

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

December 2017

It's hard to believe that another year is almost over. We hope you have enjoyed receiving this newsletter, and we look forward to bringing you more interesting stories and fun tours in 2018.

If you're looking for a unique gift for someone who loves New York, consider a custom tour from Take a Walk New York. Email us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com to discuss ideas.

Have a wonderful holiday season. Our best wishes for a healthy and happy new year.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

Who *Really* Invented Christmas? New Yorkers, Of Course!

By Deborah Harley

There once was a time when New York didn't celebrate Christmas. The big winter holiday prior to 1800 was New Year's Day, when gifts were exchanged and friends visited. But the tradition was becoming harder to keep up in the growing city. As the New Year observation waned, other possibilities arose.

One option was St. Nicholas Day on December 6, which many Europeans, including the Dutch, already observed. Washington Irving's inclusion of St. Nicholas in his 1809 satirical publication *The History of New York* reacquainted the city with St. Nicholas and laid the groundwork for a new holiday.



Alexander Anderson's depiction of St. Nicholas

Irving envisioned St. Nicholas — or Sinterklaas, as the Dutch called him — as a jolly old Dutchman. He parked his horse-drawn sleigh on the rooftop, slid down the chimney, and left gifts for children in the dead of night on the eve of his special day. A year after Irving's publication, his close friend John Pintard decided to start a new family-oriented holiday. Launching his St. Nicholas Day celebration with a grand banquet, Pintard commissioned artist Alexander Anderson to create a woodcut print that was distributed at the dinner. The picture

showed St. Nicholas as a medieval religious figure. To his right were two young children, one with a stocking full of gifts hanging at the chimney and the other with an empty stocking. It was a stern warning to children: be good or else. The day never really took off, but Sinterklaas went viral.

Another option for a new holiday that New Yorkers started to consider was Christmas Day, December 25. Protestants had shied away from celebrating on this day because of its association with Catholicism as well as its pagan roots. Then in 1820 Irving published another book, *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent*. It included personal, heart-warming remembrances of a traditional English Christmas celebration, and the holiday took off.

The only thing missing from this version of Christmas was Sinterklaas. In 1823 another friend of Irving's, Clement Clarke Moore, published *A Visit from St. Nicholas*. Following Irving's lead, St. Nick was a "jolly old elf" who climbed down the chimney and left toys in children's stockings. Moore added an important new element to the myth. St. Nick arrived with his reindeer on Christmas Eve. The emphasis on the night before Christmas skirted the issue of celebrating Christmas Day, which was still problematic for Protestant New Yorkers. Upper-class families embraced the child-centered holiday with all its domestic pleasures and sentimental enjoyments, and our modern Christmas was born.

The Cult of True Womanhood

By the early 19th century, Lower Manhattan had become increasingly inhospitable to women and children. Many upper-class families decided to move uptown to a more genteel environment. Life became separated into distinct spheres: work for the man and home for the woman. She was responsible for creating a nurturing Christian environment for her work-weary husband and family. This new ideal of a woman's world was promoted through books, magazines, newspapers, and religion; in fact, it saturated popular culture. Historians refer to this movement as the Cult of Domesticity or True Womanhood. Its relentless pursuit of domestic bliss became one of the major reasons for the success of the new Christmas holiday.

Happy
Holidays

December 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 (lewislaurie2rny@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; if in doubt, call or text Laurie (917-306-2868) or Alan (917-363-4292).

Hidden Treasures of the Financial District

Walking through the canyons of Wall Street, you can easily miss gems hidden in plain sight, including relics of the Dutch and English colonial periods and park-like oases. Discover these secrets while seeing major attractions like the New York Stock Exchange, the *Charging Bull* statue, and the recent addition staring down the bull, *Fearless Girl*. Learn how the bull came to be here; it's a great New York Christmas story. You'll realize that the Financial District has a lot more going for it than stock trades and megadeals.

Laurie offers this tour on **Sunday, December 10, at 1 PM**. To reserve a spot on the tour and to learn the meeting location, email her at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

Central Park: Marvels of the Northern Half

The northern end of Central Park features some of the city's most surprising landscapes. Did you know there are woods, complete with a lovely (and recently restored) creek with waterfalls, in the middle of Manhattan? Have you ever visited New York's own Secret Garden? Are you familiar with the role this area played in early American wars? Discover the fascinating but lesser known part of Central Park on this tour.

Join Alan on **Wednesday, December 13, 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.

If you can't make one of our scheduled tours, consider a custom tour. Please email us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com to tell us what you would like for your personalized walking tour of New York City. By the way, a custom tour makes a wonderful holiday gift. Get one now to enjoy in warmer weather.

Fort Tryon Park

The high ground in Upper Manhattan that appealed to the new American army for a defensive fort later attracted millionaires who wanted to build castles on the Hudson. We'll walk from the site of Fort Washington to Fort Tryon Park, exploring vestiges of a Gilded Age estate. We'll take in the Heather Garden, which is colorful even at this time of year, and the park's extraordinary Hudson River views. You'll hear about a fearless woman who was a good shot with a cannon, a self-indulgent tycoon, and a very generous Rockefeller. We'll end at the Cloisters Museum, which you may want to visit on your own.

Alan leads this 1½-hour tour on **Saturday, December 16, at 11 AM**. To make a reservation and to learn the meeting location, please email him at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Green Spaces and Great Places on 42nd Street

Really? Green spaces in winter? Not exactly, but little parks break up the skyscraper landscape in busy Midtown. Learn why so many “pocket parks” occupy prime Manhattan real estate. Warm up with brief visits to great places, including the public library, Grand Central, and the Chrysler Building. End by discovering Tudor City, the first residential skyscraper complex in the nation, which offers both green spaces and interesting architecture.

Laurie leads this walk as a prelude to Christmas weekend, on **Friday, December 22, at 1 PM**. To reserve a space and to learn the exact meeting place, email her at lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com.

DECEMBER						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
10 Financial District 1 PM			13 Central Park Northern Half 11 AM			16 Fort Tryon 11 AM
					22 42nd St 1 PM	
Please contact the tour guide (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net or lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com) to reserve a place and to learn the starting location.						