

**NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES**  
31 CHAMBERS ST., NEW YORK, NY 10007

# Guide to the Bodies in Transit registers, 1859-1894

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**Collection No. REC 0052**

Processed by Alexandra Hilton, May 2018

SEE THE BACK OF THIS APPLICATION.

The permit must be obtained in every case previous to the passage of the body into the city of New York.

**APPLICATION FOR A TRANSIT OR DISINTERMENT PERMIT**  
**FROM BUREAU OF RECORDS OF VITAL STATISTICS, HEALTH DEPARTMENT OF THE**  
**CITY OF NEW YORK.**

PERMISSION IS DESIRED to pass through the City the remains of

Name ..... Age .....

Occupation.....

Place and Date of Death ....

Cause of Death..... Place of Birth.....

Now at.....(Arrived by what Route).....

For interment at.....(By what Route).....

How Certified.....

Name and Address }  
of Applicant, } .....

NEW YORK, (date)..... 187

Source: *Second Annual Report of the Board of Health of the Health Department of the City of New York, April 11, 1871, to April 10, 1872*

## Summary

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**Record Group:** RG 036: Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

**Title of the Collection:** Bodies in Transit registers

**Creator(s):** New York (N.Y.). Department of Health; New York (N.Y.). Department of Health. Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics; New York (State). Metropolitan Board of Health; New York (State). Metropolitan Board of Health. Bureau of Vital Statistics; New York (N.Y.). City Inspector's Office; New York (N.Y.). City Inspector's Office. Bureau of Records and Statistics

**Date:** 1859-1894

**Abstract:** This collection consists of bound volumes recording the transportation of bodies in, out and through Manhattan during 1859-1894. These records were maintained by various iterations of New York City's Health Department to prevent and track disease and death in the city.

**Collection #:** REC 0052

**Extent:** 4 cubic feet in 10 volumes

**Language:** English

**Physical location:** Materials are stored onsite at 31 Chambers St.

**Repository:** New York City Municipal Archives, Department of Records and Information Services, 31 Chambers St., New York, NY 10007

**Access and Use:** Collection is open for research. To preserve the condition of original records, patrons are requested to use access copies when available. Advance notice is required for using original material. Please contact [research@records.nyc.gov](mailto:research@records.nyc.gov) to arrange access.

**Existence and Location of Copies:** The entirety of this collection has been digitized and is available [online](#).

**Preferred citation:** Identification of item, date; Bodies in Transit registers, 1859-1894; REC 0052; Municipal Archives, City of New York

**Processing note:** This collection was processed by Alexandra Hilton in May 2018.

## Biographical/Historical Note

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These records detailing transportation of bodies in, out and through Manhattan were created during the latter half of the 19th century, a period of great change for how local government addressed health issues in New York City. During the colonial period, slow population growth allowed the city to remain relatively orderly, and few ordinances were put in place to address human welfare directly. Any epidemics experienced were seen as an expected part of growing a new city.

It was not until the years after the American Revolution that it became apparent such measures were needed. The population was multiplying and, in turn, so were sanitation and health problems. In response to this, the formation of state and municipal public health agencies began. In 1804, the New York State Legislature authorized the Common Council to make sanitary ordinances, which resulted in the position of City Inspector. The first Board of Health was established the following year and became the governing body of the City Inspector's Department.

In 1859, the position of Registrar of Records was created within the City Inspector's Department and they were to head the Bureau of Records and Statistics. Reports contemporary to the time suggest that the recording of the transportation of bodies in, out and through Manhattan between 1859 and 1894 was mandated by this new department. As concern grew over how health and sanitary matters were addressed in a rapidly growing city, the value of vital statistics, especially regarding death, took on new precedence. Between 1859 and 1894, jurisdiction over the city's health matters changed hands from the City Inspector's Department to the Metropolitan Board of Health in 1866 to the Department of Health in 1870.

## Bibliography

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"Bodies in transit records (1859-1894)." Goodwin, Aaron. *New York City Municipal Archives: an authorized guide for family historians*. New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2016.

Duffy, John. *A history of public health in New York City, 1866-1966*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974.

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. *Protecting public health in New York City: 200 years of leadership, 1805-2005*. New York: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2005.

## Scope and Content Note

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Due to the growing city's need to keep track of disease and illness, each of the ten bodies in transit registers were preprinted with column headings to record the date of the body's transit in, out and through Manhattan, the name of the deceased, age in years and months, the place and date of death, the cause of death, nativity, a location in transit, the intended place of internment, who provided certification for the transfer, and the name and address of the applicant of the transfer. Each volume is roughly 20 inches long and 15 inches wide and range in thickness from one to 3.5 inches.

The earliest volumes in the collection are the most densely filled, with the frequency of permits issued decreased in later years. Efficiency was improved when a standardized permit application form was introduced in 1871. As explained by the Deputy Register of Records in the Annual Report of the Board of Health for 1870-1871, "... delay or inconvenience is sometimes experienced for lack of the necessary information relating to the death, particularly when bodies are sent by express, and only the name of the consignee and place of destination can be ascertained .... One reason for being so exact in demanding that the applications for a transit permit shall be accurately filled up is, that in enabling us to detect the cause of death, those bodies which might jeopardize the health of this city would not be permitted to enter. We also require to be satisfied that proper investigations have been made in cases of sudden death, death from violence, injury, or accident, the name and address of the applicant being a voucher for its correctness. The register of bodies in transit contains all the principal items that could be ascertained at the time, and which might be means of future identification."

Further advancements came along as local health agencies began forming in the surrounding cities. The 1874 annual report stated that bodies accompanied by burial permits from the newly-established Boards of Health of Brooklyn, Long Island City, Richmond County, or Hudson County, New Jersey were not required to apply for a transit permit. An increase of regulated Boards of Health across the United States may be the reason that the Health Department eventually ceased registering bodies in transit altogether: "If some general rule or mutual understanding existed between established Boards of Health and Vital Statistics regarding the transportation of dead bodies, there would be no necessity of placing any impediment or obstacle in the way of the transmission of a corpse from the place of death to its destination, provided that a burial permit accompanied it, with a sufficient number of coupons attached and containing the same items of information regarding the deceased as are contained in the transit permit; the coupons to be collected by the transportation agents on the arrival or departure of the body, and returned to this Bureau, as the regulations may require, to be entered on the register of bodies in transit." This same report also suggests using the telegraph as a means of communicating when a body is being transferred from one jurisdiction to another, including the possibility of a delay in the journey.

Notable entries in the records are those concerning reinternments from Manhattan burial grounds to one outside the borough and those noting when a body belonged to a Civil War

soldier. Additionally, there are several prominent individuals listed in the pages. Abraham Lincoln's body is listed in the third volume when his funeral cortege stopped in the city on April 24, 1865 (page 142-143). His registered cause of death is "pistol shot." The abolitionist John Brown passed through on December 4, 1859 (volume I, page 42-43), two days after his execution for leading the raid on Harpers Ferry. Beside his name, under the remarks, it reads "Hung for Murder, Treason and Inciting Slaves to escape from Virginia and Maryland."

## Arrangement

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The ten volumes in this collection are arranged chronologically by date:

1. [Volume I: 1859-1863](#)
2. [Volume II: 1863-1865](#)
3. [Volume III: 1865-1866](#)
4. [Volume IV: 1866-1868](#)
5. [Volume V: 1869-1870](#)
6. [Volume VI: 1871](#)
7. [Volume VII: 1872](#)
8. [Volume VIII: 1873](#)
9. [Volume IX: 1874-1880](#)
10. [Volume X: 1881-1894](#)

Within each volume, names were recorded alphabetically by the first initial of the last name and then chronologically by year, month and day.

## Key Terms

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### Places

Manhattan (New York, N.Y.)  
New York (N.Y.)  
New York (N.Y.) -- Politics and government -- To 1898  
New York County (N.Y.)

### Subjects

Burial records  
Registers of births, etc.--New York (State)--New York

### Material Types

Death registers  
Registers (lists)

## Container List

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### Volume I: 1859-1863

**Creator:** City Inspector's Office, Bureau of Records and Statistics

**Date(s):** 1859 July 1-1863 August 1

**Extent:** unpagged [756 pages]

Last Name Initial	Page Range	Note
A	2-41	
B	42-121	John Brown, 1859 December 4 (page 42)
C	122-181	
D (1)	182-199	
E (1)	200-209	
D (2)	210-211	
E (2)	212-225	
F	226-241	
G	242-265	
H	266-305	
I	306-365	
J	366-385	
K	386-409	
L	410-425	
M	426-479	
N	480-497	
O	498-509	
P	510-527	
Q	528-543	
R	542-579	
S	580-639	
T	640-653	
U	654-669	
V	670-681	
W	682-733	
X	734-735	
Y	736-751	
Z	752-756	

## Volume II: 1863-1865

**Creator:** City Inspector's Office, Bureau of Records and Statistics

**Date(s):** 1863 August 1-1865

**Extent:** unpagged [478 pages]

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	2-13
B	14-57
C (1)	58-73
D	74-89
E	90-109
F	110-121
G	122-133
H	134-161
I	162-173
J	174-183
K	184-195
L	196-207
M	208-251
N	252-267
O	268-279
P	280-291
Q	292-299
R	300-319
S	320-363
T	364-379
U	380-385
C (2)	386-395
V	396-407
W	408-443
X	444-451
Y	452-467
Z	468-478



### Volume III: 1865-1866

**Creators:** City Inspector's Office, Bureau of Records and Statistics

**Date(s):** 1865 April 1-1866 January 1

**Extent:** unpagged [412 pages]

Last Name Initial	Page Range	Note
A	2-13	
B	14-55	
C	56-69	
D	70-81	
E	82-88	
F	94-103	
G	104-113	
H	114-137	
I	138-147	
J	148-155	
K	156-169	
L	170-179	Abraham Lincoln, 1865 April 24 (page 172)
M	180-221	
N	222-235	
O	236-245	
P	246-255	
Q	256-261	
R	262-279	
S	280-319	
T	320-333	
U	334-345	
V	346-355	
W	356-383	
X	384-389	
Y	390-401	
Z	402-412	

## Volume IV: 1866-1868

**Creators:** City Inspector's Office, Bureau of Records and Statistics; Metropolitan Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1866-1868

**Extent:** unpagged [393 pages]

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A (1)	2-13
B	14-47
C	48-75
D	76-95
E (1)	96-103
F	104-119
G	120-139
H	140-165
I	166-169
J (1)	170-177
K	178-189
L	190-205
M	206-239
J (2)	240-241
N	242-249
O (1)	250-257
P	258-273
Q	274-275
R	276-295
S (1)	296-327
T	328-343
U	344-345
V	346-355
W	356-377
E (2)	378-379
Y	380-385
S (2)	386-389
A (2)	390-391
O (2)	392-393

## Volume V: 1869-1870

**Creator:** Metropolitan Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics; Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1869-1870

**Extent:** 402 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

**Note:** Pages 195 (right side only), 196 (left side only), 196 (right side only) and 197 (left side only) are missing from the volume.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	1-5
B	6-25
C	26-36
D (1)	37-45
E	46-48
D (2)	49-50
F	51-57
G	58-67
H	68-82
I	83-84
J	85-87
K	88-94
L	95-102
M	103-125
N	126-129
O	130-133
P	134-141
Q	142-142
R	143-151
S	152-174
T	175-181
U	182-183
V	184-186
W	187-200
Y	201-202
Z	203-203

## Volume VI: 1871

**Creator:** Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1871

**Extent:** 222 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

**Note:** Pages 109 (both right and left page) and 110 (left page only) are missing from the volume.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	1-5
B	6-14
C	15-21
D	22-26
E	27-29
F	30-33
G	34-37
H	38-44
I	45-46
J	47-49
K	50-53
L	54-58
M	59-66
N	67-69
O	70-72
P	73-76
Q	77-78
R	79-83
S	84-92
T	93-96
U	97-98
V	99-101
W	102-106
X	107-107
Y	108-110
Z	111-112

## Volume VII: 1872

**Creator:** Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1872

**Extent:** 252 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	2-5
B	6-14
C	15-22
D	23-27
E	28-29
G (2)	30-30
F (1)	31-33
F (1); G (3)	34-34
G (1)	35-37
H	38-44
I	45-46
J	47-49
K	50-53
L	54-59
M	60-67
N	68-69
O	70-72
P	73-76
Q	77-79
R	80-84
S	85-92
T	93-96
U	97-98
V	99-102
W	103-107
Y	108-110
Z	111-111

## Volume VIII: 1873

**Creator:** Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1873

**Extent:** 264 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	1-6
B	7-15
C	16-23
D	24-27
E	28-30
F	31-34
G	35-37
H	38-44
I	45-46
J	47-51
K	52-57
L	58-65
M	66-74
N	75-76
O	77-79
P	80-83
Q	84-84
R	85-90
S	91-99
T	100-103
U	104-105
V	106-108
W	109-114
Y	115-118
Z	119-119

## Volume IX: 1874-1880

**Creator:** Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1874-1880

**Extent:** 802 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	2-20
B	21-45
C	46-70
D	71-90
E	91-107
F	108-122
G	123-141
H	142-162
I	163-172
J	173-185
K	186-201
L	202-220
M (1)	221-242
N	243-250
M (2)	251-256
O	257-267
P	268-288
Q	289-294
R	295-315
S	316-341
T	342-362
U	363-370
V	371-381
W	382-397
Y	398-399
Z	400-401

## Volume X: 1881-1894

**Creator:** Department of Health, Bureau of Records and Vital Statistics

**Date(s):** 1881-1894

**Extent:** 803 pages; opposite pages bear duplicate numbering.

Last Name Initial	Page Range
A	1-13
B (1)	14-41
C	42-65
D	66-81
E	82-91
F	92-107
G	108-123
H	124-147
I	148-155
J	156-165
K	166-179
B (2)	180-181
L	182-197
M (1)	198-225
N	226-241
O	242-253
P	254-273
Q	274-275
M (2)	276-281
R	282-297
S (1)	298-327
T	328-343
U	344-347
S (2)	348-351
V	352-361
W	362-386
Y	387-394
Z	395-395