



The New York Public Library
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

Fred F. French Companies Records

1902-1988

MssCol 6206

The collection was processed by Susan Malsbury in 2009.

Summary

Creator: Fred F. French Companies

Title: Fred F. French Companies Records

Date: 1902-1988

Size: 11.03 linear feet (28 boxes, 4 oversize folders)

Source: Donated by the Fred F. French Companies, August 1994, and by Alan Rabinowitz, April 2004. The additions were donated by Timon and Lori Malloy, in 2019.

Abstract: The Fred F. French Companies was established in New York City by Fred Fillmore French (1883-1936) in 1908. French was a real estate developer who financed the construction of the Tudor City and Knickerbocker Village housing developments, and the Midtown skyscraper that bears his name. The Fred F. French Companies records, dated 1902 to 1988, consist of financial, legal, and promotional materials in a range of formats including project development binders and scrapbooks; correspondence; legal agreements; stock ledgers and certificates; prospectuses; brochures; photographs; watercolors; and architectural blueprints and renderings that document French's distinctive approach to developing real estate in New York City during the early to mid-20th century.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Fred F. French Companies Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: The collection was processed by Susan Malsbury in 2009.

Creator History

The Fred F. French Companies was established in New York City by Fred Fillmore French (1883-1936) in 1908. French was a real estate developer who financed the construction of the Tudor City and Knickerbocker Village housing developments, and the Midtown skyscraper that bears his name. In

addition to these properties, French owned several large apartment buildings in the Park and Fifth Avenue neighborhoods, some commercial buildings, Interlaken Gardens, a community on Westchester Lake, and the Hotel Everglades in Miami, Florida.

French was born in the Bronx in 1883. His father, a cigar maker, died when French was a child, leaving French's mother, a University of Michigan graduate, with four children to bring up on her own on a limited income. As a child and young adult, French worked odd jobs to help support the family. Through scholarships, French was able to attend high school, at the Horace Mann School, and Princeton University for one year, before leaving to try ranching in the American West. French soon returned to New York where he held various lower-level positions in construction and real estate ventures, before he began developing properties for himself.

Through his innovative investment strategy, which became known as the "French Plan," projects were financed by selling stock to stockholders and small investors, forgoing traditional bank financing. French also created architecture departments to provide in-house design services, acted as general contractor in the construction of buildings, and created subsidiaries to manage properties. Under this plan, French was able to maximize control of his developments and increase his profits. Each building or development became its own organization that existed under the umbrella of the Fred F. French Companies.

After French's death in 1936, Aaron Rabinowitz became the Chief Executive Officer of the Fred F. French Companies at the request of French's widow. Prior to this position, Rabinowitz had been the founder of Spears and Co., Inc., which he ran until 1928, when he left the company to his brothers. Rabinowitz also served on both the New York State Board of Housing and the State Insurance Board. In the following decades, the corporation sold the majority of its initial holdings and shifted its emphasis to real estate investment.

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Scope and Content Note

The Fred F. French Companies records date from 1902 to 1988 and consist of financial, legal and promotional materials in a range of formats including, project development binders and scrapbooks; correspondence; legal agreements; stock ledgers and certificates; prospectuses; brochures; photographs; watercolors; and architectural blueprints and renderings that document French's distinctive approach to developing real estate in New York City during the early to the mid-20th century.

The scrapbooks and project binders represent a broad spectrum of French's projects with a heavy emphasis on the Tudor City and Knickerbocker Village housing projects. They reveal the process of raising money for, and construction of, new buildings, as well as documenting the promotional activities of the Companies. Photographs depict the prior conditions of the potential building sites, the construction processes, and the completed buildings. Although the financial papers and legal records are fragmentary, they provide insights into the investment strategies and legal particulars of the

Companies.

The additions, dating from 1925 to 1980s (bulk dates 1960-1980s), supplement the collection mostly with financial records and legal documents that were folded into Series I and II. The following information regards the additional material.

The financial records are controller's reports, and consolidated financial statements of properties. There is an outside appraisal report prepared by the James Felt Realty Services for the French Companies' real estate holdings that is supplemented with photographs and diagrams.

The legal documents mainly represent two important legal issues: the sale of Tudor City along with the post-sale lawsuit Fred F. French Investing Company vs the City of New York disputing the rezoning of two private parks in Tudor City; and the merger of the FFF Subsidiary Corporation into the Fred F. French Company, Inc. going "private." Other legal files include annual reports to the Securities and Exchange Commission and some early records of the companies.

There are also several oversize watercolors of Tudor City.

Arrangement: The collection is arranged as follows: Financial Documents; Legal Documents; Photographs; Project Development Binders and Scrapbooks; Promotional Materials; and Art.

Key Terms

Subjects

Real property -- New York (State) -- New York

Names

Fred F. French Companies

Container List

Financial Documents 1918-1988

- b. 1 f. 1 General 1927-1929, 1943
- Consolidated Financial Statements of Properties 1977-1988
The files are arranged alphabetically by title of property.
- b. 14 f. 7 595 Madison Avenue 1978-1985
- b. 14 f. 8 660 Madison Avenue 1979-1985
- b. 15 f. 1 Cardiff Illinois Limited Partnership 1985
- b. 15 f. 2 Coastal States Building 1977-1985
- b. 15 f. 3 FFF Corporation 1982-1988
- b. 15 f. 4 French Coastal Limited Partnership 1985
- b. 15 f. 5 French Investing Company 1981-1984
- b. 15 f. 6 French Pershing Limited Partnership 1985
- b. 15 f. 7 French Rockville Land Limited; French Tudor Limited Partnership 1985-1988
- b. 15 f. 8 Greeley Mall 1981-1982
- b. 15 f. 10 One Central Plaza 1978, 1985
- b. 15 f. 11 JFK Greeley Associates 1983-1984
- b. 15 f. 12-13 Pershing Point Plaza 1978-1984
- b. 15 f. 14 West Side Associates 1978, 1981
- b. 11 f. 1-7
b. 12 f. 1-9
b. 13 f. 1-8
b. 14 f. 1-6
Controller's Reports 1971-1984
- b. 16 f. 1-6
b. 17 f. 1
General Financial Statements of Properties 1930-1969
- b. 1 f. 2 Questionnaire: Organization and Resources at the Fred F. French Company
1918
For qualification of government subsidies under the Council of National Defense.
- b. 17 f. 2 Real Estate Portfolio Appraisal 1981
Appraisal conducted by James Felt Realty Services, Inc.
- b. 1 f. 3-4 Stock Certificates and Agreement Forms

Legal Documents 1913-1988

General Files

- b. 1 f. 6-8 Agreements, leases, and disputes 1913-1924
- b. 17 f. 3-6 Amended Certificates for Incorporation 1950s-1980s
- b. 17 f. 7 Annual Meeting of Shareholders 1980-1981
- b. 18 f. 1-4 Annual Reports 1956-1982
- b. 18 f. 5 Quarterly Report to Stockholders 1983-1985
- b. 1 f. 5 General Information 1955, 1966
- b. 2 f. 1 Investment and Management issues 1925-1939
- b. 18 f. 6-7 551 Fifth Avenue 1925-1927
- b. 18 f. 8-9
b. 19 f. 1-9 Fred M. French Investing Company 1925-1983

Proposed Merger

Legal Documents (cont.)

Proposed Merger (cont.)

- b. 20 f. 1-2 Appraisals
- b. 20 f. 3 Cede & Company 1982
Cede and Company was used for registering shares of the Fred F. French Company.
- b. 20 f. 4-6 Going Private Correspondence and Transaction 1981-1982
- b. 20 f. 7-9 Letters to Stockholders 1981-1982
- b. 21 f. 1 Loan Agreement 1982
- b. 21 f. 2 Mortgage Notes Receivable. Appraisal 1980
- b. 21 f. 3 Notice of Pendency of Class Action 1982
- b. 21 f. 4-5 Notice of Special Meeting of Shareholders 1982
- b. 21 f. 6-7 Open Dissenting Letters, Dissenting Notice 1982
- b. 21 f. 8-9 Lita S. Espiau (Plaintiff) Against Fred F. French Investing Company 1981
- b. 22 f. 1-2
- b. 22 f. 3 Press Release 1982
The Special Meeting of Shareholders voted to approve a proposed "going private" merger.
- b. 22 f. 4-8 Proxy Material 1982
- b. 23 f. 1-2
- b. 23 f. 3-5 Stockholders Annual Meeting 1984
- b. 23 f. 6-7 Stockholders Redemption 1982
- b. 23 f. 8 Tax Returns 1984-1985
- b. 23 f. 9 Weinberger, Joseph A 1982
Secretary for the French Company.

Sale of Tudor City

- b. 24 f. 1 Blueprints 1927
- b. 24 f. 2-4 Assignments Of Leases, Deeds 1970
- b. 24 f. 5-8 Closing Statement 1970
- b. 25 f. 1-4
- b. 25 f. 5-8 Contracts 1970
- b. 26 f. 1-3
- b. 26 f. 4-6 French F. French Company vs New York City 1976
- b. 27 f. 1-4
- b. 2 f. 2 Securities and Exchange Commission registration statement 1936
For Properties and Construction Co., a subsidiary of Fred F. French Companies.
- b. 28 f. 1-7 Securities and Exchange Commission (annual report to) 1977

Other Legal Documents

- b. 27 f. 8-9 Trusts for Aaron and Clara G. Rabinowitz 1987-1988

Photographs 1926-1951

The series is arranged alphabetically by subject.

Construction photographs depict buildings in various stages of construction. Documentation photographs include images of a section of the Lower East Side known as the "lung block" (so called owing to the high incidence of tuberculosis) that was razed to make way for Knickerbocker Village. Also included are photographs of completed buildings. Photographs of executives and staff include portraits of corporation officials, including French, and photographs of company events. Unidentified photographs are of a lake house and its environs.

Executives and Employees

Fred F. French Companies

- b. 2 f. 3-4 1950, n.d. (Includes etching block of Aaron Rabinowitz portrait.)
- b. 8 undated (Includes a paper negative.)

Photographs (cont.)

Executives and Employees (cont.)

- b. 2 Spear and Co., Inc 1923-1931 (includes negatives)

Projects

Fred F. French Building

- b. 3 f. 1 Construction 1924-1927

- b. 3 f. 2 Documentation

Knickerbocker Village

- b. 3 f. 3-6 Construction 1933-1934

- b. 3 f. 7 Documentation circa 1930

Tudor City

- b. 4 f. 1-6 Construction 1926-1934, 1951

- b. 5 f. 1-3

- b. 5 f. 4 Documentation 1945-1950, n.d.

- b. 5 f. 5 Various (includes negatives and photo album)

- b. 5 f. 6 Unidentified (Includes negatives.)

Project Development Binders and Scrapbooks 1902-1963

This series is arranged chronologically. Created to document the progress of the French projects and companies, the project development binders and scrapbooks cover six decades and multiple building projects. Volumes contain photographs, clippings, advertisements, brochures, blueprints, architectural renderings, and proposals that chronicle the construction of new properties and the promotional activities of the French Companies.

- b. 6 1902-1953

Contains photographs of French and company officers, company events, and exteriors and interiors of buildings, primarily Tudor City, in various stages of construction and completion. Also includes pictures of French's travels in the American West as a young man. In addition to photographs, the album contains architectural renderings of buildings, a watercolor of a Tudor City scene attributed to Chesley Bonestell and newspaper clippings and advertisements. Loose photographs have been removed and are housed in a separate folder.

- b. 7 1918-1936

Contains published addresses and brochures by French on the "French Plan" as well as other promotional material, a proposal for Tudor City London, and a report of real estate holdings of all Companies properties for 1936.

- b. 8 1920s-1940s

Contains floor plans and blueprints of buildings for Tudor City and other projects. Also includes architectural renderings and photographs of exteriors, surrounding parks, and construction sites of Tudor City, other projects, and the construction of the United Nation Headquarters.

- b. 9 f. 1-3 1933-1935

Includes letters from supporters of the venture, a prospectus, and materials relating to the opening ceremony, including a transcript with speeches by French, Jesse H. Jones, Robert Moses and Alfred E. Smith, among others. Includes photographs of French and other officials at the dedication, demolition of the slums, and photographs of the construction. Knickerbocker Village.

- b. 10 1934-1957

Contains newspaper clippings relating to the neighborhood surrounding Tudor City, specifically the development of the United Nations Headquarters, and includes a proposal for Tudor City London.

1962-1963

Contains newspaper clippings and photographs documenting the construction of an office building in Tudor City. Loose materials have been removed and are housed in a separate folder. Location: 300 East 42nd Street.

Promotional Materials 1918-1965

Includes brochures of properties for customers, for prospective investors and for salesmen. Also includes publicity postcards promoting the quality of life at Tudor City.

Promotional Materials (cont.)

- b. 9 f. 4 Advertisements and clippings 1918-1948
- b. 9 f. 5-8 Brochures 1925-1946, 1965, n.d
Includes Tudor City calendar, 1946
- b. 9 f. 9 Postcards

Art

Three of the watercolors were painted by the same artist (name is illegible).

- o. 1-4 Watercolors of Tudor City
The watercolors are arranged as follows: Folder One. 5 Tudor Place; Folder Two. Unidentified Tower; Folder Three. Aerial View of Tudor City; Folder Four. Tudor Park.