

# West 104<sup>th</sup> Street

JUNE 2025

BLOCK ASSOCIATION

## Help Us Meet the Challenge!

Block Association launches special appeal for beautification projects

**R**ising prices and unforeseen expenses have squeezed the Block Association's beautification budget. Costs are up for the annual spring and summer plantings of tulips and begonias. A report from our arborist flagged that the block's trees urgently needed pruning and feeding. The Block Association also learned that the new pin oak in front of 309 West 104th Street needs special treatment to thrive.



These increased costs will total about \$6500. The Block Association

launched an appeal at the start of May to raise the additional funds. Generous residents responded and to date we have passed the appeal's halfway mark. We deeply thank all the residents who have supported this effort.

Unfortunately, we still need to raise nearly \$3000. If you have not contributed, please know that anything you can give will be appreciated and make a difference.

Please help us keep our block a lovely place to call home!

*(See page 7 for more beautification projects and photos.)*

### How to give

Please make checks payable to the West 104th Street Block Association Inc. Send or drop off your contributions with our vice president Mary Jo Gennaro (315 Riverside Dr., Apt. 7C, NY NY 10025) or leave with a building representative (see back page). To pay online, please go to [www.bloomingdale.org](http://www.bloomingdale.org) to pay by Paypal or other payment options.

## Save the Date!

The Yard Sale is coming September 27



**A**s the warm weather settles in, it's time to plan the West 104th Street Block Association's signature event: The Yard Sale. On Saturday Sept. 27 from 10 am to 5pm the block will host more than 60 vendors selling everything from vintage collectibles to gently used children's toys.

There's live music, a bake table, a book table, the popular What-a-Bargain tables (finds as little as \$1), a Silent Auction and the now-famous split-the-pot 50-50 raffle. Last year's first place winner took home \$3149.72.

The Block Association sponsors several tables. Keep an eye out for flyers and Block Bytes about the bake table, the What-a-Bargain table, the Silent Auction and more. Drop off information will be posted after Labor Day. Want to volunteer at the Yard Sale or selling raffle tickets or sorting books for the runup to the big day? Email Mary Jo Gennaro at [mjgennaro@gmail.com](mailto:mjgennaro@gmail.com).

The Yard Sale has been a block tradition for more than 30 years. It's a special day and a special event. Drop by for a few minutes - or hours - and say hi.

### Rent Your Vendor Space Today

Want to rent a space for the big day? Sign up now. Spaces sell out quickly. Go to [www.bloomingdale.org](http://www.bloomingdale.org) to reserve your space now for \$75.

**W 104 ST BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT**

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Contributors to the June Issue:

Mary Jo Gennaro, Mary Koval, Lynn Bender Max, Hanna Rubin (editor), Larry Stern, Steve Zirinsky. Newsletter designer: Brian Hajjar. Advertising: Jennifer Jones.

**FIRST QUARTER FINANCIALS - 2025**

<b>INCOME.....</b>	<b>\$28,983.83</b>
Dues .....	\$22,964.70
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Co-op Contribution.....	\$4375.00
Contributions .....	\$73.00
Merchandise .....	\$321.13
<b>EXPENSES .....</b>	<b>\$13,252.34</b>
Guard Service .....	\$10,379.47
Printing Costs.....	\$907.06
Beautification-Tree.....	\$456.19
Merchandise .....	\$352.00
Legal/Acct.....	\$675.00
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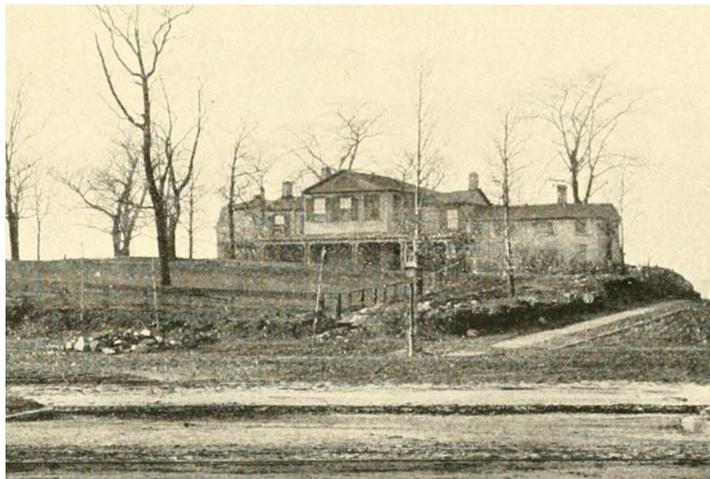


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# The Street Back When

What was West 104th Street like before brownstones and apartment buildings?

By Rob Garber



Left: HP Johnston 1897 Battle of Harlem Heights. Right: Museum of the City of New York.

Left: Woodlawn, a colonial era mansion between West 106th and West 107th looking down to the Hudson; right: West 94th Street looking west and the deep rock cuts required to grade the street.

Our piece of the Manhattan streetscape is known far and wide for its appealing and relatively homogeneous architecture. Residents cherish and visitors admire avenues lined with pre-war apartment houses, most of which were built during a burst of development between the 1890s and 1920s, as well as side streets that still have solid strips of townhouses predating the apartment buildings.

But what did our neighborhood look like before it filled up with the stone and brick structures that we now see? It's a surprisingly hard question to answer because much of the Upper West Side remained quite empty—let's call it semi-rural—until late in the 19th century, and few photographs document it. There's a widespread belief that prior to 1900, this neighborhood was filled with country estates owned by wealthy families with primary residences further downtown. In fact mansions were relatively few in number. Rather, census records show that in the 1850s-1870s, many of the residents of the Upper West Side were working-class German and Irish immigrants, with occupations such as cook, gardener, farm laborer, servant, coachman, dressmaker, and hostler.

## WOODEN HOUSES AND A POND

Most families lived in structures that were either wood frame

houses or “shanties”. A shanty was a house that had been assembled from available scraps of material, and whose shape often followed the contours of rock formations. Street addresses were either non-existent, because the streets themselves had not been cut through, or were of the “Bloomingdale Road near the 7 mile marker” variety.

The great Manhattan grid plan established in 1811 was more an intention than a reality until the 1890s, when the difficult and expensive business of “opening” streets finally reached our neighborhood. Opening a street was a multi-step process that began by leveling the terrain—often through the use of explosives to remove rock outcroppings—followed by paving, sewerage, and adding sidewalks and streetlights. The process of grading eliminated water features such as a small pond that appeared on maps of West 104th Street until the 1890s, but even today, water infiltration into basements can be matched to the routes of long-buried streams.

## A MANSION IN OPEN COUNTRY

Old maps show that in the immediate neighborhood of West 104th Street there were a handful of very old large residences—the Furniss Mansion at 99th Street near Riverside Drive and Woodlawn near 107th Street are examples. A rare image taken in the mid-1880s by an unknown photographer, shared by Tours by Gary maestro Gary Dennis, shows the land from the Bloomingdale Road to the Hudson River between 102nd and 103rd Streets. It depicts market gardens, utility poles, a large wood frame house, and the distinctive rusticated stone house with crenellations built for Richard Bacon, scholarly headmaster at Columbia Grammar School from 1864 to 1892.

Much of the open land in this part of Manhattan was held by wealthy families who could afford to keep it vacant or rent it for modest amounts, trusting that the inexorable march of development up the island would reach these blocks and greatly enhance their value. That's indeed what happened, particularly once the subway arrived in 1904. Side streets that had long been empty filled rapidly with townhouses. Riverside Drive itself waxed and waned as the address of choice for New York's elite, but settled on a splendid mix that includes intact

*continued on page 4*

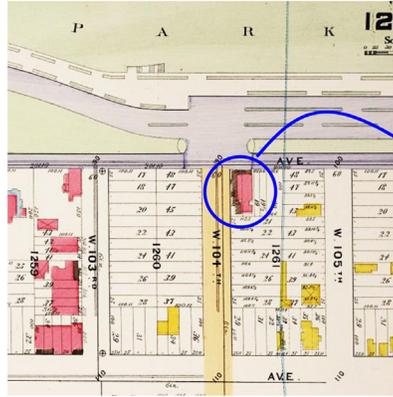
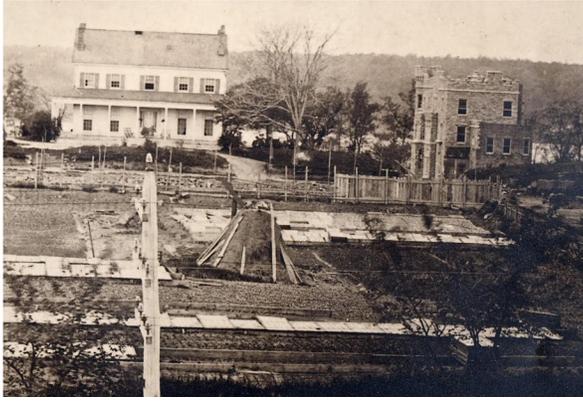


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Left: courtesy Gary Dennis. Center: Robinson & Pringle's 1890 Atlas of the City of New York, vol 2 plate 5. Right: Real Estate Record and Guide 11 Feb 1893.

Left: Looking west on West 103rd Street around 1888; right: an 1890 map of West 104th Street showing a row of brownstones, pictured at right. Several still stand on the north side of the block.

rowhouses like the Seven Beauties between 105th and 106th, delirious confections like the Schinasi mansion at 107th, and imposing towers like the Master Apartments at 103rd.

**BUILDING UP THE BLOCK**

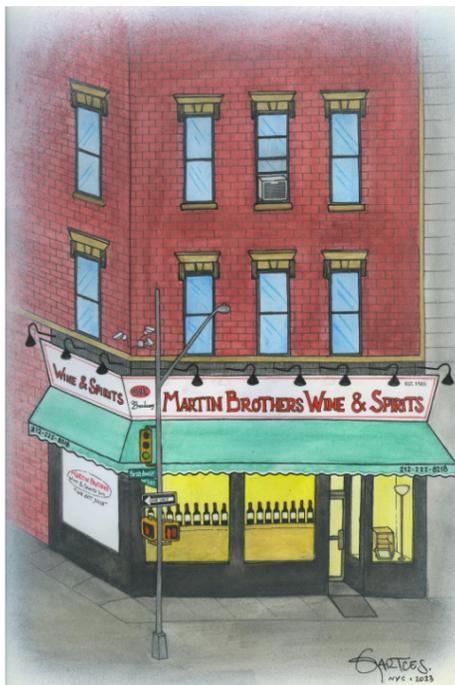
West 104th Street between West End Avenue and Riverside Drive remained devoid of residences until the Bacon house was built in the late 1880s. Shortly thereafter, rowhouse development exploded throughout the neighborhood, and by 1893 both sides of 104th were lined with handsome brownstones. The last lot to be filled was the corner brownstone at 317 Riverside Drive, built near the turn of the 20th century.

The block remained stable for a couple of decades, but the rising value of riv-

er-facing real estate on Riverside Drive eventually stimulated developers to purchase, tear down, and replace all of the rowhouses between 103rd and 105th with large apartment buildings, including 314-317 Riverside Drive on the southeast corner of 104th and 320-323 Riverside Drive on the northeast corner, buildings completed just before and just after 1930 respectively. The same happened to the rowhouses on 104th closer to West End, resulting in today's profile of several mid-block brownstones facing each other, bracketed by newer apartment buildings on Riverside and on the half block extending to West End Avenue.

*Ron Garber is a member of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group.*

  
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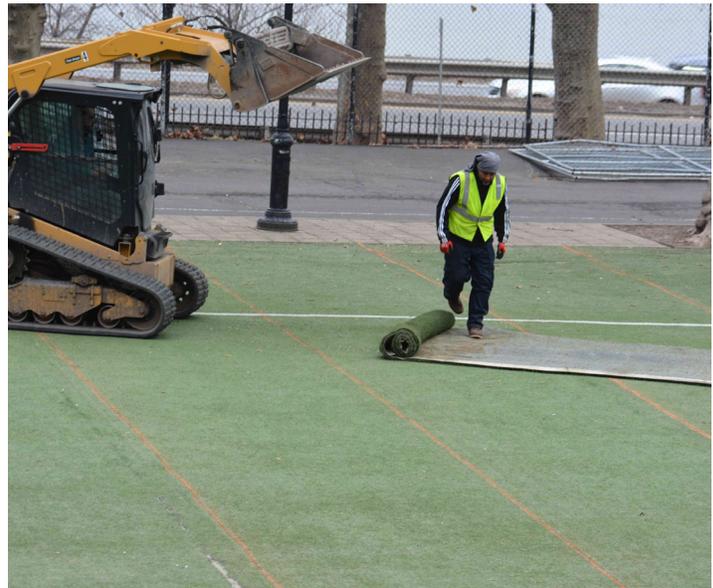
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# Perfect Pitch

The Parks Department restores the 107th Street soccer field in Riverside Park.

By Gilbert Tauber



**T**his spring, if you'd been walking in Riverside Park, you may have noticed some construction work going on in the athletic field west of the park's esplanade, roughly between 107th and 109th Streets. Neville Colman field is known mainly for soccer but can also accommodate two baseball diamonds. It is one of the most heavily used athletic grounds in the city's park system. In a project costing over \$1.3 million, the Parks Department has upgraded the field's drainage system and replaced its two acres of artificial turf. The old surface had been in place for over 20 years, twice the length of the manufacturer's warranty. While the Department prefers to use natural turf where possible, the heavy usage at this location makes it impractical to maintain a natural grass surface.

In recent months, contractors removed the old artificial turf, rolling it up in sections like soggy carpeting and stacking it up to dry before trucking it away for recycling. Before putting down the new artificial turf, the field was regraded, with crushed stone added to the low spots to provide a level playing surface and proper drainage.

Growing up in his native South Africa, Dr. Neville Colman had been a competitive swimmer, golfer and soccer player. He was also a white opponent of the country's apartheid regime. He assisted in the secret filming of two documentaries on behalf of anti-apartheid groups and was a member of a political party that was later banned. Though already launched on a medical career, he was essentially forced into exile in 1974 and emigrated to the U.S. He spent most of his career at what is now Mount Sinai Morningside Hospital. There he made important discoveries in hematology, pathology and nutrition, as well as campaigning against the misuse of DNA techniques in criminal prosecutions.

In 1987 Dr. Colman, a father of two, founded the West Side Soccer League and also became the area director of the American Youth Soccer Organization. The West Side Soccer League has continued to grow since Dr. Colman's death in 2003. It now serves over 4,000 children, generally between 5 and 15 years of age and is said to be the largest all-volunteer sports organization in New York City.

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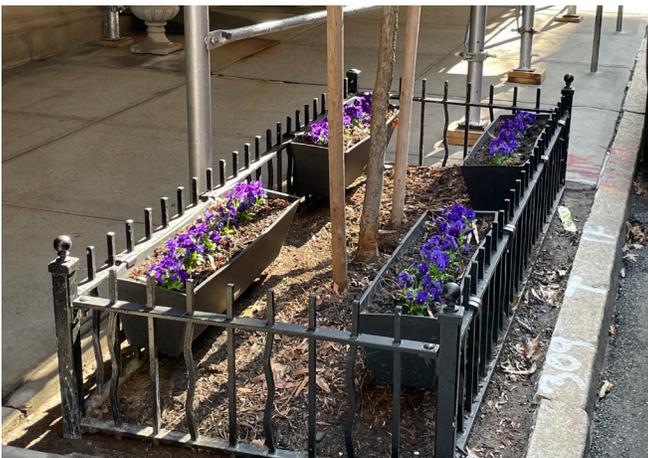
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# Blooming on West 104th Street

Neighbors and helpers make the block's tree gardens glow with color for spring and summer



Caption: From top left. Urban Explorers (left and right) provides helpers as well as 400 red dragon winged begonias for the block's summer plantings. Center: Jon Moskin, Larry Stern, Mary Jo Gennaro and Tom Monaco with pansies for the spring planting. Middle: Steve Akeson preps window boxes; Tom Monaco plants pansies. Bottom: Left: Spring sunshine sets off deep purple blooms. Right Vice president Mary Jo Gennaro and block president Steve Zirinsky with summer window box plantings.



# NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

## BABYSITTING

Experienced and eager block resident looking to babysit days, nights, and weekends. I'm a lifelong Upper West Sider and rising University of Michigan Senior. Looking forward to connecting, and please reach me on my cell at 917-834-3603.

## 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 am a BAiP member and 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.

## QUICKBOOKS CONSULTANT/ PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZER

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## YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICE PUBLICIZED FREE!

Publicize your neighborhood service (babysitting, dog walking, apartment cleaning, etc.) free in the newsletter and on our web site for one year, renewable. To submit an ad mail/deliver this information to Hanna Rubin, Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net. 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. 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](mailto:steve@zirinskyarch.com)

## Pay Your Dues Online

Visit the Block Association's website for epay options. Use the QR code below to access online dues payment.



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**2025 2nd Quarter Dues**

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Suggestions for the block: \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to West 104th Street Block Association Inc.

Please send to our vice-president, Mary Jo Gennaro, 315 Riverside Dr., Apt. 7C, NY NY 10025 or leave with one of the following:

**M. Mann: 309 W. 104, Apt 3A**      **G. Waskow: 320 RSD, Apt. 8G**  
**A. Grannis: 895 West End Ave.**      **M.J. Gennaro, 315 RSD, Apt. 7C**