

RIVERSIDE HOSPITAL  
North Brother Island in the East River  
Bronx  
Bronx County  
New York

HABS NY-6389  
*HABS NY-6389*

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

RIVERSIDE HOSPITAL

HABS No. NY-6389

Location: North Brother Island in the East River, The Bronx, Bronx County, New York

Lat/Lon: Longitude: 40.801483, latitude: -73.898125. This point was obtained in 2015 using Google Earth (WGS84).

Date of Construction: 1881-1964 (various stages of construction)

Present Owner: City of New York

Present Use: Abandoned/Nature Preserve

Significance: Riverside Hospital on North Brother Island emerged as an important quarantine location in the 1880s as part of a larger nationwide trend towards institutionalized medical care. The site evolved over time to accommodate changes in social medicine practice and to facilitate other non-medical uses. The site includes a variety architectural aesthetics from several design periods.

Historian: Todd Croteau, HAER Project Leader, prepared this report in 2013. It was adapted from a 2005 report by the University of Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation Program titled, "North Brother Island: Balancing Ecology and Cultural Heritage."

## **Overview**

### **1881-1943 Riverside Hospital**

In 1881, surveyor James E. Serrell and architect Charles Coolidge Haight visited North Brother Island to begin implementation of the Department of Health's new plan for a hospital for contagious diseases. By 1885, a complex of roads and structures had been built. Several new buildings were erected in the 1930s including projects developed by the Works Progress Administration. Construction began on the Tuberculosis Pavilion, the largest structure on the island, in 1941. Designed by Electus D. Litchfield, the four-story brick-clad concrete building with large open ward rooms and examination facilities including x-ray rooms and a film processing facility. By the time the Tuberculosis Pavilion was completed in 1943, the facility was no longer needed by the Health Department and plans were in place to use the island for other pressing needs.

### **1946-1951 WWII Veteran's Housing: The Riverside Campus**

North Brother Island's medical facilities were mothballed from 1944 until 1946, when a proposal was made to reuse the island in response to a housing shortage for veterans returning after World War II. Several modifications and new structures were built during this period.

### **1952-1964 Drug Rehabilitation Center: Riverside Hospital for Juvenile Drug Addicts**

Following the closure of the veteran's housing, the Riverside Hospital for Juvenile Drug Addicts was established on the island in 1952. The hospital was designed to wean youths off drugs and included educational and recreational opportunities during recovery. Changes in treatment practices and criticism over the facilities eventually caused the closure of the hospital in 1964.

### **1964-Present Abandonment of the Hospital Structures and Creation of Wildlife Preserve**

Since the closure of the hospital in 1964, the buildings have been left abandoned and unmaintained. Structures are in various stages of deterioration and the island has become a sanctuary for nesting Black-crowned night herons. The vegetation on the island is quickly engulfing the buildings and they are collapsing due to water penetration and decay.