

Closing the Claremont Stables

Almost nothing captures a sense of the past like the sound of a horse's hooves on the pavement of Manhattan — nothing, that is, except the smell of a horse. The island was once pervaded by both. Now all that is left of those great urban herds are the carriage horses in Central Park, the police horses in Midtown and, until last Sunday, the horses of the Claremont Riding Academy on West 89th Street.

At the very least, the closing of the Claremont stables means that Manhattan is a less surprising place. The owner said that it had become too costly to run the stable and that the bridle paths in Central Park had gotten too crowded — with humans, not horses. Others suspect that the prospect of selling to developers was too tempting to resist.

And so we will never again walk along West

89th Street and be overcome by the deeply nostalgic smell of horses, and may never again have the surprising pleasure of coming upon a horse and rider in the park. We lose yet another world, hidden just up the wooden ramp through the high doors of the Academy. It was impossible to walk past it and not feel that it was a secret entrance to a different city.

You don't have to think about the closing of the Claremont Riding Academy for very long before you realize that humanity could never have proliferated to the extent it has if it still depended on horses for transportation. New York is certainly a human city, filled as it is with humans. But the loss of this stable makes us wonder whether the city wasn't more human still when we shared so much more of it with horses.