



NEIGHBORHOOD  
HISTORY GROUP

# BLOOMINGDALE BULLETIN

Discovering, preserving, and sharing our history

**Issue No. 12**

**Fall 2023**

## ***Autumn in Bloomingdale!***

The fall season is bringing its fresh start, bringing us back to the beginning of our school years. There are new things to look forward to, including this Fall newsletter from the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group (BNHG). We've provided dates for our upcoming programs, walking tours, and Library exhibits. We're sharing the story of 293 Central Park West, 891 Amsterdam Avenue, and 319 West 107<sup>th</sup> Street. We're highlighting the lives of several of our past neighbors who are all notable New Yorkers. The BNHG welcomes your feedback, comments, and ideas [here](#).

## ***Upcoming Programs***

### **Free Walking Tours**

Jim Mackin

**Sunday, November 19 at 2:00 pm**

**Sunday, December 17 at 2:00 pm**

Meet at the south end of Straus Park, Broadway and 106<sup>th</sup> Street



Jim Mackin

Every guided walk with Jim Mackin gives extra insight into the Bloomingdale neighborhood, its history, its architecture, and its endlessly fascinating residents. Author of the popular [Notable New Yorkers of Manhattan's Upper West Side](#), Jim's tours vary from one to the next and last one to two hours. Jim is also the founder of [Weekday Walks](#), which offers tours on select Wednesdays, covering a different part of the city each time.

## **The Columbus-Amsterdam BID: A Short History of a Vital Neighborhood Resource**

Peter Arnstsen, Executive Director

**Thursday, October 12, 5:30 pm**

The Columbus-Amsterdam Business Improvement District (BID) was established to create a more vibrant and active business center along Columbus and Amsterdam Avenues, from West 96th to West 110<sup>th</sup> Streets. Peter Arnstsen, the long-time Executive Director, will describe how the BID works to make the neighborhood cleaner, safer, more beautiful, and more prosperous. You'll learn about important community resources and local landmarks, and about the BID's close association with BNHG to discover, explore, preserve, and share the history of our neighborhood.

This program will be live, in person, and free!

Bloomington Library, 150 West 100th Street, between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, 2nd floor (wheelchair accessible)

## **Meet the Artist: Neighborhood Resident Beatrice Coron Shares Her Work**

Beatrice Coron

**Thursday, November 30, 2023, 5:30 pm**



Beatrice Coron

Bloomington-based artist Beatrice Coron is the creator of the [exhibit](#) of eight art medallions that feature local luminaries on display at various outdoor locations in Bloomington (see New in the Neighborhood in this newsletter).

Coron's public art can also be seen in subways, airports, and sports facilities, among other locations. In addition, her work has been purchased by major museum collections, including the Metropolitan Museum, the Walker Art Center, and the Getty Center. Join her as she talks about her local art installation, her body of art, her working process, and her ties to the Bloomington neighborhood.

This program will be live, in person, and free!

Bloomington Library, 150 West 100th Street, between Amsterdam and Columbus Avenues, 2nd floor (wheelchair accessible)

## ***Past Programs***

### **Building the Metropolis**

Alexander Wood

Wednesday, September 27, 2023



9th Avenue El

Alexander Wood made vivid the vast changes that took place in the building of New York City in the late nineteenth century, when technological changes transformed the building trades and turned construction into big business. The result was rapid growth and the creation of a new urban landscape, with a major impact on the city's economy, and the rise in the influence of contractors and construction workers in politics.

Alexander Wood is an architectural and urban historian. He received his Ph.D. from Columbia University and his B. Arch. from Cooper Union. In 2021-22, he was the Helen and Robert Appel Fellow in History and Technology at the New-York Historical Society.

## ***New in the Neighborhood***

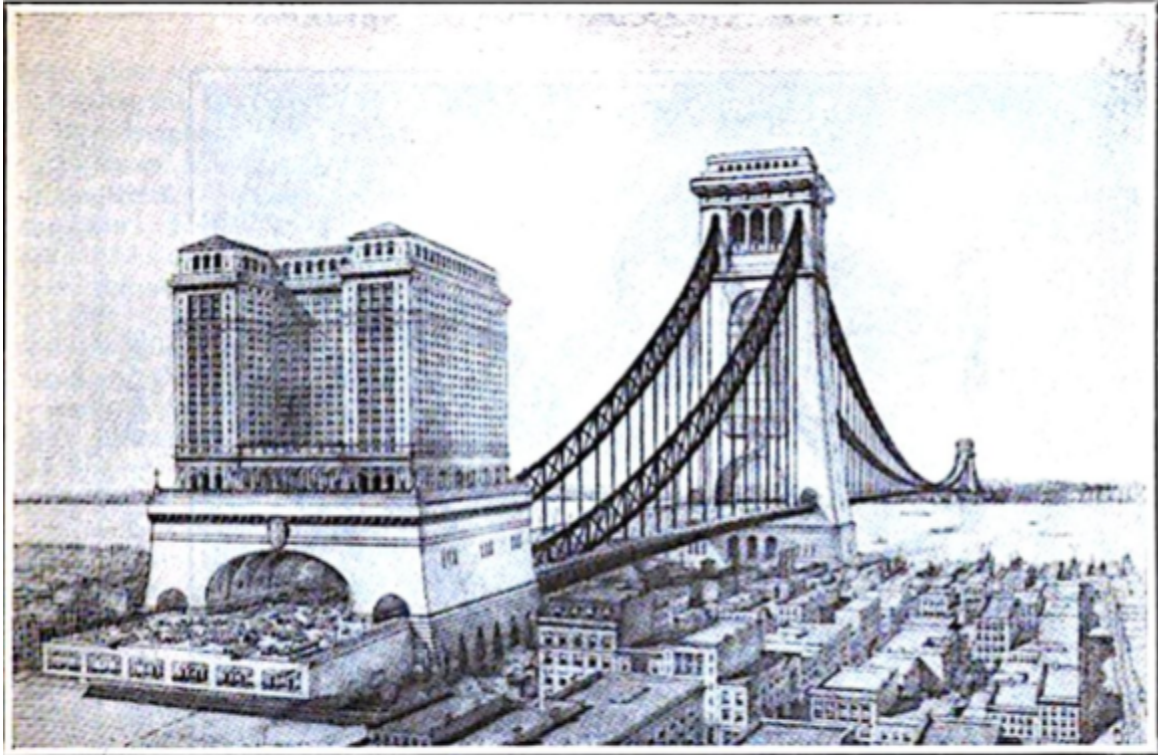
### **New Library Exhibit:**

#### **Bloomingdale as it never was (but might have been)**

A project by Rob Garber

On display at the Bloomingdale Library through November 30, 2023

New York City has always dreamed big. At various times, it has had the most people, the longest bridge, and the tallest building in the world. Sometimes, the dreams proved too big.



Lindenthal bridge

An audacious 1921 plan by civil engineer Gustav Lindenthal for an enormous bridge across the Hudson River at 59th Street, included no fewer than 12 railroad tracks, 16 car and truck lanes, and four streetcar tracks. As if that weren't enough, Lindenthal added a huge office building to the bridge approach.

See an exhibit of grand ideas for the Bloomingdale and Morningside Heights neighborhoods that never came to pass, from a spire on St. John the Divine to a stadium in the Hudson River. And more!



St. John the Divine, Ralph Cram in 1927



St. John the Divine,  
Santiago Calatrava in 1991

Coming next: The Old Community, on display December 1, 2023-February 29, 2024

The Bloomingdale Library, 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 for this exhibit by the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group does not indicate endorsement by The New York Public Library.

### **Beatrice Coron Art Installation Moves to a New Location**

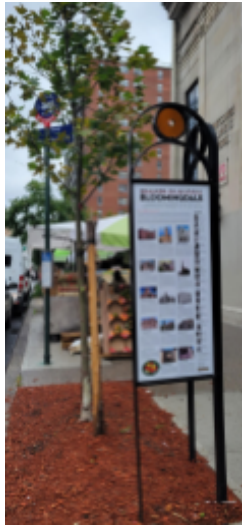


Strayhorn medallion

A striking exhibit of art medallions featuring eight Bloomingdale neighborhood luminaries will be on the move. It is currently on display at Booker T. Washington Playground, 108<sup>th</sup> Street between Amsterdam and Columbus avenues, through October 26. Its next stop will be Happy Warrior Playground, PS 163, Amsterdam Avenue between West 100<sup>th</sup> and 102<sup>nd</sup> Streets, October 26, 2023 – February 28, 2024.

The project is a collaboration with the Columbus-Amsterdam Business Improvement District (BID), El Taller Latino, and artist J. Maya Luz. The medallions were created by local artist Beatrice Coron, who will present a live BNHG program discussing her work on November 30 at the Bloomingdale Library (see Upcoming Programs in this newsletter).

## **New History Kiosk on 96<sup>th</sup> Street**



Another new kiosk featuring neighborhood history was installed on the east side of Amsterdam Avenue at West 96<sup>th</sup> Street. You'll find it between the bus stop and the food vendor stand, outside of the CVS on the corner. It includes a map, along with history and information about the surrounding local area.

This is the third kiosk in a project that is a collaboration between the Columbus-Amsterdam Business Improvement District (BID) and BNHG. The two others are at Columbus Avenue and 97<sup>th</sup> Street, and the original one installed at Amsterdam Avenue and West 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, near the entrance to the youth hostel.

## ***Support Local History***

The work of the Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group reaches you through our free programs, website, walking tours, and resources such as our Building Database and Library Collection.

Donations to our work are through a Go Fund Me 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!

## ***Remembering Cynthia Doty: 1951-2023***



The Bloomingdale Neighborhood History Group remembers our friend and founding member Cynthia L. Doty who died after a brief illness on July 17, 2023.

Cynthia participated in building the Neighborhood History Collection at the Public Library at 150 West 100 Street. As one of the original dozen planning members, she helped formulate and organize our initial public programs. Cynthia embodied the mantra of the BNHG: that we are all the inheritors, interpreters, and creators of our history.

## **Neighborhood Building Stories**

### **293 Central Park West**



293 Central Park West, between 89<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> Streets, started out as a residential building in 1896. It was not an elegant building, and, in 1908, it was converted to a medical facility, first as Miss Perrigo's Private Hospital, and then, in 1914, as the Charles B. Towns Hospital. Each of these reflected the medical issues of its time.

Alice M. Perrigo was trained as a nurse at the Presbyterian Training School in New York City, graduating in 1895. By 1898, she was the supervisor of nurses at Nassau Hospital on Long Island. She is mentioned in news articles covering extravagant fundraising events that attracted wealthy patrons of the hospital. Perhaps it was these social connections that led her to open her own hospital in 1908. Referred to as "Miss Perrigo's Sanitarium" the facility promised total privacy to its wealthy patients. Research about it reveals very little, and it appears in the news only a few times, usually when someone died there. Once, when a woman jumped from a window, the hospital staff refused to let the police investigate and simply called the coroner.

Miss Perrigo operated her hospital until 1914 when it was sold to Charles B. Towns, who moved a medical facility that he'd opened in 1909 on West 82<sup>nd</sup> Street. Charles B. Towns was not a doctor. He'd been a partner in a New York brokerage firm that had failed. In 1908, according to a 1913 *New York Times* full-page article, he had traveled to China, studied opium use there, opened three hospitals, and tried his then-secret formula for curing addiction. He attended the 1909 Opium Conference, an early international effort to control narcotics.

Towns forged a relationship with Dr. Alexander Lambert, the private physician to Theodore Roosevelt, who initially supported but later backed away from, the addiction cure. The cure, administered to a patient over 50 hours, involved administering a mix of belladonna (deadly nightshade), zanthoxylum (prickly ash), and hyoscyamus (henbane).

By 1913, Towns was drafting drug control legislation, both at the federal and the state levels. He blamed the doctors for causing addiction by over-prescribing pain-relievers, and the lack of control over the pharmacists who filled them. He recognized that addiction was a disease not a moral failure. In 1915, his hospital was in the news as five workers sent there by Henry

Ford returned to Detroit “cured.” Mr. Ford was testing the cure as he thought about establishing treatment at his own hospital in Detroit.

The Towns Hospital's most famous patient was Bill Wilson who was treated for his alcoholism three times in 1933 and 1934. On the fourth try, he experienced what he called a “spiritual awakening” and went on to form Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935.

Charles Towns died in 1947, but the hospital continued under the supervision of his son, Edward, whose family moved into the apartment there. In 1961, his daughter's estranged husband came to the building and shot his mother-in-law.

Four years later, the hospital closed and the building became residential again. If you'd like to read more about 293 Central Park West, try the excellent and [detailed post by Tom Miller](#).

## ***An Upper West Side Notable***

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

By Jim Mackin, Fordham University Press

### ***Moe Gale (1899 – 1964)***

Impresario  
41 West 96 Street



Moe Gale

Born Moses Galewsky on the Lower East Side, Moe Gale attended New York University, but dropped out to work in his father's luggage manufacturing business. He became financially successful by age 21, manufacturing his own luggage, and then went on to spur much African American talent.

In 1926, Moe Gale with fellow entrepreneur, Jay Faggen, opened the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem on Lenox Avenue between 140th and 141st Streets. Faggen was responsible for the Roseland Ballroom on West 52nd Street.

The Lindy Hop and Jitterbug dances were popularized at the Savoy, which is memorialized in the jazz standard tune “Stompin’ at the Savoy.” The Chick Webb Orchestra with the young Ella Fitzgerald was its popular house band.



In 1936, Gale discovered the Ink Spots singing group, which dominated the music charts in the 1940s and influenced much of the singing by rock and roll groups in the 1950s. Gale also managed Chick Webb, Ella Fitzgerald, and Cab Calloway, and booked the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Charlie Parker, Sarah Vaughan, and other jazz notables. His son, Richard M. Gale, did the same as his father before becoming a renowned philosopher.

## ***Place Names in Bloomingdale***

*Here is the newest addition to a series explaining place names in Bloomingdale.*

### **Gary Lincoff Way**

Amsterdam Avenue at 95<sup>th</sup> Street is not necessarily a location you'd associate with mushrooms. Yet that intersection pays tribute to Gary Lincoff (1942-2018), an internationally celebrated expert in mycology (the study of mushrooms).



For more than 40 years, Lincoff taught courses at the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx and his influence has reached nearly all current mycologists. He is author of the popular Audubon Field Guide to North American Mushrooms among other books and he served as president of the North American Mycological Association for nine years.

Although he was sought after to conduct mushroom hunts in more than 30 countries around the world, his favorite location was nearby Central Park, which he thoroughly explored and where he identified more than 700 species of fungi.

Lincoff was a city boy, born and raised in Pittsburgh. He graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1963 with a degree in philosophy and a fondness for Thoreau. He was self-taught as a mycologist and was known for his contagious enthusiasm on the subject.

His interest in mushrooms sprang from a practice of foraging for wild foods in the 1970s. His *New York Times* [obituary](#) tells the story that when Lincoff and his wife moved to NYC in 1968, he began writing a novel about a draft dodger living in Central Park, which caused him to ponder what the character would eat. That led him to study edible wild plants and, in turn, to participate in a walk with the New York Mycological Society. He never looked back.

After publishing a book on toxic and hallucinogenic mushrooms, he was approached to author the Audubon guide. It was published in 1981 and is considered the definitive guide for amateurs and professionals alike. In addition to scholarly papers, he was known to write poems and songs about mushrooms and, with others, he founded the countercultural Telluride Mushroom Festival in 1981.

Lincoff regularly contributed his expertise to news organizations and advised doctors in cases of mushroom poisoning. He supported the use of fungi for medical and psychotropic treatments, for soil decontamination, and their role in the cycle of decay and rebirth, as well as for food. He once advised Martha Stewart on a recipe involving puffballs.

The *New York Times* obituary observed, “Mr. Lincoff loved exotic fantastical-looking mushrooms with names like violet-branched coral and eyelash cup and bearded tooth and wolf’s-milk slime, and he loved nondescript little brown blots that sprouted on dead sticks. He was often asked which mushroom was his favorite, and he invariably replied, ‘The one that’s in front of me right now.’ ”

Himself the recipient of awards related to Mycology, the North American Mycological Association named one for him: The Gary Lincoff Award for Contributions to Amateur Mycology. Lincoff lived on West 95<sup>th</sup> Street. New York City dedicated the intersection of Amsterdam Avenue and 95th Street to him in 2019.

## ***Our Bloomingdale Neighborhood in 1855***

It wasn’t planned, but with one writing project after another, Bloomingdale History Group members are exploring the history of our neighborhood at certain points in time. Gil Tauber covered the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in a series “Bloomingdale Before the Road,” available on our website [here](#). Pam Tice wrote about the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries [here](#).



This photo from the Municipal Archives is of a farm on land that would become Central Park

Now Pam Tice has moved the timeline up to the antebellum Bloomingdale with a blog post about the neighborhood in 1855 when the New York State Census detailed the people who lived here, including the homes they lived in. Still a bucolic suburb to the fast-growing city, Bloomingdale had many German immigrants growing vegetables for the local markets, and a few mansion owners still maintaining their multi-acre estates. There were stores clustered around 100<sup>th</sup> Street. There were hotels in former mansions that offered respite to downtown people. The train tracks were built along the Hudson and the Croton Aqueduct ran down the streets near what would become Central Park.

There were more poor people, including many Irish people who had escaped the famine in their home country. Their struggle to make a home here put them into rough-shod housing. Pam found a young Irish girl—just 15 years old, with no parents—living in a shanty with her seven brothers and sisters. You can read the blog post [here](#).

## ***Bloomingtondale Queries***

Visitors to the BNHG website sometimes ask us a question about their own research and we try to answer with a substantive, helpful reply. Often, there's a diligent family researcher looking for a family business that once existed in our Bloomingtondale (or Morningside) neighborhood.



Gil Tauber took on a question about a movie theater that Marya's grandparents once owned and was able to find it on a database of historic movie theaters. Sharon had recently discovered that her grandmother had a typewriter store on the Broadway block where Janoff's is now, and Pam Tice found an advertisement for it in a 1938 Columbia Spectator.

Other inquiries have come from people researching their building's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Riverside Drive, in particular, is in a decade of celebrations for buildings that opened in the 1920s. We've helped organizations, too: Friends of the Metro Theater, the team working on the 79<sup>th</sup> Street Rotunda Project, and the Barbican in London.

We're all volunteers, willing to take on a question whenever we can. You can use our website [Contact Page](#) to give us a try.

## ***Preserving Neighborhood History***

The New York Preservation Archive Project was organized in 1990 to "preserve preservation history." Every effort to save an historic building or place has a story. NYPAP exists to provide an archival record of the people involved, their victories and defeats, and the many documents that tell the story of each place.

Thanks to Pam Tice, the story of 891 Amsterdam Avenue is now a part of that record. You can review the story of our neighborhood landmark, which began as the Association for the Relief of Respectable Aged Indigent Females, and is now Hostelling International-New York City.

The record is preserved at the NYPAP site [here](#).

## **Nicholas Roerich: Russian Artist and Mystic Neighbor**

Our neighborhood was featured once again on August 15<sup>th</sup> when the West Side Rag published a detailed article about Nicholas Roerich and his museum in the townhouse at 319 West 107<sup>th</sup> Street. Only a small portion of the 4,000 pieces in his collection are on display, but the range of the collection is great—from avant-garde set designs to paintings to artifacts from his many expeditions.

If you missed the article, you can find it [here](#).

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*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](http://www.upperwestsidehistory.org), and a Neighborhood History Collection of materials housed at the Bloomingdale Branch of the New York Public Library, 150 West 100<sup>th</sup> Street.*