

Learning Places Spring 2016

# LIBRARY / ARCHIVE REPORT

## LaGuardia & Wagner Archives



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### INTRODUCTION

The LaGuardia & Wagner NYCHA archives was our third library and archive trip. Upon visiting the NYCHA archives, we were given the precedent of the Public Library in Brooklyn as well as the New York Public Library. This was the first archive that was specific to a university, as well as a NYC agency. Aside from the complexity of the building, the idea of freely skimming through documents was not explored. However, the archivist gave us a wonderful overview of the research needed to produce Farragut Housing as well as the Harlem River Houses. After a brief discussion regarding the documents presented, we attended a wiki workshop in the computer lab.

### PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

I have never visited LaGuardia Community College, nor have I ever visited the archive within the college. I am excited to see how both the college and archived is organized. This visit seems like it may

hold great precedent over the research I am doing, as mayor LaGuardia's term covered most of Urban Renewal. I am anticipating several documents on the issue of housing during the Urban Renewal period. I hope to see architectural drawings that describe the typologies of housing units, and city planning drawings that describe the schematic plans of Farragut Housing, along with several other housing projects.

## SOURCES found

1. "Farragut 47-48 Fern Place from Fern Place. Towards South Side Street." A Photograph taken by NYCHA. 1947-1948
2. "Farragut 47-48 Sand St. from Hudson Ave. toward W". A Photograph taken by NYCHA. 1947-1948
3. "Farragut Interior Shot". A Photograph taken by NYCHA. Early 1950's

## DOCUMENTATION of site & resources (maps/archival documents/photos)



The image above describes the mobile shelving units for the LaGuardia & Wagner Archives. Upon entering the archive, you are confronted with large structures which measure to be higher than a typical door and is wider than a typical door (3 feet by 8 feet). The volumes have wheels attached to

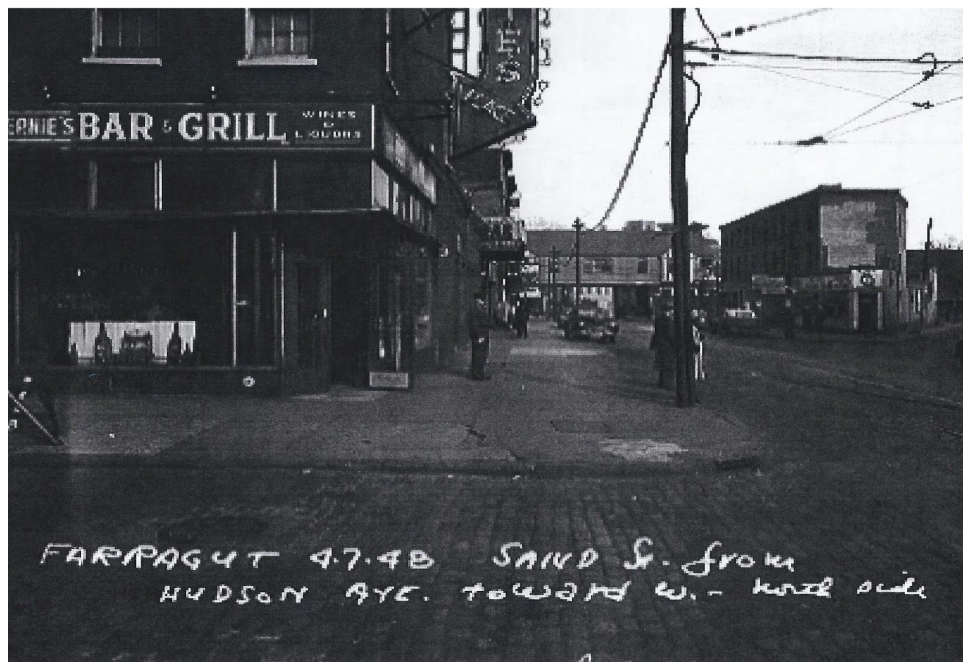
them, that can be turned clockwise or counterclockwise. When it is turned, each volume moves horizontally and follows a track on the slightly elevator floor.



Enclosed within these volumes are numerous boxes which contain documents.



During our site visit, we were presented with numerous photographs taken by the NYCHA. The photographs within this site report exhibit the condition of the neighborhood prior to the construction of Farragut Housing. One of the curiosities that spiked my mind within the previous site reports, is the existence of the diagonal street or “Fern Place” (Formally known as Old Bridge Street in the 1800’s)



While the first picture reveals the spatial conditions of the neighborhood, the second picture introduces the social conditions of the neighborhood. Numerous bars and grills occupied the street before Farragut Housing did.



The picture to the left manifests the living condition of the Farragut Housing Complex. This looks a lot like a studio apartment which usually compresses all living programs in one space, as the kitchen is shown upon entry. Adjacent to the other side of the door is a sink, that is described behind a woman and her child.

The space looks rather unsanitary, as wooden planks show evidence of decay below the entry door. A large chunk of paint decay and paint chipping is evident both above the kitchen sink and the entry door.

## DISCOVERIES

1. Neighborhood History
  - a. The photographs studied in this report mostly refers to the Farragut Housing vicinity, which can be now described as Gold and Navy, Sands and Nassau streets. The origin of these streets can be dated by extraneous information, such as maps or aerial photographs. The documentation provided within the site visit informs us of the nature of the “otherness” or unwarranted behavior within the vicinity. Commercial places such as bars were widely promoted within the area, which emphasized the bordering condition of the Navy Yard.
2. Key Events / Historical Dates
  - a. The establishment of the New York City Housing Authority, which was in 1935.
  - b. The establishment of Farragut Housing, which was about 1951.
3. Key Players
  - a. The New York City Housing Authority has been a prevalent force within my research projects, as the agency deals heavily with the idea of Urbanization and Housing. It is one of the largest housing agencies in the country.
  - b. Mayor LaGuardia, who was the mayor of New York City from 1934-1945.
4. Relationship Key Players
  - a. The New York City Housing Authority has sought to serve marginalized populations, and still continually seeks to close the gaps of inequality within New York City. NYCHA’s scope of work is not limited to proposing housing projects, but a great deal of site analysis and invention is and has been created to push the birth of these projects i.e Farragut Housing.
  - b. Mayor LaGuardia has heavily advocated the idea of urbanization and housing in New York City. He, along with NYCHA sought to revitalize the site of what is now Farragut Housing.
5. Public Perception of Key Events
  - a. The public perception of NYCHA and Farragut Housing was not discussed within our site visit. From our other site visits and from my research, it seems like the idea was merited from the issue of the population growth, and through the presence of growing slum populations. Housing Complexes may have been seen as a provocative solution to the slum population problem, though housing complexes such as Farragut Housing replaced slums themselves.

## 6. Important Changes to Neighborhood

- a. The remnants of this neighborhood can be read as erased, as the vicinity of Farragut Housing may look a lot like a tabula rasa. The only portions of the immediate neighborhood that stay in tact are the boundaries of the historic streets (which were eventually combined to create mega-blocks) and the preservation of some of the street names, such as Gold, Navy, Sands and Nassau streets.
- b. The material presented to us documented a time period before the construction of the BQE, which is now a vital part of the immediate area as well as a motivator for program planning.

## 7. Other Observations

- a. The idea of circulation within Farragut Housing is not conceived through new ideas of design. Unlike the Harlem Houses which were shown to us, Farragut Housing lacks in a the idea of a “natural” path which is found evidently in Harlem Housing’s circular intersections and Stuyvesant Town’s squiggly pathways (privately built housing complexes)

## TOPICS & KEYWORDS

Topics and Keywords relevant to this area of study would be:

“Farragut Housing”, “New York City Housing Authority”, “Housing Projects”, “Urbanization”, “Redevelopment of downtown Brooklyn”,

## QUANTITATIVE DATA for Area of Study

Subject	Data
Land Ownership	NYCHA
Number of Blocks	4 superblocks converted from 10 city blocks
# of Buildings on a Typical Block	Numerous buildings to 12 buildings
Materials	Brick for the exterior, cheap wood and paint for the interiors

# of Stories of Buildings	Varying from 1-4 stories to 14 stories.
Residential Bldgs	Mostly residential, except for the bars and pubs on the corner of each city block.
Empty Lots	Not available or exhibited within the documents given
Commercial Uses	Typically pubs or bars
Industrial Uses	Industrial uses are mostly indicated around the Brooklyn Navy Yard
Transportation	Most typically automobiles
Key Figures	Mayor LaGuardia and NYCHA

## QUESTIONS to Research Further

### QUESTIONS:

1. What were the precedent housing studies used to develop Farragut Housing?
2. Was there any idea of moving between buildings in the complex?
3. Who did NYCHA name the Farragut Housing Complexes after? Was he or she a key player in Vinegar Hill, or in the conception of public housing?

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

1. Question 1
  - a. Look at precedent housing studies around the time frame that Farragut Housing was proposed.
  - b. Compare the precedent studies to the design of Farragut Housing.
  - c. Was any of the research conclusive or informative?
2. Question 2
  - a. Refer back to the first question, but emphasize studies on the urban scale.
  - b. Compare the precedent studies to the design of Farragut Housing.



- c. Were any of the previous analysis informative or conclusive?
- 3. Question 3
  - a. Look at the history of Farragut Housing. Is there any text which relays information regarding the name "Farragut"?
  - b. Conduct more research procedures regarding the name "Farragut" relative to the 20th century.
  - c. Was any of the research conclusive of informative?

## SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

I enjoyed our visit to LAGCC Archives. Despite the confusion upon where to find the archive, it was fascinating to visit both another university and an archive within it. Upon turning numerous corners, we stumbled upon one of the first Steinway pianos. It was heavily protected, as it was encased in thick plexiglass. Along with the Steinway piano, numerous artifacts decorated the hallways, especially along the pathway towards the archives. Upon entering the archive, a small scale model which described a typical housing unit welcomed our visit. We proceeded onwards to two separate groups, to look at primary sources such as pictures that were taken in regards to Farragut Housing and - which is another prime example of a NYCHA project. I only wish that we were given ample time to inquire about more sources regarding our research projects.