

MANHATTAN PARK & MOTORGATE GARAGE COMPLEX

Surrounding this formal European-style sitting park is Northtown Phase II, better known as the **MANHATTAN PARK** residential complex. Opened in 1989, Manhattan Park was designed by Gruzen Samton and Steinglass



The Blackwell's Island Workhouse, built in 1852, stretched 600 feet from the present-day 4 River Road to 30 River Road. Replacing an older facility at Manhattan's Bellevue Hospital, the Workhouse was a detention house for the city's many petty criminals. Most Workhouse inmates were serving sentences for drunkenness or disorderly conduct.

Across the street is the **MOTORGATE GARAGE COMPLEX**, built in 1974. Motorgate may seem like just another car garage. It has a 1,000-car capacity, expanded in 1990 to 1,710. On top of that, it has won an award for the most use of cement in a given area. Despite its apparent indistinctiveness, Motorgate was constructed for a rather unusual purpose. Designed by Kallmann & McKinnell, it was originally meant as the stopping point for all vehicles crossing the Roosevelt Island Bridge. The complex was the only boarding point for buses to Queens. For pedestrians, the towering, glass-enclosed structure on the garage's south side was once the only gateway to Roosevelt Island. As all vehicles were funneled into the Motorgate garage, the island reaped the rewards of a "traffic-free" community.



Motorgate Garage Complex, 1999

and developed by Roosevelt Island Associates (a partnership of Starett Housing Corporation and Cohen Brothers Associates). The complex has five buildings, four offering a total of 884 market-rate rental units and the fifth offering 223 federally subsidized units under the Section 8 program. All five buildings have addresses on River Road, the street that loops this park.

Along with Northtown I, Manhattan Park, according to the 1990 census, has brought Roosevelt Island's population up to around 8,200. Furthermore, with an estimated 30 to 40 percent of its residents employed by the United Nations, the complex has contributed significantly to the island's ethnic diversity.



Above, Manhattan Park, 1999.

Below, Manhattan Park under construction, 1988.



But the rewards were short-lived. The island's traffic restrictions were first amended to allow drop-offs and pick-ups. Eventually, traffic restrictions were lifted altogether. Despite these changes, Motorgate remains the main parking area for island residents. Among other functions, the complex has hosted modern sculpture exhibits and weekly produce markets. The island's post office and its only supermarket, Gristede's, are on the complex's ground floor.

For those just joining the tour: This tour begins with a plaque at the island's southern tip about Strecker Memorial Laboratory. To reach this plaque, follow the island's Queens-facing seawall south (that is, towards the Queensboro Bridge). To join the tour from any point, look for plaques like this one and follow the white and green "Roosevelt Island Historical Walk" signs. The tour ends with the Lighthouse at the island's northern tip.

Roosevelt Island Historical Walk