

Learning Places Spring 2016

SITE REPORT 1

Exploring Vinegar Hill



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INTRODUCTION

The site visit encompassed a wide breadth of and knowledge between city planning, architecture and New York City history. We started our trip along the heart of Vinegar Hill, which was along Plymouth and Hudson streets. The characteristics of the main street in Vinegar Hill were explored, as several anecdotes and questions regarding the neighborhood's planning and architecture were brought up. We then navigated towards the perimeter of Vinegar Hill, which revealed to us it's relationship between the Navy Yard, Sand's street and Dumbo. Our trip terminated along the border between Dumbo and Vinegar hill, where remnants of transportation (trolley tracks) were present.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

To be frank, I'm not sure what I should anticipate for our site visit to Vinegar Hill. It's not a place you usually hear by the grapevine, but I would suppose that I'm a bit fortunate to have ponder upon on it

on google maps. While the site sits on the waterfront in Brooklyn, I anticipate it to have a system of which would prevent high tide or flooding. I also am anticipating a industrial waterfront, as it used to be lined up with distilleries. The expectation of an industrial waterfront would present larger city blocks, larger streets and less people.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches)



A view along Hudson street, opposite of the waterfront. This view emphasizes the architectural condition of the streets, as well as the urban condition of it. Most buildings around the vicinity are less than 4 stories tall, common of that of the early 20th century and late 19th century. The building on the right is a wood structure, whereas the one across from it and behind the tree is a brick structure (notice the lintel detail.) Cobble streets are present here.



Another view between Hudson and John streets. This condition emphasises the change in materiality of the ground, whereby the roads aren't paved in cobblestones, but are paved with asphalt. The beginning of this material starts at the intersection of these cross-streets, and extend into the old Hudson Train Station.



An urban cut where Harrison Alley was created. The image emphasizes and alley condition.



Harrison Alley represents an urban cutout condition as shown above. While Evans is present and continuous within Vinegar Hill, Harrison Alley terminates at the facade of this building and pushes through the empty lots above. The issue of the alley is not currently present, as both properties are abandoned and are used for storage.



The series of images above emphasize the architectural condition of the cross streets of Evans street and Little street. While the sidewalks are described through slight curvature, the complexity of the space lies between the tension between it's corner condition and edge condition. While the termination of Evans street and Little street are embraced by the elevational change of the Brooklyn Navy Yard, it's innermost corner, which faces the roundabout road is described by a new architectural piece.



These images describe the Boorum & Pease Company building on Front and Hudson streets. This building is the epitome of industrial buildings in the area. It's the second tallest building in Vinegar Hill. (It's competitor is the Tuck Away Storage building on John and Hudson streets) Not only was it prominent in it's height, but it's architectural style describes a new array of vocabulary: wider

windows, stone columns between each window bay, and iron fire escapes.

QUALITATIVE SITE OBSERVATIONS

1. Neighborhood / Street Character
 - a. Vinegar Hill
 - b. Quaint, industrial, severely mixed use.
2. Vitality of Neighborhood
 - a. General Description
 - i. Vinegar Hill, is a charming quaint, peaceful neighborhood with undertones of industrial history.
 - b. Pedestrian Activity
 - i. There is little to no pedestrian activity, as it was surprising to stumble upon other people walking around the area.
 - c. Vehicular Traffic
 - i. Vehicular traffic is almost nonexistent except for the paved road along Evans street, which still does not frequent many visitors.
3. Age of Buildings (provide evidence for prediction)
 - a. Buildings in this neighborhood fall under the spectrum of pre world war II and contemporary times. The height of the buildings, most of which are under 6 stories suggest that these buildings were built in the late 1800's to the early 1900's. More evidence that exhibits the age of the buildings are the materials, construction strategy and material wear and tear.
 - b. There are a few examples of cases of new buildings within the area, but these new buildings scattered (on the corners of streets, for an example little street and evans vs. along the trajectory of Hudson street)
4. Relationship Between Buildings
 - a. For the most part, buildings are almost always connected to each other, except for the case of the Ferragut Housing complex.
 - b. Hudson street feels the most authentic of historic preservation. The architectural style along the street are mostly homogenous, whereas it's adjacent streets may vary in style, at least ever so slightly.
 - c. There are also slight variations between building height and the exhibition of land ownership. While buildings on Hudson street do not exhibit fences or front yards,

both of which are indicators of the property line, the idea of the property line is much more prominent along the outskirts of Vinegar Hill.

5. Building Details

- a. Corner columns stand firmly at the corner of the corner buildings, emphasizing the corner condition in the early 20th century. Behind the columns is an inverted corner or a tapered edge, which describes an open towards a commercial space. The commercial space sets a precedent throughout the first floor of Hudson street. You can imagine them to be interconnected little markets, exhibiting goods along the storefront but instead they are limited to the walls of masonry construction.
- b. Masonry construction is ubiquitous in the neighborhood of Vinegar Hill. It is common to find what seems to be an old strategy of building: windows with stone lintels, and bricks that embrace the weight between them. Bricks, unlike the lintels are not as overt in terms of the manifestation of style. While bonds like the flemish bond and the standard bond both describe a time in which the buildings were built, architects can easily renovate/fabricate facades to make it look that way.
- c. Iron cast details are scarcely found on the waterfront, often painted in vibrant colors unseen in Manhattan.

6. Relationship to the Waterfront

- a. The presence of the waterfront is not an overt architectural intervention. Instead, it seems that Vinegar Hill seems to shy away from the waterfront, quietly observing it in it's place. The most aggressive move was the push of the land boundary towards the river.
- b. Buildings that sit closest to the waterfront are industrial.

7. Other Observations

- a. All of the streets are named, and do not pertain to a numerical system. Most streets follow the Roman Grid, except for Little and Evans street.
- b. There are a few discontinued streets, or alley ways such as Harrison Alley and the street next to P.S 307 (Sadly, I did not write it down and cannot find it on google maps. Planning to take note of it during the next field visit)
- c. There are remnants of trolley tracks closer to Dumbo.

QUANTITATIVE DATA for Area of Study

Subject	Data
Street Names	Plymouth, John, Evans, Gold, Little, Water, Bridge, York, Marshall and Front streets along with Hudson avenue.
Street Width	Streets are rather narrow, measuring less than 20'
Street Pavement	Varying from cobblestone to asphalt
Building Heights	Varying from 3 - 5 stories
Building Widths (Window Bays)	<p>Varies depending upon programmatic use of the building.</p> <p>Residential / Commerical: 2-3 bays Industrial: 4-6 bays</p>
Building Types/Uses	<p>Mixed uses, varying from minimal commercial, to residential and undertones of industrial.</p> <p>Several upcoming lofts are dispersed throughout Vinegar Hill: Humphrey Loft and Gold Street Lofts.</p>
Empty Lots / Gardens	Several empty lots, mostly around newly established or deconstructed streets
Shops / Restaurants	<p>Minimal, but evident along Hudson street.</p> <p>Examples would consist of Vinegar Hill House, Damascus Bakery, Los Papi's and Bridge Coffee shop.</p>
Industrial Shops	<p>Quite a few</p> <p>An example would be the Bowery Restaurant Supply</p>
Train Stations	Outdated Hudson Stop

QUESTIONS to Research Further

QUESTIONS:

1. How did the rezoning of P.S 307 change Ferragut Housing?
2. What led to the termination of the Hudson stop or Hudson line? Is that why there is a change of road materiality?
3. Is Harrison Alley now currently two vacant lots due to the alley condition of the street?

RESEARCH METHOD/SOURCE FOR EACH QUESTION ABOVE:

1. Question 1
 - a. Understand the population in Ferragut Housing through GIS sites.
 - b. Observe how the population has shifted since the establishment of P.S 307.
 - c. Study the population shift post rezoning of P.S 307.
2. Question 2
 - a. Understand the importance of the Hudson stop and find supplementary historical events which emphasize the necessity for the Hudson stop.
 - b. Look for transit maps which include the Hudson stop. Utilize these maps to observe the issue of transportation throughout the area. Where does this train go to? When did it start going there? When did it stop?
 - c. Look for maps which may include the indication of material change on the roads. Does it correlate to any of your previous findings?
3. Question 3
 - a. Compare maps of Vinegar Hill to see how congested Harrison Alley was before property started to disappear.
 - b. Look for supplementary historical events which emphasize the necessity of introducing the alley, and architecture shifts around then.

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

I was surprised to find that Visiting Vinegar Hill was not really what I had anticipated. I anticipated a much more remote, industrial neighborhood--a neighborhood which would only consist of industrial programs and architecture. I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Vinegar Hill, despite it's location and it's past, is a very charming gem in New York City. I was taken by the condition of the streets--the preservation of cobblestone, and the preservation of 20th century brick buildings. Between the historic and industrial remnants of Vinegar Hill, it was also intriguing to experience the effect of making this neighborhood mixed-use. Several questions lingered when streets were discontinued, or when new building properties were built. I am certainly looking forward to visiting again.