



**Norman B. Leventhal  
Map Center**  
at the Boston Public Library

**PRESS RELEASE**

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Contact: Tamani Jayasinghe  
508.330.2876 cell  
617.695.0369 office

**Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library Receives  
Grant to Open Access to Boston Urban Atlases  
from *Council on Library and Information Resources*  
*\$138,462 Digitizing Hidden Collections award announced***

**Boston, MA** – The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library was awarded a *Digitizing Hidden Collections* grant of \$138,462 from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR, [www.clir.org](http://www.clir.org)) last week. This grant program is made possible by funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The Leventhal Map Center project was one of only 14 selected from a total of 125 eligible applications.

The grant was issued in support of the Map Center’s project “Immigrant Roots and Urban Growth in the New England Cultural Hearth: Digitizing, Georeferencing, and Opening Access to Metropolitan Boston Atlases, 1861 to 1938.” These atlases are a critical graphic resource for studying national patterns in urban change and immigration, because Boston was the initial home for many immigrants and a launching point for further migration across the country. This is the most comprehensive collection of these highly detailed and accurate Boston area atlases, which depict features such as building footprints and property owner names. They are a valued resource for researching urban growth and change, U.S. industrialization, transportation development, immigrant neighborhoods, architectural and urban planning, environmental hazards, genealogy, and urban ethnic history. The project will make the invaluable information hidden in them freely accessible to all. The project encompasses 83 large-scale Boston area urban atlases including eleven rare, never before digitized volumes originally created to support the selling of fire insurance policies.

“The Leventhal Map Center is thrilled to have CLIR’s support for this project, which will allow us to digitize access to the most requested physical items from our collection of urban atlases,” said Connie Chin, President of the Leventhal Map Center. “Urban atlases provide a unique narrative of changes in the physical and cultural landscape of Boston, particularly during this timeframe, and these particular pieces constitute the most complete set of Boston area urban

atlases. We are proud to provide increased access to these highly valuable research assets, as no other institution holds all of the volumes of Boston's earliest fire insurance atlases.”

The project will digitize, apply metadata, and georeference individual map plates providing geographic coverage for Boston and neighboring towns, constituting the core of the New England Cultural Hearth during the last half of the 19th century. The creation of spatial data for 2,905 digitized atlas plates through the manual process of adding geographic coordinates to a digital map image, known as georeferencing will greatly facilitate the search function when using these volumes. Spatial data allows users to compare historic maps to contemporary ones and search for locations on maps directly. Last year, the Map Center launched a redesigned website, which includes crowdsourced georeferencing capabilities in order to encourage the public's understanding and use of geospatial tools. The project will allow the Map Center to provide high quality digital open access to atlases that will enable researchers to trace the locations of individuals, businesses, and churches in the Boston area, creating a fact-rich depiction of an important era of heavy immigration of Irish, Italian, Russian-Jewish, and Chinese nationals to Boston.

“Both the Leventhal Map Center and the Boston Public Library see increased digitization of our special collections and providing open access as a critical way of making ‘free to all’ a reality,” said David Leonard, President of the Boston Public Library. “The Map Center’s effort to ensure public access to these undocumented historically important atlases is worthy of recognition, as evidenced by CLIR’s support of this initiative.”

The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center is open to the public Monday-Thursday 10am-7pm; Friday-Saturday 10am-5 pm; and Sunday 1-5pm.

### **About the NORMAN B. LEVENTHAL MAP CENTER**

The Norman B. Leventhal Map Center is ranked among the top map centers in the United States for the size of its collection, the significance of its historic (pre-1900) material, and its advanced digitization program. It is unique among the major collections because it also combines these features with exceptional educational and teacher training programs to advance geographic literacy among students in grades K-12 and enhance the teaching of subjects from history to mathematics to language arts. The collection is also the second largest in the country located in a public library, ensuring unlimited access to these invaluable resources for scholars, educators, and the general public. The Leventhal Map Center, incorporated in 2007 as a nonprofit organization, was established by philanthropist Norman Leventhal as a public-private partnership with the Boston Public Library. Its mission is to use the Boston Public Library’s permanent collection of 200,000 maps and 5,000 atlases and a select group of rare maps collected by Mr. Leventhal for the enjoyment and education of all through exhibitions, educational programs, and a website that includes thousands of digitized maps at [leventhalmap.org](http://leventhalmap.org). The map collection is global in scope, dating from the 15th century to the present, with particular strengths in maps and atlases of Boston, Massachusetts, New England, the American Revolutionary War era, urban maps, and nautical charts. To learn more, visit [leventhalmap.org](http://leventhalmap.org) .

**About BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY**

Boston Public Library has a Central Library, twenty-four branches, map center, business library, and a website filled with digital content and services. Established in 1848, the Boston Public Library has pioneered public library service in America. It was the first large free municipal library in the United States, the first public library to lend books, the first to have a branch library, and the first to have a children's room. Each year, the Boston Public Library hosts thousands of programs and serves millions of people. All of its programs and exhibitions are free and open to the public. At the Boston Public Library, books are just the beginning. To learn more, visit [bpl.org](http://bpl.org).

**About THE COUNCIL ON LIBRARY AND INFORMATION RESOURCES**

The Council on Library and Information Resources is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. To learn more, visit [www.clir.org](http://www.clir.org).

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