

# Blackwell's Almanac

A Publication of the Roosevelt Island Historical Society



Aviator Snoopy, introduced in 1968, soars over spectators at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. See "Coming Soon: The 97th Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, p. 2. Credit: <https://www.makeitgrateful.com/more/macys-thanksgiving-day-parade-facts/>

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**Blackwell's  
Almanac**

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## Coming Soon: The 97<sup>th</sup> Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade

It was 1924. America was in the midst of a roaring economic boom, and so was R.H. Macy & Co. It had gone public in 1922 and, flush with capital, had bought out competitors, opened a network of regional stores, and transformed its flagship New York emporium as well.

Having expanded to cover the entire block from Broadway to Seventh Avenue and from 34<sup>th</sup> Street to 35<sup>th</sup> Street, Macy's at Herald Square now encompassed one million square feet of retail space and reigned supreme as the "World's Largest Store."

This was a marketing opportunity not to be missed! And so was born the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. Except...it wasn't about Thanksgiving. With all that space and all the merchandise that could fit into that space, the whole point was to whet people's shopping appetite for the coming Christmas holiday.

### Joy in the Streets

It didn't matter! Whatever the purpose, residents of New York, and especially children, were thrilled. Giant newspaper ads generated over 250,000 spectators lining the streets four and five deep. And at 9:00 am on November 27, 1924, a police escort officially started off the parade to cheers, exclamations and peals of delight.

The spectacle route covered an impressive six miles—from 145<sup>th</sup> Street and Convent Avenue in West Harlem to midtown's Herald Square. Reflecting the nursery-rhyme theme chosen for Macy's

Christmas window display that year, floats featured Mother Goose characters such as Little Miss Muffet, the Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe and Little Red Riding Hood. Macy's employees appeared as clowns, cowboys and sword-carrying knights. Live animals on loan from the Central Park Zoo included camels, monkeys, bears and elephants. Four bands regaled the audience with festive music. And the final float of the cavalcade showcased the guest of honor—a jolly, waving Santa Claus riding in his reindeer-driven sleigh atop a mountain of ice.



Spiderman entered the logbook of parade balloons in 1987.  
Photo credits: <https://www.makeitgrateful.com/more/macys-thanksgiving-day-parade-facts/>



It took till noon for the procession to reach Herald Square. It was estimated that, at that location alone, some 10,000 spectators cheered Santa as he stepped down from his parade perch and ascended a ladder to occupy a golden throne above the 34<sup>th</sup> Street marquee. Immediately, he sounded the signal to unveil the window display, and children rushed to the 75-foot-long window to view “The Fair Frolics of Wondertown”—miniature Mother Goose favorites dancing on moving belts against a castle-like background.

The parade’s success outstripped even the company’s wildest expectations and Macy’s announced in an ad the following day that the spectacle would be repeated the following year. And so it has annually for a total of 96 years. (The count would be 99, but the parade was suspended from 1942 to 1944 because rubber and helium were needed for the World War II effort.)

### Changes

There have been changes, of course. Because the bellows and roars of the live animals seemed to frighten some of the younger children, they were replaced, beginning in 1927, by more docile character balloons (see box). The route was shortened

to just two-and-a-half miles from 77<sup>th</sup> Street and Central Park West, but the procession itself has undergone incredible growth; from its original length of just two city blocks, recent blockbuster pageants have been many multiples of their former self featuring dozens of gigantic helium-filled figures, celebrities, cheerleaders, marching bands and clowns. The balloons themselves have exploded in girth and height, making Macy’s the largest consumer of helium after the U.S. government.

The introduction of safety measures has been another change. New York’s tall buildings and street grid can amplify wind velocity, and over the years, several “incidents” involving collisions with streetlights and telephone wires, as well as spectator injuries, have forewarned of potential disaster. Wind measurement devices now alert organizers to unsafe conditions, in which case the balloons are reined in closer to the ground. And a city law prohibits Macy’s from flying full-size balloons if sustained winds exceed 20 knots (23 mph) or wind gusts exceed 30 knots (35 mph). The law has never yet been invoked; however, in the name of safety, the 2020 parade during the COVID pandemic was downsized and closed to



*The year of this parade (2014), one dozen marching bands from around the country were invited to participate..*

the public—being filmed as a broadcast-only event.

To expand its reach, the spectacle was broadcast on local radio stations from 1932 to 1951 (except for the war years), and premiered on network television in 1948. Today 3.5 million people brave the weather (wettest, 1.72 inches of rain in 2006; coldest, 19° in 2018) to watch the three-hour parade in person, while 50 million view it on TV. An added wrinkle since 1996: an untold number watch the balloons being inflated over the course of ten hours the night before.

### Anticipating the 97th

This year's parade will take place on Thursday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, and will be aired on NBC and Peacock. Among its featured elements will be: the debut appearances of giant balloons Beagle Scout Snoopy and Cool Cats; a balloonicle (an inflatable mounted on a vehicle) entitled Go Bowling; eight floats, including 1-2-3 Sesame Street and The Wondership; NYPD and NYC Parks mounted and motorcycle units; a dozen marching bands; guest stars such as Minnie Mouse and Friends; and performance groups, including the Radio City Rockettes. Although the event is now officially named the "Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade," Santa Claus is still the show-stopper and his arrival at Herald Square still kicks off the Christmas shopping season.

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### Notable Debut Appearances in the Parade (an inadvertent catalog of pop culture)

**1927**—Felix the Cat, the first giant helium balloon to replace live animals (he actually caught fire on some telephone wires)  
**1934**—Mickey Mouse  
**1935**—Marx Brothers and Donald Duck  
**1938**—Uncle Sam  
**1939**—The Tin Man (after that year's release of the "Wizard of Oz"), Pinocchio and Happy Hippo  
**1940**—Superman (a later version, at 80 feet high, was the tallest balloon ever)  
**1951**—Mighty Mouse  
**1957**—Popeye  
**1959**—The Thanksgiving Turkey  
**1961**—Bullwinkle the Moose  
**1963**—Elsie the Cow  
**1966**—Smokey Bear  
**1968**—Snoopy (7 Versions of Snoopy balloons have appeared, including Aviator Snoopy, Astronaut Snoopy, Skating Snoopy, Millennium Snoopy & Flying Ace Snoopy)  
**1974**—Sesame Street  
**1976**—Hello Kitty  
**1977**—Kermit the Frog  
**1982**—Olive Oyl and Swee'Pea  
**1983**—Yogi Bear  
**1984**—Garfield and Raggedy Ann  
**1986**—Baby Shamu  
**1987**—Spider-Man and Ronald McDonald  
**1988**—Big Bird and Pink Panther  
**1989**—Bugs Bunny  
**1990**—Clifford the Big Red Dog and Bart Simpson  
**1991**—Babar the Elephant  
**1993**—Sonic the Hedgehog, the first video game character in the parade (crashes into a lamppost and injures an off-duty policeman)  
**1996**—Peter Rabbit  
**1997**—Pink Panther, Cat in the Hat, Beavis and Butthead  
**2001**—Curious George  
**2002**—Charlie Brown  
**2004**—SpongeBob SquarePants, Chicken Little, M&Ms  
**2006**—Energizer Bunny  
**2007**—Shrek  
**2012**—Elf on the Shelf, Buzz Lightyear  
**2013**—Woodstock

## Old New York: Part X—The City Fights WWII

As Nazi Germany began its domination of Europe, America was woefully unprepared for fighting. Our military was small, poorly supplied and without the prospect of a robust manufacturing sector that might have provided the arms, planes, ships, tanks and other equipment it would have needed.

And then, on December 7, 1941 the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, forcing us to react.

In an almost miraculous feat of leadership and persuasion, FDR cajoled industry heads to retool their factories, saw to it that they had unhindered access to needed raw materials, and inspired the American populace to sacrifice many of its

customary comforts. Within a short time, New York City, with its seven million residents, varied industries, bustling harbor and towering intellectual heft, was thoroughly immersed in the war effort.

### **Send a Salami to Your Boy in the Army**

This famous Katz Delicatessen slogan must have spurred the shipment of thousands upon thousands of salamis. For, between 1942 and 1945, the recruiting office at 39 Whitehall St. inducted over a million metropolitan area residents into the armed services. Naturally these recruits and others from around the country had to shape up and the New York area became a premier training

ground. Military bases in and around the city grew to include such familiar names as Floyd Bennett Field and Fort Hamilton in Brooklyn, Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island, Fort Tilden in Rockaway Beach, Fort Hancock on Sandy Hook and Fort Dix in New Jersey.

Over the course of the war, the U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipman's School at Columbia University boasted some 24,000 graduates, handily outstripping the number of officers

from the Naval Academy in Annapolis. WAVES trained at the country's most important Navy women's training facility at Hunter College in the Bronx (now Lehman College). The U.S. Coast Guard had its largest school at Manhattan Beach in Brooklyn. And two-thirds of the merchant seamen who ferried supplies to the front lines



*Women take on men's factory work. Credit: U.S. National Park Service.*

also got their training in New York City. In addition to all that, New York, the world's busiest port, was the main embarkation point for sending troops overseas. The streets of the city were a sea of military uniforms.

### **Factories Start Slow, Finish Strong**

Despite its 27,000 factories, relatively few wartime contracts were awarded New York at the start of the conflict. Many of the factories were quite small and, predictably, about three-quarters of the funds for materiel and supplies went to the nation's largest 100 companies in Detroit, Newark, San Francisco, Cleveland and Los Angeles. This left New York's manufacturing hobbling along



and its Depression-era unemployed still without jobs...until a special delegation to the federal government in the summer of 1942 turned the situation around.

Eventually city workers, many of them women filling in for the men who had gone to war, were putting in long hours and expanded work-weeks to meet contractual demands. They turned out a profusion of "airplane parts, metal products, spun glass fibers, optical lenses and prisms, dehydrated foods, bombs, canvas goods, tents, tarpaulins, haversacks, leggings, mattress covers, powder bags, life preservers" and electrical goods.

- \* The Steinway Piano Company in Queens made glider wings used to drop troops behind enemy lines in France.
- \* Pfizer in Brooklyn built the very first penicillin plant in the world and by D-Day in 1944 was producing 50 billion units per month of this life-saving antibiotic.
- \* The Norden Company, headquartered in lower Manhattan, invented and manufactured the highly classified Norden bombsight that provided unmatched bombing accuracy.
- \* The Aluminum Corporation of America's 10,000 employees, working in a brand new one million square foot plant on Newtown Creek, churned out millions of tons of aluminum.
- \* The garment industry's various shops cut and sewed a couple of hundred thousand Army and Navy uniforms and over a million overcoats.
- \* In the halls of the New-York Historical Society, volunteers rolled 4 million bandages.

### **Ships, Ships and More Ships**

There were 40 ship-building and ship-repair yards in the city. None matched the Brooklyn Navy Yard, which was the leading builder of battleships in the world. Here 75,000 employees, literally working 24/7, constructed the battleships *Iowa* and *North Carolina*; five aircraft carriers; and eight huge ships designed to carry tanks onto the D-Day beaches. A Navy Yard specialty was fitting ships built elsewhere with guns, as well as ship repair. Over 5,000 warships

were rehabilitated at the yard during the war, including a British Royal Navy battleship.

Other major contributors were Bethlehem Steel's Staten Island yard and Todd Shipyards in Brooklyn's Erie Basin. They turned out huge numbers of destroyers, landing craft, cargo ships and tugs. The Todd yard was particularly known for its lightning repair turn-around-time. It was said they could return a ship with extensive torpedo damage to service in just days.

In no small measure, New York City's shipyard output undergirded the nation's output as a whole. And this was so enormous that, by the end of the fighting, the U.S. Navy was larger than the combined navies of all the rest of the countries in the entire world.

### **Everyday Life**

It's no exaggeration to say that life in the city changed dramatically once we entered the war. A major change was the institution of security measures. As a coastal city, the most populous one in the country and the nation's financial center, New York, it was feared, could be a target for air or submarine attacks. (In the first four months of 1942, German U-boats did sink 87 supply ships in the Atlantic.)



Launch of the USS North Carolina, June 1940. Credit: en.wikipedia.org.

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Ration book warning stipulates a \$10,000 fine or imprisonment for anyone who uses the book fraudulently. Credit: National WWII Museum.

Almost immediately squads of volunteer aircraft spotters and air raid wardens were organized. Mayor LaGuardia mandated practice blackouts and drills. And nightly dim-outs became a routine requirement in order to hinder identification of the New York skyline.

An even more pervasive change was rationing. Because most consumer goods were needed for the troops and war effort in general, homefront families were only allowed very limited supplies. Monthly ration cards stipulated just how much people could buy of such products as butter, sugar, meat, canned milk, gasoline, fuel oil, firewood, clothing and footwear. It took considerable planning and pacing; otherwise, toward the end of the month, people were forced to do without. And certain durable goods were simply unavailable. For example, production of new housing, cars, vacuum cleaners and kitchen appliances was banned completely until the end of the war.

Perhaps the most fundamental and lasting change was society's attitude toward women working. Though there were women in the work force before the conflict, particularly young, single women, the practice was somewhat frowned upon. Now women, including married women with families, were encouraged to take jobs. And they did. Whether out of patriotism or

financial need, they flocked to offices and factories. Like Rosie the Riveter in the government's propaganda posters, they often took on men's work. Said a factory manager: "Why should men, who from childhood on never so much as sewed on buttons be expected to handle delicate instruments better than women who have plied embroidery needles, knitting needles, and darning needles all their lives?"

In an ironic turn, women who didn't work were at risk of being considered unpatriotic slackers.

With the city working at full tilt, there was a lot less time for leisure pursuits. But when New Yorkers did look for entertainment, movies were it. In addition to Hollywood's usual fare, it made hundreds of war movies reinforcing the villainy of the Axis powers and the heroism of the Allies. It is estimated that some two-thirds of the entire population flocked to movie theaters every week to see such eventual classics as *Casablanca*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy* and *Corregidor*.



Credit: Chapman Museum.

### Intellect and Intrigue

Even before the war, New York was known for its creativity. Art, advertising and media were its hallmark; so it is hardly surprising that these skills were deployed in the service of the war machine. On the radio, in magazines, newspapers and posters, large-



*The famous “sailor/nurse kiss” photo depicting the joy of V-J day and the end of the war. Credit: Reuters.*

scale campaigns promoted the era’s central theme: patriotism. Citizens were stirred to boost production at work and home, buy war bonds, and collect “scraps,” that is, recycle such commodities as rubber, tin, waste kitchen fats (raw material for explosives), newspaper, lumber and steel, all of which were critical to the fighting front.

Military training films were another important New York product. In coordination with the Army Pictorial Service, the Paramount Studio lot in Queens turned out instruction and morale-building films for the troops. It also taught combat cameramen and photographers this new aspect of their craft.

And then there was the scientific brain trust whose secret experiments would ultimately provide a surprise ending to the war. Development of the atomic bomb began with the investigation of nuclear fission by Nobel

laureate Enrico Fermi and his team at Columbia University’s Pupin Physics Lab. Although other physicists and other locations were involved in the final iteration of the bomb, what came to be known as the Manhattan Project was, arguably, the city’s most important contribution to the war. For it accelerated Japan’s surrender...and after years of combat, put a halt to the bloody strife and dislocations that were World War II.

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## The New Transit Fare: Is It Really 58 Times What It Was 100 Years Ago?

On August 20, the MTA instituted a 5% increase for the cost of a single subway or bus trip, with the base price going from \$2.75 to \$2.90. The previous fare hike took place in 2015. Should we be: Outraged? Annoyed? Or simply accepting? Perhaps history can help us decide.

From the inauguration of subway services in 1904 until the previously separate IRT, BMT and IND lines were unified into one system in 1948, the fare for a subway ride of any length was 5¢. Yes, for 44 years, 5¢—at first glance, 1/58 of the fare today. But, of course, that is misleading. In 1904, 5¢ was equivalent to \$1.63 in 2022 dollars. And it represented a much larger chunk of the average salary than our current fare does today. Available

statistics for 1905 show that that nickel was about 1/2% of the average male worker's weekly wage (\$11.16) and 8/10% of the average woman's weekly wage (\$6.17). If subway riders worked five days a week, the ten fares represented 5% and 8% respectively of their income. If they worked 6 days a week, the 12 fares consumed 6% and 9.6% of their salary.

Compare that with our current situation: \$2.90 represents only 1/4% of the median New York City weekly income (\$1,149). Ten fares a week eats up only 2.5% of that amount, and multiple-fare deals come in at even less. What's more, since 1997, the MTA has allowed free transfers between buses and subways.

### The Changing Look of Subway Tokens

Subway customers bought tickets to pay their fare until May 10, 1920. Coin-operated subway turnstiles took nickels and then dimes when the fare became 10¢. When the fare rose to 15¢, turnstiles couldn't handle two different coins. So tokens replaced coins in 1953. From there we went to refillable

Small Y Cutout—15¢ & 20¢  
Sept 1953—Jan 1970



Small Solid—15¢  
July 1953—Sept 1953

Diamond Jubilee—50¢  
Nov 1979—June 1980



Bullseye with SJD Initials—\$1.00—\$1.25  
April 1986—Nov 1995



Five Borough or Pentagon—\$1.50  
Nov 1995—May 2003



Large Y Cutout—30¢, 35¢ & 50¢  
Jan 1970—June 1980



Large Solid—60¢, 75¢, 90¢, \$1.00  
June 1980—June 1986



Archer Avenue Extension Bullseye  
\$1.00, \$1.15, \$1.25  
Dec 1986—Nov 1995



The Catalog of Transit Fiscal Ephemera & Exonomia  
from the City of the New York

nyc-tickets-tokens-transfers.info

Page 2 - Tokens



Extra Large Y Cutout or Super Sized Cutout Special Fare Token for Train to Aqueeduct Track Issued 1965 Repurposed for Express Buses Late 1980s—1990s



Special Fare or Silver Special Fare Special Token for Train to Aqueeduct Issued April 1979



By 1948, that original 5¢ fare was equivalent to only \$0.61 in 2022 dollars—somewhere between a third and a half of its purchasing value in 1904. Definitely time for a fare increase! So on July 1, 1948, the fare was increased to 10¢ (equivalent to \$1.22 in 2022) for rapid transit (subway and elevated trains), and 7¢ for surface routes (streetcar and bus). Since then, it has risen steadily (see sidebar).

The truth is, though, that since 2015, the year of the last rate hike, inflation in general has risen by 27%. In August the base price for a subway ride went up by a mere 5.5%. Perhaps we should be rejoicing!

Base Fare Increases Since 1904	
1904 – 1948: <b>5 cents</b>	1986 – 1989: <b>\$1</b>
1948 – 1953: <b>10 cents</b>	1990 – 1991: <b>\$1.15</b>
1953 – 1966: <b>15 cents</b>	1992 – 1995: <b>\$1.25</b>
1966 – 1970: <b>20 cents</b>	1995 – 2003: <b>\$1.50</b>
1970 – 1971: <b>30 cents</b>	2003 – 2009: <b>\$2</b>
1972 – 1975: <b>35 cents</b>	2009 – 2013: <b>\$2.25</b>
1975 – 1980: <b>50 cents</b>	2013 – 2015: <b>\$2.50</b>
1980 – 1981: <b>60 cents</b>	2015 – 2023: <b>\$2.75</b>
1981 – 1984: <b>75 cents</b>	2023: <b>\$2.90</b>
1984 – 1985: <b>90 cents</b>	

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## RIHS Calendar

**Roosevelt Island Historical Society Lecture Series—FREE**  
**@ the New York Public Library Branch, 504 Main St.**

**Tuesday, December 12, 6:00 pm**

**In Person: Urban Subway Construction**

Nasri Munfah, P.E., revisits his previous presentation about Eastside Access and the LIRR Connector under RI, expanding his focus to subway construction in urban areas, including the Second Avenue Subway and the Central Subway in San Francisco.

**Tuesday, January 9, 6:00 pm**

**In Person: Affordable Housing and the Future of Open Space**

Matthias Altwicker, AIA LEED AP, will discuss the history of affordable housing in New York, how Roosevelt Island fits into that history, and how ideas of open space that were supported by this housing are being reconsidered.

**Tuesday, February 13, 6:00 pm**

**To Be Announced**

**Tuesday, March 26, 6:00 pm**

**In Person: Artist Talk**

Diana Cooper, creator of DOUBLE TAKE, the mosaic mural opposite our subway station, will speak about the artistic process.