



# TURTLE BAY NEWS

From the Turtle Bay Association, neighborhood association for  
Manhattan's Turtle Bay, East Midtown, home of the United Nations.

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*Season's Greetings  
from the  
Turtle Bay Association*

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## THE TBA ANNUAL ELECTION

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Due to COVID-19, TBA was not able to hold an in-person annual meeting. Our members received a proxy vote form for the election of officers for the one year term of January 1 thru December 31, 2021 and for the election of directors for the two year term of January 1, 2021 thru December 31, 2022. The slate was approved by the membership with the needed number of votes. Committee reports can be found on the TBA web site.

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## THE TURTLE BAY ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL TRADITION

Each year, TBA donates the Christmas tree at Dag Hammarskjold Plaza and the wreaths for the NYPD 17th Precinct & the FDNY Engine 8/Ladder 2/Battalion 8.

Stop by and visit our New York's Finest and our NYC Firefighters and thank them for their service to our great city.





The firemen were happy and said "Please thank everyone in the TBA – for the beautiful wreaths."





## Looking for a Berenice Abbott bar on 56th Street

by ephemeralnewyork

Original post: <https://ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com/2020/11/30/looking-for-a-berenice-abbott-bar-on-56th-street/>



The hand-carved bar, antique fixtures, brass handles, tiled floor, and simple, red-checked tablecloths evoke the Gilded Age.

Which makes sense, as the bar first opened in either 1871 or 1880 (depending on the source) by a Michael Condron at 1020 First Avenue, at 56th Street.



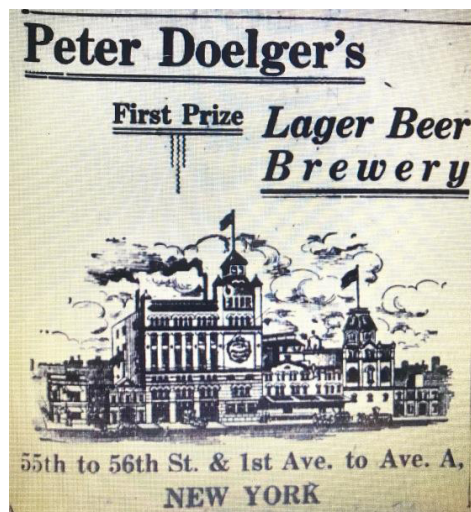
This remarkably preserved late 19th century-style saloon was captured by Berenice Abbott in four photos she took in 1936—when Billie's grandson, William Condron, Jr., was running the place.

It looks like a true neighborhood joint, and perhaps the only change from the Gilded Age to the Depression is that women are allowed in (definitely a no-no in the 19th and early 20th centuries).



Visit First Avenue and 56th Street today, of course, and you won't find Billie's. Nor is there a clear paper trail explaining what happened to this bar and restaurant worthy of Abbott's artistic eye.

The story of Billie's is the story of a neighborhood, you could say. Changing New York, the book containing Abbott's WPA-era New York City photos, states that Billie's "stood at the corner of a block dominated by the abandoned buildings of Peter Doelger's Brewery, which before Prohibition had kept Billie's and many similar well stocked."



Billie's patrons were "recent immigrants who lived in nearby tenements and worked in the factories and slaughterhouses along the East River." *continued...*

### Shop By Telephone—The Classified Directo

**Billy Rose's Diamond Horseshoe**  
 235W46 CI rcle 6-6500  
**Billy The Oysterman restrnt** 7E20 AL gonqn 4-7686  
**Billy The Oysterman restrnt** 10W47 BR yant 9-1244  
**Billy's Restrnt** 126Prl WH itehl 4-9392  
**Billy's Restrnt** 1020 1Av EL dorado 5-8920

Billy's, not Billie's, in a 1940 city directory

Tracking the story of Billie's means accepting that Abbott may have gotten the name of the bar wrong. City directories note that "Billy's Bar" was at 1020 First Avenue. (Not to be confused with another Victorian-era saloon, Bill's Gay Nineties, long at 57 East 54th Street until it was transformed into the more upscale Bill's Townhouse.)

Newspapers called it "Billy's" as well. A New York Daily News article in 1967 noted that "Billy's Gaslight Bar" was being forced to move from its First Avenue and 56th Street location because the original spot was marked for demolition. (A 1960s-style block-long high rise occupies the site now.)



Billy's/ Billie's stove, by Berenice Abbott

"Reconstruction has begun on Billy's Gaslight Bar, a landmark at 56th Street and First Avenue for 96 years," the Daily News noted later that year. "The new location will be 52nd Street and First Avenue."

So Billy's moved down the street, a milestone covered by Craig Claiborne in the New York Times.

**Billy's Gaslight Bar**, which fell to the wrecker's ball, will be rebuilt on First Ave. and 52d St. with all the old lights and, Billy Condron hopes, all the old well-lit customers . . . The Concord Hotel now advises guests of 27 planned activities and everything but "unbroken peace or quiet." Seems the management did a survey and discovered that their customers don't want any rest during their visits.

From the Daily News, 1967

"The wrecker's ball wrecked Billy's, the wonderful Sutton Place landmark, in 1966, and now it has re-opened at a new location with many of the sentimentally remembered trappings intact," wrote Claiborne.

"The present establishment seems smaller, cleaner, more polished, more civilized, lower-ceilinged, less personal. In the move, Billy's has lost a good deal of its patina and original charm, but it is still worthwhile and tables are at a premium."



So how long did Billy's (or Billie's) hang on at the 52nd Street site? I wish I knew, but the trail goes cold.

Perhaps the bar outlived its era. The East 50s along First Avenue transformed from a neighborhood of low-rise tenements to a stretch of mid-rise buildings and apartment towers, with some of the old walkups interspersed within each block. A handful are empty, supposedly awaiting that wrecker's ball.

But earlier this year, I was tipped off by another New York City history fan that even though Billy's the saloon is gone, its hand-carved wood bar might still be with us.

*continued...*





Reportedly, the French restaurant Jubilee, which has occupied a site on First Avenue between 52nd and 53rd Street since 2012, just might be using Billy's bar in their own (very atmospheric and homey) establishment.

I couldn't find anyone there who could confirm this, but the photos of the bar at Jubilee look eerily similar, no?

[Top three images: Berenice Abbott, 1936; Fourth image: Baybottles.com; fifth image: NYPL; sixth image: Berenice Abbott, 1936; seventh image: New York Daily News 1967]



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## DONATIONS RECEIVED FOR THE SINGLE PARENT RESOURCE CENTER

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We want to thank our TBA members and friends for the generous donations received for the annual TBA holiday/toy drive.

Photo: 2017 Toy Drive



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## TBA Newsletter Editorial Committee

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