



# *The Library Branch*

The Parks Library

Room 240, The Arsenal, Central Park

64th Street & Fifth Avenue

Number 8

April 2002

## APRIL LIBRARY EVENT, TUESDAY APRIL 23: “Monuments are Forever”

– A slide show & lecture by Joseph Bresnan, FAIA

Using slide images of moments in New York City parks and cemeteries, Mr. Bresnan will discuss the environmental conditions affecting the care and conservation of outdoor historic monuments including sculpture, architectural works, tombstones, and other forms of commemorative art. The lecture will also address the historical, philosophical, and technical concerns facing the custodians of historic artifacts that constitute our public heritage.

Mr. Bresnan served at Parks from 1965 to 1985 overseeing the legacy of cultural resources within the city-wide park system, including scenic and historic landmarks, historic houses, public monuments, and public art programs. He was Executive Director of the NYC Landmarks Commission for four years, followed by ten years as vice president of the Remco Group in charge of architectural services, specializing on landmark restorations and high quality projects. He and his wife Adrienne Bresnan, FAIA (also an ex-Parkie) now practice as Bresnan Architects, PC, a historic preservation consulting firm in New York City.

5:30, April 23 in the Parks Library, Rm. 240, the Arsenal, 830 Fifth Avenue (at 64th Street)  
Please RSVP by phone: 212-360-8240 or email: [Library@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Library@parks.nyc.gov)

### ***THIS MONTH IN PARKS***

Now in its third month, this column highlights notable events in Parks history that occurred any number of years ago during the current month.

- 1776 April 7: Commodore John Barry “the father of the U.S. Navy” scored America’s first naval victory. Barry later worked to create the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and in 1951 the City Council renamed nearby City Park in Barry’s honor. Acquired by the Village of Brooklyn in 1836, it is Brooklyn’s oldest park.
- 1870 April 5: Tweed Ring politicians abruptly replaced the Board of Commissioner of Central Park with a new city agency, the Department of Public Parks. The new park commissioner, Peter B. Sweeny fired Central Park’s designers Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, and Andrew Haswell Green, the park comptroller. Boss Tweed and Sweeney, along with the other key ring members, Mayor A. Oakey Hall and Comptroller Richard B. Connolly seized control of the finances of the city and embezzled hundreds of millions of dollars. Fortunately, by July of 1871 the *New York Times* exposed the Tweed Ring, and the Department of Public Parks was taken over by some of the former commissioners of Central Park. Andrew Haswell Green was reinstated as Parks Department comptroller, and Olmsted and Vaux were rehired.
- 1912 April 15: R.M.S. *Titanic* sank. On board was Isador Straus and his wife Ida. Their memory is honored by the Straus Monument and Park on Manhattan’s Upper East Side. Mr. Straus and his brothers owned Macy’s Department Store and bought out Joseph Wechsler’s share of a Brooklyn dry goods company called Abraham and Wechsler, forming Abraham and Straus. The Wireless Memorial in Battery Park, which commemorates all wireless-telegraph operators lost at sea, was initially inspired by the heroic sacrifice of the *Titanic*’s Chief Wireless Officer Jack Phillips. Against the captain’s orders Phillips telegraphed distress messages until the power went out, leaving himself no time to abandon ship.
- 1925 April 10: Marine Park site acquired eight years after being offered by Brooklyn notables Frederick B. Pratt and Alfred T. White who, fearing the environmental effects of a development scheme to turn Jamaica Bay into a port, presented their 150 acres of relatively pristine marshland around Gerritsen Creek to the City to be preserved as parklands. In the 1930s, Commissioner Robert Moses increased the property size to 1,822 acres through purchase, land fill, and draining. The Federal Government later reduced it to 798 acres.

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## ***PARKS LIBRARY NEWS***

Over the past few months several changes have taken place in the Parks Library, most notably the completion of the Historical Signs project. For more than two years, the Parks Library housed the large staff of historical sign researchers and writers, but now that the signs are written and installed, the once crowded library is a quiet, inviting place to sit and read.

When you get here, you'll find that the Library contains materials to suit many interests. In addition to having a fine collection of secondary sources on parks, New York City history, urban planning, landscape architecture, and nature, the library is well-equipped to serve the serious researcher. Many students and authors come to the Parks Library seeking minute facts about numerous aspects of Parks history. Our primary sources include Parks reports dating back to the 1850s, City and State law books, annual reports of the Metropolitan Museum, and various publications produced by numerous City agencies.

It's not just our shelves that bear a wealth of information. The Parks Library also has a concentrated collection of plans, drawings, and maps providing detailed views of the City's most prominent parks. Over the summer, the Library acquired a microfilm reader/printer and a set of microfilm documents. The films contain all Brooklyn parks correspondence between 1938 and 1966, organized chronologically and then alphabetically by subject. So if you were interested in Prospect Park around 1957, you could quickly find and print the relevant correspondence.

Whether you would like to read a little about trees or need to write an environmental impact statement, you should visit the Parks Library. Located on the second floor of the Arsenal in Central Park at 64th Street and Fifth Avenue, the Parks Library is open to the public, Monday through Friday 9:00 to 5:00. Call 212-360-8240 or e-mail [library@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:library@parks.nyc.gov) if you have any questions.

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## ***BOOKS OF THE MONTH***

### **Privately Owned Public Space: The New York City Experience**

By Jerold S. Kayden, The New York City Department of City Planning, and The Municipal Art Society of New York

*"This is an indispensable guide to New York City's 500-plus privately owned public spaces. The book's marathon undertaking is required reading for anyone interested in the history and development of modern New York."*

—Nathan Glazer, Professor of Sociology and Education Emeritus, Harvard University

### **Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance**

By Cary D. Wintz

*"By exploring the relationship between a community and its literature, Wintz captures the social issues at stake for these young authors as they crossed publication barriers, explored new forms, and wrote with passion about the Black experience in North America."*

—*Harvard Educational Review*

### **Liquid Assets: A History of New York City's Water System**

By Diane Galusha

*"In *Liquid Assets*, author Diane Galusha traces for the first time between the covers of a single volume the development of the amazing water system that altered landscapes, transformed lives, and made possible New York's preeminence among the world's great cities."*

—Purple Mountain Press

### **Central Park**

By Bruce Davidson

*"This is the Central Park that Bruce Davidson (the Central Park Conservancy's first artist-in-residence) sees, a place of poetic encounter, a space in which epiphanies are everywhere to be found, if one is patient—and observant."*

—Elizabeth Barlow Rogers