

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

November 2016

Before winter sets in, join us to take a walk in New York. Our scheduled tours for November appear in this newsletter. If you don't see a tour you want when you want to take it, consider a custom tour. Use the contact form on our website, www.takeawalknewyork.com, or send an email to takeawalknewyork@gmail.com.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

An (Almost) Forgotten November Holiday

By Alan R. Cohen

There are two federal holidays in November: Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. This month also has some holidays that you probably don't know, like Universal Children's Day (November 20), established by the UN General Assembly in 1954. There are religious holidays, like All Saints Day (November 1), and even one that Al Capp created in a cartoon: Sadie Hawkins Day (November 13). Through 1919, New York City celebrated Evacuation Day on November 25, marking the day the British left the city at the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783.

After the British invasion of New York in the summer of 1776, the city's population swelled with British and Hessian soldiers and loyalists who had lived in surrounding communities. About one fourth of the city's houses had burned soon after the invasion, creating a major housing crisis. New Yorkers loyal to the crown were forced to house the new residents. Life was good only for the occupiers and a small number of locals. Many New Yorkers, including those who had signed oaths of allegiance to Britain, found life in the city harsh. All Americans were considered suspect. The occupying forces molested women and confiscated property and goods for the war effort.



John Van Arsdale raising the American flag after taking down the Union Jack

The British were fighting on two fronts, in North America and against the French and Spanish in Europe. Deciding to focus their attention on the European continent, the British Parliament voted in February 1782 to cease fighting the Americans and seek peace.

It took more than two years for the Americans and British to agree on the terms of peace. A major sticking point was the British promise to give freedom to enslaved people living in America who had volunteered to fight on their side. The Americans viewed this promise as a violation of their property rights. As peace negotiations continued, many loyalists realized that all property was at risk. They rushed to sell what they could and moved to Britain or Canada. About 30,000 people who had lived in New York City during the war left soon afterward.

A carefully choreographed retreat of the remaining British forces took place on November 25, 1783—Evacuation Day. In an act of spite, the British left a Union Jack flying at Fort George (now Castle Clinton) but removed the halyards and greased the pole. After several unsuccessful attempts to take down the Union Jack, a soldier named John Van Arsdale, with the aid of wooden cleats nailed to the flagpole, replaced the British flag with the American flag. General George Washington later bade farewell to his troops at the Fraunces Tavern. The Americans reclaimed not a jewel, but a severely misused city whose main advantage was its location.

What to Serve on Evacuation Day

Samuel Fraunces, the proprietor of the eponymous tavern on Pearl Street, was a patriot who fled the city after it fell to the British. He was captured in New Jersey and made a cook to a British general. Fraunces reportedly spied for the Americans during the occupation of New York City. After the war, Fraunces joined President Washington's household staff in New York and then in Philadelphia.

Many items on a 1783 menu at the Fraunces Tavern are familiar to us today, like roasts and chops. A few offerings, however, are no longer in style. For example, syllabub is a sweet, alcoholic, layered, frothy concoction (similar to the layers of cappuccino), made with milk or cream, sugar, and either wine or cider to curdle the milk. A popular dessert of the time was blancmange. This all-white, molded dish is essentially vanilla pudding, often flavored with almond.

Celebrations of Evacuation Day in New York, a city that suffered greatly under British occupation, were once major annual events. Over time, especially with the aging of veterans who had fought the British, support for the holiday waned. When President Lincoln officially made Thanksgiving a national holiday to be observed on the last Thursday in November, Evacuation Day celebrations were overshadowed. The last mayorally sanctioned Evacuation Day observance was in 1919, at a time when Great Britain and the U.S. were allies.

But Evacuation Day is not completely forgotten. The Fraunces Tavern Museum, on the site where Washington entertained his troops for the last time, holds a walking tour and special dinner to commemorate the events of 1783. There have also been attempts to rename part of the Bowling Green area in honor of Evacuation Day, but support in the City Council has not been sufficient to make this happen.

An aside: Don't forget Election Day, perhaps the most important November day of all!

November Tours

Most Take a Walk New York tours cover 1 to 2 miles, last 2 to 2½ hours, and cost \$15 per person. Advance registration is required. To register and to learn the meeting place, please email the guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net). Please arrive a little before the start time. Tours are cancelled if nobody has registered or if the weather is extreme; call or text Laurie (917-306-2868) or Alan (917-363-4292) if in doubt.

Central Park: Marvels of the Northern Half

The trees are late to change color this year, so let's try again for a fall foliage tour. The northern end of Central Park features some of the city's best landscapes. The trees at the Pool dazzle the eye in the autumn. The Korean chrysanthemums at Conservatory Garden are also a must-see.

Laurie offers this tour on **Saturday, November 5, at 11 AM**. If you're in town for the New York City Marathon, this is a great way to prep, as the tour includes slightly challenging terrain. Email Laurie (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to reserve a spot and to learn where to meet.

400 Years of History in Less Than a Mile

Lower Broadway is like an illustrated history textbook, with the pages out of order. This stretch of Manhattan illustrates American history from colonial times to the 21st century. Take a walk in the footsteps of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. See beautiful buildings, including the very first department store, and hear stories of heroes and rogues like William "Boss" Tweed.

Alan is offering this tour on **Saturday, November 12, at 11 AM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, please email him at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Fort Tryon Park

Built on a high ridge with commanding views of the Hudson River and New Jersey Palisades, Fort Tryon Park features all-season gardens, lush lawns, and dramatic rock formations. The site also has a fascinating history dating way back before this area was the lovely park it is today.

Alan offers this tour, which is about 1½ hours long and ends at but does not include the Cloisters Museum, on **Sunday, November 13, at 1 PM**. The route includes inclines and stairs. To book the tour and to learn the meeting place, email Alan at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Greenwich Village: In the Footsteps of Writers

Many writers and other creative people have called Greenwich Village home. On this tour, you'll meander through charming Village streets and peek into hidden cul-de-sacs as you learn where some famous writers lived and passed the time with friends. Take a walk in the footsteps of Edna St. Vincent Millay, e.e. cummings, Eugene O'Neill, Edward Albee, and other literary greats, and maybe the Village aura will spark your own creativity!

Laurie gives this tour on **Saturday, November 19, at 1 PM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, email her at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

Mansions of Fifth Avenue

Some magnificent mansions built about a hundred years ago still grace Fifth Avenue, standing side by side with luxury apartment buildings—mansions in the sky. Hear about these palatial homes and the people who lived in them—New York City's own rich and famous.

Laurie is giving this tour on **Sunday, November 20, at 1 PM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, email her at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

| NOVEMBER | | | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|--|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat |
| | | | | | | 5 Central Park N 11 AM |
| | | | | | | 12 400 Years of History 11 AM |
| 13 Ft Tryon 1 PM | | | | | | 19 Greenwich Village 1 PM |
| 20 Mansions 1 PM | | | | | | |
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Laurie's tours in green Alan's tours in blue

Please contact the tour guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve a space and to learn the starting location.