

Learning Places Spring 2016

SITE REPORT

Vinegar Hill 1



ALISON SEULING

02.10.2016

INTRODUCTION

This is the first visit to the DUMBO, Vinegar Hill, and Brooklyn Navy Yard sites. From the Whiskey Wars article to the brief library stacks searches we did in class on some of the Vinegar Hill history, it was quite exciting to be able to walk the streets of this once busy neighborhood that was brought to life with Irish immigrants looking to start anew. The goal for the visit is to observe the architecture of the buildings, the changes in the roads, housing, and grow a bit closer to the historical district.

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

Prior to our first visit to Vinegar Hill, I had only heard of the name once, when I was looking online for an apartment and I had asked a friend, “What’s Vinegar Hill?” The response was “Ew, do not move there. It is nasty and ghetto”, with no explanation. I knew nothing about the neighborhood until the first week of the Learning Places course. In my head, I imagine a worn out, industrial zone with not much action going on. The name Vinegar Hill is also not the most appealing name.

SITE DOCUMENTATION (photos/sketches)



South view of Hudson Ave from the corner of Plymouth Street. Most of the street here is cobblestone.



Northern view of Hudson Ave from Plymouth Street. This is looking at the East River waterfront. The road starts to decline downward as it gets closer to the river.



Buildings along Hudson Ave. The amount of stories between each building is different, with one being three, the middle having only two, and the closest having about four (cut off).

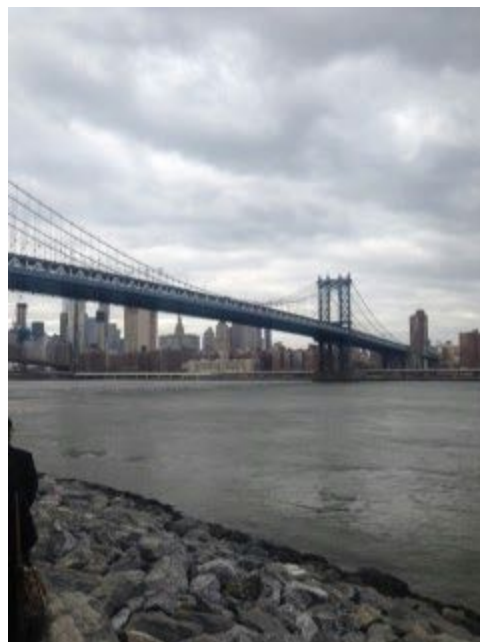
Cobblestone street, Hudson Ave.



Possibly an old factory that has since been restored.

The huge windows allowed the bright sunlight in so that workers had enough light for production.

Manhattan Bridge from Brooklyn Bridge Park, Dumbo



QUALITATIVE SITE OBSERVATIONS

1. Neighborhood / Street Character
 - a. Most of Hudson Ave was quiet.
 - b. Run down buildings, some empty lots where it looked like buildings were knocked down.
2. Vitality of Neighborhood
 - a. General Description
 - i. The area itself was very quiet. Although there were a few businesses that were open at the time, the neighborhood gave off an aura of abandonment, like a ghost town.
 - ii. There is little to no public transportation in Vinegar Hill. There are some busses in walking distance, and the F train at York Street is nearby, but nothing in the vicinity of our tour.
 - b. Pedestrian Activity
 - i. Very few pedestrian activity. I noticed maybe 2 or 3 people come out of any of the buildings on Hudson Ave.
 - ii. Dumbo had a significantly greater amount of pedestrian activity, because there were shops and cafes, definitely a hot spot compared to Vinegar Hill.
 - c. Vehicular Traffic
 - i. Very low vehicular traffic. Some cars drove by, as well as a Con Edison truck.
3. Relationship Between Buildings
 - a. Some of the buildings looked newer and restored in recent years, while others still have that look as if its untouched.
 - b. Mix of residential, commercial, and industrial.
4. Building Details
 - a. Painted brick on some buildings.
 - b. Old wooden doors
 - c. Diagonal entrances that could have been to old taverns or shops.
5. Relationship to the Waterfront
 - a. Con Edison building by the East River
 - b. Hudson Ave slopes downward toward the water.

QUANTITATIVE DATA for Area of Study

Subject	Data
Street Names	Plymouth St, Hudson Ave, Front St, Water St, John St, Gold St, Evans St.
Street Width	
Street Pavement	Cobblestone and asphalt
Building Heights	Ranged from two stories to four stories
Building Widths (Window Bays)	Three to four window bays
Building Types/Uses	Residential, Commercial, Industrial.
Empty Lots / Gardens	Some empty lots where buildings could have previously been. There is a public garden off York Street.
Shops / Restaurants	There is a restaurant on Hudson St but it is only open for dinner hours.
Industrial Shops	Con Edison building near waterfront

QUESTIONS to Research Further

QUESTIONS:

1. Where did the name Vinegar Hill come from?
2. Why are some buildings significantly modernized and updated, but the next building is completely abandoned and run down?
3. Why are some of the streets considered the Historical District and some are not? Where does the border lie?

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION

The day itself went well, despite the weather being too cold for us to do our sketches. However, we did manage to cover a lot of ground and got to observe the neighborhood. I think the visit changed my view of how I had imagined Vinegar Hill, being that its not necessarily a “gross” area, it’s just that in years of urban renewal and infrastructure, the life of Vinegar Hill was kind of taken away. You can tell by walking through Vinegar Hill that has a sense of “forgottenness”, if that makes any sense. I think as we get further into the semester and learn more of its history, we can get closer to the heart of this once active area.