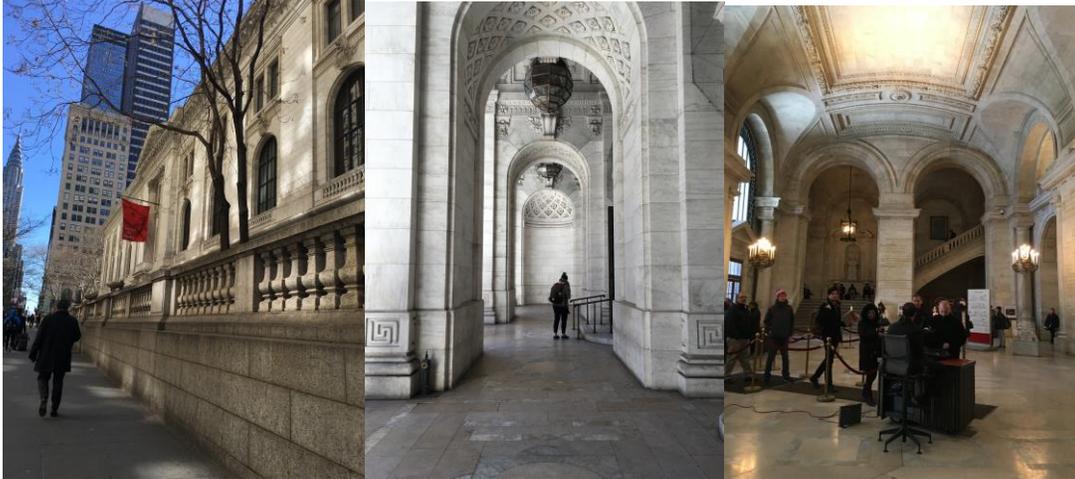


Learning Places Spring 2017

SITE REPORT #4

PHOTOS OF THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY
ON 42ND STREET AND 5TH AVENUE



1) Front wall 2) Exterior Detail Work 3) Interior Detail Work

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04.02.2017 -

INTRODUCTION

On March 22, 2017, a trip to the New York Public Library was scheduled in order to research primary and secondary sources of material to aid in the various groups hypothesis' in regards to the neighborhood of Vinegar Hill. As a full class, we were in a private room where the librarian who was the manager of the maps division of that specific library, pre-selected material for our viewing convenience. Each of the groups had a set of material relating to their hypothesis so it was a very productive and inspiring trip.

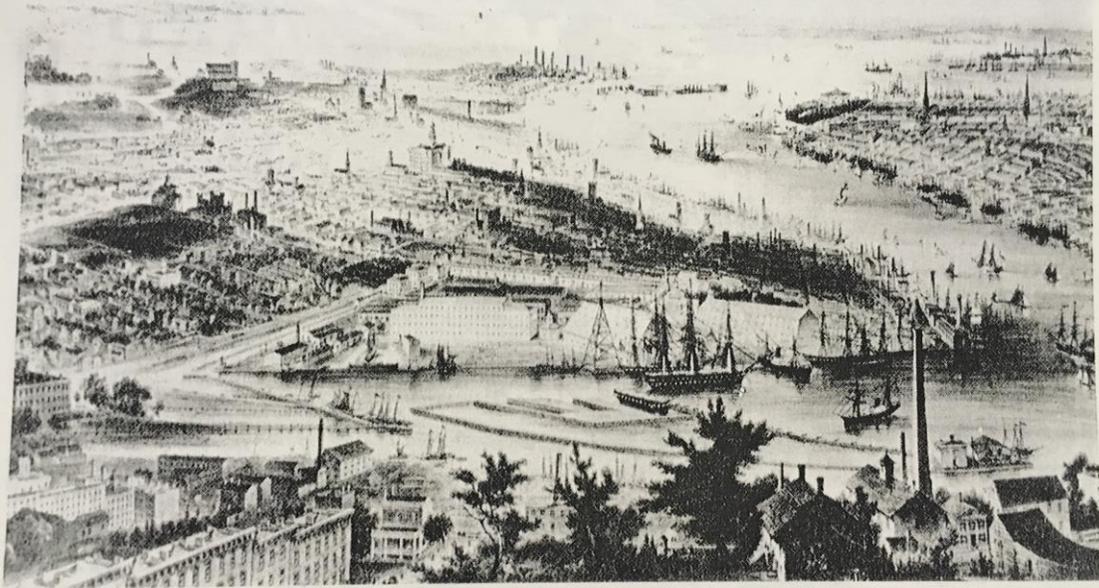
OBJECTIVES

For the visit to the New York Public Library, the Preservation and development group came to a conclusion that we needed to focus our research on the residents as well as the amount of new construction or project proposals for the neighborhood from the past 100 years. I admit that the information we have been finding, as a group is not as interesting as first anticipated but surely, that is because not all news was recorded throughout history. I believe each member of my group could agree that we just want to find something big and shocking that will change history and that seems to be the driving force in continuing to research material. In reality however, my greatest interest in this trip was to finally see the two lions at the entrance of the library as well as mentally replay the movie, "Day After Tomorrow".

PRE-VISIT REFLECTION

Based off of the data we came across from the previous trip to the Brooklyn Public Library, as a team, we from the Preservation and Development group, narrowed down our hypothesis' considering the availability of material we were looking for. At the end of the class before this trip, we determined our hypothesis should be in the area of, "Residents of Vinegar Hill are constricting the development of the neighborhood." Our goal was to find an article worth talking about. Perhaps propose the developers side rather than the homeowners.

SITE DOCUMENTATION: photos/sketches of 2 or 3 significant primary sources. Provide captions and explanations – why is the image shown significant for your topic of exploration?



Lithograph of Brooklyn in 1855, looking southwest from above the Navy Yard
John Barnet, Brooklyn Historical Society Collection

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This image is a photo from the book, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* prepared by Donald G. Presa, of a lithograph of Brooklyn in 1855 looking southwest from the Navy Yard by John Barnet. This image is useful to my group's research because it shows a major contrast between a high traffic area to what we know Vinegar Hill being today, a slow and closed off space. This is well before bridges and highways.

INTRODUCTION

The Vinegar Hill Historic District is characterized by rows of early and mid-nineteenth century houses, complemented by a mid-nineteenth century firehouse and an early twentieth-century industrial building, whose design and scale contribute to the district's special sense of place. Developers John Jackson and 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 and built housing nearby for his workers. In the first years of the nineteenth century, Jackson sold forty acres to the United States government for the Brooklyn Navy Yard, then built additional housing for Navy Yard personnel. Jackson named the area Vinegar Hill in honor of the last battle of an Irish-English conflict.¹ The historic district includes a number of houses built by Jackson and his heirs between 1801 and the 1830s. They exhibit simplified Federal and Greek Revival elements.

The Sands family, who had amassed a fortune as merchants and speculators, laid out their land, located west of Jackson's property, into blocks and lots as early as 1787. However, the Sands's lots that are located within the historic district were not developed residentially until the mid-1830s to the early 1850s when Greek Revival row houses were constructed on the lots.

In the late 1830s and early 1840s, the heirs of John Jackson sold off their estate's remaining lots on Hudson Avenue, which were developed individually or in small groups in the 1840s and 1850s with houses that have Greek Revival and Italianate characteristics. Further residential construction occurred on a few remaining vacant lots on Hudson Avenue, Water Street, and Front Street in the years following the Civil War.

By the late nineteenth century, the Vinegar Hill area had become a dense residential and industrial neighborhood. Hudson Avenue was a busy commercial strip, as evidenced by surviving ground-story shopfronts. The large number of residents of Irish descent had given the neighborhood the popular name "Irishtown," although other ethnic groups, including Germans, Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, Italians, and Eastern European Jews, were also present. Most of the residents worked on the waterfront, in the Navy Yard, or in neighborhood industries. By 1903, major changes began to occur in the area as a result of the building of the Manhattan Bridge and industrial expansion in the decade following the consolidation of the City of New York in 1898. Hundreds of small dwellings were replaced with large industrial buildings. More houses were razed in the 1920s and 1930s for truck storage facilities, parking lots, and warehouses, a pattern which continued after World War II.

Beginning in the early 1970s, new residents, including many artists, began moving to the neighborhood, attracted by its proximity to and views of Manhattan, its reasonably-priced housing, and its historic architectural character, while reviving the historic name of Vinegar Hill. Today these groups of houses and related buildings create a distinct sense of place, recalling a significant era in Brooklyn's history.

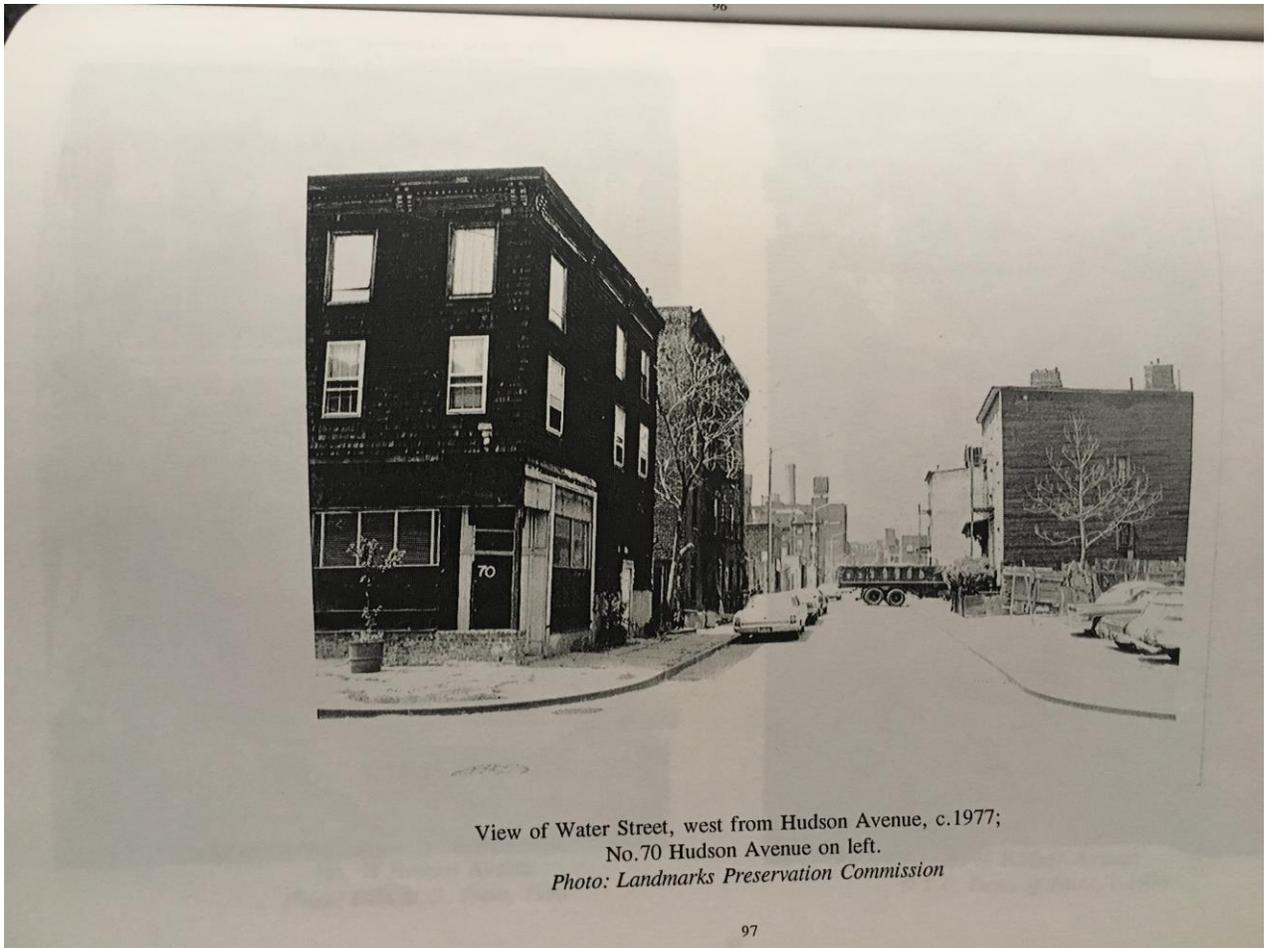
¹At the Battle of Vinegar Hill of 1798, which took place at Enniscorthy in Ireland's County Wexford, the English defeated an Irish rebellion.

This image is a photo from the book, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* prepared by Donald G. Presa, paragraph regarding the population of Vinegar Hill. Here we see, "By the late nineteenth century, the Vinegar Hill area had become a dense residential and industrial neighborhood."



Nos. 237 to 249 Front Street, c. 1977, including St. Ann's R.C. Church (demolished)
Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission

This image is a photo from the book, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* prepared by Donald G. Presa, photo taken by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1977. This is incredibly important to the change in the neighborhood over time. We see the church in the background which was demolished (relates to previous site reports articles found when church was demolished) and we also see all of the greenery in front of these row houses. It seems like a much nicer environment back in 1977 than today.



View of Water Street, west from Hudson Avenue, c.1977;
No.70 Hudson Avenue on left.
Photo: Landmarks Preservation Commission

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This image is a photo from the book, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* prepared by Donald G. Presa, of the view of Water Street from Hudson Avenue in 1977. This is great for comparing the sketch my group did weeks ago. We thought it was weird how deserted this house on the right was. Now we see that it always had empty lots beside it. Now the current question would be if there were houses up before the plants came to knock it down and build space for parking.

havens in the north.¹⁶ The first Roman Catholic church, St. James, opened on Jay Street in 1823, serving a primarily Irish congregation.¹⁷

Industrial Development

The growth of an industrial sector west of the Vinegar Hill Historic District also propelled the area's development. By the 1820s, the Fulton Ferry area¹⁸ contained the first iron foundry and white lead company in the state.¹⁹ As the century progressed, industries such as spice and coffee works, metal stamping, engine works, paint and varnish manufacturing, and sugar refining became established in the area east of Fulton Street. Many of today's nationally-known companies began in this area, including Durkee and Benjamin Moore. Additional ferries to Manhattan began operating on the waterfront at Main Street and Bridge Street, mirroring the eastward advance of industry.

Residential Growth

The area's greatest period of growth took place during the 1830s to the early 1850s, as lots were subdivided and rows of houses were constructed along the streets.²⁰ Most of the remaining houses in the Vinegar Hill Historic District were built during those years, including the entire rows at 237 to 249 Front Street, 51 to 59 Hudson Avenue, and 69 to 77 Gold Street. Very little new construction occurred in Vinegar Hill during the 1860s and 70s, except for new houses on the few remaining empty lots, such as 312 Water Street, 72 Hudson Avenue, and 202 and 204 Front Street, and the construction of additional floors on a number of buildings, as at Nos. 53, 55, and 77 Hudson Avenue.

The Jackson heirs began to sell their remaining properties around 1840, typically to established businessmen from Brooklyn and Manhattan. These landlords continued to collect rent well into the 1850s, when they in turn began to sell the properties to individual owner/occupants. Two major landlords were Valentine G. Hall and Frederick Morris. Hall was

¹⁶ The sub-cellar of No. 67 Hudson Avenue contains a doorway leading to a tunnel beneath the street, which may have been used for the transport of goods to and from the waterfront, for the movement of former slaves along the underground railroad, or both.

¹⁷ A second wave of Irish immigration began in the 1840s as a consequence of a devastating potato famine. By 1855, the Irish-born population of the Fifth Ward, in which the present-day Vinegar Hill Historic District is located, was 34.4 per cent, while that of the adjacent Second, Fourth and Eleventh Wards were 35.4, 19.9 and 22.4 per cent, respectively. At that time in Brooklyn, and elsewhere, the Irish were the target of much anti-foreign and, particularly, anti-Catholic sentiment by nativists who feared that the large number of newcomers were beginning to overwhelm the existing social fabric of the nation.

¹⁸ Designated a New York City Historic District in 1977.

¹⁹ White lead was a material used in the production of paints.

²⁰ Brooklyn itself was rapidly expanding during this period, having been incorporated as a city in 1834 and consolidated with the City of Williamsburgh and Town of Bushwick in 1854. By 1860, Brooklyn's population had reached 279,000 from about 32,000 in 1835, making it the third largest city in the nation.

This image is a photo from the book, *Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report* prepared by Donald G. Presa, paragraph titled, "Industrial Development", which defined the first time of industrial and what it was. WE now know that Vinegar Hill has been an industrial area since the 1820s beginning with the Fulton Ferry area and developing into various businesses such as iron foundry and white lead companies. Eventually, spice, coffee, metal stamping, engine works, paint and varnish manufacturing, and sugar refining was established.

SITE OBSERVATIONS: I noticed that while visiting the New York Public library, there were so many things that seemed more important than the tiny, Vinegar Hill. There were primary documents that have traveled from library to library and have been preserved in an extremely highly decorated tomb such as the building on 42nd and 5th. I also noticed that there was a small amount of information relating to my group’s topic. Perhaps it is a difficult topic to study. Not often do we think about how people feel on any given day especially in a neighborhood. Perhaps that is why no one decided to save every time someone wrote a letter of complaint or development of a property.

1. Only four to six documents which were of use to my group
2. There was no material before the 1900s regarding development
3. There did not seem to be legitimate primary sources of information. Only photos taken from other places crammed in a book or references to other texts.
4. Nothing was really opinion based of the developer or the residents

QUANTITATIVE DATA: under “subject” list the topic; Under “data” describe your findings and the quantity found

Subject	Data
Books for Preservation	3
Books for development	1
Maps of development	2

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

QUESTIONS:

1. Did anyone record their property before the development of the industrial waterfront?
2. How do we findout who was trying to develop the neighborhood n 1850? We saw people who sold off their land but it is a dead end.
3. Do we need more current events for our topic rather than past events?

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. The residents of Vinegar Hill are constricting the development of the neighborhood
2. The current residents of Vinegar Hill are boycotting all things new and good for the neighborhood in regards to transforming and revitalization

SUMMARY / POST VISIT REFLECTION / NEXT STEPS?

I believe the next step is to stop looking into the past for things about Vinegar Hill. I believe we are constantly finding dead ends as a group because there is not enough information saved from how the neighborhood has changed other than maps of fire insurance that are often inaccurate to date and proposed transportation maps which took more advances away than were provided. We have to find out who is currently tryin to develop the land and we need to see how far a design gets before it gets shut down by the community board. We need to also learn who the community board is. Are the people living in the NYCHA houses and the Waterfront/ Industrial side houses communicating their thoughts and cocerns to eachother. Who is involved?

PRELIMINARY REFERENCES FOR PRIMARY SOURCES:

Record the essential information that you might use to create a citation for 3-4 primary sources you examined. Don't worry about creating a perfect or conventionally formatted citation; record the information that someone would need to find it again. Include a variety of sources: photographs, maps, articles, manuscripts, etc.

1. Donald G. Presa - Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report. – text - page 1
2. Donald G. Presa - Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report. – photo - page 22
3. Donald G. Presa - Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report. – photo - page 97
4. Donald G. Presa - Vinegar Hill Historic District Designation Report. – text - page 8