

## L.I. Vertical Files: A Thing of the Past, or of the Present?

### Frequently Asked Questions:

- (1) Why Do We Keep the L.I. Vertical Files?
- (2) Do They Serve Any Real Purpose Anymore?
- (3) Don't They Take Up a Lot of Your Space?
- (4) Can't We Just Digitize Them, Put Them on the Website and Ditch Them?

In an ideal library world, where copyright did not matter, where scanning could be done quickly and instantaneously for entire drawers of material (all 34 of them, in our case), where databases would create themselves (and were easily achievable), where the sources of everything copied (for decades past) was clearly identified, where files weeded themselves, and newly published material magically appeared in them (or as part of a database), where computers didn't periodically crash, where content migrated by itself to ever changing hardware and software, where the guaranteed permanence of digital preservation were actual, and where Patchogue-Medford Area local history (in the public arena), weren't largely in our hands, and were our stewardship of that collection not considered important by the communities we serve, to Suffolk County, and to L.I., yeah, maybe we could dump it.

But, the realities are different. Copyright extends over much of the material in the files, and there are gray areas, as well. The material has been gathered from hundreds of sources, some of it rare or unique. Going back a few decades, many items on file were never identified by source or date. Putting that material on the web would place the Library at risk for multiple lawsuits.

A lot of this material, since it is *L.I. or P-M community-centric*, is ***not so easily gathered, accessed, or reconstructed***, and there are important items within, that are not available online. ***The L.I. & Patchogue VF's are being constantly weeded, constantly expanded, and are still very much in use.*** They have been, and are still being, ***subdivided***, which results in ***speed and precision of access***, saving both researchers and librarians what once took hours of pouring through thick, undifferentiated folders. It also means that when a local topic or person becomes a *news item or a homework assignment*, the first reporter, student, or other interested party though the door doesn't monopolize the entire topic, while others wait. It means you can ask them for the aspect that interests them the most, and sometimes pull that rabbit out of a hat for them. Pleasant surprises generate good will for PML, and a greater appreciation of what PML has to offer.

Yes, the Vertical files do take up valuable space. But, that doesn't mean they are of no value. And yes, it would be nice to have digital keyword & subject access to it all. For now, retaining this material is part of our stewardship role. ***The VFs supplement, compliment, and organize selected subject material, found around the Room in scattered sources, and include printouts of some material found in specialized sources online or on microfilm.***

The ***L.I. & Patchogue Vertical File Subject index*** ([http://history.pmlib.org/sites/default/files/LIVF\\_1.pdf](http://history.pmlib.org/sites/default/files/LIVF_1.pdf)) links 3 basic groupings – general Long Island ***Subject Headings***, L.I. ***Villages*** and ***Patchogue*** headings – to their often far more ***specific subdivisions***. They give a good idea of what may or may not be there, and ***help patrons know where to look before they even get to the room.*** Being able to have ***that degree of access***, as well as access to over 50 web pages on the Local History Website (from the State level to the locale) ***sets us apart as a valued public resource.*** Village and other historians, the Greater Patchogue Historical Society, other local historical societies, local government agencies, authors, publishers, reporters, teachers, students, ex-pat Pats, ex-patriot Medfordites, librarians, and others further afield, rely on the Room for ***quality of service.*** The LI Vertical Files, for all the space it consumes, is still a strong element, serving diverse populations and interests.