

The Church in New York City

A Walking Tour

1. 9 West 57th Street — LDS chapel and broadcast facility planned for this location.
2. Steinway Hall, 109 West 57th Street — LDS meetings here in the 1920s.
3. Carnegie Hall, 57th Street and 7th Avenue — Tabernacle Choir performed here, site of several events.
4. The Art Students League of New York, 215 West 57th Street — Several LDS artists studied and taught here.
5. 316 West 57th Street — Stillman's Gym — site of LDS meetings and organization of New York Stake.
6. Lincoln Square — First Church constructed building in Manhattan and now Manhattan LDS Temple.

Time: 1-2 Hours

Distance: 1.1 miles

Getting There:

*** Subway:**

- B, D, F, V to 47-50th St.
Rockefeller Center
- E, V to 5th Ave, 53rd St.
- F to 57th St.
- N, R, W to 5th Avenue

*** Car:**

- FDR Drive South to 63rd Street
l. on 5th Ave.,
r. on 57th St.
- * West Side Highway to 56th Street
l. on 6th Ave.
r. on 58th Street
r. on 5th Ave.,
(not recommended during
business hours due to traffic
and lack of parking)

9 West 57th Street

Church's Planned Manhattan Center

The Church has explored many options in its quest for an adequate facility to represent it in New York City. One of the more interesting efforts was here



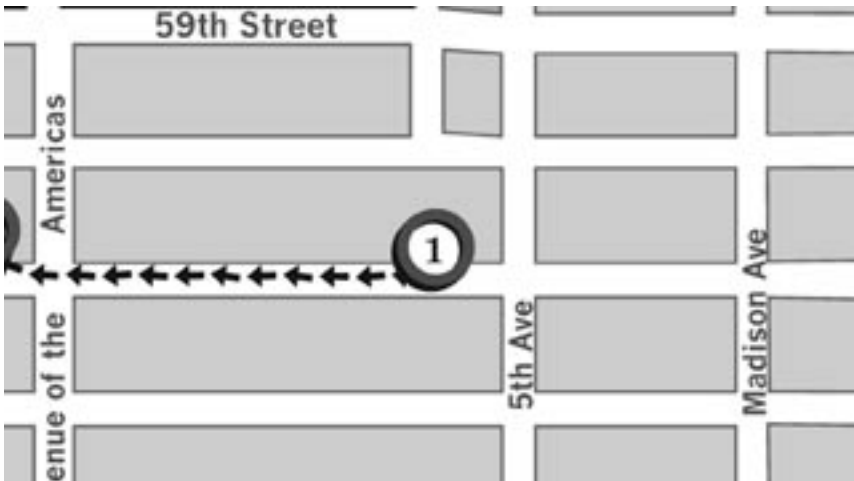
Outside escalators at 9 West 57th Street, meant for planned LDS Church use.

at the heart of midtown Manhattan on a prestigious site originally occupied by mansions of the Vanderbilts. In a joint venture with commercial real estate developers in the 1960s, the lower level of this prominent new office tower was to house not only facilities for Church

meetings, but also a media center where the Church could expand on its successful outreach efforts in the manner of the Tabernacle Choir's long-running "Music and the Spoken Word" program. Eventually the Church instead built the stake center at Lincoln Square. However, 9 West 57th Street still features the unusual external escalators which would have accessed the Church's facilities in the building's lower level.



Steinway Hall



Steinway Hall

Worship Among Pianos

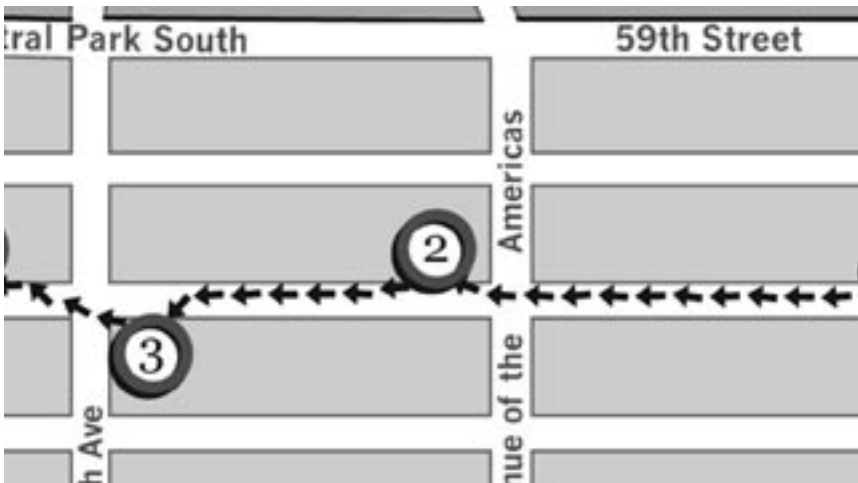
In the 1920s Church members held their Sunday services in Steinway Hall at 109 West 57th Street. The space was one of many congregational sites in the early part of the twentieth century. Moving from place to place was nothing new to New York Saints. Beginning in 1837, members began a procession of worship spaces that led the Saints, literally, from one end of the island to the other.

Initially, the congregations met downtown in the upper rooms of homes and businesses. At the turn of the century, the church moved to 125th Street where it stayed, with a brief detour to West 81st Street for nearly twenty years, until it moved to Steinway Hall. Although the Church moved out of Steinway Hall in the 1920s, the Church returned in 1943 and remained there until the end of the war, at which time, the Church purchased its first permanent New York City space, a former Jewish synagogue at 142 West 81st Street. The Manhattan Ward

remained on West 81st Street until the Lincoln Square building was constructed thirty years later.

The idea for Steinway Hall was developed by Henry Engelhard Steinway. Henry was a German cabinet maker who started building pianos and eventually developed the modern piano. Henry moved his family and company to America and under his company's name he and his sons acquired 114 patents for pianos; one patent, from 1875, is for the modern grand piano.

Steinway Hall originally opened in 1866 on 14th Street and housed the New York Philharmonic until it moved to Carnegie Hall in 1891. Later Steinway Hall was moved to its current location. This structure not only has auditoriums where many of the greatest pianists have performed, but there is also a piano bank downstairs where artists can pick out the piano they would like to play on.



Carnegie Hall

Meeting and Performing

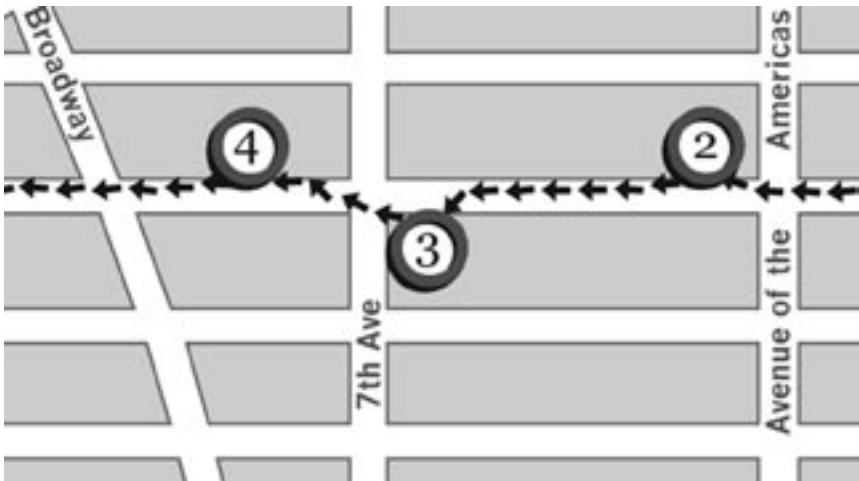
During the 1920s, the Church also held meetings in rooms above Carnegie Hall on the corner of 57th Street and 7th Avenue. The rooms are visible today and are still used as rehearsal spaces and music studios. It was an elegant space that members recalled fondly, a marked improvement from other makeshift locations. In each of these meeting spaces, the Saints were interlopers and, however well appointed, the space was not their own. They used the buildings on Sundays only and had to exercise care to treat the surroundings well.

Still, the Carnegie Hall experience of the 1920s was a marked improvement from the reception the Church had in 1914 on this site, when an anti-Mormon rally led to a newsworthy fracas. Although the Church in New York was small—there were only 400 members in 1913—the missionary presence of street meetings was a lightning rod. Other churches voiced antagonism toward

Mormons generally and also those resided in the city.

The 1914 episode began with a crusade against the Church that was organized by a former Senator from Utah named Frank J. Cannon, a disenchanted member of the Church and son of Church First Presidency member George Q. Cannon. In the spring of 1914, Cannon launched a nationwide crusade against the Mormons. At the ticket-only event in Carnegie Hall, Cannon outlined his strategy to curb the growth of the Church in America to roughly 1,000 listeners.

For two hours, Cannon presented his ideas. He demanded legislation to ban missionary street meetings and to bar the Church from owning property in New York. He condemned what he saw as the growing influence of the Church in American government, and he denounced Church leaders as polygamists. Those in attendance echoed their



approval when a vote was taken regarding these anti-Mormon acts.

Suddenly thereafter, a group of Mormon men rushed down the aisles, led by Eastern States Mission President Walter P. Monson, calling Cannon a liar and an ingrate. The skirmish was reported in *The New York Times*, “for a time it appeared likely that blows would be struck, and that Frank J. Cannon of Utah, formerly U.S. Senator and once a Mormon, would get the brunt of the attack. Women and clergymen crowded about the Senator and shielded him while he shouted stinging rebukes to his attackers.”

It was not the last time Cannon attacked the Church, but since that time, Carnegie Hall has been a considerably friendlier venue for Latter-day Saints. In addition to the use of its rooms as a worship space, the recital halls themselves have been venues for the Church. The Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed at Carnegie Hall as early as 1958, and on April 8, 1999 the New York Stake organized a celebration and performance in the hall with a large choir conducted by David Fletcher and with local vocal and instrumental soloists.

In the early 1940s, LDS pianist Grant Johannesen gave vivid performances in the hall when the Bell Telephone Hour used Carnegie Hall as its home for live radio broadcasts. In recent years, numerous local performers have taken their turns on the stages of Carnegie Hall, Weill Recital Hall and Zankel Hall as soloists, recitalists, instrumentalists and



Carnegie Hall

choral artists. Additionally, the hall is often rented by touring groups from outside of New York, and not infrequently, those high school and college groups include members of the Church.

The idea for Carnegie Hall began with the conductor Walter Damrosch. When he was 25 he went to Europe to study with Hans von Bulow. For years Walter had been trying to get a concert hall in New York City. The New York Philharmonic Society was able to find space to perform, but the group Walter conducted, the Symphony Society, was not considered as important as the Philharmonic and had a hard time finding space to play.

On his ship ride to London in 1887 to meet von Bulow, Walter had the good fortune to meet Andrew Carnegie's new bride, Louise Whitfield. Louise had sung as a soprano in the Oratorio Society for a few seasons and was interested in Walter's idea for a grand hall. She and Andrew Carnegie soon became friends with Walter and by the end of the summer they had agreed to fund the first grand concert hall in New York. Construction began on the hall May 13, 1890 and was finished seven years later—resulting in the famed Carnegie Hall.

The Art Students League

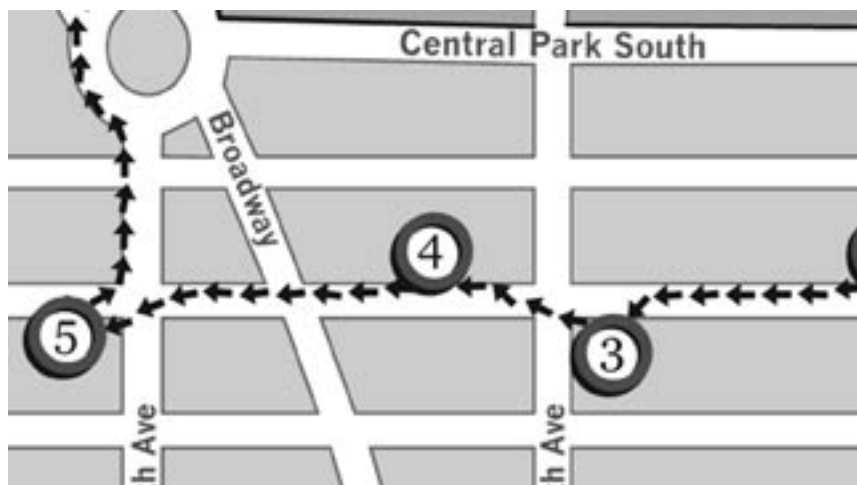
School for Mormon Artists

Beginning in 1917, Mormon visual artists flocked to this site to study drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpture. Formerly, LDS artists trained in Paris, but World War I stopped this. At the turn of the nineteenth century, art academies did not exist in the west, and the Church sent its painters abroad to learn the skills necessary to decorate its temples and meetinghouses. A list of Mormon artists who studied at the League is formidable: Mahonri Young, Minerva Teichert, LeConte Stewart, Cyrus E. Dallin, Waldo Midgley, Lynn Fausett, Louise Farnsworth, and many others.

The Art Students League became the most important art academy of 20th Century America, with a list of students that is the Who's Who of American art. The Mormons

who studied here had access both to advanced techniques of instructors and also to peers like John Sloan, Winslow Homer, Georgia O'Keefe, Norman Rockwell, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Roy Lichtenstein, all of whom dramatically altered how we think of art today.

One LDS artist, Mahonri Young, who was the last grandchild of Brigham Young, studied at the Art Students League in 1916 and eventually became an instructor and president of the institution. He taught at the League for thirty years. Initially, he planned to stay at the League briefly. He worked at a newspaper in Salt Lake City for four years, saving all of his money in order to be able to stay in New York for one year. Instead, the artist who later created the monu-



ments on Temple Square and the This Is the Place Monument remained his entire life in the New York City area.

It is no exaggeration to state that all of the artists of the Church from the first half of the 20th century are in some way products of the Art Students League. Their paintings grace the walls of chapels and the temples throughout the Church, including in New York City.



The Art Students League



*Among the important LDS artists who studied at the Art Students League was Minerva Teichert. Although most of her themes were scriptural or western, as in her well-known *Miracle of the Gulls*, she also occasionally drew on her New York City experiences as in this 1938 image of Jewish refugees arriving in New York Harbor.*

Stillman's Gym

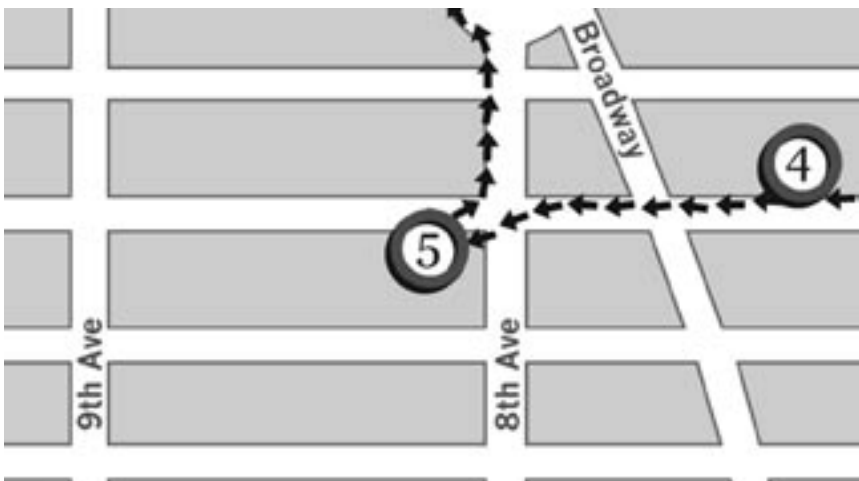
Large and Noisy

On this site, the New York Stake was created on December 9, 1934 by President Heber J. Grant, with Counselor (and former New York City resident) J. Reuben Clark. It was a landmark occasion for the history of the Church because it was the first stake to be established east of the pioneer settlements of the west since the Saints' exodus to the Rocky Mountains. In addition, it was only the third stake (after San Francisco and Los Angeles) to be created anywhere outside of the pioneer settlements.

The decade leading up to the organization of the New York Stake witnessed tremendous growth, some 400%. By 1934, there were 2,000 members in the metropolitan area. The original wards of the stake were Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, East Orange (New Jersey), with branches in Oceanside (Long Island), Bay Ridge (Brooklyn), and Westchester.

The geographic area of the stake covered all of New York City and Long Island, the northern half of New Jersey, and all of Westchester County, an area roughly contiguous with the modern boundaries of the Manhattan New York Temple District.

The building was originally built as a YMCA. After the YMCA moved to new quarters, the building was rented to a number of tenants which included art, drama and business schools in addition to the Church. It also housed Stillman's Gymnasium, a well-known training facility for boxers and other athletes. Members recalled that during Sunday meetings there was nothing unusual about a group of dancing girls walking through the meeting, dressed in leotards. Others recalled the clanking sounds of free weights from the gymnasium that rang throughout church services. For its



inconveniences, it did offer something valuable: its size. The meeting room had a capacity for 500. Separate services were held in German at the same facility.

Two millionaires had opened Stillman's Gym in 1921 in an effort to help troubled young people reform themselves through boxing. Louis Ingber bought the gym, and because it was all ready the premiere gym for boxers, he changed his name to Lou Stillman instead of changing the gym's famous name. John Garfield said, "there've been great fighters from all over the country, and good trainers, but never in the sport's history have we seen so many greats all in one place at one time. In the golden age of boxing, Stillman's produced more world class fighters than any other place ever had."



Site of Stillman's Gym today.



Stillman's Gym (YMCA) in the 1920s

Lincoln Square

From Manhattan Center to Temple

In turning up Broadway we follow the route of Bloomingdale Road, the old main road up Manhattan Island toward an area which has been settled at least since the 1700s, when Dutch New Yorkers established the village of Bloomingdale (Dutch for “vale of flowers”). As New York City expanded northward in the 1800s, the grid street plan incorporated little squares where the old Bloomingdale Road (now

renamed Broadway) crossed the grid pattern of streets. In the 19th century the area around Lincoln Square (named after a local landowner rather than the American president) filled with working class tenements, especially after the construction of the Ninth Avenue El in 1880. The El station on the block between West 65th and West 66th Streets stood directly in front of the current temple location. In 1902, the first Broadway subway established a stop at

West 66th Street. The neighborhood, of mixed Irish and African-American populations, was nicknamed “San Juan Hill,” in honor of the African-American Tenth Cavalry of the U.S. Army, which had fought in that battle during the Spanish-American War.

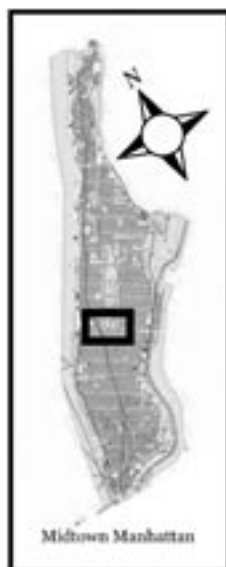
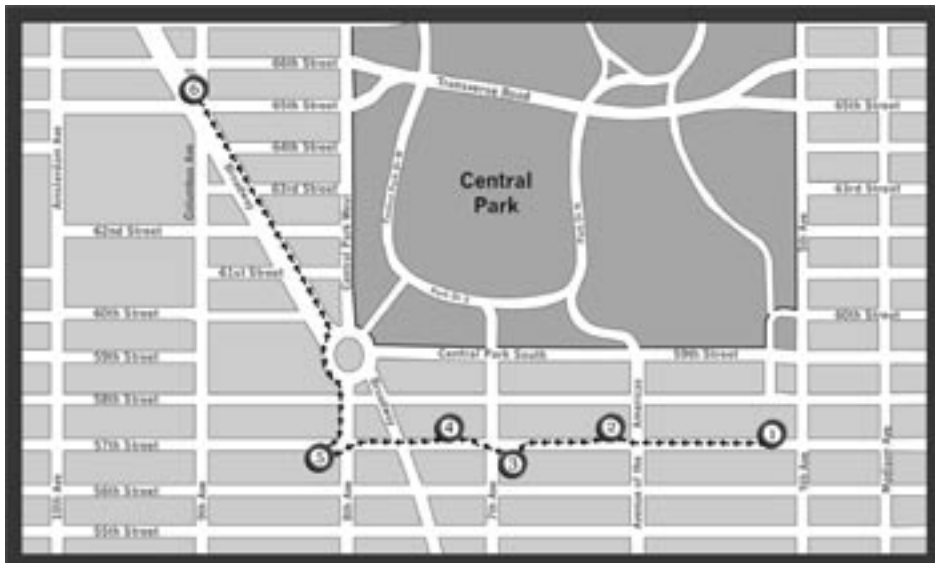
In the early 1960s, New York City’s legendary Robert Moses led the demolition of many blocks in the area to create a new complex of theaters to be named Lincoln Center. In part this was seen as an urban renewal project to clean up an area considered to be poor and dangerous. Before the buildings were demolished, they served as the set for the exterior scenes of the movie version of *West Side Story*, which portrays the battle of ethnic gangs thought to dominate the area.





*Above: The Manhattan New York Temple today.
Below: 66th & Broadway during first decades of the 20th Century.*





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| | <p>42W 27th Street: In the 1960s the Church nearly built a chapel and broadcast center in the lower levels of this sloped building. Although the Church ended up not using the space, architect Gordon Burschoff's controversially shaped tower still preserves the distinctive separate outside escalators to what was to have been the Church's space.</p> | <p>Gordon Burschoff</p> |
| | <p>109W 27th Street – Stillman Hall: Throughout the early 20th century, New York Saints met in buildings across Manhattan. In the 1920s, they met in this building where some of the best pianos in the world were played and sold.</p> | <p>Harry Stillman</p> |
| | <p>37th Street & 5th Ave – Carnegie Hall: 1904: Frank J. Cannon—a Senator emeritus and former Church member—led an anti-Mormon rally here; a group of Mormons stormed in and stopped the show. A few years later, the Church held Sunday meetings above the Hall. Many LDS musicians have since performed here.</p> | <p>Frank J. Cannon</p> |
| | <p>213W 27th Street – The Art Students League of New York: When the First World War prevented Mormon artists from studying abroad, young artists such as Mirreza Teichert and Mahoori Young studied instead at this prestigious institution. Mahoori later was president of the League, teaching there for 30 years.</p> | <p>Mirreza Teichert</p> <p>Mahoori Young</p> |
| | <p>316W 27th Street – Stillman's Gym: President Grant created the New York Stake here on December 9, 1924. The meetinghouse was shared with the YMCA, an art school, and a gym, and it was not unusual to see dancing girls in leotards wander into Church meetings.</p> | <p>William Stillman</p> |
| | <p>62th Street & Broadway – Temple at Lincoln Square: The Church's 119th temple, it was dedicated in June 2004 and serves over 40,000 members in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The temple was built over the existing New York Stake center (1975) and has a soundproof inner shell that keeps out the loud noises of the city outside.</p> | <p>Temple at Lincoln Square</p> |

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