

The History of Chelsea

Twenty-six years before the American Revolution, retired British Major Thomas Clarke, veteran of the French and Indian wars, purchased 94 acres of land three miles north of New York City. Clarke, named it Chelsea, after an English veterans' hospital and old soldiers' home, in honor of his comrades across the Atlantic. He built a mansion on a hilltop, overlooking the Hudson, where London Terrace sits today.



Hemstreet's sketch (left) of George Washington's ride up Fitz Roy Road and then along Love Lane to widow Clarke's house. Before the war 'Love Lane' was popular route for buggyride courtships, highlighted with a romantic trip along the Hudson River that ran along, what is now, Tenth Avenue.



Theological Seminary's West Building along the Hudson River at what is now, 10th Ave..

1776

1813

1750

1763

1827

The Clarke Estate



Manhattan, 1660



Thomas Clarke's mansion burned to the ground and he died days later. Unshaken, his widow, Mollie, with 'the pride and strength of Tory,' built a new home, nearby. Because of her English background, during the American Revolution she and the estate were harrassed by Continental Soldiers. Like a true Chelseaite, she appealed by note to the top honcho, General George Washington, asking him. "Why'd the quiet home of a widow and two young daughters be infested by your uniformed loutish varlets?"

Washington mounted a horse, and with an escort, rode from lower Manhattan, up Fitzroy Road, and then onto Love Lane, to the Clarke Estate where he met Mollie, calming her temper with "real kindness as well as stiff courtesy." (1)



Clement Clarke Moore inherits the Chelsea Estate. He soon offers the Episcopal Church, his apple orchard—sixty lots of land, that still remains between 9th and 10th Aves, & 19th & 20th Sts., on the condition that "the newly established theological seminary be permanently located thereon." (2)

Between an outbreak of Yellow Fever in lower Manhattan, due to bad drinking water, and a rapidly increasing immigrant population, the chunk of the city expanded north toward the farmland surrounding Chelsea. Clement Clarke Moore joined forces with James N. Wells, dividing his land into building plots based on a proposed City plan. Clement's stipulation on his sold plots was that they were for housing and that each plot had a front garden—for the enjoyment of those that lived in the neighborhood.



Clement Moore's footprint still remains in the soil of Chelsea's streetside gardens. Above are the Chelsea Cottages along 24th St., btw. 9th & 10th Ave.



Throughout the conflict surrounding the Civil War, 339 West 29th St., located on a row of houses called Lamartine Place, acted as Manhattan's lone surviving home that was part of the underground railroad. The owner, James Gibbons, printed the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* and his wife, Abby, courageously worked at helping slaves from recapture. Their house was ransacked during the Draft Riots in 1863.

(3)

Chelsea's 14th street became the commerce center of the city with RH Macy and B. Altman opening their first stores there.

1869

1836—

1820- 30's

1847

The laying of the Hudson River Railroad tracks along Tenth Avenue had a profound effect on Clement Moore's quaint hamlet. With freight trains full of supplies and raw materials arriving to the city, warehouses, lumber yards, manufacturers and truckers stormed the neighborhood. A large number of Irish settled in Western Chelsea, working at the railyards, while Spanish migrated to eastern Chelsea, getting jobs in the manufacturing trade.



In the 1860's, the waterline of Chelsea was moved West, two blocks, with fill-in to accommodate its new commerce business.

1860

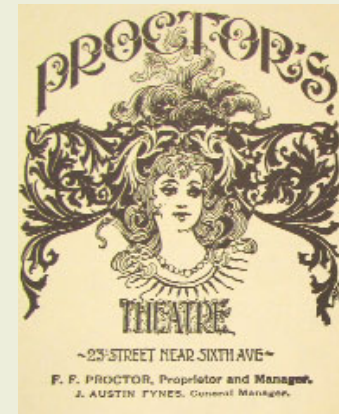


World's first elevated train, ran from Battery Park, up Ninth Avenue. Above, 9th Ave. btw 22nd & 23rd.

(4)

1880

During the 80's and 90's, Twenty-Third Street became the Theatre District of New York. Opening Edwin Booth's Theatre, Procter's Theatre, and Pikes Opera House. Many artists such as O'Henry, Mary Pickford, Mark Twain, Oscar Wilde, and Anna Held frequented Chelsea.



Lillian Russel at Procters, 23rd and Sixth

Pikes Opera House opens on 23rd.St & 8th Ave.

In what would become an inspiring tale of human commitment, Dr. John Lovejoy Elliot, happened upon a gang of Chelsea teenagers shooting craps late one night. He was so bothered by their lack of discipline that he rented a room and turned it over to the youths. The room became a hubbub of activity, later, producing two Golden Glove Champions, and serving as the foundation of many programs he launched in Chelsea.



Dr. John Lovejoy Elliot

In 1894, Elliot established the Hudson Guild at 436 West 27th St., the country's first real neighborhood center. It offered educational programs as well as lectures on how to pursue a life of self-betterment. In 1899, he also established the Hudson Guild Club Council, the first self-governing neighborhood council. In 1933, he helped establish Chelsea Association for Planning and Action, which was instrumental in conceiving and gaining the federal funding, for building of Chelsea Elliot and Fulton Housing Projects.



1894

1896



*Looking West on 23rd St.,
from the Sixth Avenue el train.*

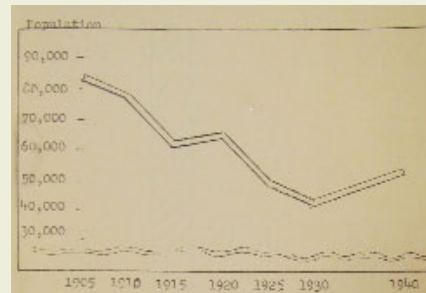
(7)

1907



*The
Lusitania
in 1910.*

Chelsea Piers, built in 1907 handled much of Trans-Atlantic luxury passenger lines up until 1935, when the ships moved to newer and larger berths further uptown. Chelsea's fortunes might have been different had the RMS Titanic not sunk. Pier 60 was to be NY's berth for the Titanic. It's survivors arrived on the Chelsea Piers by way of the RMS Carpathia.



(5)

The population of Chelsea decreased rapidly in the early part of the century, as business replaced much of the residential housing. The population rebounded with the depression, when people were 'doubling up.'

1905

1940



*Looking North from
23rd St. & Ninth Avenue.*

(6)



*Old
P.S. 33*

1930



1934



An elevated West Side Highway for automobiles and HighLine, an elevated trainline were built to protect the streets of Chelsea from congestion and accidents. The train line brought freights to the National Biscuit Company and meat market, among others. But trucking took over all transport of goods, and, by the fifties, the rails were underused.



1951



P.S. 33 is built, at 26th St. and Ninth Ave., replacing the 1857 school house that had been in continuous use at the same locale.



*Miller Highway
(west side's elevated
highway)*

During the 60's several iconic buildings by seamen unions rose in the Chelsea area, each with porthole windows. But, as N.J.'s ports took much of the business from the Port of N.Y., the International Longshoremen's Association building at 13th St. & Seventh Ave. was sold to St. Vincent's Hospital in 1973. St. Vincent's has since closed their doors too, and the building might house Chelsea's new Emergency Care Facility. The National Maritime Union building on Ninth Ave. & 16th St. was sold to the Covenant House in 1987. Today it is a hotel.



1964

A cement truck fell through a dilapidated, elevated West Side Highway and the bridge was dismantled. Plans for a new Westway, with traffic running underground were buried by environmentalists. A new surface highway was eventually laid according to the plans of the Hudson River Park and NYC Highway Department.



1973



The 2.5-acre Chelsea Waterside Park opened.

2002

The HighLine opened its southern portion between Gansevoort Street to 20th Street. A special zoning for adjacent property spurred a real estate boom. New hotels, office buildings, new condos followed its tracks through Chelsea.



2009

1962

As part of the Mitchel-Lana Housing Program, Penn South, a ten building complex with 2,820 affordable units was built between Eighth and Ninth Aves and 23rd & 29th Sts. It was sponsored by the International Ladies Garment Workers, and, today, is as vibrant and affordable as ever.



1969

A police raid on Greenwich Village's Stonewall Inn would greatly change the future of Chelsea. The ensuing gay riot gave the rest of the world a spot on the atlas, where there was strength in rebellion against sexual-orientation discrimination.

After finding few places affordable in Greenwich Village, gays and lesbians, were more than welcomed in Chelsea.



1980's—



From the 1970's on, art galleries and night clubs, looking for more space for less money, swarmed Western Chelsea.

2009

Chelsea Waterside Cove along the Hudson River Park, opened with gardens, piers, lawns, a skateboard facility and even a carousel.





Today in Chelsea

Like the survivors of the Titanic, who first stepped on Chelsea ground, following their rescue, the community of Chelsea is also a ship-load of survivors. It's turbulent history of change has tested the resolve of many, as has the force of discrimination.

Industries of railroad, warehousing, trucking, passenger shipping, manufacturing, and riots, have stormed through it's streets, leaving behind generations of those left in the wake. The last relic of the railroad industry, is now the High Line, the docks that served luxury liners are now parks, and the giant warehouses have been converted into art galleries, offices, and condos.

Historic Districts and strong zoning laws have kept a good portion of our neighborhood in the sunlight, but those laws are continually challenged, as is affordable housing, and our way of life. New York City and Chelsea too is quickly becoming a world-leading tourist destination.

Take comfort in the thought that seeds of civic spirit spread by John Lovejoy Elliot and Clement Clark Moore, before him, have grown into strong roots of passion. Local block associations, planning boards, community groups, and politicians have since been diligent in embracing and improving the lives of a very diverse Chelsea Community.

But the work is never done.

TIMELINE COMPILED & WRITTEN BY DONATHAN SALKALN
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Credits: (1) [Villages within New York City](#) ; (2) [Old Chelsea and Saint Peter's Church](#); (3, 4, 6, 7) The New York City Historical Society; (5) [Chelsea](#), a study by the Mills School. Also helpful: [Forty Years on 23rd Street](#) Any omissions of history are purely bipartisan and, please, forward any additions to dsalkaln@yahoo.com

