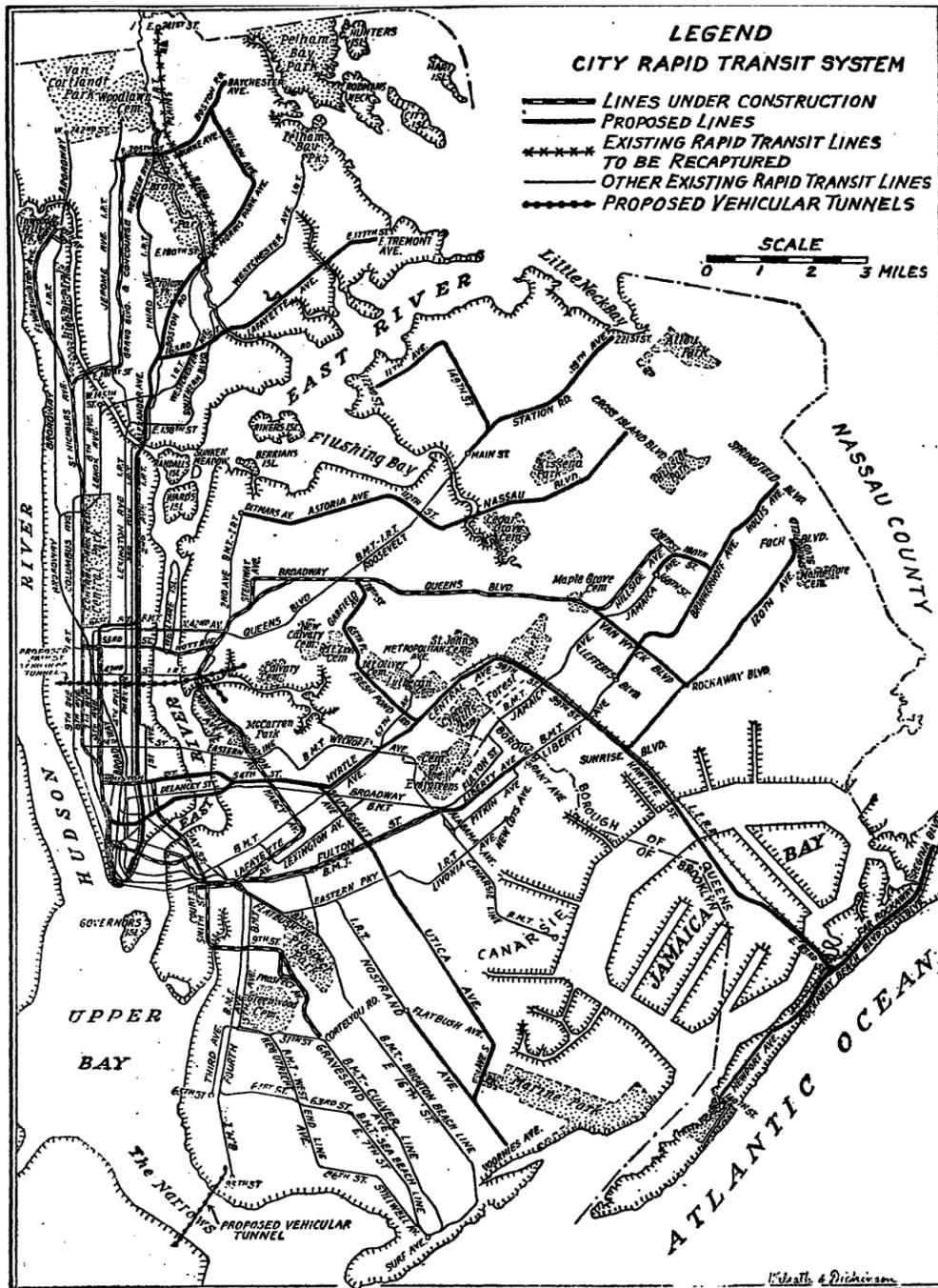


SITE REPORT

New York Public Library

HOW NEW SUBWAYS WILL LINK FOUR BOROUGHES.



Ben Sternhell

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INTRODUCTION

We visited the New York Public Library map room on Wednesday October 21 as part of our research project on the Farragut Houses. Our purpose was to look at maps of the area around the projects—DUMBO, downtown Brooklyn, Vinegar Hill—and see how the layout had changed over the years. For my own specific research, transportation to the area, it would have been helpful to study a selection of city transit maps, but unfortunately those were not available.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

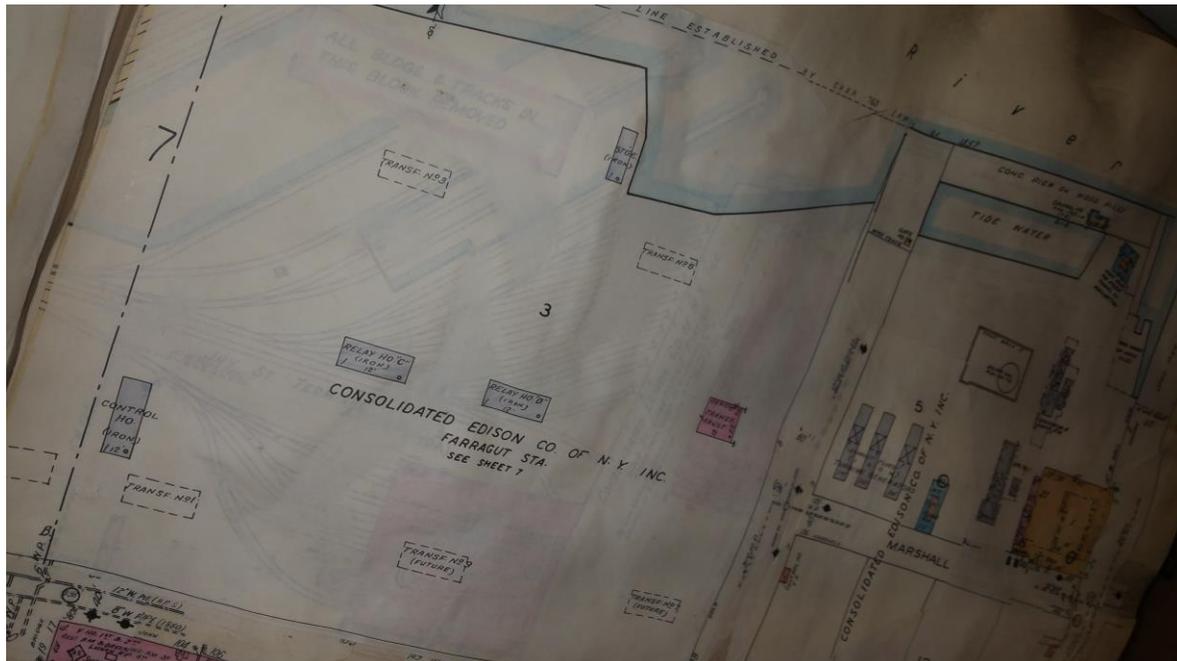
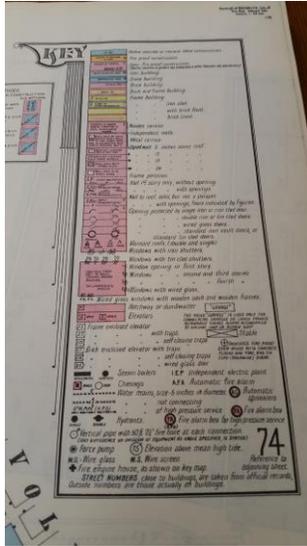
I'm looking forward to our visit to the New York Public Library map room. I'm very fond of that library; when I was a kid I used to sit on the steps and talk to the lions, Patience and Fortitude. I got a library card as soon as I could print my first name, though I mainly went to my local branches to take out books. I'm also looking forward to the visit because I've never been to the map room and I've always liked looking at maps. I really like geography so I find looking at old maps very interesting. I collect city maps whenever I travel—and of course I collect subway/metro/underground maps.

Matthew Allen Knutzen's article, "Unbinding the Atlas: Moving the NYPL Map Collection Beyond Digitization," was fascinating. I hadn't thought much—at all—before about the process of digitizing paper maps. It's an amazing project: not just simply putting maps online, but coordinating them with all sorts of other data about the region displayed and making them searchable not just by area names but by coordinates of longitude and latitude. That means it will be possible to find a map of a region even if the region had a different name or was still unnamed. It will be possible to visualize the changes in a region over time. An earlier project discussed, *Building a Globally Distributed Historical Sheet Map Collection*—"centered on a set of 776 topographic maps published in multiple editions by the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1877 to 1914"—would have been incredibly useful for another class I'm taking right now on immigration history. My own ancestors came from the Austro-Hungarian Empire during exactly those years.

It will be interesting to see the NYPL's map collection, hundreds of thousands of maps

spanning centuries—and it's exciting to think that in the future I'll be able to search many (most? all?) of this material online.

SITE DOCUMENTATION



SITE OBSERVATIONS

1. The main branch of the New York Public Library is an imposing architectural structure, like something we might see in Paris or other European cities. It reminds me of the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre on 46th Street.
2. The view up the steps framed by the famous stone lions is an iconic New York City scene.
3. We looked at about 10 maps, a minute fraction of the library's extensive collection.
4. Some of the maps were loose and some were in books.
5. All of the maps were old, and some were in much better condition than others.

QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the layout of the streets around Farragut Houses change over time?
2. How did the transit maps change over time?
3. How many transit maps are in the NYPL collection?
4. How old are the oldest maps?
5. Is the map room available to the general public?

HYPOTHESIS:

1. The layout of the streets probably changed significantly once the Farragut Houses were built.
2. Transportation to the area probably improved as more subway lines were built.
3. The map room probably contains a full collection of old transit maps.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

Subject	Data
When NYPL opened	May 23, 1911
Address of main branch	Fifth Avenue and 42 nd Street
Official name of main branch	Stephen A. Schwarzman Building
Names of stone lions	Patience and Fortitude
Architectural style of building	Beaux-Arts
Number NYPL branches	88 (plus 4 research libraries)
Number items in collection	15 million
When map room opened	Collection established 1898; room renovated 2005
Official name of map room	Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division
Number of maps in map room collection	433,000 sheet maps and 20,000 books and atlases
Number of NYC maps	more than 2,000 sheet maps and 18,000 atlas map sheets

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

I really enjoyed our visit to the New York Public Library map room. I'd been to the library many times, of course, but I'd never been to the map room before. I didn't even know it existed!

I looked at many different maps of the area around the Farragut Houses, generally known as DUMBO, downtown Brooklyn, and/or Vinegar Hill. I found lots of interesting information about the street layout and how it changed over the years. The most interesting thing actually was the fact that it **didn't** change very much until the Farragut Houses were constructed. At that point, the neighborhood was demolished. Streets disappeared, were deleted, replaced by superblocks.

I didn't find a lot of new information about transportation to the area—the main topic of my research project—because transit maps were not made available to us during our visit to the library. I did find one page in one book relating to the subway system, however, a map showing plans for the second system, the city's planned expansion of the subway right before the Great Depression. The Depression derailed the plans, and then World War II killed them entirely: there were no workers around to do the building and all available iron and steel was needed for the war effort. One part of the planned system, the Second Avenue subway, is still under construction today.

It was very meaningful to me to be surrounded by all those maps, the physical record of our changing city. I find maps—especially paper maps—fascinating, almost poetic, a way to be in touch with history. I'm glad I discovered the NYPL map room. I'm sure I'll return.

REFERENCES TO EXPLORE HYPOTHESIS

1. "100 Miles of Subway in New City Project," *The New York Times*, 16 September 1929; <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9A0DEED91F30E33ABC4E52DFBF668382639EDE>.**
2. "About the Map Division," New York Public Library website; <http://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/map-division>.
3. "About the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building," New York Public Library website; <http://www.nypl.org/about/locations/schwarzman>.
4. "Historical Maps," *nycsubway.org*; http://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/Historical_Maps.
5. Fallows, Deborah, "The New York Public Library," *The Atlantic*, 30 June 2015; <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2015/06/the-new-new-york-public-library/397322/>.
6. Goldberger, Paul, "Firestorm on Fifth Avenue," *Vanity Fair*, December 2012; <http://www.vanityfair.com/unchanged/2012/12/new-york-public-library-re-model-controversy>.
7. Petersen, Charles, "Lions in Winter," *n+1 Magazine: Issue 14: Awkward Age*, Summer 2012; <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-14/essays/lions-in-winter/>.

**This is the source of the photo of the map on my title page. After I found information about the "second system" in one book at the NYPL, I did some additional research to see how those plans had been reported at the time.