## THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, SEWARD PARK BRANCH AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD IT SERVES

A Film Commentary

by

Donald W. Fowle

Seward Park Library in 1934 looked much as it does today. Save for the vintage autos passing below, you might think this Library was the library as it stands today

Nor have the habits of the typical patron changed essentially. the father Here is a careful gentleman checking the date in his book.

But on the streets surrounding, much was different. Goods were sold on the sidewalk'- sometimes literally - without as often as within. Almost anything was available on these makeshift stands - vegetables, books, candy, clothing - "Care for this suitcoat, sir?"

And there was a breed of public servant who is, unfortunately or not, gradually becoming extinct today.

The pushcart was a major feature of the Seward Park district at that time. - There's our friend again. - And probably always will be in one form or another. But modern sanitation

punch talk Note the fruit punch here - For 2 1

bread - and the bread there.

Still, silk stockings were freely aired before purchase - or repurchase,

and hats lay open to the sun's cleansing rays.

man askef Even the local types partook of Old Sol, and they still do. The Park itself has not changed in spirit, the there are now végetable gardens where this fountain used to be Rollerskating was as much in style as ever - even on one foot. KM On the benches, elderly gentlemen read their Jewish Forward and Day-Journal,

and, across the street, young people waited on the steps for the library doors to open.

Meanwhile, across the way again, the children of the Bus load-INDIXXINAIXINAIMEINNEXINAXINAINXAXINAINEXNEXIN SOON would leave for Echo Hill at Yorktown Heights (for girls), Camp Henry at Lake Mahopac (for boys), and for Eddie Cantor's Surpise Lake, also near Yorktown. And when they are gone, the deting mothers who are now so intently giving their final instruction to their offspring will have their own summer vacations at home.

For those who were not lucky enough to go to the country, however, there was ample sun and entertainment provided on the flower-under roof of P S 31, corner of Monroe and Gouverneur Streets. There were flowers to be watered,

bridge as well as a fine view of the EXEMMINE Manhattan Bridge and the skyline of the Battery.

and the skyline of the Battery.

log w. can't carts were hauled up, onto the root

and games were provided for all - including, I guess you could ball game to be substituted as a long to be substit

push must on heat.

Of course, if the weather was too bad, any daring young man divery man could take a dip in the East River. Not everyone was darling, ing, but there was always an appreciative audience, for the exhibitionist people steeping and some indifference, too.

Told Ent

play-

public housing unit in the lower East Side, swings, slides, and just plain pushers were always in demand. The Lawanburg Apartments were also among the first to develop an organized social life complete with a library of its own, movies on the roof, dramatic clubs, and adult education groups. - a support to help the lawantic day of the property of the property of the secret help media.

Miance roof jung-forg game The broad roof of the Educational Alliance was early put to use as an outlet for the energy of the younger generations of the neighborhood. Here's a ping-pong game in progress (with the ballllost, of course)

and what looks like a minstrel show in rehearsal. ("What was platforn that, Mr. Bones?")

itrect

Now, if you couldn't get onto a roof on a busy day, there was always the street - not as empty of traffic as it might be today with the East Side Drive in operation, but withall a place to breathe and play, whether it be broadjumping or Bentant. date better volley ball

Safe, too, when closed off and supervised by one of the hardworking volunteers from the Henry Street Settlement House.

parements Here are some excellent views of the pavementsof the era,

old people on rouf

briolge

- and here are some more roof dwellers, these of an older perhaps, but still enjoying life whether chatting in the sun, taking in their own fine view of Brooklyn and the East River, lade, talking or having a wonderful time simply talking to themselves.

Ald. an

Now the summer of 1934 draws to a close. The buses roll back from the camps

and the vacationers return to the library. In those days, there were so many children in the Seward Park district that a separate entrance was supplied for them, thru which they proceded in order to bring back or take out the two or three books they were allowed at a time. They had to show their hands at the door, too.

Peres and

And now winter arrives with all its chilly blasts and the sidewalk vendors are reduced to makeshift devices for keeping

warm. Anything that will burn, is burned.

people Acrel Meanwhile, the streets must be cleared and the sidewalks scraped ling so that the local readers may not be discouraged from their so that the local readers may not be discouraged from their weekly or daily visit to their house of books. - Note the office of the East Side News there on the right.

sanitation The ever vigilant department of sanitation wants to help, XXX truck
by sending the very latest in snow removal equipment; people shoul- but it is essentially a community project, each man pitching in with his own shovel and depositing the snow where he will. Of course, as usual with such impromptu efforts, the waste is not really disposed of at all; it merely goes from one place to another - and there are always those drones who will watch and play while the workers toil. But the job gets done eventually

pusheast com- and the pushcarts move once more.

mig around

Winterior summer, the line of youngsters was always outside,

boy patiently, impatiently, waiting for the doors to open.

children And coming by any means practicable, walking on foot

add on sled or on runners.

At the same time, life was not all work or study; there was plenty to be accomplished in the way of thrills on the hills surrounding the library, no matter how slight those hills might be. And when there was any slope to be slid down, you could be sure that half the hids in the neighborhood would be on it.

boy in front Watch out there, boy!

sledw, sacks Sleds were useful for many things,

tot shoulding and every little bit of shovelling helped, so long as it well intended.

5. P. entrance Here's another shot of the Seward Park entrance. It had lanterns then on each side of the door.

buses, pavilion etc.

And here are some more winter scenes of the neighborhood, with those buses that are only a memory now,

and a view or two of the imposing arcaded open air pavilion which stood in the park next totthe library. This building, opened with the park itself around 1902; was a tremendous boon for the children who had no place to play when it rained; and its accompanying public baths proved good news for the thousands of slum dwellers who lacked adequate plumbing facilities at home.

Cadies

And last we come to an event of the past which regires little direct commentary. This is a meeting - a 25th anniversary meeting, in fact - in 1941 of the Seward Park Mother's Club, a sterling group of matrons dedicated to the furtherance of culture and understanding in the Lower East Side.

ganized originally in 1916, much to the dismay of the husband (There is a sterry in the to the dismay of the husband (There is a sterry in the to the dismay of the husband (There is a sterry in the to the dismay of the husband (There is a sterry in the to the dismay of the husband (There is a sterry in the total the field his land lord to threater

ganized originally in 1916, much to the dismay of the husbands (There is a stery, in tast, that one hasband bribed his landlord to threaten of the district, it had survived their strong opposition and had met regularly at the library once a week under the supervision first of Miss Lifshitz and then of Miss Fannie Wlodawsky, who arranged the classes and conducted them entirely in Yiddish. Every kind of subject was discussed, whether it be the origins of Jewish law or the Declaration of Independence, and the programs did much to aid this generation in its tran-

sition from the Old to the New World. The ladies, as you can readily see, invariably emerged from these meetings all wiser and more fit to face the problems of daily life which stemmed both from within and without. Slowly, they were beginning to be able to cope with the pressures imposed upon them by life in the United States - and particularly by life which existed south of Houston Street and east of the Bowery.

You may catch a glimpse now and then of a genial lady wearing

glasses and a broad smile. This is Miss Frances Westover, who was from 1928 to 1947 branch librarian at Seward Park Library. Miss Westover did much to integrate the library with the community and to welcome the refugees who sought it out at the end of the Second World War. Her retirement six years after these pictures were taken, was received with regret from all sides. Miss Westover was less sentimental about it: "I've just outstayed everyone", she said, "and it's time to go." Right now, however, Miss Westover does not seem content with ushering the ladies out once. She is bent on letting us see them again - which is all right with us but perhaps a little hard on the ladies. Some of them have walked all the way over from new homes in Williamsburg section of Brooklyn for this Saturday afternoon celebration, and they have all just sat thru a Haydn Quartet, a puppet show, several speeches, and a session of Yiddish songs. They should be tired and they deserve to go home. We shall salute them as they go, these ladies of '41. Their club disbanded in 1978 as a result of The libraryes, rehabilitation and most of them must have passed away by now. But the belief which they exemplified and which they carried

ledies.

out to such a high degree in their own lives – that of the need to learn to live with the present without forgetting the past, and to combine the best of the old culture with the best of the new – this lives on today. Now, not only the East European and Russian, but Chinese and Puerto Rican, Italian and Hungarian people have found their way to the Lower East Side, and < there is even a trickle coming in of the intellectual poor who are being forced out of Greenwich Village by the high rentals there. > All these people are searching for their place in the community, too, and the library must help them do it. So we of 1959, facing much the same problems as you did, say "Goodbye" to you, ladies, and "Goodbye" to you, too, Miss Westover. You did your jobs well.

The following text is handwritten on the page and enclosed in parentheses, e.g. (

These pictures, by the way, were taken by Miss Grace Hardie, who was a member of the Seward Park Staff at that time,

The following text is handwritten on the page and enclosed in a large bracket, e.g. []

and who came all the way up from North Carolina to be with us for their showing at the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration.

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## THE SEWARD PARK LIBRARY AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD IT SERVES

## Part II

## PART & - THE PRESEN

plague close-up Seward Park Library in its fiftieth anniversary year looks, on the surface, as we noted before, very much as it twenty-five years ago. The original plaques,

of bldg.

the stone and brick walls, the iron decorations - save for those lanterns by the front door - are exactly the same as in 1934 - or 1909, for that matter. The work of rain and wind seems to have affected the sturdy old building very little.

pan up

It was a structure built to last.

children on stepe Children still form a large percentage of the patronage, and here is a group of future readers arriving for an orientation meeting on the second floor. Bright colors prevail in summer weather and these whiteher mappeds provide no exception.

There seems to be a difference of opinion, however, as to what kind of hat is most fashionable, -a baseball cap or a fireman's helmet.

Here's an older client, tho a no less dedicated one,

and now comes a group of young readers about to embark on a

voyage of adventure or a search into the world of the unknown.

pan to new after up and back But as we turn from the library itself to the neighborhood surrounding it, we see how much the Lower East Side has changed in twenty-five years. Gone are the old East Side News offices and in their place rise the skyscrapers of a new housing project. Giant cranes stand ready to lift tons of brick into place and floor rises upon floor, a new one every

day - or so 15 seems.

new houses

along

boys in play fod.

In this modern playground grows up the future reader of Seward Park books. He may be an entirely different person from the gentleman who checked his date stamp on the library steps in 1934. He may be white, yellow, black, brown, educated, uneducated, adjusted, maladjusted, white collar, laborer, or what have you. The one thing he won't be is wealthy. And he will have his own demands to make on the library.

pan up

old ma

All this is not to say that the old Jewish core has disappeared. The eternal types remain.

store on E. B'way

+ shoppers

There are still sidewalks stalls selling everything and anything, and there is still the jovial vendor and the interested client.

E. B'way

But, as one moves up East Broadway from Jefferson west toward Rutgers, one is struck by the modern intrusions, - the shingy automobiles,

the new stores beside the old,

Cafeteria the bright smooth facade of the Garden Cafeteria,
Supermarket and the latest thing in Supermarkets complete wit and the latest thing in Supermarkets complete with air conditioning and swivel-wheeled push carts.

The Forward Building stands imposing still, and it turns out even today one of the largest circulating Jewish dailies in the world. Yet, the public has dispersed and there are not so many who can read the old language any more

P.R. Rusch The Puerto Ricans have settled in Manhattan and with them have come their religious institutions and their love of color - an item which the drab East Side could use, by the way. This is the "Latin American Pentecostal Church of God" on the corner of Stanton and Suffolk Streets. INKK

fan along Just down from it, on Stanton, one can see, side by side, a Stanton St. Hispanic grocery store or "bodega",

a Jewish butcher shop,

and a Chinese laundry.

with a Spanish-speaking Jewish lawyer thrown in for good measure

The pushcarts were ordered indoors by Mayor La Guardia in the 1940s, and their former pushers sell their wares across counters in this huge market house on Essex Street.

pan to where the old fountain where the old fountain still stands, tho moved from its timehonored position nearer the square to make room for a World War II memorial.

there are still pushcarts of sorts and business is lively on a warm summer's day.

In fact, in the summer, everything is lively intthe Park. Grandmothers, mothers, and just plain ladies enjoy the shade of a well-placed bench;

man realing those who can read the Forward or the Day;

gen seem and over in the corner by the library, there is a whole of garden world of activity in itself. Here are the gardens, flower and vegetable, which are seeded and tended with great care by chosen neighborhood children.

girl

The young lady with her watering pot,

the young man with his hoe, are learning a great deal about activity plants and agriculture which otherwise they might never know unless they had some aunt or uncle with a farm in the country. And soon the corn which they are rearing will grow to a height high above their heads - a strange sight indeed in the heart of a thriving metropolis.

In the summer, there is good use made of the open areas of dispected the Park, too:

hopscotch (sometimes performed by experts),

pan to center and bathing in the refreshing waters of the wading pool In this, mammas cannot be blamed for wanting to join their in center offspring,

boy sitting nor can little boys, for trying their own methods of cooling on ftn. off.

Of course, the rains come from time to time, and then it's every man to his own devices. (The stores should do good business at times like these.)

And sometimes, on very special occasions, a pretty lady from

SEWard Park Children's Room (in this case Miss Despina

Jen. Croussouloudis) will gather the children of the Park around her

This
for a picture book hour. It is always a nice book with many

colorsul plates. This are is called "Animals for Sale" by Brano

Minimal,

and has a wonderful big picture of a pink flamingo.

by Lynn Olerd

Then there is "The Biggest Bear", which fits in with the animal theme and is a subject any child would love.

Most of the children manage to become involved in spite of districtions from basketball players and other playgroung activities as well as the difficulty of hearing in the open air; their parents just might, too, were they there, because people never grow too old for a good children's story.

mag - Meanwhile, outside the Park, life continues. The rag pickers picker go on their daily rounds,

Il people There soap box impromptus,

and the news stands, This scene could conceivably have taken stand place in 1934, too; but, again, note the changes. Along with the Day, the Forward, and the Russian journals we find the New York Daily News, Il Progresso (the Italian Spanish papers, El Diario and La Prensa.

all fork Over at the Educational Alliance,

tamp registration is now going on. "Sign up today, while vacancies still remain," the sign says.

gen. But it is apparent many already have. Busses are taking groups artirity of campers to the country at regular intervals.

family Sometimes they go in family groups
youngs ters
groupsgis and sometimes it is just the kids who are off on a holiday.

There is always a good deal or wavenous gen.

these occasions. Parting is usually a sad and happy thing put

And here are a few views of the phenomenon in process. One can hear the last minute admonitions:

women "Now be good, dear. Eat everything they give you, keep clean, benile and don't get in any poison ivy."

Me'll see you when you come back" ( a statement unusually secure in its logic).

hand slake "Goodbye, son. Take care of yourself and come home to us safely." And at last the buses move away - all three of them - loaded deport with children, different children of many colors,

2 races,

3 and creeds.

steps

The present influx of new citizens into the community presents a challenge to the Seward Park Branch. It means larger groups of people with new interests and new demands will becoming into the library.

gen, wew It means that every day at one still more of the young Ychildren readers will be waiting in line for access to the second floor children's room....

There are quite a few on this particular afternoon.. Here comes Mr. Zimmerman of the staff to lower the chain and let them up, - and to try to reduce the inevitable stampede to only a small olamor.

Tay start They're a little reserved today, these children, because they are aware of the camera (for one thing) and their own good behavior for another...

but they reach the top just the same...

and here they are in their own domain.

The children's room is (and will be more so in the future) a very busy place on an average afternoon.

First there is the registration of new readers (here being carried out by Miss Del Poso).

the return of read ones (R\*E\*A\*D, that is) (supervised in

this case by Mr. Salvato), Children may find reading material for themselves they me Here is Mr. towle a member of the adult staff who sor · lastly there is the and the checking out of whatever is available at a maximum

charge of six bboks per customer, everyone is kept very well occupied.

CR

Pino

On a peak day the circulation in the children's room may reach as high as 900 books in three hours.

Seward Park takes pride in a collection for children of exceptional XXXXX foreign books - exceptional from the standpoint of both design and content. Here a select group is being shown some fine examples from this collection.

In the left case are volumes in Hebrew, Chinese, and French; while the one on the right is devoted exclusively to Spanish fairy tales There are also volumes in Polish, Swedish, Italian, and Russian; and a good many of them circulate.

classes from the Now, to interest president children in books, the Library neighborhood schools are scheduled for visits to the library. holds a weekly ploture book hour. Here Mrs. Margaret Beagle. children's rece librarian, is entertaining a nursery group Picture with the book &

The first one is a bright volume called "Caps for Sale". A very well-liked work by Esphyr Slobodkina, it tells the story of a cap vendor who makes the mistake of setting up of children shop under a tree inhabited by a group of monkeys. The monkeys commandeer, without payment, his entire stock of multicolored hats; and the rest of the tale is concerned with the vendor's efforts to retrieve the caps from this unruly band. It is a wonderful story for small children, as you can XXX tell from the rapt attention shown here.

taken at Halloween time, the second picture book had to do with "Wobble the Witch Cat", the case an unfortunate animal who could not keep his balance aboard a broomstick. Written and illustrated by Mary Calhoun, it proved also to be a good selection.

children

Mrs. Beagle and her assistants present a picture book hour for children of the first two school grades every Tuesday at four o'clock and a story hour for older youngsters on Wednesdays at the same time. These have proven most popular, with general reactions such as the ones you see here on there slightly young faces. It is in these picture book and story hours that a children's librarian can feel closest to her public, for it is at these times that she can lead them along new paths towards new and brighter horizons.

Along with these regular events, the children's library occasionally presents an entertainment of special interest.

at puffiel show

Recently we played host to a puppet show given by Miss Gertrude Robertson of the Hudson Fark Branch, assisted by Mr. Osman Bayazid. It was attended by over 150 expectant and receptive youngsters, some of whom you see here.

L.S ofstuge The story which Miss Robertson and Mr. Eayazid presented was "The Eears on Hemlock Mountain", based on a tale by the popular children's writer, Alice Dalgliesh.

of action

It is concerned with a boy named Jonathan, who is sent over "Me?" said Jonathan Hemlock Mountain by his mother to pick up a pot. "But aren't "All alone? They say there are there bears on Hemlock Mountains" asks Jonathan fearfully, "Stuff and nonsense; sail his mother "Many's the time Tive been over Hem "Generally, "there never were hears Mountain and not a bear did I see."

and there never will be So Jonathan goes over the mountain

to collect the pot.

boy funda And does he meet bears there?

Show again Well, watch and find out... and see what Jonathan does to escape them.

Mus R, Here are some behind-the-scenes shots of "The Bears on Hem-

Mr. B, lock Mountain, showing two experienced veterans in action. t children Seward Park would like to have more such special programs in the future - not only as a means of interesting children in books, but also are of bringing diverse members of youngest generation together in the sharing of a common

experience.

The shildren's room, however, is not the only section of the library which is enjoying constantly increasing activity Downstairs, in the adult department, the circulation total

1959-60 has been estimated at over 100,000 volumes as compared with 98,000 last year.

There is always a resident reading public. there is usually someone at the catalog,

and books are taken out on the average of over fifty volumes an hour. About fifty new books are purchased every week.

The Yiddish/Hebrew collections long the special attribute valued of Seward Park, promises to remain in good usage; for the steady older reader (as the lady being helped here by our supervising librarian, Miss Malamud) is being joined by the younger one now learning Hebrew in his classroom.

At the main desk there is a constant stream of questions, the majority of them quite unpredictable. But we have a staff ready for any emergency. Here's the library's senior clerk, Miss Lillie Israel, sees over a me book list with one of

the new clients, who became eligible for membership upon entering the eighth grade in junior high school.

We are happy to report that

As a matter of fact, the "young adults" have created as a

section

body one of the largest demands of the entire reading public. During the summer vacation period, the shelves devoted to their favorite works are pretty well cleared out, and they are forever in quest of new publications, as in this shot where Miss Jean McIntosh, senior librarian, is attempting to find for some particularly avid young readers a volume or two they have not read.

room

In the reference room, here under the supervision of Mrs. Henrietta Zeit, who is currently on loan to us from the Hamilton Fish Branch, there is often hardly an empty chair to be found, a fact indicating the need for eventual expansion perhaps to the basement or to its former quarters on the third floor.

starre

The third floor wase of elevators and escalators

info deck

Recently, a new information desk was installed on the first floor for the convenience of the readers - and also of the staff who begin to feel a little overwhelmed when the press at the main desk becomes too great. Mrs. Emily O(Reilly is one of our specialists in this department, and here she is helping a young man with his particular home-work assignment Seward Park also keeps busy enough to employ a permanent total roster of six pages, and a circulation of 100 books an hour means they always have plenty of volumes to return to the shelves. Our pages, as our staff, reflect as mixed a back-

pages

ground as one could hope to find anywhere

And that is all to the good at Seward Park, where the old library stands the same after fifty years of service, but new buildings grow up all around.

One may ask, will even the changes mentioned here be enough?

Can the library keep up with the constantly increasing demands made upon it? The answer is very simple: it will have to if the community is to be served. And, at Seward Park, it always has been.