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Rebecca Rankin's Campaign for a Municipal Archives in New York, 1920–1952

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Originally established in 1914 to help educate the city's electorate and improve the decision making of public officials, the municipal reference library of New York City, unlike others created during and after the Progressive Era, expanded its mission to include record-keeping and archival responsibilities. Encountering indifference from city officials, librarian Rebecca Rankin used her understanding of government operations, politics, and public relations to convince these leaders of the need for a municipal archives to preserve historic documents and the need for a system to manage and provide access to departmental records. In doing so, Rankin furthered the development of the archival profession in the first half of the twentieth century. Her decades-long efforts demonstrate the challenges and opportunities librarians encountered in reconciling the missions and methodologies of libraries, archives, and records management.

Prior to the establishment of the National Archives in 1934 and the organization of the Society of American Archivists in 1936, librarians played a significant role in improving record-keeping practices in the United States. Business librarians in banks, railroads, and insurance companies instituted measures to preserve, organize, and provide access to institutional records and acquired books and journals to serve the information needs of these corporations. During the Progressive Era librarians in state government, particularly in Wisconsin, adopted these special library practices to help legislators make more informed policy decisions. Following these developments and motivated by advocates who wanted to reform local governments by making them more accountable and efficient, larger cities began to establish municipal reference libraries as centralized sources of information for citizens and elected officials. Municipal reference libraries, with a mission to collect and disseminate civic information, were promoted by librarians working with government documents who wanted to create a politically educated electorate and to improve the decision making of public officials. These libraries also were championed by businessmen who sought to apply the principles

of scientific management to local governments in order to increase the efficiency of public administration and create a rational bureaucracy free from corruption that would give them access to city contracts. In New York City the development of a municipal reference library in 1913 and its administration by the New York Public Library had a unique and unintended consequence—the creation of a municipal archives.

Rebecca Browning Rankin, director of the Municipal Reference Library from 1920 to 1952, worked with Mayor Fiorello La Guardia throughout his three administrations (1934–45) to complete the transformation of the local government begun during the Progressive Era—from one based on partisan political considerations to a more rational, expert-oriented administration. As part of this process Rankin convinced Mayor La Guardia and his successor, William O'Dwyer, to establish an archives as a division of the Municipal Reference Library (MRL) in 1951. Although her primary goal was the preservation of historic documents, for practical and political reasons Rankin developed a records management program that further rationalized the administration of the local government by systematizing the retention and disposal of records. Upon Rankin's retirement in 1952 the Municipal Archives and Records Center of the City of New York became an independent branch of the New York Public Library (NYPL), which managed its operations for the next seventeen years.

Beginning in the 1890s, historians who had obtained doctoral degrees from university programs that emphasized the use of primary sources became concerned with the preservation and accessibility of government records and convinced the American Historical Association to investigate state and city record-keeping practices in the United States. The association established a Public Archives Commission in 1899 to conduct statewide surveys and list government records and the locations where they were held. Many of the investigators commented that they found the records neglected, in deplorable condition, and housed in dangerous situations. They also reported that the individuals responsible for securing and caring for the records had not assessed their value, had done nothing to arrange them in any order, and had little knowledge of their collections, making the records inaccessible to government employees, the public, and researchers. In New York the investigator for the commission described a similar situation in the town and city offices he visited and suggested that the state government intervene to protect documents with historic value.¹

The New York State Library had been given the authority to collect public records, but its administrators had little interest in storing and

preserving the records of actions taken by its officials and employees, and they made no attempt to preserve records produced by local governments. In 1895 the office of state historian was created to collect and publish records recounting the history of New York. While he did not attempt to save documents from destruction, the first state historian did publish some records of historical interest that were stored in the state library. After a fire destroyed the state library in March 1911 the state legislature passed legislation transferring the historian's office to the Education Department and created within the department the Division of Public Records to investigate local government record keeping. Employees of the division surveyed the archival material held by cities and counties and found the records in the same neglected and inaccessible conditions as the Public Archives Commission had more than a decade earlier.²

During this period political reformers in Wisconsin, particularly leaders of the movement to establish special libraries to improve the performance of government and the state library commission, began promoting the acquisition of government documents by public libraries to provide voters with the opportunity to inform themselves about the actions taken by their representatives. In 1901 the Wisconsin Free Library Commission sponsored a bill that created a legislative reference department where librarians could provide research assistance to government employees and elected officials using the public records collected by the state historical society.³ Charles McCarthy, the first director of the Legislative Reference Bureau, provided research and bill-drafting services to aid inexperienced legislators, compiled lists of state documents, and distributed catalog cards to local libraries so they could acquire and provide access to these documents. McCarthy also taught library courses in the use of government information sources at the University of Wisconsin, where he argued for the collection of municipal government reports by public libraries.⁴ These courses were designed to introduce political science and economics graduate students to legislative research and train them for leadership positions in special libraries dedicated to state and local governments.

McCarthy's campaign to collect government reports and documents, acquire primary sources and unpublished material on public administration, and develop a staff with expert research skills in related subject areas began to spread to other states. Progressive reformers, motivated by corrupt practices employed by political machines in alliances with corporations and criminal organizations, had created the National Municipal League in 1894, which, by the turn of the century, had developed a model for city government run by trained public administrators who

would be held accountable by publicizing their activities.⁵ Their desire for professional expertise and transparency in local government led to a need for depositories of information to aid municipal officials and employees in the performance of their jobs as well as to educate and inform citizens about their city's activities and past decisions. In 1908 McCarthy testified before a league committee studying state legislative reference libraries to determine how they could be adapted to the needs of cities. Municipal reference libraries would be wise business investments, he told the committee members, "where dearly bought experience could be collected, so that we won't make the awful mistakes we have been making, not merely through corruption, but through ignorance and lack of information."⁶ After hearing from McCarthy the National Municipal League called for the establishment of municipal reference libraries in all major cities and recommended that they be managed by public library directors chosen by impartial, nonpartisan boards to minimize political interference.⁷

The city of Baltimore had formed the first municipal reference library in 1907, when it created the Department of Legislative Reference with a mission to serve the information needs of the mayor, the city council, and the state legislature of Maryland.⁸ For more than thirty years Baltimore had a city library, and both the city librarian and the director of the Department of Legislative Reference were instructed to collect and care for records produced by the local government. However, their primary responsibility was to answer administrative and legislative reference questions, and they paid little attention to the archival aspects of their jobs. The city librarian published early records of Baltimore in several volumes before the outbreak of the First World War, but after the war the library's reputation declined under poor leadership, and its operations were absorbed into the Department of Legislative Reference.⁹

Baltimore established a Bureau of Archives in 1927, but it operated with little support and under ineffective leadership and failed to accomplish its preservation goals. In 1954 Baltimore instituted a program of records management and established a records office, which took control of the city archives and became a section in the Department of Legislative Reference. The records management program focused on the destruction of obsolete records and the microfilming of current records to free office space and save money. The preservation of records with historical value was neglected until 1978, when a concerned administration appointed a professional archivist, who secured funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to arrange, describe, and provide access to public records.¹⁰

Other cities established municipal reference libraries as part of their local governments—such as Philadelphia; Chicago, where the library developed from the Bureau of Statistics and became a separate agency in 1912; and Honolulu, which created a library to support city and county functions in 1929. In Cleveland and Detroit the public library systems opened and operated branch reference libraries in City Hall. In Milwaukee the public library began operating a legislative reference bureau in 1908 that became a city agency a year later, but in 1913 it reverted back to the library, where it remained for sixty years. Despite their different administrative affiliations, all these municipal reference libraries had depository responsibility for city government reports and publications.¹¹ Their collections contained documents that were unique and irreplaceable, conferring an archival function on these libraries. However, only in Baltimore and Honolulu, where the revised charter of 1973 assigned to the director of the municipal reference library the duty of managing the local government archives and records center, were archival responsibilities legally mandated.¹² In both instances the archival programs resulted from the desire of elected officials to save money on office space and to control the cost of storing records rather than from initiatives made by the directors of the municipal reference libraries.

While the development of special libraries to improve the administration of municipal governments in the United States provided an opportunity to correct problems with record keeping in these cities, only in New York did the establishment of a municipal reference library result in the creation of an archival and records management program.

New York's municipal reference library began when the city comptroller opened a library in the Department of Finance in 1913 with records from his office and publications purchased on the recommendation of the public library's government documents librarian. A year later the privately governed New York Public Library was asked to take charge of the comptroller's library. For the next fifty-five years the NYPL managed the Municipal Reference Library of the City of New York. During this period it operated under the effective leadership of long-tenured directors, who received support from the administrators of the New York Public Library for all of their duties, including the archival aspect of the library's work. They did their best to collect and preserve the records of local government officials, some of whom had little appreciation for the administrative, policy-making, and historical research value of the documents they had been creating, despite repeated attempts to educate them.

The Municipal Reference Library of New York City

In the latter half of the nineteenth century New York County had a Hall of Records, which held deeds, mortgages, and court proceedings, but little effort had been made to collect, organize, and preserve the historical records of the city of New York. Several grand juries were convened to investigate local government record keeping, and all presented findings that criticized the condition and location of these records.¹³ However, the Board of Aldermen, the city's legislative body, ignored these findings and did nothing to correct the situation.

The Public Archives Commission of the American Historical Association, created in 1899, surveyed the documents produced by the city and found them scattered among many departmental offices with little care and organization and with no facilities available for their use. The commission's report, presented in December 1900 by Herbert L. Osgood, a professor of American history at Columbia University, described how the records "containing the central thread of the city's history" were dumped indiscriminately in vaults under City Hall.¹⁴ Osgood declared that legal provisions for the care of this material were inadequate and that for all practical purposes the records of the local government were unavailable for inspection or use. He appealed for "radical change in the method of dealing with them," recommending that "the older records of the city departments [should go] into one repository and [be placed] under competent management."¹⁵ Other concerned citizens came to the same conclusion—that the records of the city with historical value should be gathered together in a suitable building, properly arranged and classified as well as protected from fire and dampness.¹⁶

The New York Public Library took custody of records from the mayor's office in 1903, the same ones Osgood had discovered and that were later described as "a mass of debris that filled a storeroom in the basement of City Hall."¹⁷ These manuscripts, representing the administration of the city during the decades following the Civil War, were first transported to the Lenox Library Building, where they were cleaned and appraised for historical value. They were then organized and cataloged and in 1911 transferred to the NYPL's new Central Building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. The library also assumed responsibility for the original city charters issued by the Dutch and British governments, while the New York Historical Society, established in 1804, saved from destruction ledgers and tax books donated by the city comptroller as well as colonial deeds and land grants that the society had acquired from among the papers of prominent New Yorkers.¹⁸

After the formation of the city of Greater New York in 1898 dramatically increased the size and complexity of the local government, the Merchants' Association requested that a municipal reference library be created to assist its members trying to do business with the city.¹⁹ The proposal, authored by a leader in the efficiency movement, referred specifically to the time-consuming process of tracking down reports, contracts, plans and specifications, and any document dealing with the transactions of city departments. The author cited the value of the government document collections assembled by the city of Baltimore and the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau and asked for a centralized source of information in or near City Hall, financed by the local government but operated by the NYPL.²⁰ This request and other efforts to establish a municipal reference library were blocked by members of the Board of Aldermen, who were obligated to follow the wishes of Tammany Hall, the Manhattan Democratic Party's political club. The leaders of Tammany Hall feared that well-kept records and a centralized source of information, available to the public, would jeopardize their opportunities for deal making and "honest graft."²¹ The board twice vetoed plans to create a library before the city comptroller established the Municipal Reference Library in the Department of Finance in March 1913.²²

A year after the Municipal Reference Library opened the new, reform-minded mayor, John Purroy Mitchel, transferred the library from the Department of Finance to the administration of the NYPL and relocated it to the fifth floor of the Municipal Building.²³ In October 1914 the director of the NYPL, Edwin H. Anderson, appointed Charles C. Williamson municipal reference librarian.²⁴ Within a week of taking over, Williamson began a campaign to attract members of Mayor Mitchel's administration to the library with the publication of a weekly bulletin entitled *Municipal Reference Library Notes*. It featured a monthly list of departmental publications—the only inventory for reports and documents printed for or by the local government. In December a bill passed by the Board of Aldermen required agency and department heads to send four copies of each of their reports and publications to the MRL.²⁵ This depository ordinance formed the basis for the library's New York City document collection.

In 1915 Mayor Mitchel asked Williamson to begin publishing municipal yearbooks, which described the organization and functions of city departments and reported on their recent activities.²⁶ Williamson also assisted in the compilation and publication of the *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784–1831*.²⁷ Its publication in 1917 fulfilled a goal of individuals and groups interested in the history of the city and

the preservation of its public records. The indexing and publication of this manuscript collection to make it accessible to researchers were in accord with the standard practice of libraries and historical societies.²⁸ The original deliberations by the local legislative body were entrusted to the MRL, introducing an archival aspect into its work.²⁹

The staff and the responsibilities of the library grew quickly during Mayor Mitchel's sympathetic administration, but Mitchel was defeated for reelection in November 1917 by John F. Hylan, who had the support of William Randolph Hearst's newspapers and the Manhattan Democratic Party.³⁰ During his administration Hylan followed the political practices of Tammany Hall in emphasizing personal connections and party loyalty and deemphasized the use of research, information, and expert advice. Early in Hylan's term Williamson took a leave of absence as director of the MRL, while his assistant librarian assumed extra duties, and resigned in May 1918 after recognizing the unenviable and ineffective position the library would occupy under Hylan's administration.³¹ He remarked at the time that his decision was "based partly on personal grounds . . . and partly on certain political conditions in New York City which seem to threaten the usefulness of my present position."³² Within a few months, Rebecca Rankin was named assistant to the new municipal reference librarian, Dorsey Hyde.

Rankin Promotes the MRL and Its Objectives

Rebecca Browning Rankin was born into an established Presbyterian family in Piqua, Ohio, on April 5, 1887. After her graduation in 1909 from the University of Michigan, she worked as a cataloger in the university's library. In 1912 Rankin received a scholarship to attend Simmons College in Boston, where she earned a degree in library science within a year. She then accepted a position as the librarian of the State Normal School in Ellensburg, Washington. After five years of working to create a library to help train teachers, Rankin took a leave of absence to visit her recently widowed mother and older sister in New York City. She decided to relocate to help support her family, and in September 1918 she accepted a position as assistant to NYPL director Edwin Anderson. At the end of the year he appointed Rankin assistant librarian at the MRL.³³

When she went to work at the library in lower Manhattan, Rankin found that Williamson had created a workable classification system for the collection of local government reports and documents, remarking that "he did a magnificent job."³⁴ The scheme he adopted followed the principles devised by Adelaide Hasse that became the basis for the U.S.

superintendent of documents' numbering system.³⁵ Hasse had applied this system of classification and arrangement, based on provenance or origin of the record, to the collection of the Public Documents Division of the NYPL when she became the division's head librarian in 1897.³⁶ At the MRL documents were grouped according to the unit of government that had created them, and the cataloger used a modified version of Cutter's *Two-Figure Author Table* to assign initials to each record based on the name of the department, with numbers identifying the type of document (e.g., annual report, bulletin, or minutes) as well as when in the record series it was issued.³⁷ This system resembled the classification of documents by government structure and provenance that was being promoted by NYPL's keeper of manuscripts, Victor Paltsits, who was leading the Public Archives Commission's effort on the national level to develop a "manual of archival economy."³⁸

When Rankin began work at the MRL, she stumbled upon a major and persistent problem in the New York City collection—the lack of space for archival storage. "The very first thing when I came to the Municipal Reference Library in 1919, [I saw] the aisles . . . between the stacks in that entire room we had filled up with volumes and volumes of the *Minutes of the Common Council from 1780 to 1835*," she recalled. Because of "those *Minutes* . . . you actually couldn't get in and use the document collection." Rankin took charge of the situation: "Right away I had to find room in the basement [of the Municipal Building] to have these things moved down there."³⁹

A month after beginning work at the MRL Rankin assumed responsibility for its daily operations, and a year later, when Hyde resigned, he recommended to Mayor Hylan as his successor "Rebecca Browning Rankin who has shown marked ability [as my assistant]."⁴⁰ On February 14, 1920, the day Rankin officially assumed the position of municipal reference librarian, NYPL director Anderson wrote to the secretary of Fiorello H. La Guardia, the president of the Board of Aldermen, stating that "Miss Rankin is anxious to get in touch with you, in the hope that you may give her an opportunity to show that the Library may be of use to President La Guardia."⁴¹ Anderson's letter was designed to immediately enlist an ally for the NYPL during the upcoming budget season, but it also led to a long-term relationship between Rankin and La Guardia that benefited the library's employees as well as all New Yorkers.

La Guardia soon made use of the municipal library's resources. As a member of Congress from New York, he had supported consolidation and municipal ownership of the subway system, but he admitted when he entered local government in 1920 that he had little knowledge or

understanding of the city's transit problems.⁴² In his study of the situation he frequently called upon Rankin and the resources of the MRL to answer his questions and further his education. After a year of research La Guardia considered himself "something of an expert" on the subject, and in his second annual message to the Board of Aldermen he proposed a unified system of rapid transit under the jurisdiction of the city.⁴³

After completing a two-year term as president of the Board of Aldermen, La Guardia returned to Congress, although he remained interested in the local politics of New York and maintained contact with Rankin. Meanwhile, Rankin and her staff labored under difficult conditions of neglect as their primary clients, the mayor and his senior administrators, ignored their efforts. Rankin commented that trying to run the library effectively during these years was "awfully uphill work" because city leaders did not give her "any apparent support, [and] no encouragement."⁴⁴ In a 1924 article she promoted the belief espoused by the original proponent of municipal reference libraries, Charles McCarthy, that these libraries were a wise business investment where local government documents and reports could be consulted to inform and improve decision making.⁴⁵ The mayor's office, however, remained unresponsive to her message that the information provided by the staff of the library and the records preserved in the collections of the MRL could help them design better policy solutions and save taxpayers money.

Despite this lack of encouragement from the mayor's office, Rankin persevered in her campaign to educate city officials and employees about the resources of the library, and she did not miss an opportunity to persuade them to consider the benefits of consulting its collections of documents and publications. As part of her public relations program Rankin sent congratulatory letters to newly elected officials, wrote articles, and listed recent acquisitions in the MRL's *Notes*. In January 1926, when Tammany Hall stalwart and state senator James J. Walker succeeded Mayor Hylan, Rankin followed her customary practice and wrote a letter congratulating Walker and offering assistance in answering any inquiry about municipal government. The "history of the City's affairs are stored in our files," she wrote. "All such information is at your instant disposal. Our sources are unlimited and our desire to serve you to the utmost is real."⁴⁶ Rankin recognized that all of the department heads from Hylan's administration who had received the approval of Tammany Hall had been reappointed, and she was prepared for the library's potential to be ignored again.⁴⁷ Her suspicions were confirmed when Walker told an interviewer: "If I spent all my time reading reports I'd have to go without eating or sleeping."⁴⁸

In March 1928 the program director of radio station WNYC agreed to give Rankin two blocks of airtime to promote the MRL and its fifteenth anniversary. She convinced Williamson, who had been named dean of the library school at Columbia University a year earlier, to give one radio talk while she presented the other one. Williamson delivered an address about the founding of the library and his years as the municipal reference librarian. During her radio address Rankin stated that "transportation, transit and traffic are uppermost problems and the Library makes a special collection of [this] material . . . [to be] up-to-the-minute."⁴⁹ She had her staff continually discard material that was dated, she told her listeners, but the MRL was the one place where they could find the "original manuscripts, letters and documents from the Departments or the Mayor's office."⁵⁰ This archival aspect of its work kept the shelves of the library full to overflowing, and its quarters on the fifth floor of the Municipal Building were extremely overcrowded.

The radio broadcasts generated enough interest that the director of WNYC asked Rankin to do a regular radio program. To promote the broadcasts and the MRL, Rankin also gave interviews to local newspapers. The *New York Times* and *Sun* ran brief notices. The *New York World*, noted for its crusades for government reform, took the information Rankin provided on the history of the library and published the article "City Officials Ignore Law Ordering Annual Departmental Reports. Few Bureaus . . . File Copies with MRL," which criticized the Tammany Hall-directed administrations of Hylan and Walker for not printing accounts of their activities.⁵¹ Rankin refuted overstatements in the *World* article about the number of unpublished reports, but she did not deny or correct the basic criticism that during ten years of Democratic Party rule the government of New York City had been negligent about recording its actions and making those records available to the public.⁵²

The New York Public Library Preserves Local Government Documents

In the sixth and final volume of the book *Iconography of Manhattan Island*, published in 1928, the compiler of its bibliography, Victor Paltsits, the keeper of manuscripts for the NYPL and chief of its American History Division, repeated Professor Osgood's plea for the establishment of a municipal archives.⁵³ Paltsits reported, as Osgood did twenty-eight years earlier, that his investigation of the "public records of the various offices and departments, scattered as they are all around town, has strikingly emphasized the need of centralization in a City archives building."

He noted that during the first quarter of the twentieth century the local government had done little to correct this situation and that many records had been either "destroyed by fire . . . [or] packed into storage quarters where they are inaccessible or in jeopardy, and still others have been officially destroyed as useless for administrative purposes, but with little thought given as to their service to scholarship."⁵⁴

Rankin supplied Paltsits with information for his description of police department records prior to the consolidation of Greater New York in 1898. Osgood in 1900 had found the records organized and intact. In 1914, however, they had been deemed expendable, removed from police headquarters, and sold to a paper mill, where they were ground into pulp; the destroyed records were from the years when Tammany Hall controlled appointments to the police department and required kickbacks in the form of campaign donations for jobs and promotions. Paltsits also noted that records in the custody of departments and agencies of the local government were in disorder and difficult to locate due to personnel changes that contributed to ignorance of their location and because of the lack of adequate rules and regulations governing their care and control.⁵⁵

In his introductory essay to the bibliography Paltsits described how he and other NYPL employees had attempted to preserve some of the city's historic records. While compiling the bibliography he found Parks Department documents dumped in bundles on the floor of the Arsenal Building in Central Park. In order to identify them Paltsits opened the dirty bundles, cleaned and ordered the papers, and then cataloged the records. He also noted that in 1903, at the request of Mayor Seth Low, the NYPL had taken possession of "a mass of debris that filled a store-room in the basement of City Hall."⁵⁶ Paltsits referred to these papers as a "filthy jumble . . . yet they represented the most valuable materials of the city's administration for about a half a century" up to 1897.⁵⁷ After they had been appraised and arranged in archival order by the staff of the American History Division, these manuscript records filled more than one hundred boxes. In 1925 Paltsits had the boxes transferred to the MRL and placed under Rankin's supervision.⁵⁸

In the essay Paltsits made no mention of any effort or initiative taken by city officials to care for the documents they were creating. His enumeration of the locations and the overwhelming volume of documents produced by the city of New York served to highlight the need for radical change in record keeping. The information in the bibliography supported Paltsits's contention that "only a distinct organization, under a trained body of administrators, in a distinct city archives building for housing

all older records no longer needed in the business of the city, will bring about the changes that are imperative."⁵⁹

Rankin Proposes a Municipal Archives for New York

In January 1930 the comptroller requested additional office space for the Department of Finance on the fifth floor of the Municipal Building, including the rooms housing the collections of the MRL.⁶⁰ Rankin saw this as an opportunity to escape the overcrowded conditions she and her staff had labored under. Her request to move the MRL to a larger space on the south end of the twenty-second floor was granted, more than doubling the space available for the local government reports and publications the MRL received. However, it was not enough room to serve as an archives for historical documents, nor did she have the legal mandate to acquire these primary resources.⁶¹

In August 1930 New York governor Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed an investigator to lead the first of three separate inquiries into the activities of the New York City government. These investigations uncovered enough evidence to force Walker to resign the mayor's office in September 1932, and he was replaced by another Tammany Hall politician, who served the remaining year of Walker's term.⁶² When Fiorello La Guardia was elected mayor in November 1933, ending fifteen years of Tammany Hall administrations, Rankin did not wait until his inauguration to offer the services of the MRL. She sent La Guardia a personal letter of congratulations, mentioning her happy memories of his presidency of the Board of Aldermen and reminding him of the assistance the library had provided him. "We are prepared to serve a new and efficient mayor who knows well how to make use of facts as gathered by a municipal research agency like ours," she wrote.⁶³ La Guardia assured her that "I shall, of course, have many occasions to use the Municipal Reference Library and I am glad to feel that there are old friends there to whom I may turn."⁶⁴

After the first of the year, at the request of the new mayor, Rankin and her staff searched for sources of revenue to balance the budget and pay for programs to relieve the suffering of destitute New Yorkers reeling from the effects of the Great Depression. The information they provided helped to shape legislation that established an emergency sales tax for the relief of the unemployed. Rankin hoped that increased involvement in the affairs of the local government would help further her goal of preserving records documenting the history of the city of New York. Rankin voiced this optimistic outlook in the MRL's annual report to the

NYPL, in which she cited the administrative use of the documents collection by the chief engineer of the Board of Estimate, the budget-making body of the city government, who provided evidence in court about a real estate appraisal that saved the city and taxpayers \$7,000.⁶⁵

In November 1934 La Guardia asked Rankin to help the Department of Finance organize an exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York on the relationship between taxes and services. She quickly began to track down old tax maps and property valuations for an educational display on budgeting. These records documented the history of the financial development of New York City, so Rankin asked Harry Lydenberg, who had recently become director of the NYPL, whether she should try to acquire them for the NYPL.⁶⁶ "I know the Comptroller very well and that approach is very important. We should act now before the end of his term," Rankin told him. "I shall work constantly toward this end and confer with many Commissioners, if you wish me to act as your liaison."⁶⁷ Lydenberg answered, "Yes indeed, be sure of our willingness to have you do what you can to secure the old records. They certainly belong in the custody of the library rather than in the care of the Museum . . . When you think the time is ripe for action let me know."⁶⁸

Rankin also contacted Paltsits, who had assisted the Public Archives Commission in developing *The Preservation of Local Archives: A Guide for Public Officials*, published two years earlier by the American Historical Association.⁶⁹ During the first week of December 1934 she invited him to inspect the storage rooms assigned to the comptroller in the basement of the Municipal Building. Paltsits sent a memo to Lydenberg describing the damp, crowded vaults far below street level and seconded Rankin's recommendation that quick action was needed to save the papers stored there, which represented the primary record of the early growth of the city of New York. Paltsits said the comptroller agreed with them that the NYPL should receive the old tax rolls, maps, logs, and registers of property assessments of the finance department and that Rankin would draw up the formal agreement to acquire the documents created prior to 1830. "This date marks a line of demarcation from a provincial city to an expansive one," he explained in his note to Lydenberg. Paltsits said he and Rankin shared similar feelings about the acquisition and the need for a municipal archives. "We think this deposit should be asked [for] until the City, itself, erects a City Archives Building in which to concentrate all of its various department records," he wrote. "It is by such a beginning, we think, that the City's responsible officials will be educated to see the value of records kept orderly and accessible for public users."⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Rankin drafted an agreement for Lydenberg to submit to Mayor La Guardia to officially transfer the financial documents of historical value from the comptroller's office to the care of the NYPL. She took the initiative to ask that the MRL "act in this capacity for records of all departments until the time you establish a Municipal Archives."⁷¹ Rankin argued for the establishment of a municipal archives similar to the national archives building, which was then under construction, and referred to President Roosevelt's appointment of an archivist, whom she called "a competent historian and librarian," as an example of what should be done in New York City. She added that her library had acted only incidentally as an archives for local government documents.⁷²

Lydenberg, who had reservations about offering the NYPL's services and facilities to store and care for these departmental records, acted cautiously and did not submit Rankin's proposal to La Guardia.⁷³ Instead, Lydenberg asked other city officials for their assessment of the political sentiment toward establishing a municipal archives.⁷⁴ He hoped that they would respond by asking him to devise a solution to the problem of saving the records documenting the city's history, but he received no requests for assistance. The "deeper we get into this problem of storage of municipal archives the more thought does it require," he told Rankin. "Unquestionably the ideal is to have an archive building."⁷⁵ Lydenberg postponed Rankin's initiative to involve the NYPL in officially keeping records produced by the city of New York while the administration remained focused on more immediate concerns than preserving the past.

Local Government Records Deposited at the MRL

Earlier in 1934, during a search for reliable sources of revenue to address the effects of the economic depression, Rankin and her staff were unable to find reports on licensing fees collected by departments and agencies during the 1920s. She explained to La Guardia that many departmental reports had never been published, either due to a lack of funds or because previous administrations had little interest in accountability. She asked the mayor for permission to make copies of departmental reports sent to his office that were not going to be published and pointed out the need to preserve the records of his administration for future use by elected officials and historians.⁷⁶

Rankin also approached Keyes Metcalf, chief of the NYPL's Reference Department, with her concerns about the failure of the local government to publish its reports. She asked Metcalf how to inexpensively reproduce



Figure 1. In September 1935 Rebecca Rankin, head of the Municipal Reference Library, presents New York mayor Fiorello La Guardia with the first copy of *New York Advancing: A Scientific Approach to Municipal Government*, a report she compiled on departmental activities during the first two years of La Guardia's administration (1934–36). Photo courtesy of NYC Archives.

the documents she hoped to receive from the mayor's office. "Please be considering this problem. It is a real one to us," she remarked and suggested that it should be discussed by members of the Committee on Public Documents of the American Library Association (ALA), which had become an important forum for librarians to discuss archival issues and the preservation of government records.⁷⁷ Metcalf recommended using a camera "to experiment with copying to film these documents which are not to be printed."⁷⁸ Rankin concurred that the "film method seems a feasible one," but she continued to have transcripts made of the individual reports sent to the MRL from the mayor's office.⁷⁹

Rankin kept up her campaign to receive all accounts of departmental activity and argued that "in the future the administrative work . . . of the City will be greatly handicapped by the lack of such records." She promised La Guardia's law secretary to return them promptly after Rankin's secretary, James Katsaros, made a typewritten copy for the document

collection. "In this way no record of this splendid administration shall be lost to posterity, even if economy this year prevents the expense of printing."⁸⁰ In April 1934 La Guardia approved her proposal to preserve the records documenting departmental activity, and she was told to keep the original reports on file at the MRL.⁸¹ By the end of 1934 Rankin had reported to Lydenberg that her "library serves as a depository for all city documents and accepts printed material from all departments."⁸²

In 1935, with the enthusiastic support of the mayor, Rankin began to compile and summarize reports from the administrative departments for publication in a municipal yearbook, similar to a corporation's annual report to its shareholders. However, due to political and economic circumstances, Mayor La Guardia did not issue a report after his first year in office. Rankin instead used the material she received to outline the structure and functions of the local government and in January 1936 published the *Guide to the Municipal Government of the City of New York*.⁸³ In the spring Rankin began compiling and editing reports on departmental activities during the first two years of La Guardia's administration. On September 9, during a ceremony on the steps of the NYPL, Rankin presented the mayor with the first copy of her work *New York Advancing: A Scientific Approach to Municipal Government*.⁸⁴ Campaigning on his record in office, and with help from Rankin, La Guardia was reelected mayor of New York in 1937 and became the first incumbent to win reelection without the support of Tammany Hall.⁸⁵

Rankin Chairs the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee

In November 1938 Rankin made arrangements to have records recovered from the basement of City Hall that she judged to have historical value transported to the NYPL's annex on West 25th Street. Lydenberg told Rankin that it was an opportunity to demonstrate to La Guardia the need for a municipal archives building and for considering "the ultimate fate of his own papers."⁸⁶ Using her political skills and appealing to his vanity, Rankin convinced La Guardia to establish an archival program to preserve local government records. "Do you know that you owe a debt to posterity that I don't believe you have considered?" Rankin asked the mayor in a request for copies of his speeches. "The history of the municipal government of the City of New York will not be complete without them," she noted. "Please help me to make this possible."⁸⁷

A year later, in November 1939, La Guardia entrusted the speeches and the papers from his public career to Rankin. He then appointed her

chair of the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee with instructions to investigate the condition and location of all documents related to his administration.⁸⁸ She received permission from NYPL director Lydenberg to accept the appointment and assume the added responsibility. Rankin credited him for encouraging her to pursue the records produced by city officials and acknowledged that "it was Mr. Lydenberg that sicked me on this and I developed it under his tutelage and with his understanding."⁸⁹ Rankin spent the first half of 1940 determining the location and condition of departmental records and held several meetings of the committee to design a plan for the municipal archives. Before submitting a proposal to La Guardia, she traveled to Washington, D.C., to consult with the national archivist, Robert D. W. Connor, and her former boss, Dorsey Hyde, the director of archival service for the National Archives.⁹⁰

Rankin's report to the mayor contained a draft for legislation to give the committee control over all documents produced by the city of New York and the authority to establish an archives to preserve and house these records.⁹¹ Mayor La Guardia chose not to introduce the legislation but instead issued an executive order to all city agencies and departments seeking to destroy old documents to refer their requests to Rankin and the Municipal Archives Committee for review to determine the historical value of the records.⁹² In 1941, at Rankin's request, the mayor persuaded the Board of Estimate to lease and then purchase the Rhinelander Building, adjacent to the Municipal Building, to hold the public documents that Rankin and the committee determined were worth saving for future use by historians and researchers.⁹³

During World War II the relationship between the mayor and the municipal reference librarian remained intact despite his rejection of her plans to staff the Rhinelander and convert the building into a true archives for the city. Due to war conditions the Municipal Archives Committee was unable to purchase steel shelving to properly equip the Rhinelander Building, and because La Guardia refused to appropriate funds to hire an archivist and assistants, the building served only as a warehouse for departmental records. During a speech to the American Historical Association in late December 1943, Rankin outlined the efforts made over four decades to preserve historically significant documents and to persuade the city government to establish a central archives, noting the diligence of Lydenberg, Paltsits, and other employees of the NYPL. She described the activities of her committee and claimed that it had contributed more than \$100,000 to the local government by salvaging waste paper. Rankin asked the historians for their help in establishing a municipal archives, saying that there would

be no permanent, functioning facility "until the majority of City officials have been convinced that it is a worthwhile investment which will pay dividends to the public and add to their prestige and popularity."⁹⁴

The Creation of the Municipal Archives and Records Center

After La Guardia left office at the end of 1945 the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee ceased to function. Rankin would later remark that "such machinery as had been put into operation ran under its own momentum for several years."⁹⁵ William O'Dwyer, who succeeded La Guardia, was reluctant to call on her or the MRL to the extent that his predecessor had during his twelve years in City Hall. Rankin did not enjoy the same access to O'Dwyer or his administration, but by January 1948 she was able to persuade him to reactivate the Municipal Archives Committee and to give her the authority to lead it as well as new responsibilities.⁹⁶ In addition to administering a historical repository in the Rhinelander Building, she agreed to devise an affordable program of records management. O'Dwyer was following the lead of officials in the federal government and the state of New York who were developing systems to organize and control the documents they produced. He was also responding to a critical study by the Citizens' Budget Commission that accused the local government of wasting tax dollars to pay rent on office space filled with useless records.⁹⁷

Over the next few months Rankin obtained executive orders from Mayor O'Dwyer that directed administrative agencies and departments to survey their records and report to her at the MRL.⁹⁸ She began working with Abraham Beame, New York City's assistant budget director, on a system for the retention and disposal of public documents.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, Rankin continued to promote the archival aspect of the committee's mission and in March 1949 told O'Dwyer that records management was "their most important long-range program . . . [but] it seems proper to make the Mayor's papers the first definite project of the Committee—making an inventory of them, placing them in order and indexing sufficiently to make them available for historical research."¹⁰⁰

A week earlier Rankin had "informed the committee that some old records of the Mayor's Office had turned up" and that she had taken responsibility for them on the committee's behalf.¹⁰¹ These records were the administrative correspondence of the first four mayors of the twentieth century, which had been preserved by the NYPL. She did not tell the committee members that the correspondence had been transferred from the library's annex to the Rhinelander Building the week before

Christmas.¹⁰² Instead, Rankin told them that students from Columbia and New York University had been searching for the correspondence for a long time to highlight a "real historic interest" and to support her argument that the committee should move forward with the archival aspect of its work while it continued to develop plans for the rational management of departmental records.¹⁰³

In May 1949 Rankin asked the mayor for funds to organize the correspondence of former administrations. She also asked Mayor O'Dwyer to introduce legislation to create a permanent Municipal Archives Committee with the power to act for the Board of Estimate to control the documents produced by the local government. Rankin explained that "existing laws place responsibility in so many hands that it causes untold confusion and makes the problem *everybody's business* and consequently it becomes *nobody's business*."¹⁰⁴ O'Dwyer did not act on her requests, but in the spring of 1950 the board appropriated money for a temporary staff for the Rhinelander Building.¹⁰⁵ Rankin assigned staff members to the supervision of her longtime assistant, James Katsaros, who directed their work organizing the collections of mayors' papers. A year later the staff—three clerical workers and two laborers—became permanent employees of the Archives Division of the MRL.¹⁰⁶

When she took charge of the Municipal Archives Committee for Mayor O'Dwyer in 1948, Rankin had told NYPL director Ralph Beals that she hoped to establish within two years a system of control for departmental records and a centralized municipal archives operating with its own staff.¹⁰⁷ Before she left New York for her summer vacation in 1950 Rankin expressed a desire to retire before the end of the year, but instead she returned to the MRL and chaired the mayor's committee until a records management program was up and running.¹⁰⁸ She also took on an additional assignment of devising a strategy for protecting vital city records against nuclear attack.¹⁰⁹

During the fall of 1950 Rankin and Beame met with representatives from the National Records Management Council to discuss plans for a pilot project to evaluate the management of records in five city agencies.¹¹⁰ In early December 1950 the Board of Estimate authorized a preliminary study by the council to gauge the cost of a citywide records management program. After the first of the year the council reported on the feasibility and benefits of records management such as salvaging waste paper, reducing filing and office rental space, and increasing revenue from fees charged for searching and copying records.¹¹¹ On February 8, 1951, the Board of Estimate approved unanimously a request by the Municipal Archives Committee to purchase equipment for a records center in the

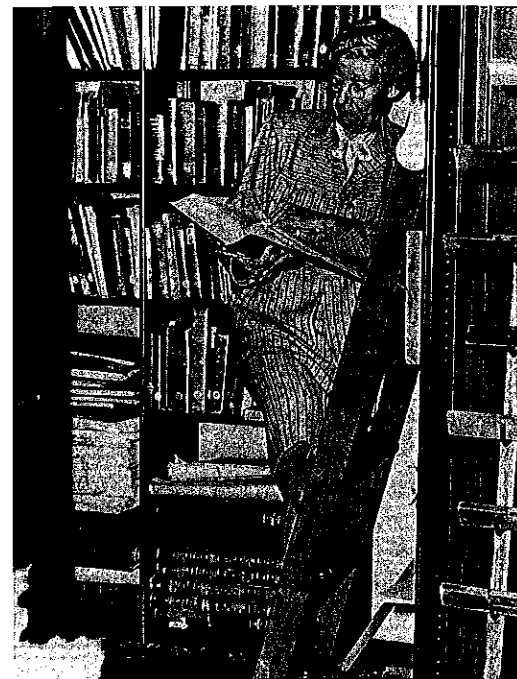


Figure 2. Rebecca Rankin consults a document in the New York City Room of the Municipal Reference Library ca.1947. Photo courtesy of NYC Archives.

Rhinelander Building.¹¹² The funds were placed in the budget of the NYPL, and Rankin used the money to buy steel shelving and boxes to furnish the records center.

Instead of following the advice of the National Records Management Council to seek legislation mandating participation in the records management program, as the federal government and the city of Philadelphia had done, the committee decided to proceed on a voluntary basis with existing laws and regulations pertaining to record retention and destruction.¹¹³ Rankin, with assistance from Beame, compiled a procedural manual, and in September 1951 the committee began conducting classes to introduce departmental representatives to the records management program.¹¹⁴ A week before she retired, at age sixty-five, Rankin presided over a graduation ceremony in City Hall for thirty-three public records officers. The mayor praised Rankin for the creation of the Municipal Archives and Records Center, which became a separate branch of the NYPL on June 30, 1952, the day Rankin resigned as chair of the archives committee and left her position at the MRL.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

"My original idea was that we would take care of manuscripts, historic manuscripts of real value," Rankin recalled a dozen years after she retired.¹¹⁶ Katsaros concurred that Rankin had been motivated by a desire to preserve historically valuable documents and remembered that she finally "got La Guardia's ear about [the need for] a municipal archives because she didn't want any records destroyed that had archival significance."¹¹⁷ However, during the three decades that Rankin directed the MRL, she also recognized that caring for the many records that government agencies did not have room to store but still needed to consult was an ongoing and critical issue. "It became apparent through the years," she said, "that the departments were simply being cluttered by their own records . . . and whenever a department came to move, they were just desperate, they didn't know what to do, and they would appeal to me to take care of their records." Rankin acknowledged that, although it was out of necessity that she began to find storage space for the semiactive records of administrative agencies and departments, she soon realized that providing city officials with a way to manage records would give her an opportunity to create a depository for documents with historical significance. She understood better than most that to get something accomplished within local government it was necessary to provide the people in power with something in exchange for their cooperation, such as monetary savings or positive publicity. "That's why the archives has a dual purpose," she explained. "So what I was doing developed into two jobs," for practical and political reasons.¹¹⁸

Rankin deflected credit to Harry Lydenberg for encouraging her to pursue the records that documented the actions of city officials, but ultimately the creation of the Municipal Archives and Records Center of the City of New York was due to her persistence and political skills. She demonstrated boundless energy in all aspects of her life. Katsaros recalled that "she was gung-ho for every activity she became involved in." Rankin knew how to get things done, he said. She was "very resourceful . . . she went to talk to the right people at the right time."¹¹⁹ These traits served her well in the environment of New York City politics and contributed to her long and successful tenure as the municipal reference librarian. Rankin's library career, culminating in the establishment of the Municipal Archives and Records Center, helped further the development of archival theory and practice in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. Her slow but steady progress, dependent as it was on political support, demonstrates the opportunities and challenges

inherent in reconciling the cultural mission of libraries with that of archives as well as reconciling the library-based, historical manuscripts tradition with public archives and records management methodology.

The nature and timing of Rankin's education and career offered her opportunities to learn and implement both special library and archival practices. Her work as a cataloger in the University of Michigan's General University Library began in 1909 during its transformation into an institution that supported research with special collections of unique and primary source material.¹²⁰ At the library school at Simmons College in Boston in 1912-13 she received instruction from some of the most knowledgeable professionals in the area, including the librarian of the state of Massachusetts, who taught the Government Documents course and aroused her interest in working in this field.¹²¹ Her year at Simmons was considered the apex of the Progressive Era, when librarians like Charles McCarthy were encouraging public libraries to collect government information to improve the efficiency of municipal administration and educate citizens so they could participate effectively in the political process. It was also the year that Victor Paltsits began leading the Public Archives Commission's effort to produce a manual for archivists working with state and local government records.

When Rankin went to work at the MRL after World War I, she discovered a classification system for its collection of city documents that was based on provenance, which arranged documents by record-creating agency and placed them in series by date, as opposed to library cataloging of individual items shelved by subject. The archival manual being compiled under Paltsits's supervision also took this nonlibrary approach to documents; its chapter on classification recommended the public archives principles of grouping records by agency, maintaining their original order, and keeping the same type of record together.¹²²

Under the tutelage of Harry Lydenberg and while working with Paltsits (who organized the NYPL's Manuscript Division according to principles outlined by the Library of Congress despite his work on the public archives manual), Rankin treated the correspondence of the mayors of New York as historic manuscripts.¹²³ She kept it grouped together but arranged by subject to facilitate retrieval. Rankin employed the archival practices that historical societies used to preserve and make their holdings accessible when she compiled and edited the records of Mayor La Guardia's administration and published them in *New York Advancing*. Yet she continued to use public archives methods when she had Katsaros make copies of the individual reports sent to the MRL and filed them along with the originals in the New York City documents collection by department and in series.

In 1933 Rankin presented a paper to the ALA Committee on Public Documents calling for the development of regional collections of local government documents and the creation of a union list to provide bibliographic access to the information in these records.¹²⁴ She participated in the discussion of archival issues with other committee members, including Dorsey Hyde, who proposed that the classification scheme of documents published by the Public Printing Office be "correlated" to the manuscript records held by the National Archives to aid researchers. He envisioned linking the numbering scheme of the superintendent of documents to the inventories of primary records at the archives.¹²⁵ Based on the archival principles used to organize the New York City collection of the MRL, his plan was never developed but pointed directly to the shared mission of archives and libraries in preserving the cultural record and the continuity between public documents and historical manuscripts.¹²⁶

By 1939, when she finally convinced La Guardia to entrust his mayoral papers to her for safekeeping, Rankin had experience with the archival practices of both historical societies and libraries and with the methods of preservation and arrangement advocated by the Society of American Archivists and National Archives employees. After she was appointed to chair the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee, Rankin persuaded La Guardia to purchase the Rhinelander with the vision of preserving his public papers as manuscripts in a historical repository, but she also began assigning space for departments to store municipal records that were not in active use.¹²⁷ Under La Guardia's successors Rankin developed a system to manage these records for administrative and legal purposes separately from the historical material held in the archives. She did not attempt to integrate the "two jobs" of preserving historically valuable records and retaining semiactive departmental records until they were scheduled for destruction. When the archives committee assumed custodial control of these records, Rankin organized the material with historical significance according to public archives methods and grouped the documents according to the principles of provenance to show how and why they came into existence, but she used Library of Congress terminology and referred to record groups as collections, developing collection registers for the departmental records, as opposed to archival inventories.

When politics allowed, Rankin used her position as municipal reference librarian to help correct many of the city's problems with record keeping. Her unique achievement during her career as director of the library dedicated to the local government was the creation of a central archives to preserve the historical record of the city—a difficult

achievement made more significant because of the driving ambition of most New Yorkers to get ahead with little regard for the past. By giving the archives a "dual purpose" and implementing a system to manage the retention and disposal of departmental records, Rankin institutionalized one of the key principles of the Progressive movement: to apply scientific management to municipal administration, making it more accountable and efficient.

Epilogue

Ralph Beals had composed a letter to Rankin before she retired in which he extended his "personal congratulations on your extraordinary achievements as chairman of the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee."¹²⁸ Beals spoke for everyone associated with the "NYPL [who] have been particularly appreciative of your patience and imagination in overcoming the stubborn fiscal and administrative problems which inevitably beset those who pioneer in such a complex field involving so many departments of the City." In the letter he asked her to acknowledge officially, in her capacity as chair of the committee, that the NYPL was administratively responsible for the management of the Municipal Archives and Records Center. Beals intended to bring this formal acknowledgment of the library's responsibility to the Board of Trustees for their approval. He never sent the letter, nor did he make the request, because of the misgivings among library officials and the trustees about becoming too closely involved in the affairs of the local government.¹²⁹

After Rankin retired Katsaros remained in charge of the operations in the records center as the chair of the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee, and in July 1952 Beals appointed him supervisor of the archives.¹³⁰ This arrangement caused administrative difficulties because, as an NYPL branch employee, Katsaros reported to the chief of the Circulation Department while also being responsible to the mayor for the control of records that remained the property of the city of New York. During the next decade library officials considered a separation of the archives from the records center, with the NYPL continuing to manage the municipal archives as a division of the MRL. A review of the services provided by the NYPL to departments and agencies of the local government concluded that the city should be encouraged to take responsibility for the Municipal Archives and Records Center, while the library should continue to direct the MRL.¹³¹

In 1966 newly elected mayor John Lindsay created the Task Force on the Municipal Archives, which recommended establishing a permanent

Public Records Commission to take responsibility for all record-keeping operations and to eliminate the voluntary nature of the records management program.¹³² Two years later, when the idea for a super agency, the Municipal Services Administration, was brought before the city council by the Lindsay administration, the legislation included a provision for the local government to assume control of the Municipal Archives and Records Center as well as the MRL. On May 15, 1969, Mayor Lindsay signed a local law transferring the employees of the library, the archives, and the records center to the Municipal Services Administration. The law went into effect on the first day of July, ending fifty-five years of dedicated information service by the NYPL to the local government.¹³³

This organizational arrangement remained intact for eight years. While the city of New York struggled through a fiscal crisis under the administration of Mayor Abraham Beame, the budgets for the library, renamed the Municipal Reference and Research Center, and the Municipal Archives and Records Center were reduced and their existence threatened.¹³⁴ In July 1977, in an effort to save money, the library, the archives, and the records center were consolidated as separate divisions in a stand-alone agency, the Department of Records and Information Services.¹³⁵ The legislation that created the department transferred custody of all documents stored at the Municipal Archives and Records Center from the agencies that created them to the control of the commissioner of records and information services. The law, which remains in effect today, also made participation in the records management program mandatory. During the last thirty years the Municipal Reference and Research Center has become an increasingly ineffective and underused division due to staff shortages and repeated changes in the position of the director, while the records management and archival operations have come to occupy a more prominent role in the department. The mandated citywide involvement in the records management program assured its status, while the leadership of long-serving municipal archivists, with the support of historical and genealogical researchers, has made the archives a vital element of the cultural memory of the city of New York.

Notes

1. Herbert L. Osgood, "Report on the Public Archives of New York," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1900*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1901), 163–250.

2. Bruce Dearstyne, "Archival Politics in New York State, 1892–1915," *New York History* 66 (1985): 165–84.

3. Valmai Fenster, "Public Documents in Library Education at the University of Wisconsin Library School, 1895–1939," *Government Publications Review* 7A (1980): 189–210.

4. Marion Casey, "Charles McCarthy's Idea: A Library to Change Government," *Library Quarterly* 44 (1974): 29–41.

5. Clinton Woodruff, *A New Municipal Program* (New York: D. Appleton, 1919), 8.

6. *Bulletin of the American Library Association* 2 (1908): 193.

7. "Report of the Municipal Reference Library Committee," *National Municipal Review* 4 (1915): 177.

8. John Boynton Kaiser, *Law, Legislative and Municipal Reference Libraries: An Introductory Manual and Bibliographic Guide* (Boston: Boston Book Company, 1914), 240.

9. Richard J. Cox, "Plight of American Municipal Archives: Baltimore, 1729–1979," *American Archivist* 42 (1979): 281–92.

10. *Ibid.*

11. Barry W. Seaver, "Survey of Municipal Reference Libraries [in the United States] and Their Administrative Affiliations," an unpublished paper written under the guidance of Edward G. Holley, School of Information and Library Science, University of North Carolina, 1989.

12. Jean T. Kadooka-Mardfin, "Archival Responsibilities of the Special Librarian," *Special Libraries* 67 (1976): 553–58.

13. Mary B. Dierickx, *Surrogate's Court-Hall of Records: A Public Treasure* (New York: Department of General Services, 1991), 9.

14. Osgood, "Report on the Public Archives," 171–72.

15. *Ibid.* Osgood found the minutes and correspondence of the committees of the Board of Aldermen in the basement of City Hall. These records explained how the city of New York provided public services prior to the establishment of a municipal bureaucracy of administrative agencies and departments during the second half of the nineteenth century.

16. Victor H. Paltsits, "Bibliography of the Fundamental Sources of New York City History," in *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498 to 1909*, by I. N. Phelps Stokes, vol. 6 (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1928), 181–223.

17. *Ibid.* Mayor Seth Low asked the New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL) to preserve these records.

18. Historical Records Survey, *Guide to Manuscript Depositories in New York City* (New York: Work Projects Administration, 1941), 69.

19. Edwin Seligman, chair of the Library Committee, to the Charter Revision Commission of the City of New York, November 20, 1908, Municipal Archives, Box 2, Municipal Reference Library's 75th Anniversary.

20. *Ibid.* Edwin Seligman was a professor at Columbia University who helped organize the Efficiency Society of New York in 1911. See Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 73.

21. Nancy J. Weiss, *Charles Francis Murphy, 1858–1924: Respectability and Responsibility in Tammany Politics* (Northampton, Mass.: Smith College Press, 1968), 60.

22. *Thirty-ninth Annual Report of the Commissioners of Accounts* (New York: City of New York, 1912), 37.

23. *Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment* (New York: City of New York, 1914), 1574. See Edwin Lewinson, *John Purroy Mitchel, the Boy Mayor of New York* (New York: Astra Books, 1965), 86–89.
24. *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 19 (1915): 221. Williamson had been the head of the NYPL's Economics Division.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 20 (1916): 225.
27. *Minutes of the Common Council of the City of New York, 1784–1831*, vol. 1 (New York: City of New York, 1917), 6–9. Williamson served as secretary to the mayor's committee, while Victor Hugo Paltsits, NYPL's keeper of manuscripts, chaired the committee appointed to publish the deliberations of the council.
28. Richard J. Cox, *Closing an Era: Historical Perspectives on Modern Archival and Records Management* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2000), 91–92.
29. Williamson to Edwin H. Anderson, January 5, 1917, Municipal Archives, Box 5607, MRL Correspondence.
30. Theodore Lowi, *At the Pleasure of the Mayor: Patronage and Power in New York City, 1898–1958* (Glencoe, N.Y.: Free Press, 1964), 186–87. Mitchel did not receive the Republican nomination in 1917, and the business community did not actively support his reelection campaign.
31. Williamson to Anderson, January 31, 1918, Municipal Archives, Box 5608, MRL History.
32. Paul A. Winckler, "Williamson," in *Dictionary of American Library Biography* (Littleton, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1978), 555–57.
33. Barry W. Seaver, *A True Politician: Rebecca Browning Rankin, Municipal Reference Librarian of the City of New York, 1920–1952* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Publishing, 2004), 13–23.
34. Rebecca B. Rankin, interview by Phyllis Dain, September 30, 1964. Dain provided me with her transcript of the interview with Rankin, who credited Williamson with organizing the MRL.
35. Gail K. Nelson and John V. Richardson, "Adelaide Hasse and the Early History of the U.S. Superintendent of Documents Classification Scheme," *Government Publications Review* 13 (1986): 79–86. Hasse initially developed the system while arranging USDA publications at the Los Angeles Public Library from 1891 to 1895.
36. Clare Beck, *New Woman as Librarian: The Career of Adelaide Hasse* (Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow Press, 2006), 192–97. Hasse became the head of the Economics Division, which merged with the Public Documents Division, when Williamson became the director of the MRL in 1914.
37. "Classification of New York City Documents," May 8, 1916, NYPL Archives, RG8, Box 1, Branch Libraries Municipal Reference Library. This is a ten-page list of call numbers created for the arrangement of departmental records by modifying Charles A. Cutter's *Two-Figure Author Table*. The list also includes "subgroup" numbers to indicate document types and instructions to arrange by date within groups.
38. Victor H. Paltsits, "Pioneering for a Science of Archives in the United States," in *Public Documents with Archives and Libraries: Papers Presented at the 1937 Conference of the American Library Association* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1937), 233–39.
39. Rankin, interview.

40. Dorsey Hyde to John F. Hylan, February 5, 1920, Municipal Archives, Box 1, Hylan's Subject Files. See *MRL Notes* 7 (1921): 2. Hyde resigned and went to work for Packard Motor Car Company's truck research bureau.
41. Anderson to Charlotte Delafield, secretary to the president of the Board of Aldermen, February 14, 1920, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 12, Director's Office Correspondence. See Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman, *Governing New York City: Politics in the Metropolis* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1960), 632. The president of the Board of Aldermen was a member of the budget-making Board of Estimate with three votes. The mayor was chair of the Board of Estimate with three votes. The comptroller was a member with three votes, while the five borough presidents were also members with one vote each.
42. Thomas Kessner, *Fiorello H. La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1989), 70.
43. Arthur Mann, *La Guardia: A Fighter Against His Times* (New York: Lippincott, 1959), 117. See *Proceedings of the Board of Aldermen*, January 3, 1921, 6–7.
44. Rankin, interview.
45. Rebecca Rankin, "Municipal Reference from Coast to Coast," *Special Libraries* 15 (1924): 238.
46. Rankin to Walker, January 12, 1926, Municipal Archives, Box 16, Mayor Walker's Dept. Letters Received.
47. *New York Times*, January 1, 1926. Walker reappointed twenty of twenty-five departmental commissioners.
48. Joseph McGoldrick, "Our American Mayors: Jimmy Walker," *National Municipal Review* 17 (1928): 569.
49. Rebecca Rankin, "A Fact Center for Municipal Information," March 7, 1928, Municipal Archives, Box 8, MRL Radio Talks.
50. *Ibid.* See Paltsits, "Bibliography," 189. The City Hall records, which Mayor Low asked the NYPL to preserve in 1903, were transferred to the MRL in 1925.
51. *New York World*, February 29, 1928.
52. Rankin to Harry M. Lydenberg, March 3, 1928, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 14, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin apologized to Lydenberg for any negative reactions to the story but defended her statements.
53. Ralph Brown, "Victor Hugo Paltsits," in *Dictionary of American Library Biography*, 388–89. Paltsits was the first keeper of manuscripts and the chief of the American History Division from 1916 to 1941.
54. Paltsits, "Bibliography," 181.
55. *Ibid.* See Osgood, "Report on the Public Archives," 176. See also Charles Garrett, *The La Guardia Years: Machine and Reform Politics in New York City* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 9.
56. *Ibid.*
57. Victor H. Paltsits, "Tragedies in New York's Public Records," in *Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1909* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911), 376.
58. Paltsits, "Bibliography," 189.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Rebecca Rankin, "A Change for the Better," *Library Journal* 55 (1930): 914–17.
61. Joseph Johnson, Commissioner of Public Works, to Rankin, March 17, 1930, Municipal Archives, Box 5608, MRL Space Allocation. Johnson granted

Rankin's request, which increased the size of the library from 6,030 to 8,330 square feet.

62. Kenneth Davis, *FDR: New York Years, 1928-1932* (New York: Random House, 1985), 233-35. See also Lowi, *At the Pleasure*, 9. Joseph McKee, president of the Board of Aldermen, served as mayor until January, when John O'Brien assumed the office after winning the special election in November.

63. Rankin to La Guardia, November 22, 1933, Municipal Archives, Box 5607, MRL Correspondence.

64. La Guardia to Rankin, November 25, 1933, Municipal Archives, Box 5607, MRL Correspondence.

65. *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 38 (1934): 353.

66. *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 39 (1935): 935. Lydenberg was appointed to the position by the Board of Trustees on October 10, 1934.

67. Rankin to Lydenberg, November 22, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office Correspondence. See also *New York Times*, November 8, 1934. Rankin was referring to Comptroller Joseph McGoldrick, who succeeded Arthur Cunningham in May 1934, when Cunningham died suddenly. In November a special election was held to fill the remaining three-year term, and McGoldrick was defeated by Tammany Hall's candidate, Frank Taylor, who became the comptroller in January 1935.

68. Lydenberg to Rankin, November 23, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office Correspondence.

69. A. R. Newsome et al., *The Preservation of Local Archives: A Guide for Public Officials* (Chicago: American Historical Association, 1932). In addition to Paltsits, Margaret C. Norton, Julian Boyd, E. E. Dale, and Stewart Mitchell also contributed to the *Guide*, which defined local archives as any written or printed book, paper, record, or map created or received by a local government in the transaction of public business.

70. Paltsits to Lydenberg, December 5, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.

71. Rankin to La Guardia, December 5, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin's archives proposal was written for Lydenberg to submit to the mayor.

72. *Ibid.* See Donald McCoy, *The National Archives: America's Ministry of Documents, 1934-68* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), 9. Franklin Roosevelt signed the National Archives Act on June 19, 1934, and named Robert D. W. Connor, head of the Department of History and Government at the University of North Carolina, as the first national archivist in October 1934.

73. Rankin to Ralph Beals, Director of the NYPL, January 31, 1951, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin compiled a chronology of the MRL's role in the development of the municipal archives and stated that her original proposal was not submitted to Mayor La Guardia.

74. Lydenberg to Adolph Berle, City Chamberlain, January 21, 1935, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 44, Director's Office Correspondence. Lydenberg asked Berle whether he felt the archives situation needed attention and proposed a survey of record holdings and archival methods.

75. Lydenberg to Rankin, December 7, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office Correspondence.

76. Rankin to La Guardia, March 1, 1934, Municipal Archives, Box 3126, La Guardia's Departmental Correspondence.

77. Rankin to Metcalf, April 27, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office—MRL. See Rankin, "Bibliographic Needs in the Field of Municipal Documents," in *Public Documents: Papers Presented at ALA 1933 Annual Conference*, ed. A. F. Kuhlman (Chicago: American Library Association, 1934), 95-100.

78. Metcalf to Rankin, April 28, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office—MRL.

79. Rankin to Metcalf, May 2, 1934, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 16, Director's Office—MRL.

80. Rankin to Paul Kern, April 25, 1934, Municipal Archives, Box 3126, La Guardia's Departmental Correspondence.

81. Kern to Rankin, April 30, 1934, Municipal Archives, Box 5610, Municipal Year Book.

82. "Annual Report of the MRL for 1934," *Bulletin of the NYPL* 39 (1935): 256.

83. Rebecca B. Rankin, ed., *Guide to the Municipal Government of the City of New York* (Brooklyn: Eagle Publications, 1936).

84. Rebecca B. Rankin, ed., *New York Advancing: A Scientific Approach to Municipal Government. An Accounting to the Citizens of New York, 1934-36* (New York: MRL, 1936). See *New York Times*, September 10, 1936.

85. Lowi, *At the Pleasure*, 186.

86. Lydenberg to Rankin, November 10, 1938, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.

87. Rankin to La Guardia, October 26, 1939, Municipal Archives, Box 3233, La Guardia's Departmental Correspondence.

88. Lydenberg to La Guardia, November 24, 1939, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 44, Director's Office Correspondence. Lydenberg thanked the mayor for entrusting his papers to the library. Note: La Guardia appointed Rankin to chair the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee on December 5, 1939.

89. Rankin, interview.

90. Rankin to Lydenberg, March 11, 1940, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 44, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin reported having "a very satisfactory conference with Dr. [Robert D. W.] Connor."

91. Rankin to La Guardia, June 19, 1940, Municipal Archives, Box 3233, La Guardia's Departmental Correspondence.

92. Executive Order #85. On September 24, 1940, Mayor La Guardia announced that the Board of Estimate had agreed to allow the committee to exercise its authority to review and grant permission to destroy city records.

93. Rankin to La Guardia, August 30, 1943, Municipal Archives, Box 3314, La Guardia's Departmental Correspondence. Rankin reviewed the accomplishments of the Municipal Archives Committee and noted the purchase of the Rhinelander Building at 238 Duane Street.

94. Rebecca Rankin, "Archives of New York City," *Library Journal* 69 (1944): 149-51. Rankin addressed a luncheon meeting of the American Historical Association at Columbia University's Faculty Club on December 29, 1943.

95. Rankin to Luther Gulick, director of the Mayor's Management Survey Committee, September 26, 1950, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin sent a copy of this letter to Ralph Beals.

96. O'Dwyer to Department Heads, January 23, 1948, Municipal Archives, Box 39, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence. Memorandum #36 announced the reactivation of the Municipal Archives Committee with Rankin as chair.
97. *New York Times*, January 24, 1948. O'Dwyer referred to the study when he reactivated the committee.
98. Executive Orders #7, February 5, 1948, and #8, May 11, 1948, Municipal Archives, Box 39, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence.
99. Rankin to O'Dwyer, April 27, 1948, Municipal Archives, Box 39, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence. Rankin reported her discussions with Beame about the control and management of records.
100. Rankin to O'Dwyer, March 10, 1949, Municipal Archives, Box 50, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence.
101. Minutes of the Municipal Archives Committee Meeting, March 4, 1949, Municipal Archives, Box 50, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence.
102. Rankin to Beals, December 10, 1948, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin informed Beals that she had arranged for the transfer of all remaining New York City records.
103. Minutes of the Municipal Archives Committee meeting, March 4, 1949.
104. Rankin to O'Dwyer, May 26, 1949, Municipal Archives, Box 50, O'Dwyer's Departmental Correspondence. See also *New York Times*, May 15, 1949. In an interview entitled "Control Devised for City Records" Rankin mentioned the decision of the committee to request legislative authority over public documents.
105. Rankin to Beals, July 19, 1950, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin asked Beals to approve the draft of the committee's report to Mayor O'Dwyer, which requested that the temporary staff, hired on March 9, 1950, become permanent employees of the NYPL.
106. Esther Johnston, supervisor of the branch libraries, to Rankin, September 7, 1950, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Johnston answered Rankin's inquiry about whether the NYPL would accept the staff on a permanent basis and told her that the Circulation Department would take them "with good grace." See also Jason Horn, "Municipal Archives and Records Center of the City of New York," *American Archivist* 16 (1953): 311-20. The staff members became permanent employees on June 30, 1951.
107. Rankin to Beals, February 3, 1948, Municipal Archives, Box 5608, MRL Correspondence.
108. Rankin to Johnston, May 17, 1950, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.
109. Rankin to Beals, January 23, 1951, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.
110. Rankin to Beals, October 17, 1950, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.
111. Rankin to Beals, January 31, 1951, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin reported that the National Records Management Council received the contract on December 14, 1950, and delivered its report, "Creating a Records Center," on January 25, 1951.
112. *Minutes of the Board of Estimate and Apportionment* (New York: City of New York, 1951), 1268. The board approved a request by the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee for \$26,800.

113. Charles E. Hughes, Jr., "The Philadelphia Program," *American Archivist* 21 (1958): 131-41. Under reform mayor Joseph S. Clark, a city charter was adopted in April 1951 that included provisions for the Department of Records with a Forms Control and Record Services Division.
114. Rebecca Rankin, "A Summary of the Mayor's Municipal Archives Committee from December 1939 to June 1952," Municipal Archives, Box 5608, MRL Correspondence. The committee compiled a "Manual of Standard Procedure" (July 1951) to guide departmental representatives, and they attended in-service classes during the fall and spring.
115. *New York Times*, June 23, 1952. See also *New York Tribune*, June 25, 1952. Mayor Vincent Impellitteri presented the certificates. O'Dwyer had resigned in August 1950, and Impellitteri was elected to complete O'Dwyer's second term.
116. Rankin, interview.
117. James Katsaros, interview by the author, December 2, 1991.
118. Rankin, interview.
119. Katsaros, interview.
120. Rankin, "Ye are all of one Body," October 1931, Municipal Archives, Box 14, SLA Talks. Rankin addressed the Michigan Library Association on the relationship between special and public libraries and remarked that she felt fortunate to have worked at the university when Theodore Wesley Koch initiated changes in library policy.
121. Rankin, "Speech to Boston Chapter," 1960, Municipal Archives, Box 14, SLA Talks. Rankin recalled how the state librarian, Charles Belden, provided the inspiration for her career as a municipal reference librarian.
122. Robert D. Reynolds, "Incunabula of Archival Theory and Practice in the United States: J. C. Fitzpatrick's *Notes on the Care, Cataloging, Calendaring and Arranging of Manuscripts* and the Public Archives Commission's Uncompleted 'Primer of Archival Economy,'" *American Archivist* 54 (1991): 466-82.
123. Ibid. Paltsits organized the Manuscripts Division in 1914 when he asked Ethel B. Virtue to write the chapter on classification for the public archives manual after she helped the archivist of the state of Iowa, Cassius C. Stiles, organize records based on provenance. See Ethel Virtue, "Principles of Classification for Archives," in *American Historical Association, Annual Report for 1914* (American Historical Association, 1915).
124. Rankin, "Bibliographic Needs." The committee agreed with her proposal and issued a call for regional centers of both state and local documents.
125. Dorsey Hyde, "Public Archives and Public Documents as Aids to Scholarship," in *Public Documents: Papers Presented at the 1936 Conference of ALA* (Chicago: ALA, 1936), 179-87.
126. Rankin to Lydenberg, May 20, 1936, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence. Rankin described attending the "stimulating" meeting of ALA in Richmond, Virginia, where the membership objected to the practice of segregation, and told Lydenberg: "The Public Document section meant the most to me."
127. Rankin to La Guardia, August 30, 1943, Municipal Archives, Box 1, Mayor's Letters. Rankin reported on the assignment of storage space to the comptroller, Budget Office, Board of Election, and Department of Purchase.
128. Beals to Rankin, May 19, 1952, NYPL Archives, RG6, Box 15, Director's Office Correspondence.

129. Ibid. The letter is an unsigned draft, and no copy or similar letter is in the collection of correspondence Rankin received at the Municipal Archives.

130. Horn, "Municipal Archives and Records Center," 313-14.

131. Rutherford Rogers, "The NYPL and Service to the Municipal Archives [of the City of New York]," October 21, 1963, Municipal Archives, Box 5608, Municipal Archives. Rogers was chief assistant to the Librarian of Congress from 1958 to 1962.

132. Richard Morris, "Report of the Mayor's Task Force on the Municipal Archives," December 30, 1966, Municipal Archives, Box 5608, Municipal Archives.

133. Barry Seaver, "A Legacy of Reform: The Municipal Reference Library of the City of New York, 1913-1969," *Bibliion: The Bulletin of the NYPL* 1 (1992): 152-55.

134. *New York Post*, June 6, 1975. See also *New York Times*, June 14, 1975.

135. Local Law 49 of 1977. Mayor Beame signed the legislation on July 28, 1977.

E. W. B. Nicholson and the *Bodleian Library Staff-Kalendar*

Barbara B. Moran

E. W. B. Nicholson, librarian at the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford from 1882 to 1912, experimented with a number of new management techniques to improve that library's effectiveness and efficiency. Among the most successful was the *Staff-Kalendar*, which began as a work schedule for the staff but expanded into a comprehensive manual of library practice. During his tenure Nicholson improved the Bodleian's collections, catalogs, buildings, and staff, and the *Staff-Kalendar* played a significant role in those advances. The *Staff-Kalendar's* influence extended far beyond Oxford, and it was the precursor of the many management manuals, handbooks, and guides found in libraries in 2010.

Edward Williams Byron Nicholson, who held the position of Bodley's Librarian at the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford from 1882 to 1912, was one of a number of librarians at the turn of the twentieth century who pioneered in bringing new management techniques to libraries. During his thirty-year tenure Nicholson instituted numerous changes in the library's collections, catalogs, buildings, and staff. Working without the benefit of established library management norms or practices, Nicholson, like others in this first wave of library managers, experimented with several new approaches to the administration of the libraries. Although many of this generation's early attempts were unsuccessful and abandoned with time, others proved to be of lasting value and are used in library management today. Nicholson's *Staff-Kalendar*, a staff work schedule that grew into a library management manual, is an example of one of those innovations that has been of long-term significance. (The title illustrates Nicholson's advocacy of phonetic spelling. The word *Kalendar* was spelled with a *K* instead of a *C* until the 1913 edition, the first prepared after Nicholson's death.)

At the Bodleian Library Nicholson was confronted with the need to manage with a very small staff the library's growing collections and an increasing number of users. To meet these challenges he instituted