

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND. COMMITTEE FILES

The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10037

NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10037-1801

African Burial Ground. Committee Files, 1991-1994

Sc MG 566

Bulk Dates: 1991-1994

Extent: Shelving Unit:
Linear feet: 3.2 linear feet

Source and Date: Howard Dodson, 1994

Processor's Name: Rose Yndigoyen, Intern, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, CUNY Queens College

Date Finding Aid Completed: November 24, 2009

Abstract: The African Burial Ground. Committee Files collection consists of administrative records held by Howard Dodson in his position as Chairman of the Federal Advisory Committee on the African Burial Ground. The committee was convened to advise the General Services Administration on issues concerning the discovery, study and memorialization of 18th century African and African-American remains discovered in Lower Manhattan.

Organization note: Collection is organized in eight series: Committees; Correspondence and Memoranda; Advisory and Research Reports; Contracts and Agreements; Public Art and Events; Media Files; Reference Files; Architectural Drawings

Access: Unrestricted access

Reproductions: All requests subject to limitations noted in divisional policies on reproduction.

Copyright: Information on copyright (literary rights) available from repository.

Citation: [Item], African Burial Ground. Committee Files Collection/Papers, Sc MG 566, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Index Terms

Names: Dodson, Howard
Jorde, Peggy King
Moore, Christopher
Tabasi, Adunni Oshupa

Subject: Africans --New York (State) -- New York -- History
African Americans -- New York (State) New York -- History
African Burial Ground (New York, N.Y.)
Burial -- New York (State) --New York --History
Cemeteries -- New York (State) -- New York --History
Landmarks -- New York (State) -- New York -- History
Historic districts -- New York (State) --New York

AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND. COMMITTEE FILES, 1991-1994
3.2 linear feet (9 boxes)

History

In 1991, in the course of excavation for a new federal office building in Lower Manhattan, skeletal remains were discovered. Historians had known of the existence of a burial ground in this location, demarcated on contemporary maps as "Negro Burying Ground," a portion of a larger potter's field, but had believed that the intervening centuries of development had obliterated most remains and artifacts at the site. However, investigation eventually revealed more than 400 intact graves belonging to free and enslaved African and African-American men, women and children. It was determined that the boundaries of the burial ground encompassed a 6.6 acre piece of land in the area of present day City Hall, bounded by Broadway, Elk, Duane and Reade Streets. In the 17th and 18th century, when these bodies were first interred, this site would have been located to the north of the New Amsterdam settlement. This location, outside the bounds that delineated the Dutch community, was reflective of the position of Africans in the settlement at that time.

Africans and African Americans eventually petitioned for land on which to build their own church and burial ground and in 1795, they opened a new cemetery on Christie Street. In the same year, the original African Burial Ground was graded and divided into lots, to be put to other uses.

The discovery of these African and African American remains, which carried with them a wealth of information about the state and station of Africans during the tumultuous formative period of American and New York history, on New York City land, belonging to a federal project, necessarily concerned stakeholders at the city, state, federal and community level. David Dinkins, Mayor of New York City at the time of the discovery, created The Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground (originally called The Mayor's Committee on the Negro Burial Ground) comprised of representatives from various organizations and interest groups. Members of the Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground included: Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library; Augusta Kappner, President of the Borough of Manhattan Community College, State Senator David Patterson, Joan Maynard of the Weekesville Society for the Preservation of Bedford Stuyvesant; Reverend Suzan Johnson Cooke, Mariner's Temple Baptist Church; Robert McDonald,

director of the Museum of the City of New York and Max Bond of Davis Brody and Associates.

The Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground advised the Mayor's office on matters of policy regarding the burial ground and took the lead on necessary communications with the Landmarks Commission and the General Services Administration. While members of different interest groups had differing opinions on how to proceed with this project and what to prioritize in the memorialization of this space as well as the preservation and investigation of these remains, it was generally granted that the African Burial Ground was a unique discovery, and one of national historical significance.

In 1992, after the federal government took control of the project, the Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground was dismantled and a Federal Steering Committee was formed, for the purposes of "advising the Administrator of General Services and the Congress in determining the present and future activities affecting the pavilion portion of the Federal construction site", including review of proposals regarding the human remains, issues of analysis and reinterment of the remains, and construction of a memorial and other educational and artistic additions to the site. It was necessary to form a new committee, because only a committee convened by the order of Congress may advise a federal agency. Some of the members of the Mayor's Committee remained on to form the Federal Advisory Committee. Howard Dodson was appointed Chairman of the Federal Steering Committee. Other committee members included: Christopher Moore, writer; Miriam Francis, community representative; Mary Lacey Madison, Community Representative; Noel Pointer, Olive Tree Productions; Carolyn Sherry, Community Representative; Adunni Oshupa Tabasi, Community Representative; Howard Wright, Community Representative; Elombe Brath, Patrice Lumumba Coalition Community Activist; Richard Brown, Community Representative; Raenice Good, Community Representative; Robert McCormick Adams, Smithsonian Institution; Dr. Jerome Handler, Department of Anthropology, South Illinois University; Reverend Suzan Johnson Cooke, Mariner's Temple Baptist Church; Joan Maynard, Weekesville Preservation Society; Barbara Fife, Mayor Dinkins' Office; J. Max Bond, Davis Brody Architects; New York State Senator David Patterson; Robert McDonald, Museum of the City of New York; Laurie Beckelman, Landmarks Preservation Committee; Reverend Herbert Daughtry, House of the Lord Church; Reverend Dr. William Howard, Jr., New York Theological Seminary; Dr. John Henrick Clarke; Paul O'Dwyer, O'Dwyer & Bernstein and Dr. Robert Bush, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

The activities of the Steering Committee intersected with many and varied organizations and individuals at the local, city, state and federal level. The General Services Administration, The Landmarks Commission, Mayor Dinkins' office (later Mayor Giuliani's office), Howard University, Lehman College CUNY, many privately held companies and many community members were involved and keenly invested in their work. On several issues, for example, the movement and study of the remains found at the burial ground site, there was a great deal of controversy among these various groups, which was documented in the transcripts of the Federal Steering Committee's meetings, in the related correspondence and in the press of the day.

During the period from 1992-1994, the Federal Steering Committee and its attendant subcommittees discharged the duties outlined above. They produced reports, held regularly scheduled meetings that were open to community commentary, and corresponded with the other major stakeholders in the project. As chair of the committee, Dodson received and reviewed the documents produced in all of these interactions, as well as kept files for his own reference and research on subjects relating to the African Burial Ground.

The Federal Steering Committee was scheduled to be disbanded in September of 1994. Prior to that date, Dodson submitted a letter on behalf of the committee requesting an extension of their term, an additional two years. The minutes of their July 17, 1994 meeting reflect that this request was denied. Although members of the committee were extremely unsatisfied with that outcome, and vowed to continue their work, the committee's work did conclude and the records of the Federal Steering Committee cease soon after that date.

Scope and Content Note

The African Burial Ground. Committee Files, 1991-1994 collection consists of administrative records kept by Howard Dodson, director of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY. These documents relate to his work as chairman of the Federal Steering Committee on the African Burial Ground in New York City. The date range of the collection is 1991-1994, with the bulk of the material originating in 1992 and 1993. The majority of the collection consists of administrative records created or used by the Federal Steering Committee, including meeting minutes, agendas, correspondence, reports and transcripts. The collection has been organized in the following eight series: Committees, Correspondence and Memoranda, Reports, Contracts and Agreements, Public Art and Events, Media Files, Reference Files and

Architectural Drawings.

Committees (1.2 linear feet)

One of the most extensive in the collection, this series consists of materials created by committees that met to address the development of the African Burial Ground site. Subseries include the Mayor's Burial Ground Committee, the Federal Steering Committee, Federal Steering Subcommittees, the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Public Land Use and Other Committees. Each subseries contains minutes, agendas and reports created by the committee named, for the years 1991-1994.

Correspondence and Memoranda (.4 linear feet)

In addition to the correspondence he generated and received, as Chairman of the Federal Steering Committee, Dodson received copies of many other communications regarding the activity at the African Burial Ground. This series is organized into subseries by the creator of the correspondence, to best capture the diversity of voices vying to be heard on these issues. Subseries include; Howard Dodson, Federal Steering Committee, General Services Administration, Landmarks Commission, City of New York, Howard University, Lehman College, and Other Correspondence.

Reports (.7 linear feet)

In addition to the reports of committee activities that are included in the Committee series, the work of the Federal Steering Committee included contributing to a final advisory report to the U.S. Congress. This work also included the review of many advisory and research reports in the course of their education on the scientific, archeological and planning details that impacted this endeavor. These reports are organized into subseries by creator, and arranged chronologically within each subseries: Federal Steering Committee, General Services Administration, Responses to General Services Administration Research Design, Howard University, Landmarks Commission, and Other Reports (arranged alphabetically by issuer).

Contracts and Agreements (2 folders)

The many parties involved with the project entered into specific, contractually bound agreements regarding the scope and duration of each of their projects, from Howard University's treatment and analysis of the remains to Linpro's construction on the site. Since the entire project is under the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration, the GSA serves as the issuer of all of these contracts. The contracts are arranged chronologically within this series.

Public Art and Events (.2 linear feet)

Public involvement was of paramount concern to the members of the Federal Steering Committee. Aside from community involvement in planning meetings and less formal discussions and correspondence, there were also design competitions open to the public to create artwork for the site, and other projects necessary to draw the public in, and guide them through an experience of the site, as well as a documentary film chronicling the discovery and development of the site. This series consists of proposals, correspondence, and other collateral materials relating to these competitions and submissions. The series is divided into the following subseries and organized chronologically within each: Design Competition Administration, Design Competition Submissions, Other Public Art and Signage, Documentary Film, Ceremonies

Media Files (3 folders)

Due to the unique nature of the African Burial Ground, and its significance in New York and American history, many news outlets covered the discovery and progress of this site. The articles included here are both from large traditional news outlets like The New York Times, and smaller, more specialized news outlets that served specific communities, for example African American Archeology, a newsletter specifically for and by African-American archeologists. This series is separated into subseries by format and arranged chronologically within the following subseries: Articles, Press Releases and Public Notices, Other Publications.

Reference Files (4 folders)

Among the records relating to the African Burial Ground, Dodson kept files of articles, excerpts, and timelines that clearly relate to the history of the site itself, the history of Africans in New York, and the history of the project and committee he himself was a part of. These files have been organized into subseries by subject, and are arranged alphabetically by author within these subseries: Black History in New York City, Burial and Disinterment, History of African Burial Ground Project, City Law and Procedure, Federal Law and Procedure

Architectural Drawings (.2 linear feet)

This series consists of architectural drawings of the federal office building site and the African Burial Ground excavation site, organized chronologically.

Provenance

Gift of Howard Dodson, 1994
SCM 94-46

Processed by
Rose Yndigoyen
Fall 2009

Container List

Box Folder

COMMITTEES

- | | | |
|---|----|--|
| 1 | 1 | Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground Agendas and Minutes, January - July 1992 |
| | 2 | Mayor's Committee on the African Burial Ground Agendas and Minutes, August - December 1992 |
| | 3 | Federal Steering Committee Members and Staff, 1991-1994 |
| | 4 | Federal Steering Committee Charter and Rules, 1991-1994 |
| | 5 | Federal Steering Committee Agendas and Minutes, 1992 |
| | 6 | Federal Steering Committee Agendas and Minutes, 1993 |
| | 7 | Federal Steering Committee Agendas and Minutes, 1994 |
| | 8 | Federal Steering Committee Finances, 1992-1993 |
| | 9 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, June 14 1993 |
| | 10 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, June 28, 1993 |
| | 11 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, July 26, 1993 |
| 2 | 1 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, November 15, 1993 |
| | 2 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, November 29, 1993 |
| | 3 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, December 20, 1993 |
| | 4 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, January 24, 1994 |
| | 5 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, February 28, 1994 |
| | 6 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, March - April 1994 |
| | 7 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, May 23, 1994 |
| 3 | 1 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, June-July, 1994 |
| | 2 | Federal Steering Committee Transcripts, August 22, 1994 |
| | 3 | Federal Steering Subcommittees A-M, 1993-1994 |
| | 4 | Federal Steering Subcommittees N-Z, 1993-1994 |
| | 5 | U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Public Works - Transcripts, 1992 |
| | 6 | Other Organizations - Agendas, 1992-1994 |

CORRESPONDENCE AND MEMORANDA

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | 1 | Howard Dodson - Correspondence, 1991-1994 |
| | 2 | Howard Dodson - Memoranda, 1992-1994 |
| | 3 | Federal Steering Committee - Memoranda, 1993-1994 |
| | 4 | General Services Administration - Correspondence, 1991-1992 |
| | 5 | General Services Administration - Correspondence, January - May 1993 |

Container List

Box Folder

4	6	General Services Administration - Correspondence, June - December 1993
	7	General Services Administration - Correspondence, 1994
	8	Landmarks Commission - Correspondence, 1992-1993
	9	Landmarks Commission - Memoranda, 1992-1993
	11	Howard University - Correspondence and Memoranda, 1992-1993
	12	Lehman College CUNY - Correspondence and Memoranda, 1992-1993
	13	Other Correspondence, August 1992
	14	Other Correspondence, September - December 1992
	15	Other Correspondence, 1993 - 1994
	16	Other Memoranda, 1991-1994
REPORTS		
5	1	Federal Steering Committee Reports, 1991-1994
	2	General Services Administration Reports, October 15, 1992
	3	General Services Administration Reports, April 22, 1993
	4	General Services Administration Reports, April - May 1993
	5	General Services Administration Reports, November 30, 1993
	6	Responses to GSA Research Design Reports, 1992-1993
	7	Howard University Reports, 1992-1994
6	1	Landmarks Commission Reports, 1992-1993
	2	Other Reports A-E, 1992-1994
	3	Other Reports F-M, 1992-1994
	4	Other Reports M-Z, 1992-1994
CONTRACTS AND AGREEMENTS		
	5	General Services Administration, 1989 - August 1993
	6	General Services Administration, September-December 1993
PUBLIC ART AND EVENTS		
7	1	Design Competition Administration, 1991-1994
	2	Design Competition Submissions, 1992-1994
	3	Other Public Art and Signage, 1991-1994
	4	Documentary Film, 1992-1994
	5	Ceremonies, 1991-1995
MEDIA FILES		
8	1	Articles, 1991-1992
	2	Articles, 1993-1994
	3	Press Releases and Public Notices, 1991-1994
	4	Other Publications, 1991-1994

Container List

Box Folder

REFERENCE FILES

8	5	African Burial Ground Project History
	6	Burial and Disinterment History
	7	Black History in New York City
	8	Federal Law and Procedure
	9	New York City Law and Procedure

ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS

9	1	Federal Office Building Site, pre-1992
	2	Federal Office Building Site, 1992
	3	Federal Office Building Site, 1993
	4	African Burial Ground Excavation, 1993