

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

September 2016

After a miserably hot and humid summer, we are looking forward to autumn, when long walks through the city should be more enjoyable. You'll find our scheduled tours for September in this newsletter. If you don't see a tour you want when you want to take it, please inquire about a custom tour. Use the contact form on our website, www.takeawalknewyork.com, or send an email to takeawalknewyork@gmail.com. We hope to see you on a tour!

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

The Nation's First Labor Day Celebration

By Laurie Lewis

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the United States was in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. Workers in a wide variety of industries were contributing to America's growth and reshaping the nation's future. But employers sometimes failed to recognize their value and treated them poorly. As a result, workers formed unions to protest their plight and to demand higher pay and improved working conditions.



First Labor Day parade, Union Square

In January 1882, labor groups in the New York area formed a federation called the Central Labor Union. The idea of diverse unions coming together to lobby, protest, and strike for the benefit of workers caught on quickly. By August, the Central Labor Union consisted of 56 unions representing 80,000 workers.

Backtrack a few months. At a Central Labor Union meeting in May, a proposal was made for a huge festival, featuring a parade and a picnic, to celebrate workers. Some accounts attribute the idea to Peter J. McGuire, general secretary of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners and a cofounder, in the near future, of the American Federation of Labor. Other reports that are just as reputable indicate that Matthew Maguire, a machinist affiliated with the Knights of Labor and secretary of the Central Labor Union at the time, proposed the festive day.

The appointed day, Tuesday, September 5, 1882, was brutally hot. Perhaps that was why the initial turnout was so low. More likely, worried organizers thought, workers were reluctant to lose a day's pay or feared being fired for participating in festivities celebrating labor. Only about 400 workers, at most, had gathered at City Hall Park when the parade kicked off at 10 AM.

The marchers started up Broadway, outnumbered by jeering spectators lining the parade route. But the ranks swelled as more and more union groups joined along the way. The jeers of the onlookers turned to cheers. This was not a protest march but a peaceful demonstration of solidarity and appreciation for work, no matter how unglamorous. By the halfway point, the reviewing stand at Union Square, 10,000 workers representing such diverse trades as bricklayers, typographers, and jewelers marched proudly in formation. They continued north to 42nd Street and Sixth Avenue, where they boarded transportation to the picnic grounds on West 92nd Street. There 25,000 workers and their families ate, drank, and listened to music and speeches.

The Unlikely Origin of "Union Square"

One might think that Union Square got its name because it was a focal point of the first Labor Day march and other mass gatherings by unions. However, the name goes back much further than any union activity.

The two main thoroughfares in old New York were called Bloomingdale and Bowery. At the odd angle where these roads met, the 1811 grid imposed more streets. A public plaza replaced the hodgepodge of intersecting streets. It was called Union Square, because it marked the union of Bloomingdale Road (now Broadway) and Bowery (which goes by different names along its length, including Fourth Avenue and Park Avenue South).

The first Labor Day celebration was so successful that the Central Labor Union held a repeat performance the next year. A group of African-American workers marched in the third annual Labor Day parade, on the first Monday in September. Women joined in the 1885 parade.

By then, other American cities were holding their own Labor Day parades. Then states began to create a Labor Day holiday. Oregon passed the first Labor Day law in February 1887, followed the same year by New York, Colorado, Massachusetts, and New Jersey. More and more states then declared a holiday honoring workers. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland signed a bill making the first Monday in September the national holiday of Labor Day.

Labor Day continues to be observed, although the celebration has changed over the years. Taking advantage of the last long summer weekend, Americans are often too preoccupied to observe a holiday celebrating workers. To assure a good turnout, local officials sometimes change the date of their Labor Day parade. In New York City, the birthplace of Labor Day, the 2016 parade will take place on Saturday, September 10, the weekend after Labor Day.

September 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 (lewislaurie2nyc@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.

Hidden Treasures of the Financial District

Walking through the canyons of Wall Street, you can easily miss some gems hidden in plain sight, including relics of colonial times and park-like oases. Discover these secrets, and you'll see why the Financial District has a lot more going for it than stock trades and megadeals.

Laurie gives this tour on **Saturday, September 10, at 1 PM**. To reserve a place on the tour and to learn the meeting location, email her at 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 1½ hours long and ends at but does not include the Cloisters Museum, on **Thursday, September 15, at 11 AM**. The route includes inclines and stairs. To book the tour and to learn the meeting place, email Alan at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Green Spaces and Great Places on 42nd Street

Walking from Bryant Park all the way to the East River, you'll discover parks among iconic buildings, including Grand Central and the Chrysler Building. This tour will change your opinion of 42nd Street forever. It's not for tourists only!

Laurie leads this walk on **Friday, September 16, at 1 PM**. To reserve a space and to learn the exact meeting place, email her at lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com.

Lower Washington Heights

Washington Heights is a microcosm of New York, steeped in history from the American Revolution to the assassination of Malcolm X and beyond. The vibrant residential neighborhood boasts beautiful brownstones, a brick-lined street with three-story wood-frame homes, and the oldest house in Manhattan. There's even a Hamilton connection here!

Alan offers this tour on **Thursday, September 22, at 11 AM**. Please send him an email (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) to reserve your space and to learn the meeting location.

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 **Sunday, September 25, at 1 PM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, email her at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

SEPTEMBER						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						10 Financial District 1 PM
				15 Ft Tryon 11 AM	16 42 nd St 1 PM	
				22 Washington Heights 11 AM		
25 Mansions 1 PM						
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.						