

SHAPING THE SHORELINE

LAND RECLAMATION AND THE CONCURRENT HISTORIES OF HARBOR ISLAND PARK AND RIVERSIDE PARK

1 HARBOR ISLAND PARK



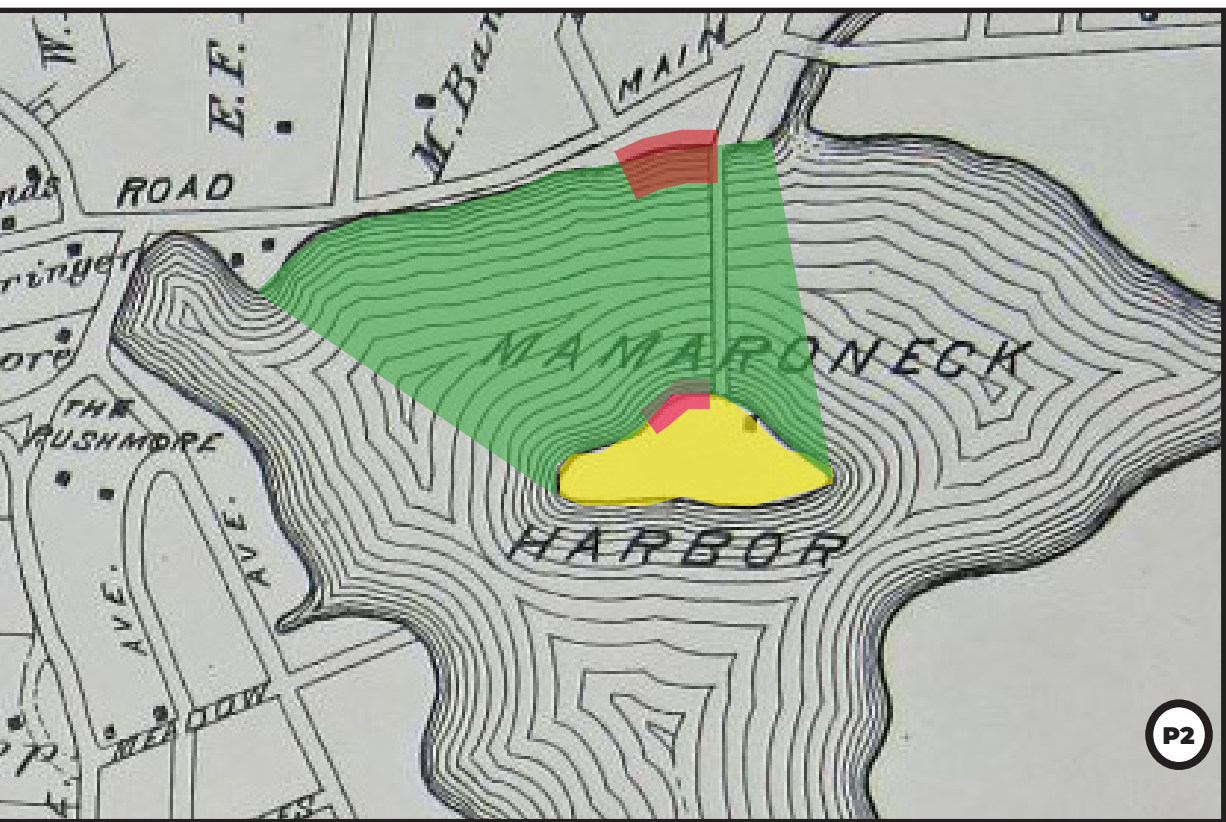
In Mamaroneck, NY lies Harbor Island Park, a small, naturally sheltered area located about 20 miles north of Manhattan on the coast of Long Island Sound. In colonial times it served as a port between New York City, NY and Boston, MA. From early colonial times, the inlet served local maritime needs such as fishing and clamming, small-scale shipping, and eventually light manufacturing.

The harbor, and Harbor Island Park, have gone through drastic physical changes over the years. Originally, there was a small island just offshore named “Hog Island”. Its name derived most likely from the abundance of Quahog Clam beds that surrounded it.

In 1919 a playground and a beach were built on Hog Island. The beach was located on the landward side of the island, so it would be safer for small to children to swim and play. Directly across from the beach, on the mainland, was the town landfill where trash was continuously piled and burned. And this is important because this development shaped the future of the landscape.

As the landfill continued to grow, it eventually encroached into the wetland area and towards Hog Island. The unintentional process of land reclamation had started - transforming unusable or degraded land, such as wetlands, shorelines, or industrial sites, into functional and sustainable spaces for human use.

Over time, the area slowly filled in with trash to the point where the beach and the landfill had essentially become one, and a peninsula was formed. In the 1930's, the city decided to fill in the remaining wetland area with more trash, dredgings from the harbor and construction waste from the building of the NYC subway system. This expanded the area to 44 acres of useable land. Eventually, it was covered with topsoil and Harbor Island Park was born.



- LAND RECLAMATION AREA (PORTION OF HARBOR FILLED IN)
- HOG ISLAND
- BEACH
- LANDFILL (ORIGINAL LOCATION)

Although much of the park developed without a formal plan, its evolution through a progression of events ultimately proved successful, making it the town's most valued space. Still, one can't help but wonder what it might have become had it been intentionally designed. Perhaps something closer in spirit to Riverside Park.

Riverside Park in New York City is situated along the Hudson River. Similar to Harbor Island Park, it combined recreational amenities with the natural beauty of the waterfront. Both parks expanded their acreage through land reclamation and, most importantly, transformed once undesirable areas into valuable public spaces. Unlike Harbor Island Park, Riverside Park was the result of a carefully planned design.

2 RIVERSIDE PARK

It was around the same time that Harbor Island Park was being created in the 1930's, when Riverside Park in New York City began its rebirth as well. Originally designed by Frederick law Olmsted in the 1880's, Riverside Park was considered revolutionary. The park spanned from 72nd Street to 129th Street. It was narrow with a varied sloped terrain that stretched over three miles along the Hudson River. Olmsted's plan was to preserve the natural landscape and design within it. A major element of his plan was the creation of the historic Riverside Drive, meandering along the top edge of the park, and is regarded as one of the most beautiful boulevards in the world.

3 MONUMENTS ALONG THE HUDSON THE CITY BEAUTIFUL MOVEMENT

Within Olmsted's park design were a network of paths to accent the views of the Hudson River while allowing horse drawn carriages to manage the grade of the steep landscape. During the City Beautiful Movement of the early 1900's, numerous monuments and statues were added to Riverside Park, including The Soldiers and Sailors Monument, Firemen's Memorial and the Joan of Arc memorial to name a few.

The most notable among them was Grant's Tomb. The original site incorporated the location and a small tomb planned by Frederick Law Olmsted himself in his early designs for the park. Years later, in 1897, during the height of the City Beautiful Movement, the modest initial burial site was replaced with the monumental General Grant National Memorial. It was a grand, neoclassical mausoleum that still stands today as the largest mausoleum in North America. Yet despite these defining features, the park was about to drastically change.



CURRENT VIEW OF RIVERSIDE PARK (2025)



RIVERSIDE DRIVE, ORIGINALLY DESIGNED BY OLMSTED (1880'S)
DECKING OVER THE RAILROAD TRACKS AND THE HENRY HUDSON PARKWAY, FROM ROBERT MOSES-ERA IMPROVEMENTS (1930'S)

- RIVERSIDE DRIVE
- HENRY HUDSON PKWY
- DECKING WITH RAIL LINE BELOW (AND HENRY HUDSON PARKWAY ABOVE)

5 PARKWAY THROUGH THE PARK THE HENRY HUDSON PARKWAY

During this period, the Henry Hudson Parkway was also constructed, creating a major transportation corridor that ran directly through the park while following the shoreline of the Hudson River. Although at the time its placement was the subject of considerable debate, the parkway was a necessary link for travel to and from the north.

The expansion of the park's acreage, now ranging from 100 to 500 feet across allowed for more features. It created space for the waterfront esplanade, which became a defining feature of the design and remains an asset to the park today. In addition, new playgrounds and recreational areas were constructed, further enhancing its role as a destination for public enjoyment.



The Henry Hudson Parkway running directly through Riverside Park, reshaping its landscape while providing access along Manhattan's west side.

6 THE MANY LAYERS OF RIVERSIDE PARK THE REGISTERS OF RIVERSIDE PARK

1 THE WATERFRONT EDGE

2 THE RAIL CORRIDOR

3 THE PARKLAND PROPER

4 THE URBAN EDGE

Shaped by its topography and design of the decking, Riverside Park is often described as a landscape composed of four distinct registers, or parallel layers.

1 THE WATERFRONT EDGE

This lowest register contains the Hudson River Esplanade, piers, boat facilities, and direct access to the river. It's the park's active waterfront band, running continuously along the shoreline, where the city meets the water.

2 THE RAIL CORRIDOR

The area encompassing the decked-over rail corridor and the Henry Hudson Parkway, Together, the decked rail lines and parkway form a continuous linear band that cuts through the park.

3 THE PARKLAND PROPER

Above the rail corridor sits the primary recreational landscape — grassy lawns, meandering paths, and sports fields. This register provides the park's central identity as a green space, serving as the main zone for leisure and community activity.

4 THE URBAN EDGE

At the highest level lies the retaining wall and terrace of Riverside Drive, marking the park's eastern boundary. This urban edge defines the transition between the city grid and the designed landscape of the park below.



ENLARGEMENT

122TH ST.

125TH ST.

P13

Also visible in this image:

A Transition where the decking begins

B Grant's Tomb within Riverside Park

7 DECKING OF RAILROAD TRACKS DETAIL



The construction of Riverside Park in the 1930's required a creative solution to the presence of the New York Central Railroad tracks running along Manhattan's west side. To preserve the park's continuity and provide uninterrupted public access to the riverfront, a series of decks and retaining walls were built over the active rail lines. This engineering feat effectively concealed the tracks beneath landscaped terraces, promenades, and recreational areas, allowing Riverside Park to function both as a green escape for the city and as a precedent-setting example of integrating infrastructure within a designed landscape.

PHOTO CREDITS

- P1: Mamaroneck Harbor. *Mamaroneck Historical Society*
- P2: Map of Mamaroneck Harbor. *Mamaroneck Historical Society*
- P3: Soldier and Sailors Memorial. *Manhattan Sideways*
- P4: Firemens Memorial. *The Kermit Project*
- P5: Joan Of Arc Statue. *Wikipedia*
- P6: Grants Tomb. *EphemeraInNewYork*
- P7: Grants Tomb. *Library of Congress*
- P8: Decking Construction. *Boweryboys.com*
- P9: Decking. *Riverside Park Master Plan, 2016*
- P10: Decking Framework. *stuffnobodycaresabout.com*
- P11: Plan View Riverside Park. *Google Images*
- P12: Henry Hudson Parkway. *Boweryboys.com*
- P13: Registers of Riverside Park. *Google Images*
- P14: Side View of Decking. *Riverside Park Conservancy*

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