

AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Democratizing the Archives: An Aggregation of Diverse Histories in Queens

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New York Ballroom West (Sheraton New York)

Natalie Milbrodt, *Queens Library*

Queens Memory is an ongoing program developed by Queens Library and Queens College, CUNY, to be a dynamic testament of collective memory for the residents of Queens, New York; the most diverse county in the United States. Among the program's goals are to record contemporary borough history as it happens and empower residents from all ethnicities and backgrounds to document their lives. The collected histories become part of the permanent archival collections at Queens Library and are added to the Queens Memory website.

One prime example of the work happening through Queens Memory is the oral history and archival digitization project on World War II home front activities coming out of Fort Totten in Bayside, Queens. This project -- headed by Lori Wallach, a student at Queens College Graduate School of Library and Information Studies -- allows us to explore how the relationships developed through digitization work contribute to the Queens Memory goal of sharing archival collections more widely while capturing historical evidence from a variety of individuals and organizational partners. Records from the Bayside Historical Society, the Archives at Queens Library, and local families will all be part of a virtual gallery that Lori will assemble and curate on the Queens Memory site by the end of 2014.

The site content includes digitized photographs, maps, news clippings and other archival records from existing collections. These historic materials provide context for the oral histories, photos and other documentation generated by the program. Many valuable records documenting communities underrepresented in our nation's largest archival collections are held by organizations too small to conduct their own digitization programs. By providing digitization and metadata services to small cultural heritage organizations and individuals in Queens, this database is widening participation in and access to historical archives.

See more of: [Revisiting New York's Experience of World War II through Digital Public History](#)

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