



Ladies' Mile

This activity focuses on the creation of the country's first department stores. It takes students on a walking tour of New York City's *Ladies' Mile*, to discover the changes in what was once a most fashionable section of the city. Students must use their skills of visual literacy and historical information to locate the city's built environment of the past as it is in the city today. Students are asked to decide for themselves which they find more appealing, the architecture of the late 19th Century or the architecture of today. The activity also addresses issues of historic preservation.

Background Information

During the decades after the Civil War many changes occurred in New York City. Among these was a big increase in the city's commerce which caused the commercial areas to intrude northward into the previously mainly residential areas of the city between Union Square and Madison Square along Broadway and over to Sixth Avenue. As it just so happened, it was the custom for upper class women to go out alone without a chaperone **only** for the purpose of going shopping. Shopping was considered a necessity but it also served as an acceptable diversion for the ladies. As a result this area of the city soon became a prime shopping area for upper class ladies. This led to the rise of many specialty stores in the area and to the creation of **the department store** --- a new concept at the time. This area of the city soon became referred to as **Ladies' Mile**.

Activity

Lead your students on a stroll up what used to be referred to as *Ladies Mile*. The purpose of your walk is to try to locate this past period in history on the streets of today's city.

Ladies Mile ran roughly from 17th Street and Broadway, at the top of Union Square over to Sixth Avenue with a few dips and curves. But we're suggesting you begin exploring a bit south of here. Pursue the following route and see what history you and your students discover:

- **Broadway and 9th Street** --- This was the location of A.T. Stewarts Department Store the very first department store.
- **785 Broadway at 10th Street** --- You'll find the building that housed Mathew Brady's studio where he took his famous daguerreotype of Abraham Lincoln.
- **801 Broadway at 11th Street** --- You'll find the original location of the James McCreery & Co. Dry Goods Store.
- **574 Sixth Avenue at 14th Street** --- You'll find the original home of the Knickerbocker Jewelry Company.

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- **Sixth Avenue at 18th Street** --- This is the original site of the Siegel-Cooper Dry Goods Store. You'll find the B. Altman Building close by as well.
- **881-887 Broadway at 19th Street** --- This was the site of the Arnold Constable Building.
- **889-891 Broadway at 19th Street** --- You'll find the original home of the Gorham Manufacturing Company, a leading silversmith of the time.
- **901 Broadway at 20th Street** --- This is the original location of the Lord and Taylor Store.
- **28 East 20th Street** --- This is the birthplace of President Theodore Roosevelt.
- **200 Fifth Avenue at West 23rd Street** --- This is above *Ladies' Mile* but we thought you would enjoy seeing the Sidewalk Clock at this location.

As your students stroll the area, have them make the following observations:

Look for large windows, especially on the second floor that were intended to allow passengers of the elevated train to see into the shops.

Look for mansard roofs that were intended to grab the attention of the ladies strolling by.

Look for elaborate cornice work on the outside of the buildings intended to attract the attention of ladies strolling by or the attention of riders on the EI.

Look for cast-iron facades and balconies on the buildings which were very popular in the day.

Look for limestone, granite and red brick.

For each site your students discover, have them consider and discuss the following:

Whether the building on the site today is historic and of the *Ladies' Mile* period or contemporary.

The current use (s) of the original building.

The current use (s) of the new building erected on this spot.

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Noting the character of the neighborhood, which fits the character better brownstones or tower buildings?

What kind of building would they erect on these streets today?

Have your students photograph all the buildings they like along *Ladies' Mile*.

When You Return to the Classroom:

- Create a gallery of *Ladies' Mile* photographs.
- Have your students research what the ladies shopping along *Ladies' Mile* were actually purchasing.
- Have your students research the development of the shopping areas in their home community.
- Have your students research dress patterns from the turn of the 20th Century.
- Purchase a pattern and have **every student** sew an apron.
- Have students research daguerreotypes.

Materials Needed in New York City

Maps of the City of New York
Cameras

Good Website About Department Stores and Ladies' Mile

1. <http://www.departmentstorehistory.net/disc.htm> --- This site is a blog about the history of department stores all over the country. It's fascinating reading.
2. <http://www.columbia.edu/~ktj1/NYC/pics/wanamakers.jpg> --- This is an historic photograph of Wanamaker's Department Store in New York City.
3. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/records/html/newsletter/may2006.html> --- This is part of the New York City Government site. It has a good list of books and articles about the history of the department store in the city.
4. <http://www.opuspublishing.com/nycguide/stores/> --- This is the site for Opus Publishing. Here you can find information about some of New York's earliest department stores.
5. <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles14/new-york-34.shtml> --- This is an article about New York's early department stores that was originally published in 1921. It has an incredible amount of information however it does have some slight discrepancies with other information.
6. <http://www.placematters.net/flash/home.htm> --- This is an interesting site with information about many of New York's buildings.

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