

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

May 2016

Our tours this month begin with Jane's Walk. Each of us will lead one of these free walks. To learn more about the woman this global event honors, read the story below.

We hope you'll join us on a tour this month. If you don't see one you'd like at a time you want it, contact us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com about a custom tour.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

Jane Jacobs: A Unique Urban Activist

By Alan R. Cohen

Jane Jacobs (1916–2006) was a writer, urbanist, and activist whose ideas about urban renewal some critics once discounted as folksy “home remedies.” Jacobs believed in the uniqueness of urban districts and the need to plan their rehabilitation by first observing how people used the streets. Her ideas ran counter to the orthodox approach of urban planners in the mid-20th century, which was to wipe a district clean of substandard buildings and then to erect tall, modern ones in park-like settings. Today, Jacobs’ bottom-up approach is a basis for how planning should be done.



Jane’s Walk, a movement started in 2007 in Toronto, Canada, honors Jane Jacobs. The event is a worldwide appreciation of neighborhoods. Jane Jacobs may not be known to everyone who loves vibrant cities, but she should be.

A native of Scranton, Pennsylvania, Jacobs began to write for a local newspaper, moved to New York City and wrote for national journals, and struggled to find the time to write books. While her passion was writing, she could not shy away from efforts to save “slums” from destruction. Jacobs helped to mobilize her West Greenwich Village neighborhood to resist its demise. She joined and helped steer the fight to stop Robert Moses’ Lower Manhattan Expressway and other projects. When she moved with her family to Canada to protest the war in Vietnam (and to keep her sons from being drafted), she joined the preservation battle in her new neighborhood in Toronto.

The major urban planners of the 20th century, like Robert Moses, Le Corbusier, and Edmund Bacon, focused on housing, transportation, and large public places. They evoked theories of what should work. Jane Jacobs focused on the street level, basing her ideas on observations. She concluded that for a district or neighborhood to be vibrant, it must have the following traits:

1. Serve more than one function, ideally more than two. People must be present throughout the day (e.g., dog walkers, shoppers, diners, children playing).
2. Have short blocks, creating frequent opportunities to turn corners. People would feel safer and find the options interesting.
3. Have a mix of buildings that vary in age and condition, including enough with low rents to allow small businesses and newcomers to thrive.
4. Be densely populated. Density allows for specialized, unique stores.

In Her Own Words

Jane Jacobs explaining that money was not the solution to urban ills:

Look at what we have built with the first billions: Low-income projects that become worse centers of delinquency, vandalism and general social hopelessness than the slums they were supposed to replace. Middle-income housing projects which are truly marvels of dullness and regimentation, sealed against any buoyancy or vitality of city life. Luxury housing projects that mitigate their inanity, or try to, with a vapid vulgarity. Cultural centers that are unable to support a good bookstore. Civic centers that are avoided by everyone but bums, who have fewer choices of loitering places than others. Commercial centers that are lackluster imitations of standardized suburban chain-store shopping. Promenades that go from no place to nowhere and have no promenaders. Expressways that eviscerate great cities. This is not the rebuilding of cities. This is the sacking of cities.

*From *The Death and Life of Great American Cities**

Jane Jacobs understood that a vibrant downtown with mixed use is an attractive place to work, live, and visit for recreation. The cure for urban ills was not “slum clearance,” which also erased the stores and a sense of community. Nor were expressways, designed to speed people to and from their suburban homes, a boon. Rather, careful study would reveal what made a particular community work. Then existing structures could be improved to make them more livable. Streets had to have enough attractions, like stores and small parks, to guarantee varied use throughout the day.

In the 2006 *New York Times* obituary, Douglas Martin wrote that Jacobs “became a beloved intellectual pioneer characterized by a dumpling face, sneakers, an impish smile, bangs and owlish glasses.” In her later years, she may have looked like a “sweet old lady.” But you’d be a fool to underestimate her resourcefulness, tenacity, and willingness to take on a fight.

May Tours

Jane's Walk—May 6, 7, and 8

Jane's Walk is a global event held annually the first weekend in May. In New York, more than 200 free walks will explore all five boroughs over the course of the three days (Friday through Sunday). For the complete schedule, see <http://janeswalk.org/united-states/new-york-city-ny>.

Below are descriptions of the walks we are leading. You don't need to register; just show up at the meeting place. We hope you'll join us on these FREE Jane's Walks.

Green Spaces and Great Places on 42nd Street

A Jane's Walk led by Laurie Lewis on Friday, May 6, at 1 PM (approx. 2½ hrs)

Meet at the northwest corner of 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue in front of Bank of America

Laurie will lead a Jane's Walk that explores 42nd Street from Sixth Avenue all the way to the East River. This busy commercial area has wonderful parks, some almost unknown, and iconic buildings, including Grand Central and the Chrysler Building.

Central Park at Night

A Jane's Walk led by Deborah Harley on Saturday, May 7, at 8:30 PM (approx. 1½ hrs)

Meet on Fifth Avenue between 59th and 60th Streets, in front of the statue of General Sherman

With Deborah as a guide, enjoy the serenity, the ethereal lights, the activity of nocturnal animals, and the company of other brave souls as you experience the mystery and magic of Central Park at night. Please bring a light; cell phones are perfect.

Preservation and Change in Washington Heights

A Jane's Walk led by Alan Cohen on Sunday, May 8, at 12 noon (approx. 2 hrs)

Meet at W 167th Street between Broadway and St. Nicholas, at the World War I memorial statue

Alan will introduce you to this neighborhood where the desire to preserve the past often clashes with present and future needs. At the end, 20 registrants (first come, first served) may take a docent-led tour of the Morris–Jumel Mansion (\$5 contribution, reduced from the usual \$10).

Our Other Scheduled Tours

Most Take a Walk New York tours cover 1 to 2 miles and last 2 to 2½ hours. The cost usually is \$15 per person. Read the descriptions below for exceptions.

Advance registration is required. Please email the guide (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to register and to learn the meeting place of the tour you would like to take. Plan to arrive a little before the start time so we can begin promptly. 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.

Fort Tryon Park

It's no wonder John D. Rockefeller, Jr., wanted to build a park on this high ridge, with its commanding views of the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades! Designed by Frederick Olmsted, Jr. (son of the Central Park designer), Fort Tryon Park features all-season gardens, lush lawns, and dramatic rock formations. In addition to its beauty, the site has a fascinating history.

Alan leads this 1½-hour walk on **Friday, May 13**, at **10 AM**. It involves steep inclines and stairs. The tour ends at the Cloisters Museum, so you might want to visit there afterward. Email Alan (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve a space and to learn the meeting place.

Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half

The popular southern half of Central Park has some of the most filmed and photographed scenes of New York, including Strawberry Fields, the Sheep Meadow, Bethesda Terrace, and the Ramble. You may think you know the park, but you'll learn so much more on this walk.

Join Laurie on **Saturday, May 14**, at **1 PM** for a walk through the southern half of Central Park. This tour covers a lot of ground and involves some stairs and climbing. Please email Laurie (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com) to register and to learn the meeting location.

Parks of the East 90s

New York City boasts many neighborhood parks. They are as different as the communities they serve, as you'll see on a walk through two adjacent neighborhoods, Yorkville and Carnegie Hill.

Join Laurie on **Saturday, May 21**, at **1 PM** to explore the parks of the East 90s. Email her (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com) to reserve a spot and to learn the meeting location.

Public Art of Lower Manhattan

You don't need to go to a museum to see great art. New York has a lot of outdoor public art, and it's available to enjoy at any time. Explore public art on this interactive tour in Lower Manhattan.

Alan offers this tour on **Sunday, May 22**, at **11 AM**. Email him (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to make a reservation and to learn the meeting place.

Hidden Treasures of the Financial District

Walking through the canyons of Wall Street, you can easily miss some gems hidden in plain sight. Discover these secrets, and you'll see why the Financial District isn't just about stocks.

Laurie gives this tour on Memorial Day, **Monday, May 30**, at **1 PM**. Email her (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com) to reserve a place on the tour and to learn the meeting location.

M A Y						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
					6 Jane's Walk 42 nd St 1 PM	7 Jane's Walk Central Park 8:30 PM
8 Jane's Walk Wash Heights 12 noon					13 Ft Tryon 10 AM	14 CP South 1 PM
						21 E 90s 1 PM
22 Public Art 11 AM						
	30 Financial District 1 PM					

Green: Laurie's tours Brown: Deb's tour Blue: Alan's tours

Contact the tour guide (lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com, धारले@moonsspray.com, or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to register for a tour and to learn the starting point.

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