



FY 2020
**ARB
REPORT**

**THE NEW YORK CITY
MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES**



As one of the largest municipal archival collections in North America, we strive to fulfill our mission to broaden access and insure preservation of New York City's historical assets. During Fiscal Year 2020, the Municipal Archives focused on building sustainable tools and workflows to support access to our diverse and vast collections, and prepared to relocate over 160,000 cubic ft. of archival holdings to our new Brooklyn facility.

While we experienced the abrupt and dramatic shift to working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, we had remarkable success in continuing core archival functions, thanks to the ingenuity and flexibility of the Archives staff, and rallying support from the Administration. This brought new projects into the fold that challenged and engaged staff including transcriptions of digitized ledgers and legacy collection descriptions, and revised digital workflows for patron requests and order fulfillment. Before March 2020 we had over 5,000 unique visitors to the Library and Archives reference and reading rooms, and over 1,800 unique email research inquiries, we've taken on the challenge to support our users both onsite and through various digital touchpoints.

This year emphasized the value in which the broader community and our staff place in the public record. From responding to fire recovery efforts at the Museum of Chinese in America, to honoring a member of our staff, Gabriel Gervais, on 40 years of incomparable customer service achievements to hosting an artist-in-residence who brought new perspectives on the archival process and access to information, the achievements this year strengthened the connection between our work and the public.

APPRAISALS & ACCESSIONS

Notable Acquisitions

The Unit appraised 1,592 cubic ft. and 2.5TB of materials, and formally acquired 611 cubic ft. including more than 9,000 WNYC audio reels from the New York Public Library. Other highlights included Commissioner files, blueprints and drawings, and digitized collections from the New York Police Department, Department of Parks and Recreation, Office of the Comptroller, and the Kings County District Attorney.



Radio Room, Municipal Building, 1926
[Bridges Plants and Structures Collection](#)
Eugene de Salignac



Field Work

On-site appraisal of records at City agencies is an important function that enables archivists to better understand the intellectual content of collections and how they are organized directly from records managers and records creators. This year, Unit Archivists reviewed over 9,000 Fire Department record books. Archivists visited the Department of Probation and appraised several records series with archival value and made recommendations on revising the current retention schedule descriptions and plan for archival transfers.

Recovery Efforts at the Museum of Chinese in America

In January 2020, a fire destroyed 70 Mulberry Street in Manhattan. The building had been constructed as Public School 23, and more recently, served as a center for cultural and community groups, including the Museum of Chinese in America (MoCA). The fire damaged MoCA's archival collections, and DORIS coordinated with the NYC Department of Citywide Administrative Services, the Alliance for Response, New York City (AFRNYC), and MoCA to assist in recovery efforts, issuing supplies, and conducting conservation and preservation triage work once the collections were relocated.

PS 23, Manhattan, 1929
[Board of Education Collection](#)





Computer Room, 1973
Housing Preservation & Development Collection,
Leonard Boykin

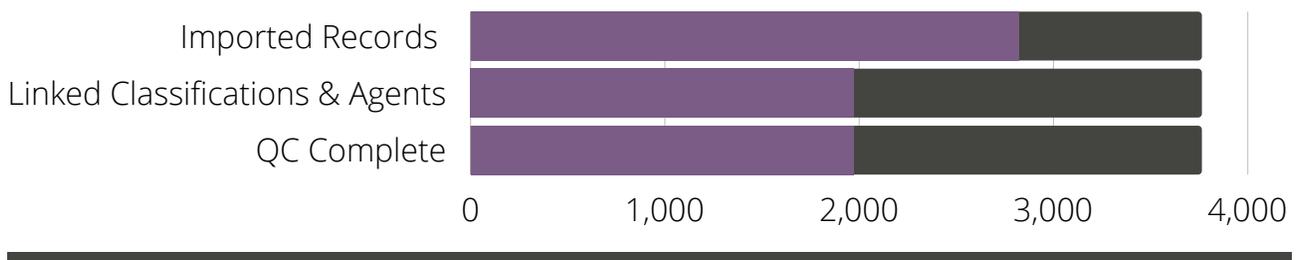
Legacy Data Management & Migration

During remote work, archivists focused on the major strategic initiative to provide access to the whole of the Archives' collections, if even at a high level, through the web-based ArchiveSpace application (set for a tentative public launch in April, 2021!).

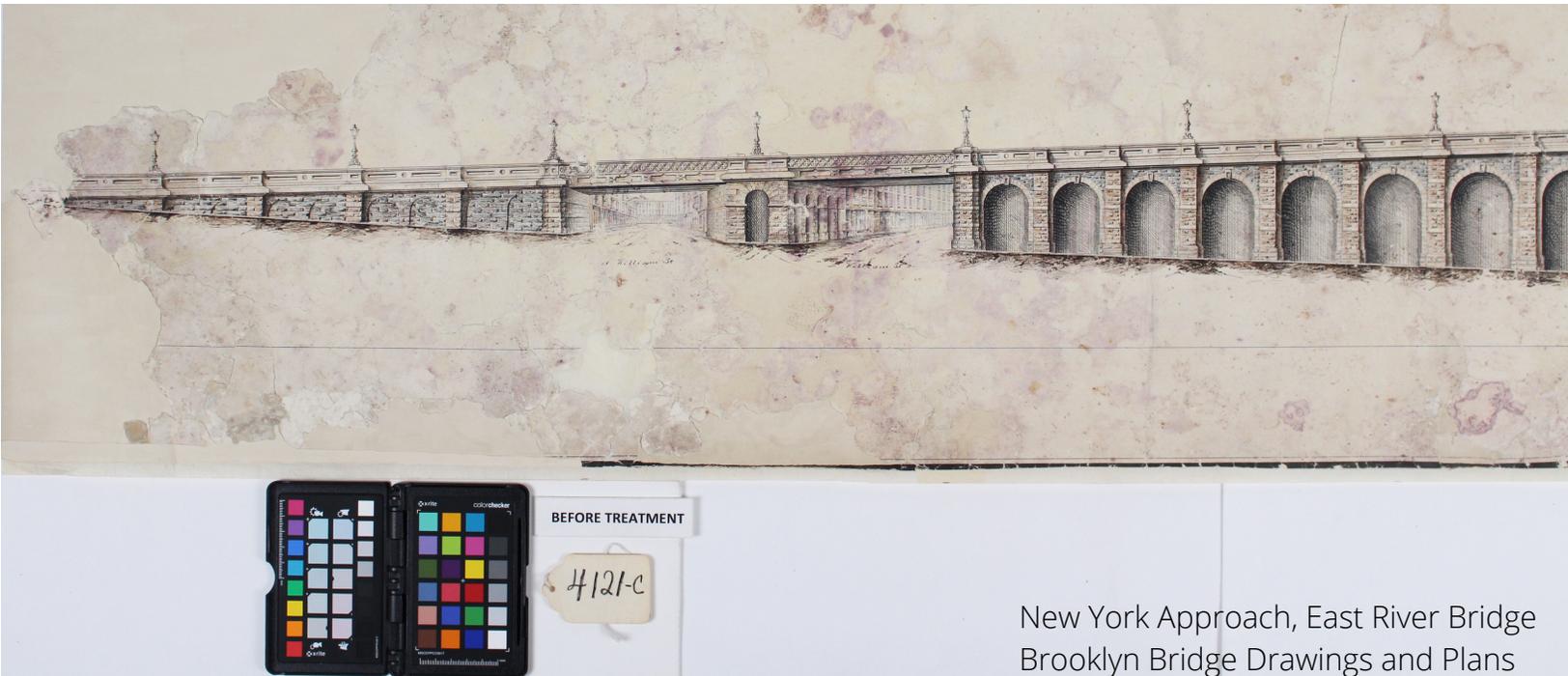
This important work will enable researchers to easily explore record types, dates, people, places, subjects and records creators. These activities create greater transparency and understanding of the constant evolution of City government and its agencies, and reflect the Archives' role in providing intellectual access points to a dynamic, ever growing collection.

Migrating 3,761 accession records, (records that officially transfer custody to the Municipal Archives and describe high level records creators, record types, and dates), is a laborious process that includes refining legacy documentation in both paper and electronic formats, confirming locations and extents, reviewing descriptions, and aligning those descriptions with industry-standard authorities and controlled vocabularies. Simultaneously, staff create high level classifications, name and subject authorities in order to link both accessions and collection finding aids. After quality control measures are performed, the accession records are published.

We imported more than 2,800 accession records into ArchiveSpace in Fiscal Year 2020.



CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION



New York Approach, East River Bridge
Brooklyn Bridge Drawings and Plans

Grant-funded Projects

The Conservation and Preservation Unit focused on two major grant-funded projects during Fiscal year 2020. The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), Sustaining Cultural Heritage grant program funding was used to assess current environmental and storage conditions at 31 Chambers Street, and to develop plans for improving and implementing long-term preservation strategies for the diverse archival collections. We teamed up with the City's Department of Administrative Services' engineers and the Landmark Facilities Group to review building plans, environmental reports, storage and preservation issues. We are developing a white paper based on the findings that were submitted to the NEH in December of 2020.

The New York State Library funded the rehousing and stabilization of 218 large-scale drawings and printed plans for Central Park and the Brooklyn Bridge. They represent some of the Archives' most unique and at-risk collections. Due to acidic substrates, flaking media, and the presence of iron gall ink, the Archives aimed to perform more in-depth treatment of the materials as needed to extend their life span and make them more accessible to researchers.



Preservation Planning

The core of any preservation plan begins with preventive efforts—the foundation for long term care of collections. The Municipal Archives acknowledges the importance of improving storage and handling, emergency preparedness, staff training, and collections security.

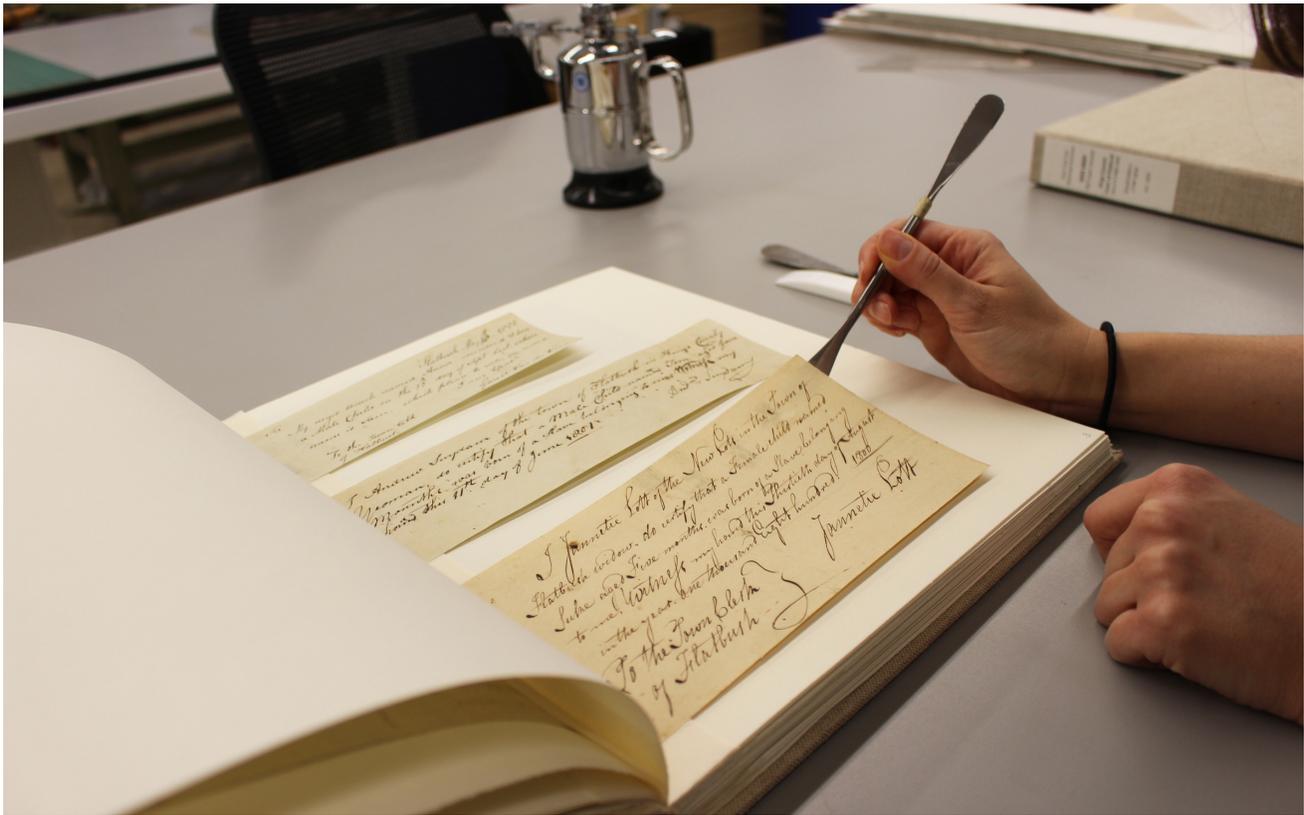
Collections Survey

During Fiscal Year 2020, the Archives initiated a preservation survey of the collections stored off-site (160,00 c.f.), identifying preservation issues such as mold, surface dirt, brittle paper, and overstuffed boxes or folders. The survey focused on housing recommendations for collections at an accession level. The survey will inform processing and digitization priorities going forward.

Stacks Maintenance

The Conservation Unit implemented a stacks cleaning project from May 2019 through February 2020 to reduce dust and debris and, in turn, pest activity. Collections and shelving were thoroughly vacuumed and wiped down in one of the three primary storage spaces at 31 Chambers Street. Staff across the Archives division participated in weekly maintenance sessions, and the Unit was able to take the opportunity to review handling practices and highlight the importance of maintaining a clean environment. Conservation continues to monitor for pests throughout the Archives and Library. Data is collected and shared with Operations to more effectively respond to infestations.





Training

The Municipal Archives recognizes the importance of supporting continuing education and training opportunities for staff. The Conservation staff presented a variety of preservation topics at monthly staff meetings, including:

- Best practices for shelving and handling materials
- Common causes of degradation and mitigation techniques
- Integrated pest management, and
- Cleaning methods for collections and collection areas.

In September 2019, Head of Conservation & Preservation, Lindsey Hobbs, attended a prestigious three-week training program in Japan that focused on traditional Japanese paper conservation techniques. Hobbs then gave presentations for staff on knowledge gained, use and care of specialized tools, and practices to implement in the Archives laboratory.

New equipment purchased with grant funding is now in use by staff, including a Zeiss stereomicroscope, a monostand and LED lighting for photographic documentation, as well as a new water deionization system. Digital Programs staff have provided guidance on equipment settings for photographing collections.



Adopt-a-book Program at the MA

Adopt New York's Past, a fundraising initiative organized by the New York Archival Society, the Conservation & Preservation Unit, and DORIS' External Affairs, was developed as a meaningful way to support conservation activities by connecting donors to items in need of repair or rehousing. This year, five adoptions were completed by the Conservation staff.

The Department of Records and Information Services acknowledges the following donors for their generous support of the Municipal Library and Archives.

- Robert Davis - *Proceedings of the Board of Alderman Collection, 1831-1853.*
- Kevin Foley - *Annual Report of the Board of Commissioners of the Central Park, 1856-1870.*
- Samantha Hightower - *Valentine's Manual of the City of New York, 1850.*
- Pauline Toole - *Slaveholders of Kings County, Flatbush, 1799-1826.*
- Stephen Weil - *Department of Public Works Annual Report, 1870.*

Loans

Princeton University Art Museum

The Greensward Plan for Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, 1858

Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum

Viele Map of the Central Park, Egbert Viele, 1855

Brady Greensward Plan Presentation Boards Nos. 4, 5, F.L. Olmsted and C. Vaux, ca. 1855.

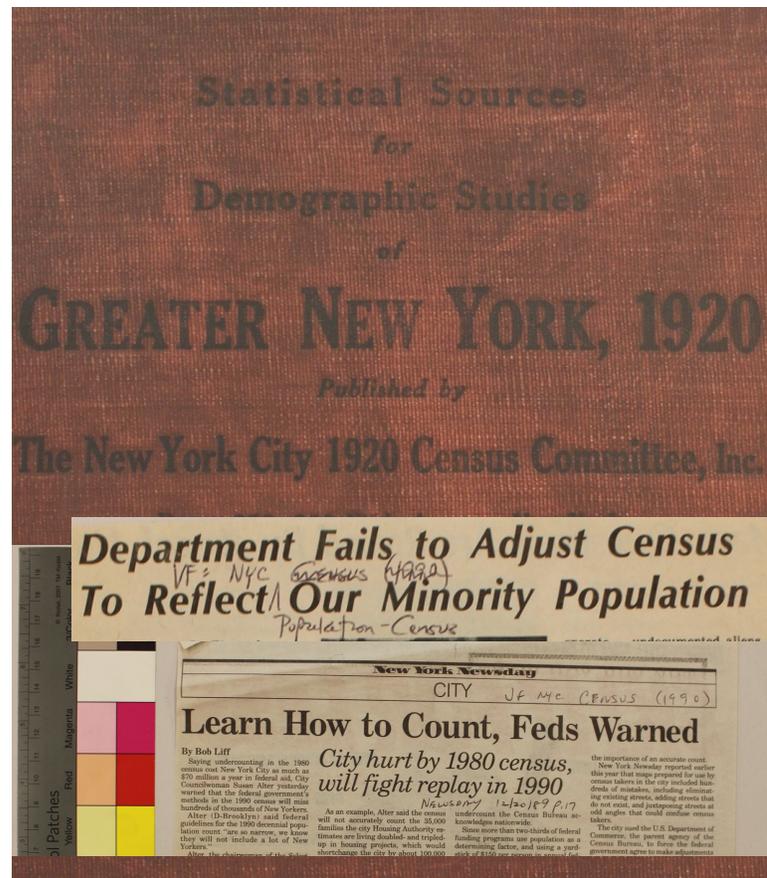
Museum of the City of New York

Department of Parks General Files, *Cycling in the City* Exhibition

Various Census Materials, *Who We Are* Exhibition

Queens Museum

Board of Estimate Volumes, Ulrike Muller and Amy Zion: *The Conference of the Animals and 120 Years of Children Drawing*

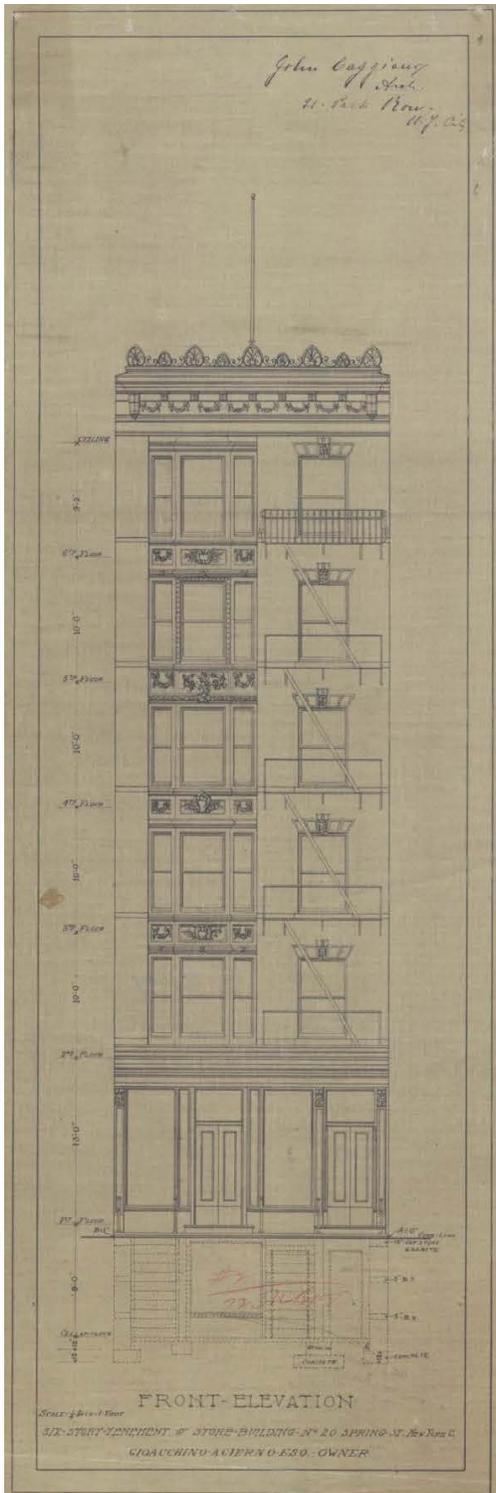


COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

PROCESSING

The Manhattan Buildings Plans project, supported in part by a New York State Library grant, is among our largest processing projects in recent years. The long-range plan is to process, inventory and repair the 96,000 plans in the collection. These measures will stabilize their physical integrity and will ensure their enduring availability for research. A team consisting of one full-time archivist and one part-time technician processed over 70 cubic feet of plans, and have responded to an increasing number of reference requests as we promote the collection.

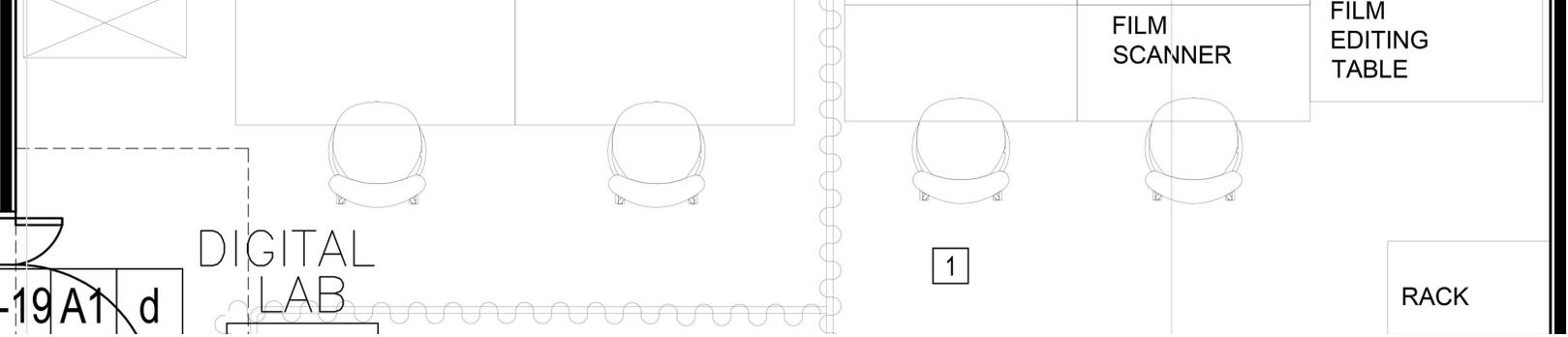
NYPD Intelligence Records processing continued on a part-time basis. Expedited file-level processing for two series, Large and Small Organization files were completed. Processing work began on two additional series, the Hard Hat Demonstrations, and the Communication files.



20 Spring Street, Front Elevation, 1905

John Caggiano, Architect

Department of Buildings architectural drawings and plans
for Lower Manhattan, circa 1866-1978



MOVING THE ARCHIVES

Throughout the fiscal year, the impending transfer of Archives collections to the new Brooklyn facility dominated much of the Archives' daily work. The facility includes space for a digital lab, collections preservation processing, conservation and triage work, records transfers and appraisals, and research and reference services. DORIS worked with the City's Department of Citywide Administrative Services and MKDA consultants to choose sustainable, environmentally friendly surfaces and materials and designs that would not compromise the collections, and support intuitive workspaces for both staff and researchers.

DORIS recruited a team to assist with re-boxing, description, labeling and basic preservation care. Limiting the transfer of surface debris to the new space, and addressing faulty, broken containers is a priority. Many collections are unprocessed and housed in original, acidic boxes. Archives staff identified frequently-requested collections including District Attorney Probation, and Office of the Chief Medical Examiner case file series as well as volumes stored on open shelving as priorities for cleaning and/or re-boxing. The team's work is among the most notable accomplishments. They reboxed over 10,000 cubic feet. and in the process decreased the footprint by 1,908 c.f.



10,311 cubic ft. re-boxed
2,628 volumes vacuumed



Preparing Collections

Reappraisals of large-scale transactional record series and deaccessions were prioritized in order to minimize the quantity of archival material that will be moved.. The reappraisal work required extensive research of original records creators, identification of duplicative information within other collections, current conditions, consideration of other appropriate repositories, historical significance and the Archives' collecting policies, as well as long term preservation requirements.

Archivists used the comprehensive collections survey completed in 2018 to begin planning for specific relocations based on specialty storage and shelving requirements, and to detail handling and moving requirements with the vendor.



DIGITAL PROGRAMS

DIGITAL LABS

The digital lab staff have unique qualifications in handling fragile, rare materials including photographic media, negative transparent material, film, bound material, and oversize drawings. The staff follow FADGI (Federal Agency Digitization Guidelines Initiative) standards and utilize DT Cultural Heritage technologies and workflows.

Their work results in high quality, preservation-centered digital reformatting of the City's historical assets. The process includes the creation of derivative files that support access and mitigate the risks caused by handling. They work with conservators to review handling and format challenges, and best practices.

The Year in Numbers...

Documents and oversize graphic materials

Vital Records (Marriage Licenses)
451,768 licenses
1,089,076 images

Transmissive Photographic Media

Mayoral Microfilm Collections
232,215 images

Vital Records Microfilm
1,178,000 images



Official Mayoral Photographs
4,395 images

Borough President, Queens, FY19-FY20
Nitrate, acetate, glass plate, and panoramic negatives, and lantern slides
2500 images, 10,948 published



Audio-Visual Materials

WNYC Film
(Local Government Records Management Fund Grant)
126 Films, 23 hours

Channel L Working Group
144 tapes, 140 hours



Bound Materials

Board of Estimate
41 Volumes
Records of Cases
214 Volumes



Customer Reproductions

Tax Photograph Collections
1,917
Luna Gallery
204 orders



DIGITAL PRESERVATION

The Archives and Municipal Library are working with the DORIS development team to identify components and build tools for a sustainable, open source digital preservation environment that will:

- Manage the ingest and transfer of multi-format digital collections.
- Employ systems for the appraisals and formal acquisition and processing of collections
- Assist in the long-term preservation of born-digital and digitized collections.
- Create user-centered public interface to improve access, and reference and research services.

During fiscal year 2020 DORIS outlined and initiated a Proof of Concept (POC) with cloud service providers in order to compare pricing for storage and infrastructure, technical requirements to integrate with cloud offerings, and support offerings to determine which cloud provider best meets our business requirements. Results of the POC (Fall 2020) will allow us to build technical frameworks for the digital preservation environment.

REFERENCE & RESEARCH

THE MAYOR'S EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARDS



The Mayor's Annual Customer Service Award is dedicated to a member of the staff who demonstrates a remarkable commitment to customer service. Gabriel Gervais, Reference and Research Associate for the Municipal Archives, was awarded for his more than 40 years of exemplary service. Gabriel's knowledge of the collections is unmatched, and his ability to coordinate and track transfers with the most detailed, and always consistent data made sure we maintained physical control of the records, and patrons received their requests in a timely manner. Going beyond reference services, Gabriel reported on building issues, and tracked environmental and preservation concerns. Gabriel's workload seemed insurmountable, yet he smiled his way through the day, and made sure every box, volume, blueprint, negative, photograph, tape, lacquer disc, reel, etc. was made available to the public. Gabriel serviced over 48,000 requests for information in his 40-year career with the Municipal Archives. A remarkable feat, to say the least.

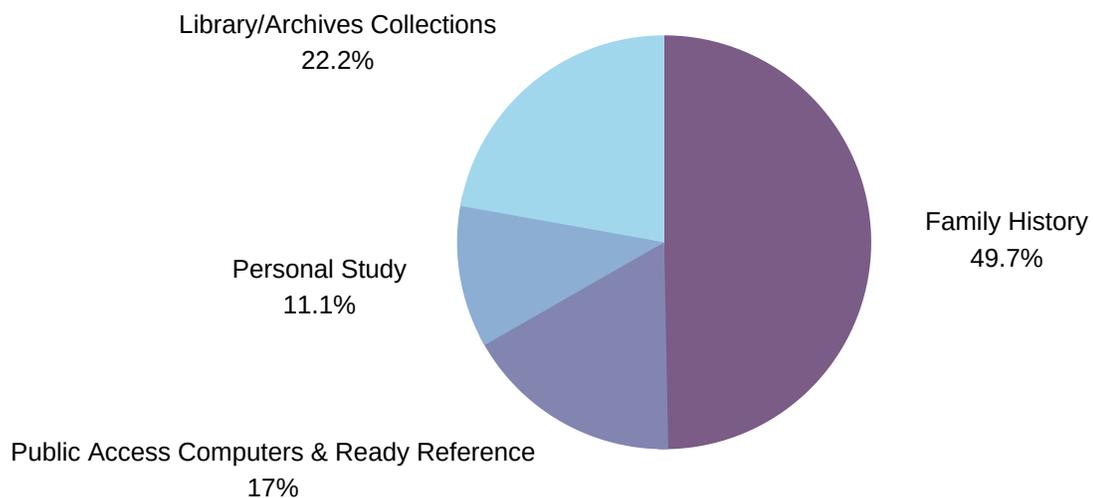


Astoria Park, Hell Gate Bridge,
[Borough President, Queens](#)
[Photograph Collection](#)

PUBLIC SERVICE STATISTICS

The Municipal Library and Archives provided reference and research services for the public six-days a week at at 31 Chambers Street until the facility closed in mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the closure, family history researchers had on-site access to vital records indices and a search tool to view digitized vital records. During Fiscal Year 2020, we serviced 26,767 requests for certified historical birth, death, and marriage records, and welcomed over 2,300 visitors to the Family History Reference Room.

The Library and Archives Reading Room provides spacious seating and tables to safely and securely view original materials and research our catalogs. The reference team registered over 3,000 onsite visits and responded to over 1,800 email requests.

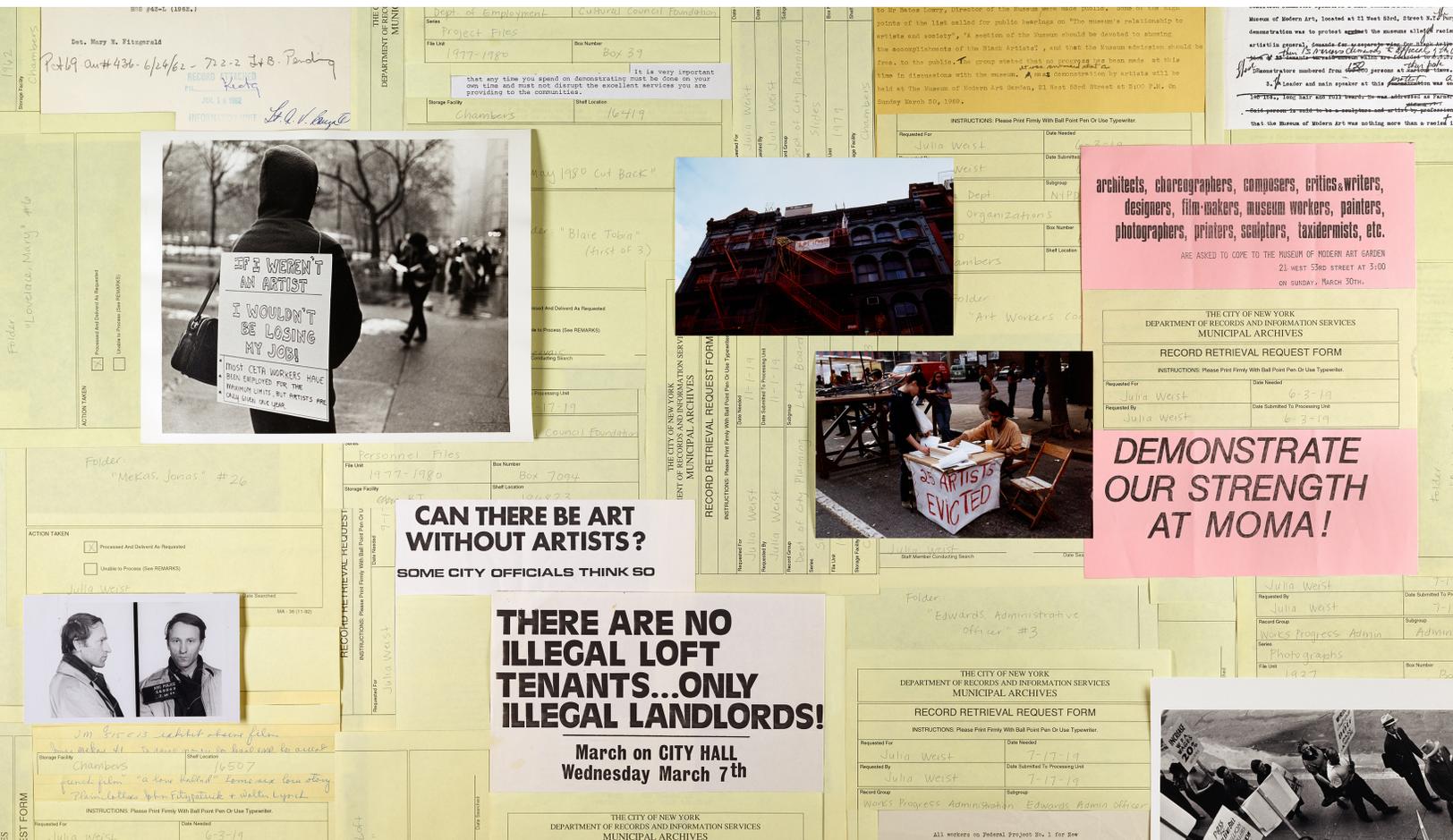


SPECIAL PROJECTS

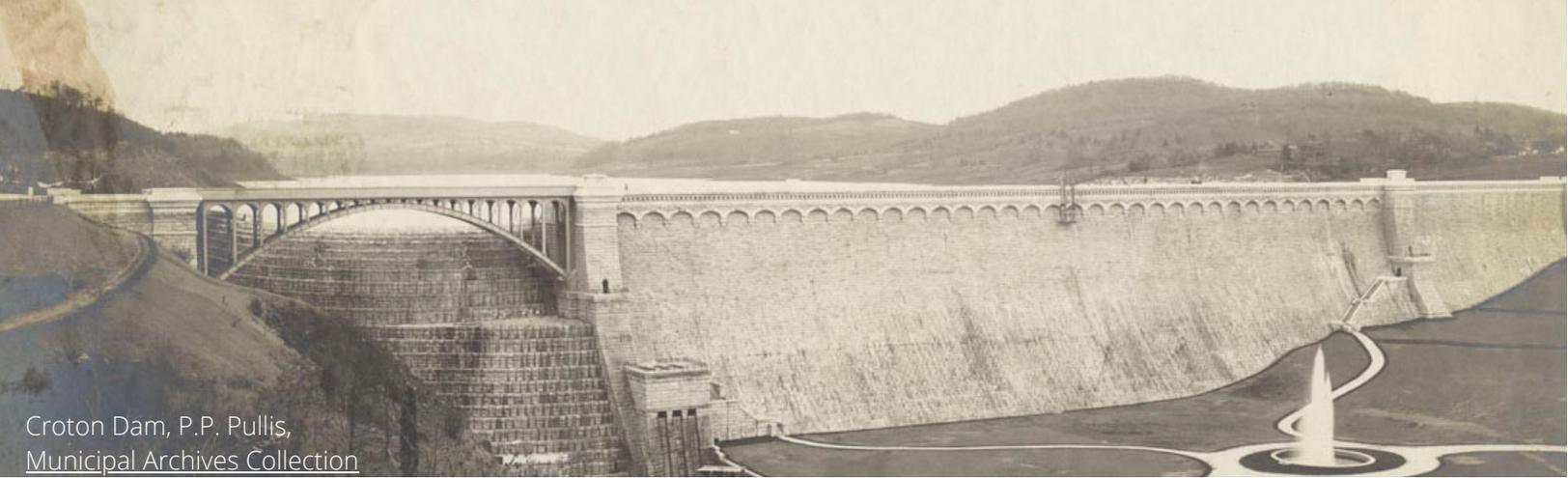
JULIA WEIST, ARTIST IN RESIDENCE

Julia Weist was in residence with atDORIS as part of Public Artists in Residence (PAIR), a New York City residency program that embeds artists in City agencies. The program, administered through the Department of Cultural Affairs, was created with the premise that artists are creative problem-solvers who can solve civic challenges.

Weist's residency resulted in a series of photographic prints entitled Public Record. Weist created the works based on her research in the Archives and focus on the relationship between government and artists, and the process by which records are created and made available to the broader public. To see the works, search for "Julia Weist" on New York City's [Open Records portal](#).



Demonstration, Julia Weist



Croton Dam, P.P. Pullis,
Municipal Archives Collection

Exhibitions and Publications

Ebb & Flow: Tapping into the History of New York City's Water

A Collaboration between the New York City Municipal Archives and the Museum of American Finance

The exhibition examined over 200 years of the City's efforts to deliver clean water to residents and how the city built such an impressive water system. The exhibit traced New York City's pursuit of a safe and reliable water source, and the trials faced along the way. The story of the Manhattan Company highlighted a most tumultuous time in the city's water history. The opening event on March 5, 2020, featured a special live recording of the National Public Radio program, *Person Place Thing* hosted by Emmy Award winner Randy Cohen and musician/actress Rachel Stern. The program featured the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection, Vincent Sapienza.

The Language of the City: Immigrant Voices

A Collaboration with *We Are Brooklyn, Immigrant Voices*, and the Brooklyn College Listening Project

The exhibition featured oral histories, historical & present day photographs, and audiovisual recordings relaying the stories of past and current immigrant lives in New York City. The exhibit was open to the public from September 2019 through February 2020.

Central Park: A Pastoral Vision by Cynthia Brenwall, Conservator
New York Archives Magazine, Fall 2019

A Delicate Process: Important Slave Records at the New York City Municipal Archives are Preserved by Lindsey Hobbs, Head of Conservation and Preservation
New York Archives Magazine, Spring 2020

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31 Chambers Street, Lobby
Matt Minor

Page 3

MoCA recovery volunteers
Lindsey Hobbs

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New York Approach, East River Bridge, Drawing 4121c
Before Treatment Photo
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Caroline De Oliveira