

Records and Resources of the New York City Municipal Archives

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Learn about the Municipal Archives holdings
2. Explore online collections and resources
3. Discover more in-person collections

NEW YORK CITY MUNICIPAL ARCHIVES HOLDINGS

Municipal Archives and its parent agency

The New York City Municipal Archives (MUNI) is just what its name says. It is the archive of the municipality of the City of New York. Harry Macy described it as “... a vast storehouse for the City’s official records—the largest such archives in the United States.”

It holds records generated by and for the City and its predecessors. Those records date back nearly 400 years to the New Netherland period, even to before the City of New Amsterdam was chartered in 1653.

Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS) operates MUNI at its primary location, 31 Chambers Street, Manhattan, and its newer storage and research facility in Industry City (near the Brooklyn waterfront). Since its founding in the early 1950s, MUNI accessions records from many City agencies. Access to the records has expanded and continues to grow.

What types of records are held by the Archives?

As the archive of the City, records extend far beyond those of most interest to family historians. This session focuses on those of greatest interest for genealogy.

MUNI’s collections include records from all five boroughs of modern New York City. Aaron Goodwin’s *New York City Municipal Archives: A Guide for Family Historians (Enhanced Edition)* (see Resources) is an indispensable resource for understanding its collections.

The most familiar and requested records for birth, marriage, and death were discussed in session 2 of this course. Please see that session for details on vital records.

Other genealogically relevant records include collections related to people (e.g., coroner’s, City cemetery, almshouse); those related to buildings (e.g., property cards, real estate assessments); and those related to courts and local governments (e.g., Common Council, court, and old town records). Records span from the New Amsterdam period to the late-1900s.

This session will look at collections and resources accessed in two ways—those that can be accessed online and those that must (at this point) be researched on-site.

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ONLINE COLLECTIONS AND RESOURCES

Digital Collections

New digital collections usually appear on this website, <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com>. View the list of collections and then browse the images within each collection.

1940s Tax Photos

A very popular one is 1940s tax photos. It was created by the New York City Department of Finance to assist in accessing real estate taxes (hence the name tax photos), in which every building was photographed from 1939 to 1941. Empty lots were not photographed. City Map (<http://maps.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap>) will assist in finding the building, block, and lot (BBL) number. By using the City's Department of Buildings Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS), an address can be turned into a BBL number to look up a property of interest. See <https://www.nyc.gov/site/finance/taxes/acris.page>.

Collection Guide: <https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/repositories/2/resources/64>

See also the collection of 1980s tax photos.

Almshouse Ledgers

Comprising 127 volumes of admission, discharge, and other registers from the almshouse (poor house), hospital, and other institutions on Blackwells Island (formerly Welfare Island, now Roosevelt Island), only a portion of the full collection is digitized. Given the size of the Almshouse collection, review of the finding aid (<https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/repositories/2/resources/24>) is recommended, especially the container list with links to the digitized volumes.

Some digitized volumes are indexed on Ancestry.com in “New York, New York, U.S., Almshouse Ledgers, 1758–1952,” which contains more than 1 million names. <https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/62048>,

Checking the Ancestry indexes is likely to be the best entry point for this vast collection. Alternatively, if a date, or suspected date, is known, the ledgers may be browsed. See chapter 6 in the Goodwin resource below and the extensive finding aids for more information.

Access: <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/almshouse-ledger-collection>

Bodies in Transit Registers

A fascinating collection by the New York City Health Department (created out of concern for the transportation of bodies through the City), is digitized and online. Likely the most famous person recorded is Abraham Lincoln, who after his assassination in Washington, D.C., passed through the City while in transit to Illinois for burial. Next might be John Brown of Essex County, New York.

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Most individuals recorded were not from New York City, but could be from nearby, including areas later annexed by the City. Many Civil War soldiers may be found within.

Access: <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/burial-transit-registers-bodies-in-transit>

The German Genealogy Group has indexed these records from a microfilm version, <https://www.germangenealogygroup.com/records-search/Bodies-in-Transit.php>.

Names and dates indexed from the Bodies in Transit Registers are included in FamilySearch's "New York, Church and Civil Deaths, 1824–1962." However, it may be difficult to determine if the indexed item is from this collection. Index access: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2373798>.

Manhattan and Brooklyn Liquor Licenses

This collection of surrendered liquor licenses commences in 1895 and contains nearly 5,000 images. The associated rebate documents are available to view onsite.

Access: <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/manhattan-and-brooklyn-liquor-licenses>

New Amsterdam Records

Court and administrative records are among those in this 38-volume collection. See MUNI's guide to the collection, <https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/repositories/2/resources/25> for details and a link to a downloadable 685-page finding aid. Some names from court minute volumes are abstracted in the finding aid and searchable in the PDF.

Access: <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/new-amsterdam-records>

Old Town Records: Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens

Gathered into a single collection, the Old Town Records are being digitized—with more anticipated to be added over time. The finding aid defines subgroups:

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Old Town Records

Sub-Group 1: Bronx Old Town records, 1665-circa 1900

Sub-Group 2: Brooklyn Old Town records, circa 1630-1943

Sub-Group 3: New York City municipal records, 1836-1910

Sub-Group 4: Queens Old Town records, 1683-1903

Sub-Group 5: Staten Island Old Town records, 1758-1898

Notes:

Town of Westchester, some digitized

Some Kings County and town records digitized

Not yet digitized

Some town and county records digitized

Not yet digitized

Notable among the volumes may be “records of slave birth” and manumission records. See chapter 14 in the Goodwin resource below for additional information.

Access by modern borough: <https://nycrecords.access.preservica.com/old-town-records>

Records of Slavery, exhibition

An exhibition provides a history and example documents. Researchers should explore the Old Town Records for digitized records or contact MUNI at research@records.nyc.gov.

Access: <https://www.archives.nyc/slavery-records>

Online Collection Guides

<https://a860-collectionguides.nyc.gov/>

MUNI’s collection guides offer important details on collections, its organization, and access to information. You can delve into the guide by subject or keyword. Its invaluable online access assists researchers in understanding what are contained in collections contain and whether on-site research is needed.

ON-SITE COLLECTIONS

Almshouse Records

There are additional records beyond the digitized ledgers for individuals in the almshouses. Most may be viewed on-site at MUNI by checking the finding aid (https://dorisarchive.blob.core.windows.net/finding-aids/FindingAidsPDFs/Almshouse_REC0008_FA-MASTER.pdf) and contacting an archivist.

MUNI holds microfilm of locally kept copies of the ‘Inmate Census Cards,’ which can also be found on Ancestry in “New York, U.S., Census of Inmates in Almshouses and Poorhouses, 1830–1920” (<https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1083>). Details added to the cards after the New York State copy was sent to Albany may reveal details not available on the Ancestry versions of the cards.

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Richmond County Clerk Records (1706–1947)

This unprocessed collection spans more than 200 years of Richmond County records from the county clerk's office, including court, business, and other organization's certificates of incorporation; land and naturalization records; and military discharges. Chapter 15 in the Goodwin resource below also details which records may be found on FamilySearch microfilm.

Civil War Volunteer Soldiers' Family Aid Fund (1861–1867)

This unprocessed collection records payments to families in New York City whose husband/son/brother served as a soldier for the Union during the Civil War—if the family was in need of financial assistance. Categorized by ward, the lists are the working documents detailing the soldier, his family members, address, unit, and the payments to his family.

The ledgers are semi-alphabetical by the first letter of the soldier's surname. Contact with an archivist is required for access. See chapter 5 in the Goodwin resource below for details.

Resources

Goodwin, Aaron, *New York City Municipal Archives: A Guide for Family Historians (Enhanced Edition)* (New York: New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, 2025). See the table of contents and details <https://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/new-york-city-municipal-archives-guide-family-historians-enhanced-edition> and a link to purchase a copy.

New York Family History Research Guide and Gazetteer, revised edition 2017, [available](#) from the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (NYG&B). See the County/Borough Guides and the timelines within each.