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Anatomy of an Almshouse Complex

Cover Page Footnote

We wish to thank all the participants in this excavation including co-field directors Arthur Bankoff, and Frederick Winter; laboratory directors Judith Guston and Diane Dallal; the assistant archaeologist, Margaret Tamulonis; and the hardworking field crew composed primarily of Brooklyn College students with a few interns and volunteers from the City Archaeology Program. We appreciate the diligent work of draftspersons Claudia Diamont and Jason Thompson. Our thanks go to photographer Carl Forster for his meticulous and thorough work taking photographs of the artifacts and making photographic reproductions of details from historical maps. We are grateful for the comments given by Paul Huey, Donald Plotts, and William McMillen. We appreciate the editorial suggestions by Mary Beaudry and Ann-Eliza Lewis. We thank Hunter Research, Inc., for allowing us to use the data from their composite maps of City Hall Park.

Anatomy of an Almshouse Complex

Sherene Baugher and Edward J. Lenik

The focus of this paper is to determine the age and function of a partial building foundation uncovered during archaeological testing in City Hall Park, New York City. The authors use evidence from historical maps, prints, and documents, as well as archaeological evidence, to determine the function of the building. The evidence suggests that the foundation is an outbuilding that was part of an 18th-century colonial almshouse complex. The foundation appears to be the remains of the almshouse kitchen.

Cet article vise à déterminer l'âge et la fonction d'une fondation partielle de bâtiment mise au jour durant une exploration archéologique effectuée au City Hall Park de New York. Les auteurs se servent de données provenant de cartes, de gravures et de documents historiques ainsi que de données archéologiques pour déterminer la fonction du bâtiment. Il semble, d'après les données, qu'il s'agit d'une dépendance qui faisait partie d'un asile colonial du XVIII^e siècle pour indigents. La fondation semble être le vestige de la cuisine de l'asile.

Introduction

While working-class and middle-class sites have been examined extensively by archaeologists, relatively few sites of the 18th- and early 19th-century poor have been studied. This article presents the results of archaeological excavations in City Hall Park, Manhattan, which unearthed material associated with New York City's first municipal almshouse complex, 1736–1797 (FIG. 1). Archaeologists have excavated 19th-century almshouse complexes such as the Magdalen Society Asylum for reforming prostitutes in Philadelphia (Clio Group, Inc. 1989; De Cunzo 1995; Weber 1988); the 1886 orphanage at the Schuyler Mansion in Albany, New York (Feister 1991); and the cemeteries of the Uxbridge and Hudson poor farms in Massachusetts (Bell 1990, 1993; Elia and Wesolowsky 1991). Only one other known almshouse of the colonial period, the 1696 almshouse in Albany, has been excavated (Huey 1987, 1991a; Peña 1990).

The purpose of this article is not to discuss the quality of life within a colonial almshouse but rather to address the basic premise of the City Hall Park excavation, which was conducted to determine the function and age of a partial building foundation uncovered during archaeological field testing. The main research questions were: 1) what could be determined about the architecture of the buried building; and 2) what was its relationship, if any, to the

almshouse complex? We believe that the problems encountered at this site are common in urban archaeology, that is, how to interpret the function of a structural ruin when the site is in an intensively developed urban setting and especially when the legal construction corridor of the project permits investigation of only a small portion of the feature.

The 18th-century artifact assemblage at the City Hall Park site was a domestic deposit composed primarily of food preparation and service vessels but also containing bottles, kitchen utensils, clay smoking pipes, buttons, and dietary remains. This article presents the documentary, architectural, and artifactual data to support our conclusion that the excavated structure was the kitchen building associated with New York City's first municipal almshouse.

Project History

In 1988, the New York City Department of General Services undertook preliminary design work for a utility corridor in City Hall Park, Manhattan (Block 122, Lot 1). The project area was located south of Chambers Street and east of Broadway between City Hall and Tweed Court House (FIG. 2). These two buildings, City Hall (1811) and Tweed Court House (1861), are designated New York City Landmarks (NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission 1966: 1; 1984: 2). In addition to the two

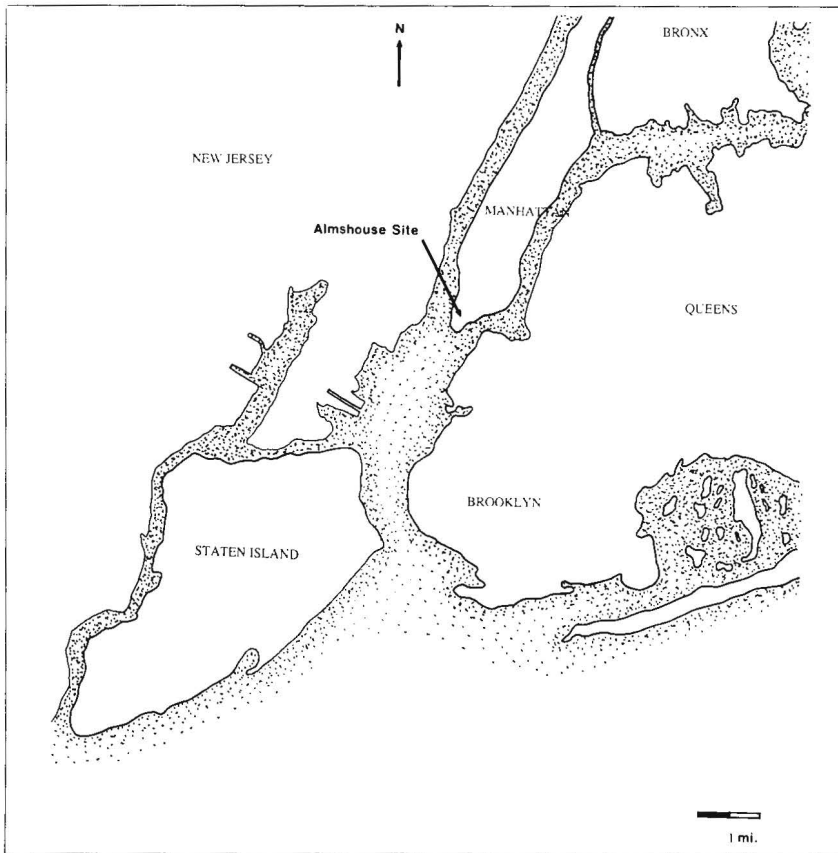


Figure 1. Map indicating the location within New York City of the City Hall Park archaeological site. (Drafted by Jason Thompson.)

extant buildings, there were at least eight other major structures on the northern portion of City Hall Park during the past 250 years (Baughner-Perlin et al. 1982: Appendices 1, 2, 11, and 15).

The City Archaeology Program identified the project site as having the potential to contain archaeological material; this information was sent to the Department of General Services. The agency contracted with a private consultant to undertake a documentary study. Because of minor disturbance to the site the consultants recommended field testing (Grossman and Associates, Inc. 1988: 12–14). In preliminary field testing the consultants uncovered a section of a brownstone wall that appeared to be part of an 18th-century building. Following the completion of the initial field testing, the Department of General Services asked the City Archaeology Program

and Brooklyn College to perform the mitigation fieldwork.

Fieldwork for this project was conducted for six weeks in 1989; this work was undertaken by the City Archaeology Program at the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission in conjunction with the Brooklyn College Summer Archaeological Field School. Laboratory work and report preparation were funded by a grant from the New York City Department of General Services to the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation and the work was done by the City Archaeology Program. This excavation did *not* require an environmental review and was carried out as a voluntary effort on the part of the three city agencies/institutions.

The excavation uncovered a total of 6,903 artifacts, including ceramics, glass, smoking pipes, and metal material. In addition, 4,514

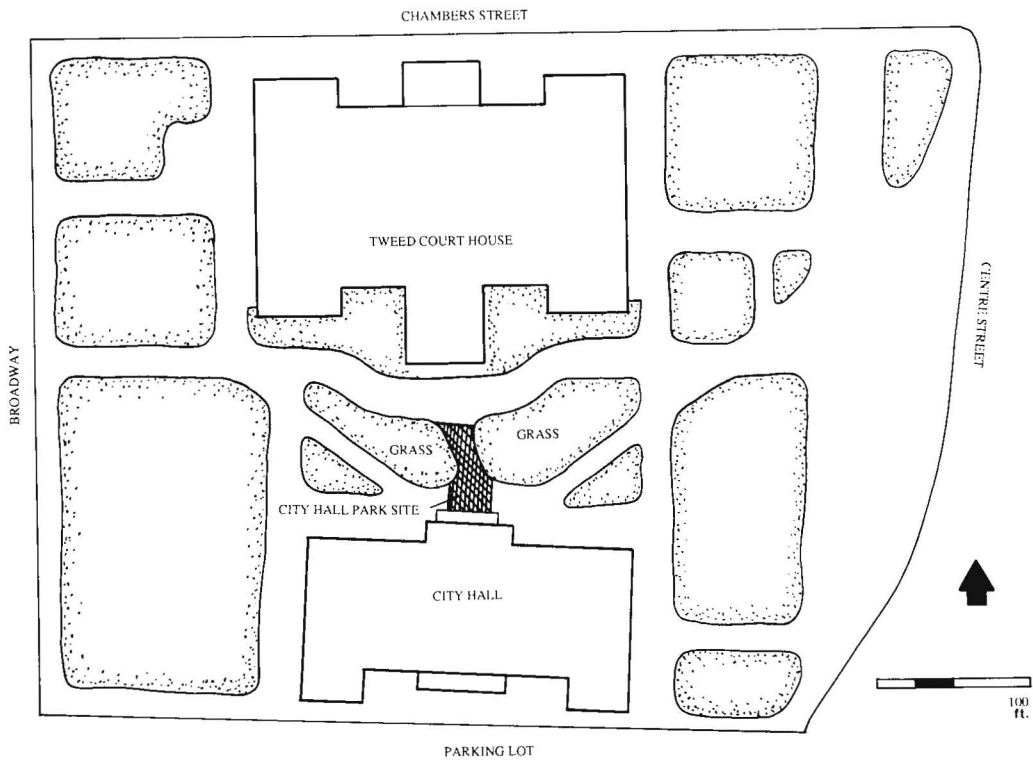


Figure 2. Map indicating the location of the City Hall Park archaeological site within the northern portion of City Hall Park. (Drafted by Jason Thompson.)

faunal remains were unearthed. The site contained material associated with a colonial structure as well as with the landscaping of City Hall Park in the late 19th and 20th centuries and with the construction of the rear steps to City Hall, ca. 1810 (Baugher et al. 1990). This article focuses only on the colonial component of the site. Historical maps, deeds, wills, municipal Common Council records, and other documents were evaluated to determine the function of the excavated colonial structure.¹

Documentary History of the Almshouse Lot, 1736–1797

In 1734, the New York City colonial government decided to build an almshouse/

workhouse; the building was erected in 1735 and opened in 1736 (New York City 1905, 4: 236, 240–241, 305). Since there was almost always a labor shortage in colonial America, only the most desperate were placed in institutions of this kind (Miller 1976: 306).

Historian Steven Ross (1988: 149) in an article on New York's almshouse notes that between 1729 and 1737 the City was in an economic depression and that "major outbreaks of measles in 1727 and smallpox in 1731 and 1732 added further to the numbers of the worthy poor." The growing number of poor in New York forced the city government to develop an institutional means of caring for them. In 1736, New York City's first municipal almshouse or workhouse opened its doors. The almshouse served both as a shelter for those poor who were sick, disabled, or elderly, and as a workhouse/house of corrections for people considered able to work, including "all disorderly persons, parents of Bastard Chil-

¹ Extensive documentary research for the northern portion of City Hall has been undertaken and is detailed in Baugher et al. 1990; Baugher-Perlin et al. 1982; Grossman and Associates, Inc. 1988; and Hunter Research, Inc. 1994.

dren, Beggars, Servants running away or otherwise misbehaving themselves, Trespassers, Rogues, Vagabonds" (New York City 1905, 4: 308–309).

The almshouse/workhouse was completed in March of 1736 and cost the city £202 to build in 1735 (New York City 1905, 4: 250–257). As early as the month after its opening, in April of 1736, additions were being made to the site complex. The number of poor who entered the almshouse increased, and within 10 years the government had enlarged the structure. From 1736 to 1790 additional structures serving the almshouse are known to have been constructed in the surrounding area:

- 1) a kitchen, oven, and wash house were built in April, 1736;
- 2) a stable was built in November, 1736;
- 3) an additional building was added to serve as a hospital in 1739;
- 4) the almshouse was enlarged in 1746 (£200 were allocated for this expansion);
- 5) two wooden cisterns were sunk in 1749;
- 6) a fenced burial place for deceased residents was established to the east of the almshouse in 1757;
- 7) an addition to the kitchen was made in 1768;
- 8) a separate small shed to be used as a washhouse was built and an additional cistern was dug, both in 1769;
- 9) a stable and storehouse were built in 1786;
- 10) a new well was sunk in the almshouse yard in 1790 (New York City 1905, 4: 260, 459; 5: 269; 6: 85–86; 7: 172, 173; 1917, 1: 550).

Map Evidence

In the 17th century, under Dutch rule, the site was part of the *Vlackte* or commons and contained open fields (Stokes 1928, 6: 518). In the Dongan Charter of 1686 the British set aside this site as public land (Stokes 1928, 6: 66). The first documented structure on the site was the 1736 almshouse. The Bradford map of 1730 (also known as the Lyne Survey) is the earliest map that depicts any structure on the northern portion of contemporary City Hall Park (FIG. 3). The only structure identified on the Bradford map is located along the east side of present-day Broadway near its intersection with Murray Street; this building, the Harris

house, is located well beyond the bounds of the almshouse site. This parcel (which bordered on the public lands) belonged to John Harris; most of the property was acquired by the City in 1746 and incorporated into the public lands (New York City 1905, 4: 483; 5: 176, 187–188).² *A Plan of the City and Environs of New York* (Grim's plan), depicting New York in 1742–1744 but drawn in 1813, is the first map to show the almshouse or any structure on this site (FIG. 4).³ On Grim's plan the almshouse is located near the site of present-day City Hall, the Harris house is to the west of the almshouse, and a small building is located to the east of the almshouse.

The Montresor plan, published in 1775 but depicting New York in 1766, identifies both main buildings and outbuildings in City Hall Park (FIG. 5). It is the major 18th-century map to provide detailed information on the almshouse site. In 1765, General Thomas Gage ordered Captain John Montresor to undertake the survey, which was made between December 16, 1765, and February 8, 1766 (Stokes 1915, 1: 339). The Montresor plan identifies the location of the almshouse, the 1757 soldiers barracks, the powder magazine, and the 1759 gaol. The map also depicts two large rectangular outbuildings north of the almshouse. These structures, between 25 ft (7.4 m) and 30 ft (8.8 m) in length, may be the 1736 kitchen and the 1739 hospital. The western outbuilding is in the same location as the excavated colonial structure. The length of this structure, approximately 25 ft (7.4 m), is similar to the north-south dimension of the building uncovered in the excavation, which is 20 ft (6 m) from outer wall to outer wall.

Two small outbuildings also are depicted on the map, one north of the almshouse orchards and close to the barracks, the other located near the southeast corner of the almshouse. The small building to the southeast (also depicted on the Grim plan) might be

² Some land remained within Harris family ownership until 1769 when the city acquired a final parcel of the property (New York County 1769: 398).

³ David Grim claimed he drew the map depicting the 1742–1744 layout of the plot from memory almost 70 years later when he was 76 years old (Stokes 1915, 1: 270). There are some similarities between the details of Grim's plan and of both the Montresor map and the Ratzen plan.

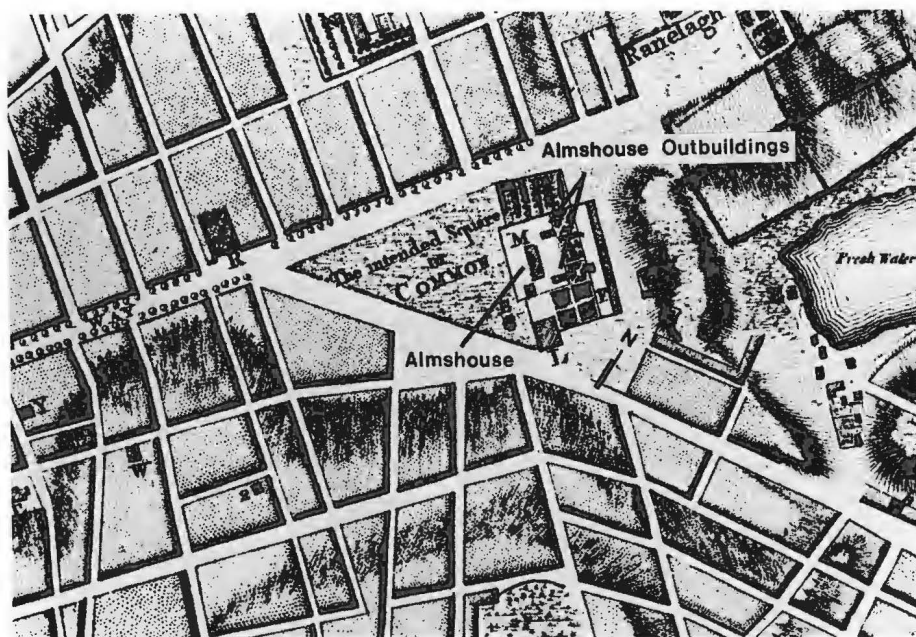


Figure 5. The site is noted on *A Plan of the City of New-York and Its Environs to Greenwich, on the North or Hudsons River, (Etc.)*, a map commonly known as the Montresor plan, by John Montresor, 1775, depicting 1766. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 40.)

the 1736 almshouse stable. Since the Commons with pasture was directly to the south of the almshouse, this site would have been a reasonable location for a barn or stable. It is possible that the structure to the north of the almshouse orchards is the 1736 wash house, or it might be a structure associated with the military barracks (the long building directly north of this small structure). The minutes of the Common Council do not discuss any other support structures for the almshouse during this period. Lastly, orchards are depicted to the north and west of the almshouse; four garden plots are shown to the east of the almshouse, and formal gardens are to the north of the two major almshouse outbuildings. The minutes of the Common Council (New York City 1905, 4: 324) note that as early as May, 1736, gardens were established for the almshouse.

In 1766, Lieutenant Bernard Ratzer, an assistant engineer to General Thomas Gage, compiled data for both the Ratzer map and Ratzen plan⁴ (Stokes 1915, 1: 341–343). Both the Ratzen plan (FIG. 6) and Ratzer map (FIG. 7) depict the almshouse, gaol, and barracks in the same location as shown on the 1766 Montresor plan. Both the Ratzen plan (1766–1767) and the

Ratzer map (1776) show orchards and gardens surrounding the almshouse complex. Both the Ratzen plan and Ratzer map also show an upside down L-shaped outbuilding to the northwest of the almshouse in almost the same location as the western outbuilding on the Montresor map. This structure may be the 1736 kitchen or the 1739 hospital; both buildings serviced the almshouse.

Identification of the colonial structure uncovered in the archaeological excavation is based on the evidence of three colonial maps; the Montresor map, the Ratzer map, and the Ratzen plan all show a large outbuilding in the same location as the foundation excavated in 1989. The question is whether this outbuilding was associated with the almshouse or with the military barracks. A clearly defined border or boundary line surrounding the almshouse and its outbuildings is shown on three maps: the Grim plan, the Montresor map, and the Ratzen plan. There is a consistency in the depiction of the two major outbuildings within the border

⁴ Bernard Ratzer produced both maps. The 1766–1767 plan, however, contained an incorrect spelling of his name as Ratzen. Stokes (1915, 1: 342) notes that the correct spelling was Ratzer.

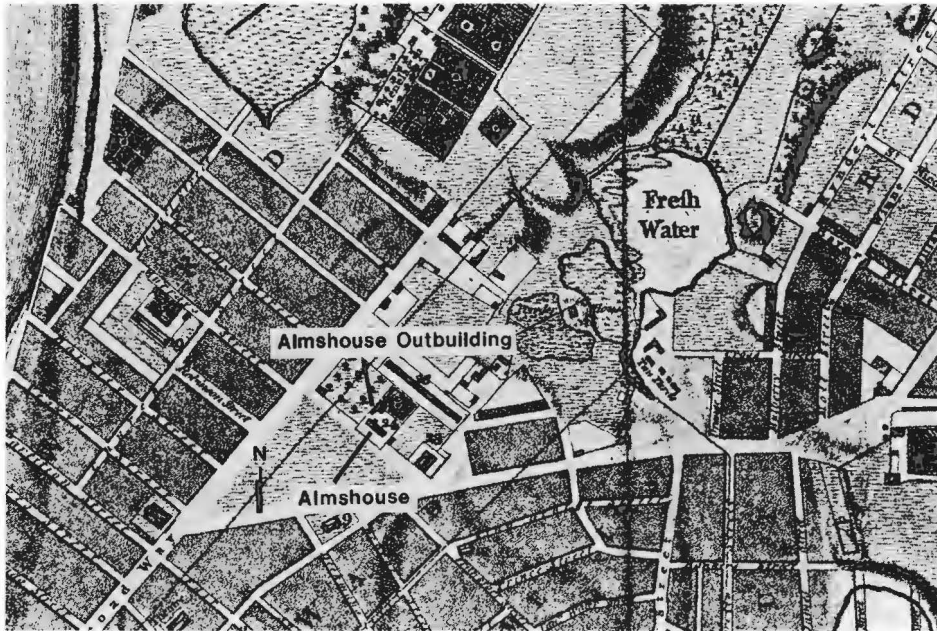


Figure 6. The site is noted on *A Plan of the City of New York*, commonly known as the Ratzten plan, by Bernard Ratzten (also spelled Ratzter), 1776, depicting 1766–1767. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 42.)

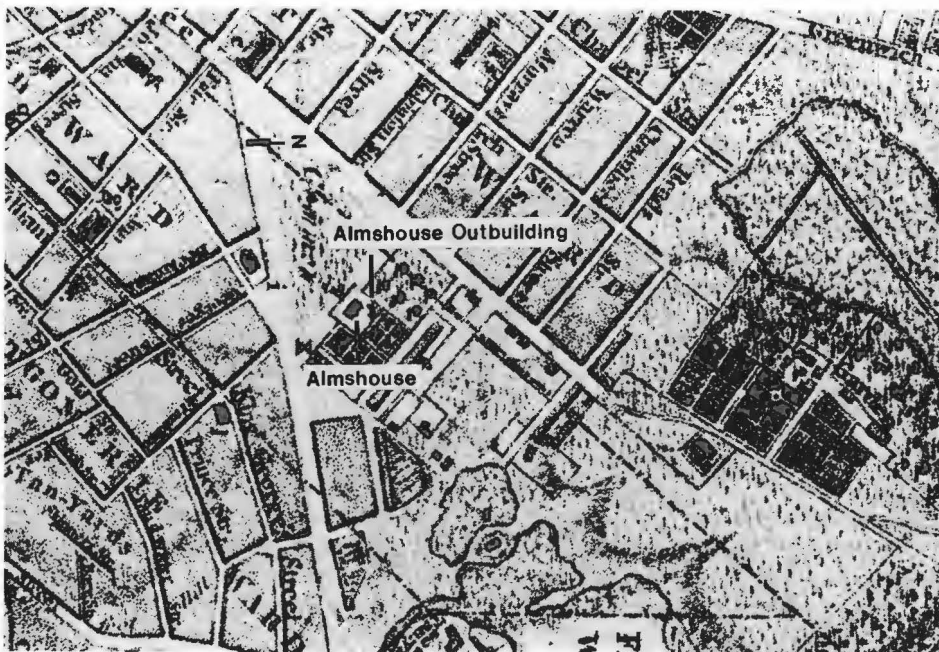


Figure 7. The site is noted on *Plan of the City of New York, In North America*, commonly known as the Ratzter map, by Bernard Ratzter, 1776. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 41.)

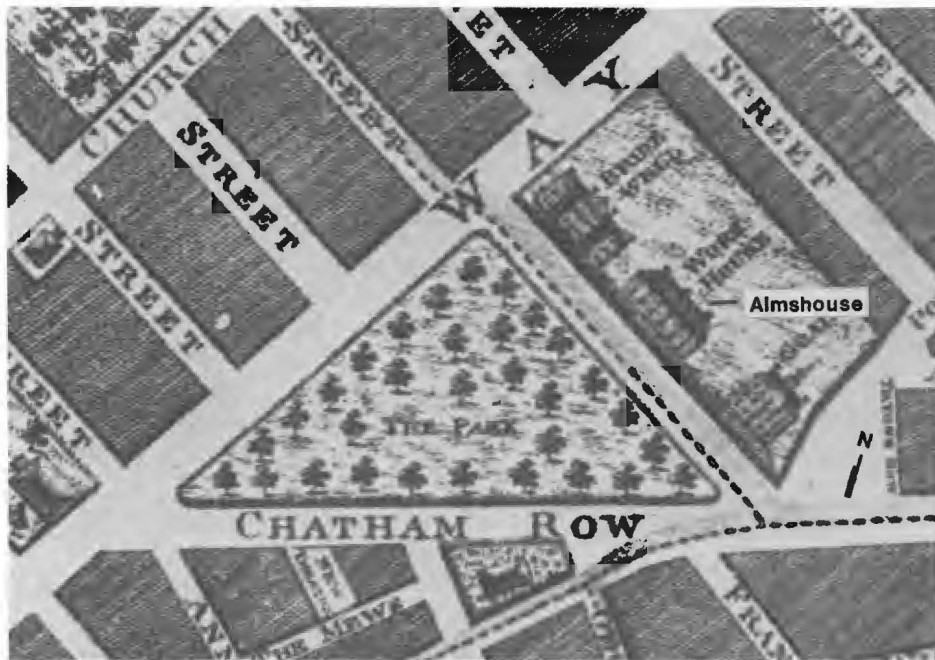


Figure 8. The site is noted on *A New and Accurate Plan of the City of New York in the State of New York in North America*, by B. Taylor, 1796. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 64.)

or boundary of the almshouse parcel. The minutes of the Common Council (New York City 1905, 4: 488) note the allocation of funds to build a fence for the almshouse in 1740. Archaeologist Paul Huey (1991b; personal communication, 1996) noted that colonial almshouse complexes in England and Holland were usually laid out in either a U shape with a central building flanked by two large outbuildings or in a rectangular shape with a main building and three support buildings. The New York City almshouse fits the description of the U-shaped plan. These two outbuildings were probably the kitchen and hospital since the other documented structures were minor buildings such as a wash house or stable. There is no indication on the maps that these two outbuildings were associated with the military barracks.

The 1796 *A New and Accurate Plan of the City of New York in the State of New York in North America* by B. Taylor is the last map that depicts the almshouse (FIG. 8). The map provides only a general location of the main structures on City Hall Park, that is, the almshouse, gaol, and bridewell (workhouse). The Upper

Barracks, demolished in 1790, is not shown on the map. The drawing of the almshouse on this map is a useful source of architectural information and is discussed later in this article.

In June, 1797, the government issued an order to take down the almshouse, and in August, 1797, the government attempted to salvage some material for reuse in a new structure to be built for the superintendent of the new potter's field burial ground at what is now Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village (New York City 1917, 2: 343, 374; Stokes 1928, 6: 337–338). In May, 1797, inmates of the almshouse were moved to the second almshouse, built on the site of the Upper Barracks and now the site of Tweed Court House.

It is interesting to note that after City Hall Park was chosen as the site for the new City Hall in 1800 there was a slow but steady relocation of the sick and poor to other locations outside the city. By 1816, all remaining poor were removed from City Hall Park to the new almshouse at the Bellevue Hospital complex north of the city (Stokes 1928, 6: 537).

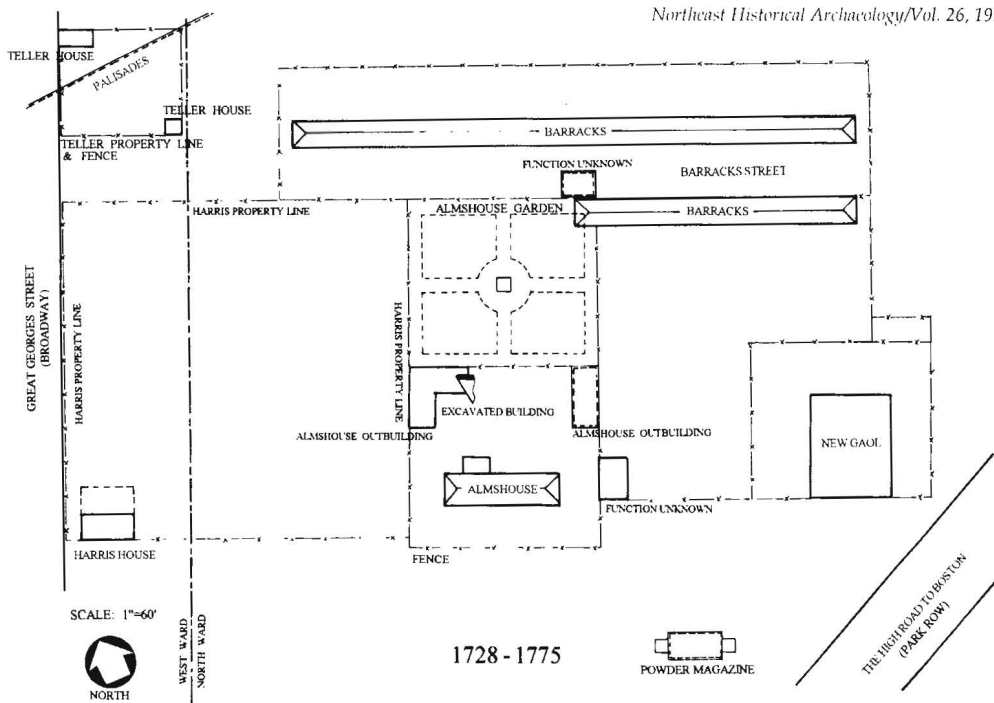


Figure 9. A Composite Map of the Northern Portion of City Hall Park Depicting 1728–1775. Hunter Research, Inc., produced the original map showing the location of all known structures including our excavated colonial foundation. In this version, redrafted by Claudia Diamont, the code numbers have been replaced with identification labels.

The Goerck/Mangin plan, issued in November, 1803, shows that the foundation of the new City Hall is located in the vicinity of the site of the first almshouse. The second almshouse, erected in 1797, is depicted on this map on the site of the former barracks. The second almshouse had been used for only 20 years when, in 1816, all inmates were moved to a third almshouse at Bellevue. In the first quarter of the 19th century, therefore, the northern portion of City Hall Park was transformed from a location to house the poor, the soldiers, and the criminals into a government center.

Hunter Research, Inc. (1994) undertook an extensive documentary study of the north and south parcels of City Hall Park; they produced a series of mylar composite overlay maps showing all the structures that have been depicted on historical maps.⁵ Figure 9 shows the known structures on the northern portion of City Hall Park from the period 1728–1775, and Figure 10 depicts known structures from 1776–1796. The military barracks and other military buildings are beyond the site of the excavated building. The excavated structure is clearly within the fenced boundary of the

almshouse. In addition, the fence lines show a clear delineation of property for the almshouse complex.

The documentary data regarding the fabric of the buildings further suggest that the excavated colonial structure was one of the main outbuildings of the almshouse rather than one of the military buildings. The 1757 upper barracks (so-called to distinguish it from the lower barracks, which was located within the city on the southern tip of Manhattan) was built as a “single story frame structure” (Hunter Research, Inc. 1990: 2–2). The other military barracks depicted on the historical maps were also wood frame structures (Hunter Research, Inc. 1994: 2–130; 2–132). The almshouse, built between April, 1735, and March, 1736, was made of brick on a stone foundation (New York City 1905, 4: 250–251). On April 15, 1736, the Common Council

⁵ The historical maps were in various scales so the structures were drafted on overlay maps with a scale of 1 in. (2.5 cm) = 20 ft (6 m). The locations and sizes of the structures depicted on the historical maps were cross-checked with other documentary data. The structures were drafted to show the largest size depicted on the historical maps.

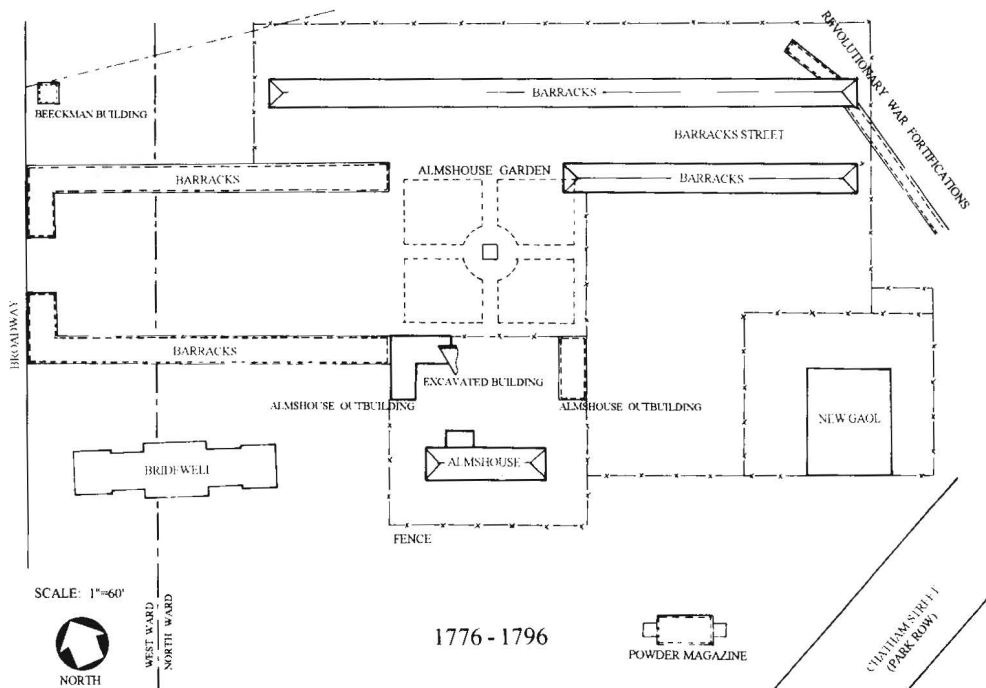


Figure 10. A Composite Map of the Northern Portion of City Hall Park Depicting 1776-1796. Hunter Research, Inc., produced the original map showing the location of all known structures including our excavated colonial foundation. In this version, redrafted by Claudia Diamont, the code numbers have been replaced with identification labels.

ordered a committee to employ workers “for Building a Kitchen, Oven and Washhouse to the said Workhouse”; the kitchen was made of materials similar to the main structure, that is, it contained stone, brick, and wood (New York City 1905, 4: 319, 331). It is not clear from the records if the kitchen was an addition to the almshouse or a detached but architecturally compatible structure. In 1768, the Common Council ordered that “a small addition be made to the Kitchen of the poor House” (New York City 1905, 7: 123). The minutes of the Common Council do not contain any information on the materials used in the construction of the almshouse hospital. The Common Council records and depictions on maps taken together suggest that the kitchen and hospital were separate structures, not additions to the main building of the almshouse. This is also in keeping with architectural precedents for almshouse complexes in England and Holland (Paul Huey 1991b; personal communication, 1996).

Archaeological Excavation

An archaeological excavation was conducted from June 14 through July 24, 1989.⁶ The 5 ft x 5 ft (1.5 m x 1.5 m) squares were excavated by removing stratigraphic soil layers from the surface down to natural, sterile subsoil. The average depth for the excavated units was 4 ft (1.2 m) and the deepest test was 6.5 ft (5.6 m) below current ground level.

The 18th-century brownstone foundation was located within the northern section of the archaeological site (FIG. 11). There were post-1800 intrusions to the site, including an 1890s steam line trench; a 1984 electric conduit line between City Hall and Tweed Court House; two non-functioning early 20th-century electric lines; an inactive 20th-century electric pipe; and a 1904 water pipe.

The following six excavation units were associated with the colonial building deposits: N30 W10, N35 W10/15, N40 W10, N40 W15, N40 W20, and N45 W20 (FIG. 11). The first natural stratigraphic level of these units, which

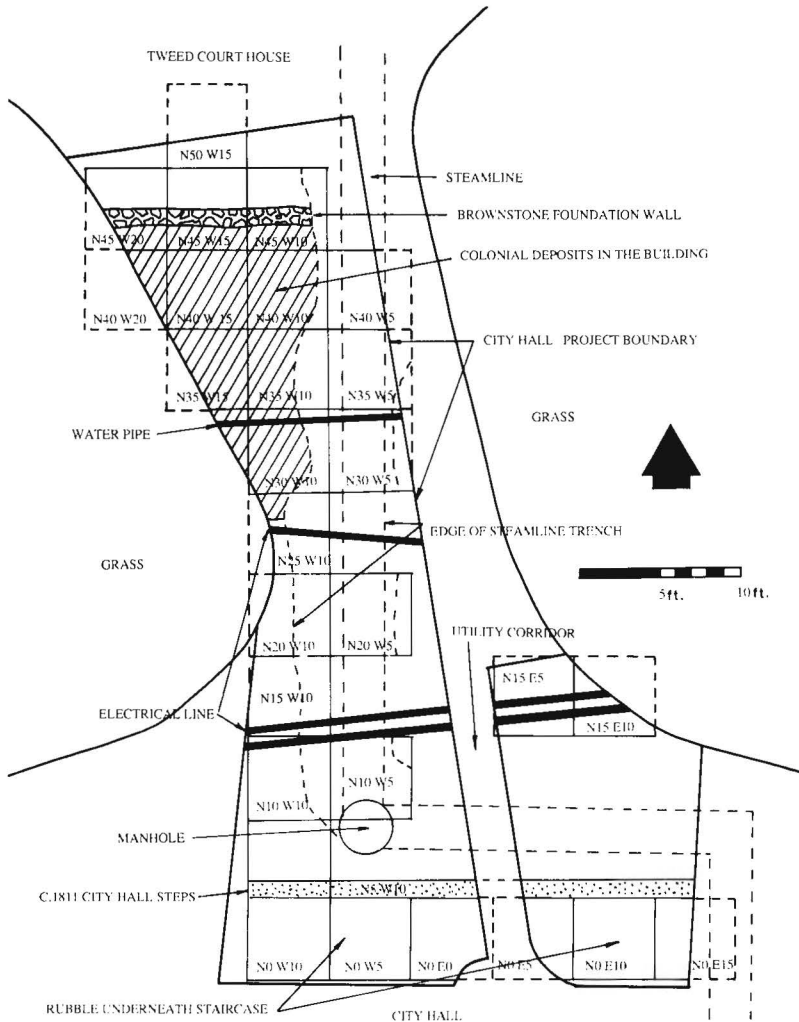


Figure 11. A map of the site showing the location of the colonial deposits, the brownstone foundation wall, and the original rear steps to City Hall. (Drafted by Jason Thompson.)

was approximately 1 ft (0.3 m) in depth, contained a mixture of 18th- and 19th-century artifacts. A reddish brown soil lay over the almshouse deposits. In most units the 18th-century deposits were 3 ft thick (0.9 m) and comprised both building demolition rubble (brick and mortar) and 18th-century artifacts, e.g., ceramics, glass, and metal (FIG. 12). The first 2–2.5 ft (0.6–0.75 m) contained remnants

of brick walls, loose brick, mortar, plaster, and assorted colonial artifacts including ceramics, glass, clay smoking pipes, and faunal material. Below this deposit was a 6–12 in. (15–30 cm) layer of loose plaster that contained 18th-century artifacts. Underneath the plaster stratum was a compacted earthen floor (Munsell number: 10YR 3/4, very dark yellowish brown). Based on observations made in the field, the floor appeared to be mortared. Examination of specimens in the laboratory, however, showed that it was a compacted earthen floor with a high lime content. Below the floor was a 2–4 in (5–10 cm) base of yellow clay (Munsell number: 7.5YR 5/6, yellow

⁶ During June, the project was jointly directed by Sherene Baugher, Director of the City Archaeology Program, and Arthur Bankoff and Frederick Winter, both professors at Brooklyn College; during July, Baugher and Edward Lenik, of the City Archaeology Program, co-directed the excavation.

brown). Underneath the clay was sterile sand (Munsell number: 7.5YR 3/4, dark brown).

The clay base underneath the compacted earthen floor also extended under the brownstone foundation (FIG. 12). When a comparison was made between the stratigraphy outside the colonial foundation and within the structure it was clear that the clay base was not a natural deposit at this level. The clay appeared to have been used as a base for both the floor and the foundation.

Within the building debris were five large segments of intact brick wall ranging in size between 24 x 18 x 14 in (0.6 x 0.45 x 0.35 m) and 38 x 34 x 18 in (0.96 x 0.86 x 0.45 m). The brick wall segments had layers of whitewash on them. The two brick segments in square N35 W10 were facing in an east-west direction whereas the brick wall segment in square N25 W10 (near the southern foundation wall) was in a north-south direction. The two brick wall fragments in N40 W10 appeared to lie in an east-west direction.

A 13.5 ft (4 m) long brownstone foundation was found in squares N45 W10, N45 W15, and N45 W20. The eastern end of both the foundation and the building's interior were destroyed by the installation of the 1890s steamline and

the 1984 electrical line (FIG. 11). The western end of the foundation and the building's interior extended underneath the adjacent fenced-in grass area. The interior surface of the wall was whitewashed. Along the exterior of the northern foundation wall was a trench that varied in width from 3–10 in (8–27 cm). The remnants of the southern foundation wall were located in square N25 W10 (FIG. 11). The distance from the outer border of the northern foundation wall to the outer border of the southern foundation wall was 20 ft (6 m). Because the utility corridor affected only the walkway between City Hall and Tweed Court House, the excavation was restricted to this area. Thus, only a small portion of the almshouse was excavated, and the rest of the building remains preserved and buried.

No wells, cisterns, or privies were found. Also, no other features or outbuildings were discovered. The yard area was heavily disturbed by the installation of electric lines, the water line, and the steam line. Only a small intact ground surface from the 18th century was found alongside the northern end of the building.

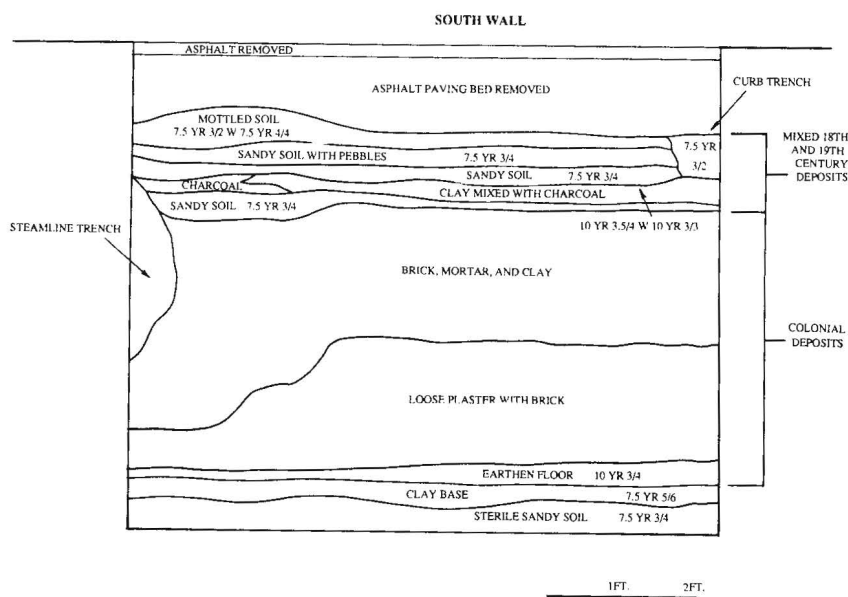


Figure 12. The stratigraphy within the colonial building. The south wall profile from excavation unit N40 W15 shows the loose brick, mortar, and plaster deposit over a layer of loose plaster and whitewash. (Sectional drawing by Jason Thompson.)

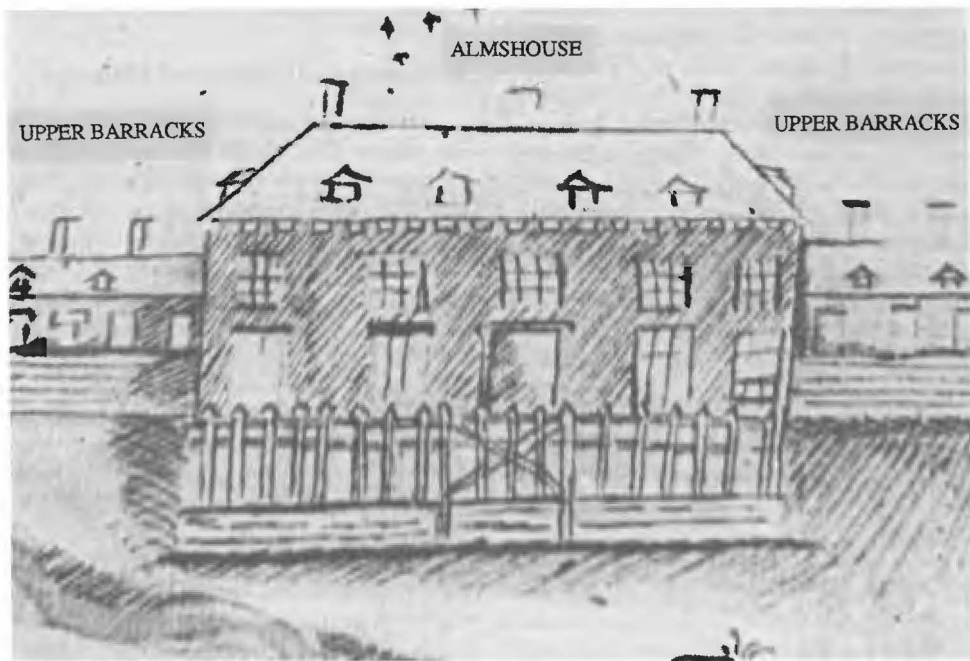


Figure 13. Detail of the almshouse in 1770. This photo enlargement of the almshouse from the pen-and-ink drawing (a political cartoon) by du Simitiere depicts architectural details. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 27.)

Evidence from Historical Illustrations

Many of the architectural details of the almshouse can be discerned from four artists' depictions of the structure and other documentary sources. The first such historical view of the structure is a pen-and-ink caricature (political cartoon) depicting an incident in 1770 and drawn, probably within the same year, by Pierre Eugene du Simitiere (Stokes 1915, 3: pl. 4-b). Depicted in this cartoon are a jail, the Liberty Pole, military barracks, and the almshouse in the center of the drawing (FIG. 13). The almshouse is shown as two and a half stories high with five bays, including a central doorway on the first level and five windows on the second level. The structure has a hipped roof and two chimneys, one at each end of the roof. A picket fence with a gate is in the foreground of the building.

A second drawing is a pen-and-ink plan of New York City as it purportedly appeared in 1742–1744, drawn from memory by the cartog-

rapher David Grim in 1813 (Stokes 1915, 1: pl. 32-a). Thirteen buildings are illustrated across the top of the map, one of which is identified as the "Poor House" or almshouse (FIG. 14). This drawing also depicts the structure as being two and a half stories high, five bays on the first and second levels, with two chimneys. Two additional details are visible in this drawing, namely what appear to be stairs leading up to the central doorway on the first level and a basement with four windows on the front.

The third drawing that shows the almshouse is on B. Taylor's map, *A New and Accurate Plan of the City of New York in the State of New York in North America* (Stokes 1915, 1: pl. 64). The map, which depicts the city in 1796, contains small bird's-eye views of selected buildings, one of which is identified as a "Work House," that is, an almshouse (FIG. 8). The structural details shown are similar to those on the du Simitiere and Grim drawings described above with one exception, i.e., a

third chimney is present at the center of the roof.

The fourth drawing, whose artist and date are unknown, depicts the almshouse with a symmetrically designed facade that Rothman (1971: 37) describes as being "built in [the] style of [an] ordinary residence." It is an engraved book illustration that may be the unknown artist's composite version of the almshouse based on earlier illustrations. The engraving shows the architectural details previously described but in a more formal and elaborate fashion (FIG. 15). A few additional details have been added, such as double-hung sash windows with six-over-six lights and what appear to be stone lintels and sills. The structure has a fenestrated basement with four windows on the front facade and two visible on one side. Seven steps lead up to the entrance from the street level. The entrance has a rectangular door with cornice. A railing flanks the entryway and stairs.

The minutes of the Common Council for December 20, 1734, state that the house was to be 56 ft (17 m) long and 24 ft (7.2 m) wide, and two stories high with a cellar (New York City 1905, 4: 241). The building was to be constructed of brick on a stone foundation. In addition, the minutes of the Common Council indicate that shingles, pine boards, two gut-

ters, lath, and lime were used in its construction in 1735 (New York City 1905, 4: 241, 250–251, 259–260, 282–286, 289–290, 338–339).

Archaeological Structural Evidence

The limited archaeological excavations at the site resulted in the discovery of an intact section of a stone foundation wall. This discovery posed a fundamental question, namely, was this foundation the remains of the almshouse that once stood on this site? Or, alternatively, was the stone foundation associated with one of the other structures built on the site? The archaeological evidence, particularly the structural features and artifacts, provided us with some answers to our basic question. In the following discussion we attempt to correlate the archaeological evidence with the documentary architectural evidence for the almshouse.

Fifty feet (15 m) north of the present City Hall rear staircase, the top of a brownstone wall was uncovered at a depth of 3 ft (0.9 m) below ground level. The extant excavated section of the wall, which extended east-west, was 13.5 ft (4 m) in length. The eastern end of the brownstone wall was destroyed by the construction of utility lines in the 1890s and again in 1984, and the western end of the wall was not excavated since it extended beyond the limits of the project corridor. The wall was 2 ft (0.6 m) in height, and 1 ft (0.3 m) in width, and the cut stone was bonded by a lime/clay mortar. The top of the wall was leveled with flat, rough-cut bluestone, and the interior or southern face was covered with whitewash.

The remains of a second foundation wall were located 20 ft (6 m) south of the wall previously described. It extended east-west and was also constructed of brownstone rubble bonded with mortar. The extent of this wall was not fully investigated since it, too, continued beyond the limits of the project area. The interior floor of the structure, that is, the area between the north and south walls, consisted of clay, probably procured locally, which functioned as a waterproofing membrane.⁷ The clay base extended under the



Figure 14. David Grim's pen-and-ink drawing made in 1813, depicting the almshouse in 1742–1744. The almshouse is one of 13 buildings that are illustrated across the top of the map, *A Plan of the City and Environs of New York*, by cartographer David Grim. (Stokes 1915, I: plate 32a.)

foundation wall, suggesting that the entire footprint of the building was excavated and the floor leveled and sealed prior to laying-up the foundation. The floor was covered with small flakes of whitewash.

A builder's trench was evident on the exterior side of the north foundation wall. It was quite narrow, ranging from 3–10 in (8–25 cm) in width. This feature together with the floor lining suggests that the foundation wall was built by workers who were standing on what was to become the interior floor of the structure. Two experts on 18th-century architecture, Donald Plotts, from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, and William McMillan, Director of Buildings and Grounds for Historic Richmond Town, evaluated the structure *in situ* and concur with this interpre-

tation of the structure's construction (personal communication, 1989).

A large number of bricks was recovered from the site, and they varied considerably in quality. Several multiple mortared brick sections were found. One such section had flat rough-cut bluestone bonded to one side of the bricks. The bluestone was of the same type and approximate size as that found on the top of the north foundation wall. The bricks of this remnant section were thinner and longer than the later standardized bricks and appear to be representative of the type produced in New York City during the 18th century. Some of the brick found at this site may have been salvaged or reclaimed from another structure and utilized here. Eighteenth-century building practices permitted the reclamation of bricks

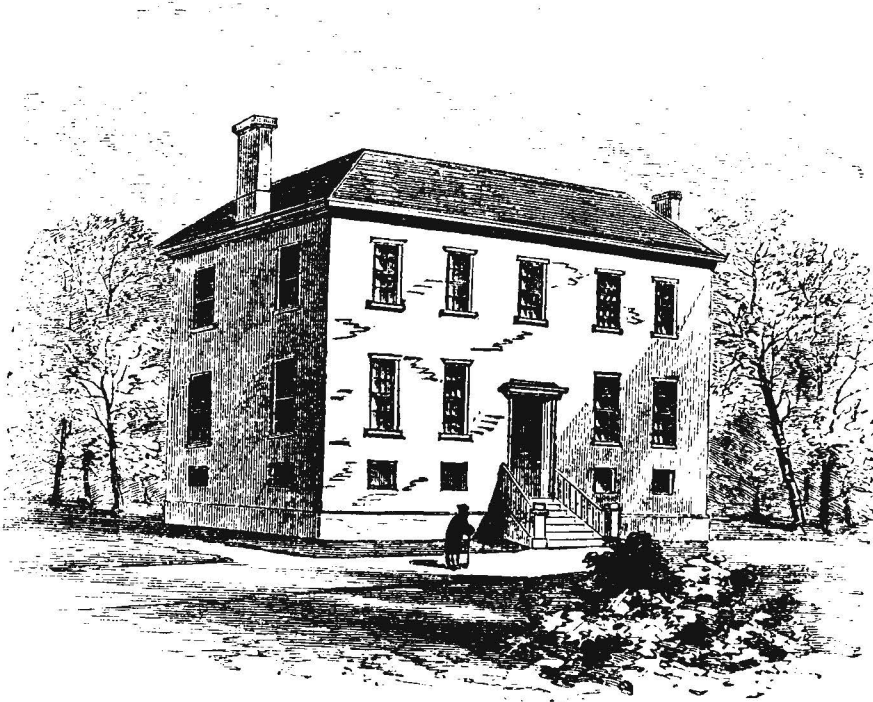


Figure 15. This illustration, which appears in both this article and in Rothman's book (1971), is from the collection of the New-York Historical Society. The photograph (from a 1905 glass negative) was taken of an illustration in an engraved book with the caption, "The Poor House. Erected in 1735, on the Present Site of City Hall, New York." The society's files have no other information on the date, the title of the book, the artist, or the source of the original art work. (Courtesy of the Collection of The New-York Historical Society.)

from buildings scheduled for demolition for reuse in new construction.

Two small masonry elements, one of brownstone and the other of Manhattan schist, were also uncovered at the site. These artifacts appear to be architectural elements related to the structure. They were not aligned with the foundation wall, however, and because of the small scale of the excavation neither their function or relationship to the wall could be ascertained.

Five large sections of the brick wall were found within the excavation units inside the structure. All of these segments had layers of whitewash on them. Four of these sections were aligned in an east-west orientation, which suggests they collapsed or were pushed inward from a wall located just to the east of the excavation corridor. The fifth brick wall segment was found near the southern foundation wall. It was aligned in a south-to-north direction, suggesting that it collapsed inward (north) from the wall. In sum, we conclude that at least two walls of the structure were made of brick. No structural elements of wood were found at this site.

The data indicate that the two brownstone foundation walls uncovered at the site were modest both in scale and in their ability to support much weight. Donald Plotts examined the foundation in the field and agreed that the building must have been modest in size, exceeding no more than one and a half stories in height. This suggests that the structure was not the main almshouse building itself but perhaps an addition or a separate outbuilding.

The building materials of brick, mortar, brownstone, and lime for whitewashing are listed in the Common Council records for both the main building and for the kitchen of the almshouse complex. The archaeological data confirm the similarity between the two structures. The similarity in the structures at the New York City almshouse complex follows the English colonial precedent for an almshouse complex in which the main building and its outbuildings are constructed

in similar architectural styles (Paul Huey, personal communication, 1996).

Architectural Artifacts

The analysis of the artifacts recovered from the site provides additional evidence of the structure's architectural elements as well as some clues to its function or use. Because of the limited excavations we were unable to determine the size of the structure and the location of such features as doors, room(s), fireplaces, or windows. Since the location and type of windows were not evident in the excavation of the site, the presence and distribution of window glass was our principal indicator of such fenestration.

Window glass was found scattered over most of the site. A total of 63 fragments was found within undisturbed deposits that date to the 18th century. Unfortunately, these fragments are too small and discolored to indicate pane size or method of manufacture, but their thickness could be measured. There are three sizes (thicknesses) within the assemblage: 1 mm (32 specimens), 1.5 mm (24 specimens) and 3 mm (7 specimens). No clustering of glass fragments was found that might indicate the location of windows within the structure.

The window glass fragments from the almshouse appear to be of high quality, that is, lacking in bubbles, waves, or ridges. The data are consistent with similar findings elsewhere. For example, "fine" window glass was found at the main barracks site at Fort Montgomery (built 1776, destroyed October 1977) located on the Hudson River at Bear Mountain, New York (Mead 1969). The stratigraphic context of the specimens plus their size-thickness indicate that they date to the 18th century. In general, window glass in the 19th century was made thicker with passage of time (Walker 1971: 78).

Three hundred and ninety-five nails were recovered from undisturbed contexts within the site. There are 201 hand-wrought nails within this collection, 36 machine-cut nails, and 158 specimens that were too corroded to be identified. No wire nails were found within the undisturbed stratigraphic levels within the structure. Several conclusions can be drawn from the nail data. First, the buried brown-

⁷ There are natural clay deposits on Manhattan Island (Ketchum 1970: 21-23). In fact, there were local colonial potteries only a few blocks north of the almshouse complex (Baughner-Perlin et al. 1982: 108-111).

stone foundation was built in the 18th century, as suggested by the preponderance of hand-wrought nails found at the site (Noël Hume 1969: 252–254). Second, the small quantity of machine-cut nails recovered from the site suggests that some structural modifications were made to the building at some point during its last decade of existence. This inference is drawn from the known period of manufacture of machine-cut nails, which were developed around 1786 and came into common usage in construction work by 1790 (Fontana and Greenleaf 1962: 45).

Three specimens of building hardware were recovered from the cellar of the structure: an iron hook, a door latch fragment, and a shutter hook. One hinge fragment was found outside and to the south of the structure, but within a disturbed context. The presence of a shutter hook is puzzling. Shutters are not illustrated in the four artists' depictions of the almshouse. This raises the question of whether this architectural specimen may have been added to the building at some point during its history or whether this is the foundation-cellar of another building.

Artifactual Analysis

The deposit was sorted according to a formula designed by Stanley South (1977) for classifying 18th-century artifact assemblages into functional categories (TAB. 1). Because the almshouse complex was purposefully demolished in 1797, the deposit contained a tremendous amount of architectural debris. The large quantities of brick, mortar, and plaster were not tabulated in our individual artifact count; even without this material the architectural group comprised almost 50 percent of the collection. The kitchen and dining group comprised the second largest category of artifacts (29 percent). The almshouse deposit suggests that people were both preparing and consuming food in this building. In addition, some button manufacturing was occurring on a small scale; the button and button-making group comprised only 5 percent (clothing category) of the collection.

There were 212 18th-century sherds associated with the excavated colonial structure. The majority of the ceramics in the deposit (81 per-

cent) dated to the last quarter of the 18th century. The 8 sherds of British white salt-glazed stoneware (1720–1805) and the 6 sherds of delftware (1700–1800) could have been objects that were trapped underneath floor boards during an earlier period of the building's history or used in the late 18th century. The ceramic deposit was composed of 87 percent tableware (dishes and tea sets) and 13 percent utilitarian wares (food preparation vessels). All of the dishes and tea sets were British-made. The utilitarian wares contained British-made slipwares, American-made redwares, American-made (probably New Jersey) stonewares, and locally-made Manhattan stonewares. There were three potteries in Manhattan (on Duane Street, Reade Street, and Chatham Street) in the late 18th century; they were owned by the Corselius family, the Crolius/Remmey family, and the Van Vlack family (Baughner-Perlin et al. 1982: 108–111). The Manhattan stonewares are distinctive in appearance because of their yellow or buff color, whereas New Jersey or Long Island stonewares are blue-gray in color (Meta Janowitz, personal communication, 1989).

Seventy-one clay smoking pipe fragments were recovered from the foundation and a mean date of 1762.3 was established based upon a sample of 51 stems. Clay pipe analyst Diane Dallal notes that "in general, the pipes recovered were consistently 18th-century Dutch and English types with almost all the Dutch pipes having been manufactured in Gouda after 1740. The English pipes, when it was possible to type them, had been imported from London and Bristol" (Baughner et al. 1990: 47).

In the colonial deposits there were fragments from one wine bottle base and a base from one medicine bottle. These fragments could not be dated precisely because they were manufactured with technology (blow-pipe pontils and solid iron bar pontils) that was used in both the 18th and 19th centuries. The colonial deposit contained 47 percent bottle glass and 53 percent table glass. In terms of the table glass there was only one fragment of expensive glass etched with a geometric and floral design; this artifact was probably from a decanter.

Table 1. Functional categories for the colonial foundation deposit from the City Hall Park site.

Artifact group	Artifact count	Artifact percentage
<i>Kitchen and dining group</i>		
Ceramics	244	23.5
Bottles	28	2.7
Table glass	32	3.1
Cutlery (spoons, knives, corkscrew)	3	0.3
Total	307	29.6
<i>Architecture group</i>		
Window glass	116	11.2
Nails	395	38
Construction hardware (hinges, latch, shutterhook)	3	0.3
Total	514	49.5
<i>Clothing group</i>		
Buttons	17	1.6
Button blanks	26	2.5
Straight pins	9	0.9
Buckles	2	0.2
Total	54	5.2
<i>Personal group</i>		
Personal items (pencils, coins, eyeglasses)	3	0.3
Tobacco pipes	71	6.8
Total	74	7.1
<i>Activities group</i>		
Construction tools (files, blades)	9	0.9
Furniture parts (pulls, lock plates)	2	0.2
Toys (marbles)	2	0.2
Misc. hardware (hooks, rings, springs, nuts, bolts, screws, washers, iron bars, wire)	4	0.4
Unidentifiable metal (function/type)	71	6.8
Other (iron, scissor)	1	0.1
Total	89	8.6
Assemblage Total	1038	100

A total of 61 buttons and button fragments was recovered from the site, most from within the colonial foundation excavation units. Of this total, 27 specimens or 44 percent are cut discs or button backs manufactured from bone. Each specimen has one central hole for attachment to a garment. These bone disc buttons range in diameter from 11–29 mm, and in thickness from 1–4 mm. Analysis of these specimens indicates that they were manufactured from flat meat bones, probably ribs. Seventy-six bone blanks or bone button by-product fragments were also recovered from

the site. These bone by-products exhibit evidence of being cut by a metal bit, and the blank holes have diameters that range from 11–23 mm. Nearly all of these discarded bone fragments were found within the colonial foundation. The presence of bone backs, blanks, or bone by-products at the site suggests that the manufacture of bone buttons was an important activity at the site during the 18th century. Ross (1988: 159) has noted that the almshouse was equipped with tools and that residents were required to work in return for their food, lodging, and clothing. Appar-

ently, New York City sold the goods produced in the almshouse, including such items as yarn. It is reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the residents probably made clothing with cloth-covered bone buttons for their own use. The data further suggest that commercially manufactured or imported buttons may have been too expensive for this institution to acquire during this time.

Only one military button was found in the colonial deposit. The military button is a stamped disc of brass with an incised decoration on its face that appears to read "GIR." This button is probably 18th-century British, i.e., George I Rex, and was found within the colonial foundation. The minutes of the Common Council (New York City 1917, 1: 184, 223) note the presence in the almshouse of two disabled soldiers in 1785 and 1786.

The clothes individuals wear (along with their buttons) can be an indicator of their economic and social status. The overwhelming presence of plain, utilitarian, self-made buttons at the site, manufactured primarily of bone and brass, clearly reflects the indigent status of the inhabitants. Owning high-quality buttons with decorated faces was apparently neither a priority nor an option for inmates and keepers alike.

Three kitchen utensils were recovered from the colonial foundation: a pewter spoon handle, a bone handle, and a bone-handled knife. Their context indicates that they date to the 18th century. Other utensils were found nearby in adjoining excavation units outside the foundation, among them an iron knife blade fragment with tang, a pewter spoon minus its handle, and a fragment of a cast-iron leg, possibly from a cooking pot. These artifacts, however, were found in disturbed or mixed contexts.

A total of four coins was unearthed in the colonial deposit. Three of the coins could be dated (FIG. 16). A fourth coin was also found; unfortunately, it was so badly eroded that it was unidentifiable. Two of the coins contained the same engravings. On the obverse was a horse's head and neck over a plow with the legend "Nova Caesarea" and the date 1787. On the reverse side of the coin was the United States shield and the legend "E Pluribus Unum" over the shield. This coin, a cent, was

issued in New Jersey (Noël Hume 1969: 169). The third coin appeared to be an Irish half-penny which was issued from 1766 to 1783 (Noël Hume 1969: 166). The obverse of this coin had a royal profile facing to the right with the legend "Georgivs" over the head. On the reverse side was a crowned harp with the letters "H" and "B," possibly for Hibernia (Ireland). The date was unidentifiable.

Both the almshouse complex (1736–1797) and the various military barracks (1757–1790) existed in the area at the same time in the mid-to late 18th century. There was nothing in the assemblage, however, to suggest a military deposit or a military building. Furthermore, there was nothing in the collection to suggest a hospital assemblage either.

Conclusion

We conclude that the brownstone foundation walls uncovered at the site of the 1735–1797 almshouse complex were not part of the main structure but rather that of another structure, most likely the kitchen. Our structural analysis indicates that the size of the walls, i.e., their height and width, would not have the load-bearing capacity to support a two-and-a-half story structure of the size indicated in the historical illustrations. Instead, the archaeological evidence suggests that the brownstone walls and other structural features uncovered were those of another smaller structure that may have been an outbuilding.

We propose that the structure uncovered at the almshouse site was most likely a kitchen that was constructed after the main building was erected. The historical record indicates that the kitchen was built of brick, stone, and lime (New York City 1905, 4: 331). The archaeological record confirms these details as we found a considerable quantity of brick, stone, mortar, plaster, and also window glass, nails, and architectural hardware. This conclusion is further supported by the quantity of Kitchen Group artifacts recovered from the site, which amounted to 29 percent of the total artifact collection (TAB. 1). The Kitchen Group, which relates to the preparation, serving, consumption, and storage of food, includes 244 ceramic fragments, 28 bottle fragments, 32 table glass



Figure 16. Three 18th-century coins. The left and right coins are 1787 New Jersey cents. The center coin is probably an Irish half penny issued between 1766 and 1783. The reverse side (shown in this photograph) has a crowned harp. (Photograph by Carl Forster.)

fragments, a spoon, a knife, and faunal remains, primarily cow and pig.

The archaeological, architectural, and documentary evidence all indicate that the foundation uncovered was most likely the kitchen for New York City's first municipal almshouse (1736–1797). Additional research and analysis can be undertaken on the archaeological collection from the almshouse kitchen; this material is significant because it has the potential to yield important information pertaining to the social history of early New York City, including governmental attempts at dealing with problems of the poor.

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