

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

January 2017

Some readers have told us that they would prefer to receive this newsletter directly in an email, rather than as a pdf attachment. We are making that change starting this month. We will continue to post a pdf on our website, www.takeawalknewyork.com, for readers who prefer a printed-page format.

Because weather is unpredictable at this time of year, we are scheduling fewer tours than usual. We are happy to prepare a custom tour, however. If you'd like to take a walk now or when the weather improves, please contact us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com. The more time we have to prepare a custom tour, the more you'll enjoy it.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

Ice Skating in Central Park

By Laurie Lewis

Even before Central Park was created, ice skating was a given for the area. A place for this winter recreation was one of the few requirements in the design competition for the completely man-made Park. Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux created the winning design, designating the Lake as the skating pond. Just a few months after construction of the Park began, the Lake opened for ice skating in December 1858.



Currier and Ives, after a painting by Charles R. Parsons, 1862

Skating on Central Park's Lake quickly became one of the highlights of winter in New York City. At a time when city homes and businesses were clustered below 14th Street, an afternoon or evening of ice skating meant a trip of three or four miles each way. But come they did, by the thousands. Sometimes as many as 100,000 men, women, and children glided over the ice of the Lake, ignoring that elsewhere Central Park was a major construction zone for about fifteen years.

A great allure of ice skating was that it was one of the few social activities, in these Victorian times, that brought men and women into close physical proximity. A gentleman could hold a lady's hands in public! He wasn't being forward; he was being chivalrous, preventing her from falling. And while a lady would never dream of showing her ankles in public, it was perfectly acceptable if her billowing skirts rose a bit too high when she swirled across the ice.

For ladies who kept to the mores of the day, Central Park offered a separate skating area called Ladies Pond. It saw its share of activity, but it was never as popular as the co-ed skating Lake. In the 1930s, Ladies Pond was filled in to become a meadow on the Park's west side.

Year-Round Ice Skating

The most popular ice-skating rinks in the city—Wollman and Lasker rinks in Central Park and the rinks at Rockefeller Center and Bryant Park—are outdoor rinks open only from late fall through early spring. If you want to take to the ice in the summer, you'll find at least one choice in every borough but the Bronx.

- Sky Rink at Chelsea Piers in Manhattan; <http://www.chelseapiers.com/sr>
- Aviator Sports and Events Center at Floyd Bennett Field in Brooklyn; <http://www.aviatorsports.com>
- World Ice Arena at Flushing Meadows Corona Park in Queens; <http://www.worldice.com>
- City Ice Pavilion in Queens; <http://www.cityicepavilion.com>
- Staten Island Skating Pavilion in Staten Island; <http://www.thepavilion.org>

In 1950, ice skating in Central Park moved from the Lake to the new Wollman Rink, funded by a philanthropist of that name. After delighting skaters for thirty years later, the rink closed for renovation. What was supposed to be a brief project dragged on for six years. It reached completion because of a man who is very much in the news today: Donald J. Trump.

Trump vowed to get the rink back in service in four months. He scrapped the new technology that had been causing so many problems, called a few construction companies specializing in ice rinks, and made a selection without soliciting bids. The project came in under budget and beat the deadline, reopening in November 1986. That is why, although the venue is still called the Wollman Rink, Trump's name is emblazoned in bold type around the perimeter. The businessman who would become President took full credit for the successful renovation, although the city had planned to abandon the failed technology and use the contractor he selected.

Central Park has another skating venue, in the northern end. Lasker Rink, which opened in 1966, is so large that it is divided into an ice skating rink and a hockey rink. In the summer, Lasker Rink becomes Lasker Pool, one of many public swimming pools operated by the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. It's worth a trip or two in the spring and fall to see the rink transform into a pool and back to a rink again.

January 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). 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).

Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half

In the popular southern half of Central Park, you'll recognize some of the most filmed and photographed sights in New York, including Strawberry Fields, the Sheep Meadow, and Bethesda Terrace. The Park beckons in all kinds of weather. In winter, you clearly see some design elements that are hard to detect in other seasons through the foliage and visiting throngs.

Take a walk through the southern half of Central Park on Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, **Monday, January 16, at 1 PM**. We'll cover as much ground as weather permits. Please email the guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to register and to learn the meeting location.

Greenwich Village: In the Footsteps of Writers

Many writers and other creative people have called Greenwich Village home. On this tour, you'll meander through charming Village streets and peek into hidden cul-de-sacs as you learn where some famous writers—including Edna St. Vincent Millay, e.e. cummings, Eugene O'Neill, and Edward Albee—lived and hung out. Maybe the Village aura will spark your own creativity!

Laurie gives this tour on **Sunday, January 22, at 1 PM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, email her at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

JANUARY						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
	16 Central Park S 1 PM					
22 Greenwich Village 1 PM						
Please contact the tour guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to reserve a space and to learn the starting location.						