

Tours and Tales of New York

An email newsletter of Take a Walk New York

July 2017

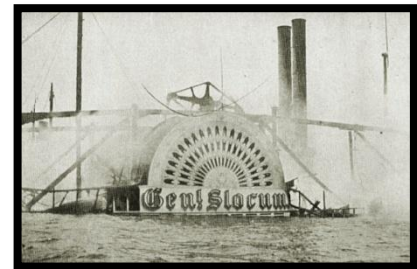
Summer is here, and the long days of shirt-sleeve weather make it a perfect time to take a walk in New York. If you can't join us for a scheduled tour, consider a custom tour. Please contact us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com to plan a custom tour that meets your needs, interests, and timetable.

Laurie Lewis, Alan Cohen, and Deborah Harley

New York's Worst Death Toll Until 9/11: The *General Slocum* Disaster

By Laurie Lewis

Excitement filled the air on the morning of June 15, 1904, as more than 1300 women and children boarded the huge excursion steamer *General Slocum*. They were members of St. Mark's Evangelical Lutheran Church on East 6th Street, in an area of New York City known as Kleindeutschland (Little Germany), and they were setting out for their annual picnic on Long Island.



From Encyclopedia Titanica

Within the hour, as the steamer chugged up the East River, the joyful sounds of children on a summer outing gave way to cries of panic. The *General Slocum* was on fire!

Rather than dock immediately, Captain William Van Schaick steered his flaming vessel toward North Brother Island, about two miles away. The crew, untrained in responding to emergencies, finally managed to turn a hose on the flames, but the flimsy hose quickly broke under the water pressure. Desperately, crew and passengers tried to loosen the lifeboats and lifejackets wired to the vessel. At last they freed some lifejackets, but passengers donning them sank to their death when they jumped into the water. The cork inside the lifejackets had rotted away and, it would later be revealed, the life preservers were weighted with iron.

The frightened passengers faced death by fire or death by drowning. Many succumbed to both fire and water as flames engulfed the decks, and piece by piece, the steamer crumbled.

When what was left of the battered vessel reached North Brother Island, it was met by a fireboat with a powerful hose. Nurses and even patients from the island's hospital for contagious diseases raced to pull survivors to safety. They were joined by a flotilla of small boats, which had been chasing after the flaming steamer since the first puff of smoke pierced the sky.

Tug to the Rescue!

Herbert N. Casson provided an account of the rescue on North Brother Island in a contemporary publication, *Munsey's Magazine*, December 1904:

Jim Wade, owner and captain of a tug, ran his grimy little boat straight against the burning steamer. His tug represented the savings of ten years of hard work, but Jim Wade was a man, not a corporation.

"Let her burn," said he. "What's a tugboat to human life?" And a hundred people or more were helped across this tug-bridge to a place of safety.

Then came nurses from the near-by hospital, fishermen, policemen, wharf-rats—to bring to shore the dead and the living....

North Brother Island became a makeshift mortuary. The death toll rose over several days as bodies floated to the surface and washed ashore. Only 321 passengers survived, making this the worst disaster in New York until the terrorist attack of 9/11.

Kleindeutschland was never the same. The outing-turned-tragedy had occurred on a Wednesday, when most men of the community were at work. They and other survivors, some having lost their entire families, could not bear to remain in the silent homes filled with memories of happier times. Soon they dispersed throughout the city, many moving to the Yorkville neighborhood further north near the East River, where they could gaze at the course the doomed ship had sailed.

Captain Van Schaick, himself badly injured in the wreck, was found guilty of criminal negligence for ignoring legal requirements to ensure the ship's preparedness. He was sentenced to ten years in prison but received a presidential pardon after serving less than half his term.

July 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 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*. You'll realize that the Financial District has a lot more going for it than stock trades and megadeals.

This tour will take place on **Saturday, July 8, at 1 PM**. To reserve a spot on the tour and to learn the meeting location, email Laurie at lewislaurie2nyc@gmail.com.

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 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 **Sunday, July 16, at 10 AM**. To make a reservation and to learn the meeting location, please email him at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

Do these scheduled times not work for you?
Would you prefer a tour in a different location?
We'll be glad to prepare a custom tour for you.
See www.takeawalknewyork.com for ideas, and
email us at takeawalknewyork@gmail.com to
start planning a New York experience that's sure
to please.

Central Park: Highlights of the Southern Half

In the 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. This area is quite crowded on summer weekends, so we will take a walk on a weekday instead.

Join **Laurie** to explore the southern half of Central Park on **Friday, July 21, at 1 PM**. Please email her (lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com) to register and to learn the meeting location.

Greenwich Village: In the Footsteps of Writers

We'll 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 lived and spent time with friends.

Laurie gives this tour on **Sunday, July 23, at 1 PM**. To sign up and to learn the starting point, email the guide at lewislaurie2rny@gmail.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. See beautiful buildings, including the first department store, and hear stories of heroes as well as rogues like William "Boss" Tweed.

Alan is offering this tour on **Sunday, July 30, at 10 AM**. To reserve your space and to learn the meeting location, please email him at alan.r.cohen@verizon.net.

JULY						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat
						8 Financial District 1 PM
16 Fort Tryon 10 AM					21 Southern Central Pk 1 PM	
23 Village Writers 1 PM						
30 400 Years of History 10 AM						
To reserve a space and to learn the starting location, contact the guide (alan.r.cohen@verizon.net or lewislaurie2rny@gmail.com).						