

BLACKWELL HOUSE



Above, the rebuilt Blackwell House, eastern view, ca. 1985. Below, ca. 1893. The northern wing of the house (right) was razed when the house was rebuilt in 1973.



Blackwell's Island was owned and farmed by the Blackwell family from 1686 until 1828, when the family sold it to the city for \$52,000. For the last thirty years of this ownership, the family lived in this modest clapboard cottage, built by James Blackwell in 1796.

The residence would have never been built if the attempts of the financially pressed James Blackwell to sell the island in 1784 had proved successful. Instead, due to either unsuccessful marketing or financial turnaround, he built this house. It now stands as the oldest structure on Roosevelt Island, the sixth oldest house in New York City, and one of the city's last examples of eighteenth-century architecture.

Under city ownership, various administrators for the island's institutions resided here, including the keeper of the nearby Blackwell's Island Almshouse, a city-run facility for paupers. In the mid-1900s, the house was abandoned, and by the 1960s, it had fallen into considerable disrepair.



A piece of Roosevelt Island's history dear to those who grew up here: Above, the old wooden Blackwell Park playground, 1976. Below, the playground's 1990 renovation.



In 1973 Giorgio Cavaglieri rebuilt Blackwell House, maintaining the southern kitchen wing and a Greek Revivalist portico over the western doorway (a city addition). In 1975 the house was designated a New York City landmark, and Nicholas Quennell Associates designed the park that now surrounds it. In 1986 a collaborative community effort refurbished the interior. The house has served as a meeting place for the Roosevelt Island Historical Society.

To continue the tour, cross Main Street and follow Main Street north (that is, away from the Queensboro Bridge). Follow the white and green "Roosevelt Island Historical Walk" signs.