



The location is more than exceptional: it is unique. The Grinnell, although having a Riverside Drive frontage, has a Subway Station only a few feet from the Audubon Place entrance, making the statement strictly true that it is the only building on Manhattan Island having a Riverside Drive address with a Subway Station at one entrance.

—The World's New York Apartment House Album, (New York: 1910)

The Grinnell at 100

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY, HISTORY, AND AN ARCHITECTURAL GEM

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Left: Church of the Intercession, Broadway and 157th Street, May 1905; 157th Street subway stations in foreground; photograph: George Wheeler (Courtesy of Matthew Spady)

Right: Audubon Park, circa 1905; houses George Blake Grinnell built for his two daughters frame the newly opened Hispanic Society building (Courtesy of The Hispanic Society of America, New York)

George Blake Grinnell brought his family to Audubon Park on New Year's Day 1857, expecting to stay for three years—the length of his lease on Wellington Clapp's house. Instead, his family remained six decades. Grinnell (often confused with his well-known son, George Bird Grinnell) and his wife Helen Lansing Grinnell had the kind of credentials that impressed the class-conscious Lucy Audubon: members of New York's prosperous merchant class, each had ancestors on the Mayflower. Lucy Audubon may not have required financial statements or questionnaires from potential residents, but she did ensure that anyone moving into the Park was "respectable."

Helen Lansing Grinnell's father, Dirck C. Lansing, a Presbyterian minister known for his dynamic preaching, had founded Auburn Theological Seminary and was its first president. Grinnell's father had served a decade in the United States House of Representatives, alongside ex-President John Quincy Adams, future President James Buchanan, Henry Clay, and John Calhoun. Although Grinnell had not attended college like his father and grandfather before him, by 1857, after apprenticeships in banking and merchandising, he was proving successful in business. He and Levi P. Morton (future governor of New York and vice president of the United States) had formed the mercantile firm of Morton Grinnell & Co., a company that prospered in the cotton trade, despite difficulties during the Panic of 1857.

The Hemlocks

At the end of 1859, when his three-year lease on Wellington Clapp's house expired, Grinnell leased the adjacent house, called "the Hemlocks," from John Woodhouse Audubon. Originally built in 1851 for businessman Edward Downer, standing on ground that was once the Audubon's chicken yard, the Hemlocks occupied the spot



where the Riviera (790 Riverside Drive) now sits. The grounds surrounding the Hemlocks were sizable, but the house was much smaller than the one Grinnell had been leasing from Wellington Clapp, not nearly large enough for the Grinnell household—six children, Helen Grinnell's step-mother, a governess, a coachman, and six additional servants—so Grinnell had the house enlarged before moving his family there in May 1860. That following August, Victor Audubon died after a lingering illness. With the family desperate for cash, John Woodhouse Audubon decided to sell the Hemlocks. Grinnell was apparently not financially ready to buy the property, so his neighbor and friend Wellington Clapp bought it instead, closing the deal in January 1861 and continuing Grinnell's lease.

The Civil War, Bankruptcy, and Recovery

Three months after Grinnell declined the opportunity to buy the Hemlocks, the Civil War began and a few months later, Morton Grinnell & Co. collapsed, as did most companies depending on the cotton trade. Grinnell quickly began a new mercantile enterprise and probably secured lucrative wartime government contracts, but his financial situation did not substantially improve until 1866, when he partnered with Clapp in a brokerage firm specializing in railroad securities. With Cornelius Vanderbilt's son-in-law Horace Clark as a silent partner, Grinnell & Clapp had access to Vanderbilt's considerable railroad transactions. Brokerage proved a turning point for Grinnell; not only did he regain his financial footing, he became a millionaire. His newfound wealth enabled him to purchase property — and he did, beginning with the Hemlocks, which he bought from Clapp in February 1864. Grinnell enlarged the house at least twice during the next decade, adding a billiard room, school room, parlors, and bedrooms. At the same time, he continued buying adjacent acreage, including

They Lived at the Grinnell...

Mr. and Mrs. Gustavus A. Rogers were the first Grinnell residents to appear in the *New York Times* society column, when they announced that they would “receive informally” on Christmas Day 1911, just a few months after the Grinnell opened. A lawyer associated with high profile cases, Rogers entered law history books when he represented the Moving Picture Exhibitors Association of America in an attempt to present movies and vaudeville shows on Sundays. Active in the Democratic Party, Rogers represented Tammany Hall and was a friend and frequent correspondent of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

After 13-year old Grinnell resident Lucy C. McDannel shepherded a group of stranded adults from Vienna to France at the beginning of World War I, no one should have been surprised that she became the first woman to graduate Yale Law School. Retiring from her father’s law firm several decades later, she moved to New London, CT and when she was in her late 60s earned a Master’s Degree in art history at Connecticut College. She is honored there with a sculpture and an endowed chair.

In June 1915, Grinnell resident John B. Coleman inherited one-third of Amelia Macdona’s estate when she died in the sinking of the *Lusitania*.



Rear Admiral Conway Hillyer Arnold and his wife Fannie moved into the newly opened Grinnell shortly after he retired as Commander of the Third Squadron of the Atlantic Fleet. The Arnolds were guardians for their two orphaned grandchildren who lived with them. Arnold died at the Grinnell on July 16, 1917 after a brief illness.

Farquhar McGillivray Knowles and Elizabeth Annie (Beach) McGillivray Knowles were living at the Grinnell when both showed paintings in the 1918 Annual Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Both painters were member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and received numerous accolades during their careers. McGillivray Knowles gained fame for his marine paintings and Elizabeth McGillivray Knowles for her miniatures and garden scenes – particularly for her paintings of fowl.

August 20, 1918, Grinnell resident Mrs. John S. Keith was matron-of-honor when world famous operatic tenor Enrico Caruso married his second wife Miss Dorothy Benjamin at the Marble Collegiate Church.

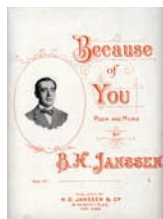
Publisher Sumner Charles Britton moved to the Grinnell in 1920, a few months after his close friend and most famous client, L. Frank Baum, died. Beginning with *The Marvelous Land of Oz*, Britton’s firm Reilly & Britton published the first editions of all of Baum’s books. Baum dedicated *The Patchwork Girl of Oz* to Britton’s son, Sumner Hamilton Britton.

Thomas D. Cutler, an early Grinnell resident, founded the *Ice Cream Journal* in 1905, one year after the ice cream cone was introduced at the Chicago World’s Fair. Reporting on the technical aspects of ice cream manufacturing, Cutler’s *Journal* played a major role in advancing the ice cream industry.



On November 11, 1914, Grinnell porters carried congratulations “by the score” to the apartment of Mr. and Mrs. Henry L. Gillespie. Mrs. Gillespie, better known to her thousands of fans as operetta diva Christie McDonald, had

given birth the previous afternoon in her Grinnell apartment to a daughter, also named Christie. Noted for her lovely voice, petite figure, and golden hair, Miss McDonald appeared on Broadway in numerous hit musicals, including the premiere of Victor Herbert’s *Sweethearts* in which she introduced the title song.



Known in the music industry as a “big, good-natured, cheerful giant,” B. H. (Ben) Janssen moved his family to the Grinnell around 1911 to be closer to his new piano

factory across the Macombs Dam Bridge in the Bronx. A composer of more than 150 piano pieces and songs, Janssen began manufacturing pianos in 1901 and within five years was producing 1,500 pianos a year. Janssen’s company introduced a built-in music desk light and the Janssen Chord Piano, featuring a system of colored lights that enabled “anyone, regardless of age, to sit down and have fun at the piano without ever having had a lesson.”

Louis C. Dalton, son of British long distance swimmer David Dalton and proprietor of the Dalton Swimming School, lived at the Grinnell in the 1930s. Dalton and his brother Frank taught “the Dalton method of swimming” (a method still taught today) at their school on West 44th Street and co-authored *Swimming Scientifically Taught*.

On August 19, 1927, the *New York Times* reported that Grinnell resident Philip Horwitz “literally

worked himself to death” running his business, the Royal Petticoat Company. At his death, his estate was valued at more than \$200,000.

In the 1930s, among the refugees fleeing Nazi Germany and settling in Washington Heights was Grinnell resident, violinist and teacher Philip Mittell. He had played the Brahms 4th Symphony with the composer conducting and counted Nellie Grant, daughter of President Ulysses S. Grant, among his students. Another musical Grinnell resident in those years was Jacob Altschuler, who organized the Russian Symphony Orchestra of New York with his brother Modest.

December 31, 1938, the *New York Times* announced that Julia Louise Acheson of the Grinnell would marry Frederick Delos Thompson (future Vice President of the *Times*). Miss Acheson was author of two juvenile books. Her aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Wallace, owned *The Reader’s Digest* magazine, which her father managed.

Actress, novelist, and playwright, Alice Childress is recognized as the first person of color to have rented an apartment at the Grinnell. She also has the distinction of being the first (and perhaps only) Grinnell resident tailed by the FBI (for suspected Communist activities during the McCarthy era). Miss Childress was living at the Grinnell when she wrote *Trouble in Mind* (1955), *Wedding Band* (1966), and *A Hero Ain’t Nothin’ but a Sandwich* (1973).

As the 1957 Easter Seal Child, nine-year-old Grinnell resident Ruth Frischer led the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus parade, one of many victories over a disability resulting from polio. After graduating Hunter College, she began a successful career in research, then founded the company Disability and Sensual Horizons, serving as president. She earned a PhD at NYU and spent nearly two decades working with USAID. She is founder and president of the Frischer-Dambra Consulting Corporation and in her free time an avid scuba diver.

Photojournalist and film producer Sam Shaw lived at the Grinnell with his family in the 1960s and 1970s. Among Shaw’s most famous images are Marilyn Monroe standing over the subway grate in *The Seven Year Itch*, which Shaw staged and photographed, and Marlon Brando in a torn T-shirt in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. As a producer, Shaw worked with director John Cassavetes and was instrumental in Cassavetes using the Grinnell and the surrounding neighborhood for scenes in the film *Gloria*.



ington Heights. After Morris Goldstein, a 61-year-old candy store operator was murdered in his store at 1 Fort Washington Avenue (only two blocks north of the Grinnell), residents descended on the precinct station at 152nd Street and Amsterdam Avenue. With the group was Assemblyman David Dinkins (later city clerk, Manhattan borough president, and Mayor of New York City). As reported in the *Times*, “underlying the protest was an effort to keep what was once a pleasant middle-class neighborhood from degenerating.” The protesting group was racially integrated and several members spoke of working together in their buildings and the community, but many, including the police, acknowledged that “there were landlords in the area who were trying to drive out white tenants because they could get more money from Negroes by ‘breaking down’ apartment houses.” Though the Grinnell was in the midst of the turmoil, it miraculously escaped “breaking down.”

Dark Years at the Grinnell

Although the Grinnell apartments escaped subdivision, the building did not escape landlord neglect, which increased through the 1960s and into the 1970s: a series of faceless,

nameless landlords hiding behind limited liability corporations owned the building and employed impersonal rental agents to manage it, agents whose sole interest was generating income with no regard for the building’s architectural integrity or the tenants’ comfort. As conditions deteriorated, many residents left the Grinnell, unwilling to live in a decaying and under-serviced building. Struggling to fill vacant apartments, rental agents exercised less oversight, with varying results: a group of nuns leased one apartment while a neighboring group of women established a bordello. One Grinnell resident ran a day-care center while another was indicted for selling “massive amounts of heroin and cocaine.” Despite these horrific conditions, a core group of dedicated people remained at the Grinnell and took charge of their collective destiny, forming a Grinnell Tenants Association and enlisting newcomers in an ongoing effort to “save the Grinnell.”

Grinnell residents shared their expertise and skills in that effort, some taking leadership roles: organizing a rent strike, haunting the rent control office, and going to court when the tenants association needed a representative. Others worked to build a sense of community. The 1970 building directory reported that the residents had established



OUR STORIES

I grew up in this neighborhood.

The first time I came into this building was around 1956. I was a Boy Scout, thirteen or fourteen years old, and I was afraid to come to the west side of Broadway, and to this building in particular. Broadway was a point of cultural and racial demarcation between Amsterdam and Edgecombe Avenues and Riverside Drive. That is not an exaggeration. ... I had the assignment to come to this building to talk to a young man about joining the Scout troop – the lone white Boy Scout we would have in our troop. I came into the building and went up to the apartment, and I was just blown away. I was going up to induce this guy to join our troop? That was my first connection and memory of this building. And then my former wife and I moved into this building in 1972. ... A few years later, the Grinnell's owners abandoned it, owing the city several thousand dollars in back

taxes, so the Board of Estimate took the property. The building was in political and monetary chaos. It was up for grabs. And there was no sponsor; we were the sponsors. And that enabled us to come together and plan how we were going to become a community. ... We had this group of people, whites and blacks, who didn't think in the context of being white or black. We thought of being human beings, and we shared. You're always going to have political differences and different philosophies and you're going to argue and debate, but when you have a common cause you come together and reach an agreement. It's painful because you have to compromise on some things, you have to do it to move the agenda ahead. That's what politics is about. And that's what made us survive.

—RICHARD JAMES, GRINNELL RESIDENT

What Mel Beinart taught us was how to run a successful rent strike.

Now a rent strike is not the withholding of rent, it's a use of your rent to bargain collectively. And we did this magnificently...very skillfully, but the center of it was a contract that Mel negotiated with the landlord in return for a substantial amount of money—\$15,000 I think—that we released. ... That contract said that for every day without heat each individual apartment could deduct a half day's rent; for every day without hot water, we could deduct a half day's rent; and for every day without elevator service, we could also deduct a half day's rent. ... The way this worked was that at the end of the month we each made out a check for our rent. We made it out to ourselves and gave it to the

treasurer, Hugo Zamora. Hugo then kept all the checks, and at a certain time, would negotiate with the landlord to release the checks – or release a sufficient amount that we negotiated.

... With these negotiations, we bought a new burner for the boiler. We also bought many, many loads of fuel oil when things were cold. And in the end we used that money to lend our staff their take-home pay so that we could induce them to return to work instead of going on strike. ... It was really that rent strike that built the sense of unity that we used to go forward and take the building away from the landlord and to get a 7A administrator appointed.

—JOEL ROTHSCHILD, GRINNELL RESIDENT

Our building represents something of a unique phenomenon in New York City. Any building that boasts a food co-op, a babysitting pool, a house newspaper, a well-run tenants' committee and sponsors frequent social events for its residents must be regarded as exceptional. The recent "renaissance" of cooperation among tenants bespeaks a way of life that present urban conditions makes not only desirable, but perhaps also inevitable for sane city living.

—ERIC BROUDY & TOM BEELER, EDITORS, *THE GRINNELL OPTIMIST*, 1970

SUNDAY

BIRTHDAY PARTY Oct. 17, 2010

HAPPY

James R. Schuman
C. 12 HISTORIAN

i Felic
Aniversario!

BIRTHDAY,

GRINNELL!

1525 Schuman
0825

Edie) resident from 1960-70 with Parents Anne & Sam Shaw 5F (1960-70)

son David Marcus + Charles Marcus (husband.) loved the Grinnell Edie

Happy Birthday Grinnell! Cindi Conti

Shaw
Marcus.

Thank you for thinking of us. Meta Shaw Former tenant Apt 5F
1969-1976 approx
I was 8 years old when I moved here!

Happy Birthday - Thank you for your graciousness!
Dorothy Paul Douchitz

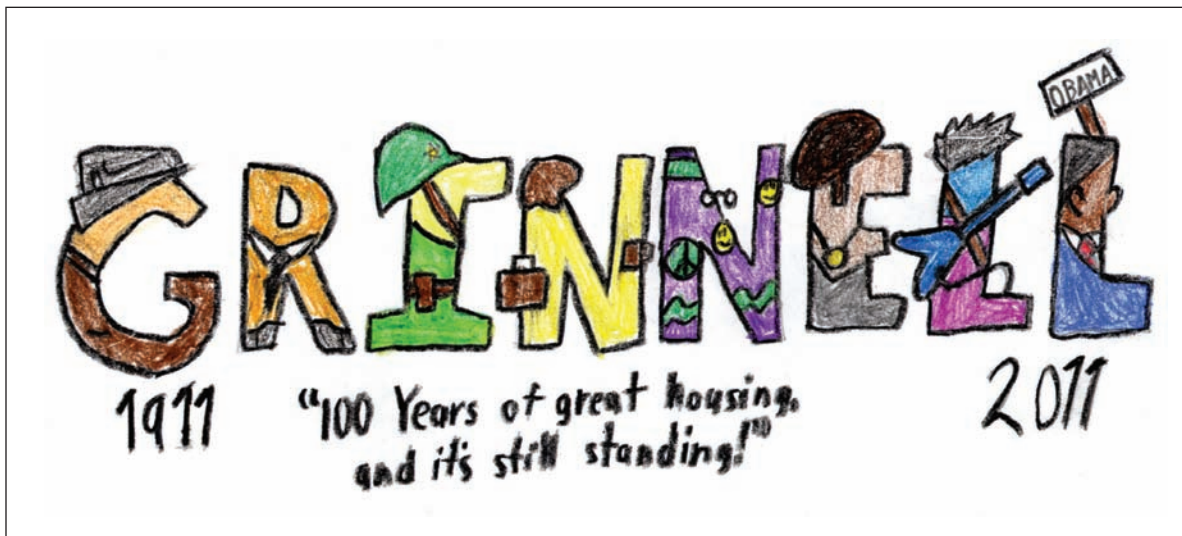
Happy B-day! from Goya seeds. 1565 street.

Hippo birdie, two eyes!
Fannie Kaufman Rothschild

Happy B-day! Abel and Vivienne

Happy 100th Birthday! Anita Van Der Funder

Logo Competition



WESLEY MARSH



EVA WERTIMER

OUR BUILDING

The building is weird
The building is smeared
The building has a really long, long beard

The Grinnell is our home
Whenever we roam
There's nothing
There's nothing
There's nothing like home

The people who greet us
Each day they meet us
The booth is the place
Where the doorman waits

The super is dooper
With a smile every day
He helps with our problems
In every which way

We wave at our neighbors
And hold open doors
When nobody's looking
I run across floors

So that's my poem
Please have a good day

MASON LEAVER

Centennial Party



Photo Competition



MO STRÖM