

Founded 1968

Thirty-fourth Year of Publication

Spring 2002

THE BROWNSTONER

A PUBLICATION OF THE BROWNSTONE REVIVAL COALITION

718.222.1473

P.O. Box 40-0055, Brooklyn, NY 11240-0055

AN UNFINISHED ESSAY: NOTES AND THOUGHTS ABOUT THE UPPER WEST SIDE

John J. Gallagher, the historian best known for his authoritative work, "The Battle of Brooklyn, 1776," died on February 4 at the age of 64. He wrote two other books, "From the Wright Brothers to the End of the Propeller Age" and "Monsieur Maginot's Line," a history of French military fortifications, scheduled for publication later this year. Gallagher, a resident of Park Slope, was a first-class architectural historian and photographer. He had a wonderful slide lecture titled "Naked Ladies," the subject of which, to the disappointment of many, turned out to be public statuary in Brooklyn. Probably with a book in mind, he had assembled voluminous notes and photographs of Brooklyn brownstone neighborhoods and Manhattan's Upper West Side. What follows are some of his notes on the Upper West Side.

There was a time, and a place, in the history of New York City when buildings were made with the idea that human beings would either inhabit them or work in them. This novelty was coupled to an economic theory which has been held in little repute since the mid-to-latter 1930's--namely, to build honestly, with relatively high initial investment, good-quality materials and talented workmen.

The owner of such a building could inhabit it with a certain degree of comfort; general upkeep would be modest; and operating costs, such as heating, would be as low as the engineers of the time could devise.

What's more, with the attention to certain decorative effects and artistic proportions, the inhabitant would be able to know with confidence, and onlookers would be able to easily tell, who was where on the social ladder.

The time was the half-century or so from around 1880 to the depths of the Great Depression; the place was New York's Upper West Side. Starting as a small tip of an angle at Columbus Circle, the area extended to the slopes of Morningside Heights at 110th Street, or Cathedral Parkway, as it is now called. The development paralleled the establishment of city life as we know it. The area had its greatest surge of building during the time the Parisians called La Belle Epoque, the English, the Edwardian Age, and Mark Twain, the Gilded Age.

[CONTINUED ON PAGE FOUR]

BRC Spring Lecture Series

At the Donnell Library Center, 20 West 53rd Street
All Lectures Start at 6:00 pm There Is No Charge

Tuesday, April 23

"The Brownstone Market
After September 11"

Are brownstones still hot and getting hotter? A panel of experts, moderated by BRC President Dexter Guerrieri, will give an up-to-date financial tour of New York's brownstone neighborhoods--East Side, West Side, and Brooklyn. Plus a talk by Loraine Nadel, Esq., on the legal problems of "Dealing with Tenant Issues in Your Brownstone."

Tuesday, May 7

"A Slide Tour

of New York's Historic Downtown"

Architecture, social history, and tragedy come together in an unusual picture tour of two centuries of lower Manhattan. See where President Washington slept in New York (he lived here for a year), where Lincoln had his photograph taken, where Columbia University was born. And lots more. Lecture by Everett Ortner, BRC Chairman.

Tuesday, June 25

"Brownstone Neighborhoods After
September 11. Will There Be Changes?"

Our brownstone neighborhoods have been riding high for the last twenty and more years. Popularity: Up. Appearance: Up. Value: Up. But what about the future of these communities? Of New York City's future? Urban expert John Muir will peer into his crystal ball and tell us.

*Si factum non sit,
Noli id reficere*

*For non-latinists, a translation may
be found on page eight

THE BROWNSTONER

Newsletter of the
Brownstone Revival Coalition

Thirty-fifth Year of Publication

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SHOULD THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION RAISE MONEY FOR THE CITY BY CHARGING FEES?

Herewith Some Thoughts
About the Unthinkable

As everyone knows, the city needs money, perhaps now more than ever. Even cultural institutions are being asked to help out, both by cutting costs and raising money. And so Mayor Bloomberg has asked the Landmarks Preservation Commission to design a permit fee program to generate revenue--the figure mentioned is \$525,000--for the city's general coffers. The preservation community has in the past been strenuously opposed to fees of any kind for LPC permits.

What to do? Here are some considerations offered by active preservationists:

- (1) Administering a fee program would be difficult for the LPC, which is already understaffed, could end up costing more than would be gained, and could create a permit bottleneck because of the extra paperwork.
- (2) The LPC's Enforcement Program, which charges fees for violations of the landmarks law, is itself understaffed, and anyway the city should be providing funds to implement the civil fines program.
- (3) The imposition of fees for permits could work a hardship on middle- and lower-income owners within the city's 81 historic districts. Also, charging a fee could be seen as unfair to owners of landmarked buildings and precipitate a backlash against future landmarking. Fees could also negatively affect compliance with LPC regulations. Simeon Bankoff, executive director of the Historic Districts Council, is quoted by the *New York Times* as saying that compliance is a "hard enough sell sometimes. This is going to discourage people from seeking landmark status, and encourage active resistance to it."
- (4) But there is another way of looking at the matter: If the LPC must establish a fee program, special permits might be the place to start: These are usually issued for big commercial projects, which pay other fees to the city and have big budgets. Then there are multiple permits which are a burden to the staff, and asking for a fee would seem fair. With this limited program, individual homeowners would not be burdened with a fee and would not be deterred from seeking the proper permits. Nor would there be a backlash.

Finally -- and perhaps the most controversial issue -- is whether or not to consider implementing fees for certain applicants. This could be of interest to a number of people, but most preservation organizations would probably have strong feelings against it.

And now, the response of The Brownstoner's
Editorial Department

Dear LPC Chairwoman Sherida E. Paulsen:

I cannot speak for the entire membership of the Brownstone Revival Coalition of New York, but the Editorial Department of the BRC newsletter, "The Brownstoner" has met, considered the problem, and wishes to offer a counterproposal, one that will raise the hackles of every tax-paying American. Before I offer my proposal I would like to enumerate some of the considerations on which it is based:

(1) New York City is the greatest city in the world, and it is a pleasure and a privilege to live here. No argument? Then let's go on.

(2) The best places to live in New York City are its oldest communities, most typically the 19th century brownstone areas in Manhattan and Brooklyn, but also the little old-house townlets in Staten Island and Queens.

(3) Some of these communities are known by urban experts all over the United States as the best places to live. A young woman I know, visiting Chicago for a conference, was told by a well-known planner that the finest urban residential community in the whole country is Park Slope, in Brooklyn. I live there, so I know it's true.

(4) Most owners of brownstones are now multimillionaires, or at least millionaires. It's a fact. Pioneer brownstoners who bought their homes, say, 30 or so years ago in the Upper West Side or in my own Park Slope for \$20- or \$25,000 can sell their homes for a million or more. (I could be rich if I sold my own beautiful brownstone, but where would I go?) And people now buying -- or trying to buy -- houses in those neighborhoods, or Chelsea, or the Village, or Brooklyn Heights, or Cobble Hill, and certainly anywhere on the Upper East Side, are already at least millionaires, and lord knows how many times over.

(5) Now here is a fact that is rarely mentioned, and then only behind a hand shielding the mouth in case there are lip-readers or tax assessors present. New York homeowners are incredibly *undertaxed*. Read the Real Estate section of the *Sunday Times* or the Thursday House & Home section and look at the prices and taxes when a brownstone, or a house in a landmark district, is sold. You'll likely find something like this: Price: \$1,500,000. Taxes: \$3,111. I didn't make that up. It's in the April 11th issue of the *Times*. If that house, going at a million-five, were in Larchmont or Scarsdale the taxes would be six or eight times as much. Maybe even more.

TWO HARLEM HEROES AND AN AWARD

Just as this issue of "The Brownstoner" was going to press (which is to say, the editor's local copy shop, which runs it off in brown ink on three 8 1/2-by-17-inch sheets of cafe au lait-colored paper) the latest issue of "The New Yorker" appeared, featuring two brownstone heroes well known to us: Michael Henry Adams and Josephine E. Jones. You can't miss Michael at an event attended by preservationists; he's always the best-dressed person there, the one with the nicest smile, and, in a crowd of people obsessed with saving the best of the past, among the most dogged. Josephine E. Jones is, perhaps, less exuberant but no less dogged. She has been a mainstay of Harlem preservation. She's the one with the big hat and the soft voice. She is particularly well known to the Brownstone Revival Coalition as a member of our Board of Directors.

Also, just about the time this issue was being written, our Chairman, Everett H. Ortner, received notice that he is to be awarded, for lifetime achievement, the New York State "Preservation League Award for Excellence in Historic Preservation." Everett Ortner was one of the founders of the Brownstone Revival Coalition, and was its first president, way back in 1968. In 1972, he founded Back to the City, Inc., a national organization that held conferences in 13 cities across the nation before it expired. His current new organization, an offspring of BRC, is Preservation Volunteers of America (PVA), which has both national and international aspirations.

Now, what would a logical person conclude from all this? Let's put the facts together. In the 81 landmarked districts there are 1) a lot of rich people who could easily afford to pay higher taxes; 2) a lot of middle-income people who wouldn't have to strain very hard to pay higher taxes, especially, as we shall see, if the increase is not very large; 3) a small number of poor people who own homes in very-low-tax areas where increases would be minimal. Besides, most houses in those poor-people areas are owned by absentee landlords making fortunes as the value of their brownstone investments goes up.

You can see what I am getting at now. Instead of developing a fee system for the Landmarks Preservation Commission with its disadvantages and costly complications, let's raise the taxes on *all structures* in the Historic Districts. Collecting would be a cinch, a simple computer matter. Raise taxes by how much? I say three percent. My own taxes, which are higher than for almost any of the brownstones around me in Park Slope, are about \$6,000. A three-percent increase would be \$180. Considering the privilege of living in Park Slope and in Brooklyn and in New York City -- I'm willing.

Everett H. Ortner

[UPPER WEST SIDE, CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE] On the West Side, perhaps, the age could be called Corinthian -- the birth of an American Golden Age, the natural implementation of Manifest Destiny. To paraphrase my dictionary, Corinthian showed itself in the graceful ornateness of its buildings, the exuberance and luxurious dissipation of its people. This was tempered by the ethic of those who emigrated to America: work hard, get ahead, enjoy the fruits of your labor. If the Fricks, the Carnegies, and the Astors could build their chateaux on the East Side, so, with his imperial outlook, the early Upper West Side builder could invest from \$15,000 to \$20,000 in the early days of the period, and \$15,000 to \$50,000 at the turn of the century in his town house, with an eye to display as well as to investment and utility. Between 1883 and 1897 more than 8,000 row houses were built on the Upper West Side.

"The Wild West"

Architectural writer Montgomery Schuyler wrote in 1899, "The houses that now characterize the West Side are without doubt the most interesting examples of domestic architecture that New York has to show." The exuberance of the designs moved Schuyler to call the area the "Wild West."

The Upper West Side is one of the last examples of major urban development, unassisted, or unhelped, by government support. In this area, during the latter half of the period, builders developed and erected three new types of structures: the residence hotel, the skyscraper, and the high-rise apartment building.

And the area is well-built and has lasted. It illustrates the belief that structures of good design and quality construction can survive. From the 1930s to the early and mid-60s, little new housing was constructed on the Upper West Side, and much of the area bore the signs of a slum. But it snapped back. Would neighborhoods with new buildings "snap back" like that if, as Nathan Silver points out in *Lost New York*: "An old building is usually one that has continued to make sense in its relationship with its place and users," then, many new buildings, erected for cost effectiveness alone, will never grow to be old buildings.

Showing the Way for Living

In its development, the Upper West Side showed the way for successful urban living. Ample public transportation made the use of an automobile more a luxury than a necessity. (For tenants who might want a private car, one building on 86th Street had its own garage in 1905, which later became a synagogue.) The proximity of shopping facilities, almost universal throughout the area, made for ease and greater choice. The nearness of physicians and other services offered the same convenience and choice. The parks were close enough for convenient recreation.

Because of the compactness of the area and, in part, because of the order imposed by the street-grid

system, some public functions (in theory if not necessarily in practice) would be cheaper and more efficient in operation. Obviously, police, fire, and postal services have shorter distances to travel while serving more consumers.

One can contrast the development of the Upper West Side with that of Brownsville in Brooklyn, built at about the same time but with buildings that were minimally serviceable and designed according to the principles of greed -- building at the lowest cost for the fastest and greatest return on investment. Once inflicted primarily on the poor, over the past several decades the practice has been extended to people of higher economic levels.

The coming together of the Upper West Side was the result of the happy accident of new money seeking a good investment uniting with an influx of talented artisans -- master mechanics skilled in the use of primary materials: brick, mortar, plaster, stone, and wood -- part of the wave of immigrants from Europe.

A Sound Investment

The immigrants provided the skills; the financial conditions of the times provided the opportunities. The country in the decades following the Civil War was in its greatest surge of growth, and more and more people were making more and more money. What to do with it? The banks offered trivial interest on deposits. Besides which, deposits were not insured and banks went under at regular intervals. Government bonds returned four to five percent. The stock market was chancy at best. A well-built private house, on the other hand, was among the soundest investments of the period -- a good place to put one's money for the long run.

Such housing was built to conform to the realities of human life and to human scale, both physical and spiritual. Residents had a great sense of identity. They knew who they were and what they were. They respected property rights and, for the most part, the rights of others to an untroubled life -- at least in the home.

From the layout of the Upper West Side, the design of its buildings, and the placing of its services and shops, one might almost believe that some supernatural city planner -- one whose ears were attuned to the music of the spheres -- who valued human needs and did not entirely despise pomp and flourish, had a hand in the design of the area.

Actually, the State of New York played an important role in the development of the Upper West Side. It was a time when the idea of the garden towns of suburbia was growing: Riverside near Chicago, A.T. Stewart's Garden City on Long Island, Jackson Heights, and, later, Forest Hills Gardens in Queens. In an effort to humanize the new industrial city that sprang up after the Civil War, the state legislature laid down a plan for the area in 1869. Because of this plan, the area had its grand boulevard -- Broadway. But more important, with the creation of Riverside Park and Drive, it

preserved the waterfront from industrial use. (That was, at the time, merely a thin ribbon of parkland bounded by mansions along the drive on the east and the railway on the west. The river front was an expanse of mud flats dotted by industrial debris cast up by the tides. In the 30s, Robert Moses expanded the park and covered the railroad tracks.)

Sleepy Hamlets

Spotted about the countryside were sleepy hamlets: Harsenville at 70th Street between Broadway (the old Bloomingdale Road) and 10th Avenue, Bloomingdale Village itself on the Hudson River from about 100th Street to 110th Street, and prosperous country manses such as the Aphorp Mansion at 105th Street overlooking the Hudson. These points of interest were connected along the Old Bloomingdale Road or sometimes in rambling country lanes more or less perpendicular to the highway.

There were a number of such lanes: Dixon's Row, now part of 110th Street; Clendening's Lane, at 103rd; Turin Lane at 94th; Jauncy Lane, which led along 93rd to the old Eastern Post Road, just west of 95th of Fifth Avenue and 96th Street; Stillwell's Lane at 86th; and Harsen's Lane and Road, running easterly, both around 71st Street. On Harsen's Lane, just to the east of Broadway at 70th, was a small hill and a copse of trees, for many years a favorite hiding place for highwaymen who attacked lone travelers on the Bloomingdale Road.

The area also held a few non-rural buildings such as the Orphan Asylum building, started in 1835 on what is now Riverside Drive and West 73rd Street.

From the time of its urbanization, the district has been shielded against incursions from industry and shipping by parkland on the east and on the west, and, on the north, across the Manhattan Valley, by Morning-side Heights, the American Acropolis of Columbia University and its neighboring institutions.

The First Powerhouse

During the period of its establishment, the area contained little in the way of slums -- areas inhabited by people in chronic poverty. It had one small brewery and one large commercial bakery, both around 11th Avenue at 60th Street. The first powerhouse for the Interborough Rapid Transit Company, with a facade designed by Stanford White, was built there. A number of livery stables, later converted to garages, were scattered about the area. There were no hide-boiling plants or other factories, these being downtown along the riverfront and closer to their workers' tenement homes.

The Hudson River Railroad, which opened in 1851, running along the shoreline, was separated from the area by Riverside Park, completed in 1885 from 72nd Street north. This park, which benefits from the view of the Palisades across the river, is the city's first major non-commercial riverfront development.

Aside from various riding academies, the St. Nicholas ice-skating rink (later a boxing arena, on 66th Street) and, from just after the turn of the century, the Crystal Carnival Skating Rink on Broadway and 94th, no major public attraction existed in this urban bedroom community.

There did, however, exist a few boat- and, for the affluent, yacht-clubs reached by footbridges over the rail tracks. Of the more prominent, as of 1882, was the Columbia Yacht Club, which had its mooring at 86th Street and the Hudson. There was a center of public entertainment around Columbus Circle, featuring Reisenwebers Rathskeller with its famous "beefsteak dinner" a highlight of communal affairs. For the less affluent, a "Little Coney Island," comprising a number of dance halls, bars, and places of other entertainment existed along 110th Street.

There were some theaters and some stages devoted to legitimate performances, such as the debt-plagued Century Theater, probably New York's most spectacularly unsuccessful theater, due in part to poor management -- the popular press labeled it a "Shrine of Snobbery" -- and in part to its distance from Times Square.

White Poor and Black Poor

Naturally, some segments of the area, particularly in the far west in the lower sixties, had their tenements of white poor, blending to black poor in a district called San Juan Hill. The nickname came partly from the weekend carnage at the emergency room of the newly formed Roosevelt Hospital, and partly in memory of the fighting qualities of the Ninth and Tenth Negro Cavalry and the 25th Infantry Regiments, which helped to carry the day at Teddy Roosevelt's famous battle in the 1898 Spanish-American War.

That these slums were in place, and providing exorbitant profits to their landlords, helped inadvertently to prevent commercial and industrial encroachment on the area above 60th or 61st streets until 1916. In that year, the City of New York enacted its, and the nation's, first zoning codes, limiting Manhattan's commercial area to south of 59th Street, the southern boundary of Central Park.

Despite the relaxation of zoning restrictions over the years to allow for commercial development north of 59th, the building of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts on the site of those slums provided a fresh buffer zone between commerce and industry to the south and the bedroom community to the north. Additionally, the new performing-arts center was one of several developments that gave impetus to the resurrection and transformation of the Upper West Side.

In bits and pieces along Amsterdam and Columbus avenues -- particularly the latter with its Ninth Avenue El overhead -- were the tenements for the worker, the servant, the shop

[CONTINUED ON PAGE SEVEN]

WINDOWS OF WELCOME FOR YOUR BROWNSTONE

A window box full of flowers adds welcome warmth and interest to the outside of a home, while providing enjoyment for those inside as well. Put them in a window near an entrance, and they add a lively note of welcome. A tremendous variety of plants will grow well in window boxes; the most important concern when making your selection is that the plants in the same box have the same requirement for soil and moisture.

One consistently successful plan to create a range of color and shape, and consequently the effect of a profusion of growth, is to place plants of differing height in rows. The front row might be made up of trailing plants that will flow over the front of the box; the middle row composed of flowers of low to medium height; and a final row of taller flowers. The three rows may be in different hues of a single color, or may contrast wildly, depending on your purpose -- do you want a subdued decorative accent or an attention-grabbing focal point?

Here are some special pointers and special techniques especially for window boxes:

- ✓ The soil should be a light mix of sand, peat moss, vermiculite and rich topsoil or potting mix in equal parts.
- ✓ Water the boxes daily and fertilize once a month.
- ✓ Drainage is critical. Gravel in the bottom of the box should handle this.
- ✓ The box must be securely anchored.
- ✓ The most common contained materials and their

pros and cons are listed below.

PLASTIC holds moisture well, but deteriorates from exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. Colored containers will fade.

CAST-CONCRETE BOXES come in a variety of sizes and shapes. They retain moisture well, yet can breathe. Select boxes with drain holes and empty them in winter to prevent cracking.

METAL retains heat to a great degree, and will cook your plants if the box is in a sunny location. Plants in metal boxes need water more often than other container planters.

WOOD is a good insulator, but loses moisture more rapidly than other container materials.

CLAY is also a good insulator, and it retains moisture and breathes well. Clay or terra cotta must be emptied or stored indoors in freezing weather to prevent cracking.

Here is a recommendation for a shady window or balcony:

Plant	Height	Color
Asparagus fern (cascading)	12"	Green
Wax begonias	10"	White, red, pink
Impatiens (dwarf variety)	8-12"	White, red, pink, lavender
Ivy (cascading)	6"	Green, white
Fuchsia	12-15"	White, pink, red, purple
Japanese pansies	10"	Purple with yellow
Vinca (cascading)		White, green

--BY JANICE GIBBS



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[UPPER WEST SIDE, continued from page five] OR downtown. Here, too, and on the neighboring side streets, were the stables, miscellaneous shops, and general business services for the private houses and luxurious apartment buildings of the Upper West Side.

Comfortable and Opulent

For the most part, the Upper West Side was a community of more than modest comfort, more than quietly opulent housing, situated along and beside three of the city's more aristocratic thoroughfares: Riverside Drive, West End Avenue, clerk, and the mechanic who worked in the area and Central Park West.

The Upper East Side attracted the entrenched super-rich. First, they advanced, stately home after stately home, up Fifth Avenue. Later, when the New York Central electrified its line from Grand Central Terminal north in 1907-11 and the formerly open cut on Fourth Avenue was covered over, Park Avenue attracted similar families of conservative tastes and money. Greenwich Village and Chelsea housed the old New York families.

In the late 19th century, the prosperous commercial and retail families came to the Upper West Side. With time, the coming merchant, the newly spawned corporate manager, and the successful artist all flocked to the area. Throughout the period, until 1929 certainly, the area attracted the solid middle class. These were for the most part people with very good incomes but with less substantial capital than their neighbors across Central Park. This type of resident has remained prominent in successive generations of Upper West Side settlers.

A Satellite of Harlem

One section, 99th Street east of Columbus, called Manhattan Valley, held, from the time of the first World War, a middle-class black community, a satellite of Harlem to the north and east. The apartment houses here were erected relatively late, between 1911 and 1916, and generally were of cheaper construction and offered fewer amenities.

Even in the early days, the Upper West Side offered a unique unghettoized mix of races, ethnic backgrounds and economic levels, and a diversity of talent that were not normally to be found in other parts of the city. On the East Side, by contrast, the rich did their living, shopping, and socializing on Fifth, Madison, and Park Avenues, leaving to their Irish servants Lexington and el-shrouded Third Avenue for resort. East of Lexington, too, like stripes on the American flag, ran solid blocks of Germans, Czechs, Hungarians, and Central American groups.

There was also little geographical segregation on the Upper West Side. Broadway, the area's trunk,

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was open to all and was viewed by many as equal to the great boulevards of Europe. Wide as any continental boulevard, Broadway had a grass- and tree-planted mall down its center, avenues of trees on the sidewalks, and, as time passed, was lined with quality shops and handsome apartment buildings and residence hotels. It was planned as a "parkway," similar to those being built across the East River to unify the City of Brooklyn: the Eastern Parkway and the Ocean Parkway.

Visions that became fact, of promenades and architectural embellishments--of acanthus leaves, sea shells and scrolls, typical of the Corinthian style--danced in the heads of architects and builders, heads heady with the growth of the American Empire. The Upper West Side, after all, was a reflection of America's Manifest Destiny. Indeed one might easily say that the ornate row house of the Upper West Side was an example of vernacular architecture -- the architecture of American Imperial aspirations -- the spirit of the times.

This concludes Part 1 of John Gallagher's essay on the Upper West Side. Part 2, in the next issue of The Brownstoner, will conclude the essay.

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A GREAT DAY AT GREEN-WOOD CEMETERY COMMEMORATES THE BATTLE OF BROOKLYN

It happened in Brooklyn, two and a quarter centuries ago: Some nineteen thousand untrained Americans met a professional British army that far outnumbered them, and were badly defeated -- many killed, many wounded, many captured. On a stormy night on August 27, 1776, under cover of darkness, the Americans withdrew across the East River to Manhattan and survived, under their gallant leader, General Washington, to fight again. And, of course, to win.

The battle raged through the woods that are now Prospect Park and on through the lanes and marshes that marked the area that is now Park Slope. The early stages were fought on the heights overlooking the harbor, now the site of Green-Wood Cemetery.

Each year, as they have for many years, on these heights on Green-Wood Cemetery, a number of Americans gather on a Sunday close to the date of the battle, to honor the patriots of '76. Last year the event took place on August 26. Busloads of citizens from Delaware joined the party. Others appeared garbed in revolutionary uniforms. Wreaths were laid. The Regimental Band of the U. S. Merchant Marine Academy played martial music. Everyone sang the National Anthem, although there was some faltering at the second stanza. Afterward, a large percentage of the party repaired to the American Legion Post at Ninth Street and Third Avenue for cold cuts and beer.

The commemorative event will, of course, take place again in August this year (almost certainly on the 25th). For information, call The Old Stone House (the historic structure where many Americans lost their lives) at 718/768-3195.



Photo: Barnaby Drake-Dame

Jack Pontes
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NEW YORK IS A COLLECTION OF SMALL TOWNS

Is not New York composed of a number of small towns -- and not only that, but the best small towns in America? Before the suburbs ate up the countryside, towns were the model for American places to live. Think of Dad coming home in the evening from the farm or the factory; Mom in the kitchen baking pies; freckle-faced kids diving into the old swimming hole; Grandpa chewing the rag with some other vets of some war in the town square right across from the zinc statue of a Civil War of an anonymous hero; the town grocer, weighing out a pound of pea beans for the church organist. The local barber. The local doctor. The local dentist. The local cobbler.

What made the small town seem so desirable? Was it the fact that the lives of so many people within a limited area were intertwined with each other, through churches, through clubs, through business -- through sheer proximity, because so much of what they did often revolved around a central spine: Main Street.

And is that not what one sees in our New York brownstone communities? Our small towns have a main-street spine where we shop and dine and wave to our friends, and see who is getting fat and who is wheeling a baby carriage. Our main streets are Broadway and Amsterdam and Columbus in the Upper West Side; Seventh and Fifth Avenues in Park Slope; Court Street for both Cobble Hill and Brooklyn Heights; Third Avenue for Bay Ridge, and so forth. Plus, of course, Lower Broadway and Orchard Street, and Fifth Avenue for all of New York.

Add to that the fact that our small towns live under a magnificent cultural umbrella of magnificent shopping centers and museums and centers of learning -- unrivaled anywhere and a subway ride away.

Do not our small towns have the best of everything in this wonderland of a city?

--Optimist

the corcoran group

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BRC HAS A NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NEW ADDRESS, NEW TELEPHONE, AND NEW FAX

Yes, Dear Members, the creaky, Victorian, 34-year-old Brownstone Revival Coalition can move with the times, to wit: a new Executive Director, David J. Sokosh.

■ A new address and telephone number.

Brownstone Revival Coalition of New York
P.O. Box 40-0055
Brooklyn, NY 11240-0055

■ A new telephone (praises only, no complaints)
718/222-1473

A NOTE ABOUT THE BROWNSTONE REVIVAL COALITION OF NEW YORK, INC.

We are a 34-year-old association of old-house lovers and New York buffs. We are the people who love New York's historic old neighborhoods, worry about them-- and live in them. Our members buy plumbing and carpentry and masonry and roofs. They buy insurance, hire lawyers, and pay City taxes. They are well-heeled and well-educated. They come to our spring lectures and winter workshops. They hang our Old New York calendars on their kitchen wall. And they read the newsletter of the BRC, *The Brownstoner*.

The Brownstone Revival Coalition is a federally tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) corporation. You could do neighborhood preservation a mighty good turn by making a tax-deductible contribution to the BRC. You could do yourself a very good turn commercially by advertising in *The Brownstoner*. You could, of course, do both.

* *Modern English translation
of Augustinian advice:*
If it ain't broke, don't fix it

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200 YEARS AGO IN NEW YORK

"A petition of certain inhabitants of Long Island and New York"

"The insular situation of Long Island and the city of New-York renders an intercourse between them at all times uncertain, and sometimes impracticable, as the only communication between them is by means of a ferry, nearly a mile in length across an impetuous tide. The great and increasing population of the city of New-York renders a daily supply from the country of the necessaries of life almost indispensable. It has therefore become an object of great importance to the interest and welfare of those adjoining islands, that a Bridge should be established between them, which may be so constructed as to answer all the purposes of intercourse, and at the same time be beneficial to the port and harbour of New-York."

-- *New York Evening Post*, Feb. 18, 1802

"A Premium of 350 Dollars"

"The Corporation of the City of New York having it in contemplation to build a new Court House and City Hall, the undersigned, a committee appointed for the purpose, hereby offer a premium of three hundred and fifty dollars for such a plan, to be presented...prior to the first day of April next....The site on which it is to be erected is insulated [sic], covering an area of three hundred feet by two hundred feet. The plan must show the elevation of the four facades. The interior arrangement of the building must comprise four court rooms, two large and two small, six rooms for jurors, eight for public offices, one for the common council, and appropriate rooms for the city watch and the housekeeper..."

--Advertisement, *Daily Advertiser*, Feb.20, 1802

Reforming Convicts

"Whereas the imprisonment of persons convicted of Petit Larceny, and other inferior offences, in the city Prison of the city of New-York has not been attended with the beneficial consequences of reforming the convicts, and of preventing crimes; and as the confinement of such offenders promiscuously in the State-Prison, would be productive of public inconvenience..." the common council is authorized "to cause to be created...a strong building to be called the Prison for solitary confinement..."

--*Laws of New York*, 1852, Chap. 73

150 YEARS AGO IN NEW YORK

The New York Exchange Company is given the power to "purchase, hold, and convey the parcel of land and buildings situate in the city of New York, now known as the Merchants' Exchange, bounded by Wall, William and Hanover Sts. and Exchange Place, for the purpose of an exchange, and, when they have purchased the same, may receive the rents and profits thereof and divide the same among the stockholders."

Laws of New York, 1852, Chap. 104

Corruption

"The corruption of the Common Council, we are sure, never approached its present depth and magnitude. The care of the public health is neglected for the sake of a wretched political intrigue; bribes are offered and accepted with an openness of unblushing impudence for which the records of municipal dishonesty, though ample, can offer no parallel; the public treasury is held to exist only that it may be drained by the most outrageous jobs; the Aldermen, sworn officers of the law, magistrates even, who sit upon the bench of justice, are leagued with the lowest ruffians...."

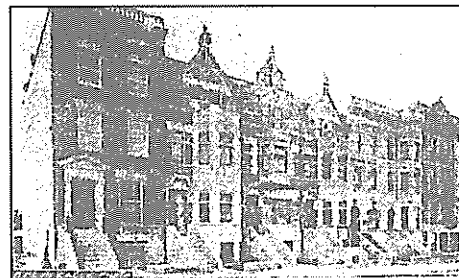
-- *New York Tribune*, June 28, 1852

100 YEARS AGO IN NEW YORK

Prince Henry

Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the Kaiser, arrives in New York aboard the Kronprinz Wilhelm. He is saluted by the harbor forts and welcomed by Mayor Seth Low. After visiting the Navy Yard and Governor's Island, he is entertained by the Deutsche Verein and set on a train to Washington to visit President Roosevelt. On his return he is entertained at dinner by the Metropolitan Club, and feted at the Metropolitan Opera House. In Brooklyn a beer is named after him: Prince Henry Beer.

-- *New York Herald*, Feb 24, 1902



an ad in
*The
Brooklyn
Eagle*,
November 2,
1902

South Side 7th St, Within 200 Feet Prospect Park.
W.B. GREENMAN, BUILDER.

The above houses are open for inspection. They have large rooms, extension bathrooms and butlers' pantries with dumbwaiters to second stories. Open plumbing throughout. Nickel plated boilers and Mott's porcelain sink and tubs in kitchen. Handsomely trimmed in mahogany, white enamel, birdseye maple, quartered oak and red birch. Parquet floors. The Flemish houses, with the red tile roofs, leaded glass windows and Flemish diningrooms and foyer halls with the old hood mantels, are worthy of a visit.

In the colonial house the contrast of the mahogany doors and stair handrail with the curved white enamel staircase, foyer hall and vestibule will be pleasing, not to mention the old colonial mantels throughout, gilt mirrors and its fine mahogany diningroom.

Take Vanderbilt, 7th or 8th av cars.

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Builder on premises or 858 Prospect place.

THINGS TO DO AND PLACES TO GO FOR NEW YORK BUFFS

THE COOPER UNION, 30 Cooper Square, Manhattan 718/353-4195

- May 22 and May 29, 6:30 pm. Lecture program. Parts 1 & 2: "Architectural Styles in New York City." Free

BIG ONION WALKING TOURS, 476 13th St., Brooklyn. 718/499-0023. All tours: \$12, 1:00 pm, 2 hours

- May 4, "Immigrant New York," Meet at Chambers St. & Broadway, City Hall Park
- May 4, "Park Slope," Meet at St. Johns Pl. and Plaza St, Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn
- May 5, "Historic Harlem," Meet at NW corner 135th St. & Lenox Ave. (Schomburg Center)
- May 5, "Jewish Lower East Side," Meet at SE Corner Essex & Delancy sts. (Olympic Diner)
- May 11, "Brooklyn Bridge & Brooklyn Heights," Meet at Chambers St. & Broadway, City Hall Park
- May 18, "The Bowery," Meet at The Black Cube at Astor Pl.
- May 19, "Green-Wood Cemetery," Meet at 5th Ave. & 25th St., Brooklyn
- May 26, "Greenwich Village," Meet at Washington Square Arch

BROOKLYN BOROUGH HALL, Joralemon & Court sts., Brooklyn. Free building tours daily at 1:00 pm

JOYCE GOLD HISTORY TOURS, 141 West 17th St., Manhattan. 212/242-5762 All tours: \$12, 1:00 pm, 2 hours

- May 7: "Gramercy Park." Meet at Gramercy Park Hotel, Lexington Ave. & 21st St.
- May 19: "Charms of Chelsea." Meet at Seminary, 9th Ave. & 20th St.
- May 22, "Fifth Ave. Gold Coast." Meet at Frick Collection, 1 East 70th St.

FRAUNCES TAVERN MUSEUM, 54 Pearl St., Manhattan. 212/425-1778

- Through May 31. Exhibition: "Freemasons in America--Colonists, Revolutionaries, Builders."

GOTHAM CENTER FOR NYC HISTORY, City University, 365 Fifth Ave., Manhattan. 212/817-8474

- May 7, "Jacob Riis' New York." Slide talk, 6-8:00 pm. Segal Theater. Free

BROOKLYN PUBLIC LIBRARY FOUNDATION, Grand Army Plaza. 718/230-2780

- May 4. Walking tour, 9:30 am. From Cobble Hill to Boerum Hill. Meet at Atlantic Ave. & Court St.
- June 2. Walking tour, 1:00 pm. "Literary Green-Wood." Visit the last homes of some famous residents. Meet at cemetery entrance, Fifth Ave. & 25th St., Brooklyn

THE BEAUX ARTS ALLIANCE, 119 East 74th St., Manhattan. 212/639-9120

- May 5, 2:00 pm. Walking tour and reception. Gramercy Park. \$25. Call for information and reservations.
- June 15, 1:00 pm. Walking tour. Downtown Manhattan from Foley Sq. to Wall St. \$25. Call for information and reservation.

THE LOWER EAST SIDE CONSERVANCY, 200 East Broadway, Manhattan. 212/598-1200

- May 20, June 24, July 22, August 26: Bus and walking tours of Lower East Side synagogues. \$118. Call for itineraries and details.

MAS PLANNING CENTER, 457 Madison Avenue, Manhattan. For information, call 718/388-1478

- May 17, 8:30 am. Breakfast forum: "The Housing & Homeless Connection"
- June 11, 8:30 am. Breakfast forum on land-use planning: "Where Will We Build It?"

THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE MUSEUM, 29 East Fourth St., Manhattan 212/777-1089

- May 5. Walking tour of No-Ho: "At Home Above Blecker," plus tour of Merchant's House. \$15. 1:30 pm
- May 19. Same

MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK, 1220 Fifth Ave., Manhattan. 212/534-1672

- Through May 12. Exhibition: "New York by New Yorkers -- Artists' Views"

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THE BROWNSTONER

A Publication of the Brownstone Revival Coalition of New York City, Inc.

Thirty-fifth Year of Publication

Spring 2002

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