



Rock the Bricks: CBGB/Bowery neighborhood - by Larry Ross

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Welcome to Rock the Bricks, a new series focused on now defunct historic music venues and what happened to the real estate and the surrounding neighborhood.

In this first edition, we look at legendary NYC club CBGB's, which opened in 1973. The full name CBGB & OMFUG stood for Country BlueGrass and Blues, and Other Music for Uplifting Gormadizers (a "voracious eater of music"). Founded by now deceased Hilly Kristal, it was in the Bowery section of Manhattan in a 19th century drinking saloon on the ground floor of a rooming house called the Palace Hotel. The club hosted mainly punk rock and new wave bands featuring rising stars such as Elvis Costello, Ramones, Blondie, The Police, The Talking Heads. The club was well known for its rough décor and lively crowds, which would sometimes spill into the street.

The Bowery at that time was a seedy place where drunks and homeless known as the "Bowery Bums" would beg in the street, often referred to as Skid Row. Some would sleep in dangerous

one-room efficiencies which offered a bed and a locker in wired cage-like rooms. These were often referred to as SRO's, lodging or rooming houses and had shared bathrooms in the hallways, community kitchens and a common lounge area in some cases. Rooms could be had for anywhere from 50 cents to \$2 per night, or special weekly rates.

Originally a farming area, it was first settled in the mid 1600s, and became home to the rich and famous and was known for its taverns and theaters. By the time the civil war rolled around, gangs had moved in and the area had become overpopulated with immigrants leading to a long and steep decline. It wasn't until the 1990s that the area began to gentrify with new residential developments and trendy restaurants. Rents had begun to skyrocket, and the club ultimately closed its doors.

In 2008, clothing designer Jon Varvatos took over the space and paid homage to the original club by maintaining notable interior features. The building remains at 315 Bowery in what is now known as the Bowery Historic District. It remains a pilgrimage site for music fans all over the world and the widely recognizable awning now sits in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.

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