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Blackwell's Almanac

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The gantry cranes of Long Island City, now the centerpiece of Gantry Plaza State Park, were once the lifeblood of rail freight transport between the Hudson River and Long Island. See "The Gantries of Long Island City," p. 2. Credit: commons.wikimedia.org.

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Blackwell's Almanac

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The Gantries of Long Island City

On April 19, 2022, Bob Singleton, Executive Director of the Greater Astoria Historical Society, spoke to Roosevelt Islanders about an historical curiosity we can see from our east shore: the gantries that now anchor Gantry Plaza State Park. Covering the history of food and freight transport that led to installation of the gantries, Singleton's talk was part of the continuing lecture series hosted by the Roosevelt Island Historical Society and our local branch of the New York Public Library.

It has been said that the development of the United States into the country we know today was largely the result of two major mechanical inventions: agricultural machinery and the railroads. And, according to the speaker, our Long Island City gantries—officially known as "car float transfer bridges"—were an integral part of that story.

By the 19th century, the center of agriculture and food production were the vast prairies of our heartland. Stretching from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, they represented a lucrative business opportunity; whoever could reach the inland region, harvest its bounty and transport it to coastal markets stood to make enormous profits. And so there arose a fierce competition.

The original frontrunner and beneficiary was the New Orleans area. Moving steamboats with the tide down the Mississippi River was a pretty simple matter, giving the southern route a distinct advantage. But, Singleton pointed out, the early riverboats were too weak to overcome the tides and rapids going in the other direction. That meant that other modes of transport had to be developed to bring the heartland's farm products to the East Coast.

A game-changer

In 1817, soon-to-be-governor of New York DeWitt Clinton initiated construction of the Erie Canal. Opening in 1825, it transformed transport to (and from) the East and reinforced New York City's port dominance. Goods traveled from the Great Lakes to Albany and down the Hudson, or down the Hudson to the Harlem River and into the East River. Blessed by many bodies of water, New York City was a shipping mecca.

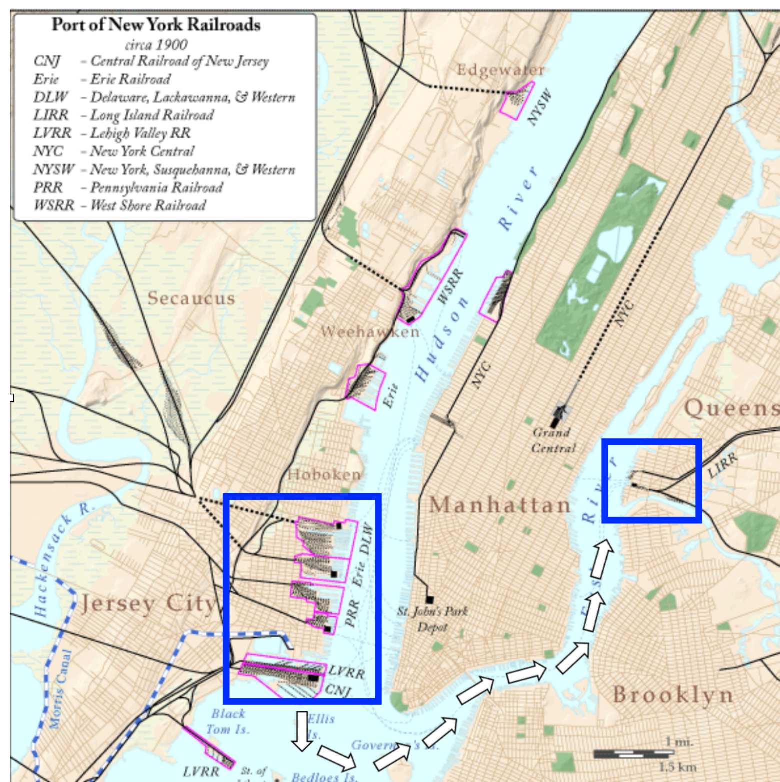
Alarmed at New York's increased share of inland goods, other coastal cities took steps to compete…using an even newer technology. In 1828, the Baltimore & Ohio (B&O) used a combination of just-invented rail and canal to reach the Ohio River (that subsequently flows into the Mississippi). A decade or more

The Erie Canal began at Buffalo on Lake Erie and continued east to Albany and the Hudson, where goods could be transshipped down to New York City. Credit: en.wikipedia.org.

later, the Pennsylvania Railroad, out of Philadelphia, also connected to the Ohio; Chicago linked up via the Illinois River; and both Boston and New York built rail lines to the Erie Canal.

"Railroads were far superior to transport by horse-drawn wagons," Singleton explained. "The ride was smoother and boxcars could hold considerably more freight." Rail soon replaced turnpikes. By 1900, efficient freight delivery by rail was everywhere in the greater New York area.

Multiple rail lines converged on the New Jersey side of the Hudson (see map). The New York Central hugged the east shore of the Hudson. And rail lines fanned out from Hunters Point, just north of Newtown Creek, to serve Long Island. What wasn't efficient was the need to offload goods piecemeal from the railroads onto barges to cross the Hudson and East Rivers, and then to reload what could be extremely heavy consignments such as iron and coal and foodstuffs onto another conveyance (wagon or rail) for local distribution. The process was time-consuming and labor-intensive, not to mention dangerous and costly.



Before gantries, goods had to be offloaded piecemeal onto barges at Hudson River Rail terminals, floated to Queens and reloaded onto rails there. Adapted from en.wikipedia.org.

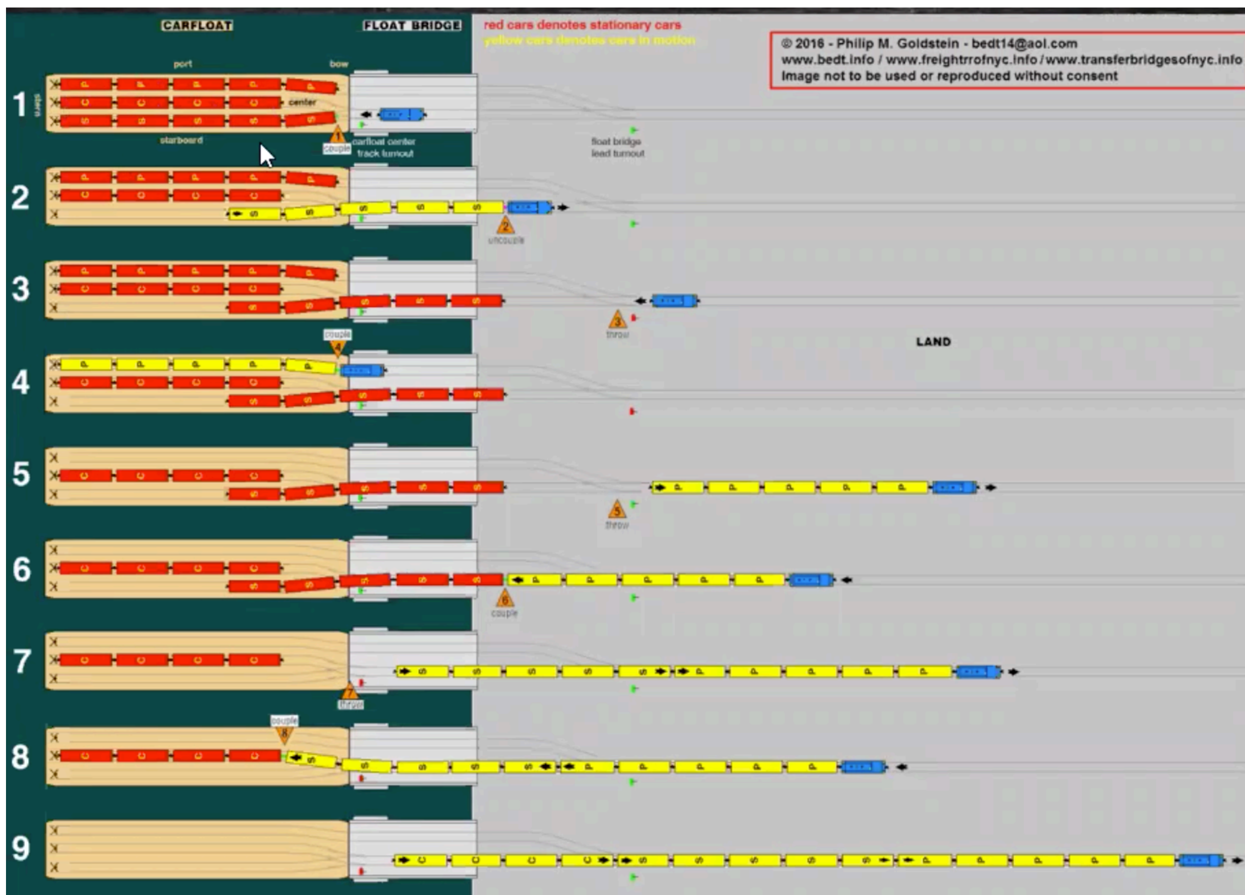
One solution: The gantry

The use of these so-called "lift bridges" was not new. During the Civil War, the North employed them to move men and materiel from one bank of a river to the other without any offloading required. The arriving railroad cars proceeded onto the gantry's deck, which—by a system of pulleys—lowered the cars to the level of a waiting barge or steamboat with rails. At the far bank, the process was reversed: the train cars were lifted to the level of the outgoing tracks so the train could proceed on its journey.

In 1925, a much more sophisticated, electric-powered version of this concept informed construction of the gantries at Hunters Point. Two double gantries were erected, which meant that four sets of train cars could be serviced at once. Trains arrived on barges from the multiple rail terminals between Hoboken and Jersey City… <u>without</u> their locomotives.

Transferring the cars from barge to gantry deck was tricky to begin with. The extreme weight of the cars and their cargo could unbalance the barge if they weren't removed in a specially designed sequence ("the dance," speaker Singleton called it). And the even heavier locomotives would have complicated the process further. Instead, pusher cars—much lighter—did the job.

Typically, a train of rail cars was broken up into three rows on the barge (1) (see photo, p. 5). First the pusher car pulled one outside row partially off the barge (2, 3). (If the entire row had been removed at once, the weight of the remaining rows would have flipped the barge over.) Uncoupling from that row, it then pulled the whole other outside row across the gantry deck and onto the rails on the other side (4, 5). The next step was to remove the first row in its entirety by coupling it to the second row (6, 7), and then back up to couple, then remove, the middle row (8, 9). a high clearance; this meant that the necessarily gradual ramps to their high decks would be so long as to cut Manhattan in half. A railroad bridge to connect Long Island to Manhattan was contemplated in the 1880s and 1890s. But because of a string of economic depressions, the funds were never available and the bridge wasn't built. The Hell Gate Bridge, opened in 1917, did finally furnish a direct railroad connection to Queens and Long Island. But trains from the Hudson rail terminals had to go many miles up the Hudson in order to cross over to its east side



Car float unloading sequence, or "the dance." Schematic courtesy of Philip M. Goldstein / www.freightrrofnyc.info.

Why not bridges?

Another way of eliminating the need to transfer goods from one mode of transport to another was a railroad bridge. But, bridges were problematic. To begin with, most were not engineered to support the sheer weight of train cars and their cargo. In addition, ships coming out of the Brooklyn Navy Yard required bridges over the East River to have where tracks led to the Hell Gate. With installation of the gantries, the route between the Hudson rail terminals and Hunters Point had the advantage of being much shorter.

The golden age of gantries stretched from the 1920s to the 1950s. At the start of that period, Bush Terminal in the Brooklyn Army Terminal Building was built and became a

huge operation simply because railroad barges from the Hudson didn't have to fight their way through Manhattan water traffic.

Two rail transfer floats, each about to unload three rows of cars. Credit: bronx-terminal.com.

For better or for worse, 1956 saw passage of the Interstate Highway Act. By the 1970s, Singleton noted, railroads and railroad freight had shrunk, largely giving way to long-haul trucks.

Operations at the Hunters Point gantries dwindled and ceased altogether in 1976. For many years the abandoned gantries rusted and deteriorated. Local kids used them as a massive jungle gym, as a neighborhood rite of passage, climbing up one side, walking across and climbing down the other side.

Today they have been restored and now serve as the centerpiece of Gantry Plaza State Park. Opened in 1998, the park will eventually be a 40-acre span of shoreline promenade showcasing these historic industrial artifacts that so contributed to the growth of LIC.

When Did NYC Stop Speaking Dutch?

In 1664, Peter Stuyvesant, Director-General of New Netherland, surrendered New Amsterdam (now NYC) to the English. For decades thereafter, the Dutch language predominated. In 1699 it was said that New York "seemed [more] like a conquered Foreign Province...than an English Colony," and the Dutch could "neither speak nor write proper English." In fact, the Dutch made up the majority of the city's white population well into the 18th century.

Nevertheless, the use of Dutch declined here more quickly than in other parts of New York State. Obviously the city's Dutch descendants were not as isolated as those in rural areas and were in more frequent contact with English speakers. By 1730, a disproportionate influx of immigrants from Britain resulted in an English-speaking population that outnumbered the Dutch. At this point, the Dutch were usually bilingual, using English in public and Dutch at home.

After 1730, younger Dutch New Yorkers learned English, not Dutch, and by 1750, the language was generally only spoken among the elderly. The new generation tended to think of themselves as English. They also preferred English language religious services, and many left the Dutch Reformed Church for the Church of England.

BY COMPARISON: Martin Van Buren, born in the Hudson Valley hamlet of Kinderhook and president from 1837-1841, still learned Dutch first and spoke English as a second language! What's more, there were pockets in New York State and New Jersey where Dutch continued to be spoken into the 20th century!

Source: Kieran O'Keefe, in New York Almanack, December 18, 2019.

Island Icons:

Alberta Hunter—Nurse, Jazz Singer, RI Resident

by Stephen Blank

Alberta Hunter rose from poverty to become one of the most influential blues and jazz singers and songwriters of the 20th century. She starred with Paul Robson on the London stage and was on the front lines in World War II. She was a leader in bringing black performers the respect they deserved, both at home and abroad.

Alberta Hunter and her nursing school classmates at the Harlem YWCA. https://notablenurses.com/alberta-hunter/.

I heard her sing. Lenore and I went several times to the Cookery in Greenwich Village to see her and hear her music. (Lenore never forgot “My Handyman Ain’t Handy Anymore.”) We knew that she was a jazz great, that she lived on Roosevelt Island, and, vaguely, that she had worked at Goldwater. But little more.

My research revealed that from 1926 until at least the mid-1940s, Hunter lived with her mother in an apartment at 133 West 138th Street. She and her mother were business partners and very close. So when her mother died in 1954, she said that the appeal of performing ended for her. At 62 years of age, she forged a high school diploma, subtracted 12 years from her official age, and successfully won a nursing license.

It’s not clear when Hunter moved to Roosevelt Island. But we know she worked for 20 years as a scrub nurse in our own Goldwater Memorial Hospital. She said she was always the first to arrive, never missed a day, never revealed her identity to colleagues or patients, and never sang for them. Apart from one recording in 1961 (“Songs We Taught Your Mother”) and an interview for the Smithsonian Institution, Hunter did not publicly perform or record any music during her decades-long nursing career.

She probably lived in the nurses’ residence while working on what was then called Welfare Island. But she seems to have moved into a new Roosevelt Island apartment when Goldwater forced her to retire because management believed she was 70. Hunter—who was actually 82 at the time — then decided to return to the stage. Soon, she would have a regular engagement at the Cookery, becoming an attraction there until her death in October 1984.

Young Alberta. Photo courtesy of Chris Albertson Collection.

But this is the middle of the story. Let’s begin at the beginning.

Alberta Hunter was born in Memphis in 1895. Her father, a porter on railroad sleepers, abandoned the family soon after. Her mother, Laura Peterson Hunter, worked as a maid in a brothel to support Alberta and her sister. She remarried in 1906 and had a baby girl with her new husband. In 1909, she moved to Denver with her other daughters, leaving Alberta behind with her grandmother. Sometime in her

teens, Hunter was doing some singing in Memphis. Learning that singers could earn the princely sum of $10 a week in Chicago could have encouraged her to move, for we know that Alberta made her way to Chicago.

She got her professional start in 1911 at a Southside club called Dago Frank's, a tough bordello. She stayed there until 1913, when the place was closed after a murder. By 1914 she was receiving lessons from a prominent jazz pianist, Tony Jackson, who helped her expand her repertoire and compose her own songs. She was now singing at a small club and managed to save enough money to bring her mother to Chicago. Alberta would support her for the rest of her life.

Alberta Hunter, far right, performs Vaudeville. Photo courtesy of Chris Albertson Collection.

One of her first notable experiences as an artist was at the Panama Club, a white-owned club with a white-only clientele. Hunter's first act was upstairs, far from the main event. "The crowd wouldn't stay downstairs," she said, "They'd go upstairs to hear us sing the blues. That's where I would stand and make up verses and sing as I go along." "I would sing softly", she said, "and if the people at the next table would want to hear what I was doing, they'd have to call me over and give me a tip."

Her big break came when she got booked at Dreamland Café, singing with King Oliver and his band. Here she joined the ranks of Chicago's most celebrated blues singers. Nevertheless, she eventually grew tired of the violence that was common in the rough and tumble clubs, especially after her piano player was murdered during a performance. After five successful years, Hunter left Dreamland and moved to New York City.

Not much is known about her personal life. We know that she met Willard Townsend, a handsome young waiter, during a gig in Cincinnati in 1919. She married Townsend, probably to stop rumors about her homosexuality. The marriage—apparently never consummated—lasted only a few months. Alberta divorced him some four years later. Shortly afterwards, she met the love of her life (which she always kept secret), Lottie Tyler, the niece of Bert Williams, one of the most famous and highest paid performers of the black vaudeville scene.

In New York, Hunter worked with pianist Fletcher Henderson and cut tracks with the Black Swan label, including "He's a Darned Good Man to Have Around," "How Long, Sweet Daddy, How Long," and "Some Day Sweetheart." She still traveled to Chicago for performances, but New York was now her home. She became the first black singer to perform with an all-white band, the Original Memphis Five.

Hunter became involved in New York's African-American theater scene and built a new following when, in 1923, she replaced Bessie Smith as the lead in the musical *How Come?*. Theater and musical revues were now her main focus, but she continued to record and perform, including a legendary session with the Red Onion Jazz Babies featuring Louis Armstrong and Sidney Bechet.

In 1927, Hunter left the US. In Europe, she felt able to escape the racism and prejudices

of America. In *Alberta Hunter: A Celebration in Blues*, she's quoted: "The Negro artists went to Europe because we were recognized and given a chance. In Europe they had your name up in lights. People in the United States would not give us that chance." In Paris, she was well known in night clubs like the Jockey Club and the Casino de Paris (where she replaced Josephine Baker). She began sharing stories of her experiences abroad in New York's *Amsterdam News*. In another major step, Hunter left Paris to star as "Queenie" in the London production of *Showboat* with Paul Robeson. The show was massively successful, and Hunter remained in London for the remainder of the year.

She returned to the US but was frustrated by the limits for black performers and now by the lack of work caused by the Great Depression. So she moved back to Europe in 1934 where she resumed recording.

When World War II prevented European travel, Hunter joined the USO. She headed the first black USO troupe, the Rhythm Rascals. The group was sent to the backwater China-Burma-India theater, where in one six-day stretch in January 1945, the Rascals performed at four Army Air Force bases in northeast India, and then donned parachutes and strapped themselves into the bucket seats of cargo planes to get to forward combat areas in Burma. One base was so dangerous that the unit had to perform in the back of a flatbed truck with a few soldiers on the ground pointing flashlights up at them for lighting in an impromptu night performance.

Hunter stars with Paul Robeson in the stage production of Show Boat *in London, 1928. Credit: JazzAgeMusic.blogspot.com.*

USO Unit 342A: (from left) Alberta Hunter, Alfred Elkins, Ollie Crawford, Leonard Caston, Mae Gaddy, and Joe Taps Miller. Public domain image.

Despite their heroic efforts, the unit was occasionally refused service in an officers' mess and told to eat in the kitchen. Hunter refused to eat and protested these insults up the chain of command…to no avail. Remember: the American forces were segregated throughout the war. Alberta saved an army-issued metal food tray for the rest of her life as a reminder of the discrimination she faced.

The group returned to United States on March 31, 1945, after six months in Asia, and quickly shipped out to Europe, arriving in Paris just after Germany's surrender. While entertaining troops there, Hunter received an urgent message from Supreme Headquarters

Allied Expeditionary Force in Frankfurt, Germany. She told the unit, "Y'all get ready because we're going to entertain Mr. Eisenhower." The Rascals gave a special performance to top allied commanders, including General Eisenhower, British commander Field Marshall Bernard Montgomery, and Soviet commander Marshall Georgi K. Zhukov and their staffs.

The Rhythm Rascals returned to New York in November 1945 after entertaining troops in two war zones for more than a year. On April 20, 1946, at a special ceremony at Ebbets Field, Hunter and 40 other USO entertainers received the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Ribbon for "outstanding service" during the war. But she wasn't finished. Hunter took part in USO tours of occupied Japan and Korea, where she entertained frontline troops in 1952.

Hunter singing at a war bond drive. Image from the PBS documentary "Alberta Hunter: My Castle's Rockin."

Postwar, she continued to perform in Chicago and New York until her mother died in 1954. And we are back to the middle of our story.

In the summer of 1976, Hunter attended a party for her long-time friend Mabel Mercer, hosted by Bobby Short. Music public relations agent Charles Bourgeois connected her with the owner of Café Society, Barney Josephson, who offered Hunter a limited engagement at his Greenwich Village club, The Cookery. Her two-week appearance there was a huge success, turning into a six-year engagement and a revival of her music career. Alberta Hunter, in her 80s, was back!

On October 6, 1978, Tennessee Governor Ray Blanton declared an "Alberta Hunter Day" and Memphis mayor Wyeth Chandler presented her with a key to the city. In December 1978, she was invited to the White House to perform for long-time fan President Jimmy Carter. She was subsequently signed by Columbia Records, went on to record four more albums and gave a commanding performance at Carnegie Hall. At the time of her death on October 17th, 1984, Alberta Hunter was at the pinnacle of her career. In 2011, she was inducted into the Blues Hall of Fame.

Music historians say that of all the blues singers, Hunter may have been the most versatile. She was a talented songwriter. She also sang musical comedy, appearing in a London production of *Show Boat* 56 years ago with Paul Robeson. And she performed as that '20s invention, the chanteuse, singing in French, Italian, and German… as well as Yiddish. I was honored to have seen her perform.

Editor's note: This essay deals with Hunter's life, not her music. For those who are interested in a serious look at her music, google *Nursing the Blues: The Remarkable Alberta Hunter (1895-1984)* by David Evans.

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Old New York:
Part VII—World War I

The fighting in Europe began in August 1914. Because the U.S. remained on the sidelines until 1917, the early years of the war had very little impact on most of the country. Not so for New York City.

In the early 20th century, the city was said to be a collection of "foreign villages" (see sidebar). This diversity was reflected in differing biases towards the war's combatants. The German-language paper *New Yorker Staats-Zeitung* was squarely behind the Kaiser; the socialist Yiddish publication *Forverts* condemned tsarist Russia's antisemitism and monarchy; *Slovák v Amerike* hoped out loud for a sovereign Slovakian state following the dreamed-of defeat of Austria-Hungary; and the *Gaelic American*, expressing its anger at Britain for forcing Ireland into the war, rallied for Irish independence.

Foreign-born Population in 1900	
Germans	300,000
Irish	275,000
Russians	155,000
Italians	145,000
Austro-Hungarians	117,000
British	90,000
Polish	30,000

Sometimes these opposing loyalties and animosities spilled into the streets. German-Americans were the largest immigrant group, comfortably ensconced among German neighbors and businesses in Klein Deutschland on the Lower East Side. They confidently paraded down Fifth Avenue to demonstrate their fervor for the "old country" and even petitioned their consulate to be returned to Europe to take part in the war. Every national group staged competing fundraisers to support the widows and orphans of their countrymen. And as crowds gathered regularly to hear news of battle victories and losses, passionate cheering and booing threatened to deteriorate into a brawl.

In April 1915, the Germans torpedoed and sank the British commercial ocean liner Lusitania, killing 128 American passengers. Three months later, in July, an attempt was made on the life of J.P. Morgan, also by Germans. Anti-German sentiment ran high. Mayor John Purroy Mitchel and his Committee on National Defense feared the potential tinderbox of the city's foreign enclaves.

First steps toward a unified city

Their first countermeasure was to ban public demonstrations of sympathy for ethnic brethren. To encourage patriotism, the city organized a war preparedness parade; marchers held aloft a banner proclaiming "Absolute and unqualified loyalty to our country" and an estimated 130,000 people attended the procession as it made its way down Fifth Avenue.

Early in 1917, the Committee circulated a petition stating:

> *As an American, faithful to the American ideals of justice, liberty and humanity… I hereby declare my absolute and unconditional loyalty to the Government of the United States…*

Despite the million or more signatures returned, there were still periodic outbreaks of civil disorder.

After the attack on the Lusitania, an outraged President Wilson issued an ultimatum to Germany: the US would regard any subsequent attacks as "deliberately unfriendly." In response, Germany renounced any action against passenger liners and vessels flying a neutral flag. However, in January 1917, British intelligence intercepted a telegram from one

German minister to another indicating that the German Government was going to reverse itself and would subsequently conduct full, unrestricted submarine warfare. It would sink all ships located in the war zone, including those carrying American citizens. When, in fact, the new policy was implemented, the United States Congress followed Wilson's request and, on April 6, 1917, declared war on Germany.

With the declaration of war in April and institution of the Selective Service Act (the draft) in May, the city government now demanded categorical pronouncements of loyalty to the U.S. According to Mayor Mitchel, there were only two categories of New Yorkers: Americans and traitors. Again to encourage patriotism, the Mayor's Committee organized "Wake Up America Day," including a re-creation of the ride of Paul Revere through the city and floats depicting scenes from American history. The government also sent letters to German-American groups requiring their members to denounce the Kaiser and declare their allegiance to the U.S. And Liberty Loans, authorizations from Congress to sell U.S. bonds to help finance the war, didn't just raise money, they also raised a patriotic fervor.

A ceramic doll used to promote Liberty Bonds. Credit: New-York Historical Society.

In the ensuing weeks, German shops and businesses changed their names to seem more American (see sidebar). Mobs kicked effigies of the Kaiser through the streets. Even before our actual participation in the war, it had begun Americanizing New York's rag-tag agglomeration of nationalities. But our involvement in the fighting ultimately transformed the city forever.

Conflict and cohesion

Most members of the American Expeditionary Forces shipped out of New York Harbor to Europe. In the summer and fall of 1917, the city's citizens fell in love—first with the New York National Guard's 27th Division and then with the 28,000 men in the newly created almost-all-New York 77th Division. Different from the Regular Army and the National Guard, this was the first division formed out of draftee civilians. And their connection to New York was manifest in their shoulder patches depicting the Statue of Liberty, as well as their nickname, the Metropolitan Division.

As might be expected, the division was a hodgepodge of 25 different nationalities and all walks of life—student and clerk, gunman and gangster, laborer, loafer and lawyer. Boot camp in Yaphank, Long Island, erased distinctions and hammered them all into a cohesive fighting force. Including one Irving Berlin. Already famous at 30 years of age, songwriter Berlin helped produce a show at the camp called *Yip Yip Yaphank*. It featured a newly crafted song, "Oh, How I Hate to Get Up in the Morning," that would be a touchstone for the entire country throughout the war.

On March 28, 1918 the division left for France, the first draftees to join the line of Regular Army in that country. Throngs of New

Some German-American Enterprises That Changed Their Names

German Savings Bank of Brooklyn	>	The Lincoln Savings Bank of Brooklyn
Germania Life Insurance Company	>	Guardian Life Insurance Company
Germania Savings Bank	>	Fulton Savings Bank
German Hospital & Dispensary	>	Lenox Hill Hospital

Yorkers crowded the West Side piers to see them off, cheering and waving in an emotional scene that would be repeated as group after group of "boys" shipped out. As the war progressed, Americans closely followed the fighting from newspaper accounts. In particular, New Yorkers fanatically followed the 77th.

The 77th Division parades through the temporary Victory Arch erected on Fifth Avenue at Madison Square Park. Credit: NYC Department of Records & Information Services.

By war's end on November 11, 1918, the men of the 77th had seriously distinguished themselves. Despite enormous losses and injuries, they had defeated 11 enemy divisions and advanced over 355 square miles of enemy territory. According to official statistics, more than 500,000 New Yorkers had served—12.5 percent of the four million American troops sent to combat in Europe. And when they returned from overseas—again through New York Harbor—they were met with a frenzy of joy, as well as parades, accolades and awards.

The aftermath

New Yorkers reluctantly gave up their "finest hour." Their attachment to the Great War spurred an abundance of monuments: a statue in Times Square of Father Francis Patrick Duffy, a Bronx priest who served in Europe as part of the Rainbow Division; a memorial to the doughboys of the 107th Infantry at Fifth Avenue and East 67th Street; a statue of a soldier holding poppies in Hell's Kitchen to commemorate Flanders Field; a memorial in Grand Central Terminal dedicated to subway workers lost in the war; an 81-foot tall obelisk in Bay Ridge honoring American sailors who helped blockade German warships off Dover, England; and York Avenue, named for Sgt. Alvin C. York, who in a single battle killed at least 25 Germans and took 132 prisoners.

Clearly these monuments radiated a civic solidarity. A city that had begun as a patchwork of independent and often hostile ethnic groups, was forged in the crucible of World War I into a new entity—a city of proud, patriotic, some would even say arrogant, Americans and New Yorkers.

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RIHS Calendar

FREE Roosevelt Island Historical Society Lecture Series in conjunction with the New York Public Library. Attend in person at the NYPL Branch, 504 Main St., and/or on Zoom, TBD. Register with danielle.shur@nypl.org.

Tuesday, September 20, 6:30–7:30

Pack Horse Librarians

Before there were bookmobiles, there were Appalachian women who delivered books, Bibles and magazines on horseback during the Depression. Jeffrey S. Urbin, Education Specialist and Director of the Pare Lorentz Film Center at the Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum in Hyde Park, talks about this little known activity of the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Tuesday, October 18, 6:30–7:30

A Queer History of the Women's House of Detention

Hugh Ryan, historian and author of *The Women's House of Detention: A Queer History of a Forgotten Prison,* sheds light on this Greenwich Village Landmark that, from 1929 to 1974, incarcerated many women simply for the crimes of being poor and insufficiently feminine.

Tuesday, November 15, 6:30–7:30

Benedict Arnold: Hero Betrayed

Before he was a turncoat, he was an American hero. James K. Martin, Professor Emeritus at the University of Houston and author of *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered,* reveals the strategic genius of Arnold, his essential contributions to the Revolutionary War, and his mistreatment at the hands of his superiors.

Tuesday, Dec. 13, 6:30–7:30

Back Number Budd

Victorians did not consider old periodicals valuable and did not save them, which severely limited the resources of researchers—unless they knew Robert M. "Back Number" Budd. Prize-winning author Ellen G. Garvey, PhD, tells about this African-American dealer who stockpiled millions of newspapers that he collected from hotels, clubs and libraries.