

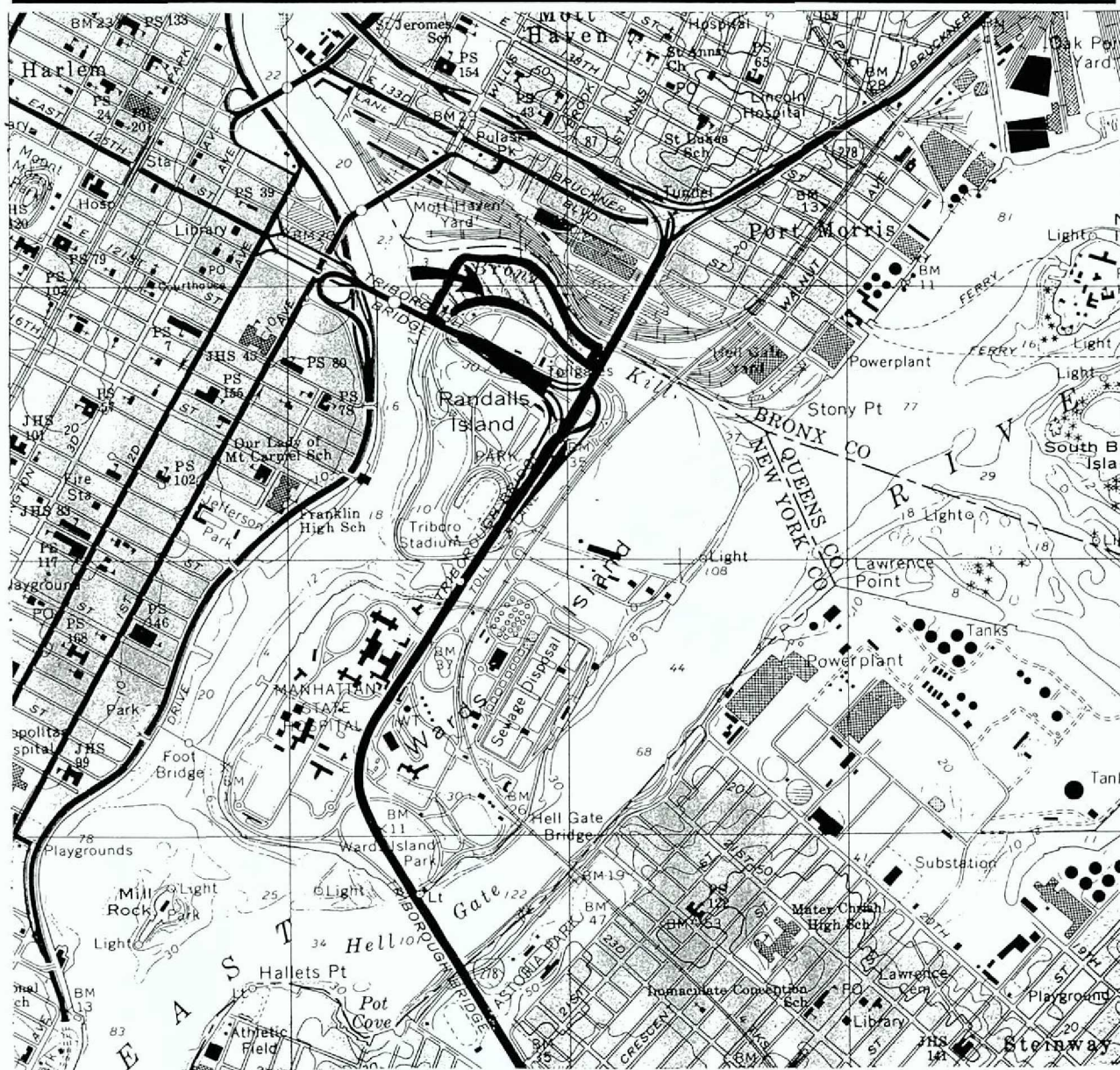
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RANDALL'S ISLAND WATERPARK

RANDALL'S ISLAND, NEW YORK

AQUATIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP INC.

PHASE IA ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT



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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Generally, in order to make a recommendation for archaeological testing, it is necessary to determine first of all the age and nature of possible remains in the project area and then, if it is determined that significant archaeological remains may be present, whether or not successive construction episodes in the past have negatively impacted them. If no evidence of subsurface disturbance is discovered during the phase IA archaeological assessment, and the research determines that possible remains have the potential to yield significant historical information, a recommendation for field testing is made in order to determine the presence or absence of such remains on the project sites.

With respect to the project site under consideration here, the following conclusions and recommendations are made:

Regarding prehistoric periods, the map of inventoried prehistoric archaeological sites compiled by the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation shows that the likelihood of prehistoric use of the project site is very low as no prehistoric sites have been located on Randall's or Ward's Islands.

For historic periods, there was no substantial building on the islands -- beyond a few farmsteads not located in the project area -- before the middle of the 19th century (fig. 13). From 1847 until the present, Randall's island has been the site of a series of public and charitable institutions, but none of these was located in the area of the project site. The closest buildings to the project site were located near the Triborough Bridge and were demolished to make way for its construction (fig. 18). Most of the project site area is landfill (fig. 2).

The writer would like to thank Michael Greenman, C.P.G., Deputy Director, City of NY, Department of Design and Construction, for information on soil borings.

II. PROJECT SITE

Aquatic Development Group Inc. proposes to create a concession within a public park consisting of an aquatic entertainment complex. The facilities will include a wave pool, speed slide, tube slides, family raft slides, children's recreation areas and a food court and rest areas (fig. 1). The park will occupy an approximately 15-acre site on the northwest shore of Randall's Island bounded on the south by the road running immediately north of the Triborough Bridge and on the east by an existing parking lot (fig. 1). It should be noted, however, that this Phase IA report analyzes a larger 23-acre area, which extends to the Bronx Approach of the Triborough Bridge (front cover). The Triborough bridge, opened in 1936, dominates Randall's Island. It runs from Manhattan to Randall's Island in a line approximately parallel to the northern side of the island, where the project site is located, then makes two right angled turns, one to the north, over the Bronx Kill -- the Bronx Bridge -- the second running southward across Ward's island.

The analyzed area is currently occupied by an approximately 125-space parking lot and ten partly overlapping baseball fields (figs. 3 to 10). The elevation of this area ranges from 3.6 feet above msl. at the northwestern edge of the project site, at the shore, to 10.4 feet at the roadway that forms the project site's southern border (City of New York Parks & Recreation 1994). On the opposite side of the roadway are a three-story stone office building belonging to the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority (TBTA) and a two-story brick garage belonging to the New York City Parks Department. There is a parking lot on the west side of the garage, partly under the highway overpass.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING

Writing in 1872, Richmond described Randall's island as originally largely swamp and granite hills.¹ Topographic maps show that the Triborough Bridge roughly follows the line of a ridge that ran parallel to the northern end of the island. Northwest of this ridge, in the project area, was marshland, as shown on the Viele map (fig. 11). During the 19th century, the charitable institutions that opened on the island established orchards and farms to feed their inmates. Today, large tracts of Randall's island are occupied by recreational parkland.

Originally comprising some 100 acres, today Randall's island is approximately 195 acres.² It was enlarged by filling the waterway that once separated it from a small island, called Sunken Meadow, that lay immediately to the east, thus incorporating Sunken Meadow into Randall's Island (fig. 12). In addition, most of the Bronx Kill, which separates Randall's Island from the Bronx, was filled, leaving only a narrow channel (fig. 2). The Bronx Kill was once about as wide as the East River at 125th Street. The East River branches around the island. The western branch is called the Harlem River.

The filling of the waterways that separated Randall's Island from Sunken Meadow and the Bronx and resulted in the narrowing of the east branch of the East River began ca. 1935 (fig. 2, USC & GS map 1935). At first, two seawalls extending northward from the northeast corner of Ward's island and from a point near the Hellgate Bridge were erected. These seawalls in time encircled Sunken Meadow and formed the edge of the landfill. A 1956 New York Times article detailed that the forty-six acre Sunken Meadow Island would be added to Randall's island by filling in the part of Little Hell Gate that separated the two. At that time, Sunken Meadow was not inhabited.

The successive episodes of landfilling recorded on USC & GS maps from 1934, 1935, 1941 and 1969 are shown together on fig. 2. From this it becomes clear that most of the project site area is composed of landfill.

A soil boring taken on the south side of the Parks Department garage recorded a surface elevation of 15', the top 5' consisting of miscellaneous fill. Below this was brown silt with traces of clay and little to some fine sand with traces of gravel -- a typically lacustrine deposit. A series of five borings were taken along the northernmost point of the shoreline, at distances from the waterfront varying from 5 to 15 feet. These revealed fills of 20 to 25 feet in depth that were created by the infilling of the shore.³

¹ Richmond 1872, 562.

² New York Times 1956; "Toward North Brother Island," 1978.

³ New York City Dept of General Services, Division of Public Structures, Bureau of Building Design, boring 1347, Feb. 11, 1982; New York City Dept. Of Public Works, Bureau of

III. HISTORY OF RANDALL'S ISLAND

The Indian name for Randall's Island was Minnahanouth.⁴

The English confiscated Randall's Island from the States General and awarded it to Thomas Delavall.⁵ When Delavall's great grandson, Elias Pison, came from England in 1732 to claim his inheritance, he built a house on Randall's Island and renamed it Belle Isle.⁶

Randall's Island was henceforth named after its successive owners. After Pison sold it to St. George Talbot, who resided here from 1747 to 1765, it was known as Talbot Island. Talbot left the land to the Society in Great Britain for Propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts. They sold it to John Montresor, a military surveyor who created the famous New York City map that bears his name. Montresor resided on the island from 1772 through the British occupation during the Revolutionary War, when British troops were stationed here. During his tenure it was called "Montresor's Island." The Americans attempted unsuccessfully to capture the island in 1776. In 1777, all Montresor's buildings and outhouses were burnt.

Montresor returned to England in 1783. The City of New York confiscated his property and sold it to Samuel Ogden, in 1784, who sold it to Jonathan Randall (or John Randall, or Jonathan Randel).⁷ Randall purchased both Randall's Island and Sunken Meadow and moved with his family to the island which still bears his name. It remained in the Randall family until 1835 when it was conveyed to New York City for \$60,000.

In the 19th century, a number of charitable institutions built structures on Randall's Island, but none of these was located on the project site. There was also a potter's field, probably located in the southern part of the island. This operated between 1843 and ca. 1850.⁸

⁴ American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society 28th Annual Report, pp. 33-34. The author cites Beauchamp's *Aboriginal Place Names* for the translation of the Indian names. The historical summary in this section is largely taken from this source.

⁵ Smith 1962, p. 100.

⁶ Valentine's Manual 1855, p. 494.

⁷ The article cited in note 3 above gives "John Randall" as the name of the purchaser. In Seitz 1996, p. 164, it is Jonathan Randel, in Smith 1962, p. 101, Jonathan Randall.

⁸ Alms House Governors 1850, p. 15; Bergoffen 2001, pp. 13-17.

The oldest of the charitable institutions was the Nurseries, a hospital and home for indigent children. It is marked "Randels Island Hospital" on the 1885 Robinson map (fig. 15). The heart of the complex was a row of five buildings erected in 1847 on the northeast side of the island, facing east towards the river (figs. 15 to 17). A large farm stretching over the northern part of the island, possibly encompassing the project site area, produced vegetables for the nurseries.⁹ The nurseries were initially administered by the Commissioners of Charities and Corrections, as was the "idiot asylum", located immediately to the west. It was a three-story brick building with wings that housed 141 patients. The building was replaced by one of the dormitories of the nursery, either Dix or Sunnyside, that were built in 1919 and removed prior to the construction of the Triborough Bridge (fig. 18). The Infants Hospital, also used for adults, opened in 1869 on the western side of the island, south of the project site area and the Triborough Bridge (fig. 15). It could accommodate 153 adults and 217 children.¹⁰ The mortality rate in this institution's early years was high. Epidemics were rampant, due to the lack of good water. In 1870, 710 of the 1516 infants under care died. In 1868 there were 383 deaths, or 21.1% per month; in 1869, 156, or 10.07% per month.¹¹ Some or all of these individuals would presumably have been buried in the new potters field on Hart's Island, which opened in 1868.¹²

The notorious House of Refuge, opened in 1854 and built by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents, was located on 30 acres in the southern part of the island (figs. 15 to 17). In 1869 there were 1775 inmates. It closed in 1935 and the inmates were transferred to the New York State Vocational Institution in West Coxsackie.

In 1909, the New York City Children's Hospitals and Schools on Randall's Island served 1,482 children.¹³ In 1913, the Commissioner of Charities, Michael J. Drummond stated that the "school for defectives" comprised 50 buildings and had 700 students.¹⁴ In addition to this facility, there was a hospital school for normal children and an industrial school with one department for boys and one for girls. The industrial school is shown on fig. 18, an undated plan probably made in the 1920s. The school stood south of the line of the Bridge. The buildings on the north side of the proposed line of the Triborough Bridge -- Edgewater, Pinel Hall, Ivy Hall, Dix -- may have been

⁹ Richmond 1872, p. 562.

¹⁰ Ibid., 564.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 565.

¹² Between the time that the Randall's Island potter's field went out of use, ca. 1850, and the opening of the potter's field on Hart's Island in 1868, a potter's field on Ward's Island was used, Bergoffen 2001, pp. 13-17.

¹³ City of New York, Dept. Of Public Charities, May 29, 1909, p. 9.

¹⁴ Drummond 1913, p. 4; the figure must include all the small buildings shown on the map.

1920s. The school stood south of the line of the Bridge. The buildings on the north side of the proposed line of the Triborough Bridge — Edgewater, Pinel Hall, Ivy Hall, Dix — may have been residences. As the map has no scale, it is difficult to determine exactly where these structures stood, but the location of the L-shaped pier on the west shore, and of the roadway in relation to the original coastline (fig. 2) shows that they must have occupied the area south of the roadway.

The 1913 description of the various schools makes them sound rather like a labor camp. Most of the instruction was of the industrial sort, with manual training in shoe repair and cobbling, weaving, mat and rug making, basketry, carpentry, furniture making, sewing, chair caning, and embroidery.¹⁶ All 125,00 yards of material used in the institution for bedding or clothing in 1912 was cut by a class of 18 "feeble minded" boys. All the clothing and shoe repairs were also done by the children.¹⁷

¹⁶ Drummond 1913, pp. 7-10.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is no evidence for prehistoric settlement on Randall's Island.

There is no evidence of any building on the project site, which is mostly composed of landfill. The nearest structures, probably residence halls connected with the New York City Children's Hospitals and Schools, were erected in 1919.

This report therefore concludes that no archaeological testing is necessary in the project site area.

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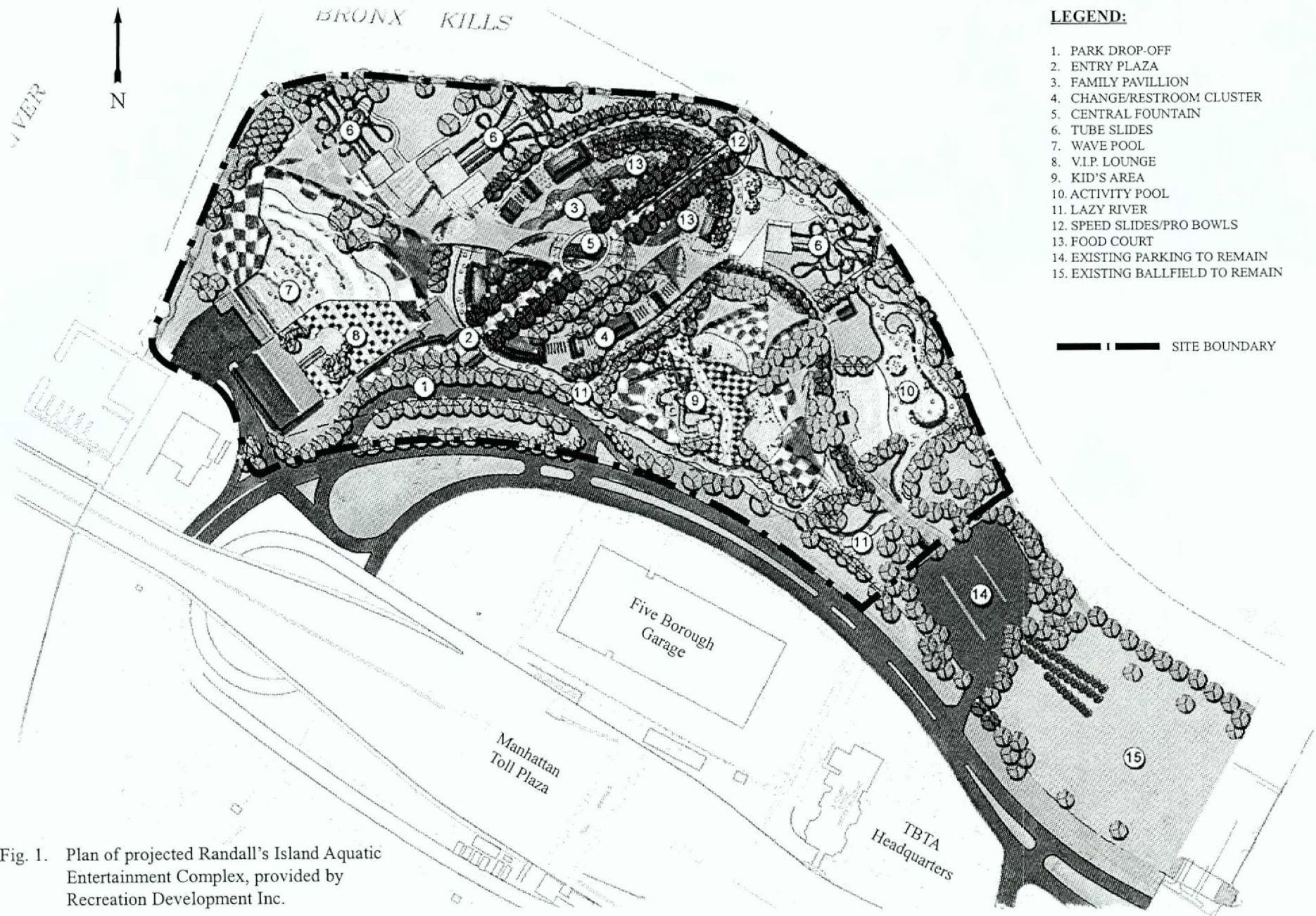
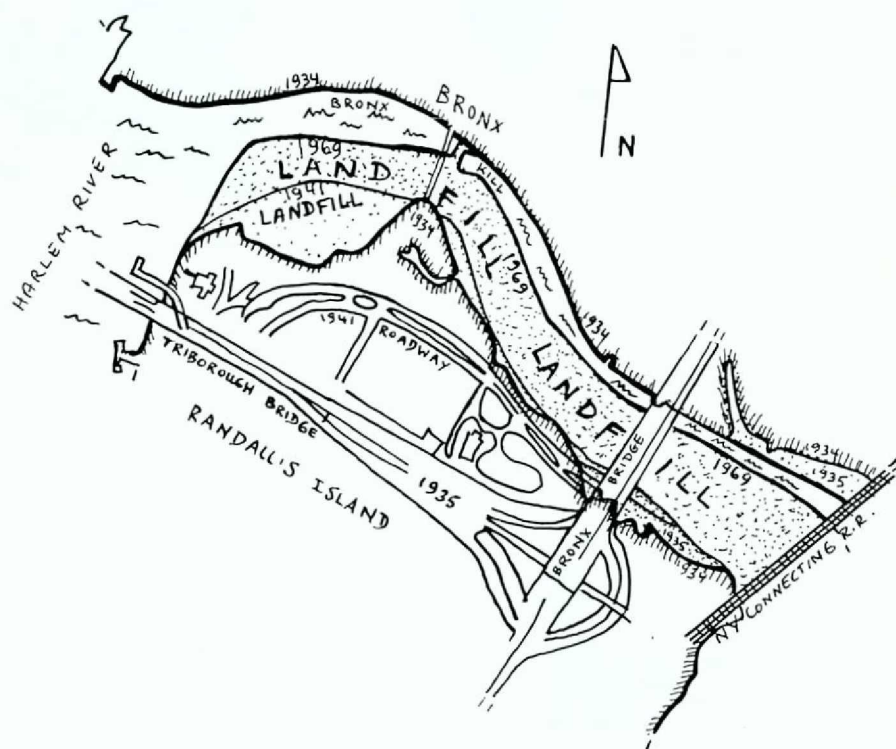


Fig. 1. Plan of projected Randall's Island Aquatic Entertainment Complex, provided by Recreation Development Inc.



KEY




-  Landfill
-  Original shorelines
-  1935 Date of USC & GS map from which the feature was traced
 (For the landfills, not the necessarily the date they were created)

Fig. 2. Tracing of the 1934, 1935, 1941 and 1969 USC & GS maps showing the successive episodes of landfill on the north side of Randall's Island, where the project site is located. Scale: 1: 10,000.

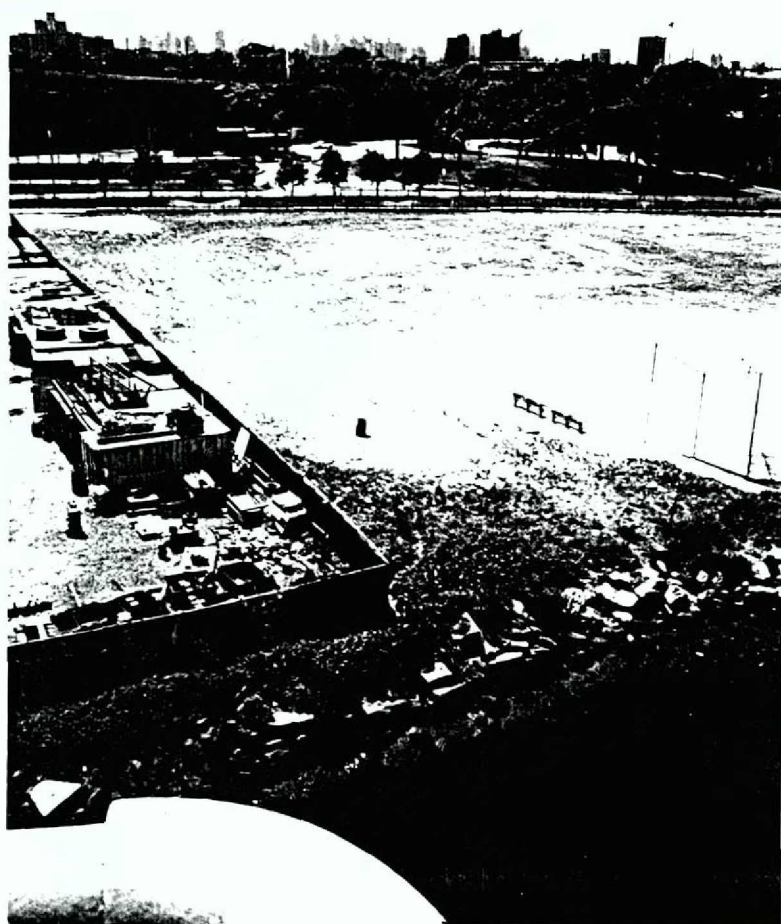


Fig. 3. (Left) View of the eastern end of the project site from the Bronx Bridge, looking south.

Fig. 4. (Below) View of the Harlem River shoreline, the edge of the project site, looking south to the Triborough Bridge.





Fig. 5. View over the project site from the Bronx Bridge, looking west; the Bronx Kill is in the center; the Parks Department's two-story brick garage and the Triborough Bridge are on the left.



Fig. 6. Close up of fig. 5, looking west, showing the northwest corner of the project site.



Fig. 7. View from the Bronx Bridge looking west over the southern edge of the project site; the white, tent-like structure seen through the trees is the New York City Police Department Marina; the Parks Department's garage and the Triborough Bridge are on the left.



Fig. 8. View of the project site from the street west of the Parks Department's garage looking northeast towards the Bronx.



Fig. 9. View of the project site from the street west of the Parks Department's garage looking west at the southwestern corner of the project site; the Triborough Bridge is on the left.



Fig. 10. View from the southwestern corner of the project site looking east; the street on the right marks the southern boundary of the project site.

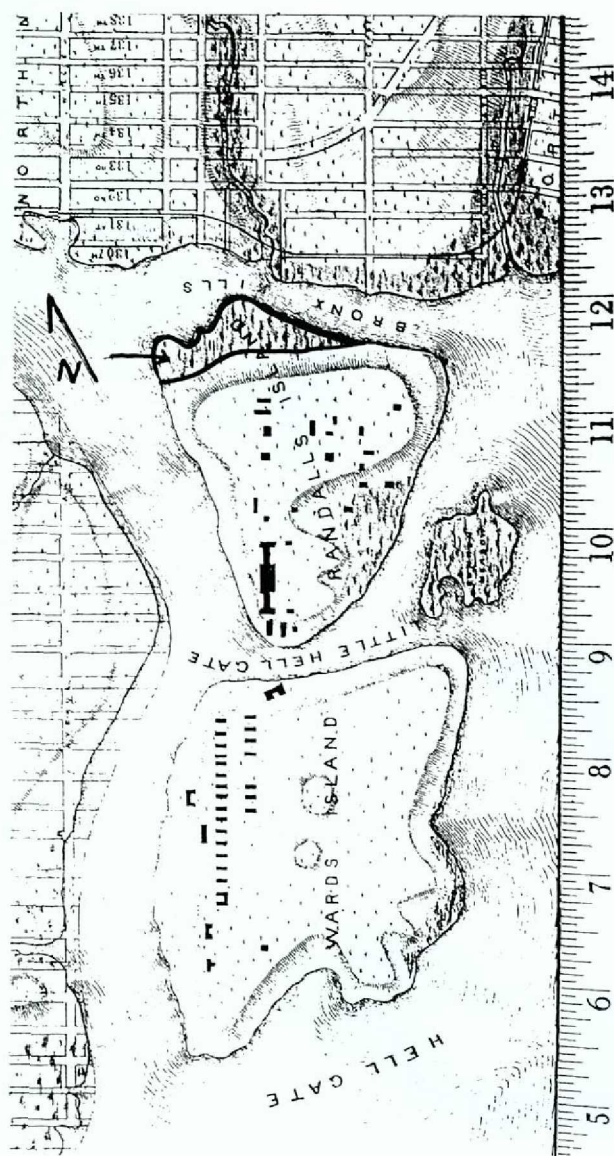


Fig. 11. 1874 Vieie map showing the location of the project site. Scale: 1:12,000.



Fig. 12. 1947 USGS Map of Randall's and Ward's Islands showing the location of the project site. Scale: 2.56" - 1 mi.

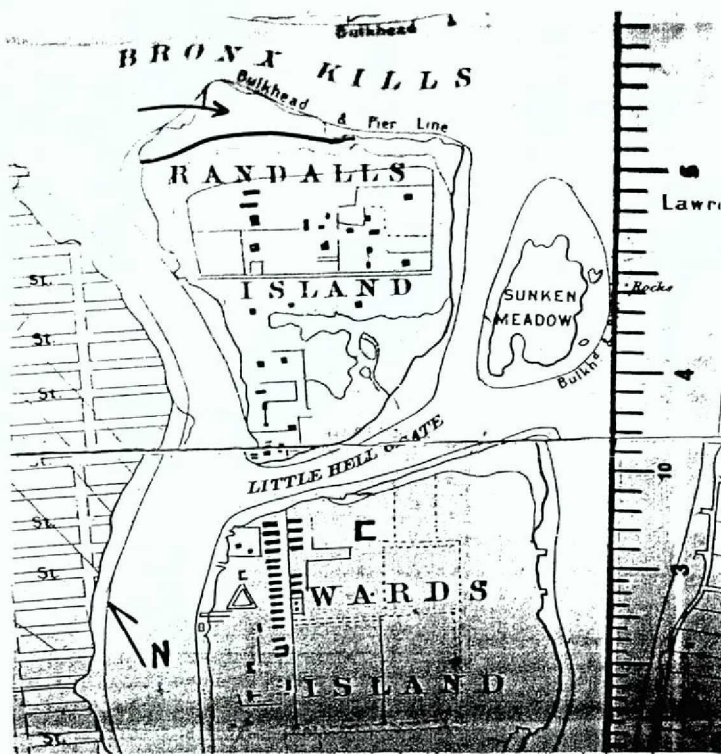


Fig. 13. (Left) Map from the 1860 Valentine's Manual 1860 showing the location of the project site (no scale).

Fig. 14. (Below) Colton map 1880 showing the location of the project site. Scale: 1" = 1000 ft.

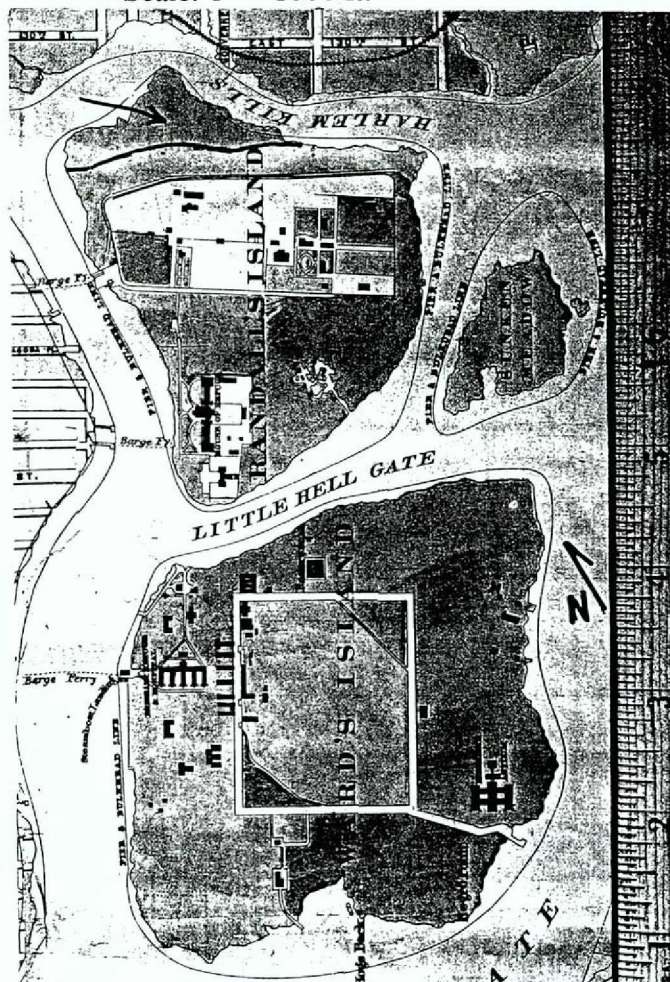
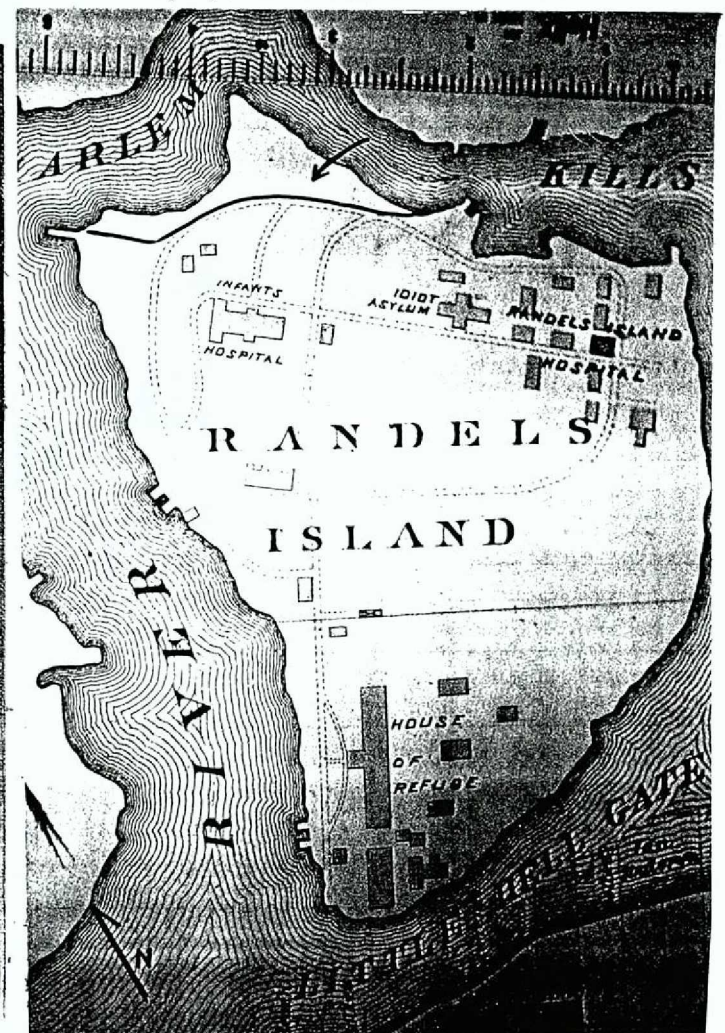


Fig. 15. 1885 Robinson map showing the location of the project site. Scale: 1" = 300 ft.



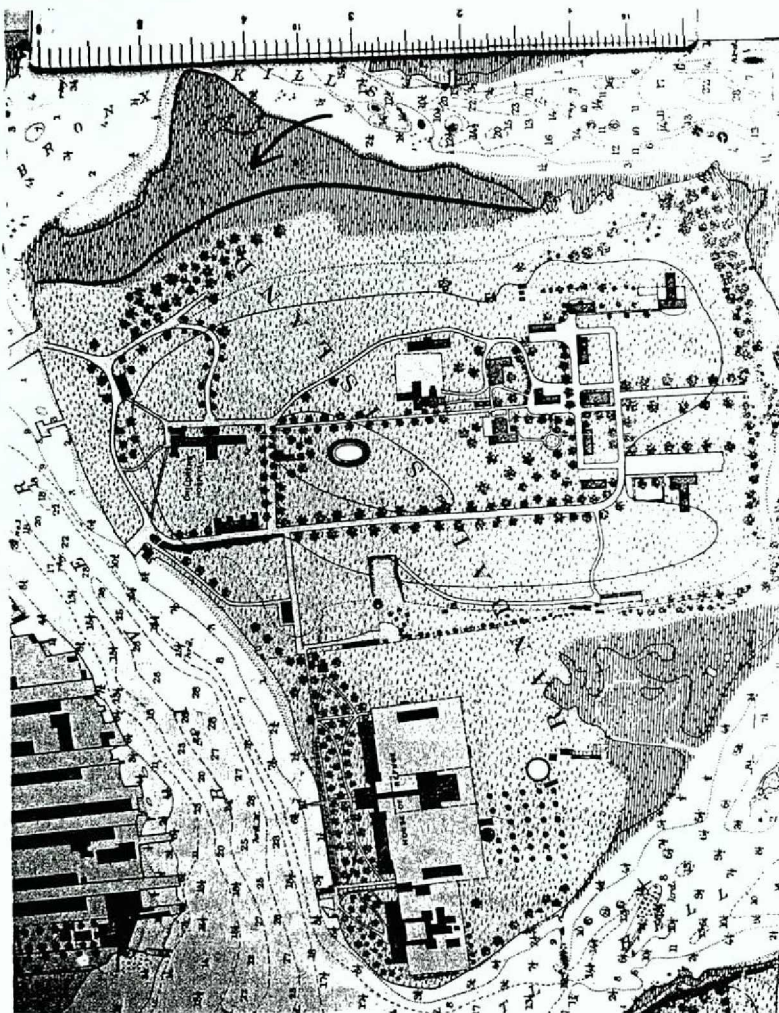


Fig. 16. USC & GS Map 1887 showing the location of the project site. Scale 3.25" = 0.25 mi.

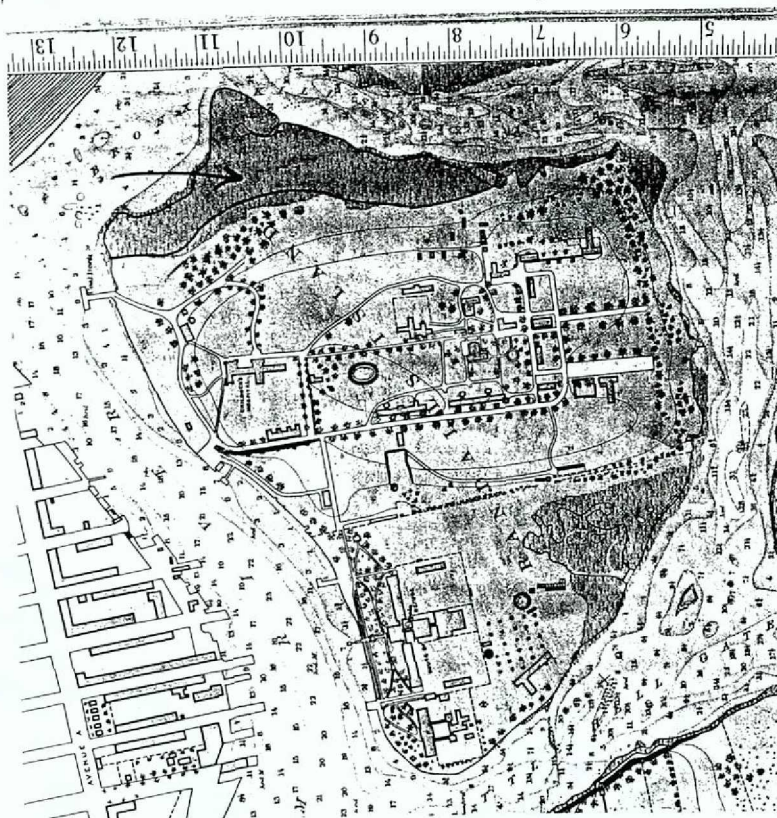


Fig. 17. USC & GS map 1909 showing the location of the project site. Scale: 3.25" = 0.25 mi.

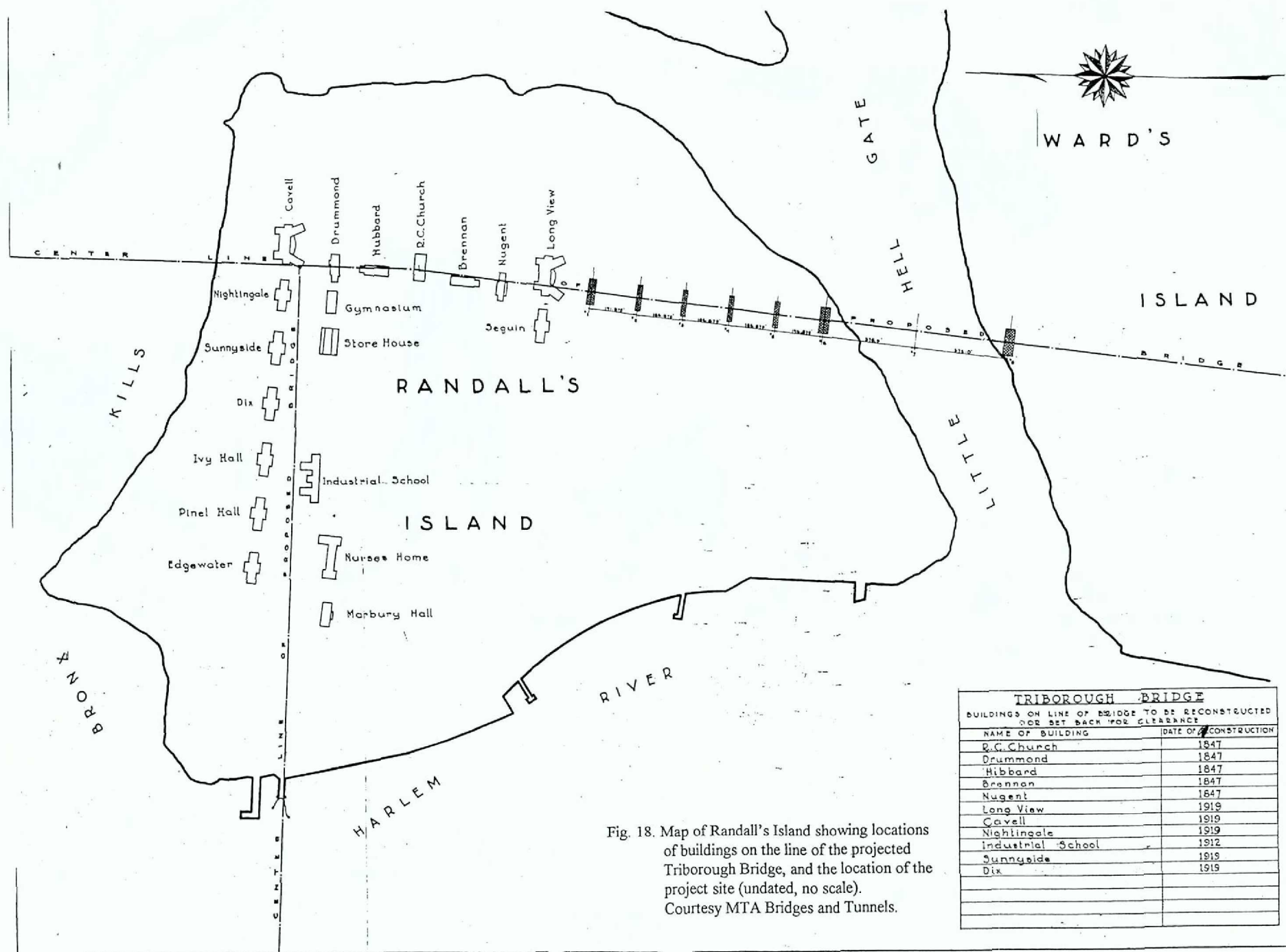


Fig. 18. Map of Randall's Island showing locations of buildings on the line of the projected Triborough Bridge, and the location of the project site (undated, no scale).
Courtesy MTA Bridges and Tunnels.