

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

May 2017

We hope you'll join us on May 5 and May 7 for Jane's Walk, an international event honoring urban activist Jane Jacobs. It's a chance to sample one of our tours for FREE! Join us later in the month for a regularly scheduled tour or a custom tour that meets your needs, interests, and timetable. Check our website, www.takeawalknewyork.com, for tour ideas, and think about celebrating Mother's Day or another special event with a guided walk in New York.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

Park-Lovers, 2; Bulldozers, 0

By Laurie Lewis

In two dramatic springs 30 years apart, ordinary New Yorkers who treasured their parks took on the city's rich and powerful, literally staring down bulldozers. In both cases, the little guys eventually won.

The first confrontation was in 1956. Robert Moses, probably the most influential city powerbroker at the time because of his longevity and multiple positions in local government, decided to take over a small section on the west side of Central Park to expand the parking lot for the Tavern on the Green restaurant. This section was a play area the neighborhood children enjoyed, and their mothers protested its loss.



Accustomed to getting his way, Moses responded by sending in a bulldozer to clear the area for the parking lot. On Tuesday morning, April 17, women, many with children in tow, formed a human barricade and faced off against the machine. The press went wild, dubbing the standoff “The Battle of Central Park.”

The bloodless battle continued for a week. Then in the dark of night, a fence popped up around the play area. The next morning, distraught mothers watched as the bulldozer uprooted trees and began to level the space for a parking lot.

But the protest didn't end there. Park-lovers sought and received help from the courts. Three months later, Moses abandoned his plans for a parking lot and built a new playground in the torn-up area, to the delight of the parents and children.

Jane Jacobs on Parks

As we honor Jane Jacobs this month with Jane's Walk, let's see what she had to say about city parks in her seminal 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*.

"...The object of a generalized bread-and-butter neighborhood park is to attract as many different kinds of people, with as many different schedules, interests, and purposes as possible....Parks intensely used in generalized public-yard fashion tend to have four elements in their design which I shall call intricacy, centering, sun and enclosure.

"Intricacy is related to the variety of reasons for which people come to neighborhood parks....If every place looks like every other place in the park and also feels like every other place when you try it, the park affords little stimulation to all these different uses....

"Good small parks typically have a place somewhere within them commonly understood to be the center....

"Although buildings should not cut sun from a park — if the object is to encourage full use — the presence of buildings around a park is important in design. They enclose it."

Thirty years after the Central Park battle, a similar skirmish played out across town in the East 40s, again climaxing with the sudden appearance of a bulldozer in the wee hours of the morning and ending with a court decision against one of New York City's muck-a-mucks. This time the powerful loser was real estate magnate Harry Helmsley, and the little guys were the residents of a skyscraper complex called Tudor City.

From the beginning, two parks were the literal and figurative core of this planned residential community. Most windows in the apartment buildings faced the green spaces, which residents enjoyed year-round. Helmsley, however, wanted to build skyscrapers on land the parks occupied.

Early Sunday of Memorial Day weekend in 1986, the wrecking machine arrived. Many residents were away for the holiday, but those who were home poured into their little green refuges to block the bulldozer. The residents then managed to get a court injunction to stop the destruction.

Helmsley sold Tudor City the next year. The parks were donated to the Trust for Public Land, saving them from further attempts at "development." They remain havens in Tudor City today.

Parks are an essential part of the New York City streetscape. For many residents, parks make the congested city livable. City dwellers may enjoy the convenience of close-to-work apartments and savor the fare in fine restaurants, but they'll stand up to bulldozers to protect their precious parks.

May Tours

Our tour selections this month begin with Jane's Walk, the weekend of Friday, May 5, through Sunday, May 7. All Jane's Walks are free. The length of these walks varies from 1 to 2½ hours. Registration is not required.

Most other Take a Walk New York tours cover 1 to 2 miles, last 2 to 2½ hours, and cost \$25 per person. Registration is required. To register and to learn the meeting place, email the guide (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com or alan.r.cohen@verizon.net). 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).

The Best Gift Ever Given to New York City: Fort Tryon Park — Jane's Walk

The high ground in Upper Manhattan that attracted the new American Army to build a defensive fort would later attract millionaires who wanted to erect castles on the Hudson. We'll walk from the site of Fort Washington to Fort Tryon Park, exploring several vestiges of a Gilded Age estate. We'll take in the magnificent Heather Garden and the park's extraordinary Hudson River views. There are interesting stories to tell: a fearless woman who was a good shot with a cannon, a self-indulgent tycoon, and an extremely generous Rockefeller. We'll end at the Cloisters Museum, which you may wish to visit on your own.

[Alan Cohen](#) leads this 1½-hour Jane's Walk on **Friday, May 5, at 10 AM**. Meet him in front of Bennett Park at 183rd Street.

The Big Public Square on 42nd Street — Jane's Walk

You may enjoy spending time in Bryant Park and the neighboring library, but how well do you really know them? Do you know the connection of these Midtown masterpieces with drinking water and a world's fair? What treasures are hidden just under the surface? Discover the stories behind the big public square on 42nd Street during this hour-long Jane's Walk.

[Laurie Lewis](#) leads this Jane's Walk on **Friday, May 5, at 1 PM and again at 4:30 PM**. Meet under the vaulted entrance to 11 W 42nd Street (across from Bryant Park and the library).

Parks of the East 90s — Jane’s Walk

What is a park? A park in this concrete and steel city may be different from one elsewhere. On this walk, we’ll see different types of parks in two Upper East Side neighborhoods — Yorkville and Carnegie Hill. How do these parks serve local residents? What do you like most?

Laurie leads this 2½-hour Jane’s Walk on **Sunday, May 7, at 2:30 PM**. Meet at Carl Schurz Park, 86th Street and East End Avenue, at the benches on the right.

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 21st century. Take a walk in the footsteps of George Washington and Alexander Hamilton. See beautiful buildings, including the very first department store, and hear stories of heroes and rogues like William “Boss” Tweed.

Alan is offering this tour on **Saturday, May 13, at 10 AM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, please email him at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Greenwich Village: In the Footsteps of Writers

This tour will explore the western part of the area of Lower Manhattan called Greenwich Village, which has been home to many writers and other creative people. You’ll meander through charming Village streets and peek into hidden cul-de-sacs as you learn where some famous writers lived and passed the time with friends. Take a walk in the footsteps of Edna St. Vincent Millay, e.e. cummings, Eugene O’Neill, Edward Albee, and other literary greats.

Laurie gives this tour on Mother’s Day, **Sunday, May 14, at 1 PM**. What a perfect way to thank your mom, in person or in your thoughts, for giving you a love of reading! To reserve space on the tour and to learn the meeting location, email the guide at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com.

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 Terminal and the Chrysler Building. Learn why so many "pocket parks" occupy prime Manhattan real estate. The tour ends at Tudor City, which was the site of the May 1986 standoff by local residents to save the green spaces that are part of their unique residential complex.

Laurie leads this walk at the start of Memorial Day weekend, **Friday, May 26, at 1 PM**. To reserve a space and to learn the exact meeting place, email her at lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com.

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|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Sun | Mon | Tue | Wed | Thu | Fri | Sat |
| | | | | | 5 Jane's Walk Ft Tryon 10 AM Big Square on 42nd St 1 & 4:30 PM | |
| 7 Jane's Walk Parks of the E 90s 2:30 PM | | | | | | 13 400 Years of History 10 AM |
| 14 Greenwich Village Writers 1 PM | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 26 Green & Great Places on 42 1 PM | |
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For Jane's Walk meeting places, see the above descriptions, our website (www.takeawalknewyork.com), or the Jane's Walk website (<http://janeswalk.org/united-states/new-york-city-ny>).

For other tours, please contact the tour guide (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net) or lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com to reserve a space and to learn the starting location.