



# The Library Branch

The Parks Library

Room 240, The Arsenal, Central Park

64th Street & Fifth Avenue

Number 5

January 2002

---

## JANUARY LIBRARY EVENTS

**Wednesday, January 16** - Amy Freitag, Director of Historic Houses, will give a lecture in the Parks Library entitled "Historic Preservation at Parks: New Technologies and Conservation Practices."

The Historic House Trust is the historic preservation arm of Parks. The Trust employs property managers, architectural conservators, and curators to improve the presentation and condition of the 80 historic structures associated with 20 sites located on New York City parkland. The Trust will present its recent conservation projects and new technologies employed to manage this significant collection.

**Thursday, January 24** - Join us for a free screening of *A Walk through Central Park*. This two-hour documentary leads us through Central Park from its historic beginnings to its present state. Sara Cedar-Miller, Central Park Photographer/Historian, will introduce the film.

*The events will begin at 5:30 p.m. Space is limited; please RSVP by calling 212-360-8240 or email [Library@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Library@parks.nyc.gov)*

---

## HISTORICAL SIGNS PROJECT COMPLETED

### 2001<sup>ST</sup> Historical Sign Installed!

During Commissioner Stern's administration more than 30 writers and researchers worked in the Parks Library, drafting hundreds of historical and natural history signs. On December 26, 2001, the last historical sign was installed.

### MAINE MONUMENT

Central Park

The *Maine* Monument stands at Merchants' Gate, a park entrance named in 1862 to recognize the importance of commerce and business in New York City. The monument honors the 258 American sailors who perished when the battleship *Maine* exploded in the harbor of Havana, Cuba, then under Spanish rule. The causes of the February 15, 1898 explosion remain unclear, but by April of that year, Spain had declared war on the United States.

The Spanish-American War ended in December of 1898 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris. This agreement, a landmark in the United States' rise to international power, released Cuba from Spanish rule and ceded Guam, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and the Philippines to the jurisdiction of the United States. Cuba, nominally independent after the war, was forced to include a clause known as the Platt Amendment in its new constitution. This amendment allowed the United States to 'protect' Cuba whenever Congress was of the opinion that the new republic was experiencing a threat to its sovereignty. By effectively negating that sovereignty, and by the brutal suppression of the independence struggle in the Philippines, the United States ended the Spanish-American War much enhanced in territory, trade, and prestige.

The war brought rewards for the state, but quoting the words inscribed on the monument itself, the "valiant seamen who perished on the *Maine* by fate unwarned, in death unafraid" were mourned by the entire nation. Four days after the *Maine* went down, newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst's *New York Morning Journal* called for a public collection to honor the sailors with a monument. Over the course of several years, the newspaper received monetary gifts of all sizes, from large grants to thousands of dollars worth of pennies collected from schoolchildren.

Hearst first considered the mouth of New York Harbor as a fitting site for a monument to sailors. He wrote that, "A monument standing at the mouth of the Narrows, looking out over the ocean, would form a memorial worthy of the brave fellows who died while on duty for their country." The site eventually chosen for the memorial was Longacre Square (now Times Square), the present location of the midtown TKTS booth. Through some "clerical oversight," however, the designers discovered that a comfort station had been hastily built on the designated spot. When the architects started looking around for another site, the obvious choice was the Merchants' Gate, where the memorial would provide a balance to the monumental column of Columbus Circle, erected in 1892.

---

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Henry J. Stern, Commissioner

Katherine O. Clark, Librarian

[www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks)

---

H. Van Buren Magonigle and Attilio Piccirilli were chosen to design and sculpt the massive monument. Sculptor Piccirilli and architect Magonigle also worked together on the *Firemen's Memorial* in Riverside Park at West 100th Street. Attilio and his five brothers operated a studio in the Mott Haven section of the Bronx where they modeled and carved their own work and also carved for other artists some of the nation's best-loved works, including the Library Lions at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue, portions of the Washington Square Arch in Greenwich Village, and Abraham Lincoln at Washington, D.C.'s Lincoln Memorial. Designed by Magonigle and created by Piccirilli, the monument is rich in allegory and symbolism. Atop the center pylon rides the bronze figure of a woman, *Columbia Triumphant*, drawn in a seashell chariot by three sea horses. This martial group is cast in bronze recovered from the guns of the *Maine* itself.

In the front of the tall shaft is an allegorical group arranged in a ship configuration, entitled *The Antebellum State of Mind: Courage Awaiting the Flight of Peace and Fortitude Supporting the Feeble*. The youth at the prow of the ship holds his hands in the sign of the *Victory* that he represents. Recumbent figures at the side fountains represent the *Atlantic* and *Pacific*, while those at the rear represent *The Post-Bellum Idea: Justice Receiving Back the Sword Entrusted to War*. The names of those who died on the *Maine* are inscribed on the pylon above the oceans, while all over dolphins, seashells, and sea creatures bring a unity of decoration to the complex allegorical composition. The sculptural program figuratively reflects America's new position as a dominant world force just as the imposing Beaux Arts structure itself symbolizes the American conception of the bold and grandiose domination of space.

---

## **BOOKS OF THE MONTH**

### **A Clearing in the Distance**

By Witold Rybczynski

*"A sensitive, engrossing biography of Frederick Law Olmsted: one of the most evocative and multifaceted men of the American nineteenth century, whose works still live and breathe among us."*

—Francis Fitzgerald

### **A Natural History of New York City**

By John Kiernan

*"The volume is one long delightful trip in the company of a charming and erudite companion... Covering a generally overlooked aspect of the history of New York City, it is a painstaking, thorough, carefully written volume. It is John Kiernan's finest work, in many ways the best treatment the natural history of a great city has ever received. The drawings by Henry Bugbee Kane have the delicate quality of lithographs and beautifully compliment the text."*

—Edwin Way Teale, The New York Times Book Review

### **Faith in a Seed**

By Henry D. Thoreau

*"Faith in a Seed... is clearly marked by the genius of Thoreau. The pages flash with penetrating insights and wisdom, with his indefatigable curiosity, his probing intellect."*

—The Washington Post

### **The Language of Landscape**

By Anne Whiston Spirn

*"Spirn has thought deeply about landscape and human responses to it. Her new book... offers a myriad of stimulating impressions and suggestions and pursues a wide array of intellectual issues... All will appreciate Spirn's sensitive eye and her vivid descriptions."*

—Choice

### **Palisades: 100,000 acres in 100 years**

By Robert O. Binnewies

*"Bob Binnewies has done a masterful job of capturing the spirit and chronicling the determination of those whose work has helped safeguard the magnificent landscape of the Hudson River. Palisades is a must for everyone involved in open space and wildlife habitat protection."*

—Patrick F. Noonan, chairman, The Conservation Fund

---

## **ABOUT THE LIBRARY**

The Parks Library is open to the public Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. If you have any questions, please feel free to call 212-360-8240, or you can write us at our new, easy to remember e-mail address: [Library@parks.nyc.gov](mailto:Library@parks.nyc.gov).

---

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Henry J. Stern, Commissioner

Katherine O. Clark, Librarian

[www.nyc.gov/parks](http://www.nyc.gov/parks)