

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of TAKE A WALK NEW YORK

December 2015

We are pleased to announce that Deborah Harley has joined the Take a Walk New York team. Like Laurie Lewis and Alan Cohen, Deborah is a licensed NYC tour guide. She is already hard at work creating a website for our tour venture.

Because December is a busy month for most people, we will not be presenting a calendar of tours in this issue of the newsletter. As always, however, you can contact one of us (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to schedule a custom tour. Speaking of which, see our special custom tour offer on page 3.

We wish you a happy holiday season. We hope to see you on a tour as we TAKE A WALK NEW YORK.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

Oh, *That* Times...and Why The Ball Drops

At the end of the year, all eyes will turn to Times Square as New Yorkers and out-of-town visitors usher in 2016 with a giant party. After standing in a mob for hours, entertained by a big-name concert and deafening horn-blowing, the celebrating crowd will focus on the brief descent of the crystal ball. When the countdown ends, “Happy New Year!” will ring through the streets, confetti will fly, lovers will kiss, and the distant echo of fireworks will fill the air.

A similar end-of-year bash has been taking place at the same location for more than 100 years. How did this tradition begin?

In the late nineteenth century, the area now called Times Square had a different name: Longacre Square. The main businesses in this pre-automobile era were related to carriages. Theaters were slowly moving here from points south, although this was not yet the theater district of today.



Two events occurred in 1904 that would forever change the area. The city’s first subway line arrived in October. Then as the year drew to a close, *The New York Times* abandoned the downtown enclave of newspaper publishers along Park Row and moved into its new home. The wedge-shaped building, designed to fit the triangular space at 42nd Street where Broadway sloped at a diagonal across the rectangular city grid, housed both the newspaper’s printing presses and its editorial offices.

The *Times* was not the first newspaper to move north from Lower Manhattan. The *New York Herald* had relocated about half a mile south along Broadway a decade earlier. Since that area had already been renamed for the newspaper, it was only fitting that Longacre Square would become Times Square.

Times publisher Adolph Ochs threw a big party to celebrate the newspaper's new home on a plot of land that bore its name. As 1904 morphed into 1905, fireworks flared above the new Times Tower, at 25 stories the second tallest building in the city, awing the masses crowded onto the street below. The annual New Year's Eve party in Times Square has continued every year since.

Squares That Are Not Square

Every student of elementary geometry knows that a square consists of two triangles lying side by side, sharing a common leg. In New York City parlance, a "square" is often a single triangle. Sometimes the point of the triangle almost touches the point of another, creating a bowtie shape. How fitting that the tip of Herald Square (home of Macy's) points at the tip of Greeley Square, which was named for the publisher of the *New York Tribune*, a popular newspaper that eventually merged with the *Herald*! Times Square creates a bowtie with Duffy Square, where theater-goers purchase discount tickets.

These triangle-shaped "squares" came about because Broadway does not conform to the city grid. Traveling the length of Manhattan and well beyond, Broadway follows a pathway beaten into the ground long before the 1811 creation of the city grid, which laid out north-south avenues and east-west streets at right angles. When Broadway intersects the rectangular grid, the result is the long leg of a triangle.

Within a few years, Times Square had become so built up that the city banned fireworks for safety reasons. The ball drop became the replacement to mark the stroke of midnight. "Time balls" are actually an old nautical tradition; a ball was dropped once a day from a high point on shore at a fixed hour, enabling ship captains to set their watches and instruments accurately.

The first midnight ball drop in Times Square was in 1907. That ball was made of iron and wood surrounded by 100 25-watt bulbs. Over the years, materials have changed to make the ball lighter and brighter. The ball has dropped every New Year's Eve, except in the World War II dim-out.

The current Times Square ball is made of Waterford crystal and has LED lighting. It now sits permanently on the old Times Tower, known today as One Times Square. The newspaper operation left the building long ago. But crowds still gather on December 31 to party as they can do only on New Year's Eve in New York City's Times Square, "Crossroads of the World."

Plan a Custom Tour Now!

We have not scheduled tours for December, but we will be available for custom tours. To arrange a custom tour, please contact either Laurie (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) or Alan (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net).

This month we are offering an **advance purchase SPECIAL for custom tours**. Do you exchange holiday gifts with a small group of friends? Surprise them with a one-of-a-kind outing: a custom tour. Or purchase a custom tour now as a treat for next summer's out-of-town guests or as the perfect birthday gift for a lover of all things New York. **The special price is \$150 for a tour of up to 4 hours for up to 6 people.** Buy it now, and take your tour before the end of 2016.

If you are concerned that a 4-hour walk is too long, you can make it shorter (our special is for "up to 4 hours"). If you want to take advantage of the full 4 hours, here are some suggestions:

- Pick and choose nearby parts of our regularly scheduled tours, described below.
- Select two areas of the city you would like to learn about. Hop on a subway between distant points for a brief rest.
- Visit a museum or other point of interest along the tour route.
- Walk at a leisurely pace, taking time to capture the best of New York in photographs.
- Add rest breaks at scenic points along your tour route.
- Stop at a restaurant for a coffee break, lunch, or afternoon tea.

The price of \$150 does not include transportation, food, or admission fees.

For ideas for a custom tour, read the following descriptions of tours we've introduced in this newsletter.

Public Art of Lower Manhattan

You don't need to go to a museum to see great art, because New York has a lot of outdoor public art. Explore outdoor art in Lower Manhattan on this interactive tour. Some of the art honors the dead; some tells a story; some expresses emotion; some is functional. Tell us what you like most!

Hidden Treasures of the Financial District

Walking through the fast-paced canyons of Wall Street, you can easily overlook some gems here. Hidden in plain sight are relics of our city's early days, as well as delightful patches of greenery. Enjoy oft-forgotten stories of famous structures of the Financial District on this walking tour.

Green Spaces and Great Places on 42nd Street

Not the glitz and glamour of the Theater District, but a different 42nd Street, from Sixth Avenue to the East River. Learn about New York City landmark buildings, and discover parks that offer respite in busy Midtown. You're guaranteed to fall in love with this side of 42nd Street!

Wide Open Midtown Spaces: The East 50s

Busy Midtown Manhattan has beautiful open spaces, some outdoors, others in. Learn why such valuable real estate has little commercial activity and why gardens appear among giant buildings—not just in Midtown but throughout the city. Visit great “pocket parks” and indoor atriums.

Mansions of Fifth Avenue

Some magnificent mansions that the cream of New York society built about 100 years ago along Fifth Avenue are still standing. Luxury apartment buildings — mansions in the sky — sprang up alongside them. Enjoy stories about these great structures and the people who lived here.

Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half

No wonder the southern half of Central Park is so popular! The area includes some of the most filmed and photographed scenes of New York. Exploring it on foot, you'll find lush lawns, a rowboat-filled lake, interesting sculptures, and woodland trails right in the heart of the city.

Central Park: Marvels of the Northern Half

The lesser-known north end of Central Park has some of the city's greatest landscapes, as well as an interesting history. With guides who love this part of the park, discover a secret garden and charming water bodies, and take a short hike in woods. You'll forget you're in New York City!

Parks of the East 90s

Parks are an antidote to the congestion and harshness of a concrete city; they make New York livable. Considering the East 90s as representative of residential areas throughout the city, we'll explore two neighborhoods and see how various types of parks serve needs of local residents.

Brooklyn Heights

The nation's first suburb, Brooklyn Heights remains one of the most desirable residential areas of New York City. Enjoy beautiful architecture and magnificent views of New York Harbor as you learn how this area developed in the nineteenth century and beyond.

Book your custom tour now at a special price of \$150!