

NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM

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New York Transit Museum Receives Grant from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation to Digitize Collection Materials from Long Island

Brooklyn, NY – Friends of the New York Transit Museum is pleased to announce that it has been awarded a grant of \$226,632 from the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation to survey, identify, catalog, and digitize an extraordinary trove of historic material from Long Island’s transportation history. With the Gardiner Foundation’s generous support, the New York Transit Museum will make collections related to the rich transportation history of Long Island – documents, photographs, maps, postcards, timetables, ephemera, employee memorabilia, and more – freely accessible online to scholars, students, and the public at nytransitmuseum.org/collections.

For nearly two centuries the train has been an integral part of daily life on Long Island, and as a result, most Long Islanders have a general sense that the region’s development was significantly shaped by the Long Island Rail Road. What would otherwise be lost is a sense of how or why this occurred, and who some of the key stakeholders were that made it happen. The New York Transit Museum’s project will illuminate that past and connect it to current daily life, amplifying the key role that the Rail Road and other modes of public transportation have played in Long Island’s history.

“We are incredibly grateful to the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation for this grant and for their support. It is an honor to be able to partner with an organization that truly believes that the story of Long Island is one worth preserving and telling. And it is our greatest hope that in the telling and sharing of this truly breathtaking collection, Long Islanders will gain a greater sense of how our past and our present were deeply shaped by the evolution of public transportation, including the Long Island Rail Road – the nation’s oldest commuter rail system,” says New York Transit Museum Director Concetta Anne Bencivenga.

The centerpiece of the three-year project will be cataloging and digitizing a recent collections acquisition from MTA Long Island Rail Road (LIRR) – nearly 1,700 early documents, dating as far back as 1836. These documents show how closely the history of Long Island and the history of mass transportation are intertwined. Books of hand-drawn land maps detailing the Rail Road’s routes from Brooklyn, Hunters Point, and Jamaica through Nassau and Suffolk Counties and along the North and South Forks to Greenport and Montauk are meticulously annotated with the names of the families that sold the land. Transaction records and annual reports record decisions and personalities that helped shape the Rail Road, and helped shape Kings, Queens, Nassau, and Suffolk Counties as we know them today.

“The Transit Museum’s collection offers a unique view into our regional past. The hand-drawn maps alone listing the lands acquired for the Long Island Rail Road lines reads as a genealogical research tool. The farmers, the landowners, the villages all are noted and their lands delineated. This is just one area of the thousands of documents that personalizes the story transportation played in the history of each of our individual communities, their changes and development,” says Kathryn M. Curran, Executive Director of the Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation.

Digitized materials will be added to the New York Transit Museum’s Digital Collections database, where more than 10,000 photographs, posters, maps, and artifacts from the Museum’s collection can be viewed free of charge. To learn more about the digital collection, visit nytransitmuseum.org/collections.

ABOUT THE ROBERT DAVID LION GARDINER FOUNDATION:

The Robert David Lion Gardiner Foundation, established in 1987, primarily supports the study of Long Island history and its role in the American experience. Robert David Lion Gardiner was, until his death in August 2004, the 16th Lord of the Manor of Gardiner’s Island, NY. The Gardiner family and their descendants have owned Gardiner’s Island since 1639, obtained as part of a royal grant from King Charles I of England. The Foundation is inspired by Robert David Lion Gardiner’s personal passion for New York history. For more information visit: www.rdlgfoundation.org.

ABOUT THE NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM:

The New York Transit Museum is the largest museum in the United States devoted to urban public transportation history and one of the premier institutions of its kind in the world. Since its inception over forty years ago, the Museum – which is housed in a historic 1936 IND subway station in Downtown Brooklyn – has grown in scope and popularity. For nearly 25 years, the Transit Museum has also operated a Gallery & Store in Grand Central Terminal. To learn more, visit

nytransitmuseum.org.

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