



BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Katelyn Williams

347-381-3718

kwilliams@brooklynhistory.org

August 1, 2015

BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY (BHS) AWARDED A NATIONAL HISTORICAL PUBLICATIONS AND RECORDS COMMISSION GRANT (NHPRC) FOR “VOICES OF GENERATIONS: INVESTIGATING BROOKLYN’S CULTURAL IDENTITY” ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

An NHPRC grant of up to \$106,186 will support ambitious project to digitize, process, catalogue, and make more accessible nearly 500 interviews

With funding from the [National Historical Publications and Records Commission \(NHPRC\)](#), [Brooklyn Historical Society \(BHS\)](#) has launched *Voices of Generations: Investigating Brooklyn’s Cultural Identity*, a project to digitize, process, catalogue, and make more accessible nearly 500 interviews that are part of ten oral history collections documenting the histories of Brooklyn’s diverse ethnic and cultural communities. Some of these interviews date back to 1973, with narrators born as early as 1880, and have been previously unavailable to researchers, educators, students, and the general public.

The ten collections provide a wealth of historical evidence about the lives of twentieth-century and twenty-first-century Brooklyn residents, and reveal how diverse communities sought to preserve vital social, political, religious, and even culinary traditions while embracing new identities as Brooklynites, New Yorkers, and Americans.

Highlights of the collections include:

- Two collections that focus on Brooklyn’s Latino/a history, including Brooklyn Historical Society’s inaugural oral history project, *Puerto Rican Oral History*, initiated by John D. Vasquez, a founder of Puerto Rican Studies at City University of New York (CUNY). Brooklyn residents who arrived from Puerto Rico via steam ships between 1917 and 1940 explain their reasons for migrating and the support systems they developed to help adjust to their new lives in Brooklyn.
- Three collections that tell the rich cultural, political, and social history of Crown Heights, one of Brooklyn’s fastest changing neighborhoods. Organizers and participants talk about the history of the West Indian Carnival—now one of the largest in the Western Hemisphere; members of the Lubavitch Jewish community discuss their faith-based commitment to the neighborhood; and community organizers and residents talk about the aftermath of the 1991 riots.

- A collection narrating the history of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, the nation's first community development corporation that will be marking its 50th year in 2017.
- An early 1990s collection of interviews with Brooklynites affected by HIV/AIDS, highlighting how health and disease shape identity and form the basis for community as much as ethnicity and culture.
- A collection of Brooklyn history makers, including philanthropists, artists, activists, preservationists, long-time residents, and others who have made Brooklyn into the vibrant, diverse borough that it is.

The NHPRC has awarded BHS a generous grant of up to \$106,186 to support this project. “We’re very proud of our oral history collection at BHS. It includes some of the earliest oral histories in any collection, and we are thrilled to have it recognized by the NHPRC with this prestigious award,” said Deborah Schwartz, President of Brooklyn Historical Society.

The chief goals of the project are to digitize and process the collections, catalogue them through item-level descriptions as well as collection-level finding aids, and post as many as possible online using the [Oral History Metadata Synchronizer \(OHMS\)](#)—an innovative online application developed by the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky that provides time-correlated, word-level or index search capability for interviews online. In addition, BHS plans to use each collection as the basis for increased community and public engagement through outreach, social media, online publishing, and programming.

“It is very exciting that we’ll be able to digitize collections that right now only exist in analog form, some of which have not been heard for decades,” says Zaheer Ali, BHS’s Oral Historian. “With oral histories, transcripts do not reflect the nuances of someone's voice and how they express themselves. OHMS allows us to make these recordings available and searchable in an online format; and once fully catalogued, these rich resources will be accessible to researchers and the general public like never before.”

###

About Brooklyn Historical Society

Founded in 1863, Brooklyn Historical Society is a nationally recognized urban history center dedicated to preserving and encouraging the study of Brooklyn's extraordinary 400-year history. Located in Brooklyn Heights and housed in a magnificent landmark building designed by George Post that opened in 1881, today's BHS is a cultural hub for civic dialogue, thoughtful engagement and community outreach.