

Local Law 22
Archival Review Board
Report to the Mayor
June 2009

“This bill will help ensure that the process of archiving the City’s historical records is one that enjoys complete public confidence. It will also help maintain the high standards which the Department of Records and Information Services applies to its own archival work and that of the organizations with which it contracts for the archival preservation of the City’s historical records.” [Mayor Bloomberg, March 26, 2003]

I. Archival Review Board

On March 12, 2003, the New York City Council passed Local Law 22, which, among other things, established an “Archival review board” (Section 3005): “There shall be in the department an archival review board which shall consist of five members: two of whom shall be appointed by the speaker; two of whom shall be appointed by the mayor, and one of whom shall be the commissioner, who shall serve ex officio as chairperson of the board.” The Mayor signed the legislation on March 26, 2003.

II. Board Members

Brian G. Andersson, Commissioner, Department of Records, ex officio, chairperson
Michael Best, member
Marion R. Casey, member
Richard K. Lieberman, member
Christopher Moore, member

III. Annual Report

The legislation required that the Review Board submit to the Mayor an annual report, “...reviewing the archival processing of any city papers during the year for which the report has been written.” The Board met most recently on April 7, 2009, and the following information is submitted by the Board in compliance with this component of the legislation:

A. Board Statement Regarding Department of Records Budget Reductions

The Board recognizes that all City agencies are obliged to accept budget reductions resulting from the overall economic downturn. However, due to the manner in which the budget reductions are implemented (a percentage based upon an agency’s entire budget), we believe the cutbacks have a disproportionate effect on the Department of Records. The bulk of the Department’s budget is earmarked for rent payments on its privately-owned off-site storage facilities. Because these rent payments cannot be reduced, the Department is forced to absorb the cuts in its budget for staff and supplies.

While the Board is pleased to report the Department's accomplishments in its archival program over the last few years, we must note that the budget situation may eliminate and/or curtail many of these worthy endeavors. We suggest that an evaluation of how budget reductions are applied to the Department of Records would be beneficial.

B. Summary of DOR archival processing activities, ca. 2004-2009

1. The Archives of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani

On December 24, 2001, at the request of Mayor Giuliani, Department of Records Commissioner George Rios signed a contract with the Rudolph W. Giuliani Center for Urban Affairs, Inc. to process the records of the Giuliani mayoral administration. The Giuliani Center contracted the Winthrop Group, a private archival consulting firm, to carry out specific processing activities, based upon a "processing plan" developed by representatives from the Municipal Archives, the Law Department, and the Winthrop Group. The contract archivists completed their work in December 2006. The archivists divided the records into several series including departmental correspondence, deputy mayors and assistants, World Trade Center-related correspondence, press digest, scheduling office, etc. The Winthrop Group contracted with the vendor Alpha Systems to microfilm and digitize the records. All paper-based records were microfilmed and digitized. The records are currently available in both formats at the Municipal Archives reference room.

2. The Archives of Mayor David N. Dinkins

Thanks to special funding from Mayor Bloomberg, a team of archival technicians at the Municipal Archives completed an inventory of the records of the Dinkins mayoral administration (1990- 1993). In seven months, from June 2008 through January 2009, the team described more than 150 series in the 2,300-cubic foot collection, including correspondence, memos, reports, photographs, and audiotapes of the mayor and his deputies and assistants. The Department published the inventory on its website, www.nyc.gov/records, and made it available in hard-copy at the Municipal Archives reference room. The inventory also includes descriptions of the records of many supporting mayoral offices such as Office of Operations, Legislative Affairs, the Press Office, and Special Projects and Events. It includes numerous constituency offices, among them Afro-Caribbean Affairs, Asian Affairs, Immigrant Affairs, as well as special offices such as the 1990 Census Project, and the NYC District Commission.

In phase II of the project, key series have been selected for standard archival processing and re-formatting to microfilm. This work began in February 2008, and is continuing at least through June 30, 2009. This will preserve the

material and make it more readily accessible. Appendix A provides a list of the series selected for processing and microfilming and their current status.

3. *1980s Tax Photographs*

The Municipal Archives is exceptionally pleased to report that public access is now available for one of its most important recent accessions, the 800,000 1980s-era “tax” photographs. Dating from 1982 to 1987, these color photographs depict every building in the five Boroughs of New York City. Like the earlier 1939/40 tax photographs (accessioned many years ago by Municipal Archives), they were originally produced by the Department of Finance for purposes of real property tax assessment. Finance had copied the new 1980s pictures onto laser video disks (LVD), an analog format popular at that time. Municipal Archives staff successfully digitized the LVD images and uploaded them into Luna, the Archives image management system, so that patrons can easily research the collection on computers in the Archives reference room. Currently, the photographs of Manhattan and Bronx (150,000 images) are easily accessible on Luna. The remaining Boroughs will be uploaded to Luna over the next few months. The 1980s tax photograph images from all five Boroughs are now available for purchase as prints in the 8”x10” and 11”x14” formats. These images have already become very popular with Archives patrons, bringing in much needed revenue.

In addition to the digitization work, the Municipal Archives received funding from the New York State Library Conservation/Preservation Discretionary program to re-house all 800,000 original color prints in appropriate archival containers. The prints had been found in a basement storage area, where they had been filed in damaging polyvinyl chloride sleeves in overstuffed acidic cartons. The corresponding 35mm negatives have also been re-housed in appropriate archival materials. This work was completed in April 2009. The negatives are used to produce new color prints upon demand from patrons.

4. *New York County Estate Inventories, 1790-1833*

With funding from the New York State Library Conservation/Preservation Discretionary program in 2007, the Municipal Archives preserved on microfilm 3,946 New York County Surrogate’s Court estate inventory records, dating from 1790 to 1833. The inventories had been filed in the Surrogate’s Court by appraisers appointed by the court to inventory the assets of deceased individuals.

Municipal Archives conservators prepared the inventories for microfilming using various techniques; extremely brittle and fragmented items were placed in mylar sleeves. Once the documents were stabilized, conservators placed them in new lignin-and-acid-free folders and document boxes, with appropriate labeling. Project staff maintained the original alphabetical by last name of decedent arrangement scheme.

In order to increase accessibility of the inventories, project staff built a database that included fields for box, folder, and microfilm roll numbers, name of decedent, date inventory filed, original inventory number, and remarks. The microfilming resulted in 24 rolls of 35mm silver halide camera film.

Completion of this project has confirmed the significance of the material for research. Not only do the inventories add to knowledge about many of the most prominent New York families, such as the Stuyvesants, Livingstons, Vanderbilts, Roosevelts, Schermerhorns, Van Wycks, Astors, and Beekmans, they also provide valuable insight to lives of more ordinary citizens. The range of occupations of decedents is remarkable: baker, blacksmith, carpenter, grocer, doctor, butcher, cartman, and broker, to name a few. And the maritime basis of the city's economy is greatly apparent in the large number of estates inventoried for seamen, shipwrights, sea captains, mariners, and pilots.

5. Board of Education Collection

Thanks to recent accessions of Board of Education records from Teachers College, and directly from the Board, the Municipal Archives went from having virtually no information pertaining to the history of education, to having one of the most important collections of such material in the United States. And with several grants from the New York State Archives Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund (LGRMIF) the Archives has undertaken several processing projects to improve access to the collection.

In 2004-05, the Municipal Archives processed a number of series of board members' papers (1950s-1990s) and prepared descriptive inventories. In the following year, 2005-06, LGRMIF funded the processing of several sets of chancellors' files (1970s-1980s). More recent LGRMIF funding supported production of an overall "Guide to the Records of the Board of Education." The Guide provides a basic introduction to each of the series in the collection, describing essential information, as well as descriptions for each series including selected standard descriptive elements -- series title, dates, extent, records types, and arrangement. The Guide also includes an explanation of the content of the records and the context of their creation to give researchers a sense of their potential relevance. Each series description also contains a note referencing any existing finding aids or inventories. The Guide has been produced in both a traditional paper format and has been published on the agency's web site.

With funding from the LGRMIF program in the current grant cycle (2008-09), the Municipal Archives is digitizing, cataloging and preserving approximately 2,000 photographic images depicting activities of pupils and teachers, special events, and school buildings. They date between 1925 and 1945. All original negatives will be re-housed and stored in a freezer to prevent and halt deterioration.

6. *Photograph Collections*

Beginning in February 2008, with purchase of the Luna image management software system, the Department has devoted considerable resources to processing, cataloging, and digitizing the historical photograph collections. Currently, 6,600 photographs in nine collections are available for research in the Luna system, as well as over 150,000 images from the Manhattan and Bronx 1980s tax photographs.

The photograph collections that have received archival processing, re-housing and/or cataloging attention include:

- Borough President Manhattan (BPM): all 13,000 hand-written catalog cards have been entered into an Access database.
- Department of Public Works (DPW): all original 16,500 negatives have been removed from acidic envelopes and re-housed in archival sleeves; all negative numbers, sleeve information, and descriptions have been entered into an Access database; print holdings (10,000) have been indicated in the database; and detailed descriptions from logbooks and subject keywords for all 20,934 images have been entered. Approximately 4,300 of the earliest acetate negatives have been frozen to prevent further deterioration.
- Bridges Plant & Structures (BPS): information from the photographers' original log books has been entered into an Access database (a total of 23,700 entries), and the original log books have been digitally photographed (1,000 pages). Approximately 800 images have been uploaded to Luna.
- Department of General Services/Department of Environmental Protection (DGS/DEP): information from 18,200 original sleeves has been entered into an Access database.
- Borough President Queens (BPQ): information from approximately 4,000 original index cards has been entered into an Access database.
- Fire Department (FDNY): the entire 740-image negative collection has been cataloged, entered into an Access database, cleaned, scanned, and uploaded to Luna.
- Police Department Evidence (PDE): all 1,200 negatives have been scanned and basic caption information has been entered into an Access database. The scans are currently being retouched and prepared for uploading into Luna.
- WPA Federal Writers' Project (WPA-FWP): information from all 4,500 original index cards has been entered into an Access database.

Scanning Totals:

DPW: 650 Department of Public Works film negatives

PDE: 1,300 Police Department glass-plate evidence negatives

DDF: 1,100 Department of Docks and Ferries glass-plates and 300 film negatives
DGS: 176 Department of General Services negatives
DOH: 85 Department of Health film negatives
WPA: 1,200 WPA film negatives
BOE: 1,200 Board of Education negatives

7. *Bronx Borough President*

Beginning in 2002, and continuing to the present, the Municipal Archives has cooperated with the Bronx Borough President's office in several projects to arrange and describe records pertaining to the Bronx. With a series of LGRMIF grants, this work has arranged and described the records of former Borough Presidents Robert Abrams (1970-1978, 112 cubic feet), Fernando Ferrer (1987-2001, 178 cubic feet), as well as the early Bronx Borough Presidents, Louis F. Haffen (1898-1909), John F. Murray (1909), Cyrus C. Miller (1910-1913), Douglas Mathewson (1914-1917), Henry Bruckner (1918-1933) and James J. Lyons (1934-1961). Finding aids to all processed materials were produced as part of the grant projects. Archivists hired by the Bronx County Historical Society completed all processing activities at the Municipal Archives.