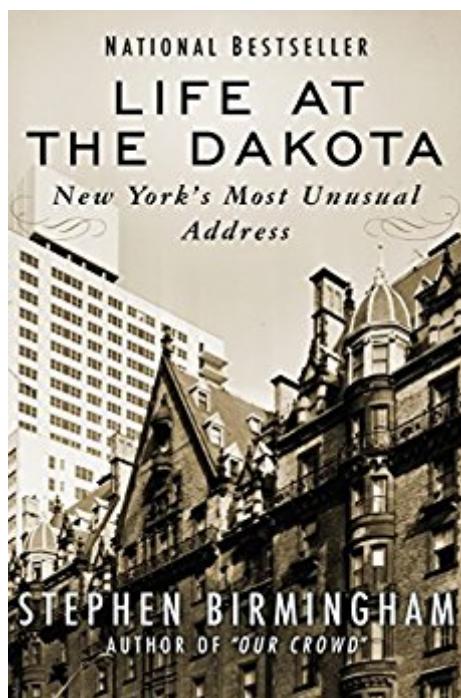


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# Life At The Dakota: New York's Most Unusual Address



## Synopsis

A history of the Manhattan building and its famous tenants, from Lauren Bacall to John Lennon, by the New York Times' best-selling author of "Our Crowd". 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

If there ever was a book that has it all, a book that holds your attention, a book that makes you want to know more, this is it. "Life at the Dakota" is a socioeconomic history of the famous New York City residential building. Yes, that one where scenes from "Rosemary's Baby" was filmed, the one where Jason Robards once slept overnight at the wheel of his car, the one where a resident displayed a her favorite stuffed horse, the one where John Lennon was murdered. The Dakota was constructed between 1880 and 1884 and opened October 27, 1884. It was built by the architectural firm of Henry Janeway Hardenbergh with the design by Edward Clark, the head of the Singer Sewing Machine Company. The Dakota was, indeed, a building well ahead of its time, with central heating, its own in-house power plant, the first elevators installed in a residential building, a gymnasium, and much more. Before it was opened for residency, all of the apartments were leased, and no vacancies existed from then until 1929. The book begins with an in-depth history of New York and the Central Park West area, including the dichotomy of the lifestyles and economic factors between the East and West Sides. Here we learn about the Who and Who Wants to Be and Who Doesn't Care Who. The original apartments, dining room, gymnasium, tennis court, servants' rooms, laundry rooms, wine cellar, et cetera were lavish or simply practical, according to function. No cost was spared. We find that over the years, even at the onset, residents took to moving and rebuilding walls and reconfiguring the space. One resident even had a sunken pool installed, only to be covered over at another time, and then rediscovered during a future remodeling project decades later. There are numerous stories about many of the residents and the employees, their quirkiness, their practicalities, and their contributions and influence on The Dakota. There are people whose names were, or are, well-known, and those who are now shadows in history or pop culture, but intriguing nonetheless. The building became a co-op in the early 1960s, and we learn how that occurred with all its brouhaha, and how that continues to impact its operation today or at least until 1979 when this book was published. This is a very tightly-written book and is, therefore, extremely interesting and difficult to put down. Each chapter is filled with so much material on the people, politics, cloak-and-dagger tomfooleries, and economic data that I want to learn more, yet it's a shame that the book ends its account in 1979. It practically screams for an

addendum to share what happened since then. I recommend "Life at the Dakota" for anyone who likes history, architecture, mystery, intrigue, and/or entertaining ideas. Yes, it even has a trio of old cocktail recipes. There is a book that has it all, a book that holds your attention, a book that makes you want to know more about this is it!

i bought this because of an "ad" on facebook-it promised a view of John Lennon's and Yoko's life at the Dakota. what i got was an awesome book that delved into the complete history of the marvelous apartment complex and the many people who have lived there and the rich background of how it came to be the Landmark it is in NYC....Loved this book...a great read!!!

A great read! I love great stories about the rich and famous, the adventurous, and just about interesting people. Life At the Dakota has this and more. The author gives us the history of how this apartment building came to be constructed and in the process, we learn a lot about New York City at the turn of the 20th Century. I knew that the film, Rosemary's Baby was set at the Dakota (although given a different name in the film) but I had no idea of the quirkiness of the actual building and its tenants over the years. I also knew that John and Yoko Lennon were probably its most famous tenants, along with Lauren Bacall and even Boris Karloff, and, of course, that John Lennon was murdered right in front of the Dakota. However, you won't read about that tragedy in this book. If there is one fault, it's that the story only goes to the late 1970's, maybe 1978, 1979, so there is no mention of the Lennon murder (which occurred in 1980, probably just after this book was published). But don't let that stop you from reading this book. Written by a man who probably loved New York and certainly the Dakota, this enthusiastic ode to both is an enjoyable read.

There is something mythic about the Dakota, the iconic apartment on the corner of what is now W72nd and Central Park West, used as the setting for Rosemary's Baby. When built, it was so far north from "everything," New Yorkers told its builder it might as well be in the territories. Hence its name, and some of the detailing on its facade. The parts I enjoyed most were about East vs West sides, the era of the 1880's, its construction details, and residents of its earlier days. But I began to fade at the gossipy tone of later chapters. The book was published in 1979, and the power struggles between residents were more relevant 30 years ago. Also, John Lennon was still alive, and his and Yoko Ono's presence was example of what was seen as a new order not exactly welcome by some. I wish there was some update on the building's life available. Zillow searches indicate the building

has definitely held its mystique. It is still one of the most desireable addresses in the City if not the entire country -- units are available for as much as \$39M.

Very well researched and well written. I really enjoyed this book. I highly recommend it if you like to learn about New York and those who lived there. Well I watched Rosemary's baby to immersed myself even more in that fascinating building. Great book.

Having grown up less than an hour outside the city, I've been aware of The Dakota most of my life, and have always wanted to see a few of the apartments inside...well, all of them, really. This book gives such a wonderful sense of the whole gestalt of the building, the venue! Someone very close to Bacall told me she's been given the Dakota apartment as an incentive to take, or a thank you for taking, a movie role (shed later receive cars for promoting their luxury brands, tho who knows what she received for promoting cat food). This person said that, while Bacall accepted the large apartment as a gift, by 1979 she complained bitterly and continually that the maintenance on her free apartment had risen to \$20,000/year. Birmingham says they wouldn't accept homosexuals, yet they were willing to accept Rex Reed?? The Dakota basement is full of architectural relics??? A ready fun book...

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