

Learning Places Spring 2016

LIBRARY / ARCHIVE REPORT

Brooklyn Public Library



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INTRODUCTION

I visited the Brooklyn Public Library, located at 10 Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11238. Specifically, the Brooklyn Collection was visited. The archivist had prepared for us various maps of Brooklyn, as well as other primary source documents.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

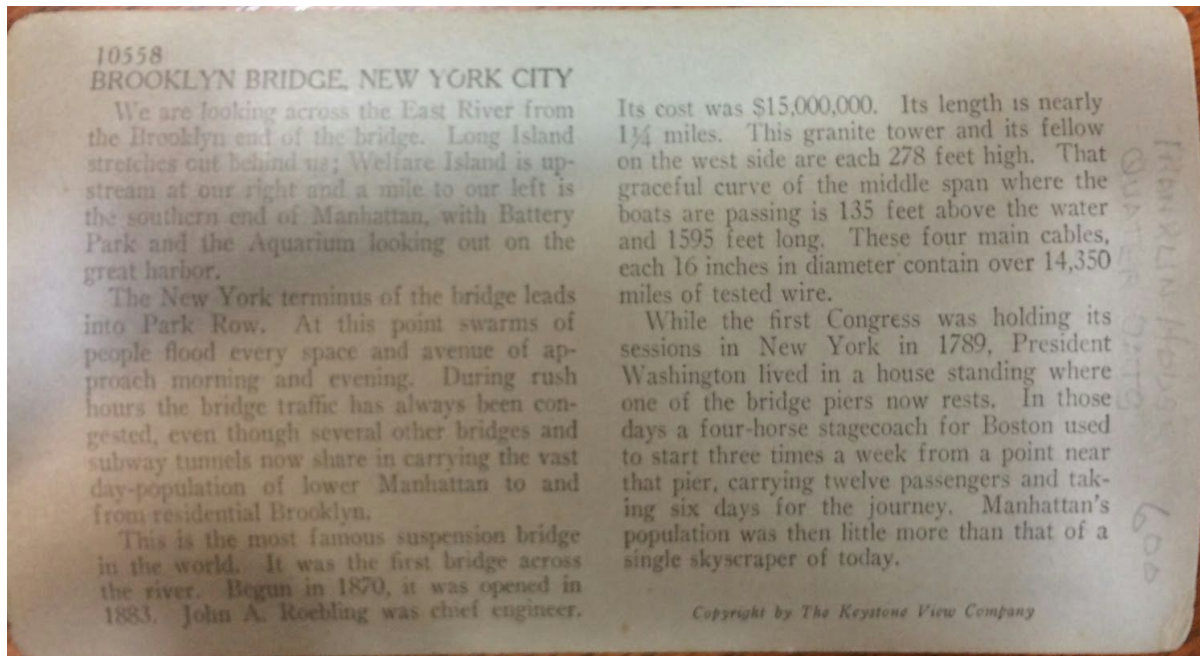
Upon visiting this site, I expected to see all manor of historic documents, including but not limited to maps, various records, newspaper clipping, and photographs. I was curious to the format on which this media would be presented; would the maps, records and photo be compressed on microfilm? Were the originals still intact somewhere?

SOURCES found

1. Brooklyn Daily Eagle, Our Civic Triumph, bklyn.newspapers.com, Pg. 11, May 24, 1883
2. Keynote View Company, "A Masterpiece of Engineering - The Brooklyn Bridge", Stereograph
3. Brooklyn Bridge. (2016). In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Brooklyn-Bridge>
4. Brooklyn Bridge. [Photo]. In Encyclopædia Britannica. Retrieved from <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Brooklyn-Bridge/images-videos/The-opening-of-the-Brooklyn-Bridge-chromolithograph-by-Currier-Ives/188943>

Pictures





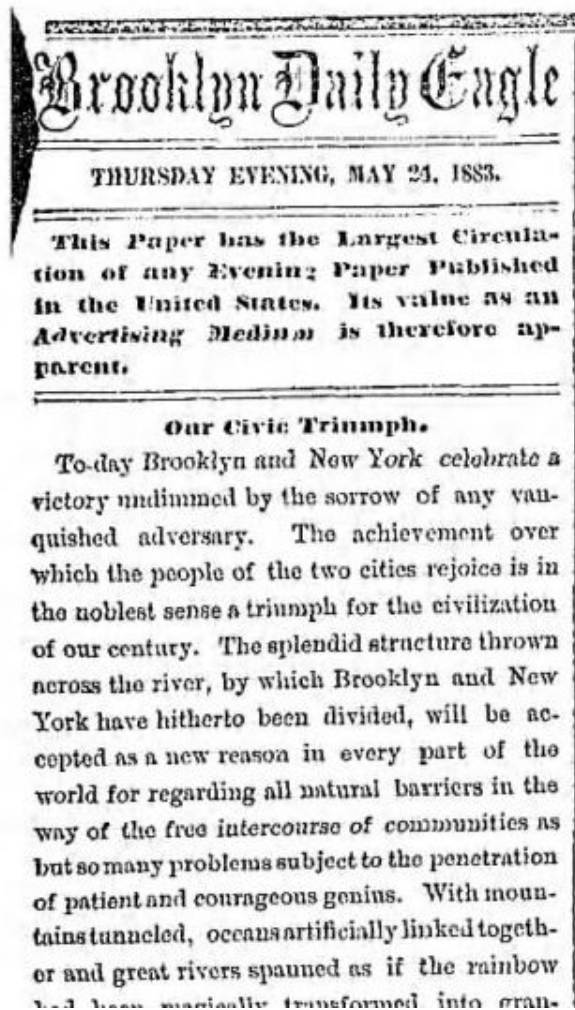
The front and back of a stereo photograph of the Brooklyn Bridge. I found this near a stereoscope in the Brooklyn collection at the library. The date of the original photo is unknown, however it was likely taken in the late 19th century due to the sail ships seen in the East river. The reverse side of the photo has a brief description of the bridge; it was composed by the Keystone View Group, a company who made stereographs. The stereo image really immerses the viewer into the scale and majesty of the bridge.

Some key information from the reverse side:

- \$15,000,000 USD price tag in 1883. This is \$384,723,096 adjusted for inflation. (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>)
- The two granite towers are 278 ft in height
- Boats up to 135ft can pass below the bridge.
- The bridge spans 1595 ft.
- There are 4 main cables, each 16 inches in diameter, containing 14350 miles of twisted wire.
- Construction time totaled 13 years, spanning from 1870 to 1883.

Further research gave insight into the construction of the bridge. The Encyclopedia

Britannica article on the bridge contains relevant information. The original architect of the bridge, John Augustus Roebling, died of a workplace accident soon after the bridge began construction. His son, Washington Roebling, continued his father's work, but was unable to personally oversee the construction of the bridge. He suffered severe decompression sickness in 1872. He used his wife Emily Warren Roebling to pass on his instructions. At its completion, the Brooklyn Bridge was the longest spanning bridge in the world. "The bridge's opening day (May 24, 1883) was marked by much celebration, and the building of it came to represent a landmark in technological achievement for a generation." (Britanica).



Full Article:

<https://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/50431503/?terms=%22brooklyn%2Bbridge%22%2Bcomplete>

This is a partial clipping from the Brooklyn Eagle Newspaper circa 1883. This article praises the bridge's construction in great detail, as a "civil triumph". It highlights the bridge's architecture and goes on to reflect on its impact, on the community, in terms of changing real estate value, among other social factors. A few logistical aspects of the bridge are mentioned as well. It was published on May 24, 1883, the official opening day of the bridge.



This chromolithograph by Currier & Ives, illustrates the opening celebration of the bridge. Note the ships on the water, which are similar to those seen in the stereograph.

RESEARCH METHOD/ ADDITIONAL SOURCES NEEDED TO ANSWER EACH QUESTION ABOVE:

1. What kind of bridge is the Brooklyn Bridge?
 - a. Bridge engineering reference
 - b. Encyclopedia articles on the Brooklyn Bridge.
2. What were the biggest challenges in its construction?
 - a. List out common engineering pitfalls in an engineering project, then analyze
 - i. Deaths, injuries (found: “20 workers were killed during construction, and many more suffered decompression sickness” (Britannica))
 - ii. Strikes
 - iii. Labor shortages
 - iv. Unforeseen circumstances
 - b. Was there significant change in building planning near the entrance to the bridge?
3. What modifications have been made to the bridge since its opening in 1883?
 - a. Research structural changes to the bridge.

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

The Brooklyn archive was an interesting place to visit. The binocular stereoscope was, by far, the most interesting thing I saw in the archive. It was a remarkable instrument, used for engineering purposes. Although I conducted a thorough visual search of the room, I was unable to find more than the 15 or so stereographs adjacent to the the stereoscope; this was unfortunate. Apart from the maps, the shelves were lined with other books and records I didn't expect to see. There were many archives of group meetings that took place in Brooklyn. I also found some early statistical data reporting from medical establishments, published and bound; it was interesting to see data in this format, since it is not reported like that anymore.