NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY GROUP

BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

Issue No. 3 Summer 2021

Introduction

Welcome to the summer edition of Bloomingdale Bulletin, with news of programs, projects and a view into the history of the Upper West Side between 96th and 110th streets and Central Park to the Hudson River. The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group (BNHG) welcomes your feedback, comments and ideas here.

Upcoming Programs

97th Street Farmers Market

Margaret Hoffman

August 2021 (check for the date here)

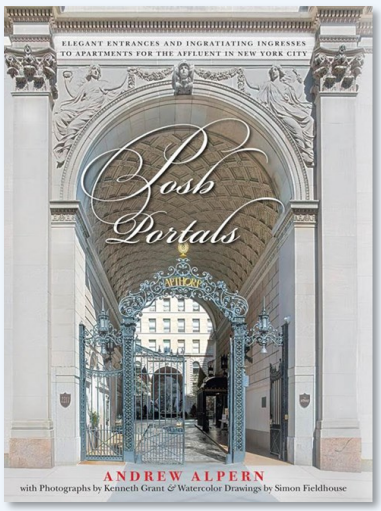
Top-quality fresh produce is plentiful at the 97th Street Farmers Market. Did you ever wonder how this venerable institution came to be? Margaret Hoffman, Greenmarket regional coordinator, tells us about its history, how it helps promote regional agriculture, and how Greenmarkets have changed our shopping and eating habits. Long-time farmers describe how this movement is saving small family farms as well as preserving farmland for the future. The program will show not only the connections to the past, but how local groups such as GrowNYC and the Farmers Markets are making current history.

Past Programs

Posh Portals of the Upper West Side: A Virtual Tour of the Extraordinary Entrances to Some of the Upper West Side's Finest Residential Architectural Treasures

Andrew Alpern

June 21, 2021



Architectural historian and author Andrew Alpern presented a richly illustrated program designed especially for the BNHG, based on his new book, *Posh Portals: Elegant Entrances and Ingratiating Ingresses to Apartments for the Affluent in New York City*. His talk treats you to the entrances of some of the most elegant and luxurious apartment houses on the Upper West Side and what they can tell us about the buildings and the people who live in them. One neighbor responded ""As I stroll our neighborhood, I will look up and appreciate so many new architectural treasures. Thanks for opening my eyes to these magnificent portals." That in turn drew an appreciation from Andrew Alpern, "Your decision to *look* when you walk and thereby to discover some of the beauty of the architecture of the Upper West Side is exactly what I hoped might be the impact of my efforts. What a great place to call home!" You can see a recording of the program here.

The Sounds Are the Story

Alissa Cherry

May 26, 2021

What can the sounds of a neighborhood tell you about who lives there? Artist and investigator Alissa Cherry conducted an interactive workshop for BNHG to introduce the idea of "soundscapes" and how observing our neighborhood through our ears makes us notice new things. Opening up to languages, music, nature, and industrial sounds can help us understand our community in a different way. This elicited a comment the next morning from a local who said it "opened my ears to the symphony of early morning activities - the guys unloading the coca cola truck, the traffic, sirens, the wind, passing conversations, and the subway below." You can see (and hear) a recording of the program here.

Upper West Side *en clave*: Bailando en Bloomingdale – Latin Music on the Upper West Side

Angel Roman, Felix Cortes, and Dan McSweeney

April 15, 2021

This thoroughly entertaining program chronicles the major role that Bloomingdale played in the world of popular Latin dance music over the decades – and tells about the giants in the field who had connections to the neighborhood. Vivid descriptions of dance clubs, jamming spots, and dance parties are brought to life with great music clips from the time. You can see a recording of the program here.

Ongoing Offerings

Free Walking Tours Are Back!

Renowned local historian Jim Mackin has resumed his terrific tours of historic Bloomingdale, after a long break because of the pandemic. He led the first one on June 30, showing off highlights of the neighborhood. Once you've completed one of his tours, you'll appreciate what makes this rarified slice of Manhattan so fascinating. The walking tours, sponsored by the Columbus-Amsterdam BID and BNHG, will resume on a regular schedule starting in the fall. For more information, and to find out about Jim's *Weekday Walks* outings in the meantime, visit our Upcoming Events.

Blogs

Slavery in Bloomingdale

BNHG historian Pam Tice has been prolific during the pandemic, publishing a series of four blog posts about Bloomingdale in the 18th Century. Her most recent one is about the topic that got her started on the whole project: Enslaved African Americans in Bloomingdale. It definitely merits attention as do the others in the series:

Part 1: Bloomingdale: Colonial Times and after the Revolutionary War
Part 2: 18th Century Bloomingdale residents before the American Revolution
Part 3: The Revolutionary War in Bloomingdale
Part 4: Enslaved African Americans in Bloomingdale

New Amsterdam in 1642. One of the earliest engraved views of the city, this composite shows Barbadan scenes in the foreground, New Amsterdam in the background. The I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Prints Division, New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

90 Years Ago: Two-Gun Crowley Causes a Ruckus in Bloomingdale

Pam Tice

Young Francis “Two Gun” Crowley only lived to his twentieth year. He was a murderer who caused an uproar in Bloomingdale on May 8, 1931.

Crowley’s crime spree began in February that year with a shooting at a dance in the Bronx. In March he was almost captured on Lexington Avenue after shooting a detective. In April, in Manhattan, Crowley and his friends broke into a West 90th Street apartment to commit a robbery using two guns, picking up his moniker. Later in April, he helped his friend “Fats” Durringer dispose of a murdered woman in Yonkers. Finally, on May 6, he murdered a policeman in Nassau County. The two young men and Crowley’s 16-year-old girlfriend were holed up in a top-floor flat at 303 West 90th Street when someone reported them.

The NYPD assembled 300 officers outside the building, between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive, as a crowd of 15,000 bystanders gathered. One officer reported later that actually nine officers captured the young criminals while 291 held back the crowds. From 5 to 6 pm that day, a gun battle ensued with the cops using machine guns and tear gas thrown into the flat through a hole in the roof. By May 10th, one of the city's movie theaters was showing "The Siege of 90th Street" as a short film, perhaps predicting the cell phone videos we expect today.

Justice for Two-Gun Crowley was swift. His trial began in Nassau County on May 25th and he was convicted on May 30th. He was sentenced to death on June 9th. On January 31, 1932, he was sent to the electric chair in Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York.

DAILY NEWS, FRIDAY, MAY 8, 1931 5

300 SHOOTING COPS TAKE CROWLEY, PAL, AND GIRL, 16

By JACK MILEY.

AS 10,000 watched, Francis (Two-Gun) Crowley, 20-year-old cop-killing lovers' lane petter, fought off 300 police who used machine guns, riot guns, revolvers, tear gas bombs and axes for more than an hour before he was captured yesterday at 6 p. m. with his young sweetie and a murderous pal in an apartment house at 303 West 90th st.

The wizened little murderer was suffering from three minor wounds and tear gas when he was dragged, cringing, from a top flat of the five-story brownstone front with Rudolph (Fat) Durniger, his chum in crime, and 16-year-old Helen Walsh, Two-Gun's lover, both of whom were uninjured.

As the sniveling youngster waited to go under the surgeon's knife at Bellevue hospital, he confessed the killing of Patrolman Frederick Hirsch, Nassau county cop who surprised him and Miss Walsh as they sat in a stolen car in a lonely lane near North Merrick, L. I., Wednesday morning.

"Sure I killed Hirsch," he boasted, "I fired sixteen shots at him. I killed that copper deader than hell, I did! When I shoot 'em, they die, buddy—and I poured enough hot lead at that guy to kill a dozen guys."

"Then I got out of the car to make sure he was dead. If he wasn't I was going to finish the job. I swiped his pistol, too. It was one of the guns I used on you fellows today!"

Durniger Confesses Killing Taxi Dancer.

At the same time, the 200-pound Durniger, whose speakeasy pals call him Tough Red, was weepingly admitting that he had murdered Virginia Brannen, Harlem taxi dancer, whose body was found in a Yonkers field ten days ago.

"I killed her with Crowley's gun," Durniger admitted. "I shot her because I was sore at her!"

While 10,000 persons gathered about the scene of the 90th st. siege, between West End ave. and Riverside dr., 200 detectives and 100 uniformed men, personally directed by Police Commissioner Mulrooney, fought from 5 to 6 p. m. to take Crowley, Durniger and the Walsh girl from the flat in which they had barricaded themselves.

The cops opened up with machine guns from nearby roof tops. They chopped holes in the roof of the apartment itself and dropped tear gas bombs in on the beleaguered trio.

Apartment Is Riddled.

As fast as they did this, Crowley and Durniger took the bombs and flung them out the window into the street. The two gunmen sniped with their nine pistols at the cops below and the girl reloaded their weapons for them.

Finally a cop from the roof above flung a bomb into the room that smacked Durniger in the face and knocked him unconscious. By then Two-Gun Crowley had a bullet in each leg and another in his left wrist.

Their ammunition exhausted, Crowley decided it was time to surrender. He shouted out the window:

"We give up! We're through! We have no more bullets! We're coming out now—for God's sake, don't shoot us!"

The door to the flat was flung open. Crowley staggered out and fell flat on his face. Durniger followed him. Miss Walsh, wearing only a gingham house dress and a pair of boudoir slippers, was the last to emerge.

The two-room-and-kitchenette apartment was a shambles. Its furniture was wrecked. An overturned chair showed where Crowley had crouched to dodge bullets that sprayed the room. The walls were bullet-riddled.

Crowley and Durniger admitted they had been living in the flat since Hirsch's murder. The place had been originally rented by Miss Billy Dunn, one of Durniger's dance hall sweethearts.

Detectives Dominick Caso and

(Continued on page 10, col. 1)

(NEWS photos) Above—Crowd outside apartment at 303 West 90th st. Left — Helen Walsh being led from station house.

Rudolph Durniger (without hat) on his way to the police station after his arrest in Crowley crime nest yesterday.

"I ain't armed," said Crowley to detectives. But a frisk yielded these two guns strapped to his legs.

Francis (Two-Gun) Crowley

Rain of Gold Silvers Clouds Of 11 Minders

By SALLY JOY BROWN.

THE cloud of despair and grief which has hung so long over the family of Valentine and Margaret Minder is beginning to show a little of its silver lining.

The anguish and distress which tore the hearts of these stricken parents has been lightened greatly by the sympathetic and understanding aid generous readers of The News so freely have offered and, were it not for the still critical condition of Valentine jr., it would seem that happy, peaceful days for a fully recovered and reunited family are not far away.

Mrs. Minder, the courageous little mother of this brood of eight,

(Continued on page 6, col. 1)

Baby Barbara, 3, and Margaret, 16, console each other in South Side hospital, Bay Shore, L. I.

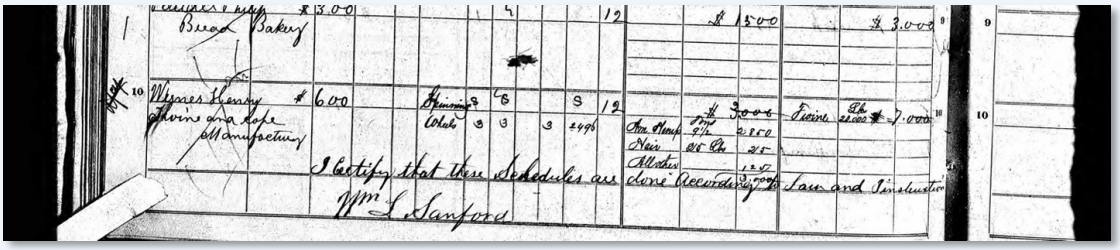
A Neighborhood Discovery: The Rope Walk on 106th Street

Pam Tice

As a member of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group, I learned about the maps of our Upper West Side blocks. One of my favorites is the mid-nineteenth century Mathew Dripps Map, available at the Library of Congress. One of the mysteries on the map was the designation of a Rope Walk on West 106th Street, on the south side of the street, just west of 10th Avenue, now named Amsterdam Avenue. Rope Walks were in many east coast cities in the 19th Century to serve the maritime industry. They were covered walkways where long strands of material were laid before being twisted into rope. Because the hemp used to make rope was so flammable, rope walks were often in the news as the site of large fires.

Recently, while researching something else, I noticed that in the 1850-1870 federal censuses for our Bloomingdale neighborhood, there were rope-making workers listed, and a rope manufacturer, Mr. Henry Warner. Thanks to Ancestry's data collection, I had access to the non-population federal censuses listing businesses as well as agricultural operations. There, in Ward 12 in 1870, I found Henry Warner's business, making twine on West 106th Street. His materials were American hemp (9.5 tons) and hair (215 pounds). The type of hair was not given. He produced 20,000 pounds of twine annually and employed three people.

In my search for the rope walk, I uncovered one other story. The *New York Times* published a speech by Dr. Draper on June 29, 1853, celebrating the 21st anniversary of the alumni association of New York University. In his speech, Dr. Draper tells the story of a group of men accompanying Samuel F.B. Morse, the inventor of the telegraph and a professor at NYU, to "the rope walk at Bloomingdale" to test the concept that the current passing through a wire would not be diminished by distance. They tested varying lengths of wire using the rope walk and determined that the distance did not affect the transmission.



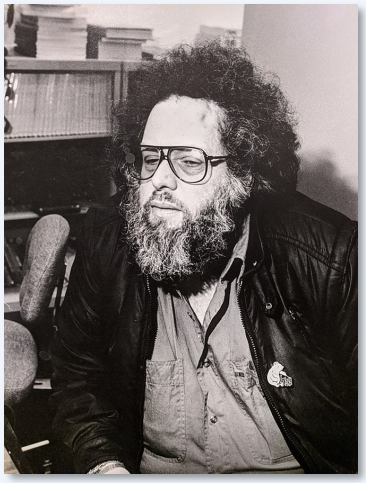
Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side

Fordham University Press

Entry from Jim Mackin's 2020 Book

Marshall Berman - Marxist Philosopher and Social Commentator (1930 - 2013)

838 West End Avenue (near 101st Street)



Berman was an unabashed fan of Marxism. Raised in the Bronx and educated at Columbia University, he taught for four decades at City College and frequently weighed in on the subjects of urbanity and modernism. The mess and noise of New York City, evidenced in his books on Times Square and New York City, were to his liking. He was ever an optimist. His studies at Oxford and a Harvard doctorate attested to his intellectual depth.

You can find out about other notables here.

Research Gems

Vita Wallace

As you may know, the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group has a collection of research material that is normally accessible in the Bloomingdale branch of the New York Public Library. While we all await the reopening of the branch, you may now read some of the gems of our collection, which we are in the process of scanning and posting online. Just click on an image to download and read the entire document. I am especially drawn to historical accounts by people deeply involved in First Church of Christ, Scientist, on 96th and Central Park West; the Bloomingdale Branch Library itself, on W 100th; the W 104th Street Community Garden; and Woman's Hospital on 109th and Amsterdam.

We're also intrigued by excerpts from long-gone neighborhood papers: *Wisdoms Child*, the *'Heights and 'Valley News, The Morningsider,* and the *West Side News (WSN)*. Can you help us identify these last two? Do you have clippings or issues of other neighborhood papers to share? If so, please contact us.

Interior of the First Church of Christ Scientist on 96th and CPW, from a real estate brochure in the library collection.

Lights, Camera, Action!

Look for Members of BNHG, in historical costumes, appearing in video shoots on your block this summer. We are working on a short video featuring the history of the Bloomingdale neighborhood. This will be a fun and informative look at our neighborhood's important themes, notable residents, musical influences, and other aspects of our culture. The script was written by Lisa Krizman and Dan McSweeney will shoot and edit the piece. We expect to launch the video on the BNHG website by the end of the summer.

Jim Mackin as Humphrey Bogart in the BNHG video