Researching Buildings in NYC: a Bibliography

Abbreviations used in this guide:
LPC: Landmarks Preservation Commission
NYPL: New York Public Library

In-Person Research

Columbia University (Broadway and 116th Street, NYC):

Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library:

* Real Estate Record and Builders Guide (catalog record: https://elio.columbia.edu/catalog/7031128; on-site issues may be incomplete.)

1868–1922 online (http://rerecord.cul.columbia.edu/), contains information on sales, alterations, new buildings; often includes articles on building types or NYC development issues and features advertisements for construction-related businesses and services.

* Library also has hard copies of LPC designation reports (many offsite, request in advance), a selection of Bromley atlases and Sanborn maps, and an architectural drawings collection (http://library.columbia.edu/locations/avery/da.html).

New York City Government Offices:

* Municipal Archives: 31 Chambers Street, NYC. tax photographs (1940s, 1980s - also online at http://nycma.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet), docket books (1866–1959, microfilm), vital records (microfilm).

* Real Property Records: (NYC Department of Finance) 66 John Street, 13th Floor, NYC.

No website, records in physical books and microfilm/fiche.

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New York Public Library:

* Dorot Jewish Division (http://www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/jewish-division):

  Collections of Hebraica and Judaica. Strengths relevant to NYC history: New York City Jewish history "in the age of immigration" (1870s–1910s), Yiddish theater, nineteenth- and twentieth-century Jewish periodicals.

* Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy:

  http://www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/milstein (American history, vital records, online databases, census records, and city directories pre-1934.)

* Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division:

  http://www.nypl.org/locations/divisions/map-division

* List of fire insurance, topographic, zoning, and property maps of NYC from NYPL Digital Gallery: http://www.nypl.org/collections/nypl-recommendations/guides/fire-topo-property-maps

* Microforms Reading Room: (NYC, national, and international newspapers; NYC directories (some years missing), microfiche, phone books and reverse directories—check catalog.nypl.org for availability)

Reference Books, Guidebooks, and Other Nonfiction Sources

Homberger, Eric. The Historical Atlas of New York City: a Visual Celebration of Nearly 400 Years of New York City's History. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1994. (There is a second edition with the same title, which provides much the same information, updated by eleven years.)


White, Norval, et al. *ALA Guide to New York City*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2010. (The four previous editions are also helpful and may provide additional information, as some addresses—and photographs—are omitted in later iterations.)

Wright, Carol von Pressentin. *Blue Guide: New York City*. New York: Somerset, 2008, revised 2016. (The gold standard guidebook, against which all Licensed New York City Sightseeing Guides are trained. Includes essays by New York historian Francis Morrone and extensive information on the city, transportation, etc.)

** The Stern books offer remarkable insights on the history of New York City’s architecture and development. Each volume includes high-quality photographic reprints, facsimiles of architectural drawings, unrealized plans, and comprehensive essays.

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Internet-Specific Resources

Research guide created by Diane Dias De Fazio for Pratt School of Information; offers overview of building research, provides links to items in Pratt and other library collections.

Census Records:

* Ancestry.com (subscription required or "Library edition"—can be viewed at NYPL)
* HeritageQuest (subscription required):
  http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/census/search
* National Archives (1940 only): http://1940census.archives.gov/ (Not indexed by name.)

Christopher Gray / Office for Metropolitan History:


Fulton History (Historic Newspapers): http://fultonhistory.com/ (OCR-based search of several New York and other state historical newspapers.)

Google Earth: view warped (rectified) maps from NYPL Map Warper; use opacity slider to view changes on the block: select the "Download KML" to view in Google Earth. (Note: you must have Google Earth installed on your computer first!)

Internet Archive:

* Digitized New York City directories
  (https://archive.org/details/doggettsnewyorkc1847dogg)
* Seymour B. Durst Old York Library Collection:

(https://archive.org/search.php?query=%28collection%3Adurstoldyorklibrary OR mediatype%3Adurstoldyorklibrary%29 AND -mediatype%3Acollection&sort=-avg_rating%3B-num_reviews). Items available for download as PDF, Full Text, Torrent, etc.

Library of Congress:

* Chronicling America: http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/#tab=tab_advanced_search

(Database of historic newspapers on the Library of Congress website. OCR-based search.)


(Recommended: review their "Search tips" first. Search thousands of digital images by keyword.)

* Library of Congress Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscapes Survey:

http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/hh/ (Search architectural drawings, photographs, and other documentary materials compiled by the HABS/HAER/HALS divisions of the National Parks Service since 1933.)

Neighborhood Preservation Center database:

http://www.neighborhoodpreservationcenter.org/designation_reports/ (NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission reports in PDF. Search by keyword, date designated, or title.)

New York City Government:

* NYC Department of Buildings BIS Information Search: http://a810-bisweb.nyc.gov/bisweb/bispi00.jsp

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* NYC Department of Finance - Property Address Search (for Block/Lot determination):
  
  http://webapps.nyc.gov:8084/CICS/fin1/find001i (NOTE: enter address with the word or abbreviation "avenue" or "ave.", "street" or "st.", etc.) Directs users to a page that provides "Parcel (BBL)" (Borough-Block-Lot) numbers, as well as owner and property information (like valuation and taxes).

* New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), Designation Reports:
  
  http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/publications/designation.shtml (Click directly on link for appropriate borough, search for address or region.)

* Manhattan LPC Reports:
  

  (Reports for Manhattan only.)

* NYCityMap: http://gis.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/ (GIS map provided by nyc.gov. Layers include capital projects, water quality, public safety, transportation/parking, etc.; search by location.)

* OASISNYC: http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx (Geographic data, layered maps, download and print user-created maps.)


New York Public Library (Internet):

* NYPL Digital Collections: http://digitalcollections.nypl.org

* NYPL Map Warper: http://maps.nypl.org/warper (Search by item ID from Digital Collections.)

* NYPL Photographic Views of New York City, 1870s to 1970s:
  
  http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/explore/dgexplore.cfm?col_id=219
* NYPL Research Guides: [http://www.nypl.org/collections/nypl-recommendations/guides](http://www.nypl.org/collections/nypl-recommendations/guides)

Search by Subject, Division, Library, Audience, and Format. (This document includes many resources also found here:


* OLD NYC: (also available as mobile app) All public domain NYC historic photos, tagged to points on an Open Street Map resource. Search by address or map point.


NYC-Architecture: [NYC-Architecture.com](http://www.NYC-Architecture.com) Tom Fletcher's repository of information and images on New York's built environment. Not all images are free of copyright.

NYC Songlines: [http://www.nysonglines.com](http://www.nysonglines.com) Jim Naurekas' "virtual walking tours" of Manhattan. Some of the material is outdated (and there are some dead links), but its concise summaries of addresses can provide a valuable starting point for researchers.

Research Guide to New York City Buildings (Columbia University):

[http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/avery/nycbuild.html#guides](http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/avery/nycbuild.html#guides) (Some links slightly outdated; comprehensive list. Specific to searching via CLIO, Columbia's online catalog.)