



npr **history dept.**

Holding On Tight To Old New York

AUGUST 28, 2015 11:03 AM ET



LINTON WEEKS



Louise and Michael Toscano, mother and father of Brooklyn Public Library patron Vera Toscano, on their wedding day. The reception was at the Grand Paradise Ballroom in the Williamsburg neighborhood on May 9, 1926. The photo is now part of the "Culture in Transit" online collection.

Courtesy of Vera Toscano/Brooklyn Public Library

Once thought to be ephemeral and fleeting, the keeping of keepsakes online may be the best way to hold on to — and to share — historic photographs and documents.

That's the thinking behind "Culture in Transit," a project that "democratizes and preserves New York's cultural heritage by helping communities and small institutions digitize items that would have otherwise been hidden," says Sarah Quick of the Brooklyn Public Library. "These important items are not only inaccessible, but often suffering damage due to improper storage conditions."

Quick is one of several "digitization specialists" — a term that speaks to the evolving missions of public libraries — who capture virtual representations of real objects for posterity.



Michael Toscano, father of Brooklyn Public Library patron Vera Toscano, in his company truck, circa 1940.

Courtesy of Vera Toscano/Brooklyn Public Library

"Culture in Transit" is a two-pronged endeavor.

Prong 1: Part of the focus is "on the collections of small libraries, museums and archives across the city who haven't been able to digitize their collections due to cost

or staff time," Quick says. "The project allows these items to be digitally preserved and accessed without removing them from their communities or institutions."

Prong 2: Folks are encouraged to bring personal memorabilia and photos to participating libraries in Brooklyn and Queens where project specialists make digital copies for the individuals and for the libraries' collections.

The collections will also eventually be available to all of us via METRO Digital Culture, Queens Memory, the Brooklyn Public Library catalog and the Digital Public Library of America. "Culture in Transit" is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (which also provides funding to NPR).

"People come to these scanning events really wanting to share their piece of Old New York," says Quick. "And I'm realizing that it comes in the form of both objects and memories. It's fun to tag along on someone else's trip down Memory Lane."

Follow me @NPRHistoryDept; lead me by writing lweeks@npr.org

OLDER

The Creation Of An Emmett Till Archive

NEWER

The Black Cowboys Of Florida

About

Subscribe

Connect with me

© 2015 npr

SHARE

