

Municipal Library Notes - August 2020 Spotlight on New York City Chamberlain

Vertical File Feature: New York City Chamberlain

By Christine Bruzzese, Director, Municipal Library

The concept of "Chamberlain" dates to the Roman empire and British monarchs. This officer oversaw money and financial matters for royal and noble households. When the British acquired New York City in 1664, a New York City Chamberlain replaced the Dutch Treasurer, known as the Fiscal. According to an article in the New York Herald Tribune from May 1934, the Chamberlain was designated as custodian of the city's accounts and spending. Things began to change when the office of City Comptroller was established in 1802.

A review of the vertical files on the subject reveals some interesting perspectives on the Chamberlain. Rebecca Rankin, the first Municipal Librarian, provides an overview in "The Treasurer, Chamberlain, and Comptroller of New York: History of its Financial Offices from 1653-1949." She describes how the position of Chamberlain was established by the Dongan Charter of 1686 as treasurer for the city. However, nothing was clearly defined as to his responsibilities and in 1710 action was taken by a committee appointed by the city's rulers to clearly define the role of the Chamberlain. His responsibilities, according to a law that was passed, included issuing bonds for \$1,000; keeping books for the Corporation of New York that provided a strict accounting of all moneys; and reporting quarterly and annually on the Corporation's finances. Not unlike the Comptroller today, perhaps.

Rankin goes on to provide more details on the Chamberlain and how the office of the Comptroller was established by ordinance in 1802, giving that office the authority to report on receipts and expenditures and reducing the Chamberlain's role to such duties as reporting all receipts to the Comptroller. Further changes in the way the city's finances were overseen and corruption scandals saw the Office of the Chamberlain decline further in influence.

Another item from the vertical files dated April 13, 1920, is a pamphlet written by the Hon. William S. Hall of the New York State Assembly. Hall argues for maintaining not abolishing the office of Chamberlain as New York State sought to pass a law to eliminate the position. Hall's main objection was that the City Comptroller was trying to take power and shut the Chamberlain out of the city's financial operations. He also believed the Chamberlain held an important position as treasurer of the five counties that made up the boroughs of New York and was responsible for the safekeeping of the city's money while the Comptroller served mainly as a funds collector. The Chamberlain could also prevent the Comptroller from becoming too powerful.

The 1934 Herald Tribune mentioned earlier includes a description of the job of the Chamberlain as:

"still a complicated one... He is a banker and fiscal agent with control of funds and investments. The Mayor, the comptroller and the chamberlain constitute a committee which selects the banks designated as depositories for the money of the city. The details relating to the choice of banks and their relations to the city, as custodians of her cash, fall most upon the chamberlain." Despite this, Adolf A. Berle, the City Chamberlain mentioned in this article, wanted the post abolished under charter revision. Berle believed his department should merge with the city Department of Finance. In 1938, the office was abolished.

There are many ways to celebrate winning women's suffrage in the United States. Here are three different activities that you can participate in.

By LaTonya Jones, Director, Community and External Affairs

Do you have some time on your hands? Write inspiring women into history. Enter the WomensActivism.NYC Story Writing Contest

Who inspires you? A public figure, a historic leader or a member of your family? Our communities are home to countless inspirational women – friends and neighbors, teachers and community leaders -- yet their stories are seldom told.

You can help change that by entering the WomensActivism.NYC Story Writing Contest to share stories about inspiring women for a chance to win up to \$500. The deadline for the contest is Sunday, August 16, 2020 at 11:59 PM.

For more information about the contest visit <https://bit.ly/2DUc3wm>. Register by going to <https://bit.ly/30ysarn>.



On August 26, Join the Women's Equality Day Write-In

Calling all storytellers, writers, wordsmiths, English majors, and history buffs! Calling anyone who would like to celebrate the women who have made a difference in their lives!

In honor of the Women's Suffrage Centennial, you're invited to write women into history during our Women's Equality Day Write-In.

Date: Wed, August 26, 2020
Time: 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM EDT

Location: online platform - directions will be emailed upon registration

The goal of this virtual event is to gather in community to collect stories of inspiring women from around the world who have made a difference through their activism - from world leaders to the everyday women who have had a direct impact on our lives. The stories you write will be permanently preserved by the New York City Municipal Archives, so that they can be an inspiration for the next generation of female leaders.

To attend the event, you will need a computer or phone. The workshop will take place via an online platform. Directions on how to access the event will be emailed to everyone who RSVPs through Eventbrite.

RSVP by visiting <https://bit.ly/2X9HvgZ>



And Celebrate Women's Suffrage by Lighting your building or windows in purple.

August 26 is Women's Equality Day. It recognizes the date in 1920 when the ratification of the Suffrage amendment to the Constitution by two-thirds votes of the States was certified by U.S. Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby.

We plan to celebrate this occasion on August 26, 2020, by lighting up the city in purple - the signature suffrage color. There are different approaches—buildings can be programmed to be lit in purple for the evening, businesses can put strings of purple lights in their windows, Business Improvement Districts could place purple lights in planters. Winning suffrage provided 50% of the country's population with the opportunity to fully participate in our democracy. It's a great thing to celebrate.

Join us in this nationwide celebration! For more information on the Light Up the City in Purple initiative, please email womensactivism@records.nyc.gov.



Government Publications Portal Update

By Julia Robbins, Deputy Librarian, Municipal Library

With the passage of Local Law 11 of 2003, the Municipal Library strengthened its efforts to be the online digital library and preservation arm of NYC government. New provisions of the Charter (Chapter 49, Section 1133) mandate that agencies place digital copies of all of their published material as well as required reports into the Municipal Library's Government Publications Portal (GPP). Starting with a home-grown software system that was launched in 2003 the agency launched an open source portal in 2014, and now has progressed through three shifts in software since then. We are now proudly using an open source software called Hyrax.

Libraries everywhere are learning to adapt to electronic operations, and the Municipal Library is no exception. The agency's amazing Applications Development team takes pre-existing open systems and tailor them to our needs. Agencies now find it easier than ever to upload their electronic files to the GPP, with customized forms for their metadata (information about the file such as title, date of publication, subject, etc). We work to make the government documents more easily located by the public, as well as put in place industry-standard protections for the digital preservation of the files. Come explore the Municipal Library GPP remotely – we promise it won't be dusty, dull or contagious!

