk Street Viaduct. Originally built in 1890, the viaduct was designed to connect the wealthy neighborhoods surrounding the New York State Capitol with the working-class areas along Clinton Avenue.



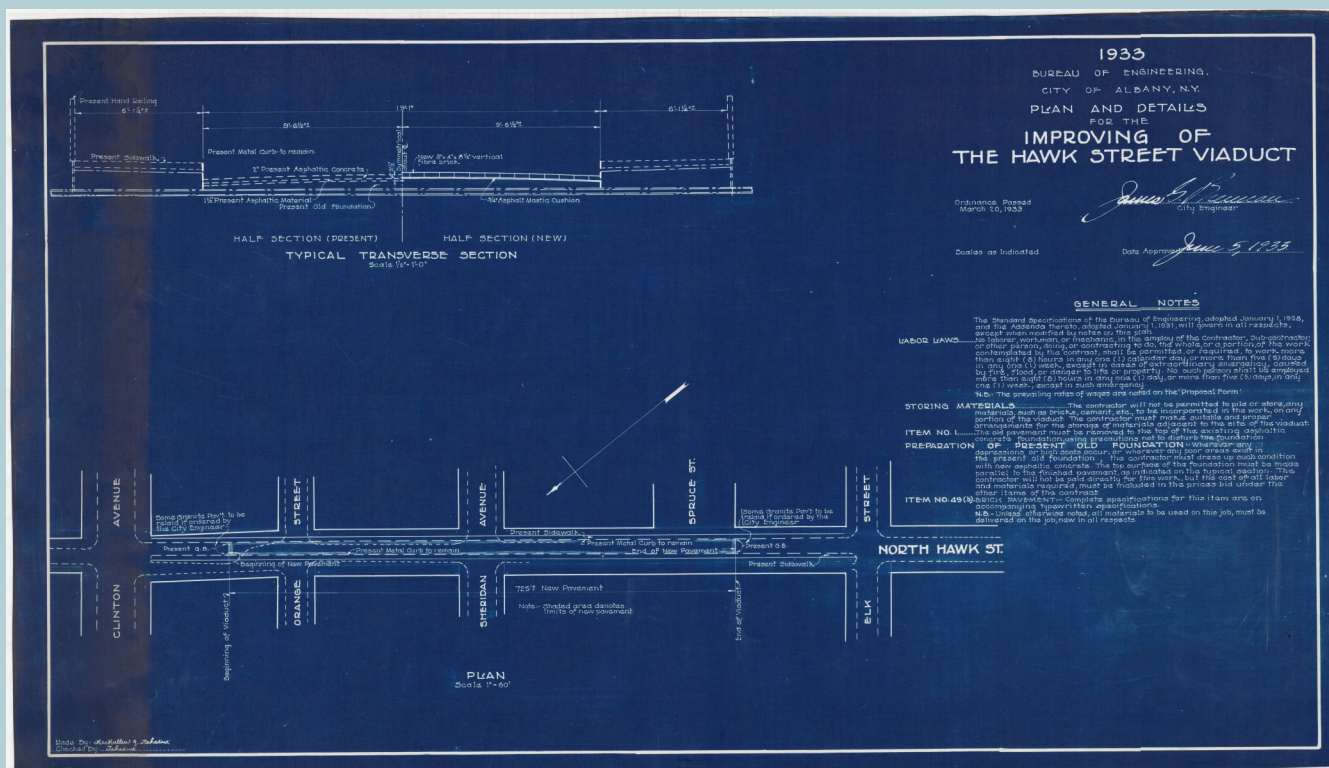
*Photos from Albany Public Works Negatives Box #4
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 0504809000*



The 1933 repaving project helped maintain the Hawk Street Viaduct. However, by the 1960s, the structure had deteriorated significantly, and its load capacity was reduced. It was closed to pedestrian traffic in 1968 and ultimately demolished in 1970.



Photo from Albany Public Works Negatives Box #4
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 0504809000



City Engineer Map AA-343 for Improvement of the Hawk Street Viaduct
ACHOR Inventory Control Number: 9101758000

The Albany County Hall of Records protects and preserves records which document Albany County's rich history. If you would like to make an appointment to view these collections or our other research materials, please call us at 518-436-3663 or e-mail us at achor@albanycounty.com.