

Tour Through New York National Historic Sites with Darien Library

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Darien Library is hosting a virtual tour of natural and man-made wonders in New York in the first of an eight-week online series. Each event will be accessed on Zoom.

Week 1, Oct 5 — From the Seven Wonders to National Parks

Retired United States park ranger Allen J. Despres will explore the seven wonders of the world to America's National Parks system.

Even in ancient times, there were those who loved to travel to see great natural places as well as man-made

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ones. The growth of the middle class in the 19th century and the advances in transportation technology made our present age of easy travel possible. These changes were the leading factors in the creation of America's National Parks system.

Register for From the Seven Wonders to National Parks

This virtual event will take place at 3 p.m., Tuesday, Oct. 5 . [Register here](#) on Darien Library's website.

Need help registering? Email Adult Programming at apstaff@darienlibrary.org.

This event will take place on Zoom. You will receive an email confirming your registration with a link to join the Webinar after you **register** for the event.

Each event in the series takes place from 3 to 4 p.m. on successive Tuesdays.

Week 2, Oct 12 — Federal Hall

Despres shares the story of Federal Hall, New York City's first City Hall as well as the first Capital of the United States under the Constitution. It also celebrated the Inauguration of George Washington. Later on, it was a Custom House, as well as a U.S Sub-Treasury location.

Register for Federal Hall

Week 3, Oct 19 — African Burial Ground

Despres discusses the African Burial Ground and slavery in New York from the 17th Century through the 18th Century. Learn how New York City became the second largest slave holding city in North America, second only to Charleston.

Register for African Burial Ground

Week 4, Oct 26 — Hamilton Grange

The story of Hamilton Grange, the final home of Alexander Hamilton, one of our founding fathers. Alexander Hamilton rose up from humble beginnings in the West Indies.

He won the great trust of George Washington and went on to become the first Secretary of the Treasury. His economic plans addressing the national debt set the New Republic on a secure economic foundation.

Alongside James Madison, he was the major contributor to the Federalist Papers, the classical work about checks and balances in government and how federalism should work.

[Darienite.com editor's note: Hamilton also had the distinction of having [Ethan Allen Brown](#) as a law clerk.

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Brown (named after the Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen) was born on July 4, 1776 in Middlesex Parish, which later became Darien. Brown later became the governor of Ohio and a U.S. senator.]

[Register for Hamilton Grange](#)

Week 5, Nov 2 — Castle Clinton & the Forts of New York Harbor

Despres shares the story of Castle Clinton and the Forts of New York Harbor. During the war of 1812, Castle Clinton and the Forts of New York Harbor protected NYC. Throughout its lifetime, the castle reinvented itself many times.

In 1823 it became Castle Garden, a restaurant and entertainment center, where Opera singer Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," made her American debut. It was an Immigration Station from 1852-1890 and New York Aquarium from 1890-1940. Allen will shed light on the 20th Century fight for preservation of historic structures.

[Register for Castle Clinton & Forts](#)

Week 6, Nov 9 — Ellis Island & Immigration in the later 19th Century

From 1892 to 1922 over 12 million immigrants were processed on Ellis Island. Despres will explain how the process was accomplished and share how many immigrants were sent back.

Despres will also explain what the criteria was for refusing entry. Was this process successful and did it serve its purpose fairly?

[Register for Ellis Island and Immigration](#)

Week 7, Nov 16 — The Statue of Liberty & How it Came to be

The Statue of Liberty was a gift from the people of France to the People of the United States. Presenter, Allen J. Despres will explore the 20-year process from far-fetched idea to successful beacon of Democracy and Immigration to the New World. Despres will share how the poem "The New World Colossus" by Emma Lazarus was chosen. Learn how the Statue of Liberty became the great icon it is today and is recognized the world over.

[Register for Statue of Liberty](#)

Week 8, Nov 23 — Grant's Tomb

Despres shares the story of Grant's Tomb, the largest mausoleum in the United States. The burial place of the General who was called in his time the 'the savior of the Union' who defeated the Confederacy and became the most important Civil Rights President between Lincoln and Lyndon Johnson.

Now considered a very important President indeed, whose desire to “Let Us Have Peace” was sincere but who also fought for the rights of the newly freed African Americans as the Reconstruction President.

[Register for Grant's Tomb](#)

[Darienite.com editor's note: Late in life, Grant was bankrupted by [Ferdinand Ward](#), a man who was a business partner of one of Grant's sons as he swindled numerous investors. Grant visited Ward in Ward's country house in Stamford at least once. Ward's house is gone, but [the gate house](#) has survived. It's located at the corner of Strawberry Hill and Holbrook Drive. Grant's bankruptcy led him to write his memoirs, which became renowned as the best autobiography written by any U.S. president. [This Stamford Advocate article](#) mentions a plaque at that site, which states, incorrectly, that Grant began writing his memoirs there. He didn't.]

About Allen J. Despres

Allen J. Despres is a retired United States park ranger. Allen has been giving programs for the American and even the international public, about the important issues of universal and American values of history found in our National Parks and Historic Sights for over twenty years.

As an interpreter of history at Weir Farm, the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island, the African Burial Ground, Grant's Tomb, Federal Hall, and Castle Clinton, Allen has lectured, given tours, and created programs for the general public as well as school groups.