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# **CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR ELLIS ISLAND**

**SITE HISTORY, EXISTING CONDITIONS, AND ANALYSIS**

**OLMSTED CENTER FOR LANDSCAPE PRESERVATION  
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**ELLIS ISLAND  
STATUE OF LIBERTY NATIONAL MONUMENT  
Liberty Island  
New York, NY 10004-1467  
212-363-7621  
[www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/elis/index.htm)**





# **CULTURAL LANDSCAPE REPORT FOR ELLIS ISLAND**

## **STATUE OF LIBERTY NATIONAL MONUMENT**

*...the building stands  
detached and encircled by  
water....the country beckons  
the immigrant into the harbor  
with the torch brandished by  
Liberty and then offers him  
the largest and finest edifice  
in the panorama for his  
landing place.*

*New York Times  
Magazine,  
1898*

### **SITE HISTORY**

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### **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

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### **ANALYSIS**

By J. Tracy Stakely, Historical Landscape Architect

National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation  
Brookline, Massachusetts, May 2003

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**Cover Photo:** Ellis Island aerial looking north toward the skyline of New Jersey and upper Manhattan, New York. Facing image is Ellis Island aerial looking east towards lower Manhattan. (Photos: National Park Service, Statue of Liberty National Monument/ Kevin Daley)

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## FOREWORD

Upon first glance, visitors to Ellis Island are drawn to the enormous French Renaissance-style Main Immigration Building that dominates the island's landscape. Here the story unfolds of the millions of immigrants who passed through this portal between 1892 and 1954, each longing to become a citizen of the United States. Yet, beyond this grand edifice, spread across the island's twenty-seven-acre campus, are many more stories to be told. Spanning the island from north to south is a sprawling collection of hospital and administrative buildings interconnected by a series of linear corridors. Surrounded by stately shade trees and interlaced with courtyards once filled with ornamental vegetation, for many immigrants this campus was their first or only home on American soil.

Early 1930s Commissioner of Immigration Edward Corsi spoke of the significance of the island setting:

As it is the port of entry to the largest city in the largest country in the Western World, it seemed in keeping that the physical appearance of that port should bear witness to the importance of the city and country whose door it opened. That Ellis Island should be to the immigrant, as well as to the American, an inspiration—a tribute to our physical development as exemplified in adequate buildings, well-planned grounds, satisfactory sanitary and housing conditions—was in my mind the first, but by no means the only or the most important consideration.

With a longstanding recognition of the importance of the island and its setting, this Cultural Landscape Report describes in detail the evolution of the Ellis Island landscape and documents those individuals playing a major role in shaping its design and physical appearance. The report identifies the numerous features remaining from the immigration period, reflecting the island's high level of historical integrity with respect to its location, design, setting, and association as the country's premier immigration station. A full understanding of the significance of the cultural landscape will ensure better protection of the island's nationally significant resources and a more complete and meaningful experience for visitors.

I am pleased to recognize the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation of the National Park Service's Northeast Region for overseeing the management and writing of this document. I would like to commend Tracy Stakely for his thorough research, tremendous effort, and clear writing, which has resulted in a document of incredible value for the island and its historic landscape resources. I am also grateful for the contributions of many staff members at Ellis Island, including Diana Pardue, Jeffrey Dosik, Barry Moreno, Janet Levine, Kevin Daley and Al Farrugio. Our responsible stewardship of the island relies on the knowledge of what we need to preserve for future generations, so that they, in turn, will be inspired by the many stories of Ellis Island.

*Cynthia Garrett*

**Superintendent**

**Ellis Island/Statue of Liberty National Monument**



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to the numerous individuals and organizations whose contributions added to the successful completion of this cultural landscape report for Ellis Island.

At the Statue of Liberty National Monument (STLI), Diana Pardue, Chief of Museum Services, was the primary park contact, providing assistance with on-site research and coordination of park input through project scoping and draft reviews. Librarians Jeffery S. Dosik and Barry Moreno provided access to research files and historic photographs in the STLI collection, reviewed drafts, and coordinated the reproduction of several historic images. Janet Levine offered guidance and insight for use of the Ellis Island oral history collection. Horticulturist Al Farrugio supplied historic images, reviewed drafts, and provided information concerning ongoing maintenance and preservation of the island's vegetation.

David Uschold, Program Manager at the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation (OCLP), oversaw the project and reviewed all drafts. Additional OCLP staff provided research assistance and insightful suggestions for improvement of the document. Mark Davison assisted in developing a research methodology for examining immigration and public health records

at the National Archives. Patrick Eleey gathered existing condition images previously used in the park's cultural landscapes inventory. Lauren Meier and Debbie Smith reviewed the initial draft of the site history, and Jeff Killion and Lisa Oudemool reviewed the analysis section. NPS Architectural Conservator Naomi Kroll provided missing details on construction of the seawall. Thanks to all of these individuals for their contributions.

Historical research was completed with the cooperation and assistance of numerous agencies and individuals outside the park service. Thanks to Raynelda Calderon and Andrea Felder at The New York Public Library, and Marguerite Lavin and Eileen Morales at the Museum of the City of New York, for assistance with locating and reproducing historic images. Thanks also to Marion Smith, at the Immigration and Naturalization Service archives in Washington, DC, John Celardo at the National Archives in New York City, and staff at the National Archives in College Park, MD, for providing information that helped direct research into the island's historical development.

Finally, additional credit goes to NPS historian Harlan D. Unrau, whose early research on the island was invaluable in pulling together the landscape history section of this document.





## INTRODUCTION

Ellis Island, a part of the Statue of Liberty National Monument, is nationally significant for its role in U. S. immigration, serving as the entry point for twelve million immigrants between 1892 and 1954. Situated in New York Harbor's Upper Bay on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, the island lies approximately one and one-half miles southwest of Manhattan Island and three-quarters of a mile north of Liberty Island. Originally only three and one-half acres in size, today Ellis Island covers nearly twenty-seven and one-half acres as a result of numerous landfill operations between 1830 and 1935. This pattern of development created a landscape divided into three distinct parcels that are identified by the names Island One, Island Two, and Island Three (Figure 0.1).

Island One is the northernmost area and was the location of the original island. Island One contains the primary immigration facilities, including the renovated main immigration building, and houses all the park's operations: Administration, Concessions, Interpretation, Maintenance, Management, Museum Services, and Park Police. Islands Two and Three are constructed entirely of landfill and contain hospital facilities formerly occupied by the U. S. Public Health Service and the U. S. Coast Guard. Some areas of Island One and all of Islands Two and Three have been virtually unused and unmaintained since the immigration station closed in 1954. Many structures are abandoned and remain in extremely poor condition. A multiyear preservation effort is currently under way for their stabilization.

### Purpose of the Report

A Cultural Landscape Report (CLR) is the primary document used in the treatment and long-term management of cultural landscapes. It provides site managers with a comprehensive site history, identifies important landscape characteristics for the property, compares and analyzes the historic and existing conditions,

discusses the site's significance and historic integrity, and provides treatment recommendations to guide future site development. This report represents the completion of phases one and two of a three-phase project intended to develop a complete CLR for Ellis Island. This document includes a comprehensive site history from prehistory to the present, with emphasis on the site's 1892 to 1954 period of significance, when the island was actively used as an immigration station. It also includes a complete record of the island's existing landscape condition and provides an analysis of the island's significance and integrity. A treatment plan for the island's landscape will be developed during phase three of the project.

When the Ellis Island immigration station closed in 1954, the island was abandoned. Its management was turned over to the federal government's General Services Administration; however, the facilities remained unused for the next decade. In 1965 the island became part of the National Park Service (NPS) but the agency was not able to begin any substantial preservation efforts until the 1980s. From 1984 to 1990 the main immigration building on Island One underwent an extensive rehabilitation. The updated facility was opened to the public as the state-of-the-art Ellis Island Immigration Museum and has subsequently seen visitation rise to more than five million visitors per year. Islands Two and Three were not included in the 1980's rehabilitation. For the most part, the features on these islands, including hospital wards, maintenance facilities, residences, connected walkways, and outdoor spaces, have been derelict and abandoned since 1954 and remain off-limits to visitors. The landscape of Ellis Island dates primarily to a 1939 planting plan implemented in the 1940s. Remnants from this era include a deteriorated circulation system, overgrown vegetation, and many unstable and deteriorating buildings and site features.

A voluminous amount of research and written documentation regarding the immigration station

has been completed since its closure. Most of these efforts have been directed toward the social implications of the station's operation. In the recent past the NPS has completed a substantial amount of research on the physical resources of the island as well. The most comprehensive is a fourteen-volume Historic Structures Report completed between 1981 and 1988, documenting more than forty of the island's structures. A Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) was completed by the Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation in 2001, providing a preliminary finding of significance and integrity for the island's landscape. The CLI concluded that many of the features associated with the 1939 development plan remained, although in extremely deteriorated condition.

Since the initial rehabilitation of the main immigration building, other work on the island has been completed under NPS management. The kitchen and laundry building and powerhouse on Island One have also been renovated. In 1998, in preparation for building stabilization on Islands Two and Three, overgrown and invasive vegetation was removed and potentially historic plant material was documented by park service horticulturists, landscape architects, and maintenance crews. Contractors completed exterior building stabilization on Island Two in early 2001, and are currently completing exterior restoration and interior stabilization on the new ferry building (constructed in 1936) and hospital outbuilding (constructed in 1901), and building stabilization on Island Three. Finally, the park has recently initiated a Development Concept Plan (DCP) for Ellis Island. The DCP will concentrate on the adaptive reuse of Islands Two and Three. Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners, LLP, has been hired by the NPS to produce the DCP, which should be completed in 2003.

Until the past few years, the cultural landscape of Ellis Island was not adequately documented nor recognized as an important aspect of the island's historical significance. The rehabilitation and stabilization efforts, as well as the dramatic increase in the numbers of visitors, have affected the landscape of the island. Given that

completion of the DCP will lead to additional development on all three islands, a comprehensive evaluation of the landscape for Ellis Island is needed. A completed CLR will inform the DCP and subsequent planning efforts, ensuring that the impacts of any future development on Ellis Island's cultural landscape will be adequately evaluated and addressed to minimize loss of historic character.

## **Methodology**

This report was prepared using a variety of primary and secondary sources to complete "thorough" research as defined by *NPS DO-28*. Several repositories were consulted, including:

- Statue of Liberty / Ellis Island Library and Museum Collection
- NPS Boston Support Office
- NPS Cultural Resources Management Studies Collection, Charlestown, MA
- NPS Technical Information Center files, Denver, CO
- National Archives, New York, NY
- National Archives, Washington, DC
- New York Public Library
- Museum of the City of New York

Most of the documentation was primary source material in the form of photographs, maps, and construction documentation. The author examined photographs at several locations, including collections from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), U. S. Public Health Service, U. S. Coast Guard, NPS, and an extensive early twentieth-century series taken by former Ellis Island Commissioner of Immigration William Williams. Early maps located at the National Archives provided documentation on the island's military use, while original building specifications were also available for nearly all of the island's immigration structures and facilities. The author reviewed additional plans and drawings from the NPS Technical Information Center, including digitally scanned copies of selected drawings housed in the park's library. Several oral histories of former island employees,

residents, and immigrants provided additional primary source material. This collection is also housed in the park library.

Major secondary sources include several NPS planning documents. Harlan D. Unrau's 1981 *Historic Structure Report, Ellis Island, Historical Data* was written primarily as an architectural history of Island One, and Islands Two and Three to a lesser extent, but it also covers key aspects of the development of the entire island's landscape. John F. Pousson's 1989 *An Overview and Assessment of Archeological Resources on Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York* provided historical information about the island's development and limited existing conditions documentation. In 1988 architectural contractors Beyer Blinder Belle/Anderson Notter Finegold completed a Historic Structures Report for the main immigration building on Island One. A portion of this document specifically addressed the island's historic landscape and was perhaps the earliest attempt to analyze the significance of Ellis Island as a cultural landscape.<sup>1</sup>

## Organization of the Report

The report is divided into seven chapters. The first six chapters focus on the island's history, each representing a specific time period important to the island's development. Each chapter contains a brief introduction summarizing the period, a historical narrative, a description of the period landscape with an accompanying period plan, and plans and photographs from the period.

Chapter 1 covers prehistory to 1890. This period focuses on the early inhabitants of the island, including Native Americans, Dutch colonists, and the island's namesake, Samuel Ellis. The island's military use is discussed with an abbreviated history of the development of Fort Gibson. A narrative and period plan is provided describing the 1890 landscape, just prior to the island's immigration period.

Chapter 2 documents the development of the first immigration station on Ellis Island from 1890 to

1897. Selection of the island for immigration use and the ensuing development phase are examined. The 1897 landscape is described, just after the facilities were completed but prior to an island-wide fire that destroyed the first station.

Chapter 3 focuses on the initial planning and development of the second immigration station between 1897 and circa 1907. This chapter covers the construction of Island Two and the primary buildings on Islands One and Two, including the main immigration building. It also describes the landscape improvements installed under Commissioner Williams during 1902 and 1903, and the creation of Island Three between 1902 and 1906.

Chapter 4 examines the growth of the facility from the circa 1907 peak immigration period through World War I years, ending circa 1920. The development of facilities on Islands One and Two, including construction of a greenhouse and continued landscape improvements, as well as the construction of a contagious-disease hospital on Island Three, are described.

Chapter 5 documents the broad period from circa 1920 to the island's abandonment in 1954. Emphasis during this time was on the changing role of the island from an immigration entry point to a detention center. Landscape improvements made under Ellis Island's Commissioner of Immigration Edward Corsi in the 1930s are addressed.

Chapter 6 describes the postimmigration period from 1954 to the present. Early NPS planning and rehabilitation of the island facilities for public use are documented. The chapter ends with a discussion of the existing condition of the island's landscape in 2002.

Chapter 7 provides an analysis of the historical significance of Ellis Island and an evaluation of the integrity of the physical character of the landscape, based on criteria developed by the National Register of Historic Places program.

## **Historical Overview**

Ellis Island was originally composed of glacial till approximately 15,000 years ago. The island boasted a diverse animal and plant community prior to European settlement. Many of the island's resources contributed to the subsistence of precontact human populations, but the fish and shellfish of the Hudson River estuary were of special importance in this regard, as native peoples relied on these resources for seasonal food gathering.

In 1630 Dutch colonists purchased Ellis Island from local Native Americans. Samuel Ellis, a New York merchant, acquired the island in 1774 and retained possession of it until his death in 1794. Ellis made improvements to the island, including the construction of several buildings for residential and commercial use.

In 1794 the threat of war with France and Great Britain persuaded the State of New York to secure Ellis Island as part of its harbor defense, and in 1808 the state purchased the island from Samuel Ellis's heirs through condemnation. The state deeded the island to the federal government, and the War Department installed a battery and garrison. The fortifications were named Fort Gibson and became part of the New York harbor defenses, along with Fort Wood on Bedloe's (now Liberty) Island, and the West Battery at the tip of Manhattan. An interstate agreement in 1834 declared Ellis Island and neighboring Bedloe's Island part of New York State, even though both islands were on the New Jersey side of the main ship channel. As the Civil War began in 1861, most of Fort Gibson was dismantled and a naval powder magazine established on the island.

In 1890 the federal government assumed full responsibility for the reception of immigrants at the Port of New York and commissioned a study of New York Harbor to determine the best location for a federal immigration depot. Officials considered Castle Garden at the southern tip of Manhattan, the site of the state-administered immigration station since 1855, inadequate for a new federal facility. After examining potential

locales, they chose Ellis Island as the most appropriate site. On April 11, 1890, Congress appropriated \$75,000 for the removal of the naval magazine, the addition of landfill, and the construction of a new immigration station. On January 1, 1892, the Bureau of Immigration formally opened the new immigration station for the processing of steerage passengers; first- and second-class cabin passengers were processed by bureau staff onboard ship. Some 445,987 immigrants passed through Ellis Island in 1892. The Department of the Treasury completed construction on the immigration station in early 1897.<sup>2</sup>

On June 15, 1897, a devastating fire destroyed nearly all the buildings on the island. Congress soon authorized funds for the construction of new fireproof structures, and a contract was awarded to the New York architectural firm of Boring and Tilton to design the second immigration station. Boring and Tilton's plan featured an impressive French Renaissance brick immigration building with limestone trim, and the addition of a second island and hospital. Boring and Tilton proposed extensive landscaping for both islands, but it was never implemented. Contractors completed the construction of the second island, known as Island Two, in December 1898. On December 17, 1900, the second immigration station opened on the original part of Ellis Island, now called Island One, and authorities processed more than two thousand immigrants that day. The hospital on Island Two opened in 1901.

In 1902 President Theodore Roosevelt appointed William Williams, a respected Wall Street lawyer with experience in government legal service, as the new Commissioner of Immigration for the Port of New York. Williams instituted procedures to ensure efficient, honest, courteous, and sanitary treatment of immigrants. He improved the island's landscape with the addition of turfgrass, *Ligustrum* (privet) hedges, concrete sidewalks, benches, flower beds, and lighting.

By 1903 the number of immigrants passing through Ellis Island had increased significantly



and the facilities became inadequate for processing the large number of people. In response to complaints by Commissioner Williams and others, President Roosevelt appointed a commission to investigate the island conditions in September 1903. The commission identified several inadequacies, including the lack of space in the major buildings, poor sleeping facilities for long-term detainees, and poor sanitation on the island.<sup>3</sup> These concerns were not immediately addressed by the Bureau of Immigration due in part to a lack of adequate and timely funding by Congress. However, the Bureau made changes a little at a time in an effort to improve and maintain the facilities. The addition of Island Three between 1902 and 1906 increased Ellis Island's total size to just over twenty acres. The hospital facilities expanded with the construction of new buildings on Island Two and a contagious-disease hospital on Island Three.

Between 1907 and circa 1920, the Bureau of Immigration continued to use the facilities on Ellis Island for their intended immigration purpose – except for a brief period during World War I.<sup>4</sup> Immigration numbers peaked at the facility in 1907, with the processing of 1,123,842 immigrants during the fiscal year.<sup>5</sup> Immigration levels for the next five years remained high, with well over half a million immigrants each year, and in the two years prior to the outbreak of the war, levels once again passed the one million mark.<sup>6</sup> With the high level of immigration, the facilities became overcrowded and overused. The resulting unsanitary conditions necessitated many facility improvements between 1911 and 1914.

With the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917, supervision of Ellis Island was temporarily transferred from the Bureau of Immigration under the Department of Labor to the War Department for U. S. Army and Navy use. A portion of the facilities was also used by the Department of Justice as a detention center for German merchant ship crews and other suspected enemy aliens. Approximately twenty-two hundred sailors and enemy aliens were housed and kept under surveillance by the Department of Justice in the main immigration building and baggage and

dormitory building on Island One. In February 1918 these detainees were transferred to mainland camps, including Fort Ogelthorpe and Hot Springs.<sup>7</sup> After the departure of the detainees, the U. S. Army Medical Department and the U. S. Navy used the buildings as a way station for soldiers and sailors destined for Europe, and as a hospital for returning American soldiers. Some minor changes were implemented by the Army to accommodate the influx of patients, including the replacement of the wooden causeway between Islands Two and Three with a new covered passageway to facilitate easier and safer transfer of patients between buildings.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of the war, the military withdrew from the island by mid-1919. In September 1919 the U. S. Public Health Service assumed control of the hospital from the Department of Labor and operated it as marine “Hospital No. 43.” The transfer agreement stipulated that immigrant patients would continue to have precedence in admission over other patients, including U. S. seamen, although by 1929 most patients were affiliated with the Merchant Marine or U. S. Coast Guard and only twenty-five percent of the patients were immigrants.<sup>9</sup> The Department of Labor resumed management of the remainder of the facilities and returned the island to its prior use as an immigration station.<sup>10</sup> Improvements during the early 1920s included initial construction of a new concrete and granite seawall around Island One, and the installation of landfill between Islands Two and Three.

During and immediately after World War I, the Bureau of Immigration gradually changed the primary use of Ellis Island from an immigrant processing facility to a detention facility. A number of factors contributed to this change, such as new processing methods, fluctuating immigration rates, and the establishment of quota laws. Prior to this era, the Bureau of Immigration inspected first- and second-class passengers aboard ship. Aliens who did not pass this inspection and all steerage passengers were sent to Ellis Island by barge for a more detailed inspection. During the war the Bureau processed all immigrants aboard ship and none were sent to

Ellis Island. More restrictive immigration began when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1917, introducing a literacy test requirement and more detailed examinations of immigrants. This law and the war itself effectively slowed the influx of immigrants, with only fifty thousand immigrants processed during fiscal year 1918, the lowest immigration numbers since 1890. More permanent restrictions followed when Congress passed the first quota law in 1921, limiting the numbers of each nationality allowed to enter the country.<sup>11</sup> Despite these limitations, there was a slight increase in immigration through New York Harbor during the early 1920s, with immigration levels rising to more than three hundred thousand in fiscal year 1920.<sup>12</sup> But this growth ceased when Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924, placing further restrictions on immigration and effectively ending mass processing of immigrants at Ellis Island. After the mid-1920s, the Bureau of Immigration performed primary examination of U. S. immigrants at consulates at the immigrant's point of origin and visas were issued prior to arrival in the United States. After arriving in New York, all passengers, crew, and immigrants were inspected aboard ship. The Bureau only sent immigrants to Ellis Island if they did not pass the onboard inspection, or if they needed medical treatment.<sup>13</sup> The demise of mass inspections changed the main function of Ellis Island from immigrant reception and processing to immigrant detention. The Bureau of Immigration detained persons awaiting deportation, including those who failed the shipboard examinations, those who had illegally entered the United States, or those who had violated the terms of their admittance, until their cases were resolved or transportation was arranged to return them to their countries of origin.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of the decrease in population and activity on the island, many of the facilities fell "into disuse and disrepair" during the mid- to late-1920s.<sup>15</sup> In the early 1930s the Ellis Island Committee examined the island's deteriorated facilities and made recommendations to improve both the physical plant and administrative operations. Commissioner of Immigration Edward Corsi implemented many of the

recommendations throughout the following decade through several Public Works Administration programs. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)<sup>16</sup> oversaw the addition of landfill northeast of the main immigration building for new recreation grounds, the construction of several new buildings, including a new ferry building and recreation building, and the implementation of various landscape projects. In 1939 the Federal Works Agency's Office of the Supervising Architect for the Public Buildings Administration developed a comprehensive planting plan for the entire island. The INS immediately began implementation of this plan, continuing the work into the 1940s.

In 1940, prior to U. S. involvement in World War II, the INS was transferred from the Department of Labor to the Department of Justice. Although this did not adversely affect daily operations, the administrative move did emphasize the government's changing attitude toward immigration fueled by popular opinion. No doubt a major motivation for the transfer was the prospect of war and the realization that newly arrived immigrants were often considered a first-line threat to national security. The Department of Justice seemed a more appropriate "watchdog" for this threat than did the Department of Labor.<sup>17</sup>

During World War II, Ellis Island once again became a military facility. It served as a U. S. Coast Guard station, a hospital for wounded veterans, and a detention center for enemy aliens. In 1939 the U. S. Coast Guard took over the new immigration building and the baggage and dormitory building, using the facilities for "training recruits for neutrality patrol duty."<sup>18</sup> The U. S. Public Health Service continued to operate the hospitals on Islands Two and Three. The U. S. Coast Guard facility was decommissioned in 1946, but the INS strengthened the detention facilities and by 1948 more than one hundred and fifty Germans remained detained on the island as enemy aliens. The INS released or deported most of these detainees by 1949.<sup>19</sup>

Immigration fell consistently at the Port of New York during World War II, from 62,035 in 1939 to just 1,075 in 1944. However, activity on the island did not decrease proportionally. The site's use as a detention facility saw the average number of daily detainees rise from 236 in 1940 to more than 800 in 1943-1944. Deportation of aliens became more difficult or often impossible during the war because of the devastation of many European countries' economy and infrastructure. Conditions immediately after the war remained the same, increasing the number of European immigrants to the United States. As a result, immigration levels began a steady climb back to numbers similar to 1920's levels.<sup>20</sup> However, the rise in immigration numbers did not reflect how many of these individuals actually landed on Ellis Island. By 1947 detention was still the primary activity on the island. Most immigrants were inspected aboard ship and relatively few set foot on the island for inspection.<sup>21</sup>

In 1950 the number of detainees temporarily increased when Congress passed the Internal Security Act of 1950, prohibiting aliens who were members of communist or fascist organizations from immigrating to the United States. By November 1950 the INS held more than thirteen hundred detainees per month on the island. This increase resulted in some upgrades and repairs to the facilities between 1951 and 1953, including changes to the fencing around the recreation yards on Island One and construction of guardhouses.<sup>22</sup>

U. S. Public Health Service closed the hospitals on Islands Two and Three on March 1, 1951. A special survey board determined the facilities were "obsolete and that the equipment was outmoded," and the numbers of patients had dropped steadily to about half of the peak-year levels. Federal Security Administrator Oscar R. Ewing indicated closure would save approximately \$200,000 for the 1951 fiscal year and was the appropriate measure to take "in the interest of efficiency and economy."<sup>23</sup> The U. S. Public Health Service transferred most remaining patients to the Veterans Administration Hospital in Brooklyn or the Marine Hospital on Staten Island. However, they maintained a small infirmary on Ellis Island for the detainee population.<sup>24</sup>

In 1951 the U. S. Coast Guard returned to the island and established the Ellis Island Port Security Unit. The hospital on Island Two became offices and crew quarters, and an altered administration building accommodated a galley and mess hall. A few of the buildings on Island Three served as storage for files.<sup>25</sup>

After Congress passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1952, resulting in a more liberalized policy for detaining aliens, the remaining INS and U. S. Coast Guard operations became unnecessary. Both organizations ceased operation and Ellis Island was officially shut down in November 1954. Closure amounted to abandonment, and most everything on the island was left as it was. Other INS offices and the National Archives acquired the official files and some office equipment and furniture, but most miscellaneous items remained on the island. Even the ferryboat *Ellis Island* was left docked in its slip. The General Services Administration (GSA) took jurisdiction over the island. By March 1955 the agency determined the property to be "surplus to the needs of the federal government," prompting a search for an appropriate method of liquidation from the federal government's ownership.<sup>26</sup>

The GSA tried unsuccessfully to dispose of the abandoned property. The island was offered first to other federal agencies, then to state and local agencies, and finally to nonprofit institutions. No eligible applicant or use was found for the facilities, so the GSA scheduled a private sale for the island. However, given the historical significance of the site, widespread public opposition deterred a private sale. After three bid solicitations, no acceptable offer was received. In 1960 the GSA continued its liquidation efforts, allowing the U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to request proposals for public health or educational usage of the island. Several groups applied for that status during 1961, however, all were rejected.

In 1962 the Senate Committee on Government Operations reviewed five bills submitted to the 83<sup>rd</sup> Congress addressing the possible reuse of Ellis Island. The Committee formed the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Relations to

study the various reuse proposals, oversee the disposition of the island, and resolve the “Ellis Island question.” The Subcommittee found that no proposal had “widespread support or stood out as being more meritorious than the others,” and attempts to “promote cooperation among the various sponsors to arrive at joint sponsorship of a multipurpose proposal failed.”<sup>27</sup>

Throughout the early 1960s, redevelopment of the adjacent New Jersey waterfront into a public park was in the planning stages. This proposed development spurred the Senate Subcommittee to consider similar development on Ellis Island for “national park, monument, or recreational purposes.”<sup>28</sup> A 1964 NPS study examined this question, assessed the feasibility of the proposal, and identified issues and effects created by the proposed addition of Ellis Island to the existing Statue of Liberty National Monument. NPS planners were especially “concerned with the appraisal of the park and recreation potential of the island and the development of a concept of use as it relates to historical importance, relationship to Liberty Island, relationship to New Jersey waterfront, and relationship to the New York Bay region.”<sup>29</sup> After investigation and analysis, the planning team recommended that Ellis Island should be included in the national park system. On June 24, 1964, the NPS forwarded the report and its findings to the Senate Subcommittee. The Subcommittee concurred with the team’s finding, recommending the creation of the Ellis Island National Historic Site to the Senate.<sup>30</sup>

On May 11, 1965, Ellis Island was officially incorporated into the national park system when President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Proclamation 3656, adding Ellis Island to the Statue of Liberty National Monument. However, there were no funds to cover the cost of developing facilities on Ellis Island. As a remedy, Congress passed Public Law 89-192 on August 17, 1965, authorizing six million dollars for the development of the island, but stipulating that not more than three million dollars would be appropriated during the five years after passage of the act.<sup>31</sup> In 1966 the island was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The NPS began park planning immediately and produced several important documents during the next two decades to guide park management. A 1968 master plan called for preservation of some of the island’s features and the addition of new landscape elements to create a more “parklike” setting. However, this plan was never fully implemented and the island remained in a neglected state. NPS work in the mid-1970s allowed sections of the island to be opened to the public on a limited basis, including parts of the main immigration building. Continued NPS planning throughout the 1980s produced additional documents addressing the historical development of the island, its architectural resources, relevant social themes, preservation alternatives, and interpretive prospects.

In 1980 and 1981 the NPS began rehabilitation on Island One with masonry repairs on the main immigration building. In 1984 it implemented a more extensive building rehabilitation. To facilitate construction activities, contractors installed a temporary bridge between the island and the New Jersey shore. Rehabilitation of the Island One altered the landscape considerably and introduced new features to the site. A raised grade adjacent to the building on the southeastern end made the immediate area accessible to visitors with disabilities. A new Wall of Honor commemorated donors to the Statue of Liberty / Ellis Island Foundation. A reconstructed water tower reestablished a missing historic feature. In 1990 the NPS completed work on the facility and opened it to the public as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum.

The structures and landscape on Islands Two and Three remained relatively untouched during the 1980s and early 1990s and were closed to the public. They continued to deteriorate, and as a result in 1992, and again in 1999, Ellis Island was listed on the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Eleven Most-Endangered Sites. The NPS eventually received funding for building stabilization through park appropriations, and by 2001 this work was completed for Island Two structures. Also in 2001, a grant from the federally funded *Save America’s Treasures*

preservation program initiated exterior restoration and interior stabilization of the new ferry building and hospital outbuilding on Island Two.

Planning for the landscape continued in 2001 when the NPS initiated the development of this CLR for the entire island and a DCP for Islands Two and Three. The CLR will provide a more in-depth analysis of the site's historical development and significance, and make recommendations for future landscape treatment, while the DCP will make recommendations for economically feasible rehabilitation and compatible reuse of the facilities on Islands Two and Three.

## Endnotes for Introduction

<sup>1</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*. The historical landscape section was written by landscape architect Bruce Kelly in 1984.

<sup>2</sup> The Immigration and Naturalization Service has been known by different names throughout its history and has been housed under different governmental departments throughout the development of immigration facilities like Ellis Island. The Immigration Act of 1891 ended the dual system of state-federal administration of immigration and established complete federal control by creating the Bureau of Immigration under the Department of the Treasury. On July 1, 1903, the Bureau became a division of the Department of Commerce and Labor. Passage of the Basic Naturalization Act of 1906 created the combined Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization within Commerce and Labor. In 1913 the Department of Commerce and Labor was reorganized and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization was divided into two separate units, the Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization. In 1933 the two were reunited to form the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). The INS stayed under the Department of Labor until 1940, when it was moved to the Department of Justice. In 2002, the agency was moved to the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. Marian L. Smith, *Overview of INS History* (originally published in *A Historical Guide to the U.S. Government*, edited by George T. Kurian, New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), INS webpage ([www.ins.usdoj.gov](http://www.ins.usdoj.gov)).

<sup>3</sup> United States Library of Congress, *Report of the Commission Appointed by the President on September 16, 1903, to Investigate the Condition of the Immigrant Station at Ellis Island* (Washington, 1904), pp. 15-16; *New York Times*, February 29, 1904, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 127.

<sup>4</sup> *New York Times*, July 1, 1903 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 2); *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 130; "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> It is unclear if the official figures include immigrants as well as deportees.

<sup>6</sup> U. S. Library of Congress, "Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1928" (Washington, 1928), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 5, 155-156, 467.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 5, 155-156, 468.

<sup>9</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 5, 155-156, 468.

<sup>11</sup> "History of Ellis Island, New York," U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, Division of Research and Education, October 1947 (STLI Library EL-MS EH-6); "History of Ellis Island, New York," U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, December 1, 1952 (STLI Library, EL-MS EH-7); U.S. Library of Congress, "Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1928" (Washington, 1928), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> U. S. Library of Congress, "Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration to the Secretary of Labor, Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1928" (Washington, 1928), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 7; *History of Ellis Island*, 1947; *History of Ellis Island*, 1952.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 7.

<sup>16</sup> Formerly the separate Bureau of Immigration and the Bureau of Naturalization, see endnote 2.

<sup>17</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 6; *Archeological Resources*, p. 75.

<sup>18</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 74.

<sup>19</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 7, 414; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 74-76.

<sup>20</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>21</sup> "History of Ellis Island, New York," 1947, pp. 2, 6.

<sup>22</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 8, 212; *Archeological Resources*, p. 81.

<sup>23</sup> *New York Times*, December 28, 1950, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 499-500.

<sup>24</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 8, 501, 571; *Archeological Resources*, p. 81.

<sup>26</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 8; *Archeological Resources*, p. 86; "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> National Park Service, *A Master Plan for Ellis Island, New York*. (United States Department of the Interior, 1968), p. 1.

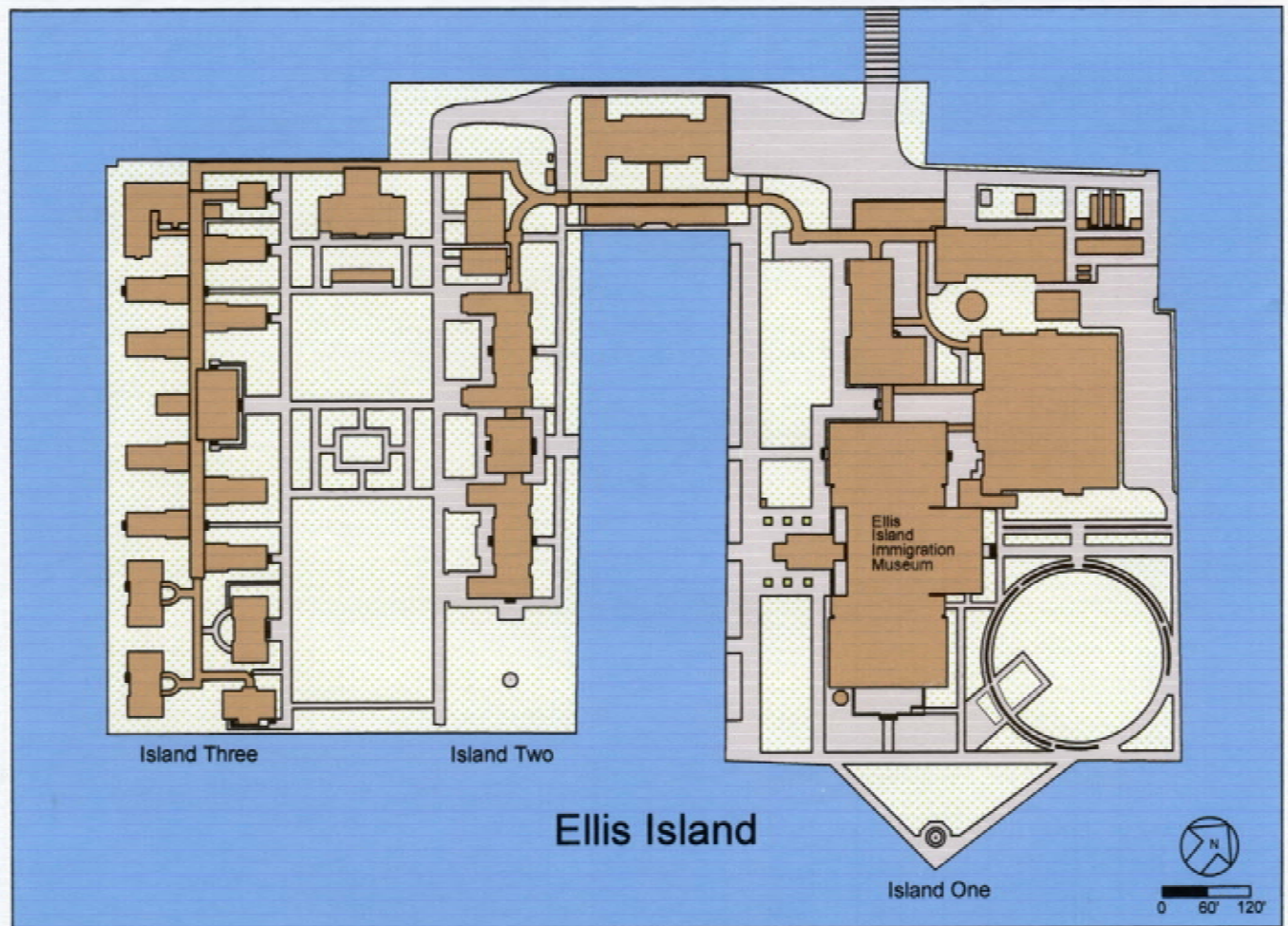
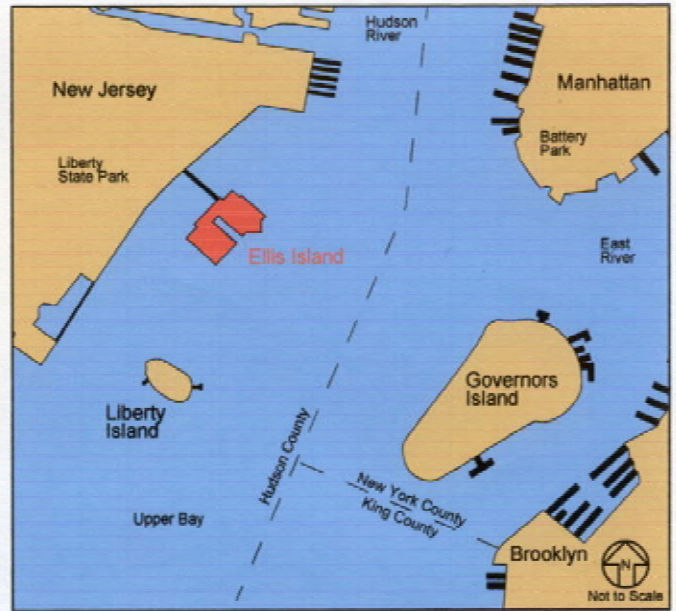
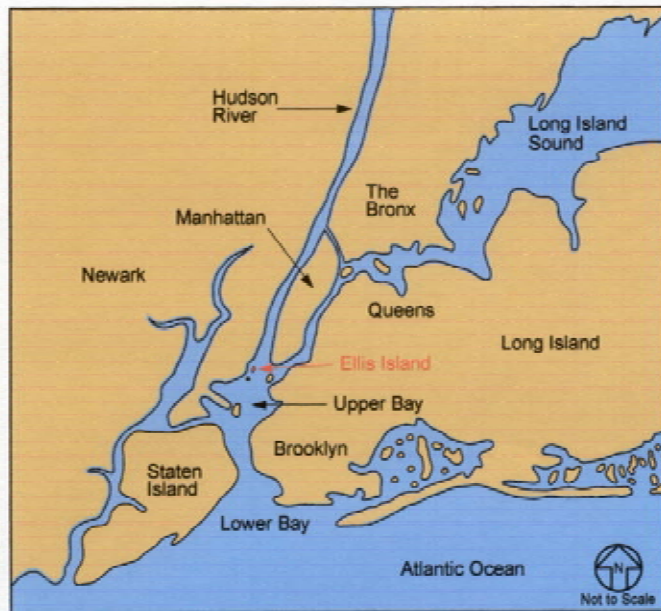
<sup>28</sup> *A Master Plan for Ellis Island, New York*, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, "A Study Report on Ellis Island," June 1964.

<sup>30</sup> *A Master Plan for Ellis Island, New York*, 1968.

<sup>31</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 8; *A Master Plan for Ellis Island, New York*, 1968, p. 13.





## Ellis Island Location Plan

### Figure 0.1

Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



#### Sources:

1. NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, digital file STL1 28001-0001.tif
2. Ellis Island CLR 2002 Existing Conditions Plan
3. Map of New York Harbor from <http://citimaps.com>

Plan drawn using  
Autocad 2002 by  
J. Tracy Stakely, OCLP.  
February 2003.

#### Legend

- = Building / Structure
- = Walkways / Roads
- = Turfgrass / Lawn





## **CHAPTER 1: PREIMMIGRATION PERIOD (PREHISTORY – 1890)**

During the period from prehistory to 1890, Ellis Island grew from a small islet in New York Harbor with relatively few distinguishing characteristics to a highly developed island dramatically influenced by human intervention. Ownership of the site passed from Native Americans to early colonists and eventually to the state and federal governments. Land use patterns evolved from occasional Native American subsistence gathering, to small-scale recreational and residential usage by colonists, to a fully functional military fortification protecting an increasingly prosperous and developed urban harbor. Throughout this period the island's permanent inhabitants altered the natural landscape by adding landfill and constructing numerous buildings, fortifications, and small-scale features like wells, docks, and seawalls. Through the years this continued construction greatly affected the island's native vegetation, replacing it with a new palette of low growing grasses that accommodated the increased human activity and a few trees and garden plots planted by island residents. By the end of the period, Ellis Island was no longer recognizable as the small glacial deposit from which it was born, but was a fully developed island ready to move into a new era of use as the location of the country's premier immigration station.

### **Prehistory**

During the late Wisconsin Period, approximately fifteen thousand years ago, retreating glaciers deposited a small landmass in what is now called New York Harbor, creating a "hummock along a plain fronting the west side of the Hudson River estuary."<sup>1</sup> With the melting of the icecaps and rise in sea level approximately fifteen hundred years ago, this hummock eventually became a small island surrounded by shallow tidal waters.

As the young island's ecology developed, the site became vegetated with species similar to other coastal barrier islands. Typical plant life would

have included salt-spray tolerant grasses and shrubs that could survive with limited fresh water. Along the intertidal zone, brackish marsh grasses like salt marsh cordgrass, salt grass, and salt meadow hay, would have thrived. It is unlikely there were any heavily wooded areas on the island, as the predominant oak-chestnut forests grew on more upland sites, including the mainland piedmont and Manhattan Island. Given the lack of substantial vegetation and fresh water, there was minimal support for a large animal community. Prevalent species were migratory and permanent bird populations, amphibians, and small mammals.<sup>2</sup> However, the shallows around the island supported a productive marine environment, with a variety of fish and mollusks like the American oyster, hard clams, blue mussels, striped bass, bluefish, weakfish, flounder, and sturgeon. It is likely that Native Americans subsisted on these resources, although "the fish and shellfish of the Hudson River estuary were of equal if not greater importance locally in this regard."<sup>3</sup>

The particular abundance of shellfish in the surrounding tidal flats gave rise to the use of "Oyster Islands" as an early name for Ellis Island and other nearby islands and shoals. Great Oyster Island was the largest of these and eventually became known as Bedloe's Island.<sup>4</sup> Ellis Island was initially called Little Oyster Island even though it was the second largest in size, and the smallest island was a shoal or group of shoals located south of Great Oyster. An early description by European settlers described Little Oyster and the surrounding shoals as "three small islands of a mere acre each, which were barely visible above the tide between Bedloe's Island...and the New York – New Jersey shore."<sup>5</sup>

### **Early Native American Use**

Prior to European contact and colonization, Ellis Island may have been permanently settled by native peoples.<sup>6</sup> However, given the abundance of

natural resources in the area around the island and more suitable locations for settlement, it is more likely that they used the island primarily for the “exploitation of food resources.”<sup>7</sup> The island’s topography as the high ground on a relatively flat plain provided an ideal spot for hunters to observe “migratory herd animals, starting as soon as the last Wisconsin glacial melt had passed.”<sup>8</sup> Native Americans may have found the island to be a suitable location for temporary hunting and fishing camps. But as the sea level rose, access to the island became more difficult and fresh water became harder to obtain, further restricting the possibility of permanent settlement. It became far more likely that seasonal harvesting of the oyster beds and animal populations became the primary focus of human activities on the island.

Limited use by the Native Americans kept the island in a relatively natural state. Since it is unlikely that there were permanent settlements during this era, there would have been minimal long-lasting human impacts upon the island. Shelters or other constructed structures were temporary in nature and few if any remnants of these features would have survived longer than a season or two. This pattern of seasonal occupation would have allowed some regeneration of the plant and animal life during times the island was unoccupied.

### **Dutch Colonization of Oyster Island**

Even though the Oyster Islands were probably not used as permanent settlements by Native Americans, the islands were still considered native lands. So in 1630, when Dutch colonists wanted to obtain the rights to Little Oyster Island, they contracted a purchase agreement with the local Native Americans. After the Dutch purchased the island, it was granted to Mynher Michael Paw (or Paauw) for his contributions to the establishment of the Dutch colonies in the New World. Little is known about Paw’s usage of the island. Records indicate that sometime between 1674 and 1680, Governor Edmond Andross of the Royal Colony of New York granted Little Oyster Island to Captain William Dyre. On April 23, 1686,

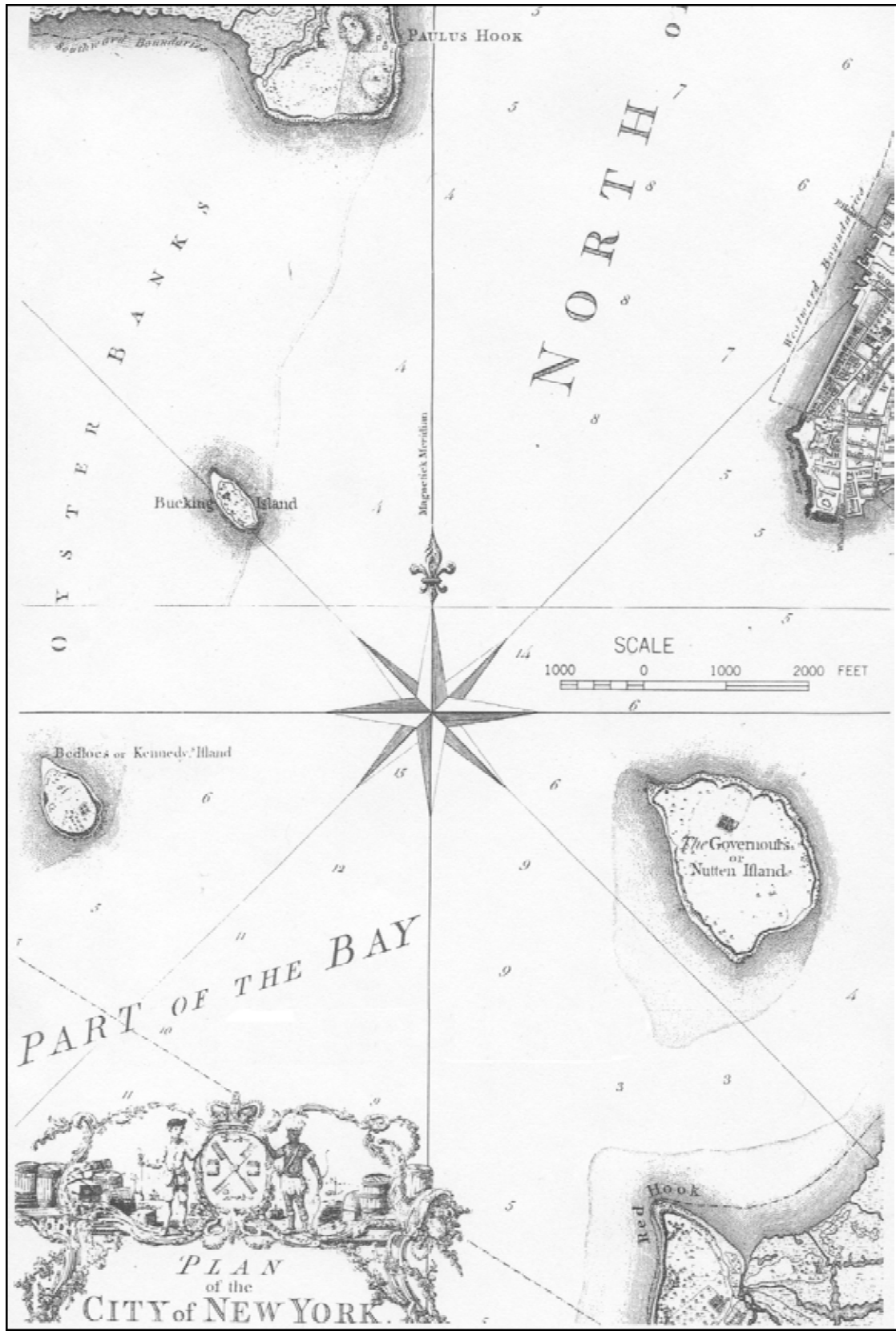
William and Mary Dyre sold the island to Thomas Lloyd, who subsequently conveyed the island to Enoch and Mary Story.<sup>9</sup>

Under colonial ownership, Little Oyster Island continued to be a profitable location for gathering fish and shellfish, although it was eventually used for other activities as well. The site served as a temporary retreat for Dutch and English settlers from their permanent mainland homes, becoming a convenient place for picnicking and relaxation. An early map of the island drawn from a 1766-1767 survey and published in 1776 shows several structures that may have accommodated both the fishing and increased recreational activities on the island (Figure 1.1).

By the mid-1700s other, less savory uses were also recorded for Little Oyster Island. It became a convenient public execution site for criminals, especially pirates such as “Pirate Anderson,” who was put to death by public hanging in 1765. The island continued to be a highly visible execution site until at least the 1830s. Often the body of an executed pirate was left hanging from the gallows tree, called a “Gibbet Tree,” as a deterrent for other would-be criminals. This tree, or group of trees, was identified on several island maps from the period and as a result the island was often called Gibbet Island.<sup>10</sup>

Although some of the executed may have been buried on the island, it is unlikely that this was a common practice. An 1831 account indicates the bodies were “sent to the College of Surgeons and Physicians for dissection.”<sup>11</sup> That may have been the prevailing method of disposing of the bodies as no evidence has been found that any part of the original island was used consistently as a graveyard by island inhabitants.

The arrival of European colonists during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulted in new land use patterns and incremental changes to the landscape. They added features to accommodate increasingly permanent human occupancy, including buildings for residential and commercial use, freshwater wells, subsistence gardens, and structures needed for resource



**Figure 1.1** Map of New York Harbor from 1776, including Governors Island, Bedloe's Island, and Ellis Island (labeled Buckling Island). Several structures are shown on Ellis Island, indicating increased usage by colonists. (copied from Pousson, *Archaeological Resources*, p. 17, original source unknown)

gathering like docking and staging areas for fishing activities. The colonists changed the island's landscape by adding more permanent circulation patterns and seasonally harvesting available resources. During this period, views from the island toward the harbor and mainland were an important feature for island visitors.

### **Samuel Ellis Purchase**

In 1774 Samuel Ellis purchased Little Oyster Island and it became known as Ellis Island. Among other activities Ellis operated a tavern on the island. He made some improvements to the site, possibly including the addition of buildings shown on the 1776 map, although the exact locations and configuration of these structures may or may not be accurate. Additional maps drawn around the turn of the nineteenth century show brick buildings arranged in a different layout. Ellis placed advertisements on at least two separate occasions for the sale of barrels of shad and herring, indicating the island's resources continued to be exploited during his ownership. By 1785 Samuel Ellis attempted to sell the island for unknown reasons, but was unsuccessful.<sup>12</sup>

In 1794 Samuel Ellis died, leaving a will stipulating that Ellis Island should pass to the unborn child of his daughter Catherine Westervelt, but only if she had a son. A male child was born, also named Samuel Ellis. However, the child died within a few years, and letters of administration for the child's estate were granted to his mother. On December 24, 1806, John A. Berry acquired deed to the island. According to this deed, after the child Samuel Ellis had died, "the Island passed into the hands of the two remaining daughters of the original Samuel Ellis, namely Elizabeth Ellis Ryerson and Rachel Ellis Cooder."<sup>13</sup>

### **Fort Gibson**

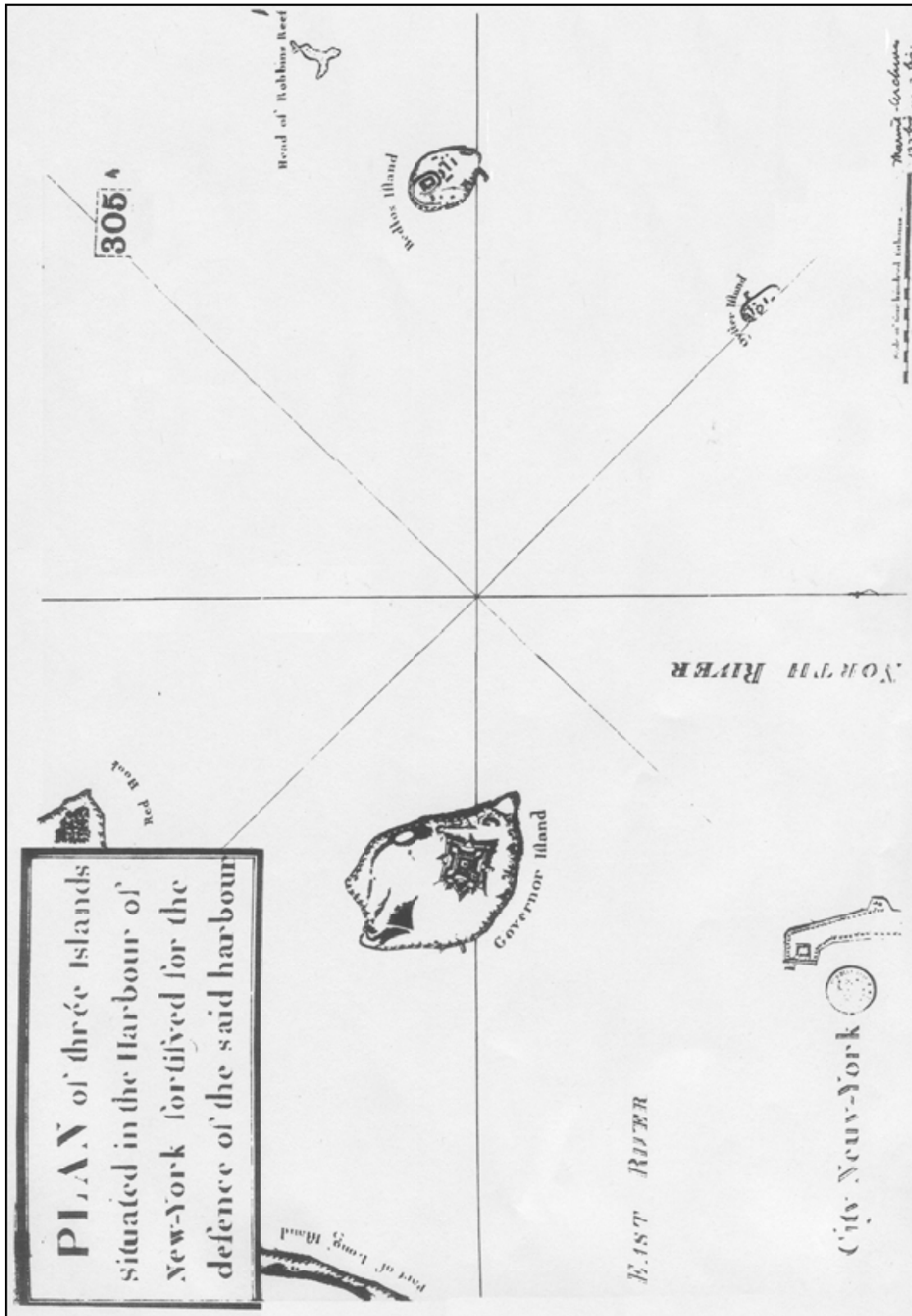
In the mid-1790s, during a time of increased tensions between the United States and Great Britain, New York State prepared for the installation of defenses around New York Harbor.

Ellis Island was one of the chosen sites. On April 21, 1794, the Corporation of the City of New York ceded "the soil from high to low waters mark around Ellis's Island" to the citizens of New York State to install fortifications on the island.<sup>14</sup> The majority of the island, however, still remained in the ownership of the heirs of Samuel Ellis.<sup>15</sup>

In 1795 the New York State Legislature appropriated \$100,000 to construct fortifications on Governors, Bedloe's, and Ellis Islands. The state acquired total jurisdiction over the fortifications on the three islands on February 15, 1800, and soon constructed earthwork fortifications on the southeast end of Ellis Island. A jetty was also added to the island's southwest side. An inlet on the northeast side of the island may have been dug as a source of earth for the fortifications or the jetty. The preexisting commercial facilities remained concentrated on the northwest side of the island (Figure 1.2).<sup>16</sup>

The tensions with Great Britain eased and the fort was never used in battle. However, by the late 1790s, there was a similar threat of war with France, and in response the state upgraded and strengthened the harbor fortifications. A 1798 report to the Secretary of War indicated "the barracks on Ellis Island had been completed, that twelve 24 pounders had been mounted there, and that the island could accommodate one company of soldiers."<sup>17</sup>

By circa 1800 incremental addition of the harbor fortifications changed the island's landscape drastically. Land use became less residential and commercial and more military. Construction of the jetty, earthworks, and the small inlet to provide the fill for these additions altered the island's topography. Extant buildings at the fort, including a magazine, barracks, store, and "hot-shot" furnace, changed the spatial organization and circulation patterns of the island by concentrating the majority of island activities to the south shore, away from the earlier commercial center in the north. Although little is known about the vegetation at this time, it is likely trees and scrub that might obscure views of the harbor from the fort were continually cleared.



**Figure 1.2** Circa 1800 map of New York Harbor, showing fortifications and structures on Governors Island, Bedloe's Island, and Ellis Island (labeled Oyster Island). A dock, inlet, and several buildings are marked on Ellis Island. (Karpinski Collection, Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

The anticipated conflict with France did not materialize, and by 1805, the fort was in disrepair again. Nevertheless, after inspection of the facilities for the War Department by Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Williams, the federal government initiated plans to erect a “casemated Battery” on the island in anticipation of future harbor defense needs.<sup>18</sup>

This plan was approved in 1807, and in 1808 the state of New York purchased Ellis Island from the Ellis heirs through condemnation proceedings and ceded it to the federal government.<sup>19</sup> During the legal process, it was found that those with a claim to Ellis Island included “John A. Berry, Samuel E. Ryerson, Nancy Ryerson, William Kingsland and Rachel, his wife, and others, to the Jurors foresaid unknown.”<sup>20</sup> In estimating what would be fair compensation for the owners, it was determined:

The quality and appearance of the land is no criterion to judge its value to the owners. It is found to be one of the most lucrative situations for shad fishing by set nets [*sic*] within some distance of this place, yielding annually from 450 to 500 Dollars to the occupant from this single circumstance. The Oyster Banks being in its vicinity affords an income in the loan of oyster boats, rakes, etc. of which before I had no idea; besides this a considerable advantage results to the occupant from a tavern in the only possible place of communication for people engaged there between the oyster banks and this city.<sup>21</sup>

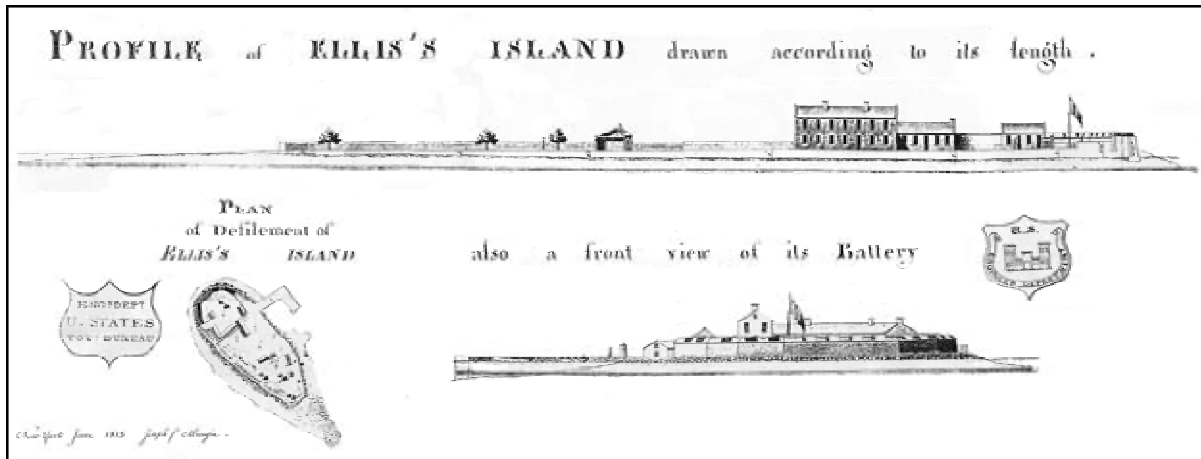
The Sheriff of the City and County of New York, under direction of the Chancellor of New York State, determined that damages sustained by the interested parties if the state took the island would equal \$10,000. The governor approved the expenditure and granted title to the people of New York State on June 18, 1808. On June 30, 1808, the state transferred ownership of the island to the United States government when Governor Daniel D. Tompkins executed a deed for “all the right, title and interest of the state of New York

in and to the lands, tenements and appurtenances above mentioned and described [Ellis Island]” to the United States Secretary of War.<sup>22</sup>

During the War of 1812, Ellis Island defenses were improved again. No battles were fought on the island during the war, but the U. S. Eleventh Regiment stationed up to one hundred eighty-two artillerists on the island, along with British prisoners of war. There was no substantial change to the island’s topography, land use, or circulation patterns. By 1813 the War Department had upgraded the earthworks to a stone parapet with thirteen embrasures. Extant buildings dating to circa 1800 included the furnace, store, barracks, and magazine, while the state and federal governments had added a two-story officers’ quarters, flagstaff, pump, and sentry box at later dates. On the northwest end of the island, structures from the island’s earlier commercial use remained clustered around a well. Additionally, the inlet had been filled, and a low stone or brick wall encircled the entire island. A map from this period shows three large trees present near the commercial buildings, but none were identified and no other vegetation is depicted on the island (Figure 1.3).

After the war, the facilities were used primarily as a recruiting depot, and in 1814 the site was officially named Fort Gibson by the Secretary of War.<sup>23</sup> Activity on the island decreased over the next several years and the fort was nearly abandoned for a short time. There are few known details about island usage during the 1820s. However, historic maps indicate that by circa 1820 the War Department had modified the parapet with a brick facing and backing, constructed a cookhouse near the jetty, placed a crane on the jetty, and removed the furnace and commercial buildings. Only one of the trees shown on earlier maps remained and it was identified as an apple tree (Figure 1.4).

In 1834 an interstate agreement between New York and New Jersey declared Ellis Island and Bedloe’s Island to be part of New York, even though the islands were on the New Jersey side of the main ship channel. By 1835 the United States



**Figure 1.3** An 1813 map of Ellis Island with a profile of the buildings of Fort Gibson. The entire map also shows Governors and Bedloe's Islands, but only the excerpts pertaining to Ellis Island are shown here. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG77, Drawer 36-20)

Army and Navy jointly administered Fort Gibson, which was primarily used as a naval powder magazine.<sup>24</sup>

In 1841 the U. S. Army resumed complete administration of Fort Gibson and made extensive repairs during the next year, including construction of a new hot shot furnace. The primary land use remained military and the U. S. Navy maintained its magazine on the island. However, the Army downgraded the site from Fort Gibson to Battery Gibson, the facility was not garrisoned, and only a small navy guard was left to protect the magazine.<sup>25</sup>

By 1854 the fort consisted of an eleven-gun battery and three naval magazines. Other additions included a railroad line from the jetty to the magazines and a kitchen and oven next to the officers' quarters. The military removed the cookhouse and extended the jetty with the addition of a boathouse and boat slip.<sup>26</sup> The military also constructed a new group of structures in the location of the former commercial and residential buildings on the island's north end, including a gun carriage house, a barn, gunners' house, and privy. These changes altered the spatial organization and circulation patterns of the island slightly by adding residential facilities away from the main fort area (Figure 1.4).

In 1861 the fort's primary role shifted from defense to ammunitions storage when the U. S. Navy partially dismantled the parapet and upgraded the magazine to a more extensive facility. During the Civil War, defenses were temporarily upgraded again when the U. S. Army fortified the island with ten rifled 32-pounders and two smoothbore eight-inch seacoast howitzers, mounted in position to fire over the top of the dismantled parapet. The U. S. Navy continued to control the fort during and after the war, overseeing the six masonry magazines and two shell houses. During the war, the Navy constructed shell house number one north of the existing barracks and converted the former officers' quarters into shell house number two.<sup>27</sup>

As was the established pattern, deterioration of the fort set in after the war ended.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the neglect was so bad that the wooden gun carriages rotted in place and the guns were unable to fire. By the late 1860s public concern rose about the dangers of storing powder and shells on an island so close to a heavily populated area and the "imminent peril" to the New York City vicinity if the magazines were to explode.<sup>29</sup> However, this concern did not dissuade the U. S. Navy from keeping the magazine on the island.<sup>30</sup>

By 1870 the U. S. Navy utilized the entire island for support of its magazine. The military converted existing barracks and officers' quarters into additional magazines and a tank house, and added new structures including a loaded shell house, powder house, steam fire engine house, kitchen, woodshed, carpenter shop, icehouse, and pigpen. It also constructed two new docks., one on the northeast side of the island near the new kitchen, and another with a small boathouse on the western side of the island in front of the gunners' quarters. Other improvements made by the U. S. Navy included the addition of railway lines between the main jetty/dock and the various magazines, the construction of several small guardhouses, and the installation of least two more flagstuffs. Maps from this period also show a large garden area between the magazines and loaded shell house. Although it is likely there were gardens on the island for food production for some time, this circa 1870 documentation gave the first indication where these features were actually located in the landscape (Figure 1.4).

Some change occurred on Ellis Island between the end of the Civil War and 1890, primarily in the number of structures on the island and the increased U. S. Navy activity associated with operations of the magazine. In 1881 the federal government's jurisdiction was extended to include waters surrounding the island when New York executed a deed granting the federal government "title and jurisdiction of lands covered with water at Bedloe's Island, Ellis Island and elsewhere."<sup>31</sup>

### **The 1890 Landscape**

Ellis Island's landscape was extensively altered from its earliest history as Native American seasonal hunting and fishing grounds to a mid-nineteenth-century military fortification. In three centuries of human use and occupation, the original "hummock" on the estuary of the Hudson River had changed dramatically. The natural landscape of Little Oyster Island with its minimal evidence of human use and occupation had been transformed to a highly impacted landscape with numerous extant examples of

human alteration and occupation. The island's development is graphically depicted in Figure 1.4, which illustrates the changes from 1776 until 1870, and Figure 1.5, a period plan of the island for 1890.

By 1890 nearly all characteristics of the island's landscape were modified to some extent, with the most significant development resulting from changes in primary land use and exponential increase in structures and small-scale features needed to support these new uses.

Military facilities defined spatial organization and land use on the island. The main part of Fort Gibson, on the island's south end, housed the storage facilities for powder and ammunition shells, while residential areas for naval personnel were concentrated in buildings on the island's northern end.

Extensions on both the main jetty and the smaller jetty near the gunners' house, as well as the addition of two new docks, increased the island's footprint. However, the topography remained largely unchanged.

A series of plank walks, including walks along the edge of the seawalls, provided circulation throughout the island. Railway lines used for transporting ammunition and supplies linked buildings to the main dock and with one another. Boats to one of two main docks on either the north or south side of the island provided access to and from the island.

Most structures present in 1870 were also extant in 1890. Several new structures were added, including a boathouse on the new dock north of the gunners' house and a filling house on the new dock near shell house number one. Only one guardhouse remained on the northern end of the island. The parapet and powder magazines were constructed of stone and brick, the pyrotechnic magazine and shell houses were brick, and the remaining structures were wooden.

Vegetation was minimal as it had been during previous eras, consisting primarily of a few trees,



native grasses, and shrubs. No substantial trees were present on the island. The garden first shown on circa 1870 maps remained extant between the two shell houses, and an additional garden was located on the island's northern end, near the gunners' house.

Due in part to the lack of significant vegetation, views from the island to the harbor and beyond remained relatively unobstructed. The primary views from the island were toward Manhattan and the New Jersey shore and to other harbor islands including Governors Island and the Statue of Liberty on Bedloe's Island. Views within the island were somewhat obstructed by the buildings.

Small-scale features included two cisterns located near shell house number two, a flagstaff near the office, and the cribwork seawall surrounding a major part of the island.

## **Endnotes for Chapter 1**

<sup>1</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> An early Mohegan name for Ellis Island was Kioshk or Gull Island, likely referring to a substantial gull population on the island. Henry H. Pike, "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," (Washington, DC: General Services Administration, Office of General Counsel, February 11, 1963), pp. 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>4</sup> Currently called Liberty Island and serving as the home of the Statue of Liberty National Monument.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *History of Ellis Island, New York*, December 1, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Undoubtedly Ellis Island was used by prehistoric peoples and Native Americans. However, any scenario of prehistoric use is speculative since substantial archeological evidence of extended habitation has not been found on the island.

<sup>7</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Kardas and Edward Larrabee, *Report of Archeological Resources Probability and Significance and Recommendations for Protection, Ferry Slip and Approach Channel, Ellis Island* (Denver, CO: United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1976), p. 12, as cited in *Archeological Resources*, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 3; *History of Ellis Island*, 1952, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> On an 1813 map, two large trees are indicated on the northwest side of the island. Although these were not specifically identified as Gibbet Trees, they are in the general location of trees later so identified. On an 1896 map a Gibbet Tree is shown northeast of the original immigration building. This tree appears dead in construction photographs taken in 1900. A 1913 map showing the second immigration station identifies another Gibbet Tree located just northeast of the kitchen and laundry building. It is shown in photographs dating to 1892 and 1901, and appears on an early 1916 map but is not shown on the site in a map made during the later part of the same year. "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," pp. 2-3; *History of Ellis Island*, 1952, p. 1; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 15-16, 19, 123.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Berengarten, *Ellis Island* (Civil Works Administration, Office of National Parks, United States Department of Interior, 1934), p. 23, as cited in *Archeological Resources*, p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> John A. Berry may have been related to Samuel Ellis, since he was listed in later documentation as an owner of the island when the state of New York initiated

condemnation proceedings against the remaining Ellis heirs. It is unclear from the record what became of Catherine Westervelt. "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Harlan D. Unrau, *Historic Structure Report, Ellis Island, Historical Data, Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York/New Jersey* (Denver, CO: United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, 1981), p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," pp. 3-4; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>17</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," pp. 4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Letter, May 16, 1808, Public Papers of D. D. Tompkins, Vol. II, p. 85, as cited in *Archeological Resources*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," pp. 4-5.

<sup>23</sup> The fort was named after James Gibson. *Archeological Resources*, p. 23; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 30; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 30.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

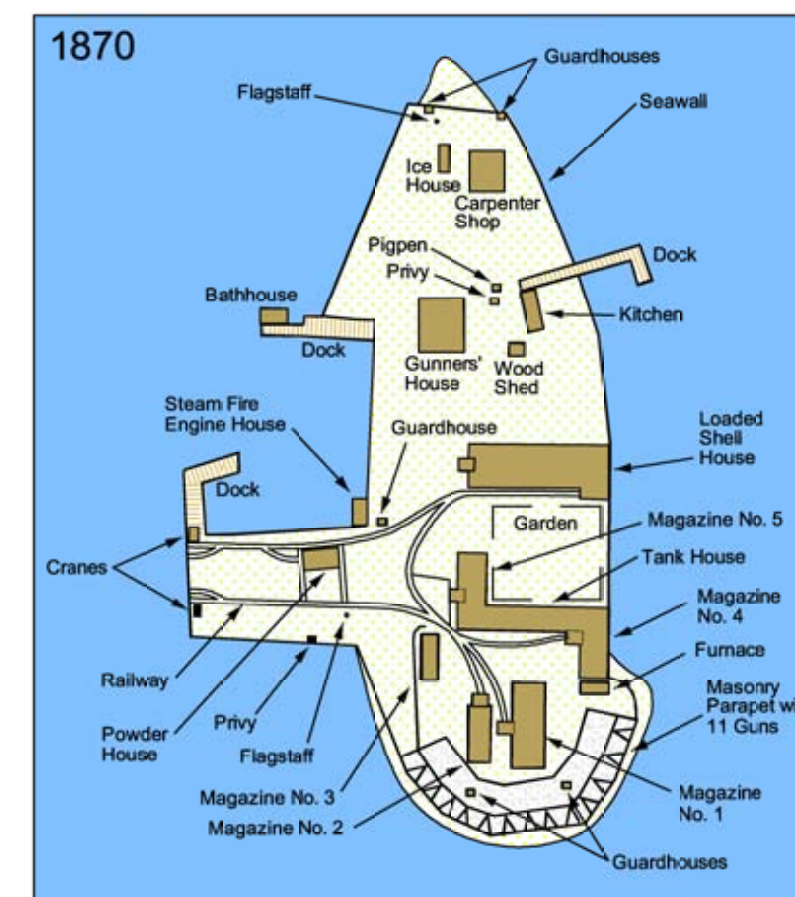
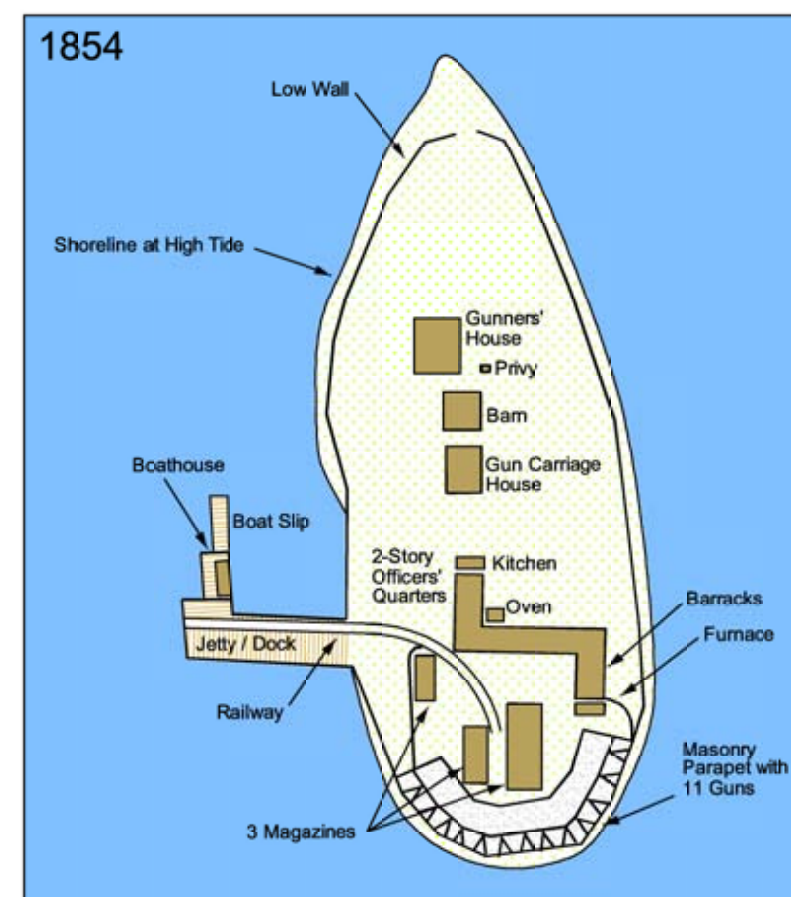
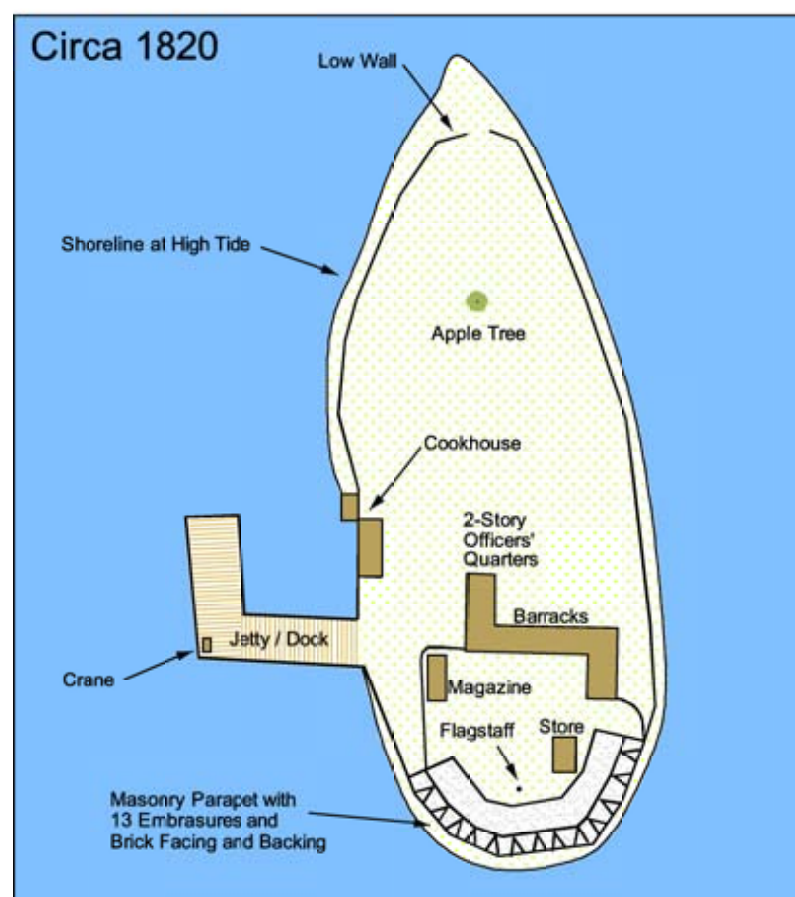
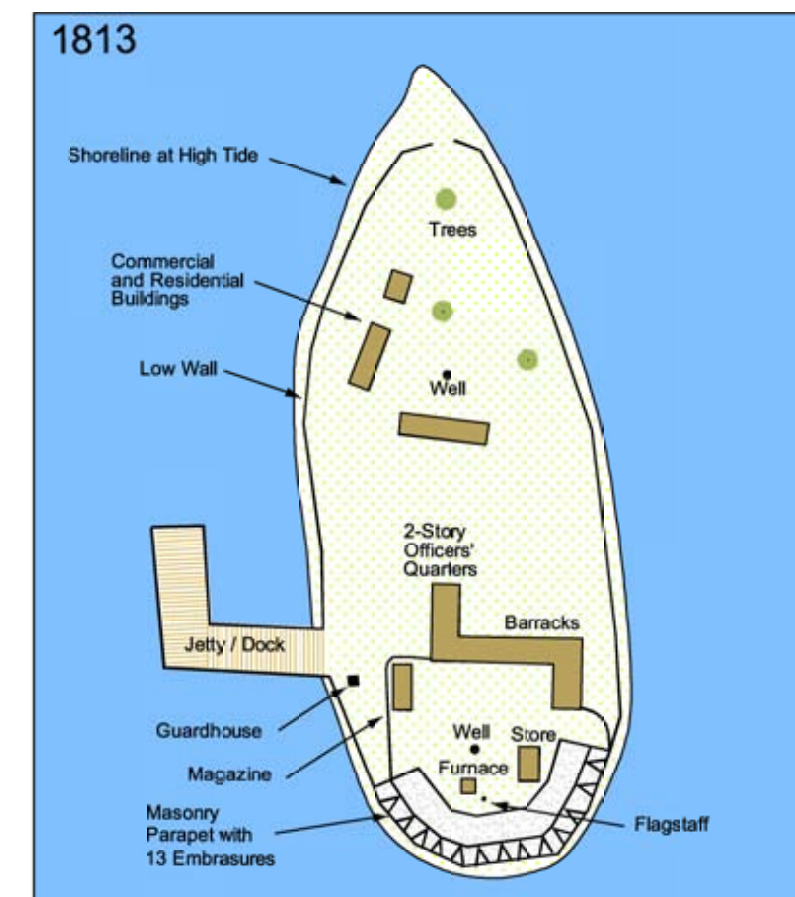
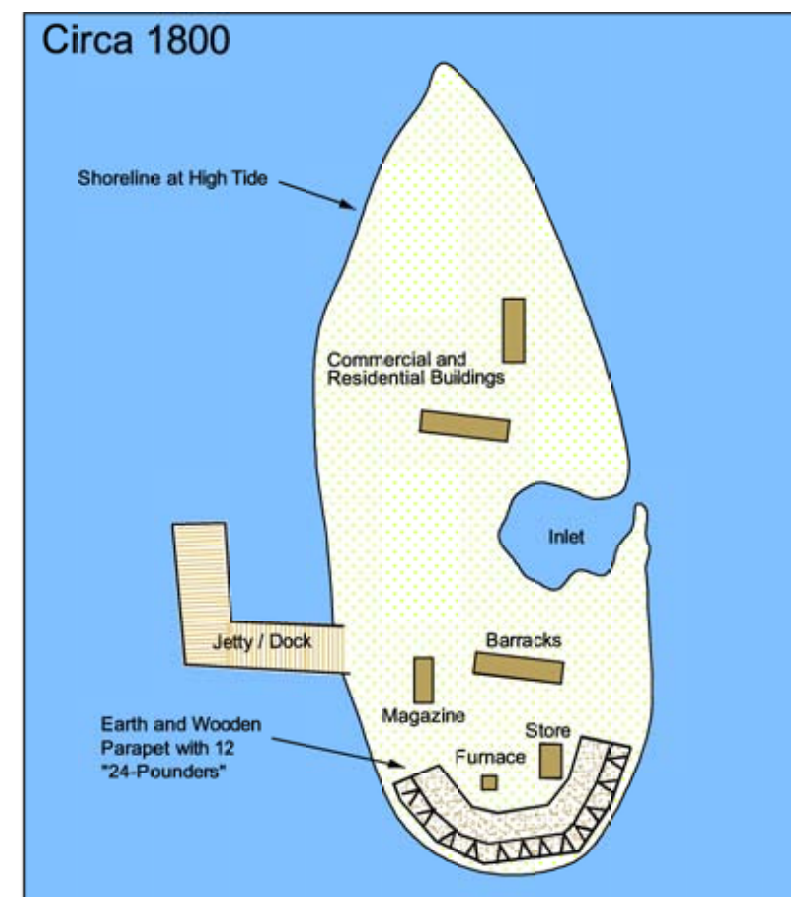
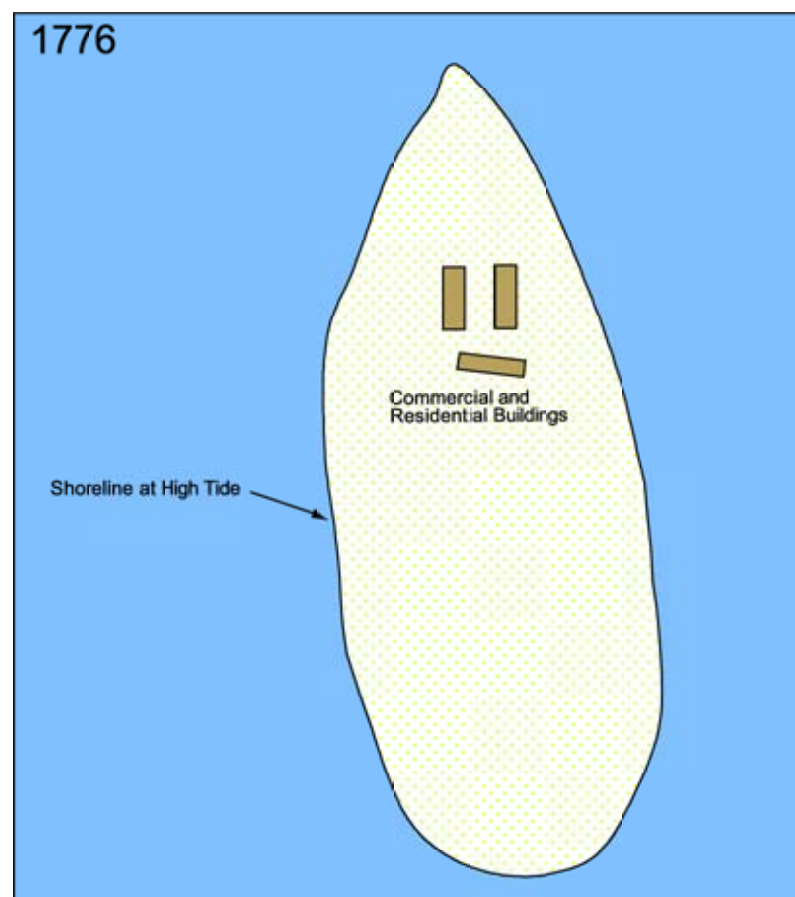
<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>29</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, March 14, 1868, as cited in *Archeological Resources*, p. 33.

<sup>30</sup> The perceived public danger from the magazine may have been a contributing factor to the later decision to close the magazine and site the new federal immigration station on the island.

<sup>31</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 33-35; "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 5.



# **Ellis Island Development From 1776 to 1870**

**Figure 1.4**

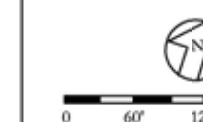
Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation



- Sources:**
1. "Plan of Defilement of Ellis's Island," 1813 (National Archives, RG 77, Drawing 36-20)
  2. "Ellis's Island, Fort Gibson," 1819 (National Archives, RG 77, Drawing 38, Sheet 5)
  3. "Map of Ellis's Island," 1853 (National Archives, RG 74, Red # 460, Drawing 1)
  4. "Map of Ellis's Island, Bureau of Ordnance, May 30, 1864" (National Archives, RG 74, Red # 460, Drawing 2)
  5. "Plan of Ellis' Island, Navy Yard, New York, July 2, 1866" (National Archives, RG 74, Red # 460, Drawing 5)
  6. "Plan of Ellis' Island, Navy Yard, March 26th, 1870" (National Archives, RG 74, Red # 460, Drawing 6)

Plan drawn using Autocad 2002 by J. Tracy Stakely, OCLP. February 2003.

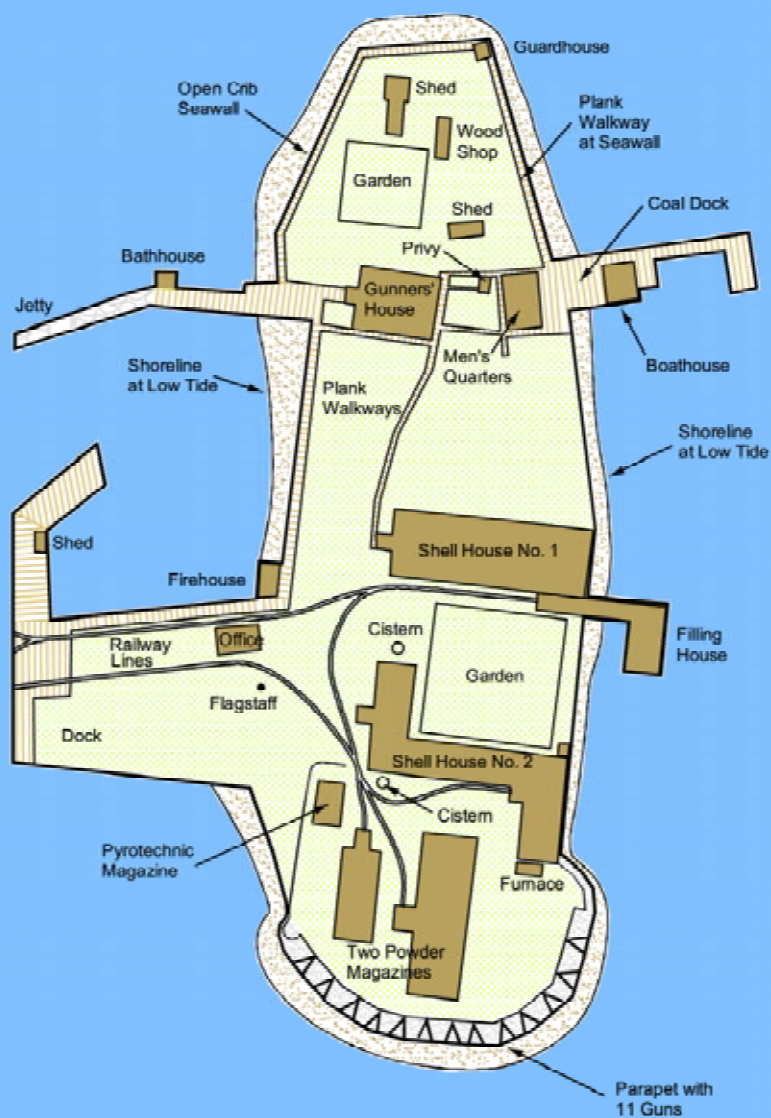


**Legend**

	= Building / Structure
	= Parapet
	= Boardwalk
	= Turfgrass / Lawn
	= Tree







## Ellis Island 1890 Period Plan Figure 1.5

Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



### Sources:

1. "Map of Ellis Island, New York Harbor, NY, U.S. Emigration Depot, 1890" (STLI Library)
2. "Ellis Island, June 1880" (National Archives, RG 74, Red # 460, Drawer 8)
3. "Ellis Island, Showing Proposed Channel and Breakwater, Ordnance Office Navy Yard, N.Y., April, 1883" (National Archives RG 74, Red # 460, Drawer 7)

Plan drawn using  
Autocad 2002 by  
J. Tracy Stakely, OCLP,  
February 2003.



0 60' 120'

### Legend

- = Building / Structure
- = Turfgrass / Lawn
- = Jetty Fill
- = Boardwalk
- = Gravel / Sandy Shore



## CHAPTER 2: FIRST IMMIGRATION STATION (1890 – 1897)

Between 1890 and 1897, the Ellis Island landscape changed dramatically. Immigration became the island's primary land use, and the federal government constructed a new facility to process the thousands of immigrants passing through the port of New York each year. To accommodate this expansion, the Department of the Treasury removed many of the existing naval magazine structures, added cribwork and landfill to increase the island's footprint, and constructed numerous wooden buildings to accommodate immigrants' processing, medical care, and temporary housing. They added small-scale features to the island like fences, walks, and lighting, and in the process removed nearly all of the extant vegetation, except for a few trees around existing buildings. By 1897 the island was more than fourteen acres in size and had twelve major buildings extant. The new Ellis Island Immigration Station was ready to greet the flood of immigrants expected to arrive at the dawn of the new century.

### Selection of Ellis Island for Federal Immigration Station

Up until 1875, immigration matters were generally handled by individual states, except for some minor limitations placed in immigrant numbers by the federal government. In that year a new era in immigration began with initiation of federal exclusion laws to curtail the immigration of "unacceptable" individuals. The first law excluded criminals and prostitutes. By 1882 an additional law prevented immigration of "any convict, lunatic, idiot, or any person unable to take care of himself or herself without becoming a public charge."<sup>1</sup> A similar restriction applied specifically to Chinese laborers. In 1885 the Alien Contract Labor Law made it "unlawful to import aliens for labor under contract."<sup>2</sup> These restrictions, the inability of New York and other states to care for sick or indigent immigrants adequately, and unsuccessful attempts to manage immigration through a mixed federal-state system, led to the eventual removal of immigration control from the states and the establishment of centralized

immigration oversight within the United States Department of the Treasury.

In New York, the state immigration facilities had been located at Castle Garden on the southern tip of Manhattan since 1855. At the time immigration processing was transferred to the federal government, the operations at Castle Garden were plagued with "varied charges of mismanagement, abuse of immigrants, and evasion of the laws."<sup>3</sup> As a result, Secretary of the Treasury William Windom wanted to make a complete break from the existing facilities and establish a new immigration station in New York that would be "isolated and completely under federal control."<sup>4</sup> An island in New York Harbor was the ideal setting for the new station, and the Department of the Treasury undertook a study to locate the most appropriate choice. On February 13, 1890, Secretary Windom, Solicitor Hepburn, and Collector Erhardt took a tour of the various proposed sites. According to a *New York Times* article,

The three gentlemen went first to Castle Garden, which they inspected thoroughly. Then they boarded the Government tug, W. E. Chandler, at the Barge Office, and crossed over to Governors Island.

Gen. O. O. Howard showed them all over the island. It was about a three-mile walk altogether. From there they went to Bedloe's Island, where they spent a few moments. Then they steamed around Ellis Island. There is a quantity of gunpowder stored there, and the officials would have been compelled to throw away some freshly-lighted, special-brand cigars.<sup>5</sup>

Over the next several weeks there was much speculation about which island would be chosen. Secretary Windom did not want Ellis Island because the island was too small and so low that it barely rose above water during high tide.<sup>6</sup> Governors Island was a likely candidate since

there was already a federal military presence on the island, and even though there was “considerable opposition from the Army, Secretary Windom believed that there was plenty of room for both military and civil purposes.”<sup>7</sup> Despite this reasoning, in the end Windom preferred Bedloe’s Island. On March 1, 1890, the *New York Times* reported that Windom “issued orders for the establishment of an immigrant landing depot on Bedloe’s Island, New York Harbor, and arrangements will at once be made for the construction of the necessary buildings.”<sup>8</sup>

However, there was intense local opposition to using Bedloe’s Island because of the presence of the Statue of Liberty. The statue’s creator, Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, even contested the decision, calling it a “monstrous plan” and “downright desecration.”<sup>9</sup> The sensitive issue of the federal government taking over immigration from New York State fueled public sentiment. Local politician Big Alderman Flynn “introduced a resolution which protested against the Government taking the island for a landing place for immigrants as a ‘wanton act of vandalism’.”<sup>10</sup> He called on New York State’s congressional representatives to “do all in their power to prevent the taking of the island.”<sup>11</sup> The board of aldermen passed the resolution unanimously, although it was not binding on the federal decision-makers.

After the temporary congressional committee on immigration examined the options on Governors Island, Bedloe’s Island, and Ellis Island, and took into consideration the military and public opinion, they recommended Ellis Island for the facility. Of the three islands, Ellis was the only site with “no powerful sentiment to be overridden” since the removal of the naval magazine for safety reasons was still a very popular issue.<sup>12</sup> Once the choice was made, Congress proceeded quickly with funding. On April 11, 1890, it appropriated \$75,000 to remove the powder magazines at Fort Gibson and make improvements on the island to accommodate its anticipated new use as New York Harbor’s primary immigration facility.<sup>13</sup>

## **Construction of First Immigration Station**

On May 24, 1890, the federal government formally transferred Ellis Island from the War Department to the Department of the Treasury. Planning for the new immigration facilities began immediately under the supervision of John W. Marshall, Superintendent of Repairs of the U. S. Public Buildings Service in New York. Marshall’s assistant, J. Bachmeyer, prepared the plans, proposing “a main building, which would be perhaps 200 x 245 feet, a baggage station on the pier, which would be about 80 x 450 feet... The structures might be made principally of iron.”<sup>14</sup> In addition, the plan called for a boiler and engine house, three hospital buildings, kitchen and dining room for the hospital, and restaurant.<sup>15</sup> Upon further revision, published accounts of the plan described a wooden, two-story main building with a slate roof and towers on each end, an “insane hospital” in the renovated shell house number one, a wooden kitchen and dining room addition to shell house number one, a brick hospital, and doctor’s cottage in one of the existing gunners’ houses.<sup>16</sup>

In preparation for construction of the new facilities, the Department of the Treasury removed the ammunition stored at Fort Gibson’s naval magazine along with the remaining guns, parapet, and gun platform. It also razed some existing structures including the office building, pyrotechnic magazine, fire engine house, and various outbuildings, while other buildings were to be reused.<sup>17</sup>

Construction of the new buildings necessitated major site work, including the expansion of the island with the addition of landfill and the construction of docking and landing facilities. To fund this work, Congress appropriated an additional \$75,000 on August 30, 1890, in addition to the initial \$75,000 appropriation.<sup>18</sup> The Department of the Treasury contracted various phases of the work to the W. H. Beard Company and Warren Rosevelt, both of New York City.<sup>19</sup> The contractors soon began adding landfill around the island, except on the east and northeast sides. The fill material was a mixture of



mud, clayey sand, and gravel and probably came from a dredging operation in the ship channel. The newly established elevation for these filled areas was approximately two to three feet above the high-water mark.<sup>20</sup> In conjunction with the landfill, the contractors added more than seventeen hundred feet of docks and cribwork to the island. In 1890 they installed a breakwater on the southeast side of the island, creating a protected ferry basin. In 1891 a ferry slip, rack, and landing area were added to the basin's northwest side. The work on the ferry racks included the addition of "bridges, flows, gallow frames, hoisting chains, sheaves, wenchies, platform connections, receiving platforms, backing logs, a hauling shed over the bridge at the bulkhead, a fence and gates across the ferry slip, and a shed over the side exit."<sup>21</sup> By 1892, with the completion of the landfill, breakwater, and docks, the island was approximately eleven acres in size.

The Department of the Treasury contracted construction of the main building and boiler house to the firm of Sheridan & Byrne. It also secured additional contractors for the renovation and reuse of other existing structures as previously planned by Bachmeyer. As Bachmeyer specified, shell house number one became the insane hospital, the gunners' house functioned as a temporary construction office and then became the surgeon's quarters, the large powder magazine was used as the main kitchen for the station, the small powder magazine first became a temporary coal house and then stored records, and shell house number two became a detention building.<sup>22</sup>

To supply fresh water to the new facilities, MacKnight Flintic Stone Company designed and installed a rainwater reservoir system in the summer of 1891. The firm placed twelve-foot-deep concrete cisterns northwest of the insane hospital, approximately five feet above sea level. It also located an additional circular saltwater cistern southeast of the boiler house. The freshwater cisterns connected to roof drains to collect and store rainwater. In September 1891 contractor Thomas J. Kelly installed additional cast-iron pipes from the downspouts of the boiler

house to the cisterns. However, even with increased supply lines, the system of downspouts and cisterns did not provide a reliable source of water. In 1892 a subsequent contractor installed an artesian well to supplement the island's water supply. Even that did not improve the situation, and eventually "the whole supply of water, which amounted to nearly 20,000 gallons per day (was) brought from Manhattan by steamers and pumped into storage tanks on Ellis Island."<sup>23</sup>

On October 34, 1891, an article about the nearly completed facilities in *Harper's Weekly* described the island and the new immigration building as,

two and a quarter acres in extent...long used as the naval magazine....By necessity the island has been about doubled in size....a latter-day watering place hotel, presenting to the view a great many-windowed expanse of buff-painted wooden walls, of blue-slate roofing, and of light and picturesque towers. It is 400 feet long, two stories high, and 150 feet wide....It is designed to permit the handling of at least 10,000 immigrants in a day, and the first story, which is 13 feet in height, is sufficiently capacious for the storage and handling of the baggage of 12,000 newcomers. Elsewhere on the island...there were, either finished or under construction, hospital buildings, bathhouse, powerhouse, kitchen and restaurant, and doctor's quarters."<sup>24</sup>

The Department of the Treasury approved the completed facilities and the site was officially opened on January 1, 1892. Approximately seven hundred immigrants landed on the island during its first day of operation. Critics of the new facilities complained about the excessive construction costs, running nearly double the original budget, and the lack of architectural distinction of the main building, described by some as having "no particular style of architecture."<sup>25</sup> Victor Safford, a medical officer serving at Ellis Island at the time, published the following reminiscences of the station:

...There were several substantial stone and brick buildings on the island besides the half burned thick stone and mortar structures once used for the storage of explosives. These latter were converted into vaults for the keeping of immigration records. The other old buildings were utilized for various purposes. Some of them, enlarged and extended, formed a part of an extensive two story dormitory for detained immigrants. The hospital and the main immigration building were, however, new wooden structures. The hospital consisted of a group of one and two story buildings with sheltered verandas, arranged on the quadrangular plan. In some part of the central court, protected from the wind, rain or sun, as the need might be, a convalescent patient could almost always find comfort out-of-doors in winter or summer.

The location of the main building at Ellis Island at the time when I first made its acquaintance was parallel to the present structure, but nearer the water, in fact directly alongside the ferry slip. It was a two story wooden building about six hundred feet long and perhaps one hundred feet wide with towers at each corner....<sup>26</sup>

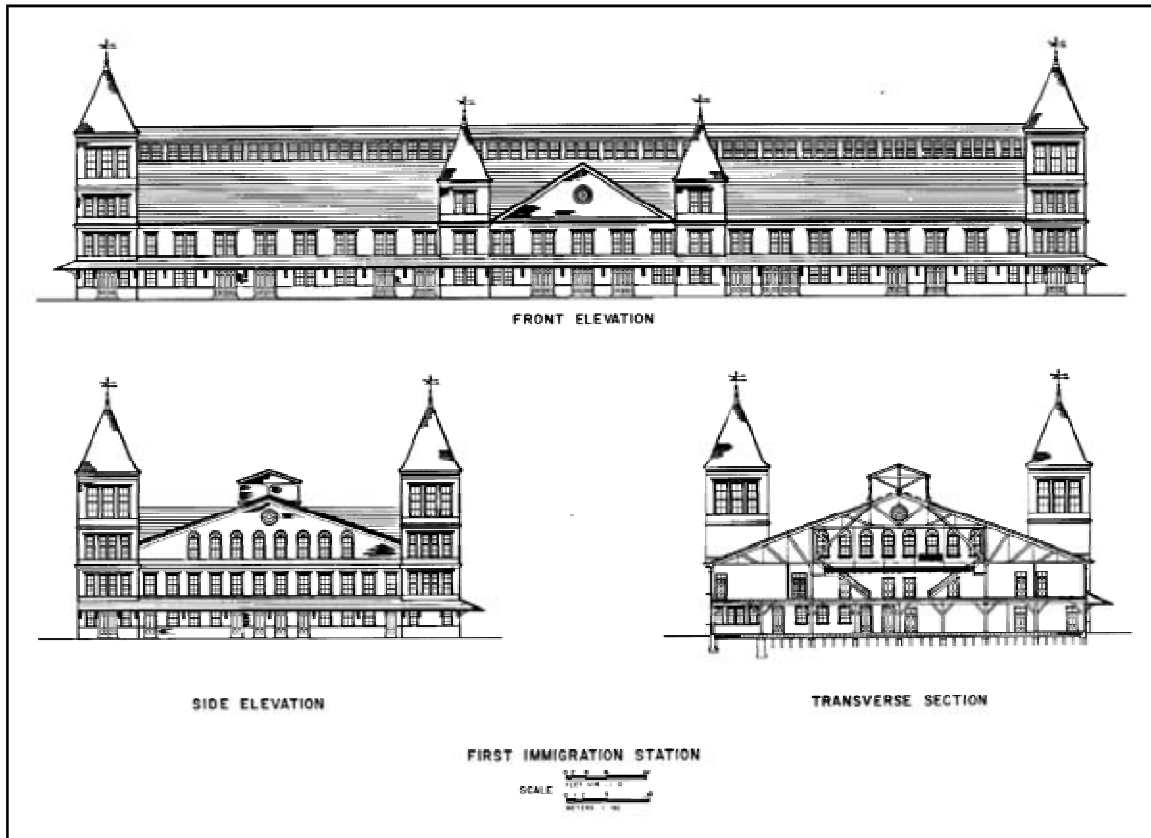
The Department of the Treasury completed all major building construction and remodeling of existing buildings by 1893, although additional construction projects continued at the station until 1897. Between 1894 and 1896, new cribwork bulkheads and fill were added to the east and northeast edges of the island, extending the island's size to some fourteen acres at a cost of \$19,882. The fill material consisted of cinder waste from the island's new coal-fired power plant, clayey sand, and loam, and was graded at around two and a half and four feet above the high-water mark. In 1896 contractors remodeled the detention building from a single-story to a two-story structure, created a recreation area on the roof, and installed a temporary detention pen on the grounds for similar use.<sup>27</sup> Other additions

completed under Department of the Treasury contracts included the construction in 1897 of a new disinfecting house on the eastern side of the detention building, the installation of a covered passageway with a baggage run between the main building and ferry landing, and the addition of a landing dock on the south end of the island. In June 1897 construction on the facility ceased with the installation of underwater cables to New York City for telegraph and telephone service via Governors Island (Figures 2.1 – 2.2).<sup>28</sup>

### **Destruction of Facilities by Fire**

On June 15, 1897, just a few days after construction was completed, a fire destroyed most of the new immigration facility. The fire broke out during the early morning in the restaurant and kitchen building, and the flames soon engulfed the main building and other structures. The structures' wooden walls provided ample fuel for the fire. All immigrants evacuated the island within twenty minutes of the first alarm, with no loss of life. After two and a half hours, the fire consumed three to four acres of the fourteen-acre island, and by morning, only three buildings remained standing – the boiler house, the tank and coal house, and the surgeon's quarters. Some walls of the records storage office and restaurant and kitchen building also remained, and the boardwalk along the ferry basin was intact, but everything else was "a tangle of charcoal, battered and rusted iron, and ashes."<sup>29</sup>

Surprisingly, Ellis Island's Commissioner of Immigration Joseph H. Senner was relieved that the facilities had been consumed by fire. Since the main buildings had been constructed of wood, and not masonry or iron, Senner had feared that sooner or later such an accident would overtake the structures and many lives would be lost. Although he was greatly relieved that there were no casualties, he remarked, "A row of unsightly, ramshackle tinderboxes has been removed, and when the Government rebuilds, it will be forced to put up decent fireproof structures."<sup>30</sup> Newspaper and magazine accounts reported many citizens were equally relieved that the structures



**Figure 2.1** Elevations of the first immigration building. Drawn by Daniel H. Buehler, Building Conservation Technology, Inc., The Ehrenkrantz Group, 1978. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 28001-0007.tif & 0008.tif)



**Figure 2.2** The first immigration station on Ellis Island. The buildings from left to right are the tank and coal house, boiler house, surgeon's quarters, and main building. 1892. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-37D-5)

were gone, primarily because of the structures' questionable aesthetic or architectural value.<sup>31</sup> With the devastation on the island, the Bureau of Immigration temporarily transferred operations to the Barge Office, at the southeast corner of Battery Park on lower Manhattan.<sup>32</sup>

### **The 1897 Landscape**

The landscape underwent a dramatic transformation during the short period between 1890 and 1897. Shifting the island's primary land use from a naval magazine and military post to a bustling immigration station completely altered the landscape. The removal of much of the former military facility, the addition of seven new structures, and the renovation of five existing buildings changed the facility's spatial organization. Oriented on a north/south axis, the new main building sat relatively close to the ferry basin edge. Enclosed courtyard spaces separated smaller structures east of the main building, with additional open space extending to the shoreline. The island's 1897 landscape is illustrated in Figure 2.3.

By 1897 the addition of cribwork and landfill changed the topography of the island, increasing its size from just under three and a third acres to fourteen and one-fifth acres and raising the elevation to approximately two feet above the high-water mark. These changes necessitated a need for new circulation patterns, with emphasis on basic circulation routes between the docking facilities and the buildings. Newly installed walkways, including a boardwalk along the front of the main building, connected the facilities and directed the flow of immigrants from one destination to another. Boats continued to provide access to the island, landing at the ferry slip at the north corner of the ferry basin. A minor water circulation route was also established to the coal wharf at the boiler house.

Upon completion of the immigration station in 1897, there were twelve major buildings on the island. Five of these were preexisting and remodeled for new uses. These included the

record storage office (former magazine, originally built circa 1854-1886), restaurant and kitchen building (former magazine, originally built circa 1844), detention building (former shell house number two, originally built prior to 1813), insane hospital (originally built circa 1854-1868), and surgeon's quarters (former gunners' house, originally built prior to 1886). Seven buildings were newly constructed, including the main building, disinfection house, two hospital buildings, hospital office, boiler house, and tank and coal house.<sup>33</sup> Another significant structure on the island was the wooden crib seawall surrounding most of the island and the breakwater.

The addition of landfill eliminated most extant vegetation. Only a few large trees on the north of the island, including one labeled the Gibbet Tree on a historic map, were preserved from the island's earlier periods. Since the facilities were complete for such a short time before their destruction by fire, it is unlikely that any effort was put into improving the landscape. There was not adequate time to plan for the installation of ornamental vegetation like trees, shrubs, and flowers.

Views from the edges of Ellis Island to the harbor and beyond remained consistent with earlier periods. However, views within or across the island were less expansive than they had been previously. Although the new immigration facilities actually contained fewer buildings than had been present in 1890, the new structures were generally larger in scale, thereby blocking more of the views across the island.

Various contractors added small-scale features to the landscape during the construction of the facilities. Docks and wooden pilings lined the ferry slip. A covered walkway and adjacent baggage run connected the ferry landing to the main building. Lighting illuminated the front of the main building and scattered locations around the island.<sup>34</sup> A system of downspouts, water pipes, and concrete cisterns collected fresh water and three water hydrants near the hospital buildings distributed it throughout the island.

## Endnotes for Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> Thomas M. Pitkin, *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, February 14, 1890 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 1).

<sup>6</sup> *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, February 6, 1890 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 1).

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, March 1, 1890 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 1).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Hugins, *Statue of Liberty National Monument: Its Origin, Development and Administration* (National Park Service, 1958), pp. 18-19, as cited in *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> *New York Times*, March 19, 1890 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 1).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 3-4, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *New York Tribune*, May 25, 1890, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 36-43.

<sup>16</sup> *New York World*, August 3, 1890, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 11-13.

<sup>17</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 36-43.

<sup>18</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 92.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 36-43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 13-16, 48.

<sup>24</sup> Ralph Julian, "Landing the Immigrants," *Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1891, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 18.

<sup>25</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 4, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Victor Safford, *Immigration Problems: Personal Experiences of an Official* (New York, 1925), pp. 22-24, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 22.

<sup>27</sup> It is unclear where this feature was located.

<sup>28</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 43-45, 93; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 45; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 4, 25-26. The fire also destroyed some immigration records from 1855 to

1890, which may have included files transferred from Castle Garden to Ellis Island circa 1889 and/or files from Ellis Island itself. *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> *New York Tribune*, June 16, 1897, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 26.

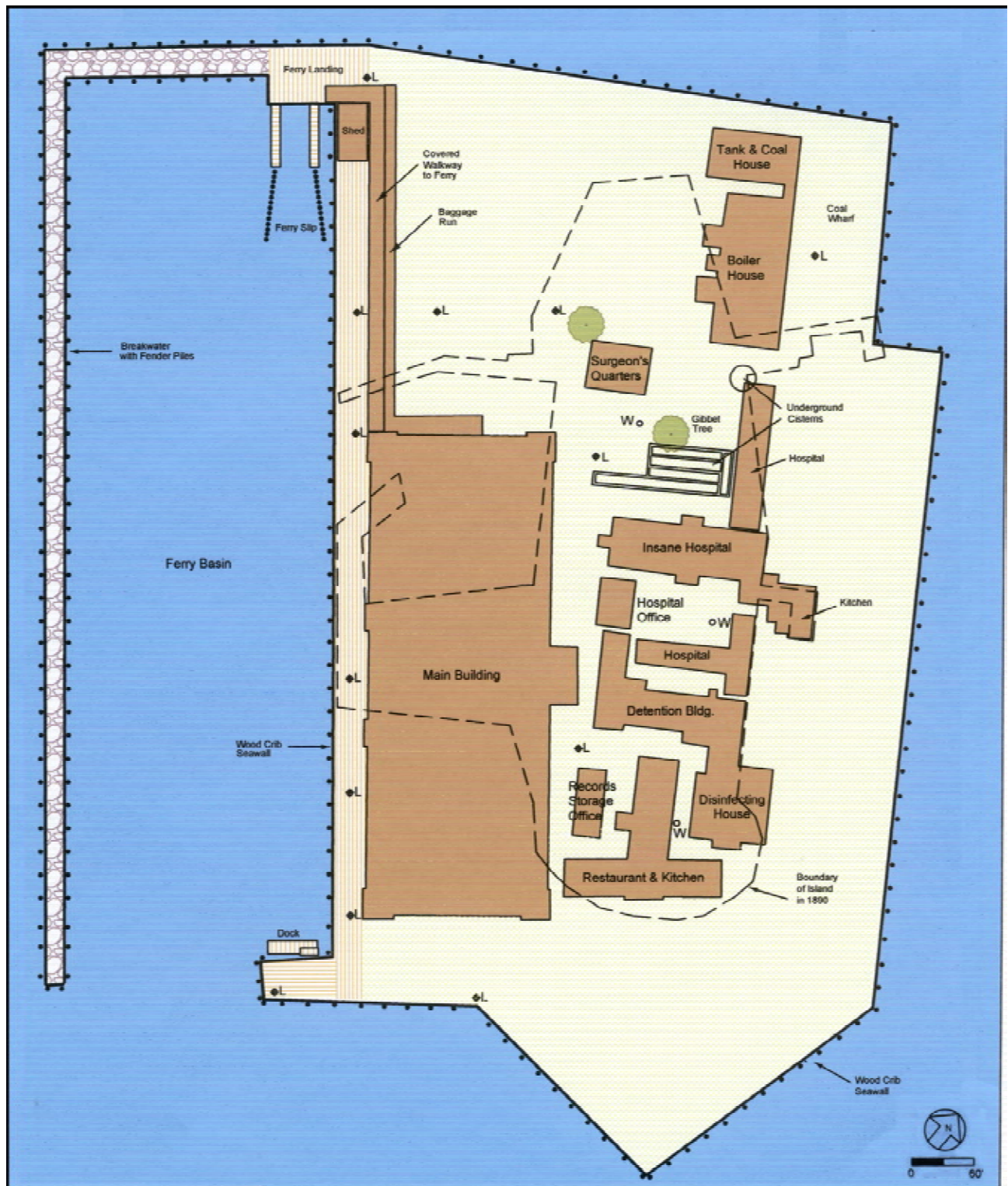
<sup>31</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> The Barge Office had served as a temporary immigrant processing location previously. During construction of the initial Ellis Island immigration facilities, immigrant processing relocated from Castle Garden because New York State commissioners refused to allow the Department of the Treasury to continue to use Castle Garden after the system of state/federal immigrant processing ceased. The Barge Office was located near Castle Garden, adjacent to the Staten Island Ferry. Constructed for the Department of the Treasury's Customs Bureau in 1883 to accept steamship cabin passengers, the building was relatively unused by 1890. The location had served as a landing spot for barges to and from Governors Island from colonial times to the Civil War, hence the name "Barge Office." *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 26; *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 39, 48.

<sup>34</sup> No extant photographs or documentation of the style of light has been discovered, but their locations are noted on historic maps.





## Ellis Island 1897 Period Plan

### Figure 2.3

Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



#### Sources:

1. "1896 Plan of Ellis Island, Which Also Indicates Earlier Shortline" (NPS DSC Drawing 356/43.967:6)
2. "Plan of Buildings & Utilities, c. 1897" (John F. Pousson, *An Overview and Assessment of Archaeological Resources on Ellis Island*, Figure 17, p. 48)
3. Historic Photographs (STLI Library, NY Public Library, National Archives)
4. Harlan Unrau, *Historic Structure Report, Historical Data, 1981*

Plan drawn using  
Autocad 2002 by  
J. Tracy Stakely, OCLP.  
February 2003.



0 60' 120'

#### Legend

- = Building / Structure
- = Turfgrass / Lawn
- = Misc. Fill in Breakwater
- = Boardwalk
- = Tree
- L = Light Pole
- W = Water Hydrant





### **CHAPTER 3: SECOND IMMIGRATION STATION – INITIAL CONSTRUCTION (1897 – CIRCA 1907)**

The decade from 1897 to 1907 was one of the most significant time periods in the development of the Ellis Island that exists today. It was during these years the federal government constructed the second immigration station and began enlarging the island to accommodate the increasing influx of immigrants. Supervised by the Department of the Treasury, contractors added landfill to the original island and created two additional islands for facility enlargement. They constructed eight masonry buildings, several smaller wooden structures, and numerous small-scale features to support the immigration operation. Rising immigration rates resulted in increased wear on the facilities. Responding to criticism of the conditions, Ellis Island's Commissioner of Immigration William Williams pushed for continued improvements. He stressed the importance of the station's appearance as a symbol of the United States to incoming aliens and established the island's aesthetic with his desire to improve the landscape. By the end of this era, a decade of work on the island increased its size to just over twenty acres and established a pattern of development that would be followed for the next several decades.

#### **Planning**

Within three days after the fire, the Department of the Treasury began preparations to rebuild the immigration facilities on Ellis Island. On June 25, John L. Smithmeyer, inspector of public buildings for the U. S. Public Buildings Service, submitted a preliminary plan to Secretary of the Treasury Lyman J. Gage calling for enlargement of the island by three acres and construction of three brick and steel buildings – a main immigration building, a hospital, and a kitchen and restaurant. The estimated cost of these improvements was \$600,000. President William F. McKinley approved the plan and Congress appropriated funds for construction on July 19, 1897.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1897 the Department of the Treasury initiated an architectural competition with design guidelines issued by its supervising architect. The American Institute of Architects recommended several prominent architectural firms to participate in the competition with the approval of Secretary Gage. The firms included Alfred E. Barlow; Boring and Tilton; Carrere and Hastings; McKim, Mead and White; and Bruce Price, all from New York City; and John L. Smithmeyer of Washington, DC. Secretary Gage appointed a commission to judge the competition, including John K. Taylor, supervising architect; T. P. Chandler, FAIA, of Philadelphia; and R. S. Peabody, FAIA, of Boston.

By December the commission had reviewed all entrants and chose Boring and Tilton as the firm “who has best shown...the ability to grasp his subject rather than the selection of a final plan.” The firm was to participate in “further study in conjunction with the authorities,” which would likely “produce a very successful final result.” The commission was further impressed that the winning scheme did not consist of a building too costly to construct, but included a facility “built of simple materials” that would likely be constructed “more cheaply than any of the designs offered of similar size.”<sup>2</sup>

Boring and Tilton's final plan included three structures on the site of the original immigration facilities – the main immigration building, “an impressive French Renaissance-style structure,” the kitchen and laundry building, and the powerhouse.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the plan called for the creation of a new island south of the original island, with a ferry slip in between the two. The firm proposed a hospital building for this location.

The firm also addressed the island's landscape, proposing “an ample ornamental landscape designed in a Beaux Arts style of symmetrical

walks lined with allees of trees,” which would underscore the importance of the immigration facilities as a governmental institution and leave a lasting impression on the newly arrived immigrant.<sup>4</sup> Public response to this proposal was positive. Memories of the previous facilities, often referred to as “architectural rubbish heaps,” were still fresh in the public’s mind.<sup>5</sup> Critics from *Harper’s Weekly* praised the Boring and Tilton plan for its addition of “much green space on the island” and the creation of a facility that would appear “comely to passing ships” (Figure 3.1).<sup>6</sup>

## Island One

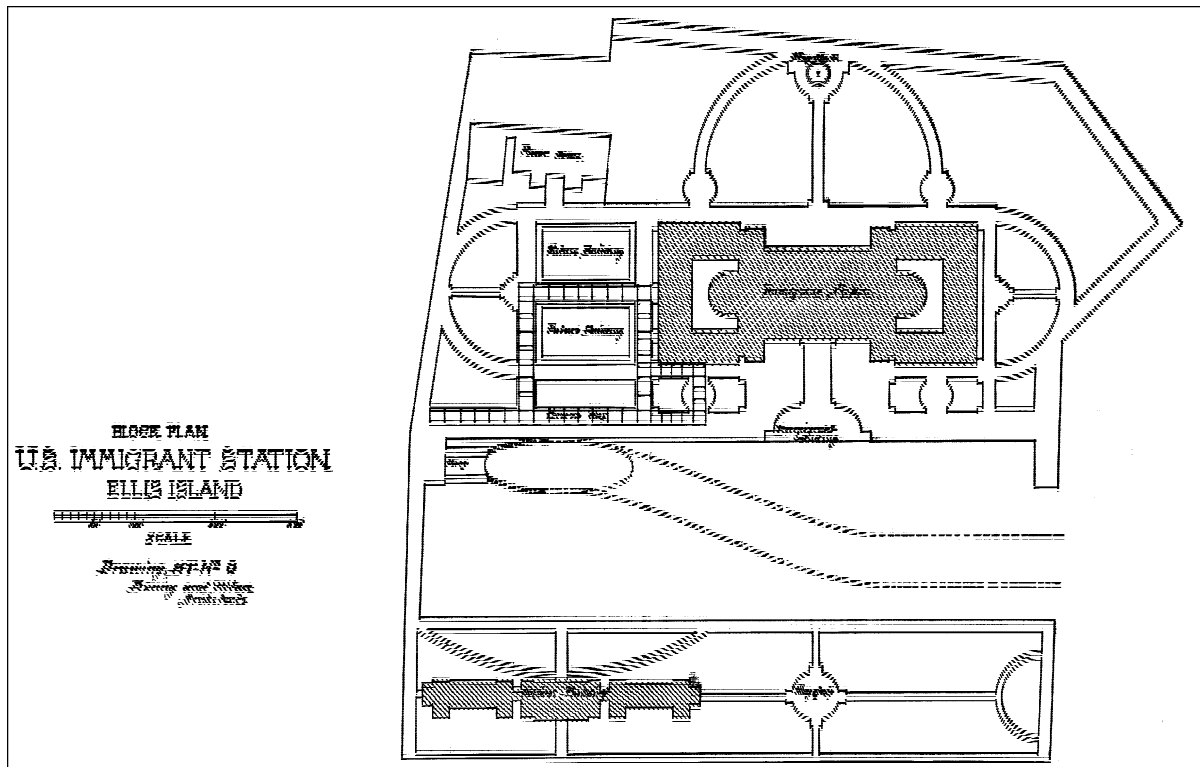
### Main Immigration Building

In February 1898 the supervising architect approved initial drawings for the new immigration buildings, including a block plan for the island and detailed plans for the hospital and main immigration building. By mid-June Boring and Tilton completed nearly all of the drawings, plans, and specifications for the new Ellis Island facilities.<sup>7</sup>

An article in the *New York Times Magazine* on August 7, 1898, provided a detailed description of the new building based on the architect’s plans and a scale model that had been constructed.

The immigrant station on Ellis Island, exclusive of hospital and powerhouse, will be a palace 386 feet in length by 162 in width, with towers rising to the height of 120 feet at their apexes of gilded copper, and entrance arches 40 feet to the keystone. Owing to the tides, the first floor will be eight feet above the present level of the island; so that on calm days the structure will mirror itself in the smooth waters of the bay. A sloping greensward will rise from the top of the cribwork on the water’s edge to the granite foundations.

...the fact that the building stands detached and encircled by water was an advantage in some ways...it affords some of the chances for effect presented by the water court and



**Figure 3.1** Boring and Tilton’s early design for the landscape of Ellis Island. October 1898. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 41962-0001.tif)

canals at the World's Fair in showing off the buildings of the White City. The architects seem to have had those buildings in mind, at least so far as proportions are concerned.

...the effect will be that the country beckons the immigrant into the harbor with the torch brandished by [the Statue of] Liberty and then offers him the largest and finest edifice in the panorama for his landing place.<sup>8</sup>

Prior to construction of the main immigration building, the Department of the Treasury contracted with the firm of Holmes & Logan to install a new six-inch water main from Jersey City, New Jersey, to Ellis Island. The contractor completed the installation in early November 1898, installing the line from Communipaw Avenue and Phillips Street in Jersey City to the existing boiler house on the island. The artesian well, dug in 1892, had not worked as expected, resulting in a constant problem with obtaining fresh water for the island. Attempted solutions included collecting rainwater in cisterns and later, shipping nearly twenty thousand gallons of water

per day from Manhattan to be stored in tanks on the island. The new water line was a much more reliable alternative.<sup>9</sup>

On August 8, 1898, the Department of the Treasury awarded the contract for construction of the main immigration building to the R. H. Hood Company of New York City, at an estimated cost of \$419,298. Construction on the building began later in the year. The surgeon's quarters, which had survived the 1897 fire, functioned as a temporary construction office (Figure 3.2).<sup>10</sup>

There were numerous delays in construction of the building, caused by both contractor and governmental actions. For example, the preferred location for the new building overlapped part of the foundations of the old main building. When digging for the new foundations, the Hood Company uncovered old cisterns and underground utility corridors from both the naval magazine and first immigration station, causing unanticipated delays. To remedy the situation, Boring and Tilton prepared specifications to fill the cisterns and corridors so construction of the new foundations could proceed.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 3.2** Construction of the main immigration building. Notice the wooden fence remaining from the earlier building in the foreground. June 30, 1899. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-37D-6)

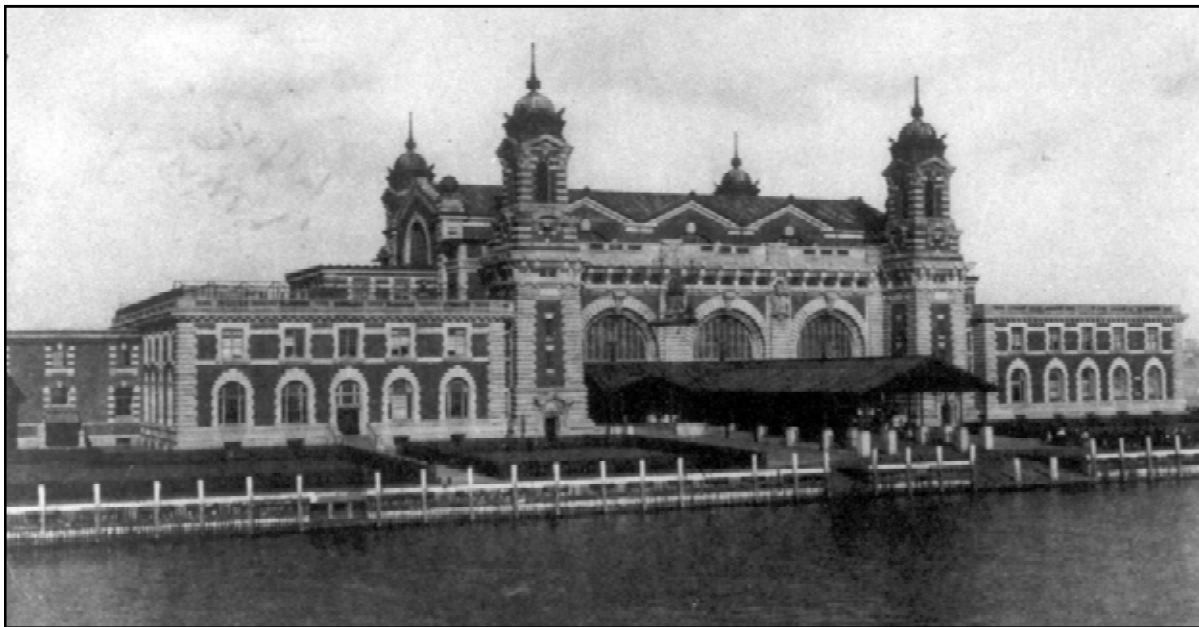
The new immigration station began operations on December 17, 1900, with no official dedication or opening ceremony, leaving the immigration staff to move quietly from the Barge Office to the new facilities. However, accounts of the opening were published in local newspapers including a *New York Tribune* article with Secretary Gage remarking the main immigration building along “with its companion buildings will form what the Department of the Treasury set out to make it, the model immigration station of the world.”<sup>12</sup> The first immigrants processed on the island included 654 Italian steerage passengers from the *Kaiser Wilhelm II*, with a total of 2,251 immigrants passing through the facilities on opening day.<sup>13</sup>

After the completion of the main immigration building, the Department of the Treasury contracted for alterations to the structure on a fairly regular basis. In June 1901 Snare & Triest, Inc., of New York City, constructed a glazed porch and portico at the main entrance on the building’s southwest facade. This structure protected immigrants from the elements as they proceeded from the ferry landing to the building. The porch floor was cut granite and the copper roof contained glass skylights (Figure 3.3).

Approximately six months later, Snare & Triest installed a baggage conveyor adjacent to the portico “in a chamber forming a cellar between the dock and the main building.”<sup>14</sup> The portico and the conveyor were separated by a granite coping with a railing on top and were both completed by April 1, 1902. In 1904 a railroad ticket office was added to the northeast side of the building to accommodate the increasing numbers of immigrants needing railway transportation after processing.<sup>15</sup>

### Additional Structures

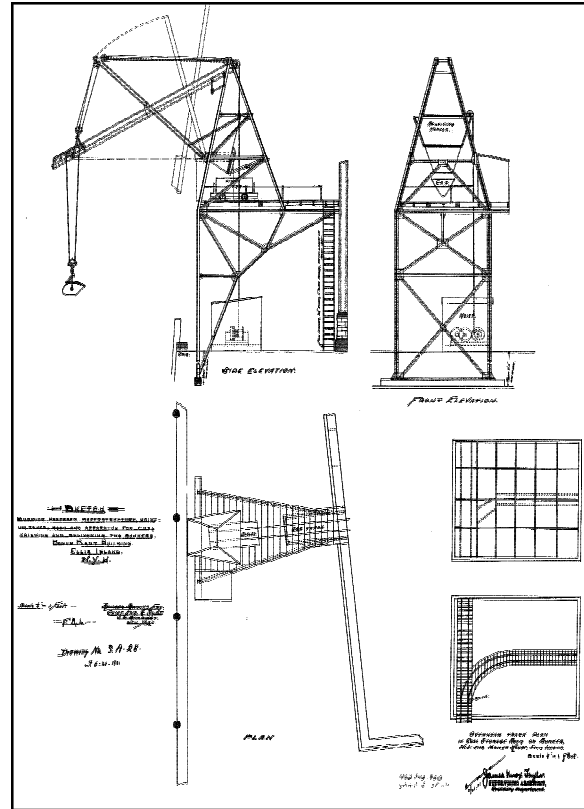
Between 1901 and 1903, the addition of several structures to the island completed the Boring and Tilton design for the immigration station. On May 4, 1900, a contract was let to Louis Wechsler of New York City to construct the kitchen and laundry building, powerhouse, and several covered, connecting walkways. By April 1901 Wechsler had substantially completed work on the kitchen and laundry building, however, the powerhouse was not finished until November of that year.<sup>16</sup> By the end of 1901, contractor A. J. Hemphill of New York City added coal hoisting and delivering equipment to the dock on the northeast side of the powerhouse (Figure 3.4).



**Figure 3.3** The main immigration building, with the glazed porch and portico, view from the south. Circa 1905. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG90-G-90-4)

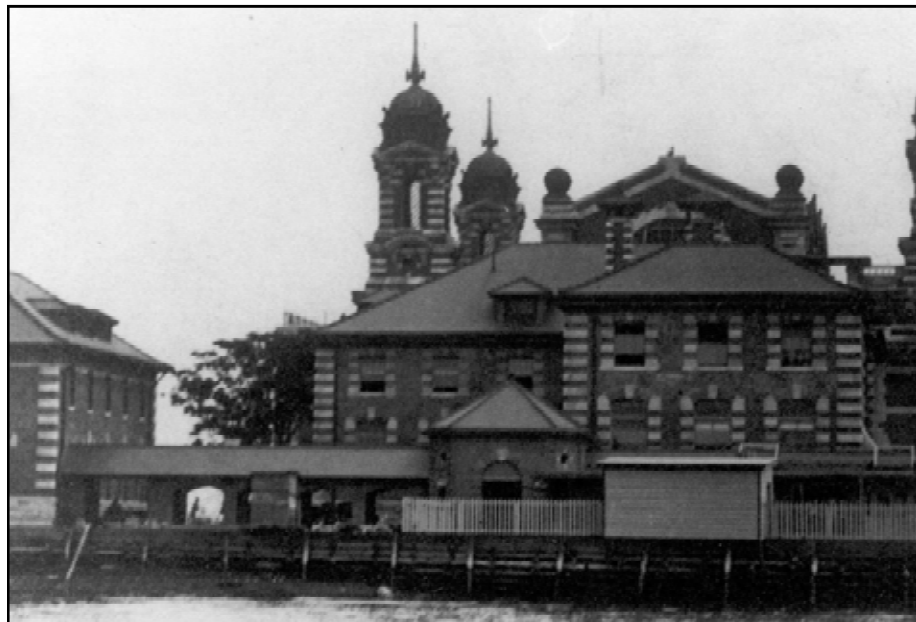
This equipment unloaded coal from the barges and transferred it to the powerhouse.<sup>17</sup> In January 1902 Benjamin Boulger of New York City constructed a sixteen-foot wide by twenty-eight feet long refuse incinerator on the northwest edge of the island.<sup>18</sup>

The Department of the Treasury contracted for the construction of several temporary wooden structures to alleviate overcrowding, created by the increase in immigration and the numbers of detainees and visitors on the island. Sometime after 1901, the bakery and the carpentry shop were constructed northwest of the kitchen and laundry building. A waiting room for immigrants destined for New York was constructed on the north side of the connecting corridor between the kitchen and laundry building and the main immigration building. A waiting room for immigrants' friends was built on the west side of the covered walkway between the ferry house and the kitchen and laundry building. The fenced yard north of the waiting room contained a small privy on the nearby seawall (Figure 3.5). A single-story barracks with seven hundred beds on the northeast side of the main immigration building became the largest temporary structure built on the island upon its completion in 1903.<sup>19</sup>



**Figure 3.4** Construction drawing of the coal hoisting apparatus installed near the powerhouse in 1901. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43960-0006.tif)

**Figure 3.5** The waiting room for immigrants' friends included a small yard enclosed with a wooden fence and a privy on the seawall. The privy is shown in the right foreground. June 30, 1901. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-37D-3)







**Figure 3.7** The main hospital building on Island Two, viewed from the south side. Circa 1903. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

### Island Two Structures

In early February 1898, the Department of the Treasury approved initial plans for the main hospital building on Island Two and work began on installing the pilings. However, construction was soon suspended due to a funding delay by Congress. Complete funding was not acquired until March 1899 when Congress appropriated \$150,000 for the main hospital building, \$9,500 for the surgeon's house, and \$33,340 for the hospital outbuilding. Boring and Tilton developed plans for the main hospital building, while the office of the supervising architect designed the surgeon's house and hospital outbuilding. The plans specified the use of piers on the ground and the avoidance of pilings. A small pump house was also included. After initial bids for the main hospital building came in over budget, Boring and Tilton redesigned the structure for cost savings, and Daniel A. Garber of New York City was awarded the contract on February 20, 1900. Garber finished the contract in April 1901, but only after much conflict between Garber and the authorities, culminating in the contractor having to address a number of construction inadequacies (Figure 3.7).<sup>24</sup>

On September 5, 1900, the Department of the Treasury awarded a contract for the construction of the surgeon's house and hospital outbuilding on Island Two, both two-story brick structures, to



**Figure 3.8** The surgeon's house on Island Two, with the main hospital building in the left background. June 30, 1901. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-37D-1)

Attilio Pasquini of New York City. As with the main hospital building, initial bids for the projects came in over budget, and the office of the supervising architect altered the designs with cost-saving changes. The hospital outbuilding included a laundry, linen room, and autopsy room. The surgeon's house was designed and constructed with a basement; a parlor, kitchen, pantry, dining room, library, and hall on the first floor; and five bedrooms, hall, and bath on the second floor. Pasquini proceeded with construction, and after numerous minor change-orders, completed both buildings by late November 1901 (Figure 3.8).<sup>25</sup>

The main hospital building accommodated one hundred twenty-five patients along with office and staff space. However, due to the budget constraints and redesign of the original plan, the completed building was not adequate to meet the needs of the immigration facility. According to Terence V. Powderly, United States Commissioner-General of Immigration at the time, “The new immigrant hospital on Ellis Island...will not afford sufficient ward space for the service. Another pavilion is necessary for the accommodation of the patients, exclusive of those suffering from acute contagious diseases and cared for in the hospitals of the city health department under annual contract.”<sup>26</sup> Powderly also suggested adding more space for officers’ quarters, since the rooms allocated for this use in the new building would have to be used for wards.

To alleviate some of the overcrowding, the Bureau of Immigration proposed an addition on the southeast end of the building. In October 1905 the Northeastern Construction Company of New York City began construction on the new facility, completing the hospital addition by February 1907. The new space brought the total number of beds to two hundred fifty; however, the facility was still consistently overcrowded due to high immigration levels.<sup>27</sup>

Along with regular hospital patients, there was also an increase in the number of “insane aliens” requiring housing prior to deportation. This led to the construction of the psychopathic ward between the main hospital building and the hospital outbuilding on Island Two. William F. Holding of New York City completed the facility in November 1907. The two-story brick structure could house about twenty-five patients, and contained a small enclosed porch on the south side of the building (Figure 3.9).<sup>28</sup>

Other structures built in conjunction with the hospital on Island Two included a ferry house at the northeast end of the ferry basin and a covered walkway connecting the ferry house with the hospital buildings. These two items were covered under Pasquini’s contract for the hospital outbuilding and surgeon’s house and the firm



**Figure 3.9** This undated photo, labeled “The porch, men’s psycho ward” was probably taken on Island Two. It is not clear which building is actually in the photo, but this type of enclosed porch was typical of Island Two structures. The structure in the background may be a building originally constructed to house psychopathic patients. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG90-G-125-53[3])

completed them in October 1901. The construction included a new ferry slip, centered in the ferry basin directly in front of the ferry house. In 1905 the ferry house was widened, possibly as a result of the increase in immigration during this period.<sup>29</sup>

### **Landscape Improvements Under Commissioner Williams**

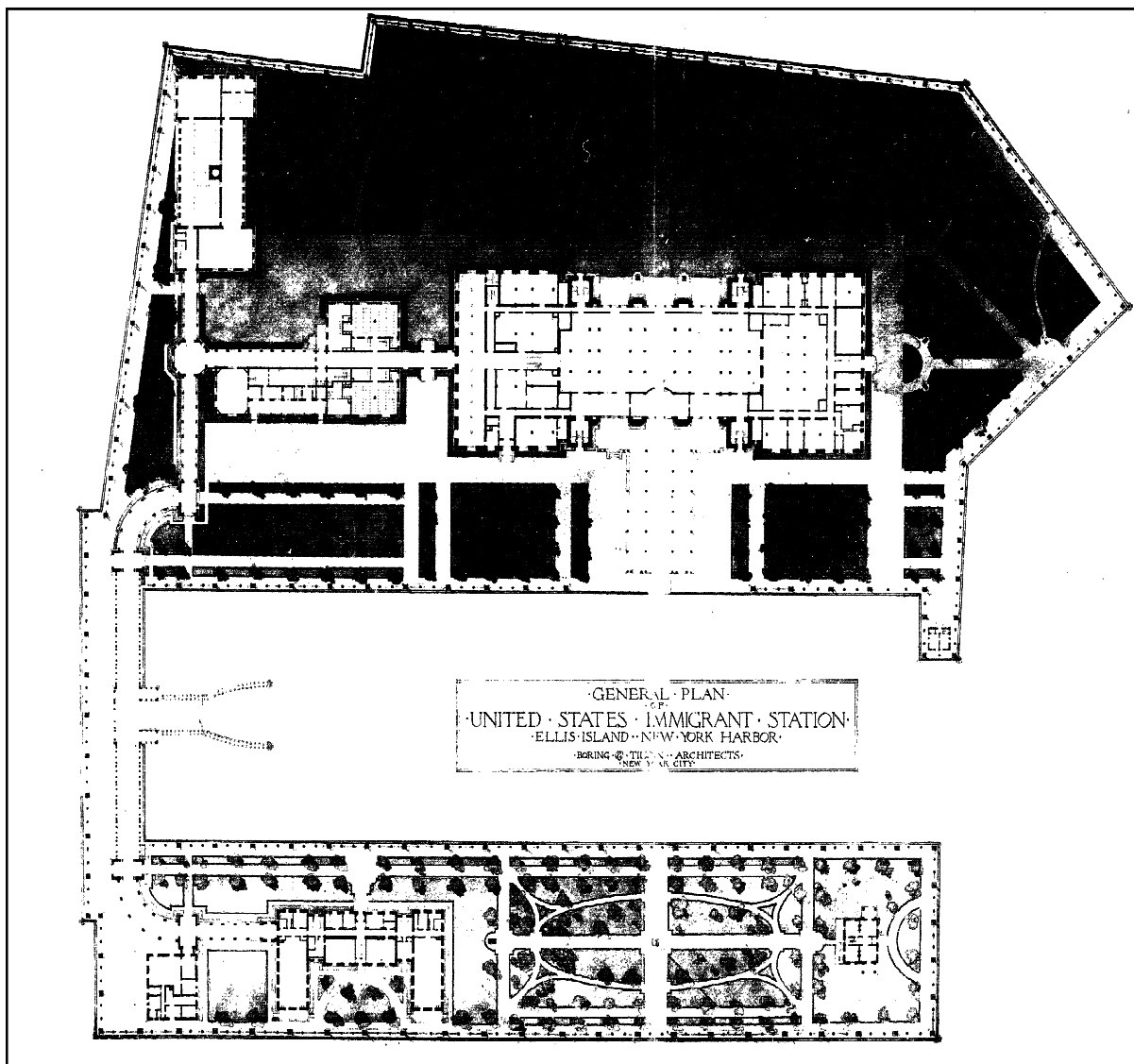
After the completion of the main immigration building and other principle structures on both islands, Boring and Tilton developed a revised master plan for the landscape (Figure 3.10). A series of formally designed walks and open spaces enhanced the existing buildings. The plan was similar in style to the architects’ initial design, but contained a more intricate circulation pattern with connecting passageways between the two islands and incorporated changes to the buildings’ footprints and placement that had occurred during construction. However, the immediate



need to enlarge the facilities due to increasing immigration and the inevitable funding shortfalls left landscape improvements far down the list of priorities. The main immigration building and other structures received generally favorable reviews for their architectural qualities by the public, but the lack of an aesthetically pleasing landscape was a blight on the facility. Criticism appearing in the local press called the island a “treeless strip of land” with some “grayish-looking buildings” – not exactly the most flattering description for the nation’s premier immigration station.<sup>30</sup> Despite this criticism, the

Department of the Treasury failed to implement the Boring and Tilton design for the landscape.

With the arrival of Commissioner of Immigration William Williams in 1902, the barren island landscape received much-needed attention.<sup>31</sup> Williams was determined to improve the facilities and establish a more prestigious setting on the island. He soon implemented many changes. It is not known if Williams actually designed plans for the landscape, but it is likely he used the Boring and Tilton design as a reference. Although the Williams landscape did not strictly follow the



**Figure 3.10** Boring and Tilton’s revised design for the landscape. Circa 1902. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43968-0006.tif)

formalized structure of the earlier design, it was a similar approach both “ceremonial and decorative in its concept.”<sup>32</sup> Williams established an orderly combination of lawns and walkways laid out in a rectilinear pattern to complement the buildings. In comparison to the Boring and Tilton design, total paved area specified by Williams decreased and there was less overall ornamentation in the design.

Landscape improvements began with the removal of construction debris and the addition of approximately seven thousand cubic yards of loam. Work crews graded the island and planted lawns.<sup>33</sup> They installed scored concrete walks in front of the main immigration building and the kitchen and laundry building, extending along the southwest side of the main immigration building and connecting with rear doors. They added concrete around the powerhouse, the main hospital building, and the existing flagstaff, and installed a wider boardwalk along the edge of the ferry basin. They constructed small post and wire fences around the blocks of lawn in front of the main immigration building, placed benches under the portico and south of the main immigration building, and added ornamental light fixtures along the boardwalk. Gardeners added greenery and color to the island by planting *Ligustrum* hedges and filling beds and containers with flowers (Figures 3.11 – 3.14).<sup>34</sup>

The design as it was implemented enhanced the island and established an appropriate setting for the buildings. However, the purpose of the station was to move people through as quickly as possible and it is unlikely immigrants were able to enjoy much of the landscape beyond the area immediately around the main immigration building. They saw little of the island other than what was visible from the ferry basin or the entry plaza, as they were moved quickly from the ferry slip either to the plaza or directly into the building itself and then on to the ferries for New York or the trains for New Jersey and beyond. The immigrants did not regularly use other parts of the landscape for casual relaxation or recreation. The “neat clipped hedges and lawns, without trees for shade and few benches for sitting” created a

setting for the island that emphasized “efficiency and official business rather than a human scale place to linger.”<sup>35</sup>

The drastic change in the appearance of the island under Williams’s direction was described in a July 12, 1903, *New York Times* article:

Ellis Island, which a year ago, was with the exception of the imposing Government structures occupied by the Immigration Bureau, about the dreariest looking spot in the harbor of New York, has undergone a great change in appearance since William Williams became Commissioner. When Mr. Fitchie relinquished the Commissionership there was not a flower or a bush of any kind on the island, and the walks were not graded.

To-day [*sic*] all is changed. The island has been divided into neat squares and crescents, in which grow blue grass, and around which a hedging of California privet is rapidly assuming substantial dimensions. Then again in the squares and crescents geraniums, nasturtiums, palms, pansies, and ferns, arranged in neat figures, have been



**Figure 3.11** Immediately after the completion of the main immigration building, development of the grounds on Island One was not a high priority. When Commissioner Williams began his emphasis on improving the landscape, much of the island was in a condition similar to what is shown in this circa 1900 photo. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

**Figure 3.12** Post and wire fences and newly planted hedges surround the lawn in front of the main immigration building. Circa 1903. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 3.13** In 1903 landscape features on the southeast end of Island One included a small flower bed, benches, flagstaff, and ornate lamp posts. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 3.14** These *Ligustrum* hedges and lawn in front of the main immigration building and the kitchen and laundry building show two years of growth. Circa 1905. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



planted, and as they are beginning to bloom, the front of the island as seen from passing ferryboats and other craft makes a very pleasing sight, and one that is sure to cause comment by people who are familiar with the way the place looked before the Williams era.

Then again, on either side of the main entrances to the various buildings big iron vases of granite have been placed, and palms and various flowers planted in them. But the great attraction is the beautiful entrance [of the main immigration building] from the barge landing. This entrance is constructed entirely of iron, the pillars being fancy in shape, while the roof is of glass. Within this arcade, which extends almost clear to the waterfront, have been placed a lot of neat park benches for the use of visitors, where, seated in the shade, and where they are almost sure to get the benefit at any time of the day of a good sea breeze, the view of the city beyond and the harbor is an ideal one. The whole island is as a result of Mr. Williams's energy now what may be appropriately termed a well-regulated and unusually prettily decorated park.<sup>36</sup>

As Commissioner Williams continued to pursue funding for maintenance and improvements to the island, his ideas about the landscape began to change slightly.<sup>37</sup> A rise in immigration resulted in an increase in the number of detainees. The administration realized a need to provide an opportunity for outdoor recreation and relaxation as an alternative to indoor confinement. To accommodate this, Williams approved the addition of a roof garden with a retractable canvas awning on the southern wing of the main immigration building.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the staff encouraged immigrants to linger in the outdoor areas adjacent to the main immigration building while waiting to be processed.

Implementation of these small changes was apparently successful and well-received by the immigrant detainees. Commissioner Williams's

1904 report mentioned that during warm weather the detainees were "out of doors as much as possible, a portion of them on the westerly roof garden fitted with awnings and benches, and another portion on the broad granolithic sidewalk on the northerly side of the building where they can move about in the shade." This commitment to provide outdoor recreation space for detainees was reinforced later in the year when "at the Commissioner-General's [of Immigration for the United States] suggestion special provision [was] made for the amusement of detained children by converting a portion of the roof garden into a playground, where they may enjoy fresh air and various kinds of amusements" (Figure 3.15).<sup>39</sup>

### **Island Three**

When the hospital on Island Two was constructed, consideration was not given to housing patients with contagious diseases. Since the 1890s, these patients had been sent to hospitals in the area under a contract with the New York City Health Department. In June 1902 surgeon George W. Stoner, who was in charge of the medical division on Ellis Island, voiced the need for a contagious-disease hospital to complement the existing hospital. In September of that year, the issue became more urgent when the New York City Health Department decided to terminate its contract for receiving immigrants with contagious disease. As a result, the Department of the Treasury soon implemented plans to construct a third island southwest of Island Two and add the needed facilities.<sup>40</sup> According to Commissioner Williams, the addition of the new island and hospital was "a matter of the greatest urgency, for we sometimes have 400 and even 500 sick people to care for, and as we know that the city hospitals are overcrowded, we do not like to ask them to take the non-quarantinable [*sic*] contagious cases; a great many of these patients are eventually deported."<sup>41</sup> Other reports said that in one year "over fifteen hundred children had come in at the station afflicted with Scarlet Fever and Measles, and that many of these diseases had been contracted on the trip...two hundred and five had



**Figure 3.15** Immigrant children enjoy the roof garden playground on the main immigration building. Circa 1906. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

died on the passage...[many] on account of the insanitary [*sic*] conditions of these steamships.”<sup>42</sup>

In 1903 Congress appropriated \$150,500 for construction of Island Three but did not immediately provide funds for construction of the hospital itself. The federal government also began negotiations with New Jersey to purchase submerged lands around Ellis Island, including an area approximately four hundred to five hundred feet south of Island Two for the construction of Island Three. New Jersey challenged the government’s legal rights to the existing Ellis Island, but on November 30, 1904, the case was settled. New Jersey executed a deed to the federal government “granting all the right, title and interest of the State of New Jersey in and to land under water surrounding Ellis Island” for the sum of \$1,000. The deed recorded the United States as the owner of Ellis Island and stipulated, “The United States of America does not waive any rights or privileges which it would possess had not the [deed] been accepted, and that no rights of the grantee [New Jersey] of any kind whatsoever shall be prejudiced by such acceptance.”<sup>43</sup>

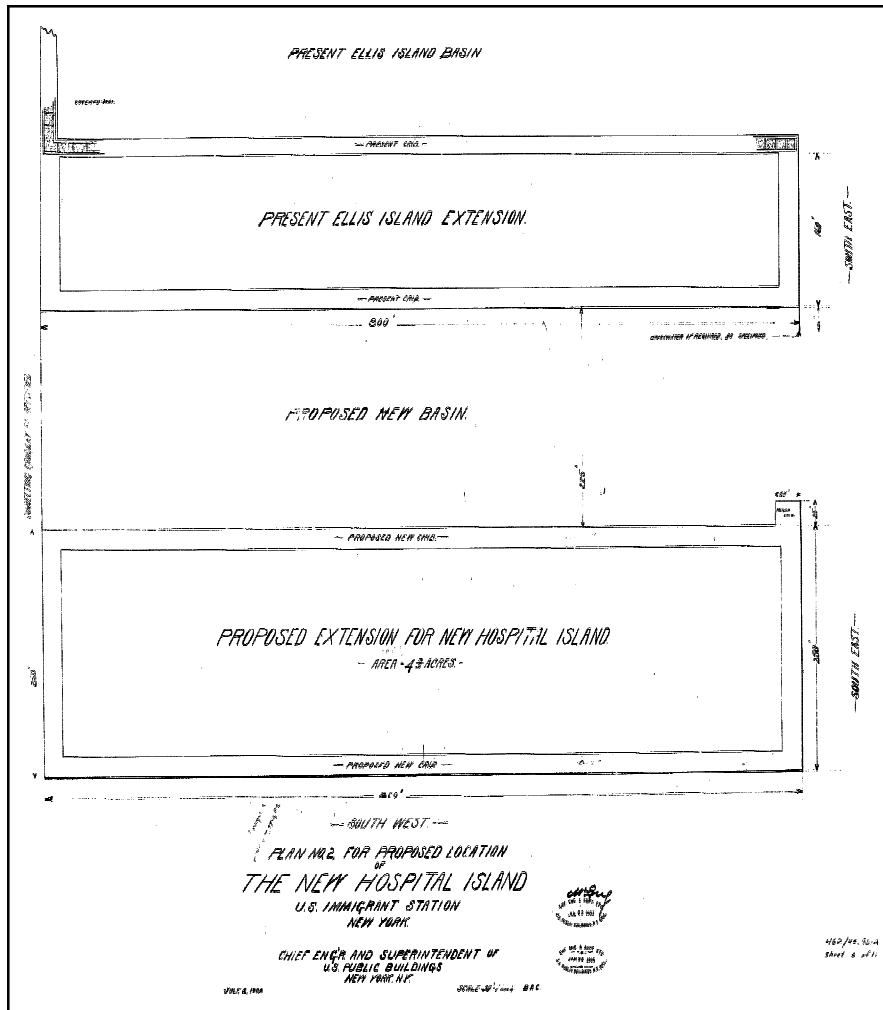
Alfred Brooks Fry developed specifications for construction of the new island approximately eight hundred feet from Island Two. The

Department of the Treasury had previously acquired permission from the War Department to construct the new island within five hundred feet of Ellis Island, and it was feared that to gain approval for the proposed eight hundred feet distance would delay the project. Commissioner Williams sought the advice of the Surgeon General to determine an appropriate distance from Island Two and how best to lay out the facilities to minimize contamination between patients on Island Two and contagious-disease patients on Island Three. In response, the Surgeon General indicated that an island “with an outside limit of 410 feet from the present island and with 200 feet of clear water space between the two islands, would be amply sufficient to insure freedom from danger of contagion according to modern ideas of hospital construction.”<sup>44</sup> Also, contemporary opinion indicated that a single building was less desirable than a series of several small pavilions, where various diseases could be treated in isolation from other wards.<sup>45</sup>

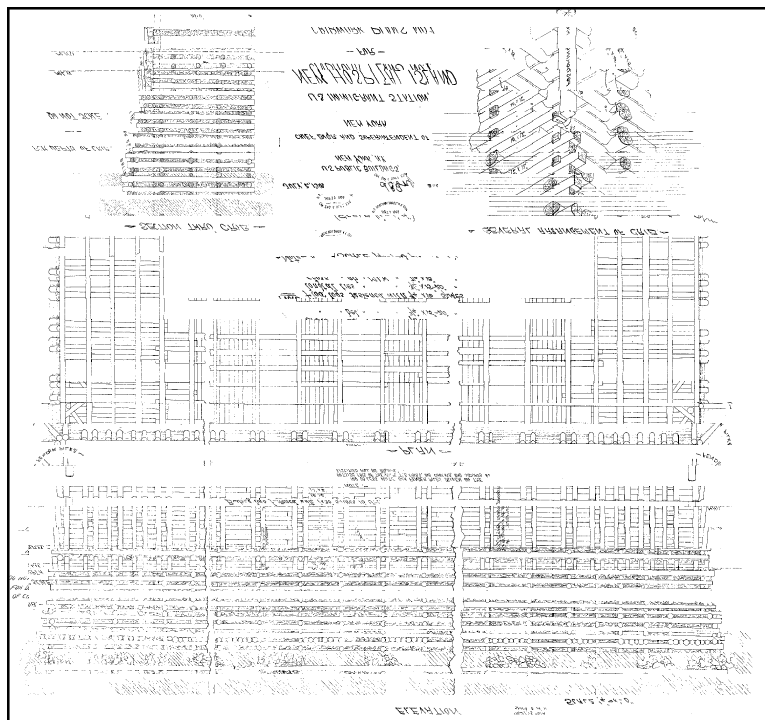
In April 1905 the Department of Commerce and Labor let to New Jersey Dock and Bridge Company for construction of the island.<sup>46</sup> The contractor laid boundaries for the construction of an island eight hundred feet in length by two

## Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island

### Chapter 3: Second Immigration Station – Initial Construction (1897 – Circa 1907)

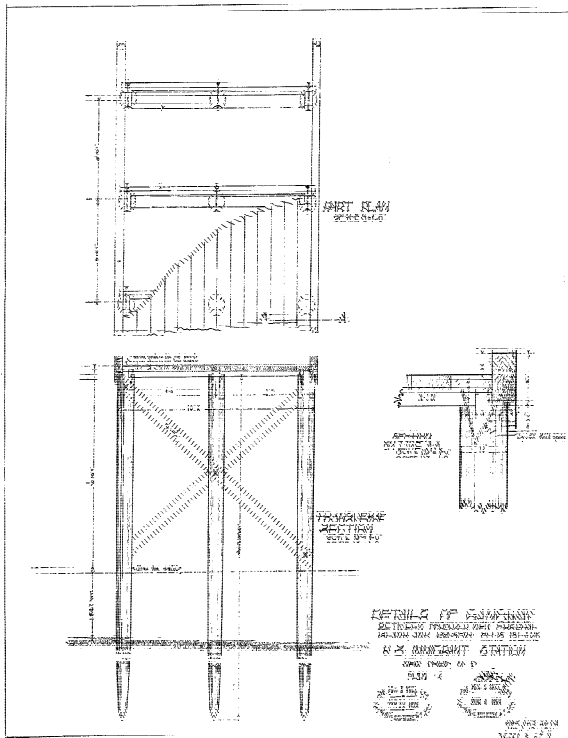


**Figure 3.16** Layout plan for the creation of Island Three. July 2, 1903. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961a-0003.tif)



**Figure 3.17** Construction details for cribwork used to create Island Three. July 2, 1903. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961a-0002.tif)

hundred fifty feet in width with two hundred feet of open water between it and Island Two. The company dredged a fifteen-feet-deep by thirty-feet-wide trench and filled it with more than 1.2 million cubic feet of cribwork and stones. The island was formed by filling behind the cribwork with approximately sixty thousand cubic yards of dredged material including “cellar dirt, stones, clay, old masonry, etc.,” and seventy thousand cubic yards of earth and “a very excellent grade of sand obtained by dredging” near the island.<sup>47</sup> New Jersey Dock and Bridge completed Island Three in early 1906 and connected it to Island Two with a fifty-foot-long wooden gangway. The four and three-quarters acre island increased Ellis Island’s total acreage to approximately twenty and one-quarter acres (Figures 3.16 – 3.18).



**Figure 3.18** Construction details for the gangway connecting Islands Two and Three. August 1903. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961a-0006.tif)

## The Circa 1907 Landscape

Between the initial planning and construction of the second immigration station circa 1897 and the completion of Island Three in 1906, the landscape underwent significant change. The Department of the Treasury oversaw the completion of an entirely new immigration station, increasing the number of immigrants who used the landscape, and the island’s total acreage increased to just over twenty acres with the additions of Islands Two and Three. This period was likely the most significant and eventful in the frequency and significance of change to the landscape. Figure 3.21 illustrates the island’s circa 1907 landscape.

Construction of the new immigration facilities altered the island’s spatial organization. Structures on the first immigration station were all clustered on one island, aligned on a north/south axis, and included a large central building with numerous small structures separated by enclosed courtyard spaces. Although the second immigration station facilities maintained the same general north/south orientation, they occupied two islands, enclosing the ferry basin on three sides. There were fewer, generally larger, buildings, leaving less opportunity for intimate courtyards but providing more open space extending to the shore. The new main immigration building sat farther back from the water’s edge, establishing an added sense of presence and defining a more formal entry sequence into the new immigration station.

The primary land use remained the same with the institutional processing of immigrants. The completion of the surgeon’s house and hospital addition on Island Two brought a limited amount of residential use for employees of the station.

Some alterations to Ellis Island’s topography occurred during this period. The addition of landfill to Island One and the creation of Islands Two and Three increased the total size of the island and altered the topography of the existing harbor floor where the landfill was added. The completed additions conformed to the same general elevation above sea level and level landform previously established on Island One.

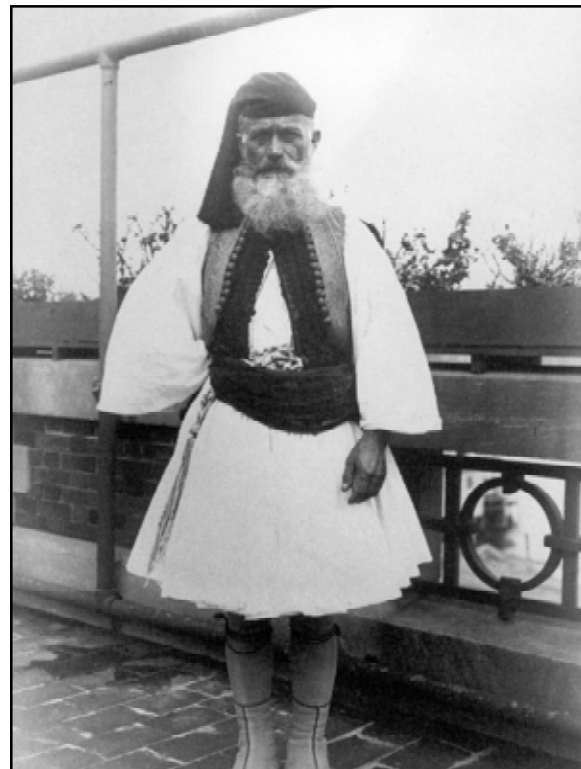
Circulation patterns changed with the construction of new buildings and walkways. Boardwalks continued to be used along the ferry basin edge and new concrete walks were added to the island. The placement of walks served to direct immigrants on their primary route from the ferry landing, through the ferry house, and into the primary buildings on Island One. Formal walks were not yet established on Island Two or Three, although a concrete apron surrounded the main hospital building and a wooden gangway connected these two islands. The most significant change was the construction of the first segments of the covered walkway system on Islands One and Two. This feature would eventually be expanded to connect major buildings on all three islands. The placement of the new ferry slip in the center of the ferry basin, rather than at the north corner, altered boat traffic slightly. Barge traffic continued its established route to the coal wharf at the powerhouse.

By circa 1907 there were eight masonry buildings constructed on Islands One and Two – the main immigration building (1900), kitchen and laundry building (1901), powerhouse (1901), main hospital building (1901), hospital outbuilding (1901), surgeon's house (1901), hospital addition (1907), and psychopathic ward (1907). There were five significant wooden structures – the ferry house (1901), immigrants' waiting room (circa 1901), carpentry shop (circa 1901), bakery (circa 1901), and temporary barracks (1903). Other extant structures included a coal hoist at the powerhouse (1901), privy, immigrants' friends waiting room (circa 1901), covered walkways, pump house (1901), two floating docks, new ferry slip in the ferry basin (1901), and incinerator (1902). A wooden crib seawall surrounded most of the island.

The only vegetation remaining on the island from earlier periods was a tree, or group of trees, on the northeast corner of the main immigration building, and identified as Gibbet Tree on historic maps. New vegetation included rectangular lawns in front of the main immigration building, lawns in other open space areas on Islands One and Two, and *Ligustrum* hedges around the lawn

panels. No new trees were added. Other ornamental plantings included two annual flower beds on Island One, some flowers and plants in pots and boxes near the entry portico and on roof decks, and ivy (possibly *Hedera helix*) covering the facades of several of the primary buildings (Figures 3.19 - 3.20).

The addition of numerous large-scale structures changed views and vistas within the island from earlier periods, but the views from the island's edges across the harbor to Manhattan, the Statue of Liberty, and other sites remained relatively unchanged. The construction of the main immigration building further from the edge of the ferry basin enhanced the view of the island's primary building from arriving vessels. The forecourt created by the lawns and walks in front of the building gave the facility an increased sense



**Figure 3.19** Aesthetic improvements to the island included flower boxes on the rooftop deck of the main immigration building, as shown on the railing behind this immigrant. Circa 1906. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 3.20** One of the flower beds on Island One was this star-shaped bed, adjacent to the boardwalk at the northern end of the ferry basin. It was planted with a variety of annual flowers. A wooden post and twisted wire fence surrounded the lawn and bed, like the fencing used around the lawn panels in front of the main immigration building. Circa 1906. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



of importance. Views from the main immigration building were slightly different from views observed from the original main building. The removal of structures on the eastern side of Island One opened up views toward Manhattan, and the construction of the ferry house and hospital buildings on Island Two blocked some of the previously open views toward New Jersey.

The addition of various small-scale features also enhanced the island. Circa 1902 Bishop's-crook lamp posts lined the boardwalk on Island One and at least one was located on Island Two, west of the main hospital building. Fencing, constructed of wooden posts and twisted wire, surrounded all newly planted hedges and most lawn areas. Gates provided access to each of the lawn panels in front of the main immigration building. Ornamental features included benches, planters, and flower beds, while other, more utilitarian features included a fog bell and flagstaff on the southern end of Island One and several fire hydrants on Islands One and Two, likely dating to a circa 1903 fire protection project.

### Endnotes for Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 27-28.

<sup>2</sup> Peabody, Chandler, and Taylor to Secretary of the Treasury, December 7, 1897, and Taylor to Boring and Tilton, December 8, 1897 (Washington National Records Center, Record Group 121, Records of the Public Buildings Service), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 35; *New York Times*, December 8, 1897, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Beyer Blinder Belle/Anderson Notter Finegold, *Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument, Historic Structure Report, The Main Building, Volume 1* (United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service), 1984, p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, February 26, 1898, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 37, 42.

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, August 7, 1898, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> This water line was later relocated to the new powerhouse constructed in the same vicinity in 1901. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45; *Archeological Resources*, p. 54.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53; *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>12</sup> *New York Tribune*, December 17, 1900, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 99.

<sup>13</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 4, 98-99.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> It is not clear from the documentation who constructed this addition. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 224-226.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 315-318.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 582; *Archeological Resources*, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> The bakery and carpentry shop were later replaced with one masonry structure. The immigrants' friends waiting room was razed when this building was added. In 1907, when the baggage and dormitory building was under construction, the temporary barracks were relocated to the southeast side of the main immigration building. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 365; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 58-59.

<sup>20</sup> Secretary Gage to Secretary of War, August 5, 1897 (Washington National Records Center, Record Group 121, Records of the Public Buildings Service), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 30.

<sup>21</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 35-36; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 54, 94.

<sup>22</sup> Kemper to Fry, September 28, 1897 (Washington National Records Center, Record Group 121, Records of the Public Buildings Service), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 417-423.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 430.

<sup>26</sup> *Annual Report, Commissioner-General of Immigration, Fiscal Year 1901*, pp. 38, 40, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 425.

<sup>27</sup> The addition was later called the administration building; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 442-446.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 446-448.

<sup>29</sup> There is no documentation for who widened the ferry house. *Ibid.*, pp. 573-575.

<sup>30</sup> *Outlook*, October 4, 1902, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 107.

<sup>31</sup> Williams started his first term as Commissioner of Immigration under President Theodore Roosevelt's administration in 1902, serving until 1905. He later served four years under the Taft and Wilson administrations. Williams resigned on May 6, 1913, but remained in his position until June 30, 1913 at the request of the president. *New York Times*, June 5, 1913 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 3).

<sup>32</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup> It is not known if this work was contracted out or performed by Bureau of Immigration staff.

<sup>34</sup> U. S. Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, "Improvements at Ellis Island Station, H. Doc. 625," 57<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> session, May 23, 1902, pp. 1-3, as cited in *Historic Structure*

*Report...Historical Data*, pp. 128, 442; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 50, 53-55;

*Archeological Resources*, p. 95; Memorandum for the Commissioner, September 21, 1903 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, William Williams Collection).

<sup>35</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 53-55, 68.

<sup>36</sup> "Ellis Island Improved: Commissioner Williams's Pleasing Landscape Gardening," *New York Times*, July 12, 1903 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, William Williams Collection), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 129.

<sup>37</sup> *Annual Report*, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration, New York, NY, August 4, 1903 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, William Williams Papers).

<sup>38</sup> A roof garden had been included in the original Boring and Tilton design, but it was not implemented upon construction of the building. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 129; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 70.

<sup>39</sup> "Report of the Commissioner of Ellis Island, September 15, 1904", *Reports of the Department of Commerce and Labor*, 1904, p. 834, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 132.

<sup>40</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 503.

<sup>41</sup> *New York Times*, December 18, 1904 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 2).

<sup>42</sup> Excerpt from a speech by U. S. House Representative Hon. John L. Burnett, June 19, 1912, as cited in John F. Mann, "Comedies and Tragedies at Ellis Island," unpublished manuscript, 1912 (National Archives, Record Group 85, Entry 9, Box 205, File 53371-74).

<sup>43</sup> "Ellis Island: Its Legal Status," p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> Wyman to Commissioner-General of Immigration, November 26, 1902, and White, Pettus, Vaughan, Geddings, and Rosenau to Surgeon-General, November 6, 1902 (National Archives, Washington, DC, Record Group 85, Records of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, 1906-1932), as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 507.

<sup>45</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 504, 507.

<sup>46</sup> In 1903 the Bureau of Immigration was moved to the Department of Commerce and Labor from the Department of the Treasury. See Introduction, endnote 2. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 468, 508-510.

<sup>47</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 504, 513; *Archeological Resources*, pp. 94-95.

# Ellis Island Circa 1907 Period Plan

Figure 3.21

Cultural Landscape Report  
for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National  
Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



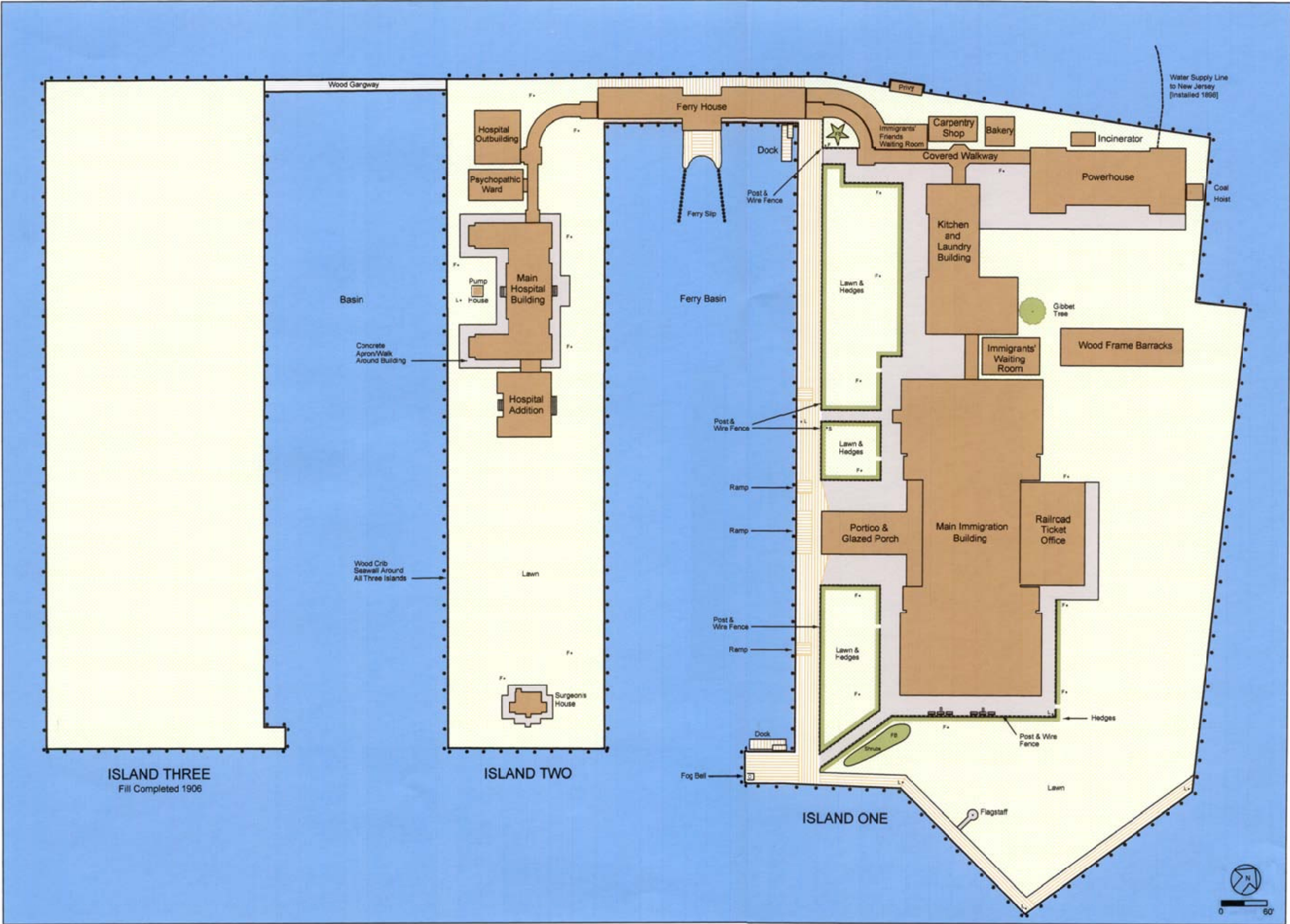
- Sources:
1. "U. S. Immigrant Station, Ellis Island, New York Harbor," 1904 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 41999x1, 0003.tif)
  2. "U. S. Immigrant [sic] Station, Ellis Island, N.Y. Harbor, Fire Protection Apparatus," circa 1903. (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 43965, 0001.tif)
  3. "Water Supply Pipe Line to Ellis Island, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, N.Y. Harbor, Drawing No. SA-4," circa 1897 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 43963-0004.tif)
  4. Historic Photographs (STLI Library, NY Public Library, National Archives)
  5. Harlan Ureanu, *Historic Structure Report, Historical Data, 1981*

Plan drawn using Autocad  
2002 by J. Tracy Stakely,  
OCLP. February 2003.



0 60' 120'

- Legend
- = Building / Structure
  - = Turfgrass / Lawn
  - = Concrete
  - = Boardwalk
  - = Tree
  - = Fence
  - B = Bench
  - F = Fire Hydrant
  - FB = Flower Bed
  - L = Light Pole
  - S = Directional Sign







## **CHAPTER 4: SECOND IMMIGRATION STATION – FACILITY GROWTH (CIRCA 1907 – CIRCA 1920)**

During the period from circa 1907 to circa 1920, a general increase in immigration and other activity on the island led to continued expansion of the Ellis Island facilities. Construction of several buildings occurred, existing structures received continued maintenance and renovation, and landscape changes accommodated more people on the island. During the early part of this era, the ornamental landscape remained consistent in its appearance and condition, reflecting the improvements made under Commissioner Williams during 1902 and 1903. The landscape evolved with the approach of the 1920s and the ensuing changes to the station's use during and immediately after World War I. Throughout these years the overall size of the island increased only slightly with the addition of landfill on Island One created by the construction of a new seawall.

### **Island One**

#### **Baggage and Dormitory Building**

As early as 1902 immigration officials noted the inadequacy of the facilities for receiving, inspecting, and housing immigrants. The steady rise in immigration to the United States brought increasing numbers of immigrants to the island. The temporary wooden barracks installed on Island One initially alleviated some of the overcrowding of those who were detained overnight. The addition of this structure increased the island's sleeping capacity to eighteen hundred, but there was soon a need to house up to three thousand persons per night. Additionally, space for handling and storing the baggage accompanying the immigrants was limited.

After several years of funding requests, the station received a congressional appropriation of \$400,000 in 1907 for an addition to the main immigration building. However, Commissioner of Immigration Robert Watchorn used the funds for construction of a separate baggage and dormitory building instead, arguing additions to the main immigration building would not

adequately address the space requirements. The U. S. Public Buildings Service supervising architect developed plans for the two-story brick building, including a rooftop deck and pergola to provide outdoor space for detained immigrants. Officials from the Department of Commerce and Labor let a contract to the New York State Construction Company in January 1908, and construction on the building began in March of that year. The company sited the building near the northeast corner of the main immigration building, proceeded with construction, and completed the facility by February 1909 (Figure 4.1).<sup>1</sup>

Within a year of completion, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization proposed alterations and additions to improve the building's usefulness. By 1910 the courtyard between the structure and the main immigration building had a concrete surface, providing additional outdoor space for immigrants. The most significant alteration was the construction of a third story in 1914. This addition increased the amount of dormitory space and baggage storage. Although the existing roof deck and pergola were removed, the third-floor addition incorporated "open-air porches," providing new outdoor space on the roof for detainees' use.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Greenhouse**

In September 1910 island employees erected a greenhouse on the northeast side of the main immigration building. The gardener requested this facility to "decrease the amount of the annual flower bill by providing space for keeping flowers during the winter."<sup>3</sup> The forty-foot-long structure was finished by early November, constructed entirely of materials recycled from other buildings on the island, and cost approximately \$250. This addition was an essential element in maintaining the island's ornamental landscape. According to the Commissioner's 1913 Annual Report,

Continued effort has been made to add to the attractive appearance of

the grounds by setting out additional privet hedges and hardy plants. A small greenhouse has been erected by our own mechanics from old material, so that the Government is now able to propagate nearly all of the flowering plants needed for beds....<sup>4</sup> (Figure 4.2)

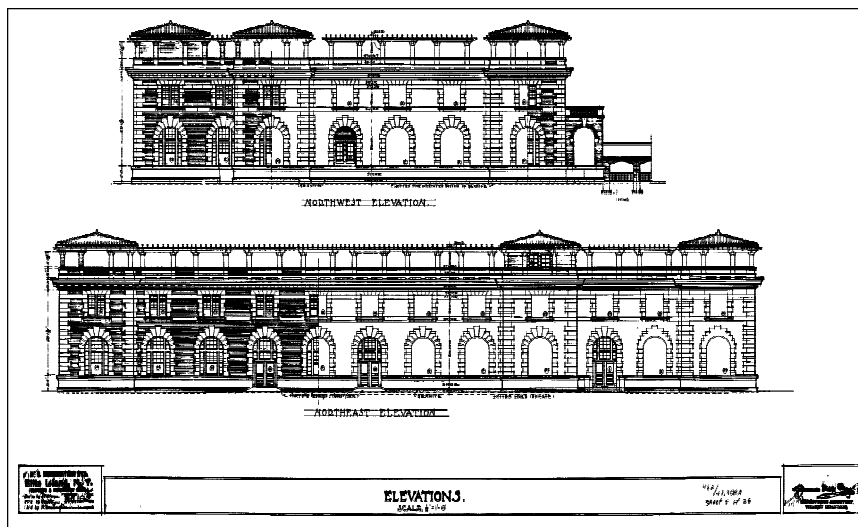
There were several of these beds scattered throughout the island, some dating to the initial 1902-1903 landscape improvements and others installed at later dates. Gardeners planted flowers and shrub roses along the entry path to the greenhouse, along with several climbing roses on five freestanding trellises. They used shrub roses between the baggage and dormitory building and the greenhouse in a small semicircular bed. They filled the existing star-shaped flower bed near the ferry house with begonias and protected the bed with a border of small wire hoops. Workers also installed a small pool, fountain, and flower bed in the lawn between the baggage and dormitory building and the powerhouse. Other ornamental vegetation present during this period included vines on the exterior walls of the kitchen and laundry building and the adjacent covered walkway, and numerous flower boxes and planters at several island locations (Figures 4.3 – 4.8).<sup>5</sup>

### Additions and Renovations

Immigration officials continued to make recommendations for renovations to the extant

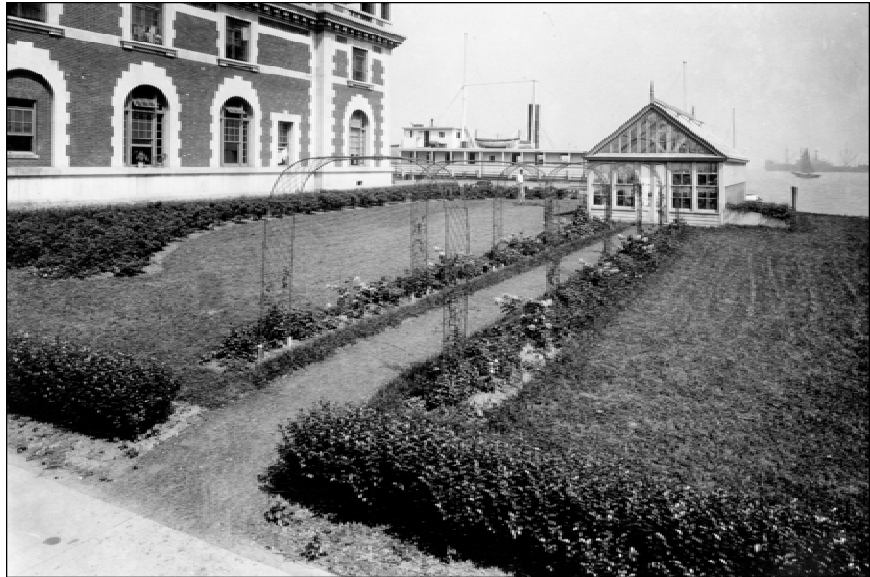
buildings on Island One to accommodate changing needs and improve the facilities. Upgrades to the main immigration building included a 1908 dormitory addition, a 1910 third-story addition on the north wing for administrative use and day quarters for detainees, and a third-story addition on the south wing between 1913 and 1915 for medical inspection facilities.<sup>6</sup> This addition necessitated the removal of the rooftop garden, encouraging officials to allow immigrants increased access to the landscape around the buildings for recreation. In 1908 contractor George Sykes of New York City added a one-thousand-seat dining room to the kitchen and laundry building on the renovated upper floor.

Several additional structures were added to the island during this period. By March 1910 the existing incinerator was in “imminent danger of collapse” and Commissioner Williams requested \$15,000 for the construction of a new facility.<sup>7</sup> Congress approved the appropriation and the Morse-Boulger Destructor Company constructed a new incinerator on a concrete platform outside the seawall adjacent to the former incinerator location. The company completed the structure by November 1911.<sup>8</sup> The landscape contained four privies at various sites by 1913. Island One locations included the dock east of the baggage and dormitory building behind the greenhouse, the bulkhead on the western side of the bakery



**Figure 4.1** This elevation of the baggage and dormitory building shows details of the rooftop deck and pergola. The addition of these features provided opportunities for immigrant detainees to escape the confines of the institutional buildings and spend some time outdoors. Circa 1907. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 41902a-0005.tif)

**Figure 4.2** This circa 1913 view of the greenhouse shows the adjacent rose and shrub beds and trellises over the path. The rooftop pergola is visible on the nearby baggage and dormitory building. (William Williams Collection, #28879, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.3** By 1915 mature climbing roses covered the trellises along the path to the greenhouse. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.4** In 1913 the star-shaped flower bed adjacent to the boardwalk at the northern end of the ferry basin continued to be used for annual plantings. A small wire hoop fence separated the lawn from the walks, replacing the earlier post and twisted-wire fencing, and ornamental vines climbed the adjacent walls. (William Williams Collection, #28878, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)





**Figure 4.5** Ornamental vines, shrubs, and window boxes filled with flowers embellished the front facade of the kitchen and laundry building. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #28881, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.6** In 1913 this small flower bed on the northwest corner of the ferry basin on Island Two contained ornamental summer bulbs. (William Williams Collection, #28880, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.7** Commissioner Williams had this ornamental pond and fountain installed southeast of the powerhouse. It is not clear how long this feature remained in the landscape. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



and carpentry shop, and yard on the northern corner of the main immigration building. Island Two had one privy on the north corner of the island. However, by 1916 only the privy located in the yard near the main immigration building on Island One remained.<sup>9</sup> Congress appropriated \$50,000 for the construction of a new bakery and carpentry shop in 1913. A contractor completed the new building by June 1915, replacing the old wooden structures on Island One with a new masonry building in the same location.<sup>10</sup> Additions to the ferry house included a coal hoist and a series of coal bins located behind the building.<sup>11</sup> These numerous alterations and efforts to improve facilities indicate activity at the immigration station remained high.

Documentation reveals the ornamental landscape was well-maintained throughout this period. A 1912 article described the pleasing island aesthetic:

Ellis Island usually is pictured in the minds of those who never have been on it as a desolate sort of place whereon misery and ugliness stand side by side. Nothing is further from the truth. In the spring and summer there is no place in or near New York which has greener grass or more beautiful privet hedges. Those hedges, in fact, would do credit to the private estate of any millionaire, so dense and uniform is their growth and so well are they kept by the gardener on the island. In fact, at this great clearing house for homesick but hopeful humanity most of the immigrants have more inviting surroundings than ever they had at home, with a view of one of the most magnificent and interesting harbors in the world added to them.<sup>12</sup> (Figure 4.9)

**Figure 4.8** Flower-filled planters accented various parts of the island, like these used in front of the glazed porch at the main immigration building. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #28873, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.9** The grounds staff at Ellis Island kept the grassy lawns and *Ligustrum* hedges highly manicured and well-maintained. Notice the planters on the entry steps, small wooden fences used for traffic control, and directional sign near the ferry basin. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #28895, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



By 1915 Commissioner of Immigration Frederic C. Howe implemented additional landscape improvements. These changes increased the recreational space for detainees and increased their access to the outdoors. The Bureau of Immigration installed a wire fence along the cinder walk at the northeast seawall, added swings and other playground equipment, and created recreation spaces for both adult and children detainees (Figure 4.10). They added benches to the lawns, constructed handball courts, and encouraged outdoor activity with a series of regular Sunday band concerts on the lawn. Increased flower plantings in beds and pots enhanced the more “user friendly” landscape.<sup>13</sup> The circulation system, upgraded in 1909 when the existing boardwalk was replaced with new wood, was improved again circa 1915 when concrete replaced the boardwalk on a newly rehabilitated section of seawall.<sup>14</sup>

The approach of World War I and the resulting shift in focus from immigration to military use on the island led to a general decrease in landscape improvements and maintenance. Many of the existing ornamental plantings were probably not as highly maintained during the war years. Some of the flower beds may have been abandoned altogether. However, officials still encouraged military detainees to use the landscape for recreation and the area east and north of the main immigration building remained fenced for this purpose. The weekly band concerts on the lawn were suspended, but after the war Commissioner of Immigration Frederick A. Wallis reinstated the shows for returning immigration staff and aliens. On August 1, 1920, during the first concert after the war, “about 800 aliens were entertained on the lawn by a band, which played all the national anthems of countries represented on Ellis Island, opening with *The Star-Spangled Banner*.”<sup>15</sup> Even immigrants remaining aboard ships in the harbor enjoyed the entertainment. One report mentioned that twelve hundred passengers from the Holland American liner *Rotterdam* watched the show from the decks of the ship. However, officials did not allow all immigrants to participate. Some aliens remained detained inside the buildings and fenced yards.<sup>16</sup>

## Island Two

By June 1907 United States Commissioner-General of Immigration Frank P. Sargent determined that the hospital on Island Two, even with the newly completed extension, still did not provide adequate facilities for the increasing numbers of patients treated at the site. Officials proposed construction of an additional wing southeast of the recently completed addition (administration building). Called the new hospital extension, this building was similar to the main hospital building in size and appearance. Congress concurred with the recommendation and appropriated \$250,000 for the project in February 1908. George W. Stoner, chief medical officer for the hospital, submitted initial sketches for the building to architects with the U. S. Public Buildings Service, but a controversy soon arose over the design. The medical staff and Commissioner of Immigration Watchorn wanted the building floors to be on the same level as the existing hospital addition, which were higher than the main hospital building, allowing room for a full-size basement in the new building. Architects wanted to maintain consistency between the facades of the main hospital building and the new structure, which would allow room for only a service basement. The issue was eventually resolved in favor of the former alternative, and the architects completed drawings for the building. The New York State Construction Company



**Figure 4.10** Immigrant children enjoy the playground on the north side of Island One. 1926. (Hine Unit 1, No. 31, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

began construction in June 1908, and work was nearly complete by the spring of 1909. Cold weather delayed the pouring of concrete sidewalks and stoops until late April, but by May all construction was finished (Figure 4.11).<sup>17</sup>

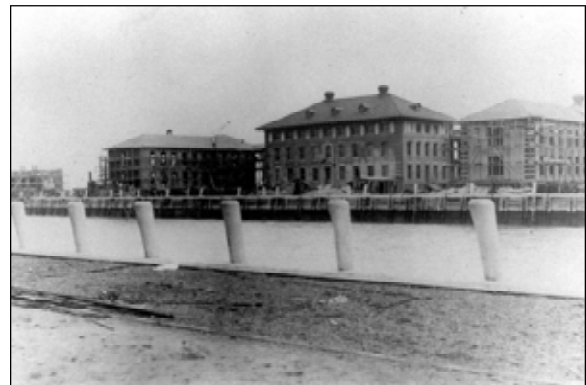
Another addition to Island Two was the American Red Cross recreation building constructed around 1915. The small masonry structure was located on the northeast corner of the island near the ferry house and the hospital outbuilding. There is little documentation on the construction of this building, however, photographs show the installation of ornamental landscaping along the building's foundation (Figure 4.12).<sup>18</sup>

As the new buildings were constructed on Island Two, immigration officials oversaw various landscape improvement projects. Concrete aprons installed around the perimeter of the buildings served as walkways and provided circulation routes. A cinder path provided circulation around the perimeter of the island (Figure 4.13). Lawns filled the remainder of the open space. A tennis court near the surgeon's house provided recreation space for island residents and employees. Sometime after the completion of the new hospital extension in 1909, a connecting walkway covered with a wooden pergola was constructed between this building and the surgeon's house. Details of the installation

**Figure 4.11** Island Two is viewed from Island One in this circa 1913 photograph, showing (left to right) the new hospital extension, administration building, and the original main hospital building. The boardwalk, wooden cribwork seawall, and fender pilings along the ferry basin on Island One are shown in the foreground. (STLI Library, 19.5, #14)



**Figure 4.12** Workers install plantings around the new American Red Cross recreation building on Island Two. Circa 1915. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG90-G-125-56)



**Figure 4.13** From Island Two, a cinder path is visible along the seawall in the foreground, while the construction of hospital buildings on Island Three is visible in the background. December 16, 1907. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38A1-13)

and exact date of these features is unknown, however, they first appear on 1913 maps and photographs. Vines and flowers enhanced both the pergola and a circular flower bed between the pergola and ferry basin (Figure 4.14).<sup>19</sup>

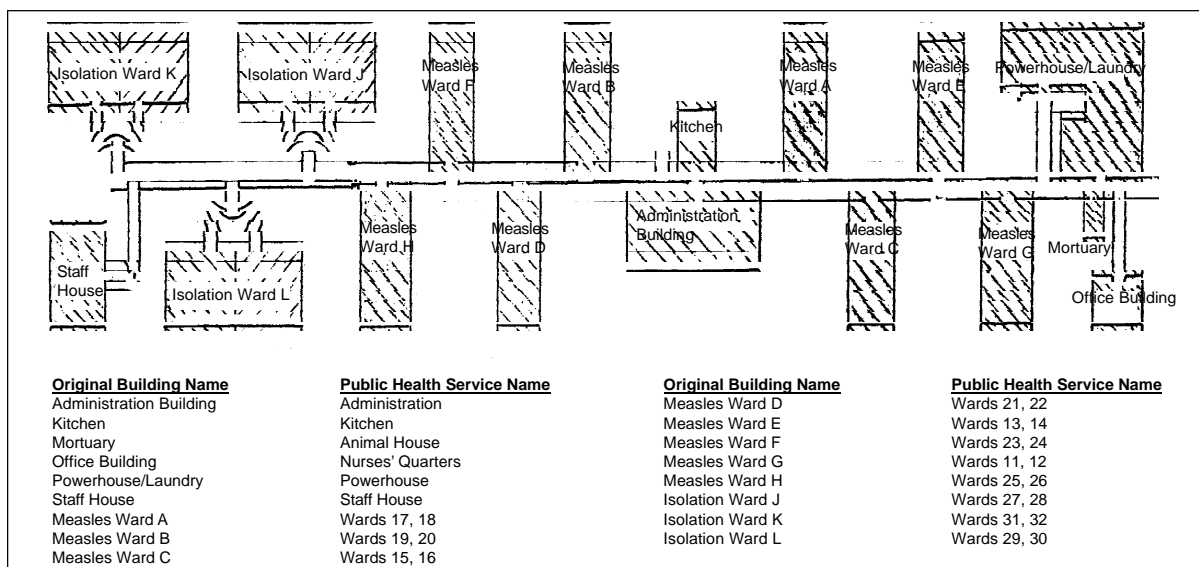
### Island Three

In March 1905 a \$250,000 appropriation from Congress initiated construction of the contagious-disease hospital on Island Three. In planning the hospital's layout, much debate arose between immigration officials, hospital officials, and U. S.

Public Buildings Service architects concerning the design, specifications for construction, and need for additional funding. Given the history of increasing immigration and the continuous need to update buildings on Islands One and Two, Commissioner-General Sargent wanted to ensure the new hospital would fulfill future needs. In his 1906 annual report, Sargent argued for an additional \$250,000 to ensure the hospital on Island Three would be "large enough and sufficiently commodious and complete in its arrangement and equipment to obviate any possibility of additions or extensions being required in the near future."<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 4.14** This walk and pergola, constructed between the new hospital extension and the surgeon's house (out of photo to left), provided a perfect location for flowers and vines. Also shown are a circular flower bed and tennis courts behind the pergola on the southwest side of Island Two. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #28877, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.15** The as-built layout of Island Three. The U. S. Public Health Service changed the names of the buildings on Island Three when they took over the facility in 1919. (Copied from *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 537)

In December 1906 the Department of Commerce and Labor awarded a contract to Northeastern Construction Company for the construction of several of the buildings in the Island Three hospital complex, including the administration building, the kitchen, the powerhouse and laundry, and measles wards A, B, and E. Northeastern completed these structures by November 1907. It won an additional contract for construction of the second phase of buildings including measles wards C, D, and G, isolation ward L, the staff house, the mortuary, and corridors from the powerhouse to measles ward E. Northeastern and other contractors fulfilled subsequent contracts to complete measles wards F and H, isolation wards I and K, and the office building. By the spring of 1909, the entire contagious-disease hospital was finished, although several problems with last-minute details delayed its opening until June 1911 (Figure 4.15).<sup>21</sup>

As building construction concluded, the landscape surrounding the newly completed hospital was gradually improved. It is unknown whether this work was contracted out or performed by immigration employees. In 1908 workers filled around the first set of completed buildings on Island Three with soil taken from the excavations of the new hospital extension on Island Two. They graded the fill, added loam, and planted a lawn (Figure 4.16). Work crews completed additional grading and lawn renovations on Island Three in 1912. However, they did not install any trees or shrubs, nor did officials develop a comprehensive plan for the island's landscape. By 1913 an established lawn existed on the north side of the island, but areas on the south side remained rough and barren.

A central concrete walkway was integral to the building's layout and design and provided circulation between the buildings. Although initial 1909 drawings specified additional concrete walks between the buildings and around the island's perimeter, these were not installed. By 1913 cinder walkways existed in these locations instead. In 1914 Congress appropriated funds to enclose the two-story central corridor, which connected all buildings on Island Three except the isolation



**Figure 4.16** Upon completion of the mortuary (animal house) on Island Three, there was still a considerable amount of fill needed to raise the island's grade to its planned elevation. Notice the distance between the bottom of the staircase and the rough grade prior to the addition of topsoil fill. October 14, 1907. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38A-3)

wards and office buildings. The glass enclosure allowed use of the corridor during inclement weather. Contractors completed the work by June 1914.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, in 1918 the U. S. Army replaced the wooden gangway connecting Islands Two and Three with a covered walk while they occupied the hospital complex. Commissioner Williams requested this upgrade as early as 1911, since the open walkway did not provide adequate protection for transferring patients between buildings and the existing piles were deteriorating quickly. He requested a fireproof masonry structure, but the walkway added by the U. S. Army was constructed of wood.<sup>23</sup>

The facilities on Island Three were certainly adequate to meet the needs of the immigration

station at the time of their completion, but Commissioner of Immigration Daniel J. Keefe continued to push for upgrades in his annual reports. For example, in 1909 he stressed the need for space to house aliens with “mental defects”:

Our hospital facilities, thanks to the recent construction of a contagious disease hospital on the new island, will probably now be adequate, except that there is no proper ward for holding for observation cases in which it is suspected that the alien may be affected mentally. Certain wooden barracks are now used for this purpose. They were never intended to stand permanently, and furthermore are dangerous by reason of their inflammability.<sup>24</sup>

It is unclear where these barracks were located, but they were eventually removed and additional structures were not constructed to house the mental patients.<sup>25</sup> These patients received treatment in isolation wards within the hospital complex on Island Three.

### Granite-faced Seawall

In Commissioner Williams's 1910 funding request to Congress, he included \$150,000 for replacement of the cribwork seawall. In justifying this expenditure, Williams noted that the cribwork surrounding the island varied from two to fifteen years in age, and the reasonable life span for this type of structure was only seven years. The cribwork around Island One already showed signs of decay above the water line and according to engineers, the entire structure needed replacement with a concrete and granite seawall within the next five years.<sup>26</sup> The station did not immediately receive approval for the expenditure and Williams repeatedly requested funding during the following years, with justification noting it was “desirable in the interest of economy...to encase the three islands, the life of the existing crib work above high water being very limited.”<sup>27</sup>

Congress eventually approved funding, and in 1913 the Department of Labor began initiating a series of contracts to replace the existing wooden crib, rock-filled bulkheads with a new concrete seawall with granite facing. The work covered several phases of construction. The Chief Engineer for the Bureau of Immigration recommended starting Contract #1 on the north side of the ferry basin.<sup>28</sup> This section cost approximately \$115,000 to complete. Contract #2



**Figure 4.17** In 1913 construction began on the new concrete and granite seawall on Island One. This image of construction on Contract #1 shows how the new seawall was placed outside the existing crib bulkhead, reducing the width of the ferry basin by about thirty feet when the north and south basin seawalls were completed. Circa 1913. (STLI Library, 26.7, #16)

began soon after the completion of Contract #1, and covered the portion of wall directly opposite the ferry basin on the northeast side of Island Two. Placed on the water side of the existing bulkhead, the new seawall installed under Contracts #1 and #2 reduced the width of the ferry basin by approximately thirty feet (Figure 4.17). Contract #3 extended the wall around the southeast and southwest sides of Islands Two and Three, bridging the basin between the two islands. Contract #4 consisted of the section of wall on the northeast side of the baggage and dormitory building on Island One, northeast of the existing bulkhead. Upon completion of Contract #4, a wooden ramp spanned the space between the existing bulkhead and the new seawall, and the area was eventually filled. A new section of thirty-four fender piles along the face of the seawall allowed boats to moor alongside the building in this area.<sup>29</sup> Contract #5 extended the seawall from northeast of the baggage and dormitory building to the north side of the powerhouse on Island One, and included additional landfill between the existing bulkhead and the new seawall (see Appendix A). By 1921 the concrete and granite seawall enclosed most of Island One. However, the southeast point of the island did not receive

the new wall until the 1930s, and the seawall was not completed on the northwest sides of Islands Two and Three until 1934, when landfill was added for the construction of the new immigration building (see Chapter 5).<sup>30</sup>

### **The Circa 1920 Landscape**

The landscape of Ellis Island underwent many improvements during facility expansion from circa 1907 until the midteens. During the war years, from 1917 to 1919, it is unlikely that the landscape was improved upon or highly maintained. When the island reopened for immigration after the war, the landscape showed evidence of neglect. Postwar priorities for the Bureau of Immigration centered on reestablishing the immigration operations and maintaining the deteriorated facilities, leaving limited resources available for maintaining the ornamental landscape.<sup>31</sup> Figures 4.18 and 4.26 illustrate the circa 1920 landscape with an aerial photograph and period plan.

Changes in Ellis Island's spatial organization during this period built on previously established development patterns. The addition of numerous



**Figure 4.18** Circa 1920 aerial photo of Ellis Island. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG18-AA-93-60)



buildings on Islands Two and Three decentralized activity from Island One, spreading active land use among all three islands. As new structures were added, their placement reflected locations specified on early plans for the second immigration station, and reinforced the established linear organization along the north/south axis of the island. Open space remained an important organizational feature. On Island One, additional landfill replaced existing open space that was used for the construction of the baggage and dormitory building, and on Island Three, building placement along a central axis created numerous small courtyard spaces. The basins between the islands provided both a physical and a visual separation between building groups and land uses associated with each island.

Overall, institutional land use dominated Ellis Island, with minor residential use continuing in the hospital buildings and surgeon's house on Island Two, and the staff house on Island Three. At a more detailed level, Island One focused on immigration operations, Island Two offered general hospital care, and Island Three provided a distant area for quarantining patients with contagious diseases.

Construction projects necessitated only minor topographical changes during this period. Completion of the hospital on Island Three required minor regrading and the addition of topsoil. Landfill was also added to Island One

with the completion of the seawall. In all cases, the relatively flat landforms present after these additions were consistent with the topography already extant on all three islands.

The circa 1915 replacement of the ferry basin boardwalk with a new concrete walk improved circulation on Island One. On Island Two, concrete aprons around the buildings and a perimeter cinder walk created new circulation routes. An enclosed central corridor and outside perimeter walks connecting all buildings provided circulation on Island Three. The addition of a dock extension on the northeast corner of the ferry basin, adjacent to the ferry ramp and extending out over the bulkhead, slightly altered the circulation pattern of incoming immigrants at the ferry house. This addition allowed immigrants to access the ferryboat directly from the basin-side walk on Island One without having to enter the ferry house. Water circulation routes remained consistent. Immigrant ferries arrived at the main ferry slip, while barge traffic landed at the powerhouse coal wharf and the coal wharf behind the ferry house (Figures 4.19 – 4.21).

By circa 1920 there were five primary buildings on Island One including the main immigration building (1900), kitchen and laundry building (1901), powerhouse (1901), baggage and dormitory building (1909), and bakery and carpentry shop (1915). The ferry house (1901) stood between Islands One and Two. Island Two



**Figure 4.19** The boardwalk along the ferry basin on Island One. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #28939, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.20** This new concrete walk replaced the boardwalk along the ferry basin on Island One. Circa 1915. (STLI Library, 19.6, #29)



contained the main hospital building (1900), hospital outbuilding (1901), surgeon's house (1901), psychopathic ward (1907), administration building (1907), new hospital extension (1909), and the American Red Cross recreation building (circa 1915). Seventeen buildings were located on Island Three, including an administration building (1907), powerhouse (1907), kitchen (1907), staff house (1908), animal house (1908), nurses' quarters (1909), and eleven hospital buildings housing twenty-two wards (1907-1909). Miscellaneous structures included a coal hoist (1901), incinerator (1902), and greenhouse (1910) on Island One, a coal hoist and coal bins behind the ferry house, a pump house (1901) on Island Two, and several covered walkways on all three islands. The ferry slip (1901) and one floating

dock remained in the ferry basin. The new concrete and granite seawall completely surrounded Island One, while a wooden crib seawall enclosed the other two. Most of the structures remained in good condition since the island was fully occupied and in use.

By 1920 vegetation on the island consisted primarily of large areas of lawn accented by a few scattered flower beds and hedgerows. These features were remnants of the pre-World War I landscape when there was more focus on maintaining the site. None of the three islands had any substantial tree cover. However, the tree identified earlier as the Gibbet Tree remained on Island One northeast of the kitchen and laundry building, and a few small trees grew behind the hospital buildings on Island Two (Figure 4.22).

**Figure 4.21** Immigrants disembarking the ferry proceeded down the dock extension and along the ferry basin on Island One to reach the main immigration building. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, #29023, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.22** Typical vegetation on the island during this period included large expanses of lawn, like this area around the greenhouse on Island One. October 29, 1913. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38A-1)

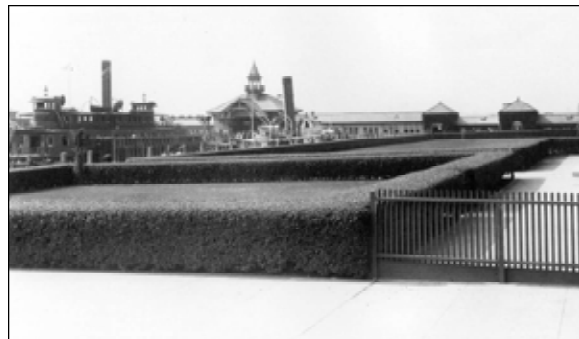




**Figure 4.23** Benches and lamp posts remained on the island from the earlier era, including these on the southeast side of the main immigration building. Circa 1913. (William Williams Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)

The addition of more buildings to the island altered views and vistas slightly. The structures blocked some existing view sheds, but also created new and more intimate views within the island. Views from the island's edges remained relatively consistent, with only slight alteration caused by the changing Manhattan skyline and the increasing development on the New Jersey wharves.

Many of the small-scale features present in earlier periods remained on the island, including the circa 1902 lamp posts, benches, planters, a fog bell, and the flagstaff. The post and wire fencing around the lawn on Island One had been removed by circa 1913. Some wooden picket fence sections assisted with crowd control on the main sidewalks. At several points along the seawall, including the edge of the ferry basin, large iron mooring cleats served as docking points for ferryboats and other vessels. Playground equipment occupied a small area in the recreation grounds on the northeast side of Island One (Figures 4.23 - 4.25).



**Figure 4.24** The hedges no longer contained post and wire fences, but small wooden fences assisted with crowd control in front of the main immigration building. Circa 1913. (William Williams Collection, Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations)



**Figure 4.25** Iron mooring cleats along the seawall, as shown in the lower left of the photo, assisted with docking ships. They were added to the landscape sometime between 1907 and 1913. Circa 1915. (STLI Library, 19.6, #29)

## Endnotes for Chapter 4

<sup>1</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 365-376.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 382-388.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 589.

<sup>4</sup> "Annual Report, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, New York, N.Y.," June 30, 1913 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, William Williams Papers).

<sup>5</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 55-57.

<sup>6</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 5, 140-153.

<sup>7</sup> The contract was awarded to the Morse-Boulger Destructor Company, which began work in the spring of 1911. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 582-583.

<sup>8</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 60.

<sup>9</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 383, 529, 532; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 55; *Archeological Resources*, p. 61.

<sup>10</sup> There is no information available on the chosen contractor. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 593-594; *Archeological Resources*, p. 60.

<sup>11</sup> It is not clear when these features were added. They first appear on a 1913 map, however, they may have been installed as early as 1905 when the ferry house was widened.

<sup>12</sup> "Our Clearing House for Immigrants," unidentified press article, 1912 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts, William Williams Papers, Scrapbook 2).

<sup>13</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 54, 57, 70-71.

<sup>14</sup> The 1909 rehabilitation of the boardwalk modified the original design. The original planking was laid parallel to the seawall, but the new planking was installed perpendicular to the seawall. *Archeological Resources*, p. 62; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 60.

<sup>15</sup> *New York Times*, August 2, 1920 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 4).

<sup>16</sup> *New York Times*, August 23, 1920 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 4).

<sup>17</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 448-459.

<sup>18</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 61.

<sup>19</sup> "Block Plan, Showing Relative Locations of Buildings, Corridors, etc. on the Three Islands, U. S. Immigration Station Ellis Island N.Y.H.," December 24, 1913 (National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center File, 462/43968-0008.tif).

<sup>20</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 513-515.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 515-532.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 534.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>24</sup> "Annual Report, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, N.Y.," August 16, 1909 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, William Williams Papers).

<sup>25</sup> The 1911 Annual Report said "the wooden barracks on the north side of the island, together with much debris, have been removed and the ground graded. This portion of the island no longer presents an unsightly appearance." This may be in reference to the wooden barracks mentioned in the 1909 report, or it may be referring to the barracks removed on Island One when the baggage and dormitory building was constructed. ("Annual Report, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration for the Port of New York, with Reference to Ellis Island Affairs for the year ended June 30, 1911," Government Printing Office, Washington, DC (National Archives, Record Group 85, Entry 9, Box 201, File 53294-8).

<sup>26</sup> William Williams, Commissioner of Immigration to Commissioner General, July 1, 1910 (National Archives, Record Group 85, Box 620, File 52519-18B).

<sup>27</sup> "Annual Report, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, New York, N.Y.," June 30, 1913 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, William Williams Papers).

<sup>28</sup> According to the Bureau of Immigration's Chief Engineer and Superintendent of Repairs, the new seawall sections were to generally be "monolithic construction separated by proper joints spaced about 20 feet apart, using, where practicable, as a foundation the present cribwork in place, which is generally sound below extreme low water." The proposed amounts to complete the seawall around all three islands were: Island One, \$368,669.70; Island Two, \$198,620.10; Island Three, \$219,880.50. William Williams, Commissioner of Immigration to Commissioner General, July 1, 1910 (National Archives, Record Group 85, Box 620, File 52519-18B).

<sup>29</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 390.

<sup>30</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 62; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 7; "Annual Report, Office of the Commissioner of Immigration, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, New York, N.Y.," June 30, 1913 (New York Public Library, Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection, William Williams Papers).

<sup>31</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 71-72.





# Ellis Island Circa 1920 Period Plan

Figure 4.26

Cultural Landscape Report  
for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National  
Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



## Sources:

1. "U. S. Immigrant Station, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, Descriptive Location Plan," 1916 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 41999x2, 0057.tif)
2. "U. S. Immigrant Station, Ellis Island, New York Harbor, Descriptive Location Plan, No. 2 Island and Ferry House," 1916 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 42957, 0001.tif)
3. "Immigrant Station, Contagious Disease Hospital, Approach Plans, Details, Etc." (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 41999x4, 0038.tif)
4. Historic Photographs (STL Library, NY Public Library, National Archives)
5. Harlan Unrau, *Historic Structure Report, Historical Data, 1981*

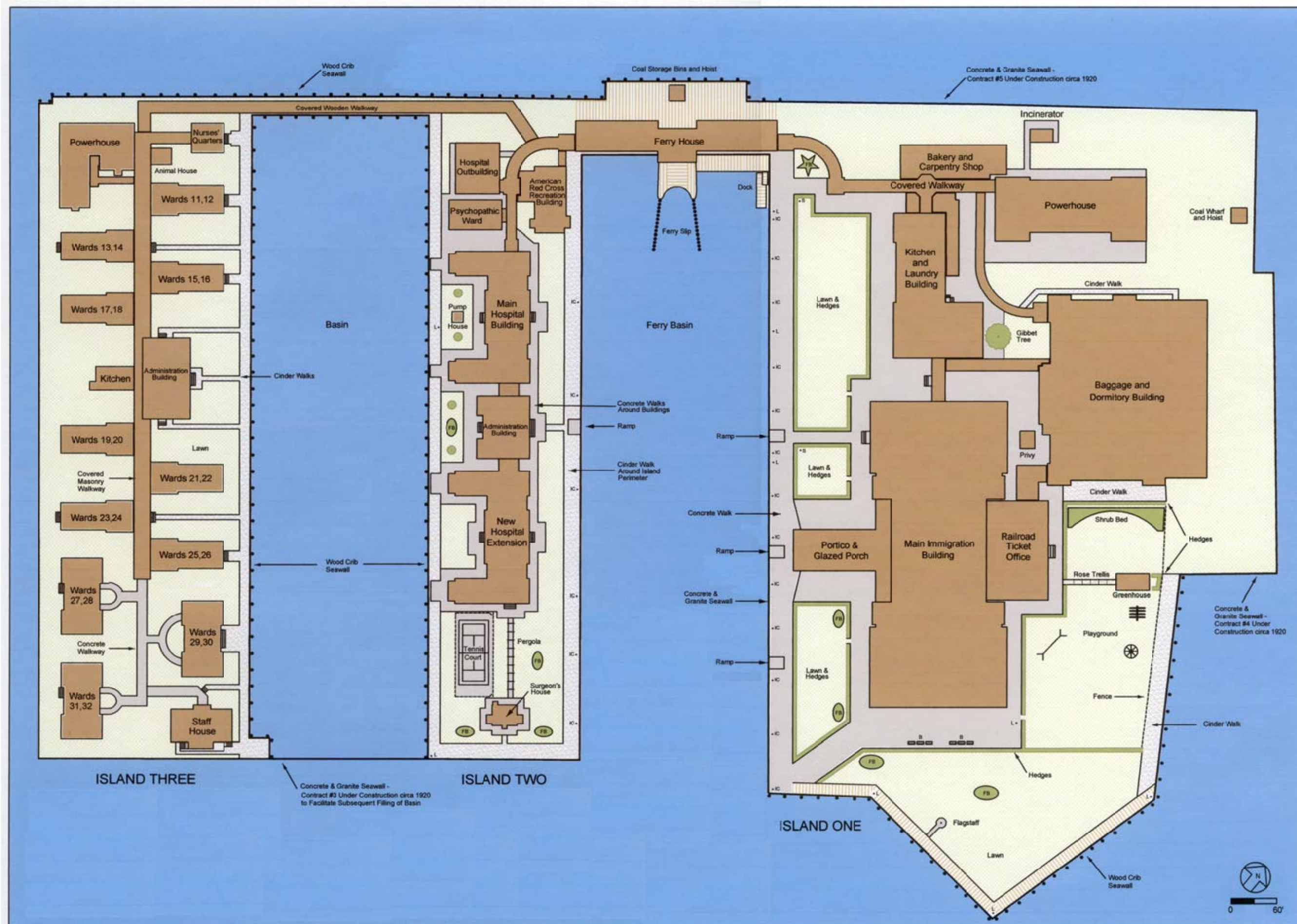
Plan drawn using Autocad  
2002 by J. Tracy Stakely,  
OCLP. February 2003.



0 60' 120'

## Legend

- = Building / Structure
- = Turfgrass / Lawn
- = Concrete
- = Cinders
- = Boardwalk
- = Tree
- = Fence
- B = Bench
- FB = Flower Bed
- IC = Iron Mooring Cleat
- L = Light Pole
- S = Directional Sign







## **CHAPTER 5: SECOND IMMIGRATION STATION – DETENTION FACILITIES (CIRCA 1920 – 1954)**

During the next three decades, Ellis Island's landscape consistently changed in response to modified patterns of use on the island. Reduced immigration activity in the 1920s and the accompanying reduction in station staff resulted in some deterioration of structures and the landscape. However, routine maintenance preserved most landscape features. Changes during the 1930s emphasized the facility's new role as a detention center by providing increased areas and facilities for detainee recreation. This period saw the addition or rehabilitation of numerous features, including security fencing to confine detainees, guardhouses, and new sections of concrete and granite seawall. Implementation of a comprehensive planting plan began in the early 1940s and continued until the onset of World War II. During the late 1940s and early 1950s, island activity slowed considerably and little change took place on the island. By the time the station officially closed in 1954, the facilities and landscape were once again neglected and deteriorating.

### **Landscape Changes During the 1920s**

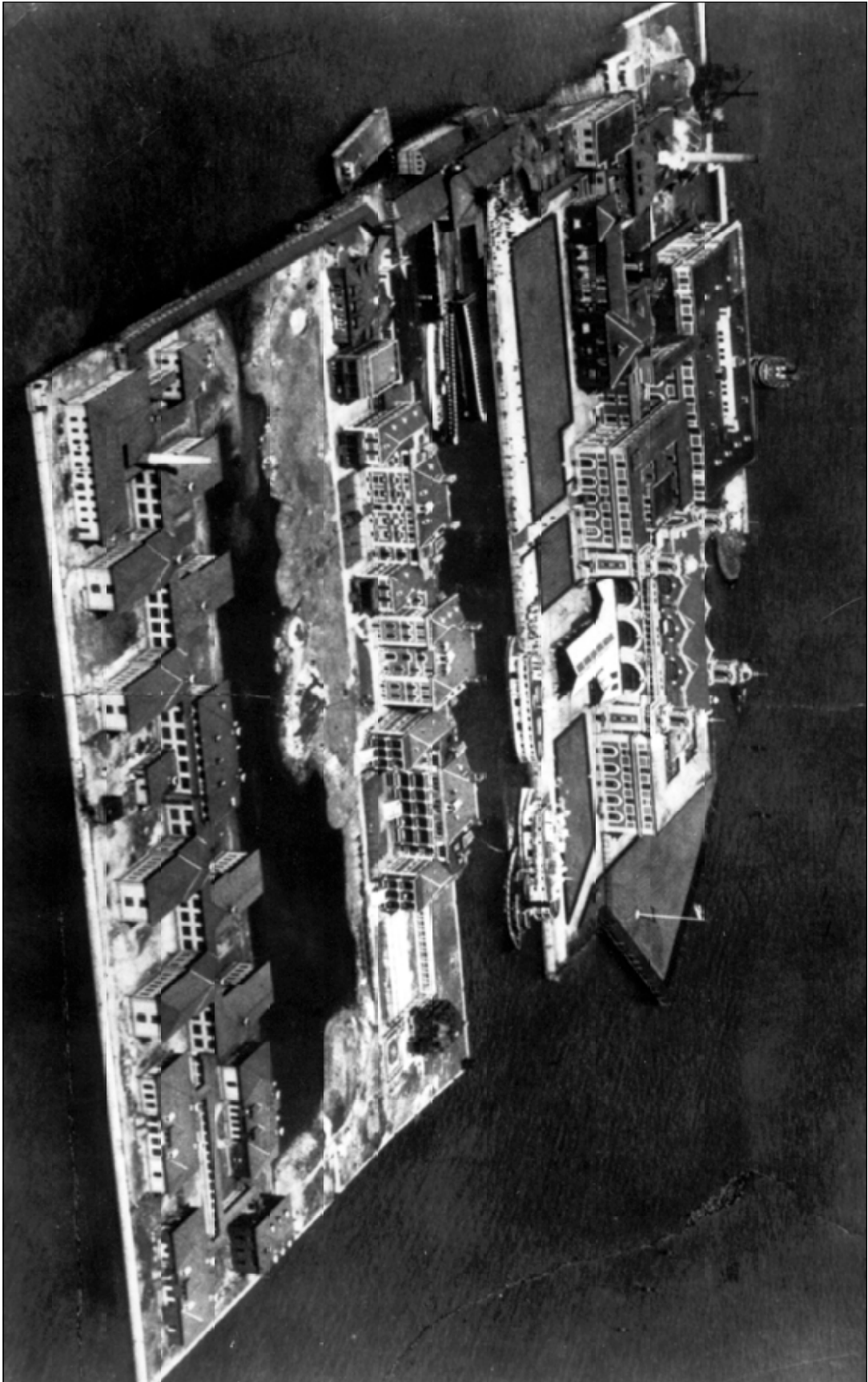
Throughout the 1920s, various immigration commissioners sought funding to maintain the facilities and to provide for growing numbers of detainees. Once again, the provision of recreation space for immigrants and detainees was a landscape priority. In 1923 the Bureau of Immigration requested more than \$2.5 million for "a commodious, sanitary, attractive Ellis Island" including a new sea wall "and more land acquired by filling in, so that the immigrants should have space for exercise outside the buildings," including a "pavilion for shelter and a children's house with kindergarten and nursery."<sup>1</sup> In anticipation of receiving the funding, immigration officials developed preliminary plans for these structures.<sup>2</sup> President Calvin Coolidge supported the work, and in 1924 he asked Congress to appropriate \$300,000 to improve conditions on the island.<sup>3</sup> Congress appropriated partial funding and work

began in the mid- to late 1920s on both the buildings and landscape, addressing some of the inadequacies of the facilities first mentioned as early as 1903.

A major project completed during this time was filling the area between Islands Two and Three to create additional recreation space, which began in the early 1920s but was not completed until the early 1930s. Fill consisted primarily of cinders from the coal-fired island ferry (Figure 5.1). William Bean, who lived on Island Three as a child during the 1920s, recalled,

After every trip or two they [ferryboat crewmen] would clean out the ashes and clinkers, and load them into these two-wheeled carts...the kind they used to push concrete in....And they'd wheel those over on the bridge from the ferry slip between the first and second island, and dump them into the slightly diminishing lagoon there. And the ashes would be hot. And they would...bring forth deposits of sulfur and whatnot....There'd be beautiful growths of crystals and steam coming up.<sup>4</sup>

Various landscape and structural renovations, completed during the 1920s, improved both the flow through the buildings and the immigrant's experience on the island. In the main immigration building, individual beds with supplied bedding replaced old bunks in wire cages, improving the situation for overnight detainees. Rearrangement of the reception and examining rooms eliminated "unnecessary climbing of stairs and needless going to and fro," and allowed the "transfer station [to] be more businesslike."<sup>5</sup> In late 1924 the Hamilton & Chambers Company of New York City installed a steel staircase on the northeast side of the baggage and dormitory building. This provided access for the detainees from the open porch on the second story of the building to the recreation area below (Figure 5.2).<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 5.1** Aerial photo showing the area between Islands Two and Three partially filled, early 1920s. (STLI Library, 25.2, #7)

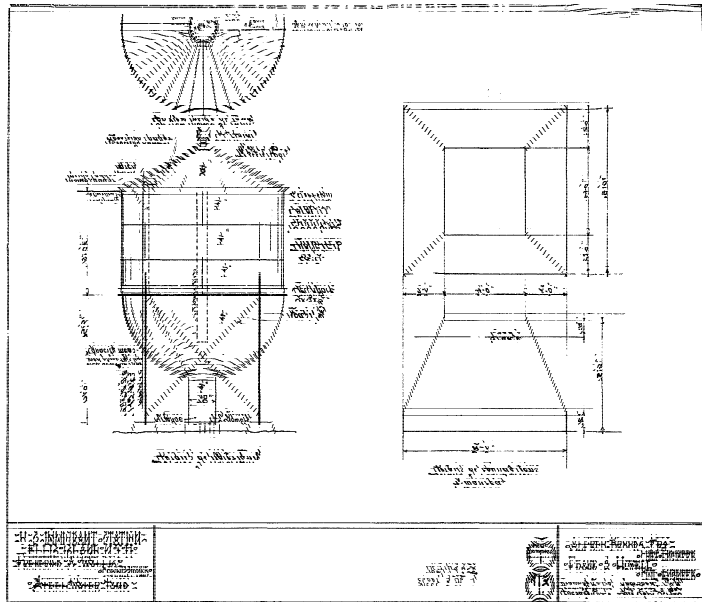


In the fall of 1924 the Fireproof Products Company of New York City repaired the pergola on Island Two, and in 1926 Neptune B. Smyth, Inc., repaired porches, steps, railings, and ladders on the rear of wards 3, 4, 7, and 8 on Island Three. This contractor also installed a concrete sidewalk "from the end wall of wards 3 and 4 to the curb line, and the old concrete sidewalk between the building lines around the courtyard was to be replaced."<sup>7</sup>

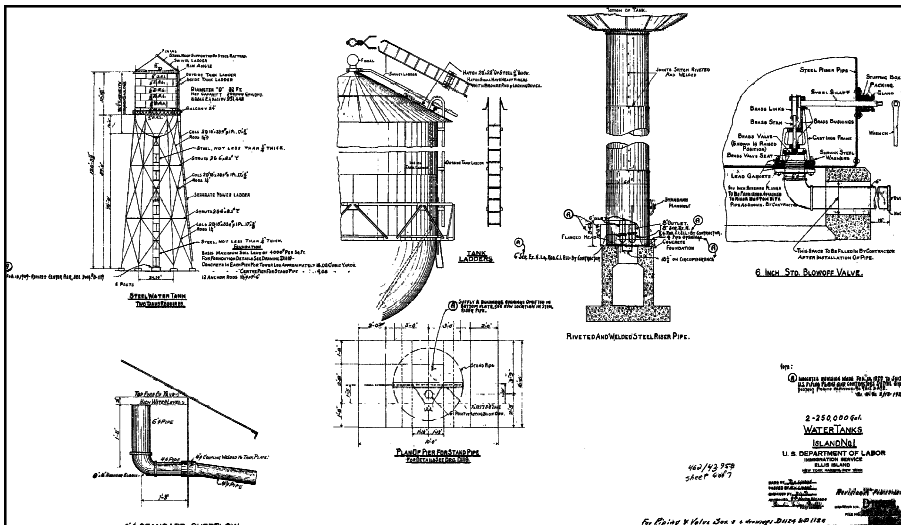
The installation of a new 75,000-gallon water tank and accompanying service pumps in 1920-1921 was the only structural addition during the 1920s. Bureau of Immigration engineers designed the tank, and its installation upgraded the entire island's freshwater service. The tank was located at the western corner of the baggage and dormitory building near the powerhouse. With continued expansion of the island's facilities, the need for freshwater storage increased, and in 1929-1930 the Bureau added two additional 250,000-gallon water towers adjacent to the original tank (Figures 5.3 – 5.4).<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 5.2** A recently installed steel staircase is shown on the northeast side of the baggage and dormitory building, with immigrants standing next to a trellis on the greenhouse path. Circa 1920s. (STLI Library, 20.3, #5)



**Figure 5.3** Plans for the original 75,000-gallon water tank installed on Island One in 1920-1921. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43958-0003.tif)



**Figure 5.4** Plans for the two 250,000-gallon water tanks installed on Island One in 1929-1930. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43958-0006.tif)

## Landscape Improvements Under Commissioner Corsi

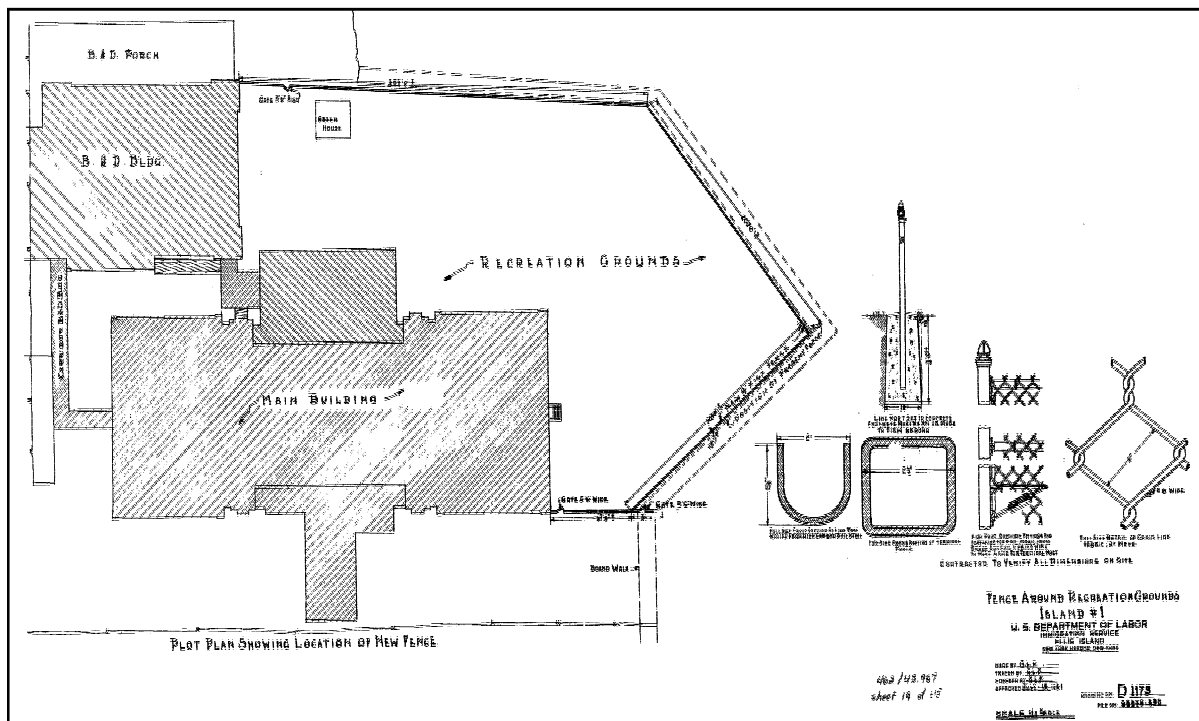
In 1931 Edward Corsi began serving as Ellis Island's Commissioner of Immigration, remaining in the position until January 31, 1934. Corsi, an immigrant himself, had passed through Ellis Island as a child. His consistent support for improving the island's facilities and grounds led to the implementation of numerous changes to the landscape throughout the 1930s. Much of the work was funded and/or constructed through the Public Works Administration (PWA) and Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs.<sup>9</sup>

In his memoir, *In the Shadow of Liberty*, Corsi described the importance of the appearance of the island and how immigrants perceived the facility.

I had advocated from the very beginning of my office the need of publicizing and humanizing the Island in the eyes of the entire world. As it is the port of entry to the largest city in the largest country of the Western

World, it seemed in keeping that the physical appearance of that port should bear witness to the importance of the city and country whose door it opened. That Ellis Island should be to the immigrant, as well as to the American, an inspiration – a tribute to our physical development as exemplified in adequate buildings, well-planned grounds, satisfactory sanitary and housing conditions – was to my mind the first, but by no means the only or the most important, consideration.<sup>10</sup>

Changes implemented under Commissioner Corsi focused on improving the immigrant experience by updating facilities. In one of his earliest projects, the recreation space on the northeast side of Island One was increased and enclosed with a new eight-foot-tall galvanized chainlink fence (Figure 5.5). The Atlas Fence Company of Newark, New Jersey, completed the project in October 1931. The new fence extended from the southern corner of the main immigration building, around the point of the island, to the eastern corner of the baggage and dormitory



**Figure 5.5** Plans for new fencing around recreation grounds on Island One, installed in 1931. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43967-0019.tif)

building.<sup>11</sup> In 1932 removal of the entry portico altered the main immigration building's entry, and installation of a paved plaza and a forty-foot diameter circular flower bed renovated the surrounding landscape (Figure 5.6). In that same year, the Quintine Realty Company of New York City installed a new steam heating system in the greenhouse to improve its operation.<sup>12</sup> As early as 1920, immigration officials proposed converting the generators in the powerhouse from coal to oil burners to save fuel and manpower costs. After the third proposal in 1931, Congress appropriated \$40,000 to complete the work. The R. H. Baker Company of New York City completed the changes by January 1933. Part of this contract included converting the original 75,000-gallon water tank into a standby oil storage tank, leaving the two large water towers to serve the island's freshwater needs.<sup>13</sup> The coal hoist and conveyor equipment near the powerhouse were removed soon after.<sup>14</sup> Another alteration occurred in October 1932 when contractors installed an additional incinerator in the same building as the existing incinerator, increasing the capacity of the facility.<sup>15</sup>

On Island Two, minor alterations were made to landscape features. With the initial construction of the main hospital building, vacuum pumps for the heating system had been installed in a pump house on the southwest side of the structure. Seawater often flooded the basement-level pumps during particularly high tides, causing them to malfunction. To remedy this, contractors C. F. Malanka and the David E. Goggin Company installed a new pump house and pumps near the psychopathic ward and covered walkway in 1930. The structures had a concrete foundation, brick walls, and steel frame windows.<sup>16</sup> In 1932 the Quintine Realty Company renovated drains and sewers on Island Two, including the replacement of leader stacks, alterations to house drains on the main hospital building, alterations to house sewers, repairs to sewer mains, construction of catch basins and manholes, replacement of lines, and patching of concrete, masonry, and plaster.<sup>17</sup>

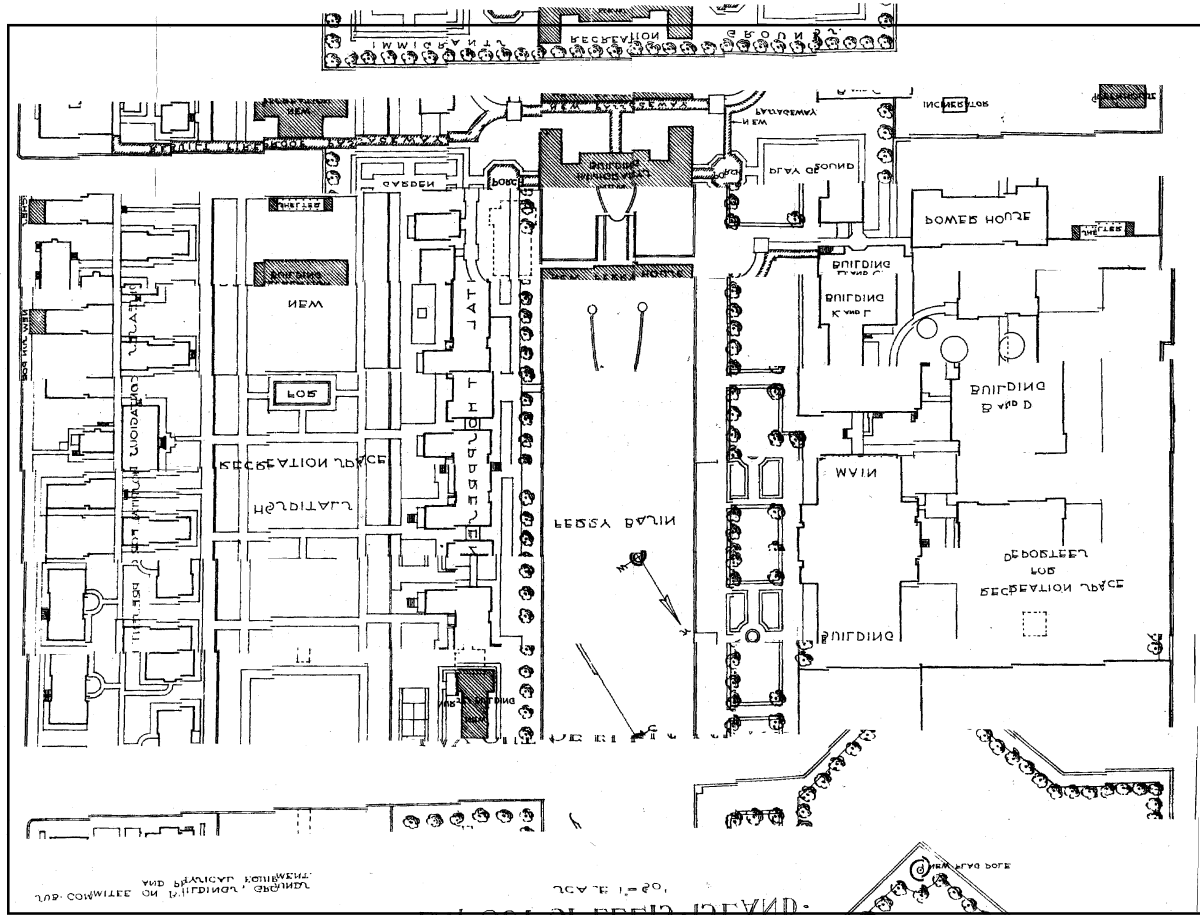


**Figure 5.6** One of the improvements initiated by Commissioner Corsi was the replacement of the entry portico in front of the main immigration building with a large circular planting bed. January 9, 1934. (STLI Library, 25.2, #8, copy also located at National Archives and Records Administration, RG90-G-90-16)

### **Ellis Island Committee Recommendations**

In 1933 Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins established “a nonpartisan committee of prominent citizens” to complete a thorough analysis of the operation and facilities at Ellis Island. The objective of the Ellis Island Committee, as defined by Perkins, was “not to find fault with the administration at Ellis Island, but to assist in effecting greater economy in operation and to improve the general amenities in the administration of the immigration law.”<sup>18</sup> Commissioner Corsi worked closely with the committee and many of his suggested improvements were considered for inclusion as the committee prepared its report to the Secretary.

By the end of 1933, the Ellis Island Committee's Subcommittee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment issued a preliminary appraisal of the condition of the island landscape. This evaluation focused on increasing recreation potential for the detainees and specifically recommended adding more recreation areas, improving fencing, adding shelters and comfort stations, installing turfgrass on the newly filled recreation area between Islands Two and Three, and improving landscaping on Island Two and near the new water tanks on Island One. In 1934 the Ellis Island Committee issued its final report



**Figure 5.7** Plan of Ellis Island accompanying 1934 Ellis Island Committee final report. (Copied from *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 269)



**Figure 5.8** New ferry building. Circa 1939. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG135-SA, Photo B)



**Figure 5.9** Construction of the covered masonry walkway between Island Two and Island Three. July 26, 1935. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38B-28)

on the island's administration and facilities. Included were the subcommittee's landscape evaluation and several additional recommendations addressing the deteriorating conditions present since the late 1920s (Figure 5.7). A brief listing of landscape-related recommendations appearing in the report is included in Table 5.1.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the committee's recommendations were subsequently implemented, while others were not. By the time the committee issued the final report and recommendations, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) had already been considering numerous construction projects for the island, and several were under way or proposed for funding and implementation through the PWA and WPA. The resulting new additions, building upgrades, and landscape rehabilitation performed during the 1930s would be the last major phase of construction completed on Ellis Island while it was still in use as an immigration facility.

One addition proposed by the committee was a new ferry terminal building. By 1934, the existing ferry house was "old and somewhat dilapidated" and, along with the wooden connecting passageways, needed replacement. The committee recommended replacing the structure with "a new fireproof ferry house and connecting passages." In October 1934 the Department of Labor awarded a \$133,000 contract to George F. Driscoll of Brooklyn for building construction. The building, consisting "of a high central pavilion surmounted by a copper-covered cupola and two one-story wings," was a fireproof masonry and steel construction designed with art deco influences. Driscoll constructed the building at the head of the ferry basin between Islands One and Two. The contractor finished both the new ferry building and covered walkways, including a new covered masonry walk replacing the 1918 covered wooden walk between Islands Two and Three, by January 1936 (Figures 5.8 - 5.9).<sup>20</sup>

George F. Driscoll also constructed a new immigration building under contract with the Department of Labor. This structure, intended to

**Table 5.1**  
**Ellis Island Committee**  
**Recommendations**

**Building Changes**

- Construction of a new immigration building and alterations to existing structures to provide "better facilities for segregation of different classes...of deportees and of incoming immigrants and repatriates." Some of the deportees were criminals, some had medical reasons for deportation, and others had simply fallen on hard times during the Great Depression and were voluntarily returning home. The remodeled areas would allow these different classes of deportees to remain separate, while newly arrived immigrants would be processed in a building away from the deportees.
- Removal of the surgeon's house and construction of a larger structure to house doctors and nurses, allowing residences to be moved out of the adjacent hospital, freeing up the room for new hospital use.
- Construction of verandas on four wards on Island Three, for "tubercular and other patients."
- Installation of a new recreation building to replace the Red Cross building on Island Two.
- Installation of a new fireproof ferry building with "waiting rooms, lunch counter, guard-room, toilets for men and for women, repair shop, etc."

**Landscape Changes**

- Installation of a new seawall and landfill on the northwest side of Island One. The area was to be "about 110 feet wide, well fenced, providing space for recreation...and landscaped as shown on the plan." Also adding other seawalls as shown on the accompanying plan, "carried up three feet above grade to afford protection from salt water, for planting," to create new areas for "recreation and occupational work on the Island."
- Regrading and landscaping the area between Islands Two and Three, including planting the cinder-covered area and using it "for hospital recreation for all classes of patients including a separate enclosure between pavilions for illegal entrants under hospital care."

**Source:** *Report of the Ellis Island Committee*, March 1934, Reprint, Jerome S. Ozer, The American Immigration Library, A Facsimile Reprint Collection, New York, 1971 (STLI Library, JV6481 1934a), pp. 137-139.



**Figure 5.10** A new seawall and pilings were added to accommodate construction of the new immigration building on the northwest side of the island. September 24, 1934. (National Archives and Records



**Figure 5.11** After seawall completion, dredging and fill created a land area for the new immigration building. The old wooden covered walkway is shown in the background. October 24, 1934. (National Archives



**Figure 5.13** February 1936 aerial photo showing the completed new ferry building and new immigration building on the northwest side of the island. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG18-AA-93-59)

aid in segregating the different classes of immigrants and detainees, was located on the northwest side of the new ferry building. Construction required the addition of a new section of seawall and landfill north of the new ferry building. Installation of the support pilings began in 1934, and Driscoll completed the structure in 1935-1936. The building's original plans reflected continued emphasis on immigrants' recreation needs. Chester H. Aldrich, consulting architect for the project, specified sun porches on the north and south ends of the building as well as a playground and gardens in the surrounding landscape. Even though these initial plans were never implemented, the newly filled ground around the building was used for recreation. Two tennis courts took the place of the proposed garden on the south end of the building (Figures 5.10 – 5.13).<sup>21</sup>

By the time the new immigration building was funded and constructed, the extra space it provided for immigrant processing was no longer needed. Immigration had slowed and the island's focus had changed from immigrant processing to detention, reducing the numbers of immigrants passing through the facilities. This shift was caused primarily by the earlier implementation of the Immigration Act of 1924, which restricted immigrant numbers and effectively ended mass immigration. This allowed the Bureau of Immigration to replace island-based processing with shipboard inspection. Only those immigrants who did not pass inspection, those needing medical attention, or those being detained for deportation were brought directly to the island. The reduction in use of island facilities, compounded by a general decrease in immigration during the Depression and the lack of funding for the building's upkeep, left the new structure unused for several years after its completion.

In 1939 the U. S. Coast Guard occupied the new immigration building and several other island facilities, staying for the duration of World War II. Other wartime changes included the use of the existing hospital for wounded veterans and the addition of a large number of enemy aliens to the existing population of detained immigrants,

strengthening the island's primary use as a detention facility. In 1946 the U. S. Coast Guard left the island and the new immigration building remained unused until Ellis Island's abandonment in 1954.<sup>22</sup>

In August 1934 the Department of Labor awarded a contract to B & Z Contracting Company to construct a new greenhouse. The Ellis Island Committee recommended locating the new structure on the northeast corner of Island One, near the powerhouse and incinerator. Razing the old greenhouse and removing the adjacent shrub beds and walk created more recreation space for detainees east of the main immigration building. The new greenhouse was approximately twenty-five by fifty feet in size and consisted of a structural steel frame, typical ridge roofline, and "B" quality double-strength window glass. The contractor installed a low-pressure, steam-heating system and the building was in use by the summer of 1935. During a subsequent renovation in the 1940s, contractors replaced the glass, reworked the ridge caps, and painted the superstructure.<sup>23</sup>

Federal Project No. 61 was one of the landscape projects already under way when the committee issued its recommendations. This project included adding "2397 linear feet of granite facing concrete seawall to complete the enclosing of Ellis Island, as authorized by Congress 1911," installing "required fill and soil for the eastward extension of Island No. 1 if new sea wall is built," and removing "2 feet of present cinder fill between buildings of Is. No. 2 and replace with 18 inches of sub soil and 6 inches of top soil and plant with grass and shrubs. Also similar treatment for north side of Is. No. 1 and south side of Is. No. 3."<sup>24</sup> The proposed cost was \$549,000. In 1934 an updated cost estimate added repairs of the existing seawall, dredging in the ferry slip, and various landscaping for Islands Two and Three.<sup>25</sup> It is not clear whether Federal Project No. 61 was fully implemented as proposed, but numerous projects on all three islands throughout the mid- to late 1930s addressed items included in this proposal (Figure 5.14).





**Figure 5.14** This area northeast of the main immigration building adjacent to the recreation yard was the last section of landfill added to the island. Its addition increased the available space for immigrant recreation. It may have been constructed as part of Federal Project No. 61. April 2, 1934. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38C-12)

Due to the increased emphasis on projects with landscape components, the INS began developing a more comprehensive planning strategy for the entire island. Officials proceeded with the early development of an island-wide master plan, which would evolve during the remainder of the decade. A 1935 memo between the Department of the Treasury and the WPA district office identified several items a master plan should address. The memo described an accompanying 1935 drawing titled "Drawing T-L," however, this plan has not been located. The work described in the memo is consistent with subsequent changes made in the landscape, indicating landscape projects completed in the late 1930s were the direct result of this early planning. Recommendations from the 1935 memo are listed in Table 5.2.

In August 1935 the INS applied to the WPA for funding to complete renovations on the island, including some of the work described in the 1935 memo. The Commissioner of Immigration requested "an allotment of \$84,340.00 for renovation of station buildings and equipment and for landscaping grounds."<sup>26</sup> It is unclear from the record whether this funding was received in full, but subsequent alterations to the facilities and landscape on Ellis Island during the late 1930s and early 1940s followed the direction of the 1935 planning efforts and indicate at least partial funding was obtained for this work.<sup>27</sup>

In response to the Ellis Island Committee's recommendation to provide more recreation amenities for the detainees, as well as for the staff of the various organizations working on the island, the INS developed plans to construct a new recreation building and two recreation shelters. In February 1936 the Department of Labor awarded a contract for the construction of these facilities to the Albert Development Corporation of New York City. The contract included razing the existing American Red Cross recreation building on the northeast side of Island Two, constructing the new recreation building and one recreation shelter on the landfill between Islands Two and Three, and constructing another recreation shelter on Island One northeast of the powerhouse. The contractor completed these structures in early 1937 (Figures 5.15 – 5.16).<sup>28</sup>

The recreation building and shelters retained their intended functions from 1937 until the island closed in 1954. They allowed "ailing immigrants, merchant seamen, and members of the U. S. Coast Guard who received treatment at the hospitals on islands 2 and 3...to participate in athletic and social activities in the recreation building and nearby shelter while the shelter on island 1 was used exclusively by those detained on island 1."<sup>29</sup> When the U. S. Public Health Service closed the hospital facilities in 1951, the U. S. Coast Guard continued using the recreation facilities until the entire island was shut down in 1954.



**Table 5.2**  
**1935 Landscape Proposals for Master Planning**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Removal of existing walks and forty-foot-diameter circular planting bed in front of the main immigration building and the installation of new flower beds, hedges, walks, and poplar trees.</li> <li>• Removal of the hedge, concrete walk, and wrought-iron fence located on the triangular section of ground at the southeast end of Island One and installation of topsoil, lawn, and some trees.</li> <li>• Addition of a "terrace around the porch" and walks to the recreation area for detainees bounded by the powerhouse, baggage and dormitory building, and recreation shelter. Regrading and seeding existing lawn with "Bermuda grass or other tough grass suitable for recreation grounds."</li> <li>• Installation of an eight-foot-wide terrace adjacent to the porch on the baggage and dormitory building, two and one-half feet above grade with a retaining wall or ramp that "could be planted to grass and climbing ivy," but "No trees or shrubs offering concealment."</li> <li>• Removal of six inches of cinders from the area around the powerhouse and the addition of newly graded topsoil and lawn, but no trees or shrubs. Completion of filling the area behind the new immigration building, "extending from the water, forward to the 'covered passage,' Ferry Building, and Bakery and Carpenter Shops" with dredged material, allowing the fill to settle and dry out, and adding six inches of topsoil and a newly seeded lawn. Trees or other shrub plantings "would be as decided upon by the landscape architect."</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renovating the lawn on Island Two by turning under the existing sod, regrading, adding four inches of topsoil, reseeding, and adding trees or shrubs, and additional sidewalks as specified by the landscape architect.</li> <li>• Seeding the newly filled area between Islands Two and Three, except for the proposed walks and flower beds, and planting trees and shrubs as specified by the landscape architect.</li> <li>• Regrading Island Three, where the cinder fill had settled from four to six inches below the proper grade for the buildings and there was only a "thin covering" of topsoil in some locations, adding topsoil, seeding, and planting additional trees and shrubs. Extant trees included birch with trunk diameters of three to four inches. A new system of walkways for the recreation area was also proposed.</li> <li>• Contracting out the preparation of the flower beds for planting on all three islands and using in-house staff for planting these beds. However, "all other labor, grading, soil, top soil, seeds, fertilizer, planting, trees, shrubs and other nursery stock should be supplied by contract."</li> <li>• Improving the establishment of trees on the island. The island's grade averaged four feet above high tide and tree establishment had been difficult because of this and other adverse conditions such as high winds. The landscape architect should be consulted for suitable tree and shrub varieties.</li> <li>• Renovation of the three lawn areas in front of the main immigration building by turning under the existing sod, adding six inches of topsoil, and reseeding.</li> </ul> |
|--|--|

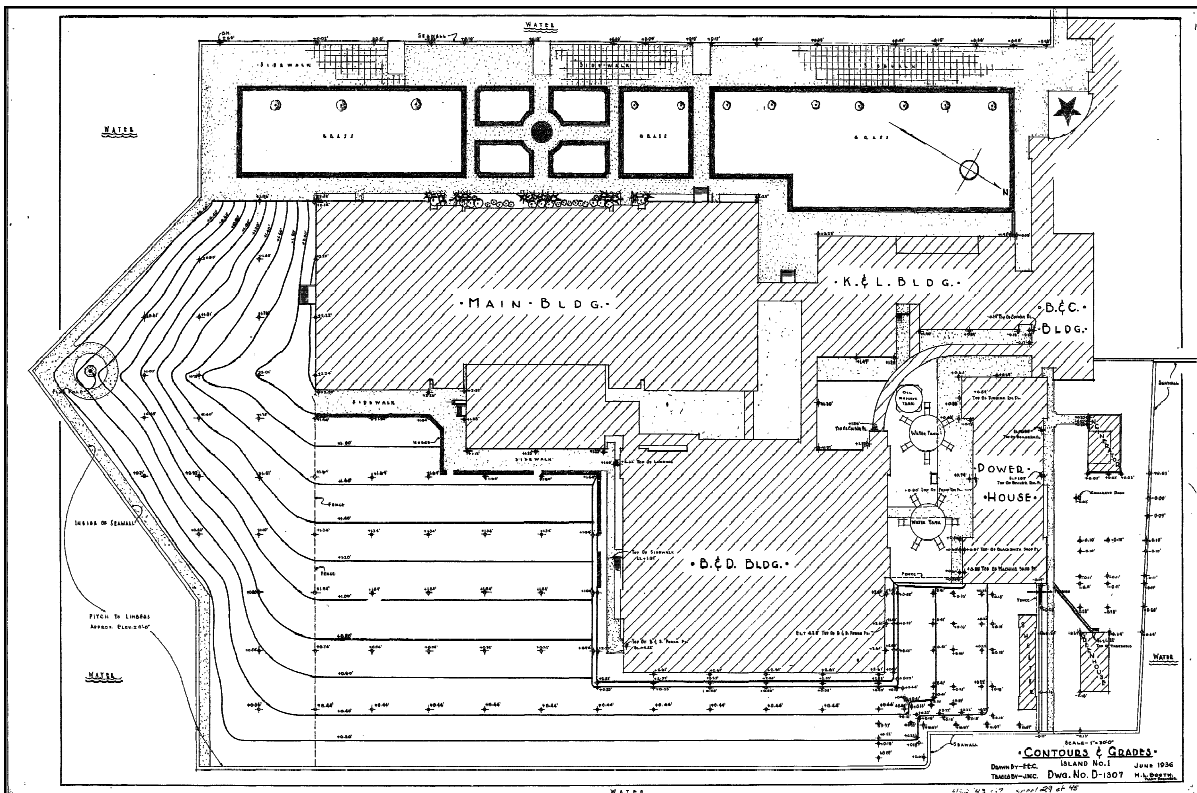
**Source:** Byron H. Uhl to Paul H. Heimer, January 10, 1935 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 10, Folder 222).



**Figure 5.15** Newly completed recreation building and shelter between Islands Two and Three. February 26, 1937. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38B-3)



**Figure 5.16** The recreation shelter on Island One marked the edge of the recreation yard adjacent to the powerhouse. The second greenhouse built on Island One is shown on the left. October 25, 1936. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38B-29)

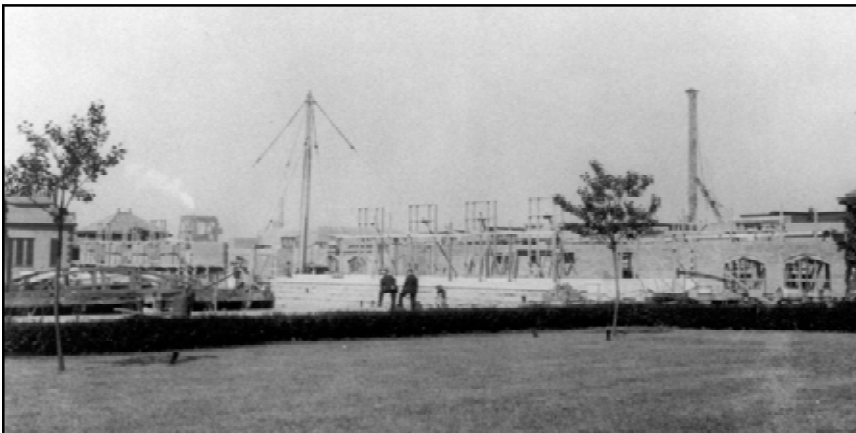


**Figure 5.17** This June 1936 map of contours and grades identifies the new pattern of walks and planting areas on Island One. Notice the trees in the lawn panels along the ferry basin, and the groupings of shrubs planted directly in front of the main immigration building. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43957-0029.tif)

Work performed as a result of the committee's recommendations improved walkways on Island One and added a small amount of vegetation to the landscape. In 1936 and 1937 contractors replaced existing concrete walks around the island. New walks on the ferry basin side of the kitchen and laundry building and west wing of the main immigration building replicated the 1902 walk layout. Directly in front of the main immigration building, a rectilinear layout of lawns and walks with four quadrants and a small circular planting bed replaced the larger circa 1932 circular planting bed. One walkway adjacent to the south side of the main immigration building was removed. A decrease in the width of the walkway/apron on the north and east sides of the building provided a space for planting between the path and the building. Existing hedges and a row of poplar trees parallel to the ferry basin remained intact, while new shrubs filled the space between the front of the building and the new walkway. Some plant species specified for various locations on the

island included *Juniperus sabina tamariscifolia* (savin juniper), *Ligustrum ibota* (ibota privet), *Viburnum cassinoides* (witherod viburnum), *Spiraea latifolia* (meadowsweet), *Ampelopsis veitchi* (ampelopsis), and *Ligustrum ovalifolium* (California privet) (Figures 5.17 – 5.18).<sup>30</sup> The relocated flagstaff on Island One, at the “point” of the landfill southeast of the main immigration building, was enhanced with a new concrete walk circling the base.<sup>31</sup> Contractors installed larger areas of concrete following specifications calling for reinforced concrete, five inches thick, scored in four foot squares, with three-eighths-inch expansion joints set twenty feet apart. Smaller walks provided circulation between the new greenhouse, incinerator, and recreation shelter.<sup>32</sup>

A new system of walkways also defined the recreation space between Islands Two and Three. Constructed in 1936, the walks followed the rectilinear grid pattern first shown in the committee's 1934 report (Figure 5.19). Lawn



**Figure 5.18** Lawn, hedges, and a row of poplar trees filled the area between the main immigration building and the ferry basin. Construction of the new ferry building is shown in the background. May 25, 1935. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38B-30)



**Figure 5.19** Newly poured concrete walkways in the recreation area between Islands Two and Three. June 25, 1936. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG121-BCP-38B-26)

filled the areas between the walks, leaving plenty of open space between the islands for the recreation activities of hospital patients and employees. Beatrice Conan, a hospital attendant on Ellis Island in the late 1930s, recalled the grounds in this area were not elaborately landscaped, but there “were places outside where we could stay, like a bench and...like a garden, but not a garden...just paths with greenery along side of it.”<sup>33</sup>

Following the committee’s recommendation to provide separation for detainee classes, the Department of Labor awarded several contracts to remodel the interior of the baggage and dormitory building for this purpose.<sup>34</sup> Work to fulfill this recommendation also extended to the island’s landscape. By the mid-1930s, adjustments to existing recreation areas on Island One provided segregated spaces for detainees. Fenced recreation areas existed near the new immigration building and north and east of the main immigration building. The latter area included a new baseball field and backstop. Fences between the baggage and dormitory building and the powerhouse defined a third recreation area on Island One.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, some fenced areas between wards on Island Three provided recreation space for detained patients.

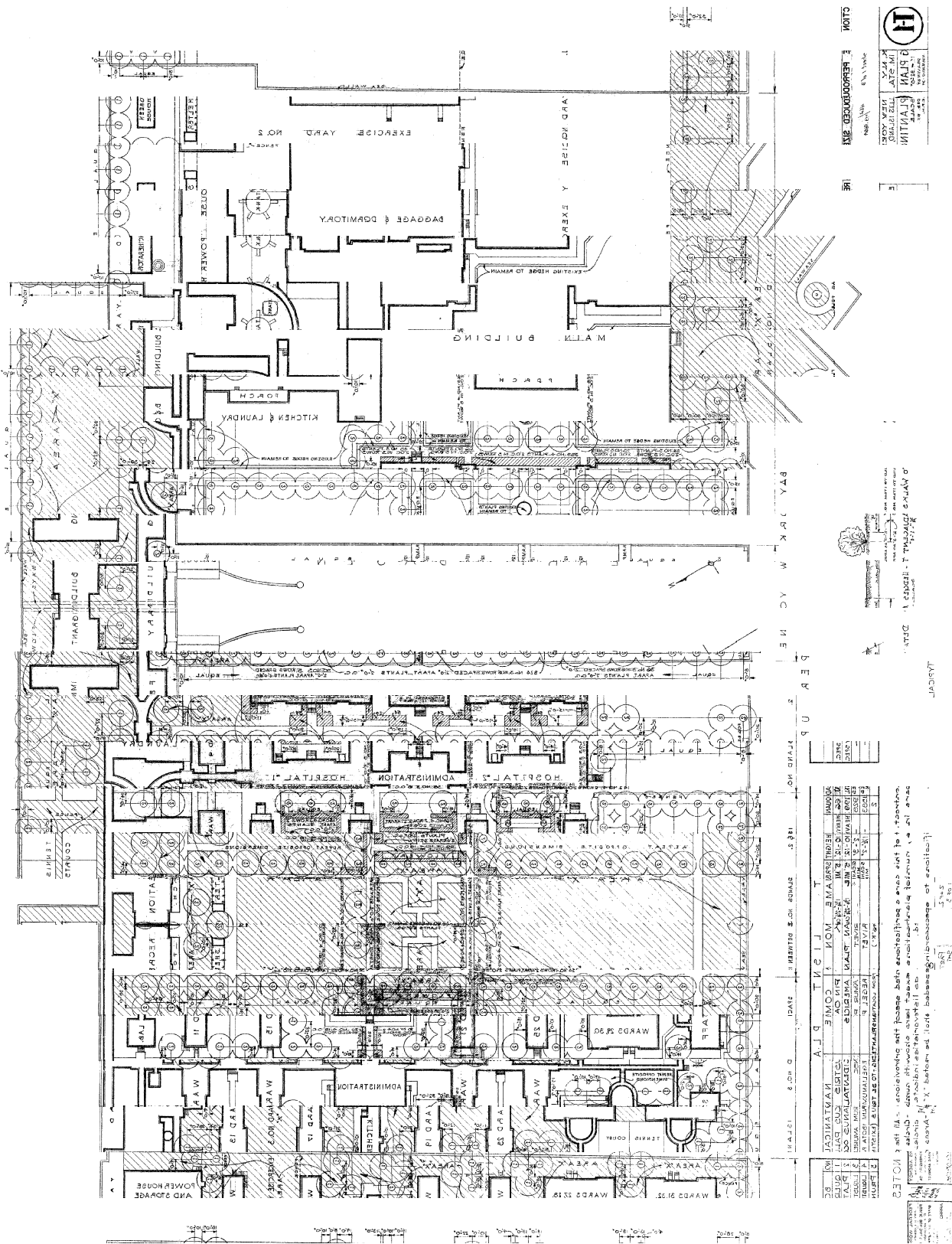
Structural additions and alterations in the mid- to late 1930s also followed committee recommendations and had impacts on the landscape. The committee proposal to raze the surgeon’s house and the adjacent pergola on Island Two and construct “a new pavilion for housing hospital staff” was partially implemented.<sup>36</sup> The Department of Labor approved removal of the structures sometime between 1936 and 1940, however, a new facility was not built. It is unknown if the adjacent tennis courts were removed with the house, but they were no longer extant by 1940. The addition of sun porches on wards 13-14, 17-18, 19-20, and 23-24 increased available outdoor space for Island Three tubercular patients. WPA contractors completed this work between 1936 and 1939. Although the committee recommended locating porches on both the first and second floors, it is unclear if they were constructed as specified.<sup>37</sup>

Contractors also added a covered masonry walkway between the powerhouse on Island One and the powerhouse on Island Three, replacing the previous wooden structure. This renovation established a permanent covered masonry circulation route between all three islands.<sup>38</sup>

Landscape projects remained a priority to the end of the decade. In 1938 the INS budgeted \$6,500 for installation or maintenance of “topsoil, hedges, trees, fertilizer, materials for walks.”<sup>39</sup> By May 1939 WPA designers developed a detailed landscape plan for the areas surrounding the hospital buildings on Island Two. This plan called for a highly ornamental landscape of shrub and flower beds, reminiscent of the extensive flowers installed on Island One during Commissioner William Williams’s tenure. Some of the specified shrubs included *Ilex crenata* (Japanese holly), *Pyracantha coccinea* (scarlet firethorn), *Rosa rugosa* (rugosa rose), and *Myrica carolinensis* (bayberry), with annual color provided by blue *Petunia x hybrida* (petunia) and mixed colors of *Portulaca grandiflora* (moss rose). The plan marked existing two- to three-inch caliper *Populus* (poplar trees) along the ferry basin for relocation. A row of *Platanus orientalis* (Oriental plane tree) was proposed for the edge of the ferry basin and groupings of *Pinus nigra* (Austrian pine) were to be added in the lawn at the island’s southern end on the former location of the surgeon’s house. Despite the detail of the design, there is no documentary evidence it was ever implemented (see Appendix B).

### Implementation of the 1939 Planting Plan

In October 1939 the Office of the Supervising Architect for the Federal Works Agency’s Public Buildings Administration developed a comprehensive planting plan for Ellis Island addressing all three islands in detail (Figure 5.20). This plan focused on a large-scale approach, emphasizing placement of trees and shrub groupings over the detailed design of small-scale flower beds. It built upon the various landscape projects implemented during the previous decade and reflected the changing use of the facilities, particularly on Island One. Since the mid-1920s,



**Figure 5.20** The 1939 Planting Plan developed by the U. S. Public Buildings Service, Office of the Supervising Architect. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43968a-0001.tif & 43968a-0001a.tif)

the primary function of the main immigration building had been as a detention station with immigration activities taking a secondary role. The addition of the new immigration building was intended to shift immigration activities to the northwest corner of the ferry basin. The main immigration building would no longer be the focal point of the island. Its main entrance shifted from the central doors to the building's southwest corner. The 1939 plan, with symmetrical rows of *Platanus occidentalis* (American plane tree) along both sides of the ferry basin's edge and reduced size of the large gathering space adjacent to the main immigration building, enhanced this change by focusing attention toward the end of the ferry basin and the new immigration building. Even though the new immigration building was never used for its intended purpose and immigration activities continued to be housed in the main immigration building, the planting plan did not change. As work on the landscape continued in 1940, implementation generally followed the 1939 plan as originally designed, although not all elements of the plan were installed.<sup>40</sup>

The most significant element of the 1939 planting plan was the use of two tree species in large numbers. The design specified *Platanus occidentalis* for rows along the lawns on the south and east sides of the main immigration building, along the north side of the hospital complex on Island Two, and along both sides of the recreation space between Islands Two and Three. The majority of the trees located on the plan were installed over the next few years, however, *Platanus acerifolia* (London planetree) was used as a substitute in the field.<sup>41</sup> The design specified *Quercus palustris* (pin oak) for use around the northwest end of Island One, around the new immigration building, and in a regular pattern between the buildings on Island Three. Many of these trees were planted on Island Three, but not all of them were installed around the new immigration building. The design also specified two shrub species, *Ligustrum amurense* (amur privet) and *Ligustrum ibota regelianum* (ibota privet), however, it is not clear if these were installed in the landscape.

By December 1939 at least six major projects with landscape components had been completed on the island with funding and/or labor provided by the PWA and WPA. The work included "grading on some of the grounds, removal of old wooden bulkheads... grading down and filling up sections of the grounds... distribution of topsoil... making new lawns," and work on "yards and grounds."<sup>42</sup> From 1937 to 1939 completion of various landscape projects added more than seven hundred cubic yards of topsoil to the island and seeded more than eight thousand total square yards of lawn.<sup>43</sup>

Maintenance of recreation space for both immigrant detainees and island workers continued to be an issue during the early 1940s. In 1940 the U. S. Coast Guard began using the recreation area northeast of the baggage and dormitory building and the area northwest of the new immigration building. The guardsmen intended to construct a softball diamond, tennis courts, and boxing ring for recreation. They eventually installed the tennis courts northwest of the new immigration building, but not the other facilities. However, they did install a flagstaff with a concrete base, inscribed "United States Coast Guard Oct 1940," east of the new immigration building. This suggests the space may have been used for assembly rather than as a recreation field.<sup>44</sup>

In 1940 the INS increased security on Island One with the installation of a double row of chainlink fencing in front of the main immigration building. The INS also added a single fence at the rear of the building and on the east side of the baggage and dormitory building. A new chainlink baseball backstop complemented the existing baseball field in the detention area.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the 1940's war years, detention remained the primary focus of the immigration station. The number of detainees on the island peaked at approximately eight hundred. Landscape maintenance was not the priority it had been during past eras, although the INS and U. S. Coast Guard put some effort into maintaining trees and other vegetation installed according to

the 1939 plan. The detention areas on Island One were the least aesthetically pleasing locations on all three islands and even the inclusion of the baseball field did not help the desolate appearance of the main yard adjacent to the main immigration building. A 1942 *New York Times* article described the condition as,

bleak and treeless...a pretty dreary place. It is fenced on the two sides that lie open to the bay....The other two sides are shut in by the red brick walls of the administration building. The corral thus enclosed is a large rectangle of made land, as flat as a floor, with a dust-gray surface and not a spot of green anywhere....<sup>46</sup>

Unfortunately, this assessment remained accurate throughout the remainder of the decade (Figures 5.21 – 5.23).



**Figure 5.21** An immigration official questions detained aliens. Background details show a guardhouse and chainlink fence in front of the main immigration building. October 1940 Coast Guard photo. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG26-G-49-13243)



**Figure 5.22** Recreation yard south of the main immigration building with benches, flagpoles, tables, and trees. Circa 1947. (STLI Library, 19.10, #9)



**Figure 5.23** Detainees congregating in the recreation yard east of the railroad ticket office. Notice the benches near the building and trees along the fence line in the background. October 1949 Coast Guard photo. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG26-G-49-13233)



**Figure 5.24** Maturing trees along the ferry basin on Island One. Circa 1950s. (STLI Library, 25.1, #18)

### Landscape Changes During the 1950s

On March 1, 1951, the U. S. Public Health Service closed the hospitals on Islands Two and Three due to a steady decrease in patient numbers. However, it maintained a small infirmary on the island for the detainee population. That same year, the U. S. Coast Guard returned to the island and established the Ellis Island Port Security Unit. It occupied the hospital on Island Two as offices and crew quarters, altered the administration building to accommodate a galley and mess hall, and used a few of the buildings on Island Three for file storage.

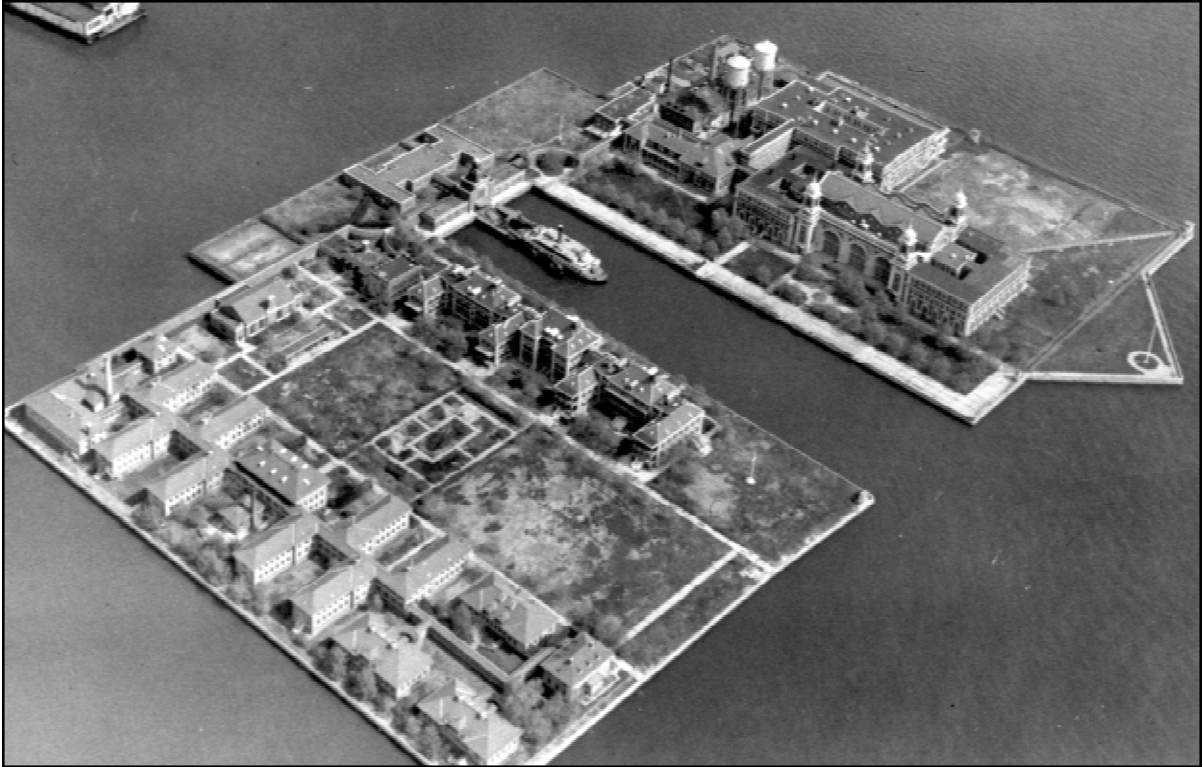
During the early 1950s, the INS and U. S. Coast Guard focused on maintaining the existing facilities and landscape, making minimal changes. There were a few additions added by both groups, including a 1952 fire protection system with hydrants on all three islands, additional guardhouses on Island One, an additional reserve fuel oil tank on Island One northeast of the powerhouse, and a small greenhouse on the southwest side of ward 32 on Island Three.<sup>47</sup> The most noticeable change to the landscape was the maturation of many trees and shrubs planted during the previous decade (Figure 5.24).

The main recreation yard on Island One remained enclosed with a chainlink fence topped with barbed wire and was for detainee use, weather

permitting. Immigration employees used the same facilities during their off hours and lunchtimes. While the aliens were having lunch indoors, some of the staff would participate in a game of ball.<sup>48</sup> The various activities the detainees participated in “under the direction of the security officer in charge [gave] the alien his first introduction to America.” Popular U. S. team sports such as softball and baseball were “old friends to most aliens from the other countries in this Hemisphere,” but they were considered strange by European or Asian immigrants who favored soccer and volleyball.<sup>49</sup> Since the late 1940s, an immigration staff softball team played in a league with the other government agencies, like the U. S. Post Office, the U. S. Attorney’s Office, and the Internal Revenue Service, and other immigration offices. According to INS employee Joseph Gallo, a few immigrant detainees maintained the baseball diamond, keeping it in “tip-top shape.” The detainees were not allowed to play in the league, however, they often watched the ball games for entertainment.<sup>50</sup>

The U. S. Coast Guard maintained the landscape surrounding the buildings it occupied since there was no civilian crew to do the work. Each guardsman had a specific job on the island such as delivering the mail, doing the laundry, working in the operations room, monitoring communications, or maintaining the grounds.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, some of the guardsmen who were





**Figure 5.25** 1954 aerial photo of Ellis Island. (STLI Library, 25.2, #24)

prisoners in the brig often maintained the lawns on the island.<sup>52</sup> According to Charles M. Allmond, III, who was a U. S. Coast guardsman stationed at Ellis Island in 1953-1954, the island's landscape was well-maintained during this period. On Island Two there was a lawn bordered with "rows of sycamore trees...and a large parade ground behind the U. S. Coast Guard buildings, which was used for reviews and musters." Park benches along the seawall allowed off-duty guardsmen to "sit and watch the harbor traffic and get a beautiful view of the New York skyline."<sup>53</sup> Purchasing records indicate consistent expenditures made by the U. S. Coast Guard throughout the 1940s and 1950s supported landscape improvements and maintenance. There are numerous entries for purchases of grass seed, flower bulbs, bedding plants, shrubs, fertilizers, insecticides, and grounds maintenance equipment, indicating maintenance of the landscape continued to be an important consideration on the island (see Appendix C). The U. S. Coast Guard also continued to use the tennis courts near the new immigration building.<sup>54</sup>

By 1954 both the INS and U. S. Coast Guard operations on Ellis Island were shut down and the island was abandoned. The previously well-maintained landscape quickly became overgrown with vegetation. Invasive trees like *Betula* (birch) and *Ailanthus altissima* (tree of heaven) were introduced to the island by birds or other methods of seed dispersal and spread rapidly. This was especially true for Islands Two and Three and between the baggage and dormitory building and powerhouse on Island One.<sup>55</sup>

### The 1954 Landscape

Throughout the decades between 1920 and 1954, Ellis Island's landscape changed dramatically. Landfill projects during the 1920s and 1930s increased the island's size to twenty-seven and one-half acres while partial implementation of a comprehensive plan in later years finally provided a sense of overall order and continuity in the landscape. Changes in immigration patterns and island operations directly influenced how the

landscape evolved and was maintained. Its appearance at the end of this period began to reflect the island's slow decline. Just prior to abandonment in 1954, officials expressed less concern for the landscape than they had previously shown. This landscape, installed and maintained by the INS and the U. S. Coast Guard over many years, would soon have no caretaker and become overgrown and nearly unrecognizable as a designed landscape. An aerial photograph of the island in 1954 is shown in Figure 5.25, while Figure 5.37 provides a 1954 period plan.

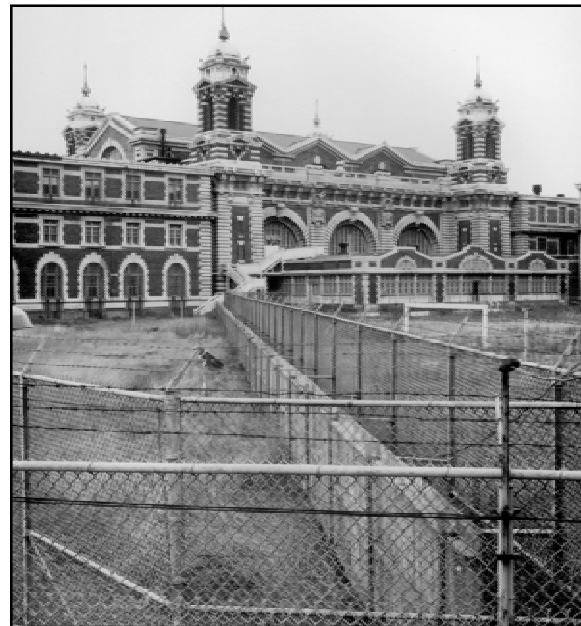
The island's spatial organization changed slightly during this era. Although building additions during the 1930s complemented the spatial organization of the existing structures, maturing trees created minor changes. They established an overhead plane that was not present during earlier periods. Removal of the surgeon's house and American Red Cross recreation building created additional open space on Island Two. Landfill between Islands Two and Three established two large land masses out of the former three islands, and landfill added with the construction of the new immigration building provided additional open space to the island's north side.

Military land use returned during World War II and later U.S. Coast Guard occupation of parts of the island. Upon closure of the immigration station, active island land use ceased. All prior uses, including institutional, residential, and military, ended when the island was abandoned.

The existing topography on all three islands remained consistently flat throughout this period. The addition of landfill between Islands Two and Three, and at other locations on Island One, increased the island's overall size and altered the topography of the bay floor where fill was added. The elevation of the original island averaged sea level at the shoreline to a high point of five feet. Upon completion of the seawall and the addition of the final landfill, the elevation averaged seven feet at the seawall to a high point of eleven feet.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the average change in the island's elevation remained relatively consistent at approximately four to five feet.

By 1954 a system of exterior and interior walkways provided circulation routes between all three islands. The landfill between Islands Two and Three improved circulation between the two islands by connecting them with a continuous landmass. Prior to the landfill, the only connection between the two islands was the connecting walkway at the northern end of the islands. Additionally, the creation of a formally designed walkway system enhanced this newly created recreation space. The installation of fencing around the main immigration building to enclose detainee recreation yards and other locations altered circulation on the island by restricting access (Figure 5.26). After the island was abandoned, circulation by boat traffic was eliminated.

Thirty-four major buildings remained on Ellis Island in 1954, many in a state of disrepair. Located on Island One were the main immigration building (1900), kitchen and laundry building (1901), powerhouse (1901), baggage and dormitory building (1909), bakery and carpentry shop (1915), incinerator (1911), new greenhouse



**Figure 5.26** Wooden and chainlink fencing restricted island access and changed circulation patterns during the 1950s. This image of the detainee recreation yards on Island One was taken approximately four years after the island's closure. (*Area in Front of Main Building, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.13*)

(1934), and recreation shelter (1937). The original greenhouse had been removed. A new ferry building (1936) and new immigration building (1936) constructed on landfill between Islands One and Two replaced the old ferry house. On Island Two, the main hospital building (1901), hospital outbuilding (1901), psychopathic ward (1907), administration building (1907), and new hospital extension (1909) remained. The surgeon's house and American Red Cross recreation building had been removed. A new recreation building (1937) and recreation shelter (1937) stood between Islands Two and Three. Extant buildings on Island Three included an administration building (1907), powerhouse (1907), kitchen (1907), staff house (1908), animal house (1908), nurses' quarters (1909), and eleven hospital ward buildings (1907-1909).

Other extant structures included four guardhouses around the detainee recreation yard (Figure 5.27), a sand and gravel box and debris box adjacent to the greenhouse, and two water tanks and one oil tank southeast of the powerhouse on Island One. The ferry slip, along with the moored ferryboat *Ellis Island*, remained in the ferry basin. On Island Three a small greenhouse (circa 1950) was adjacent to wards 31-32, and a storage shed and small oil tank stood near the kitchen. The concrete and granite seawall, completed during this era, enclosed the entire island.

When the island was abandoned, a large amount of vegetation covered all three islands, most of it dating to the 1939 planting plan. Rows of *Platanus acerifolia* remained along both sides of the ferry basin and along the recreation grounds between Islands Two and Three. A row of these trees also grew along the southwest edge of Island Three with additional tree species scattered between the hospital wards. The Gibbet Tree was no longer extant on Island One. The extensive flower beds from earlier periods were gone, and turfgrass covered the majority of the island. With the absence of maintenance, lawns soon became unkempt and overgrown and volunteer trees took root along fence lines, especially southeast of the main immigration building (Figure 5.28). The main greenhouse on Island One remained, but the reduction in ornamental plantings left it

infrequently used. The presence of the small greenhouse on Island Three, along with purchase records for seeds, fertilizer, bulbs, and other gardening supplies from 1943 to 1952, indicate that at least parts of the landscape were maintained until the island was abandoned in 1954.<sup>57</sup>

The addition of buildings and the maturation of vegetation continued to alter views and vistas slightly during this period. Views from the island



**Figure 5.27** Detail of guardhouse in the Island One recreation yard. (*Ellis Island, Recreation Area in Front of Main Building*, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.14)



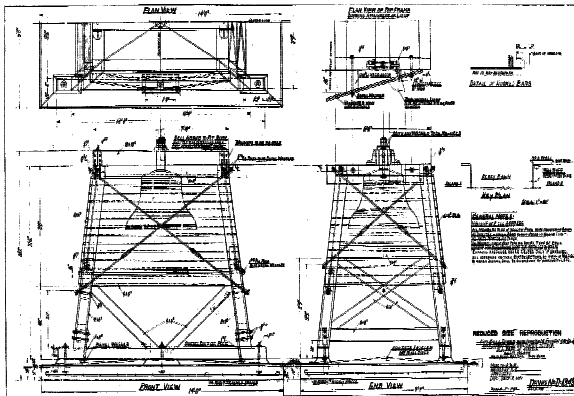
**Figure 5.28** After the island's closure, vegetation started to become overgrown from lack of maintenance. The open lawns, like this central open space between Islands Two and Three, soon filled with mature grasses and shrubby growth. (*Ellis Island, Hospital Wings*, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.12)



**Figure 5.29** Detail of crook-neck light post and chainlink fencing on Island One. (*Ellis Island, Untitled*, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.15)



**Figure 5.30** Detail of a Beaux Arts light with an octagonal concrete post on Island Two. (*Ellis Island, Walkway*, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.42)



**Figure 5.31** Construction details for the wooden fog bell tower on Island Two. September 5, 1940. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43987-0001.tif)



**Figure 5.32** A view of the southeast corner of Island Two from Island One shows the fog bell in its wooden tower, constructed here circa 1940. Also shown are young trees and iron mooring cleats along the seawall. Circa 1950. (STLI Library, 19.6, #25)

edges across the harbor remained relatively consistent with earlier periods, with Manhattan providing the predominant view shed to the northeast, the Statue of Liberty to the south, and the New Jersey coastline to the northwest.

Numerous small-scale features were extant in 1954. There were several circa 1945 crook-neck lights attached to the chainlink fence near the main immigration building (Figure 5.29).<sup>58</sup> In the recreation area between Islands Two and Three, circa 1935 Beaux Arts lamps with eight-foot octagonal posts were present (Figure 5.30). All circa 1902 lamp posts had been removed from the island. The fog bell occupied the eastern corner of Island Two, housed in a wooden tower constructed circa 1940, and a pilot light was located directly across the ferry basin on the corner of Island One (Figures 5.31 - 5.32). Several 1952 fire hydrants remained on Islands One and between Islands Two and Three. The circa 1920 iron mooring cleats lined both sides of the ferry basin and several other docking locations on the island. Several manhole covers were present. Some of these may have dated to construction of the original immigration station. Cast concrete downspout splash guards remained from the 1940s around several of the buildings on Islands Two and Three (Figure 5.33). Three flagstaves remained – on the southeast point of Island One, on the southeast end of Island Two, and east of the new ferry building.

Four bench styles were extant on the island. The first style, near the railroad ticket office in the recreation yard, was cast iron with one-inch-by-four-inch wooden slats and dated to circa 1904 (Figure 5.34). The second style, used on the north side of the baggage and dormitory building, had bent-steel supports on seven-foot centers and wooden slats. The third, west of the new immigration building, had perforated cast-iron supports and wooden slats. An example of the fourth bench style was located on the northwest corner of Island Two and consisted of simple steel supports and wooden slats. Wooden picnic tables were also scattered around the recreation yard on Island One (Figure 5.35).<sup>59</sup>

Sections of chainlink fencing from the late 1940s stood at various island locations, including near the main immigration building, baggage and dormitory building, powerhouse, new immigration building, and around detainee recreation yards on

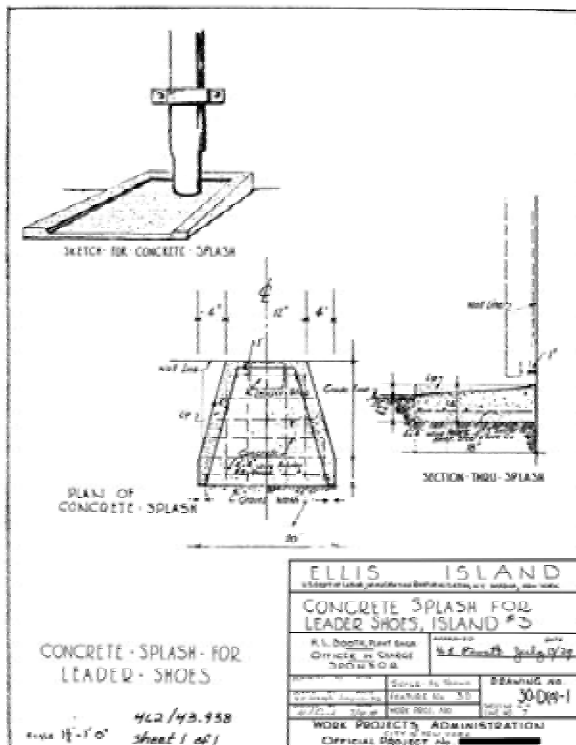
Islands One and Three (Figure 5.36). A wooden fence and the chainlink baseball backstop were also present in the recreation yard on Island One. An eight-foot-high brick wall, present between the bakery and carpentry shop and the seawall, was a circa 1937 feature used to separate detainee classes.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 5.34** Detail of cast-iron/wooden bench and wooden fencing in the recreation yard on Island One. (Ellis Island, Recreation Area in Front of Main Building, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.14)



**Figure 5.35** Detail of wooden picnic table and chainlink fencing in the recreation yard on Island One. (Ellis Island, Untitled, Shirley Burden, Circa 1958, Museum of the City of New York, 88.85.1.15)



**Figure 5.33** Design for concrete splash installed with downspouts on Island Three in the 1940s. July 1939. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43938-0001.tif)



**Figure 5.36** The INS added this fence in the 1940s west of the new immigration building around the site of the former tennis courts. It remained in place until the 1970s. (BOSO Engineering Files, 1978)

## Endnotes for Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> *New York Times*, December 24, 1923 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 8); NPS Denver Service Center drawing 43958-0001.tif.

<sup>2</sup> The Department of Labor contracted for the construction of the two pavilions, as described later in the text. It developed plans for a kindergarten building, but it was never built. (NPS Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43958-0001.tif)

<sup>3</sup> *New York Times*, January 24, 1924 (STLI Library, *New York Times, Ellis Island Articles*, Vol. 8).

<sup>4</sup> William Bean and his brother Howard Bean lived on Island Three when their father was Executive Officer at the Marine Hospital. Howard Carlisle Bean and William Smith Bean, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Tape Recording, Ellis Island Recording Studio, April 20, 1994, Transcribed by John Muriello, May 1996 (STLI Library, EI-463); *Archeological Resources*, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, December 23, 1924, as cited in *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 168.

<sup>6</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 7, 396.

<sup>7</sup> The existing pergola columns were replaced with new columns, twelve inches in diameter, nine feet five-eighths inches tall, and constructed of two-inch-thick white pine with caps and bases. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 472.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333; *Archeological Resources*, p. 68; National Park Service, "Cultural Landscapes Inventory, Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument," 2001.

<sup>9</sup> The Public Works Administration (PWA) was a federal work program set up under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal in 1933 to aid in the United States' economic recovery after the Great Depression. The PWA was "authorized to supervise the construction of roads, public buildings, and other projects in order to increase employment and to prime the nation's economic pumps." The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was a similar federal program set up under the New Deal in 1935. The WPA not only employed workers on construction projects, but also employed thousands of workers in the arts and humanities. In 1939 the program later became known as the Works Projects Administration. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Almanac of American History* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons), 1983, pp. 464, 468.

<sup>10</sup> Edward Corsi, *In the Shadow of Liberty* (New York: Macmillan Company), 1935, pp. 310, 314.

<sup>11</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 7; "Specifications for Fence Around Recreation Grounds, Island No. 1," U. S. Department of Labor, Immigration Service, Ellis Island, New York, File

98529/398, and "Standard Government Form of Invitation for Bids (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 2, Folder 38).

<sup>12</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 589.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 344-348.

<sup>14</sup> "Remodeling of Immigration Station," March 4, 1935, NPS DSC digitized map 41999z5-0119.tif.

<sup>15</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 582-583.

Waste handling on the island consisted of a processing operation in which metals were separated and sold for scrap, and wood, paper, and other garbage was burned in the incinerators. Cans that could not be sold were collected and crushed into cubes. Ashes from the incinerators and coal stoves, masonry rubbish, and crushed cans were stored in the thirty-five-square-foot debris box next to the greenhouse on Island One. The bin was approximately six feet deep and was surrounded by a low wooden fence. When the bin was full, bids were taken for a contractor to remove the accumulated waste from the island. A five hundred-yard load was typically removed once a year and dumped at sea at a cost of approximately one thousand dollars. *Archeological Resources*, p. 82.

<sup>16</sup> Material from foundation excavations for this structure was deposited as part of the fill between Islands Two and Three. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 473-474; "Specifications for Replacing Vacuum Pumps, Island No. 2," November 18, 1930 (National Archives, Record Group 85, Entry 9, Box 465, File 55652).

<sup>17</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 484.

<sup>18</sup> *Keepers of the Gate: A History of Ellis Island*, p. 164;

<sup>19</sup> "Report of the Subcommittee on Buildings, Grounds, and Physical Equipment for Ellis Island," September 13, 1933 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 330).

<sup>20</sup> The new structure was consistently called the "new ferry building" or "ferry building" in later plans and documentation, rather than "ferry house," which had been used for the previous structure. Throughout this report, "new ferry building" will be used to identify the structure built in 1934-1935. *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 578-579.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 594-596; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 73.

<sup>22</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 596-597.

<sup>23</sup> "Remodeling of Immigration Station," March 4, 1935, NPS DSC digitized map 41999z5-0119.tif; *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 590-592.

<sup>24</sup> Federal Project No. 61 was a combination of three earlier proposals, Federal Project No. 57 (\$475,000), Federal Project No. 58 (\$40,000), and Federal Project No. 60 (\$34,000). The total combined dollar figure did

not change. Harold L. Ickes, Federal Emergency Administrator of Public Works, Washington, DC to The Secretary of Labor, November 18, 1933 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 330).

<sup>25</sup> "Sea Wall Grading, Etc.," December 12, 1934 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 9, Folder 203).

<sup>26</sup> W. H. Wagner to District Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization, August 27, 1935 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 330).

<sup>27</sup> Limited WPA planting records, including invoices and planting lists, are contained at the National Archives, Washington, DC. However, these were not discovered until the end of this CLR project, and their content was not reviewed in the completion of this report. They may be of interest to future researchers. Record Group 85-58A734, Box 922, 55912/642 (Stack area 17W3, Row 9, Compartment 14, Shelf 1); Record Group 85-58A734, Box 1105, 55938/903 (Stack area 17W3, Row 9, Compartment 24, Shelf 2).

<sup>28</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 598-599; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 599.

<sup>30</sup> "Invitation, Bid, and Acceptance, U. S. Standard Form 33," August 30, 1937 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 10, Folder 222).

<sup>31</sup> An additional concrete walk was proposed from the flagstaff, along the seawall, to the main walk at the ferry basin. It is doubtful this extension was constructed, as no evidence of this walk appeared during seawall reconstruction at this area in 1975.

<sup>32</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 187; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 63, 84.

<sup>33</sup> Beatrice Cohen Conan, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Tape Recording, Ellis Island Recording Studio, July 25, 1995, Transcribed by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., November 1998 (STLI Library, EI-646).

<sup>34</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, pp. 7, 407-413.

<sup>35</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 73.

<sup>36</sup> *Historic Structure Report...Historical Data*, p. 491.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 565, 568.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Miscellaneous Note, 1938 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 324).

<sup>40</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 73.

<sup>41</sup> *Platanus acerifolia* was typically planted around New York City during this era at Liberty Island, Battery Park, and in similar urban settings. "Cultural Landscapes Inventory."

<sup>42</sup> Memo, December 15, 1939 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 331).

<sup>43</sup> Memo, unsigned, October 31, 1939 (National Archives, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 16, Folder 331).

<sup>44</sup> *Archeological Resources*, p. 74.

<sup>45</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 65.

<sup>46</sup> *New York Times Magazine*, January 25, 1942, as cited in *Archeological Resources*, p. 75.

<sup>47</sup> *Archeological Resources*, pp. 81-82. No documentation has been found regarding the addition of the greenhouse, although it does appear in historic photos from the 1950s.

<sup>48</sup> Louis Kaye, Interview by Margo Nash, Tape Recording, Location unknown, November 14, 1973, Transcribed by Charlene Keylor, April 1979, Reconceived by Meg Maher, February 1995 (STLI Library, NPS-29).

<sup>49</sup> *History of Ellis Island*, 1952, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph Gallo, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Tape Recording, Ellis Island Recording Studio, June 18, 1993, Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1994 (STLI Library, EI-335).

<sup>51</sup> Ralph Hornberger, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Tape Recording, Langhorn, Pennsylvania, April 24, 1991, Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1993 (STLI Library, EI-040).

<sup>52</sup> Richard Miller and Robert Iles, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. and Brian Feeney, Tape Recording, Ellis Island Recording Studio, September 4, 1991, Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1993 (STLI Library, EI-085).

<sup>53</sup> Charles M. Allmond, III, Interview by Serena Rinker, Tape Recording, Ellis Island, August 7, 1983, Transcribed by Lydia Hanhardt, June 1995 (STLI Library, NPS-140).

<sup>54</sup> Ralph Hornberger, Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Tape Recording, Langhorn, Pennsylvania, April 24, 1991, Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1993 (STLI Library, EI-040).

<sup>55</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> John F. Pousson, *An Overview and Assessment of Archeological Resources on Ellis Island, Statue of Liberty National Monument, New York* (Rockville, Maryland: United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Eastern Team, 1986), p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> "Ellis Island Records, Supplies: Materials Received, 1943-1945; 1946-1948; 1948-1950; 1950-1952," National Archives and Records Administration, New York City, Record Group 79, Box 13, Folders 278-280.

<sup>58</sup> A detailed plan for placement of the perimeter fencing and crook-neck lighting on Island One is

located in park archives. NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43967-0040.tif.

<sup>59</sup> Bench information was partially taken from the 1983-1984 existing conditions survey (Appendix C). Since the majority of the island's features remained untouched after the island's abandonment, it is likely that remnant benches present in 1984 were also present in 1954.

<sup>60</sup> See note 58 above.



# Ellis Island 1954 Period Plan

Figure 5.37

Cultural Landscape Report  
for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National  
Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



## Sources:

1. "General Plan, 1st Floor, U.S. Department of Labor, Immigration & Naturalization Service, Ellis Island, Drawing No. D-1316," Dec. 23, 1937, Revised May 27, 1942 and Oct. 8, 1946 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 43968-0019.tif)
2. "Plot Plan, Outside Fire Protection, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, N.Y., Drawing No. 9-OS-1," Circa 1950s (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 41999x1-0028.tif)
3. "Plan of the Island, Marine Contract, U.S. Immigration Station, Ellis Island, N.Y.H., 1936 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 43954-0001.tif)
4. "Planting Plan, New York, N.Y., Ellis Island Immigration Station," 1939 (NPS DSC Digitized Drawing 43968a-0001.tif)
5. Historic Photographs (STLJ Library, NY Public Library, National Archives)
6. Harlan Ussau, *Historic Structure Report, Historical Data*, 1981

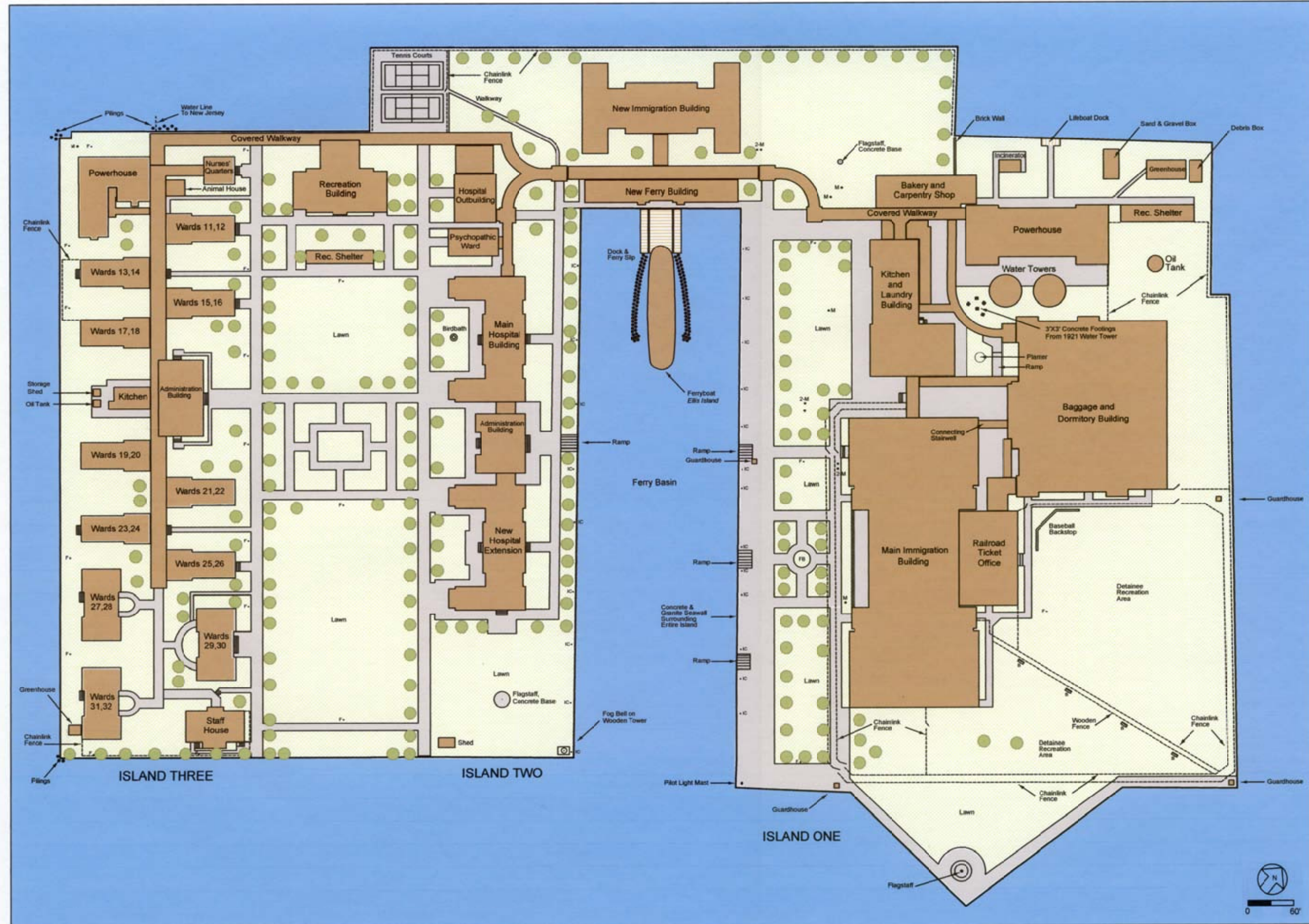
Plan drawn using Autocad  
2002 by J. Tracy Staskely,  
OCLP, February 2003.



0 60' 120'

## Legend

- = Building / Structure
- = Turfgrass / Lawn
- = Concrete
- = Boardwalk
- = Tree
- = Fence
- B = Bench
- FB = Flower Bed
- F = Fire Hydrant
- IC = Iron Mooring Cleat
- M = Manhole







## **CHAPTER 6: POSTIMMIGRATION PERIOD (1954 – PRESENT)**

The postimmigration period from 1954 to the present brought another dramatic change to the island's land use and its landscape. The designation of Ellis Island as a national park in 1965 stimulated National Park Service (NPS) planners to develop numerous rehabilitation options for the island. However, most of these plans called for the loss of historic fabric, including buildings and landscape features. The NPS delayed island development several years for numerous reasons, including limited funding and public support for any of the proposed actions. When the NPS finally began work on the island in the 1970s, the primary focus was rehabilitation of the main immigration building and its surrounding landscape for visitor use. With the opening of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in 1990, the NPS added interpretation and commemoration as new land uses for the island. The focus since then has been to develop and maintain the buildings and landscape in a manner that preserves the site's significance while providing the services required and expected by the visiting public. Continued planning into the twenty-first century emphasizes this direction by exploring adaptive reuse of the stabilized buildings and landscape features in a manner that is compatible with the island's historic integrity and character.

### **Early National Park Service Planning**

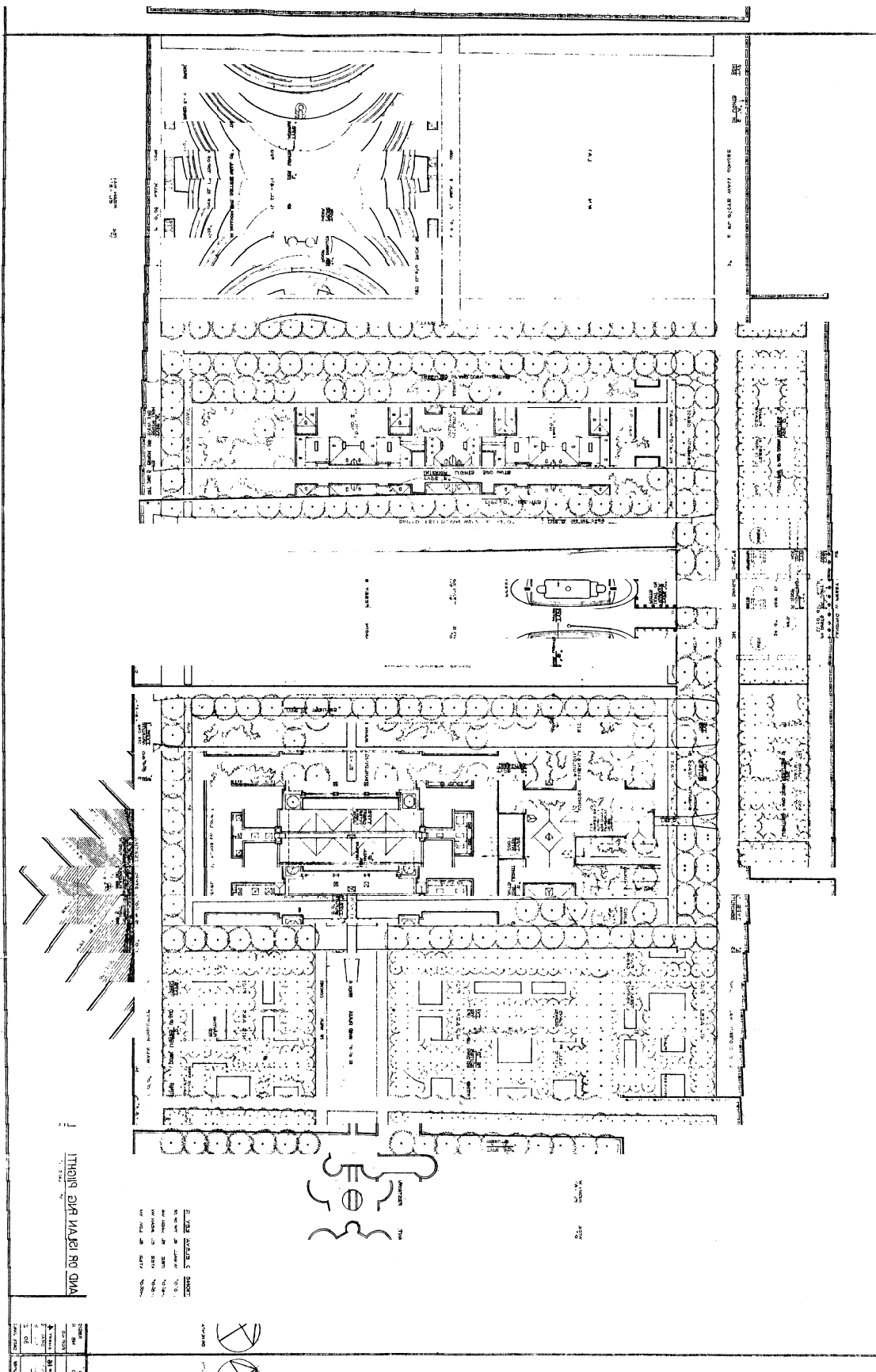
Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the General Services Administration (GSA) tried unsuccessfully to dispose of Ellis Island by soliciting proposals for reuse and/or redevelopment of the site. Finally, on May 11, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Proclamation 3656 adding Ellis Island to the national park system and securing the island's future as a historic property. The NPS began planning to address the complex issues involved in the preservation and/or rehabilitation of the island's facilities. Several plans emerged over the ensuing years addressing pertinent issues such as whether to preserve or demolish existing structures, what amenities should be provided for

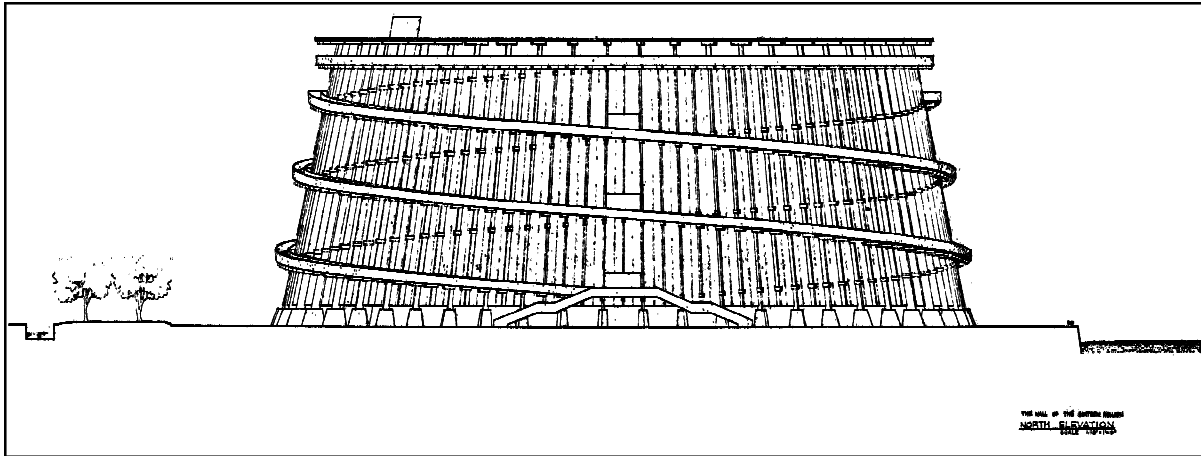
the anticipated visiting public, and the overall vision for the future use and development of the island.

In 1966 Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall appointed New York architect Philip Johnson to oversee redevelopment of the island. Since the site had been essentially abandoned for a decade, a lack of maintenance had taken its toll on the facilities. With heat and utilities shut down for some time, leaky roofs and damp conditions led to quick deterioration of the buildings' interiors. The island was plundered by "harbor pirates" who managed "to sneak ashore and carry off chairs, desks, metal piling and anything else that was portable," while vandals defaced or destroyed features that could not be easily removed.<sup>1</sup> The seawall cracked and failed in various locations, and vegetation continued to grow unchecked throughout the island. Johnson took the decaying state of the facilities into account and developed a proposal in which the main immigration building, kitchen and laundry building, and hospital complex on Island Two were preserved as ruins and "vines would be encouraged to grow around and through the buildings...creating a sense of nostalgia."<sup>2</sup> All other facilities, including the hospital wards on Island Three, the extant landscape features, and historic vegetation, were to be removed. Johnson recommended extensive new tree plantings for the areas surrounding the remaining buildings in an effort to create a more traditional parklike setting. Proposed new facilities included a pavilion, restaurant, and large memorial to immigrants tentatively called "The Wall of the Sixteen Million." The plan received mixed reviews from the public and the NPS determined its completion would likely exceed the funds appropriated for the island's rehabilitation. As a result, Johnson's plan was never implemented (Figures 6.1 – 6.2).

The facilities continued to deteriorate, however, and something had to be done if any of the island's important features were to be saved. Consequently, a NPS planning team of architects, landscape architects, museum technicians, and

**Figure 6.1** Philip Johnson plan developed for the rehabilitation of Ellis Island, 1966. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 41999-0006.tif)





**Figure 6.2** Elevation of Philip Johnson's proposed "Wall of the Sixteen Million," 1966. The wall was to have been installed on the southern end of Island Three. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 41999-0012.tif)

historians convened in 1968 to develop a master plan. Although NPS management stressed the Johnson plan should not influence the study, the resulting 1968 Master Plan retained some of the same components as the earlier plan (Figure 6.3). The 1968 Master Plan emphasized the rehabilitation of the main immigration building at the expense of other resources on the island. It expanded on the earlier ideas of enhancing the island's parklike appearance by calling for the removal of nearly all extant buildings and landscape features to allow for the creation of numerous public use areas, including a memorial plaza, picnic areas, and an open space for "immigrant celebrations."<sup>3</sup> The plan provided for rehabilitation of previously landscaped areas in front of the main immigration building to create an appropriate setting for the structure. Proposed additions to the landscape included a greenhouse, maintenance facility, and residential structures on the northwestern corner of Island One, all "well screened from visitor use areas."<sup>4</sup> The changes to Islands Two and Three were more substantial, since all existing buildings and features were slated for removal. Proposed additions included a promenade around the islands, "a raised, informally landscaped area" providing space for "viewing the harbor, lunching, and strolling," and "a central open space" for folk dancing and other activities.<sup>5</sup> Other suggested additions included a pavilion, portable stage, band shell, and

concession area. The area adjacent to the new immigration building was to be a transition zone between the contemplative area on Island One and the active areas on Islands Two and Three. This zone included the rehabilitated ferryboat *Ellis Island*; a sculpture garden, plaza, and reflecting pool highlighting immigrants' contributions to the country; and a transportation hub for connections to Liberty State Park and Manhattan.

Realizing that full implementation of the 1968 Master Plan would take several years, and believing Ellis Island was "too important historically to continue to lie unused," the planners developed an interim plan for "controlled use by limited numbers of visitors."<sup>6</sup> This plan provided visitor access to Island One by ferry and participation in a short interpretive program in the examination room of the main immigration building, including interpretive displays, a film, and a chance to "stroll to the northeast corner of the island and enjoy the spectacular view of the Manhattan skyline."<sup>7</sup> Access to the rest of the island would be restricted. The requirements to implement the interim plan were minimal and included rehabilitation of the ferry basin seawall, a structural inspection and cleanup of the main immigration building to ensure visitor safety, negotiation of a concession contract for ferry

[illegible]

service, and the installation of temporary restrooms. Planners intended to proceed with implementation of the 1968 Master Plan after the interim public access and interpretation program were in place.

However, funding and public support for implementing the 1968 Master Plan were scarce. Consequently, the plan was shelved and implementation of the access and interpretation program was placed on indefinite hold. With no visitation and little agency support, the condition of the facilities continued to decline. Facilities continued to deteriorate and unchecked vegetation engulfed the buildings and features. Some plant

specimens remained from the implementation of the 1939 planting plan while new invasive species arrived on the island from seeds dispersed by birds and/or other means. One of the most blatant examples of the site's deterioration occurred in 1968 when the ferryboat *Ellis Island* sank at her berth in the ferry basin between Islands One and Two (Figures 6.4 – 6.6).<sup>8</sup>

### Opening the Island to the Public

It was not until the mid-1970s, when the NPS put parts of the interim plan into place and made preparations to open the main immigration



**Figure 6.4** This late 1960s photo of the ferry basin taken from the roof of the main immigration building shows the deteriorating ferry boat prior to its sinking. (STLI Library, 26.9, #32)



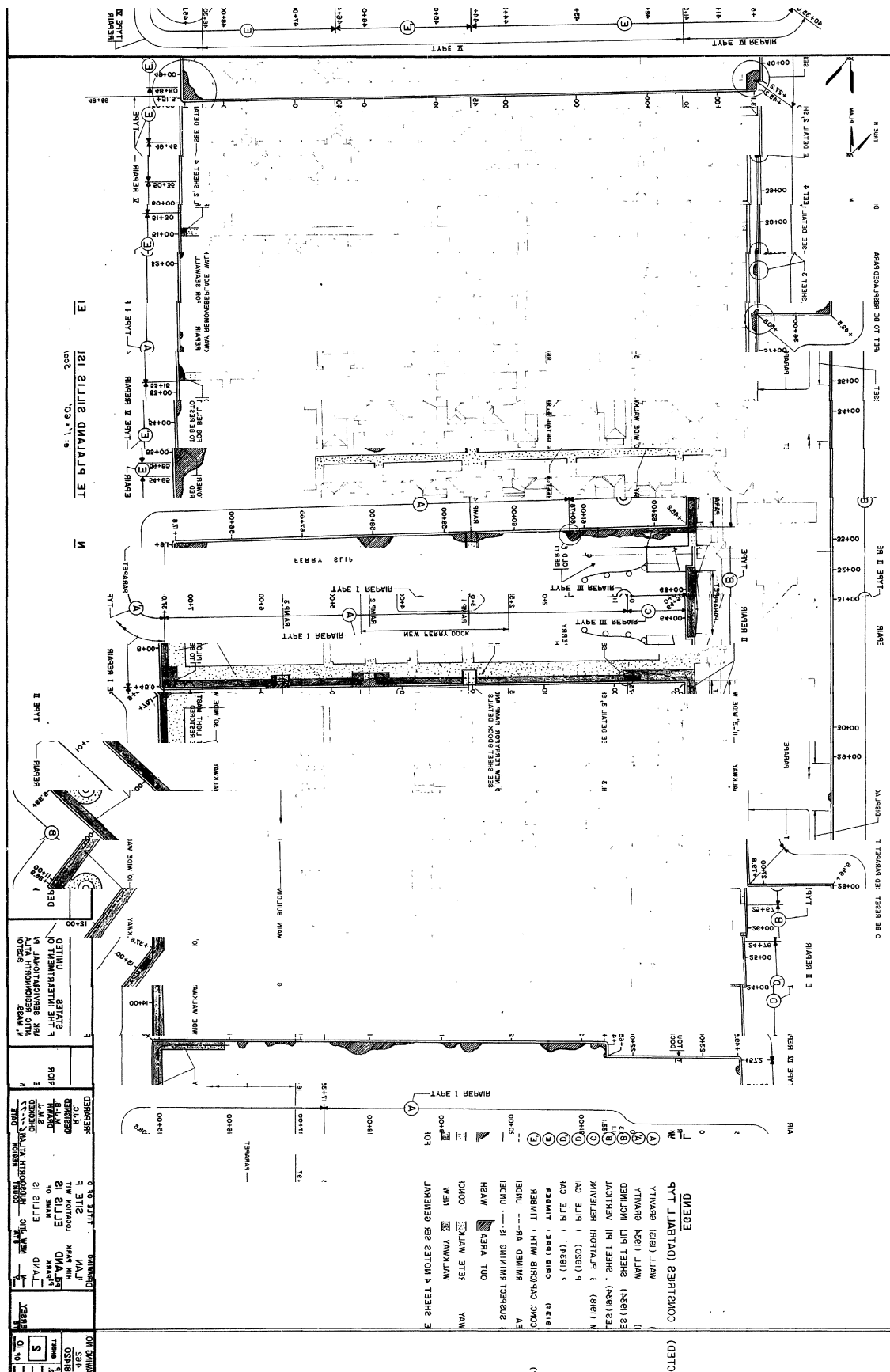
**Figure 6.5** During the early 1970s, much of the island remained in a derelict state, as illustrated by this deteriorated section of seawall and walkway along the north side of the ferry basin on Island One. October 1973. (STLI Library, 26.7, #2)



**Figure 6.6** By the mid-1970s, the main immigration building was nearly obscured by overgrown vegetation. October 1973. (STLI Library, 26.7, #4)



**Figure 6.7** This plan of proposed seawall repairs identifies major areas of seawall deterioration. 1977. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STL 81420-0002.tif)





**Figure 6.8** By April 1978 overgrown vegetation had been cleared from Island One and initial facility improvements allowed limited visitation. However, Islands Two and Three continued to remain in an abandoned state and off-limits to visitors. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS, NY, 31-ELLIS, 1-3 [Jack E. Boucher, NY-6086-3])

building for visitation on a limited basis, that any work or maintenance on the landscape occurred. During this time NPS crews cleared invasive trees, shrubs, and vines from the area immediately surrounding the main immigration building and the ferry landing and maintained these sites to allow visitor access. A wooden post and pipe rail fence installed along the ferry slip assisted with crowd control.

In 1976 the NPS continued making improvements and completed several projects. Contractors dredged the ferry basin, constructed a new dock, and began stabilizing deteriorating sections of the seawall (Figure 6.7). Workers removed forty thousand bags of debris from Island One as part of a general cleanup of the grounds and buildings. The main water lines between the island and Jersey City were improved and the sewage treatment system was upgraded with construction of new septic tanks and a leach field on the

northwest edge of Island One, between the bakery and carpentry shop and the new immigration building.<sup>9</sup> Visitors began coming to Island One in 1976, but Islands Two and Three remained closed. Although many of the original plantings from the 1940s remained, including the original *Platanus acerifolia*, the NPS undertook minimal vegetation management on these islands.<sup>10</sup> A limit of one hundred thirty persons per tour capped yearly visitation to Ellis Island to less than seventy-five thousand (Figure 6.8).<sup>11</sup>

In 1980 the NPS let a contract to begin extensive masonry repairs to the main immigration building, which would continue throughout the decade. In 1984 it awarded a contract to the Ehrenkrantz Group for the completion of a comprehensive rehabilitation of the interior and exterior of the building. This project soon became the costliest renovation of a historic structure in United States'



**Figure 6.9** A 1999 view of Ellis Island from Liberty State Park shows the 1984 temporary bridge. (“Cultural Landscapes Inventory”)



**Figure 6.10** The incinerator on Island One prior to its demolition. March 1985. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, 31-ELLIS, 1B-2 [Stephen Zane, NY-6086-B-2])



**Figure 6.11** The greenhouse on Island One prior to its demolition. The recreation shelter is shown in the right background. March 1985. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, NY, 31-ELLIS, 1A-1 [Stephen Zane, NY-6086-A-1])



**Figure 6.12** The water towers on Island One prior to their demolition. The new ferry building is visible through the supports of the tower on the left. May 1985. (Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, HABS, NY, 31-ELLIS, 1H-1 [Jack E. Boucher, NY-6086-H-1])



**Figure 6.13** Visitors arrive at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum in the renovated main immigration building. 1990. (BOSO Engineering Files)

history. Rehabilitation plans included proposed alterations to the landscape, so in 1983, the architectural firm of Beyer Blinder Belle initiated a field survey of existing landscape conditions for inclusion in a historic structure report for the main immigration building (see Appendix C). Subsequent landscape alteration included the creation of a terraced outdoor concession area on the southeast end of the building. Contractors raised the existing grade to allow universal access to this terrace from within the building. They also added a new entry portico on the south facade of the building, which was reminiscent of the style of the original 1901 glazed porch and portico. The construction of this feature necessitated additional landscape changes including alteration of the walkway, installation of planting areas in the walks on either side of the portico, and the reestablishment of lawn under the extant trees between the building and ferry basin.<sup>12</sup>

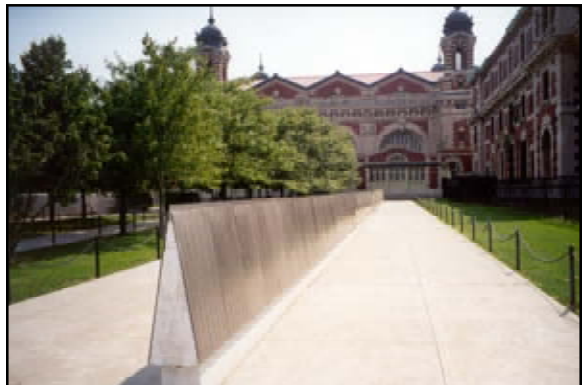
Additional contractors completed work on various other island structures during the 1980s and early 1990s. The powerhouse on Island One was renovated and park offices were established in the hospital administration building on Island Two. In 1984 the NPS contracted for the construction of a temporary bridge between the New Jersey shore and the island to facilitate the extensive renovations and provide easy access for construction crews and equipment (Figure 6.9). In 1985 the incinerator, greenhouse, and two original water towers remained on Island One, although all had deteriorated beyond repair. The NPS documented these structures and razed them (Figures 6.10 - 6.12). Soon after, contractors reconstructed a new water tower in the same vicinity as the originals and repaired various sections of the seawall. By 1990 most of the renovations were complete, and the main immigration building opened to the public as the Ellis Island Immigration Museum (Figure 6.13).<sup>13</sup>

In 1989-1990, the NPS designated an area north and east of the main immigration building, the location of the former detainee recreation yard, as a memorial space to erect a Wall of Honor. The initial memorial consisted of copper panels engraved with the names of donors to the Statue of Liberty / Ellis Island Foundation attached to

the top of the seawall. However, the horizontal panels became routinely covered with sea bird guano, making them hard to read and requiring frequent cleaning. In 1993 contractors removed these panels and began construction of a new Wall of Honor. They constructed phase one of this project as a circular wall of stainless-steel panels, located east of the outdoor concession area and main immigration building. Phase two added a row of linear panels nearby in 1998-2001.<sup>14</sup> During the construction of the Wall of Honor, NPS archeologists excavated in the area, uncovering some of the original Fort Gibson walls. Upon completion of the excavation, a section of the fort's wall remained exposed for interpretive purposes (Figures 6.14 - 6.15).

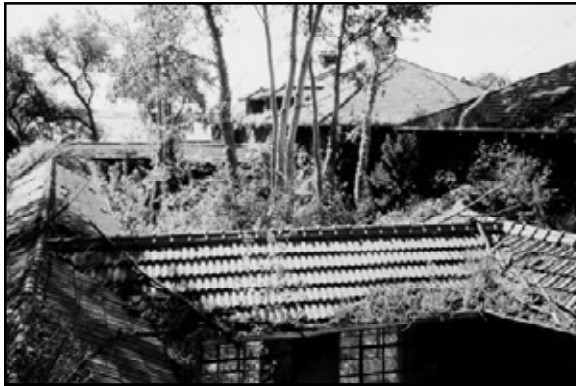


**Figure 6.14** The circular Wall of Honor and Fort Gibson excavation occupies the southeast corner of Island One adjacent to the main immigration building. 1999. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



**Figure 6.15** The linear addition to the Wall of Honor was completed in 2001. The main immigration building is in the background. August 2002. (Photo by author)

The landscape on Islands Two and Three remained overgrown and was not consistently maintained throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s, especially in areas not easily viewed by the visiting public. In 1999 the NPS initiated development of a Cultural Landscapes Inventory (CLI) for Ellis Island. The Olmsted Center for Landscape Preservation completed the CLI in 2001. The inventory provided a brief history of the island's development, a preliminary analysis of its significance and integrity, a listing of the character-defining landscape features, and an evaluation of the island's existing conditions. Site investigations identified remaining historic vegetation dating to the implementation of the 1939 planting plan. In preparation for building



**Figure 6.16** In 1999 this courtyard on Island Three, like the majority of the island, contained overgrown, mostly volunteer vegetation. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



**Figure 6.17** After vegetation clearing, crews installed landscape fabric to deter vegetation from resprouting in the courtyard areas. This recently cleared space is between the nurses' quarters and wards 11 & 12 on Island Three. August 2002. (Photo by author)

stabilization on Islands Two and Three, the NPS supervised removal of nonhistoric vegetation during an extensive project completed by prisoners from the New Jersey prison system. The park sponsored additional clearing projects during the next two summers, and most overgrown vegetation was cleared from Islands Two and Three by fall 2002 (Figures 6.16 - 6.17).<sup>15</sup>

### **The 2002 Landscape: Existing Conditions**

From 1954 to the present, the Ellis Island landscape continued to evolve as it had throughout the preceding historic periods. The island's vegetation became wild and overgrown when the station was abandoned, but other features like walkways on Islands Two and Three remained relatively unchanged. With interest in island preservation and subsequent construction projects in the 1970s and 1980s, portions of the landscape on Island One were modified for new uses while Islands Two and Three remained untouched. During the past decade, the NPS has recognized the importance of landscape resources in overall island rehabilitation, and their planning efforts are more comprehensively addressing the island's cultural landscape. The landscape's current condition reflects this change in approach. The island's 2002 existing conditions are described below and graphically illustrated in Figure 6.40.

The spatial organization developed over the immigration station's one hundred year history still remains, even though the patterns of land use have changed. No longer are immigration, military, or residential uses present on the island. Commemoration and interpretation are now the primary uses for Island One, where the Ellis Island Immigration Museum, NPS administrative offices, and maintenance facilities are located. The spatial organization of Island One was not altered during structural and landscape rehabilitation in the 1980s. On Islands Two and Three, the current primary land use is preservation. The on-going stabilization and limited rehabilitation of the facilities and landscape on these islands reinforces this use and continues to preserve the established spatial organization as well. Defining spatial



characteristics on all three islands include linear building placement, open lawn areas, small courtyards between the various buildings, linear tree plantings, and geometric circulation patterns.

The island's topographic characteristics remain relatively unchanged. The deterioration of the seawall throughout the early years of the island's abandonment led to the development of sinkholes in the landscape adjacent to the shoreline. However, most of these were repaired during various seawall rehabilitation projects. Some sinkholes still exist on Islands Two and Three, where rehabilitation efforts are not as advanced (Figure 6.18). Minor changes in the topography of Island One occurred with the construction of a grassy knoll within the circular Wall of Honor, and the creation of a depressed area when parts of Fort Gibson were excavated and preserved as ruins for archeological interpretation. However, the predominant topographic quality of all three islands is the flat and level ground plane, much as it has been throughout the island's history.

Ellis Island's circulation systems are altered from their 1954 conditions. Island One has many elements of the historic walkway system with an overlay of contemporary improvements and upgrades. The area in front of the main immigration building retains a geometric pattern

of concrete walkways emphasized by formal plantings. The construction of the new portico created six small planting areas within the walkways, three on each side, and added an accessible entry into the main immigration building (Figure 6.19). Construction of the Wall of Honor and concession terrace added new walkways and an accessible entry to the southeast end of the main immigration building. Walkways on Islands Two and Three remain intact but are in extremely poor condition from nearly fifty years of neglect. Parts of the covered walkway system on Island One are rehabilitated, but covered walkways on Islands Two and Three continue to deteriorate. Access to the island by boat has resumed, however, the historic ferry slip is no



**Figure 6.18** Some sinkholes continue to exist along the seawall, including this section on the south side of Island Two. August 2002. (Photo by author)

**Figure 6.19** The addition of the contemporary portico added an accessible ramp to the entry of the main immigration building. 1999. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



longer used. Visitors arrive by boat, landing at the seawall directly in front of the main immigration building and disembark onto one of the ferry ramps built into the sidewalk. Staff boats land in this location as well as at the old coal wharf adjacent to the powerhouse, and a small floating dock on the northwest corner of the ferry basin accommodates U. S. Park Police boats (Figures 6.20 - 6.21). The addition of the bridge to Liberty State Park and a gravel parking area between the new immigration building and the powerhouse added vehicular circulation to the island.

Thirty-two historic buildings remain on Ellis Island in varying states of rehabilitation, stabilization, or abandonment. On Island One, four of the six historic buildings are rehabilitated completely or partially – the main immigration building (1900), kitchen and laundry building (1901), powerhouse (1901), and bakery and carpentry shop (1915). The baggage and

dormitory building (1909) and recreation shelter (1937) have not been renovated. Between Islands One and Two, the new ferry building (1936) has had exterior restoration and internal stabilization, but the new immigration building (1936) remains abandoned and untouched. On Island Two, all extant buildings are stabilized, including the main hospital building (1901), psychopathic ward (1907), administration building (1907), new hospital extension (1909), and recreation shelter (1937). Additionally, the hospital outbuilding (1901) has had exterior restoration and interior stabilization. The recreation building (1937) is stabilized and currently serves as a museum storage facility for NPS collections. On Island Three, all buildings have been stabilized, including the administration building (1907), powerhouse (1907), kitchen (1907), animal house (1908), staff house (1908), nurses' quarters (1909), and eleven hospital ward buildings (1907-1909). The small greenhouse (circa 1950) on Island Three is no

**Figure 6.20** Staff boat docking at the old coal wharf on Island One. 1999. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



**Figure 6.21** Remains of the historic ferry slip and a small floating dock used by U. S. Park Police boats. August 2002. (Photo by author)





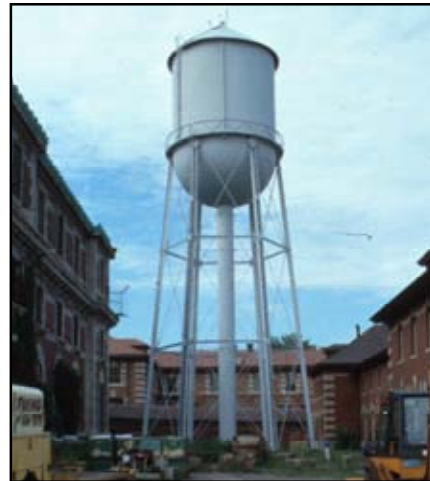
longer present, although remnants of this structure include foundations, plumbing, and stacks of clay flowerpots under a layer of rubble (Figure 6.22).

Several other structures are also extant on the island, many of them nonhistoric additions. A reconstructed water tower is present between the baggage and dormitory building and the powerhouse (Figure 6.23). A small NPS guardhouse is located at the ferry landing near the main immigration building's portico (Figure 6.24), and a concession kiosk is located on the terrace at the south corner of the building. The Wall of Honor (1993, 2001), including both the circular and linear portions, occupies the entire southeastern corner of Island One. A metal maintenance building is located south of the recreation shelter and a utility area containing fuel tanks and HVAC units is located north of the powerhouse on Island One (Figure 6.25). Additionally, the historic ferry slip and the sunken ferryboat *Ellis Island* remain in the ferry basin, and a mostly rehabilitated granite seawall surrounds the island (Figure 6.26).

Trees are the predominant vegetation on the island, primarily the numerous historic *Platanus acerifolia* lining the ferry basin, which date to the 1939 planting plan. Nineteen of these trees are extant along the basin's north side, while fourteen trees are present on the basin's south side. The turfgrass on Island One was renovated during the island's rehabilitation phase during the 1980s and follows the 1939 layout, with slight modification for the new entry portico (Figure 6.27). Installation of the Wall of Honor created an additional circular lawn on the southeast corner of the island. A few trees are extant near the Wall of Honor dating to the historic period, including one large crabapple (Figure 6.28). These are probably volunteer species that grew along fence lines in the former detainee recreation yard. Contemporary additions include flower beds adjacent to the entry portico and in front of the kitchen and laundry building, approximately seventy-five new trees located in the Wall of Honor area, and evergreen screening used around the utility yard north of the powerhouse on Island One (Figures 6.29 - 6.30).



**Figure 6.22** Remains of the small greenhouse, including foundation walls and heating pipes, are extant adjacent to wards 31 & 32 on Island Three. August 2002. (Photo by author)



**Figure 6.23** The NPS reconstructed one of the water towers circa 1985 at the original location. 1999. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



**Figure 6.24** This small NPS guardhouse is located along the main walkway at the entrance to the main immigration building. August 2002. (Photo by author)



**Figure 6.25** A service area containing fuel tanks and HVAC units is located north of the powerhouse on Island One. August 2002. (Photo by author)



**Figure 6.26** A view of the concrete and granite seawall surrounding all three islands. 1999. (“Cultural Landscapes Inventory”)



**Figure 6.27** The major vegetative features on Island One continue to be the historic trees and expanses of lawn adjacent to the main immigration building. 1999. (“Cultural Landscapes Inventory”)



**Figure 6.28** This mature crabapple southeast of the main immigration building probably started as a volunteer tree along an old detention fence originally located in this area. 1999. (“Cultural Landscapes Inventory”)



**Figure 6.29** Contemporary additions to the landscape include various flower beds planted for seasonal color, including this site adjacent to the kitchen and laundry building, and others incorporated into the walkway at the entry portico. August 2002. (Photo by author)



**Figure 6.30** Arborvitae hedges (*Thuja species*) are used to screen the fuel tanks and HVAC units in the utility area on Island One. August 2002. (Photo by author)

Much of the invasive and overgrown vegetation on Islands Two and Three was removed during recent clearing projects. However, as the tree canopy is thinned and more light is available to the understory, the vegetation reestablishes itself at a vigorous pace and must be kept in check by annual clearing. Historic trees dating to the 1939 planting plan have been identified, and most of these remain on both islands. The large recreation space between Islands Two and Three remains, and is now maintained as a lawn.

Both views within the island and across the harbor have changed since 1954. On-island views improved with the removal of vegetation and the continuing renovation of the island's facilities. Views from the edges of the island are more varied with the growth of the surrounding urban environment. They are dominated by the Manhattan skyline to the east, the Statue of Liberty to the south, and Jersey City and Liberty

State Park to the north (Figures 6.31 - 6.33). Also included in these view sheds are the Verrazano Narrows Bridge connecting Staten Island and Brooklyn, the Newark skyline, Governors Island, and various New Jersey harbors north and west of the island. The view toward the island from the water, with its imposing and impressive building facades, was restored with the resumption of regular passenger service to the island.

Both historic and contemporary small-scale features are present on all three islands. Historic features include iron mooring cleats along the seawall edge, fire hydrants, manhole covers, flagstaff bases, the fog bell, birdbath, utility trenches and pits, and remnant lighting and fencing. Contemporary features added to the landscape during island renovation include new lighting, seating, trash receptacles, fencing, railings, and signage. Selected extant small-scale features are shown in Figures 6.34 to 6.39.



**Figure 6.31** View toward Manhattan from Island One. August 2002. (Photo by author)



**Figure 6.32** View toward Liberty Island from Island One. 1999. ("Cultural Landscapes Inventory")



**Figure 6.33** View toward Jersey City and Liberty State Park from Island One. August 2002. (Photo by author)

## **Endnotes for Chapter 6**

<sup>1</sup> *Keepers of the Gate*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *A Master Plan for Ellis Island, New York, 1968*,  
Developed Area Plan.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Developed Area Plan.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The NPS determined that 90% of the superstructure of the ferry was beyond salvage, so any plans to raise the ferry were scrapped. The remains of the ferry are still visible in the basin at low tide.

<sup>9</sup> Prior to this upgrade, raw sewage from the islands was simply discharged into the harbor. *Archeological Resources*, p. 87.

<sup>10</sup> "Cultural Landscapes Inventory"; *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, p. 67.

<sup>11</sup> "Cultural Landscapes Inventory."

<sup>12</sup> *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 79-105.

<sup>13</sup> "Cultural Landscapes Inventory."

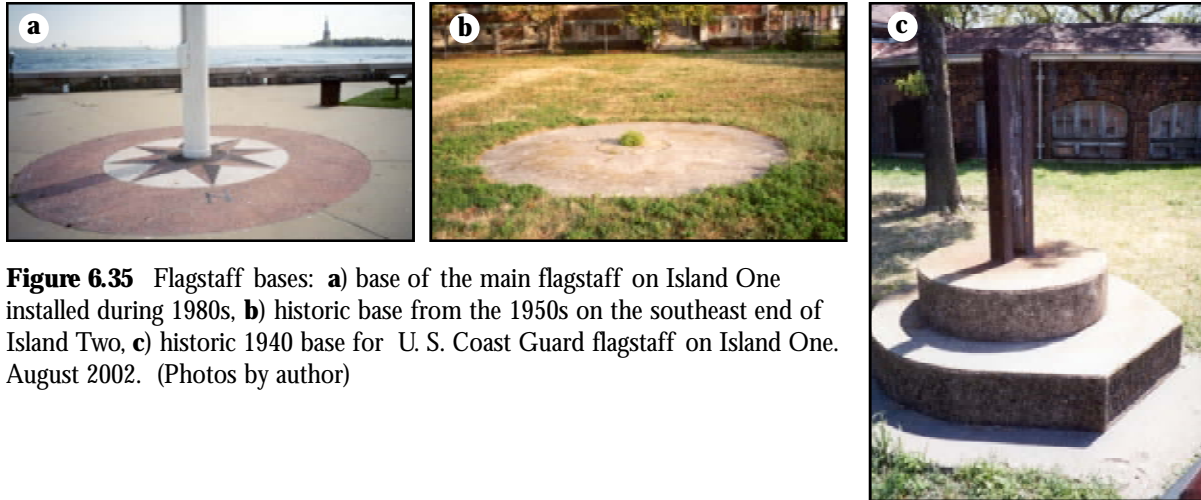
<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

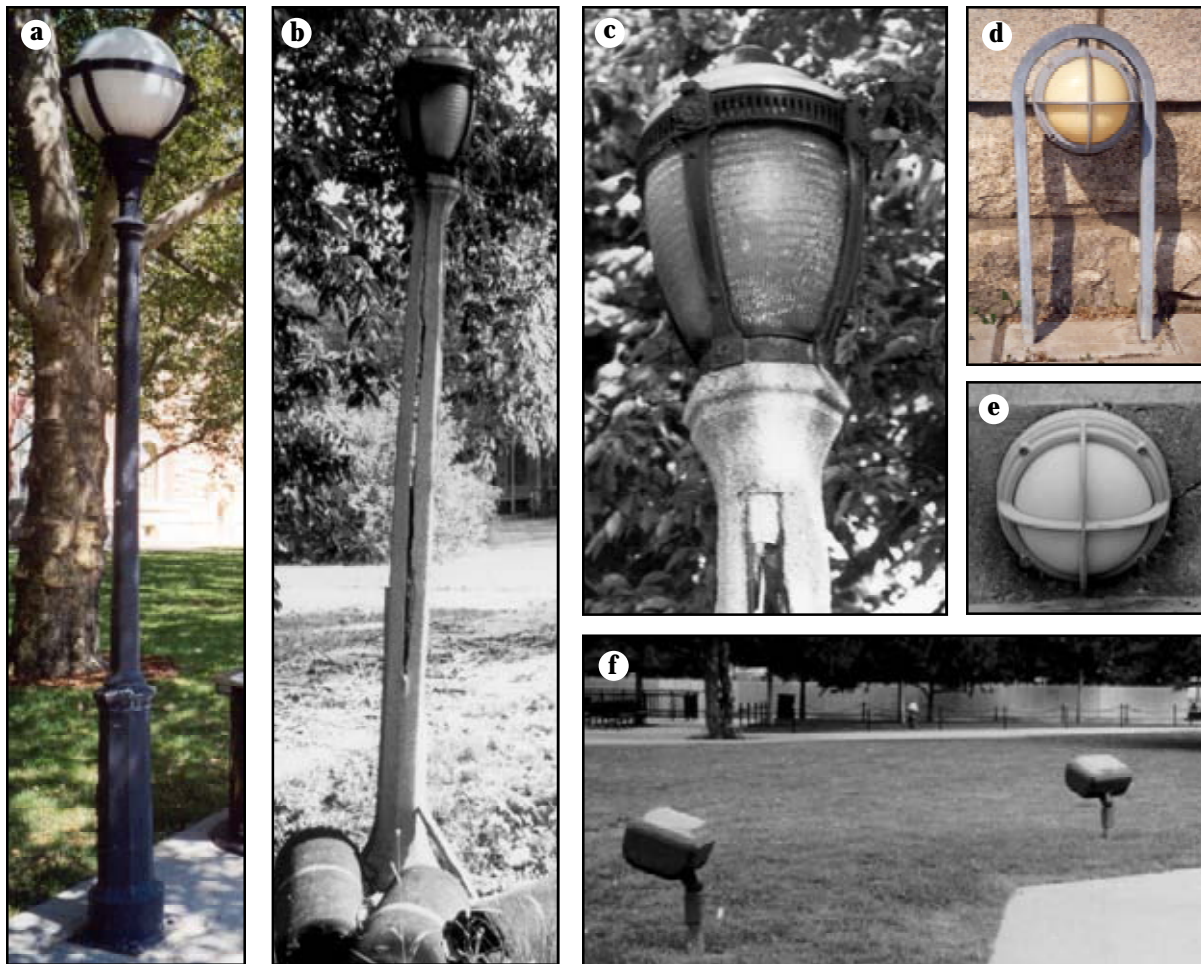




**Figure 6.34** Fence styles: **a)** iron railing along ferry basin and steel mesh gate at ferry ramp on Island One, **b)** iron railing at Fort Gibson site and post-and-chain fencing at Wall of Honor, **c)** portable iron rail fencing used for crowd control, chainlink fencing in background on Island One, **d)** chainlink fencing and gate, iron railing along seawall on northeast side of Island One, **e)** historic chainlink fencing on northwest side of Island Three, dating to early 1950s detention era, **f)** contemporary posts used for chainlink fencing to restrict access to Island Three, fence is down to facilitate recent vegetation clearing. August 2002. (Photos by author)



**Figure 6.35** Flagstaff bases: **a)** base of the main flagstaff on Island One installed during 1980s, **b)** historic base from the 1950s on the southeast end of Island Two, **c)** historic 1940 base for U. S. Coast Guard flagstaff on Island One. August 2002. (Photos by author)



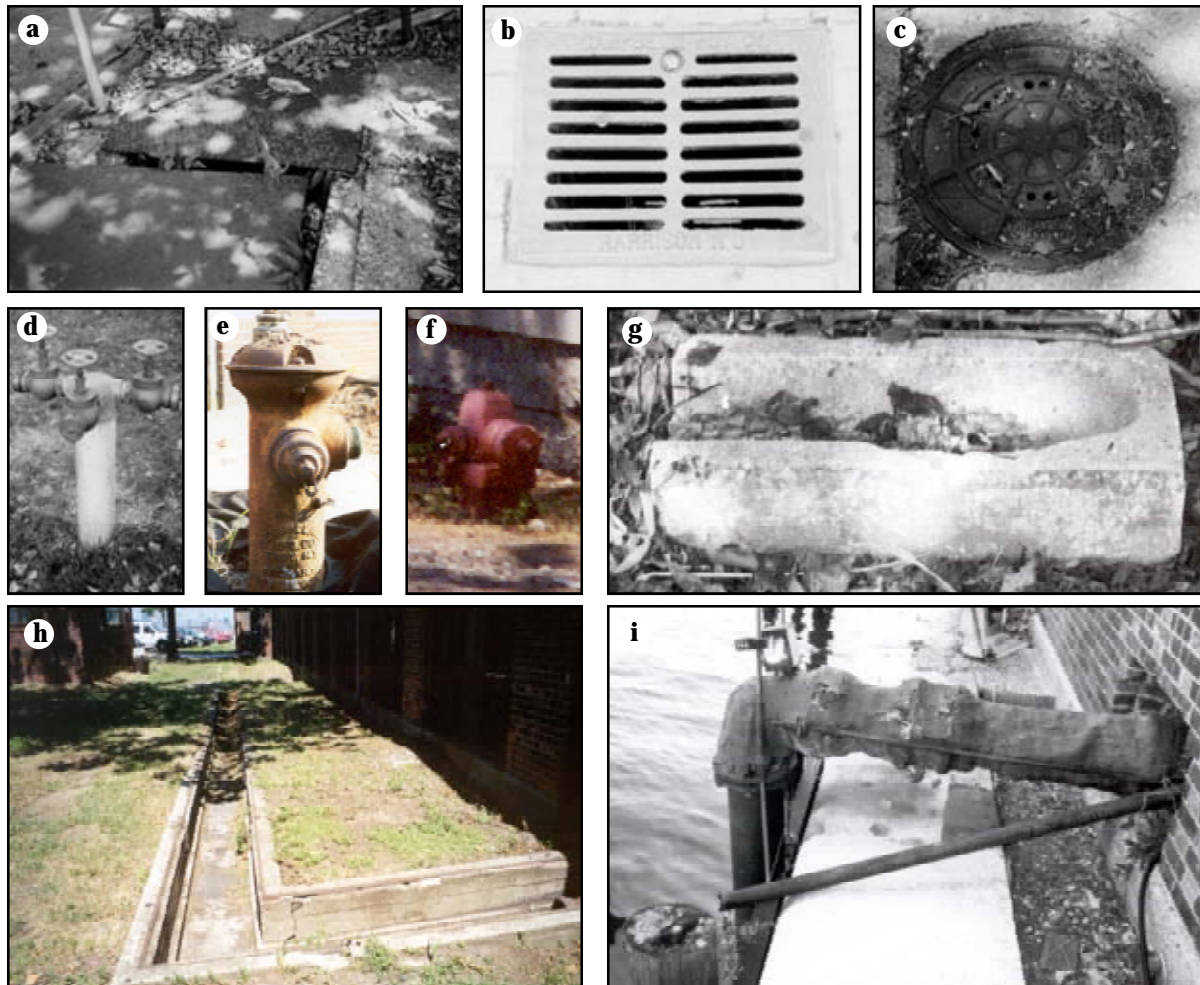
**Figure 6.36** Lighting styles: **a)** contemporary metal light post on Island One, **b)** last remaining historic concrete light post on Island Two, **c)** detail of lamp on historic light post, **d)** seawall lighting style one on Island One, **e)** seawall lighting style two on Island One, **f)** floodlights at the base of the flagstaff on Island One. (Photos **a** - **d** taken August 2002 by author; photos **e** - **f** taken 1999, "Cultural Landscapes Inventory")





**Figure 6.37** Sign styles: **a)** interpretive sign at ferry basin on Island One, **b)** park identification sign at main entry to the immigration museum on Island One, **c)** orientation sign for the Wall of Honor, includes name locations and credits, **d)** NPS arrowhead sign along the ferry basin on Island Two, **e)** caution sign located on the seawall on Island One, **f)** large “No Trespass” sign at the southeastern corner of Island Two, **g)** small “No Trespass” sign along the western seawall on Island Three. August 2002. (Photos by author)





**Figure 6.38** Utility and drainage features: **a)** historic utility pits with iron covers in the walkways on Island Two, **b)** contemporary sanitary sewer drain on Island One, **c)** historic manhole cover on Islands Two and Three, **d)** contemporary fire hydrant in the front lawn on Island One, **e)** historic fire hydrant on Island Three, **f)** contemporary fire hydrant on the north side of Island One, **g)** concrete splash for gutters on Island Three from 1940s, **h)** historic concrete utility trench north of the new ferry building, **i)** abandoned water line from Island Three to New Jersey, northwest end of covered walkway. (Photos **a** - **d** taken 1999, "Cultural Landscapes Inventory," photos **e** - **i** taken August 2002 by author)







# Ellis Island 2002 Existing Conditions

Figure 6.40

Cultural Landscape Report  
for Ellis Island,  
Statue of Liberty National  
Monument

Produced by:  
National Park Service  
Olmsted Center for  
Landscape Preservation



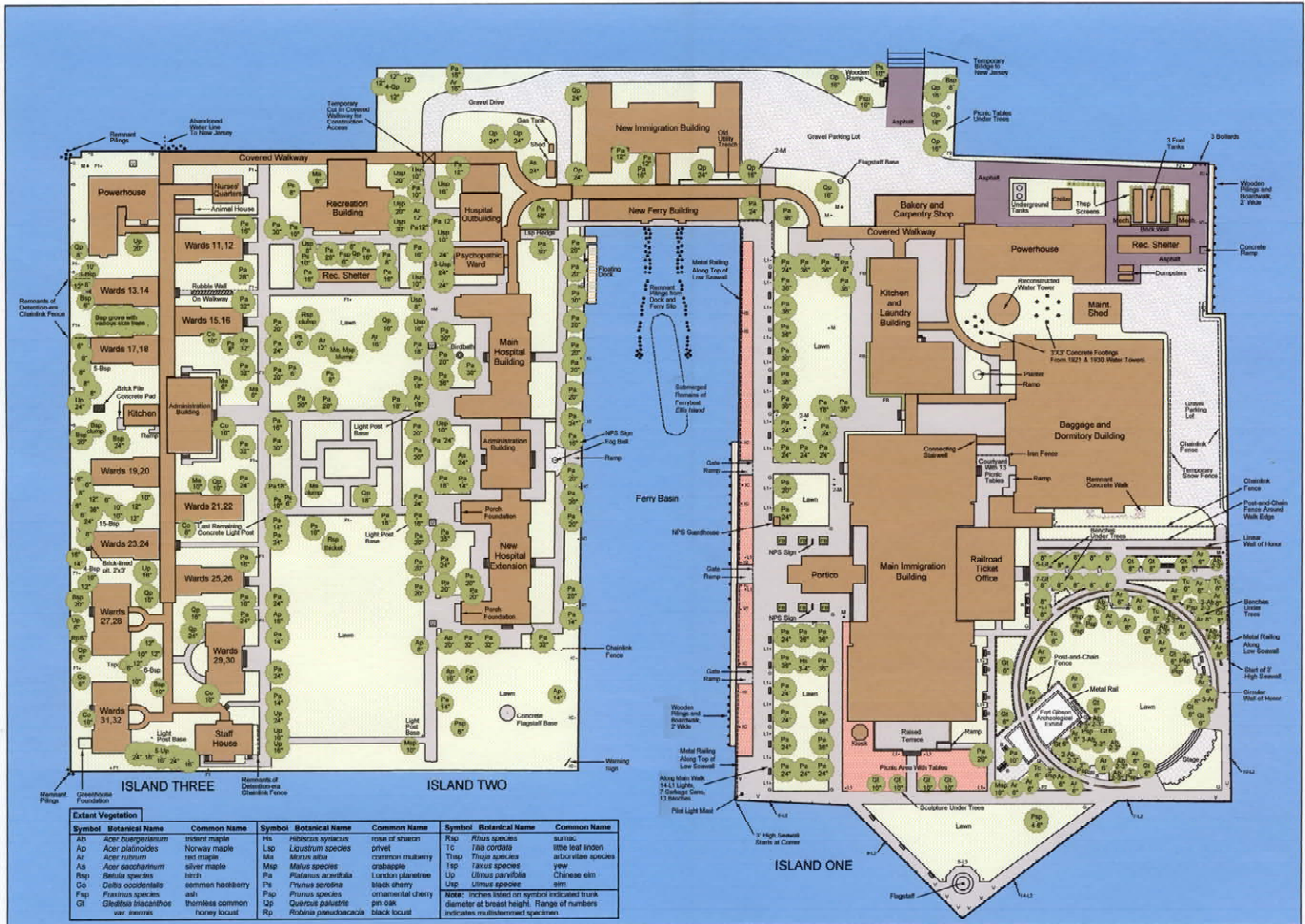
Sources:  
1. "Cultural Landscapes  
Inventory, Ellis Island, Statue  
of Liberty National  
Monument," 2001  
2. Site Visits, August 2001,  
July 2002

Plan drawn using AutoCAD  
2002 by J. Tracy Stakely,  
OCLP, February 2003.



0 60' 120'

	= Building / Structure
	= Turfgrass / Lawn
	= Concrete
	= Gravel
	= Asphalt
	= Concrete Pavers
	= Brick Pavers
	= Tree
	= Fence, Railing, Gate
	B = Bench
	FB = Finer Rail
	F1 = Fire Hydrant, Historic
	F2 = Fire Hydrant, Modern
	G = Garbage Can
	IC = Iron Mooring Cleat
	IS = Interpretive Signage
	L1 = Light Pole
	L2 = Low Light Along Seawall
	L3 = Flagpole Floodlight
	M = Manhole
	S = NPS "No Trespassing" Sign
	U = Utility Pole, Metal Cover
	V = Optical Viewer





## CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS OF SIGNIFICANCE AND INTEGRITY

This chapter provides an analysis of the historical significance of Ellis Island and an evaluation of the integrity of the physical character of the landscape. The analysis is based on criteria developed by the National Register of Historic Places, which lists properties significant to our country's history and prehistory. Included here is a review of the current National Register status for Ellis Island and a discussion of the property's area of significance, including its association with the cultural landscape. An examination of the extant physical character of the landscape compares the site's historic and present condition and identifies landscape characteristics and features that do or do not contribute to the site's historical significance. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the property's integrity in accordance with National Register criteria. An awareness of the site's contributing features and analysis of its historic integrity will facilitate future development of the second volume of the CLR, the treatment plan.

### Statement of Significance

#### National Register Status

A property's significance in U. S. history is determined by a process of identification and evaluation as defined by the National Register of Historic Places. Historic significance may be present in buildings, sites, districts, structures, or objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, or association and that meet at least one of the following National Register criteria:

A: That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history; or

B: That are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or

C: That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that

possess high artistic values, or represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

D: That have yielded or may be likely to yield information in prehistory or history.

A property can be found to have significance under one or more of these criteria on a national, state, or local level.<sup>1</sup>

Ellis Island became a part of the national park system in 1965 and was subsequently listed on the National Register in 1966, though an official nomination form was not completed at that time. A nomination was completed in 1975 and accepted by the Keeper of the Register in 1976. In this documentation, the island's association with immigration was identified as the primary area of significance, with the architectural elements of the facility providing support to this theme. However, the cultural landscape was not mentioned. In 1981 a joint National Register nomination form was completed and approved for both Liberty and Ellis Islands (*Statue of Liberty National Monument, Ellis Island and Liberty Island*). The listing also ascribed national significance to the property under Criterion A, for its association with immigration history in the United States. Although the statement of significance was updated from the 1976 nomination, the documentation was still limited and failed to adequately address the importance of Ellis Island's cultural landscape, including its unique landscape characteristics and features.

#### Area of Significance

Ellis Island's significance as documented under Criterion A in the site's current National Register nomination recognizes the island's direct contribution to the broad pattern of United States history through its use as the country's premier federal immigration station. The period of significance for the island is 1892-1954, covering the immigration period and extending to the date of the facility's closure.



The following discussion illustrates how the development of the cultural landscape on Ellis Island supports the identified area of significance. During the sixty-two-year historic period, planning and development for immigration needs resulted in major landscape changes, most of which contributed directly to the immigrant experience. The pattern of landscape rehabilitation and neglect parallels the cyclic rise and fall of overall immigration activity as it occurred on Ellis Island. Consequently, the cultural landscape is a supporting contributor to the island's primary significance. Ideally, the official National Register nomination should be updated to document this; nevertheless, the discussion presented here is preliminary and is not intended to act as a formal nomination.

During the immigration period, the Ellis Island landscape was extensively altered from its early history as a Native American seasonal hunting and fishing ground, colonial commercial and residential site, and military fortification. Construction of the first immigration station between 1890 and 1897 shifted the island's primary land use to immigration and changed its spatial organization by establishing a group of interrelated buildings to support immigration operations. The organizational pattern of the facilities, with buildings clustered in close proximity to one another, provided order and efficiency in the landscape and in the immigration station's operation.

Construction of the second immigration station beginning in 1898 and the subsequent addition of landfill to create Island Two and Island Three altered many landscape characteristics, including spatial organization, circulation, topography, and vegetation. The new buildings were set further back from the water's edge than the original immigration station's structures, creating additional open space and providing a more impressive setting for the public buildings. Alteration of the island's topography and size through landfill projects accommodated building development, and the establishment of direct circulation routes from ferry docks to buildings encouraged the orderly processing of immigrants.

With the substantial rise in immigration during the first decades of the twentieth century, the island's landscape became many immigrants' initial introduction to America and played a vital role in their immigration experience. Recognizing this, Commissioner of Immigration William Williams implemented changes to enhance the station's aesthetics and improve perceptions of the facility. He initiated the creation of a more formalized landscape with defined walkways, expansive lawns, and ornamental plantings. Later, he advocated for increased interaction with the landscape by providing designated outdoor spaces and adding benches for immigrant use. The Williams period was likely the most eventful with respect to the frequency and significance of landscape change.

During World War I, a decrease in immigration and introduction of military use left the island's landscape relatively unaltered but also unmaintained. The landscape showed evidence of neglect when the island reopened for immigration after the war; however, postwar priorities centered on reestablishing functional operations and maintaining deteriorated buildings, leaving limited resources available for the ornamental landscape.

Despite these limitations, some landscape improvements did occur throughout the ensuing decades, once again enhancing the immigration experience. Landfill projects during the 1920s and 1930s, including filling the basin between Islands Two and Three, increased Ellis Island's size to twenty-seven and one-half acres, allowed the construction of new hospital facilities and recreation space, and created better circulation between Islands Two and Three. Development and partial implementation of a comprehensive planting plan in the late 1930s and early 1940s provided a sense of overall order and continuity to the landscape and enhanced the island's appearance as a well-run, orderly governmental facility. Most of the extant circulation patterns, open spaces, and tree rows were established during this period.

Subsequent changes in immigration policy and patterns directly influenced how the landscape evolved and was maintained throughout the late



1940s and early 1950s. The shift from immigrant processing to detention led to the creation of more fenced outdoor spaces for detainee and employee recreation and less emphasis on maintaining a formal landscape. Although some of the island grounds were well-maintained by the U. S. Coast Guard during their second tenure on the island in the 1950s, the highly manicured landscape from earlier years was no longer present. When the facilities closed at the end of the immigration period in 1954, the landscape once again became neglected, completing another cycle of rehabilitation and decline.

Throughout the period of significance, Ellis Island's acreage increased from just three acres to twenty-seven and one-half acres, construction occurred on more than forty buildings, and the landscape underwent a series of changes including the development and partial implementation of a comprehensive landscape plan. These alterations to the island's landscape supported and enhanced the island's primary role as the premier United States immigration facility. Throughout the period of significance, the island's cultural landscape continued to evolve in support of changing federal immigration policy and practice as it was implemented on Ellis Island.

### Landscape Characteristics

This section provides an evaluation of the landscape's physical integrity by comparing landscape characteristics and features present during the period of significance with current conditions. Each characteristic or feature is classified as either contributing or noncontributing to the site's overall historic significance. Contributing characteristics or features were either present during the period of significance or are in-kind replacements of such historic elements. Landscape characteristics identified for Ellis Island are spatial organization, land use, topography, circulation, buildings and structures, vegetation, views, and small-scale features.

Of the identified characteristics, four categories stand out as most significant for the preservation of Ellis Island's cultural landscape: **spatial organization, circulation, buildings and structures, and vegetation**. Additionally, preservation of some of the island's **small-scale features** would also assist in maintaining the cultural landscape's integrity, but to a lesser extent.

A summary of individual items and features included under each category of landscape characteristics is provided in Table 7.1.

#### Spatial Organization

The initial construction of the first immigration facilities at the beginning of the immigration period began the establishment of the island's dominant spatial organization by clustering new buildings in a linear fashion along the ferry landing. As additional buildings were constructed on Island One and the landfill of Islands Two and Three, the linear pattern of development was retained and open spaces developed between the structures, including small courtyards, lawns, and larger recreation areas. This development pattern continued throughout the island's history. The rectilinear layout of exterior walkways, connecting corridors between the buildings, and the planting of a formally influenced landscape, including tree rows along the walks and lawns, reinforced the island's spatial organization.

Currently, the spatial organization remains consistent with its historic pattern and is one of the most important contributing characteristics to the island's historic significance. Extant buildings and structures are arranged in a linear pattern, running generally north/south along all three islands. Defined open spaces include individual courtyards between buildings, former recreation areas on all three islands, and the formal lawn panels on Island One. Despite years of concealment by overgrown vegetation, historic open spaces are revealed once again, thanks to several recent vegetation clearing projects on Islands Two and Three.

### **Land Use**

Historically, the island's land use was primarily related to immigration, with occasional periods of residential and military usage. With the close of the facility at the end of the period of significance, active land use ceased. Currently, land use is focused on commemoration, interpretation, and preservation. Implementation of these new uses has resulted in numerous landscape additions like the Wall of Honor, concessions areas, crowd-control features, and signage. However, since these contemporary uses do not have integrity to the historic period, the current land use is classified as noncontributing to the island's significance.

### **Topography**

In 1898 Boring and Tilton recommended raising the elevation of Ellis Island for the main immigration building two feet above the original level and sloping the grade slightly away from the new buildings. This height and landform has been maintained ever since. The topography of the island and surrounding bay floor was altered with the addition of landfill to create Islands Two and Three. However, these new additions maintained essentially the same elevation as Island One, reinforcing the predominant low, flat topography of the island. These conditions have not changed from the historic condition. The existing topography remains relatively flat and stable, with only a few small sinkholes along the seawall on Islands Two and Three. The continuity of Ellis Island's overall topography makes it a contributing characteristic to the island's significance.

### **Circulation**

Throughout the period of significance, several different features accommodated pedestrian circulation. Primary pedestrian circulation was originally achieved with boardwalks along the ferry basin on Island One. These were later replaced with concrete walkways along the new seawall and in a rectilinear pattern adjacent to the main immigration building, providing definition to outdoor spaces and access to all buildings. The specific pattern changed slightly over the years, especially with the removal of the entry portico

and construction of subsequent flower beds, but the overall rectilinear form of the walkways remained consistent. Ferry ramps were also extant at various times both in the boardwalk and the later concrete walkways along the ferry basin. On Islands Two and Three, initial circulation routes included cinder paths, concrete aprons directly adjacent to the buildings (on Island Two), concrete walks, and eventually covered corridors between all three islands. The last major addition during the historic period occurred during the 1930s with the construction of the rectilinear walk system in the recreation area between Islands Two and Three.

Currently, the pedestrian circulation is relatively consistent with the island's historic condition. Concrete walkways provide the major pedestrian access routes through the public areas on Island One. Although these walks replaced original ones during the early NPS rehabilitation of Island One, their rectilinear pattern is consistent with the historic precedent. Ferry ramps are still extant and are located in the same general area as they were historically, with one contemporary addition on the southeast end of the ferry basin. Additional walkways, steps, and ramps have been added, primarily with the construction of the Wall of Honor, the entry portico, and the concessions area on the southeast end of the island. The covered corridors still provide pedestrian access to all three islands. Sections on Island One have been rehabilitated, but sections on Islands Two and Three remain in a state of disrepair. The historic rectilinear walkways on Islands Two and Three remain intact but are also in extremely poor condition. After nearly fifty years of complete neglect, vegetation, weather, and erosion have damaged the concrete, and all these walkways are in need of repair.

Circulation to and from the island was historically accomplished by water transportation. Arriving boats came directly to the ferry basin between Islands One and Two, with most landing along the edge of the ferry basin and some docking at the ferry slip and dock at the basin's end. Additional boats arrived at the coal wharf northeast of the powerhouse, primarily for deliveries and other operational needs.

Island access has changed slightly from the historic condition. Boats still provide the primary transportation for visitors, arriving in the ferry basin as they did historically. However, the only landing access for the public is located along the ferry basin edge in front of the main immigration building. The historic ferry slip and dock, where the sunken ferryboat *Ellis Island* is located, are in a deteriorated state and are no longer in use. Boat traffic also continues to arrive at the location of the old coal wharf, primarily serving maintenance facility needs. There is also a small floating dock located on the northwest end of the ferry basin that is used for smaller boats operated by the U. S. Park Police. Additionally, vehicular access has been added to the island with the construction of the temporary bridge to New Jersey and the adjoining parking lots.

Despite having portions in relatively poor condition, the existing pedestrian walkways and corridors on all three islands are contributing features to the significance of Ellis Island. The pattern of water transportation to the island is also contributing, but since there was historically no vehicular access to the island, the temporary bridge and parking lots are noncontributing features.

### **Buildings and Structures**

Ellis Island's buildings and structures are perhaps the most prominent elements in the cultural landscape, and nearly all that remain are contributing features to the island's significance. Approximately forty buildings were constructed on the island during the period of significance throughout several phases of development and rehabilitation. Historic development of the extant buildings of the second immigration station began in 1901 with the construction of the main immigration building and main hospital building. Building construction ceased in the late 1930s when the last major phase of development added the new ferry building, new immigration building, recreation building, and recreation shelters. Various other structures were also a vital part of the facility historically, including water towers, coal hoisting equipment, trash storage facilities, tennis courts, small docks, and the ferry slip and dock.

Some historic buildings and structures were lost during the period of significance, including the surgeon's house, original ferry building, tennis courts, coal hoisting equipment, and wooden seawall. The NPS removed others from the island during rehabilitation work in the 1980s and 1990s including the greenhouse, incinerator, and original water towers.

Currently, thirty-two historic buildings and four historic structures are extant on the island in varying states of rehabilitation, stabilization, or abandonment. They include all the major immigration and hospital buildings, the concrete and granite seawall, remnants of the ferry slip and dock, the sunken remains of the ferry boat *Ellis Island*, and an exposed portion of the archeological remains of Fort Gibson. A contemporary water tower is present on Island One that is an in-kind reconstruction of a missing historic feature. There are also several nonhistoric buildings and structures present including the Wall of Honor, NPS guardhouse, concession kiosk, and maintenance building. These features are noncontributing, and their presence is less critical to maintaining the island's significance and integrity.

### **Vegetation**

During the historic period, numerous changes to the island landscape altered the overall vegetation character. During the station's initial establishment and development, there was a limited amount of preexisting vegetation combined with newly planted trees, shrubs, and lawns concentrated primarily on Islands One and Two around the ferry basin. Subsequent improvements under Commissioners Williams and Corsi added more ornamental vegetation like flower beds, climbing vines, ornamental planters, and formal lawns with hedges. Implementation of the 1939 planting plan increased the overall amount of vegetation on the island, but there were relatively few species present. *Plantanus acerifolia* (London planetree) was the predominant tree planted along the ferry basin and around the recreation yard between Islands Two and Three. Established lawns remained in front of the main immigration building, in open spaces between

other buildings, and in the large recreation spaces. Plantings of *Juniperus spp.* (juniper), *Ligustrum spp.* (privet), *Spiraea spp.* (spirea), and *Viburnum spp.* (viburnum) existed in smaller numbers in a few locations between buildings and along walkways. By the end of the historic period, the amount of ornamental vegetation had decreased substantially. Mature trees and open lawns dominated the island and there were few, if any, flower beds or other ornamental plantings.

After the station's closure in 1954, vegetation growth was rampant and unchecked. The historic landscape became overgrown and many invasive and volunteer species began to take over the island. By the mid-1960s a wide variety of species were present including vines like *Euonymus spp.* (euonymus), *Hedera helix* (English ivy), *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* (Virginia creeper), and *Toxicodendron radicans* (poison ivy); shrubs such as *Forsythia intermedia* (forsythia), *Ligustrum spp.* (privet), *Rhus spp.* (sumac), *Syringa vulgaris* (common lilac), *Taxus spp.* (yew); and numerous trees including, *Ailanthus altissima* (tree-of-heaven), *Betula spp.* (birch), *Malus spp.* (crabapple), *Platanus acerifolia* (London planetree), *Prunus spp.* (wild cherry), *Quercus spp.* (oak), and *Ulmus spp.* (elm). Subsequent island rehabilitation and preservation efforts in the 1970s through the 1990s cleared much of the rampant vegetation, leaving many historic trees and remnant shrubs in place.

Currently, extant vegetation on Island One includes a mix of historic trees and newly planted trees, shrubs, lawn, and flowers. The mature *Platanus acerifolia* are still present along the ferry basin where they were originally planted and are in reasonably good condition. There is also one *malus* southeast of the main immigration building dating to the historic period, but it was likely a volunteer tree that sprang up along an earlier fence line. All other trees on Island One, whether planted or volunteers, postdate the historic period. On Islands Two and Three, most existing mature trees date from the historic period, however, many were volunteers and were not part of the island's planting plan. Many mature *Platanus acerifolia* and *Quercus palustris* remain in their original planting pattern along the walkways and are in good

condition. Recent vegetation clearing projects removed many volunteer species, but continual maintenance is required to prevent the landscape from becoming completely overgrown again.

Historic specimen trees and shrubs, including the mature *Platanus acerifolia*, *Quercus palustris*, and surviving shrubs from the 1940s, are considered contributing features to the island's historic significance. All other vegetation, including recently planted trees, shrubs, and flowers on Island One and volunteer trees, shrubs, or vines on Islands Two and Three, is noncontributing.

However, the vegetation planting patterns surviving from the 1939 planting plan are the more significant contributing features to the cultural landscape. The linear tree rows along the ferry basin and walkways, formal lawn panels on Island One, lawn recreation spaces on all three islands, and small courtyard spaces between buildings have been defining elements of the cultural landscape since the historic period.

### **Views**

There is no indication that early planners considered view sheds to, from, or within Ellis Island to be significant. However, the island's development pattern and the spatial organization of its features did establish view sheds that became character-defining elements of the cultural landscape. Prior to the period of significance, island views were expansive. Facility development and extant vegetation were minimal, providing important open site lines for the early military installation. View sheds changed with the start of the immigration period and the subsequent development of the immigration station. Views across the harbor became blocked from the island's interior by the numerous buildings, structures, and eventually by maturing vegetation, however, they remained open if viewed from the island's edges. These expansive views could be seen at the seawall, where dominant view sheds included the Manhattan skyline to the northeast, the Statue of Liberty to the south, and the New Jersey shore to the north and west. The construction of various small courtyards, recreation spaces, and open lawns

created more intimate views within the individual islands. Additionally, the sight of the island and the immigration station from the surrounding harbor was an important view for the thousands of immigrants processed at the facility. For many, this view of the grand buildings and formally influenced landscape was their first glimpse of America and emphasized the stature and importance of this governmental facility. These views became less impressive at the end of the historic period, due to the increased fencing around the island for detention areas and the general wear and tear of the facilities and landscape. Upon the closure of the station in 1954, most views within and toward the islands became obscured with the subsequent vegetation growth.

The rehabilitation of many facilities and removal of overgrown vegetation has reestablished important island views. Views from the seawall across the harbor are more varied with the growth of the surrounding urban environment, particularly the development of Manhattan and the New Jersey coastline, including Liberty State Park to the northwest of the island. Interior island views continue to be small in scale, with emphasis on views across the islands' open lawns and into small courtyard spaces. Views of the island and former immigration station from the harbor are also extant and with the exception of the inclusion of mature trees, are similar to the views experienced by arriving immigrants. All views are considered contributing features to the island's historic significance.

### **Small-scale Features**

The immigration station contained a variety of small-scale features throughout the period of significance. Cycles of construction, deterioration, and rehabilitation brought about continuous changes in the style and placement of a number of these elements. Many features provided a utilitarian function, including wooden docks and pilings, several different styles of outdoor lighting, a water collection and supply system, flagstaffs, a fog bell and wooden tower, pilot light, and various types of signage. Ornamental features accompanied subsequent

phases of landscape improvements, including twisted-wire fencing around lawn areas, movable picket fencing for crowd control, benches for immigrant and employee use, planters for ornamental vegetation, and at least two birdbaths in the Island Two and Three courtyard spaces. Seawall improvements brought the addition of iron mooring cleats along the ferry basin for docking ships. Features like the children's playground equipment, chainlink fencing, and baseball backstop served the increased recreation and detention facility needs. By the end of the historic period, many of the oldest small-scale features were no longer extant, or had been replaced with new feature types. During the time the island was abandoned, substantial loss or damage occurred with many remaining features. However, some historic features did survive intact.

Small-scale features on the island are currently a combination of historic and contemporary. Contemporary items like benches, fencing, lighting, and trash receptacles are generally in good condition, however, they do not contribute to the island's historic significance. Most historic features such as the iron mooring cleats, manhole covers, water tower foundations, a concrete birdbath, and fire hydrants are in relatively good condition. However, other historic small-scale features are in much worse shape and are in danger of loss from vandalism or neglect, including remnant chainlink fencing and the last existing concrete light post on Island Two. Despite their condition, all extant historic small-scale features contribute to the island's significance.

<b>Table 7.1 Summary of Landscape Characteristics for Ellis Island</b>		
<i>Characteristics and Features</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Spatial Organization</b>		
Building placement and open space	Contributing	The historic spatial organization is reinforced in the placement of buildings, open spaces, and circulation system.
<b>Land Use</b>		
Commemoration, interpretation, and preservation	Noncontributing	The historic immigration land use is no longer extant. Current uses do not contribute to the historic significance.
<b>Topography</b>		
Flat, level landform	Contributing	The site retains its historic character of a relatively flat island just a few feet above sea level.
<b>Circulation</b>		
Historic concrete walkways	Contributing	Most extant historic walkways date to the mid-1930s and are present on Islands Two and Three.
Contemporary concrete walkways, steps, and accessible ramps	Noncontributing	Installed on Island One in the 1980s
Covered corridors	Contributing	The corridor between Islands One and Two was completed by 1907; the corridor on Island Three was completed in 1914; the masonry corridor between Islands Two and Three was completed in 1936 (replacing 1918 wooden original).
Ferry basin ramps	Contributing	The features date to the period of significance. The originals were likely altered with walkway upgrades but generally remained in the same location. One new ramp added circa 1992.
Temporary bridge	Noncontributing	Constructed in 1984
Parking lots	Noncontributing	Constructed in 1984
Water transportation	Contributing	Use of boats to access island dates to historic period.
<b>Buildings and Structures</b>		
Main immigration building	Contributing	Completed in 1901
Kitchen and laundry building	Contributing	Completed in 1901
Powerhouse – Island One	Contributing	Completed in 1901
Main hospital building	Contributing	Completed in 1901



<b>Table 7.1 Summary of Landscape Characteristics for Ellis Island</b>		
<i>Characteristics and Features</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Buildings and Structures, cont.</b>		
Hospital outbuilding	Contributing	Completed in 1901
Psychopathic ward	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Administration building – Island Two	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Administration building – Island Three	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Powerhouse – Island Three	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Kitchen	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Wards 13 & 14	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Wards 17 & 18	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Wards 19 & 20	Contributing	Completed in 1907
Animal house	Contributing	Completed in 1908
Staff house	Contributing	Completed in 1908
Nurses' quarters	Contributing	Completed in 1909
New hospital extension	Contributing	Completed in 1909
Baggage and dormitory building	Contributing	Completed in 1909
Wards 11 & 12	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 15 & 16	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 21 & 22	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 23 & 24	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 25 & 26	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 27 & 28	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 29 & 30	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Wards 31 & 32	Contributing	Completed circa 1909
Bakery and carpentry shop	Contributing	Completed in 1915
New ferry building	Contributing	Completed in 1936
New immigration building	Contributing	Completed in 1936

**Table 7.1 Summary of Landscape Characteristics for Ellis Island**

<i>Characteristics and Features</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Buildings and Structures, cont.</b>		
Recreation building	Contributing	Completed in 1937
Recreation shelter – Island One	Contributing	Completed in 1937
Recreation shelter–Between Islands Two and Three	Contributing	Completed in 1937
Exposed Fort Gibson walls	Contributing	Predates period of significance, but archeological fort remains were present during immigration period.
Concrete and granite seawall	Contributing	Completed in 1921 – Island One Completed in 1934 – other islands Various rehabilitation projects have occurred throughout historic and contemporary periods.
Ferry slip pilings	Contributing	The existing layout dates to the 1930s
Sunken ferry boat <i>Ellis Island</i>	Contributing	Sank in 1968
Entry portico, main immigration building	Noncontributing	Completed in 1980s
Fuel tanks & HVAC units	Noncontributing	Completed in 1980s
Maintenance building	Noncontributing	Completed in 1980s
Water tower, reconstruction	Contributing	Completed circa 1985
Concession kiosk	Noncontributing	Completed in 1990s
NPS guardhouse – Island One	Noncontributing	Completed in 1990s
Wall of Honor	Noncontributing	Completed in 1993 and 2001
<b>Vegetation</b>		
Extant <i>Platanus acerifolia</i> or other historic trees and remnant shrubs	Contributing	For individual specimens, only those associated with the 1939 planting plan, or in-kind replacements, are contributing. All other vegetation including invasive or volunteer species, as well as contemporary additions, are noncontributing.
In-kind replacements for historic vegetation	Contributing	
Planting pattern for tree rows, lawns, courtyards	Contributing	
All other vegetation	Noncontributing	

<b>Table 7.1 Summary of Landscape Characteristics for Ellis Island</b>		
<i>Characteristics and Features</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Views</b>		
Historic views	Contributing	Includes views across harbor, within site, and harbor to island
<b>Small-scale Features</b>		
Benches	Noncontributing	Installed from 1980s to present
Birdbath, Island Two	Contributing	Installation date unknown
Coin-operated viewfinders	Noncontributing	Installed in 1980s
Fencing, historic chainlink – Island Three	Contributing	Installed in 1950s
Fencing, contemporary styles including iron railing along seawall, chainlink, post and chain, temporary crowd control	Noncontributing	Installed from 1980s to present
Fire hydrants, historic – Islands Two and Three	Contributing	Installed circa 1952
Fire hydrants, nonhistoric – Island One	Noncontributing	Installed in 1980s
Flagstaff and base – Island One	Contributing	Moved to present location in mid-1930s. Base renovated in 1980s. Unknown if flagstaff is original or replacement.
Flagstaff base, U.S. Coast Guard – Island One	Contributing	Installed in 1940
Flagstaff base – Island Two	Contributing	Installed in 1950s
Fog bell – Island Two	Contributing	May date to original construction of immigration station. Moved to current location in 1980s.
Footings, concrete for old water towers – Island One	Contributing	Installed in 1921 and 1930
Greenhouse ruins – Island Three	Contributing	Installed in 1950s
Gutter splash guards, concrete – Island Three	Contributing	Installed in 1940s
Iron mooring cleats	Contributing	Installed between 1907 and 1913
Lighting, contemporary fixtures including posts, seawall fixtures, floodlights	Noncontributing	Installed in 1980s

<b>Table 7.1 Summary of Landscape Characteristics for Ellis Island</b>		
<i>Characteristics and Features</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<b>Small-scale features, cont.</b>		
Lighting, historic concrete octagonal post and remnant bases – Island Two	Contributing	Installed in 1935, only one concrete octagonal post and Beaux Arts lamp remains
Manhole covers, historic	Contributing	Some may date to original immigration station.
Manhole covers and drain inlets, contemporary	Noncontributing	Installed in 1980s
Picnic tables	Noncontributing	Installed in 1980s
Pilot light mast, with small bell – Island One	Contributing	Installation date unknown
Rubble wall – Island Three	Noncontributing	Likely composed of broken pieces of concrete walkway, likely dates to early rehabilitation work in 1970s or 1980s
Sculptures, abstracts of immigrant figures located on Island One concession terrace	Noncontributing	Installed 1990s
Signage	Noncontributing	Most installed in 1980s, some remnants on Island Three installed after island abandonment in 1950s
Trash receptacles	Noncontributing	Installed from 1980s to present
Utility corridors and pits, concrete and brick – Islands Two and Three	Contributing	Installation dates unknown
Water line, abandoned – Island Three	Noncontributing	Installation date unknown, although a line in this location appears on a 1916 map

## **Integrity of the Historic Landscape**

The National Register has identified seven aspects, or qualities, that define integrity. These include location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Several or all of these aspects must be present for a site to retain its historic integrity.<sup>2</sup> Analysis of the aspects of integrity is a subjective measure that varies from site to site, but the determination is always based on a thorough knowledge of the historical significance of the property and how well its current features convey that significance. To be listed on the National Register, a property not only must be shown to have significance under one of the four criteria, but it must also retain a degree of its historic integrity.

### **Location**

This aspect of integrity refers to the place where the landscape was constructed. Although the size of Ellis Island has increased throughout its history as an immigration station, the location of the island, the immigration station, and the landscape in New York Harbor have remained unchanged. Therefore, the site retains high integrity of location.

### **Design**

The combination of elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style of a cultural landscape or historic property fall under this category. Ellis Island maintains high integrity of design for both the structures and the landscape. Extant buildings retain their original design schemes and features including materials, proportion, scale, site placement, and ornamentation. Although buildings were added to the island over several decades, each structure has remained relatively true to the original design for the immigration station, even though there were also numerous alterations and additions to some individual structures. The linear placement of the buildings, and the numerous open spaces and small courtyards, particularly between the hospital structures on Islands Two and Three, remained consistent throughout the island's development and still dominates the island today. The predominant landscape design dates to a period

of renewed emphasis in improving island aesthetics under Commissioner of Immigration Corsi in the 1930s. Originally developed in the 1939 planting plan and implemented during the 1940s, much of this landscape is extant including mature trees, a formal circulation system, and designed open lawn spaces. Although some changes have occurred in the landscape during subsequent site rehabilitation, overall these primary landscape characteristics have remained unaltered. That is especially true for Islands Two and Three, where little rehabilitation work has been undertaken to date.

### **Setting**

Since the setting, or physical environment, for the immigration station has remained consistent with its condition during the period of significance, the island's landscape retains high integrity of setting. From the period of initial construction of the buildings and subsequent landscape, the island's topography has remained a flat, level landform, even with various landfill additions. The relative isolation of the immigration station on a harbor island provides a certain level of separation from the urbanity of nearby New York City and sets the facility apart as a place of importance. This setting fulfilled the conditions of the congressional committee who first chose the island for the immigration facility in 1890, and it remains evident today. The arrangement of buildings and open spaces is consistent with early facility layout, and the mature tree rows and extant walkways reinforce the slightly formal setting established by the island's landscape design.

### **Materials**

All types of construction materials, including paving, plants, and other landscape features, as well as the materials' placement in the landscape, are included under this aspect of integrity. The quality, condition, and placement of the materials found on Ellis Island is mixed, resulting in a moderate integrity of materials. In areas of the island that have not been rehabilitated, original construction materials remain, including the brick and granite building facades, concrete walks, small-scale landscape features, and a concrete and granite seawall. However, many of these materials

are in a deteriorated state or are no longer present in their historic location, and may soon be lost. In areas that have already been rehabilitated, some of these original materials remain, but many original features were replaced during renovations. Numerous concrete walks are extant from the historic period, particularly on Islands Two and Three, but new sections of walk replaced some of the originals on Island One during the rehabilitation of the main immigration building. Nearly all sections of galvanized chainlink fencing dating to the historic period have been removed. Plant materials dating to the 1940s, including mature trees and some shrubs, are still extant in their original locations on all three islands. The concrete and granite remains intact on the seawall around the island, with only a few sections repaired or replaced since its construction.

### **Workmanship**

This aspect of integrity refers to the physical evidence of the crafts of a particular period. Ellis Island currently maintains moderate integrity of workmanship. There is still evidence on the island of the fine quality of historic workmanship exhibited in both the buildings and the landscape. The detailed masonry and concrete work installed by local artisans and craftsmen remains visible in the extant buildings, walks, and seawall that date to the historic period. However, since many of the constructed features exhibiting this workmanship are in a state of deterioration, there is a reasonable expectation that the integrity of the historic workmanship may continue to diminish.

### **Feeling**

A property's expression of the aesthetic or historic sense of a particular time period is evaluated under this aspect of integrity. The Ellis Island landscape has moderate integrity of feeling to the immigration period. At the height of the station's operations, the island was generally well-maintained and orderly. The physical plant was in a good state of repair, and the landscape was designed and maintained to reinforce the island's status as an important governmental facility. Currently, the island landscape is only highly maintained at locations where visitors are likely to

gather or view it, specifically portions of Island One around the renovated structures and areas on Islands One and Two bordering the ferry basin. Other parts of the island, especially around the abandoned structures on Islands Two and Three, remain in a derelict state, although work is currently under way in many of these areas to stabilize historic features. The deteriorated portions of the landscape do not provide the same feeling of orderliness and control exhibited by the relatively well-maintained facility that was present during the historic period. However, additional integrity of feeling has been maintained on Island One by the continued influx of visitors into the landscape, re-creating the feeling of the busy, crowded island that existed historically during peak immigration periods.

### **Association**

This aspect refers to the direct link between the significant historic event or person and the cultural landscape. The Ellis Island landscape maintains high integrity of association. The remaining landscape design, characteristics, and features primarily date to the historic immigration period, with minor alterations to the landscape resulting from various stabilization and rehabilitation projects.

### **Integrity of the Property as a Whole**

As stated above, the Ellis Island landscape retains high integrity in location, design, setting, and association. It retains moderate integrity in materials, workmanship, and feeling. According to National Register guidelines, a property either does or does not retain its overall historic integrity, indicating that it does or does not convey its significance. Even though there have been incremental changes subsequent to the historic period, the above analysis indicates the Ellis Island cultural landscape does retain integrity to its 1892-1954 period of significance.



## Endnotes for Chapter 7

<sup>1</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, *National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Nomination Form* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, *National Register Bulletin 15: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1997).



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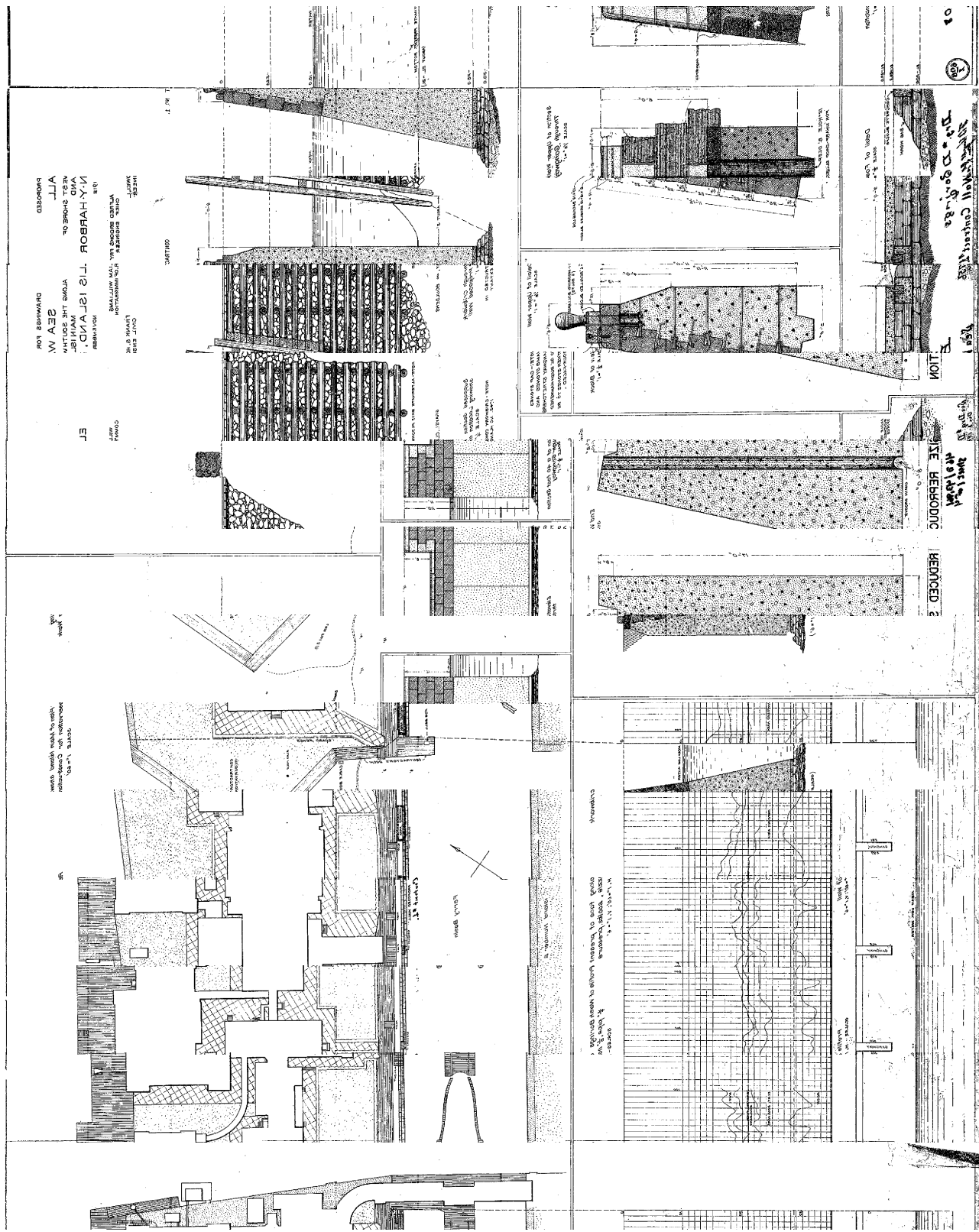
Conan, Beatrice Cohen. Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. Tape Recording. Ellis Island Recording Studio, July 25, 1995. Transcribed by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., November 1998. (Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Library, EI-646)

Gallo, Joseph. Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. Tape Recording. Ellis Island Recording Studio, June 18, 1993. Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1994. (Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Library, EI-335)

Hornberger, Ralph. Interview by Paul E. Sigrist, Jr. Tape Recording. Langhorn, Pennsylvania, April 24, 1991. Transcribed by Nancy Vega, May 1993 (Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Library, EI-040)

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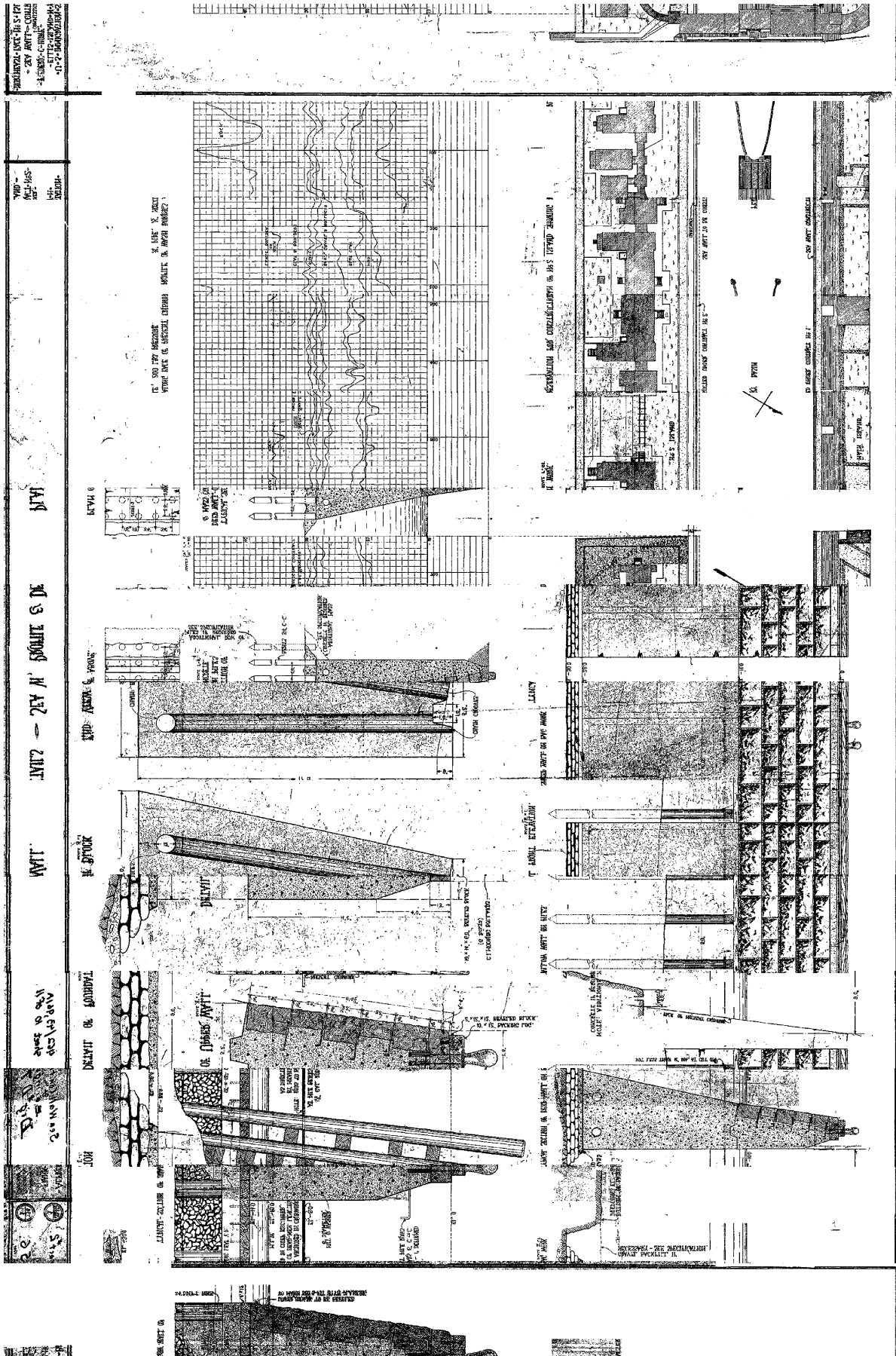
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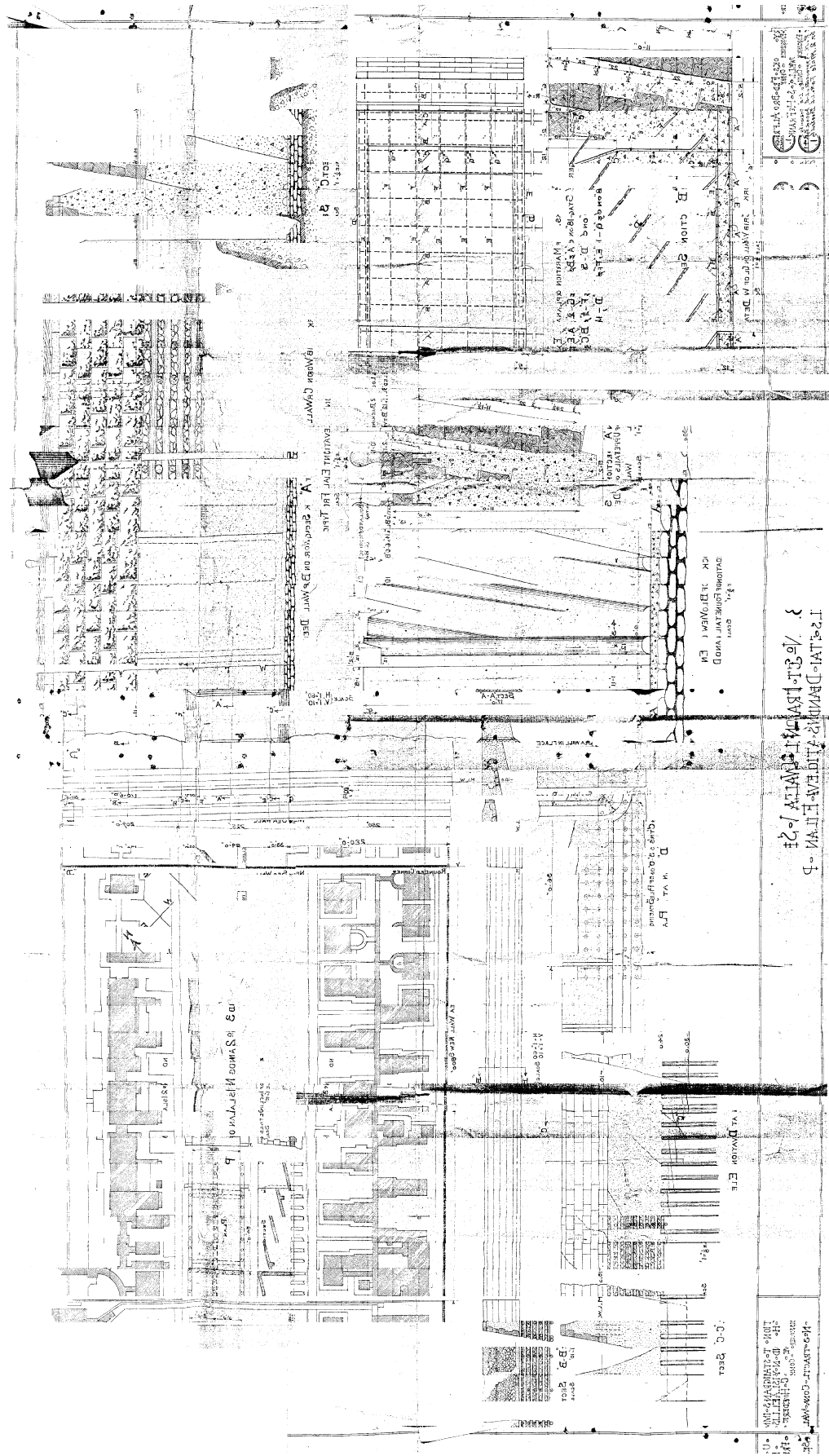


Seawall Contract #1, November 1913. (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961-0001.tif)

Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island  
Appendix A: Seawall Plans and Details, 1912 - 1920

Seawall Contract #2, circa 1913 (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STIL 43961a-0010.tif)

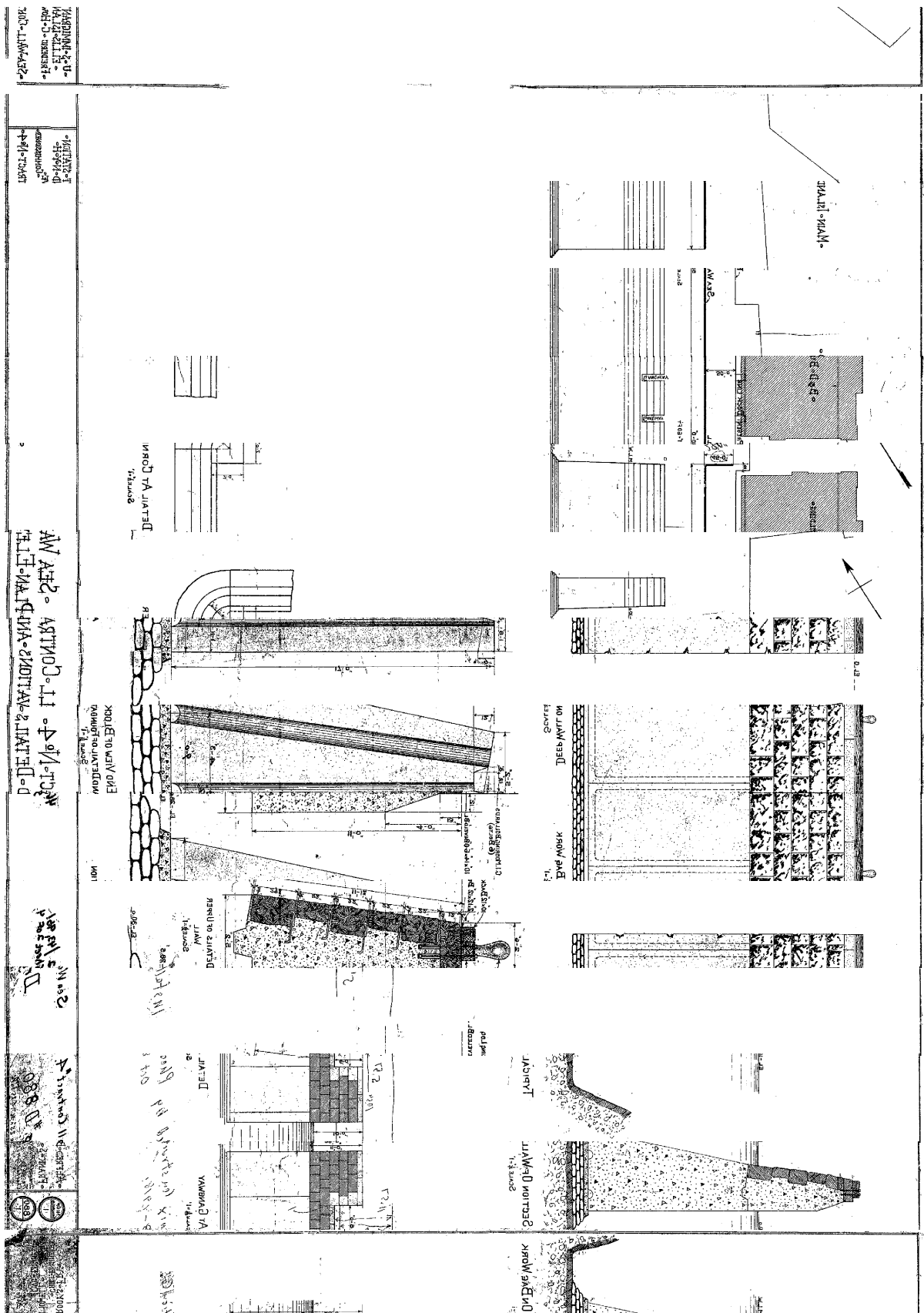


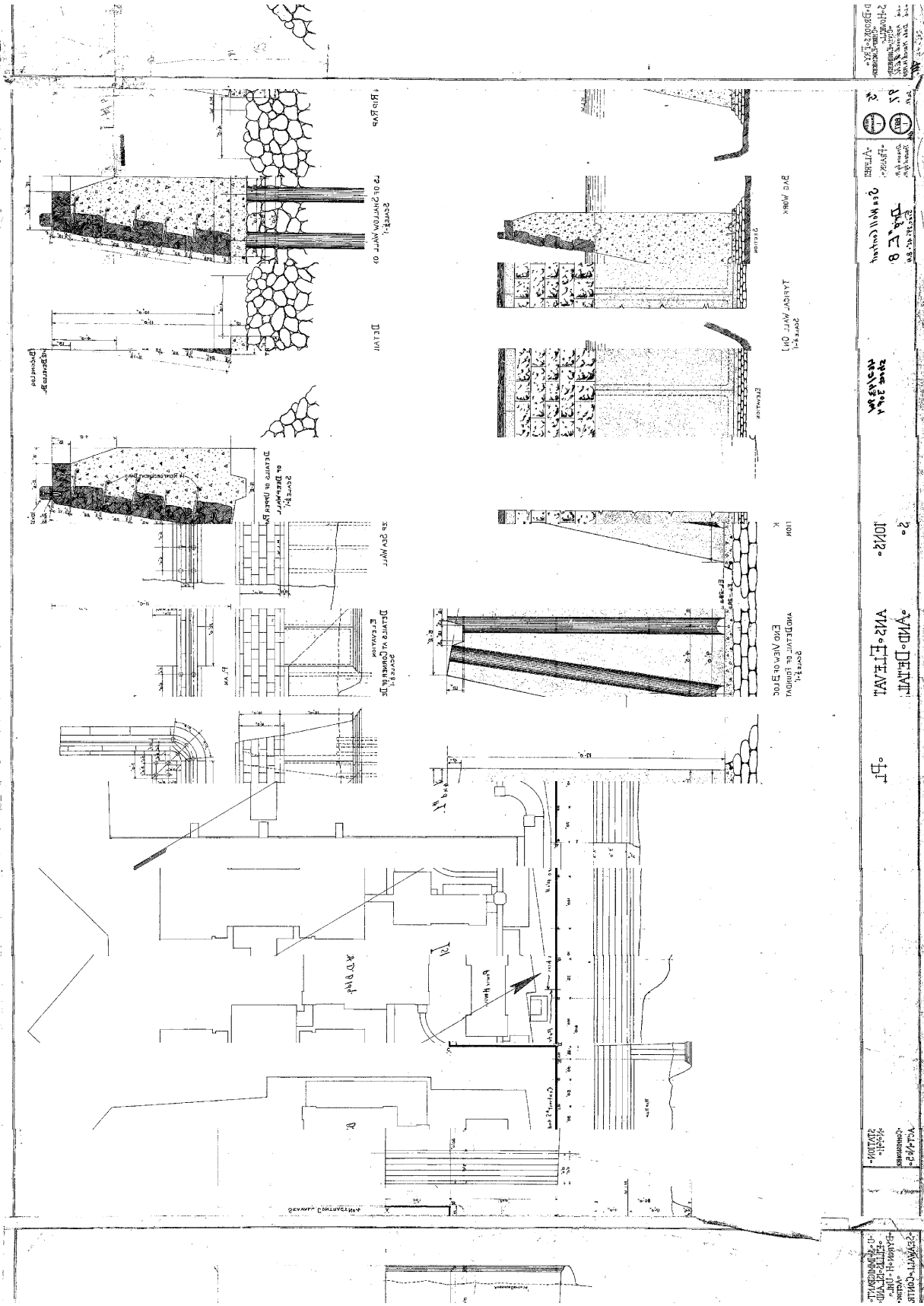


Seawall Contract #3, February 1918 (National Archives, Washington, DC, RG 85, Entry 9, 55640, Box 462, File 558 C)

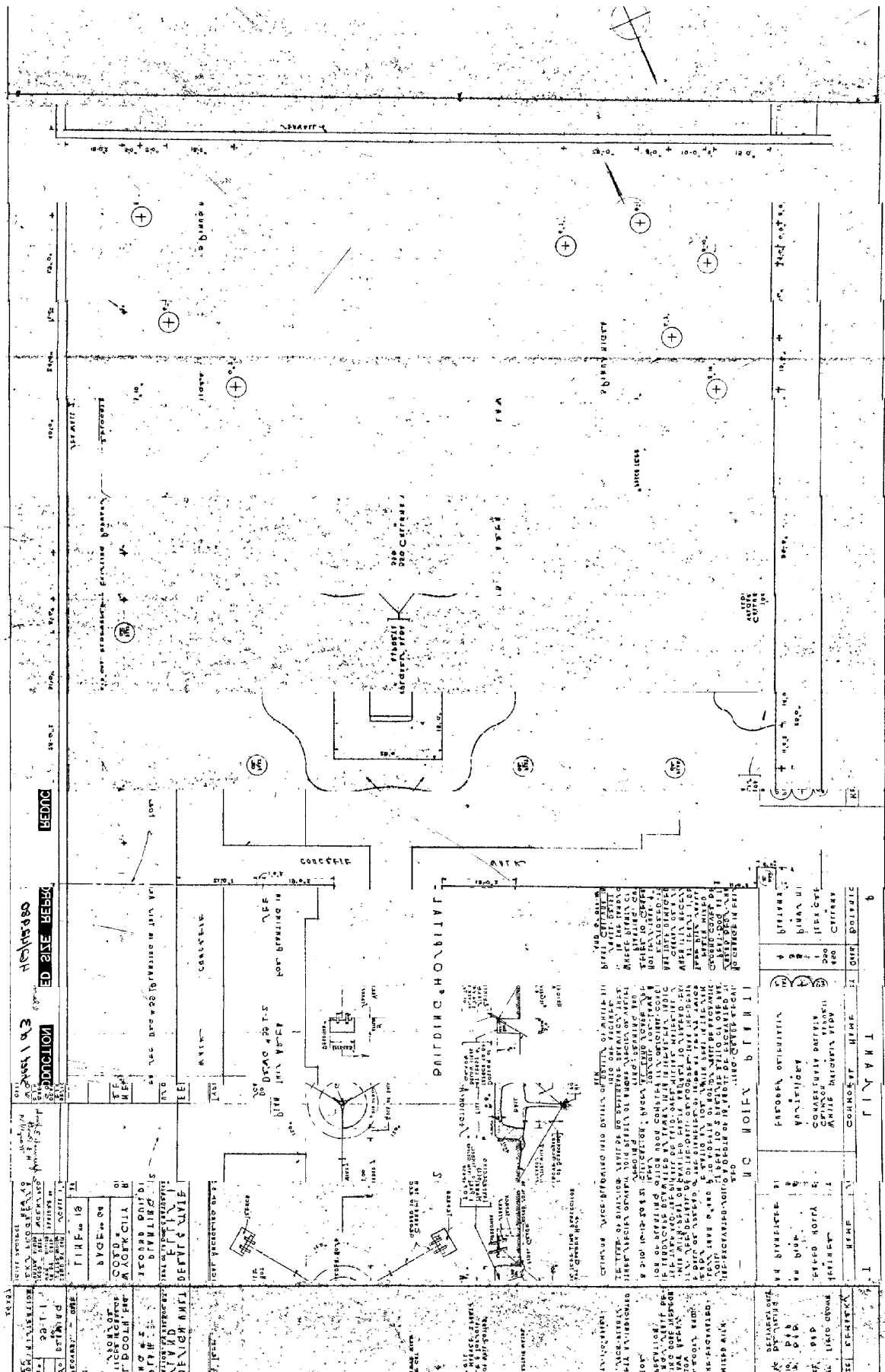


Seawall Contract #4, 1918 (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961-0002.tif)





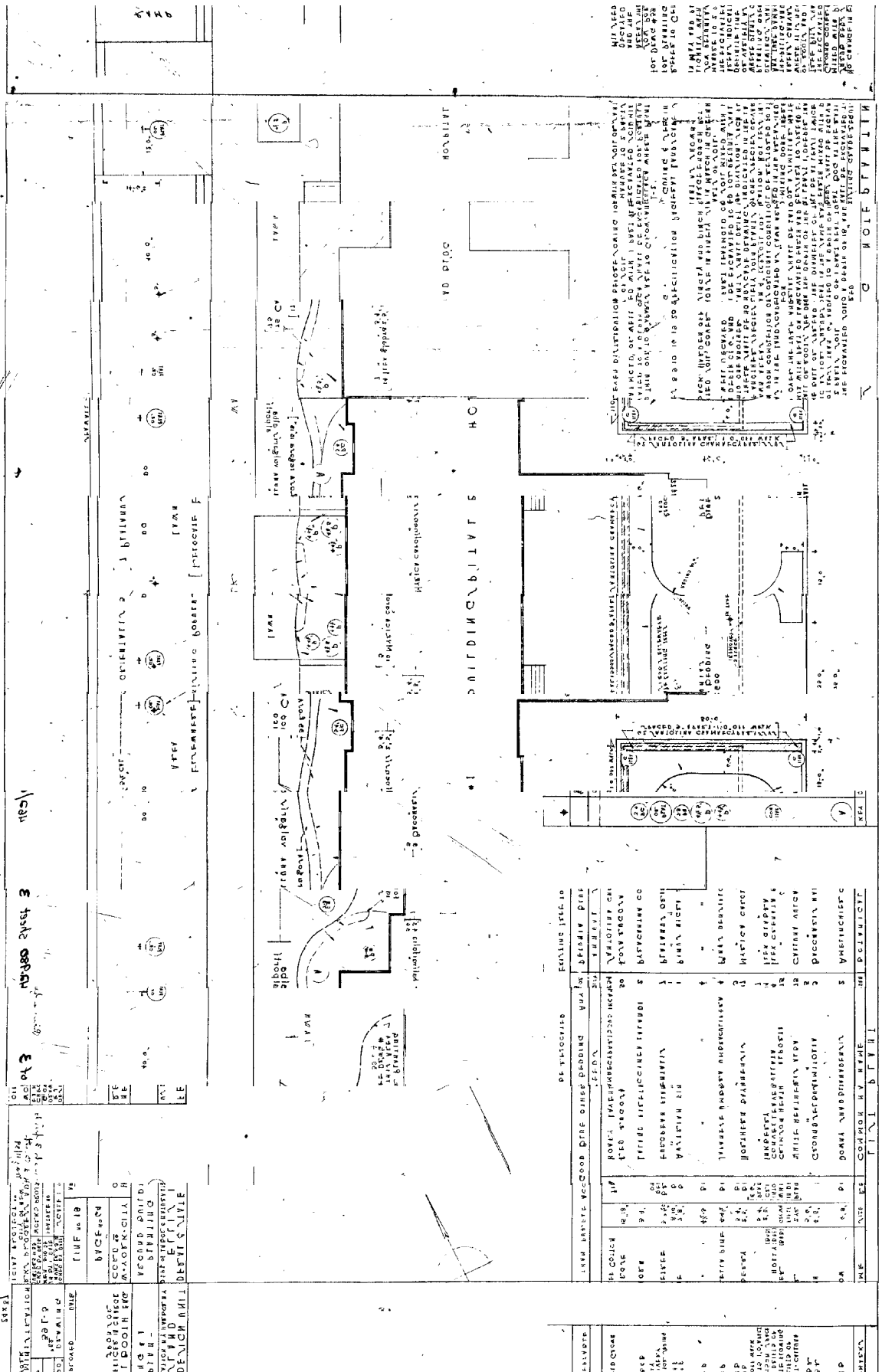
Seawall Contract #5, March 1920 (NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STLI 43961-0003.tif)





Cultural Landscape Report for Ellis Island  
Appendix B: Planting Details for Island Two, 1939

(NPS, Denver Service Center, Technical Information Center, STIL 42980-0003.tif)



This survey was based on fieldwork conducted by Bruce Kelly, September 1983 and May 1984, as cited in *Historic Structure Report, The Main Building*, pp. 79-100.

### **Spatial Organization**

The spatial organization of the island was defined by building placement and the walkway system and remained unchanged from earlier periods when the facilities were at their peak.

### **Land Use**

The main immigration building and limited amount of the surrounding landscape was used for interpretation, education, and memorialization. Islands Two and Three remained abandoned except for minimal NPS administrative use.

### **Circulation**

Extant walkways were concrete in poor condition, with cracks, spalling, buckling, and indistinct edges. No cinder walkways remained. A small amount of boardwalk remained near the greenhouse. Circa 1903 walkways were present in front of the western wing of the main immigration building and the kitchen and laundry building. Circa 1937 walkways were present in front of the eastern wing and to the rear of the main immigration building, and east of the baggage and dormitory building. Some of the circa 1937 walkways had six-inch concrete curbs. Circa 1902 bluestone curbing remained on the western end of the lawn areas and adjacent to buildings on Island One. A concrete gutter remained adjacent to the walk on the western end of the lawn, perpendicular to the ferry basin. Remnants of circa 1912 concrete apron were extant around the hospitals on Island Two. Circa 1935 walkways in the recreation space between Islands Two and Three remained. Remnants of a circa 1937 walkway was extant adjacent to the ferry slip seawall. Part of this walk was demolished during seawall reconstruction in 1976. An informal path southwest of the new immigration building was marked by rows of overgrown *Ligustrum* dating to the 1939 planting plan.

### **Topography**

The topography remained stable with a few sinkholes near failing areas of the seawall. Most of the grade on Islands One and Two was circa 1902, averaging two feet higher than the original island elevation. The grade on Island Three was circa 1912. The fill between Islands Two and Three and some additional landfill areas of Island One were graded in 1935-36.

### **Buildings and Structures**

The granite seawall, under rehabilitation since 1976, was in good condition. The top of the wall varied from zero to four feet above the surrounding grade. Twelve-inch square timbers lined the ferry slip along the seawall. The extant timbers were replacements of the circa 1920 originals.

### **Views and Vistas**

Views from the island's edge remained relatively unchanged. Views from the buildings and across the island were obscured by overgrown vegetation.

### **Small-scale Features**

**Lighting:** Two lamp types were present. A circa 1945 "single tin crooked-neck lamp" was extant in front of the eastern end of the main immigration building, adjacent to the chainlink detention fence. Between Islands Two and Three, circa 1935 Beaux Arts lamps with badly deteriorated eight-foot octagonal posts were located in the recreation area. Circa 1902 Bishop's-crook lamps were no longer extant on the island.

**Fog Bell:** The 1913 fog bell was located at the southeastern corner of Island One. It was moved to this location circa 1935 from its original location, just north of the current site.

**Iron Bollards:** Circa 1920 iron bollards were located along the ferry slip in front of the main immigration building. They were installed after the construction of the granite seawall and concrete walk. The bollards were rusted.

**Fire Hydrants:** Fire hydrants were extant dating from the 1952 installation of the fire suppression system.

**Manhole Covers:** Two manhole covers were present, one circular and one rectangular. It was thought these features dated to the first immigration station buildings.

**NPS Firebox:** A 1976 NPS wooden firebox was located in front of the main immigration building.

**Water Spigot:** One water spigot was located in the lawn adjacent to the southwest entrance to the main immigration building.

**Flagstaffs:** Two flagstaffs were present. A 1967 flagstaff and concrete base were extant on the south end of Island One. A flagstaff base inscribed "United States Coast Guard, Oct 1940," was extant northeast of the new immigration building. It is unknown if the flagstaff was present or just the base.

**Benches:** Four bench types were present. A cast-iron bench with one-inch by four-inch wooden slats, similar to benches in circa 1914 photographs, was located near the railroad ticket office. A bench with bent-steel supports on seven foot centers and wooden slats was located on the north side of the baggage and dormitory building. A bench with perforated cast-iron supports and wooden slats was located west of the new immigration building. A bench with simple steel supports and wooden slats was located on the northwest corner of Island Two. The wooden parts of all of these benches were in poor condition, but the iron or metal parts remained intact.

**Waste Receptacle:** A wire waste receptacle was located behind the hospital on Island Two.

**Fences:** Sections of World War II-era chainlink fencing were present adjacent to the main immigration building, baggage and dormitory building, and powerhouse. The chainlink baseball backstop was present at the corner of the railroad ticket office on the rear of the main immigration building and the baggage and dormitory building. A circa 1950s wooden fence was located between the powerhouse and baggage and dormitory building. It was constructed of two-inch by four-inch braces and similar-size capped posts. A 1976 NPS crowd-control fence with wooden posts and two metal cross members was located along the walkway to the southwest entrance to the main immigration building and along the seawall to the new ferry building.

**Walls:** An eight-foot-high brick wall was extant between the new immigration building and the powerhouse. This circa 1937 feature was part of the fencing used to separate detainee classes. A large hole had been made in the wall, but it remained structurally stable. A three-foot-high rubble wall, approximately thirty inches wide, was extant on Island Three in an alcove between the contagious-disease ward and hospital ward, south of the central quadrangle. The wall was in poor condition and workmanship suggested it was constructed after the WPA era.