



Municipal Library Notes February 27, 2025

WELCOME to Lauren Gilbert, Director of the Municipal Library



As many people are aware, the Department of Records and Information Services operates a Municipal Library. Opened in 1913 and initially part of the New York Public Library, the Municipal Reference and Research Center has several duties mandated by the City Charter including:

- providing information and research assistance to the Mayor and other elected officials;
- maintaining facilities open to the public where published City records shall be available;
- ensuring one copy of each city publication is available;
- collecting data pertaining to the operation of the city; and
- ensuring the online publication of city government's publications.

In 2024, we bid adieu to former Library Director Christine Bruzzese and launched a search. Finally, in January, DORIS welcomed Lauren Gilbert as the new Director of the Municipal Library. Lauren has extensive library experience, having worked for 24 years in the field.

Immediately before joining DORIS, she served as the Director of Public Services at the Center for Jewish History. Her responsibilities included coordinating research services provided by its five divisions and implementing outreach programs to diverse communities. In addition, she managed the Center's online reference management software and facilitated access to its digital resource platform. These skills will be beneficial at DORIS where we plan to implement solutions that integrate the Library and Archives workflows.

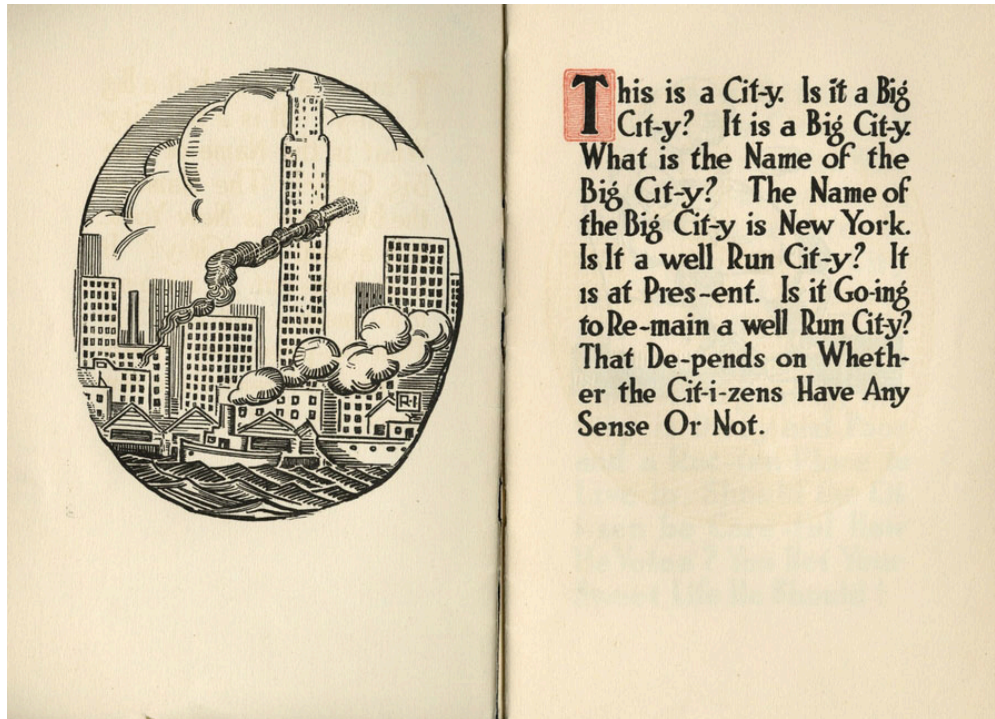
Previously she worked for eight years as the Director of Public Services at the Sachem Public Library on Long Island where she helped to develop that library's collection of materials available to adults, as well as directing community outreach. Prior to that she worked as a reference librarian, maintained online content, and provided computer literacy training.

As the Director of the Library, Lauren will expand online access to government publications and information about City government on the Government Publications Portal, our digital library. In 2024, the Archives and Library research team fielded 31,130 requests for information and research assistance. By collaborating with the Archives Director to cross-train employees, we will be more efficient in providing reference services to researchers.

The Municipal Library's collection is a unique resource showcasing the history of City government institutions and the City itself. Lauren's resourcefulness, collaborative approach, knowledge, and management skills will make accessing this content easier for researchers everywhere.

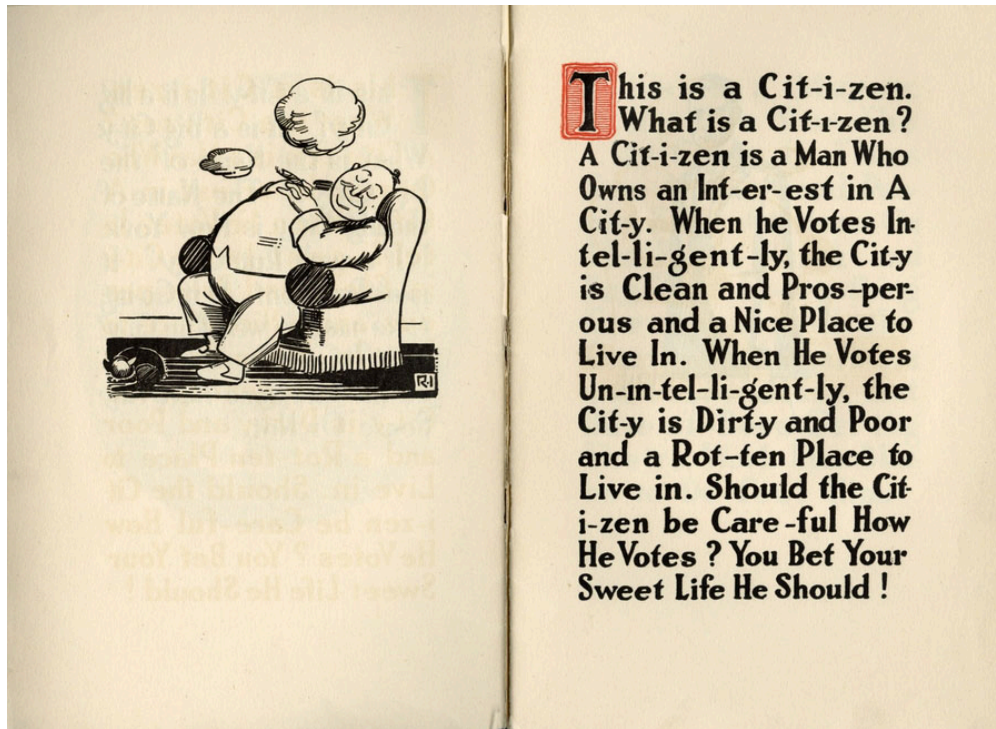
A Note from the Library Director...

In my first week on the job, while trying to familiarize myself with the library's collections, I started poking around the various "vertical files," which are cabinets full of clipped articles along with pamphlets, flyers, and other ephemera that didn't qualify for a slot on the bookshelves, all collected by diligent librarians in decades past.



This is a Cit-y. Is it a Big Cit-y? It is a Big Cit-y. What is the Name of the Big Cit-y? The Name of the Big Cit-y is New York. Is It a well Run Cit-y? It is at Pres-ent. Is it Go-ing to Re-main a well Run City? That De-pends on Whether the Cit-i-zens Have Any Sense Or Not.

The first folder in the "NYC Politics" vertical file, which is dated 1917, not long after the 1913 founding of the Municipal Library, contains a "Political Primer" connected to that year's mayoral campaign. Featuring striking typography and illustrations, it opens with images and definitions of "city" and "citizen," stressing civic responsibility and the importance of an educated populace for the efficient operation of city government.



"Political Primer" by Porter Emerson Brown. Published by Public Welfare Committee, 50 East 42nd Street, 1917

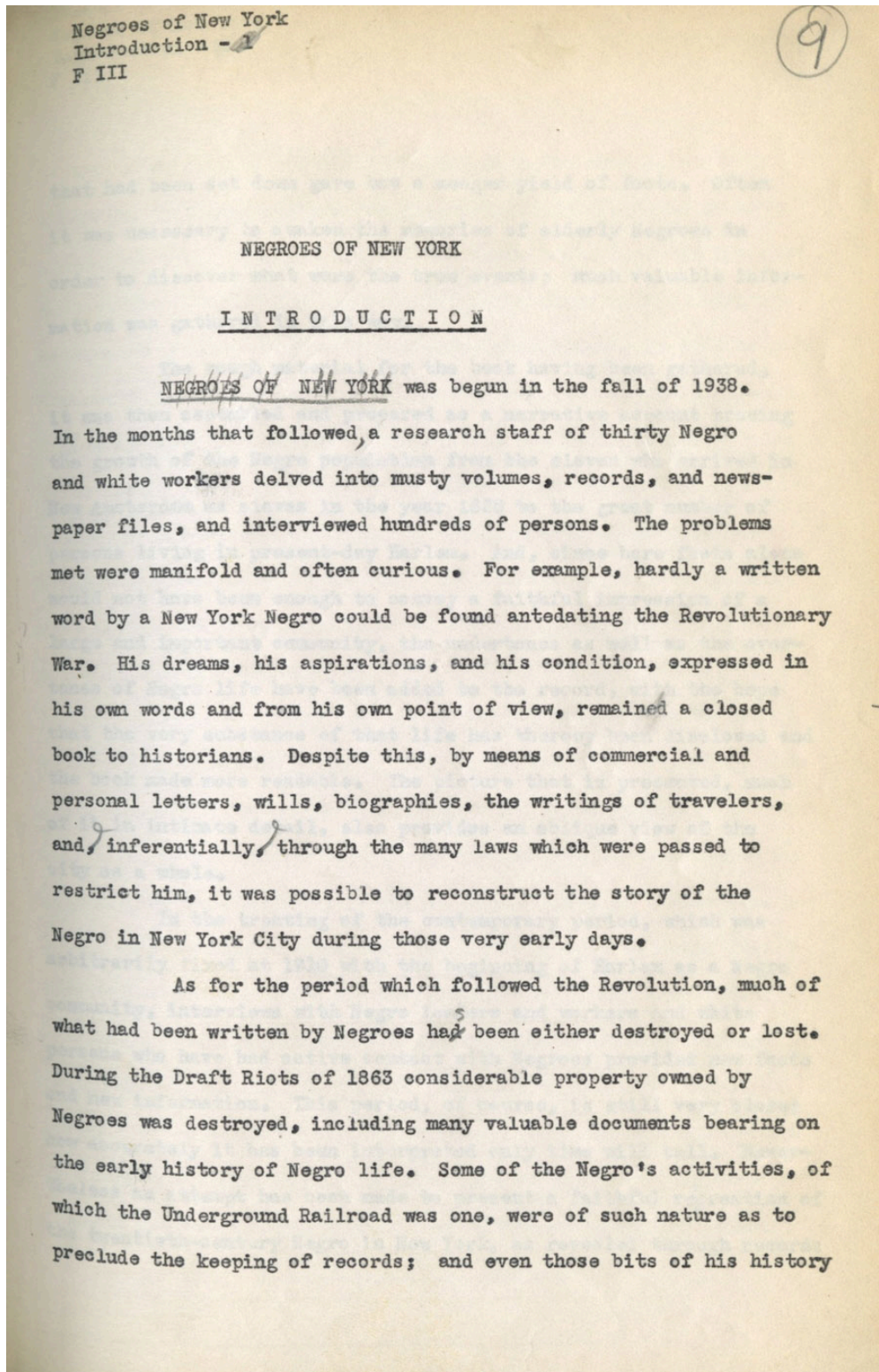
Of course, women only got the right to vote in New York State in 1917, and while our collective image of the average citizen may have changed over the years, and our language is more inclusive, the sentiment remains valid. A well-informed citizenry is the key to a functioning democracy, and it is the free flow of information along with transparency in government that allows citizens to make enlightened decisions, whether in the voting booth or in other areas of daily life.

I am proud to be serving in this role and look forward to continuing the work of my predecessors at the Municipal Library, where the collections illuminate our city's past and present. While librarians no longer clip articles from newspapers and magazines, and in fact little of what is accessioned in the library is in paper form, we are still documenting and preserving and making available all of the publications of the numerous divisions and agencies of our city government through the [Government Publications Portal](#) and the [Social Media Archive](#).

Highlights from the Library Collections: February is Black History Month!

The edited manuscript of a publication called [Negroes of New York](#), compiled from 1937 to 1941 by writers of the Work Projects Administration and sponsored

by NYC Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia, consists of articles representing various aspects of the Black New York experience, including "Antislavery Movement," "Black Bohemia," "Negroes in War," and "Music and Dance." The introduction (below) describes the volume's genesis: "a research staff of thirty Negro and white workers delved into musty volumes, records, and newspaper files, and interviewed hundreds of persons."



A 1942 collection from the [City-Wide Citizens Committee on Harlem](#) contains multiple reports, including one from the Sub-Committee on Housing that attempts to address the causes and potential solutions to the "Negro housing problem in New York," one from the Sub-Committee on Health and Hospitals that addresses the diseases plaguing the Harlem community, and one from the Sub-Committee on Employment (below) that discusses the lack of equitable job opportunities, opening with the declaration that "Justice for Negro Americans in the national war effort is a searching test of our democracy."

PRELIMINARY REPORT OF THE
SUB-COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT

Foreword

Forward looking, intelligent and courageous citizens throughout America repeatedly have voiced the sentiment that "justice for Negro Americans in the national war effort is a searching test of American democracy." The all-out war effort demands mobilization of our total manpower on all fronts. Thus, whatever constructive efforts lend themselves toward making important manpower available for essential war industries in the most expeditious manner are in the interest of prosecuting the war. Not only is this true in terms of our own national life, but in terms of the world situation. According to a representative of the President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice--"Most important at this time when the Nation is allied with people of several races and many creeds, it is of the essence of patriotism in keeping with President Roosevelt's Executive Order that we show that we can work and live amicably together like good neighbors regardless of our racial or national background or our religion."*

Traditionally, the Negro worker in America has been beset by many handicaps. Restrictions in the free exercise of the ballot, residential segregation, segregated and inferior schools, exploitation and neglect, and numerous other limitations might be noted. But the disastrous effects of all these combined problems have not equaled that of the practice of discrimination in the field of employment. Because the Negro has been the victim of these practices, and more particularly the practice of discrimination in employment, Negroes today are burdened with a deep sense of disillusionment, skepticism, and in far too many instances, bitterness.

It is not intended in this report to sound a pessimistic note or to review at great length the social and economic disadvantages from which Negroes suffer in this community. Suffice it to say that the lack of equitable job opportunities, together with other restrictions, constitute the main causes of the deplorable housing problem, the high incidence of illness, family disorganization, disproportionate rate of delinquency, and the high incidence of delinquency and crime.

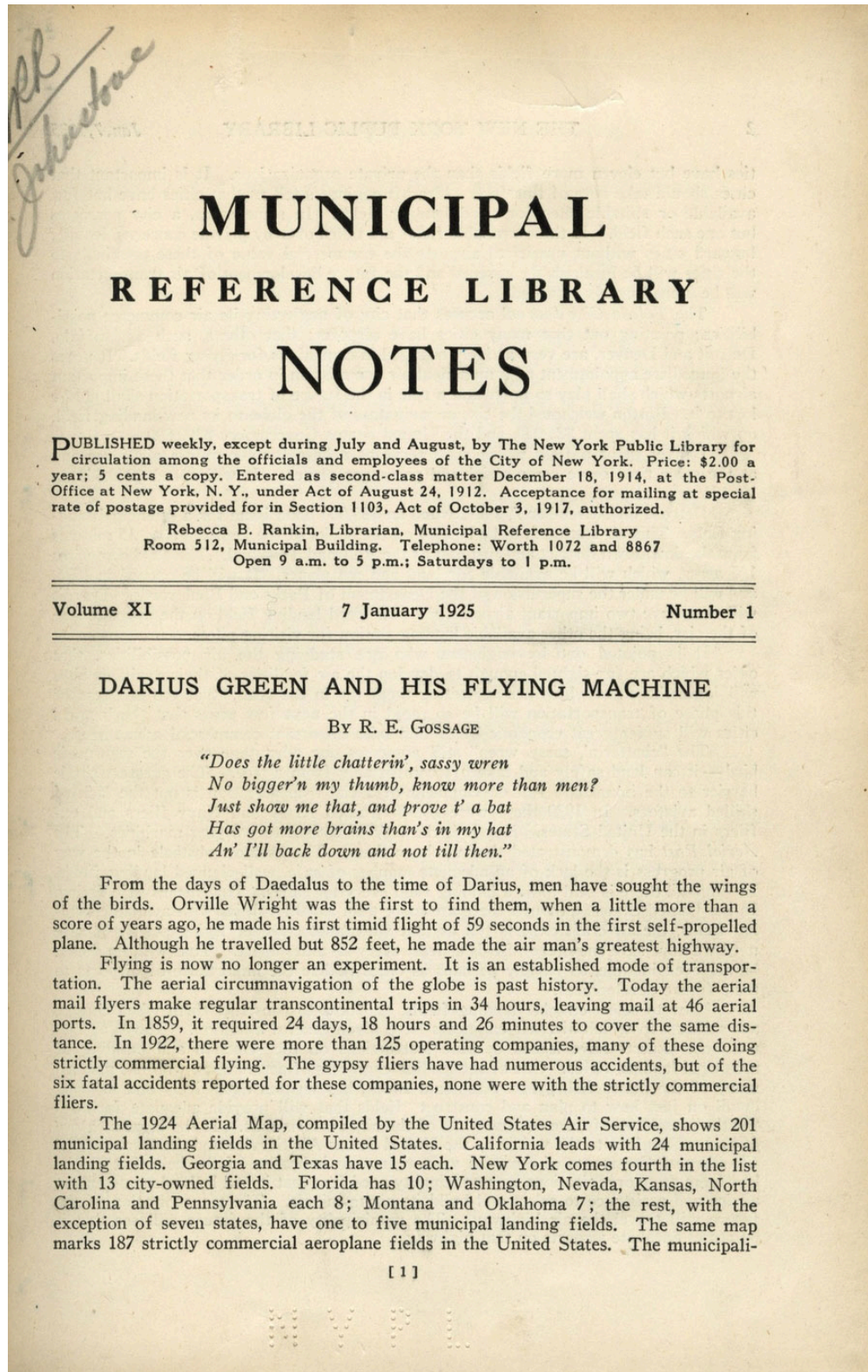
* President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice--Press Release,
May 4, 1942

In addition to these and other official publications, the library offers a wide selection of non-governmental published materials, including such titles as: [Harlem on My Mind: Cultural Capital of Black America 1900-1978](#), [In the Black: A History of African Americans on Wall Street](#), and [Black and White Manhattan: The History of Racial Formation in Colonial New York City](#).

Municipal Reference Library Notes

Darius Green and His Flying Machine

100 years ago, the January 7, 1925 edition of the [Municipal Reference Library Notes](#) was devoted to the then-recent and burgeoning field of aeronautics. Opening with a short poem, the article explained that “today, the aerial mail flyers make regular transcontinental trips in 34 hours.” It continued with information about the 201 existing municipal landing fields in the United States, as reported in the 1924 Aerial Map, and concluded with the confident assertion that “the transportation of the future will travel the air highway.”



ties have but eleven more fields than the private organizations. It is important that cities should take note of this fact. Aircraft engineers tell us that cities have but few available or suitable sites for good landing fields. In some cases, a city possesses but one such field. If these available fields are taken over by private concerns, leaving laggard cities without municipal airports the commercial value of these terminals to the cities will be incalculably lessened and the future development of air transportation will be immeasurably retarded.

The *Toledo City Journal* accuses that city of neglecting its air commerce possibilities; pointing out that many cities have airports; that others, such as Buffalo, Detroit and Denver, are very actively engaged in campaigns for flying fields. It urges the immediate appointment of a municipal air commission in order that these important airports which shall play so important a role in the future of transportation shall not be lost to it. Boston welcomed the circumnavigators of the globe to its new landing field, on which it has spent \$25,000, and the United States Government \$300,000.

Denver plans a field which shall serve as a base for the militia air force and at the same time serve commercial and passenger planes. It will spend \$250,000 on its 131 acre airport.

Detroit, on November 7, 1924, voted an \$85,000 bond issue for a municipal landing field. This air station is to be located on the banks of the Detroit river, 15 minutes from the downtown district and just east of the Railroad Terminal. The field comprises 165 acres, which will be available for land and sea planes. It will be opened in 1926, and will be under the supervision of the Department of Parks and Boulevards. Detroit will then have two important airports, the new Ford landing field on the opposite side of the city, being the other available landing station for visiting pilots.

It is pointed out by engineers who are studying the air possibilities, that cities which are far-sighted enough to develop the air facilities of their available sites will leave the cities which are neglecting them far in the rear; that the progress of this phase of transportation will be so rapid in the next few years that the laggard cities will suffer great economic losses and miss important commercial advantages.

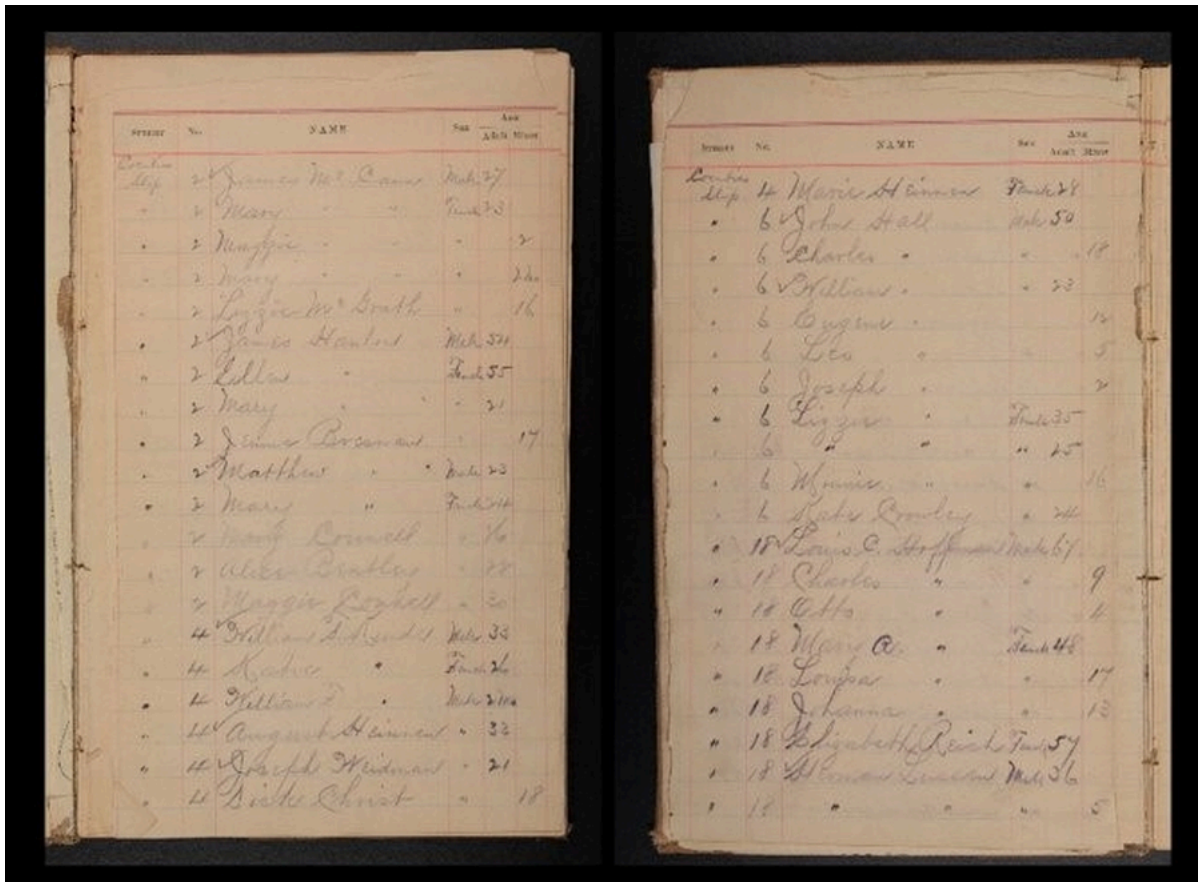
The "chatterin', sassy wren" still possesses one advantage over the man-made bird—it can land safely and take off comfortably from a tree. The greatest single barrier to the immediate full development of aerial transportation is not the lack of skilled aviators. In 1920 there were 25,000 trained Army and Navy fliers and ex-fliers in the United States. Nor is it the lack of satisfactory flying machines. The *Aerial Post* has demonstrated that we have them. The greatest obstacle in the way of air progress is the lack of an adequate number of safe, well-planned landing fields. In England there is said to be a landing field every ten miles. That means safe flying. In the United States, although there are more than 5,000 localities with available landing fields, the air-craft experts tell us that we cannot consider flying positively safe until we have safe emergency fields at least every 25 miles apart. That will, no doubt, be achieved in time, as rapidly perhaps as cities realize the importance of airports to their future development.

How to select suitable landing fields, and how to construct them when chosen, are subjects to which aircraft engineers have given careful attention. The War Department experts have issued definite instructions on the selection and building of municipal landing fields. One of the leading engineers of aeronautics, who has planned many of the better fields, Mr. Archibald Black, has written extensively and in great detail on just how to plan and construct fields that will provide adequate facilities for the present and future requirements of the city air terminals. If the large measure of assistance given to the writer by the United States Air Service and the Aeronautical Chamber of Commerce of America upon request is indicative of the help that can be had from these organizations, no municipality need fear that it will lack adequate expert advice and assistance to select and build its air terminals. The transportation of the future will travel the air highway. The municipality of the future will see that it possesses adequate airports on that highway.

News from the Municipal Archives

The Municipal Archives invites the public to transcribe two important collections:

1890 New York City Police Census



In 1890, New York City officials questioned the accuracy of the City's population count in the United States federal census. As a result, the New York Police Department was tasked with conducting an independent census, which was completed between September 29 and October 14, 1890. This collection consists of the original police census volumes, which record the name, age, gender, and address of residents of the city.

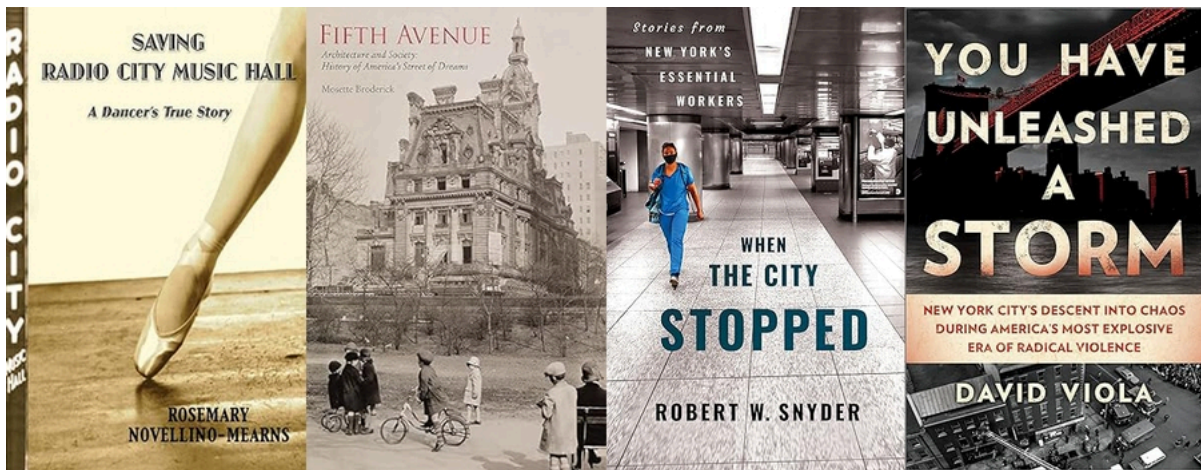
The Census was microfilmed approximately 40 years ago by the Genealogical Society of Utah. In 2022, the Municipal Archives received grant funding from the Peck-Stacpoole Foundation to begin digitizing, transcribing, and indexing the 1890 Police Census volumes. Now that the collection is digitized and published online, we are asking for volunteer transcribers to help us create a searchable index of the individuals named in the volumes. As the 1890 federal census records were destroyed in a fire in the Commerce Building in Washington, D.C. in 1921, these records will be invaluable to family historians. [Learn more about this project in a recent blog post.](#)

Records of Slavery

Over the last several months, Arafua Reed, the Archives' City Service Corps member, has researched various volumes that include records of enslaved people in New York City. A selection of nine volumes from the Old Town records dating from 1660 to 1827 have been published [online](#) for transcription, including manumission records and records of children born to enslaved women.

This important project was just featured on NBC News! Watch the clip [here](#).

Uncovering NYC's Past: DORIS' Spring Programs Explore History, Resilience & Change



During 2025, the 400th anniversary of the founding of City government, DORIS is expanding access to records documenting the city and its diverse communities.

From the evolution of NYC's "Street of Dreams" to the fight to save Radio City Music Hall, from the inequalities exposed by the pandemic to the unrest of the '60s and '70s—DORIS' spring public programs offer a captivating journey through New York City history.

The season kicks off at 6 PM on March 13th with former Radio City Music Hall dance captain Rosemary Novellino-Mearns, who will discuss her book *Saving Radio City Music Hall: A Dancer's True Story*. She'll share her firsthand account of the battle to preserve this iconic institution when it faced closure in 1978.

April brings a compelling trio of Lunch & Learn programs:

- **April 3rd:** Borough Historian and Rutgers professor Dr. Robert Snyder presents *When the City Stopped: Stories from New York's Essential Workers*, an intimate look at the pandemic's impact through poems, oral histories, and first-person narratives.
- **April 8th:** Architectural historian Dr. Mosette Broderick traces the transformation of Fifth Avenue—one of the world's most legendary streets—in *Street of Dreams*.
- **April 29th:** John Jay College professor Dr. David Viola explores political radicalism and domestic terrorism in *You Have Unleashed a Storm: New York City's Descent into Chaos During America's Most Explosive Era of Radical Violence*, examining the turbulence of the 1960s and '70s.

Learn more and register to attend at: https://doris_events.eventbrite.com.

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