

BOATING TO ROOSEVELT ISLAND

Although this wharf is purely decorative, it allows us a chance to discuss...well, boats, which, for most of the island's history, were either the only or the primary means of reaching here.

The city established itself on the island in the 1830s. Rowboats were still used here well into the 1880s, even though steam was in wide use by 1810. This lithograph (right), dated 1862, shows row boats docked at 84th Street from where, every hour, they would depart for the Workhouse on Blackwell's Island. The 84th Street Dock was structured much like the other docks of the Upper East Side: They were mostly flimsy wooden constructions, and accessing them involved descending the muddy cliffs of Manhattan's coastline.



Around 1880 the *MINNAHAMOCK* became the first steamer to serve the island. Styled after the island's Native American name, the *Minnahamock* made two trips daily from Bellevue Hospital's 26th Street dock. Here it is pictured (ca. 1893) docked at the island's City Hospital landing.

In December 1894 another steamer, the *WILLIAM H. WICKHAM*, began service, transporting visiting staff and patients from a reception ward at the East 70th Street dock to the island's Metropolitan Hospital (a general medical facility specializing in tuberculosis). By 1911 a small third steamer, the *BRONX*, pictured here (ca. 1916), was in service. The *Bronx* and the *Wickham* operated daily from 7 A.M. to 1 A.M., sometimes as often as every 15 minutes.



When the Elevator Storehouse at the Queensboro Bridge opened in 1919, the facilities at the East 70th Street dock were no longer needed. A new dock was built at 86th Street. From this dock, the last steamer to serve the island, the *WELFARE*, pictured here, began service to Metropolitan Hospital in November 1930.



In 1955 with the opening of the Welfare Island Bridge, regular ferry service ended altogether. In 1986, however, ferry service made a brief, two-month return, carrying commuters from the dock east of the Tram to Wall Street's Pier 11. This short-lived ferry is pictured here. (The sign in the upper-left corner, warning about "dangerous cargo," pertains to the pier's continuing use as an oil dock for Coler and Goldwater Hospitals.)

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 Society

Roosevelt Island Historical Walk

Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation