



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**African Burial Ground Committee files**

1991-1994

Sc MG 566

Processed by Rose Yndigoyen, Intern, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Queens College, CUNY, in 2009.

## Summary

**Title:** African Burial Ground Committee files

**Date:** 1991-1994

**Size:** 3.2 linear feet (9 archival boxes)

**Source:** Gift, Howard Dodson, 1994

**Abstract:** The African Burial Ground Committee Files (1991-1994) collection consists of administrative records kept by Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. These documents relate to his work as chairman of the Federal Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground in New York City. The majority of the collection consists of administrative records created or used by the Federal Steering Committee, including meeting minutes, agendas, correspondence, reports and transcripts.

**Conditions Governing Use:** All requests subject to limitations noted in divisional policies on reproduction

**Preferred citation:** [Item], African Burial Ground Committee files, Sc MG 566, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Rose Yndigoyen, Intern, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Queens College, CUNY, in 2009.

## Creator History

In 1991, skeletal remains from the 18th century were discovered in the course of excavation for a new federal office building in Lower Manhattan. The investigation eventually revealed more than 400 intact graves belonging to free and enslaved African and African-American men, women and children. It was determined that the boundaries of the burial ground, originally called the Negro Burial Ground, encompassed a 6.6 acre piece of land in area bounded by present day Broadway, Elk, Duane and

Reade Streets.

The discovery of these African and African American remains concerned stakeholders at the city, state, federal and community level. Mayor David Dinkins convened a committee to advise on the issues. In 1992, after the federal government took control of the project, the Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground was dismantled and a Federal Steering Committee was formed for the purposes of "advising the Administrator of General Services and the Congress in determining the present and future activities affecting the pavilion portion of the Federal construction site," including review of proposals regarding the human remains, issues of analysis and reinterment of the remains, and construction of a memorial and other educational and artistic additions to the site. The activities of the Steering Committee intersected with many and varied organizations and individuals at the local, city, state and federal level. On several issues, for example, the movement and study of the remains found at the burial ground site, there was a great deal of controversy among these various groups, which was documented in the transcripts of the Federal Steering Committee's meetings, in the related correspondence and in the press of the day.

During the period from 1992-1994, the Federal Steering Committee and its attendant subcommittees discharged the duties outlined above. They produced reports, held regularly scheduled meetings that were open to community commentary, and corresponded with the other major stakeholders in the project. As chair of the committee, Dodson received and reviewed the documents produced in all of these interactions, as well as kept files for his own reference and research on subjects relating to the African Burial Ground.

The Federal Steering Committee was scheduled to be disbanded in September of 1994. Prior to that date, Dodson submitted a letter on behalf of the committee requesting an extension of their term, an additional two years. The minutes of their July 17, 1994 meeting reflect that this request was denied. Although members of the committee were extremely unsatisfied with that outcome, and vowed to continue their work, the committee's work did conclude and the records of the Federal Steering Committee cease soon after that date.

## Scope and Content Note

The African Burial Ground Committee Files (1991-1994) collection consists of administrative records kept by Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. These documents relate to his work as chairman of the Federal Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground in New York City. The majority of the collection consists of administrative records created or used by the Federal Steering Committee, including meeting minutes, agendas, correspondence, reports and transcripts.

**Arrangement:** I. Committees; II. Correspondence and Memoranda; III. Advisory and Research Reports; IV. Contracts and Agreements; V. Public Art and Events; VI. Media Files; VII. Reference Files; VIII. Architectural Drawings

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African Americans -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 18th century  
Africans -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 18th century

Burial -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 18th century  
Cemeteries -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 18th century  
Excavations (Archaeology) -- New York (State) -- New York  
Historic districts -- New York (State) -- New York -- History  
Historic sites -- New York (State) -- New York -- History  
Memorials -- New York (State) -- New York  
Slaves -- New York (State) -- New York -- History -- 18th century

**Names**

Dodson, Howard  
Jorde, Peggy King  
Moore, Christopher Paul, 1952-  
Tabasi, Adunni Oshupa  
African Burial Ground (New York, N.Y.)  
Howard University. Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
New York (N.Y.). Landmarks Preservation Commission  
New York (N.Y.). Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground  
Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground (New York, N.Y.)  
United States. General Services Administration

## Container List

### Committees

One of the most extensive in the collection, this series consists of materials created by committees that met to address the development of the African Burial Ground site. Subseries include the Mayor's Burial Ground Committee; the Federal Steering Committee; Federal Steering Subcommittees; the U.S. House of Representatives; Committee on Public Land Use; and other committees. Each subseries contains minutes, agendas and reports for the years 1991-1994.

- b. 1 f. 1-2 Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground agendas and minutes 1992
- Federal Steering Committee
  - b. 1 f. 3 Members and staff 1991 - 1994
  - b. 1 f. 4 Charter and rules 1991 - 1994
  - b. 1 f. 5-7 Agendas and minutes 1992 - 1994
  - b. 1 f. 8 Finances 1992 - 1993
  - b. 1 f. 9-11 Transcripts 1993 June - December
  - b. 2 f. 1-3
  - b. 2 f. 4-7 Transcripts 1994 January - August
  - b. 3 f. 1-2
- b. 3 f. 3-4 Federal Steering Subcommittees 1993 - 1994
- Subcommittees A-M are in folder 3; N-Z are in folder 4.
- b. 3 f. 5 U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Public Works transcripts 1992
- b. 3 f. 6 Other organizations, agendas 1992 - 1994

### Correspondence and memoranda

In addition to the correspondence he generated and received as Chairman of the Federal Steering Committee, Dodson received copies of many other communications regarding the activity at the African Burial Ground. This series is organized into subseries by the creator of the correspondence to best capture the diversity of voices vying to be heard on these issues. Subseries include: Howard Dodson; Federal Steering Committee; General Services Administration; Landmarks Commission, City of New York; Howard University; Lehman College; and other.

- b. 4 f. 1-2 Howard Dodson correspondence and memoranda 1991 - 1994
- b. 4 f. 3 Federal Steering Committee memoranda 1993 - 1994
- General Services Administration correspondence
  - b. 4 f. 4 1991 - 1992
  - b. 4 f. 5-6 1993
  - b. 4 f. 7 1994
- b. 4 f. 8-9 Landmarks Commission correspondence and memoranda 1992 - 1993
- b. 4 f. 11 Howard University correspondence and memoranda 1992 - 1993
- b. 4 f. 12 Lehman College, CUNY, correspondence and memoranda 1992 - 1993
- Other
  - b. 4 f. 13-15 Correspondence 1992 - 1994
  - b. 4 f. 16 Memoranda 1991 - 1994

## Reports

In addition to the reports of committee activities that are included in the Committee series, the work of the Federal Steering Committee included contributing to a final advisory report to the U.S. Congress. This work also included the review of many advisory and research reports in the course of their education on the scientific, archeological and planning details that impacted this endeavor. These reports are organized into subseries by creator and arranged chronologically within each subseries: Federal Steering Committee; General Services Administration; responses to General Services Administration research design; Howard University; Landmarks Commission; and other (arranged alphabetically by issuer).

- b. 5 f. 1 Federal Steering Committee 1991 - 1994
- b. 5 f. 2-5 General Services Administration 1992 - 1993
- b. 5 f. 6 Responses to GSA research design reports 1992 - 1993
- b. 5 f. 7 Howard University 1992 - 1994
- b. 6 f. 1 Landmarks Commission 1992 - 1993
- Other reports 1992 - 1994
- b. 6 f. 2 A-E
- b. 6 f. 3 F-M
- b. 6 f. 4 M-Z

## Contracts of the General Services Administration

The many parties involved with the project entered into specific, contractually bound agreements regarding the scope and duration of each of their projects, from Howard University's treatment and analysis of the remains to Linpro's construction on the site. Since the entire project was under the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration, the GSA served as the issuer of all of these contracts. The contracts are arranged chronologically within this series.

- b. 6 f. 5 1989 - 1993 August
- b. 6 f. 6 1993 September - December

## Public art and events

Public involvement was of paramount concern to the members of the Federal Steering Committee. Aside from community involvement in planning meetings and less formal discussions and correspondence, there were also design competitions open to the public to create artwork for the site. Other projects were necessary in engaging the public and guiding them through the experience of the site, such as a documentary film chronicling the discovery and development of the site. This series consists of proposals, correspondence, and other collateral materials relating to these competitions and submissions. The series is divided into the following subseries and organized chronologically within each: Design Competition administration; Design Competition submissions; other public art and signage; documentary film; and ceremonies.

- b. 7 f. 1 Design Competition administration 1991 - 1994
- b. 7 f. 2 Design Competition submissions 1992 - 1994
- b. 7 f. 3 Other public art and signage 1991 - 1994
- b. 7 f. 4 Documentary film 1992 - 1994
- b. 7 f. 5 Ceremonies 1991 - 1995

## Media files

Due to the unique nature of the African Burial Ground, and its significance in New York and American history, many news outlets covered the discovery and progress of this site. The articles included here are both from large traditional news outlets like *The New York Times*, and smaller, more specialized news outlets that served specific communities, such as *African American Archeology*, a newsletter specifically for and by African-American archeologists. This series is separated into subseries by format and arranged chronologically within the following subseries: articles; press releases and public notices; and other publications.

### Articles

- b. 8 f. 1 1991 - 1992

Media files (cont.)

Articles (cont.)

- b. 8 f. 2 1993 - 1994
- b. 8 f. 3 Press releases and public notices 1991 - 1994
- b. 8 f. 4 Other publications 1991 - 1994

#### Reference files

Among the records relating to the African Burial Ground, Dodson kept files of articles, excerpts, and timelines that clearly relate to the history of the site itself, the history of Africans in New York, and the history of the project and committee in which he himself participated. These files have been organized into subseries by subject, and are arranged alphabetically by author within these subseries: black history in New York City; burial and disinterment; history of African Burial Ground Project; city law and procedure; and federal law and procedure.

- b. 8 f. 5 African Burial Ground Project history
- b. 8 f. 6 Burial and disinterment history
- b. 8 f. 7 Black history in New York City
- b. 8 f. 8 Federal law and procedure
- b. 8 f. 9 New York City law and procedure

#### Architectural drawings

This series consists of architectural drawings of the federal office building site and the African Burial Ground excavation site, organized chronologically.

- b. 9 f. 1-3 Federal Office Building site pre-1992 - 1993
- b. 9 f. 4 African Burial Ground excavation 1993