

Learning Places Spring 2016

SITE REPORT 01

The first Vinegar Hill visit



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INTRODUCTION

This activity was based on being introduced with the Vinegar Hill area by walking thru it and witness what we previously read about this place and some of the history that is still left there. By visiting Vinegar Hill we would experience it very differently than just reading about this neighborhood, and it will help us to get inspired to talk and write more about it.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

Prior to the visit we read about Brooklyn, Vinegar Hill and its surroundings. We created an idea of how this area would have been, but I didn't think that there will be still historic houses alive because of I imagined that would have been devoured by the new constructions and high-rise buildings. I imagined that all the streets were going to be asphalted. I basically thought that we were going to learn where the historic places were located and to do a research on their lifetime history.

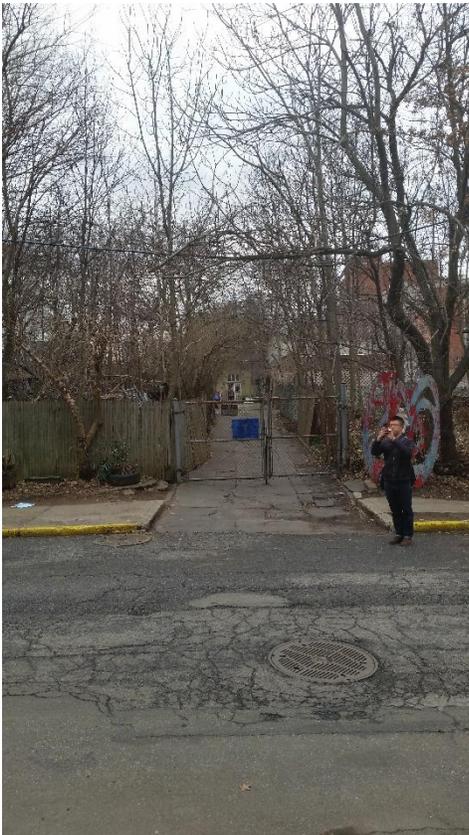
SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches)



In this picture is shown the intersection of Harrison Alley and Evans Street. This intersection existed ones upon a time, but now on one side of Harrison Alley they built the building shown on the picture. Evans Street still exist as a regular street and is being used by the public.



On this pictures we can see the remaining of the Harrison Alley that is not anymore to public use, is being used as a private driveway that leads you to the building in the end of it.



This is a view in perspective of Harrison Alley where we can clearly see the prohibited entrance since is considered a private territory and where the owner placed doors and locked them.



In this picture is shown the expansion of Gold Street from one lane for each traffic direction to two lanes for each traffic direction and parking on both sides. This expansion came because of the growth of the population and the motorized traffic needs. This street most likely is been extended after 1960's when Brooklyn Queens Expressway was built and urban renewal came into play.



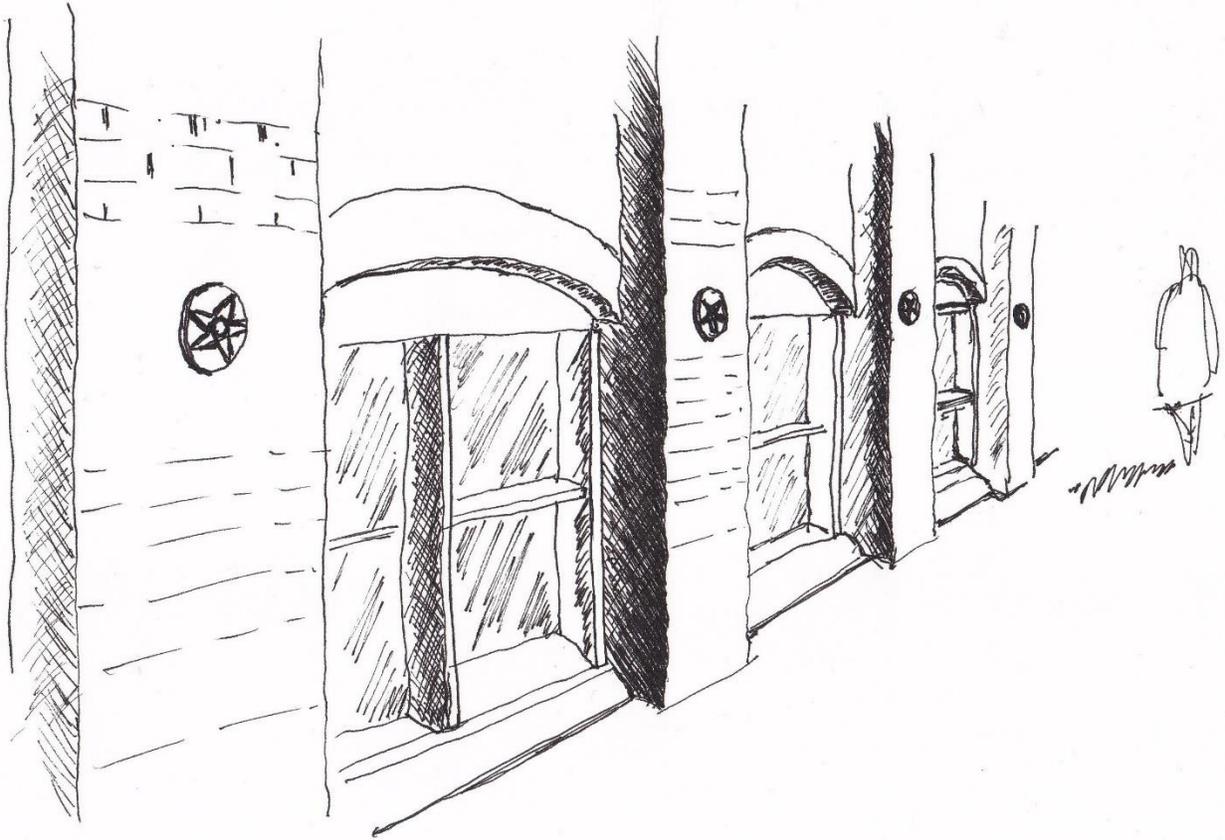
In this picture is shown a corner building that was a preferred location at that time for commercial use, and it is still the most preferred nowadays. This locations were being used as stores, but now is used as residential space. The triangle entrance makes possible to become easy to notice the store by people. The big glass windows show as well that the ground floor of this building was being used for commercial purposes.



In this picture we can notice the difference in colors of the street names. The color green one is just a regular street, instead the brown one indicates that the street falls in a special district, it's an historic street. Front Street stops from being an historic street at the point where it meets with the green colored Gold Street. If we zoom in the picture we can notice that on the other side Front Street and Gold Street are both green, so this proves the point on the previous sentence.



This door is one of the oldest doors we have seen so far in Vinegar Hill neighborhood. Surprisingly this door it's in a pretty good shape, well maintained or should we say well resisted since the owner doesn't look like he cared much about this property. We can't say the same about the rest of the building since we can see that the walls are amortized and the paint is falling apart.



In this sketch I wanted to show the centered detail on each column, the rounded plate with a star in the middle. This detail was placed in buildings when cracks were appearing, and this detail served to keep the facade with the rest of the building intact. This detail comes in different details and shapes, but the most important functionality is being screwed to the rod that is strongly connected in the interior of the building. In this case this detail is just decorative since the building is a new construction.

QUALITATIVE SITE OBSERVATIONS

1. Neighborhood / Street Character
 - a. Historical neighborhood
 - b. Old fashion street with cobblestone
 - c. It's in a corner end location.
2. Vitality of Neighborhood
 - a. General Description
 - i. It's a great area that reserved its antique feeling and very quiet
 - b. Pedestrian Activity
 - i. Rarely saw people walking on those streets since there are not much

commercial activities there.

- c. Vehicular Traffic
 - i. Rarely cars had a purpose to drive there unless they were looking for parking
- 3. Age of Buildings (provide evidence for prediction)
 - a. Most of them were built in mid-20th century since the brick work on them its Running Bond style, even though some of them may be from an earlier age since they did replace the facades.
 - b. We rarely saw buildings with Flemish Bond brick work since they are part of an older time like in late-19th century.
 - c. We saw other wooden buildings with Shingle style facade that is an old way of building too. This type of construction was being used in late-19th century as well.
- 4. Relationship Between Buildings
 - a. Some of them are next to each other.
 - b. Some others are detached and separated from the buildings next to them.
 - c. Their first floor is for commercial use and the floors above are residential.
- 5. Building Details
 - a. Big glass windows in the first floor of the buildings
 - b. Column by the entrance of the corner houses/stores
 - c. Corner entrances for better interaction with clients.
- 6. Relationship to the Waterfront
 - a. Their strongest relationship with the Waterfront were the streets with a smooth pendency toward the East River like Bridge Street, Gold Street and Hudson Avenue.
 - b. Some of the streets I mentioned above are demolished or barely used for the connection with the waterfront.
 - c. The relationship with the waterfront is nonexistent, it's blocked by Con Edison buildings.

QUANTITATIVE DATA for Area of Study

Subject	Data
Street Names	Hudson Avenue, Gold Street, Harrison Alley, Evans Street, Front Street, Plymouth Street, Bridge Street, York Street, Water Street

Street Width	In most of the Vinegar Hill areas the streets had the same width as before. A few of them like York Street, Gold Street became wider after the urban renewal.
Street Pavement	Mostly asphalt, and in some parts of their length like Hudson Avenue, Water Street, Plymouth Street, etc. kept their identity with cobblestone style pavements.
Building Heights	2 – 4 floors high residential, 4 – 6 floors high industrial
Building Widths (Window Bays)	The old ones are about 25 feet or 3 window bays
Building Types/Uses	Residential, commercial, industrial
Empty Lots / Gardens	Couple of them are available in the area and we walked on some of the in Hudson Avenue and Evans Street
Shops / Restaurants	Cafés, restaurants, art stores and pharmacy
Industrial Shops	Restaurant supply, Doors and hardware store
Semipublic / Public spaces	The elementary school, low income housing playgrounds

QUESTIONS to Research Further

QUESTIONS:

1. Why some of the street names are colored brown and some green?
2. When the name Vinegar Hill was given to this area?
3. Did Vinegar Hill increase or decrease at some points of time?

RESEARCH METHOD/SOURCE FOR EACH QUESTION ABOVE:

1. Question 1

- a. Searching in Google “Why are some NYC street signs brown?”
 - b. Searching in Wikipedia “New York City streets”
 - c. Brooklyn Historical Society website
2. Question 2
- a. Old newspapers from the Brooklyn Public Library website.
 - b. Wikipedia “Vinegar Hill, Brooklyn”
 - c. Searching in Google “When Vinegar Hill was named”
3. Question 3
- a. Brooklyn On Line website
 - b. Searching in Google: “Vinegar Hill border changes”
 - c. Digital maps of that period of time at New York Public Library website.

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

The visit to the site was very productive and we got to know many interesting things about Vinegar Hill. This place is filled with history and was a very important area at that time since it had direct access to the East River and the ferry. At that time the transportation was via water. It is a unique neighborhood and I think it should be kept in a better shape, because what I noticed from the visit was that most of these buildings are not being maintained properly, and this shouldn't left only on the owners hands, the government should intervene on it. Walking on those few blocks, watching those old houses, and experiencing the quietness of this neighborhood you feel like you are somewhere else, like you are in a different era.