CITY GOVERNMENT AND YOU
Keeping New York City Streets Clean Since the 1800s

LA GUARDIA AND WAGNER ARCHIVES
La Guardia Community College/CUNY
Acknowledgments

Gail O. Mellow, President, La Guardia Community College/CUNY
Hon. Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, City of New York
Hon. Gifford Miller, Speaker, Council of the City of New York
Hon. Helen Marshall, President, Borough of Queens
Hon. Kate Levin, Commissioner, Department of Cultural Affairs
Hon. Michael McMahon, Council Member, New York City Council
Tom Newell, Vice President, Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc.

Project Director
Richard K. Lieberman

Associate Project Director
Lisa M. Sita

Content Specialist
Benjamin Miller

Teacher Consultant
Joe Brincat

Design
Abigail Sturges

Design Assistant
B. Webb Eaken

Administration
Eduvina Estrella

La Guardia and Wagner Archives Staff
Soraya Ciego
Douglas DiCarlo
Maureen Drennan
Oleg Kleban
Susan M. Landaira
Steven Levine
Joe Margolis
Melissa Rodriguez
Jennifer Steenborne
Kate Zou

Special Thanks
Brian G. Andersson
Pat Catapano
Mostaque Chowdhury
Ken Cobb
Carmen Cognetta
Carol Consolato
Dorothy D'Eletto
Walter Ditman
Randi Fader-Smith
Joseph Farinella
Matthew J. Farrell
Sharon Jones
Alan Katz
Carl Lee
Dan Luhman
Tom McMahon
Richard P. Mills
Jo Ann Mulligan
Thomas D. Norris
Brenda Parnes
Mel Schiff
Maria Tsiros

Cover: Children rummaging through trash, Bronx, circa 1945.

Photo Credits
Cover and p. 3, La Guardia and Wagner Archives
p. 1, 9, 13 ("before" image), and 20, Harper's Weekly
pp. 4, New York City Department of Health and Hygiene
pp. 5 (report), 6 (map), 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, and
19, (Waring's street cleaners), Municipal Archives,
Department of Records and Information Services,
City of New York
p. 6 (photo of reservoir), courtesy of The New York
Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations
p. 7, map courtesy of Benjamin Miller
p. 14, Municipal Reference Center, City of New York
p. 16, Scientific American (1845-1908), Nov 3,
1883: Vol. XIX, No. 18
pp. 21 and 22, courtesy of Brooklyn Public Library-
Brooklyn Collection
pp. 23, 24, 25, and 26 Courtesy of The Staten
Island Institute of Arts and Sciences
p. 27 and back cover, New York City Department
of Sanitation
p. 29, letter courtesy of Michael E. McMahon,
photo courtesy of Dan Luhman
p. 31, New York City Office of the Mayor

For further information on the topic of this curriculum, see Fat of the Land: Garbage in New York, the Last Two Hundred Years, by Benjamin Miller, New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2000.

This publication is supported, in part, by public funds from The New York City Council, The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, a grant from Consolidated Edison Company of New York, Inc., and a grant from the New York City Department of Records, Administration Unit.

© 2004 La Guardia and Wagner Archives

La Guardia Community College/CUNY
31-10 Thomson Avenue, Room E-238
Long Island City, NY 11101
Tel: 718/482-5065 Fax: 718/482-5069

This curriculum and a teacher's guide will soon be available on our website at

Click on "Fourth Grade Curriculum" for this and other online publications.
New York City’s Endless Problem: What to Do with the Garbage

New Yorkers have always had to deal with more garbage than most other places because there are so many people living here. As the city’s population grows, so does the problem. Today, the word “garbage” has come to mean anything we no longer need or want. Actually, garbage refers to things that rot, or decompose, such as meat or vegetable scraps. A hundred years ago, the terms rubbish and refuse were also used when people talked about waste materials. Rubbish included items such as paper, metals, glass—what we call recyclables today. Refuse was a term used for everything, including ashes and other street sweepings. Up until the early 1900s, ashes from the burnt coal used in furnaces was garbage that had to be removed regularly. One hundred years ago, in 1904, the city removed nearly 1,286,000 tons of ashes from Manhattan. That is more weight than three Empire State Buildings!

City officials have passed laws to make our city cleaner and healthier. Sometimes special committees or departments are formed to enforce these laws. In this booklet you will learn about some of the ways the city has tried to solve the problem of getting rid of garbage.
LESSON 1

Garbage and Public Health

Imagine life in New York City in the middle 1800s. At that time New York City was only lower Manhattan and part of the lower Bronx. Brooklyn was a separate city, and Queens had Long Island City and several villages. In a time before the car was invented, people traveled by walking, by horse, or later by bicycle. Horse-drawn vehicles included buses, ambulances, fire engines, and delivery wagons. With so many horses, the streets of New York were thick with manure. According to the census of 1835, there were 270,089 people living in New York City and 10,683 horses. A thousand-pound horse makes anywhere from 30 to 50 pounds of waste a day. As the population grew over the years, so did the need for more horses, and the amount of manure continued to grow.

But that was not the only problem. The city also had many places of business that produced foul and smelly waste. There were slaughter houses, where cattle, pigs, and horses were killed to be processed into food and other items. The animal hides were used to make leather goods. The fat was melted to make tallow (used in candle and soap making). Bones were made into buttons and ground up for fertilizer. There were also cattle yards and stables to house the animals, and distilleries that made alcoholic beverages.

Disease-causing germs grew in this kind of environment. When disease affects many people at one time and in one area, it is known as an epidemic. One of the most dreaded epidemics was that of cholera. New York City suffered three epidemics of cholera in the 1800s—in 1832, 1849, and 1866. Cholera is caused by bacteria. If the bacteria gets into the water supply, people can pick it up by drinking or handling the infected water. In the early 1800s, New York’s water supply was not very clean. Sewage often ran into the drinking water, including waste from people who had cholera. However, no one knew that cholera was spread in this way until 1883, when the German physician Robert Koch discovered the cause of the disease while working in Egypt. City officials realized that filth and dirt often caused people to get sick, even though they didn’t know exactly how. They realized that many diseases could be prevented if the city were cleaner, so they decided to do something about it. After the second cholera epidemic, in 1849, the city decided to take control of waste and garbage. In 1850, a law was passed giving power over waste management to the City Inspector. Earlier, in 1842, the city had allowed street cleaning to be handled by private contractors, or businessmen, whom the city paid to remove the waste. With the 1850 law, garbage and public health were once again in the hands of the city.
This map shows lower Manhattan and part of Brooklyn in 1850. It also shows how the population of New York had grown since the 1600s.

How did people travel to and from Manhattan? (Hint: Look carefully at the rivers.)

The Brooklyn Navy Yard is located on what body of water?

How many people were living in New York City in 1677? (Remember, Brooklyn was not yet part of New York City. It was a separate city until 1898.)

By 1850, the population had increased how many times?

Compare the population of 1730 and 1790. What was the increase in numbers of people?

What was the percent increase in this 60-year period?

Compare the population of 1790 and 1850. What was the increase in numbers of people?

What was the percent increase in this 60-year period?
This chart has information from the New York City Department of Health and Hygiene. It shows the population of New York City from 1830 to 1870 and the number of people who died of cholera and other diseases during those years. The year is shown above the disease. The number of people who died is shown underneath. Round off the numbers on the chart to the nearest thousand to answer the questions.

Approximately how many people were living in New York in 1830? __________

Approximately how many people died in 1832 of cholera? __________

Approximately how many people were living in New York in 1850? __________

Approximately how many people died of cholera in 1849? __________

The population in 1849 was nearly three times as large as in 1832. In which year did a larger percentage of the city's population die of cholera?
(circle one) 1832 1849

Approximately how many people died of cholera in 1866? __________

Between 1850 and 1870, were there more or fewer people living in New York than between 1830 and 1850?
(circle one) MORE FEWER

According to this chart, was the problem of cholera getting worse or better as time went on?
(circle one) WORSE BETTER

Name two other diseases that people in the 1800s died from.

1  
2
In 1865, a group called the Citizens Association of New York did a **survey** of the city to find out how bad **sanitary** conditions were. Health inspectors went to different areas of the city, called districts, and then reported on what they learned. The street map on the next page shows part of one of the districts. The report states that the problems of this area included bad smells

"... from the manure-heap at Thirty-eighth Street and East River; from the ... street sewers; from filthy streets and overflowing **privies**; from large and numerous **droves** of **swine** which, while passing, completely fill the streets. ...; and from **refuse** matter of **infinite** variety, and in every stage of **decomposition**.

"... It frequently happens that a gang of men sweep the thickest of the dirt into piles; the cart does not follow to remove it until a day or more afterwards. Meanwhile it is scattered more or less by the wind, wheels, and the animals. At length, a portion is taken away, and the street is soon filthy as ever.

"... The condition of the streets has compelled the citizens to resort to private **enterprise**. Portions of many of them are swept every morning, and on Saturday afternoons. The snow is leveled; the gutters are kept open; the sidewalks are cleaned."

List three things that added to the health problems of this district:

1. 
2. 
3. 

Why did the streets get filthy again soon after they were cleaned?

What did citizens do to help?
Now look carefully at the map to answer the following questions.

Locate the place at 38th Street and the East River. The report says that something there smells bad. What is it?

If you walked north along Lexington Avenue and turned east at 42nd Street, what would you reach after walking two blocks?

If you walked west from the varnish factory on East 44th Street, what place would you pass before you reached Fifth Avenue?

Name one place that is south of East 46th Street and west of First Avenue.

The distributing reservoir between Fifth and Sixth Avenues was a main source of water for New York City at the time this map was drawn. Water from the reservoir was distributed for use in the city. Today the main branch of the New York Public Library is built on the spot where the reservoir used to be. In which direction would you have to travel if you wanted to get from the distributing reservoir to the manure yards?

The distributing reservoir, called the Croton Reservoir, around 1900.
Where to Put the Garbage?

The city had different ways of handling the garbage problem over the past two centuries. Sometimes it was dumped on land, sometimes at sea, and sometimes it was burned. This is a present-day map showing three places where garbage used to be dumped: Rikers Island, Barren Island, and Fresh Kills.

Rikers Island remains an island, but Barren Island is no longer. The water around the island was filled in to make it a part of what borough? _____________________________

This borough is southwest of what other borough? _____________________________

In what borough is Fresh Kills located? _____________________________

What body of water used to surround Barren Island? _____________________________

Barren Island was (circle one) north south east west of Staten Island.

Rikers Island is (circle one) north south east west of Manhattan.
Garbage was brought to the island dumps in wide, flat-bottom boats called scows. The garbage was brought in carts to the piers and dumped onto the scows, where there were workers waiting. These men, along with their wives and children, would sort through the garbage and pick out rags, bones, and other items that could be sold to factories that would make products out of them. Rags, for example, were the main material used for making paper. Instead of using wood pulp as we do today, cotton rags were used, so many people made a living as rag pickers.

After items of value were removed from the garbage heaps, the men would level the garbage across the deck of the scow so that all the garbage was even. If there was too much garbage on one side, there would be too much weight on that side and the boat would be in danger of flipping over. This job of leveling out the garbage was called “trimming the scows.”

Taking the garbage out to the islands may have seemed like a good idea, but there was one problem. All that garbage, piled up and rotting, began to smell and the odor drifted across the water to other areas of the city. Sometimes the smell was unbearable, and many people thought it was causing sickness. New Yorkers often wrote letters of complaint to the mayor and city health officials.

Fill in the words on the next page to complete the sentences. In the space below, write down the letters that are in the circles. Then, unscramble the circled letters to discover the words to the caption of the picture on the next page.
1 Many people believed that the smell of rotting garbage caused __ __ __ __. sesnikcs

2 In the 1800s, paper was made mostly from __ __ __ sgra

3 Scows were __ __ __, flat-bottomed boats. wdei

4 The odor from the island dumps was a __ __ __ __ for many New Yorkers. lebmrop

5 Garbage was brought to the piers and __ __ __ onto the scows. medupd

6 Many New Yorkers wrote letters of __ __ __ __ about the smell of garbage. tlpincaom

7 __ __ __ __ was often dumped on islands. Ggeaabr

8 Sometimes the __ __ __ __ was unbearable. lemls

9 Items like rags and __ __ __ __ were picked from the garbage and sold. senob

10 Many people made a __ __ __ __ as rag pickers. givnil

Caption: __ __ __ __ __ __ the __ __ __ __.
LESSON 3

New Yorkers Take Action

The smell of rotting garbage coming from Rikers Island caused great discomfort for many New Yorkers. (Go back to page 7 to see where Rikers Island is located on the map.) One man described it as "the foul stench that is present when an old house drain is cleared of its cheesy slime." On this page and the next are two letters of complaint, both written in 1894 to city health officials by people living in the Bronx. The first is by a thirteen-year-old girl. The second is by a teacher named Annie E. Bigelow.

LETTER #1

Do we know the name of the girl who wrote this letter? (circle one)
YES  NO

In what Bronx neighborhood does she live? ____________________________

She claims the smell is causing a danger to the city. What is that danger? ____________________________

What daily activity does the smell ruin for her? ____________________________

What was ruined for her during the summer? ____________________________

What word would you use to describe how she feels? ____________________________

New York City, July 1, 1894.

Sirs:

I wish you would attend to this matter immediately.

I heard that lately the people dump the dirty stuff and trash into the Sound, or somewhere around there, to fill up a ditch, I think. This, as you know, is not proper at all. Every day, about a dozen times there is a breeze from the Sound, and it smells as horrible as if you'd live in a dirty, old yard closet that the dirt hadn't been cleaned for a thousand years or more.

Last summer, I was sick with a lot of contagious diseases from that smell, and could not enjoy my vacation, and I think that is the reason I was not so smart in school this term. Now, I'm not going to stand it this summer any more. I want to enjoy my vacation just as well as any one else.

While I am writing this letter, the smell is here all the time, and is fearful, and a girl of thirteen years, like me, and as delicate, surely cannot stand it.

The first thing you know, a lot of contagious diseases will break out and spread all over the country, and you'll get it too, the whole Board, and that will be the end of you, if you don't attend to the matter.

The fault lies wholly on the part of this ring of people now in existence and will end dreadfully.

When you get up in the morning, you smell this horrible cologne. When you eat breakfast, which you almost always can't, you smell this dreadful cologne. At dinner and supper and all the time, you smell the stinky cologne.

I can't help expressing myself in this manner, because it is a shame and a horrible shame. I hope you'll attend to this matter immediately, if not before.

And, leaving you with this report, of which all the people in the neighborhood have been discussing, I remain

(Signed) The Writer of this letter.

The Neighborhood of Morrisania.

Attend to immediately.
LETTER #2

What does this teacher do to stop the smell from coming into her classroom? 

How many students are in her class? 

How are she and the children feeling? 

Name two things that the writers of both letters have in common. 
1 
2 

If you were facing this problem in 1894, what would you do about the smell coming from Rikers Island? 

Describe the source of any bad smells in your neighborhood. 

Dr. O'Byrne, 

Dear Sir:-

Something must be done in regard to the awful stench prevailing in Morrisania. The air in the school to-day is simply unsufferable. We keep the windows closed and endure the heat and breaths of the children in preference to the polluted atmosphere outside. It cannot be the result of bad sewerage, as the smell seems to be everywhere. At my home on Home Street it is quite as bad as here at the school. Surely the city authorities must know that a plague breaking out in the 23rd Ward would contaminate the whole city of New York. We will hardly be able to stand the remaining two weeks of school unless we can have fresh air in our class rooms. Forty-eight children averaging 12 years of age in close room in such warm weather is in itself enough to breed disease.

I write you because you are an officer of the Board of Health, and because I think from current reports that you have the interests of the people of the 23rd ward at heart. If I have been too blunt or emphatic, pray excuse it; the children are sick and nervous and so am I.

Yours very truly,

(Signed) Annie B. Bigelow.

Dr. Doty, 

Sir:-
The complaints in the letter are very just. The stench from the smell where the contractors are throwing in garbage is terrific. Complaints come to me from all quarters and from all classes of people. Something should be done to remedy the nuisance.

(Signed) WM. J. O'Byrne, San. Medical Inspector.
LESSON 4

George Waring and the Department of Street Cleaning

When the city took control of waste management in 1850, street cleaning and garbage removal became one of the responsibilities of the police department. Then, in 1881, a New York State law was passed that created the Department of Street Cleaning for New York City. With the Department of Street Cleaning, the city took action to make sure that the problem of dirty streets was getting the proper attention it needed.

The new Department of Street Cleaning at first did not function very well. Then, in 1895, Mayor William Strong appointed George Waring commissioner of the department. Waring had been a colonel in the Civil War, and he ran the department with an army officer's sense of discipline and order. Under his leadership, street cleaners were well organized workers who were required to wear clean white uniforms. Their work made a big difference in how New York looked and smelled. The streets were scoured, wagons that were left on the streets for days were removed, and in the winter snow was shoveled away. The streets were so much cleaner that newspapers published photos of how the streets looked before and after Waring had taken charge.

Morton Street (Manhattan) in 1893, before Waring.

The same street in 1895, after Waring.
The photos below show what the street cleaning crew of New York City looked like before and after Commissioner Waring took charge.

Before.

After.

List two changes that occurred.

1

2

What do you think the letters DSC stand for on the barrel in the second photo?
One of Commissioner Waring’s new rules in 1895 was that New Yorkers had to separate their household waste into different containers. Below is a list of the different types of waste and how it was to be separated. This list is from the 1901 Department of Street Cleaning Annual Report.

Department of Street Cleaning. 13 Park Row, New York City.

Keep Your Materials Separate.

The Sanitary Code, Section 108, requires householders and occupants to provide separate receptacles for ashes and garbage and forbids mixing these in the same receptacle.

This law will be strictly enforced.

Garbage put into Garbage Receptacles.
Kitchen or table waste, Vegetables, Meats, Fish, Bones, Fat, Fruit.

Ashes put into Ash Receptacles.
Ashes, Sawdust, Floor sweepings, Street sweepings, Bottles, Broken glass, Broken crockery, All tin cans, *Oyster and clam shells.

Rubbish put into Rubbish Bundles.
Paper, pasteboard, etc., Rags, mattresses, carpets, Old furniture, oil cloths, Old shoes, flower stems, Leather and leather scrap, Tobacco stems, Straw and excelsior from householders only.

(All rubbish such as described in this column must be securely bundled and tied. Boxes and barrels filled with paper, etc., will be removed with contents, and the boxes or barrels will not be returned.)

All rubbish described in third column must be kept indoors, and when ready for removal the red “P. & R.” must be hung in a conspicuous place, and the driver of the paper cart will call for such rubbish.

JOHN McGAW WOODBURY, Commissioner.

The report says that citizens are forbidden to mix ___________ and ___________.

Name three kinds of refuse that were considered “garbage” in 1901.

1 ___________

2 ___________

3 ___________
What do all the garbage items have in common? ______________________

Name three kinds of refuse that were considered “ashes.”

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

3. ______________________

Name three kinds of refuse that were considered “rubbish.”

1. ______________________

2. ______________________

3. ______________________

What does all the rubbish have in common? ______________________

______________________

Garbage and ashes were placed in containers, but rubbish was ______________________

______________________

When rubbish was put out in boxes and barrels, were those containers returned to their owners? (circle one) YES NO

Rubbish had to be kept ______________________ until it was ready to be picked up.

Was George Waring still commissioner in 1901? (circle one) YES NO

Why did New Yorkers in 1901 (and New Yorkers today) separate garbage items? ______________________

______________________

Name two items that present-day New Yorkers have to separate from the rest of their garbage.

1. ______________________

2. ______________________
In 1888, a law was passed by the federal government called the Marine Protection Act. This law made it illegal for anyone to dump garbage in the ocean. However, the law was often ignored, and in New York garbage boats continued to go out into the ocean and release waste into the water.

The problem with ocean dumping is that the garbage often comes back! Wind, tides, and currents cause the garbage to wash back up on the shores. In 1918, this problem became so bad for the state of New Jersey it decided to take New York City to court. New Jersey claimed that the garbage dumped from New York City was washing up on New Jersey beaches. This had to be stopped. The case went before the US Supreme Court, the highest court in the nation, and was not resolved until the 1930s. The city was told it could not dump its garbage in the waters, and if it did, it would have to pay New Jersey $5,000 a day until the dumping stopped.

A boat designed for ocean dumping. The diagram in the upper left-hand corner shows how refuse was released into the water.
Washed-up refuse, around 1900.
In 1906, property owners in Rockaway Park, Queens, were upset about the pollution caused by ocean dumping. They got together and had a lawyer write a letter of complaint to the mayor about the problem.

On what date was this letter received? __________________

It was received by what city office? __________________

Who was the Acting Mayor of New York City at this time? __________________

Read the highlighted paragraph to answer the following questions.

The garbage is dumped
a far away from the beach.
b only a short distance from the beach.
c in New Jersey.

The garbage is brought back to shore by
a sea gulls.
b swimmers.
c wind and waves.

The garbage is causing
a discomfort to bathers.
b a threat to public health.
c both a & b.

What is the problem of ocean dumping according to this letter? __________________
In response to this letter, the Acting Mayor had the Department of Street Cleaning look into the matter. The letter below is a report from the person assigned to this task. He writes to the Deputy and Acting Commissioner of the department that he has inspected the beach area and doesn’t find much of a problem.

Who was the Commissioner of the Department of Street Cleaning in 1906?

Who was the Deputy and Acting Commissioner?

Who was the Acting General Inspector?

According to the inspector, the beach had a lot of
a. driftwood.
b. sand.
c. garbage.

Some of the items he found on the beach were
a. broken toys.
b. fruit skins.
c. water pails.

The inspector believed that a lot of the refuse on the beach was caused by
a. boats dumping garbage.
b. animals digging up buried trash.
c. people eating their lunches.
LESSON 6

Life on Barren Island

Workers at Barren Island.

(Go back to page 7 and locate where Barren Island used to be.)

Barren Island began accepting the city's garbage in 1852 and remained a dumping ground until 1916. The island also had factories that processed the garbage and a "dead horse plant," which stayed open until 1936. The plant took dead horses and other animals that the city picked up off the streets. Here, fat from the animals was made into glycerine, which was used in many products such as food and cosmetics. Glycerine is also a main ingredient in making nitroglycerine, an explosive.

Many of the factory and plant workers lived on the island. There were homes for the workers' families, and a one-room school house for their children. When not in school, the children contributed to the family income by picking through the garbage to find items such as rags, metal, and glass, which could be sold.

Many articles were written about Barren Island in local newspapers. On pages 21 and 22 are excerpts from two articles written in the Brooklyn Eagle in August 1901. These articles tell two different views of what life on the island was like. The first article was written by a Brooklyn Eagle reporter. This reporter felt that Barren Island was a gloomy place and that the children living there were probably not very happy.
GOOD WORK OF SCHOOL ON BARREN ISLAND.

The Only Bright Spot for the Children of That Desolate Place.

It is a fact that many of these children whose parents are employed in the garbage crematory have never left the island for a day since their birth; some of them are twelve years old and up to a year ago knew practically nothing beyond how to prepare garbage for cremation, or the proper method for disposing of horse carcasses.

The school building is a bright, clean looking wooden building, painted gray and white, next to it a smaller house has been erected for the use of the superintendent's family and any of the teachers who may care to live there.

Long before one arrives at the Barren Island dock its proximity is apparent. The villainous odors from the crematory and the glue factory are blown boatwards as a warning to approaching visitors.

The employees on the island live in small wooden houses which might be called huts; A few bedraggled smokers serve to decorate their “gardens” and the houses are all in a row, each having a number, like a convict settlement.

List three reasons why the reporter did not like Barren Island.

1

2

3
ARTICLE #2

List three reasons why the principal liked Barren Island.

1

2

3

Would you have liked to live on Barren Island? Why or why not?
No Garbage Here: Staten Islanders Protest the Fresh Kills Landfill

What can New Yorkers do when they are unhappy about a decision the city makes? In 1938, efforts were made to start a landfill in Fresh Kills, Staten Island. Many Staten Islanders were upset by this. They did not want any of the city’s garbage ending up in their community. Many of them took steps to stop the landfill from opening. Here are excerpts from a 1938 article in the Staten Island Advance newspaper telling about one action the people took.

What did some of the people of Staten Island say they would do to prevent the landfill from opening?

Who does Dr. Hampton think should help?

Why would their efforts help bring about change?

Garbage War Begun: 10,000 to Organize;

Following meetings of representatives of the Kiwanis and Rotary Clubs and the three Lions clubs, Dr. Vernon B. Hampton announced last night that a Staten Island Citizens Committee of 10,000 is being formed to fight the dump project.

“We propose to petition the mayor, the governor, the city and state Health Departments; that we fight the threat of this invasion with every legal means at our disposal.

The smell caused by the dumping of thousands of tons of garbage cannot be controlled. Every home and business house will be invaded. Not a home on Staten Island will be free from the noxious odors at certain times.

“Students, Boy and Girl Scouts, Campfire Girls, and other youth groups must become agents of civic justice, to secure signatures to petitions. Our schools teach students to keep their homes healthy and attractive places to live in. These children are taught to clean up litter in the streets. These things are part of the civic code. What is the good of these instructions when the City of New York, the largest city in the world, decides to dump its garbage in the community?

Dr. Hampton said he would make an effort to have 10,000 school children on Staten Island circulate petitions against the garbage dump in order to secure 90,000 signatures in as short a time as possible.
There were some Staten Islanders, however, who did not mind having a landfill in their borough. Below and on the next page are two letters written to the editors of the Staten Island Advance in 1938. The two writers of these letters held very different viewpoints about this situation.

LETTER #1

Is the writer of this letter “for” or “against” the opening of the Fresh Kills landfill?

(circle one)  FOR  AGAINST

List two reasons for his or her opinion.

1 _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2 _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

What words would you use to describe how this person feels?

________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

‘Principle of Thing’ Has Its Own Odor

DEAR EDITOR:

It is remarkable when you consider that New York City’s elected officials, and others actually are trying to make the prospect of a huge dump in Fresh Kills seem attractive to Staten Islanders!

They talk about new highways, parks, industrial development. They infer that we Islanders have to live in a constant state of nausea for years if we want to “get ahead.” This implication nearly smells as bad as the Great Kills dump when the wind is right.

The garbage has an odor. Maybe the wind doesn’t carry it as far as City Hall, but it carries it to Island communities — and that’s what we are concerned about.

Our garbage-men-with-creased-pants say a layer of clean fill will cut down the odor at Fresh Kills. Health Commissioner Weinstein talks about “large quantities of deodorants.”

Let’s see the thing right. We don’t like the odor. That’s agreed. But it’s the principle of the thing. Staten Island wouldn’t want to be the city’s dumping ground if they covered their garbage with “Evening In Paris.”

STAUNCH CITIZEN.
LETTER #2

Is the writer of this letter "for" or "against" the landfill?

(circle one)  FOR  AGAINST

What kind of land would be filled in by the garbage?

What reason does the writer give for his opinion?

Why do you think this person is willing to identify himself, while the other person wants to be anonymous?

New Brightonite Sides With City on Dumping

DEAR EDITOR:

Reading the comment of Dr. Weinstein (Health Commissioner Israel Weinstein), I perfectly agree with him on the question of the Marine Park and Fresh Kills dumping projects.

The present complaints come from people who have resided here on Staten Island only a short time and who do not realize the blessing of having swamp-lands filled in. They are the people who, as a rule, find fault with mosquitoes when they come along. Well, we cannot please everyone but Dr. Weinstein knows what he is talking about.

Another good space that should be filled, a spot as far as the eye can see, is the area from South Beach beyond Midland Beach.

And, if Dr. Weinstein's opinion and advice is not accepted, look out in the future for more mosquitoes and rats. Let's have toleration of this present nuisance; we must be patient.

Leave it to Dr. Weinstein.

FRANK MEHLING,
12 Ermont Place,
New Brighton.
The people of Staten Island were able to stop the Fresh Kills landfill from opening in 1938. However, another effort was made to open it in 1946 and this time the city was successful. Fresh Kills opened in 1948. It was supposed to stay open for only two years, but actually stayed open for another 53 years. The people of Staten Island continued to protest against having the city dump its garbage at Fresh Kills. They were opposed to the smell of rotting garbage and to the rats the garbage would attract. Finally, in 2001, the Fresh Kills landfill was closed.

This chart appeared in the *Staten Island Advance* in 1996.
How many acres is Fresh Kills? ________________________________

Fresh Kills is how many times larger than Disneyland? ________________________________

Fresh Kills is taller than which building on Staten Island? ________________________________

In 1996, how many tons of trash were dumped at Fresh Kills by the end of any given week? ________________________________

Approximately how many homes could have been heated each month by the gases produced each day at Fresh Kills? ________________________________

If Fresh Kills is 2,200 acres:

How big is Central Park? ________________________________

How big is Disneyland? ________________________________

How big is Monaco? ________________________________

How tall is the Statue of Liberty? ________________________________

How much methane is produced in the United States? ________________________________

How much methane does it take to heat one home? ________________________________

Fresh Kills today.
LESSON 8

Looking Ahead: Cleaning your City

The streets of New York have been difficult to keep clean. The old dumping areas that used to hold garbage are no longer used. Rikers Island is now the location of a corrections facility. Barren Island is now part of the Gateway National Recreation Area. Fresh Kills will become a city park in the future. (See map on page 7.)

Today, much of the city’s garbage is sent to other parts of the country to be dumped. New York City officials continue to discuss ways of solving the problem of garbage and are looking into new technologies that can help turn garbage into energy. As residents, we must also do our part in helping to keep New York City clean.

The letter on the next page was written by Council Member Michael McMahon of the New York City Council. The New York City Council, headed by the Speaker, Gifford Miller, works with the Mayor to make the laws of New York City. It is the role of the City Council, under the leadership of Speaker Miller, to make sure New Yorkers have a voice in city government. Every Council Member represents a different area, or district, of the city. Council Member McMahon represents the city’s District 49, which is in Staten Island. He is in charge of a special committee that works on managing the city’s garbage.

When was this letter written? ________________________________

What is the name of the committee that Council Member McMahon is head of? ________________________________

Council Member McMahon feels it is his job to do what? ________________________________

What states have been receiving New York garbage since the Fresh Kills landfill closed? ________________________________ and ________________________________

Give two reasons why sending our garbage to other states is not a good idea.

1 ________________________________ 2 ________________________________

What are the “Three R’s”?

1 ________________________________ 2 ________________________________ 3 ________________________________

Which of the “R’s” do you think will make the biggest difference? ________________________________

Name two kinds of energy sources that can be made from processed garbage.

1 ________________________________ 2 ________________________________
Dear Students of New York City:

I am the Chairman of the New York City Council Committee on Sanitation and Solid Waste Management. It is my responsibility to help develop a plan for how we will dispose of our garbage for the next 20 years. This is a very important responsibility and will directly affect how you and all the other residents of New York City deal with their trash for a long time.

For many years we took all the trash in our city to a landfill on Staten Island, called Fresh Kills. So much garbage was brought to the landfill that they created four mountains of trash that can be seen for miles around. Putting all that trash in one place, close to where people lived made many people sick. That landfill is now closed.

It is now my job to find a better way for our city to dispose of its trash. Since the landfill on Staten Island closed we have been shipping our trash to landfills in Pennsylvania and Virginia. This is not a good solution to our problem. We just create bad landfills for the citizens of other states and eventually those landfills will fill up and leave us with nowhere to put out trash. We must find a new solution.

We all can help. First, we all must live with the three R’s; recycling, reuse and reduce our trash. Our city recycles metal, glass, plastic and paper but only about half our citizens take the time to recycle. We must all recycle. We must not throw out household items that are good and can be reused by ourselves or some else. We must reduce our trash by buying products with less packaging.

Second, with what trash we have left we must find new technologies to process it in an environmentally safe way. My committee has held hearings on these new technologies and has convinced the Mayor to investigate if they can be used in our city. A technology called thermal depolymerization takes organic trash (food, wood, paper) and makes it into oil! Another technology called gasification takes all trash, places it in a chamber under 30,000-degree heat and makes it in to a gas that generates electricity. Both processes create no pollution, rid us of our trash and create energy that we badly need. We must look to these technologies to help us move into the future of waste disposal.

Everyone creates trash and everyone must be responsible for its appropriate disposal.

Very truly yours,

Michael E. McMahon

Council Member Michael McMahon
with City Council Speaker Gifford Miller.
On the opposite page is a press release from Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg. A press release is a document that announces information for the media to report to the public.

What are the two reasons why the Mayor made the difficult decision to stop part of the recycling program?

1

2

Why was Mayor Bloomberg pleased to announce that he was bringing back glass recycling?
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PR- 050-04
March 5, 2004

MAYOR MICHAEL R. BLOOMBERG AND SANITATION
COMMISSIONER JOHN J. DOHERTY ANNOUNCE GLASS
RECYCLING AND WEEKLY COLLECTIONS TO RESUME APRIL
1ST

Program Hiatus Yields More Lucrative Recycling Contracts
Allowing for Restoration of Services

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Department of Sanitation (DSNY)
Commissioner John J. Doherty today announced that starting April 1,
the City will resume recycling glass and return to weekly recycling
collections. Glass and plastic recycling was suspended in July 2002.
Plastic recycling was resumed July 2003 and all collections went from
weekly to bi-weekly. As of Thursday, April 1, 2004, glass will return
to the recycling stream and all collections will be weekly. Metal and
paper recycling was never suspended.

"Two years ago the City faced the most severe fiscal crisis in a
generation," said Mayor Bloomberg. "We made the difficult decision
to suspend a portion of our recycling program because costs were
skyrocketing, and materials that should have been recycled ended up
in landfills. Today, I am pleased to announce that we are bringing
back glass recycling and weekly collections April 1 because we've
found a more cost effective and environmentally friendly way to
recycle."
CONCLUSION

We Need your Help!

In this booklet you have learned about the ways the city has dealt with garbage since the 1800s. Now we turn to you for ideas. What do you think the city should do with its garbage? Just as people in the past took action by writing letters, you can do the same by contacting the Mayor or your City Council Member.

To find out who the Council Member of your district is, go to the New York City Council web site, www.nycouncil.info. Click on “ Constituent Center.” Then, where it says “Council Member Look-up,” type in your address, select your borough, and click on “Find my Council Member.”

To find out how to contact the Mayor, go to www.nyc.gov. Then go to “Office of the Mayor” and click on “Home Page.” Then click on “Contact the Mayor” and you will find his address at City Hall.

You can write to your Council Member or to the Mayor to suggest ways of handling the city’s garbage problem.

As New Yorkers, we are all responsible for doing our part to keep our streets and neighborhoods clean. You can make a difference!
Glossary

bedraggled thoroughly wet and limp
carcasses (spelled “carcasses” in the article on p. 21) dead bodies of animals
census a survey that counts the people in an area and collects information such as name, age, occupation, etc. (The term can also be used for such counts of animals, plants, etc.)
cholera a disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms include vomiting, cramps, and diarrhea. It can be transmitted when human waste containing the bacteria gets into drinking water or food.
cologne a perfumed liquid made of alcohol and fragrant oils
compelled forced
contagious spreading from one person or animal to another either by touch or through the air
crematory Today this word refers to a place where dead human or animal bodies are burned to ash. In the past, it meant a place where any wastes were burnt.
decomposition the process of decaying
desolate lonely; gloomy
distributed delivered; passed around
drovers many animals moving around together, such as when cattle are driven or herded to a marketplace by a drover
endure to carry on; to last, often through hardships
enterprise a project that is especially difficult, complicated, or risky
epidemic the spread of disease between many persons or disease hosts, such as animals or insects, within an area or between areas in a certain period of time
excerpt a part taken from a longer work
infinite endless
insufferable (Annie Bigelow used the word “unsufferable”) something that would be too difficult or painful to suffer
landfill a system of waste disposal in which waste is buried between layers of earth
noxious harmful to one’s health and usually very unpleasant to smell
nuisance something that causes annoyance
offal the waste parts of a butchered animal, including organs such as intestines
plant a factory where materials are processed to make products
privy a toilet
proximity closeness to something
pulp wood that is ground up and chemically treated to make into paper
recyclables items made of glass, metals, plastics, woods, etc. that can be processed to make new products out of the same materials
refuse anything that is thrown away
reservoir a storage place for water
sanitary kept as clean as possible
scoured having removed dirt by scrubbing
scow a wide, flat-bottomed boat with square ends used to carry refuse or freight
shanties shacks; run-down cabins
staunch strong and firm
survey a report based on information that is collected by observation or by questioning people
swine a category of animals that includes pigs, hogs, and boars
varnish a liquid finish for protecting and beautifying wood; when dry it leaves a hard, clear film.
villainous vicious and wicked

Answers to word jumble on page 9:
1 sickness 2 regs 3 wide 4 problem 5 dumped 6 complaint 7 Garbage 8 smell 9 bones 10 living

Caption Trimming the Scows
Glossary

bedraggled  thoroughly wet and limp

carcasses (spelled "carcasses" in the article on p. 21) dead bodies of animals

census  a survey that counts the people in an area and collects information such as name, age, occupation, etc. (The term can also be used for such counts of animals, plants, etc.)

cholera  a disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms include vomiting, cramps, and diarrhea. It can be transmitted when human waste containing the bacteria gets into drinking water or food.

cologne  a perfumed liquid made of alcohol and fragrant oils

compelled  forced

contagious  spreading from one person or animal to another either by touch or through the air

crematory  Today this word refers to a place where dead human or animal bodies are burned to ash. In the past, it meant a place where any wastes were burnt.

decomposition  the process of decaying

desolate  lonely; gloomy

distributed  delivered; passed around

droves  many animals moving around together, such as when cattle are driven or herded to a marketplace by a drover

endure  to carry on; to last, often through hardships

enterprise  a project that is especially difficult, complicated, or risky

epidemic  the spread of disease between many persons or disease hosts, such as animals or insects, within an area or between areas in a certain period of time

excerpt  a part taken from a longer work

infinite  endless

insufferable  (Annie Bigelow used the word "unsufferable") something that would be too difficult or painful to suffer

landfill  a system of waste disposal in which waste is buried between layers of earth

noxious  harmful to one’s health and usually very unpleasant to smell

nuisance  something that causes annoyance

offal  the waste parts of a butchered animal, including organs such as intestines

plant  a factory where materials are processed to make products

privy  a toilet

proximity  closeness to something

pulp  wood that is ground up and chemically treated to make into paper

recyclables  items made of glass, metals, plastics, woods, etc. that can be processed to make new products out of the same materials

refuse  anything that is thrown away

reservoir  a storage place for water

sanitary  kept as clean as possible

scoured  having removed dirt by scrubbing

scow  a wide, flat-bottomed boat with square ends used to carry refuse or freight

shanties  shacks; run-down cabins

staunch  strong and firm

survey  a report based on information that is collected by observation or by questioning people

swine  a category of animals that includes pigs, hogs, and boars

varnish  a liquid finish for protecting and beautifying wood; when dry it leaves a hard, clear film.

villainous  vicious and wicked

Answers to word jumble on page 9:

1 sickness  2 rags  3 wide  4 problem  5 dumped  6 complaint  7 Garbage  8 smell  9 bones  10 living

Caption  Trimming the Scows
What To Recycle

Recycling collection is weekly, effective April 1, 2004.

- Place in CLEAR bags or BLUE-labeled recycling containers.
  - Empty and rinse containers before recycling.
  - Place bulk metal next to recycling containers or bags.
  - Continue to return & deposit bottles and cans to the store for refund.
  - Call 311 before discarding appliances that contain CFC gas (such as refrigerators and air conditioners).
  - Remove doors from refrigerators and freezers.

- Place in CLEAR bags or GREEN-labeled recycling containers.
  - Tie and bundle corrugated cardboard.

mixed paper & cardboard

- ONLY Recycle Designated Materials!
  - DO NOT RECYCLE any other plastics or any other types of glass.
  - Place these items with your regular trash.

Call 311 or visit www.nyc.gov/sanitation for recycling decals and flyers.
For waste prevention tips, visit www.nycwasteless.org.

Thanks for doing your part, New York!

Go to page 14 to compare recycled items of 2004 with recycled items of 1901.

LA GUARDIA AND WAGNER ARCHIVES
La Guardia Community College/CUNY
31-10 Thompson Avenue
Tel: 718/482-5065
Long Island City, NY 11101
www.laguardiawagnerarchive.lagcc.edu