

W75BA NEWS

WEST 75TH STREET BLOCK ASSOCIATION ■ AMSTERDAM AVENUE TO RIVERSIDE DRIVE

It's Party Time Again! Tuesday, December 14

PLAN TO JOIN US for our annual celebration of seasonal good cheer, good food, and good music. Each year, the festive crowd grows along with our membership. We'll be inviting Chris Lavin, our own John Lehmann-Haupt, and our singing super, Gene Cartrell, to entertain us, and we hope that new talent will appear from our ranks. Councilwoman Gale Brewer may stop in for a quick visit.

As always, it's a group effort, so we'll be asking for decorations and treats in addition to contributions of dessert and fruit platters, eggnog and wine from the markets we patronize so heavily all year long. We will also finalize our donations to assist West Side groups that assist the needy.

Time: 7:30 P.M. / Place: Beacon Hotel, Room 205

Curtains Up for W75BA on October 12

To showcase the varied and lively theatrical world of the Upper West Side, three guests addressed us: Jim McDonald, assistant house manager of the Promenade Theatre; Barrack Evans, manager of Second Stage, and Masavia Greer of Stand Up New York on 78th Street.

The Promenade opened in 1969 in a former Mormon Church in what was then Manhattan Hotel. It seats 399, and its large, open stage has attracted major stars and playwrights in smallish plays, although *Godspell* played there in the '80s.

Second Stage is currently between seasons and management is hard at work developing a new season of experimental theatre. Its core audience is season subscribers, and Mr. Evans urged us to subscribe.

Stand Up New York, Mr. Greer admitted, doesn't appeal to everyone. You might not want to take your grandma there for certain shows, especially if Chris Rock is on. Jerry Seinfeld and Robin Williams have appeared occasionally to try out new routines, but always on short notice.

It was a lively meeting, even though most of the Q and A concerned wheelchair accessibility and the price of tickets for seniors. Everyone seemed to have a very good time, but it was a baseball night, so the meeting was not overly long.

Currently at the Promenade

Mary Ratcliffe and Joan Franklin joined Mary's TDF group to see *Trying*, currently playing at the Promenade.

Fritz Weaver is giving an award-winning performance as Judge Francis Biddle, former U.S. Attorney General and a judge at the Nuremberg trials, a genuine curmudgeon who is not quite aware that his grip on reality is loosening. On a morning in his 81st year the judge is confronted by a determined and feisty young secretary, hired by his unseen wife. Needless to say, the generation and culture gaps cause sparks to fly. Both are definitely trying each other's patience.

Playwright Joanna McClelland, who did once work as Francis Biddle's secretary, has created two

exceptional personalities and given them wit, learning, and humanity as their mutual antagonism gives way to friendship and affection. It's a predictable but amusing evening, the role of a lifetime for Weaver, and a wonderful part for Kati Brazda early in her career. "Enormously bracing theatre," raved the *News*. "Comic and touching," wrote the *Times*. Joan particularly admired Judge Biddle's vintage office furniture; Mary tries to see Mr. Weaver whenever he's appearing on a New York stage.

Showing at Stand Up New York

The following Saturday Sara and Tom Selz, with family from Tennessee, no less, took in the 8 o'clock show and declared it "fabulous," a little naughty (perhaps not for those easily shocked), very funny, and very crowded. Definitely call ahead for reservations. There's a ticket fee, a two-drink minimum, and pizza and buffalo wings if you're hungry. Five guys did their routines, and Sara said that two were great, the others not bad. Best joke: "No one has a fear of flying. We all have a fear of *not* flying, especially when the plane is up at 30,000 feet..."

Press for the Seventies

The October 18 issue of *New York Magazine* lauded our neighborhood for food (from fine dining to hot dogs), lodgings, dry cleaning, architecture, shopping, elbow bending, and entertainment. Barney's Co-Op may even bring a touch of chic to old Broadway. Rents and the price of a condo were mentioned in a sidebar, but there was nothing about our great transportation, street plantings, or our glorious park and our majestic river views. *New York Magazine* definitely didn't get the whole picture.

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“On the Hudson”

“**H**AVE YOU SEEN that place of Charley’s? It makes mine look like a cottage.” Steel baron Andrew Carnegie, whose Fifth Avenue cottage is now the Cooper-Hewitt Museum, was talking about the four-story, gabled and turreted mansion that Charles M. Schwab built on the property now occupied by the only Schwab House most of you know.

Lively, personable, irrepressible, music-loving, good old Charley Schwab began his career in the steel industry driving stakes for \$1 a day. By the time he was 35, he was president of Carnegie Steel at a salary of \$1 million a year plus six percent of the profits, bringing his actual annual income closer to \$3 million in turn-of-the-century, pre-tax dollars.

Charley alone among pals like Andy Carnegie and Henry Frick passed up Millionaire’s Row on Fifth Avenue to build his home on the West Side. He bought the land for \$800,000 from financier Jacob Schiff, whose wife was afraid her friends would never visit her on Riverside Drive. Construction came

to \$2 million, and the elaborate interiors brought the total cost of the house, which Charley called “On the Hudson,” to \$5 million.

He was by now president of J. P. Morgan’s United States Steel, at twice his Carnegie salary and still with a percentage of the profits. But the public perceived him as a good-time guy with a lot of energy and probably nice to know. One

story had him introducing a manservant to the King of Sweden with, “King, this is my valet—he’s a Swede, too!”

The chateau’s state rooms were on the first floor, living and bedrooms on the second, rooms to accommodate as many as 70 guests on the third, and servants’ quarters on the fourth. In all, there were 75 “living” rooms and 40 bathrooms. The main hall rose two-and-a-half stories, surrounded by a gallery leading to the principal rooms.

In one of them was Charley’s beloved \$100,000 pipe organ, which he played daily. The library was styled after Fontainebleau, and the state drawing room after Le Petit Trianon. Gobelin tapestries matching those in Versailles lined the walls of the the dining room, and by combining it with the conservatory, Charley could seat 1,500 for dinner. Enrico Caruso might provide after-dinner entertainment.

At a time when no New York mansion could boast more than one elevator, Charley had three, adorned with heavy bronze doors. There were also a colonnaded swimming pool, a bowling alley,

and a private chapel where Charley, a devout Catholic, had Mass said for him every morning. The entire 74th Street wing was an art gallery, displaying paintings by Rembrandt, Hals, Velasquez, Corot, Turner, and Charley’s favorite: Titian’s “Portrait of Cardinal Pietro Bombo.”

Yet when Charley died in 1939, he was \$2 million in debt, and for eight years afterwards, his splendid home slowly deteriorated. Proposed as a mayoral residence, it was turned down by Fiorello LaGuardia. “What—*me* in *that*?” It was finally sold for \$1.25 million and razed in 1947 to make way for the present apartment building, which the new owners called Schwab House.

But it isn’t, of course. That red brick pile is nothing like Charley Schwab’s dream chateau, and we’ll not see the like of “On the Hudson” again.

—Mary Ratcliffe

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Action at #252

One day in late October the front door of this derelict house stood open and some folks who looked very much like a broker and a buyer stood talking outside. What passes for a front yard had been marginally cleaned up. We told the presumptive buyer what a great block he would enjoy, but he only smiled. A night or two later a work light showed in an upstairs window. Dare we hope that it signalled the coming end to this eyesore?

Farewell to a Friend

We are losing Shirley Lazar, a merry little lady who lived alone at #315. Shirley broke her hip around Labor Day and subsequently fell twice in the hospital, but she’s on her feet again in a rehab center. She’s looking forward to moving into a senior residence on the Upper East Side that will spare her housework and a long flight of stairs, and just as important, will accept her beloved cat, Lola.

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name _____
 Address _____
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 E-mail _____
 Date _____

DUES: \$10/YEAR

Mail application with check to
 W75BA, 311 West 75th St, New York, NY 10023

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