

The High Line

Introduction

High Line Overview

On this stop, you will hear about the origins of the elevated freight rails, their decline and the birth of the High Line.

The Whitney Museum

Slated to open in 2015, the construction you see on the west side of the High Line is the future location of the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Whitney is dedicated the collection and display of 20th century and contemporary American Art. It's new location will be 9 floors and 200,000 sq. ft of floor space, including 50,000 sq. ft of exhibit space, a 170 seat theater, a restaurant, retail space and much more. The building was designed by Renzo Piano. The finished product is on the right. This was also the location for Fort Gansevoort, a defensive structure built in preparation for the War of 1812 as well as the customs building where Herman Melville once worked. Visit the [Whitney Museum website](#) for more information on the museum.

The Standard Hotel

As you are walking up the stairs to the High Line, you can't help but notice the large concrete hotel directly in front of you. The high-end hotel boasts 338 rooms, all with stunning views of the city and the beautiful park below. If you want to satisfy the voyeuristic side, then look closely inside some of the open windows. The Standard Hotel was a topic of controversy when it first opened when word got out that the hotel might be encouraging it's curvy employees and guests to put on peep shows in it's ceiling high windows. To read about it, check out this [New York Magazine article](#).

Pier 54

Directions: Now cross to the other side of the High Line and look out at the view from West 13th Street out to the Hudson River, where you should see the cast iron shell of what was once Pier 54's gateway.

Over a century ago, Pier 54 was a part of the Chelsea piers. Imagine the great trans-Atlantic passenger ships docked here in southern Manhattan on the Hudson. Pier 54 belonged to the Cunard Line and it's from this pier in 1915 that the RMS Lusitania disembarked before being sunk by a German U boat, precipitating U.S. entry into WW1. When the RMS Carpathia rescued the survivors of the Titanic in 1912 they brought them here to Pier 54, but only after they had made a stop at Pier 59 to drop off the Titanic's lifeboats.

Chelsea Market

Directions: Continue north on the Highline past a few benches to your right and to a playful water arrangement on your left until you reach the intersection of West 15th Street. You are walking through the Diller-Von Furstenberg Sundeck, which contains grasses, perennials and shrubs, including several wetland species.

Southern Spur

Directions: Now walk underneath the main Nabisco building and look to your left.

The "spurs" of the High Line are curved tracks that veer off of the main track. The Southern Spur connected the tracks with the Nabisco Warehouse and the rail cars could go right into the building. You can still see "NBC" written on the Southern Spur, which stood for National Biscuit Company (aka Nabisco.)

Northern Spur and Merchant's Refrigeration Company

Directions: Once you come out from underneath, you shall have reached West 16th Street. Stand on the left side of the High Line.

The railroad tracks that make up the High Line led directly inside this building, which opened in 1918. At that time, merchants and businesses did not have personal refrigeration systems. Instead, they rented out space in building such as this one to keep things cold or frozen. This is also known as the Northern Spur, designed to evoke the wild landscape that once was common on the High Line.

10th Avenue Overlook and West Side Cowboys

Directions: Continue north along the High Line until your reach a seating area overlooking 10th Avenue.

This seating area allows for a rare view of a busy avenue. Pedestrians can sit and rest while looking out at the madness of 10th Avenue. No matter how bad the traffic looks while you sit there; remember that it doesn't even come close to being as bad as it once was! 10th Avenue in the late 19th century was known as "Avenue Death." The streets were so clogged with wagons and pushcarts, not to mention freight trains being hauled down the tracks, that pedestrians didn't stand much of a chance. Hundreds of people were killed on this avenue between 1880 and 1920. The danger and congestion of 10th and 11th Avenues were a key factor in the decision to elevate the railroad tracks.

Chelsea Piers

Directions: As you walk back up to the High Line from the overlook, you should notice a grove of 3 flower maple trees known as the 10th Ave Square. Look south in the distance and you can see the Statue of Liberty. Continue north until you reach West 17th Street and look out toward the Hudson River on your left.

It is hard to picture what the Chelsea Piers used to look like while gazing at the modern complex that it is today. But the piers on the west side of Manhattan used to accommodate massive ocean liners from lines such as the Cunard and White Star lines. Though Pier 59 today is the location of the Chelsea Brewing Company, it was once the intended destination for an eagerly anticipated arrival in New York: the Titanic. After the tragic sinking of the ship, survivors were brought to New York on the R.M.S. Carpathia. While the Carpathia unloaded the survivors further down at Pier 54, the ship first made a brief stop at Pier 59 to unload the lifeboats from the Titanic. They then continued back to Pier 54, where thousands of grief-stricken people awaited the survivors. The white building that looks strangely like an iceberg is the IAC Building, designed by Frank Gehry in 2007. IAC is the parent company that owns Newsweek and Match.com.

Roxy Nightclub Location

Directions: Now continue north until you reach West 18th Street and look to the low-lying building on your left side.

The Roxy Nightclub opened as a roller disco in 1978 and was described as "the Studio 54 of roller rinks." In the 1980's the club became a venue for hip-hop music and sponsored breakdancing competitions. The Roxy continued to change with each decade and hosted one of the city's largest weekly gay dance nights in the 1990's, called "Roxy Saturday." Artists that graced the Roxy during this time period included Cher, Madonna, Bette Midler and Cyndi Lauper. Sadly, this legendary venue closed its doors for the very last time in 2007.

The Kitchen

Directions: Continue north again through a series of narrow passageways until you get to West 19th Street. However, along the way, see if you can line the Empire State Building up with a tower at the Theological Seminary. You are now walking through an area known as the Chelsea Grasslands, an area with a mix of colorful meadow grasses and perennials, all chosen to add color and texture throughout the year.

The Kitchen, 512 West 19th Street, the first building on your left on the south side of the street, is a non-profit art and performance space. The organization began in 1971 and takes its name from its original location: the kitchen of the Mercer Arts Center, where video artists showed their work. Though the organization was originally established to display the work of video artists, it expanded to include all kinds of art and performance. They focus primarily on local and emerging artists whose work is experimental in nature. Alumni of The Kitchen include Phillip Glass and Brian Eno, and The Beastie Boys gave an early performance there in 1983. When the organization moved to its current location in 1986 it was considered a bold and slightly odd choice, given that the neighborhood at the time was primarily auto repair shops. The New York Times said of the move, "This neighborhood will be the next SoHo." (Prophetic, NY Times!)

General Theological Seminary

Directions: Continue till you reach West 20th Street and look out to the large red complex to your right.

This entire neighborhood was once a large family estate called "Chelsea." The estate was named by its original owner, Maj. Thomas Clark. Major Clark was a British veteran of the French and Indian War, and he named his estate after a London hospital that served war veterans. His estate was passed down through the family and eventually came into the possession of his grandson, Clement Clark Moore. When the Commissioners Plan of 1811 was laid out Clark Moore was extremely opposed to it. The plan called for 9th Avenue to cut directly through his estate. Eventually he realized that he couldn't fight the growing city and he sold off his land in lots to moneyed New Yorkers. He set aside his apple orchard, however. This was donated to the Episcopal diocese so that a seminary could be built there. The Neo Gothic structure was built in 1927. It is still standing and takes up most of 20th and 21st streets in between 9th and 10th Avenues. Clement Clark Moore's legacy isn't limited to the seminary, however. He composed the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" for his children. Today it is known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas."

Manhattan Project Testing

These warehouses off to the left of the High Line on West 20th Street held several tons of uranium during the 1940s. This was done as a part of the Manhattan Project, which was the name given to the research and development project that created the first atomic bomb.

Church of the Guardian Angel

Directions: Continue north until you reach West 21st Street and look to the church on your right side.

This seems like an odd spot for a church. The Church of the Guardian Angels was built specifically in conjunction with the elevated railroad. The congregation had been meeting at a church located further uptown, directly in the path of the coming rail lines, so they were forced to demolish their building and relocate. The new church was built in 1930, right up against the new High Line. Sunday mass was often accompanied by the rattling of trains going by.

The Dia Foundation

Directions: Now continue north one block to West 23rd Street, where you will reach a futuristic looking steel and glass apartment building adjacent to the High Line called HL-23, designed by Neil Denari. The creating of the High Line Park has been the catalyst for the construction of many new apartment buildings with multi-million dollar units.

Today, West 22nd Street is in the heart of the Chelsea art gallery district. When the renowned Dia Foundation opened a four-story converted warehouse in 1987 called Dia: Chelsea, it was just the beginning. At its height, Dia: Chelsea had 60,000 visitors per year. It closed for renovations in February 2004, but the repairs needed for the building were so vast that the organization sold the building for \$38.55 million in February 2007. The Dia Foundation considered opening a museum at the entrance to the High Line, but in 2009 they announced that they would be back on W 22nd Street. The new Dia will have 15,670 square feet of gallery space and 3625 square feet of rooftop space.

London Terrace Apartments

Directions: Now continue north one block to West 23rd Street, where you will reach a futuristic looking steel and glass apartment building adjacent to the High Line called HL-23, designed by Neil Denari. The creating of the High Line Park has been the catalyst for the construction of many new apartment buildings with multi-million dollar units.

This massive apartment complex to your right on the other side of 10th Avenue was once the largest in the world. Construction began in 1929 on this complex, which includes about 1700 apartments and an Olympic-sized swimming pool. The project was headed by Henry Mandel, and he selected the location for its proximity to Midtown Manhattan. He wanted to create modestly priced housing for white collar workers. He met resistance, however, in the form of Tillie Hart. Tillie was living in a subleased house that she insisted she had the right to be in until May of 1930. The underlying lease for the house has expired, so Mandel has legal rights to the property. Still, Tillie Hart refused to budge. The construction advanced and all of the houses around hers were demolished. Tillie held firm. She barricaded herself inside and fended off intruders by throwing bricks and stones at them. In October of 1929 the police entered her house and moved all of her possessions to the sidewalk out front. She slept inside on the bare

floor. The next day she gave in and moved out. Her house was demolished and the cornerstone for the London Terrace Apartments was laid. Tillie Hart maybe got a moment of satisfaction, however, when Henry Mandel, the man who had torn down her house, ended up ruined by his building project. The building, which had cost \$25,000,000 to build, fell into default by 1933. Mandel declared personal bankruptcy with debts of \$14,000,000 (about \$220 million adjusted for today's inflation.)

Cass Gilbert Building

On the north side of W 25th St is a somewhat nondescript building that was built for the RC Williams Wholesale Grocery Company. RC Williams had started off as a small family store on Maiden Lane in 1809, but by the time this building was constructed in 1927-28 they were prosperous enough to employ one of America's top architects: Cass Gilbert. People who are familiar with Gilbert's other work, such as the Woolworth Building, the US Supreme Court in Washington DC or the Alexander Hamilton Custom House, are surprised when they see this plain building. It has none of the ornamentation of Gilbert's better known works. This was entirely on purpose- simplicity was the goal here. Gilbert said, "There is something very fine about a great, grey mass of building. All one color, all one tone, yet modified by the sunlight or shadow to pearly grey of wonderful delicacy." That's a good enough explanation for me!

Starrett Lehigh Building

Directions: Now walk north to West 26th Street and look left (west) to the end of the block to 11th Avenue.

This block-long building was a warehouse and freight terminal that opened in 1932. Trains could be driven directly into a space on the ground floor of the building. This massive structure was a joint venture of Starrett real-estate ventures and the Lehigh Valley Railroad, and the building has 26 million cubic feet of space. Its lines and rounded edges make it a relatively graceful-looking building, particularly for a warehouse. It is beauty meets function. The lot that it is built on was also the site of the former Lehigh Valley Railroad freight terminal. The building hit hard times during the Great Depression. Starrett was bought out, and the Lehigh Valley Railroad held on until 1944, when they too disassociated themselves from the building. The rail tracks were removed in 1966, and the Helmsley real estate concern bought the building in 1998. Ownership has changed hands a few more times, but current tenants of the building include Martha Stewart Omnimedia and Tommy Hilfiger USA.

U.S. Mail Distribution Center

This is where most of New York's mail is processed. In 2001 this center had a serious scare when it processed mail that had been laced with anthrax, causing a panic in New York. Though the building is a little worse for wear on the outside, the rooftop has had quite a makeover and is

one of the largest green rooftops in New York City. The Distribution Center sits where the Hudson Railroad Depot used to be. The Hudson Railroad controlled the lines that went down the west side of Manhattan, and the west side tracks used to be US Mail Distribution Center New York used for both passenger and freight trains. When Cornelius Vanderbilt bought all of the rail lines in New York, including the Hudson, the west side tracks were designated as "freight only." This was because he wanted all passenger lines to go through the new terminal at 42nd St: Grand Central Depot. Before this switch, however, the Hudson Railroad Depot at 30th Street had a very famous visitor. On February 15, 1861 Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln disembarked at the Hudson Depot for his first visit to New York City as the President of the United States. He was greeted by thousands of well wishers and cheering crowds. Four years later, on April 25, 1865, mourners accompanied Lincoln's body, which has lain in state at City Hall the day before, to the 30th Street Depot for the beginning of a cross-country trip that would bring Lincoln back to his hometown of Springfield, IL.

New Section Overview (Walk and Listen)

You are now entering the newest section of the High Line, which opened officially in 2014. You will still see a fair amount of construction, as the High Line itself has massively changed the area.

Continue walking until you come to a split in the path. If you go to the right, you will be able to walk the Spur. Unlike the spurs further south on the High Line, this one is opened to the public and meant to be walked on. Feel free to pause and go explore the spur. It offers art installations and beautiful views.

When you are ready you can circle back to the main High Line path. You will come to the entrance to the Hudson Yards on your right. Stop and press play.

Hudson Yards Development

The Hudson Yards is the largest private development in New York City since Rockefeller Center was built in the 1930s.

The Hudson Yards boasts that it is Tomorrows City Today, largely due to the fact that it is a "smart city" that uses data gathered to monitor and manage everything from air quality and energy savings to waste management.

The site that these building now occupy has been intended for other projects over the years-most notably for the Westside Stadium when New York City was making a bid for the 2012 Summer Olympics.

What you can see today is considered phase 1- 8 structures and a public green space. The buildings are a mix of commercial and residential, and also includes a mall, a hotel, and a cultural center, which is named The Shed.

The Shed is multipurpose and dedicated to bringing arts in all mediums to the Hudson Yards. The building itself has an extendable outer shell, so it can double the footprint of the building if need be.

The Shops at Hudson Yards includes a number of high-end stores, as well as Snark Park, a constantly changing exhibition space.

Phase 2 will include more office and residential buildings, as well as a school. This is a great area to stroll around and do some shopping or some eating. There are plenty of food options here, including Mercato- a food hall dedicated to Spanish cuisine.

One of the most striking features of the Hudson yards is the Vessel- an interactive art installation designed by Thomas Heatherwick. It features over 1 mile of interlocking staircases, with 2500 steps. The structure rises 16 stories into the sky, and there are 80 different stair landings to rest on. The idea is for people to climb and explore and take in as many unique views as possible. Because of the nature of the structure, you do need a ticket to climb, but they are available at kiosks in the 20 Hudson Yards Building. The Vessel is actually not a permanent name- owners have asked the public to name it, and there is a website devoted to it.

We will provide directions back to the Hudson Yards at the end of the tour if you would like to explore this area. For now, let's continue along the High Line.

Continue walking along the High Line. You will be following it as it starts its last broad curve. You will come to the Pershing Square Beams, an interactive play installation for children, as well as numerous rotating art installations. Follow the path as it curves until you are able to see the Hudson Yards straight on.

Walk and Listen

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West Side Train Yards

From here, you can see the West Side Yard, a train yard that gives this area its name. You can look down from the High Line and see trains sitting on the tracks. A part of the Hudson Yards development is actually built right out over the top of the train yards.

This area's importance to the New York city railroads began a long time ago when trains were not allowed south of 32nd street and the Hudson River Railroad Depot was in this area. Later, as the railroads grew, NY Central and Penn Central railroads used this area as a freight terminal.

The property was put up for sale when Penn Central declared bankruptcy in the 1970s, and it was purchased by the state of New York. The northern part of the property became the Javits convention center, which you can see if you look to your left from here, and the rest became the West Side Yards.

The West Side Yards greatly improved railroad capacity for commuters. Previously, trains that brought passengers in from Long Island had to turn around and go back to Long Island empty of passengers to be stored through the day. The West Side Yards immediately increased capacity for the railroad out of Penn Station when it was completed in 1987.

The eastern part of the rail yard was rezoned for commercial and residential and the air rights above it were acquired in order to build the Hudson Yards.

Now continue walking as the High Line curves to the end.

The End

When you exit, you will be at 34th street, west of 11th Ave. To get to the subway or back to Hudson Yards, you will walk east down 34th. Be aware that the block right off the high line is a Mega Bus pickup point, so it can be extremely crowded right as you get off.

You will come to the 7 train after you cross over 11th Ave (closest entrance). From here, you can also explore the Hudson Yards before you go.

That's the end of our tour, thank you for joining me! I hope you will consider checking out one of our other audio tours or signing up for one of our pay what you wish group walking tours. Visit www.freetoursbyfoot.com for more details.

See you next time!