

LEARNING PLACES, SPRING 2016

Alison Seuling

MID SEMESTER REPORT



How did Vinegar Hill get its name?

From day one I was curious as to how Vinegar Hill had gotten its name. The name “Vinegar Hill” does not necessarily have the most attractive ring to it. Local landowner and entrepreneur John Jackson, along with brothers Comfort and Joshua Sands purchased land in the area in the late eighteenth century. Jackson, a noted ship builder, opened a shipyard at the foot of present-day Hudson Avenue waterfront and built housing nearby for his workers. Jackson named the area after Ireland’s last famous 1798 Battle of Vinegar Hill in County Wexford, Ireland where Irish rebels saw heavy casualties and a major defeat at the hands of the English. John Jackson wanted to attract the recent wave of Irish immigrants to settle in Brooklyn. The neighborhood became populated by

Irish dockworkers, many holding jobs at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. During this time, the area became known as “Irish Town.” Hudson Avenue was a busy commercial strip, and there are still some ground floor storefronts that we have taken pictures of as a class, along with sketching. Some buildings still have diagonal doorways, showing that they could have been restaurants or bars. Although the majority of the immigrants were of Irish decent, some Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, Italians, and Eastern European Jews, were also present in the area.

Where are the borders for the Vinegar Hill Historic District?

During our class tours of Vinegar Hill, I wanted to know why some street signs were regular green signs, whereas some were brown, signifying it being part of the Historic District. There was a certain point where we stood at an intersection, I looked up and saw both signs as brown, but right across the street was one green and one brown sign of the same names. The perfect source was the official Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report, by Donald G. Presa. The Historic District is a residential remnant of the early nineteenth-century neighborhood that occupied the blocks between the Brooklyn Bridge and the Brooklyn Navy Yard. It is comprised of three separate groups or areas of brick, Greek-Revival row houses. Area 1 is located on most of Front Street, between Gold and Bridge Streets. Area 2 is a small corner on Gold Street and Water Street, only by a few households. The largest of the three areas, Area 3, borders north from Plymouth Street, south to Front Street down Hudson Street. The width of Area 3 spans western Water Street to eastern Evans Street. Any building that is within these borders are there to retain historic architectural character to signify Brooklyn’s history.

Why did the original Brooklyn Daily Eagle stop after 114 years of business?

The Brooklyn Public Library was a great opportunity to step foot into an archive, and it was cool because I had never been to one before. The librarian showed us as a class how to access digitations of the old articles from the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, a newspaper that was published in the city and later closed in 1955 after 114 years of business. I was

finding a lot of fascinating information through articles of Vinegar Hill while searching the Eagle online. In my research of the history of the Brooklyn Eagle, I found out that Walt Whitman was once an editor for about two years. According to the Brooklyn Public Library website, the Brooklyn Eagle was founded in 1841 by Isaac Van Anden and Henry Cruse Murphy. In its 114 consecutive years, the Brooklyn Eagle went every day without missing a single edition. The newspaper was originally conceived as a temporary political forum for the 1842 election, then it lived the longest and absorbed all other Brooklyn daily newspapers except the *Brooklyn Citizen*. In 1955, The Eagle closed following a protracted CIO American Newspaper Guild strike. They were faced with continuing economic pressure, published its last edition on January 28, 1955, and shut down for good on March 16, 1955.

Which of the street names in Vinegar Hill changed since the 19th Century and which remained the same?

Today, we know the main streets in Vinegar Hill as Plymouth, Hudson, Evans, Water, Front, Gold, and York. We've done our walking tours and gotten used to the names by now. But were they always these names? Thomas Addison Richards (1820-1900) was an American landscape artist and map maker. I found one of his maps from 1857, with readable street names, some I have never heard of before. What we know today as Hudson Street, was once called Jackson. But look west of Vinegar Hill to what we know as DUMBO: Orange, Cranberry, Pineapple, Middagh, Poplar? Fast forward to a present-day map of DUMBO and Vinegar Hill, and the only street that is different is Hudson, formerly Jackson. One of the things I still want to find out and do more research on is, when and why exactly did Jackson Street become Hudson Street? What was the motive for the city to rename that one street?

