

## THIS ISLAND'S MANY NAMES

You have already been told a couple of Roosevelt Island's past names, namely Blackwell's and Welfare. But did you know that the island has had a total of six different names? Take a deep breath:

- ◆ Native Americans called the island **MINNAHANOCK**, which can translate into pretty much every possible phrase involving the word "island." Among the myriad translations are "Long Island" and "It's Nice to be on the Island." Some sources claim, however, that "Minnahanock" belongs to the present-day Randall's Island.
- ◆ When Holland colonized the area in the early 1600s, Wouter van Twiller, the second director-general (mayor) of New Amsterdam, misappropriated funds and purchased the island for himself from the natives. (He probably



*Blackwell's Island, 1908*

never set foot on it.) This purchase was later voided by Peter Stuyvesant, the last governor of New Netherlands, and the island came under direct Dutch control. The first known inhabitant of the island was one Jan Claessen Alteras, who, probably under contract to Holland's West India Company, farmed here as early as 1639. He built, among other structures, a house, a goat-pen, and a sowed garden. A map of this time labels the island **VARCKENS EYLANDT** (or "Hog Island").

- ◆ In 1665 the English gained control of the city, and under the Act of October 10, 1665, they confiscated this island. Two years later, King Charles granted the island to Captain John Manning, sheriff of New York City, for his heroism against the Dutch. Thus the island became **MANNING'S ISLAND**. In 1673 England and Holland were again at war. While defending Fort James (formerly Fort Amsterdam), Manning hastily surrendered New York after Holland's first attack. Although England ultimately regained New York, Manning pleaded guilty to cowardice and treason, was publicly humiliated, and retired to his island in disgrace. Despite his shame, he lived his last years rather comfortably in a mansion dubbed "the castle" at the island's southern end.
- ◆ In 1685 the island was passed down to Manning's stepdaughter, Mary Manningham, wife of Robert Blackwell, and thus it became **BLACKWELL'S ISLAND**, a name that would stick for the next 236 years.
- ◆ In 1828 the city paid James Blackwell \$32,500 for the island, but the details surrounding the transaction were later found illegal, and the city paid another \$20,000 to secure it. The city built many charitable and correctional facilities here, but by the early 1900s, these were heavily steeped in scandal. In 1921 the city changed the island's name to **WELFARE ISLAND** in an effort to erase its horrific reputation.
- ◆ By 1970 the island was slated for residential development. To reflect the island's changed role, John V. Lindsay, mayor of New York, signed legislation in 1973 officially renaming it **FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT ISLAND**.

*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, away from 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, 1985. The spray of water in the foreground is the Delacorte Fountain, which once shot water 200 feet above the East River.*