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Sackett Street's Cultural Revolution

Young Ventures in Film, Stage, Books

By Alexa Olesen

Brooklyn, for all its working class practicality and lack of pretentiousness, has always been a place where the people, living in the long shadow of Manhattan's great artistic achievements, have excelled in the creation and appreciation of culture.

The historical record tells of one group in particular, the Brooklyn Forum, which was a debating society that in 1822 "opened its discussions to the public, at the reasonable rate of twelve and one half cents for a gentleman and a lady together."

This debating society was set up by two young law students, one by the name of Clarence D. Sackett.

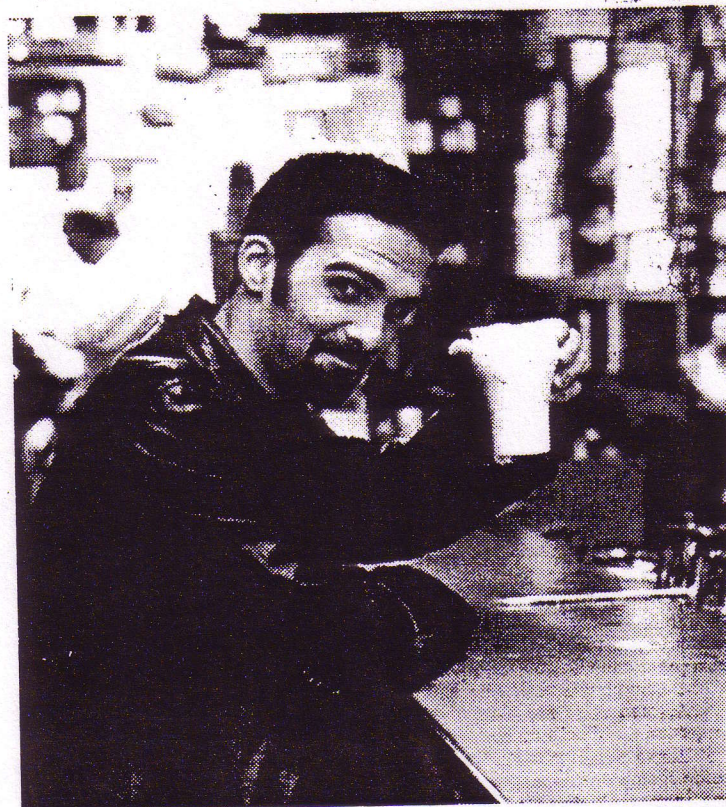
Today another "Sackett" is fostering a cultural renaissance in Brooklyn. It is not a young gentleman lawyer, but rather a stretch of asphalt known as Sackett Street. The arts, in the form of theater, literature and film are germinating along Sackett Street these days all the way from Hicks to Smith.

Three new cultural ventures, a film company, a theater group and a specialist bookstore have all taken root there over the past few years. And all three take great pride and inspiration from their very "Brooklyn" creative identities.

The Film Maker

Paul Bracco does not aspire to be a film maker or actor. He is both. At 25 years old he has already formed his own film company, Red Hook Films, which was incorporated in January of this year. He also recently completed the shooting of his first feature film, titled *The Court*.

A third generation Sicilian American and proud Carroll Gardens resi-



Film maker Paul Bracco 'hoists' an egg cream at Lou Guardascione's candy store on Henry Street, where he filmed part of *The Court*, a feature almost ready for release. Bracco is one of Sackett Street's new cultural movers.
Photo by Chris Olesen

dent Bracco says: "I've always had this philosophy. If you can't get it, make your own."

So Bracco wrote his script, saw it through the 28 drafts it took to finish it, played the lead in and directed *The Court*. Over a one-month period last spring, Bracco shot nearly every scene of his movie in his neighborhood, Carroll Gardens.

The movie, which is nearly fin-

ished and ready for release and distribution, is described by Bracco as an Italian wise guy flick about "four guys in the neighborhood. You see one man have a fall with grace and one boy become a man."

One central setting of the film was Lou Guardascione's candy store at 575 Henry street. The characters

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meet, talk and drink egg creams at the candy store's counter, just like, says Bracco, he himself did as a kid. Bracco's ideas for the script arose from his own experiences in the neighborhood and from stories he heard his father tell about growing up in the Carroll Gardens of a former era.

"I wanted to try and get a little of the old camaraderie of the older generation and the cowboy feeling of the newer generation," said Bracco about the inspiration behind the film.

Another Brooklyn actor, Eli Wallach, was quoted in an oral history of Brooklyn as having had very similar candy store experiences.

Wallach's parents owned a Red Hook candy store called Bertha's and it was there that he found inspiration for his portrayals of wise guys as well. "As in all candy stores, people hung around. Some of them were Mafia guys. I've played these tough guy roles, like the one in *Godfather III*, and based my characterizations in the people I used to see hanging around Bertha's."