

West 104th Street

SEPTEMBER 2026

BLOCK ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

The Other West 104th Street Garden

A Story of the Landscape at 104th Street and Riverside Drive

By Charles McKinney

When I prepared the master plan, as an “Urban Design trainee” for the restoration of Riverside Park in 1984, I studied Frederick Law Olmsted’s design for Riverside Drive. Olmsted gave the drive its sinuous course. It swerved around river inlets and other topographical difficulties, and lengthened the road where the grade was steep, making the climb easier for carriage horses. The planted islands helped buffer the residences from the main drive.



McKinney among the south meridian plantings.

Olmsted used landscape plantings to orchestrate the opening and closing of views while making the landscape appear natural. The exceptions were deliberate formal gestures, such as the allées of elms and other arching trees that shaded Riverside Drive.

Park Rescue and Restoration

The 1984 master plan initiated the restoration of Riverside Park. It was funded by Council Member Ruth Messinger, followed by future council members and, in recent years, the Mayor’s Office. Ruth also funded an effort to restore the park through improved horticultural maintenance and erosion control. Our motto was simple: “Maintenance is Restoration.”

During the financial crisis of the Dinkins administration, much of that budget was cut, forcing us to lay off the horticultural restoration workers. As Park Administrator, I decided to use what remained to support volunteers and to pair our resources with projects undertaken by the Riverside Park Fund, now the Riverside Park Conservancy.

We supported resident initiatives: people who cared for parts of the park and wanted to make them better, including the garden at 91st Street. Over time, working with the Conservancy, volunteers adopted many places throughout Riverside Park. The park received the benefit of local knowledge and sustained, dedicated effort. By the time I left my treasured job, people had adopted 80 sites, including entire playgrounds and the clay tennis courts at 91st Street.

Adopting an Island

My wife, Susan, and I had adopted the island at 103rd Street. We spent years
continued on page 7.

Come to the Ultimate Upper West Side Event

The West 104th Yard Sale Needs You! Your donations, your help, your block spirit....

Our is a special block and so is our block party. On Saturday September 26, the Block Association will host the 36th West 104th Street Yard Sale, a distinctly Upper West Side event. Shop more than 60 stalls, visit the Block Association’s book, bake, What-a-Bargain and Silent Auction tables. Enjoy live music from classic New Orleans jazz to Beatles covers to Motown. Be sure to buy a ticket—or 20—for the 50-50 raffle (last year’s winner took home \$3649) and celebrate our block. The Yard Sale also generates nearly one-third of the Block Association’s annual budget.

And we need you make it a success.

Here’s how to donate and help.

Books:

We are looking for novels, poetry, non-fiction including memoirs and history, art books, cookbooks and children’s books. We cannot sell textbooks, CDs, cassettes, dictionaries or any out-of-date books. Please drop off your donations between Sept. 8 and Sept. 23 with the doorman at 320 Riverside Drive in sturdy bags marked “Yard Sale.”

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Shailah Edmonds performs at the 2025 Yard Sale.



Cars will be towed from West 104th Street between West End Ave. and Riverside Drive if they have not been moved before the morning of the Yard Sale.

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Contributors to the September Issue:

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W 104 ST BLOCK ASSN FINANCIAL REPORT

2ND QUARTER FINANCIALS - 2026

Starting Balance..... \$32,696.54

Dues\$5,621.86

Misc Donation \$25.00

Yard Sale-Vendors..... \$4,043.38

Contributions\$3,515.00

Merchandise\$194.75

Ending Balance.....\$23,444.10

Guard Service\$10,613.42

Printing Costs..... \$1,006.59

Beautification-Flowers\$9,976.22

Merch/Activities\$376.25

Website.....\$36.19

Yard Sale Permit \$25.00

Legal/Acct.....\$477.22

Misc.....\$141.54

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Treasurer Mary Koval 895 WEA

Secretary Larry Stern 315 RSD

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Canine Cohort

Violet and Garbanzo are two of the block's many canine residents. See our salute to West 104th Street's dogs on pages 4-5.



A Lost Mansion in a Long Ago Village Called Bloomingdale

When the neighborhood was rural farmland, wealthy New Yorkers built their country homes here.

By Pam Tice

Escaping the city in summer has a long history. Going back a few hundred years, the Bloomingdale neighborhood was the Hudson Valley of New York.

Starting in 1796, John Clendening, a textile merchant with a home and office in downtown Manhattan on Pearl Street, began assembling land in Bloomingdale, where other wealthy merchants located their summer residences. He soon owned several acres between 99th and 105th Streets, west of Eighth Avenue.

Bloomingdale had its road in place from early in the 18th Century. Now, as the City's merchants grew their wealth, they could imitate the English gentry by acquiring a country estate, a place to escape the downtown heat of the summer months, along with the epidemics of yellow fever that threatened their families. There was land available for cultivation as well as a fine home. Property advertisements often noted "respectable New Yorkers" living nearby. When the city's first guide was published in 1807, a description of the Bloomingdale Road, now part of Broadway, noted there were "numerous villas with which Bloomingdale is adorned."

Mr. Clendening's house was built in 1811, a two-story brick home surrounded by gardens and fruit trees. Mr. Clendening named his property "Sharon Farm" after the Rose of Sharon growing there. The house was described as "fifty feet square, standing 250 feet back from Clendening Lane," the roadway between 103rd and 104th Streets that connected the estate to the Bloomingdale Road, the main highway that ran through the city's west side. The driveway gate was at 105th Street and Ninth Avenue, leading to the mansion just south of 104th Street. There is an 1863 image of the Clendening home in *The New York of Yesterday*, a book assembling articles from Valentine's Manuals. (The image is mislabeled as to its location.)

Mr. Clendening died in 1836. His seven children decided to invest their legacy in the Second United States Bank, which failed shortly thereafter. The estate was sold off in the 1840s, with various investors buying the land that was becoming more valuable as the city grew. Robert Marshall, a Scottish merchant and confectionery manufacturer, bought the house and some of the land, which now totaled six acres. His wife Ann was described as one of New York's famous beauties. They had five children in their home in the 1860 census, female servants born in Ireland, and a gardener.

In 1855, Robert Marshall had to move his house when Ninth Avenue (now Columbus) was opened. A crowd gathered to watch the delicate operation, moving the brick structure to a new foundation 45 feet to the west, now locating it between 104th and 105th Streets on Ninth Avenue.

Robert Marshall hosted meetings at his house in 1887 to organize the West End Presbyterian Church, located today on Amsterdam Avenue at 105th Street. Marshall and his colleagues first built a small chapel over on Broadway and organized a Sunday School. Soon, they bought the land and built the church, which stands to this day, in 1891-92. Marshall helped finance the land purchase and later paid off the mortgage on the building. After her parents' deaths, their daughter, Margaret Marshall, donated a new pulpit to the church in 1898 to honor them.

By 1898, Robert Marshall and his wife had died. The house, now painted white, and grounds, some 80 city lots, were sold, the house to



From upper left: The Clendening Mansion in 1863; the Clendening hotel; the mansion after Robert Marshall bought it.

Solomon Rothfeld. Today the hill where the house was located, on Columbus Avenue at 104th Street, is the edge of the Frederick Douglass Houses built in the late 1950s; along with the stores and tenement buildings that run along the avenue.

When the news broke that the house would be removed, several newspapers published articles about its history, also known as "Sharon House." *The New York Times* described the home's twelve-foot-wide center hallway, with a room on the west side of the house containing a fireplace of unusual beauty, its wrought iron adorned with artistic designs inlaid with variously colored jewels and mother-of-pearl. The downstairs rooms included a reception room, a music room, and a library. The bedrooms, heavily carpeted and furnished with mahogany and rosewood, were upstairs. Somewhat mysteriously, the article mentioned that several large cannon balls and bullets were found buried in the garden, although the house was not standing during the American Revolution.

While the Marshall name is no longer part of the neighborhood, the Clendening name continued for a while. When the aqueduct bringing Croton water to the reservoir in Central Park was built, the area it traversed in our neighborhood was called "Clendening Valley." In the early 1900s, the Clendening apartment-hotel opened on the southwest corner of Amsterdam Avenue and 103rd Street. By the 1950s, it had become a cheap place to live, and it was demolished to make way for the building there now, part of the Frederick Douglass Houses.

Dog Days of West 104th Street

Sometimes it seems like everyone on the block has a canine family member. Meet some of the block's most beloved residents.



Nicki, age 10



Zippy, age 4, Nicki's roommate, identifies as a dog



Buddy, age 8



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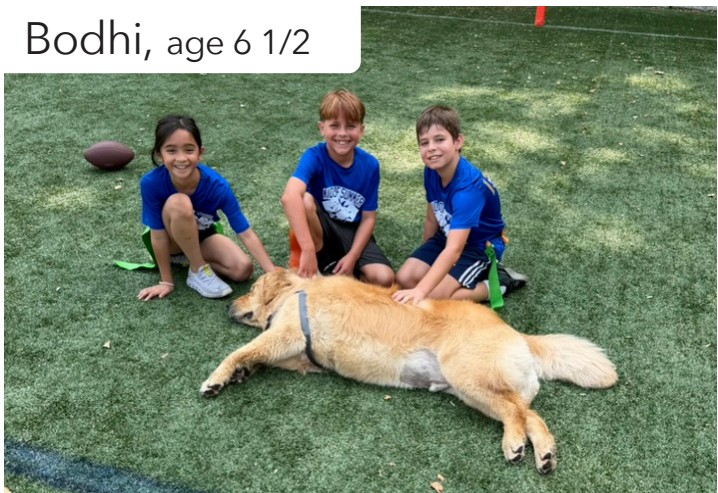
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Bodhi, age 6 1/2



Naya, age 14

Milo,
age 4



Bruno, age 10

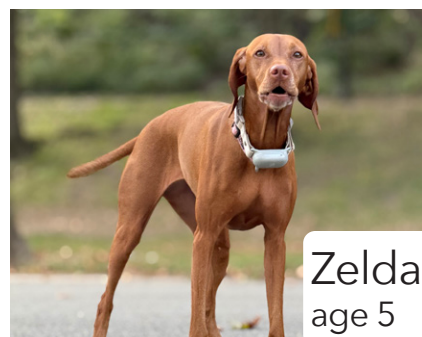


Ryan, age 12

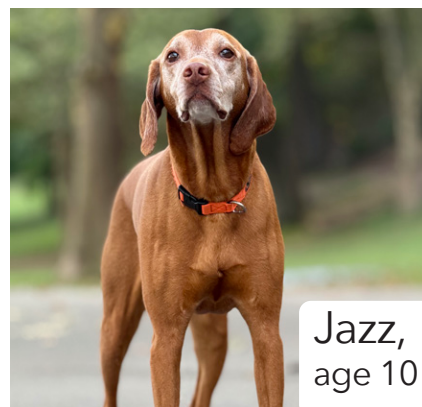


Fergus,
age 4

Mika, age 16 months
(and growing)



Zelda,
age 5



Jazz,
age 10

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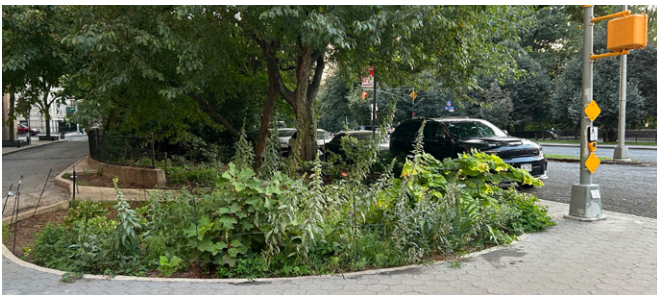
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104th Street Garden

continued from page 1.



Plantings on the median have been donated by local residents and the Block Association.

forking wood chips into the sterile, compacted soil near the black pine planted by the Friends of Riverside Park in the early 1980s. The Parks Department planted the crab apple trees, and we planted shrubs the Conservancy provided.

The Conservancy later installed an asphalt path and a water line, providing irrigation for plantings cared for by five different volunteer groups on the island. Thirty years of work have created a thriving landscape with seasonal beauty. That work has also sparked many social connections and stories.

As a volunteer gardener, I have often battled the discouragement of working in a landscape that continues to receive litter dumped from parked and passing cars and occasional piles of dog poop. It is also hard to recover from inept repairs to traffic-signal posts and repeated over applications of snow-melting salt.

On the other hand, it is a joy to work in a public garden appreciated by so many neighbors. I find it more satisfying than tending a private garden. Every so often, someone asks how they can help or contribute to the plantings.

That brings me to the tip of the island at 104th Street.

Common Ground

The tip was one of several created by removing pavement and replacing it with an absorbent planted area. The purpose was to catch stormwater before it could flow into Riverside Park and cause erosion, or be sent unnecessarily to the sewage-treatment plant. This accounts for the bed's noticeably downward-sloping surface.

The original planting plan included fast-growing ground covers. Most died from dog urine and a lack of water. I offered to take over the site, install new plantings and fencing, and keep it watered.

The planting is informal but thoughtful. Some plants, such as the golden leafed redbud, have been donated by local residents and have a special meaning to them. Other plants, purchased by local residents and the 104th Street Block Association, provide moments of seasonal delight. The bed does not look overly designed, and that is intentional. Each year it will become fuller and more pretty. Provided we can keep the weeds and Department of Sanitation's road salt out of it.

Recently Karen, a neighbor, began helping. She wanted some exercise and offered to remove the euonymus that was taking over the bed. It was a heroic job. Her work opened enough space for us to plant ferns and native iris.

There is something deeply satisfying about this small piece of ground. It began as an effort to absorb rainwater, and for me to get some exercise. It is a garden shaped by City investment, local knowledge, persistence and neighborly help. Like much of Riverside Park, it will thrive because neighbors help, they lobby for funds, contribute to the Conservancy, coach teams, rake leaves, pick up litter and fallen branches. It will never be finished, and it will continue to improve as long as we the people continue to care for it.

Charles McKinney headed Riverside Park's restoration for 20 years at the New York City Parks Department. If you want to volunteer in Riverside Park, visit <https://riversideparknyc.org/volunteer/>.

Spain v. Argentina on West 104th Street



Building 309 West 104th Street has begun a new tradition: World Cup Final Street Watch Party. An inaugural cohort of 309 Residents, deliveristas and passersby enjoyed Spain v. Argentina from the best block in NYC. See you in 4 years!

Yard Sale

continued from page 1.

What-a Bargain

Contribute jewelry, toys, bric-a-brac, ceramics/pottery, musical instruments and complete games and puzzles. We cannot accept clothing, heavily used kitchenware, any drinking glasses or mugs or any items missing any pieces. We will accept donations between Sept. 8 and Sept. 23. To donate, contact Joyce Mann by email (joycemann2@gmail.com) or phone (516-238-4609).



Silent Auction

We would like antiques in good condition, collectibles, framed artwork and photos, fine jewelry, performance tickets, household gadgets in their original boxes and services (piano lessons, resume reviews, etc.). We do not accept exercise or computer equipment or anything broken. To donate, please contact Hanna Rubin between September 8 and September 23 at Hanna.Rubin@verizon.net.

Bake Sale

We would like your best treats: cookies, pies, finger food. Please call or email Miriam Duhan (646-942-6994; mduhan@nyc.rr.com) to let her know what you plan to bring.

Volunteer

We need your help at the Yard Sale. If you have an hour to lend a hand, please contact Mary Jo Gennaro at mjgennaro@gmail.com.

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.

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Pay Your Dues Online

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



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

Check Your Junk Folder

Did you sign up for Block Bytes but have not received it lately? Check your junk folder. It may end up there unless you add the email to your permissions list.

2026 3rd Quarter Dues

Please allocate my contribution to:

___ Security ___ Beautification ___ Social ___ Newsletter ___ Board Decision (Suggested amt: \$175/year or \$43.75/quarter)

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(For internal use only. The Block Assn. will not sell, exchange, or lend your e-mail address to any outside parties.)

Suggestions for the block: _____

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

Please deliver to our vice-president, Mary Jo Gennaro, 315 Riverside Dr., Apt. 7C, NY, NY 10025 or leave with Mary Koval: 895 West End Ave.