

Doc Chat Episode Ten Transcript

KATE CORDES: Hi, everyone. Welcome to Doc Chat. We're just going to wait a few minutes until more people have signed on and then we'll get started. Alright. We can get started now. I just want to welcome you all again to Doc Chat. I'm Kate Cordes, the Associate Director for Reference and Outreach at the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building. Doc Chat is a weekly program series from the library's Center for Research in the Humanities that digs deep into the stories behind the library's most interesting collections and highlights the ways that teachers can incorporate them into the classroom. In this episode, we have two library curators here to dialogue about different but related maps of the Brooklyn waterfront. Ian Fowler is Curator of Maps and our Geospatial Librarian and Julie Golia is the library's Curator of History, Social Sciences, and Government Information. A little bit about the run of show, Julie and Ian will speak for about 10 to 15 minutes before we open up the conversation. During the program, please feel free to use the chat function to share general comments, though make sure that you change your chat mode over to panelists and attendees from just panelists so that everyone is included in the conversation. Once we begin the question and answer segment, please use the Q&A feature at the bottom of your screen rather than the chat function to share your questions with us. If you wish to remain anonymous with your question, you can do that. Just select that option before submitting your question. One last thing before we start, we would also really like to know a little bit more about you as it helps us kind of create these episodes. So, please fill out the poll that I'm about to launch. And with that, I'm going to pass it over to Julie and Ian.

IAN FOWLER: Thank you so much, Kate. Welcome to Doc Chat Episode 10. So, the first map we're going to look at is this map and I'm going to read the whole title while you do the poll because I love the title so much. This is A New map of that part of the city of New York south from 20th Street on the Hudson and 35th Street on the East River showing the position of Greenwich, Washington, and West Streets on the Hudson River and Pearl, Water, Front, Cherry, and Tompkins Streets on the East River. Also, the Brooklyn shore from Bobine House to Red Hook Point. Also, the high and low water mark as developed from the original city grants, the ordinance lines of 1795, 1796, and 1808, and the lawful boundary of the city. This is a map from 1862. So, Julie, what do we need to know about the waterfront and Brooklyn and everything in 1862?

JULIE GOLIA: Well, Ian, before I get into that, I just need you to now say the title with your eyes closed.

IAN FOWLER: Oh, okay.

JULIE GOLIA: So, this map, I love this map. And, Ian, if you could move to the next slide so we can look at the part of the map that I prefer, which is the Brooklyn end of the map.

IAN FOWLER: Of course.

JULIE GOLIA: Let's talk a little bit about what's going on along this coastline at this time. So, the map is in 1862 and I think maybe the most important thing for us to know is that in 1862 these two islands, which we so associate with each other, were different cities at the time. New York was the largest city in the country and Brooklyn was the third-largest city in the country. Brooklyn had, you know, a little bit of a maybe like a little bit of an inferiority complex when it came to the number one city across the river, but Brooklyn was growing. If we went back to Brooklyn in 1800 it would have been a sleepy little town of about 4,000 people, primarily agricultural. By the time we get to when this map was made, its population was over a quarter of a million people. So, a rapid amount of population growth and economic growth. And a key part of that was the development of Brooklyn's waterfront. Manhattan's waterfront had been developed since this, you know, mid-18th centuries and onward, and it was crowded. It was old. Its peers were rundown. And Brooklyn was this sort of land of opportunity for developers. And so, throughout the beginning of the middle of the 19th century, we begin to see new kinds of commercial development spreading up along the waterfront and I think this map is a really important sort of chronicle of that change that we're seeing in the 19th century.

IAN FOWLER: Yes.

JULIE GOLIA: Ian, tell us more about what this actual map is. Like, who made it? What was it made for? That kind of thing.

IAN FOWLER: I would love to. So, this map was made by a man named Orville Whitmore Childs. He was a civil engineer for New York State. And a version of this map was originally published in a state report. This was not a commercial object. And so, if we look a little bit, we can see that we're talking about a lot of the number of acres that are going into the Hudson River and the East River and that sort of information and we'll get to why that is but there's a number of good reasons.

JULIE GOLIA: Somebody raises an important point in the chat that I want to clarify for any Brooklyn newbies, which is that today we associate Brooklyn with all of King's County, and at the time of this map, Brooklyn was not all of King's County, it was its own city. But the actual island that we now associate with Brooklyn, the kind of the western end of Long Island, was made up also of several towns, which eventually get annexed into Brooklyn by the 1890s and then, of course, Brooklyn itself gets annexed into New York. So, thank you so much for clarifying that to somebody in the audience. It's an important part of Brooklyn's history. Ian, I'm wondering, like talk to us about the coloring in this map. This is really fascinating to me. See some pink lines, some pink shading, some blue shading. What do they signify and like how would they have actually done that on the map? Was it hand-drawn?

IAN FOWLER: Yeah. So, the blue line is the original waterline and I'll show a detail of that in a

little bit. And then, the pink line, -- and that is the original waterline going back to the late 18th century. And then, the pink line is the current waterline as of when this map was produced in the 1860s. This was a fresh survey. We also have the original watercourses. This map would be used by Egbert Viele when he produces his sanitary map of New York City. And so, what we're really looking at here is we're really interested in waterways, the original shorelines in blue, and the current shorelines and bulkhead lines that are in pink. And the reason that we're interested in that is because this map was made by New York state and they felt that they were getting short [inaudible] by both Brooklyn and the city of New York because according to the charter from 1731, which was published in 1735, New York state owns all of the New York Harbor and the land that is in the harbor that is past the city limits. And so, they had their surveyor come out and you can see -- and these are both on the map. I pulled these out. They're looking at these encroachments, they're showing how much, as you can see here on the right, how much has been reclaimed outside of fees. And so, what the state is saying is that we own all this land and if you want to expand it further, both Brooklyn and New York City, you're going to have to pay us. And just so you know, here is how many acres you've already taken from us that you haven't paid us for. And there's a central part of this, which is on the next slide here showing the original waterway 1755 and then the pink there is the current as of 1861 pier and bulkhead lines. And it was this West Washington Market, which the city wanted to build on the Hudson there between Bay and [inaudible] Streets. And that became the huge impetus and like the straw that broke the camel's back for the state to say, well, hold on a minute, you might owe us some money and you might be interfering with shipping.

JULIE GOLIA: You know, I think we have this kind of really interesting kind of municipal state tension over, you know, who has access to make money off of what kind of land, right? This seems like almost like kind of chronicle of infighting. But I think there's some really important observations to make about sort of what's inherent in this. And I think the first thing to really emphasize and point out to people is the fact that New Yorkers and Brooklynites were constantly remaking the waterline and landfilling the waterline. And landfill, you know, we often associate a landfill with a place where we bring garbage today and that is pretty much what a lot of our coastline here in New York City is. It's garbage, it's refuse sunk into the ground sometimes with framework to make it secure in order to create new land. Because I think, you know, one thing to keep in mind in New York is that one of the most important commodities that was traded and re-traded throughout our history was the actual land of New York. You know, something like 90,000 acres of New York is manmade. I mean, that is something like 50% of New York City's landmass itself, which is a pretty remarkable thing when you think about what that means in terms of wealth creation. But this is something that is constantly changing both along Brooklyn's coastline and New York's coastline, especially in the late 19th century.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah, and you can see examples of that just here on this portion that is showing the proposed West Washington Market. You can see the high waterline of 1699 and then 1773 and then going all the way to 1860. That is adding two full square blocks to the west side of Manhattan just in that pretty short amount of timeframe you think about engineering and perhaps wars or other things were going on that might have paused construction. And we do

have a nice little -- this was also issued with this map in the report. This is just a map of that West Washington Market area. Just to show that there are always more things for teachers and educators to find in the collections that relate to these kinds of things. And this is a curious thing. So, this is a small inset that is oddly located in the bottom left of the map of the Atlantic Basin. What's the importance of Atlantic Basin and why would we include it if we're talking about the harbor?

JULIE GOLIA: That is a great question, Ian. And, actually, I think perfectly encapsulates the way that the development of Brooklyn's waterfront was actually quite different. So, the 19th-century development that happens on Brooklyn's waterfront is very different than like the 18th-century development that we see on lower Manhattan's waterfront. So, Atlantic Basin and then Atlantic Docks, which was the facility that was built around it, was built between 1840 and 1850. It was the massive dredging of a huge basin that could have dozens of ships sitting inside it at any point. Dredging deep into the riverbed in order to create the kind of depth that would be able to support the larger ships that are coming in, especially with the opening of the Erie Canal and other sort of waterways that are allowing more and more commercial goods to find their way toward Brooklyn and then out toward the rest of the world. One of the things that Atlantic Docks was most known for was its grain elevators. And so, this was the primary place that after 1827 when the Erie Canal opened that midwestern American grain was coming into the port. And we often think of this as a New York thing, this is a Brooklyn thing. The great majority of the grain trade took place, not in Manhattan but actually over in Brooklyn. And the facility was -- there was no comparison to it in New York at the time. And I think this is a really important thing is that this was the cutting edge of the way you do shipping and storing in the 19th century. But one actually really fascinating thing also about storage during this time. So, this was just one facility of I would say about 70 that existed between Red Hook and what we today call Dumbo. This was an area of Brooklyn that was often called the Walled City because when you looked at it from a ship it looked like essentially a fortress, like a fortress of commerce if you will, filled with goods from all over the world. At this time when this map was made, almost all of these were actually independently owned. And so, this was not a huge conglomerate yet. This continued to be relatively small businesses. Some had, you know, warehouses over in Brooklyn and then sort of trading operations in Manhattan as well, but each one with independent ownership, which I think is pretty fascinating.

IAN FOWLER: So, that is a great segue to our next map, which will change the entirety of that kind of relationship completely, more competition with New Jersey and more competition with the rest of the world. So, I'd like to start with this. This is William Wade's Atlantic Dockyards from 1851 kind of showing this kind of, you know, nascent emergence of commerce along the shores. And then, by the time we get to the New York Dock Company in the early 20th century [inaudible] exploded to, as you're saying, like this wall of commerce and this wall of ships and wharves and floating bridges and docks. And, [inaudible] --

JULIE GOLIA: And, Ian, I want to point out, just go back to the last slide for a second. If anyone is interested in doing place-based history, head down to Red Hook. There's a wonderful

organization called Portside New York that operates basically out of Atlantic Basin and actually, the Governor's Island Ferry was leaving out of there this season rather than out of Pier 6. And you can absolutely get a feel of exactly the built environment that you're looking at here. The sense of the heft of the basin and sort of the purpose, the design purpose and development purpose, of it. So, anybody who is just curious or interested in bringing students, this would be an amazing place to do place-based history. But, sorry, go back to our wonderful map, Ian.

IAN FOWLER: So, talking about this expansion, which leads to our map here. This is from the New York Dock Company. So, what was the New York Dock Company and why is this important and what are we looking at in terms of a history here?

JULIE GOLIA: So, the New York Dock Company I think serves as a really good foil and maybe a good example of the nature of commerce in the mid-19th century as we move into the 20th century. It's essentially a warehousing company that looks to take advantage of changing markets and consolidate ownership of all of those independent warehouses that we had talked about in the 19th century. And so, buying them up, there were foreclosures that took place, there were some smaller sales that took place, but by the time we get to I think around the 1910s, the New York Dock Company essentially owns all of the warehouses between Erie Basin and Red Hook all the way up to the Empires Stores warehouse up between the two bridges and what we presently know as Dumbo, which is a completely different business model than what we had been talking about in the 19th century. And, Ian, what is the red on this map? Tell us.

IAN FOWLER: The rest on this map is actually all of the warehouses that the New York Dock Company owns. So, it's a striking map obviously with the kind of the red versus the monochromatic. I love the situation geographically with kind of Governor's Island kind of centered as opposed to Manhattan really showing the dominance of Brooklyn, but it's an interesting map because it's kind of where history and research comes in in some of the secondary and primary sources we have at the library. So, we're talking about warehousemen and we're talking -- that is mentioned on the map. These are people that work at the warehouses. They actually have legal right to liens on property that were at warehouses. So, having warehousemen kind of reaffirms your legitimacy in the eyes. And this is from the Exporters' Encyclopedia, which is full of great information and advertisements for all of the docks and warehouses in Brooklyn. But what the map was made for was actually the sale of this property, which is between the bridges and Dumbo, which they were offloading as not as profitable to their expanded new business model that you just mentioned, Julie. So, while it seems kind of braggadocious, it also is used for a purpose. And the gentleman who made this map actually also constructed all of their formed concrete warehouses, which are still in existence thankfully and I believe have been landmarked, which is why they're there. And it's great to see down there in Red Hook. And what's also interesting, just to go back to it, is as far as we can tell, we have the only copy of the map that still exists. So, it looks like something, especially when you examine the materiality of this map, that was probably maybe printed in a run less than five or 10 and then distributed internally, not something that actually would've gone

up for competitors or been sold commercially or that you would've seen around the warehouses and their docks.

JULIE GOLIA: I think that is just -- when Ian told me that this was probably the only copy of this map, I just think it's absolutely amazing. And it actually is also a great document to look at when we're thinking about today because I think this begs a huge question, which is, where did all of these warehouses go? Where did this stretch of 70 warehouses go? And so, if people, you know, have spent any time on the waterfront, Empire Stores, which is that top part that Ian just showed, the part they were trying to get rid of because it felt separate, is still there. As you say, it's been landmarked and actually redeveloped and that is a totally different Doc Chat and a really interesting conversation to have. And then, if you go all the way to the other end of it, there are a number of important warehouses that are still extant in Red Hook, but that big stretch along the middle of that is largely gone. They were essentially destroyed in the redevelopment of the waterfront throughout the mid and late 20th century and then sort of the northern part of that is currently part of Brooklyn Bridge Park. And it's an important thing I think for us to remember that these sort of relics, these physical remnants of this industrial waterfront, where so many hundreds of thousands of people worked, are no longer visible to us today, though I do think there's just sort of a wonderful honoring and nod to the work that they did in the title of this map New York Dock Company Warehousemen, right? A real focus on the workers more so than the buildings, which I think is fascinating.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah. And that could be a whole separate Doc Chat of labor history and the forefronting of these warehousemen and their power and being part of this company and their prominence on the map.

JULIE GOLIA: Yep. Absolutely. Well, this seems like a good time to open it up to conversation.

KATE CORDES: I have a question. Going back to the first map you discussed and I think, Ian, you may have mentioned this term, but what is a sanitary map?

IAN FOWLER: Oh. So, Egbert Viele creates what is known as the sanitary and topographical map of New York City. And that map is really essential in understanding the original waterways of New York City. He was a sanitary engineer. It's called that because at that point in time they were really concerned about Yellow Fever outbreaks and cholera. And so, they thought it was miasmatic and so they thought if they controlled airflow and water flow that they could better understand it. But what we use that for now is primarily understanding the effects of climate change and where original bodies of water in low lying areas are so that we can better predict where upcoming climate change will impact. So, pretty much any superstorm Sandy or beyond-type scenarios. And it's a beautiful map.

KATE CORDES: It's a gorgeous map. I just put a link to it in the chat. And just a quick note in the chat from Barbara, the U.S. Naval Yard is in the top corner. It says U.S. Cob Dock U.S. Navy Yard there. So, yeah, it's there. And there are more resources and more maps in our

digital collections portal, which I linked to also. Question --

JULIE GOLIA: And that is another I think amazing place to visit in person, especially as we're looking for outdoor places to go see these days to get just a scale of the kind of alteration to the waterfront. There's no place I would say -- Erie, Basin, and Red Hook and the Brooklyn Navy yard are some of the most remarkable transformations of the waterfront that you can actually go right to the edge and see.

KATE CORDES: Another question from Crystal. Can either of you speak about the industrial waterfront in the Sunset Park area? And, specifically, the jobs that people may have held around there in the late 1800s?

JULIE GOLIA: So, one of the most notable developments is Bush Terminal, which we today know as Industry City, which at the same was called Bush's Folly because they thought it was going to be really problematic to build warehouses down there. And he ended up making an enormous amount of money and it was seen as one of the most cutting edge and modern designs for sort of an integrated warehouse and shipping system. What kinds of jobs people held there is a really fascinating question and I actually would take -- one of the things I want to point out is that Bush Terminal continued to operate as a warehouse and also as factory spaces well into the 20th century. And in the research that I did about the Brooklyn waterfront in the 20th century, we found a remarkable number of women actually working at Bush Terminal. And, you know, and I think that is like, you know, we could do a whole gendered analysis of the warehousemen map, you know, and what it means to sort of gender the work of the waterfront, but women were working along the waterfront in the 19th century in a number of capacities. And then, in the middle of the 20th century, were playing really important roles and particularly in the packaging of small items. Things like olives or children's toys for which their smaller hands were seen as more appropriate to help pack those materials. So, a real diversity of jobs. But I just wanted to sort of point out that often we associate those with men workers, male workers, and there were female workers as well.

IAN FOWLER: And just to add. There's also a lot of new research being done with GIS and kind of seeing what the gender differentiation between these jobs that would have happened at the Bush warehouses was broken down by nationality derived from the census. So, we're just now starting to get like these new maps and new research done that is really diving as granularly as possible as we can into this kind of information.

KATE CORDES: I think we'll have time for two more questions. One from Renee. I am a volunteer on a fireboat, John J. Harvey, a retired FDNY fireboat built in the shipyards in Gowanus Bay, Brooklyn. How does one locate any documentation of the shipyards in Brooklyn as they're a big part of the waterfront. How does someone research those?

JULIE GOLIA: I think you start in Ian's division.

IAN FOWLER: I think it would depend on what you would want to know. The resources of New York Public Library could definitely get you a lot of information. The local history division would also be roped into that, as well as our general research division. But I definitely think at some point in time, if you really want to get into it, you're probably going to want to take a trip either virtually or in-person to the archives because they're going to have all sorts of things related to construction, permits, that kind of thing that will help kind of flesh out that story. So, I would say, and, Julie, correct me if you think I'm wrong or Kate, but I think that would be a multi-institution visit to really flesh out the history if it hasn't been written already, which you can always contact your local history division to find out.

JULIE GOLIA: I'll also, as a newspaper scholar, point you toward periodicals. Because particularly in 19th century in Brooklyn and in New York there was enormous attention on the maritime trades and on shipbuilding. And a lot of this was documented just in regular newspapers, as well as in specific industrial newspapers. And that is a place where our general division could really help point you toward the kinds of periodicals that you need.

IAN FOWLER: Yeah

JULIE GOLIA: And I think the thing to be careful with about manuscripts is actually a lot of 19th-century companies didn't necessarily keep their papers, you know? And so, I was always on like the treasure hunt for, you know, tons of, you know, business papers as relates to some of these warehouses and it was a really tricky thing to find people didn't have the sense of archiving the way that we do today, but actually, I think there are real tricks around some holes in the archives through periodicals.

KATE CORDES: One last question. So, the map division helps a lot of researchers, right Ian? We know this. But can you recall like how do people use these in their own research? Like, you're telling stories, but when is the last time someone maybe have accessed one of these maps? Without divulging private information maybe, what were they? How do they use these maps?

IAN FOWLER: Yeah. Keeping the very rigid standards of New York Public Library's privacy policy in mind, I can say for each map I'll give one example. So, this map in particular and maps like this for Brooklyn as Julie was talking about, these nonprofits that do like historic neighborhood tours or people that want to do building research or block research, this is a great way to visualize what that space looked like beforehand. And so, that is good. I mean, if you're ever, you know, happen to be in Red Hook and you're at Sunny's and you're having a very nice beverage, you can gaze out and think of this map and imagine what could have been a long time ago. And then, I pointed this out a little bit, but for this map, you know, these legal, kind of quasi-legal, maps that show these kind of where the original high-water marks were, where the bulkhead lines were, and also just how the city was laid out are extremely useful for any sort of ecological history, industrial history. I mean, as Julie pointed out, you can look at the Cob Dock, you can compare that with the blueprints of the Navy yard that we have in the map division and

then you can kind of see with all of the piers and docks, this is before the Brooklyn Bridge, what's going on with ferry lines and with travel and with all kinds of cultural history, social history you can tie into this. Going back to the reason this map was made. What is with the West Washington Market and how does that tie in with history of the actual Washington Market, both the first one and the current one? So, these maps have been used in a lot of different ways and there's a lot of ways to approach them based on your field of research. And a lot of ways as educators to ask your students about them and then say like, why do you think this map exists and what would this be used for?

JULIE GOLIA: I think that last point I would just reiterate. I'm sure any teacher who is on here has seen the way students react to maps. And I think particularly the way that students react to maps of a place that they're familiar with and looking at the layers of history as depicted in maps over time it's just such an engaging way to kind of immerse, especially like a student who is not super experienced with document analysis, into the world of primary sources. And a lot of these are on our digital collections and can be used in virtual classrooms during this kind of virtual period that we're in.

KATE CORDES: So, Ian, I put the links in again into the chat, but can you just walk us through how people find these items?

IAN FOWLER: Yeah. So, the best way to go about it is to go to Digital Collections, which is just digitalcollections.nypl.org. You can put in search terms so finding this one is just West Washington Market. And then, what's great about that is that is across our research libraries and so you'll find, hopefully, some other information. If you look up New York Dock Company there's a lot of great pictures from the various divisions, photographs from various time periods that show the New York Dock Company's expanse. And if you're looking for something -- so, you know, a lot of this is based on, you know, title, keywords, cataloging subjects. If you're not finding something, I guarantee you we have something for you. Just email maps@nypl.org or you can just talk to Ask NYPL, which is another great resource, find us on Twitter, and we'll figure out if it's not at our library it's probably in Brooklyn or Queens or Staten Island or the Bronx and we'll find it.

KATE CORDES: Great. Thank you, Ian and Julie. So, there are the links to the items we discussed. But links to these collection items and other resources along with a video and transcript of this episode will be published shortly in a blog post on the NYPL website, which we'll send out to everyone who registered for this episode. All previous episodes can be found on our site as well. The easiest way to find blog posts is by subscribing to the Research at NYPL channel of the NYPL blog. I'll put the link here in the chat for you. And more information on Doc Chats. They're held every Thursday at 3:30. Our next one on November 19th is going to tackle modernism and women photographers and feature some of the gems from the library's photography collections. You can register in the link that I'm about to put in the chat and also keep an eye out for future Doc Chat event pages on library's research newsletter and social media. Let me just put that in here. I'm going to relaunch the poll actually because a few people

have asked. I appreciate you wanting to fill it out again. Oh, no. Actually, let me not do that because I'm going to lose all my previous polls. Sorry. If you want to fill out the poll, come back next week please, and fill it out again. Just one more link. And with that, I just want to say thank you for everyone for attending and for your great questions and to Julie and Ian for this stimulating discussion. Thanks, everyone.

IAN FOWLER: Thank you.

JULIE GOLIA: Thanks, everybody.