In the early 1800s, the number of ferry lines between Manhattan and Brooklyn steadily increased. As a result, Brooklyn began its transformation from a rural agricultural area to an urban metropolis. Researching the built environment in Brooklyn can provide a window into family history, business history, neighborhood history and so much more. This guide is intended to aid researchers in conducting such research.

The resources listed here are available at the Brooklyn Collection and online and can be used to research the histories of buildings in Brooklyn. These resources include maps and atlases, local newspapers, photographs, landmarks reports, directories and more.

For additional information, please contact the Brooklyn Collection at bcref@bklynlibrary.org.
Getting Started

Interested in learning more about a particular building in Brooklyn, but don’t know where to begin? Here are some tips to get started.

**Gather information:** Start with the building’s address, then familiarize yourself with its surroundings. What are the cross streets? What neighborhood is it in? This is also a good stage to determine a note-taking and organizational strategy for your research process. Will you save your notes and documents digitally or physically? Where will you store them?

**Determine block & lot number:** Some resources for building information will require a block and lot number. The numbers can also be helpful to identify specific properties in historic maps and atlases. New York City provides a tool for inputting an address to determine its block and lot number via the Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS).

**Identify research goals:** What do you hope to learn in the course of your research? Are you interested in the people who lived in or used the building, the building’s architecture, how it changed over time, or all of the above? Determining your goals can help guide your research tools and choices.

**Begin your research:** Let your research goals determine where it will be most helpful for you to start. For example, if you want to know more about who lived at a specific address, you might want to start with city directories.

**Let your research lead you:** As you discover more information, use it to guide further research. If you discover something new, you may want to return to a resource you had previously searched or a collection you had previously visited to see if you can find more using the new information you uncovered. And of course, don’t hesitate to ask a librarian for assistance.
Digital Resources

Maps Collection
Access from home without a library card
The maps collection, spanning 1666-2002, contains topographical, demographic, transit and street maps. A portion of the collection has been digitized and is available through our Digital Collections portal (see below for the full collection guide). There is a tutorial video available for the Digital Collections portal here, and there are detailed search tips available on the Advanced Search Page.
Search terms to try: Neighborhood names, street names.

Digitized Photographs
Access from home without a library card
Our collection of digitized photographs includes thousands of images from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle newspaper, the work of Brooklyn photographers, and more. Search an address, street, intersection or neighborhood name to find related images. There is a tutorial video available for the Digital Collections portal here, and there are detailed search tips available on the Advanced Search Page.
Search terms to try: Addresses, street names, neighborhood names, building names.

Brooklyn Newsstand
Access select titles from home without a library card. Full access at the Brooklyn Collection
Brooklyn Newsstand is a collection of digitized Brooklyn newspapers made possible through a partnership between Brooklyn Public Library and Newspapers.com. Search an address, street name, or intersection, or find out more about a particular neighborhood, with this rich source of local news coverage. There is a tutorial video available for this resource here. Additional titles are available on microfilm at the library (see below).
Search terms to try: Addresses, street names, neighborhood names, building names.

Fire Insurance Maps Online (FIMO)
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
A subscription database with searchable, full-color fire insurance maps and atlases. This resource is helpful for determining how buildings at a specific address or on a specific street have changed over time, and for discerning details about those buildings, such as the building material.
Search by address or browse by area and date.

Digitized City Directories, 1856-1967
Access from home without a library card
Digitized city and telephone directories from the Brooklyn Collection available via the Internet Archive. For additional directories on microfilm and in hard copy, see below. There is a tutorial video available for this resource [here](#).
Search terms to try: Addresses, street names.

PropertyShark
Access at the Brooklyn Collection with librarian assistance
This site combines proprietary data with public data. View the comprehensive listing of a given property including its sale history, ownership information, zoning etc. Foreclosure listings and comparable sales along with phone numbers and maps are also available. Search by address.

Archival Collections
Our archival collection guides can be keyword searched using ctrl+F.

Maps Collection, 1666-2002
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
A collection of maps depicting Brooklyn, New York City, and Long Island. Many of the maps in this collection are available online via our Digital Collections (see above). Search terms to try: Neighborhood names, street names.

Brooklyn Atlas Collection, 1855-1969
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The Brooklyn Atlas collection provides a wealth of information about Brooklyn geography and city planning from the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century. In addition to topographical information about elevation, water depth and natural features, atlases provide details on property owners, building construction and usage, street construction, modes of transportation, and water maintenance. Search terms to try: Neighborhood names, street names.
Local Newspapers on Microfilm
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The Local Newspapers on Microfilm Collection consists of 89 neighborhood and Brooklyn-wide newspapers covering the years 1835-1999. If you know your building’s date of construction or want to know more about the area or neighborhood where the building is located, these papers are a rich source of localized information. Many of these titles are also available digitally on Brooklyn Newsstand (see above). Search by using neighborhood names to select appropriate titles, and year ranges to select appropriate reels.

Brooklyn City and Telephone Directories, 1786-2017
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The many city and telephone directories held at Brooklyn Public Library include “criss-cross” directories, in which you can look up an address to find listings of residents. The collection guide details which directories are available in hard copy, on microfilm and digitally (see above for digitized directories). Search terms to try: Street names via indexes.

Letterhead Collection
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The Brooklyn Letterhead Collection includes letterhead from a wide range of Brooklyn businesses spanning 200 years of Brooklyn history. The finding aid lists the address from each letterhead and can be searched for addresses or street names to find out more about businesses that might have been located at a certain address. Search terms to try: Addresses, street names, neighborhood names.

Sanborn Maps on Microfilm, 1886-1951
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
Sanborn maps were designed to assist fire insurance agents in determining the degree of hazard associated with a particular property and therefore show the size, shape, and construction of dwellings, commercial buildings, and factories as well as fire walls, locations of windows and doors, sprinkler systems, and types of roofs. The maps also indicate widths and names of streets, property boundaries, building use, and house and block numbers. The maps on microfilm, which are available upon request in the Brooklyn Collection, are in black and white only. Search by selecting reels for appropriate neighborhoods and years.
Brooklyn Ephemera Collection
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The Brooklyn Ephemera Collection consists of catalogs, postcards, business cards, fliers, circulars, and other remnants of daily life in Brooklyn. There are sections for houses and housing as well as sections for types of buildings such as banks, theaters, and houses of worship.
Search terms to try: Neighborhood names, building types/names

Clippings Collection
Access at the Brooklyn Collection
The Brooklyn Collection maintains a collection of local news clippings organized by subject. These clippings date primarily to the second half of the twentieth century. Some relevant subject headings for buildings research include Real Estate, Development, and various neighborhood- and community-specific headings.
See a librarian for assistance searching this collection.

Books and Journals
Search our book and journal holdings by using the library’s Advanced Catalog Search and selecting “Brooklyn Collection” from the “Collections” dropdown menu.
Search terms to try: Neighborhood names, street names
Access at the Brooklyn Collection

Landmarks Designation Reports
The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the New York City agency that is responsible for identifying and designating the City's landmarks and the buildings in the City's historic districts. The LPC’s designation reports explain the architectural, historical, or cultural significance of an individual landmark or historic district and describe the significant features of the individual landmark or historic district at the time of designation, which provides the basis of regulating future changes to these properties.

NYC Planning Commission Reports & Proposals
Various reports and proposals published by the New York City Planning Commission regarding certain neighborhoods and areas in Brooklyn.
Other Resources

Brooklyn Historical Society House & Building Research Guide

New York City property records at the Department of Buildings, Department of Finance, the Department of Records/Municipal Archives, and the Landmarks Preservation Commission

Maps at the New York Public Library

The Real Estate Record & Builders Guide and the Real Estate Brochure Collection at the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library at Columbia University