

TURNSTILE/TOURS

Wall Street to Astoria Ferry Guide

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East River Islands

There are several islands in the East River, and like much of New York City's waterfront, few of them have natural coastlines. Just south of Roosevelt Island, **U Thant Island**, named for the third Secretary General of the UN, was created from material excavated during construction of a tunnel that is today used by the 7 train. As we head further up the river, many islands were reshaped to make the dangerous waters of the Hell Gate, the waterway that connects the East River to Long Island Sound, more navigable. **Mill Rock**, visible when crossing from Astoria to East 90th St, was formerly two smaller islands that were merged with debris taken from the demolition of Flood Rock in 1885, the largest planned explosion in history until World War I (pictured). **Randalls and Wards Island**, which are conjoined (along with a third, forgotten island called Sunken Meadow) to form a large municipal complex of sports fields, emergency services, a wastewater treatment plant, and the city's largest homeless shelter. It is crossed by both the Triboro and Hell Gate Bridges, and it is accessible by a pedestrian lift bridge.



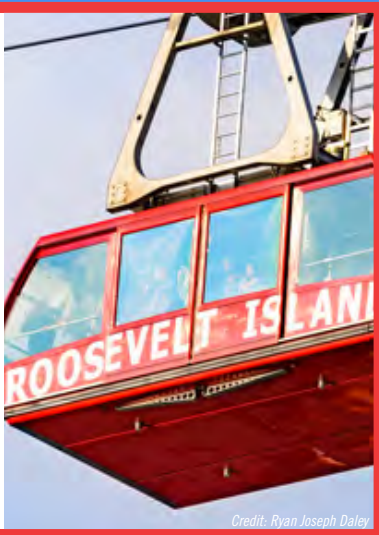
East River Barges

While we often think of the East River as a barrier to be crossed between the boroughs, it remains an important commercial artery. The primary traffic on the river is barges, carrying everything from construction materials to **garbage** to fuel. While today most barges are passing through the East River en route to Newtown Creek or Long Island Sound, there remain many examples of historic barge infrastructure still visible today. In the first half of the 20th century, many barges carried train cars, as New York City did not have a direct freight rail link across the Hudson River, so trains would be moved by specialized barges called car floats. The structure emblazoned with "Long Island City" in **Gantry Plaza** was a terminal for these car floats, as was **Marsha P. Johnson State Park**, formerly known as Eastern District Terminal. In 1918, New York State completed a major expansion of the Erie Canal, including building new terminals in New York City; remnants can still be found in **Hallets Cove**, right next to the Astoria ferry landing, and in **Greenpoint**. Many cultural institutions can now be found on this stretch of waterfront, including **MoMA PS1**, **Noguchi Museum**, and **Socrates Sculpture Park**.



Roosevelt Island

Formerly known as Blackwell's Island, this strip of land in the middle of the East River long served as a place of exile. The city built a prison on the island in 1832, followed by the asylum in 1835, who's **octagonal dome** still stands near the north end of the island. A workhouse followed in 1852, then **Renwick Hospital** for smallpox patients in 1856, which stands as the only landmarked ruin in NYC. Even though the Queensboro/Ed Koch Bridge spanned the island in 1909, it remained largely inaccessible. Not until the 1970's did housing arrive on the island, as it was reimagined as a model community with car-free streets and a vacuum tube system to dispose of garbage, and it was renamed in honor of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, as it sits opposite the **United Nations**. The **aerial tramway** opened in 1976 and was the only public transit to the island until the arrival of the subway in 1989 and NYC Ferry in 2017. More recent developments on the island include **Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park**, designed by Louis Kahn in 1974 but not completed until 2012, and **Cornell Tech**, a 12-acre technology campus that is a joint venture between Cornell University and Technion-Israel.



Credit: Ryan Joseph Daley

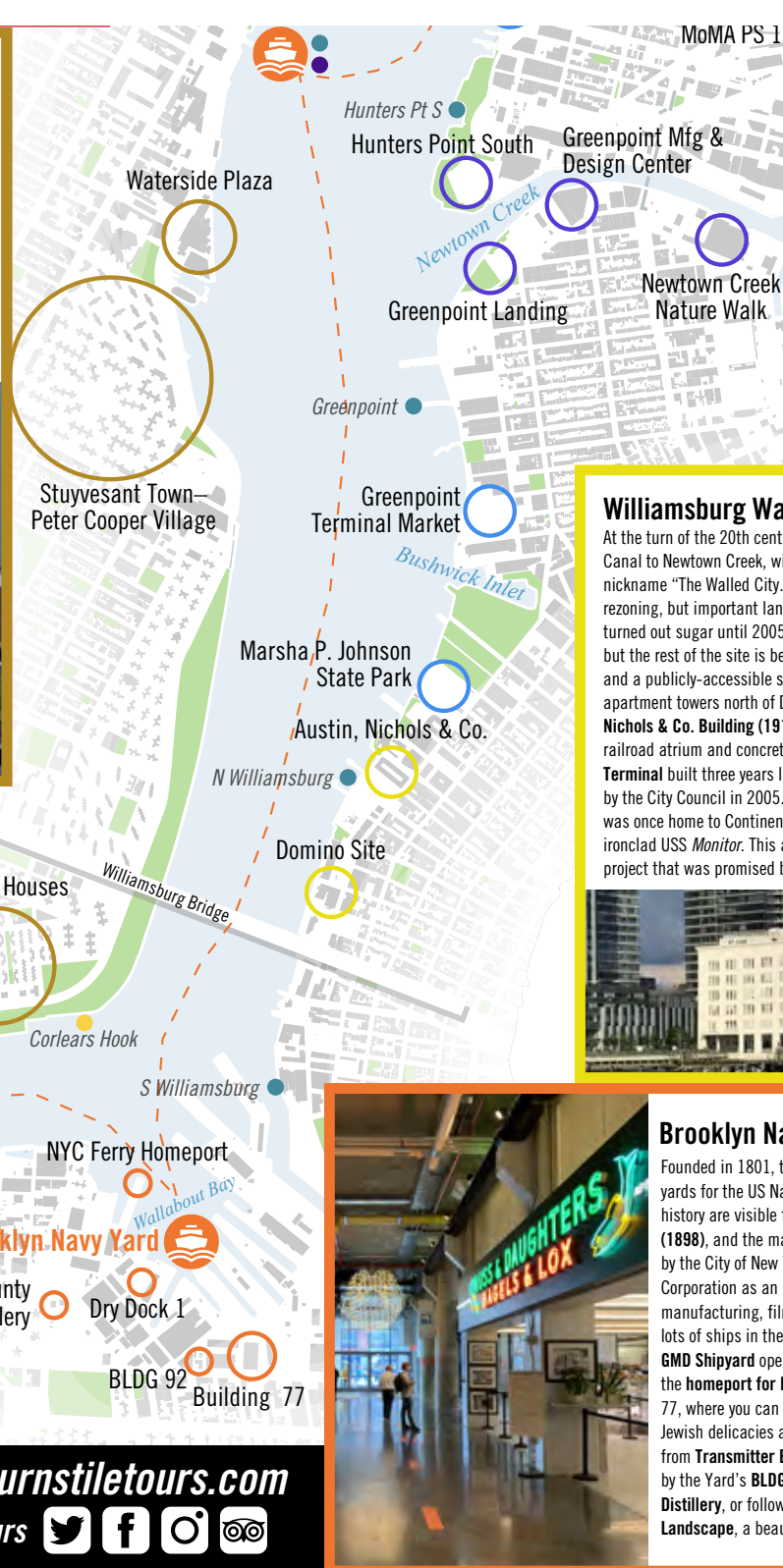


Newtown Creek

The stream that forms the border between Brooklyn and Queens, the Newtown Creek was channelized into an industrial canal, and by the mid-19th century, it had become a center of the petrochemical industry. Leaking underground storage tanks spilled an estimated 30 million gallons of oil into the

Housing History

Along the East River, you can see important moments in the history of housing in New York City. **Tudor City (1927)** was an early apartment complex that tried to lure wealthy residents away from the suburbs with a cloistered development and lots of in-house amenities. Note how Tudor Tower and Prospect Tower have small windows facing the river; elevators and utilities were put on the back side, as residents did not want views of the industrial waterfront. As the Depression hit, NYC built huge amounts of public housing, and you can see many early NYCHA developments, including the **Vladeck Houses (1940)** and the **Queensbridge Houses (1941)**, the largest public housing complex in the US. To supplement public housing, NYC supported the private development of affordable apartments, but this stirred major controversy when MetLife built its massive **Stuyvesant Town–Peter Cooper Village (1947)** explicitly for white residents only, sparking a major civil rights fight. **Waterside Plaza (1973)**, the four-tower complex jutting into the river, was built under the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program, which created limited-profit co-ops for middle-income housing and limited resale prices and rent increases (Waterside exited this program in 2001).



surrounding water and soil. Today there is significantly less traffic on the creek, but it still has a number of industrial tenants, including **Sims Metals Management**, the **Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center**, and the **Newtown Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant**, which features public access to the creek and a nature walk. The mouth of the creek is now flanked by two large residential developments, **Hunters Point South** and **Greenpoint Landing**.



Williamsburg Waterfront

At the turn of the 20th century, Brooklyn's industrial waterfront stretched from the Gowanus Canal to Newtown Creek, with an unbroken chain of factories and warehouses earning it the nickname "The Walled City." Today the waterfront is largely residential, the result of a 2005 rezoning, but important landmarks of this industrial past remain in Williamsburg. Domino turned out sugar until 2005; the landmarked **Pan, Filter, and Finishing House (1882)** remains, but the rest of the site is being redeveloped with commercial, office, and residential highrises, and a publicly-accessible space called **Domino Park** opened in 2018. Amidst the glass apartment towers north of Domino, you can see a white, low-slung building. The **Austin, Nichols & Co. Building (1915)** was designed by Cass Gilbert as a dry goods warehouse, and its railroad atrium and concrete construction would serve as a prototype for his **Brooklyn Army Terminal** built three years later. Today it is apartments, and it had its landmark status revoked by the City Council in 2005. Further up the river, a small, wooded cove called **Bushwick Inlet** was once home to Continental Iron Works, the shipbuilder that constructed the Civil War ironclad USS *Monitor*. This area is slated to become part of Bushwick Inlet Park, a long-delayed project that was promised by the city in exchange for the 2005 neighborhood rezoning.



Brooklyn Navy Yard

Founded in 1801, the Yard served as one of the principal construction and repair yards for the US Navy until 1966. Structures from many different eras of the Yard's history are visible from the water, including **Dry Dock No. 1 (1851)**, **Building 128 (1898)**, and the massive **Building 77 (1942)**. Since 1969, the Yard has been owned by the City of New York and is operated by the Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation as an industrial park, home to 500+ businesses and 11,000+ jobs in manufacturing, film production, technology, and creative industries. You will notice lots of ships in the Wallabout Bay – most of the cranes in the Yard still work, as **GMD Shipyard** operates the largest ship repair facility in the region, and the Yard is the **homeport for NYC Ferry**. From the ferry stop, follow the exit signs to Building 77, where you can grab food and drinks at the Food Manufacturing Hub, including Jewish delicacies at **Russ & Daughters**, Haitian cuisine at **Grandchamps**, and beer from **Transmitter Brewing**. Head out onto Flushing Ave – turn right, and you'll pass by the Yard's **BLDG 92** museum, **Wegmans** grocery store, and **Kings County Distillery**, or follow the fence to the left and stop by the **Naval Cemetery Landscape**, a beautiful green space created by the Brooklyn Greenway Initiative.



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