

# Tours and Tales of New York

*An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York*

August 2016

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*We're hoping August won't be as hot and humid as July was so that walking tours are more enjoyable. You'll find our scheduled tours in this newsletter. We also offer custom tours. Use the contact form on our website, [www.takeawalknewyork.com](http://www.takeawalknewyork.com), to inquire about a custom tour, send an email to [takeawalknewyork@gmail.com](mailto:takeawalknewyork@gmail.com), or contact one of us personally; our individual contact information appears on page 3 of this newsletter.*

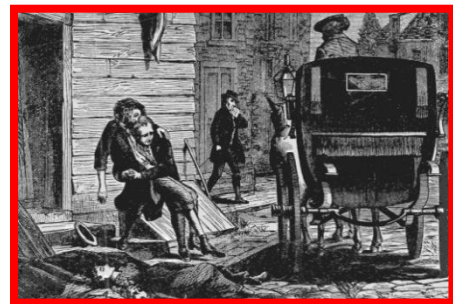
*Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley*

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## Sickly Summers in the City

By Laurie Lewis

Summer has often been an unhealthy time in New York. Deadly yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox epidemics plagued New York from the early 1700s. Although vaccines and public health measures have contained many infectious diseases that used to sicken New Yorkers on a regular basis, fears of new illnesses keep us ever-alert. Think of last summer's outbreaks of Legionnaire's disease and modern mosquito-borne threats: West Nile virus and Zika virus.



Dealing with the yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia, 1793

Physicians in the late eighteenth century were woefully ignorant about the causes and prevention of illness. A common belief was that sickness was a punishment for sin, and fasting and prayer could prevent disease. It is thus amazing that when yellow fever literally decimated Philadelphia in 1793, killing one of every 10 residents, decisive action prevented a similar fate in New York. Bellevue Hospital was built on the East River, far north of the city at the time, specifically to quarantine patients with yellow fever. It first did so in the summer of 1795.

The yellow fever epidemic of 1822 was responsible for a major extension of the city's northern border. Wealthy and healthy residents fled to the rural village of Greenwich. Before long this thriving new residential area of New York City became known as Greenwich Village.

Cholera made its New York debut in the summer of 1832, claiming 3,500 lives within two months. Subsequent cholera epidemics occurred in 1849 and 1866. The disease was most prevalent in poor neighborhoods with bad sanitation. The city's Metropolitan Board of Health, formed just months before the 1866 outbreak, oversaw vigorous street cleaning, which helped to keep disease in check. Despite huge growth in the city's population, only 1,400 died of cholera.

Like cholera, typhoid fever is not strictly a seasonal disease, and it too is related to poor sanitation. Given the crowded, unclean living conditions in rapidly growing New York in the mid- to late-1800s, it is not surprising that typhoid hit the poor neighborhoods as waste built up in the streets. The disease also can spread through food handled by an infected person, even one who is the picture of health. The most famous example is New York's own Typhoid Mary.

### **Is the Cook Really Healthy?**

Mary Mallon was happy to spend the summer of 1906 as a cook for the Warren family—until almost half the household developed typhoid fever. This wasn't the first time typhoid hit families where she worked, yet Mary herself was as healthy as could be.

Or so it seemed. It turned out she was an asymptomatic carrier of the bacteria that cause typhoid. Mary was hospitalized in isolation on North Brother Island near the Bronx for three years. She was released only when she promised that she would no longer work as a cook and that she would wash her hands often, a habit she admitted she hadn't practiced in the past.

Within a few years, "Typhoid Mary" went back to her old ways. Everywhere she worked as a cook, typhoid fever broke out. She then would quickly disappear, often changing her name so she could not be easily tracked. After five years of freedom, though, she was apprehended and returned to North Brother Island, where she lived out the remaining 23 years of her life in quarantine.

The first polio epidemic in the city was in the summer of 1916. More than 9,000 people became ill, and 2,343 died. Polio epidemics made repeated appearances for many years, peaking in the 1940s through mid-1950s, when the first polio vaccine became available. In the pre-vaccine era, the official response was quarantine of patients and families. The unofficial response was panic. Fear shut down crowded gathering places like swimming pools and air-cooled movie theaters and kept youngsters, who were hit hardest by polio, isolated at home.

The most famous victim of the disease, of course, was not a child but the future president of the United States. Franklin D. Roosevelt became ill with polio in August 1921. How fitting that in 1939 a hospital for survivors of polio and other chronic diseases was built on a strip of land in the East River that was then called Welfare Island but today is known as Roosevelt Island.

# August 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. But read the descriptions below for exceptions. Advance registration is required. To register and learn the meeting place, please email the guide ([lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com), [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net), or [धारley@moonspray.com](mailto:धारley@moonspray.com)). 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), Alan (917-363-4292), or Deborah (347-620-2128) if in doubt.*

## The Romantic Park

Central Park was designed to reflect mid-nineteenth century spiritual and political aspirations—a movement called Romanticism. See how the park continues to embody this idealism as we explore the Sheep Meadow, the Mall, Bethesda Terrace, Bow Bridge, and the Ramble.

Deborah gives this tour on **Saturday, August 6, at 2 PM**. Email her ([धारley@moonspray.com](mailto:धारley@moonspray.com)) to reserve a space and to learn where to meet. This tour is offered on a pay-what-you-want basis.

## Central Park: Marvels of the Northern Half

In the lesser-known northern end of Central Park, discover charming bodies of water and a secret garden, and take a hike in the woods. You won't believe you're in the middle of Manhattan!

Escape the heat by taking a walk with Laurie in the northern part of Central Park on **Sunday, August 7, at 1 PM**. Email her ([lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com)) to learn the meeting place. Notes: The tour includes inclines, steep steps, and woodchip trails. You might want to linger in this area of the park for the free concert (Trio Caliente) along the Harlem Meer.

## 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 buildings and the people who lived in them—New York City's own rich and famous.

Laurie gives this tour on **Saturday, August 13, at 1 PM**. To reserve your space and learn the meeting location, email her at [lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com).

## 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 1 hour long and ends at but does not include the Cloisters Museum, on **Sunday, August 14, at 11 AM**. Please come only if you can handle inclines and stairs. To book the tour and learn the meeting place, email Alan at [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net).

## Brooklyn Heights

The nation's first suburb, Brooklyn Heights is notable for beautiful architecture and magnificent views of New York Harbor. As you walk along brownstone-lined residential streets, learn how this area developed in the nineteenth century, and see some of the twentieth century highlights.

Alan gives this tour on **Sunday, August 21, at 11 AM**. Email him ([alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net)) to reserve your space and to learn the meeting location.

AUGUST						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						6 Romantic Park 2 PM
7 Central Park North 1 PM						13 Mansions of Fifth Ave 1 PM
14 Ft Tryon 11 AM						
21 Brooklyn Heights 11 AM						

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

Please contact the tour guide ([dharley@moonspray.com](mailto:dharley@moonspray.com), [lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com), or [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net)) to reserve a space and to learn the starting location.