



**NEIGHBORHOOD  
HISTORY GROUP**

# **BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN**

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

**Issue No. 18**

**Spring 2025**

## ***It's Spring!***

Another season is here, with more to learn about Bloomingdale's history. Join us for a walking tour, zoom in for a presentation, read about an old photo, the first neighborhood playground, and the boys who dug up bones on West 104<sup>th</sup> Street. Head to the Bloomingdale Library for the latest exhibit. We look forward to feedback, comments, and ideas [here](#). Enjoy this issue and, if you wish, make a [donation](#).

## ***Upcoming Programs***

### **Neighborhood Walking Tours**

*Jim Mackin, NYC Historian*

**Wednesday, April 30**

**Wednesday, May 14**

**Wednesday, June 18**

Free. No reservations needed.

Meet at the south end of Straus Park, Broadway and 106<sup>th</sup> Street, at 2:00 pm.



Jim Mackin

Greet the spring flowers with a walking tour of our own neighborhood. Popular tour guide Jim Mackin, author of [Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side](#), will share his deep trove of fascinating stories about the people and places that make up Bloomingdale's history. The walks are different each time and last between one and two hours.

## **Art, Theater and Murder: *The Master Building***

*Stephanie Azzarone*

**Thursday, April 24, 2025, 6:30 pm**

The Master Building, formerly the Master Apartment Hotel, was created to celebrate and support Russian artist, philosopher, and explorer Nicholas Roerich.



The Master Building, Riverside Drive at 103rd Street

Over time, the building became a Bloomingdale Neighborhood educational and cultural hub, site of the Master Institute of United Arts, as well as museums, theater groups, and musical performances. The Master abounds in architectural detail, from a noteworthy cornerstone to a rooftop “stupa,” or Buddhist shrine. It has also been home to an intriguing array of residents — and the scene of a headline-making murder or two.

Stephanie Azzarone will guide us on a tour through the history and outstanding design of this official New York City designated landmark, which architectural historian Andrew Dolkart called “among the finest Art Deco high rise structures in New York City.”

Stephanie is a member of the BNHG Planning Committee and leads walking tours of the neighborhood. She is the author of [\*Heaven on the Hudson: Mansions, Monuments, and Marvels of Riverside Park\*](#) and the upcoming *Fabulous Fountains of New York*.

This will be a free Zoom presentation. Check Upcoming Events on our [website](#) for the link.

## **Past Programs**

### **Cleopatra's Needle: A Journey Through Bloomingdale and the Upper West Side**

*Gil Tauber and Jim Mackin, BNHG members and local historians*  
**Wednesday, January 22, 2025**

In 1880, the obelisk called Cleopatra's Needle arrived in New York from Egypt. The 220-ton column towers over Central Park at East 81<sup>st</sup> Street, near the Metropolitan Museum.



Two of the members of the BNHG Planning Committee, Gil Tauber and Jim Mackin, recounted the monument's back-story and recreated the 112-day trip it took from Egypt to the Hudson River, across 96<sup>th</sup> Street, and then down Broadway on its way to its present spot in Central Park.

According to Tauber, "It took 37 days just to get from the railroad tracks up the steep hill to 96<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway – and the entire operation took almost three times as long as its 39-day journey from Alexandria to New York." You can see a recording of the program on our [website](#).

### **Jauncey Lane: Traveling Through Time on an Ancient Roadway**

*Suzanne Wray and Jim Mackin*  
**Thursday, February 20, 2025**



Recent photo of the path of Jauncey Lane

This presentation took us on a trip back in time along Jauncey Lane, an old country road dating from Bloomingdale's colonial days. It was one of the many paths that then crisscrossed this once verdant neighborhood of farms and country houses.

Vestiges of this lane, which connected the Upper West Side to the Upper East Side can still be seen today along Riverside Drive. Suzanne Wray and Jim Mackin, members of the BNHG Planning Committee, gave a richly illustrated presentation tracing the lane's history from its beginnings up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

You can see a recording of the program on our [website](#).

## ***New in the Neighborhood***

### **New Library Exhibit – Sports and Leisure in Upper Manhattan**

*A project by Rob Garber, BNHG Planning Committee member*

On display at the Bloomingdale Library through April 30, 2025



Horse racing in Bloomingdale

Being obsessed with sports is nothing new in New York City. It turns out that our Bloomingdale neighborhood played a big role in sports during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. No, not football, not baseball, not hockey. New Yorkers were into boxing, horse racing, and “pedestrianism!”

And you’ll be surprised to find out where the first professional tennis championship took place. Check this display to find out loads of fun facts.

## Coming next — Putting the Bloom into Bloomingdale: The History of Upper Manhattan’s Flower and Nursery Industry

*A project by Rob Garber, BNHG Planning Committee member*

On display May 1 – July 31, 2025



The outdoor flower market era  
Hearth and Home 6 May 1871

Before today’s concrete streetscape, there was once a thriving collection of greenhouses and gardens that supplied New York’s mighty appetite for cut flowers — as well as fruit trees, rose bushes, and plant seeds. Nurserymen raised plants to satisfy the diverse needs of homes, restaurants, and funeral parlors.

From colonial days until rising property values drove them to the suburbs, Upper Manhattan was home to greenhouses in some surprising places. And the men and women who worked in the florist industry left some curious tales behind for us.

The Bloomingdale Library, West 100th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues (across from the 24th precinct station house)

Mon-Tue 10am-7pm | Wed-Thu 11am-7pm | Fri-Sat 10am-5pm

Use of library space by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group for this exhibit does not indicate endorsement by The New York Public Library.

## ***Playgrounds for the Bloomingdale Children***

*By Pam Tice*

The Bloomingdale kids got their first playground in the summer of 1898, constructed in an empty lot between West 94<sup>th</sup> and West 95<sup>th</sup> Streets between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. It was called a “vacation playground,” or one set up during the summer months when school was not in session. Children were still playing in the streets in those days despite a city ordinance against it, and they could be arrested, although they were usually just held at the police station until their parents came to pick them up.



*New York Tribune* photo of the West 95th Street playground

Several organizations and people are given credit for the West 95<sup>th</sup> Street playground project. On the NYC Parks Department's website about the history of playgrounds, credit is given to the Board of Education, which wanted to open a playground in each school district. They also opened one that summer at Broadway and 69<sup>th</sup> Street. Other credit goes to the Federation of Churches and, helping in our neighborhood, St. Michael's Episcopal Church. Another supporter was a West Side woman, Mrs. Clarence Burns, who was active in Republican Party politics and many philanthropic projects in the city.

The movement to create playgrounds was underway in the 1890s. Many credit Stoyen Vasil Tsanoff, a Bulgarian immigrant, who began his work in Philadelphia and then moved to New York. In June 1898, the *New York Times* reported that he was "in charge" of the West 95<sup>th</sup> Street playground. It's not clear if the summer playground would be able to last all year, opening after the school day.

Tsanoff studied at the University of Pennsylvania and became the Secretary of the Cultural Extension League in Philadelphia. The League set up two summer playgrounds in 1894 and, by 1897, had support to set up twenty-three.

After Tsanoff moved to New York City, he joined others to get children off the city's dangerous streets. Similar movements were underway in Chicago and in

Boston, where they built several “sand gardens” for children based on similar work in Berlin, Germany.

In New York City, movements supported “small parks” and “outdoor recreation.” But it wasn’t until 1903 that the City built its first playground, Seward Park, on the Lower East Side.

Tsanoff developed his understanding of playgrounds as a moral issue. He believed that character was built on the playground as children learned to take turns, follow rules, and help others. He saw this as a prevention against the development of criminal behavior later in life, and he believed that building playgrounds would be far cheaper than building jails. He wrote his book *Children’s Playgrounds: A Novel Plan of Character Building* while in New York City.

In the summer of 1899, the Bloomingdale children got a different summer playground, on the south side of West 99<sup>th</sup> Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. The *New York Times* reported that it was under the auspices of the Federation of Churches, that it had “all the usual appliances,” two caretakers, and daily gymnastics lessons. Mrs. Clarence Burns chaired the committee in charge. The following summer, the playground was a project of “the General Committee of the West Ninety-Ninth Street Playground Association.” Mrs. Burns was still presiding.



Mrs. Clarence Burns, Organizer

By 1900, the playground was still operating. Now, Mrs. Burns was also the President of the Tribune Sunshine Society, a *New York Tribune’s* women’s page project that took donations and sent flowers and magazines to homebound people. The Society would fund trolley trips for poor children to Coney Island, Pelham Bay Park, and Fort George. Mrs. Burns herself, sometimes with only one other adult, would take a group of children on a day trip.

The *New York Tribune* wrote in August, 1901, about Mrs. Burns’ report of her trolley trip to Fort George in northern Manhattan near Washington Heights:

“We had a most delightful outing to Fort George. I took fifty-eight boys and girls and one grown-up. A car inspector kindly gave us a car to ourselves, and we filled it. Of course, we visited the merry-go-round, and the man, as

usual, gave all the children what they called a 'triple-plate-ride' for a small sum, and the man with the goat carts contributed much to the pleasure of the small boys by giving them a free ride. Just before leaving for home, each child had cake and lemonade."

The West Ninety-Ninth Street Playground lasted through the summer of 1902.

Mrs. Burns began collecting books during the summer for the older girls at the playground, and soon a Club developed: the Neighborhood Social and Industrial Club, operating out of St. Michael's Church. Young women could join and have a place to enjoy themselves, "surrounded by good influences." The dance halls and saloons up on West 110<sup>th</sup> Street were of particular concern during those years.

The 1916 Bromley map covering our Bloomingdale blocks does not show playgrounds. However, there were more schools than there had been in the waning days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and there were small schoolyards. My colleague at BNHG, Rob Garber, shared a 1914 news clipping about the roof gardens in the tall apartment houses being built in our Bloomingdale neighborhood. The Hendrick Hudson, on West 110<sup>th</sup> Street near Riverside Drive, has a children's playground as part of its roof garden.

Of course, the Bloomingdale neighborhood had Central and Riverside Parks on either side. The playgrounds we know today were not built until later in the 20th century.

## ***The BNHG Library Collection***

We recently added another selection of titles to the BNHG collection of books available at the Bloomingdale Library. The collection is housed on its own shelves and the books are identified with a BNHG label. Below is a list of the newest titles.

New titles:

Sanders	The Downtown Jews
Johnson	Panorama of the Hudson River
Gill	Harlem
Hudson Valley Museum	The Hudson-Fulton Celebration
Jackson & Dunbar	Empire City
Reid	The Brazen Age
Brand	Lower East and Upper West
AIA	Guide to New York City



Gilfoyle	City of Eros
Gayle & Gillon	Cast-Iron Architecture in New York
Lockwood	Manhattan Moves Uptown
Kouwenhoven	The Columbia Historical Portrait of New York
Cromley	Alone Together
Birmingham	The Rest of Us
Kessner	Fiorello La Guardia and the Making of Modern New York
Dyja	New York New York New York
Wakin	The Man with the Sawed-Off Leg
Schermerhorn	Letters to Phil
Van der Donck	A Description of the New Netherlands

You can see the updated list of the entire book collection [here](#).  
 If you have any books or other items you'd like to contribute, please contact us [here](#).

## ***Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side***

From [\*Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side\*](#)  
 by Jim Mackin, Fordham University Press

### **Isaac Stern 1920-2001**

#### **Violinist**

865 West End Avenue (near West 102nd Street)  
 515 West 111th Street



Isaac Stern

Isaac Stern saved Carnegie Hall. When it was in danger of being torn down in the 1960s, Stern organized the Citizens' Committee to Save Carnegie Hall, which raised the funds that enabled New York City to purchase it for \$5 million. To raise awareness and funds, Stern enlisted the support of Eleanor Roosevelt, Van Cliburn, Arthur Rubenstein, Leopold Stokowski, Marian Anderson, and many other giants in the classical music world. He was the first president of Carnegie Hall and remained so until his death. In that capacity, he nurtured the careers of Emanuel Ax, Yo-Yo Ma, Pincus Zuckerman, and others.

Stern was born in a part of Poland that is now in Ukraine, but he came to San Francisco with his parents before he was two years old. Though not a prodigy,

he was well-trained at the San Francisco Conservatory of music. By 1943, he rendered the first of more than 200 performances at Carnegie Hall. He played the world and American premieres of numerous works, furnished motion picture soundtracks, and was granted too many awards, including Grammys, to be listed.

## ***Win Armstrong Day***

*By Nancy Macagno*

BNHG owes its genesis to Win Armstrong. One day, in 2000, someone asked her about the history of Park West Village, where she has lived since 1967. That sparked an idea to organize a talk. That talk led to more talks about the history of surrounding areas. Win and friends formed the Park West Village History Group, which has now grown into the wider Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group.

When friends wanted to honor her on the occasion of her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday, Win had a different idea. She said, “I’m better at seminars than at parties,” and in her distinctive style, she chose to use the opportunity to put together a seminar to share information about sustainability, one of her abiding interests and long-term work. The event took place in the community room of her building on the day of her birthday, February 22.

The seminar was titled *Multiple Faces of Sustainability: A Conversation about Community-Led Approaches*. It featured residents of her building, which has earned an A Grade in the NYC Energy Efficiency Rating System, as well as collaborators who are long-time colleagues of Win. Speakers included:

- Winifred Armstrong, early organizer of NYC Government Climate Change
- Wendy Brawer, founder and director of Green Map System
- Jaimie Cloud, founder and director of Cloud Institute for Sustainability Education
- Glenn Dolcemascolo, co-organizer of Global Grassroots Women’s Congress, Huairou Commission
- Lynne Elizabeth, founder and director of New Village Press

Attendees joined the discussion as well.

During the proceedings, NY State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal read a New York State Proclamation citing some of Win’s work over 70 years and naming February 22, 2025, Winifred Armstrong Appreciation Day in New York State’s 47<sup>th</sup> Senate District. It included this reference to BNHG:



Win with Brad Hoylman-Sigal and the Proclamation  
Photo by Jan Goldstoff

WHEREAS, Win's commitment to history and education led her to co-found the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group; the organization hosts one of the City's most significant collections of local history, organizing lectures, walking tours, and public exhibitions, preserving the stories and culture of the Upper West Side.

## ***Bones Found in Bloomingdale***

*By Pam Tice*

One day in early April 1892, four Bloomingdale boys dug around in an empty lot between West 103 and West 104 Streets, on the block between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, just east of the "Home for Indigent Women," the site today of the youth hostel. As reported in *The Sun*, they unearthed several bones and then a "grinning human skull." The 13-year-olds were old enough to know they might get into trouble, so they re-covered the bones.

The boys knew that the lot used to be an old burial ground, but they thought all the bones had been removed two years previously. Soon, the rector and sexton of St. Michael's Church were part of the story since the burial ground was on their property. They promised to ensure the ground was re-inspected and remove any human remains.

There are burial sites all over the City of New York. Recently, I ran across an online archive of more than 500 such sites, part of a study made by Dr. Elizabeth D. Meade for her Ph.D. dissertation for CUNY in 2020. This is what she calls the "deathscape" of New York. You can look at it [here](#).

Thanks to the Reverend Peters' compiling *The Annals of St. Michael's* in 1907, we have details of the church's burial spaces. Other Upper West Side spaces include Grant's Tomb, the Grave of the Amiable Child, and, thanks to recent archaeological work, several Jewish cemeteries that had to be moved when Central Park was built. Of note is the Shaaraly Tefila Congregation burial ground in what is now the center lawn of the Park's Conservatory Garden.

The Leake and Watts Orphanage had a burial ground on West 110<sup>th</sup> Street until they moved the bodies and sold the land when the Ninth Avenue El was constructed. Seneca Village had more than one burial space moved when Central Park was constructed. Recently, we were also made aware of the Harlem African American Burial Ground at East 126<sup>th</sup> Street. Our neighborhood is undoubtedly the site for many burials that may not have been mapped or commemorated, such as the British and American soldiers who were killed in the 1775 Battle of Harlem Heights that took place from West 96<sup>th</sup> to West 122<sup>nd</sup> Street.

The old cemetery the boys found that day in 1892 was called the Upper Ground by St. Michael's. The Church had become a neighborhood institution. It was founded in 1807 as a summer chapel for the wealthy merchants who spent the warm months in the Bloomingdale countryside. Like most Protestant churches, it buried its dead in a churchyard next to its building.



St. Michael's Church in 1854

In the 1820s, the church had established a Parish school for the neighborhood children of Bloomingdale Village and planned to build a structure for it. They bought more than an acre of land at Clendenning Lane and West 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. The Clendenning estate was at West 104<sup>th</sup> Street and Ninth Avenue, and the Lane was its route from Bloomingdale Road to the estate.

Before the church could build its school, the Public School Society was formed and took over the project. In 1828, the Vestry of the Church voted to make the land a cemetery.

By the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Michael's buried only its pew holders and members of their families in the churchyard. Starting in 1810, the churchyard burials also included vaults. Poorer people were buried in what came to be called the Upper Ground burial plots, which were used until 1854. In the 1870s, when Amsterdam Avenue was graded and opened, several of the graves in the churchyard at St. Michael's had to be moved. The church did what many other Manhattan churches and synagogues did: They bought cemetery space in Queens. In church records, St. Michael's Cemetery is called Newtown, but today, we describe it as East Elmhurst. Later, when West 103 and West 104<sup>th</sup> streets were established, St. Michael's Upper Ground graves were also moved to Queens.

In the 1880s, St. Michael's decided to build a new church building on West 99<sup>th</sup> Street and Amsterdam Avenue, the new name of Tenth Avenue. The new church's design required some of the space in the graveyard. Additional bodies from both graves and vaults were removed, but many were left. The Southern half of the nave of the church is built over them. The tombstones were removed and placed in a crypt beneath the Chapel of Angels in the church.

One of our Bloomingdale neighbors, General Egbert Ludovicus Viele, had a different approach to his death and burial. Trained at West Point, General Viele fought in the Mexican and Civil Wars, served as the Engineer-In-Chief for Central Park, then as Parks Commissioner, and was elected to the House of Representatives. His mansion was at Riverside Drive and West 88<sup>th</sup> Street.

An amateur Egyptologist, the General believed he would be restored to life when he died. He also may just have been afraid of being buried alive. When he died in 1902, he was entombed in a mausoleum at the West Point Military Cemetery. A bell was installed just inside for him to ring for the caretaker when he returned to life.



General Egbert Ludovicus Viele

## ***A Mansion Photo Leads to A Sad Family Story***

*By Pam Tlce*



Old mansion on West 86th and Amsterdam

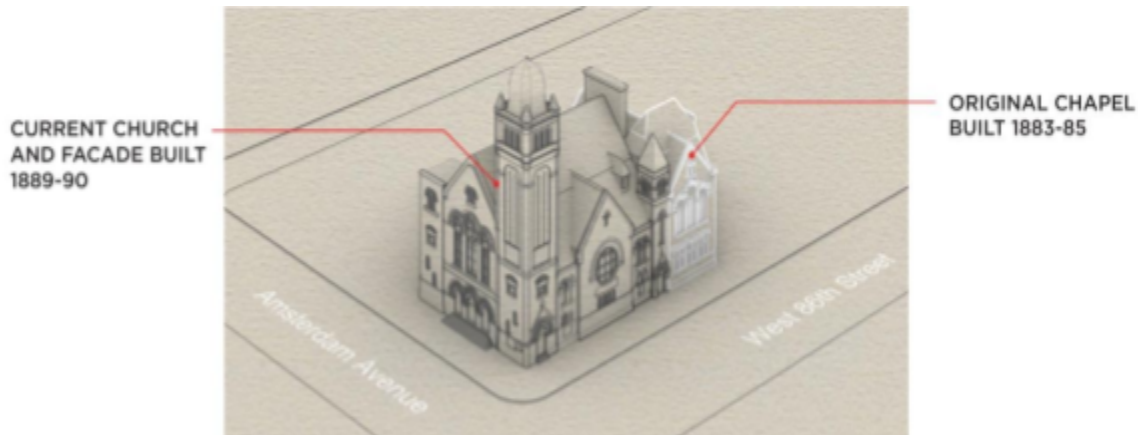
The New York Historical's collection of photos by Robert Bracklow is somewhat addictive to a local historian. I thought I'd seen all there was to see of our Upper West Side neighborhood when this one popped up recently.

This photo of an old, crumbling mansion on West 86<sup>th</sup> Street with the West Park Presbyterian Church rising behind it caught my eye. One of my

BNHG colleagues quickly identified the house from the 1852 Dripps map as the Gerard Hopkins house.

The West Park Presbyterian Church bought land on the northwest corner of West 86<sup>th</sup> and Tenth (later Amsterdam) Avenue in the 1880s. They built a small chapel in 1885, which the growing population quickly outgrew. The remainder of the church was finished in 1890. The church is in the news today as its congregation has considered tearing it down.

Based on the house's angle to the church's soaring tower, it looks like the Hopkins house was on West 86<sup>th</sup> just to the west of the church, perhaps on the land now occupied by the Belnord apartments, which were built in 1908-1909.



West Park Presbyterian Church  
 Source: Landmarks Preservation Commission sketch

I started researching the Gerard Hopkins family in the 1855 New York State census. I found Gerard Hopkins and his family are at home in Bloomingdale. Gerard, age 51, born in Maryland, and a resident of New York City for 26 years, is listed as a leather dealer and the owner of his frame house, valued at \$12,000. No wife is listed. He has daughters, Sarah, age 22; Anna, age 20; and Geraldine, age 17. His son, J.C., is 14 years old. Boy and girl twins, Tazde and Frank are 11. Three servants are in the home, all born in Ireland: Catherine Burns, the cook, age 23; Mary Doyle, a "waiter," age 19; and John Luffin, the gardener, age 30.

In the 1850 federal census, Gerard is in Bloomingdale with a wife, Ann; daughters Sarah and Anna; sons named Gerard, Charles; Lloyd and Frank; and a young daughter named Carrie, age three.

The Gerard Hopkins family is also listed in the 1860 federal census in Bloomingdale.

Numerous directories existed in New York City in the 19th century. Several list Gerard Hopkins as a "leather dealer" or the owner of a leather store downtown on Ferry Street. The only newspaper story I found for him reported his bankruptcy in July 1842.

The U.S. Encyclopedia of American Quaker Genealogy listed numerous family deaths, which tell a rather sad story about this Bloomingdale family. Hopkins' wife Annie died suddenly in January 1851 at 42. There was also a newspaper announcement of her death as being sudden and after a short illness. His daughter Elizabeth died in August 1846 at the age of 16. His daughter, Carrie, died in 1851 at age four.

The family graves were at the Quaker cemetery on Houston Street but were later moved to the Friends Cemetery in Prospect Park, where they are today. Several family members listed in the 1855 census died as the years went by: his son John Chandlee, listed as "J.C." in the 1855 census, died in 1863 at age 21. The death did not appear to be related to a Civil War event: the newspaper announced the death as taking place in the city and that the funeral would be at the home of his father at 109 Second Avenue.

Gerard Hopkins, the father, died in July 1864.

Sarah Hopkins, a daughter, died in May, 1865 at age 33 years. When Sarah died, the family home appeared to be at 87½ West 26th Street, where Sarah's funeral would take place. The leather business is listed in the Trow's Directory 1865-1868 at 29 Cliff Street with a home address on West 26th Street.

One son, Frank, appears to have continued his father's business. He is listed in Goulding's Directory 1876 as a leather dealer on Ferry Street. According to the Quaker Genealogy archive, Frank lived until 1900 and was buried in a cemetery in Connecticut.

## The Upper West Side Fortune Tellers of World War I

Since our last issue, we have added another Pam Tice blog post to our [website](#).

Pam wrote about the proliferation of fortune tellers in our neighborhood, using archived newspapers as a source. Fortune telling for a fee was illegal. Many of them convinced people who had soldier sons in World War I that they could "contact" the soldier and determine his well-being.

The Manhattan District Attorney thought the situation was out of control and dispatched women detectives to make arrests. One of the cases involved a man labeled "Om the Omnipotent," who became one of the founders of yoga in the United States. What a neighborhood!



Pierre Bernard, Om the Omnipotent Source: The Rockland Historical Society



## ***Donate***

You can support local history when you support the work of The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group. BNHG presents many free programs throughout the year, in person and on Zoom. We display exhibits at the Bloomingdale Public Library. Our website offers numerous blog posts, a usable building database, and many other resources. Donations to our work can be made through a GoFundMe site managed by the Columbus Amsterdam Business Improvement District, making your gift fully tax-deductible. Visit our website [Donation Page](#) to learn more. Thank you!

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The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group promotes research and education about the history of the Bloomingdale neighborhood, and we are available as a resource. We share our findings through free public programs, walking tours, workshops, publications, a blog, [our website](#) and a Neighborhood History Collection of materials housed at the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library, 150 West 100th Street.