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# SoHo Life

November 2012

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## LENS MASTER

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# Behind SoHo Street Names

The etymology of street names reveals much about the history of SoHo and the surrounding areas. Here's a new way to take a look at our very old neighborhood.



Many of the major streets in SoHo are named after important figures in our nation's history. Spring was named for an area in Lispenard's Meadow once used for recreation by early European settlers. Houston was named in honor of Nicholas Bayard's son-in-law, William Houstoun. Mercer and Greene streets commemorate war heroes. In the early 1800s Canal was used to transport toxic waste from Collect Pond to the Hudson River.

Photos: Marilyn Holstein; collage created by Roman Kudryashov

By Yukie Ohta

One way we New Yorkers define ourselves is by where we live—in what neighborhood, on what street. We've repeated our own addresses an untold number of times, yet we usually do not know for whom or for what the streets are named. The etymology of street names reveals much about the history of the areas through which those streets run. In SoHo, the names of our major thoroughfares often pay homage to figures in our nation's history.

## Houston Street

In the early 1800's, Nicholas Bayard, once the largest landowner in Manhattan, cut a street through his land and named it after his son-in-law, William Houstoun, a congressman from Georgia, who, it is thought, pronounced his name *house-ton*, instead of *hews-ton*, like the city in Texas. There is a Houston County in Georgia that is also pronounced *house-ton*. At some point, the second "u" in Houstoun was dropped, but the pronunciation remained. Some have said

that the name comes from the Dutch words *huijs tuijn*, meaning "house garden," but this etymology is false.

## Canal Street

Collect Pond was a fresh water pond located just southeast of the present-day corner of Broadway and Canal Street. In the 1700's, it was used for recreation as well as a reservoir, but as industries began dumping waste there, it became a toxic wasteland. In 1807, the city widened a small spring that ran from the

pond to the Hudson River to drain it and planted rows of trees along both sides of this new canal. This path was known as Canal Street, even after it was paved over in 1821 because residents complained of its foul smell.

## West Broadway

Until the mid-nineteenth century, West Broadway was called Lorenz Street, after a general in George Washington's army. The street was nicknamed "rotten row" because it was lined with numerous brothels. Briefly renamed South Fifth Avenue, it was re-renamed West Broadway in the 1870's.

In 1972, August Heckscher, the city's parks, recreation and cultural affairs administrator, proposed that the stretch of West Broadway between Canal and Houston Streets be renamed "Jackson Pollock Place." The proposal was not very popular amongst residents and, in the end, the street was not named

for the famed painter. The portion of West Broadway that is north of Houston Street was renamed LaGuardia Place, after former New York Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia, in 1967.

### Broadway

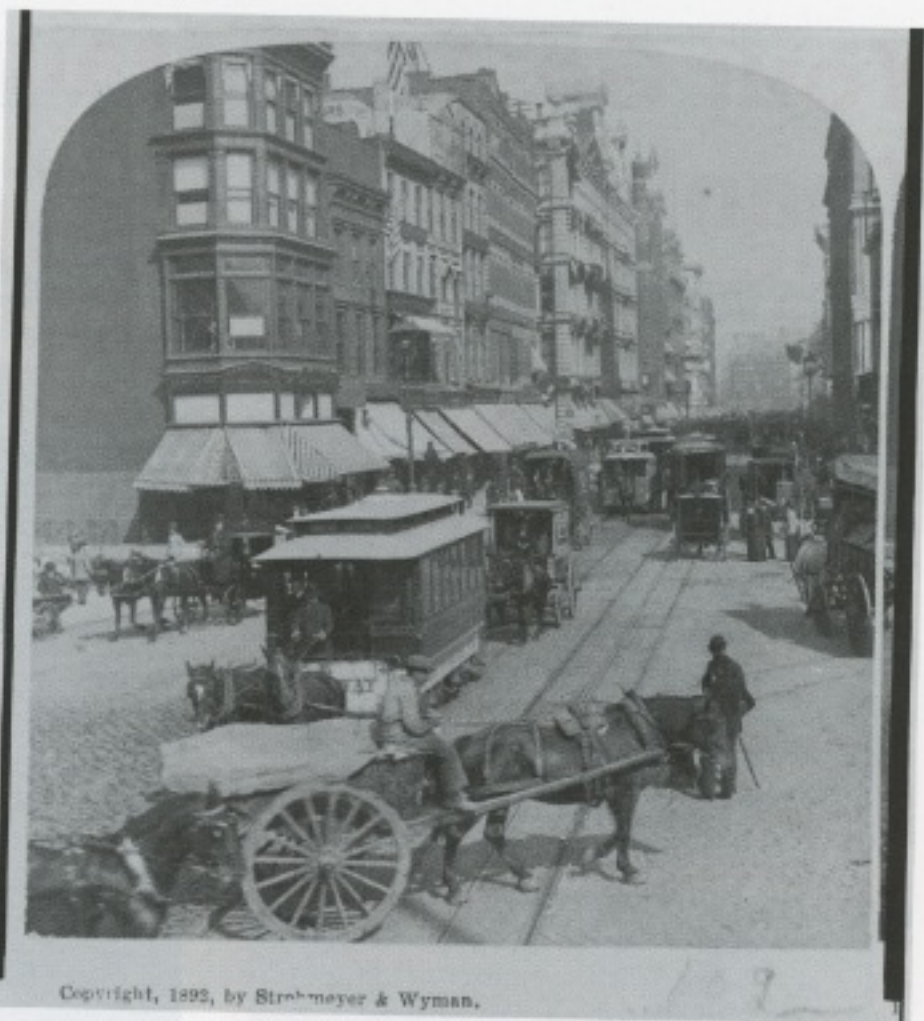
Originally a Native American trail called Wickquasgeck that meandered through Manhattan, Broadway was made into a wide thoroughfare by the Dutch.

Before 1899 when the name "Broadway" became the official name for the entire road, it was known by different names in different parts of the island. The name is a literal translation of *breede weg* (Dutch). Broadway begins at Bowling Green at the southernmost tip of Manhattan and runs 33 miles northward, through Manhattan, the Bronx, and Westchester County, ending just north of Sleepy Hollow.

### Spring Street

Spring Street was named for a spring that flowed in Lispenard's Meadow, which, along with Collect Pond (see "Canal Street" above), was used for recreation by early European settlers. Spring Street was earlier known as Brannon Street, because it ran through the garden of a man of that name.

After the Civil War the textile industry began moving into the area and remained until the 1950's, when the first artists in search of large raw spaces began moving in. By the 1970's galleries had taken over SoHo storefronts, and by the 1990's, the galleries were, once again, replaced by retailers. As a matter of fact, Tiffany & Co. will be opening in the neighborhood, again, later this year on Greene and Wooster Streets. What goes around, comes around.



Copyright, 1895, by Strehmeyer & Wyman.

Broadway's first glory days as a commercial destination for wealthy New Yorkers was in the 1800s. U.S. Library of Congress

**1895** In the early 1800's, the area through which these streets run enjoyed its first heyday as a commercial destination for well-to-do New Yorkers. From the 1820's until 1895,

when it was demolished to make way for an office building, Niblo's Garden was one of New York City's premier "pleasure gardens," venues where wealthy New Yorkers could find diversion and amusement, both indoors and out, before the advent of public parks. On this same stretch of Broadway, one could also find the ultra-opulent St. Nicholas Hotel at Broadway and Spring Street and Tiffany & Co. was once located at 550 Broadway between Prince and Spring Streets.

## WAR HEROES: LEGACIES REMAIN

Many other streets that run through SoHo are named for war heroes whose legacies stretch far beyond the borders of SoHo. Mercer Street is named for General Hugh Mercer (1726-1777), soldier and physician, who was a close associate of George Washington. Greene Street is named after General Nathanael Greene (1742-1786), a war strategist who served under Washington. Wooster Street is named for General David Wooster (1711-1777), who also fought in the French and Indian War. Broome Street is named for John Broome (1738-1810), Lieutenant Governor of New York and tea merchant, who did not serve in the military.



Hugh Mercer served as a Confederate General in the Civil War. U.S. Library of Congress

# AROUND TOWN

Local news you can use.

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## Grand Unveiling

*The Drawing Center reopens after major renovations*

By Lindsay Barton

This month The Drawing Center unveils a renovation aimed to reflect the mission and vision of Executive Director, Brett Littman. "Now, for the first time in its history, The Drawing Center will have fully climate-controlled galleries — some 4,300 square feet in which to present exhibitions from around the world," says Littman. "We will be able to organize never-before-possible exhibitions of light-sensitive materials."

Littman believes the renovation was necessary for the future of The Drawing Center. "Artists today are redefining the outer reaches of what constitutes drawing— whether they are drawing in cyberspace or on buildings, doing animation, or making marks through the movements of dancers. This space serves that future."

The Drawing Center used most of its \$10 million budget for necessary renovations to ensure a useful space for artists.



The Drawing Center now has climate-controlled galleries and 50% more public and exhibit space.

Renovating courtesy of WXY architecture + urban design.

### The Stats

**COST:** \$10 million, (includes \$3 million grant from LMDC)  
**SPACE:** 9,150-square-foot reno; 50% more exhibit & public space.  
**VISITORS:** 55,000 each year

Old infrastructure was repaired, electrical and plumbing systems were replaced, new floors were laid, and an elevator was installed to take visitors from the street to other floors. A new storefront, glass partition wall between the lobby and galleries, and non-UV-emitting LED lighting in the top and lower galleries was also installed.

The new mechanical and electrical systems exceed the sustainability mea-

sures in the NYC Energy Conservation Code. The high-efficiency boiler and the energy recovery system uses heat exchange to reduce energy usage and the program-specific zoning system efficiently distributes heating and cooling.

### Upcoming Exhibits

"Diarios," by Guillermo Kuitca, Nov. 3 – Dec. 9 in the Main Gallery; "The Yearbooks," by José Antonio Suárez Londoño, Nov. 3 – Dec. 9 in the Drawing Room; "In Deed: Certificates of Authenticity in Art" Nov. 3 – Dec. 9 in the Drawing Room; "Alexandre Singh: The Pledge," Jan. 17 – Mar. 13, in the Main Gallery; "Ignacio Uriate," Jan. 17 – Mar. 13 in the Drawing Room; "Ishmael Randall Weeks," Jan. 17 - Mar. 13 in The Lab. *Location: 35 Wooster St., 212-219-2166, drawingcenter.org.*

## IN 1847

Fanelli's first opened its doors, and the establishment has been continuously serving food and drink to the public for the ensuing 165 years. This makes it the second-oldest such establishment in New York City (the oldest is the Bridge Café, established 1794).

Fanelli Café, currently owned by Sasha Noe, was known by a variety of



Fanelli's is the second-oldest cafe in the City.

Marilyn Holstein

other names before 1922 when Mike Fanelli took over and ran it for the next 60 years. During Prohibition, the bar operated as a speakeasy.

The bar now caters to a mix of old-time neighborhood regulars, fashionable young office workers, and tourists. If you go into the back room of the establishment, liquor licenses dating back to 1877 are framed and hung around its periphery as a testament to its longevity. —Yukie Ohta