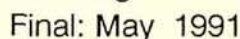


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The Buried History of City Hall Park:

The Initial Archaeological Identification, Definition and Documentation of Well-Preserved 18th. Century Deposits and the Possible Structural Remains of N.Y.C.'s First Almshouse

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PREFACE: SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This report documents the discovery and definition in City Hall Park of the previously undocumented structural remains of a colonial building (basement, foundation wall, and preserved, exterior living surface), in association with a well-preserved sequence of naturally stratified, high integrity, historic colonial deposits, spanning a one hundred year sequence between the first quarter of the 18th century through the first quarter of the 19th century (See Figure 1). The 18th century structural remains and colonial deposits were found undisturbed, buried and sealed below the modern asphalt walkway of City Hall Park, approximately midway between City Hall and the Tweed Court House (See Figure 3).

In addition to the identification of the original 18th century surface 18 inches below the modern asphalt pavement, the controlled excavation identified the presence of stone foundation remains and post-occupation destruction debris of an early 18th century (post-1720) structure. Because of the correlation of its location with historic map depictions, and the dated artifact associations, these well-preserved remains may represent the pre-Revolutionary War era foundation wall of New York City's first Almshouse. The discovery of several functionally suggestive artifactual indicators found associated with the building remains, specifically 18th century bone button blanks and copper alloy straight pins, provides corroborative archaeological evidence for early archival references of institutional craft activity by the indigent inhabitants of the original 18th century Almshouse.

In total, the controlled test excavation identified twenty distinct natural stratigraphic deposits (contexts), lenses and features. Based on the recovered and dated artifacts and the stratigraphic relationship of these distinct layers, each context subdivision was then grouped into eleven distinct strata groups, which in turn represented four larger archaeological periods, each indicative of distinct time periods or episodes of initial development, occupation and destruction processes (See Table 1 and Table 4). The eleven strata groups (designated with Roman numerals I-XI), yielded a total of 1,643 colonial, 18th century, and 19th century artifacts, food remains and construction materials. In addition to 507 oyster shells which were distinguished by their large size (36% from a single mid-18th century refuse pit), the collection included 116 clam shells, 175 fragments of historic ceramics, 47 fragments of historic smoking pipe, 6 buttons and bone button blanks, 121 pieces of glass, 8 sherds of historic tile, 7 straight pins, 2 human bones, a lead "weight", and one 18th century door key (See Table 2 and Table 3).

As is documented below, this initial archaeological site testing investigation clearly demonstrated six major insights of relevance to the evaluation of the archaeological sensitivity of City Hall Park:

- 1) The original colonial surface lies buried and sealed, with only minimal intrusions from modern impacts, 18 inches below the most recent pavement surface of City Hall Park.

- 2) This buried colonial surface and the associated 18th century building remains were found overlaid and capped by several deposits of late 18th and 19th century historic fill, possibly deriving from deep basement construction associated with the ca. 1812 building of City Hall or the 1861-67 construction of the Tweed Courthouse.
- 3) Beneath this cap of late 18th and 19th century near-surface fill deposits, and beginning at 18 inches in depth, the excavation documented the presence of a well-preserved sequence of construction, occupation and destruction deposits and structural remains spanning from the first half through the last quarter of the 18th century (post-1720 to post-1780).
- 4) This sequence of construction, occupation and destruction deposits showed clear horizontal and vertical stratigraphic distinctions between the interior and exterior of the colonial building. To the south of the identified foundation wall, towards City Hall, the interior cellar hole was filled with mixed destruction debris to a depth of 4.5 feet, consisting of bricks and plaster, and artifacts derived from a broad time range, some associated in time and space with the occupation and use of the building, while others appear to have been deposited as secondary refuse during or shortly after its destruction. The area to the north of the foundation wall, on the building's exterior, was associated with the original 18th century living surface, and with historic features, including the builders' trench and a mid-18th century refuse pit, both of which cut into the original surface.
- 5) In addition to being deeply stratified and predominantly unmixed by later intrusions, these well-preserved 18th century deposits yielded a broad range of chronologically and culturally diagnostic artifacts of bone, metal, ceramic and glass, which were highly indicative of the economic and domestic activities of the colonial inhabitants.
- 6) Furthermore, three independent lines of evidence (archaeological, archival and cartographic) suggest that the excavated building may indeed be New York City's original colonial Almshouse. 1) The location of the excavated building corresponds with the general location of the original Almshouse indicated on 18th century historic maps. 2) The timeframe of the excavated building, which based on dated artifacts was built after 1720 and destroyed after 1780, corresponds with the documented occupation phase of the original Almshouse (1736-1797). And, 3) Artifacts were recovered that matched early historical accounts of craft activity conducted by the Almshouse's indigent inhabitants.

In sum, this well-preserved archaeological record not only augments the written historic record but also represents a sequence of archaeological deposits distinguished by a high level of stratigraphic integrity, preservation, and research potential for understanding the colonial history of New York City.