



The New York Public Library
New York Public Library Archives

Guide to the

Melrose Branch records

1914-1989

MssArc 5832

Processed by Brenda Hearing and Robert Sink.

Summary

Creator: New York Public Library. Melrose Branch

Title: Melrose Branch records

Date: 1914-1989

Size: 1 linear foot (3 boxes)

Source: Transferred from Melrose Branch Library

Abstract: Reports, brochures and administrative records of the Melrose Branch of The New York Public Library.

Physical Location: RG 8

Conditions Governing Access:

Library records are closed for 20 years from time of creation.

Conditions Governing Use: All rights reserved. Permission to quote must be obtained in writing from the New York Public Library

Preferred citation: Melrose Branch Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Brenda Hearing and Robert Sink; revised by Jim Moske; machine readable finding aid created by FAKER.

Related Materials:

Creator History

The opening of the Melrose Branch Library in 1914 brought a free circulating collection of books to readers in this section of the South Bronx for the first time. The opening day benefaction given by Cyrus E. Miller, then Borough President of the Bronx -- "Now there are richer fruits available here, free" (referring to his boyhood thievery in the orchard the library had displaced) -- is recalled on anniversaries throughout the library's seventy-eight years of near-continuous service. In a letter to Miller a week before the opening, Edwin Hatfield Anderson, Director of the New York Public Library, proclaimed: "[T]his branch will tap entirely raw territory. It is a region of rapid development, and we are opening a branch in that section none too soon."

Anderson's enthusiasm for the opening of the Melrose Branch reflects his special responsibility for the Carnegie branches of the New York Public Library, in whose company Melrose belonged. Melrose was the 34th of 65 original branch library buildings erected with a portion of Andrew Carnegie's 1901 gift of \$5,200,000 to establish a free public library system in New York City. The land was purchased for \$20,000 while the building and equipment cost \$102,974.81. The library building is further distinguished by having been designed by the architectural firm of Carrere and Hastings, whose celebrated Central Research Library building was completed just three years earlier, in 1911.

The library's 12,000-volume collection was opened to adult and children borrowers the morning after the dedicatory ceremonies on January 16, 1914. Head Librarian Ida Molnar and Children's Librarian Jessie Wing presided over the first day's activities; each would continue serving the branch in her respective capacity for the next twenty-five years.

Melrose is especially noted by having been headed by only four librarians during its first fifty years of operation: Ida B. L. Molnar, who served until her retirement in July of 1939; Marjorie Church Burbank, 1939 -1946; Ruth Shinnamon, 1946-1954; and Mary Dodge Read, who served until 1967 and was therefore on hand for the branch's fiftieth anniversary in 1964. From that milestone to the library's 75th anniversary in 1989, and excepting the closing of the branch for renovation from mid-1957 until early 1960, individuals filling the position of head librarian have included Marvelous Brooks (1968-1969), Viola Barrett (1969-1970), Fred T. Gee (1970-1979), Raymond Markey (1979-1986), and Linette Allmond.

Scope and Content Note

The records of the Melrose Branch Library document the first 75 years of its service, 1914-1989. The collection includes correspondence, memoranda, photographs, newspaper clippings, and printed ephemera. The records document the day-to-day operation of a New York Public Library Branch, with special emphasis on the development of children's services. The collection contains an extensive and detailed run of Melrose Children's Room Reports, and an unabridged copy of a 1941 system-wide Children's Room Report prepared by Frances Clarke Sayers, successor to Anne Carroll Moore. Certainly any study of the life and work of Moore, who created the Library's Children's Services and served as its superintendent from 1906 until 1941, would wish to take into account the lively reports from the Melrose branch, with their typical, simple opening of "Dear Miss Moore..." The Melrose Branch Records illuminate several other broad historical themes: the history of education, with respect to cooperative relationships between public schools and public libraries; women's history, in light of the feminization of the librarianship profession; the history of reading; architectural history, with respect to its building's Carrère and Hastings provenance.

Arrangement: The Melrose Branch Records are organized in the following series: Series 1. Administrative Files, 1923-1986; Series 2. Celebrations, 1914-1987; Series 3. Subject Files, 1914-1989.

Key Terms

Subjects

Adult services in public libraries
Branches libraries
Libraries -- New York (State) -- New York
Libraries and preschool children
Libraries and students
Public libraries -- New York (State) -- New York

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Annual reports
Photographic prints

Names

New York Public Library. Melrose Branch
Molnar, Ida B.L

Container List

Series 1. Administrative Files 1923-1986

Series 1. Administrative Files gathers together the annual reports for the branch, as well as the individual reports for its divisions: Adult Services, Young Adult Services, and Children's Services. Annual reports for the years 1979-80 through 1985-86 are inclusive for all divisions. Together, these records provide more than a historical profile of the Melrose Branch Library. The regular practice of describing the library's service within the context of the patrons and neighborhood it serves has resulted in a unique record of the fluctuating demographics of this region of the Bronx. Particularly vibrant in their descriptions of changing readers are the Children's Room Reports, reflecting that division's activity from 1923 through 1979. Further, these reports represent the earliest evidence of service at the branch of any sort -- the Branch Annual Reports collected here date from 1939, as do reports from Young Adult Services; Adult Services reports date from 1948.

- b. 1 f. 1 Annual reports 1939-1986
- b. 1 f. 2-6 Children's Room reports 1923-1979
- b. 2 f. 1 Adult Services 1948-1974
- b. 2 f. 2 Young Adult Services 1939-1977

Series 2. Celebrations 1914-1987

Series 2. Celebrations consists of materials related to the Branch's Opening in 1914 and its subsequent 25th, 50th, and 75th anniversaries. Notable items to be found here include a history of the branch written by Ida B. L. Molnar (including a copy in autograph typescript), who served as head librarian the first 25 years; photographs of the branch and its staff from 1914 through the 75th anniversary celebration in 1989; and a copy of the January 16, 1914, opening day program.

- b. 2 f. 3 Opening 1914
- b. 2 f. 4 25th Anniversary 1939
- b. 2 f. 5 50th Anniversary 1964
- b. 3 50th Anniversary scrapbook 1964
- b. 2 f. 6 75th Anniversary 1989

Series 3. Subject Files 1914-1989

Series 3. Subject Files contains Branch brochures, printed ephemera, correspondence, and memos. An extensive publicity file, comprised of newspaper clippings, is the highlight of this series. Spanning the first 75 years of the branch's existence, the clippings document New York Public Library milestones generally, particularly as regards the Central Research Library: a copy of the 50th anniversary program for the New York Public Library may be found here, as well as a copy of the press release concerning Dr. Lawrence Reddick's resignation as Curator of the Schomburg Collection. There is also a survey of library resources in the Melrose neighborhood and adjoining areas, ca. 1970.

- b. 2 f. 7 Brochures 1975-1989
- b. 2 f. 8 Community survey ca. 1970
- b. 2 f. 9 Correspondence, memoranda and reminiscences 1931-1941, n.d.
- b. 2 f. 10 Printed ephemera 1939-1989
- b. 2 f. 11 Publicity 1914-1988
- b. 2 f. 12 Special Investigator 1969-1979
- b. 3 Poster 1969