MAILER'S BROOKLYN

J. MICHAEL LENNON

Editor's note: In Mark Noonan's 2013 essay in The Mailer Review, *"Brooklyn Accents and the Paradox of Ambition in Norman Mailer and Arthur Miller," figures one and two were transposed: 555 Crown St. was labeled as 102 Pierrepont, and vice versa.*

THE MAILER FAMILY MOVED FROM LONG BRANCH, NJ to Courtelyou Road in Flatbush, Brooklyn, in 1928. In 1932, they moved to 555 Crown Street in Crown Heights, about five miles away, off Eastern Parkway on the other side of Prospect Park. A middle class Jewish neighborhood when the Mailers lived there in the 1930s, it is now home to many immigrants from the West Indies, and also a large community of Hasidic Jews.

In 1943, Mailer's parents moved to 102 Pierrepont Street in Brooklyn Heights, the waterfront neighborhood facing lower Manhattan. Many writers lived in the Heights, including Thomas Wolfe, Carson McCullers, John Dos Passos, and Truman Capote. After he graduated from Harvard in May 1943, Mailer lived with his parents while awaiting his draft notice. He was inducted in March 1944 (shortly after his marriage to Beatrice Silverman) and served for 25 months. Arriving home in mid-1946, he and his wife lived at another Brooklyn Heights address, 49 Remsen, and he worked in a one-room attic studio at 20 Remsen.

In October 1947, after completing the manuscript of *The Naked and the Dead*, he and Bea left for ten months in Paris. When he returned, he lived again at 49 Remsen for a few months before moving to Vermont and then Los Angeles, where he lived from mid-1950 to mid-1951. In 1952, Mailer (now divorced) moved to the Lower East side of Manhattan, but rented a sixth floor studio in the Ovington Building at 252 Fulton Street in Brooklyn. On the floor below, Col. Rudolph Abel, the famous Russian spy had an

THE MAILER REVIEW, VOL. 8, NO. 1, FALL 2014. Copyright © 2014. The Norman Mailer Society. Published by The Norman Mailer Society.

apartment. He was arrested there in 1957. In May 1962, after several years living at five different places in Manhattan, Mailer and his third wife, Jeanne Campbell, moved into a four-story apartment building at 142 Columbia Heights. He later sold off the lower floors, but maintained his apartment on the top floor until his death in 2007. In 1949, his parents moved to 128 Willow, just a short walk from his apartment, and he visited there often. His long-time secretary, Judith McNally, also lived nearby, at 62 Hicks Street.

Buildings on the walking tour:

A. 142 Columbia Heights, where Mailer lived longer than any other place. In the 1980s and 90s, he also had a fourth floor writing studio down the street.
B. 106 Columbia Heights, home of John Dos Passos in the late 1920s. He wrote parts of *Manhattan Transfer* (1928) here.
C. 110 Columbia Heights, where Hart Crane lived with Emil Opffer, in the late 1920s, and wrote his epic poem, *The Bridge*, published in 1930.
D. 7 Middagh Street, house now demolished. It was called The February House by Anais Nin (who visited there) because several of its residents had February birthdays. In the early 1940s, poet W.H. Auden, his lover, Chester Kallman, and the composer, Benjamin Britten, lived here, as did Paul and Jane Bowles, Carson McCullers, the ecdysiast, Gypsy Rose Lee, and three of Thomas Mann's children. George Davis, an editor at *Harper's Bazzar* magazine, was the honorary house master. See Sherrill Tippins' book, *The February House* (2005).
E. 19 Cranberry Street, the "Moonstruck" House. The four-story federal-style brownstone was the main set of the 1987 film *Moonstruck*, starring Cher and Nicholas Cage. It sold for $4 million in 2008.
F. 70 Willow Street, home of Truman Capote in the 1960s. When Capote moved there in 1960, Mailer wrote him a note inviting him over, saying, "The possibility suggests itself to light a candle for Senor Capote, our own peripatetic Truman." He wrote *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1958), and *In Cold Blood* (1966) in this 9,000 square foot mansion. It sold for $12.5 million a few years ago.
G. 155 Willow Street. Arthur Miller lived here, one of several places he lived in Brooklyn. He wrote *Death of a Salesman* (1949) at 31 Grace Court, off Remsen Street.
H. 128 Willow Street, home of Mailer's parents from 1949 until Fan's death

in 1985. Barney died in 1972. Norris Mailer lived in a small apartment in the building before moving in with Mailer at 142 Columbia Heights in 1976.

I. 102 Pierrepont Street. Home of the Mailer family from 1943 until 1949. Arthur Miller lived in the same building, and Norman used to meet him at the mailbox. According to Mailer they both had the same thought about the other: "That guy is never going to amount to anything."

J. 91 Remsen Street, corner of Henry Street, where Henry Miller lived with the great love of his life, June Mansfield Smith, in 1925–26.

K. 84 Remsen Street. Norman Rosten, aka "Norm II," lived here. He was the poet laureate of Brooklyn for many years, and was a good friend of Mailer's and Marilyn Monroe's.

L. 49 Remsen Street. Mailer and his first wife Beatrice lived here after he returned from WWII.

M. 20 Remsen Street. Mailer wrote a large part of *The Naked and the Dead* in a one-room attic studio in this building. He sublet it from Norman Rosten for $5 a week. Charlie Devlin (the model for McLeod in *Barbary Shore*), who edited *The Naked and the Dead*, also lived there. Setting for *Barbary Shore*.

N. 5 Montague Terrace. Thomas Wolfe wrote *Of Time and the River* (1935) here in the early 1930s, using the top of a refrigerator as a desk. See his short story, "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn."