

Twenty-Seventh Year of Publication

Fall 1995

THE BROWNSTONER

A Publication of the Brownstone Revival Committee

(212) 675-0560

P.O. Box 577, New York, NY 10113

BRC Seminars in Manhattan and Brooklyn Will Cover Brownstone Architecture

(Bring a Photo of Your Brownstone)

And the History of the Brownstone Age

NeoGrec? Queen Anne? Maybe Richardsonian Romanesque? Bring a picture of your brownstone to one of these Brownstone Revival Committee seminars and our expert will identify its architectural style. The two-hour seminars—on November 30 in Manhattan and December 7 in Brooklyn—lavishly illustrated by slides, will cover:

* **The Brownstone Age:** How horses, steam power, an expanding population (with plenty of cheap labor), and the vast explosion of wealth following the Civil War came together to create what many people believe is the finest era this city or nation has known. By Everett Ortner, chairman of the Brownstone Revival Committee.

* **Brownstone Architecture:** Our expert will tell you about the major architectural styles of New York brownstones—and identify the features of your own brownstone (if you bring a picture of it to the seminar). By Evelyn Ortner, well-known preservationist.

The seminars will be given at two different sites on different Thursdays:

MANHATTAN: At the Dorot, 171 West 85th Street (near Amsterdam). November 30, 7-9:00 pm.

BROOKLYN: At the Montauk Club, 25 Eighth Avenue (near Flatbush Avenue). December 7, 7-9:00 pm.

There will be a \$10 charge for the seminar, payable at the door. A special annual Brownstone Revival Committee membership rate of \$25 has been set for the seminars. The \$10 fee can be applied to this. Contributions to the BRC are tax-deductible.

The Encyclopedia of New York Is Born, with Rejoicing All Around

The Encyclopedia of New York City, edited by Kenneth T. Jackson. Published jointly by Yale University Press and The New-York Historical Society. \$60.

It's impossible to predict—for me, anyway—when a person might want a list of the 14 Episcopal bishops of New York since 1742; or the borough presidents of New York's five boroughs since the 1898 consolidation of the city; or the mayors of New York or of Brooklyn; or the hundreds of songs and compositions inspired by New York City; or indeed any of information packed into the 4,300 entries and 688 illustrations in this mag-

nificent 7 1/2-pound 1,350-page compendium of New York facts, past and present.

Look up "dance," for example, and you find a 3 1/2-page history of dance in New York, starting with "The Adventure of Harlequin and Scaramouche, or the Spaniard Trick'd" in 1739, and finishing with Merce Cunningham and Twyla Tharp at BAM. And this is followed by lengthy pieces on "dance criticism," "dance halls and discotheques," "Dance Theater Workshop," and "Dance Theatre of Harlem."

History, history, history. Every New York community, including many areas this reviewer never heard of, along with its ethnic population, is covered in detail from the times of the Dutch to the time (today) of the Koreans and Hasidim.

(Con't. on page two)

Architect C.P.H. Gilbert, who probably put up more buildings in Brooklyn (where he lived) than in Manhattan, although you'd never guess it from the Encyclopedjia entry. And though Manhattan's Ansonia gets a brief note, what about Brooklyn's Ansonia—once the largest clock factory in the world and now a handsome co-op apartment house? And how about those wonderful old Brooklyn societies, all more than a century old and still going strong: The New England Society in the City of Brooklyn, The Rembrandt Club, and the Society of Old Brooklynites (yes, SOB's). Incidentally, there is also a New England Society in the City of New York, approximately 20 years older than its Brooklyn counterpart and similarly ignored.

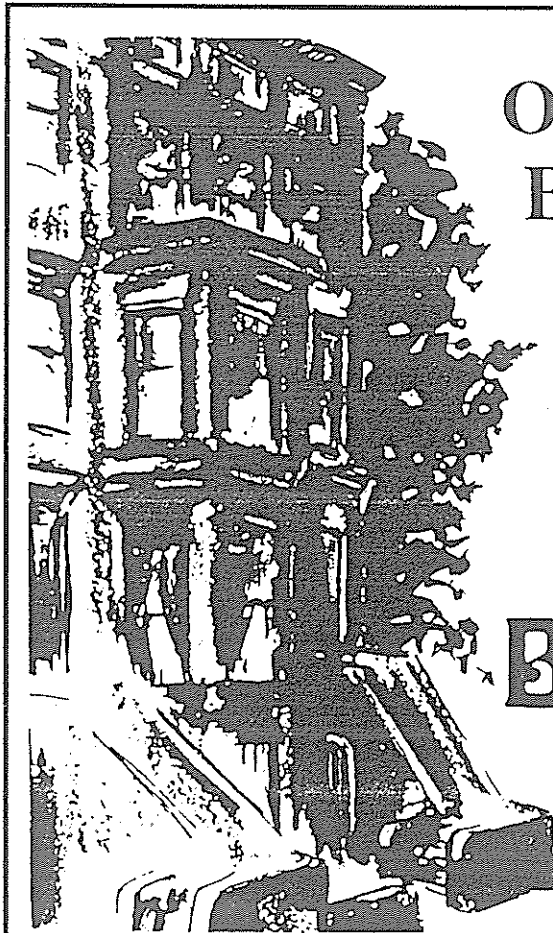
I'm glad that Timothy Lester Woodruff made the cut. As a Brooklynite, lieutenant governor of New York State (1896-1902), and president of the Montauk Club (1904-1908), he deserves it. However, he did not live "for many years at 25 Eighth Avenue," which is the address of the Montauk Club, but on Carroll Street in Park Slope. There's a nice little reminiscence about Woodruff, which is likely true; it appeared in the "Congressional Record" (April 13, 1949). Woodruff was a well-known and well-liked politician. In 1896, the

Republican boss Mark Hanna of Ohio was looking for a running mate for his presidential candidate, William McKinley, governor of Ohio. The idea was to get a man for vice-president who could carry New York state for the Republican ticket. The Eastern leaders proposed Lieutenant Governor Tim Woodruff. Mr. Hanna said: "Is he the man who wears those loud vests?" Someone replied: "Yes, Tim does have a penchant for wearing very fancy vests." Hanna said: "Who else have you?" And they suggested Theodore Roosevelt. The rest, as they say, is history.

There are two small errors concerning the entry on the Montauk Club. Chauncey Depew, whose birthday was celebrated annually for 33 years (1892-1925) at the Montauk Club, was not a member, but an honorary member. (He had to travel from his home in Manhattan for those parties.) Perhaps the Club's two best-known members would be Mayor Wiliam J. Gaynor, who lived at 20 Eighth Avenue, across from the Club, and Governor Hugh Carey. And the Club is located on 8th Avenue at Lincoln Place and Plaza Street (not Plaza Place).

One last word about the *Encyclopedia of New York City*: Every true New Yorker should have a copy.

—Everett H. Ortner



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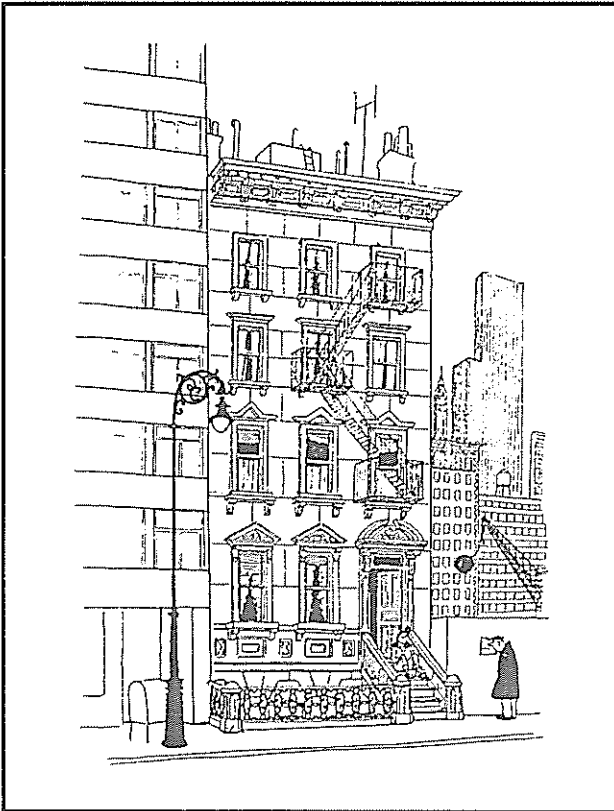
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The Old Brownstone
(from "A Cartoon History of Architecture"
by Osbert Lancaster)

The conservative impulse which in London led the big speculative builders to adopt Kensington Classic as the style most suitable for housing the prosperous bourgeoisie operated in the United States, more particularly in New York, to produce the stylistically very similar Old Brownstone. If that which the two styles have in common is at first sight more apparent than their differences, there are, none the less, some curious deviations



in the American variants.

The detail is generally much heavier, attributable no doubt in part to the change of material, but it is difficult to think of any structural explanation for the extraordinary overdevelopment of the cornice. Nevertheless it is to these enormous projections supported on those whacking great consoles that the style owes much of its effectiveness, particularly when employed over a large area in wide thoroughfares such as Second and Third Avenues. To attribute the greater height of the basement to any compassionate preoccupation with the welfare of the domestic staff, unshared by his Victorian counterpart, would be to credit the New York householder with a social conscience for which strangely little evidence is available. Having regard to the racial composition

of the population at that time it would seem more likely that the raised ground floor, common all over Dublin although practically unknown in contemporary England, was due to Irish influence. Totally without charm, the style does not lack a certain dignity, sufficiently pronounced in some cases almost to overcome the affront to the facade offered by the inevitable fire-escape.

Curiously enough this heavy and not overstimulating style would seem strongly to encourage the homicidal urge, for, as every keen student of American detective fiction knows, there is hardly one of these mansions in all New York that has not witnessed the rubbing-out of an eccentric dowager, or heard the unseasonable death rattle of a miserly millionaire.

**Brooklyn Celebrates Centennial
of America's Oldest Bicycle Path**

America's two great park designers, Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, were responsible not only for New York's two famous parks—Central Park and Prospect Park—but for the great parkways they created to mate with Prospect Park: the Ocean Parkway, to Coney Island and the ocean beaches, and the Eastern Parkway, to link up with bicycle paths that would circle around to connect with New York (Manhattan) paths. They coined the word "parkway." A bulletin from the NYC Parks Department offers some background information:

"Improving on the design of some of the great European boulevards—Paris's Avenue Foch and Berlin's Unter den Linden—Olmsted and Vaux envisioned these two great roads being used for scenic carriage drives and grand bicycle tours, linking Prospect Park with its surroundings communities, Brooklyn's beaches, and the many open spaces beyond. The Ocean Parkway Bicycle Path was the first road constructed in the United States exclusively for the use of cyclists. It was laid in the fall of 1894, and formally opened on June 15, 1895. Ten thousand cyclists attended the opening celebration, cheered by huge crowds along the route."

A much smaller crowd of celebrants—perhaps a hundred or so—assembled on Ocean Parkway on June 15, 1995, to mark the centennial of the bike path, newly and very handsomely restored. Among matters worth noting, Supreme Court Justice Joseph Levine married a couple, Arthur and Elaine Grae, as they sat on their bicycle-built-for-two, six assorted public employees (five cops and a fireman) struggled with little success to stay upright on a six-seater bike, and Parks Commissioner Henry J. Stern arrived with a friend on a two-passenger cart propelled by a muscular cyclist up front.

150 Years Ago in New York

"The cause of temperance, a good and holy cause,... has received a shock in a calamity which has just befallen a Mr. John B. Gough, an itinerant who has been going about the country delivering temperance lectures, and proclaiming his own shame in having been formerly a drunkard. This person has been missing the last two or three days. His friends have published advertisements in the newspapers and put up placards on the street corners offering rewards for his discovery; and now behold he comes to light in a vile brothel, somewhere in Walker Street, to which (from his own account) he was inveigled by some pretended acquaintance, who gave him soda-water, drugged with some deleterious and oblivious liquid which reduced him to a state of insensibility and insanity; in which state the poor man was carried to this abode of drunkenness and lust."—*The Diary of Philip Hone*, Sept. 15, 1845.

"A leaden pipe was successfully laid on the bed of the East River to cross the Fulton Ferry from New York to Brooklyn, for the conveyance of the wires of the magnetic telegraph. The pipe weighs 6,000 pounds, all in one piece without a joint. This is a pretty specimen of mechanical skill, and I see no doubt of its perfect adaptation, except that which arises from the...danger to the pipe from the anchors of vessels riding in the stream...."—*Ibid.* Oct. 23, 1845.

"My apprehensions in regard to the submarine pipe in the East River have been realized. The ship Charles of Liverpool, in weighing her anchor, dragged it up, broke the pipe, and of course destroyed the connection"—*Ibid.*, Oct. 23, 1845.

GOOD BOOKS: Recent Publications

The Battle of Brooklyn—1776 by John J. Gallagher. An absorbing account of the battle (unfortunately known better, if known at all, as the Battle of Long Island) that took place on August 27, 1776, barely seven weeks after the Declaration of Independence. George Washington, the untried general of an untrained army, managed to save his army to fight again and launch a republic. Most of the action took place on land occupied today by Park Slope, Prospect Park, and Green-Wood Cemetery. \$24.95. Published by Sarpedon.

Guide to New York City Landmarks by Andrew S. Dolkart. An excellent guide to the 55 historic districts, 904 individual landmarks, 83 interior landmarks, and nine scenic landmarks designated by the NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission from Oct. 14, 1965 through the end of 1991. \$9.95

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Fireplace Tips:

How Not to Set the World on Fire

Part of the heating season is over, and everything has gone all right, right? But if you have been burning wood in a stove or a fireplace—whether just because it's cheery or because you're trying to keep gas or oil bills lower than the national debt—please consider safety.

Yes, you looked up the flue and can see the blue sky, and yes, there's a hole in the chimney-breast into which you can cram a log or two. But wood can be burned safely only in a fireplace built for it, and most NYC fireplaces weren't. By the 1840's or so, longer-burning coal came into broad use, followed later by no-ashes-to-haul gas. Everyone switched, and fireplaces and flues were built to suit the new fuels—and not wood.

A proper wood-burning fireplace is backed and bottomed with special brick; the flue is lined with sections of terra cotta "pipe," and the joints between sections are snugly stuffed with special cement. Check before you burn: Firebrick lining the fireplace is off-white to beige; flue linings stick up above the chimney and may be seen from across the street (they are square or rectangular, usually 8" x 8" or 8" x 14"). If there is only one chimney, it probably belongs to the furnace, and you really don't have that "wood-burning fireplace" you had hoped for (or that may have caught your eye in the advertisement—that "wbf") when you rented or bought your brownstone apartment.

What gums up a flue?

Evenly with a properly lined chimney, you should not burn pine if you can get any other kind of wood. You may use up old pine lath for kindling (if it's a hundred or so years old, it's thoroughly dry), but pine is full of resin, which goes up the flue with the smoke and sticks there. Burned-on resin is almost impossible to remove from the flue.

So who cares? You do. Gunk in the chimney makes the inside of the flue rough. A rough surface means friction, friction cuts down on the draft, and a poor draft means smoke in the room.

But there is worse still. Creosote. All woods deposit it. In general, the softer and greener (freshly cut) woods deposit the most; hardwoods, especially when well aged and dry, deposit the least—which is one reason why they are so expensive. Creosote rises with the smoke and settles on the flue. And creosote is highly inflammable.

In the days when most folks did use firewood, newspapers prominently featured on the "police blotter" page—right along with apprehended thieves and suspected murderers—the names of householders who had been given summonses for "sparks issuing from the chimney." They, too,

were considered a menace to the entire community. And now, as then, creosote is a real menace.

Put a lid on it.

The only way to control a chimney fire—if you have one—is to cut off the draft. That can be difficult, since you may be dealing with a miniature Vesuvius. First, of course, call the Fire Department. If everyone is safe and you're brave, try to cut off the air. If you can reach the damper handle with a poker, pull it down and hang on (we aren't kidding about the strength of the updraft). Or if you can get your hands on a wet rug, which of course you will have handy for just such an emergency, brace it against the opening with a table. When the fire folks come, they will send a torrent of water down the chimney, since that, too, cuts the draft.

Cleanliness is next to safety.

All this is not to make you afraid to use your fireplaces, but it is meant to make you careful. Safety checks are important. Some things to look for: If, when you open or close dampers, bits of black stuff trickle down on your arm; or if, reaching as high as you can, a fingernail will stick into the stuff to a quarter-inch or so, it's time to phone for the chimney sweep. Depending on what you've been burning and how often, that could be every couple of years or every few months.

When the sweep does come, be sure that the job will be done with brushes. Vacuuming alone won't clean a flue. Mostly, it's good for keeping the dust raised by brushing from floating all over the place.

A cheery fire can indeed dispel much of the gloom of a foul February and miserable March. Just be sure you're not a "sparks issuing from the chimney" menace.

—Adapted from the February, 1979
"Brownstoner"

Getting Ready for the Winter: Time to Check Your Furnace

Brooklynites are lucky to have two competent and reasonably priced services available when furnace turn-on time comes: For a safety check and adjustment: Gilson Heating & Electric (718-253-2929). For a clogged chimney: Jakobsen Chimney Cleaner (718-338-5338).

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*Saturday, November 11: "The Women of Green-Wood": Walking tour of famous cemetery, focusing on famous & infamous females, with BCUE guides Barbara Winslow & Jeff Richman. Meet at 25th Street & Fifth Ave., Brooklyn at 1:00 pm. \$8.

*Sunday, November 12: "We've Got the Power"—Tour of Con Ed and Transit Authority power sources and control centers. 11:00 am. \$15. For reservation call (718) 243-3063.

*Sunday, November 12: "Revolutionary War Sites": 10:30-4:00 pm BCUE bus tour of campgrounds, battlefields and mansions connected with Revolutionary War. Meet at 9th Street and Prospect Park West at 10:30 am. \$30.

*Thursday, November 16: "Writers Talk": Camilo Jose Vergara discusses his book, *The New American Ghetto*, 12:00. Free. Bring lunch if you wish.

*Saturday, November 18: "Polish Greenpoint"—walking tour. \$12. Brooklyn Historical Society. Call (718) 624-0890.

*Saturday, November 18: "Breakfast at Tiffany's"—Behind-the-scenes tour of Tiffany Street Iron Shop at Hunt's Point in the Bronx. Breakfast included. 10:00 am. \$15. Call (718) 243-3063 for reservation.

*Saturday, November 18: "Two City Halls/Two City Hall Subway Stations": BCUE tour of both Brooklyn and New York city halls, plus their subway stations—including rare visit to abandoned Manhattan station. Meet at tall steps of Brooklyn Borough Hall at 12:00 noon. \$8.

*Sunday, November 19: "Ladies Mile: Emporia & Entertainments"—Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave. Lecture. 2:00 pm.

*Sunday, November 19: "Sheep, and a Forest, Too"—autumn tour of Prospect Park with Bill Novak to enjoy glories of restored meadows and woodlands. Meet 1:30 p.m. at Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn (No. 2 or 3 train on IRT).

*Monday, November 20 (& two following Mondays): "Parks for New York: 19th & 20th Century Views." Lectures by John Kriskiewicz. 6:30-8:00 pm. Cooper Union. \$30 for series.

*Saturday, December 2: "Brooklyn's Brewery": BCUE tour of new brewery in Williamsburg. Meet at G train, corner of Metropolitan Ave. & Grand St., Brooklyn. 12:00 noon. \$8.

*Sunday, December 3: "Uncommon Threads: 300 Years of New York Style"—gallery lecture, Museum of the City of New York, 1220 Fifth Ave. 2:00 pm.

*Friday, 8 December-Sunday, December 10: Antiquarian Book & Paper Fair at Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. Witold Rybezynski will read from his new book, *City Life; Urban Expectations in a New World*. Hours: Friday, 10:00 am-9:00 pm. Saturday, 10:00 am-5:00 pm. Sunday, 12:00-5:00 pm. \$3 per day, \$5 for three days.

*Sunday, December 10: "Nostalgia Train"—Ride a restored 1928 D-Type Triplex from the Transit Museum's collection on a four-hour journey on the subway's finest tracks. Lunch at Rockaway or Coney Island, then return to museum. 1:00-5:00 pm. \$20. Children, \$5. Call (718) 243-3063 for reservation.

*Sunday, December 10. "Latino Williamsburg"—walking tour. Brooklyn Historical Society. \$12. Call (718) 624-0890.

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Oct. 26: The "El" Trains and the Brooklyn Bridge: 1869-1883

Nov. 2: Central Park and City Planning: 1857-1890

Nov. 9: The Post Civil War Era: 1865-1885