

Thirty-third Year of Publication Spring 2000

# THE BROWNSTONER

A Publication of the Brownstone Revival Coalition

(212) 675-0560

P.O. Box 577, New York, NY 10113

## Report from the Firing Line: The Red-Hot Brownstone Real-Estate Market

A good showing of hearty souls braved wet and wintry weather to attend the Brownstone Revival Coalition's Thirteenth Annual Brownstone Market Seminar on April 13, 2000. There were no surprises. As brownstone buyers, sellers, and brokers know, prices are high and houses for sale are few.

Dexter Guerrieri, President of BRC and head of the West Side's Vandenberg Real Estate, moderated the seminar, which featured presentations by leading brokers from the East Side and West Side of Manhattan and downtown Brooklyn.

John Capobianco of Alice Mason Properties discussed the East Side, giving examples of single-family and tenant-occupied houses. "There's nothing on the East Side," he said. "Even smaller houses on East End Avenue are going for \$2 million." Murray Hill was worth investigating--"There's some inventory there." He noted also the expansion of desirable town houses in Harlem. Buyers, dream on, he advised, except if your dream includes Harlem.

Hal Lehrman of Brooklyn Properties covered some of the recent real-estate history of Park Slope, Fort Greene, and Prospect Heights. These areas are also zooming in price, particularly as many Manhattanites are turning to Brooklyn in their search for town houses. Buildings that were going for under \$1 million have gone up to \$2-3 million in a year's time. Condos, too, have gone crazy. Prospect Heights, across Flatbush Avenue from Park Slope, offers comparative bargains. Many buyers are now looking deeper into Brooklyn, to Prospect Park Southwest and to Ditmas Park, where large stand-alone turn-of-the-century houses, with grass and gardens, are going for much less than brownstone town houses.

Dexter Guerrieri, representing the Upper West Side, had much the same story to tell--of rising prices and few properties for sale. He noted, however, the remarkable rise in interest in formerly "non-hot" town-house areas, particularly on Manhattan Avenue in an area historically called "Doctors' Row."

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 2)

## "The Brownstone Age--Where and How It All Started"

Slide Lecture at Donnell Library  
20 West 53rd Street  
6:00 PM, TUESDAY, MAY 16

19th Century New York Shown in  
Fascinating Pictures

Free Admission

Everett H. Ortner, Chairman of the Brownstone Revival Coalition and Lecturer on Brownstone subjects, will talk about his favorite (and, some say, his only) topic. Mr. Ortner has a vast archive of photographs to accompany his talk, which will cover:

- \*The affluent Post-Civil War period
- \*How steam power replaced horse power
- \*Why New York fell in love with brownstone
- \*Are brownstones the best houses ever built?
- \*And much, much more

## John Steinbeck on New York City

"New York is an ugly city, a dirty city. Its climate is a scandal, its politics are used to frighten children, its traffic is madness, its competition is murderous. But there is one thing about it--once you have lived in New York and it has become your home, no place else is good enough. All of everything is concentrated here, population, theater, art, writing, publishing, importing, business, murder, mugging, luxury, poverty. It is all of everything. It goes all night. It is tireless and it is charged with energy. I can work longer and harder without weariness in New York than any place else."

New York Times Magazine, Feb. 1, 1953

# THE BROWNSTONER

Newsletter of the  
Brownstone Revival Coalition

Thirty-third Year of Publication

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## The New Danger: Monstrous High-Rises That Threaten Low-Rise Communities

The East Side long ago succumbed to the apartment-house builder--so much so that high-rise living became the way of life for the rich in such communities as the high-rent area-code 10021 Gold Coast. But not all New Yorkers care to look out on the city from a 30th-floor penthouse. Some like living in three-and four-story houses and walking down streets where the sky is more than a blue slit overhead.

But living in that low-rise town-house community faces an uncertain future if it reaches a certain stage of urban success, which is to say that a lot of people whom others admire and follow live there, and housing and rental prices have risen to a point where school teachers can no longer afford to live there--at that stage nature decrees that the financial juices of developers will flow and they will start those actions that destroy the qualities that brought about the community's success.

Which is to say, they commission their architects to design multistory structures in those town-house communities. We see that now in Brooklyn Heights, with monsters rising on Montague Street and Court Street. We see it in Park Slope, where developers are in process of attempting to construct 15-story apartment houses that would tower over the community.

It is obvious that existing landmark designations and zoning regulations are not sufficient. The sale of air rights over buildings in landmark communities should be prohibited. Such a prohibition would have eliminated one hybrid that is now being considered in Park Slope--where the "right" to build on the edge of the designated district is enhanced by the acquisition of air rights from an adjacent landmarked lot.

Our old communities are under attack. Where is the Seventh Cavalry now?

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### THE RED-HOT BROWNSTONE MARKET, CONT. FROM PAGE ONE

Areas noted in passing as worth exploring were, of course, Clinton, Harlem, and the Lower East Side in Manhattan. In Brooklyn, Greenpoint is finding new buyers; there are bargains still in Boerum Hill and Carroll Gardens; and there are acres and acres of handsome brownstones in Bedford-Stuyvesant.

Jeffrey L. Jackson, Chief Appraiser of Mitchell, Maxwell & Jackson, Inc. discussed the various elements of town-house appraisal and the details that make a house special, ending with tips to both owners and buyers.

## Where Did Brownstone Come From? Connecticut and New Jersey

Everything was going smoothly in the brownstone quarries of New Jersey and Connecticut in 1895, just about the time brownstone was falling out of popularity as a building material. The reason: The great Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, with its accent on architectural classicism and of course classical materials, had altered the fashion of the day, from brownstone to marble and limestone. It was called "The White City." Brown was out; white was in.

Too late, but with the popularity of brownstone, by 1895 new standards and new technologies for quarrying the stone were in place. While the brownstone building frenzy of the 1870's and 1880's was on, quarrymen were frequently required to fill a rush job at a time of year--particularly in winter when Connecticut quarries were shut down-- when filling it meant furnishing an inferior stone that might otherwise have been rejected. By 1895, enough stone was on hand to fill all orders with quality stone.

In earlier days, before 1885, much brownstone was injured by blasting and hammering. When a heavy charge of powder was used to loosen a large quantity of the stone, the heavy jar caused many incipient cracks that frequently appeared only after long exposure to the weather.

By the end of the century, brownstone had come under heavy attack by critics. In New York and Philadelphia there was much evidence of the decay of brownstone facades. That, and changing fashion, ended the use of brownstone for the better class of house.

It is impossible to tell now which supplied more brownstone--New Jersey or Connecticut, although opinion generally favors Connecticut.

The New Red brownstone formation in New Jersey continued in a northeasterly direction from the Delaware River through New Jersey to the Hudson River in New York. The color range was from brown to red. The stone was finer in texture than Connecticut stone and less distinctly laminated, and thus less likely to scale. In earlier times, there were quarries south of Paterson, and some--in the first half of the century--in Avondale and Belleville. There were also productive quarries at Newark; and, prior to 1896, the Wilburtha (Greenburg) quarries, a few miles above Trenton, produced "Trenton" brownstone, a name often used for almost any stone from the Delaware Valley quarries.

The brownstone quarries of Portland, Connecticut, on the east side of the Connecticut

River, were, as of 1896, the oldest (opened about 1700), largest, and best known in the United States. So extensive was the use, that the terms brownstone, Portland, and Connecticut stone were used interchangeably. The miles of brownstone fronts in New York and other eastern cities are testimony to the stone's popularity.

Portland brownstone ranged in color from light brownish gray to reddish brown, and varied considerably in texture. There were railroad connections to all of the quarries, but most of the brownstone was shipped by boat down the Connecticut River to the Long Island Sound and thence by way of the East River to dealers in Brooklyn and New York.

The scaling and delamination [separation into constituent layers] of brownstone is as much the responsibility of builders and architects as it is of the stone itself. It was the almost invariable custom to split the stone with the grain into slabs a few inches thick, and to veneer walls with the slabs set on edge, vulnerable to scaling and delamination. However, no stone as capable of absorbing so much water, as were the Portland and other of the Triassic stones from New Jersey, could be more than moderately durable in the trying climate of the northern states.

### Building

I watched them tearing a building down  
A gang of men in a busy town--  
With a yo-heave-ho and a lusty yell  
They swung a beam and a side wall fell.  
I asked the foreman: "Are these men skilled--  
The kind you would hire if you wanted to  
build?"

He laughed and said: "Why, no indeed,  
Just common labor is all I need;  
They can easily wreck in a day or two  
What builders have taken years to do."

I asked myself, as I went on my way,  
Which of these roles have I tried today?  
Am I a builder who works with care,  
Measuring life by the rule and square,  
Shaping my needs by the well-made plan,  
Patiently doing the best I can.

Or am I a wrecker who walks the town,  
Content with the labor of tearing down?

--G.K. Chesterton

## 100 Years Ago in New York

(Miss Olga Nethersole and her managers are arrested in New York): "It is not necessary to soil the columns of this paper with a particular account of the sickly sentimentality of Mr. Daudet's book or the reeking compost of filth and folly that the crude and frivolous Mr. Clyde Fitch has dug out of it, with which to mire the stage. It is enough to say that this heavy and foul rigmarole of lust, sap-headed sentiment, and putrid nonsense tells a vulgar, commonplace and tiresome story about a harlot and a fool, showing how, in a carnal way, they fascinated each other, how the fool clove to his folly, and how the harlot, having bamboozled the fool, went away with a criminal rogue just out of prison. Into details of the relations between these cattle those commentators may enter who have a taste for muck and can deliver expert opinions upon it."

--*Evening Post*, Feb. 21, 1900

"There is nothing shocking in it, and the rush to see it may stop when this fact is discovered...."

--*The Press*, Feb 21, 1900

(New York University receives a gift of \$100,000 to erect a Hall of Fame for Great Americans): In October, "twenty-nine names were chosen, of which those receiving most votes of the judges were: George Washington, 97; Abraham Lincoln, 96;

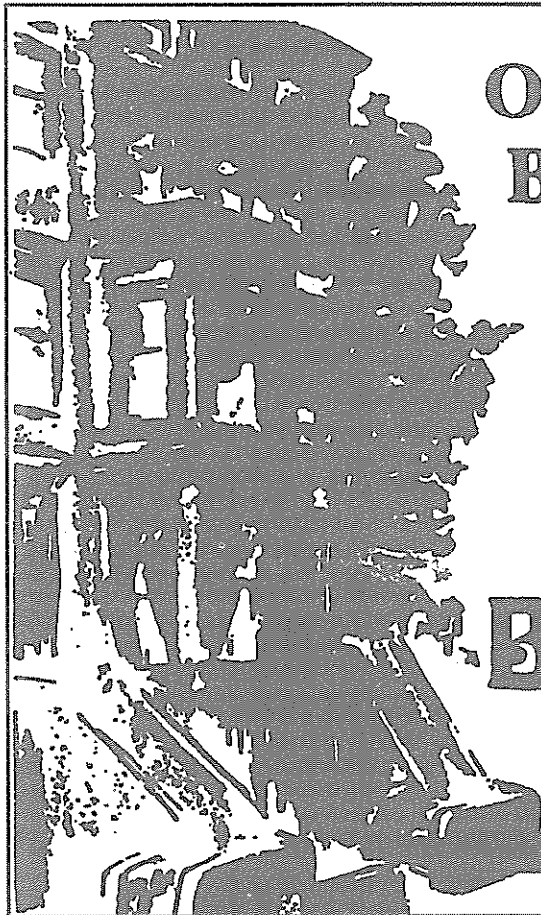
Daniel Webster, 96; Benjamin Franklin, 94; Ulysses S. Grant, 92; John Marshall, 91; Thomas Jefferson, 90."

--*Our Times*

## 150 Years Ago in New York

"The dreadful question of slavery, which has cast an inextinguishable brand of discord between the North and the South of this hitherto happy land, has taken a tangible and definite shape on the question of the admission of the new State of California into the Union with the Constitution of her own framing and adoption.... Compromise is at an end.... When will all this end? I see no remedy! If California is admitted with the prohibition of slavery which themselves have adopted, or if the national district is freed by the action of Congress from the traffic in human flesh, the South stands ready to retire from the Union, and bloody wars will be the fatal consequence.... On the other hand, the abolitionists of the North will listen to no terms of compromise.... They profess to hold of no value [the blessings of union] unless the power is conceded to them of restraining the extension of the great moral evil which overshadows the land."

--*Diary of Philip Hone*, Feb. 18, 1850



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"I went, last evening, to the opening of the exhibition of the National Academy of Design, at their new rooms in Broadway, opposite Bond street. There was a collation, with a large party of artists, literati, men of science, and men of taste to partake of it. The Academy has made an admirable arrangement; the stables of Brown have been converted into a temple of the Muses."

--*Ibid.*, April 13, 1850

"If they do not pull down the houses in the annual renovation of Broadway, they fall of their own accord. The large three-story house, corner of Broadway and Fourth Street, fell today with a crash so astounding that the girls, with whom I was sitting in the library, imagined for a moment that it was caused by an earthquake.... The mania for converting Broadway into a street of shops is greater than ever. There is scarcely a block in the whole extent of this fine street of which some part is not in a state of transmutation. The City Hotel has given way to a row of splendid stores; [Alexander T.] Stewart is extending his stores to take in the whole front from Chambers to Reade Street; this is already the most magnificent dry-goods establishment in the world. I certainly do not remember anything to equal it in London or Paris; with the addition now in progress this edifice will be one of the 'wonders' of the Western World."

--*Ibid.*, May 31, 1850

"Two new houses in the process of erection fell down yesterday,--one in Mercer Street, and the other in Spruce Street, near Gold Street. Both these disasters have been attended with loss of life.... The shameful manner of constructing houses intended for renting demands a remedy. Laws should be passed, and inspectors of buildings appointed with arbitrary power, to prevent the erection of these man-traps. I have noticed, especially in the eastern section of the city, blocks of new buildings so slightly built that they could not stand alone, and, like drunken men, require the support of each other to keep them from falling."

--*Ibid.*, August 6, 1850

### Window-Repair Tip

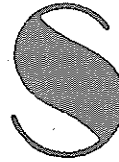
Broken pane in one of your brownstone's windows? When the window man comes to replace it, make sure that he uses the same thickness of glass. Old windows, typically, had 1/4-inch glass. Most new replacement glass is only 1/8 inch. It is also, of course, lighter. The result is that the sash weights, designed for the heavier window, will want to keep pulling the newly glazed (1/8 inch) window up and may not let it come to rest at the bottom.

If the time comes when you decide to replace all of your windowpanes, consider double-glass thermal windows. They are usually 3/8 inch thick and keep out a lot of winter cold and summer heat.

### On Architecture

"The surest test of the civilization of a people--at least, as sure as any--afforded by mechanical art is to be found in their architecture, which presents so noble a field for the display of the grand and the beautiful, and which, at the same time, is so intimately connected with the essential comforts of life."

--*The Conquest of Peru*,  
William H. Prescott, 1847



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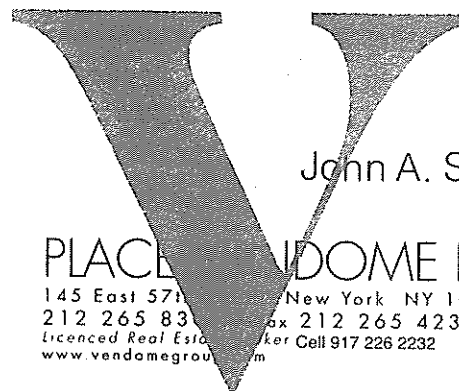
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## Things to Do and Places to Go For New York Buffs

HISTORIC RICHMOND TOWN, Restored Village, 441 Clarke Ave., Staten Island 718/351-1611

\*Friday-Saturday, May 19-21, 10:00-5:00 pm. Antique and contemporary quilt exhibition.

\*Sunday, June 4, 10:00-5:00 pm: Antiques & collectibles market. 140 dealers

\*June 28-September 1: Living history in the village--costumes, crafts, in restored buildings.

\*Sunday, July 2: "Independence Day Celebration": Traditional speeches, games, and food.

JOYCE GOLD HISTORIC TOURS, 141 West 17th St., NYC 10011 212/242-5762 All tours, 2 hours, \$12

\*Sunday, May 14: "Hell's Kitchen"--Meet 1:00 pm NW corner, 10th Ave. & 42nd St.

\*Sunday, May 21: "Wholesale Meat Market & Art Scene"--Meet 1:00 pm, 13th St. & Eighth Ave., at Jackson Sq. Park entrance

\*Saturday, May 27: "Greenwich Village Highlights"--Meet 1:00 pm at Washington Arch, 5th Ave. South of 8th St.

\*Sunday, May 28: "SoHo Then & Now"--Meet 1:00 pm, SE corner Houston & Lafayette Sts.

\*Saturday, June 3: "Tribeca's Creative Explosion"--Meet 1:00 pm, Duane Park at Duane & Hudson Sts.

\*Saturday, June 10: "Hell's Kitchen"--Meet 1:00 pm, NW corner, 10th Ave. & 42nd St.

\*Wednesday, June 14: "5th Avenue Gold Coast"--Meet 11:00 am, Frick Museum, 70th east of 5th Ave.

\*Sunday, June 18: "Jewish Lower East Side"--Meet 1:00 pm at Straus Sq., Essex & Canal Sts.

\*Thursday, June 22: "SoHo Then & Now"--Meet 11:00 am, SE corner, Houston & Lafayette Sts.

\*Tuesday, June 27 "Chinatown & Little Italy"--Meet 11:00 am, HSBC Bank, Canal St. & Bowery

\*Sunday, July 2: "Lower Manhattan Tory Story"--Meet 1:00 pm, Trinity Church, Broadway & Wall St.

FRIENDS OF CENTRAL PARK, Lenox Hill P.O. Box 610, NYC 10021

\*Saturday, May 20: "Walk on Wall"--Lower Manhattan tour. Meet 5:00 pm, corner Wall & William Sts.

\*Friday, June 2: "Festivals, Trees & Jungle Parks"--Slide lecture on SE Asia. 6:00 pm, Skyscraper Room, Chase Bank, One Chase Manhattan Plaza

BIG ONION WALKING TOURS, P.O. Box 20561, Cherokee Station, NYC 10021 212/439-1090 \$10.  
Duration: 2-2 1/2 hours

\*Thursday, June 1: "SoHo & No. Little Italy at Twilight"--Meet 6:30 pm, SE corner Spring & Lafayette Sts.

\*Friday, June 2: "Immigrant New York"--Meet 1:00 pm, City Hall Park, Chambers St. & Broadway

\*Saturday, June 3: "Historic Lower Manhattan"--Meet 1:00 pm, U.S. Custom House, Bowling Green

\*Saturday, June 3: "Central Park at Twilight"--Meet 5:00 pm, NW corner, 66 St. & Central Park West

\*Sunday, June 4: "Multi-Ethnic Eating Tour"--Meet 1:00 pm, SE corner, Essex & Delancy Sts.  
(reservation required)

\*Thursday, June 8: "Brooklyn Bridge & Brooklyn Heights at Twilight"--Meet 6:30 pm, SE corner, City Hall Park, Chambers St. & Broadway

\*Friday, June 9: "Revolutionary New York"--Meet 1:00 pm, at City Hall Park, Broadway & Murray St.

\*Saturday, June 10: "Historic Harlem"--Meet 1:00 pm, Schomburg Center, NW corner, 115th St. & Lenox

\*Saturday, June 10: "Greenwich Village at Twilight"--Meet 5:00 pm, Washington Sq. Arch

\*Sunday, June 11: "Jewish Lower East Side"--Meet 1:00 pm, SE corner, Essex & Delancy Sts.

\*Thursday, June 15: "Central Park at Twilight"--Meet 6:30 pm, NW corner, 66th St. & Central Park West

- \*Friday, June 16: "Greenwich Village"--Meet 1:00 pm, Washington Sq. Arch
- \*Saturday, June 17: "Green-Wood Cemetery"--Meet 1:00 pm, 5th Ave, & 25th St., Brooklyn
- \*Sunday, June 18: "Father's Day Multi-Ethnic Eating Tour"--Meet 1:00 pm, SE corner, Essex & Delancy St.  
(Reservation required)
- \*Thursday, June 22: "East Village at Twilight" Meet 6:30 pm, Black Cube at Astor Pl.
- \*Thursday, June 29: "Greenwich Village at Twilight"--Meet 6:30 pm, Washington Sq. Arch
- \*Friday, June 30: "Historic Harlem"--Meet 1:00 pm, Schomburg Center, 135th St. & Lenox Ave.  
COOPER-HEWITT NATIONAL DESIGN MUSEUM, 2 East 91st St., NYC 10128 212/849-8400
- \*Through August 6: National Design Triennial---exhibition of selections illustrating cultural currents affecting today's designs--in products, graphics and media.  
MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK 1220 Fifth Ave., NYC 10029 212/534-1672
- Opening May 17: Exhibition--"New York Now--Contemporary Work in Photography"
- Opening May 17: Exhibition--"Elegant Plate: Three Centuries of Precious Metals in New York City"  
BROOKLYN CENTER FOR THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT, Tennis House, Prospect Park, Bklyn. 11215 718/788-8500
- \*Saturday, May 20: "Brooklyn Bridge & Fulton Ferry"--Meet 1:00 pm at east side of City Hall, Manhattan
- \*Sunday, June 4: "Brooklyn Waterfront Greenway Prowl"--Meet 11:00 am on steps of Brooklyn Borough Hall, Court & Montague Sts.
- \*Saturday, June 10: "Calvert Vaux's Park & His Arches"--Meet 1:00 pm at Grand Army Plaza Arch, Brooklyn
- \*Sunday, June 18: "Gowanus Canal Gala Cruise & Benefit"--\$100. Advance reservation required.  
BRONX COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 3309 Bainbridge Ave., Bronx 718/881-8900
- \*Thursday, May 18: "The Great Bronx River Expedition"--Lecture, 3:00 pm, Riverdale Public Library, 5540 Mosholu Ave., Bronx  
BROOKLYN HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 128 Pierrepont St., Brooklyn, NY 11201 718/624-0890
- \*Saturday, May 20: "Coney Island Walking Tour"--Meet 2:00 pm at Nathan's, 1310 Surf Ave., Brooklyn  
BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn 718/638-5000
- \*May 19-August 6: "Vivian Cherry--Street Photographer"
- \*May 26-August 13: "William Merritt Chase--American Landscapes"
- \*May 26-August 6: "Maxfield Parrish--New York Painter"  
NATIONAL ACADEMY OF DESIGN, 1083 Fifth Ave., NYC 10128 212/369-4880
- Exhibition to December 31: "Treasures from the Archives of the Academy"  
TRINITY CHURCH, 74 Trinity Place & Wall St., NYC 212/602-9676
- \*Tours daily at 2:00 pm  
ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE, 2 Hylan Boulevard, Staten Island 718/816-4506
- \*Saturday, May 14: Antiques Fair, 10-5:00 pm  
ELDRIDGE STREET SYNAGOGUE:12, Eldridge St., NYC 212/219-0888
- \*Tours every Tuesday, Thursday at 11:30 and 2:30; Sundays, on the hour  
BROOKLYN BOROUGH HALL, Joralemon & Court Sts., Brooklyn 718/855-7882
- \*"Lunch-Hour Tours" every Tuesday at 1:00 pm

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## A Beaux Arts Thought

(Courtesy of the Beaux Arts Alliance)

"Architecture records with unerring accuracy the history and character of each period of civilization or each lapse into barbarism."

—Cass Gilbert upon being presented with a gold medal for the Woolworth Building

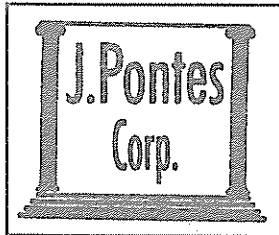
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## A Prediction from 1879:

### Engineer Egbert Viele Views the City

Fifth Avenue...has now become thoroughly invaded from Washington Square almost to the Central Park with fancy shops, jewelers, hotels and boarding-houses, and its exclusiveness has vanished forever. 'Murray Hill,' the line of which it crosses, was for a considerable time regarded as the synonym of fashion, but in time it will be more strictly synonymous with shabby gentility. Fifth Avenue northward is limited to the east side of the Park, and has a 'jumping off' place at 102nd street, into the Harlem Flats, which checks its career of availability. Madison avenue has to some extent usurped the place of Fifth avenue, due in large measure to the convenience afforded originally by the extension of the Fourth avenue surface road into that avenue...

"The conclusion is inevitable...that the section of the city that has been held in reserve until the time when the progress of wealth and refinement shall have attained that period of development when our citizens can appreciate and are ready to take advantage of the situation, is the section that is to be the most favored and the most sought after. At an expense unparalleled except in the period of lavish imperial opulence, the great west and plateau, extending from the Central Park to the North River, has been laid out and ornamented with a series of magnificent avenues not excelled by any other city in the world. Moreover, the entire region combines in its general aspect all that is magnificent in the leading capitals of Europe. In our Central Park we have the fine Prater of Vienna, in our grand boulevard the rival of the finest avenues of the gay capital of France, in our Riverside avenue the equivalent of the Chiaja of Naples and the Corso of Rome, while the beautiful 'Unter den Linden' of Berlin and the finest portions of the West End of London are reproduced again and again....

"The territory of the West side is so admirably divided up by the broad boulevard through the centre, the open space of the Central Park on the east and the Riverside Park on the west--that the interminable vistas of brown stone that characterize the rest of the city are impossible, while unexamined facilities are supplied for the erection of elegant homes that will do credit to their owners and will be ornaments to the city. Instead of expending \$30,000 to \$50,000 for a corner lot on Fifth avenue, from four to six lots can here be purchased for that sum.... Steam transit has accomplished in a year what a decade would have failed to do without it. The admirable service on

## 200 Years Ago in New York

"This being the day recommended by congress on January 6 and by the common council on February 17 to the people of the United States publicly to testify to their grief for the death of Washington, all the public offices are closed, business is suspended and the city exhibits 'the appearance of respectful sorrow.'"

--Spectator, Feb. 26, 1800

A new regulation enacted by the legislature states that no person shall vote as a freeholder "unless he shall be possessed of a freehold estate, in lands or tenements in his own right or that of his wife, to the value of fifty dollars...and shall have possessed the same at least one month before the day of such election."

Laws of New York, March 21, 1800

"You have been informed of the loss of our election in this City. It is also known that we have been unfortunate throughout Long Island and in Westchester. According to the returns hereto, it is too probable that we lose our Senator for this District.

"The moral certainty, therefore is that there will be an Anti-Federal Majority in the ensuing legislature, and the very high probability is that this will bring Jefferson in the Chief Magistracy, unless it be prevented by the measure which I shall now submit to your consideration, namely the immediate calling together of the existing legislature.

"In observing this, I shall not be supposed to mean that anything ought to be done which integrity will forbid..."

--Letter, Alexander Hamilton  
to Gov. John Jay, May 7, 1800

VIELE, CON'T. FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

the elevated roads has shown with what comfort and facility a home in this vicinity can be reached, and as these roads will be running through the west end this spring a decided movement has already begun, and building operations on an extensive scale have been commenced.... Some fine private residences will also be erected this spring on the unrivaled Riverside avenue. This splendid avenue will be fully completed and opened during the coming season. Visitors to the 'World's Exposition' in the Central Park, in 1888, will probably find the entire region, westward to the river, built up in a manner consistent with the public improvements."

--Egbert Viele, *The West End Plateau  
of the City of New York*, 1879

## Brooklyn House Tours

**FORT GREENE:** Sunday, May 7, 12-5 pm. \$15 Fort Greene Assn. 718/237-9031

**BROOKLYN HEIGHTS:** House & Garden Tour. Saturday, May 13, 1-5 pm. \$25. Brooklyn Heights Assn. 718/858-9193

**PARK SLOPE:** Sunday, May 21, 12-5 pm. \$20. Park Slope Civic Council. 718.832-8227

**PROSPECT LEFFERTS GARDENS:** Sunday, June 4, 12-5 pm. \$15. Lefferts Manor Assn. 718/284-6210

**BOERUM HILL:** Sunday, June 11, 1-5 pm. \$15. Boerum Hill Assn. 718/403-0694

**BROWNSTONE BROOKLYN GARDEN DISTRICT:** Garden Walk. Sunday, June 6, 11-5 pm. \$10. Garden District. 718/855-7090

**PROSPECT HEIGHTS:** Sunday, Sept. 17, 1-5 pm. \$15. Prospect Heights Assn. 718/707-1277

**BEDFORD-STUYVESANT:** Saturday, Oct. 21, 11-4 pm. \$15. Brownstoners of Bedford-Stuyvesant. 718/452-3226

## NEW YORK BUFFS, CON'T. FROM PAGE 7

**BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION,** Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn, NY 11238 718/230-2780

Saturday, May 13: "Walking Tour of Park Slope." \$12. Meet on Main Library Steps, Grand Army Plaza, 11:00 am

Saturday, June 13: "Walking Tour of Greenpoint." \$12. Meet at McDonald's, Greenpoint & Manhattan Aves.

**LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM,** 97 Orchard St., NYC 212/431-0233

\*Tours Saturdays, Sundays: "Neighborhood Heritage"--Meet 1:30 & 2:30 pm at 90 Orchard St. for one-hour tour

\*Tours Tuesday-Sunday: "19th Century Tenement Apartments"--Tuesday-Friday, 1, 2, 3, & 4 pm, one-hour tour; Thursday 6 & 7 pm.

## Start of the Subway Century

After years of squabbling, New York City celebrated the groundbreaking of its subway system on March 24, 1900. Thus began construction of the Interborough Rapid Transit (IRT) system, which ran from City Hall to Grand Central, across 42nd Street to Broadway, and up the West Side--all the way to 145th Street when it opened on October 27, 1904.

## Rediscovering William H. Whyte

**A**t a time when the sociologists and seers of our time--or anyway the '50's, '60's, and '70's--were looking to the abandonment, or maybe only rebuilding, of our cities, along came this urbanologist William H. Whyte with the vision of a Jeremiah who was able to see beyond the problems of the moment--see over the garbage and the crime and the grim predictions--to the critical role that cities play in our civilization.

As the Fordham University press release for a new issue of his writings says: "Whyte's fascination with cities led to the creation of the Street Life Project, a ten-year study of the dynamics of how people interact with the urban environment. The crowning achievement of Whyte's career came with the publication in 1988 of "City: Rediscovering the Center."

This reviewer was privileged to attend a meeting at the Municipal Art Society introducing the book. Whyte was there, and some movies were shown that explored how people reacted to setbacks and other big-building design schemes that were supposed to improve the way people related to the environment of the city. It was a caustic examination of why some of the "best" theories don't work in practice.

Now the Fordham University Press is issuing a compilation of Whyte's core writings entitled "The Essential William H. Whyte." It includes portions from Whyte's other works: from his early best-seller, "The Organization Man," "The Last Landscape," and others. It is edited by Albert LaFarge with a foreword by the architectural critic Paul Goldberger. The price: \$39.95 hardcover; \$19.95 paper.

--Everett H. Ortner

## A Great Federal House

The Stuyvesant-Fish residence, 21 Stuyvesant Street, between Second and Third avenues, was built in 1804. It is wider than most houses of its time and is as handsome as ever. Why the hyphen in the name? Governor Stuyvesant's great-grandson built the house as a wedding present for his daughter, who was engaged to marry Nicholas Fish.

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## Handyman Tips for Unsticking Stuck Doors

**S**ticking or dragging problems with a door? If it sticks, and it was repainted recently, you can guess what the problem is: four coats of paint too many--two on the door, two on the jamb. The cure is to remove the excess coats of paint--a rasp often does it in the sticking areas. Do it as soon as possible after the door has been painted so the touchup won't show.

**Tight on the lock side, loose on the hinge side?** Probably a hinge problem. Hint: Before you start investigating, prop up the outer corner of the door with a book or magazine to keep it from crashing while you're working on a top hinge. The most common cause of a loose hinge is loose screws. So first try simply tightening the hinge screws. In fact, tighten all the screws while the door is open and supported.

There are two possible cures for screws that have loosened in century-old wood: longer screws to bite deeper into the wood or wood plugs to tighten the hole. For the latter, shave off slivers of scrap wood to tap into the hole, and re-use the old screws. Or try bits of wood toothpicks shoved into the hole. If the screw heads are clogged with paint, making them difficult to turn with a screwdriver, clear the slot by running it along the blade of a hacksaw. On the jamb side, a screw may have to be angled to find fresh wood to grip, probably the framing member behind the jamb.

**Tight on the hinge side, loose on the lock side?** Most likely, old age has also caused this problem. Another possibility is that someone has already tried to fix a bind, and has gone too far. Either way, the answer is usually a shim--a piece of cardboard a hair smaller than the hinge flap. Remove the screws, place one or two pieces of the shim behind the flap, and screw the hinge back in place. You may need slightly longer screws for a secure bite.

**Stuck at the bottom? Look at the top.** Unless you've just laid new, thick carpeting, the usual reason for this problem in an old house is a frame that is sagging, typically more on one side than the other. Assuming that you have checked the hinges for loose screws, in this case you'll have to trim the top of the door to work with the new alignment, and then move the door up in the frame to match the new alignment--and then remortise the jamb side to match the new hinge position.

• **Too much work?**  
Try the *Yellow Pages*. Look for "Carpenter--No Job Too Small." And good luck.

## Hot Air vs. Hot Water

On January 14, 1846, E. L. Miller, 89 Clark St., Brooklyn, who had introduced "air" furnaces for central heating, now introduced a house hot-water system. Hot-air systems that preceded Miller's system consisted primarily of a stove in the cellar with a grating overhead to warm the parlor floor above. By Miller's time, metal ducts transported the warmed air throughout the house with, in advanced systems, return ducts carrying air to be reheated.

Many, perhaps most, brownstone row houses were built with hot-air systems, most of which were later converted to steam or hot water—unfortunate, because the old hot-air ducts can also transport cooled air.

## Grand Central in 1900

The "glorious" Old Grand Central Terminal, built in 1871, had by 1900 become the "worst station in New York," according to Railroad Gazette. Almost 500 trains used the station every day, and even an 1898 expansion that turned the original three-story structure into six stories failed to solve the station's many problems. In 1900 the architect Samuel Huckel, to cure the interior problems, created a single 200-by-100-foot waiting room with a 50-foot-high ceiling and conveniences such as armchairs, rocking chairs, and writing desks. But travelers had to wait till 1913 for a truly adequate station, the current magnificent, and newly restored, Grand Central.

## New York's Old Water Mains

A survey a half-dozen years ago, showed that New York had 53 miles of mains installed before 1870. Other mileage's:

1870-79:	204 miles
1880-89:	90 miles
1990-99:	255 miles
1900-09:	462 miles
1910-19:	902 miles
1920-29:	1,024 miles
1930-39:	698 miles
1940-49:	446 miles
1950-59:	574 miles
1960-69:	499 miles
1970-79:	295 miles
1980-89:	222 miles

Most of the mains consist of eight- and 12-inch-diameter pipes (2,522 and 1,863 miles respectively). There is only a half-mile of the largest pipe: 84 inches. Before 1930, all pipes were of unlined cast iron; from 1930 to 1969, concrete-lined cast iron; since 1969, concrete-lined ductile iron. The city replaces, on average, about 20 miles a year at a cost of about \$45 million.

## Restoration Help Via Internet

Need information for a preservation or restoration project? Here are some web sites worth browsing:

\*New York Landmarks Conservancy:

[www.nylandmarks.org](http://www.nylandmarks.org)

\*National Preservation Institute:

[www.npi.org](http://www.npi.org)

\*Association for Preservation Technology. Technical briefs can be downloaded.

[www.apti.org](http://www.apti.org)

\*Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings I. National Park Service briefs can be downloaded.

[www.2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presb-hom.htm](http://www.2.cr.nps.gov/tps/briefs/presb-hom.htm)

\*Technical Preservation Services for Historic Buildings II. A teaching site.

[www.2.cr.nps.gov/e-rehab](http://www.2.cr.nps.gov/e-rehab)

\*National Center for Preservation Training and Technology. National Park Service for training, grants, and research.

[www.ncptt.nps.gov](http://www.ncptt.nps.gov)

\*Traditional Building Magazine

[www.traditionalbuilding.com](http://www.traditionalbuilding.com)

\*New York Landmarks Preservation Commission.

[www.nylandmarks.com](http://www.nylandmarks.com)

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