

How to Research a New York City Building

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Landmarks Preservation Commission's Designation Reports

If your building is located in one of the six historic districts on the Upper East, FRIENDS can provide you information from the Landmarks Preservation Commission's Designation Reports. Just [email](#) us with a request, please be sure to include your building's address. You can also call (212) 535-2526.

If your building is an Individual Landmark, there is a designation report available for purchase from the [Landmarks Preservation Commission](#).

General Information

Christopher Gray, a New York Times reporter and architectural historian, wrote "[A GUIDE TO RESEARCHING THE HISTORY OF A NEW YORK CITY BUILDING](#)." The guide is posted on the New York Society Library's site.

One of the finest architectural libraries in the world is [Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University](#). They have compiled a guide titled, How to Research a New York City Building.

"Tax" Photographs

The first stop for most researchers is the "[Tax" Photograph collection](#) contained at the Municipal Archives. From 1939-1941, the Department of Taxes photographed every building in the five Boroughs. There is one black and white photograph for each building in the five Boroughs. With some 100,000 cubic feet of civic documents, vital and building records, films and photographs, New York City's Municipal Archives boasts the largest collection of any U.S. city government.

New York City Department of Buildings

Using the department's [Building Information System](#), you can now search for general information, including block and lot numbers, on properties in the city.

New York Public Library

The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, comprises 4 [research centers](#) in Manhattan, and 85 branch libraries in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. With more materials than any other public library in the nation, it is also the largest research library with a circulating system in the world. A vast array of [images](#)

can be found at The New York Public Library. Thousands of original photographs, color transparencies and book images from the Research Libraries are available for reproduction and for research/scholarly/commercial use.

The New-York Historical Society

[The New-York Historical Society](#) houses one of the oldest research libraries in the United States. The library collection encompasses a breadth of formats: printed books and pamphlets, manuscripts, which include diaries, letters, and business records from four centuries, maps and atlases, newspapers with a special concentration on pre-1820 titles, broadsides, sheet music, scrapbooks, menus, and an unparalleled variety of ephemera. Two hundred years of gathering research materials has allowed the Historical Society to develop collections which are rich, deep, and diverse, covering a 400 year period with a concentration on pre-1900 imprints and manuscripts. Due to the rare nature of the holdings, the library is non-circulating, with closed stacks.

The Museum of the City of New York

The museum has an excellent collection of [photographs](#). You must make an appointment to conduct research with them.

The Library of Congress

The [American Memory](#) collection is a gateway to rich primary source materials relating to the history and culture of the United States. The site offers more than 7 million digital items from more than 100 historical collections. One can find many photos of the Upper East Side in their collection.