

Learning Places Spring 2017

SITE REPORT #4



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INTRODUCTION

This site visit was to visit New York Public Library on 5th avenue between 40th and 42nd street in Manhattan. The visit was to gather more information from the map division that would help us with our topic as a group. We're focused on preservation and development of Vinegar Hill.

OBJECTIVES

The objective is to continue finding information that helps us with our hypothesis. We narrowed our hypothesis questions to “The residence of Vinegar Hill are opposing the opportunity for development in the neighborhood.”

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

Prior to the visit, I expected to find mainly old maps since we were visiting the map division. I didn't expect to find much documents about Vinegar Hill since the previous visits didn't have much either.

SITE DOCUMENTATION:



This was from a small book that had information about Vinegar Hill. This page shows a picture of the houses during 1930. It also mentioned that the neighborhood had more than 6,000 residents.



Mixed history

The Sands brothers, who failed to turn their Vinegar Hill property into a developed community, were influential businessmen in New York and Brooklyn in the late-18th and early-19th centuries. Comfort Sands was one of the founders of the Bank of New York, along with Alexander Hamilton. His younger brother, Joshua, was a U.S. Representative from Brooklyn who lived in a mansion in Fulton Ferry Landing and operated a rope-making factory on the nearby waterfront, one of Brooklyn's first manufacturing operations. However, the only local sign of the Sands brothers today is on the street that bears their name, and that street has a mixed history. In the late-19th and early-20th centuries, Sands Street included a rollicking red light district frequented by sailors from the navy yard. The street now runs through the Farmgut Houses, a public housing complex completed in 1950 that swept away the red light district—brothels, tattoo parlors, shops and row houses alike. Named for the Civil War Admiral David Farragut, the housing complex borders the navy yard, which became an industrial park in the 1970s.



Living in the yard

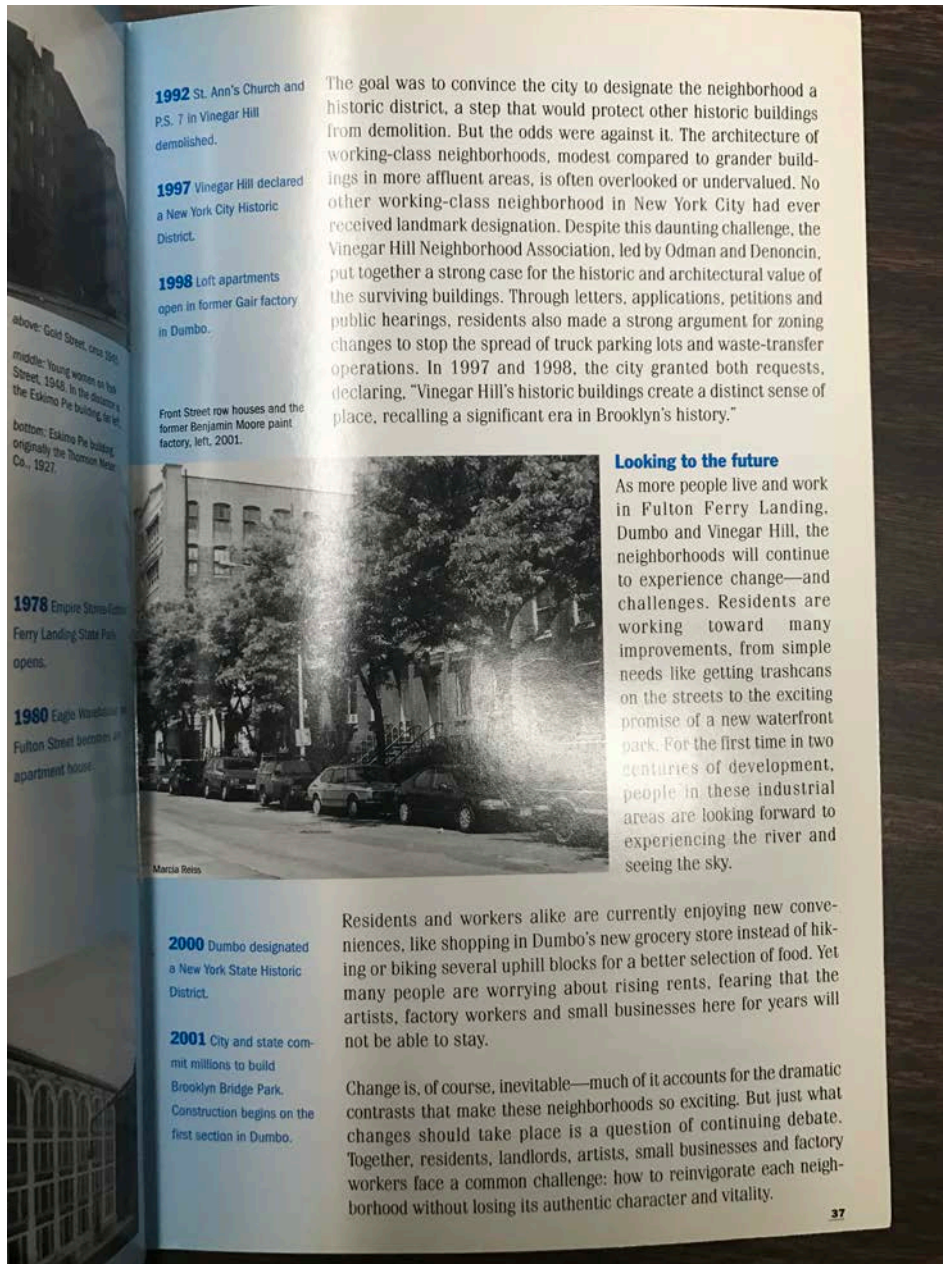
One of the first navy yard buildings to go up in 1806 was the Commandant's House, a mansion set behind an elaborate gate at the edge of Vinegar Hill. Still standing, the elegant white home is in strange company. Just across the street are the towering stacks of the Con Ed generating plant and the concrete domes of the Red Hook Water Pollution

Top: Sands Street tattoo parlor, circa 1940s.

Bottom: Commandant's House, Brooklyn Navy Yard, 1897.

Control Plant. As a young boy, Thomas Pocius, a longtime Vinegar Hill resident, played football in front of the mansion under the watchful eyes of a 24-hour U.S. Marine Guard. Today, the stately building is still occupied, not by the Navy, which left the yard in 1966, but by a family with two children.

This page is showing some history about the Sand brothers in Vinegar Hill. Sand Brothers were one of the development during late 18th and early 19th centuries developers but they failed to turn their property into development community.



1992 St. Ann's Church and P.S. 7 in Vinegar Hill demolished.

1997 Vinegar Hill declared a New York City Historic District.

1998 Loft apartments open in former Gair factory in Dumbo.

Front Street row houses and the former Benjamin Moore paint factory, left, 2001.

above: Gold Street, circa 1940.
middle: Young women on First Street, 1948. In the distance is the Eskimo Pie building, left.
bottom: Eskimo Pie building, originally the Thomson News Co., 1927.

1978 Empire State Ferry Landing State Park opens.

1980 Eagle Warehouse on Fulton Street becomes an apartment house.



Marcia Reiss

2000 Dumbo designated a New York State Historic District.

2001 City and state commit millions to build Brooklyn Bridge Park. Construction begins on the first section in Dumbo.

The goal was to convince the city to designate the neighborhood a historic district, a step that would protect other historic buildings from demolition. But the odds were against it. The architecture of working-class neighborhoods, modest compared to grander buildings in more affluent areas, is often overlooked or undervalued. No other working-class neighborhood in New York City had ever received landmark designation. Despite this daunting challenge, the Vinegar Hill Neighborhood Association, led by Odman and Denoncin, put together a strong case for the historic and architectural value of the surviving buildings. Through letters, applications, petitions and public hearings, residents also made a strong argument for zoning changes to stop the spread of truck parking lots and waste-transfer operations. In 1997 and 1998, the city granted both requests, declaring, "Vinegar Hill's historic buildings create a distinct sense of place, recalling a significant era in Brooklyn's history."

Looking to the future

As more people live and work in Fulton Ferry Landing, Dumbo and Vinegar Hill, the neighborhoods will continue to experience change—and challenges. Residents are working toward many improvements, from simple needs like getting trashcans on the streets to the exciting promise of a new waterfront park. For the first time in two centuries of development, people in these industrial areas are looking forward to experiencing the river and seeing the sky.

Residents and workers alike are currently enjoying new conveniences, like shopping in Dumbo's new grocery store instead of hiking or biking several uphill blocks for a better selection of food. Yet many people are worrying about rising rents, fearing that the artists, factory workers and small businesses here for years will not be able to stay.

Change is, of course, inevitable—much of it accounts for the dramatic contrasts that make these neighborhoods so exciting. But just what changes should take place is a question of continuing debate. Together, residents, landlords, artists, small businesses and factory workers face a common challenge: how to reinvigorate each neighborhood without losing its authentic character and vitality.

On the left side, it's a timeline of the changes in Vinegar Hill and Dumbo. Looking for the future is about how residents of Vinegar Hill will continue experiencing change and how they are enjoying the change in Dumbo because it's making their life easier. However, they're afraid of rising rents.

Kings County, Office of the Register, Deeds Liber 213, p.189.
New York City, Department of Buildings, Brooklyn, ALT 1832-1903; ALT 672-1976.
Henry Stiles, *The Civil, Political, Professional and Ecclesiastical History and Commercial and Industrial Record of the County of Kings and the City of Brooklyn, New York, from 1683 to 1884* (New York: W.W. Munsell & Company, 1884), vol. 1, 573.

229 Front Street

Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map block/Lot: 42/1 in part

Type: empty lot

The lot was once occupied by a three-story brick row house and rear outbuilding that were demolished between 1903 and 1929.

231-233 Front Street a/k/a 244-246 Water Street³⁰

Borough of Brooklyn Tax Map Block/Lot: 42/11 in part

Date: 1908 [NB 1637-1908]

Owner/Developer: Benjamin Moore & Company

Architect: William B. Tubby

Type: factory

Style/Ornament: Early Twentieth Commercial

Number of Stories: 6

Features:

Front Street Side

Facade: non-historic replacement stairs
cast stone foundation
replacement doors
brick facade with cast stone lintels and sills
historic steel sash
exposed brick side walls with historic steel sash.

Site: concrete sidewalk

This brick-fronted, steel-framed six-story factory, built in 1908 by Benjamin Moore & Company, replaced two, three-story brick row houses. Benjamin Moore and Company, manufacturers of paints and varnishes, had been occupying a portion of the site as early as 1903. (The structure on the Water Street side of the building lot, which was constructed between 1886 and 1903, is not part of this designation as indicated on the district map.) The

³⁰No. 244-246 Water Street is not part of the designated historic district

This book had information about many buildings in Vinegar Hill.

SITE OBSERVATIONS: One or 2 general notes about the Brooklyn Collection, and 2-3 specific observations about how the primary sources you found are connected to the topic of your investigation

1. Mainly books
2. A couple of maps from the 20th century
3. Information was mainly about NYC
4. A couple of brochures

QUANTITATIVE DATA:

Subject	Data
Maps	2
Brochure	5
Books	3

QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESIS Consider the primary sources found during your visit and review the material you included so far in this report.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the Sand Brothers fail to develop Vinegar Hill?
2. Why was there a lot of demolition of buildings and factories?

HYPOTHESIS: From the questions you wrote above, select the most important question for your own research topic. Propose an explanation made on the basis of the evidence you have so far as a starting point for further investigation.

1. Did they ask Vinegar Hill residence about the kind of development they're looking for!
2. Maybe people wanted to move out of Vinegar Hill so they decided to sell their land.

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION / NEXT STEPS?

The visit was really helpful. It was interesting to see history preserved. Especially the maps because we got to see how people were updating the maps before technology. The most helpful information was find in the brochures because it was focused on Vinegar Hill unlike the other books that were focused on NYC. The next step is to keep researching to find more information focusing on the development and preservation of Vinegar Hill.

PRELIMINARY REFERENCES FOR PRIMARY SOURCES:

1. Vinegar Hill Historic District, Brooklyn Public Library.
2. <http://nyhistory.org/library/digital-collections>