

Fig. 1. Archival materials and drawings in Avery Library's Drawings and Archives reading room. Photograph by Shelley Hayreh, 2024.



Drawings, photographs, and documents often are owned by the building owner or are in research institutions and museums that collect archives. Local, state, and national government archives also have very large collections because of mandated filings for new projects and alterations. Architectural archives are large enough in number and physical size to make materials in their collections expensive and difficult to transport to other locations, so a search of repositories in the place where the architectural firm is located also can yield results.

Internet Searches

Research collections and municipal repositories generally have online catalogs and descriptions of their archival collections to attract researchers.

Archival collections are usually titled as a person's papers, or if looking for an architectural firm's papers, as a firm's records. Drawings or architectural drawings are also useful terms. There may be additional terms depending on the contents of the collection.



Fig. 2. Archival box storage, New York City Municipal Archives, Industry City, Brooklyn, New York. Photograph by the New York City Municipal Archives, 2023.



Fig. 3. Storage of rolled plans, New York City Municipal Archives, Brooklyn. Photograph by the New York City Municipal Archives, 2023.

Searching online for an architect just by name or by the name with the word “drawings” and the other suggested terms will retrieve substantial results of articles and websites on the architect, projects, or drawings of projects.

For example, a general search on “Cass Gilbert architect” yields hundreds of results. A more specific search term, however, will show links to the major collections of Cass Gilbert more prominently. For example, if the search is “Cass Gilbert architect drawings,” only the link to The New York Historical collection will be returned on the first screen. If the search is “Cass Gilbert architect papers,” links to The New York Historical, as well as to other institutions holding his papers will be returned on the first screen.

One can also search by looking for institutions holding architectural archives. The Society of American Archivists has a cohort on Design Records. Their website provides information on finding architectural archival records and lists U.S. institutions that hold them: archivists.org/groups

/design-records-section/finding-design-records.

For a wider range of institutions holding archives, using Archivegrid.org brings together all archival records that are on WorldCat.org, the largest online library catalog. Small institutions can contribute online records by reporting them to the Library of Congress, even if they are not members of WorldCat or have their own online library catalog. This expands the search possibilities to local historical societies and landmarked buildings or museums with information about their own building or others in their community. ArchiveGrid includes international repositories, including Canadian and Australian repositories. There are over 11,000 records for the Canadian Centre for Architecture: cca.qc.ca/en/.

State and local historical societies and universities often collect architectural archives from the region; Northwest Architectural Archives is one example, founded in 1970 to aid historic preservation: lib.umn.edu/collections/special/naa.

The Online Archive of California (OAC) covers archival records in the state, including USC; the Environmental Design Archives at UC Berkeley; Art and Design at UC Santa Barbara and UCLA, among many others: oac.cdlib.org/.

The Canadian Architectural Archive is located at the University of Alberta: libguides.ucalgary.ca/caa.

The International Confederation of Architectural Museums (ICAM) lists its members by geographic location and links to its website and collections: icam-web.org/member-index/.

Finding Aids and Understanding Descriptive Records for Archives

Archives are described in documents called finding aids, a description of the contents of the collection organized hierarchically in series, or categories, relevant to the material. The home page of the finding aid includes summary information on the contents, number of items, general physical types, biography of the subject of the collection, and a history of provenance, among

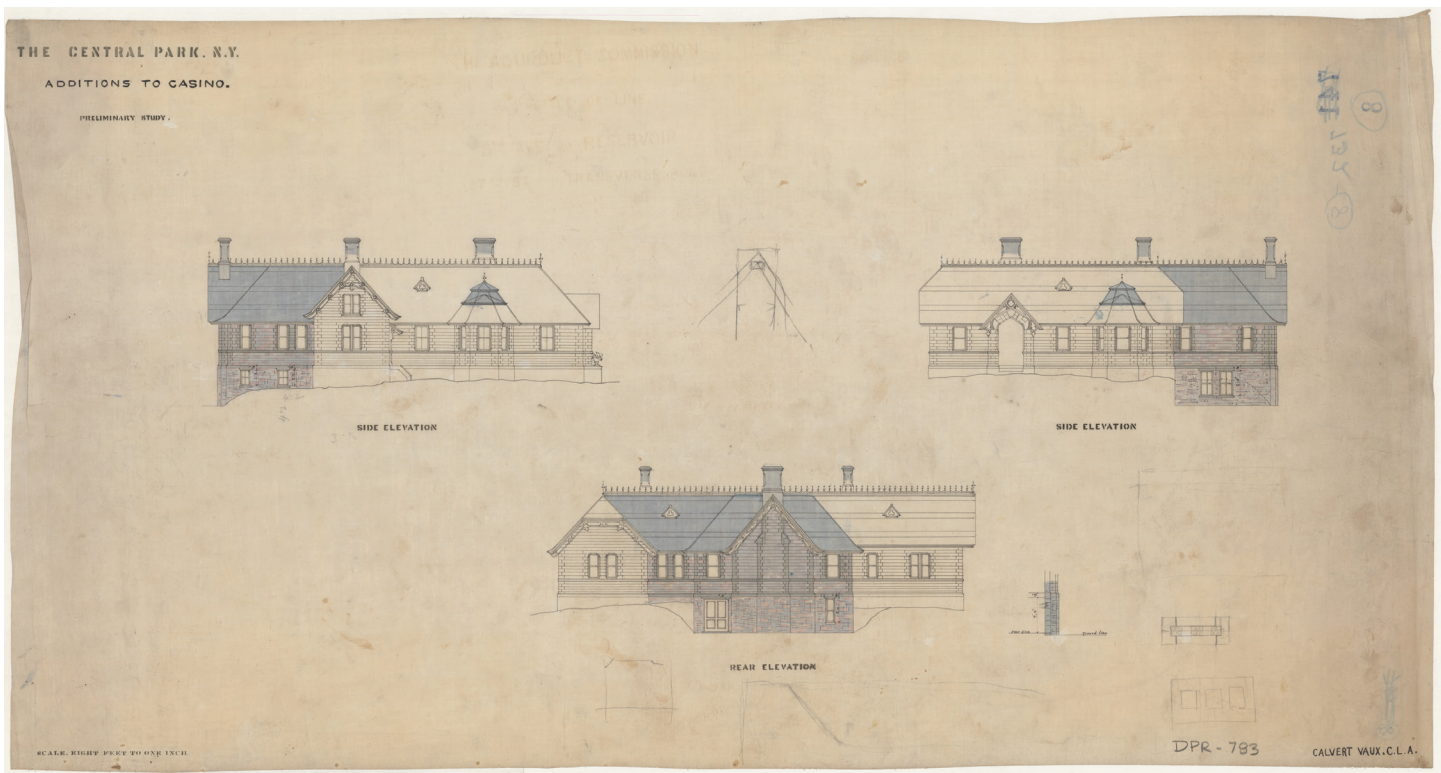


Fig. 4. New York City Department of Parks, drawings and plans. Casino, additions to Casino, preliminary study showing side and rear elevations. New York City Municipal Archives, ID No. REC0042_04_0783.

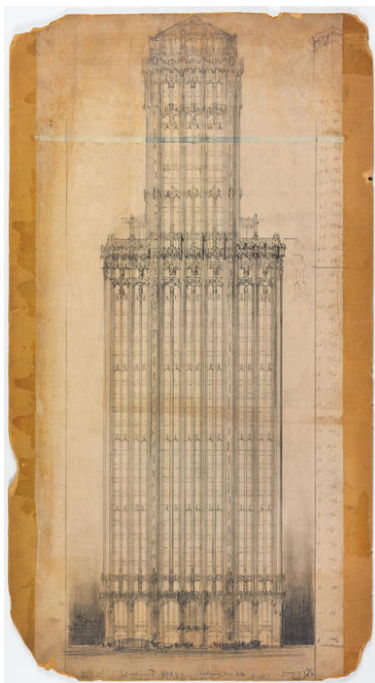


Fig. 5. Cass Gilbert. Woolworth Bldg. scheme no. 26, June 27th/10 (June 27, 1910). Cass Gilbert presentation drawings, circa 1900-1935. Collection of The New York Historical.

other things. For a description of the documents within the archive, the finding aids usually contain series for drawings, photographs, correspondence, and other document types that are most relevant to an architectural archive. If the series are particularly large, the topic can be divided into subseries.

The series and subseries are usually accessed through live links to allow for quick perusal of the materials. Most finding aids can also be searched by keyword.

The underlying coding of finding aids is based on a protocol shared throughout the U.S. and Canada. The presentation of the information may vary based on the style used by the owning institution.

Seeing Collections in Architectural Archives

Architectural archives hold rare and unique materials, and collecting institutions maintain the records under conditions that will preserve them. Each institution has specific visiting and

photography procedures, and it is best to contact them as soon as possible to confirm the availability of materials and to make an appointment to see them.

The Museum of Modern Art's online FAQ regarding their archives is a good overview of how to use an archive: [moma.org/research/archives/archives-faq](https://www.moma.org/research/archives/archives-faq).



Fig. 6. Menokin, Richmond County, Virginia, ca. 1930. Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston, ca. 1930. Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017891304/>.



Fig. 7. Archival materials and drawings in the Avery Library Drawings and Archives reading room. Photograph by Shelley Hayreh, 2024.

Finding or Requesting Digital Images

Digital imaging of items in a collection may be attached to the finding aid or found separately in a digital gallery or collection. If in a digital gallery, then generally items from all collections owned by the institution are organized together in the digital gallery.

Digital repositories now contain many images of architectural drawings and new images are added on a regular basis. Here are a few sites worth exploring:

- The public collections on JSTOR (the Avery Library page on JSTOR is, for example, where the images from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives are found as a collection): jstor.org.
- Most museum and library collections have digital image galleries. Some examples are:
- The Library of Congress: loc.gov/research-centers/main/collections/digital-collections/
- The New York Public Library: digitalcollections.nypl.org/
- The Art Institute of Chicago: artic.edu/archival-collections/explore-the-collection
- The Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) provides a list of useful digital resources: sah.org/jobs-opportunities/digital-resources

If interested in obtaining professional images of architectural drawings, researchers should inform the staff as soon as possible. Most archives offer digitization services, and many allow the informal use of cell-phone photography in the reading room. Photographing large architectural drawings and capturing their sharp line quality requires specific photographic techniques, which are time consuming. It is important to keep track of citations of specific items that are needed for photography.

In addition to imaging services at repositories holding architectural



Fig. 8. Avery Library Digital Imaging Studio, showing a drawing laid out for photography. Photograph by Margaret Smithglass, 2024.

archives, regional imaging centers, like the Regional Digital Imaging Center at the Athenæum of Philadelphia, may also be able to handle large materials: philaathenaeum.org/regional-digital-imaging-center/.

Certain uses of imagery may require copyright and publication permissions. Each institution will have its own procedures. For an overview of the process, see the Museum of Modern Art's online Archives FAQ: moma.org/research/archives/archives-faq.

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