

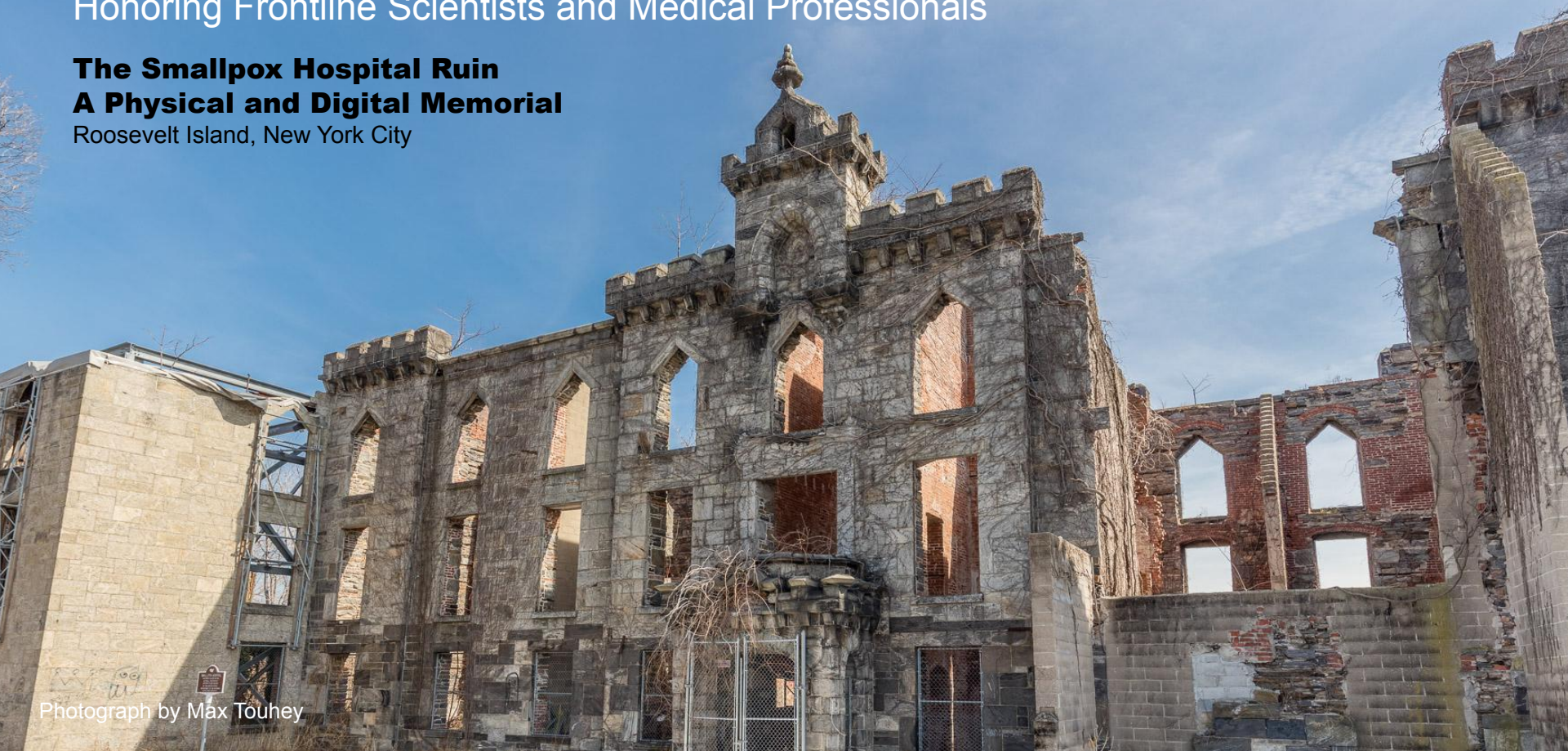
A Public Health Memorial

Honoring Frontline Scientists and Medical Professionals

The Smallpox Hospital Ruin

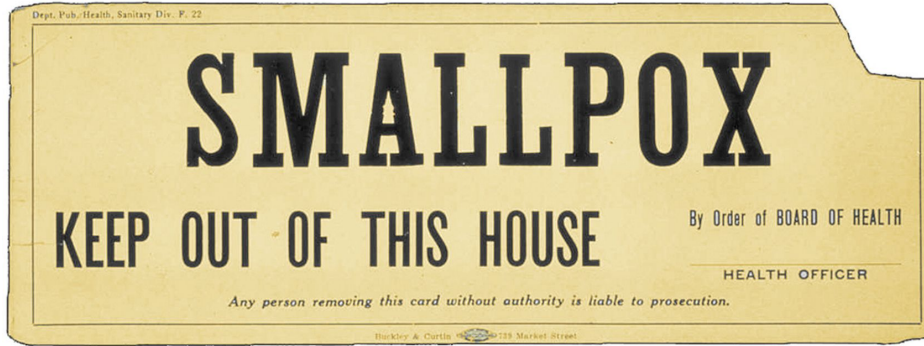
A Physical and Digital Memorial

Roosevelt Island, New York City



Photograph by Max Touhey

A New York Epidemic Raising Alarms



In the 1850s, “New York was an astonishingly unhealthy place. One of every 36 of its citizens died annually.... Thousand of malnourished immigrants arrived daily, cramming into tenements. Epidemics of infectious disease swept through the city with lethal efficiency. **No epidemics raised more alarm than those of smallpox.** The disease killed a quarter of its victims, leaving many of the survivors pockmarked and blind.”

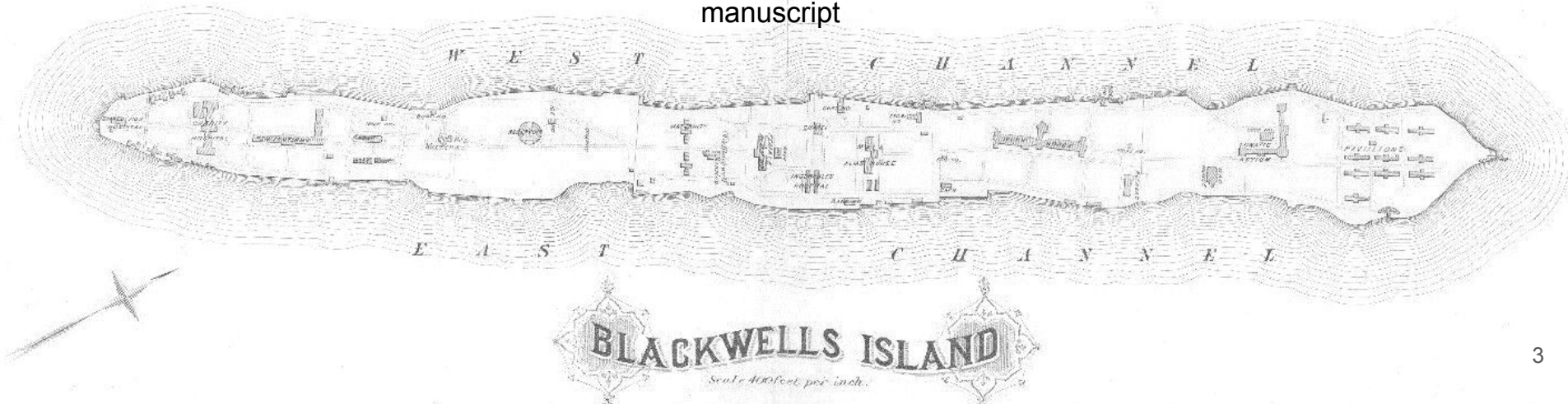
- *The New York Times*, 2003

Blackwell Island

An Outpost for the Disenfranchised

In the 1800s, the City of New York purchased Blackwell Island as a site for prisons and hospitals. The basic impulse that drove the development of the island throughout the nineteenth century capitalized on the island's isolation to keep certain classes of people—“our standing army of paupers, criminals, and sick poor,” the reformer Jacob Riis called them in the 1890s—nearby, but distinctly apart.

-Katharine Greider, *Persistence of a Dream*
manuscript



A Smallpox Hospital

To Fight A Devastating Disease



Construction

In 1854, New York began construction on the [first major U.S. hospital dedicated to the care of victims of smallpox](#). Its architect was James Renwick, Jr. Construction was completed by prison labor and lasted two years.

Notable Renwick Buildings

Renwick, a native of New York City, is considered one of America's most influential architects. [He is well known for his design of St. Patrick's Cathedral](#) in New York City as well as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.

Renewed Life

Training New York's Frontlines



For almost 20 years, the hospital served victims of smallpox. In 1875 ownership changed hands and it became the Riverside Hospital. Roughly ten years later it would be the Nurses of the Maternity and Charity Hospital Training School. [The building served as a nursing school for 60 years until the 1950s.](#)

A Singular ‘Landmark Ruin’

Key Dates

Landmark Designations
1972 Federal Landmark
1976 New York City Landmark
1980 New York State Landmark

1828	1857	1886	1956	1973	2018
<div>Blackwell Island</div> <div>The City of New York purchases Blackwell Island as a site for prisons and hospitals.</div>	<div>Smallpox Hospital Opens</div> <div>Smallpox spreads and the City of New York constructs hospital; costs total \$38,000.</div>	<div>Converted to a Nursing School</div> <div>School is called Home for the Nurses of the Maternity and Charity Hospital Training School.</div>	<div>Structure Abandoned</div> <div>Building has been vacant for over seventy years, only its historic shell remains.</div>	<div>New York State Assumes Island Management</div> <div>Urban Development Corporation begins 100-years- term of island operations and maintenance.</div>	<div>Friends of the Ruin Established</div> <div>Friends of the Ruin, a non profit, is established to advocate and raise funds for the Ruin.</div>

The Smallpox Hospital Ruin



Photograph by Max Touhey

A Fitting Memorial Site

Location

The Ruin sits on Roosevelt Island, south of Cornell Tech and immediately north of Four Freedoms Park. It is within the shadow of the [United Nations and World Health Organization](#).

Building History

Designed by renowned architect James Renwick, Jr., the building once served as a hospital for a devastating pandemic and as a nursing school for the frontlines. [It is hard to imagine a more fitting site to memorialize scientific advances and the frontline workers fighting viral and infectious disease.](#)

A 'Landmark Ruin'

The gothic structure is our country's only landmark ruin. It is registered as a [federal, state and city landmark](#).

Accessibility

The Ruin is [easily accessible from Manhattan and Queens](#), transportation options include tram, subway, ferry, bus, and car.

A Garden Among Ruins

Memorial Design
Competition



Digital rendering by Synoësis



A Place for Reflection

Memorial Design

Today, the interior of the Ruin has no roof or floor slabs. Sunlit, open interiors allow for a sensitive landscape, art, or architectural intervention to honor our scientist, heroes and those we have lost. Once completed, the memorial will be free and open to the public year-round.

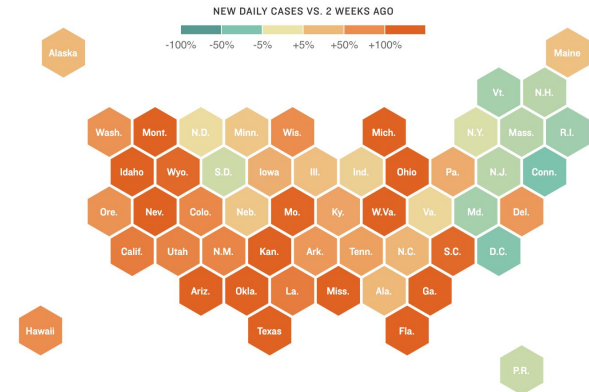
Digital Engagement

Educational Resource and Online Memorial

The online resources, targeted to grades K-12, will focus on advances around infectious disease and epidemics including COVID-19, smallpox, polio, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and SARS and detail advances that have been made in the scientific and medical field across time, memorializing professionals.

Lesson plans, available in both English and Spanish, will analyze how epidemics have disproportionately affected low-income communities and neighborhoods of color.

The resource will focus on preventative actions, speaking to national and international response. Students will be engaged with written, video, and audio materials through deep observation, primary source learning, and persuasive writing.



Timeline A Phased Approach

TO DATE

- Received over \$1.2 M through REDC, public & private support
- Historic preservation team [completing stabilization drawings](#) to embark on memorial design competition
- [Partnered with local NYC school](#) to teach historic preservation class
- Developed [TheRuin.org](#)

PHASE 1

- [Continue capital fundraising](#) toward \$43.2M goal
- [Develop educational materials](#) in partnership with Cornell/Tech, the World Health Organization
- [Complete first phase](#) of construction

PHASE 2

- [Maintain partnerships](#) with NYC Health + Hospital, the Department of Education, Four Freedoms Park Conservancy
- [Complete second phase](#) of construction
- [Launch beta site](#) for digital memorial/ education site

PHASE 3

- [Complete third phase](#) of construction and open to the public
- Final [educational resource](#) is launched
- Develop rich [on-site programming](#) as well as readily-available, Common Core materials



Photograph by Max Touhey

Thank you

Contact Information



Mission Founded in 2018, the mission of Friends of the Ruin is [to excite interest](#) in the cultural value of New York City's historic Smallpox Hospital; [to engage the public](#) in dialogue about its potential for adaptive reuse as open space; and [to raise essential funds](#) to complete a restoration.

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