



NEIGHBORHOOD
HISTORY GROUP

BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

Issue No. 7

Summer 2022

Summer Greetings!

Here's the summer edition of the *Bloomingdale Bulletin*, with news of upcoming local events and a view into the history of the Upper West Side between 96th and 110th Streets from Central Park to the Hudson River. The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group welcomes your feedback, comments and ideas [here](#).

Upcoming Programs

Free Walking Tours

Jim Mackin, NYC Historian

Wednesday, July 13, 6:00 pm

Wednesday, August 31, 6:00 pm

Meet at the south end of Straus Park, Broadway and 106th Street.

The popular walking tours of historic Bloomingdale will continue through the summer. Jim Mackin is not your everyday tour guide — he's a renowned NYC historian and author of the recently released book, [Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side](#). His tours are treasured by neighborhood locals and visitors



Jim Mackin

alike. Join one to hear highlights of the neighborhood, interspersed with entertaining tidbits about individuals from all walks of life. Tours vary from month to month. Jim is also the founder of [Weekday Walks](#), which offers tours every Wednesday morning, covering a different part of the city each time.

Homemade History Exchange

Vita Wallace

Sunday August 14, 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm

Amsterdam Avenue at 109th Street



The Lion Brewery, built around 1879 at 107th to 109th Streets between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues

Stroll over to Amsterdam Avenue for a real Open Streets treat. Eat cookies, chat with neighbors, and look through a treasure chest of historical photos, articles, and maps related to the immediate neighborhood.

There will be coloring sheets and crayons for those who enjoy them as well!

As part of the history exchange, volunteers will be at the ready to help you research your block or your building, and to introduce you to further resources. Bring along your own historical photos to show us — we'd love to see them!

The History Exchange is co-sponsored by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group and the Columbus Amsterdam BID as part of the Open Streets program.



Brewery cart

Recent Events

From Tidal Marsh to Idyllic Retreat: The Story of Central Park's Harlem Meer

Lane Addonizio

June 13, 2022



Harlem Meer

Lane Addonizio, VP for Planning at the Central Park Conservancy, traced the past, present, and future history of the Meer (Dutch for lake) – the northernmost part of NYC's Central Park – and of the multiple communities who



Lane Addonizio

use and cherish it. You can see a recording of the program [here](#).

Flowering Trees in Bloomingdale

Margaret Bracken

Riverside Park Conservancy

April 27, 2022



Margaret Bracken, Landscape Architect for Riverside Park, shared lots of fascinating history about the park, from the time it was farmland in the 1880s, to its initial design by Frederick Law Olmsted, through its enlargement in the Robert Moses Era, to today's 327 acres of beloved space. You can see a recording of the program [here](#).

100 Years Ago in Bloomingdale: Radium on Riverside

By Pam Tice

This short piece joins previous BNHG presentations, blog posts and articles about medical facilities in Bloomingdale. You can find them [here](#).

One hundred years ago, in January 1922, New York City's Radium Institute moved into a townhouse at 323 Riverside Drive that had once been the Edwin Holden family's residence. The Director of the Institute was Dr. C. Everett Field. To understand the relevance of the Radium Institute, we need a brief history of radium, a natural element discovered by Marie and Pierre Curie in 1898.

In the early years of the 20th century, radium was considered a "wonder drug" and its marvels penetrated popular culture into what was called a "radium craze." Radium was used as an additive in products from toothpaste to face creams. Restaurants served glow-in-the-dark radium cocktails and candy. Pop culture celebrated radium in songs and the "Radium Girls" onstage on Broadway.

In 1904, the MIT Club of New York City held a "Sunshine Dinner" attended by the city's social elites and generating wide press reports on the healthy, rejuvenating attributes of radium. Of special importance was the attention radium received as a way to deal with two diseases that were greatly feared by the public: tuberculosis and cancer.

By the middle of the second decade, external and internal radium therapy had developed. External therapy involved the application of radium salts in tubes and plasters while internal therapy consisted of the ingestion or injection of radioactivity. Physicians tended to concentrate on one or the other. At a time when the only treatment for cancer was surgery, radium therapy was a welcome alternative.

In order to obtain the radium needed for treatment, many doctors established relationships with the companies that were at first importing the element and then producing it from American mines.

Radium Institute of New York

323 RIVERSIDE DRIVE

Phone, Academy 1609

At 104th Street

AN OPEN HOSPITAL FOR THE ADMINISTRATION OF ALL FORMS OF RADIUM THERAPY

THE new building provides the greater space and better facilities necessary to meet increasing demands of radium therapeutics. Every provision is made for the study and treatment of malignant and benign growths with radium and allied measures.

Co-operation with physicians and hospital officials relative to radium applications is invited. Information regarding the properties of radium and its limitation should interest every practitioner.

C. EVERETT FIELD, M.D.

Director

Newspaper ad for the Radium Institute

Dr. C. Everett Field had such a relationship with the Radium Chemical Company, a subsidiary of the Standard Chemical Company that had become the leading American producer of radium throughout the 1910s.

Dr. Field was noted as their New York Office representative in 1915. The New York Radium Institute was first established at 205 West 70 Street.

Dr. Field was a proponent of internal radium therapy, making over 7,000 injections and touting the efficacy of the treatment, using it for treating high blood pressure, increasing red blood cell count, and “rejuvenating sexual powers.” Despite the excitement of practitioners like Dr. Field, the general medical community remained skeptical. However, Dr. Field pressed on, moving the Institute to larger quarters on Riverside Drive.

The Radium Institute’s advertisement was in a 1920s medical directory: “... an institution fully equipped for the treatment of malignant and benign growths,

with radium and allied measures of therapy ... preparations of Radium Chloride suitable for intravenous use ... for Arthritis, Gout, Arteriosclerosis and the manifestations of the senile period ... radio-active waters of any mache unit strength supplied on prescription order.”

Dr. Field claimed to operate his Radium Institute until 1930. “From 1920 on to 1930 I had among my most considerate patients a most interesting group of wealthy patients from Maine to California I had Governors from three of our eastern states and a large group of army officers or their families. Boy it was fine sleddin (sic) while it lasted.”

There is no source found regarding the closing of Dr. Field’s Institute. However, several other radium-related stories were getting public attention. In New Jersey in the mid-1920s, the young women who were poisoned while painting watch dials with radium-laced paint were beginning their efforts to find out why they were getting sick. Now known as “The Radium Girls,” thanks to contemporary historians telling their story, their case was working its way through the New Jersey courts.

But Dr. Field had another problem. In 1926, he lost his medical licenses because he had supported a Dr. Koch who claimed to have a secret radium formula for a serum that cured cancer. Maybe he lost patients. In a 1926 newspaper article, Field’s address was given as West End Avenue. But Dr. Field prevailed and in the 1940s is listed in city directories with an office on West 58th Street. He died in 1951 in New Jersey.

Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side

From *Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side*
by Jim Mackin, Fordham University Press

Ben E. King, 1938 – 2015

Rock and Roll Singer

255 West 108th Street (the Manchester)



Ben E. King performing on the final day of the 2006 Summerfest.

One of his big hits in 1961 was “Spanish Harlem”, co-written by the infamous Phil Spector. Another in 1961 was “Stand By Me” which was extensively used on movie soundtracks, including the film of the same name, and was recorded by more than 400 artists from Otis Redding to John Lennon. Ben E. King was also the lead singer of the Rock and Roll group the Drifters in 1959 and 1960 when he can be heard crooning “There Goes My Baby” and “Save the Last Dance for Me”. The original Drifters that formed in 1953 had a number of hits and spouted Rock and Roll star Clyde McPhatter.

Ben E. King was born Benjamin Earle Solomon in North Carolina and came to Harlem at age seven with his family. While working at his father’s luncheonette, he sang harmony in a church choir and in doo-wop groups that formed in his public school. One of those groups, the Five Crowns, got reformed into the 1959 Drifters, and the rest is history.

You can find out about other notables [here](#).

Bicentennial Ceremonies at Grant's Tomb

By Gil Tauber



Celebration of U.S. Grant's 200th birthday at Grant's Tomb.

April 27th was the 200th birthday of Ulysses S. Grant, commander of the Union Army in the Civil War and 18th President of the United States. The occasion was marked by a colorful outdoor ceremony at the General Grant National Memorial, better known as Grant's Tomb.

The building was decorated with flags and bunting. An honor guard from West Point presented the colors; wreaths were laid; and

the audience of about 400 joined in the singing of the National Anthem, played by the U.S. Military Academy Band.

The Mistress of Ceremonies was Savona Bailey-McClain, Executive Director of the West Harlem Art Fund. Speakers included Frank Scaturro, President of the Grant Monument Association; Ulysses Grant Dietz, great-great-grandson of the President; Lieutenant General Darryl A. Williams, the Superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy; and Brooks D. Simpson, author of the 2000 book "Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity 1822-1865."

In the audience, in addition to two representatives of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group, Gil Tauber and Jim Mackin, was Ron Chernow, author of the 2017 biography "Grant."

The Tomb, designed by John H. Duncan, is the largest mausoleum ever built in North America. It is the final resting place of President Grant and his wife, Julia Dent Grant. It was completed in 1897, twelve years after Grant's death, by the privately funded Grant Monument Association (GMA). For many years the war hero's tomb was a place of pilgrimage for Americans who had lived through the Civil War, especially for Union veterans and their families.

Grant was also revered by African Americans who recalled Grant's support for Reconstruction and for the civil rights of former slaves (measures that were undone by Grant's successor, Rutherford B. Hayes). The first secretary of the Grant Monument Association was Richard D. Greener, a lawyer, diplomat, and Bloomingdale resident who had been the first Black graduate of Harvard University.

By the mid-20th century, as the Civil War generation passed on, financial support for the GMA could not keep up with maintenance needs. In 1959 the site was taken over by the National Park Service, but maintenance and staffing still lagged, and the site was marred by vandalism. In the early 1990s Mr. Scaturro, then a student at Columbia and a volunteer with NPS, revived the Grant Memorial Association and launched a successful campaign to secure adequate Congressional funding for the building. A restoration was completed in 1997, in time for the hundredth anniversary of the building's dedication.

Place Names in Bloomingdale

By Pam Tice

This is the first in a series explaining place names in Bloomingdale.

Anibal Aviles Playground

111 West 108th Street

between Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues



Friends of Anibal Aviles Playground/Amigos del Parque de Anibal Aviles, with Councilmember Gale Brewer.

In 1969, this New York City Parks playground was named for Anibal Aviles (1947-1966), a young Marine who was killed in action in Vietnam on March 5, 1966.

Aviles grew up on West 109th Street and attended J.H.S. 54 where he captained the basketball and track teams. He was well-known in the neighborhood where he participated in other organized athletic programs.

A Friends group helps with lively programming at the playground. The playground is about to begin an extensive renovation.

How It Began: The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group 2000 – 2020

This is the second of occasional brief articles about the history of the history group, based on a report in preparation by Winifred Armstrong. The files on which it draws are in the Neighborhood History Collection at the Bloomingdale branch of the New York Public Library, 150 West 100th Street. You can find the [previous article](#) in the Spring 2022 Bloomingdale Bulletin.

As the Park West Village History Group (precursor to the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group) formed, we gave attention to defining our purpose. Initially, curiosity and discovery about our neighborhood were our primary motivations — and still are. We wondered: Who is living here now? Who came before and why did they come here? How do the systems that support us work?

It was something like walking down a street with an economist, then with a sociologist, then an architect, a geologist, a biologist, a stone mason, a musician, a detective — you see and hear something different each time, your sight and insight enhanced.

We came to see that this unearthing and sharing of ways of seeing made everyone more appreciative of each other and of their roles in the neighborhood. It made us all aware that they themselves were in fact creating history.

This recognition was set out in several ways:

- For formal documents, our Statement of Purpose read that the group was “formed to explore the history of Park West Village and the surrounding neighborhood through research, interviews, talks, walks and workshops, and to make this information available through materials collected for the New York Public Library and through

publications. (*From Park West Village: History of a Diverse Community*, pub 2007)

- For less formal presentations, the purpose was described as discovering, researching, and sharing information about the Bloomingdale neighborhood of Manhattan's Upper West Side.
- For programs and on the website, to encourage all to share, we wrote with a 'we' that meant everyone: "We are the inheritors, the interpreters, and the creators of our history."

The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group promotes research and education about the history of the Bloomingdale neighborhood, and we are available as a resource. We share our findings through free public programs, walking tours, workshops, publications, a blog, our website www.upperwestsidehistory.org, and a Neighborhood History Collection of materials housed at the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library, 150 West 100th Street.