

BURT WOLF TRAVELS & TRADITIONS NEW YORK CITY

The great cities along the Atlantic coast of North America were originally colonized by groups of people who wanted to build communities based on their religious beliefs; Puritans in Boston, Quakers in Philadelphia, Anabaptists in Rhode Island. There was, however, one extraordinary exception: New York. New York was founded in the 1620s as a trading post by the Dutch West India Company, a profit center for a corporation. The directors of the Dutch West India Company had one objective, to make as much money as they could as fast as they could. All other issues were secondary.

Four hundred years have gone by, but the priorities on this island are still pretty much the same; making money comes first. But at the heart of making money is



creativity. You need an idea or an invention that will make money for the investors and the creators. So, Manhattan also became the center for creativity. And once you have creativity and money in the same place, people become interested in culture.

Today, Manhattan is a world epicenter for all three: money, creativity and culture. It is an extraordinary place to live and an amazing place to visit.

Let's start with the money, the big bucks, the money that changed everything in New York City. It came floating into town when the Erie Canal opened in 1825. The canal was 135 miles long and it connected New York City with the Great Lakes. Suddenly, products that took a month to get to New York were arriving in a week. Shipping charges that were a dollar dropped to a dime. New York City was connected to the heartland of America and the products that were being made there were now being shipped through the port of New York.

The Erie Canal made New York the mercantile center

of the new world. The stocks issued to fund the canal and the money needed to deal with the city's sudden growth made it the financial center of the country. By 1830, New York had passed Philadelphia to become the nation's most important money market. And it still is.

The New York Stock Exchange is the largest equities market in the world. On an average day, over 35 billion dollars worth of stock is bought and sold. It started in 1792, when two dozen brokers got together under a tree near 68 Wall Street. It became an official place for trading stocks in 1863 and the ticker was introduced just four years later. It took over 100 years, but in 1975, The New York Stock Exchange got its first woman member.

When you buy a membership in The New York Stock Exchange, what you get is the right to buy and sell listed shares with other members. When the general public when it wants a share he or she must go to a member. Another word for a membership is seat; but no one gets to sit down on the floor of The New York Stock Exchange. In the 1870s, a seat sold for 4,000 bucks. In 1999, that same seat, slightly reupholstered, sold for two and a half million.

When the Exchange is open, so is the visitor's gallery. You can stand above the trading floor and watch vast wealth coming and going.

Just down the street from The Stock Exchange is The Federal Reserve Bank of New York. It's one of the 12 regional reserve banks that was set up to serve as the central bank of The United States. The Fed sets the monetary policy for the country. It's also the warehouse for hundreds of billions of dollars worth of gold and securities, and tourists can come in and pay the gold a visit.

From its earliest days, circulating money was an essential part of New York, and to a great extent that circulation depended on immigration. During the 1640s, Peter Stuyvesant was the Governor of the colony. He ruled with an iron fist and a wooden leg. And was New York's first official bigot.

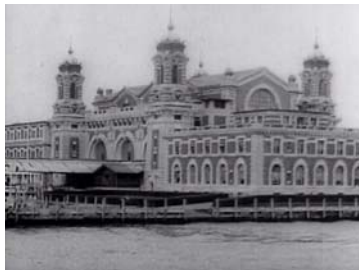
He begged the Dutch West India Company to let him keep the Jews out. But the company was into riches, not

religion, and they told him to stick it. His instructions were to let the Jews and any other race or religion into the colony so long as they would enhance its economic standing. And you know what? That's pretty much the predominant view in New York today.

IMMIGRATION TO NEW YORK

By the beginning of the twentieth century, immigrants were arriving from all over Europe and Asia. Thousands were coming in each day and they were allowed in for the simple reason that the city needed cheap labor for its new factories. And massive immigration to New York is still going on. An analysis of U.S. census figures indicates that during the 1990s, over one million immigrants settled in New York. Today, over 40 percent of the city's residents are foreign born.

There's major immigration to other American cities. But, for the most part, those cities are receiving large homogeneous groups; lots of people who come from the same place, like the Cubans in Miami. But the immigration to New York City is coming from all over the world, and it's revitalizing the town. In the 1620s, there were 500 people living on this island. They spoke 18 different languages. Today, the people who live in Manhattan speak over 100 different languages and some of them even speak English.



The immigrants and their children are also the source of much of the city's creativity. Pete Hamill's father and mother immigrated to New York at the beginning of the twentieth century. Pete became a journalist, Editor-In-Chief of both *The New York Post* and *The New York Daily News*, a screenwriter and a novelist. We stopped in at the Tribeca Grill to talk about New York and creativity.

PETE HAMILL:

I think, first of all, that the immigrant generation, the people that come from the other places, don't imagine in any conceivable way careers for themselves. They go to work in those grocery stores, whether they were Irish or Jewish, 70 years ago or they're Korean today, so that their kids don't have to do those jobs. They are here to make the careers of their children possible. And so they gave those kids something that was extraordinary, and that wasn't

money. It was optimism. It was the belief to create in them the belief they could be anything. You want to play the left field for The Dodgers? You could be a left fielder. If you have real bad luck, you can be President of the United States, but if you're really lucky, you can be a free man or a free woman. You can be an artist or a writer or a playwright or whatever. I think the art, particularly the arts, were amazingly nourished by that European immigration generation; by the Irish, the Jews and the Italians.

The roads took different paths, but the arts in America, the twentieth century arts were essentially the results of the children of immigrants plus African Americans.



And when you put those combinations together, you got American art in the twentieth century. We are seeing now I think the beginning of the amazing gifts that we will get back from the new generation of immigrants. It's for that reason that the city feels replenished, the city feels excited again, the city feels full of possibility. I think it's very hard to create art in total isolation, that all those little collisions, the irritations of living in a city like New York are the same kinds of irritations that can create pearls.

For me, New York makes my blood pulse. I need the kind of isolation like a lot of writers need to be able to focus deeply and surrender to the trance of the work. You need that kind of isolation. But when I get to the end and I take a breath and say that's it, I open the door, I'm out in the street and there's a Chinese woman yelling at somebody else in Chinese while a Latin guy is arguing with a Haitian over a parking spot. And when I hear that, when I hear the bouncing of languages, all those vowels colliding with all those consonants, my blood races. I'm so happy to be there. I'm so happy to be in cement.

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

Cement that holds up some of the most interesting buildings constructed during the twentieth century. Norval White is the author of *The American Institute of Architects Guide to New York*. It's a definitive record of the city's architectural heritage. I asked him to show us a few of his favorite structures.

NORVAL WHITE:

This is the Chrysler building, one of the great examples in New York of the art deco style. It's a marvelous skyscraper. It has

many details of fascinating interest. On the third setback, you can see the radiator caps of an early Chrysler automobile. And then way up at the top, you can see the falcons projecting into space, kind of modern gargoyles. And then above that, this rather glorious finial, this steel sphere lancing into the sky.



It was the tallest building in the world until the Empire State came along, which is distinguished really only for its height. This one is distinguished for its architecture, as well as its height.

Another grand space is the main reading room of the New York Public Library. It's called the Rose Main Reading Room after the philanthropist who endowed it. And it's been brought back to its original spark, which was when it was opened in 1913.

It's really an inflated copy of an Italian Renaissance palace and the ceiling, which could come from a majestic fifteenth century Florentine palazzo, is twice as big in every direction as anybody could construct in that time. So the engineering of the late nineteenth century allowed this colossal expansion. Fascinating oak, Roman Tuscan columns. This is where the books are returned and a very grand place.



And speaking of grand, our next stop was Grand Central Station. Since Pennsylvania Station was torn down by the vandals, this is the great place to celebrate one's arrival to New York City.

1913 it was finished. I think it was built between 1903 and 13. A fantastic combination of engineering, which made these great spaces, and the rich end of the nineteenth century what we call "beaux art architecture," grand architecture of those times.

The windows are glass bridges. You can walk from one side to the other. But the architects who have completely redid the station and did this magnificent restoration of the zodiac up here in the sky.

One of the most interesting things about the ceiling is that the star scape is in reverse. If you look up at the night sky, this is not the view you will see. This is the view from outer space looking down at the stars.

CENTRAL PARK

The idea for New York's Central Park came from Andrew Jackson Downing, a well-connected landscape architect who felt that the upper-class citizens of the city were no longer coming into contact with the lower classes in ways that might be beneficial for both. He believed that a large park in the center of the city would accomplish this objective. Citizens of every class would come to the park and be reminded that underneath we are all brothers and sisters. Sara Cedar Miller is a historian with the Central Park Conservancy, and she took me on a tour.

SARA CEDAR MILLER:

We are on the mall in Central Park, the straightest line in the park. If you can imagine that you are walking down the nave of Chartres Cathedral,



the landscape architects used plant material in the exact same way that architects used stone. So you have the trees as the columns of the buildings, the sculptures as the apses with the chapels inside and the beautiful branches of these American elms acting like the ribs of the Gothic vaulting.

This is the largest span of American elms in North America, even perhaps the world. They are 70 years old.

Right now, we're in the heart of Central Park, at Bethesda Terrace. I like to think of it as Central Park's living room, and the fountain as the TV.

Right behind the fountain is the lake. Central Park has three different kinds of landscapes. The formal landscape, we just came down the mall, we are here at Bethesda Terrace, more or less the Versailles for every man. And behind us is the pastoral park, the Great Meadows and the great big, broad sheets of water like the lake. Behind that is the Ramble, the third kind of landscape, which is the picturesque landscape of the woodlands.

Nature all over the place. We're on Beaux Bridge, the largest span in the park and the second oldest cast iron bridge in America. They knew that cast iron could break.

This is a very brittle material. So what they did was bury cannonballs at the base of the bridge to act as ball bearings so the bridge could have a little movement when the lake froze for ice skating.

Very clever technology. So, after all of these years, it has become what Olmstead dreamed about, a park for the people.

A BITE OF THE BIG APPLE

In addition to their cultural contributions the immigrants brought their gastronomy. There are over 10,000 restaurants on the island of Manhattan, so you can find just about anything you want.

In the beginning, most of the cultural and gastronomic influences were from the English. After all, we speak English. Our laws are based on English common law, and much of the cooking was based on English recipes. As immigrant groups arrived, they wanted to assimilate and be like everybody who was here and, so, they accepted the English tradition. There was, however, one group of people who thought we needed a little cultural help and that the cooking was absolutely terrible. They flatly refused to give up their old-country ways, and, I think, changed America in many ways more than we changed them, and those were the Italians.

The key decade for the Italians was the 1880s. A conflict was developing between the Italian immigrants arriving in New York and the scientific community. Researchers were developing theories about the relationship of what people ate and drank to their overall well-being. They were also teaching these theories, as if they were scientific facts. The scientists had some interesting ideas. They thought that the tomato was poisonous and could kill you. They thought that fruits and vegetables had so much water in them, that from a nutritional point of view they were useless, they thought that green vegetables were the worst of all. They thought garlic was so dangerous it was like a self-inflicted wound. They were very nervous about eating different foods at the same time. If you put meatloaf and mashed potatoes and mixed vegetables on the same plate and ate them at the same time, it might put too much stress on your digestive system, and you'd get sick.



Ludicrous stuff. Imagine a family coming to New York from Italy, and the government tells them that everything they love and have been eating for generations is no good for them. Outrageous! Fortunately, they stood their ground and we're lucky they did.

It's easy to credit Italian immigrants for America's love of pizza and pasta. But they're also responsible for the widespread acceptance of fruits and vegetables.

At the Fairway Market on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, it's easy to see what the Italians brought in. Bins of fresh pasta. Shelves of dried pasta. A wall of olive

oils. Tubs of fresh olives. Tomatoes. Artichokes. Broccoli. Baby eggplants. A dozen different espresso coffees and biscotti. And that's just the easy stuff. Steve Jenkins is in charge of Fairway's Cheese Department, and he has his own story.

STEVE JENKINS:

At this counter, there's probably some 400 cheeses. But I'd say, France aside, the majority of them are Italian. We started in the Northwest corner of Italy where there's one of the five greatest cheeses in the whole world. It's called Fontina d'Aosta, from Aosta, the great semi-soft, raw cow's cheese from near Mont Fontin, the greatest melting cheese in the world. And from there, we just fell across the Piemonte border and discovered that the great Paglia cheeses and the Toma cheeses and Bra, the great, great cow's milk cheeses of Piemonte, in addition, the goat's milk Roccaverano and the sheep's milk Murrizzano, and now, they're sort of ... they're staples. They're things our customers absolutely have to have. From Piemonte we travel West into Lombardia, where we discover great mascarpone. From there we went into Tuscany and pioneered what I think is my favorite cheese in the world which is Pecorino Toscano, name-controlled, sheep's milk cheese from Tuscany. Comes in a variety of sizes and shapes and ages. It's always raw milk. It's one of the most satisfying cheeses I know. And into Campagna. And we bring in mozzarella di bufala which, since the 2nd Century A.D., has been the definitive mozzarella, not cow's milk. They don't even call cow's milk mozzarella. They call it il fiore di latte. That's Campagna. That's the area that's all around Napoli. We make sure we've got them every day, and they sell in ever-increasing amounts, and it's an enormous source of pride.



For centuries, the idea of good eating meant meat and fat. And in the early 1900s, researchers discovered vitamins and dietary minerals and all the rules changed. Suddenly, fruits and vegetables became good foods. The Italians also brought in America's favorite dessert. The Chinese had been making something like ice cream for about 5,000 years. But it was the Italians who introduced ice cream to Europe and eventually to the general public in North America. The ancient Romans loved ice cream. They would send a runner into the mountains to get ice, bring it back to town, mix it with crushed fruit and cream and end up with something like what we have today.

Ice cream follows a rather rocky road in ancient Rome. If you came back from the mountains and your ice was melted, the Emperor might just feed you to the lions. Things were better in Colonial America. George Washington had his own ice-cream making machine, and Thomas Jefferson had his own recipe for French vanilla. But it took the immigrants from Italy to make ice cream what it is today. Yummy!

And it was the Italian immigrant community that developed much of the American wine business. Many of the great vineyards in California were started by Italian farm families that came to the United States at the end of the 1800s.

New York is also the center of Italian gastronomy in the new world. So you should definitely stop into one of the city's great Italian restaurants. These days, the superstar is Babbo, which is the Italian word for daddy. The two daddies that own the restaurant are Joe Bastianich and Mario Batali. Mario's in the kitchen and he started me off with marinated fresh anchovies, pasta with toasted garlic, hot peppers and pecorino, and for dessert, sweet corn crema and zeppoli, which are little dough nuts.

One of my favorite hot spots in New York is Balthazar. It has the feeling of a traditional French brasserie, and like the famous brasseries of Paris, it's a place for celebrities to see and be seen. I usually come in a group and we share the dishes. For starters, a chicken liver and foie gras mousse, roasted beet salad and Brandade de Morue, which is a mixture of cod and potatoes. The main courses were pan roasted chicken, steak in a pepper sauce and whatever the daily special is. Today it's saddle of lamb. For dessert, a fresh fig and raspberry tart and a pineapple upside down cake with coconut ice cream.



The wine list is excellent and the bakery next door offers top-notch breads, sandwiches and pastries.

There are tens of thousands of Japanese living in the New York metropolitan area and they have encouraged the growth of Japanese restaurants to a point where some of the best Japanese food off the islands of Japan is on the island of Manhattan. The most innovative is Nobu, which has brought a new style of Japanese cooking to the city. Nobu is owned by actor Robert De Niro, celebrated chef Nobu Matsuhisa and restaurateur Drew Nieporent. The restaurant has lots of natural wood, tall birch tree columns rising into the ceiling and Japanese fabrics.

The food is fantastic. We started with yellow-tail tartar with caviar, sashimi salad with Matsuhisa dressing. Then Moroheiya pasta salad with lobster. For dessert, a parfait; dark chocolate on the bottom, caramel in the middle, white chocolate on top and hazelnut Florentines on top of the top. A work of art.

The author Lewis Mumford said that Manhattan itself was a work of art, the creation of human imagination. And I think Frank Sinatra had the best take on the place when he said "if you can make it here, you can make it anywhere," and you can make this place a great vacation.

TO LEARN MORE . . .

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