



The New York Public Library
New York Public Library Archives

Guide to the

United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division Records

ca. 1900-1987 [bulk bulk 1970-1979]

Processed by Maryanne Basciani.

Summary

Creator: New York Public Library. United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division.

Title: United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division Records

Date: ca. 1900-1987 [bulk bulk 1970-1979]

Size: 3 linear feet (7 boxes)

Source: Transferred from New York Public Library United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division

Abstract: The United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division Records document the administration and operation of this division of the New York Public Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Library. The United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division collects materials that document American history on the national, state and local level, genealogy, heraldry, personal and family names, and flags. Records of the division are composed of correspondence, annual reports, reference log books, notes and memoranda.

Conditions Governing Use: Box 4 is closed to public research.

Preferred citation: United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Maryanne Basciani; machine readable finding aid created by.
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created by .

Related Materials:

American History Division records. New York Public Library Archives.

Creator History

The Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, located in The New York Public Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Library, collects materials documenting American history on the national, state and local level, genealogy, heraldry, personal and family names, and flags.

The division's local history and genealogy collection dates back to the establishment of the Astor Library in 1848. The Astor Library, unlike many other libraries of its time, collected local history material on a national scale, and acquired genealogies concerning prominent American families of European descent.

In 1895, the Astor Library, Lenox Library and Tilden Trust merged to form the New York Public Library. Genealogical and local history materials from the Astor and Lenox libraries were joined to form a single collection when the new institution's central building opened in 1911. In the beginning this collection was chiefly used by people engaged in genealogical research regarding their families. Users often came from out of town seeking information that could not be found elsewhere. Demand was high for books on American and British genealogy and there was a constant call for books on New York City and New York State history.

In later years, wartime brought in an influx of users. War stimulated interest in the ancestry of military leaders like General MacArthur and Winston Churchill.

Two events occurred in the late 1970's that had significant effects on the division, resulting in a 20% increase in readers. The country's bicentennial inspired people in communities across the nation to write local histories, and the television miniseries "Roots" in 1977 caused a tremendous stir as tracing ancestry became a national pastime.

From its inception in 1911 until 1987, 4 individuals served as Chief of the Division: Henry Strippel (1911-1945), Gerald D. McDonald (1945-1969), Gunther Pohl (1969-1985) and John Miller (1985-1987).

Over the years, the name of the division has changed. When the New York Public Library central building opened in 1911 it was called the Genealogy and Local History Division. In 1947, the name was inverted to become Local History and Genealogy Division. It was divided administratively into two divisions-American History and Local History & Genealogy-in April 1969. In 1980, the American History Division closed, and its books were transferred to Local History and Genealogy. In 1981 the name was changed to United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division.

Known today as the Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, the division still thrives. The collections includes town, city, county and state histories that are national in scope, as well as international genealogical materials. In addition to the book and serial collection, the division houses over 300,000 postcards, a local history ephemera collection, political campaign ephemera, vertical files and a photographic and negative collection.

Scope and Content Note

The Local History and Genealogy Division Records document the collections, public services and administration of the division, which is part of the New York Public Library's Humanities and Social Sciences Library. The records reveal the challenges and issues associated with running a library division utilized by tens of thousands of readers annually.

The records span the years ca. 1900-1987, with a concentration on the period in the 1970's. The collection is composed of four series: annual reports, correspondence, reference inquiry log books, and subject files. Strengths of the collection include the annual reports which provide a clear synopsis of divisional activities. The annual reports series is virtually complete, with only the 1984-1985 report missing, perhaps due to the retirement of Gunther Pohl, chief of the division. Correspondence with patrons, both individual and institutional, documents the high regard and esteem that the division was held in by its users. In addition, the records offer a glimpse into the nature of the day-to-day work of the employees of the division.

Arrangement: The United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division Records are organized in the following series: 1. Annual Reports, 1958-1987 2. Correspondence, 1948-1986, n.d. 3. Reference Inquiry Log Books, 1939 - 1982 4. Subject Files, ca. 1900-1986, n.d.

Container List

Series 1. Annual Reports 1958-1987

Series 1 contains annual reports written by the Chief of the United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division that highlight the accomplishments, news, and issues of the division. The majority of these reports are authored by Gunther Pohl, who served as chief for 16 years. Standard information contained in these reports includes staff rosters, reader statistics, notable acquisitions and gifts, staff accomplishments, trends in the use of the collection, and a commentary on the state of the division's affairs. Requests for increased space, additional staff and improved services are recurring themes. The majority of annual reports contain attachments consisting of weekly surveys of reader use by affiliation and place of residence, as well as an inventory of periodicals received on an annual basis.

These reports are supplemented by the annual reports reference material files containing the information from which the chief would prepare and generate the annual report. The reference files, which date from 1960-1984, contain a range of materials including user statistics, notes, memoranda, and correspondence relating to the issues of staff, space, cataloguing, conservation, and improved services, as well as information regarding gifts received, materials loaned to other institutions, and group visits.

- b. 1 f. 1 Annual Reports 1958-1976
- b. 1 f. 2 Annual Reports 1976-1983
- b. 1 f. 3 Annual Reports 1983-1987
- b. 1 f. 4 Annual Reports Reference Material 1960-1969
- b. 1 f. 5 Annual Reports Reference Material 1971-1972
- b. 1 f. 6 Annual Reports Reference Material 1972-1973
- b. 1 f. 7 Annual Reports Reference Material 1973-1974
- b. 1 f. 8 Annual Reports Reference Material 1974-1975
- b. 1 f. 9 Annual Reports Reference Material 1975-1976
- b. 1 f. 10 Annual Reports Reference Material 1976-1977
- b. 1 f. 11 Annual Reports Reference Material 1977-1978
- b. 2 f. 1 Annual Reports Reference Material 1978-1979
- b. 2 f. 2 Annual Reports Reference Material 1979-1980
- b. 2 f. 3 Annual Reports Reference Material 1980-1981
- b. 2 f. 4 Annual Reports Reference Material 1981-1982
- b. 2 f. 5 Annual Reports Reference Material 1982-1983
- b. 2 f. 6 Annual Reports Reference Material 1983-1984

Series 2. Correspondence 1948-1986, n.d.

Series 2 consists of incoming and outgoing correspondence from the years 1948-1987. The bulk of the correspondence is from the 1970's. The correspondence primarily consists of reference questions and answers, thank-you letters for services the division provided, solicitations from genealogical vendors and libraries as well as general correspondence with both individual and institutional patrons. There is extensive correspondence between the division and the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), the Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ, and Microfilm Corporation of America. This series is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

- b. 2 f. 7 A 1970-1979, n.d.
- b. 2 f. 8 B 1950-1986
- b. 2 f. 9 C 1969-1985
- b. 2 f. 10 D 1969-1983
- b. 3 f. 1 Daughters of American Revolution 1970-1985
- b. 3 f. 2 E-F 1970-1985

Series 2. Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 3 G 1968-1983
- b. 3 f. 4 Genealogical Society of the Church of Jesus Christ 1967-1973
- b. 3 f. 5 H 1965-1984, n.d.
- b. 3 f. 6 J-K 1969-1985
- b. 3 f. 7 L 1968-1984
- b. 3 f. 8 M 1963-1984
- b. 3 f. 9 Microfilm Corporation of America 1978-1979
- b. 3 f. 10 N 1948-1971
- b. 3 f. 11 O-P 1948-1985
- b. 3 f. 12 R 1971-1985
- b. 3 f. 13 S-U 1968-1983
- b. 3 f. 14 W 1959-1983
- b. 3 f. 15 Y-Z 1984

Series 3. Reference Inquiry Log Books 1939-1982

Closed to public research.

This series contains 7 log books that record reference letters received from 1941-1982. Log books were used to keep a record of all reference correspondence passing through the division. Entries were arranged according to the name of the correspondent, a brief statement of the subject, date of acknowledgment, and the date a reply was sent. Another log book contains reference questions from the years 1939-1955. Answers to the questions are provided or, in some instances, the source of an answer is listed. The series is arranged chronologically.

- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1941-1946
v. 1
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1947-1951
v. 2
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1951-1954
v. 3
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1954-1959
v. 4
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1959-1962
v. 5
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1969-1975
v. 6
- b. 4 Record of Letters Received 1976-1982
v. 7
- b. 4 Record of Reference Questions Received 1939-1955
v. 8

Series 4. Subject Files ca. 1900-1986, n.d.

Series 4 addresses various issues relating to the running of the United States History, Local History and Genealogy Division. Included in the series are memoranda, correspondence, reports, minutes, and other items relating to individuals, divisions, and library matters. Space, staff, gifts and bequests, surveys, and acknowledgements and criticisms regarding staff and service are topics that are well represented. There are 3 folders regarding the holdings of the Astor and Lenox libraries on local history and genealogy from ca. 1900. This series is arranged alphabetically by topic.

- b. 5 f. 1 Acknowledgments and Criticisms 1967-1984, n.d.
- b. 5 f. 2 Bequests-Miscellaneous 1966-1982
- b. 5 f. 3 Board of Health 1937-1984, n.d.
- b. 5 f. 4 Catalogs and Cataloguing 1955-1972
- b. 5 f. 5 City Directories 1961-1968

Series 4. Subject Files (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 6 Coat of Arms 1970-1976
- b. 5 f. 7 Finance 1978-1981, n.d.
- b. 5 f. 8 Gifts-Collection-Beinecke, William 1974-1981
- b. 5 f. 9 Gifts-Collection-Miscellaneous 1951-1986
- b. 5 f. 10 Gifts-Collection-O'Connor, James 1978
- b. 5 f. 11 Gifts-Financial-Miscellaneous 1958-1982
- b. 5 f. 12 Holdings of Astor and Lenox Library's on local history and genealogy-
Genealogical Material ca. 1900
- b. 6 f. 1 Holdings of Astor and Lenox Library's on local history and genealogy-
Miscellaneous ca. 1900
- b. 6 f. 2 Holdings of Astor and Lenox Library's on local history and genealogy-New
England Local Histories ca. 1900
- b. 6 f. 3 McCubbins Collection 1971-1973, n.d.
- b. 6 f. 4 Memos 1960-1983
- b. 6 f. 5 Miscellaneous 1927-1972, n.d.
- b. 6 f. 6 Periodicals 1965-1974
- b. 6 f. 7 Stack Maintenance and Delivery 1971
- b. 6 f. 8 Space 1964-1979
- b. 6 f. 9 Staff 1954-1986, n.d.
- b. 6 f. 10 Staff-Restricted 1964-1985
- b. 6 f. 11 Statistics-Genealogy 1911-1963
- b. 7 f. 1 Surveys 1940-1984, n.d.