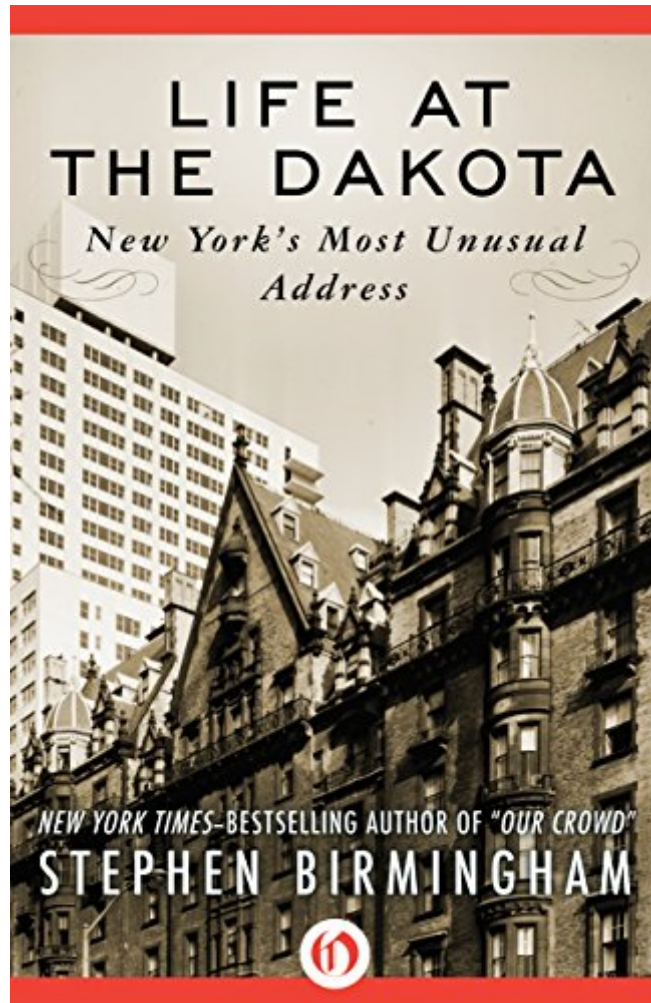


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Life At The Dakota: New York's Most Unusual Address



Synopsis

A riveting history of Manhattan's most eccentric and storied apartment building and the famous tenants who called it home. When Singer sewing machine tycoon Edward Clark built a luxury apartment building on Manhattan's Upper West Side in the late 1800s, it was derisively dubbed "the Dakota" for being as far from the center of the downtown action as its namesake territory on the nation's western frontier. Despite its remote location, the quirky German Renaissance-style castle, with its intricate facade, peculiar interior design, and gargoyle guardians peering down on Central Park, was an immediate hit, particularly among the city's well-heeled intellectuals and artists. Over the next century it would become home to an eclectic cast of celebrity residents including Boris Karloff, Lauren Bacall, Leonard Bernstein, singer Roberta Flack (the Dakota's first African-American resident), and John Lennon and Yoko Ono who were charmed by its labyrinthine interior and secret passageways, its mysterious past, and its ghosts. Stephen Birmingham, author of the New York society classic "Our Crowd", has written an engrossing history of the first hundred years of one of the most storied residential addresses in Manhattan and the legendary lives lived within its walls.

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Customer Reviews

Stephen Birmingham's insightful look at one of New York City's most memorable addresses will be an enjoyment to all who find great interest in the details in the history of this wonderful city. The book studies the story of this well-known landmark from the very beginning; by understanding the background of key figures like Edward Clark (founder of the Singer Co.) and architect Henry Janeway Hardenbergh (designer of the old Waldorf-Astoria and The Plaza Hotel). In an era where 'polished society' observed presentation and 'location' as signs of refinement, the Dakota was one of the first experiments in 'modern' urban living in the United States. Wealthy upper class New Yorkers were presented with a new and less costly option in 'elegant' living to the grand homes rising in late 1800s Fifth Avenue. Although initially frowned upon by the 'Old Guard' of New York society, the Dakota instantly found its market and was one of the pioneers in this now 'acceptable' style of living. Throughout the years the Dakota apartments has found a vast array of 'celebrity tenants'. Individuals who have always been out of the 'mainstream' and have put little thought on which side of Central Park they resided. Boris Karloff, Zachary Scott, Leonard Bernstein, Lauren Bacall, Roberta Flack, John Lennon and Yoko Ono have been a few of the tenants that have called this historically rich building their home. Stephen Birmingham chronicles the first hundred years of 'One 72nd Street West', capturing along the way the growth and changing trends of this vast Metropolis. Readers will also discover that by the end of this witty and insightful book the building itself gains a feisty personality of its own; by being the one that dared being 'too far up' and on the wrong side of town.

A wonderfully entertaining book that chronicles the history of one of New York City's most colorful residences. The early chapters are particularly enjoyable, with tongue-in-cheek descriptions of the (often ludicrous) rituals of high society during the Gilded Age. The last quarter of the book is not as interesting, with sometimes overlong discussion of the building's modern-day residents. As a whole, however, "Life at the Dakota" is a vibrant and ingratiating portrait: not just for history buffs and not just for New Yorkers.

This was an entertaining social history of the Dakota apartment building in New York. The early parts of the book discusses the early history of the building, its first tenants, & its place in the history of the city & this is where the book is at its most interesting. Who knew that early apartment buildings & hotels were frowned upon because they were so much like the tenements of the day? The last bit of the book is a bit gossipy, but that's also delicious in its own way, although

somewhat disconcerting after the earlier historical writing. There are some cool photographs, as well, but I would've liked to have seen more photos of the interior of the building - maybe not the insides of people's apartments, but surely there's a picture of the lobby somewhere! I love the notion of this building going up on the west side of Central Park & being called the Dakota because at the time it was so far out west. Its original budget was a million dollars & it took four years to build - from 1880 to 1884. This, of course, is where John Lennon lived & where he was shot. The exterior of the building has been used in a couple of movies, Rosemary's Baby most notably, but they don't allow filming inside. This is an enjoyable, if not terribly scholarly, book.

Mr. Birmingham did his research well and spoke with many of the old regime of quirky residents (now surely passed on) to bring great detail of the history of this legendary building. I thoroughly enjoyed this book. My only complaint is that this book was first published in 1979 and has not been updated since. Also, I understand that many of the building's residents are very private people, but it would have been nice to see more photographs of the building's interiors. These issues aside, it is a pleasant read for anyone like myself that has always had an interest in this fascinating old building and historic landmark.

Although this book was published thirty years ago, it has surprisingly stood the test of time as a record of a remarkable building. It is of course a bit dated, especially in regard to the most famous residents, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, having been published just a short time before he was killed on the doorstep of the venerable building. Nevertheless, it is well written, thoroughly researched and at times down right riveting, profiling many unique and eccentric characters both famous, infamous and now mostly all forgotten. I would have liked to have seen more photographs. The few pictures published were all certainly interesting, but they only served to whet my appetite for more - thank goodness for the internet! I was able to find many photographs of past residents and a few additional photos of some of the building's interior spaces. But it would have been nice to have it all in one place. Overall, it was a very interesting and satisfying read and would certainly appeal to anyone interested in historical architecture. I only wish there was a follow-up sequel documenting the building's evolution, profiling the building's current tenants.

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