



NEIGHBORHOOD
HISTORY GROUP

BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

Issue No. 14

Spring 2024

Here Comes the Sun!

It's Spring --- and here comes the sun --- well, until the afternoon of April 8th, when it will disappear for a while. This Spring Bulletin brings the news of a 1925 total solar eclipse, a bicycle craze, a historical automobile accident, and two fascinating women whose lives touched our neighborhood. You'll learn about upcoming tours, programs, and exhibits. All of this reflects the eclectic mix of topics covering our neighborhood history.

Enjoy the sun, the spring evenings, and our BNHG seasonal newsletter. Please send in your comments and suggestions. And if you are enjoying our work, perhaps you'll consider a [modest donation](#) to help us continue.

Upcoming Programs

Free Walking Tours

Jim Mackin

Wednesday, April 17, 6:00 pm

Wednesday, May 29, 6:00 pm

Wednesday, June 5, 2:00 pm

Free. No reservation needed. Meet at the south end of Straus Park, Broadway and 106th Street



Jim Mackin

The flowers and trees are blooming in Bloomingdale and it's a great time to take part in a free tour of the neighborhood with popular tour guide Jim Mackin, author of [Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side](#). The route changes with each walk, which takes between one and two hours. Jim is also the founder of [Weekday Walks](#), offering tours every Wednesday morning, covering a different part of the city each time.

Voices of the Stones: A Behind-the-Scenes Look at the Unfinished Tower of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine

Robert F. Rodriguez

Wednesday, April 3, 6:30 pm



Carving in place atop tower. Photographer Robert F. Rodriguez

Forty years ago, the Cathedral of St. John the Divine undertook a major project to build its long overdue towers. That they were never completed earned the church the nickname St. John the Unfinished. What most people don't realize is that the partially built south tower is host to an extraordinary array of exquisite stone sculptures – not readily visible from street level.

This program will present a series of never-before-seen photographs giving a unique, up-close look at the wondrous, intricate and often humorous carvings, tracing them back to the dedicated men and women stone carvers who created them, and revealing some “secret” messages they carved into their limestone creations.

As artist-in-residence at the Cathedral, photojournalist Robert F. Rodriguez spent more than 10 years documenting all facets of the construction work involved in building the tower. A photographer and photo editor at Gannett

Newspapers for 38 years and The Daily Mail for 10, he was also the photographer for a book on local Upper West Side history, *Heaven on the Hudson: Mansions, Monuments and Marvels of Riverside Park*, and the upcoming *Fabulous Fountains of New York*, both written by Stephanie Azzarone. His series of blogs about the Cathedral's architecture may be found at <https://divinestone.org>.

This will be a free Zoom presentation. Check [here](#) for the link.

Before Central Park

Sara Cedar Miller

Wednesday, May 15, 6:30 pm



Central Park is an urban masterpiece. But before it became a model for city parks worldwide, the land was the site of farms, businesses, churches, wars, and burial grounds – and home to many different kinds of New Yorkers. In this program, Sara Cedar Miller will chronicle two and half centuries of the history of that land:

- the 17th and 18th century Dutch and English landowners
 - three wars
 - the land divisions of the 19th century
 - New York's Common Lands
 - the land that became Seneca Village, with new research on the landowners and renters of the Black community
 - the immigrant experience
 - the reservoirs
- the system behind the monetary awards to the landowners so the city could create Central Park.

Sara Cedar Miller has been the historian emerita of the Central Park Conservancy since 2017. She was the Conservancy photographer from 1984, and its historian from 1989 to 2017. Miller is the author of *Central Park: An American Masterpiece* (2003), *Strawberry Fields, Central Park's Memorial to John Lennon* (2011), *Seeing Central Park: The Official Guidebook: Updated and Expanded* (2021), and [Before Central Park](#) (2022).

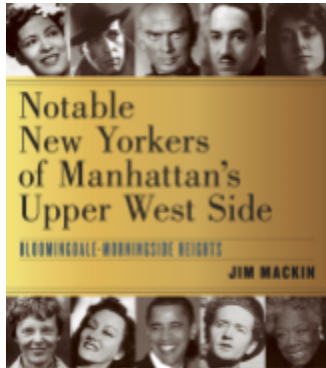
This will be a free Zoom presentation. Check [here](#) for the link.

Past Programs

Notable New Yorkers of Bloomingdale: An Update

Jim Mackin

Wednesday, January 31



Jim Mackin, an eminent New York City historian and author of the popular [Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side](#), presented an update to his collection of captivating stories of remarkable former residents. He gave a close look at some of the tremendously diverse people who once lived in the Bloomingdale neighborhood and who shaped the character of the area. He previewed his new book, a follow up to the first, that's now in the works. You can see a recording of the program on our [website](#).

An Island in Bloomingdale: Life in the Old Community

Susan Fridie, Rob Garber, Jim Mackin

Monday, February 12

A vibrant community of African Americans filled two blocks in Bloomingdale during the first half of the 20th Century, only to be displaced by “urban development” in the 1950s. It became known as the Old Community and its story was related in this standing-room-only program.

The audience saw an illustrated history of the 50-year period documenting the life of the residents, businesses, and activities of this close-knit enclave.



A game of basketball being played on the street corner at West 99th Street near Central Park West.

The presentation described remarkable, lasting aftermath of this community, along with the special treat of first-hand stories from a former resident. Susan Fridie has extensive family ties to the Old Community and now lives in Park West Village, the development that replaced it. She has worked on the Old Community archived materials in the BNHG collection at the Bloomingdale Library – you can find a description of them in the Summer 2023 BNHG [newsletter article](#) titled *Sprucing Up the “Old Community.”*

Rob Garber is the creator of a related [exhibit](#) that is on display at the Library through April 30. The exhibit is available to schools or community groups that may wish to display it.

You can see a recording of the program on our [website](#).

Jim Torain Award

Monday, February 12



BNHG presented its annual Jim Torain Award as part of the February 12 program about the Old Community. The award acknowledges the person or organization that honors the history of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood. It is named after Jim Torain, who grew up in The Old Community and ensured that its legacy, including its many talented and accomplished residents who enriched our neighborhood and our history, would not be lost or forgotten.

On behalf of BNHG, Marjorie Cohen presented the award to Andrew Alpern, who has been a friend to the group since he gave a talk for BNHG on the decoration of Upper West Side buildings that he included in his 11th book, *Posh Portals: Elegant Entrances and Ingratiating Ingresses to Apartments for the Affluent in New York City*. Alpern is an architectural historian, architect, and attorney.

The Lost Theaters of Broadway - An Upper West Side Story

Gary Dennis

Thursday, February 22



Gary Dennis dispensed his deep, expert knowledge of the many theaters and movie palaces that graced the Upper West Side over the years and are now long gone.

His illustrated talk provided abundant information about their unique stories, their architects, their historical significance, and their

importance to the neighborhood. Denis was the owner of the beloved Movie

Place, the favorite Bloomingdale independent video store with one of the most extensive film inventories in the country.

You can see a recording of the program on our [website](#).

New in the Neighborhood

Eclipse! The remarkable story of New York City's 1925 total solar eclipse, and what to expect from the partial eclipse on April 8

A project by Rob Garber, BNHG member

On display at the Bloomingdale Library through April 30



As excitement builds about the solar eclipse coming on April 8th, visit The Bloomingdale Library to learn about the greatest eclipse in the city's history: a total eclipse of the sun on January 24, 1925.

Arriving on a frigid but crystal-clear winter's morning, the 1925 event struck awe into tens of millions of viewers in the eastern United States and Canada and sent New Yorkers scurrying to viewing spots above 110th Street. Learn what a

solar eclipse is and how this April's eclipse will differ for New Yorkers from the spectacle that halted the city in its tracks 99 years ago.

The Bloomingdale Branch Library: Serving Our Community for 125 years

A project by Rob Garber, BNHG member

On display at the Bloomingdale Library May 1 through July 31

Learn about the 1896 origin of Bloomingdale's library and its decades in a beautiful but crowded building west of its current home. Discover which books were being "lost" by patrons in 1900! Read about notable events hosted at the branch – including the remarkable 1977 "read-in" when Isaac Asimov and Betty Friedan protested deep cuts in Bloomingdale library hours during the city's fiscal crisis.



Finally, be surprised at the number of times that this branch has been mentioned in books that were set or written in the neighborhood, where "courteous and competent" librarians worked in a "dilapidated but vigorous" building.

The Bloomingdale Library, 150 West 100th Street between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues (across from the 24th precinct station house)
Mon-Tue 10am-7pm | Wed-Thu 11am-7pm | Fri-Sat 10am-5pm

Use of library space by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group for this exhibit does not indicate endorsement by The New York Public Library.

An Upper West Side Notable

From [*Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*](#)

By Jim Mackin, Fordham University Press

Bliss, Henry Hale (1830-1899)

Automobile Fatality

121 Manhattan Avenue (near 105th Street)



Henry Bliss

Real estate broker Henry Bliss was the first person in the United States killed by an automobile. He was struck by an electric taxicab as he stepped off a southbound Eighth Avenue trolley car. The passenger in the taxicab was Dr. David Orr Edson, the son of former New York City Mayor Franklin Edson.

The folk singer Pete Seeger was the great-nephew of Mayor Edson. Henry Bliss's second wife, Evelina, had a daughter from her previous marriage. In 1896, the

daughter, Mary Alice, was charged with poisoning her mother, Evelina, with arsenic-laced clam chowder. Mary Alice was acquitted in a 43-day trial that supposedly set a record in summoning more than a thousand potential jurors to select just twelve.

Looking Forward to the Sun's Eclipse on April 8th



As you and your family prepare to experience the sun's 91% eclipse on the afternoon of April 8th, you may want to learn about the 100% eclipse our neighborhood experienced on a cold winter morning in January, 1925. That year, the path of totality's southern edge was between West 96th and West 97th Streets, established only after a concerted effort by local electrical companies that assigned many men to the rooftops of our buildings to measure the light. Later, the event was dubbed "The West 96th Eclipse."

You'll find out all about it in a [blog post](#) by Pam Tice.

In addition, Rob Garber has prepared an exhibit about it on display at the Bloomingdale Public Library (described above).

A Guide to Former Street Names

In the [Winter 2024 Bulletin](#), we noted a new NYC law to establish an official website of [NYC Honorary Street Names](#), guaranteeing the permanent continuation of a project created and maintained by BNHG member Gil Tauber.

This time, we are directing your attention to another Gil Tauber website, [A Guide to Former Street Names in Manhattan](#). It includes old roads, lanes, alleys, courts, terraces, parks, squares, wharves, piers, slips, markets, and other named urban features that have been demapped, obliterated, or renamed. All the information in it has been compiled and annotated by Gil Tauber. We think you'll find it fascinating!

Two Accomplished Women

By Pam Tice

This winter, two accomplished black women whose lives touched our neighborhood were brought to our attention. In his late January talk on neighborhood notables, Jim Mackin included Hettie Anderson in his presentation of recently discovered Bloomingdale Notables. Our colleague, Stephanie Azzarone, added to our knowledge the next day when she shared this Central Park Conservancy [YouTube video](#) unveiling Hettie Anderson's legacy.

Hettie Anderson (born Harriette Eugenia Dickerson 1873-1938) lived at 698 Amsterdam Avenue. She was a model and muse for American sculptors and painters. One of her most famous likenesses is the Winged Victory figure on the Sherman Monument at Grand Army Plaza, dedicated in 1903.

Recently my friend Sara Cedar Miller, the Central Park historian, pointed out a [New York Times article](#) by Brent Staples about the life of Elizabeth Gloucester. Sara had discovered her in her research on the property owners of Seneca Village, on the west side of the Park. Gloucester's property was taken by eminent domain as the Park's land was assembled.

Elizabeth Gloucester was a wealthy black woman of many accomplishments whose land in the pre-Park demonstrates the importance of real estate ownership in the mid-19th century. For black men, it paved the way to voting. For women, the passage of the Married Women's Property Act of 1848 allowed a married woman to own her property separate from her husband.

The Bicycle Craze Comes to Bloomingtondale



Cyclists on Riverside Drive from the NYPL collection

In the 1890s, a bicycling craze swept America as men and women purchased bicycles and took to the roads. The safety bicycle, a machine much like the one we have today with equal-size wheels and inflated tires, fueled the craze as the model became widely available by the mid-1880s. Bicycles cost from \$45 to \$75, making the craze very much a middle-class phenomenon.

In our neighborhood, with its paved roadways and two parks, the bicycle craze became part of the street life. Pam Tice has written [a new blog post](#) about the bike craze and the wheelmen and wheelwomen who pedaled through Bloomingtondale.

A new BNHG writer

Congratulations to our colleague on the Bloomingtondale Neighborhood History Group's Planning Committee, Joan Paylo! Trained as a journalist, Joan began studying fiction writing six years ago and has just been published for the first time. It's in a collection of short stories — fictionalized memoirs — about where she comes from. *Children of Steel* is about the industrialized mid-West, where immigrants flocked to work in the steel mills and other heavy

industries. Joan's contribution, "BlueCollarLand," chronicles a fifth-grade girl's coming of age in industrial Northwest Indiana.

The book is available [here](#).

Donate!

You can support local history when you support the work of The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group. BNHG presents many free programs throughout the year, in person and on Zoom. We display exhibits at the Bloomingdale Public Library. Our website offers numerous blog posts, a usable building database, and many other resources.

Donations to our work can be made through a GoFundMe site managed by the Columbus-Amsterdam Business Improvement District, making your gift fully tax-deductible. Visit our website [Donation Page](#) to learn more. Thank you!