

Gramercy Park

The Story of Manhattan's Last Private Sanctuary



The Ultimate Status Symbol: The Key

Gramercy Park is one of only two private parks in New York City, accessible only to a select few. The rules are strict and the privilege is rare.



The Lock

Gates are secured with special Medeco locks, which are changed annually.



The List

Only residents of the 39 buildings directly fronting the park are eligible for one of the approximately 383 keys in circulation.

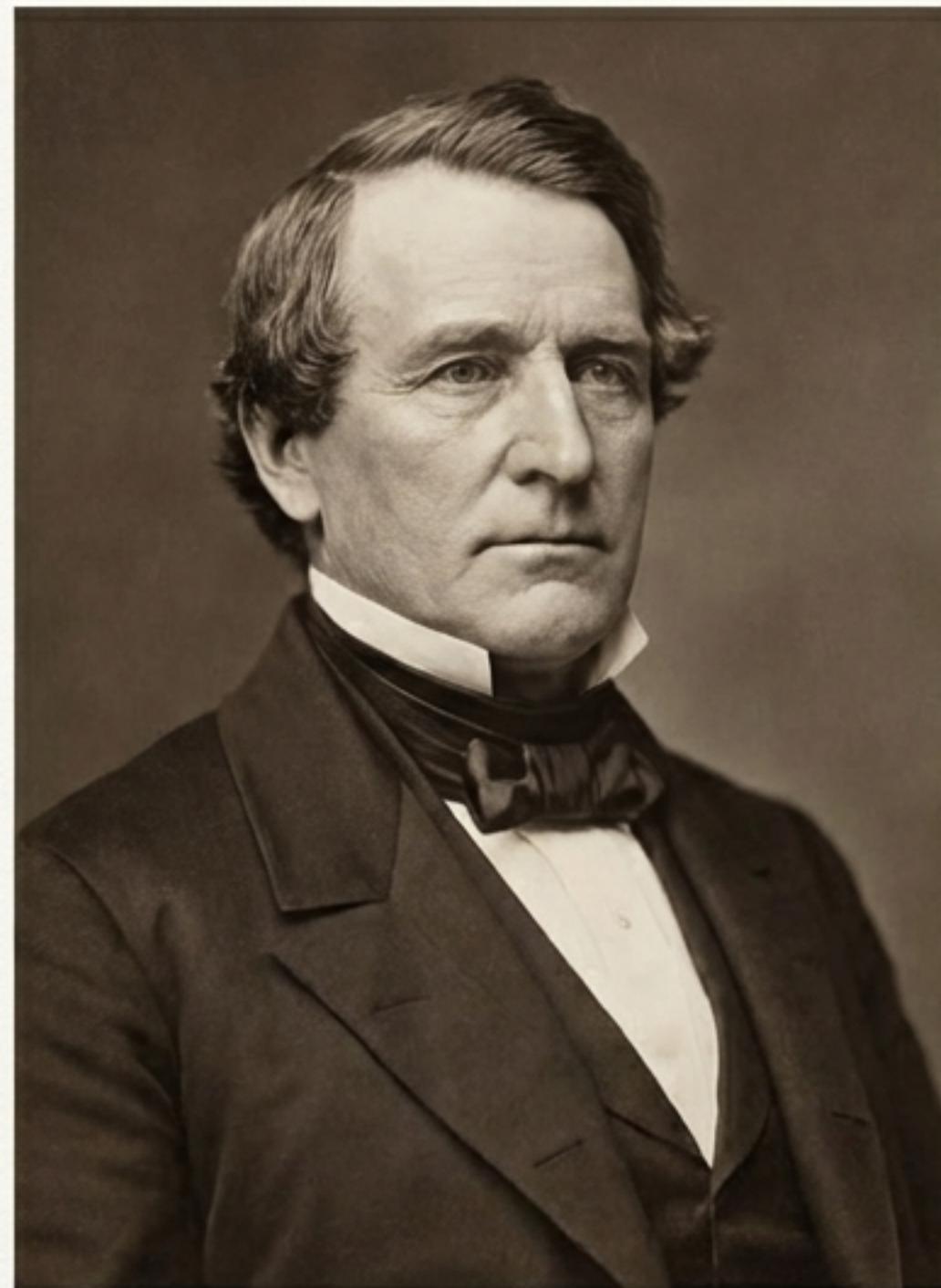


The Cost

Access carries a significant cost: an annual assessment of \$7,500 per lot, a \$350 fee per key, and a lost key fee of \$1,000, which rises to \$2,000 for a second instance.



From “Crooked Little Swamp” to Urban Oasis



In 1831, developer Samuel B. Ruggles had a radical vision. He purchased 22 acres of what was then “Krom Moerasje” (Dutch for ‘little crooked swamp’) and spent \$180,000 to drain the land and move a million horsecart loads of earth.



Key Insight: Ruggles deeded the parkland to the owners of the surrounding 60 lots, creating a shared private garden to ensure the neighborhood would always remain a fashionable, tranquil enclave—one of America’s first examples of city planning.



The Thespian's Haven: The Players

In 1888, the era's most celebrated Shakespearean actor, Edwin Booth, purchased his home on the park. He commissioned architect Stanford White to redesign it as a club where actors could mix with other artists and patrons.



Fun Fact: The statue at the center of Gramercy Park is of Booth in character as Hamlet, a gift from the club. He is the park's only permanent resident.

The Governor's Fortress: The National Arts Club

Originally the home of Governor Samuel J. Tilden, who ran for President in 1876. Tilden had the mansion redesigned in an ornate, Aesthetic Movement style. The Club was founded in 1898 to "stimulate, foster, and promote public interest in the arts."



Fun Fact: Wary of the violent politics of the day, Tilden had steel doors installed and reportedly built an escape tunnel leading to East 19th Street. The building became home to the National Arts Club in 1906.



Where the Walls Have Stories

The buildings ringing the park are a living museum of 19th and early 20th-century architecture, from Greek Revival townhouses to pioneering apartment buildings.

- **34 Gramercy Park East (1883):** Originally the "Gramercy Apartment House," it was only the second co-op in New York and is now the oldest one still operating. This 10-story Queen Anne-style building featured modern marvels like Otis elevators and an upscale restaurant.
- **The Original Aesthetic:** On the west side, Greek Revival townhouses built between 1844 and 1850 maintain the park's original, elegant character.





A Quiet History of Principle

The neighborhood's tranquility has often concealed a powerful conscience.

🔑 An Underground Railroad Stop

Before becoming the Brotherhood Synagogue, the Quaker Meeting House, established in 1859, was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

🔑 A Civil War Refuge

During the violent Draft Riots of 1863, the park's gates were opened to provide refuge for Union soldiers, while the park itself was protected by howitzers.

The Vibe of the Village

The streets surrounding the park have their own distinct charm, from historic saloons to architectural gems.

- Irving Place:** The neighborhood's main artery, home to cozy restaurants and bars like Pete's Tavern—New York's oldest surviving saloon. It's also home to the iconic concert venue, Irving Plaza.
- 'Block Beautiful':** East 19th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue is famed for its eclectic and pristine architecture, from converted carriage houses to classic townhomes.
- Getting Around:** The neighborhood is a short walk from Union Square and the Flatiron District, with easy access to the 4/5/6 and L/N/Q/R/W subway lines.



The Residents' Roster

For generations, Gramercy Park has been a magnet for those who shape culture. The list of past and present residents includes:

Inventors

Thomas Edison

Authors

John Steinbeck
Edith Wharton

Actors

James Cagney
John Barrymore
Julia Roberts
Jimmy Fallon

Artists

Daniel Chester French
Robert Henri

Musicians

Rufus Wainwright



“End of an Era: The Gramercy Park Hotel” in Playfair Display

For nearly a century, the hotel was the neighborhood's bohemian heart. Frequented by rock stars and presidents, it was reborn in 2006 as a lavish, art-filled destination under hotelier Ian Schrager and developer Aby Rosen.

The Story Today

After closing during the pandemic amidst disputes with the landlord over millions in unpaid rent, the hotel was fully vacated in 2022. Its iconic, artist-designed contents—from lamps to bathrobes—were sold at a public auction, marking the close of a major chapter in the neighborhood's history.

The Neighborhood on Screen and on the Page

The park's unique blend of beauty and inaccessibility has made it a compelling backdrop in popular culture.



In Film

- Referenced in classics like Woody Allen's *Manhattan*.
- Seen as the namesake film-within-a-film in *Notting Hill*.



On TV

- A setting in shows from *Law & Order* to *And Just Like That...*, where a main character moves into a Gramercy Park West apartment.



In Literature

- The setting for E.B. White's classic *Stuart Little*, whose family lived at '22 Gramercy Park.'

Private Oasis or an Antithesis of New York?

“Something about Gramercy Park grates me as being antithetical to the best things about New York and the USA. It just reeks of classism.”

– Reddit user, r/nyc

”

The park's defining feature—its privacy—remains a topic of debate. Is it a successful model of private stewardship, preserving a historic gem? Or is it an undemocratic relic at odds with the public spirit of the city? The conversation is as old as the park itself.





How to Experience Gramercy Park

While access is limited, the neighborhood's charm is not.

- Walk the Perimeter:** The sidewalks around the park (approx. 0.5 miles) offer a beautiful walk with full views of the landscape and surrounding architecture.
- Become a Member:** Join The Players or the National Arts Club for access to their historic buildings and key privileges.
- Christmas Eve:** The gates are traditionally opened to the public for one evening a year for caroling.

Gramercy Park at a Glance



Location

Bounded by E. 14th/23rd St,
Park Ave South, and 1st Ave.



The Park

Approx. 2 acres, established
1831 by Samuel B. Ruggles.



Historic District

Designated 1966.



Architecture

Greek Revival,
Italianate, Queen Anne,
Victorian Gothic.



Subway

4, 5, 6, L, N, Q, R, W at
nearby Union Square.



GRAMERCY

Gramercy Park

A neighborhood preserved by a vision, protected by
a fence, and defined by a key.