

West 104th Street

NOVEMBER 2018

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

SPOTLIGHT

A Park Is Born

The long green road to Riverside Park

By Gil Tauber

The first formal proposal for a riverside park along the Hudson came in 1865. City officials had long been aware that it would be impractical to construct many of the Upper Manhattan streets first envisioned in the city's 1811 grid plan. As described by Andrew Haswell Green, who played an instrumental role in the park's creation, "It is very doubtful whether the rocky ridges of the island along the shores of the rivers...should be cut by numerous crossing streets, especially where the grades to reach the river must be so steep as to render the convenient passage of vehicles impossible." Moreover, such streets would be of doubtful value. The Hudson River Railroad had been built along the river's edge in 1846-49, greatly impeding access for maritime uses. In addition, the success of Central Park, which had more than repaid its cost by increasing the value of surrounding property, made a riverside park an attractive proposition for both government officials and surrounding landowners.



Constructing Riverside Dr.

COURTESY NEW YORK CITY PARKS PHOTO ARCHIVE

By the Water's Edge

Back in 1811 when the grid plan of Manhattan's streets was adopted, New York was a maritime city. Its built-up area barely extended north of Canal Street. Railroads had not been invented, and the few roads out of the city were unpaved and often impassable. To move any distance, goods and people had to travel by water. It was assumed that, as the city grew, both the Hudson and East River shores would be entirely lined with wharves, piers, docks and shipyards. To provide access to them, the 1811 plan had nearly all of its east-west streets running in a straight line to the water's edge on both rivers.

In 1865, the State Legislature passed an act empowering the Commissioners of Central Park (CPC) to revise the street plan for Manhattan west of Central Park from 59th to 110th Streets and for the entire remainder of the island from 110th Street northward. At that time, New York had nothing resembling a city planning department, but in creating Central Park, the CPC had built a staff of architects, engineers, landscape architects and other professionals who had accomplished one of the biggest public works projects in American history.

CPC president Andrew Haswell Green (1820-1902) proved the driving force behind the creation of Riverside Park. As CPC's president, he had been Frederick Law Olmsted's boss. Esteemed for his energy and integrity, Green arguably had a far greater effect on the development of New York City than Robert Moses.

continued on page 3

Sunshine Fuels Yard Sale Success

A mellow fall day boosted the 29th Annual West 104th Street Yard Sale on September 29.



After a rainy week, the early morning sun pierced the bedroom curtains of neighborhood drivers, prompting them to remove their cars from West 104th Street, enabling the metamorphosis of parking spaces into showcases for Yard Sale treasures. It boosted the spirits of vendors unloading their merchandise. It served as a bugle call for the small army of volunteers who readied the street for the Bake Sale, Book Sale, 50/50 Raffle, Silent Auction, What-A-Bargain, and a stage show featuring veteran New York musicians.

As vehicles cleared the street, sunlight transformed the block into a hotbed of communal activity: sweeping; hauling; unpacking, chalking off the locations of vendor stalls; erecting a stage; testing sound equipment; hoisting heavy trays of used books into browsing position; brewing coffee; schmearing bagels with cream cheese; furnishing the street with folding chairs, wobbly tables, and improvised clothing racks; and fine-tuning displays of merchandise to arouse shoppers' lust for bargains.

By 10:00 a.m., the sun spotlighted a tableau of neighborhood harmony. As the temperature rose, vendors shed their jackets, rolled up their sleeves,

continued on page 5

IN THIS ISSUE:

Yard Sale Wrapup	p. 1
Riverside Park History	p. 1
Block Financials	p. 2
Yard Sale Raffle Winner.....	p. 2
BAiP Update.....	p. 7
Muriel Manings Farewell.....	p. 7
BAiP SciFi Reading Group.....	p. 8

Contributors to the December Issue:

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Stephan Russo, Larry Stern, Steve Zirinsky.

Newsletter designer: Brian Hajjar.



Block president Steve Zirinsky, left, hands block resident Jesse Berger the raffle grand prize: a check for \$2025.50.

W 104 ST BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT


October 2018

Opening Balance	15,791.01
Income	8407.49
Dues.....	550.00
Yard Sale	7857.69
Expenses.....	6594.03
Guard service.....	4669.11
Newsletter.....	200.00
Tote Bags	291.00
Yard Sale	1431.65
Closing Balance (10/31/18)	17,351.91

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A Park Is Born

continued from page 1

Though he lacked the latter's zeal for self-promotion, Green was a skilled political operator. When he asked the Legislature for something, they usually gave it to him. Within a few months of the 1865 Act, the CPC had issued a plan that led to the creation not only of Riverside Park and Riverside Drive, but also of Morningside Park, St. Nicholas Park, Colonial (Jackie Robinson) Park, and the broad boulevard that we now call Broadway.



Before the Park

Olmstead's Drive

In 1866, the Legislature—which in those days exercised even more authority over city affairs than it does today—authorized the city to purchase the land for the new Riverside Park. In the West 104th Street neighborhood, that was in the hands of the merchant William P. Furniss (99th Street up to the midline of the block between 104th and 105th Street) and the patent-medicine magnate William Moffat (from the midline to 107th Street).

Next came a new avenue that would form the park's eastern boundary. In 1867 the Legislature authorized the creation of Riverside Avenue, a straight roadway. When Green became New York City Comptroller in 1871, the project moved forward under the new city Department of Parks. In 1873, likely at Green's behest, the city retained Frederick Law Olmsted to design the park and the new avenue. Olmsted considered the avenue as part of the park experience. He determined that, to function as a scenic drive, the new avenue should avoid steep grades. To achieve that, he had it curve with the terrain. To further moderate the steepest cross-slopes, he divided some portions of the route into a main roadway and a service road.

Because of its fine views over the Hudson, the stretch between 104th and 123rd Streets would have a broad pedestrian promenade along the west side of the drive. In 1875, the landscaped strip between the sidewalk and the curb became a bridle path. Riverside Avenue, now known as Riverside Drive, opened to the public in 1880. Construction of the park proper, including its plantings, paths and retaining walls, continued into the early 20th Century.

Within the park, all the streets were eliminated except for 79th and 96th Streets. These crossed the railroad tracks to provide access to the remaining private uses along the Hudson shore, such as coal and lumber yards and a boat club. As population increased along

Riverside Drive and its side streets, the railroad began to be seen as a nuisance. In 1913, the New York Central Railroad proposed a "West Side Improvement Plan" that would roof over the tracks from 72nd to 129th Streets and eliminate the grade crossings at 79th and 96th streets. The plan bogged down in a series of political and financial disputes. However, it received new impetus in 1924, after the passage of a state law requiring that all railroad lines

in Manhattan be electrified. At the same time, the city's police commissioner called for construction of an elevated highway from the Battery to 59th Street to relieve congestion around the Hudson River piers. This proposal was eventually realized as the Miller Highway, better known as the West Side Highway.

Robert Moses' Park Expansion

The highway led to a revived interest in the West Side Improvement Plan, but now with the continuation of the West Side Highway running through Riverside Park atop the roofed-over railroad tracks. In 1930, the eminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White (MMW) was retained. They proposed a granite structure that, seen from the river, would resemble an ancient roman aqueduct. Its giant arches would support a deck on which the highway would run behind a classical balustrade.

In 1934, Fiorello LaGuardia became mayor and appointed Robert Moses as Park Commissioner. Moses had long had his own vision for the future of Riverside Park. Using landfill, he expanded the park westward by 148 acres, roughly doubling its size and providing a variety of athletic fields as well as parking and picnic areas. He shifted the highway to the edge of the river, and discarded the MMW plan as a 'visionary scheme.' In fact, his own architects retained a good deal of it, substituting concrete for granite and simplifying its classical details.

The press liked to refer to Moses as a "Master Builder." In truth, he was more of a master bureaucrat. He knew the Federal government had work-relief funds available through the WPA and that it was eager to use them. He was quick to come up with numerous shovel-ready plans that would immediately put people back to work. Remarkably, he was able to complete the massive Riverside Park scheme in less than four years.

As for Andrew Haswell Green, after overseeing the revision of the city's street plan and the expansion of its park system, as well as the creation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the American Museum of Natural History, the New York Public Library, and the Bronx Zoo; he engineered the expansion of the city itself. It was he who conceived the 1898 consolidation of Manhattan and surrounding areas to create today's New York. His remarkably productive life ended in a tragic case of mistaken identity. On November 13, 1903, Green was shot on his own doorstep by Cornelius Williams, who believed that Green was the man who had lured away his ex-girlfriend. Ironically, Green was, in the parlance of that era, a confirmed bachelor. He was also 83 years old.

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Sunshine Fuels Yard Sale Success *continued from page 1*



Left to right: Foley Road kicks off the entertainment; Jeff Howitt, Yard Sale chief organizer, with Silent Auction item; shopping the stalls.

and welcomed the hordes of bargain hunters descending on the block, which had transformed into a gallery lined with parallel rows of stalls for shoppers with Tiffany tastes and Kmart budgets. From the stage at the top of the block, loudspeakers broadcast the musical stylings of Foley Road (James Weatherstone and Kurt Emmerich), Joe Giglio and Carl Sciaberra, and Shailah (Edmonds) and the Shaylettes.

Of course, preparations for the Yard Sale began well before

September 29. In late winter, Block Association board members began reaching out to bureaucrats who grant permission to hold street festivals. By spring, a Block Association SWAT unit pounded the pavement to local restaurants, stores, and cultural institutions in a special operation to collect gift certificates

The village of West 104th Street earned nearly \$8000.

for the Silent Auction. As fall approached, volunteers camped on the corners of West End Avenue, unfurled a banner announcing the availability of tickets for the 50/50 Raffle, and began exchanging thirty chances for \$20. Others posted Yard Sale flyers on bulletin boards in buildings and stores from 96th to 110th Streets. They sent press releases to local media. Generous allies from neighboring blocks joined the public-outreach campaign.

Days before the event, local bakers set to work creating an array of mouth-watering masterpieces for the Bake Sale. Block residents draped “No Parking Saturday” signs from the trees lining West 104th. By the night before the Yard Sale, the raffle-tickets hawkers had collected \$2,854. They sealed their jar of tickets, folded their table and chairs, and prepared for an early morning.

The next day, the curtain rose on the long-awaited performance. An enthusiastic audience applauded the efforts of the individual actors, who executed their roles with conviction and heart. Vendors closed sales and opened themselves to new acquaintances. Shoppers searched for bargains and rediscovered old friends. Volunteers completed mundane tasks and accomplished a larger purpose. An urban village emerged from a municipal thoroughfare. At 5:00 PM, vendors and shoppers joint forces to dismantle displays, to clean the street, and to raise a small mountain of sealed plastic garbage bags and cardboard boxes flattened and tied.

By the end of the day, the pot of the 50/50 Raffle totaled \$4,051. The lucky winner—Jesse Berger—took home \$2,025.50. Second prize winner Teresa Elwert won \$100; third prize winner Arlene Metrick, \$50.

As a whole, the village of West 104th Street earned nearly \$8,000 to ensure its safe, well-maintained, welcoming street where a friendly guard patrols nightly, custom-fitted steel enclosures protect the flowers overflowing tree beds, and replicas of vintage street lamps brighten the lengthening evenings.

Thank You to Our 2018 Yard Sale Volunteers!

Many thanks to the people who gave their time and baking skills to make the Yard Sale a success

Bakery: Miriam Duhan, Elaine Hazzard, Orli Himmelweit, Hannelore Roston, Hannah Moskowicz, Paul Zeigler. Bakers: Karen Collins, Sandi Cooper, Stacy Coleman, Barbara Cowling, Kay Cynamon, Patrick Dail, Miriam Duhan, Mary Jo Gennaro, Alex Grannis, Henry and Dori Haber, Phina Halak, Daniel Jenkins, Nancy Lian, Lynn Max, Steve Pred, Katherine Randall, Louise Rosenberg, Hanna Rubin, Ray Schwartz, Jon Smith, Larry Stern, Ursula Strauss, Donna Tapper, Nancy Tarshis, Lee Yurista, Paul Zeigler, Paula Zirinsky, Lisa Zeitz... And whoever made the delicious blondies!

Books: Emily Berleth, Jesse Berger, Karen Gershenhorn, Terry Jorell, Felicia Patzke, Phyllis Patzke, Steve Pred, Katherine Randall, Barbara Rothenberg, Lynn Sadofsky, Patti Smith, Gil Tauber, Sharon Waskow, Robin Willner.

Prep/Set-up/Music Setup/Equipment: Dino Bicaj, Teresa Elwert, Ira Gershenhorn, Trudie Grace, Dan Jenkins, Steve Max.

Silent Auction: Michelle Ajami, Lydia Dufour, Gil Tauber.

Raffle: Laura Bronson, Margaret Beels, Missy Cohen, Lani Sanjek, Emily Szasz, Lisa Rabinowitz.

What-A-Bargain: Paul Bifani, Hilde Darre, Michelle Dearce, Carol Goodfriend, Aaron Grayson, Angelo Jimenez, Karen Odom, Rebecca Silber, Sam Silber, Connor Stewart, Helene Victor, Lisa Zeitz.

**If you enjoyed the Yard Sale,
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- V & T Restaurant
- West End Hall
- Westside Market

West 104th Street Yard Sale
Sponsored by the West 104th Street Block Association

Bloomingdale Aging in Place: Building Community One Group at a Time

By Stephan Russo

“Aging in place” has become a term of art when discussing the realities of growing old and the importance of staying active. “In place” means remaining in the community rather than retiring elsewhere. Who can blame New Yorkers for wanting that? What better place to spend these years than in this beloved city that offers opportunities for continued personal growth and civic involvement?

In 2009, a group of active West Side neighbors decided to answer this question by creating an all-volunteer network called Bloomingdale Aging in Place (BAiP). Their mission was to build community among older adults who lived in our area. The neighborhood’s two block associations, West 104th Street and West 102-103rd Street, lent their support to the organization’s launch. Eventually, they shared a survey with residents, asking what was most needed to help their elderly neighbors stay in their homes. Many responded that an active social life and connection to other residents would make a difference.

Fast forward ten years, and what began as a handful of volunteer group activities and helping-hand visits has blossomed into an all-blown organization with over 1200 members, 70 group activities,

and panel discussions and social events organized by the volunteers themselves.

Why are efforts like BAiP so necessary? The baby boomer generation leaving the workforce is one of the fastest growing demographics. In New York City alone, the Department for the Aging projects that by 2040 the number of residents over the age of 60 will rise to close to 2 million—over 20 percent of the population.

This spring, I attended a BAiP panel discussion led by two knowledgeable attorneys titled “Over My Dead Body.” I thought there would be few attendees, but when I entered the Bloomingdale library on W. 100th Street, I encountered about 100 people who had gathered to learn about wills, health proxies and what happens to your apartment if you live alone and die at home.

Want to feel uplifted? Sit in on one of BAiP’s activities. Arlene Seffern is 82 years old, and used to work in a knitting store on Broadway. She also spent part of her working life as a bookkeeper at several non-profit organizations. Arlene felt that she had a special artistic ability, out of which grew her weekly BAiP knitting group. “I get so much joy out of teaching the group and the members care deeply for each other,” she says. “When one group member was having cataract surgery and had no one to be with her, another member picked her up and stayed with her.”

It was a wonderful example of what BAiP calls N2N — its Neighbor-to-Neighbor program — and considers a core organizing principle. Caitlin Hawke, one of the many forces behind BAiP, characterizes the effort as “connecting democracy to action.”

“It’s a balancing act between having a structure and encouraging members to create opportunities themselves,” Hawke said.

Membership is open if you live within the area bounded by W. 96th and 110th Streets from Riverside Drive to Central Park West. To learn more about BAiP and how you can become involved, visit bloominplace.org or call 212-842-8831.

Stephan Russo is the former Executive Director of Goddard Riverside Community Center and a member of BAiP. A version of this article appeared in The West Side Spirit and is reprinted here with permission.

See back page for new Tri-Bloomingdale reading group.



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FAREWELL TO A BRIGHT SPIRIT

Friends and neighbors mourn the loss of Muriel Manings (1923-2018), a vibrant and beloved resident of 309 West 104th Street. Manings died on October 25, after a long career as a dancer, choreographer, dance teacher and arts advocate. Manings performed with celebrated choreographer Sophie Maslow and with the New Dance Group before teaching there for more than 25 years. She eventually served as associate professor of dance and coordinator of the dance program at Queensboro Community College from 1970-1990. She also served as president of the American Dance Guild. For those who knew her, Manings’ charm, vitality and insight made a lasting impression. She will be greatly missed. Her husband, William Korff, died in 2002. She is survived by her son Steven and two grandsons. The newsletter profiled Manings in September of 2011.



BLOOMINGDALE AGING IN

PLACE (BaiP) Bloominplace.org
 BAiP is an intergenerational volunteer network of neighbors working to help older residents to continue living at home safely and comfortably. BAiP sponsors social and cultural activities, provides educational tools, and a helping hand for those in need through its Neighbor-to-Neighbor (N2N) program. The latter takes the form of providing help going places, running errands, light shopping, accompaniment at home or outdoors, and information. If you want to contact N2N for this kind of assistance, or to talk about volunteering, e-mail: N2N@bloominplace.org, or call: 212-842-8831 to leave a message with your contact information. Either way, a BAiP member will respond promptly.

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We enjoy having residents attend the meetings.

Please let us know if you would like to attend one and we will send you an invitation.
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**New Tri-Bloomingtondale
Sci-Fi Book Group
Seeks Members**

BAiP periodically teams up with the two local block associations to offer neighbors chances to connect. It is launching a SciFi Reading Group, led by Jandy Warner as a Tri-Bloomingtondale activity. Members will share their love of favorite classics such as Robert A. Heinlein's Double Star as well as newer titles such as Terry Pratchett's Making Money and John Scalzi's Redshirts. Jandy is a fan who has enjoyed the genre for more than 50 years and isn't fussy about the dividing line between SciFi and fantasy. She's looking forward to finding others in our neighborhood who feel the same way. The group will meet in neighbors' homes on on third Thursdays at 7 p.m. Contact Caitlin Hawke if you'd like to join: chawke@bloominplace.org.

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