

## How to Research a New York City Building

*Compiled by: Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts  
966 Lexington Avenue, #3E  
New York, NY 10021  
[info@friends-ues.org](mailto:info@friends-ues.org)  
212-535-2526*

**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. You can access the designation reports at the [Landmarks](#) or [Neighborhood Preservation Center's](#) websites. If still having difficulty accessing the reports just [email](mailto:info@friends-ues.org) 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.

Municipal Archives also has an [online gallery](#) that contains over 870,000 images selected from their historical collections and archives, including the 1980 Tax Photo collection. The online gallery also includes historical maps, motion pictures and audio recordings.

**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.

**Metropolitan History:** Christopher Gray created the website [Metropolitan History](#) that contains all the digitized new building (NB) applications filed in Manhattan between 1900 to 1986. By entering in a building's block and lot number (found in the Department of Buildings Information System) into the search function you can obtain the building's architect, initial owner, cost, and description.

**Newspaper Archives:** The [New York Times Archive](#) contains over 13 million digitized articles, including real estate news and advertisements.

**Genealogy:** [Stephen P. Morse](#) created a website that allows you to do a reverse look up (search using the address of a building instead of person) on a census tract. Following the website instructions and after entering the cross streets of building's site is into the website's search function an Enumeration District (ED) number is provided. You can then go into any genealogy website, such as [Ancestry](#), and click on a specific Federal Census tract (ex. 1900, 1920, and 1940). In the search function for the census tract there is box where you can enter in the state, county, township, and ED number of you building. Scroll through the portion of the census tract provided until you find your address written in the far left column. Once you find your address you can see who lived there and what they did for living.

**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. Thousands of original photographs, color transparencies and book images from the Research Libraries are available for reproduction, research, scholarly, and commercial use. A vast array of image collection can be found online at [The New York Public Library Digital Gallery](#).

**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](#) available online to conduct research with.

**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.