New Digital Collection: New York Real Estate Brochure Collection

NEW YORK, October 16, 2009 – Columbia University Libraries announces the new online digital resource, _The New York Real Estate Brochure Collection_.

The New York Real Estate Brochure Collection is an invaluable resource for studying and conducting research about New York City apartment buildings. The user can browse or search by address, building name, neighborhood, architect, and owner/agent. Buildings are also encoded with GIS coordinates so that locations and neighborhoods can be displayed using the Google Maps application. Users of the site are able to contribute comments about individual buildings, thereby enabling the creation of an even richer set of descriptions and potentially valuable historical context.

Images from The New York Real Estate Brochure Collection

The first release of the new Web collection includes approximately 800 buildings in the borough of Brooklyn, displaying over 3,000 images of brochures, drawings, floor plans and marketing material. In early 2010, material for buildings in the borough of Manhattan will be added to the online collection, with content from other boroughs added over the next year. When completed, the collection will represent more than 4,100 buildings.

The collection was donated to Columbia's Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library by Yale Robbins, Henry Robbins, and David Magier in 1986 and consists of more than 9,000 items including advertising brochures, floor plans, and related materials that document residential and commercial real estate development in the five boroughs of New York and surrounding areas from the 1920s to the 1970s.

According to Andrew Dolkart, Columbia's James Marston Fitch Professor of Historic Preservation, "the digitalization of the Yale Robbins Collection revolutionizes the study of New York City's vernacular apartment buildings. Floor plans and marketing material for typical mid-20th-century apartment buildings have been almost impossible to find. Now, these unique and valuable records are easily accessible. These are of interest to architectural, social, and urban historians, as they include not only fascinating floor plans, but information on amenities, such as linoleum floors, radio outlets, and Venetian blinds, that were considered so new and modern that they would attract tenants."

The New York Real Estate Brochure Collection is a joint project of the Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, the Libraries' Preservation and Digital Conversion Division, and the Libraries' Digital Program Division. It was funded by monies allocated by Columbia University Libraries for the digitization of special and unique materials of permanent research value.

The Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library is one of the most comprehensive architecture and the fine arts library collections in the world. Avery collects a full range of primary and secondary sources for the advanced study of architecture, historic preservation, art history, decorative arts, city planning, real estate, and archaeology. The Library contains more than 450,000 volumes including more than 40,000 rare books, and receives approximately 1,000 periodicals. Avery's Drawings and Archives collection includes 1.5 million architectural drawings and records.

Columbia University Libraries/Information Services is one of the top five academic research library systems in North America. The collections include over 10 million volumes, over 100,000 journals and serials, as well as extensive electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, maps, graphic and audio-visual materials. The services and collections are organized into 22 libraries and various academic technology centers. The Libraries employs more than 550 professional and support staff. The website of the Libraries at www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb is the gateway to its services and resources.

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