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ROBERT MOSES, 1888-1981

Papers, 1912-1980

Compiled by Charles Kronick
March 1986

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RARE BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS DIVISION
ACCESSION SHEET

53 M 145 61 M 91 86 M 6
54 M 55 63 M 58
Accession# 55 M 36 64 M 83 Location Annex C 25-C-I-1/6; 25-J-2/6(R)
61 M 66 65 M 52
Title ROBERT MOSES PAPERS

Approximate inclusive dates 1912-1980

Date of receipt December 1953-January 1986

Received from Robert Moses and the Tri-
borough Bridge and Tunnel
Authority

Volume on arrival

Number of boxes (after reboxing) 134 RC, 6 AB, 57 Volumes; 146 Linear Feet

Condition Fair: many letters in the correspondence files are brittle and crumbling, as
are many of the clippings in the printed matter.

Restrictions

Description See attached sheets.

Special Formats Photographs Maps Audio Tapes Films Graphics
 Artifacts Machine-readable records
 Other (list) _____

Temporary catalog card added entries

Add from yellow sheet

Accessioned by CRK

Date MARCH 21, 1986

ROBERT MOSES PAPERS

Biographical Sketch

Robert Moses (1888-1981) was a public official whose vision played a major role in shaping the physical development of the New York Metropolitan area. Moses was born on December 18, 1888 and raised in New Haven, Connecticut and on East 46th Street in Manhattan. He graduated from Yale University in 1909, and went on to receive a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University in 1914. He began his career with the Municipal Research Bureau in 1913. By 1922 he had become involved in the areas to which he devoted most of his career: parks, construction and highways. Moses was married twice, and had two daughters. He died on July 29, 1981.

Moses was principally responsible for the construction of an enormous number of major public projects in the state and city of New York, including the Triborough Bridge, Queens Midtown Tunnel, Bronx-Whitestone Bridge, the Henry Hudson Bridge, the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, the Throg Neck's Bridge, and the Verrazano Narrows Bridge, as well as Jones Beach State Park, the Robert Moses State Parks, and the Robert Moses Power Plant on the Saint Lawrence River and Robert Moses Power Dam on the Niagara River. Moses was also responsible for the construction of much public housing in New York City.

During his long career, his offices included the following: President, Long Island State Park Commission, 1924-1963; chairman, New York State Council of Parks, 1924-1963; Secretary of State, New York State, 1927-1928; president, Jones Beach Parkway Authority, 1933-1963; president, Bethpage State Park Authority, 1933-1963; chairman, Emergency Public Works Commission, 1933-1934; commissioner, New York City Department of Parks, 1934-1960; chairman, member, and consultant, Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority, 1934-1981; New York City Construction Co-ordinator, 1942-1960; New York City Planning Commissioner, 1946-1960; chairman, New York State Power Authority, 1954-1962; president, New York World's Fair, 1960-1966; special advisor to the Governor of the State of New York on Housing, 1974-1975.

Scope and Content

The Robert Moses Papers provide a vast, though by no means comprehensive, view of Robert Moses' long career as a public official. The great number of positions which Moses held, many of them concurrently, over long periods of time, make it difficult to identify precisely which portions of the collection document which aspect of that career. Similarly, the often unorthodox means by which Moses sought to achieve his plans at times obscures any separation of duties. While it is possible to identify series in the papers, it is important to consider that Moses' concerns were far-reaching, and that he considered no project, whether parks, parkways, bridges, tunnels or housing, simply of one department, division or commission. As a result, the letterhead of a given department is no guarantee that the matter discussed in the letter is within the purview of that department. Similarly, over the span of the papers, Moses' secretaries and filing systems changed: some files are alphabetical-subject, while others are chronological.

The Robert Moses Papers can be divided into sixteen principal series: Personal Correspondence and Library Files, 1912-1980; Triborough Bridge and Tunnel (TBTA), 1932-1966; Emergency Public Works Commission, 1933-1934; Office of the City Construction Co-ordinator, 1933-1953; New York Gubernatorial Campaign, 1934; New York City Department of Parks, 1934-1958; New York Constitutional Convention, 1938; Long Island State Park Commission, 1953-1962; New York State Council of Parks, 1953-1962; Committee for Slum Clearance, 1954-1959; New York State Power

Authority, 1954-1962; 1964-65 New York World's Fair, 1960-1966; Speeches; 'Housing', 1924-1960; Printed Matter, 1934-1967; and Photographs. It is important to realize that Moses' activities were almost inseparable from each other, and his characteristic approach to his work involved many of the same questions, issues and personalities regardless of Moses' "official" relationship to the series under consideration. The contents of the series: correspondence, related press releases, reports, speeches, magazine and clippings, are also consistent from one series to another.

Series 1, Moses' Personal Papers and "Library" (personal copy) Files, represents the largest bulk and the greatest span of material. The early portions of these files contain materials relating to the Municipal Research Bureau, and Moses' early career as a reformer, the creation of Jones Beach, the Long Island State Park and parkway system - especially the acquisition of land and rights of way, and bond and funding issues, and Moses' tenure as Governor Alfred E. Smith's Secretary of State, the latter representing Moses' only real "political" appointment. These files also reflect his role in the Moreland Commission bank failure investigation of 1929, the creation of the State Park system, and the State Council of Parks, "home rule" for New York City, and reform in New York State government. Also included is material relating to banking regulation, early depression relief, and the 1939-40 World's Fair. Prominent correspondents include Alfred E. Smith, Herbert Lehman, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Benjamin Cardozo and Fiorello La Guardia. The later portions of the correspondence refer to the establishment of the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the 1964-65 World's Fair, the Hall of Fame of Great Americans, and extensive personal and family correspondence.

The files relating to the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA) form Series 2. They contain materials relating to the conflict with Harold Ickes, President Roosevelt, and the Federal government concerning Moses' continuing appointment as Chairman of the TBTA, as well as construction projects including the Triborough Bridge itself, the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, and later projects, such as the Verrazano Narrows Bridge. Other records in these files are marked "Housing" and "Co-ordinator" which relate to Moses' activities in these areas while at the TBTA. There are also materials relating to planned but unrealized TBTA projects, such as the Lower Manhattan Elevated Expressway.

The Emergency Public Works Commission, Series 3, pertains to early, local depression relief efforts in New York City, and the relationship of those efforts to Works Progress Administration and other New Deal projects. The material of the Office of the City Construction Co-ordinator, Series 4, represents a continuation of publicly funded building activities begun during the depression. The records of Moses' 1934 Gubernatorial campaign, Series 5, consist mainly of speeches, press releases, some correspondence, much background material on the issues of the election, including the generation of electrical power, banking regulation, and agricultural legislation and interests.

Series 6, Moses' correspondence files from the New York City Department of Parks, including the Zoo, and other Central Park Projects, and the expansion of parks and playgrounds throughout the city. Series 7 relates to the New York State Constitutional Convention of 1938, and consists of correspondence files on the administrative, legal and personal issues of New York governmental reform in the 1930's. Series 8 and 9, materials relating to the Long Island State Park Commission and the New York State Council of Parks, concern the same issues of development, maintenance and improvement in the two governing bodies over the majority of New York Parks, both controlled by Moses, and treated as practically one entity.

Series 10, materials relating to the Committee for Slum Clearance, reflect Moses' activities in the area of urban housing and redevelopment of what were considered "blighted areas" in New York. The files include correspondence, reports, and plans for "Title 9" projects in the Bronx, Upper Manhattan, the Washington Square area, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, and Brooklyn.

Series 11, correspondence files regarding the New York State Power Authority, concerns most prominently the development of power generating facilities on the Niagara and St. Lawrence Rivers, also in these files is correspondence documenting Moses' requests for waiver of the New York State mandatory retirement regulations.

Moses' library files on the 1964-65 World's Fair, Series 12, consist of photocopies of letters and memos generated by Moses and his staff in the office of the President of the Fair, as well as copies of letters directed to him, or needing his consideration. The correspondence deals with the soliciting and construction of exhibits and facilities at the Fair, and administration of the Fair after its opening in 1964. Series 13 and 14, "Speeches" and "Housing", consist of items from throughout Moses' career; the speeches are a selection of Moses' many addresses at official openings, graduations, and ceremonies of every sort, while the housing files include letters, reports and press releases from a variety of sources.

The Printed Matter, Series 15, is largely comprised of TBTA "Greenbooks". These volumes are annual compilations prepared by the TBTA from 1934 to 1966 of official reports, speeches, magazines, and clippings on a variety of subjects with Moses' range of interests, but not necessarily related directly to the TBTA. There are also complete transcripts of the Moreland Commission proceedings of 1929, and other unsorted printed items. Finally, Series 16, Photographs, is a small selection of publicity and news service photographs of Moses.

ROBERT MOSES PAPERS

Container Listing

BOX

CONTENTS

Personal and "Library" Correspondence (Series 1)

1	1912-1950
2-3	1915-1926
4-7	1927-1929
8-9	1930-1932
10	1933-1934 A-L
11	1935-1936 A-S
12	1935-1936 T-Z, 1937-38 A-Mc
13	1937-1938 M-Z, 1939-40 A-F
14	1939-1940 G-Z
15	1941-1942 A-M
16	1941-1942 M-Z
17	1943 A-H
18	1943 I-P
19	1943 P-U
20	1943 V-Z, 1942-43, A-Z, 1944 A-E
21	1944 E-L
22	1944 L-P
23	1944 P-Z
24	1945 (and various dates) A-E
25	1945 F-M
26	1945 N-Z, 1946 A-B
27	1946 C-M
28	1946 N-Z
29	1947 A-K
30	1947 L-Z, 1948 A
31	1948 B-I
32	1948 J-Z, 1949 A-B
33	1947-1948 A-Z
34	Ca. 1940's A-G
35	1949 C-M
36	1949 N-Z, 1950 A-E
37	1950 F-Z
38	1951 A-M
39	1951 N-Z, 1952 A-H
40	1952 I-Z
41	1953 A-Mc
42	1953 Mc-Z, 1954 A-J
43	1954 K-Z
44	1955-1956
45	1957-1958
46	1959
47	1960-1961
48	1961-1962
49	1963-1964
50	1954-1968
51	1960-1976
52	1965-1966

ROBERT MOSES PAPERS

BOX

CONTENTS

Personal and "Library" Correspondence 1912-1980 (Series 1)

53	1967
54-55	1968
56-57	1969
58-59	1970
59-60	1971
61-63	1972 (and other dates)
64-65	1973
66	1974
67	1975
68	1977
69	1977-1978
70	1978
71	1979-1980

Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority 1932-1966 (Series 2)

72-74	1932-1953
75	1953-1955
76	1955-1957
77	1957-1959
78	1959-1960
79	1961-1962
80	1963-1964
81	1964
82-83	1965
84-86	1966

86-89 Emergency Public Works Commission 1933-1934 (Series 3)

90-91 Office of the City Construction Co-ordinator ca. 1933-1953 (Series 4)

92-96 New York Gubernatorial Campaign 1934 (Series 5)

New York City Department of Parks 1934-1958 (Series 6)

97	1934-1939
98	1940-1946
99	1947-1953
100	1954-1956
101-102	1957-1958

103-104 New York State Constitutional Convention 1938 (Series 7)

Long Island State Park Commission 1953-1962 (Series 8)

105	1953-1959
<u>106</u>	<u>1959-1960</u>
107	1955-1960
108	1960-1962

New York State Council of Parks 1953-1962 (Series 9)

109	1953-1954
110	1954-1958

ROBERT MOSES PAPERS

<u>BOX</u>	<u>CONTENTS</u>
111	1958-1962 <u>New York State Power Authority 1954-1962 (Series 10)</u>
112	1954-1957
113	1957-1959
114-115	1955-1962 <u>Committee on Slum Clearance 1955-1959 (Series 11)</u>
116	1955-1957
117-118	1958-1959 <u>New York World's Fair, 1964-1965, Inc. 1960-1966 (Series 12)</u>
119	1960 January - October
120	1960 November - 1961 June
121	1961 July - December
122	1962 January - August
123	1962 August - 1963 February
124	1963 February - August
125	1963 August - 1964 January
126	1964 January - May
127	1964 May - July
128	1964 August - December
129	1965 January - April
130	1965 April - August
131	1965 August - 1966 April
132	1966 May - December
133	World's Fair clippings and printed matter
134	<u>Housing 1924-1960 (Series 13)</u>
135-136	<u>Speeches (Series 14)</u>
137-194	<u>Printed Matter (Series 15) (VOLUMES)</u> Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority "Green Books" and other materials 1934-1967
195-196	Moreland Commission Proceedings 1929
197-198	Unsorted Printed Matter
199	Oversize Printed Matter
200	<u>Photographs (Series 16)</u>