

LINDA – Fieldnotes – June 24, 2007

Subject: Harlem CBO Fair

Location: [Charles A. Dana Discovery Center](#), Central Park (110th St between 5th and Lenox)

Time: 2:30-3:30

I learned of the Harlem CBO fair on Harlem One Stop. Here is the description:

“The Conservancy is hosting a Harlem ***CBO (Community-Based Organization) Fair*** at which local organizations will answer questions about their various programs, display information, and have representatives available to get you involved.”

<http://www.harlemonestop.com/event.php?id=2144>

This description seems slightly folksier than the one on the Central Park Conservancy site:

<http://www.centralparknyc.org/activities/specialevents>

“Members of the public are invited to meet representatives from local CBOs who will display and discuss information on their various programs in neighborhood improvement, cultural activity, and health support.”

I took buses to the location. On the M11 I met two young French female tourists visiting New York for a week. They wanted to see the Gay Pride Parade and asked for directions to 5th Avenue. On the M4 I asked where they were staying, and they said the hostel on 103rd. I asked if they were enjoying their stay and where they had been, and they named a number of usual tourist destinations: ferry to Ellis Island, Empire State Building, Chinatown and Little Italy, remarking on how different each district was. They also mentioned that they had gone this morning to hear gospel at a nearby church, on Malcolm X Blvd. They said they did not have this in France, and explained how solemn and serious the services were (my words not theirs). I asked if they stayed for the sermon, and they said of course not.

I got the impression from one of them that they had gone with a tour group. I asked if they went with a tour group in the morning and explored on their own in the afternoon. The other girl corrected me, letting me know that they went by themselves to the church, no tour group.

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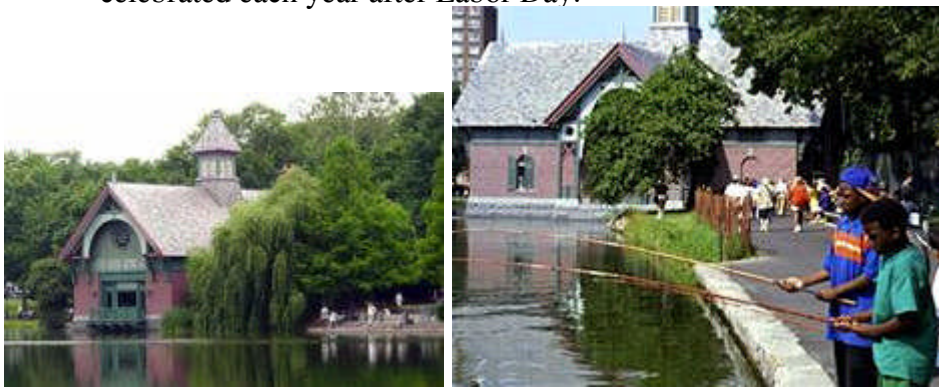
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When I got off the bus at 5th Avenue, I was struck by the beauty of the Harlem Meer. (Mostly, I was wishing that I had “discovered” the Meer earlier, since it is within walking distance of my residence.) It is a very small lake, probably man-made, with a walking path around it. I could immediately see lots of people strolling, sunbathing, fishing, playing in the playground, and enjoying the day.

The Discovery Center sits at the north end of the Meer. I did not think to go inside the small structure, pictured below, but it turns out that it offers fishing poles for catch-and-release fishing along with environmental education and community programs. From the website:

<http://www.centralparknyc.org/virtualpark/northend/danacenter:>

“Catch-and-release fishing at the Harlem Meer has become a favorite family and community pastime. The Dana Center provides poles, unbarbed hooks, and instruction booklets. There is also a fishing jamboree celebrated each year after Labor Day.”



Next to the center was a small stage set up with two congas. Two sections of chairs were arranged, one section shaded by the same kind of white tarp shading the stage, the other in the shadow of the Discovery Center. The picture below, from the Harlem One Stop site, does not accurately depict the seating arrangements but gives an overall feel for it. There was a banner advertising the performance, that did not list the names of the performers. (I did not think to look more closely or take notes until later, when I discovered on the Harlem One Stop site that there is a weekly performance series for the entire summer.) The band was not due to begin for awhile, as the stage was still not set up with other instruments, but there were at least 100 people already seated.



On the north side of the Discovery Center there were two long rows of tables covered by white tarps, with few visitors (maybe four or five in the entire area). This appeared to be the CBO Fair. I was expecting something much bigger, since the Harlem One Stop announcement listed 27 participating organizations:

- 92nd Street Y www.92y.org
- Cathedral of St. John the Divine www.stjohndivine.org
- City Year New York www.cityyear.org/sites/new_york/
- Community League of the Heights www.cloth159.org
- Dance Theater of Harlem www.dancetheatreofharlem.com/
- Friends of Morningside Park www.parks.nyc.gov
- Greenhope Services for Women, Inc. www.projectgreenhope.org/index.shtml
- Groove With Me www.groovewithme.org/
- Harlem Arts Alliance www.harlemaa.org/aboutus.htm
- Harlem Children's Health Project
www.childrenshealthfund.org/programs/harlem_chp.php
- Harlem Children's Zone
- Harlem RBI www.harlemrbi.org/
- Harlem School of the Arts www.harlemschoolofthearts.org/indexfinal.html
- Hope Community, Inc. www.hopeci.org
- Jazz Museum of Harlem www.jazzmuseuminharlem.org
- Lehman Brothers Health
- Promotion Learning Lab www.childrenshealthfund.org/programs/harlem_chp.php
- Museum for African Art www.africanart.org
- Museum of the City of New York www.mcny.org
- Office of the Manhattan Borough - President Scott Stringer www.mbpo.org
- Opus 118 Harlem School of Music www.opus118.org/
- Settlement Health www.settlementhealth.org
- The African Film Festival, Inc. www.africanfilmny.org
- The Ghetto Film School, Inc. www.ghettofilm.org
- The Public Theater www.publictheater.org/
- The Society of the Educational Arts, Inc. www.sea-ny.org
- UrbanGlass www.urbanglass.org

Instead there were about 12 organizations represented. Most likely, many of the absentee organizations had bailed early, since there were only two empty tables on one end. (One

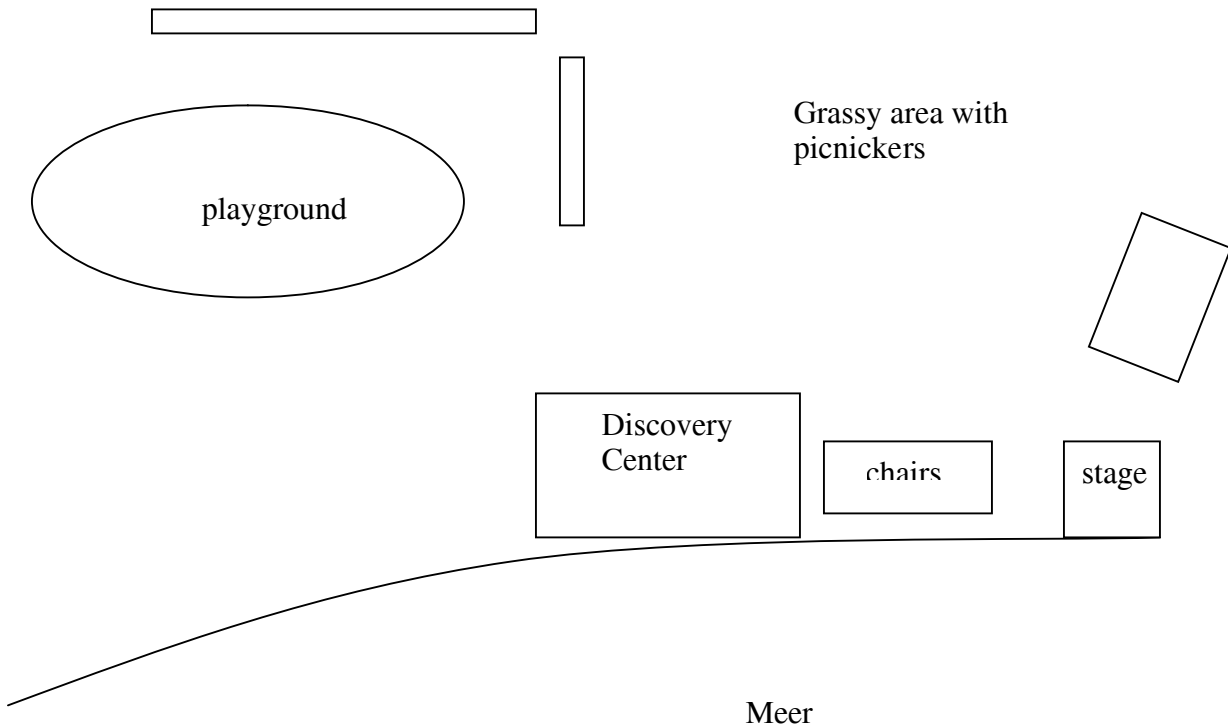
potentially empty table might have been annexed by another organization: the Harlem Children's Zone took up two tables.) The contrast to the crowded performance area, and also to the nearby playground (bursting with happily screaming children, parents, and others) made the CBO Fair look rather pathetic (diagram on following page).

The first table was the Central Park Conservancy, staffed by four people in dark blue t-shirts printed with the Central Park Conservancy. I skipped this table (to my chagrin, when later I saw people thumbing a pamphlet advertising the SummerStage concert series). The second table was for the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. I also skipped this table. The next table was the 92nd Street Y [I may have mixed up the order of these two tables], where a charismatic young African American girl of six or seven was interacting with a young white woman. Apparently, the girl wanted to fill out a form on a small pad of paper, the kind used for drawings, but did not know her contact information and needed to consult an adult. The young woman told her to take the pen, a blue Bic ball point pen, saying, "I trust you."

When I tried to extricate a yellow flier listing their jazz concerts from under a pile of flat marbles, a middle-aged white woman jumped out of her seat. I found her rather aggressive as she pushed me to write down my contact information. (Single tickets for these concerts are \$50.) Since I'd seen some interesting events listed at this Y before, I obligingly complied. A middle-aged, dark-skinned woman of indeterminate ethnicity came up to ask if the new catalogs were out; she said she already had the summer one. In contrast to other tables, the people staffing this table made no effort to "sell" the organization; presumably, the 92nd Street Y is well-known enough not to have to do this.

The next table was for the Museum of the City of New York. I took a pamphlet entitled, "Discover East Harlem." The fourth and fifth table in this row were taken by Harlem Children's Zone.

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Two young girls, pre-adolescent or adolescent, perked up when I approached their table. One of them offered me pamphlets and stumbled over the explanation of what they were doing there. The other, who seemed more sure of herself (and looked older), explained that they used technology to promote health. I asked what this meant, and she handed me a pamphlet for the Harlem Promotion Learning Lab. (Sarah Wessler's name is printed on the back.) They offered me free toothpaste (travel size) and free floss. I also picked up a "Healthy K.I.D.S." (Knowledge Improving Diet and Strength) newsletter printed with games and activities such as a maze, circling the healthy snacks, and color by number. For the children in the picture, instructions are to color their clothing red, green, orange, and so on, but for their skin color, "You Choose!" Another activity instructs you to "Put your fist on the paper and draw around it." Below, it says, "Not very big, huh? It does not take much food to fill up your tummy." The newsletter is printed by the Children's Health Fund.

The older girl explained that they work for Harlem Children's Zone and the Promise academy, and that they are "interns." An older girl sitting at the next table explained that the program is based in the school. I asked if she went to the school, and she scornfully said that it only went up to 2nd grade. She said that there was also the middle school. A young blond woman, whom I speculated could be a teacher from the Promise Academy, asked the girl sitting across from her what grade she was in, and she said, in a very soft voice, fourth. As I was moving on the young girl who wanted to fill out the raffle form at

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the Y table came up to this table. When offered toothpaste and floss, she began taking handfuls of toothpaste, declaring that she was going to take all of them. The young girls laughed and encouraged her to give toothpaste to everyone she knew. The white woman told the girls she was not keeping track of how much they were giving away. [The white woman seemed bored, perhaps regretting spending her Sunday afternoon this way. This also seemed true of many other adults manning the tables.]

I moved onto the next row of tables, the first of which was the Harlem Arts Alliance. Immediately the middle-aged African American woman sitting at this table began a spiel, telling me that is a group for artists, dancers, writers, etc, and that they have monthly meetings in Riverside Church. Finally she got through the spiel and asked if I was an artist. I said no, but I appreciate art. She told me to come, saying that some of the artists are very interesting. She told me that they are a stop for European tourists. I got the impression that she meant their monthly meetings, which confused me: is this a performance space, or to discuss matters? She did say something about announcing what people are doing. Just then a middle-aged African American man came up to the table and they began exchanging greetings and jokes. I believe this was the only booth manned by only one person.

The next table was “Groove With Me.” I had already checked out this group on the website, and they were targeted towards young women in East Harlem (as were many of the participating groups listed on the website). I skipped this table. Next was the Jazz Museum in Harlem. I had seen their office in the same building as In the Spirit of the Children, and I was confused about what constitutes a “Jazz Museum.” Visual displays behind walls of glass? Listening booths? Multimedia displays? Performances? There were two older African American women at this table, and one explained to me that they had programs at one of the museums (I can’t remember which, the website says Smithsonian but I think she named a different one) and a “Jazz for Curious Listeners” program at the Metropolitan Community United Methodist Church.

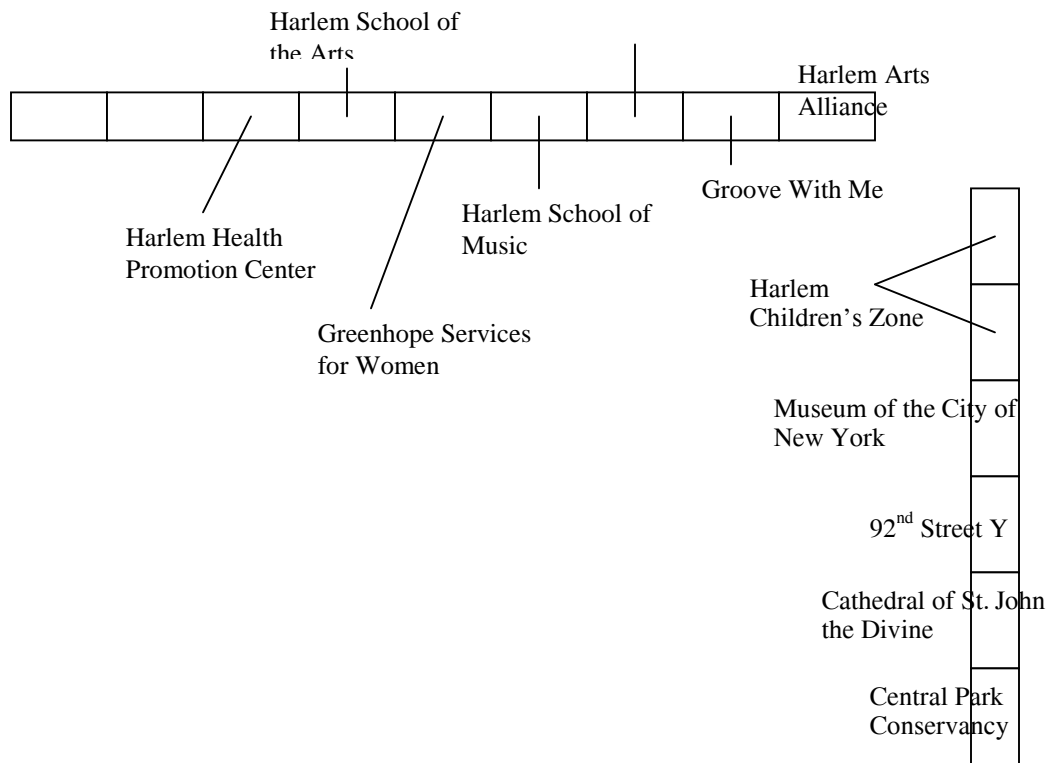
Jazz Museum
in Harlem

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I also skipped the Harlem School of Music, which had neatly-pressed children on display. (I can't remember what gave me this impression: uniforms? I seem to remember maroon blazers, white shirts, and black slacks on young boys, but this also could have been the Harlem School of the Arts.) Next was Greenhope Services for Women, which was the only table with a hand-lettered sign. This group is targeted toward formerly incarcerated women, and provides housing and other services in East Harlem. I also did not approach this table, although in retrospect it would have been interesting to do so. I skipped the Harlem School of the Arts. Several children, whose faces were painted white and red like clown faces, were talking with each other behind the table.

The last table (with two empty tables beyond) was the Harlem Health Promotion Center. Two young African American women sat behind this table, and one of them perked up when I approached. She told me about a web portal that will be up soon with information on health. She explained to me that there is a "research" arm funded by the CDC and a "clinical" arm, and that the clinical arm serves teenagers. The research arm looks at "all" the problems facing Harlem, and the clinical arm focuses on sexual health, including testing for STIs, a support group for HIV positive teens, etc. I asked if they were affiliated with any churches or organizations, and she named Columbia and mentioned hospitals without naming any names. [Rest of paragraph added June 25, 2007] She also mentioned a Community Advisory Board. In response to my question about who sits on this board, she said that she knew names, and trailed off, looking confused. Then she

brightened and mentioned a social worker, businessman, and a clergy member. Her partner added someone who has a health background.

I sat down near the performance area to take some notes. By then the chairs had filled up even more, to maybe 150 or more people. The crowd was quite mixed, although generally older than me. It included families, single men, groups of middle-aged women, etc., and was mostly African American, with a good number of white people and a few Asian Americans other than myself. Later I would see that today's performers were the Harlem Blues & Jazz Band.

I then took a stroll around the Meer. There were quite a few boys and men fishing with flimsy-looking poles. A few young white men joined the young white women sunbathing in bikinis and tank tops. A family had set out balloons and a tablecloth on a picnic table. Couples of all ages strolled the path. Families set out blankets in the grass.

I noted that once west of Malcolm X Blvd I thought the park turned noticeably "whiter." While there were white people east of Malcolm X Blvd, there were not nearly so many as on the west side. On the east side, a lone white woman sunbathing in a black bikini looked strange, whereas there were many young women sunbathing on the west side. I noted that I noted the presence of three interracial couples with white men and black women; this seemed like a lot to me since I hardly see this when walking around Harlem. (Somehow I seem to see that particular combination downtown, where both people appear very expensively groomed.) There were also brown-skinned people with curly hair speaking Spanish all around the park who appeared "Puerto Rican" to me. On the south side of the meer, a boy was dragging a line through the water without a pole, with an older male (his father?) seeming to give instructions in Spanish. A woman and several girls sat on a bench behind him. A man on a bike who appeared "Mexican" stopped near them, but when they paid him no attention he got back on the bike.

The south side of the Meer is much less crowded. In the southwest corner of the Meer, there a giant empty pool. The website reads that Lasker Rink and Pool opens July 1. On the east side a flock of Canadian geese sit beneath the trees.

[I have been double-booking my weekends and this was no exception. I was going to meet my cousins and aunt this afternoon. I would have liked to stick around for the performance.]

[Although the CBO fair was initially disappointing, it shows how "outreach" works (operates, that is). While the location and the performance provided the opportunity for foot traffic for the fair, there were hardly any people approaching the tables. The fair definitely lacked the "fun" factor of street fairs, with their flashy wares and food booths.

I saw people perusing the schedule for SummerStage and the yellow flier for jazz concerts at the Y. I did not see people looking at literature from the other tables. With so many people crowding the performance area, grassy areas, playground, and paths, and

hardly anyone coming to the tables, I felt that those manning the tables might feel discouraged. (Especially since over half of the people at the tables I approached made no effort to talk with me until I lingered.) It called to mind Guedy Arniella's expectation that people are initially suspicious, and her expectation that it takes time (multiple weekly appearances) for people to begin talking with the outreach person. I wonder if for most of these organizations, low-status employees (and interns) are assigned to sit and wait for people to approach them. Is this "going into the community"?

Also this phenomenon of what is accomplished by mentioning the existence of a Community Advisory Board—to establish credibility, connection to the community, closing off uncomfortable questions of who gets to do what and with what consequences.]