



FY2021
ARCHIVAL
REVIEW BOARD
REPORT

THE NEW YORK CITY
MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES



This year marks a culmination of many strategic initiatives at the Municipal Archives that were accomplished because of the support and guidance from the mayoral administration, collaborations with city agencies and the dedicated Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) staff.

After years of planning and construction, the agency opened a new research and storage facility that will dramatically improve preservation of city government's historical records. The \$22 million facility spans three floors in the Industry City complex in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. It features environmental controls, high density shelving, public access, and modern, functional work spaces that support essential appraisal, processing, conservation and preservation work.

The Municipal Archives also launched the [NYCMA Collection Guides](#), a web-based platform that provides public access to detailed descriptions of acquired records. Archives and IT staff spent years building the vast data infrastructure of names, places, and subjects that are linked to New York City agencies, offices, commissions, and administrations. The result is a comprehensive access tool that will facilitate public researchers as well as the work across multiple units at the Archives.

Another important achievement was establishment of a cloud infrastructure that supports the acquisition process and the long-term preservation of digitized and born digital assets. The cloud environment is a building block for managing the transfer, processing, preservation, and access to city government collections, as well as the architecture of systems that will support digital initiatives at the agency.

APPRAISALS & ACCESSIONS

Re-appraisal Work

This year the Municipal Archives continued essential functions related to intellectual control and physical preservation of the collections. This work was focused primarily on materials stored off-site in preparation for the move to the new Industry City facility.

The Appraisals and Accessions unit prioritized reappraisal of several large-scale transactional record series that had been stored in the old off-site facility. These materials did not conform to the Archives' collecting policy, presented long-term preservation and access issues, and contained duplicative or minimal intellectual content. The evaluation process typically resulted in partial or whole deaccessions or selections to serve as representative samples of collections.

The unit reviewed items from the Comptroller, mayoral gifts and items related to the World Trade Center. A collection of cancelled stocks and bonds, acquired from the Comptrollers' Office, totaling 400 cubic feet and dating from 1920 to 1990, were determined to have no research value. The Archives maintained a sample, and a selection with some graphic value have been offered for sale. Gifts presented to Mayors Koch, Dinkins, Giuliani and Bloomberg were similarly deemed not archival. Representative samples have been retained from each administration.

The Archives also maintained selections of memorabilia collected from various parks after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Due to the volume, condition, and formats of these items, partial collections were retained. For example, missing person images and notes that had been posted to wooden planks and foam core posters were retained, and the supports were disposed. In other instances, weathered items stored in boxes created hazardous handling conditions and were wholly deaccessioned.



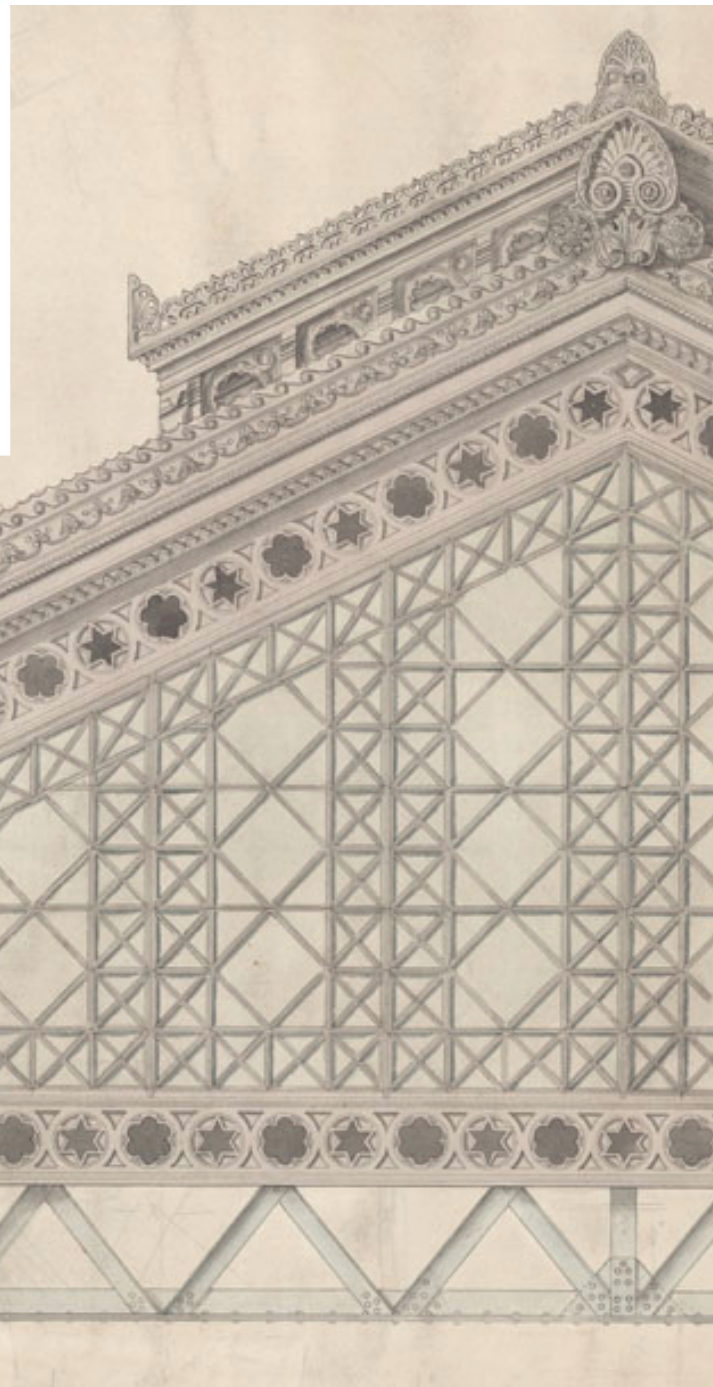
CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION

Grant-funded Projects

During Fiscal 2021, the Municipal Archives received grant awards for several projects in the Conservation and Preservation Unit.

Brooklyn Bridge Drawings Project

The Institute of Museum and Library Services - Save America's Treasures Grant program awarded a three-year grant to conserve approximately 2,240 drawings detailing the design, construction, and subsequent alterations of the Brooklyn Bridge. The drawings were executed in a variety of media, supports and dimensions, and the collection has presented a preservation and storage challenge since its accession in the mid-1970s. This work is scheduled to begin in January 2022.



CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION

Grant-funded Projects

Old Town Ledgers Project

In January 2021, the Conservation unit began treating and re-housing a subset of volumes from the Old Town Ledgers collection. They comprise New York colonial and early statehood administrative and legal records dating from 1645 through the early 1800s. The records pertain to Dutch and English colonial settlements in New York City, western Long Island, and the lower Hudson Valley. The grant award from the New York State Library Conservation/Preservation Program supported work on 570 items documenting towns and villages in Kings County.

HVAC Upgrade

The National Endowment for the Humanities Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections program awarded funding to develop plans for improving and implementing long-term preservation strategies appropriate for archival collections housed at 31 Chambers Street. The grant funded analysis of the current status of the HVAC and storage systems, and production of a report that included detailed recommendations for a new HVAC system with an emphasis on sustainable energy use.

During 2022, DORIS will facilitate a collaboration between the Department of Design and Construction and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services to develop a capital improvement project to implement the recommendations.

Conservation Treatment Projects

Civil War Draft Riot Claims, 1863

The collection documents the property damage claims resulting from the draft riots of 1863. Consisting of over 800 trifolded document bundles, the treatment included humidification and flattening, surface cleaning, and repairs.



CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION

Save New York's Past

The Adopt New York's Past fundraising initiative organized by the New York Archival Society was developed as a meaningful way to support conservation activities by connecting donors to items in need of repair or rehousing. Among the "adoptions" completed during Fiscal 2021 were the Brooklyn Bridge Drawings Indexes, and a 1797 map of the Town of Flatbush. The indexes are a four-volume set containing the original, handwritten index to the Brooklyn Bridge drawings collection. Donor Betty Kay's support enabled rebinding and the creation of custom enclosures to preserve their contents.

The 1797 hand-drawn map depicts the town of Flatbush and surrounding areas of Brooklyn. It includes the homes of several early Dutch families, as well as Erasmus Hall (now Erasmus Hall High School) and the Flatbush Reformed Dutch Church, the longest serving religious site in all of New York City. Richard Buehring's donation allowed conservators to reduce the acidic discoloration of the paper, remove much of the surface dirt that was obscuring fine details, and prevent further deterioration.



COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

PROCESSING

Collections Management work was also hampered by closure of the offices at 31 Chambers, but when staff began returning to the facility, work continued on several projects.

The Manhattan Building Plan Collection project

This processing project is one of the Archives' largest undertakings in many years. The long-range plan is to process, inventory and repair 96,000 architectural drawings pertaining to buildings in lower Manhattan that were accessioned from the Department of Buildings in the 1970s. These measures will stabilize their physical integrity and will ensure their availability for research. Grant awards from the New York State Library and the New York State Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund have been received to continue this work through Fiscal 2022.

Old Town Ledgers Collection project

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission awarded a grant to catalog and digitize 189 selected volumes from the Old Town Ledgers collection. The Covid-19 pandemic delayed the start of this project and the Archives received an extension of the grant period through 2022.

LEGACY DATA MANAGEMENT & MIGRATION

The Archives continued to identify authoritative inventories, remediate multi-level metadata and update finding aids. Over 1,400 hours were dedicated to the Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani mayoral collections. The Department of Buildings plan collection, Plant & Structures photograph collection, the New York Police Department photograph collection, and the WNYC moving image collection inventories were also updated.

The Collections Management unit coordinated on-going development of the comprehensive NYCMA Collection Guides. The initial application contains 35 resource records with more than 150,000 components, or levels of description. In addition, information from more than 3,300 accession records will provide the public with more comprehensive access to MA collections. The [NYCMA Collection Guides](#) was officially launched in Fiscal 2022 (October 25, 2021).

Transcription Projects

The transcription projects began when the Municipal Archives closed to the public in March 2020 and all staff began to work remotely. Although staff began to return to the office on a limited basis beginning in the summer of 2020, remote work continued through Fiscal 2021. The projects involved entering index data (names, dates, locations, subjects, etc.) from original analog inventories and records into searchable databases. Collections transcribed included the Brooklyn Condemnation Proceeding and Brooklyn Grade Crossing photograph collections, pre-1898 mayoral collections, the 1816, 1819 and 1821 jury census records, and the Bodies in Transit ledgers.



MOVING THE ARCHIVES

During the year, DORIS guided the build-out of a state-of-the-art facility for the City's historical records. Despite pandemic delays, construction was completed in the Industry City archival facility by May 2021.

The space includes a public reading room for research, a digital lab, collections appraisal and processing offices, and a conservation triage lab. In addition, the facility provides more than 90,000 linear ft. of storage across three floors with industry-standard temperature and humidity environments, and a cold storage vault for photographic and audio-visual material. The custom storage units were designed to house ledgers, rolled and oversize flat maps, drawings, and unique objects, as well as various containers to maximize storage space and access to collections.

The “move” project provided the Archives with the opportunity to improve intellectual control over collections. The work included barcoding, adding descriptive information on a container and/or item level, replacing more than 55,000 severely damaged boxes, and surface-cleaning collections. In total, more than 160,000 cubic feet of varied materials were relocated to the new space.

While still underway, the new facility is one of the City's most strategic investments in the long-term preservation of the collections at the Municipal Archives.



DIGITAL PROGRAMS

DIGITAL LABS

Digitization projects were put on hold during most of the fiscal year due to access restrictions to the Archives facilities and the necessary scanning equipment. Staff were reassigned to remediate existing digital file naming structures to comply with standards, as well as the transcription projects described above.

The Year in Numbers



Documents and oversize graphic materials

Vital Records (Marriage Licenses) 116,586 licenses



Transmissive Photographic Media

Vital Records Microfilm
2,666,614 images



Audio-Visual Materials

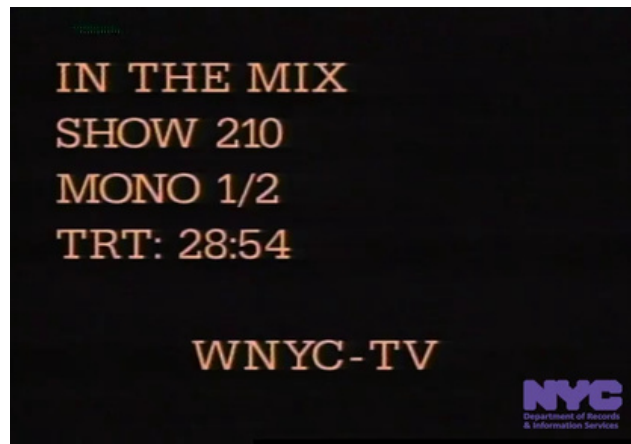
WNYC Film
195 films, 14 hours, 34 minutes



Reproductions

Tax Photograph Collections
3,169 prints

Luna Gallery
165 prints



DIGITAL PROGRAMS

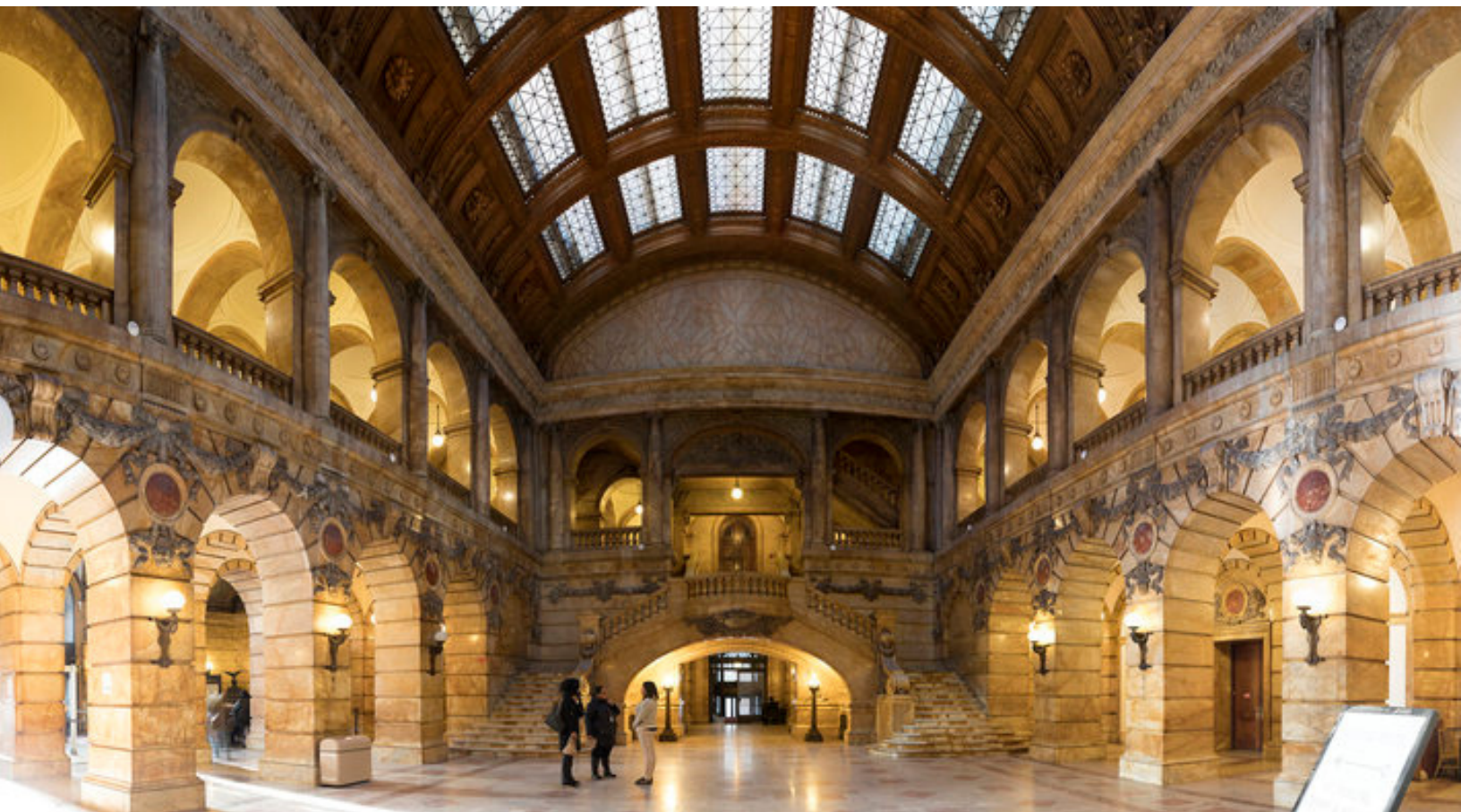
DORIS DIGITAL PLATFORM

THELMA (**THE** Library & **M**unicipal **A**rchives)

Library and Archives staff worked with the DORIS' application development team to build tools for a sustainable, open source digital preservation and access environment. The goals are to manage the ingest and transfer of multi-format digital collections, employ systems for the appraisal, formal acquisition and processing of collections, assist in the long-term preservation of born-digital and digitized collections, and to create a public interface to improve access, and reference and research services.

During Fiscal 2021, DORIS began a transition to the Microsoft Azure cloud for storage and servicing of its digital assets.

Archives staff worked to remediate preservation files for digital collections. This work ensured standardized file naming and reflects the collection hierarchy.



REFERENCE & RESEARCH

FAMILY HISTORY REFERENCE & PRODUCTION

The family history reading room remained closed to the public throughout Fiscal 2021. Staff mostly worked remotely; beginning in the summer of 2020, they began returning to the office for one or two-days per week to process hard-copy vital record copy requests needed for legal purposes. To accommodate the remote working environment, production workflows were revised so that staff could service requests with emailed PDF copies of requested records, whenever possible. During the year, staff fulfilled more than 24,000 requests for orders totaling more than 30,000 items.

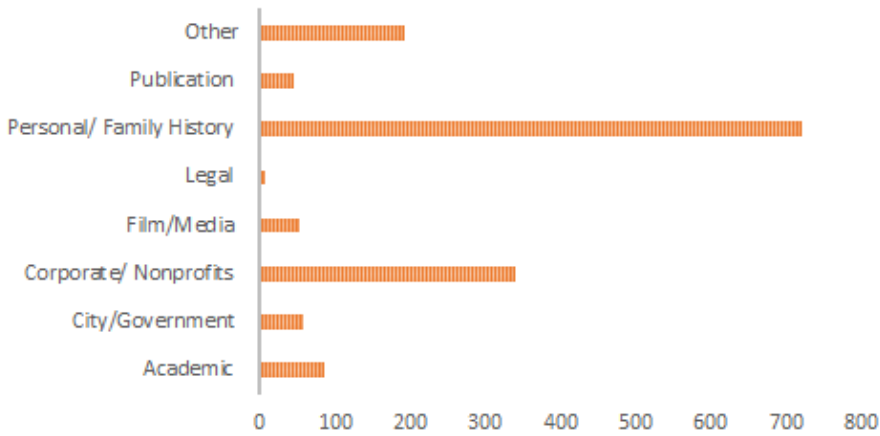
ARCHIVES REFERENCE AND RESEARCH SERVICES

The reference staff successfully met the year's challenges. To compensate for the pandemic-related closure of the public reading room, reference staff provided assistance by email and telephone. Whenever possible the staff scanned requested materials for patrons and waived copy fees. The number of unique remote inquiries rose more than 30% to 2,497 requests, from 1712 during the previous year.

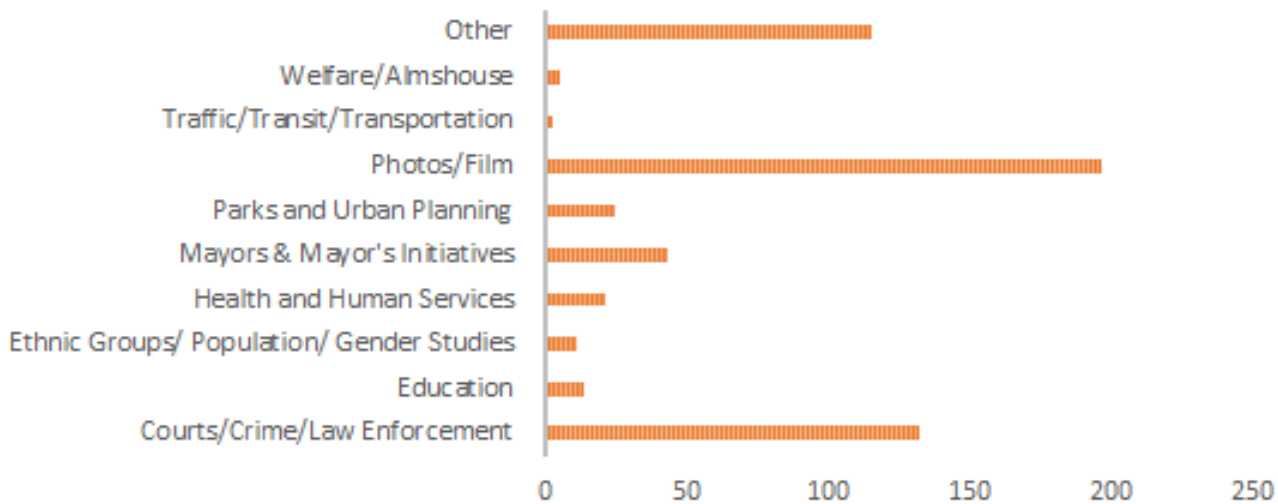


PUBLIC SERVICE STATISTICS

RESEARCH PURPOSE



RESEARCH TOPICS



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Sylvia Kollar, Director, Municipal Archives

Images and Credits

Cover

Bush Terminal, Brooklyn - Buildings #1-4, 1912. Ports and Terminals.

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Job sites in Brooklyn, Purchase Warehouse 33rd Street and 2nd Avenue, 1938. Bridges, Plants and Structures

Page 2

88th Street looking East from York Avenue, 1931. Borough President Manhattan collection.

Page 3

Gable-End Elevation, Brooklyn Bridge Station, Brooklyn Terminal, 1882. Brooklyn Bridge drawings and plans.

Page 4

Civil War Draft Riot Claims, 1863. Photographed by MA conservators Nora Ligorano and Virginia Buchan.

Page 5

Map of Flatbush, 1797. Photographed by head of Preservation and Conservation, Lindsey Hobbs.

Page 6

City Island Bridge, 1901. Bridges, Plants and Structures collection.

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Photographs taken by DORIS Operations Manager, Michael Lorenzini and head of Appraisals and Accessions, Todd Gilbert.

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Lobby, 31 Chambers St. Photographed by Mathew Minor.

Page 12

PS 47, Queens, 1939. Board of Education records.