

Tours and Tales of New York

September 2015

While studying for my New York City Sightseeing Guide license and preparing tours (which I hope you'll take with me!), I learned many fascinating stories about New York. I've created this monthly newsletter to share some of these stories with you. The newsletter also lists my planned tour schedule for the month. If you'd like to take a tour that is not listed here, please contact me at lewislaurie2rny@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

Where Has Our History Gone?

For an American city, New York goes quite far back, all the way to 1624, when Dutch settlers established the colony of New Amsterdam south of today's Wall Street. Forty years later, it fell under British rule and was renamed New York. Except for a brief return to Dutch hands, New York remained a British colony until the Revolutionary War.

Traces of our colonial history have all but disappeared from view. But look hard and you can find reminders of our earliest past: in street names, under the sidewalk, in reconstructions often mistaken for original structures, and in a few survivors from days long ago.

Let's look for our history near the southern tip of Manhattan, where it all began. In 1979, before a skyscraper went up at 85 Broad Street, the city, fearing that a bulldozer might destroy our irreplaceable past, ordered an archeological dig. Part of the land on which the new building would stand was the known site of the Dutch Stadt Huys, or City Hall. Although no remains of the Stadt Huys were found, the dig unearthed the foundation of an adjacent tavern dating from 1670, as well as a cistern from the 1700s. The ruins are now visible through the glass-covered sidewalk on Pearl Street near Coenties Slip.



The 1641 Stadt Huys, with the 1670 tavern on the left

Incidentally, these street names also reflect early New York. Before landfill extended the footprint of Manhattan, Pearl Street was on the water's edge. The street got its name because it was iridescent from the oysters abundant in the East River. The several "Slip" streets in this area were once boat slips in the busy harbor. And yes, there really once was a wall on Wall Street, built by the Dutch at the northern boundary of their settlement as protection against the British.

The wall, like so many other structures in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was made of wood, a highly flammable material. Most of New York's colonial past went up in smoke. A major conflagration, which took out 500 structures, occurred on September 21, 1776. Although the cause of the fire was never determined conclusively, the battling British and American patriots pointed the finger of blame at each other.

Fast forward to 1835. On a frigid December night—so cold that water froze in hoses and even in the East River—a gas line explosion ignited what became known as the Great Fire. More than 600 buildings in the major commercial and residential district centered around Hanover Square, including the last remnants of colonial times, burned to the ground.

The ~~Sou~~ Sole Survivor

St. Paul's Chapel, the oldest church building in Manhattan, is a miracle. In the 1776 fire, patriots manning a bucket brigade saved the 10-year-old church. (Trinity, the mother church a few blocks to the south, went up in flames.) The Great Fire of 1835 stopped short of St. Paul's. In the 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, just to the west, nearly everything in the area was damaged or destroyed, but not St. Paul's; it survived unharmed. It served for months as a relief and respite center for workers digging through the rubble of Ground Zero. Today, the church provides moving mementos of this modern-day mission, along with relics from George Washington's time.

Some structures in Lower Manhattan evoke the past while not actually being from the past. A case in point is the building commonly called Federal Hall, where an imposing statue of George Washington stands on the steps at the approximate location where the first President took the oath of office. But Washington did not stand on *these* steps. He was sworn in at a predecessor Federal Hall, which the current building replaced in 1842. That's why the official name of the building is the Federal Hall National Memorial.

At the end of the Revolutionary War, Commander-in-Chief Washington bid farewell to his officers during a banquet at Fraunces Tavern. Patrons at the present-day restaurant with the same name in the same location, at Broad and Pearl Streets, assume they are dining in the very same building. But they are actually enjoying a meal in a 1907 reconstruction.

Fraunces Tavern will never disappear the way so many structures in Manhattan go: to make room for skyscrapers. The entire block, which includes nineteenth-century commercial buildings, is an official historic district, meaning it cannot be altered. Although this block does not date back to the beginning of New York, it is a reminder of the low-profile skyline of our city's earlier life, right in the midst of giant towers.

September 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. If you don't know me, look for the bright patchwork bag I carry on tours. You don't need to preregister, but it would be nice to get an email (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: Hidden Treasures of the Financial District

Walking through the fast-paced canyons of Wall Street, you can easily overlook some gems in the area. Hidden in plain sight are relics of our city's early days, as well as patches of greenery and light that refresh employees of the frenetic Financial District. As you discover these treasures, you'll enjoy oft-forgotten stories of well-known area fixtures, including the New York Stock Exchange, the *Charging Bull* sculpture, and Bowling Green Park.



George Washington's statue (from behind) looks on the New York Stock Exchange

Enjoy one last chance for an after-work-hours tour, as well as weekend tours when the area is quiet.

Meet:

At Trinity Church (Broadway and Wall Street), near the red sculpture on the southern side

When:

Thurs, Sept 3 at 5:15 PM

Sun, Sept 13 at 1 PM

Sat, Sept 26 at 1 PM

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 in the popular southern half of Central Park.

Meet on Monday, September 7 (Labor Day), at 1 PM, just outside the park on the northeast corner of 72nd Street and Central Park West.

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. Enjoy stories about New York City landmarks, including the library, Grand Central Terminal, and the Chrysler Building. Discover parks where Midtown workers seek relief from high-pressure jobs. Visit architectural gems where greenery is as essential as masonry.

Meet on the northwest corner of 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue, in front of Bank of America. This tour takes place on Friday, September 18, at 1 PM.

SEPTEMBER						
Sun	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
				3 Financial District 5:15		
	7 CP South 1 PM					
13 Financial District 1 PM					18 42 nd St 1 PM	
						26 Financial District 1 PM

Two Ways You Can Win a Free Tour!

Question of the Month

New York's popular High Line is not the only park several stories up. The first person who emails me the name and location of a raised park in Lower Manhattan 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 tour Hidden Treasures of the Financial District to 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