

Gramercy Neighborhood Tour

Meet at 11 Stuyvesant Oval, Stuyvesant Town Security

1. **Stuyvesant Town** was built in the late 1940s by Met Life Insurance Co. as affordable housing originally for returning World War II veterans. Stuyvesant Town is named after Peter Stuyvesant, New Amsterdam's governor who owned most of the land in the neighborhood. The area occupies what was once the Gashouse District, notorious for its chemical fumes and the fearsome Gashouse Gang. This complex contains NYU graduate student housing.

Exit Stuyvesant Town through the 1st Ave Loop @ 16th St. Stop on the corner of 1st Ave. and 16th St.

2. On 1st Ave. between 15th St. and 16th St. are two kosher restaurants: La Bagel (263 1st Ave.) and Murray's Falafel and Grill (261 1st Ave.). On 1st Ave. at 15th St. there are two banks: Citibank (262 1st Ave.) and Chase Manhattan (255 1st Ave.).

Continue on 16th St. until Pearlman Place/Stuyvesant Square.

3. **Stuyvesant Square (between 15th St. and 17th St. on 2nd Ave.)** was donated to St. George's Church by Peter Stuyvesant, a descendent of the colonial governor. It was turned into a park in 1836 and the cast-iron fence that surrounds the park dates from 1850. It has not become as popular as Union Square or Washington Square, perhaps because of the bisection of the park by 2nd Avenue. The western half features a sculpture of Governor Stuyvesant. The eastern half of the park has a statue of composer Antonin Dvorak. Designed by Yugoslavian sculptor Ivan Mestrovic, the sculpture sat for three decades on the roof of the Avery Fischer Hall at Lincoln Center. In 1997, the New York Philharmonic moved the sculpture to the Square.

Turn right (north) onto Pearlman Place. Continue on Pearlman until E. 17th St. Turn left (west) onto E. 17th St. Continue on E. 17th St. until 2nd Ave.

4. **Rutherford Place Apartments (303-305 E. 17th St.)** was once New York Lying-In Hospital. In the early 20th Century, 60% of all NYC hospital births were here. The last patient was discharged from the Lying-In Hospital in 1932. From then until 1984, the building functioned as a ward of various NY hospitals. It was then converted to an apartment building, which Wesley Snipes, Judd Nelson, and David Lee Roth have all called home. There are still dancing babies on the facade from its days as the Lying-In Hospital.

Continue on E. 17th St. until Rutherford Pl.

5. *On the corner of 16th St. and Rutherford Pl.* and considered part of Stuyvesant Square are the **Friends Meeting House and the Friends Seminary**, built for the use of the Quaker community. Built in 1860, these two are part of a larger five-building complex including the original schoolhouse, a 19th Century townhouse, and a modern school building. The building came about because of split from another Quaker congregation a few blocks away at Gramercy Park. The Gramercy Park congregation eventually left their building and joined the one in Stuyvesant Square. The statue of Peter Stuyvesant faces the Friends Meeting House, which is ironic because Stuyvesant apparently disliked Quakers during his time.

St. George's Church is also located on the corner of 16th St. and Rutherford Pl. This official NYC landmark for its Early Romanesque Revival architecture was once one of the wealthiest congregations in the country with J.P. Morgan as a notable parishioner.

On the corner of E. 17th St. and 3rd Ave. is **Mumbles (200 17th St.)** that has affordable food and good burgers. They also have an early dinner special from 5-7pm, Monday-Thursday.

Continue on E. 17th St. until Irving Pl.

6. *Looking below E. 17th St on Irving Place:* **40 Irving Place – Washington Irving High School** was once the Girls' Technical High School teaching both girls training for vocational or technical trades and those undertaking an academic curriculum. It is now a public high school that boasts Whoopi Goldberg as a graduate. The exterior of the building was used for the TV show *Head of the Class*.

47 Irving Pl. was once a residence of Oscar Wilde in 1883 while he had a play running at the Union Square Theatre.

49 Irving Place – Irving House was rumored to be Washington Irving's prior residence. However he never actually lived here. Edgar Irving, an unrelated merchant, apparently lived here at one point but the street was named after Washington Irving. Elsie de Wolfe, an interior decorator from the early 1900s who decorated the

White House in 1902 did live here as did Oscar Wilde's literary agent Elizabeth Marbury after Wilde had left the residence next door.

Looking above E. 17th St.: **52 Irving Pl.** was originally built as Bachelor apartments for single men. The apartments all lacked a kitchen. In 1933, kitchens were added to the suites and they are no longer exclusively for bachelors.

55 Irving Pl. – Now **Sal Anthony's**, this location is supposedly where O. Henry wrote *The Gift of the Magi* in three hours. However, **Pete's Tavern (129 E. 18th St.)** further north off of Irving Pl. also boasts that O. Henry wrote *The Gift of the Magi* there.

Continue on Irving Pl. until E. 18th St.

7. **Pete's Tavern** opened in 1864. It is said that the building may have been serving liquor as early as 1852. In 1899, it was bought by Tom and John Healy and it was under the name Healy's that it was a favorite hangout of O. Henry's. During Prohibition it survived by posing as a flower shop. The interior has been featured on *Seinfeld* and several beer commercials.

Irving Place Coffee and Tea Bar (71 Irving Place) is the building where Violet Thomas, the wife of Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas, had a tearoom in the 1930s and '40s. George Axelrod, who wrote scripts for *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *The Seven Year Itch*, and *The Manchurian Candidate*, also lived in this building.

Continue on Irving Pl. until Gramercy Park South.

8. **Gramercy Park** was once a swamp. Samuel Ruggles, a lawyer, filled in the swamp in the 1830s with soil from the leveling of the nearby Bowery Hill. In the deed to the park, Ruggles specified that he wanted five trustees, regularly elected by the neighborhood, be given the task of maintaining the grounds according to his specification. The fence around it has stood since it opened in 1844. It is a private park and only those who pay an annual fee have a key to enter it.

10 Gramercy Park South is the former home of painter Robert Henri, considered the "father" of American realism. He trained such revolutionary painters as Edward Hopper and George Bellows. He held a popular weekly open house for local artists in his top-floor studio. The Henri estate continues to preserve the building.

15 Gramercy Park South houses the National Arts Club. It was formerly the home of 1876 presidential candidate Samuel J. Tilden. There is an underground tunnel from his house to 19th St. as an escape route, since Tilden feared those from Tammany Hall. The National Arts Club holds different events throughout the year from staged readings to studio art showings. For more information visit www.nationalartsclub.org.

16 Gramercy Park South is the Players Club. Founded in 1888. At the center of the park, there is a statue of Edwin Booth, the founder, performing in the role of Hamlet.

19-20 Gramercy Park South was the Sonnenberg mansion. Originally built in 1845, 19 and 20 Gramercy Park South were separate complexes. In 1931, publicity man Benjamin Sonnenberg bought both and installed connecting doors between the two buildings. No. 20's studio apartments were fashioned into guest rooms for his mansion, totaling 37 rooms. The expanded mansion was put on sale in 1979 by the Sonnenberg estate and remains a private home today.

Turn left (west) on Gramercy Park South until Gramercy Park West. Turn right (north) on Gramercy Park West until Gramercy Park North.

9. **1 Gramercy Park West** is the former residence of Dr. Valentine Mott. He was a founder of both New York University Medical College and Bellevue Hospital. He died of shock after being told of President Lincoln's assassination.

7 Gramercy West was once the residence of Julia Roberts.

Turn right (east) on Gramercy Park North. Continue on Gramercy Park North until Lexington Ave.

10. **1 Lexington Ave** was the home of Cyrus West Field who conceived of and organized the massive project of laying the first undersea transatlantic cable between London and New York. The cable finally became operable in 1865 after several failed attempts. He also built much of Manhattan's elevated railroads in the 1870s.

Gramercy Park Hotel (2 Lexington Ave.) has had several famous guests. Joseph Kennedy and his 11-year old son were long-term guests at one point. Humphrey Bogart's first wedding took place here in 1926 and Deborah Harry once lived here. It's also featured in the movie *Almost Famous*. It was also once architect Stanford White's residence. Some of the original fireplaces from his apartment were salvaged and are now being used in the hotel.

Further north on Lexington Ave. at 9 Lexington Ave lived Peter Cooper, the creator of America's first steam locomotive, the "Tom Thumb," as well as the creator of glue and gelatin. Since he never received higher education for himself, he founded Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, a free university designed to provide higher education for the working class.

Looking down 21st St. towards Park Ave. South: On the corner of 21st St. and Park Ave. South is **Calvary Church** completed in 1848. The Church, once the parish of the Roosevelt, Vanderbilt, and Astor families, has now been assimilated into St. George's Parish of Stuyvesant Square. Both Edith Wharton and Eleanor Roosevelt were baptized here. The Church attracted people to the Gramercy area prompting the sale of several still-vacant lots on the square. The Church's architect, James Renwick Jr., also designed Grace Church and St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Continue on Gramercy Park North (it changes into 21st St.) until 3rd Avenue.

11. **258 3rd Ave.**, now Cleo II Spa-Zone, is the oldest building in the neighborhood built in 1832 and put up by Samuel Ruggles.

Gramercy Park Flower Shop (260 3rd Ave.) has been around since 1904. It is now owned by the grandson of the founder. It has some celebrity history: The Wizard of Oz's Wicked Witch of the East Margaret Hamilton was a regular customer and Benjamin Sonnenberg, the owner of the large two building mansion on Gramercy Park North bought white anemones here for Greta Garbo.

Continue on 21st St. until 2nd Ave. Turn left (north) onto 2nd Ave. Continue on 2nd Ave until 22nd St.

12. On the corner of 2nd Ave. and 22nd St. is where the **Union Steam Works** factory once stood. In July 1863, it was the site of the fiercest battle of the New York City Draft Riots. The NYC Draft Riots lasted four days and included the working class opposing the Civil War draft laws and those in opposition to the emancipation of slaves among the rioters. A mob of thousands attacked Union Steam Works, a wire factory that had been converted for wartime arms production. Twice the mob took control of the building and seized thousands of weapons. Howitzers (small cannons) were used by policemen to clear 2nd Ave. In the end, instead of surrendering the factory, rioters burned the brick building to the ground, killing ten of their own.

The **Church of the Epiphany**, currently on the corner of 22nd St. and 2nd Ave., is a Roman Catholic Church built in 1967, replacing an older church destroyed by fire. The Church is built on the site of Rose Hill, the mansion of Horatio Gates, the Revolutionary War general who won the battle of Saratoga.

Bruno Ravioli (387 2nd Ave.) has a large assortment of sandwiches and wraps at good prices. Or further north on 2nd Ave. is **Bao Noodles (391 2nd Ave.)**, which offers a decently priced Vietnamese cuisine.

Turn right (east) onto E. 22nd St. Follow E. 22nd St. until 1st Ave.

13. Stretching from 20th St. to 23rd St. between 1st Ave. and FDR Drive is **Cooper Village**. Like Stuyvesant Town, it was built in the 1940s by Met Life Insurance Co. Considered initially as the more expensive of the two, it was also part of the Gashouse District. It is named after Peter Cooper, the founder of Cooper Union, whose former residence was visited earlier on the tour.

