



The Library Branch

Number 15

January 2003

It Happened on Washington Square

Lecture, slide show, and book signing event January 15

From gardens to trees to the parks themselves, there's been a continuous flow of books on New York City's beautiful and historic green spaces. *It Happened on Washington Square*, by Emily Kies Folpe, is not just the latest but also one of the best installments to the veritable tome of parks-related scholarship that has been flourishing in recent years.

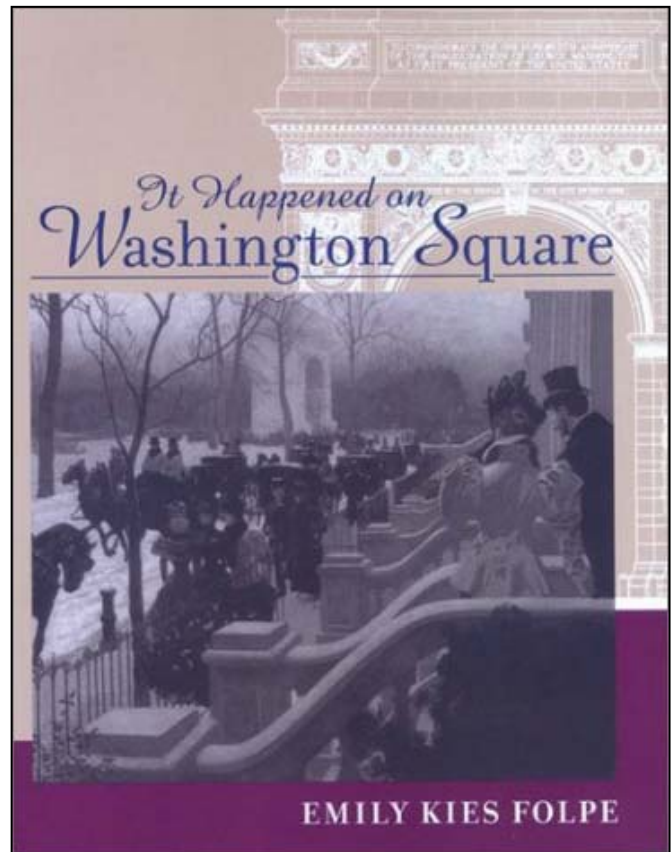
Taking things from the very beginning, Folpe's book first looks at Washington Square during the Dutch Colonial period when freed African slaves farmed the area. In later years it served as a potter's field, but the city decided to make it a military parade ground in 1826. This was its first recognizable incarnation as a public open space.

New York's elite migrated north through Manhattan during the 19th century leaving a trail of fine architecture behind. When they reached Washington Square in 1830 they built the Greek Revival townhouses that still define the park's north side. Ms. Folpe also explains that we have the New York elite to thank for the illustrious Washington Square arch, which was designed by Stanford White of the renowned architecture firm McKim, Mead and White.

In 1837 New York University took its place beside the square and is a mainstay there to this day. The book contains three illustration sections with images and descriptive texts on facing pages. One of the many things these historical photo essays illustrate is the importance of NYU buildings in Washington Square's urban landscape.

Landscape and architecture notwithstanding, Washington Square Park bears the distinction of having continuously functioned as a social and political barometer of New York City. One generation after another, New Yorkers have come together to work, to fight, to protest, to advocate, to paint, to write, to play, to talk, and to think in that space. This book therefore represents more than the history of 9.75 acres of land. The analysis of what happened on Washington Square amounts to a ticker-tape readout of the social history of New York. But as they say...you don't have to take my word for it.

Come to our lecture on January 15, and see Ms. Folpe's slide presentation on the history of the park, which will draw from images in the book as well as many others that were not published. You may buy a book at the event for a discounted price of \$20.00 (\$5 from each book sold at the event will go to the Fund for Washington Square) or at your local bookstore for the regular price. But whether you buy it there or bring your own, the author will be happy to sign your copy during the reception after the talk.



Wednesday, January 15, at 6:00 p.m., in the Arsenal Gallery

Please call 212-360-8240 or e-mail Library@parks.nyc.gov to reserve your seat.

THE NEW YEAR BRINGS NEW RULES TO THE PARKS LIBRARY

Readers of this newsletter typically fall into the category of Parks Library patron or Parks employee. The following changes in the Library's policies will be of interest to both groups, as well as newcomers who might be reading this on the web.

For its first three years of operation the Parks Library was open to the public 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week. This will no longer be our policy. Anyone seeking to visit the Library should make an appointment, and while drop-ins are welcome, you will sometimes find that the Library is closed for a meeting or that the librarian is away.

Although this might be perceived as a reduction in service, it should produce an increase in quality. The librarian will use his time away from the Library to dig up other source material that is currently in storage and to collect items that Parks employees have been keeping at their desks that ought to become part of our collection. In the end, the Parks Library will be better stocked than before.

THE STRAND SUPPORTS THE PARKS LIBRARY

When the Parks Library opened just three years ago, we relied on the generosity of bookstores such as Barnes and Noble and Borders for our initial stock of in-print titles. Later we used budgetary funding to buy new books. Since the City's budget was first frozen in 2001, the Parks Library has had no acquisition budget. Seeking to acquire books without the use of money, we started the Got Books campaign, where we asked you to donate books relating to parks history. From that effort we got some important donations. We have also received donations directly from the authors and publishers of parks-related books. In fact, most of the books we feature in this newsletter have been donated in that way.

Although these single book donations have kept us going over the past year, what we have always really needed was another sponsorship by a major bookstore. We are proud to announce that the famous Strand Bookstore in Greenwich Village has started a partnership with the Parks Library. We provided them a wish list and they pored through their voluminous stacks and have already made a generous contribution of titles. We thank the Strand for their kindness and we hope to be able to credit them for many future contributions.

THIS MONTH IN PARKS

- 1881 January 22: Dedication of Cleopatra's Needle. Officially called the Obelisk, the famous stone shaft is the oldest man-made object in Central Park. Located directly behind the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the monument earned its nickname soon after its installation, but it has no connection to the legendary Queen of the Nile. In fact, Thutmose III, an Egyptian pharaoh who ruled from 1479-1425 B.C., commissioned two pink granite monoliths to celebrate his third jubilee (30th year of reign). One at the portal to the Temple of the Sun in the sacred city of Heliopolis on the Nile River, one now stands in Central Park and the other on the bank of the Thames River in London. The shafts themselves are 69 feet high from base to tip, and weigh somewhere between 193 and 200 tons. The base and steps, which were added in Alexandria, are 27 feet high and weigh over 50 tons.
- 1932 January 22: New York Senator Royal S. Copeland introduced a bill proposing that Fort Schuyler be turned over to the city as a park. Located in the Bronx at the mouth of Long Island Sound, this historic fort (construction began in 1833) eventually became the home of the State University of New York Maritime College. The approach to the Throgs Neck Bridge goes over the school's land.
- 1966 January 11: The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission designates "King Mansion" as a Landmark. Once the home of Rufus King (1755-1827), a distinguished lawyer, statesman, and gentleman farmer, King Manor, which is located in Queens, has operated as a museum since 1900.

Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor

Adrian Benepe, Commissioner

John S. Mattera, Librarian

www.nyc.gov/parks

1925 January: The city of Nome, Alaska experienced an outbreak of diphtheria. Gunnar Kasson's dog sled team, with a black and white Alaskan malamute named Balto at the lead, raced 340 miles over the frozen tundra in only five days and seven hours – a world record time – delivering the precious serum that quickly ended the deadly epidemic. *Balto*, Central Park's monument to the legendary dog, is so often petted and mounted by adoring children that the head and back of the bronze are permanently shined.