

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

February 2016

We have exciting news this month. Our new website, www.takeawalknewyork.com, is now up and running. Check it out to see descriptions of all the tours we offer as well as an expanded schedule and to access past issues of this newsletter.

*We're introducing a new series this month, called *On This Corner*. Taking half an hour or less, these living history lessons focus on buildings and events in a specific location and involve little walking, making them a good way to enjoy New York in the winter. *On This Corner* tours are always offered on a pay-what-you-want basis, as are all of our tours this winter.*

Presidential Moments in New York City

By Laurie Lewis

All eyes turn to presidents this month. The first votes of the 2016 election cycle will be cast before the nation honors past presidents on February 15. So it seems fitting that we recall historic events in presidential elections that occurred here in New York and reflect on their current significance.

On February 4, 1789, the Electoral College unanimously elected George Washington as the nation's first president. Unlike some contenders in today's crowded races, Washington doubted his ability to handle the job. But he accepted the call to serve. On April 30, Washington stepped onto the balcony of Federal Hall, at the intersection of Wall and Broad Streets in Manhattan, and repeated the oath of office. A statue of Washington by the sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward stands on the very spot where the Father of Our Country became our first president.

Washington's birthday was February 22. In 1968 Congress changed the date, or rather the day it is celebrated, by creating a new federal holiday called Presidents' Day, to be observed on the third Monday in February. Abraham Lincoln, born on February 12, 1809, is also honored on that day.



Statue of George Washington on the steps of Federal Hall National Memorial, which replaced the building called Federal Hall where the first president was sworn in

Washington didn't have to campaign for his presidency, but Lincoln sure did. Relatively unknown on the national level, the Illinois lawyer took an opportunity to impress Republican voters with an address at Manhattan's Cooper Union on February 27, 1860. The speech, about regulation of slavery by the federal government, famously concluded: "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

Earlier that day, Lincoln posed for photographer Matthew Brady. The photo of the beardless young man was replicated in newspapers and magazines and often paired with reports of the rousing Cooper Union address. The man who would become the sixteenth president of the United States seemed to know that in campaign politics the ultimate winner must not only sound presidential but also look presidential.

The Home of the Only NYC-Born President

Only one of the 44 U.S. presidents was born and raised in New York City: Theodore Roosevelt. He was born on October 27, 1858, in the family's townhouse at 28 East 20th Street. The family moved 14 years later.

The home where "Teddy" was born was razed in 1916. A few months after the former president died in 1919, the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association bought the building that replaced his childhood home as well as the house next door, which had been owned by Roosevelt's uncle. Both buildings were leveled and replaced by a new structure that replicates the way the home would have looked when the future president lived there. Much of the furniture comes from the Roosevelt family.

The Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site, as the museum home is now called, is operated by the National Park Service. It is temporarily closed for renovation but should reopen later this year.

In the twentieth century, the need to look and sound presidential took on greater importance with the televised broadcast of presidential debates. The first such debates were between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon in the 1960 campaign. The younger, more charismatic Kennedy put his sweating, camera-wary opponent to shame before the television audience. For the third debate, the opponents weren't even in the same city. The magic of television enabled Nixon to remain in his comfort zone in California, while Kennedy spoke from a studio here in New York.

New York City is likely to have some interesting presidential moments in the current election cycle. Three leading contenders have ties to the city. Although usually associated with Vermont, Bernie Sanders was born and raised in Brooklyn. Hillary Clinton lives in the metropolitan area, and her husband Bill opened an office in Harlem to much fanfare after his presidential term ended. And Donald Trump...well, what can be said of a man whose name appears on so much prime Manhattan real estate?

February Tours

Most Take a Walk New York tours cover 1-2 miles and last 2-2½ hours. The cost usually is \$15 per person. However, during winter months, when weather may create obstacles to enjoyment of a walking tour, we are instituting a pay-what-you-want policy. Advance registration is required.

A new tour series of Take a Walk New York is called On This Corner. These short outings, only 20- 30 minutes, involve little walking and focus on buildings and events at a specific location. If you can wait for a bus or el train in the cold, you'll enjoy an On This Corner tour this winter.

Please email the guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to register and to learn the meeting place of the tour you would like to take. So that punctual tour-takers (and the guide!) don't wait needlessly in the cold, plan to 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.

NEW! On This Corner: Astor Place

Today a busy street in the East Village near New York University, in the mid-nineteenth century the area around Astor Place was home to wealthy citizens and their cultural institutions. It was also the scene of a riot by, of all people, theater-goers! And in a nearby building included on this tour, Abraham Lincoln delivered a speech that propelled him to victory in the presidential race.

Laurie gives this brief tour on the anniversaries of Lincoln's birth (**Friday, February 12, at 1 PM**) and of his famous speech (**Saturday, February 27, at 1 PM**), and also on Presidents' Day (**Monday, February 15, at 3 PM**). Email her (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to reserve a space and to learn the exact meeting place. If you think you can guess it from this description, think again! Several streets come together in this area, and a construction project adds to confusion.

NEW! On This Corner: Wall Street

Synonymous with the financial industry, Wall Street had its roots in colonial America. Learn the early history of the Street and its famous buildings, and discover why Washington's statue looms large here. You'll also hear stories of change and of terrorism in the past 150 years or so.

Laurie gives this 30-minute-or-less tour on Presidents' Day (**Monday, February 15**) and on Washington's birthday (**Monday, February 22**). Both tours are at **1 PM**. Please email her (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to reserve a space and to learn the exact meeting place.

Public Art of Lower Manhattan

You don't need to go to a museum to see great art. This interactive tour includes some of the most interesting and varied art in New York City. The art works are as old as the doors of Trinity Church and as new as the SeaGlass Carousel. Tell us what you like most about this public art.

Alan gives this tour on **Saturday, February 20, at 11 AM**. Email him (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve your space and to learn the meeting location.

Brooklyn Heights

The nation's first suburb, Brooklyn Heights is notable for beautiful architecture and magnificent views of New York Harbor. Learn how this area developed in the nineteenth century, and see some of the twentieth century highlights. Walk along brownstone-lined residential streets, and stop by Plymouth Church, where Henry Ward Beecher mesmerized throngs of worshippers with his famous oration skills. Visit the site of a former brothel, the home where Truman Capote wrote *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and a setting for *Moonstruck*. Enjoy views of bridges connecting Brooklyn and Manhattan, as well as the hip area known as DUMBO.

Alan gives this tour on **Sunday, February 28, at 11 AM**. Email him (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve your space and to learn the meeting location.

| F E B R U A R Y | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----|-----|------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat |
| | | | | | 12 Astor Pl 1 PM | |
| | 15 Wall St 1 PM Astor Pl 3 PM | | | | | 20 Art 11 AM |
| | 22 Wall St 1 PM | | | | | 27 Astor Pl 1 PM |
| 28 Brooklyn 11 AM | | | | | | |

Laurie's tours in green Alan's tours in blue

Contact the tour guide (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve a space and to learn the starting location.