

# Tours and Tales of New York

July 2015

---

*As I was studying for my New York City Sightseeing Guide License and as I have been preparing tours (which I hope you'll take with me!), I discovered many fascinating stories about New York. I've decided to produce a monthly newsletter to share some of these stories with you. The newsletter also will list my planned tour schedule for the month. If you're interested in taking a tour that is not listed here, please contact me at [lewislaurie2rnyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2rnyc@gmail.com).*

*Please share this newsletter with your friends. Forward it to them, or better yet, ask them to email me to be put on my mailing list and receive the newsletter directly.*

*Laurie Lewis*

---

## The Birth of Luxury Apartment Buildings

Today, the vast majority of Manhattanites live in apartments. But until 100 years ago or so, the very wealthy never would have considered living in an apartment building. Communal living was for the lower classes. People of means lived in private homes. The closest they ever came to shared space were the walls between their townhouse and the brownstone next door.

A few daring developers, seeing the potential for great profit when multiple dwellings occupied the same ground, paired with prominent architects to create the first luxury apartment buildings. The earliest was the Dakota, completed in 1884 on what was then an isolated plot opposite the west side of Central Park. The developer was Edward S. Clark, heir to the Singer Sewing Machine company fortune. The architect was Henry J. Hardenbergh, who would later create the Plaza Hotel.



The name *Dakota* is said to come from the location of this pioneer luxury apartment building: so remote that it might as well be in Dakota Territory.

Apartment living in the area often considered synonymous with wealth—the Upper East Side, especially along Fifth and Park Avenues—was slower to develop. In 1910, while the preeminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White was working on additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, developer James T. Lee hired the firm to build a luxury apartment building across Fifth Avenue at 81<sup>st</sup> Street. A few years later, right after completion of their masterpiece,

Grand Central Terminal, the firm of Warren & Wetmore erected a 12-story, 12-unit apartment building down the Avenue at 74<sup>th</sup> Street.

These “mansions in the sky” were as roomy as any townhouse, the typical residence of the well-to-do up to this time. Privacy was paramount, with some buildings claiming only one or two apartments per floor. A uniformed attendant, schooled in the tradition of the discrete British valet, might deliver residents and guests in an elevator that opened onto an elegant private or semi-private foyer. The apartments had space to entertain and to showcase extensive private art collections. The one-percent of their day of course needed a host of servants, and they too were easily accommodated, either in back rooms of the huge family residence or on separate floors reserved for servants in buildings such as the Dakota.

### Where the Horses Lived

Whether they lived in freestanding mansions, elegant brownstones, or luxury apartment buildings, wealthy residents of the Upper East Side in the early twentieth century needed a place for their horses and carriages. The side streets between Lexington and Third Avenues were perfect—close enough for the carriage to come quickly, but far enough away to avoid the unpleasantness associated with stables. Some of these carriage houses have been spared the wrecker’s ball. Check out 69<sup>th</sup>, 70<sup>th</sup>, 73<sup>rd</sup>, and 75<sup>th</sup> Streets. Most of these former carriage houses are now private homes; a few are small businesses or other enterprises. On the street level of some is a Manhattan rarity: a personal garage.

The early apartment houses for the rich and famous created the template that apartment buildings of lesser note would copy later. Amenities intended to entice the wealthy to experiment in the brave new world of vertical living included:

- A large cadre of building employees, including uniformed doormen, porters, and maintenance staff
- Interior courtyards for the exclusive enjoyment of building residents
- Swimming pools, children’s playrooms, and other recreational facilities
- Sky-high rents (that’s correct; apartment ownership began much later), assuring neighbors of similar economic status

It didn’t take long to convince wealthy New Yorkers that apartment living was the way to go. By the 1920s and 1930s, they quickly filled the luxury high-rises popping up on Fifth and Park Avenues and becoming neighbors to the once isolated Dakota across town.

# July Tours

*These are walking tours. Most tours cover one to two miles and last 2 hours or a little longer. Cost is \$15 per person. Please arrive 10 minutes before the start time listed below. You don't need to preregister, but it would be nice to get an email ([lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com)) if you plan to attend. Tours are cancelled in severe weather; call or text 917-306-2868 if in doubt. Be sure to tell your friends about these tours.*

## **Featured tour: Mansions of Fifth Avenue**

About 100 years ago, the cream of New York society began to move to Fifth Avenue north of 59<sup>th</sup> Street. They built magnificent mansions, many of which are now museums and other cultural institutions. Before long, luxury apartment buildings — mansions in the sky — sprang up alongside the private homes. Hear stories about these great structures and the people who lived in them.



**Offered 3 times in July**

**Take advantage of the holiday weekend and long July evenings**

### **Meet:**

Fifth Avenue between 70<sup>th</sup> and 71<sup>st</sup> Streets, on the Central Park side (across from the Frick)

### **When:**

Mon, July 6 at 1:30

Sat, July 18 at 1:30

Thur, July 23 at 5:45

## **Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half**

Don't fret if you're stuck in the city on the holiday weekend. Escape to lush lawns, a rowboat-filled lake, and woodland trails right in your own back yard.

Begin the long Independence Day weekend exploring the popular southern half of Central Park. **Meet** on Friday, July 3, just outside the park on the northeast corner of 72<sup>nd</sup> Street and Central Park West at 1:30 PM.

## Parks of the East 90s

Most of my tours focus on parks, because I believe that they make New York so livable. Considering the East 90s as representative of residential areas throughout the city, we'll explore two neighborhoods: Yorkville and Carnegie Hill. You'll leave wanting to know more about the parks wherever you call home.

**Meet** at Carl Schurz Park, 86<sup>th</sup> Street and East End Avenue, at the benches on the right. This tour takes place on Sunday, July 26, at 1:30 PM.

JULY						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					3 CP South 1:30	
	6 Mansions 1:30					
						18 Mansions 1:30
				23 Mansions 5:45		
26 E 90s 1:30						

## Two Ways You Can Win a Free Tour!

### Question of the Month

Four sites on or slightly off Fifth Avenue between 72<sup>nd</sup> and 92<sup>nd</sup> Streets are associated with Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. The first person who emails me the names of all four sites wins a free tour, which can be taken any time within a year. The winner will be announced next month. If nobody comes up with the correct answer, the question may be used again. (HINT: Take the Mansions of Fifth Avenue tour, and you'll learn the answer.)

### Help Grow My Mail List

Do you know people who would like to receive this newsletter and take my tours? Please send me their email addresses (check with them first so I don't end up spamming), or have them email me and mention your name. When I have received four referrals from you of names not already on my list, you will receive a free tour, which can be taken any time within a year.

Send emails to [lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com)