

American Veterinary Medical History Society

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Clifton (Passaic), New Jersey

U.S. Animal Quarantine Station

NRHP Ref #81000397

Added October 9, 1981



Clifton Avenue, Clifton, New Jersey

Located 10 miles west of New York City, the U. S. Animal Quarantine Station is a large 26-acre complex of buildings constructed between 1900 and 1907 in a uniform grid pattern by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Opened in 1903, its purpose was to provide facilities to confine animals, mostly sheep and cattle, entering this country in order to prevent the importation of infectious and foreign animal diseases.

According to Fagan, “Clifton was home to the "Ellis Island for animals" from 1900 to 1979.

Muskoxen, giraffes, antelope, camels, circus animals, swine, horses, and lots of cattle and sheep were housed for observation and testing at this United States Animal Quarantine Station, the primary and largest such facility on the East Coast serving the Port of New York.

Over the years the station lost its usefulness, and the federal government began to sell off the property. In 1953, the city bought the tract that now houses Clifton High School.

In 1962, Clifton obtained the deed to the property. Seventeen years later in 1979 it was abandoned as a quarantine station. A new Animal Import Center was opened at Rock Tavern, New York near New York Stewart International Airport west of Newburgh, New York.

Some of the barns have been converted to usable community space, such as the Clifton Arts Center, fire headquarters, and Senior Center. “There are about 15 buildings with conditions ranging from poor to dire, officials said.”

What remains of the former "Ellis Island for animals" are 27 structures that include red-brick cattle barns, a clapboard house and a pump house.

On October 9, 1981, the Station was added to the US National Park Service’s National Registry of Historic Places (NRHP Ref #81000397) for its significance in agriculture.

In 1999, in an attempt to save and repurpose some of the deteriorating original buildings, a local preservation group established the Clifton Arts Center in two of the barns joined by a modern central entrance atrium. The plan was to provide a community gathering place to host art exhibits, special events, programs, and activities. The Arts Center and Sculpture Park celebrated its 25th anniversary in November and December 2024. The Center is open several days a week and visitors can also enjoy the 26-acre outdoor sculpture park surrounding the site.

MORE INFORMATION:

Fagan, Matt. Clifton group forms to save quarantine barns once known as “Ellis Island for Animals.” Northjersey.com. March 2, 2019; updated March 3, 2019.

Includes a 22 photographic slide show of buildings in the complex.

<https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/passaic/clifton/2019/03/02/clifton-nj-group-forms-to-preserve-historic-animal-quarantine-barns/2951861002/>

Fagan, Matt. Clifton to preserve Barn S2 of historic U.S. Animal Quarantine Station. Northjersey.com, May 10, 2022. <https://www.northjersey.com/story/news/passaic/clifton/2022/05/10/clifton-nj-barn-s-2-us-animal-quarantine-station-preserved/9647927002/>

<https://www.njherald.com/embed/video/2973745002/>

View a 0.58 minute color video of buildings in the complex by Mitsu Yasakawa.

Houck, U.G. *The Bureau of Animal Industry of the United States Department of Agriculture: Its Establishment, Achievements and Current Activities*. Washington, DC: The Author, 1924. HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065260997>

Kristen. This New Jersey town was once the Ellis Island for animals and you can still see some of the remnants. Only in New Jersey, June 8, 2019. <https://www.onlyinyourstate.com/trip-ideas/new-jersey/ellis-island-animals-nj>

McFarland, Jane. APHIS in action: Preserving APHIS history: A community's agricultural ancestry. USDA, APHIS, 2024. <https://www.aphis.usda.gov/news/agency-announcements/aphis-action-preserving-aphis-history-communitys-agricultural-ancestry>
<https://www.aphis.usda.gov/print/pdf/node/7341>

Nomination form. National Register of Historic Places. August 28, 1981.
<https://npgallery.nps.gov/GetAsset/22fcbcf8-c869-462b-845b-a7e3445c5394>

Prial, Frank J. US Animal Center to move from Clifton. *New York Times*. 1975 Aug 9, p. 49.

Vintage Home Films Vault. U.S. Animal Quarantine Station, Clifton, New Jersey, 1947-1970. Jan Neuteboom Productions, June 14, 2023. 3:37 minute video. YouTube,
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IL_lfwGvZX0

Updated January 8, 2025