

Researching Buildings in NYC: a Bibliography

Abbreviations used in this guide:

HABS/HAER/HALS: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record/Historic American Landscape Survey

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://clio.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.

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.)

Jackson, Kenneth T. *Encyclopedia of New York City*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995. (The 2010 edition has expanded, updated, and additional entries.)

Moscow, Henry. *The Street Book: An Encyclopedia of Manhattan's Street Names and Their Origins*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1990.

Stern, Robert A.M. *New York** 1880: Architecture and Urbanism in the Gilded Age*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1999.

---. *New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890–1915*. New York: Rizzoli, 1983.

---. *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars*. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

---. *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1995.

---. *New York 2000: Architecture and Urbanism between the Bicentennial and the Millennium*. New York: Monacelli Press, 2006.

Stokes, I[saac] N[ewton] Phelps. *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498–1909*. New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915–1928. (The inimitable history of New York City, published in six volumes. Also available online via Columbia University's digital collections, here:

<https://clio.columbia.edu/catalog/5800727>) Several NYC libraries have reprint editions.

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.

Internet-Specific Resources

Architecture in New York City Research Guide (<http://libraryschool.libguidescms.com/nycarchitecture>):

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:

* Buildings Permit Database (<http://www.metrohistory.com/searchfront.htm>): search via address information to see data from New Building permits from 1900–1986.

Organized and managed by former *New York Times* "Streetscapes" columnist Christopher Gray.

* Guide for New York Society Library: <http://www.nysoclib.org/researchers/guide-researching-history-new-york-city-building>

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.)

* Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/>

(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>

* 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:

http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/html/publications/designation_manhattan.shtml
(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.)

* Zoning Maps: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/zone/zh_zmactable.shtml

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>

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

[http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/10/14/guide-researching-your-homes-history.](http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/10/14/guide-researching-your-homes-history))

* 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.

<http://www.oldnyc.org/>

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> 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> (Some links slightly outdated; comprehensive list. Specific to searching via CLIO, Columbia's online catalog.)