

Records of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association

The Rockefeller Archive Center is pleased to announce the opening for research of the records of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association (DLMA), a non-profit association designed to rehabilitate, redevelop and reinvigorate Lower Manhattan. The DLMA collection encompasses 85.5 cubic feet of archival material documenting all aspects of the Association's activities. The collection documents the DLMA's creation in 1958 through the consolidation of the Downtown Manhattan Association and the Committee on Lower Manhattan, its most active and successful years of 1958-1974, its participation in the mid-1990s in the Lower Manhattan Project and its resulting updated Lower Manhattan Plan, and its role as the supporting organization for Lower Manhattan's Business Improvement District (BID) the Alliance for Downtown New York. Its most recognizable achievement was to foster the development of the World Trade Center complex.

Material in the DLMA collection includes the meeting records of the Board of Directors and various committees, a limited selection of officers' files, financial records, membership records, project files, DLMA publications, and reports and studies. The overwhelming majority of the records are contained in the projects series, which documents the creation, development and evolution of many of the important projects advocated, recommended or endorsed by the DLMA in the realm of land use, redevelopment, and traffic and transportation improvements. Accompanying photographs, audio and visual materials are available in Special Collections Series 1081. This companion collection contains approximately 1100 photographs and 900 slides.

The DLMA consists of individual and organizational members representing many of the prominent businesses in the Lower Manhattan community. In addition to rehabilitating, redeveloping and reinvigorating Lower Manhattan, the association's objectives have been to maintain and expand Lower Manhattan's position as the world's preeminent leader of finance, commerce and shipping, and to transform the area into a total community by expanding residential capacity and introducing all the amenities of urban community life, including social services and facilities and programs in education, recreation, and the arts.

The founding of the DLMA is interconnected to the aims, goals and objectives of its first chairman, David Rockefeller, and those of the Chase Manhattan Bank. In 1955 Chase National Bank (often linked with the Standard Oil Company and its largest shareholders, the Rockefeller family) merged with the Manhattan Company (commonly known as the Bank of Manhattan, which had been founded by Aaron Burr in 1799 as New York's second bank, preceded only by Alexander Hamilton's Bank of New York.) Historian Robert Caro has called the Chase Manhattan Bank "very probably the single most powerful financial institution on the face of the earth" in the quarter century following World War II.¹ The powerful new Chase Manhattan Bank was looking to make a colossal statement, and there was no better way than to build a flagship headquarters. David Rockefeller, as Executive Vice President of Planning and Development and chairman of the committee responsible for the location of the new headquarters, chose Lower Manhattan. This bold and risky decision was based on the

¹ Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1974., p. 734.

potential strength of both the Chase Manhattan Bank and the Lower Manhattan financial district. Despite its rich history as the former capital of the United States, in the 1950s the area many had claimed as “capital of the world” was undeniably in decline. Rents and occupancies were low and vacancies were high, while many of the existing public and private facilities were deteriorating and suffering various levels of obsolescence. Lower Manhattan was rapidly losing to its competition - the posh new facilities offered in midtown. Robert Moses “pointed out that many Wall Street businesses had already moved uptown or were about to leave the city altogether. If any more left, Chase’s decision to remain would be a colossal blunder,” David Rockefeller recalls in his *Memoirs*. “The construction of a new Chase headquarters could make a difference but by itself would not be enough. If the physical infrastructure and public services were not radically upgraded, the exodus from Wall Street would continue.”² David Rockefeller credits Robert Moses with the idea that led to the DLMA: “Moses suggested that I put together an organization that could speak on behalf of the downtown financial community and offer a cohesive plan for the physical redevelopment of Wall Street to persuade the politicians to allocate the necessary resources.”³ The new organization was officially established in 1958 through the consolidation of the Downtown Manhattan Association, Inc. (founded as the City Hall Park Association in 1937) and the Committee on Lower Manhattan, Inc. (originally organized as a committee of the New York State Chamber of Commerce) as the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association, Inc. with David Rockefeller as its chairman.

To study the activities of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association requires an understanding of the area itself. In the terms specified by the DLMA, Lower Manhattan refers to the area south of Canal Street, generally bordered to the west by the Hudson River, to the east by the East River and to the South by the Battery and New York Harbor, geographically encompassing approximately one square mile. Lower Manhattan is often hailed as the financial capital of the world and it has a rich history of shipping and commerce through the port of New York. Lower Manhattan was the earliest area settled by the Dutch when it was known as New Amsterdam and once housed the entire population of the city of New York. Early government activity of the newly forming United States of America also centered in Lower Manhattan. George Washington bid farewell to his troops at Fraunces Tavern (54 Pearl Street) in 1783 and was inaugurated as the country’s first President at Federal Hall in 1789. New York City served as the capital of the United States from 1785-1790 at which time Fraunces Tavern (the oldest structure still standing in Manhattan) housed the offices for the Departments of State, Treasury and War. Today government activity in Lower Manhattan is representative of all levels of government and is mainly concentrated in Civic Center including City Hall, the Municipal Building and Foley Square.

At the time the DLMA was formed, Lower Manhattan had a working population of approximately 400,000 and a residential population of 4,000.⁴ Employment in the area focused mainly in the financial and shipping sectors, with small representation from other industries such as transportation, communications and wholesale distributors. The area had for the most part been left out of the post-World War II industrial boom. “In June

² Rockefeller, David. *Memoirs*. New York: Random House, Inc. 2002, p.387.

³ Rockefeller, David. *Memoirs*. New York: Random House, Inc. 2002, p.388.

⁴ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 197, Folder 1807.

1958, when our association was organized, the words that best described the fringes of Lower Manhattan were erosion, decay and exodus.”⁵ “Potentially valuable acreage either lay idle or was underutilized in block after block of low-rise, low yield, decrepit structures housing marginal enterprises. A sorry network of rotting piers and primitive waterfront facilities ringing the perimeter completed the scene of economic waste and blight.”⁶ This was the landscape as the DLMA began its operations.

The DLMA has served as a vehicle for Lower Manhattan’s business and institutional leaders to interact, develop common goals and objectives and to work in concert with the public and with representatives at every level of local, state and federal government to facilitate implementation of its plans and long-term vision. According to the “Agreement for Consolidation,” the specific objectives of the association are to foster, promote and support: physical improvements, sound redevelopment and preservation of economic values; improvement of transit, traffic and transportation facilities serving the area and parking facilities in the area; preservation, rehabilitation and restoration of buildings, structures and sites of historical interest; establishment and maintenance of non-profit publicly accessible museums, libraries and other cultural, educational, recreational, humanitarian, patriotic and civic facilities and programs; and to honor organizations and individuals that have rendered distinguished service to the area.⁷

To accomplish these objectives, the DLMA’s main course of action has been to initiate, or to commission, studies, surveys and reports and to disseminate these findings, and to subsequently support those proposals deemed to promote Downtown and oppose those that would be a detriment to the area. In this vein, the DLMA’s *First Report*, published on October 14, 1958, presented a comprehensive view of the current conditions and offered a series of recommendations toward the strategic revitalization of Lower Manhattan in the fields of traffic and transportation, land use and the proposed designation of several major redevelopment areas. Among the many recommendations were a variety of street widenings and closings to alleviate crowding and congestion, comprehensive rezoning of the entire area, a plan to demolish and/or modernize the east and west side waterfront piers, and the proposed relocation of the Fulton Fish Market and the west side produce market known as Washington Market.

The historical legacy of the Association will surely be connected to its role in the creation of the World Trade Center. At the Executive Committee meeting of June 15, 1959, the DLMA considered a May 25 memo written by McKinsey & Company, Inc. regarding preliminary study of a World Trade and Finance Center. The memo states that the “growing orientation of American management to a world-wide point of view raises the possibility of, and perhaps the need for, a physical center for international trade and business in the United States – a center where United States and foreign business and financial interests can meet to do business; where representatives of the United States and foreign governments are available for consultation and aid; and where facilities are available to expedite business transactions. Such a center might accelerate the development of international business and act as a symbol of this country’s growing world leadership in the international business community...New York City is in all

⁵ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 200, Folder 1823.

⁶ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 200, Folder 1823.

⁷ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 1.6, Box 10, Folder 90.

likelihood the logical place for such an international center.”⁸ As David Rockefeller reports in his *Memoirs*, the DLMA sponsored the first plan for the World Trade Center in 1960: “DLMA commissioned Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to develop a plan for a 13.5 acre site that included a 70-story hotel and office building, an international trade mart and exhibition hall and a central securities building”⁹ to be located along the East River between Old Slip and Fulton Street. This 1960 report also recommended giving the Port Authority the authority to plan and build the complex. Ultimately to insure political cooperation from New Jersey, and utilization of the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad (PATH) terminal, the World Trade Center complex of seven buildings, including the 110-story twin towers, were built on the west side in the area previously occupied by “radio row” and the Washington Street produce market.

The Association also certainly had its share of frustration and failure, illuminating the intricate combination of public, private and governmental support needed for any project to succeed in New York City as well as the perseverance, determination and sustained resources needed to see it become reality. Expansion of the Second Avenue Subway, Westway and construction of the Lower Manhattan Expressway are all examples of major projects advocated by the DLMA that for a variety of reasons never came to fruition. Westway, a highway project to be built on landfill along the Hudson River, failed after its federal funding collapsed as a consequence of legal opposition from environmentalists.

In the case of the Lower Manhattan Expressway, the DLMA joined forces with Robert Moses. As his biographer explains, “Moses had long been planning to construct [expressways] across Manhattan island itself. Even before the war, Moses had planned at least three such expressways – all elevated: an Upper Manhattan Expressway at approximately 125th Street; a Mid Manhattan Expressway at either 30th or 36th Street; and a Lower Manhattan Expressway that would run across Broome Street and connect the Holland Tunnel with the Williamsburg and Manhattan bridges.”¹⁰ David Rockefeller and the DLMA were possibly Moses’ biggest downtown allies in the battle to build the LME. “Our continued support for the Expressway is not only for reasons of traffic improvement or increased tax revenues, or enhanced real estate values,” the DLMA noted in its *Second Report*. “We are convinced that this undertaking will add more employment opportunities, will create improved and upgraded jobs in the area, and will result in higher wages and better living conditions.”¹¹ Following large-scale organized community opposition, the Board of Estimate rejected a budget appropriation for the Expressway, but the DLMA continued to show support for the ill-fated project.

After initiating a variety of traffic and transit improvements and successfully expanding the capacity to house local businesses, the DLMA shifted its focus to increasing residential capacities in Lower Manhattan and expanding the available social, cultural and recreational services suitable for the development of a truly multi-purpose 24-hour total community in Lower Manhattan. The concept of utilizing the Battery Park area for a large-scale affordable housing project had been endorsed as a portion of

⁸ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.1.3, Box 17, Folder 190.

⁹ Rockefeller, David. *Memoirs*. New York: Random House, Inc. 2002, p.389.

¹⁰ Caro, Robert A. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1974., p. 769.

¹¹ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 197, Folder 1809.

DLMA's *First Report*.¹² Detailed plans for Battery Park City were introduced in 1966 by Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller and architectural consultant Wallace K. Harrison. The Governor's plan proposed the development of 98 acres of landfill on the Hudson River from the Battery to Chambers Street for use as middle and low income housing, light industry, schools, religious houses of worship, a library and museum, a civic center and a hotel.¹³ "Battery Park City (BPC) represents the largest and most complex single urban real estate development ever undertaken in this country."¹⁴ Ultimately, after many years and vast transformation of the project, the as-built BPC bore virtually no resemblance to its original vision.

Another significant project was the cultural development of South Street Seaport, a 33-acre site that includes a state-sponsored Maritime Museum, restored buildings, recreational, entertainment and shopping facilities, and a fleet of ships for public educational use. South Street Seaport serves as both a wonderful asset for every day use by current Lower Manhattan citizens and a reminder of the maritime lifestyle and historical significance of the port of New York.

Overall, the DLMA has been quite successful in its aims. In the 15 years spanning 1958-1973, nearly 47 million square feet of new office space was created in Lower Manhattan and the area's workforce had expanded to 500,000 while its residential population grew to approximately 33,000. This new office space alone would be considered the fourth largest office center in the United States. Only two other cities (Chicago and Washington) have as much office space in their central business districts as Lower Manhattan added during this period.¹⁵ Of course, the centerpiece of this building boom was the World Trade Center complex which, at its height, contained 13.4 million square feet of office space, representing approximately 4% of the entire available office space in Manhattan at the time. But the development in the area extends far beyond simply the construction of the World Trade Center. The Chase Manhattan Bank headquarters (completed in 1961), the Home Insurance building (completed in 1965) and the Jacob Javits federal office building (completed in 1968) are just a few of the construction successes.¹⁶

The number of educational facilities in Lower Manhattan dramatically expanded as a result of the new development in the area. New schools and colleges included the Borough of Manhattan Community College (Washington Street urban renewal project), New York University Graduate School of Business, and a newly constructed two-block campus for Pace University and the DLMA-sponsored Murry Bergtraum High School in the Brooklyn Bridge southwest urban renewal area. In addition to Battery Park City, residential expansion included Chatham Green, Chatham Towers, and the Southbridge Towers. There was also significant expansion of community services, including the Beekman-Downtown Hospital and a downtown branch of the New York Public Library. A short list of cultural and recreational accomplishments includes the Museum of the American Indian, located in the former U.S. Custom House, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the restoration of Bowling Green Park.

¹² RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 197, Folder 1807.

¹³ Roberts, Steven V. "Governor Urges 'City' at Battery", *New York Times*, May 13, 1966.

¹⁴ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 200, Folder 1823.

¹⁵ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 202, Folder 1830.

¹⁶ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 200, Folder 1823.

The DLMA collection serves to document a model of what many regard as successful urban renewal based on collaboration between the public and private sectors and various agencies of all levels of government. In many ways any study of the activities of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association is truly a snapshot of the history of New York City, its position as the dominant urban center of New York State and the United States, as well as its place in the global economy. Urban and regional planning are dominant themes throughout, but the records also illuminate the complex maze of elected officials, city agencies, commissions and public authorities that must be navigated, with all of its significant players, from the local community board to the Board of Estimate, City Council, City Planning Commission, the Mayor's office, as well as the participation of such powerful entities as the Port Authority and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and community groups such as the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

The activities of the DLMA are, in the words of DLMA's *Fourth Report* of 1973, "powerful testimony to what can be accomplished when public minded private interests and all levels of government join to take a long, bold and outward look at community needs and potential, and then work in concert to bring about constructive change."¹⁷

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[Click here for more information on DLMA on the RAC website](#)

¹⁷ RAC, IV3B24 DLMA, Inc., Series 2.4, Box 202, Folder 1830.



This design for the proposed World Trade Center on the east side of Manhattan was first published in a report by the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association, "World Trade Center: A Proposal for the Port of New York," on January 27, 1960. According to the caption circulated with this public relations photo: "This architectural perspective, an imaginative view from above the Brooklyn Bridge overlooking downtown New York, shows the group of buildings (lightly shaded) proposed for the World Trade Center in the middle foreground. The World Trade Mart is the flat structure at right and the Commerce office-Hotel Building is the tall building at the left. To the left of this group are three towers of the middle-income housing project under consideration for the Battery Park area." *From the DLMA Archives.*





The Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association endorsed eleven “Major Improvements” for Lower Manhattan in its second report in November 1963. These projects, identified on this photograph and design sketch, “will bring added vitality to lower Manhattan and will create new and better employment opportunities for the people of the whole New York metropolitan area,” the report argued (p. 8). *From the Second Report of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association, November 1963, pp. 6-7.*

- A World Trade Center.
- B. New York Stock Exchange
- C. Civic Center
- D. Brooklyn Bridge Southwest
- E. Washington Street Redevelopment
- F. Heliport
- G. Marina and Boatel
- H. East River Espalanade
- I. Hudson River Landfill Project
- J. Brooklyn Bridge Southeast
- K. Brooklyn Bridge North



David Rockefeller, chairman of the Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association, shows New York City Mayor Robert Wagner, Jr. the DLMA's recommended improvements for Lower Manhattan during a meeting on November 20, 1963. They are looking at an enlargement of the photo and design sketch from the DLMA's Second Report. *From the DLMA Archives.*



The DLMA's chairman, David Rockefeller, and president, Edmund F. Wagner, use a scale model of Lower Manhattan built by Theodore Conrad to review the association's ten years of progress during its 10th anniversary meeting at the Chase Manhattan Bank on June 10, 1968. *From the DLMA Archives.*