



Bedford • Barrow • Commerce

Block Association
46 Barrow Street • New York, NY 10014

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP IS (ONLY) \$25
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April 2025 BBC News And Views

Nabe Notes

Spring is here. We hope you enjoy the thousands of flowers you see throughout our neighborhood. Only through the generosity of members and contributions from film companies were we able to plant 3000 bulbs in November.



Need a place for breakfast and lunch? Great news, **Commerce Inn** has started serving breakfast and lunch on weekdays starting at 9am to 3pm.

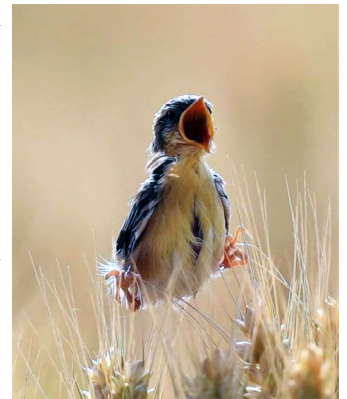


Save the Date

BBC Spring planting, Saturday, May 17, 10:00pm.
Details to follow.

Jefferson Market Garden

Spring is Here! Come share the joys of Spring as we open the Jefferson Market Garden gates for the new season on April 1, 2025. This marks a special year for us as we celebrate our 50th anniversary in Greenwich Village! We look forward to seeing our friends, visitors and community in the Garden. Hours of operation: 10:00am - 6:00pm, Tuesday - Sunday, Rain or Shine



Greenwich House Music School:

Uncharted Is Back, Thursday, April 10.

Our annual concert series not only serves as a launching point for some of NYC's most diverse artistic voices, it functions as a vital artist-in-residency program. During their residency, Uncharted artists receive funding to compose, rehearse, and perform new material while retaining all box office sales and master rights to the work-empowering them to develop new projects without any financial risk. Past alumni include **Endea Owens, Shaina Taub, Brandee Younger, Riley Mulherkar**, and more.



Shaina Taub

We can't think of a better way to directly support local musicians than this! tickets \$20 the 2025 season premiere with jazz tap dancer Michela Marino Lerman on 4/10. www.greenwichhouse.org
Black Composers Upsouth: Dance Clarinets April 15 @ 7:30pm - 9:00pm. Directed by **JD Parran**,

Greenwich House Music School's premiere jazz clarinet ensemble will kick off the Black Composers Upsouth Festival with a concert celebrating the music of **Oliver Lake, Julius Hemphill, and James "Jabbo"**



Oliver Lake

Ware. Oliver Lake will read original poetry. Doors 7:15pm, Concert 7:30pm. Tickets are \$20 available at the door only (cash preferred).

You're cordially invited to Greenwich House Music School's Annual Fundraiser and Benefit Concert. This year, we're humbled and thrilled to present an intimate evening with two-time Tony Award winner, **Shaina Taub**! Shaina is a prolific musician, composer, and actor who gained recent acclaim for her original Broadway musical *SUFFS*. And did you know she's also an Uncharted Concert Series alum? Tuesday, April 29, at 7:00pm at 46 Barrow St. The evening will begin at 5:30pm with hors d'oeuvres and wine from our friends at The Little Owl, and Greenwich House Trustee **Mark Rudd**, followed by the performances at 7 pm. This is sure to be a special evening for the Music School, and we hope you can be there with us. Tickets www.greenwichhouse.org.



Mark Rudd

Village Preservation

Join us for a special night of comedy benefiting Village Preservation, with **James Mattern** as our emcee! The lineup's still in formation — prior years have featured **Mo Amer, Geoffrey Asmus, Mike Cannon, Chris Distefano, Kevin Dombrowski, Rachel Feinstein, Mia Jackson, Erin Jackson, Jordan Jensen, Yamaneika Saunders**, and many more! Tuesday, April 29, 2025, 6:00pm,. \$45 per ticket, two item minimum, Comedy Cellar at the Village Underground, 130 W. 3rd Street. Register www.villagepreservation.org.



James Mattern

Municipal Arts Society Tour: Chelsea Art Galleries

Saturday, April 12, 11:00am.

[In-person tour] New York is the art capital of the world! The best way to explore the latest trends in contemporary art, whether brand new or newly appreciated, is roaming the art galleries in NYC. On this tour of Chelsea galleries with art historian **Sylvia Laudien-Meo**, we will explore a selection of the most interesting works on view. Artists always find intriguing way to inspire us with thought provoking works, fascinating practices and techniques, beautiful creations, broadening perspectives on life. We will have the opportunity to discuss the works presented as a group at the end of our tour. This is an enhanced price, limited capacity tour and will be offered



Sylvia Laudien-Meo

at 11:00am and again at 2:00pm, For all tours, there are no refunds, cancellations, or exchanges unless we cancel a tour. Online registration closes one hour prior to the tour start time. Members \$35, non-members \$45 www.mas.org

Tour:Fort Greene

Saturday, April 26, 2:00pm. [In-person tour] On the edge of rapidly developing downtown Brooklyn, Fort Greene has seen more major construction in the last twenty years than most neighborhoods have experienced in the last 60 years. It seems as if every time one looks down the street, a new residential tower is rising over the brownstone blocks, and we've forgotten what they replaced. This tour



Fort Greene — Davud Hudson Wright

with **Suzanne Spellin** and **Morgan Munsey** mixes the protected old with some of the avant-garde new, spanning two centuries. Residential, civic, cultural, and commercial buildings, houses of worship and green spaces - all are part of Fort Greene's storied history and its future. For all tours, there are no refunds, cancellations, or exchanges unless we cancel a tour. Online registration closes one hour prior to the tour start time. \$25 members, \$35 non-members www.mas.

Old News

When the owners of the three-story house at 34 Commerce Street rented the parlor and basement levels in March 1854, their advertisement mentioned the "marble mantels and folding doors on the first floor." The following year they suggested that "gas can be put in, if desired" — evidence of their comfortable financial situation. By the first years of the 1860's it was home to the William Kingsland family. The funeral of Kingsland's wife, Eliza G. Kingsland was held in the house on August 7, 1867.

At the time of Mrs. Kingsland's death, R. H. McDonald was embarking on a new business venture. Around 1862 Joseph Walker, who styled himself as "Dr. J. Walker," began producing a patent medicine which he called Dr. J. Walker's California Vinegar Bitters. He purchased some of the ingredients from a New York City dealer, R. H. McDonald & Co. Then, in 1868, McDonald and J. C. Spencer, proposed a deal whereby they would manufacture the tonic and act as its sole agents. Walker moved his production and distribution to New York City in 1869.

On November 13, 1869 the *Real Estate Record & Builders' Guide* reported that R. H. McDonald & Co. would erect a "one story open front wagon shed" at 32 and 34 Commerce Street. Whether McDonald purposely misrepresented the building — perhaps to avoid property taxes — is unknown. But the resultant structure was a two-story brick factory, completed within months. On February 8, 1870 an advertisement in *The New York Herald* read "Wanted — At the California Vinegar Bitters office, a smart boy, from 14 to 16 years of age, who writes a good hand and resides with his parents." The stipulation that the boy live with his parents eliminated what were



commonly referred to as "street arabs;" the homeless boys who would be likely to pilfer goods or money.

Someone trusted with cash — possibly McDonald himself — was careless a few months later. On May 18 an announcement in *The New York Herald* read "Lost — On Monday afternoon, shortly after six o'clock, in going from the California Vinegar Bitters Manufactory, 32 and 34 Commerce street to corner of Morton and Hudson streets, an envelope containing \$178 in currency and greenbacks. The person finding it will be very liberally rewarded by returning it to the above number." The lost cash equals about \$3,450 today.

McDonald had changed the name of his firm to the R. H. McDonald Drug Co... The tonic was called "The great blood purifier and life-giving principle" and was guaranteed to cure scores of disorders, including "heart and chest, liver and kidney complaints, stomach ache, jaundice, gout and fits, dizziness...biliousness, dysentary, piles, etc." McDonald marketed the product not only as a tonic, but as a temperance drink. An 1871 ad mentioned in part "The liquor traffic annually sends to prison 100,000 persons, reduces 200,000 children to a state worse than orphanage, sends 60,000 annually to drunkard's graves, and makes 600,000 drunkards."

McDonald's sanctimonious claimswere shot down by Professor William R. Nichols of the Boston Board of Health. He analyzed the contents and announced to the East Saginaw Sanitary Convention in December 1884 that Dr. J. Walker's California Vinegar Bitters contained 6% alcohol.

Years before that, however, things had become strained between McDonald and Joseph Walker. Walker was in the factory only one or two months in the fall and again in the spring. "The balance of the year I consumed in selling," he explained in *The*





The corner of Commerce and Bedford in 1922.

American Journal of Digestive Diseases. When he was in town, he had heated discussions with McDonald about the advertising campaign.

Indeed, McDonald had stopped paying his partner his share of the income and refused to show the books to Walker or his son, Josiah; eventually locked them out of the factory. In 1872 McDonald moved the operation to Washington Street. After years of receiving no money from the sale of his tonic, Joseph Walker finally sued in 1877 for \$5,000 — a little over \$120,000 today.

The Commerce Street factory had been converted to a storage facility by Jas. Michael & Son. The firm's successful business led it to expand into the building steps away at 38 Commerce Street the following year.

Second-hand furniture dealer and carpenter James Hodge moved his operation into 32-34. A typical ad, on May 2, 1874, offered "Large lot [of] fine counters, showcases, drug drawers, office railings; will be sold cheap. Carpenter and cabinet work at short notice."

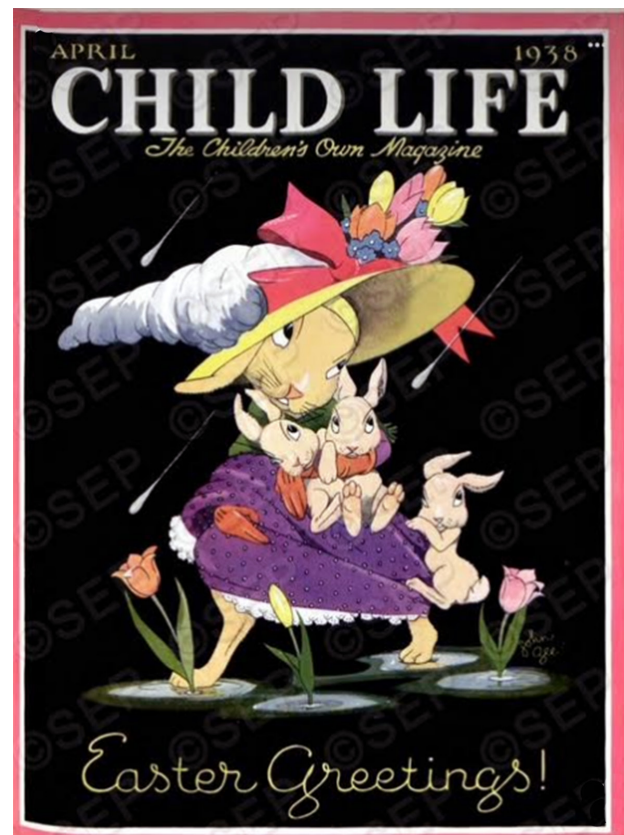
Around 1884 J. Soria & Co.'s dye shop leased the building. Founded before 1859 and now run by Andrew Soria, it described itself as a "French dyeing establishment." When son David Soria renewed the lease in 1891, the yearly rent was \$500, or about \$14,000 today. The dyeing operation remained in the building at least until 1898 when it was sold to Michael H. Cardozo. In 1896 A. F. Soria employed six men and eight women who worked 54 hours per week. One can only imagine the miserable conditions inside the brick building with large vats of boiling water creating a constant hot and humid work environment.

In the first part of the 20th century the old factory building was in serious disrepair. In 1912 a demolition permit was issued. For whatever reason, the owners never went ahead with the project. In October 1923 a group of artists, writers and performers—including

poet Edna St. Vincent Millay--purchased a cluster of the old houses around the Commerce and Bedford Street intersection in an effort to save them from apartment building developers.

32-34 was converted to apartments shortly afterward. But its renovation was not so glamorous as the private homes. Painted beige, there was nothing especially pleasing about the building; and by the last half of the century it was a sort of eyesore along the picturesque block. Then, on October 17, 1993 *New York Times* journalist Tracie Razhon wrote "change is coming for one of Greenwich Village's most tranquil and historic enclaves...four buildings, which border a private garden mews, have offers from young architects and other professionals that have been accepted by a family that has owned them for decades." Included in the group was the nearly vacant converted factory. Razhon said "There is one rent-controlled tenant, who lives in half of the downstairs. The prospective buyer is a young architect." Scott Newman created an entry stoop and period-appropriate iron railings, removed the paint and redesigned the interiors. The renovations resulted in a two-family residence. Long the ugly duckling of the block, it is now an appealing piece of what Razhon called "one of Greenwich Village's most tranquil and historic enclaves."

abridged from Daytonian in Manhattan



The BBC wishes you a happy, peaceful holiday.