

West 104th Street

JUNE 2023

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

A Love Letter to Riverside

Author Stephanie Azzarone shares highlights of her salute to the Park and Drive.

By Hayley Elasz

For more than a century, Riverside Drive has played Cinderella to Fifth Avenue, with Central Park as its lawn and mansions to give it cachet. No more. Local journalist and author Stephanie Azzarone has written a history of Riverside Park and Drive, titled *Heaven on the Hudson: Mansions, Monuments, and Marvels of Riverside Park*.



The Schinasi Mansion at West 107th Street

The book has earned praise from architecture critics and local historians. Azzarone is an experienced journalist, having freelanced for the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine, and other publications. She was the featured speaker at the Block Association's annual meeting a few weeks ago, and spoke with board member Hayley Elasz before about some of the process and motivation behind her book: a deeply researched love letter to the area we call home.

What first got you interested in writing a history of Riverside Park and Drive?

I have lived on the Drive for well over 30 years, and I fell in love with the neighborhood early on. When I wanted to learn more about it, I discovered that while much has been written about Central Park and Fifth Avenue, there was very little about Riverside Park or Riverside Drive. My goal with *Heaven on the Hudson* was to pull together the kind of information that I wanted to know about the history and the architecture and the people. And I wanted to tell their story from the personal point of view of a long-time resident of the area.

What were some of your favorite things that you found during your research?

Everything was a discovery. But to pin that down a little bit, one of

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Start the Countdown

The West 104th Yard Sale's Coming on Sept. 30



Summertime means Yard Sale planning time on the block. On Saturday Sept. 30th from 10 am to 5pm the block will fill with more than 60 vendors selling everything from vintage Depression-era glass to outgrown children's toys. It's a day of music, fun, amazing finds, and delicious food.

The Yard Sale sponsors several tables. The bake table has made-on-the-block treats—including signature items like lemon-poppyseed cupcakes. The book table offers novels, non-fiction, mysteries, cookbooks, and a cornucopia of great reads. The Silent Auction features gift certificates from local restaurants, stores, and museums. And the 50-50 split-the-pot raffle means someone will walk away with several thousand dollars. Last year's winner took home more than \$2500.

Block residents can to sell their wares by renting a vendor space for \$65. Don't miss our online signup—visit onto our website (www.bloomingdale.org) for details. Got a treasure to donate to the Silent Auction? E-mail Hanna at Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net. We take everything from oil paintings to orange juicers, but no used computer or fitness equipment, please! Got gadgets and neat stuff for What-a-Bargain? Board member Joyce Mann will start taking donations in September. The book table also will start accepting donations then. Keep an eye for flyers with donation details for both. Want to volunteer? We would love your help! Email Mary Jo Gennaro at mjgennaro@gmail.com.

The Yard Sale has been our signature event and a block tradition for more than 30 years. Like our neighborhood, it's welcoming, quirky, and relaxed. Drop by for a few minutes—or a few hours. We'd love to say hi!

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Contributors to the June Issue:

Hayley Elaszcz, Stephen Helman, Mary Koval, Nancy Lian, Lynn Bender Max, Joyce Mann, Hanna Rubin (editor), Larry Stern, Steve Zirinsky.
Newsletter designer: Brian Hajjar.



WEST 104 BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

APRIL 2023

OPENING BALANCE	\$36,203.83
Income.....	1,011.86
Dues	997.86
Merchandise.....	14.00
EXPENSES	5535.10
Guard Service.....	2589.71
Rodent Control	1852.89
Beautification - Trees.....	496.47
Accounting Taxes.....	136.03
Rental Annual Meet	460.00
CLOSING BALANCE	\$31,680.59

Prepped for Planting

The Block Association planted dragon-wing begonias for the summer. Planters have been installed in several beds to ensure the plants' safety. For more on the plantings, see page 5.

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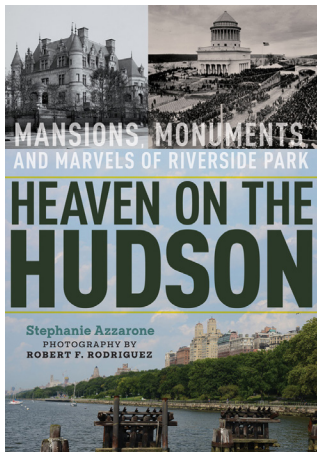
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A Love Letter to Riverside *continued from page 1*



Author Stephanie Azzarone lives on Riverside Drive and read 75 years' worth of Parks Commission minutes in the course of her research.

the surprises for me was the crime in the area. Now I'll clarify that. So of course I knew there were crimes on Riverside Drive on the 1970s because that's when the city was at a low point and there was crime everywhere. But I was surprised at the murders and some of the crime that took place around the turn of the 20th century and a bit after that. There was a very dramatic murder in the early 1900s that I had known nothing about, and so that was a surprise. [Readers: Pick up the book to learn more!]

What are some of your favorite monuments or houses on the Drive?

My favorite monument is the Amiable Child, which is just north of Grant's Tomb. This is a memorial to a little boy, age five, St. Claire Pollock, who in the 1700s fell to his death from the cliffs and was buried where he fell. And it's just very moving. He has his tomb and memorial there. I like to visit sometimes and leave flowers and other mementos in honor of this young boy.

And my favorite house is by far the Schinasi Mansion, which is on the corner of 107th and Riverside. It's this glorious, glistening white marble confection. And it is the only privately-owned freestanding mansion on the Drive.

And what about in our own neighborhood, the "Happy Hundreds"?

Aside from the Schinasi Mansion, there are so many that I had to give this some thought! I adore the Davis Mansion on the corner of 105th Street, both for its beauty – the exterior and interior alike are wonderful – but also because of the scandalous story that goes with it. [This and other fascinating anecdotes are among the book's historical highlights.] The Baumgarten House between 101 and 102 appeals with the delicacy of its decorative ironwork, and the round windows on its entrance doors. And, the Strathmore, because of its wonderful marquee and because I'm a huge Mrs. Maisel fan (in the show, it's the location of the Maisel apartment).

What were the primary ways that you went about your research?

It was a combination of "walk and talk" and also a deep dig into the archive. "Walk and talk" involved literally walking up and down Riverside Drive and talking to doormen and supers and leaving notes for presidents of co-op boards in the hopes that they

would talk to me. So that was part one. But other types of research were very extensive. I went through every Landmarks Preservation Commission report on the Upper West Side that existed. I read 75 years' worth of Parks Commission minutes. I read hundreds and hundreds of articles from the 19th century, and tons and tons of books. So it was very interesting, and I enjoyed it quite a bit.

So what about the park itself, do you have a favorite part?

Yes, I have several favorite parts. I have a special tree that I like to sit under, which will be my secret. I also really enjoy the garden, the People's Garden at 91st Street on the promenade. I just find it so beautiful and so peaceful. And also, the crab apple grove. I like to go there every spring around this time to see the trees bloom. It's a real joy.

Where did you source some of the amazing historical images in the book?

We had mainly three sources for those. One was the New York Public Library. The second was the Museum of the City of New York, and the third was the Library of Congress.

Am I right that your husband photographed the more contemporary images?

Yes!

Is there anything else that you would like readers to know?

I would love—if people choose to read the book—that they read both the introduction and the last chapter. I say that because people often will skip an introduction and go straight into the book. But the introduction and the last chapter really give the sense of why I love the neighborhood and why I wrote this book.

Heaven on the Hudson is available at both locations of Book Culture, as well as Amazon and other booksellers.



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West 104th Street in Bloom



The Block Association planted 675 bright red dragon-wing begonias in the block's 20 tree gardens on May 13. The Planting Committee—Mary Jo Gennaro, Alex Grannis, Lynn Max and Larry Stern—chose the plants for their hardiness and vibrant color. In the three tree beds on the block's south side where there has been a lot of rodent activity, the block placed hanging planters to protect the plants.

Clockwise from top left: Planting Committee members Lynn Bender Max and Larry Stern with Steve Max; Larry Stern prepping one of the new planter boxes; planting begonias; Henry Pita and son Kento lend a hand; planting helpers Stephen Helman, Hayley Elszasz, Lynn Bender Max and Mary Jo Gennaro.



A Menu of Classics

The Grand Feast offers American and Continental favorites

By Mary Koval

The Grand Feast, a gem of a restaurant, is located at 854 Amsterdam Ave and 102nd Street. The owner characterizes the menu as American/European.

The main menu for lunch and dinner features 6 types of burgers, including a veggie burger, Italian fare such as chicken parmesan, risotto, gnocchi, cheese ravioli, and more. The French cuisine includes beef bourguignon, croque monsieur, and duck a la orange. In addition to the burgers, the American cuisine includes fried chicken sandwich, New York steak, house baby back ribs, grilled salmon, and half roasted chicken.

Appetizers include soup of the day or onion soup, salads, spicy tuna tartare, and fried crab bites. Desserts include crème brulee and chocolate mousse, and tiramisu.

They also feature a kid's menu and vegan and gluten free options.



The restaurant serves brunch Friday through Sunday. Dishes to try include the best Western Omelet in the neighborhood, Eggs Benedict, as well as other brunch menu items.

My husband and I have eaten there many times and highly recommend the duck a la orange, second to none, the baby back ribs, and the beef bourguignon. Excellent appetizers are spicy tuna tartar and fried crab bites. I had the lobster bisque, which was outstanding.

The restaurant is in the process of revising its menu, so check their website: www.thegrandfeast.nyc.

The portions are generous and the prices very reasonable. Visit this restaurant once and you will find that it will be your "go to" restaurant for a "grand feast." They are open 7 days per week, from 12noon to 11PM, Monday through Thursday, and 9AM to 11PM on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.



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24th Precinct Names Captain Noreen E. Lazarus New Chief

By Mary Koval

Captain Noreen Lazarus has taken the reins as the new commanding officer at the 24th Precinct, located on 100th Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues. Captain Lazarus served as executive officer, second in command, at the precinct for nearly a year and more recently, has been second in command at the 28th Precinct in Central Harlem. She has been in the police force since 2003.



Captain Lazarus explained the precinct's current areas of focus at the community meeting last month. They include smoke shops selling marijuana without a permit, the rash of car burglaries and thefts on Riverside Drive, and traffic violations like riding on sidewalks by motorbikes and bikes. She has placed uniformed officers in subway stations and in areas where theft is on the rise, such as 96th and Broadway.

Our two Neighborhood Coordination Officers are Joseph Bonardi, Joseph.bondardi@nyp.org, and Samantha Cortez, Samantha.Cortez@nyp.org. You can reach out to them directly with any neighborhood concerns.

The 24th Precinct holds a community meeting the third Wednesday of the month at 7PM, usually at the 2nd floor of the Bloomingdale branch of the New York Public Library. Captain Lazarus conducts the meeting and welcomes neighborhood input. If you have a concern but are unable to attend the meeting, you can email Mary Koval, mtkoyal@aol.com, a member of the West 104 Board of Directors to address your issue at the meeting.

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"Being Green" Leader Earns BAIP Volunteer Award

Sharon Waskow is honored for helping neighbors take a greener approach.

By Joyce Mann

photo credit: Lynn Saville



Sharon Waskow

Sharon Waskow, a founder of "It's Easy Being Green," a group of local residents dedicated to adopting and educating people about day-to-day ways to address climate change, was honored with the Bloomingdale Aging in Place Herman Sands Volunteer Award on April 23. A longtime block resident, Waskow founded the group in 2019. She also has lead a BAIP history book group for twelve years, and is a frequent contributor to the West 104th Street Block Association newsletter on environmental subjects.

Waskow said she was always "climate conscious," and in her role as a school librarian steered teachers and kids towards projects that fostered a love of the natural world and an awareness of the peril the earth faces. She was especially concerned because formal climate change education is barely mentioned in the New York State curriculum.

With the birth of a granddaughter, she remembers thinking, "What would I tell her if she asks me one day what I did about climate change? I want to be able to tell her that I tried to do what I could." That's when she came up with the idea of providing

neighbors with information about the effects of climate change and suggestions about what actions they might take to mitigate those effects. Already a member of BAIP's Science Reading group, she tapped its leader Christine Campbell, a former science teacher to co-lead the group.

It's Easy Being Green is divided into teams that concentrate primarily on reducing single use plastics, promoting participation in the City's compost program and advocating for environmental legislation on the city and state level. The group's dozen or so dedicated members have been with the group since its inception. "They are amazing, hard-working volunteers," says Waskow. "IEBG would not have come this far without their efforts."

Every month, the teams contribute to a newsletter which includes interviews with top City officials and nonprofit leaders working for clean air and water, decarbonization of buildings, reducing food waste, environmental legislation and more. A recurring column contains reviews of products that don't come in plastic packaging. The newsletter currently has nearly 400 subscribers. (Want to read previous newsletters or subscribe? Go to www.itseasybeinggreen.org).

"We are all facing this climate crisis together," Waskow says. "We want people to understand that even small individual steps matter because they accumulate to make a difference." Of course new volunteers are always welcomed and questions can be asked by writing to itseasybeinggreen.uws@gmail.com.

Congratulations to Sharon Waskow on a well deserved honor.

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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.

MEDICARE & AARP/UNITED HEALTH CARE MEDICARE PLANS.

I live at 890 West End Avenue and am a licensed independent agent with the AARP/United Health Care Medicare plans. I am happy to help you understand Medicare and Medicare plan options (no cost). Please feel free to contact me at (cell) 914-419-5499 or (email) susanmschorphd@gmail.com.

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For our records:

Your name and mailing address

For publication: Your name, contact method (phone or email address), description of your service

The block association board meets once a month (now via Zoom). 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. steve@zirinskyarch.com

Contribute to the Newsletter

Interested in writing or photographing for the West 104th Street Block Association newsletter? Have suggestions about what to cover in the neighborhood? Want to share block news, suggest a profile, send a photo? Please send an email to Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net. Your ideas are welcome.

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