

Cultural Daily

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Central Park Lite

William Zinsser · Wednesday, May 25th, 2011

Central Park and I go back almost as far as a man and a park can go. In the early 1930s, when my sisters and I were children, we sometimes stayed overnight with our grandmother, who lived at 1 West 69th Street. Unskilled at amusing the young, she would give us loaves of stale bread, saved for just such an emergency, and send us across the street into the park to feed the sheep.

At that time Central Park had a flock of 300 sheep that grazed on the vast Sheep Meadow, as it's still called today, and thereby kept it mowed. They were housed in an edifice that was built especially for them in 1871, just inside the park at 67th Street. Ambitious beyond the usual dreams of sheepfold architecture, it had Victorian Gothic gables and spires and was clothed in polychrome red brick—a masonry style that would become the signature of all the park's small buildings. This was the temple to which my sisters and I came bearing our gift of stale bread. Seeing us, the sheep would poke their snouts through slots in the fence that enclosed their courtyard and would nibble at our childish fingers.

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