

# Tours and Tales of New York

*An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York*

November 2017

---

*Autumn is often the best time to take tours; it's neither sweltering hot nor freezing cold. Please join us this month to take a walk in New York. We are offering two brief outings related to the story below—about elevators—as well as more chances to view spectacular fall colors. Of course, you'll always learn about the history of New York and its residents on our walking tours.*

*We are redesigning our website and hope it will be ready soon. In the meantime, if you want to get in touch with us, please email us at [takeawalknewyork@gmail.com](mailto:takeawalknewyork@gmail.com).*

*Are you're starting to think ahead to the holiday season? Consider a unique gift for someone who loves New York: a custom tour from Take a Walk New York. Email us to discuss ideas.*

*Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley*

---

## Going Up!

By Laurie Lewis

Some 70,000 elevators whisk people to their apartments, offices, and leisure-time activities in this vertical city. At one time, though, elevators, while convenient to hoist large and heavy objects, were considered unfit to transport living beings. What if the ropes or pulleys broke? The passengers likely would plunge to their deaths.

That fear lessened after an American inventor, Elisha Otis, demonstrated his elevator safety brake at the Crystal Palace Exposition of 1853, held in the area that is today Bryant Park. Before anxious spectators, Otis mounted a platform near the top of Latting Observatory, which at 315 feet was the tallest structure in New York City. He signaled to an assistant to cut the connected cable. The crowd gasped as he started to descend—then stopped almost immediately!



Latting Observatory, 1853

Within a few years of the demo, the safety brake was put to use. In 1857, china and glassware merchant E. V. Haughwout opened a five-floor store on Broadway and Broome Street. Crowds flocked to the store—not to make a purchase, but to ride the world’s first passenger elevator.

While the Haughwout Building had the first elevator, the first shaft for a passenger elevator was at Cooper Union, the free institute of higher education founded by industrialist Peter Cooper less than a mile to the north. When he commissioned the building in 1853, Cooper assumed that elevators would be *de rigueur* by the time construction was complete, and he had the architects include a round elevator shaft. He guessed correctly about the desire for elevators but was wrong about their shape. Otis elevators always have been rectangular, although a special one was made to fit the round Cooper Union shaft. It is still in use.

### What Cooper Union and Haughwout Have in Common

The Cooper Union and Haughwout buildings were pioneers in the other element, besides elevators, essential for skyscrapers: a metal framework. Railroad inventor Peter Cooper used iron beams he had created for train tracks to support the masonry in his educational institution. In the Haughwout building, iron was not superimposed on the façade, as was typical in the emerging cast-iron architectural style, but was part of the structural frame, helping to support the weight of the corner-lot building.

Both buildings also have a connection with Abraham Lincoln. The aspiring presidential candidate delivered his famous “Right Makes Might” address in Cooper Union’s Great Hall. After the election, First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln ordered china for the White House at Haughwout.

Both landmarked buildings, erected in the 1850s, are still standing. They are dwarfed by nearby skyscrapers—structures made possible by the elevator and structural metal “firsts” of the Haughwout and Cooper Union buildings.

Elevators made their office-building debut in 1870, when the Equitable Life Assurance Company installed several in its new eight-story headquarters on Lower Broadway. The challenge was finding tenants willing to take their chance on the top floor. It would be a long climb up if the elevators were out of service and a fast, potentially fatal trip down if the mechanism failed.

The human touch, literally, helped early vertical riders feel safe. Elevator operators opened and closed the doors and brought the cars to a stop exactly level with the floor.

When elevator operators went on a five-day strike in 1945, life in the city froze. By then, New York was a high-rise city, with elevators an essential feature of apartment buildings as well as offices and stores. After the strike, building owners fearful of another walkout opted more often for automatic elevators, where passengers could push a button and arrive safely at their floor. But a friendly elevator operator still greets passengers in some office buildings, apartment houses, and public venues in a city that keeps going up and up.

# November Tours

*Most Take a Walk New York tours cover 1 to 2 miles, last 2 to 2½ hours, and cost \$25 per person. Advance registration is required. To register and to learn the meeting place, email the guide ([lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com) or [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto: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; if in doubt, call or text Laurie (917-306-2868) or Alan (917-363-4292).*

## Central Park: Marvels of the Northern Half

Trees seem to be late changing color this year, so take advantage of this opportunity to discover one of the best places for fall foliage in Manhattan: the northern end of Central Park, especially the Pool landscape. Take a hike in the woods here, and you'll feel as though you've left the city. Visit New York's own Secret Garden, which should still be glorious with daisy-like Korean chrysanthemums. If history rather than nature is your thing, fear not. You'll learn about the role this area played in early American wars.

Join Alan on **Wednesday, November 8, at 11 AM** to explore the northern part of Central Park. To reserve a spot and to learn where to meet, email him at [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net).

## Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half

We never get enough of Central Park! In the southern half of the park, you'll recognize some of the most filmed and photographed sights in New York, including Strawberry Fields, the Sheep Meadow, and Bethesda Terrace. Enjoy the scenic Lake and the Ramble too. There should still be fall colors to make your visit to this popular destination extra special.

Join Laurie to explore the southern half of Central Park on **Friday, November 10, at 1 PM**. Email her ([lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com)) to register and to learn the meeting location.

If you can't make one of our scheduled tours, consider a custom tour. Please email us at [takeawalknewyork@gmail.com](mailto:takeawalknewyork@gmail.com) to tell us what you would like for your personalized walking tour of New York City.

## Greenwich Village: In the Footsteps of Writers

Take a walk through the western part of Greenwich Village, which has been home to many writers and other creative people. Meander through charming Village streets and peek into hidden cul-de-sacs as you learn where some famous writers, such as Edna St. Vincent Millay and e. e. cummings, lived and spent time with friends. You'll hear about the history of the area while seeing for yourself why it appealed to so many writers and remains a choice residential community.

Laurie gives this tour on **Sunday, November 12, at 1 PM**. To sign up and to learn the starting point, email the guide at [lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com).

## The Big Public Square on 42nd Street

Where was Latting Observatory, where Otis demonstrated his safety brake for elevators? What does 42nd Street have to do with New York City's water supply? What is under Bryant Park? What is the connection between the New York Public Library and a current movie?

Meet Laurie on **Saturday, November 18, at 1 PM** to learn the answers to these questions. This hour-long outing is ideal for people who don't want to walk long distances, because we don't go far. Plus, it's a pay-what-you-want tour. To sign up and to learn the meeting point, email the guide at [lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com).

### Central Park in Bronze

We have collaborated with two other tour guides to create [www.centralparkinbronze.com](http://www.centralparkinbronze.com), a website devoted to the statues and other ornamental artwork in Central Park. The website includes:

- Multiple photos of more than 70 pieces of art
- A brief write-up about the artist or the work
- Maps showing the location of each piece

Enjoy a virtual tour of the art of Central Park, or take a walk with the website open on your phone to learn about the statues you see. Inquire about a custom tour of statues on the website's Contact form.

[www.centralparkinbronze.com](http://www.centralparkinbronze.com)

## 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 present. Take a walk in the footsteps of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. Hear stories about heroes like them as well as rogues like William “Boss” Tweed. Look at beautiful buildings, including the first department store, and see vestiges of a 1920 Wall Street explosion.

Alan is offering this tour on **Sunday, November 19, at 10 AM**. To make a reservation and to learn the meeting location, please email him at [alan.r.cohen@verizon.net](mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net).

## On This Corner: Astor Place

Today a busy hub near New York University, in the mid-nineteenth century the area around Astor Place was home to wealthy citizens and cultural institutions. One of them was Cooper Union, where you can still see the first elevator shaft poking through the roof like a chimney.

This brief tour, lasting less than an hour, involves little walking but lots of history. Laurie offers the outing on **Wednesday, November 29, at 1 PM** on a pay-what-you-want basis. To reserve a place and to learn the meeting location, email the guide at [lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com](mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com).

NOVEMBER						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
			8 Central Park Northern Half 11 AM		10 Central Park Southern Half 1 PM	
12 Village Writers 1 PM						18 Big Square on 42nd St 1 PM
19 400 Years of History 10 AM						
			29 Astor Place 1 PM			
Please contact the tour guide ( <a href="mailto:alan.r.cohen@verizon.net">alan.r.cohen@verizon.net</a> or <a href="mailto:lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com">lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com</a> ) to reserve a place and to learn the starting location.						