NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY GROUP

BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

Issue No. 24 *Fall 2026*

New Season!

Soup and sweater weather has arrived! Here's your Fall 2026 issue of the Bloomingdale Bulletin with our quarterly collection of news, notes, and events. Take a walk with Jim Mackin or visit the 102/103 Street Block Association website to read about Caitlin Hawk's new Mom and Pop stores project. Read about Jim's two recent presentations: one on our neighborhood's Revolutionary War event and the other on his new book of Notables. Pam Tice writes a medical history story and explores what was happening on the Upper West Side 100 years ago. Learn about a recent street naming and one of our neighborhood notables. We look forward to feedback, comments, and ideas here. We hope you enjoy it all and will choose to support us with a donation.

Upcoming Programs

Neighborhood Walking Tours
Jim Mackin
Wednesday, October 14, 6:00 pm
Sunday, November 1, 2:00 pm
Sunday, December 6, 2:00 pm
Free. No reservations needed.
Meet at the south end of Straus Park, Broadway and 106th Street.

Jim Mackin

Fall brings energy to your step, and a great way to use it is on a walking tour of historic Bloomingdale. Walks are led by popular neighborhood tour guide Jim Mackin, a NYC historian and author of *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*. The tour is rich with neighborhood architecture, history and stories about the people who have lived here. Tours vary monthly and last between one and two hours.

Past Programs

The Battle of Harlem Heights: Our Neighborhood Connection to the Revolutionary War on the 250th Anniversary of the Founding of the United States
Jim Mackin
Wednesday, September 16
Co-sponsored by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group and the Columbus-Amsterdam BID

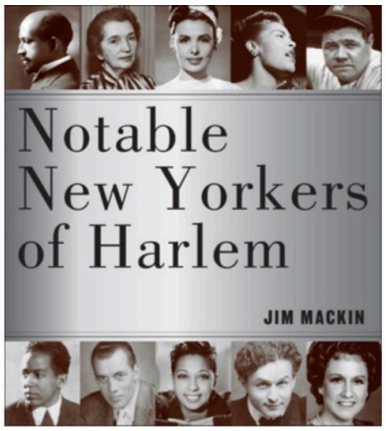
The Battle of Harlem Heights, September 16, 1776
By Alfred R. Waud

The Battle of Harlem Heights was a win for the Patriots of the American colonies and showed that they were capable of fighting the British successfully. The battle took place on September 16th, 1776. Now, 250 years later, to the day, this presentation described what happened and where it

happened — in the historic area of Bloomingdale and before Harlem Heights became Morningside Heights.

Jim Mackin is a historian and author of *Notable New Yorkers of the Upper West Side* and the just-published *Notable New Yorkers of Harlem*.

Notable New Yorkers of Harlem
Jim Mackin
Wednesday, October 7



Jim Mackin's new book, *Notable New Yorkers of Harlem*, features more than 800 notables who lived in Harlem from the earliest days of the Dutch period to the present. Learn about Colonial Harlem, Jewish Harlem, Italian Harlem, Spanish Harlem, Finnish Harlem (!), and African American Harlem, where so many notables of the Harlem Renaissance flourished.

In his presentation, Mackin shares many tidbits of the long Harlem history and culture that may be unfamiliar to many of us.

Jim Mackin is the author of the popular book *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*.

You can see a video of the program on our website.

When the Turtle Serum Came to Bloomingdale

Pam Tice

For a brief time in May of 1913, a house at 103rd Street and West End Avenue became a medical facility dispensing the new "turtle serum," believed to be a cure for tuberculosis. The story is interesting, showing how our public health system handled such medical events before the FDA and CDC existed.

Tuberculosis was rampant in New York City in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The city began requiring case reporting in 1894, but the counts were unreliable. Estimates suggested that as many as 100,000 cases existed in the

1910s. Hospitals opened in various places, including Blackwell's Island (now Roosevelt Island) and the Sea View Hospital on Staten Island.

In 1882, German physician Robert Koch discovered the bacterium that caused tuberculosis, proving that the deadly disease was contagious, not inherited, and earning him the Nobel Prize in 1905. The search for a serum to cure the disease began. Koch proposed a cure in the 1890s, but it proved ineffective. A Berlin doctor, Friedrich Franz Friedmann, working at the Berlin Zoo in 1903, discovered that a sea turtle had died of consumption, and that "Koch bacilli" in the cold-blooded animal had lost virulence and had become the basis of a toxin for warm-blooded animals. (You may remember from your science classes that weakened versions of bacterial toxins were given to train the immune system safely.) Over the next 10 years, Friedmann vaccinated thousands of people in Germany, and claimed they were helped.

In February 1913, the Aetna Bank President brought Dr. Friedmann to New York and challenged him to help New Yorkers for a million-dollar reward if he succeeded. Dr. Friedmann eventually declined the challenge, but he was granted a license to treat patients only at incorporated hospitals and without compensation. A few hospitals received him, and patients were inoculated. Some skepticism began to emerge in the press about the patients chosen and what exactly was in the vials the doctor produced.

Dr. Friedrich Friedmann
Library of Congress

Patients seeking treatment began to try to get into the Waldorf Astoria, where Dr. Friedmann was staying, and the hotel evicted him in early March. He moved to the Ansonia on the Upper West Side. The hotel's doctor, Maurice Sturm, obtained the serum and said he could improve it and achieve better results.

Meanwhile, Dr. Friedmann traveled to Providence, Rhode Island. The governor granted him permission to inoculate patients there and be compensated for his service. The newspapers reported that he returned to New York, quite happy to have earned some money.

On his return to New York, Doctor Friedmann sold his drug to the German drug company Eisner-Mendelson, gaining $125,000 for the rights, and an

interest in the stock of the company set up to administer the vaccine. Now Maurice Eisner was planning to locate Friedmann Institutes in American cities. New York City's would be at 878 West End Avenue at 103rd Street.

The New York Herald reported on May 13 that the Institute's facility was a 12-room, 4-story house with a basement, on the southeast corner of the Avenue. The owners were Dr. and Mrs. H. Marion Sims. He was the son of Dr. Sims, who founded the Women's Hospital on Amsterdam Avenue. The neighbors were outraged that such a facility would be located in their neighborhood.

Dr. DeForrest Bogart, the father of actor Humphrey Bogart, lived down the street. Rumors circulated that the building would become a sanitarium. (Today, that corner has a 12-story apartment building designed by Rosario Candela in 1923.)

Mr. Eisner tried to allay the concern by noting that the patients would only be at the facility after making an appointment. They would be inoculated, and then leave. The neighbors' concern continued, worried that their children playing outside would come into contact with the "consumptives" arriving there. They threatened to protest to the City's Board of Health.

The Friedmann Institute opened on May 20, 1913, and began treating patients sent by their doctors. They paid $25 "and up" for their treatment. The Institute indicated that it would treat a few poor patients for free, but when people showed up, they were instead given a form and told to make an appointment after their doctor had approved the treatment.

The Institute lasted for about 10 days. Now that Dr. Friedmann had made money on his treatment, both in New York and Providence, the skepticism about the cure increased. The news on May 25th that an Institute patient, Mrs. Rose Horowitz, died at her home in the Bronx was not helpful to his cause.

On May 30, the announcement came that the city's Board of Health had amended the city's Health Code, requiring that any cure using a living microbe be submitted to and approved by the health authorities before it could be introduced to the public. If violated, the punishment would be a $500 fine and a year in prison.

The Friedmann Institute on West End Avenue closed its doors. Other health authorities in U.S. cities and states amended their codes to match New York's. Mr. Eisner quickly hired Dr. George Gibier-Rambaud, who ran the city's

Pasteur Institute, to take over the leadership of the Friedmann Institute, in an effort to show that it would undertake a more scientific study of the tuberculosis cure and reapply for approval from the City of New York.

Dr. Friedmann returned to Germany in July, still proclaiming his cure. In the next few weeks, five additional deaths of New York patients were reported. After more patients died, and Rambaud concluded that the turtle serum did not work, the effort ended. In 1914, New York declared the Friedmann treatment illegal. The New York County Medical Society reconsidered its ethics guidelines, focusing on its members who had embraced the Friedmann turtle serum cure too quickly.

Place Names in Bloomingdale

Malachy McCourt Lane
West 93 St and West End Avenue

On the afternoon of September 27, 2025, a horse-drawn carriage and a bagpipe player arrived at the intersection of West 93rd Street and West End Avenue to celebrate its official naming as Malachy McCourt Lane. The co-naming was spearheaded by Siobhán McCourt, Malachy's daughter, who quipped about the "official hanging of Malachy McCourt," referencing the hanging of the street sign bearing his name. The ceremony included Community Board 7 representative Linda Rosenthal and City Councilmember Gale Brewer, as well as hundreds of attendees, including family, friends, fans, and spectators.

Malachy McCourt
Credit: Wes Washington

Malachy was born in Brooklyn in 1931. When he was age three, his family left the depression era United States to return to Ireland. He spent his entire childhood there, one of seven children in a wretched, poor section of Limerick.

In 1952, aged 20, he returned to New York City and began a many-faceted career. He performed as an actor in soap operas, off-Broadway, and in film. He owned several bars, including one in Greenwich Village and the successful Malachy's on Third Avenue, which he claimed was the original singles bar. He authored three memoirs, including the best-seller *A Monk Swimming*, and

became a mentor to NYC Irish writers. Malachy was the younger brother of renowned author Frank McCourt.

As a political activist, he ran as the Green Party candidate for New York Governor in 2006 and lost to the Democrat, Eliot Spitzer. He never lost his Irish brogue and earned recognition as a highly talented and much-beloved raconteur and wit.

In the mid-1960s, the McCourt family took up residence on the corner of West 93rd Street and West End Avenue. He lived there for 59 years until March 2024, when he died at age 92.

Common in Ireland, the designation “Lane” is unusual in Manhattan. The most famous example that still exists in New York City is Maiden Lane, named in the 1700s.

Celebrating Our Memories of the Mom & Pop Shops of Broadway

Crowdsourcing the recollections of our neighborhood Mom & Pop stores has led to a web page on the West 102nd and 103rd Streets Block Association site. This new page, the Bloomingdale Mom & Pop History Project, lists businesses at each address from West 96th Street to West 106th Street along Broadway, presented in reverse chronological order.

The page is the first stage of a local history memory project Caitlin Hawke is conducting over the coming months. Caitlin was the winner of the BNHG 2021 Jim Torain Award, reported here.

If you wish to be involved and share your recollections, Caitlin invites you to complete this survey. You may also send corrections for her Mom and Pop's page via email to caitlin@w102-103blockassn.org.

The next phases of the project include collecting images and conducting oral histories to bring some of the beloved old businesses back to mind.

Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side

By Jim Mackin
Author of *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*

John R. Strachan (ca.1916 - 1982)
Postmaster
711 Amsterdam Avenue

John R. Strachan

John R. Strachan was the first African American in the United States to head a major post office on the East Coast. In fact, it was the busiest post office in the entire world: the General Post Office at 33rd Street and Eighth Avenue in Manhattan. President Lyndon Johnson appointed him, and Senator Robert F. Kennedy announced the appointment.

Born in Harlem, Strachan earned bachelor's and master's degrees at New York University, studied at Harvard, and served in World War II. In 1979, he retired from one of the busiest jobs in government service.

He was also an accomplished saxophone player with much experience at local clubs, including nearby Rust Brown's. It was located at 168 West 96th Street, adjacent to 733 Amsterdam Avenue, and was favored by local notables such as Earl "The Pearl" Monroe and Walt Frazier.

1926 Upper West Side

Pam Tice

Our Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group gave a presentation in June on the Jazz Age in New York City, which prompted me to look at the news from our neighborhood in 1926 to see what I could learn. This was the time when New York City became "modern" and a world city. I was expecting the

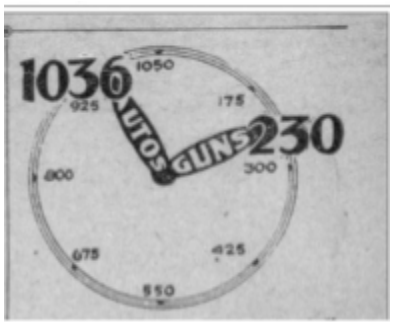
neighborhood to be like today's—which it was, and sometimes wasn't. Here's some of what I found.

Buildings went up on Central Park West, in the blocks that are now a historic district. The Mayflower Hotel at 15 (now demolished), the Arden at 225, and the Bolivar at 230 joined the many other Central Park West residences of Jazz Age New York. Some were apartment-hotels, combining a permanent residence with in-house staff for cleaning, dining, and a doorman, so residents would not need household staff. Elegant residences were also added on West End Avenue and Riverside Drive.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., announced that he was funding the construction of a new church with a 400-foot tower on Riverside Drive at 121st Street to replace the Park Avenue Baptist Church. He announced that when it was completed, the new church's spire would be taller than the one planned for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

A new subway line, named the Washington Heights line, was underway on Central Park West. It was the first line of the Independent Subway System. The construction method was "cut and cover," and the open pit was dangerous for cars, as they landed in it more than once. The excavated material went into Central Park to fill the old "Lower Reservoir" that became today's Great Lawn.

Two ideas about Central Park emerged in 1926 and, thankfully, were not enacted. First, a plan was proposed to build underground parking when the Great Lawn was created. Second, as the removal of the trolley tracks along Central Park West was discussed, a plan emerged to make both Central Park West and Fifth Avenue spacious boulevards along the Park, with the Park's wall removed so people could stroll along its edge, unseparated from the green space. The tracks were removed, and Central Park West widened, but the wall remained.



Hands of Death clock
Daily News Dec. 31, 1926

Traffic fatalities were high on New York City streets in the 1920s. In 1926, according to the "Hands of Death" clock in the Daily News, there were 1,036 people killed by automobiles. (There were 205 in 2025.) Children were often the victims: a 4-year-old boy ran out in front of a truck on Columbus Avenue and 101 Street; another child, age 6, was killed while crossing Columbus Avenue at 94th Street.

There were strikes that year: the IRT workers and the masons at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine.

Crime stories were as popular in the news in 1926 as they are today. What was different is that when the police were actively pursuing a suspect on the streets, running or chasing a stolen car, their guns were drawn and fired with seemingly no regard for bystanders.

In April, 1926, Mr. and Mrs. William Randolph Hearst hosted a costume ball for 300 guests at their home on Riverside Drive, the Clarendon at 86th Street. Mr. Hearst was already known for keeping his mistress, actress Marion Davies, at a residence on Riverside Drive at 105th Street. Mr. Hearst had just commissioned his new building at Eighth Avenue and 57th Street, a structure that would reach only six stories at the time and wouldn't be finished until 2006.

The news ran with stories of wealthy businessmen living on Central Park West or Riverside Drive, and of young actresses. One of the New York judges made news when he railed against the "vice dens" of Riverside Drive near 88th Street, where groups of wealthy men would keep a flat to entertain young girls at wild parties. In 1926, the New York Prohibition Administrator raided the Entre Nous Club on Riverside Drive, capturing $10,000 worth of liquor.

People who were injured in 1926 were brought to the Reconstruction Hospital at 100th Street and Central Park West. When a 14-year-old boy was killed in Central Park by a baseball smashing into his face, his Trinity School friends carried him there. A man who jumped off the El on Columbus Avenue in a suicide attempt was carried there and then arrested because such an act was a criminal offense. A young father was brought there, crushed by a rockfall on the subway construction at Central Park West and 92nd Street.

A little girl named Irene Butler, who lived at 425 Riverside Drive at 115th Street, won first prize in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Child Movie Star contest. She won $1,000 and the chance to go to Los Angeles, earning $200 a week on a two-year contract. Another girl, 5-year-old Dorothy Hodge of West 95th Street, won fifth prize and $500. Children became popular in Hollywood movies. The industry used them, it was said, as a way of countering criticism that it promoted sex and violence and was therefore subject to government censorship.

Two big events touched the West Side in 1926. On August 23, 1926, film star Rudolph Valentino died, and his funeral at the Campbell home on Broadway at 66th Street was a public event, attracting an estimated 100,000 people,

Rudolph Valentino's funeral 1926

causing a riot on the first day, but then controlled by the NYPD. A few days later, on August 27th, a ticker-tape parade honored Gertrude Ederle, who had successfully swum across the English Channel on August 6th. Trude was a neighborhood girl whose father was a butcher on Amsterdam Avenue.

In April 1926, radio station WHAP relocated to a small building at 9 West 96th Street. It was funded by Augusta Stetson, who had founded the Christian Science church at Central Park West and 96th Street, and lived in her mansion next door. I wrote a blogpost about Mrs. Stetson a while ago. She had been excommunicated by the church, but bought the radio station as a way to promote very ugly propaganda.

WHAP stood for We Hold America Protestant. Franklin Ford ran the station. The station played classical music and also broadcast Ford's anti-Catholic diatribes, which aligned with the Ku Klux Klan's popularity in the 1920s. He identified WHAP as a religious station to counter the growing complaints New Yorkers were expressing in the newspapers. Ford also illicitly raised the station's wavelength and used his voice to

Gertrude Ederle at her parade
August 1926, New York World

rail against the campaign of Governor Alfred E. Smith, a Catholic politician.

Franklin Ford
Daily News 1926

The rise of radio in the 1920s was a new way to reach a growing audience with cultural events, and political and social discourse. WHAP operated before any controls were established. No rules existed about what could be said on the air. The Federal Radio Act of 1927 did not grant the Federal Radio Commission censorship authority, but it did give it the power to change frequency allocations. WHAP had to discontinue broadcasting when a new wavelength was assigned to it. The broadcast of Klan ideology from our West Side neighborhood had stopped, but in 1927, WHAP was granted a new license to operate in New Jersey.

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 maintain a collection at the Bloomingdale Public Library. Our website offers numerous blog posts, an interactive 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!

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 www.upperwestsidehistory.org, and a Neighborhood History Collection of materials housed at the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library, 150 West 100th Street.