

Table 5. Items Selected for Replication

Burial No.	Items
6	1 large button (plain face), Catalog No. 219-B.008
10	1 button, Catalog No. 234-B.004
12/14	12 straight pins, Catalog Nos. 253-B.001, 253-B.002, 253-B.003, 274-B.001, 274-B.002, and 274-B.003
71	1 finger ring, Catalog No. 813-B.004
147	7 small rings, Catalog No. 892-B.004
158	cuff links, 1 pair, Catalog No. 903-B.001
181	2 buttons, Catalog Nos. 967-B.005 and 967-B.006
211	cuff-link or button face, enameled, Catalog No. 1186-B.001
214	1 button, Catalog No. 1191-B.002
238	cuff links, 1 pair, Catalog No. 1224-B.001
250	1 button, Catalog No. 1239-B.002
254	1 silver pendant, Catalog No. 1243-B.001
310	1 paste ring (with glass insets), Catalog No. 1486-B.001
313	1 button, Catalog No. 1516-B.001
371	2 cuff-link faces, enameled, Catalog No. 1875-B.001
392	4 buttons, all assigned Catalog No. 2039-B.002
398	1 finger ring, Catalog No. 2061-B.001
403	1 button, Catalog Nos. 2067-B.003
405	1 button, Catalog No. 2071-B.001
415	1 button, Catalog No. 2097-B.004

some individuals were missing materials that had been recovered from their original graves, typically coffin remains (nails and wood).

Also fortunate was the storage of all original, individual burial field records at the Cobb Laboratory at Howard University. Copies of these records were in the World Trade Center laboratory (they were not salvaged after September 11), and a set was also kept at GSA's New York offices, but the

original documentation of the excavations of burials, especially the excavators' notes and in situ drawings, is invaluable.

Reburial

The MOA entered into by GSA, the ACHP, and the LPC stipulated that human remains and "burial associated artifacts" were to be reinterred. As plans were developed for the reinterment that took place in October 2003, decisions had to be made as to exactly what materials were included in this mandate. Of course, the skeletal remains were always intended to be reburied, although small samples of bone were retained for future analyses. Confusion about artifacts arose, however, because the phrase "burial artifacts" had been used early on in the conservation laboratory to refer only to those items that had been placed in direct association with the deceased. Project conservators had estimated that there were 500 such items. Yet the coffin remains themselves (wood and hardware) were also clearly "burial associated."

More problematic were items found in grave-shaft-fill soils. Because there was no remnant of the original ground surface over most of the site (see Chapter 3), there was no way of determining whether artifacts in the soils had at one time been placed on a grave.¹² For the most part, material found in the shafts of graves is believed to have been present in the soil matrix that was used to fill the graves at the time of the interment. Thus, it is material that lay strewn on the surface or in shallow deposits covering the ground when the grave was originally dug. Some of this material represents a thin, scattered deposit of common eighteenth-century refuse, including glass and ceramic sherds, bits of brick and nails, fragments of animal bone, and so forth. In one area of the site, there was a good deal of animal bone thought to be waste material, perhaps from a nearby tannery. But by far, the most ubiquitous class of grave-shaft material is stoneware-kiln debris (sherds from broken pots, kiln waste, and kiln furniture). The latter material is basically "industrial waste" from pottery kilns that stood on the burial ground in the eighteenth century (see Chapters 2 and 4).

In the end, GSA made a decision to exclude artifacts that were found in grave-shaft fill from reburial. This

¹² In some cases, artifacts appeared to excavators to be directly on the coffin lid, and when such items are thought *possibly* to have been placed there deliberately, they have been included in the reburial.

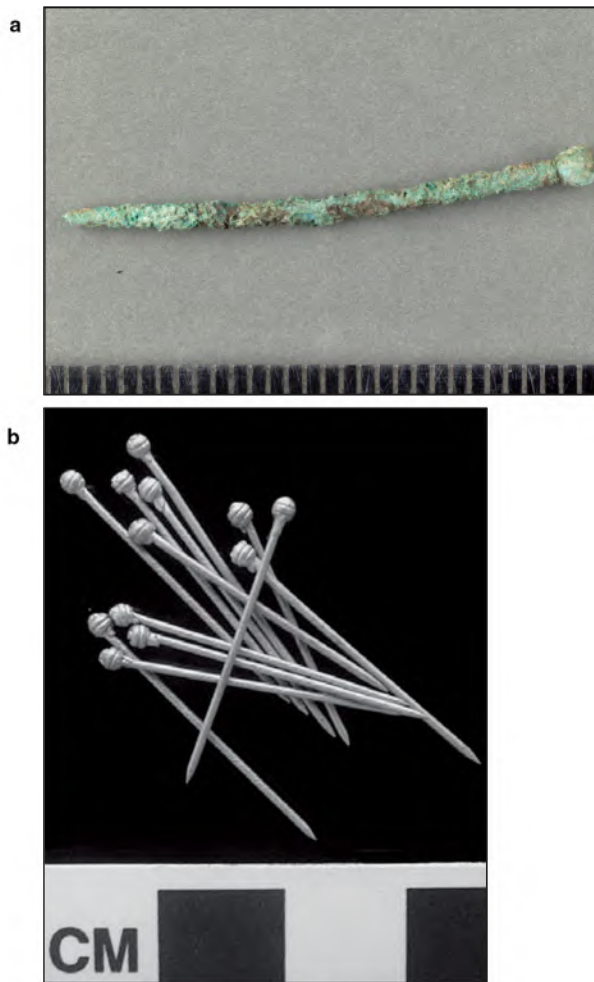


Figure 9. (a) Copper alloy straight pin as recovered in the field (photograph by Jon Abbott); (b) replicas of African Burial Ground pins created by artisans at Colonial Williamsburg (photograph by Rob Tucher).

decision was arrived at after discussions among representatives of the public (who attended public meetings on the subject), GSA, the Howard University research team, and the National Park Service (in its role as consultant to GSA on the future Interpretive Center and disposition of the collection). Our reasoning was that these materials were not deliberately placed with the deceased, do not represent actions on the part of mourners, and lacked spiritual meaning at the time of interment. In fact, most of those who entered the discussion felt that these items represent depredations on the cemetery that occurred during the period of its use. Other parties expressed interest in the future research potential of the materials and in their potential use in interpretive programs, and believed they should be excluded from reburial for these reasons as well. It should be pointed out, however, that some in the descendant community had a differing opinion on this matter, feeling instead that the presence of these materials in the sacred ground of the cemetery over the past 200–300 years had in fact imbued them with a spiritual essence by virtue of their close contact with the remains of the ancestors (Mrs. Ollie McLean, personal communication 2003).

What does the nonskeletal retained collection currently consist of, how is it organized, and where is it stored? Table 7 summarizes the retained artifact collections and their disposition as of this writing. All material is bagged in plastic, labeled according to catalog number and burial, and boxed according to burial. The boxes were transferred to the custody of the Army Corps of Engineers, acting as GSA's technical representative, on February 27, 2006. Following processing at the Corps' St. Louis facility, the collection will be returned to New York to be housed at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Table 6. Items Not Recovered after World Trade Center Collapse, September 11, 2001

Category	Material Lost	Comments
Artifacts and samples		
Coffin wood	Burials 26–50 and 126–175; all samples stored in freezer.	Bags had been inventoried; freezer samples had been damaged by mold prior to September 11.
Coffin hardware	Burials 76–125; all items set aside for X-rays.	These items had been inventoried.
Artifacts from grave shafts	Burials 76–125; tobacco pipe fragments from all burials.	Only ceramics had been inventoried.
Artifacts from uncertain proveniences	All burials	Items lost were those set aside during the selection and packing of reburial artifacts in July 2001.
Soil samples	Burial 42; Burials 51–53 and 58–63, except for control-sample heavy and light fractions; Burials 70–126; Burials 172–175, except for control-sample heavy and light fractions; Burial 219; Burials 315–319, except for control-sample heavy and light fractions.	Samples that had been pulled from the shelving for any reason and set aside were not salvaged. Numerous control samples were off-site at New South Associates on September 11.
Faunal remains	Burials 1–25; Burials 76–125; Burials 326–350.	This includes shell and animal bone.
Floral remains	Inventoried seeds from all burials.	Seeds had been quantified but not identified.
Grave markers	Cobbles from burials in southwest area of site; headstones from Burials 18, 23, and 47.	Only nine cobbles that had been boxed along with Burial 13 artifacts were salvaged.
Records and documents		
Maps	Site maps on Mylar; in situ and detail bead drawings for Burial 340.	Photocopies (poor quality) of most of these were stored off-site. The lost set had mark-ups for CADD editing.
Photographs	Color slides of artifacts taken in 1998; 35-mm black-and-white negatives of artifacts; black-and-white large-format negatives of artifacts; one set of in situ color slides of Burials 1–57.	Artifact slides were stored at the Office of Public Education and Information, which was located in the same building; materials housed there were not salvaged.
Inventories	Paper copy of conserved artifact inventory with all hand-written notes taken during packing of reburial artifacts, July 2001; manuscript original of coffin hardware inventory; preliminary flotation sample inventory.	This artifact inventory was annotated to indicate which items had been packed for reburial and sent to Artex.
Research files	Four file drawers of reprints for comparative research.	Material compiled by JMA and Howard staff.

Key: JMA = John Milner Associates

Table 7. Artifact Categories, Counts, and Current Disposition

Category	Approximate Count	Notes	Current Status
Artifacts other than coffins recovered in direct association with skeletal remains	1,628	Includes over 1,200 fragments of straight pins from shrouds or clothing as well as buttons, jewelry, beads, and other items, such as coins and pipes.	Reburied at the site in coffins with human remains, October 2003.
Coffins			
Coffin furniture, nails, and screws	14,057		Reburied at the site in coffins with human remains, October 2003.
Coffin wood samples	529		Reburied at the site in coffins with human remains, October 2003.
Artifacts recovered from grave-shaft-fill soil	24,000	This category includes small sherds of glass, brick, animal bone, shell, and fragments of iron. Its largest component, however, consists of 18,366 ceramic pieces, mainly waste material from the potteries that were in operation immediately adjacent to the excavated part of the cemetery.	Transferred to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, February 2006.
Soil samples	1,200	Two or more soil samples were taken from each burial, usually from the coffin lid, the interior or stomach area, and an outside sample for comparison.	Half-liter subsamples of unfloated soil and all light fractions were transferred to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, February 2006. All remaining soil has been reburied at the site.

CHAPTER 2

Documentary Evidence on the Origin and Use of the African Burial Ground

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This chapter presents an overview of the African Burial Ground from two complementary points of view. Part one examines documentary evidence about the origin of the cemetery and the development of its immediate surrounds. It covers the mid-1600s–1795 and includes a chronology of property transactions, petitions, surveys, ordinances, and key events directly relevant to the cemetery's use. Maps of New Amsterdam/New York are reproduced in this chapter.

Part two takes a comparative tack. It examines documentary evidence about African funerals in New Amsterdam/New York, along with evidence about burial practices in the black Atlantic world when the African Burial Ground was in use.

Origin of the African Burial Ground

The African Burial Ground is the only cemetery for Africans known to have existed in Manhattan until the eve of the Revolutionary War, yet it left little impression in public and private documents of the day. Indeed, it is all but invisible before 1713, when the first known reference to African burials on public land appeared in a proposal written by the Anglican chaplain John Sharpe (1881). Africans were first brought to New Amsterdam/New York in 1625. Where, between 1625 and 1713, did they bury their dead?

There are three places where members of colonial Manhattan's black community would have been laid to rest during the seventeenth century: in plots set aside on family or syndicate farms, in the town burial ground, or in congregational yards. Rural family cemeteries in upper Manhattan, New Jersey, and Long Island had burial plots for enslaved Africans in the eighteenth century, but seventeenth-century examples of this practice are not known (Kruger 1985:545–551). Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who had the single largest

slaveholding in New Amsterdam, may have permitted burials in the chapel yard at his *bouwerie*, the Dutch word for a plantation or a farm. Stuyvesant erected the chapel for his neighbors and tenants and paid the Dutch minister Henricus Selyns 250 guilders a year to conduct Sunday evening services there (Christoph 1984:147–148). In use from approximately 1660 to 1687, the chapel was located near what is now the west side of 2nd Avenue at about 10th Street, within the yard of St. Mark's Church (Stokes 1915–1928:4:202). The Dutch West India Company, New Amsterdam's commercial landlord, may have allowed burials near the camp for Africans who fed the lumber mill on the Sawkill (Saw River). Situated near present-day 74th Street, the camp was far from the public burial ground at the island's southern tip, where the town took shape around a fort built with African labor (Figures 10 and 11).

New Amsterdam/New York's public burial ground, in use from approximately 1649 to 1676, was located on the west side of present-day Broadway, near present-day Morris Street (New York State Archives, Albany, New York Colonial Manuscripts, Dutch Patents and Deeds 1630–1664, Patents Liber 2:20; New York County, Office of the Register, Deeds Libers, Libers 12:85, 90 and 13:102). A second public cemetery was opened on the same side of the road, just north of the town wall (present-day Wall Street). It began operation after the cemetery established under the Dutch West India Company ceased to be used.

The second public cemetery, which is still in existence today (Figure 12), was integrated into the yard of Anglican Trinity Church. After opening its doors in 1697, Trinity Church banned the burial of Africans in the cemetery outside. The Vestrymen

Ordered, That after the Expiration of four weeks from the dates hereof no Negroes be buried



Figure 10. Detail from the Manatus Map, a depiction of New Amsterdam in 1639, with a mark (F) showing the camp (near present-day 74th Street) where the Dutch West India Company housed African workers. The unnamed mapmaker provided the earliest known cartographic reference to slavery in New York (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).



Figure 11. The Castello Plan, cartographer Jacques Cortelyou's street grid of New Amsterdam in 1660, shows the common burial ground on the west side of the wagon road (Broadway), midway between the fort and the wall (Wall Street) (I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).



Figure 12. View of Trinity Churchyard, October 2005 (photograph by Rob Tucher).

within the bounds & Limits of the Church Yard of Trinity Church, that is to say, in the rear of the present burying place & that no person or Negro whatsoever, do presume after the terme above Limited to break up any ground for the burying of his Negro, as they will answer it at their perill [Stokes 1915–1928:4:403, citing the vestry minutes of October 25, 1697].

The ban implies that Africans had been using the town cemetery during the seventeenth century. If so, Africans, or the men and women who held Africans in bondage, would have had to find another burial site after the cemetery came under Trinity’s wing. Trinity Church did not take over the northern end of the town burial ground until April 1703. It is possible that burials of Africans in the north yard continued until then (Cannan 2004:3).¹

Did the Reformed Dutch Church and other congregations open their graveyards for the burial of Africans prior to, or after, Trinity Church issued its ban? The officially sponsored Dutch Church had a wide reach in New Amsterdam’s multiethnic, multi-religious community. Town residents, including Africans, were married and baptized by its clergymen, and attendance at its services was open to people of non-Dutch descent (on African marriages and baptisms, see Goodfriend [1984, 2003] and Swan [1995]; on the ethnic make-up of Dutch Church members, see Goodfriend [1992:16]).

¹ Trinity Church’s archivist suggests that there may have been unrecorded burials of black Anglican communicants during the eighteenth century (Phyllis Barr, personal communication 1991). Burial registers are not extant prior to 1777, and churchyard headstones, which are used to document burials at Trinity, may not have been provided to blacks.

The Dutch Church oversaw the upkeep and use of the town cemetery. It collected fees for the rental of the pall, straps, benches, and boards and for tolling the bell for the dead. At the behest of the church, city officials reminded the town’s two grave diggers to keep a register of “all who die and are buried” (Minutes of the Burgomasters, February 25, 1661, in New York Orphanmasters 1902:2:77–78), but these registers, and any precursors, apparently are not extant. The proportion of the African population interred in the town cemeteries during the seventeenth century is therefore unknown. A new Dutch Church with an adjoining yard was opened in 1694 on Garden Street. If the Dutch Church on Garden Street permitted burials of Africans after the Trinity ban, the practice did not persist through the following century. An examination of Dutch Church burial records, extant for 1727–1804, yielded only five burials of Africans, and only one, Susannah Rosedale’s in 1729, was *opt de kirkhoff*, “in the churchyard” (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, Burial Register of the Reformed Dutch Church in the City of New York, 1727–1804).

Other congregations held religious services during the Dutch period, but they utilized private homes or the church in the fort until they could establish sites of their own (Rothschild 1990:44). In 1688, the town’s Huguenot community erected a building for the French Church (Église du Saint Esprit). From 1688 until 1804, the French Church performed marriages, baptisms, and funerals, but no burial records of Africans are listed in its register (French Church du Saint Esprit 1968). Among the smaller congregations, a group that includes the Lutherans, who erected a church in the early 1670s; the Quakers, whose first meeting was recorded in 1681; and the Jews, who had a cemetery by 1683 and a synagogue by 1695 (Goodfriend 1992:84), few burials of blacks were recorded.²

Burials of unfree Africans in congregational cemeteries would have been at the request of the slaveholder. A rough sense of the congregational affiliations of slaveholding households at the end of the seventeenth century can be had by linking data on slave-

² There were only two burials of Africans recorded at Trinity Lutheran Church in the eighteenth century: a free African woman named Mareitje van Guinea, in March 1745, and an illegitimate mulatto child, Abraham Beeling, in October 1747 (Stryker-Rodda 1974:84–85). Moravians buried just two Africans in their cemetery in the 1770s (New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, Moravian Church Death Records, 1752–1890). German-language records of Christ Lutheran Church include burials from 1752–1763 and 1767–1773, but these have not been translated. The United Lutheran Church burial records from 1784–1804 were not examined for the present study. For information on Protestant church records, see Macy (1994, 1995, 1996).

Table 8. Church Affiliation of a Sample of New York City Slaveholding Households, 1703

Church Affiliation	Number of Households	Black Males	Black Females	Black Male Children	Black Female Children	Total Blacks
Huguenot	11	6	19	4	2	31
Reformed Dutch	17	20	15	6	3	44
Anglican	33	27	32	15	7	81
	61	53	66	25	12	156

Note: From U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909) and Rothschild (1990:185–204). To obtain church affiliation, households with blacks in residence identified in the 1703 census were matched with names of church members from Rothschild’s list.

holding with tallies of congregational rolls. Working with figures from the 1703 census, when the black population numbered 799, historian Joyce Goodfriend (1992:76) found that Manhattan’s Dutch households held 45 percent of the town’s unfree Africans, the English held 40 percent, the French held 13 percent, and the Jews held 2 percent.³ Based on a sample of 61 slaveholding households for which the actual church affiliation of the household head can be determined, Anglican parishioners were well represented in the town’s slaveholding ranks. Anglicans held slightly more than half (81 out of 156) of the Africans in the sample (Table 8). Even if other denominations did allow burials of Africans, it is likely that the closing of Trinity’s churchyard to blacks would have had a noticeable impact.

There is no record of the establishment of a cemetery for Africans after the 1697 ban was issued or after the northern end of the town cemetery was transferred to Trinity’s jurisdiction in 1703. It is likely a cemetery already existed, the one now known as the African Burial Ground.

The African Burial Ground was located in a low-lying area on the undeveloped reaches of the town.⁴ The spine of high ground that present-day Broadway would follow lay to the west. The *vlacht*, or “flat,” of the town Common, where indigents and criminals

would be housed after 1736, was on the south. The lower end of Kalch (also “Collect” or “Fresh Water”) Pond lay to the east-northeast.

The area was situated between the town and the outlying parcels the Dutch West India Company conveyed during the 1640s to Africans granted conditional freedom.⁵ The parcels formed a loose arc around the top of Kalch Pond and the Cripplebush (thicketed, swampy wetlands) that accompanied the pond’s western outlet across Manhattan to the North River, one of the names by which today’s Hudson River was known. Domingo Antony’s 12-acre parcel, granted July 13, 1643, anchored the eastern leg of the arc to the wagon path that would become the Bowery Road. His land, located below present-day Canal Street, extended west to the “Fresh Water or swamp.” The opposite leg of the arc rested on Simon Congo’s farm, granted December 16, 1644. Congo’s 8-acre parcel was centered on present-day Varick Street. One of 17 African land grants located on the northwestern side of the Cripplebush, his farm angled downward from present-day West Houston to Charleton Street, between present-day Avenue of the Americas (Sixth Avenue) and Hudson Street. The approximate locations of the farms are shown in Figure 13 (for descriptions of the parcels and their subsequent conveyances, see Stokes [1915–1928:6:73–76, 123–124]).

³ Official counts of New York’s black population are presented in a discussion of African burial practices in New Amsterdam/New York.

⁴ The present-day state of knowledge about the geographical coordinates of the African Burial Ground during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is based, in part, on the documentary evidence presented in this chapter. Only a portion of the cemetery was excavated in 1991–1992. The archaeologically excavated portion is discussed in Chapter 3.

⁵ Eleven African men petitioned the New Netherland Council for release from servitude to the Dutch West India Company. The petition, granted February 25, 1644 (New Netherland Council 1974:212–213), made freedom of the men and their wives contingent upon the annual remittance of a tax and assistance, when requested, with public works projects and civil defense. The Company granted conditional freedom to some of its other African workers. Several slaveholding individuals manumitted Africans as well. On the legal rights and privileges of black New Yorkers under Dutch rule, see Goodfriend (1978), Higginbotham (1978:105–108), Moore (2005), and Swan (1998).

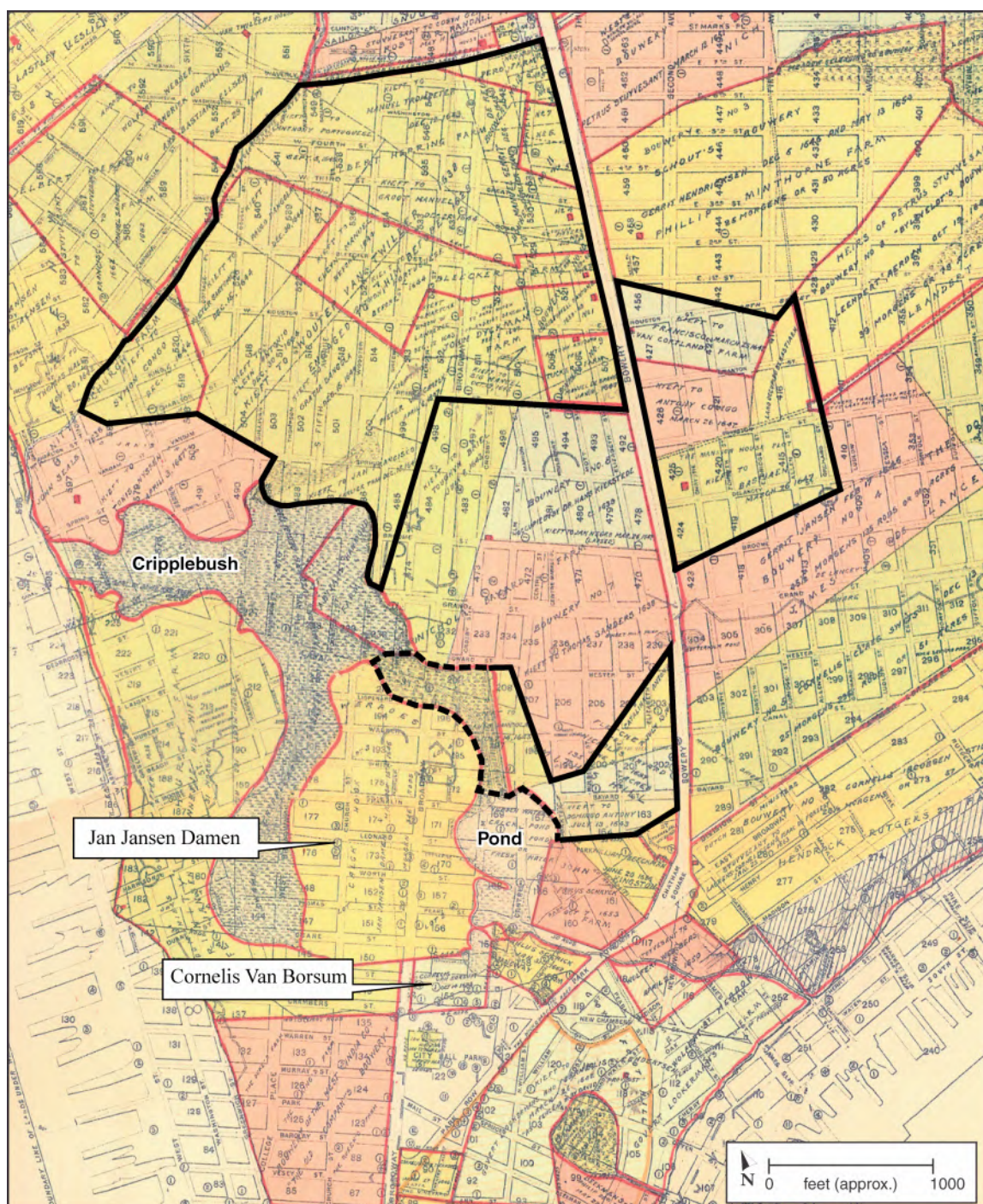


Figure 13. Detail from a map of Dutch-era land grants, superimposed on a Manhattan street grid (ca. 1835), showing the approximate locations of patents issued to African men and women (the areas inside the heavy black lines), Jan Jansen Damen, and Cornelis Van Borsum. The map, prepared by R. H. Dodd from translations of the original ground briefs, alludes to the features of the seventeenth-century landscape—the pond, the swamps and wetlands, the wagon roads—to which these outlying parcels were oriented. The African farms formed a loose arc around the northern side of Fresh Water Pond and the Cripplebush to the west. The Damen and Van Borsum lots were situated south of the Cripplebush and west of the pond. The African farms were subsequently reconveyed to Europeans (from Stokes 1915–1928:6:Plates 84Ba and 84Bb; on the creation of the map, see Stokes [1915–1928:2:355–357]).

Peter Stuyvesant relocated some of the African farmers in 1659–1660, a period of heightened anxiety about the possibility of attack from Native Americans. In keeping with a policy to safeguard settlers on outlying parcels (see Stokes 1915–1928:4:202–203), Stuyvesant recalled that he had “ordered and commanded” the Africans “to take down their isolated dwellings for their own improved security . . . [and] to establish and erect the same along the common highway near the honorable general’s [Stuyvesant’s] farm.” At least nine Africans were granted parcels “in true and free ownership” aside the common highway (Bowery Road) that edged Stuyvesant’s land.⁶

The Dutch traveler Jasper Danckaerts referred to the African farms in a journal entry penned October 6, 1679. When describing the changing political geography of seventeenth-century Manhattan, Danckaerts (1913:65) overestimated the liberty Africans had about where they could live:

We went from the city, following the Broadway, over the *valley*, or the fresh water.⁷ Upon both sides of this way were many habitations of negroes, mulattoes and whites. These negroes were formerly the proper slaves of the [West India] company, but, in consequence of the frequent changes and conquests of the country, they have obtained their freedom and settled themselves down where they have thought proper, and thus on this road, where they have ground enough to live on with their families.

Europeans as well as Africans held land in and around the African Burial Ground. To understand how Africans used the land—our primary aim—requires knowing how the activities of other town residents encroached upon it. Two seventeenth-century land grants to Dutchmen, Jan Jansen Damen and Cornelis Van Borsum, are now known to have overlapped the cemetery. The Van Borsum patent encompassed the majority of the burial ground, and by the mid-

eighteenth century, the parcel came to be known as the “Negroes Burial Ground.” The cemetery eventually overlapped the south edge of the Damen grant as well. Van Borsum’s land would become conflated not only with the African Burial Ground but also the town Common, both in the popular imagination and in the official record of property conveyances and deeds. Figure 13 highlights the geographical relationships between the African farms and the Damen and Van Borsum parcels.

Jan Jansen Damen received a patent from the Dutch West India Company in March 1646. According to the ground brief, Damen had been in possession of the parcel for about 10 years (Stokes 1915–1928:6:82–83). Called the Kalck (Calk) Hook Farm (for the hilly spit of land that pushed into the western side of the pond), the parcel extended westward from the pond to the approximate alignment of present-day Church Street. It extended northward from present-day Block 154 just south of Duane Street to Canal Street.

Damen died ca. 1651. Sometime before 1662 (Stokes 1915–1928:6:82), the land was ordered to be partitioned into four quarters, and, in 1671, Jan Vigne, the son-in-law of Damen’s wife, came into possession of the southeastern piece (referred to as Calk Hook Lot No. 2; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber of Deeds, Liber 25:110). Vigne’s piece overlapped the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground (see Chapter 3). A nephew, Gerrit Roos, took control upon Vigne’s death in 1689, and when Gerrit died in 1697, his son Peter became the executor of Vigne’s property (Wills Liber 5–6:263 [New York County Surrogates Court 1893:297–298] and Liber 7:465 [New York County Surrogates Court 1893:457]). Wolfort Webber purchased the property in 1708. By 1725, Anthony Rutgers had acquired it, along with Calk Hook Lot Nos. 1 and 3. The Rutgers heirs would continue in ownership through the 1790s, by which time burials were located along the southern portion of the property (for a history of the Rutgers family, see Crosby [1886]). During the Rutgers’ tenure, several buildings abutting the burial ground would be constructed, and Great George Street (later Broadway) would be extended northward along the cemetery’s western edge.

Cornelis Van Borsum acquired his patent from Governor Colve in October 1673 (Figure 14). The grant was made in recognition of Van Borsum’s wife, Sara Roeloffse or Roeloff (Roeloff was her father’s given name), who had rendered service as an Indian interpreter. The parcel was described as

⁶ Among this group were Christoffel Santome, Solomon Pieters, Francisco Cartagena, Assento, Willem Antonys, Groote Manuel, Manuel Sanders, Claes the Negro, and Pieter Tamboer. Stuyvesant’s confirmation of the replacement lots, issued April 1665, was translated by Charles Gehring from the original held at the New York State Archives, Albany (typescript provided to the authors).

⁷ The “Broadway” Danckaerts followed would likely have been today’s Bowery Road. At the time of his journey, the road that became present-day Broadway had not been laid through the patchwork of African and European farms situated north of Fresh Water Pond and the wetlands to the west.

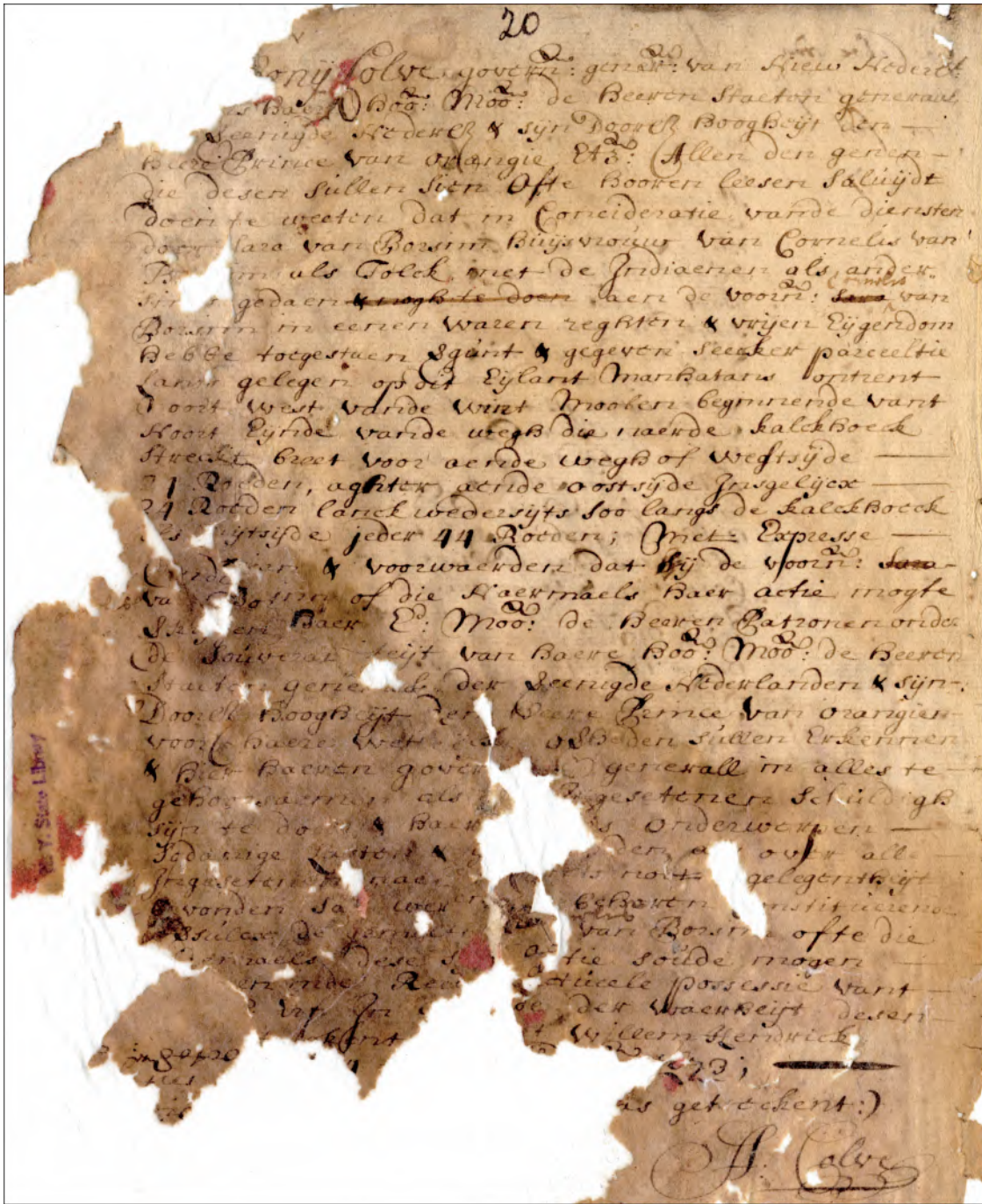


Figure 14. The Van Borsum Patent, issued in October 1673 under Governor Colve's signature, describes the boundaries of an outlying parcel that came to be known as the African Burial Ground. The patent was damaged in a fire at the New York State Library, Albany, in 1911. (New York State Archives; Series A1881-78, Dutch Colonial Administrative Records, 1673–1674, Vol. 23, 20–433.)

a certain small parcel of land situate on the Island of Manhattan about north-west from the Windmill, beginning from the north end of the road which runs toward the Kalckhook, broad in front on the road or west side, 24 rods; in the rear on the east side, the like 24 rods; long on each side as well along the Kalckhook as on the south side, 44 rods each [Stokes 1915–1928:6:123].

Based on the description, the parcel covered approximately 6.6 acres. Using as a guide the street grid shown in Figure 13, the area extended eastward from Broadway to approximately Centre Street. The northern boundary was just south of Duane Street. The southern boundary ran, roughly, along Chambers Street.

Sara Roeloff had seven living children, including grown sons and daughters, by her first husband, surgeon Hans Kiersted. She would have an eighth child with Van Borsum, and after his death in 1682 would remarry once again, to Elbert Stouthoff (for biographical information on Roeloff, see Janowitz [2005]; Totten [1925:210–212]). Roeloff had a prenuptial contract with her third husband that enabled her to retain ownership of her property (Narrett 1992:77–79). On her death in 1693, she left her estate to her children and named as executors her son Lucas Kiersted and sons-in-law Johannis Kip and William Teller (Wills Liber 5–6:1–6 [New York County Surrogate’s Court 1893:225–227]). In 1696, Governor Fletcher would grant a confirmation deed for the land to these three as trustees of the estate (New York State Archives, Albany, Letters Patent, Patents Liber 7:11). Johannis Kip’s eldest son Jacobus would petition the city in 1723 to have the land surveyed, but there is no clear evidence of any development taking place on it around that time. A piece of the land near the southeast corner was leased for a stoneware pottery sometime around 1730. From 1745 to approximately 1760, a palisade cut across the bottom of the patent, eliding the southern portion with the town Common behind the wall. By 1765, five houses had been built along the east side of Broadway, within the patent, and were being occupied or leased out by the heirs.

Why and when members of colonial Manhattan’s African community began interring their relatives and friends on the undeveloped edge of the town is not known. Our conjecture is that free and enslaved Africans might have begun appropriating Common land for use as a burial ground during the 1640s, when the first African farms were established, or perhaps during the 1660s, when some of the Afri-

can lot holders were moved to the road alongside Stuyvesant’s bowery. The first interments might have been limited to the core African farm families, but a more inclusive cemetery might have developed as members of the town’s steadily expanding African population sought a burial place under the control of their own community. It is reasonable to assume that the families who were the farms’ proprietors were influential in overseeing the burial ground. As African farms passed into European hands, and New Amsterdam was renamed New York, use of the burial ground would have continued.⁸

Although the area would be granted to Europeans by the third quarter of the seventeenth century, we hypothesize that its Dutch deed holders and the English colonial government would have abided African burials on land that was inconvenient for residential development and undesirable for agricultural use. Approval in practice, if not in law, of an existing African cemetery would have solved the problem posed by the Trinity Church ban. It also would have been consistent with the racial segregation upon which slavery in Britain’s mainland American colonies came to depend.

In summary, there is no known date for the origin of the New York African Burial Ground and no evidence that explains how its location was chosen. We know that it was in existence by 1713 and believe that a need for it must have arisen by 1703 at the latest. We also know that the land that would become the New York African Burial Ground was in close proximity to some of the farms granted to Africans during the mid-1600s. Spatial proximity alone, however, cannot be taken as proof that the burial ground was established during the time that Africans held these lots. Much of the land was granted to Sara Roeloff’s husband in 1673, but neither the ground brief nor the 1696 deed of confirmation mentions the cemetery. None of Roeloff’s heirs questioned the presence on their property of an African cemetery, although they knew of its existence—legal documents of the day identify the heirs as claimants and proprietors of the “Negroes Burying Ground.” Despite the language of the law, the cemetery was a place where Africans held sway.

⁸ Africans held the rights and interests in their farms for varied spans of time, as Stokes’ (1915–1928:6:73–76, 123–124) biographies of the parcels attest. Domingo Antony’s farm was conveyed in August 1668 to Augustine Hermans. The duration of Simon Congo’s tenure is unclear.

Documentary Chronology of the African Burial Ground, 1650–1783

Subsequent to its archaeological excavation in 1991–1992, the African Burial Ground’s history has been recounted often, in all manner of media.⁹ That history, however, has been reconstructed through a very limited set of public and private documents, and, often, inferences based on scant evidence have been made. To clarify the sources of information that anchor the archaeological analysis presented in this report, a two-part chronology of documented events, laws, and transactions that affected the use of the cemetery is provided.

ca. 1650: This is the hypothetical date for the origin of the African Burial Ground. Land grants to Africans began in the 1640s. The Damen patent, which skirted the northern edge of the burial ground, was issued in 1646.

1673: The Van Borsum Patent, which covered much of the area of the African Burial Ground, was issued under the signature of Governor Colve.

1697–1703: Anglican Trinity Church assumed management of the town cemetery and banned burials of Africans in it.

1704: French Huguenot Elias Neau, with financial support from the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, organized a school for enslaved Africans (Butler 1983:166–169). Enslaved and free black New Yorkers put literacy to a variety of uses, including petitioning the municipal government for assistance in protecting African graves, and acquiring land for a new cemetery (see entries for 1788 and 1795).

1712–1713: According to a letter from Governor Hunter to the Lords of Trade, dated June 23, 1712, in April of 1712, an armed insurrection of enslaved Africans resulted in 6 suicides and 21 executions (Brodhead 1853–1887:5:341–342; see also Scott 1961). The Common might have been used for the executions, and the dead might have been buried in the African Burial Ground. In the following March, John Sharpe of the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts mentioned African burials in his “Proposals for Erecting a School, Library and Chapel at New York.” Sharpe (1881:355) noted that Africans were “buried in the Common by those of their country and complexion without the office [of a Christian minister], on the contrary the Heathenish rites are performed at the grave by their countrymen.” He was almost certainly referring to funerals in the African Burial Ground, although the exact portion of the ground then in use cannot be determined. The Common covered the area of present-day City Hall Park to Fresh Water Pond.

1722: The Common Council passed a law regulating the burial of “all Negroes and Indian Slaves that shall dye within this corporation [located] on the south side of the Fresh Water” (New York City Common Council 1905:3:296).¹⁰ The law stipulated that the enslaved had to be “buried by Day-light,” on penalty of 10 shillings, payable by the slaveholder.

1723: The Common Council appointed a committee to assist Alderman Jacobus Kip (the son of Johannes Kip and grandson of Sara Roeloff) in surveying the Van Borsum patent (New York City Common Council 1905:3:335). Care was to be taken by the committee to preserve the width of Broadway as it was extended northward, through the patent. Kip’s need for a survey may have been related to Anthony Rutgers’s purchase of Lot No. 2 of Calk Hook Farm. That lot abutted the Van Borsum patent on the north, with the boundary running diagonally across present-

¹⁰ Here and in other restrictive legislation, both “Negroes” and “Indians Slaves” are referred to. There is no reason to suppose that enslaved Native Americans would not have used the same burial ground as Africans, yet no distinctive forms of burial attributable to Native Americans were identified during the archaeological excavation in 1991–1992. Although burial practices of Native Americans during the “contact period” are not well known, evidence indicates that Munsee-speaking Lenape Delaware buried their dead in immediate proximity to their settlements and exhumed and reburied the bones of their kin when settlements were moved (Cantwell and Wall 2001:97–103). Apparently, the typical burial position for these groups, and for Iroquois, was flexed. By the time the African Burial Ground was in use, head-to-west burial with an extended supine position was practiced (Kerry Nelson, e-mail to Historical Archaeology mailing list at Arizona State University, August 1, 2000; Wray and Schoff 1953:57–59). The African Burial Ground Skeletal Biology Team compared the skeletal sample with Native American DNA, dental morphology, and craniometrics, but none of these statistical analyses pointed to Native American ancestry. If native individuals were buried in the excavated portion of the cemetery, there was insufficient evidence to identify them by their biological characteristics. The biological evidence generally pointed to African origins if any origin was estimable.

⁹ The Office of Public Education and Interpretation for the project retains huge files of articles, books, and the many films and videos that have told the story of the cemetery and its rediscovery. Official documents, such as the National Historic Landmark nomination (Howson and Harris 1992, reproduced in Appendix A, Part 3 of this volume) and the Designation Report for New York City’s landmark historic district, provide synopses of the documentary research.

day Block 154.¹¹ Perhaps there was some question about the exact location of the boundary between the two patents. It is more likely, however, that the extension of Broadway northward to Rutgers's land required an exact survey.

1730: Two plans of the town ca. 1730, each based on a survey conducted by James Lyne, show little development in the area near the burial ground. The 1731 Lyne-Bradford Plan (Figure 15) labeled the Common, the ropewalk along the west side of Broadway ("Great George Street"), and the powder magazine on a small rise between the main Fresh Water Pond and a smaller pond or swamp to its south (the "Little Collect"). Also depicted, but not labeled, were two buildings, one on the east side of Broadway, south of the burial ground, and one on the northern part of the Common. The latter building was identified as a pottery on the Carwitham Plan, printed in 1740 (Figure 16). The parcel of land containing the pottery was apparently in the possession of Abraham Van Vleck (Sara Roeloff's granddaughter Maria had married Van Vleck in 1710). Van Vleck probably leased it to William Crolius, listed in the city as a freeman potter in 1728. This area (on the south side of present-day Reade Street to the east of Elk, Block 153) was probably not used for burials after this date, if it had been previously.¹² The pottery may have begun disposing of kiln waste within the excavated portion of the African Burial Ground around this time (see Chapter 4). Only the pottery operation—and its waste disposal practices—would have constituted a clear encroachment.

1731: A smallpox epidemic in the city claimed the lives of approximately 50 African New Yorkers, and 79 Africans were listed in the bills of mortality published in the *New-York Gazette* in August through December. The *Gazette* sorted whites by congregational affiliation and noted that eight of the town's congregations had cemeteries (*New-York Gazette*, November 15, 1731). Blacks were listed separately and, presumably, were interred in the African Burial Ground. In mid-November, when the municipal codes were renewed, the Common Council placed two more restrictions on burials of enslaved Africans (see entry for 1722). To ensure that African funerals were not a pretext for insurrection, the master of the deceased slave was made responsible for vetting the attendees

and limiting their number to 12, excluding the grave digger and "the Bearers who Carry the Corps." Pawls and pawl bearers were also banned (New York City Common Council 1905:4:88–89). A pawl, or pall, was a large, typically sumptuous cloth spread over the coffin (or the corpse) during the funeral procession. Pallbearers held up the hem. Given that palls were usually rented from churches, prohibiting palls at black funerals turned a sign of Christian burial into a prerogative of whites.

1732–1735: The first cartographic reference to a "Negro Burying Place" appeared on a hand-drawn plan of the city, ca. 1732–1735. Mrs. Buchnerd's Plan (Figure 17) situates the burial ground on the southwest side of the swamp below the Fresh Water pond. It is likely this is the same part of the Common referred to by John Sharpe when he mentioned burials conducted by Africans.

1736: The city erected an Almshouse on the Common, at the approximate location of present-day City Hall. This was the beginning of the transformation of the Common into a site for public institutions (Epperson 1999; Hall 1910; Harris et al. 1993; Hunter Research 1994).

1741: A "great conspiracy" of Africans was thwarted and its perpetrators brought to trial (Lieutenant Governor Clarke to Duke of Newcastle, and to the Lords of Trade, June 29, 1741, in Brodhead [1853–1887:6:195–198]; see also Horsmanden [1971]). Thirty of the convicted Africans were executed on the Common (13 by burning at the stake and 17 by hanging), as were 4 of the Europeans. The executions were memorialized on the Grim Plan, a depiction of New York in 1742–1744 set down in 1813 (Figure 18). The Africans might well have been interred at the African Burial Ground, if interment was allowed.

1745: The town erected a cedar-log palisade wall, and part of the Van Borsum patent (along the south side) was within it, part without. After this time, it is presumed that the African Burial Ground would have been restricted to the area outside (i.e., to the north of) the wall. When the palisade was dismantled is unclear, but city plans from ca. 1760 onward do not show it. During the time that the wall stood, access to the burial ground from the town would have entailed passing through one of the palisade gates.¹³

¹¹ Rutgers acquired one of the Calk Hook lots in 1723 and two more in 1725. The latter two were probably Lot Nos. 1 and 3 (Crosby 1886:84; Stokes 1915–1928:6:82).

¹² The location of the kiln was traced back from later property records and maps.

¹³ David Grim, in notes jotted in November 1819 on the back of the plan he drew (see Figure 18), identified the logs as cedar and put their length at 14 feet. He situated one of the palisade's four gates at present-day Broadway near Chambers Street (Hall 1910:389; Stokes 1915–1928:4:591).

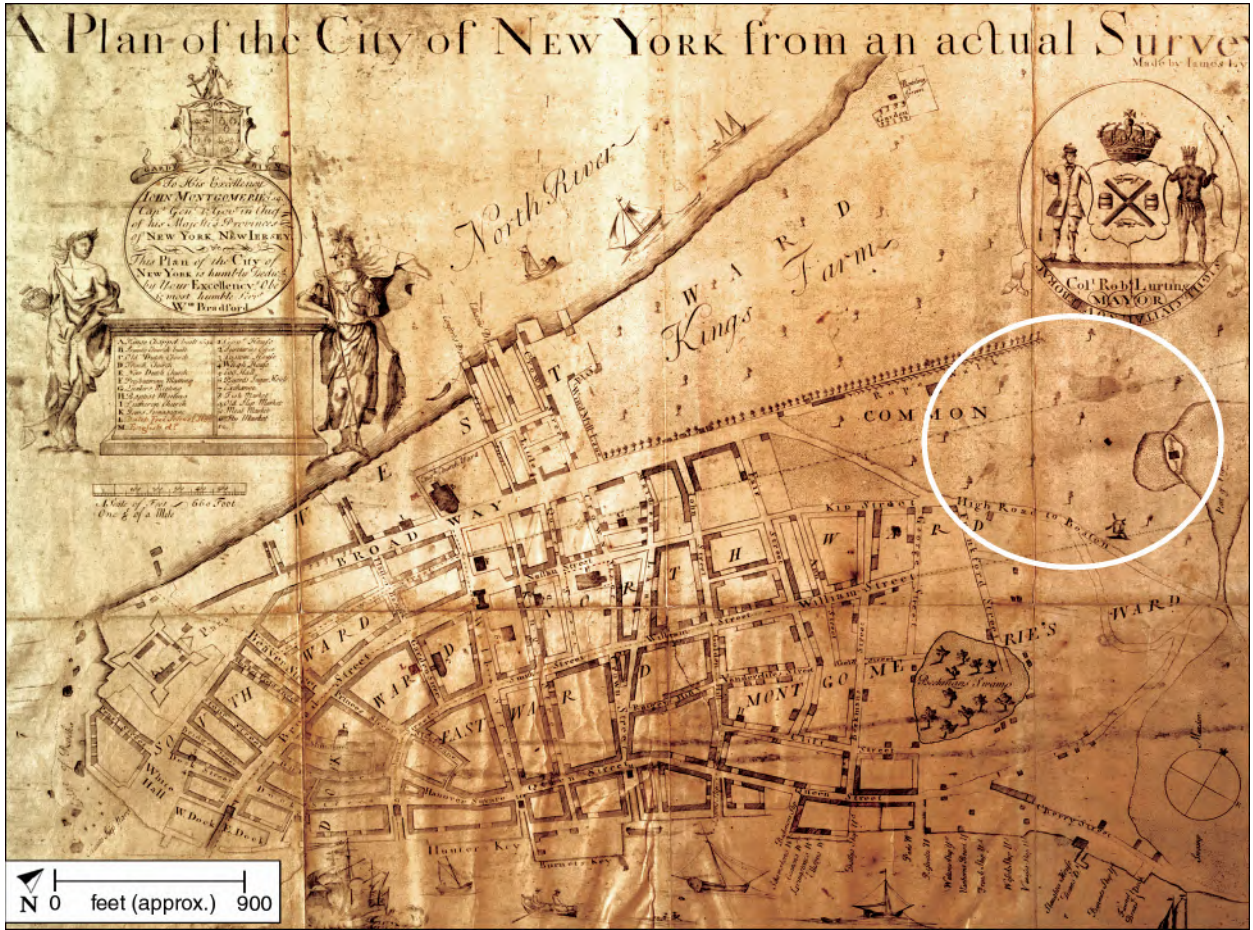


Figure 15. The Lyne-Bradford Plan, printed by William Bradford in 1731 from a survey made by James Lyne, depicts New York in 1730. The African Burial Ground is not identified on the map, which Bradford marketed at 4s. 6d. The cemetery's immediate surrounds show little development. The structure encircled on the detail at the right was the Crollius Pottery. The large structure on the Common adjacent to the ropewalk has not been identified. The dashed line parallel to the ropewalk is a ward boundary (Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).





Figure 16. The Carwitham Plan, named for its engraver John Carwitham, was based on James Lyne's survey. Printed in London in 1740, the Carwitham Plan provides more details than the Lyne-Bradford Plan. The arrow on the upper left points to the Crolius Pottery, located just south of the ponds, in what was probably the southeastern part of the African Burial Ground (Viscount Coke and the Trustees of the Holkham Estate).



Figure 17. Mrs. Buchnerd’s hand-drawn Plan of the City of New York in the Year 1735. The words “Negro Burying Place” are legible on the central fold of the manuscript, adjacent to the “swamp” on the south side of the Collect (near the top of the full sheet shown above, and circled at right). This was the first time the cemetery was labeled on a map (I. N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).



1753: In August, John Teller, Jacobus Stoutenburgh, and Maria Van Vleck petitioned the Common Council for “Some lands belonging to this Corporation in Exchange for the Negroe burying place, as also for a small Slip of Land on which a Pott house &c are built” (New York City Common Council 1905:5:416). The land offered to the city was probably the portion of the patent that fell within the palisade wall, making it ripe for corporation encroachment or even confiscation.¹⁴ If the wording of the request is taken to mean that part of the land Teller and company tried to swap had been used for burials, then the total area of the cemetery contracted following the wall’s construction. The Common Council deferred consideration of the petition, and no further mention of it was made in the minutes until 1760.

1754–1755: The “Negros Burial Ground” was labeled clearly on the Maerschalk Plan surveyed in 1754 and published in 1755 (Figure 19). Also shown on the map are the town palisade wall, potteries at the presumed northeast and southeast corners of the burial ground, a structure on Broadway, and a dashed line running southwest to northeast from that structure toward the northern pottery. This line may represent a fence along the southern boundary of the Calk Hook Farm, possibly marking the northern limit of the burial ground (see Chapter 4). The structure on Broadway may have been a gatehouse to the Rutgers estate located to the north, or a house that Anthony Rutgers was leasing out.

1757: A small burial ground (“the length of two Boards”) was laid out on the Common, on the east side of the Almshouse, for the abject poor who resided within (New York City Common Council 1905:6:85). The Almshouse cemetery was situated south of the southern boundary of the Van Borsum patent, but because the southern extent of the early African Burial Ground is not known, there is a possible overlap between the two cemeteries. Also in this year, a jail was built east of the Almshouse, and a barracks went up along the south side of present-day Chambers Street east of Broadway (Hall 1910; Hunter Research 1994). The construction in this area may have disturbed African Burial Ground graves.

¹⁴ We postulate that the portion of the patent on the south side of the palisade was in the de facto possession of the city, though not, as it would turn out, in its legal possession. The map evidence indicates that the first pottery works (ca. 1730) stood outside the palisade’s line-of-march. Another building, presumed to be part of the works, was located inside the wall on the city plan surveyed in 1754 (see Figure 19). It is possible that Van Vleck had the latter built for the Crolius pottery works in the 1740s or early 1750s.

1760: The Common Council and the children of Maria Van Vleck came to an agreement regarding “three Lotts of Ground Contiguous and adjoining to the Negroes Burying place on part of Which said Lotts, their Father [Abraham Van Vleck] Built a Potting House pot oven and Sunk a Well Supposing at that Time the said Lands were his property” (New York City Common Council 1905:6:238). It is likely this parcel was separated from the majority of the Van Borsum patent by the palisade wall built in 1745, which may account for the city’s unexplained possession, although there may be a missing transaction. Under the agreement, the city leased the land (a 100-by-100-foot plot) to Van Vleck’s daughters for a period of 19 years. Thus, land that originally may have been within the African Burial Ground was taken over for a pottery factory, came to be considered city property, and was reconveyed by lease to the Van Borsum heirs.

ca. 1765: Isaac Teller (one of the claimants to the land) built three houses along Broadway within the Van Borsum patent, near present-day Chambers Street. At the time, there apparently were two other houses on Broadway to the north of Teller’s buildings.¹⁵ All of the buildings may have encroached on the African Burial Ground. Although the burial ground’s original western limit is not known, there is no reason to think it did not extend to Broadway. Teller built a fence around an unspecified portion of the African Burial Ground and charged a fee for entering its gate (see Chapter 4). By the 1760s, it is likely no burials occurred within 100 feet of Broadway, the depth of a typical lot.

1767: The Ratzer Map of this year (Figure 20) did not identify the African Burial Ground. It depicted the houses along Broadway that would have occupied the burial ground’s western edge, as well as a diagonal line that may have marked the northern boundary and may represent a fence. Three structures, all of unknown function but possibly associated with the potteries, stood along the north side of this line, two near Broadway and one near the swamp south of Fresh Water Pond. The barracks was located south of present-day Chambers Street. Numerous buildings occupied the eastern/southeastern perimeter of the

¹⁵ According to testimony entered before the New York State Supreme Court of Judicature in 1812 (*Smith v. Burtis*) and 1813 (*Smith v. Lorillard*), Teller had one brick and two wood houses put up between 1760 and 1765. Two more houses were said to have fronted Broadway to the immediate north of Teller’s buildings: the Ackerman house (next door to Teller) and the Kip house (next door to Ackerman, near present-day Broadway and Reade Street). For the case testimonies, see Johnson (1853–1859:9:174–185, 10:338–357).

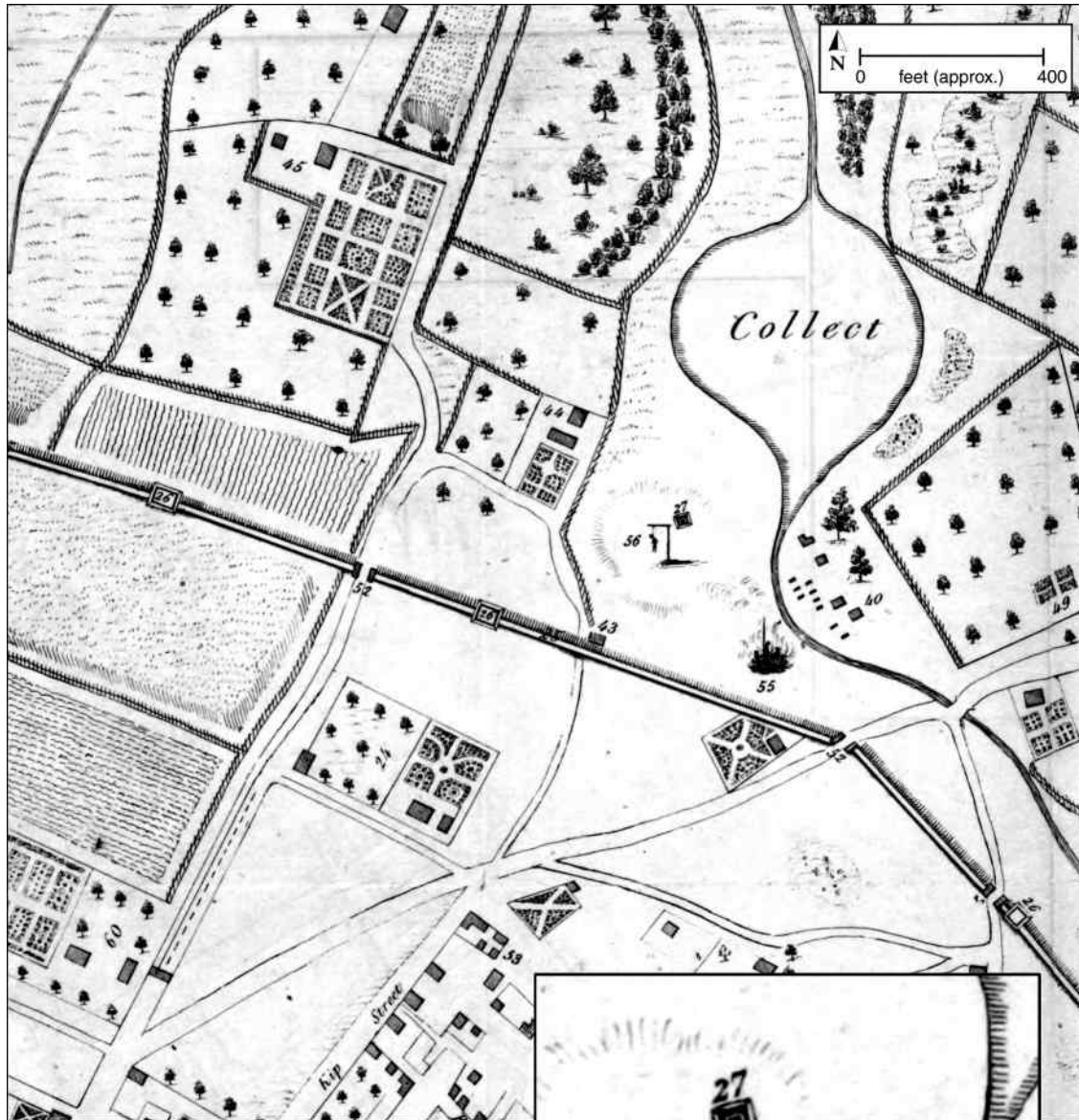


Figure 18. Detail from New Yorker David Grim's recollection of the city in 1742–1744, showing two of the punishments meted out to Africans convicted of conspiring to set fire to the town. The stake at which some of the conspirators were burned (No. 55) is set across from a tannery (No. 40). A box representing the powder house (No. 27) is near the scaffold where the gibbeting took place (No. 56). Northwest of the scaffold are the Remmey & Crolius Pottery (No. 44) and the neatly laid gardens of the Rutgers estate (No. 45). Grim labeled the small building to the southwest of the scaffold (No. 43, abutting the palisade) as the Corselius Pottery (The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

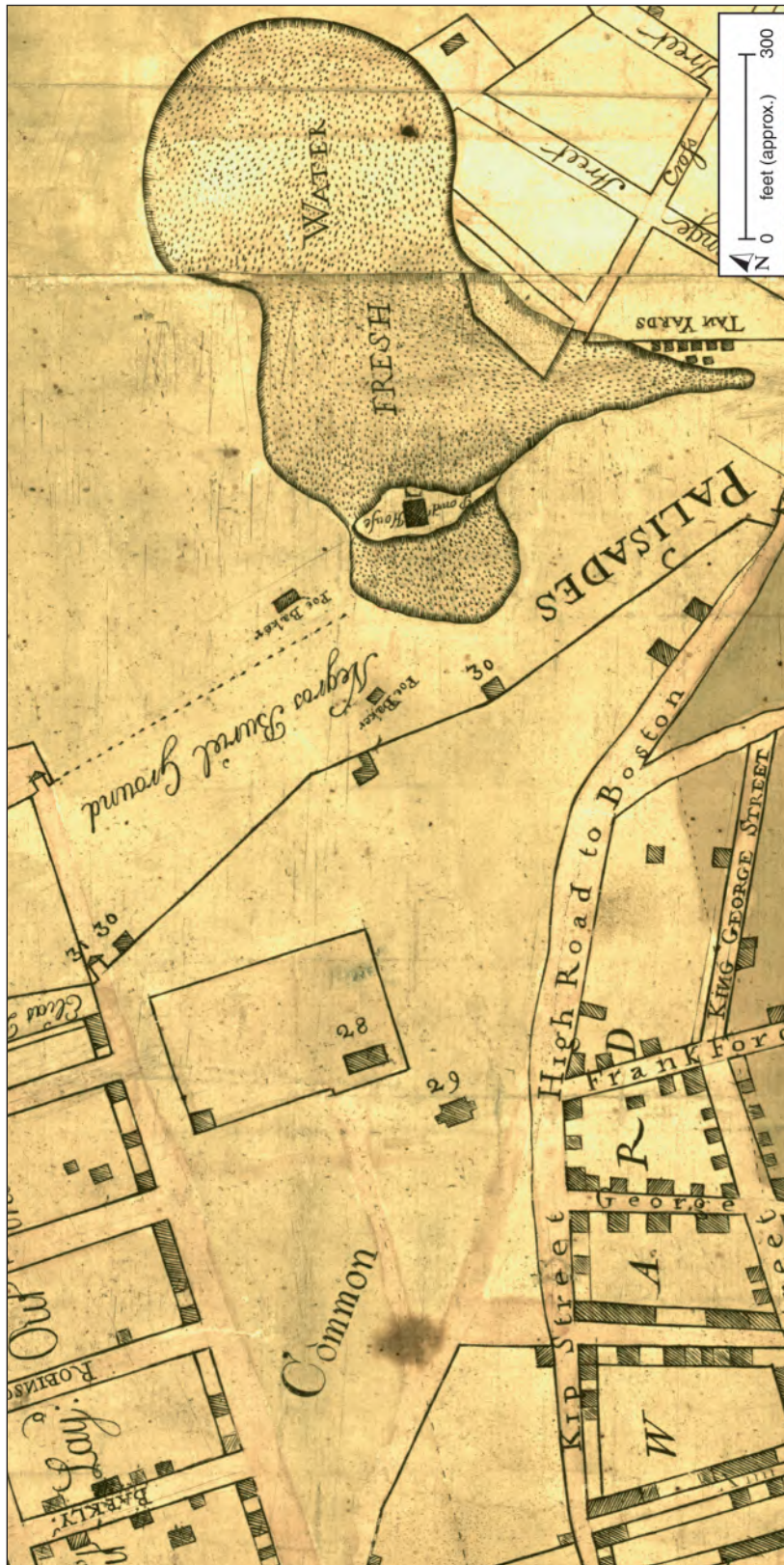


Figure 19. Detail from the Maerschalk Plan, surveyed by Francis Maerschalk in 1754 and published by Gerardus Duyckinck in 1755. The “Negros Burial Ground” is clearly labeled to the southwest of Fresh Water Pond and north of the Common and the palisade wall. The dashed diagonal line corresponds to the approximate northern boundary of the Van Boerum patent, and probably also of the African Burial Ground, and may represent a fence. The “Common” is today’s City Hall Park, with Broadway running along its west side. By this date, houses had gone up along the west side of Broadway as far north as the Palisade. The almshouse (No. 28) and a powder house (No. 29) stood on the Common. The unidentified building that hugs the south side of the palisade is presumed to be a part of the pottery works on the opposite side of the fence (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).

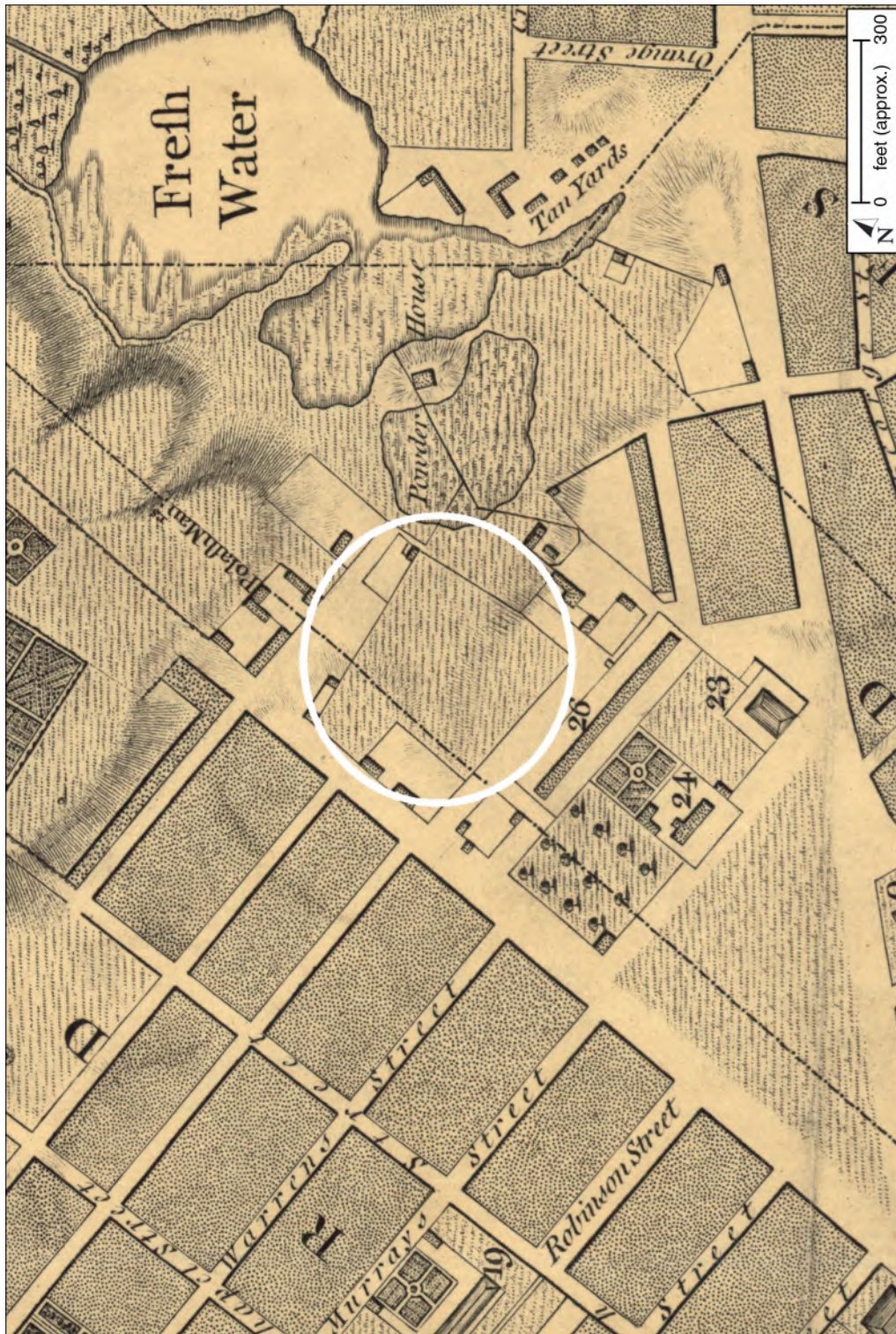


Figure 20. Detail from the Ratzler Map, 1767, surveyed by Bernard Ratzler. The general location of the African Burial Ground is circled. The hachures indicating relief suggest the contours of the hillside sloping down from south to north through the area. Note structures on Broadway properties on the west side of the burial ground, the pottery buildings on the southeast, the barracks (No. 26) to the south, the almshouse and gaol (No. 24 and No. 23) below the barracks, and the diagonal line that may have marked the northern boundary of the Van Borsum patent (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).

African Burial Ground. The physical area available for interments was becoming increasingly constrained by this time.

1773: Trinity Church established its own small “Burial ground for the Negro’s” on a lot bounded by present-day Church Street, Reade Street, and West Broadway (Trinity Church Archives, Minutes of the Vestry, September 15, 1773; New York Public Library, Special Collections, Gerard Bancker Plans 1770–1848, Box 3, Folder 81). Records of burials in this cemetery, located a block to the west of the African Burial Ground, are apparently not extant. The cemetery was in use through mid-August 1795, after which Trinity’s vestrymen arranged to have it surveyed into lots. Within 2 years, the lots had been leased out (Cannan 2004:4).

1775: The Bridewell, an institution for the incarceration of debtors and vagabonds, was built west of the Almshouse, near the present-day southeast corner of Chambers Street and Broadway. Again, this construction may have disturbed graves belonging to the early African Burial Ground.

1776–1783: British forces took New York and occupied the city for the duration of the war. They pulled down the houses Teller had built ca. 1765, along with the fence (Johnson 1853–1859:10:335). They also buried deserters and prisoners of war behind the barracks on the Common (New York Public Library, Special Collections, British Headquarters Papers 1775–1783, Provost Weekly Returns, 1782–1783; Stokes 1915–1928:3:927). These burials probably were limited to the southern portion of the African Burial Ground (Figure 21) within present-day Chambers Street and between Chambers and Reade Streets. Some of them may have been shallow, with bodies “thrown into the ground in a heap” (Sabine 1954:149). No mass graves were found in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground. During the war, the city’s population swelled with Africans in search of freedom. It is assumed that those who died while in the city would have been buried in the African Burial Ground (see Chapter 9). When the British evacuated, thousands of blacks accompanied them.

Closing of the African Burial Ground, 1784–1795

The return of peace and the boom in development following the war spelled the demise of the Afri-

can Burial Ground. Within a very short period, from the mid-1780s to the mid-1790s, the African Burial Ground would be ever more constricted, so that, finally, burials could no longer take place there. Free and enslaved African Americans kept a close eye on the burial ground and responded rapidly to its declining fortunes by mobilizing their own and the city’s resources.

1784: In response to a petition from Henry Kip and the other Van Borsum patent holders, the Common Council appointed a committee in September to lay out and regulate streets through the parcel (New York City Common Council 1917:1:81). Clearly, Sara Roeloff’s heirs were making plans to develop their property. The committee dragged its heels, and Kip petitioned it again, in mid-November 1787 (New York City Common Council 1917:1:338).

1787: With the survey into lots of the Calk Hook Farm (Figure 22), parts of the northernmost area of the African Burial Ground may have ceased to be used. Houses were not built on these lots immediately, but it is possible that a fence, or perhaps survey posts marking the outlines of the lots, discouraged burial in this area (see Chapters 3 and 4).

1788: Public exposure of the unsavory world of nocturnal grave robbing at cemeteries used by blacks and the poor created an uproar that spilled from the February pages of the popular press to the April city streets, where citizens mobbed doctors accused of desecrating the dead. Free and enslaved blacks had petitioned the Common Council in 1787 to stop physicians from carrying African corpses to the dissecting table at the municipal hospital, located on the west side of present-day Broadway near Duane Street (Municipal Archives of the City of New York, Papers of the Common Council, Petitions, Free Negroes and Slaves of the City of New York, February 14, 1787).¹⁶ A free man of color detailed the horrid practice in a letter printed in the *Daily Advertiser*. Another letter disclosed that a private cemetery on Gold Street, made available

¹⁶ The men wrote on behalf of a burial ground “assigned for the Use of your Petitioners,” a description that may best fit the Trinity Church African cemetery at the corner of Church and Reade Streets (see discussion in the entry for 1773). Bodies were also disinterred from the African Burial Ground and the Almshouse cemetery on the Common, as letters published in the *Daily Advertiser* during February and recollections of the city’s cadaver-seeking medical men make clear (see Heaton 1943; Humphrey 1973; Ladenheim 1950).



Figure 21. Detail from the British Headquarters Map, 1782, that depicts the area behind the barracks used for interments by the occupying British forces during the Revolution. This area (just inside the circle used to identify the general location of the African Burial Ground) is stippled with crosses, a convention the mapmaker used to represent congregational as well as common burial grounds. St. Paul's churchyard, in the lower left corner, is also stippled with crosses (The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

for African interments by Mr. Scipio Gray, had been looted, too. Gray had been forced to remain inside his home while physicians ransacked the grave of a child in the nearby ground (*Daily Advertiser*, February 16 and 28, 1788). The cemetery may have belonged to Anglican St. George's Chapel, identified on a 1789 plan that depicts New York on the eve of the development boom (Figure 23).

1794: On October 27, the Common Council read “a Petition from sundry black men in this City praying the Aid of this Board in purchasing a Piece of Ground for the interment of their dead” (New York

City Common Council 1917:2:112).¹⁷ The petition was referred to a committee, which reported back the following year.

1795: The survey and division into lots of the Van Borsum patent made inevitable the complete closing

¹⁷ The words of the petition were not read into the minutes, and the petition itself is apparently not extant—a search of the Common Council Papers held at the Municipal Archives of the City of New York came up empty-handed. Though it is not possible to find out whether the petition carried any signatures, it is likely that some of its writers were the founding members of the African Society, which petitioned the Common Council 8 months later regarding the management of the African cemetery at Chrystie Street.

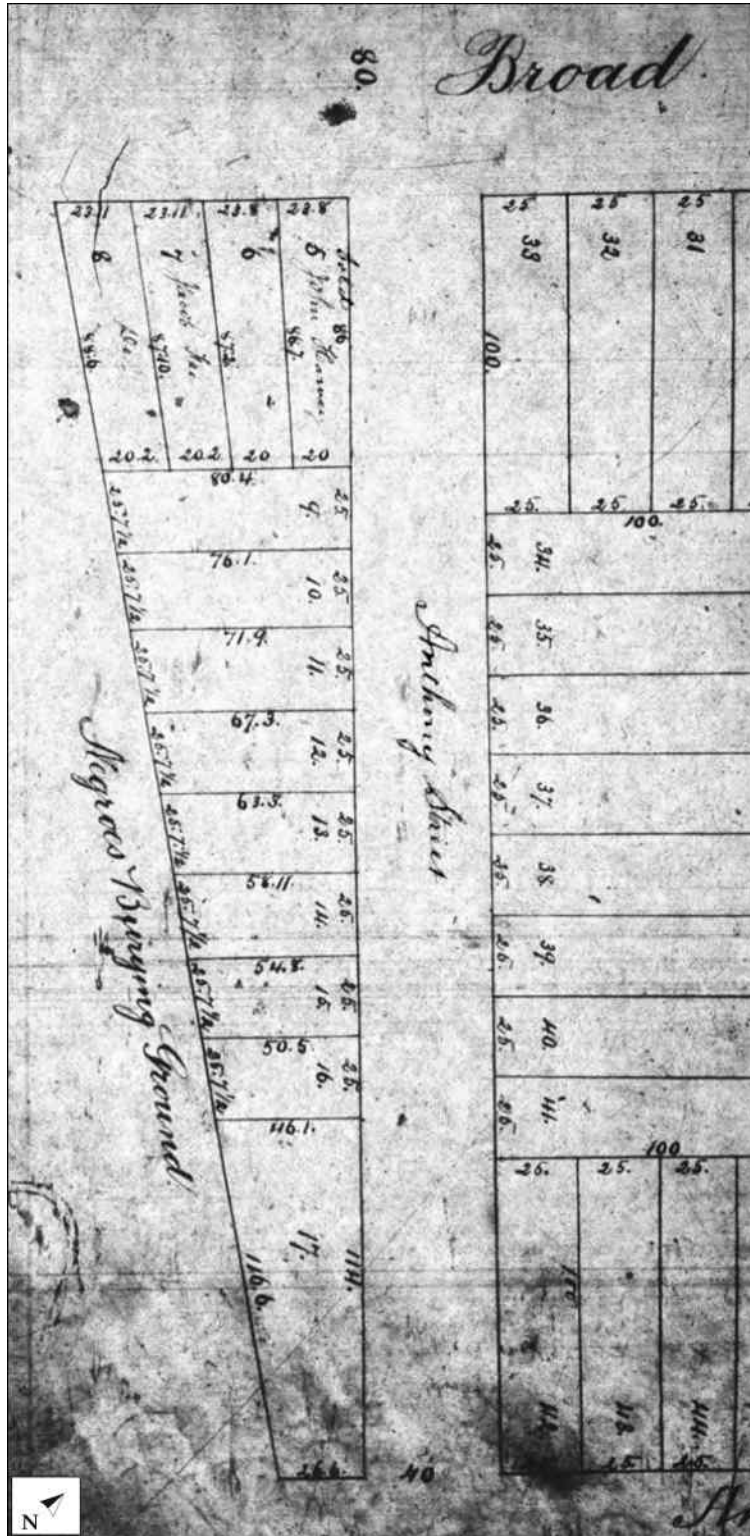


Figure 22. Detail from a 1787 surveyor’s map showing the partition of the Calk Hook Farm into lots. The lots on the southern side of Anthony Street (present-day Duane), shown abutting the “Negroes Burying Ground,” actually overlapped the cemetery’s northern edge. Broadway crosses at the top of the map detail. Ann (present-day Elk) Street crosses at the bottom. Lot dimensions are shown in feet (courtesy of the Division of Land Records [Liber 46:140]).



Figure 23. Detail from the Directory Plan of 1789, drawn by surveyor John McComb, Jr., for the annual directory of city residents published during New York's brief stint as the federal capital. The plan depicts the city on the eve of the development boom that led to the closing of the African Burial Ground (the cemetery's general location is circled). The Gold Street cemetery Mr. Scipio Gray made available for African burials was near Anglican St. George's Chapel (No. 8), located several blocks southeast of the African Burial Ground (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).

of the African Burial Ground (Figure 24). Property disputes amongst the heirs notwithstanding, lots were rapidly sold off and development would begin soon after the partition. Haggling between the heirs and the city over the transfer of rights and titles to the strip on which Chambers Street east of Broadway would be

laid was resolved in June of the following year (New York City Common Council 1917:2:252–253).

Meanwhile, the Common Council committee charged with locating land for a new African cemetery reported on April 7 that a proper spot had been found on Chrystie Street in the Seventh Ward, on a parcel

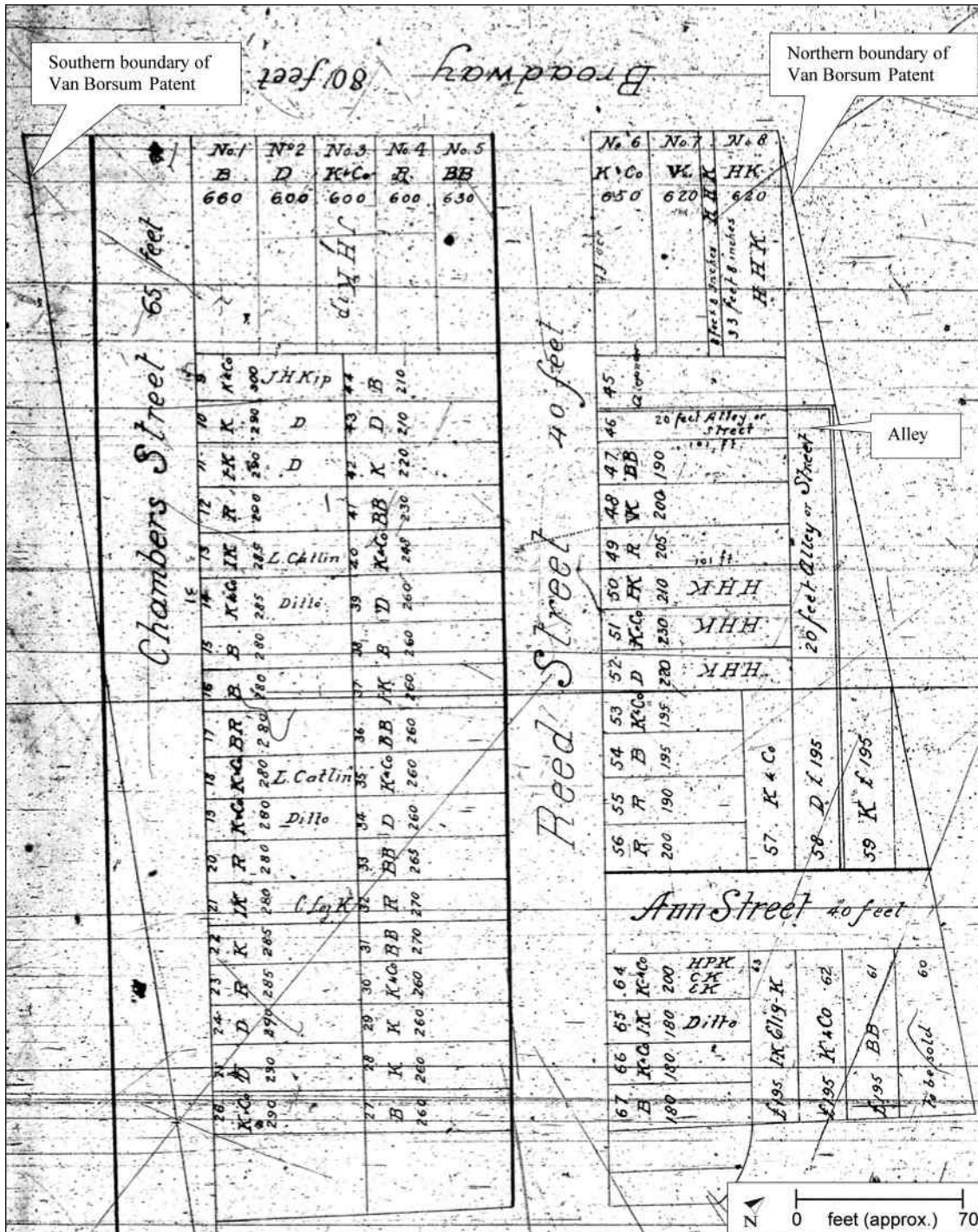


Figure 24. Detail from a 1795 surveyor's map showing the locations of the lots assigned to Sara Roeloff's heirs. For example, *D* stood for lots that would have fallen to the Tellers (descended from Rachel Kiersted), *F* for those of the Van Vlecks (descended from Catherine Kiersted), and *B* for Daniel Denniston (whose wife descended from Lucas Kiersted). The alley laid out from Reed Street to Ann (later Elm/Elk) Street would be shifted slightly and come to be called Republican Alley (courtesy of the Division of Land Records [Liber 195:405, Filed Map 76J]).

privileges usually taken and had by the proprietors of burial grounds in said City. And that in case of the death or other removal of the said managers; such others as shall be chosen by the said Association, may be so authorized and that whenever an Incorporation can be effected agreeably to Law, the said Land may be conveyed to the Trustees for the purposes aforesaid -

New York June 19th 1795.

Isaac Fortune ✓
 William Hutson ✓
 James Parker ✓
 John Hull } By request of
 William Hutson ✓
 Abraham Dickenson ✓
 Peter Frances ✓
 Joseph Jackson ✓
 Edward Jackson ✓
 John Ferguson }
 Nathaniel King } By request of
 George Henry } William Hutson ✓
 Major Cowell }
 Simon Nathan }
 York Night }
 Lues Frances }

Isaac Fortune
 William Hutson
 James Parker
 John Hall
 Abraham
 Dickenson
 Peter Frances

Figure 25. Detail of a petition submitted in June 1795 to the municipal government from the African Society, requesting that six of its members be granted legal standing to manage a cemetery established on Chrystie Street for black New Yorkers. The names of the proposed managers are marked with a check (courtesy New York City Municipal Archives; Papers of the Common Council, Petitions [Isaac Fortune, June 19, 1795]).

that had been part of the Delancey estate. The committee recommended that the city contribute £100 toward the purchase of the parcel, described as four contiguous lots, at 100 by 25 feet per lot, available for £450. The committee also recommended that the deed to the ground be held by the city in trust for its users (New York City Common Council 1917:2:137). On June 22, the Common Council read into the minutes a petition from Isaac Fortune and other free men of color who requested legal standing to manage the affairs of

the Chrystie Street cemetery (Figure 25). Fortune and his fellow petitioners informed the Common Council that they had organized a mutual aid association called the African Society but had been unable, under state law, to incorporate as a religious organization. The petitioners described their involvement in arranging for the purchase of the Chrystie Street parcel from Samuel Delaplaine, declared their intention to make improvements on it, and asked for the right to collect the burial fees and exercise the privileges held by

managers of other burial yards. The Common Council granted the request (New York City Common Council 1917:2:158–159).¹⁸

It is not known how long African American New Yorkers maintained their connection to the African Burial Ground. Once private houses and businesses began to be built and landfill covered the ground surface, surely the community was severely constrained from even visiting graves. Yet during the opening decades of the nineteenth century, free blacks came to reside in the relatively inexpensive housing along the streets that had been laid through the cemetery and its immediate surrounds (Figure 26). The concentration of black households within the area was evident by 1810, as historian Shane White (1991:171–179) has shown (see Chapter 9). The neighborhood was also home to the early independent black churches, where many African American New Yorkers invested their spiritual energies and organizational acumen after the African Burial Ground had closed. The land where the African Burial Ground sat would see several more phases of development over the next 200 years. With the exception of property deeds and surveyor’s plans, traces of the cemetery would become increasingly scarce. When the cemetery was unearthed in 1991–1992, most New Yorkers were wholly surprised. The African Burial Ground’s period of use, which might have lasted a century and a half, had to be examined anew, as did the lives and labors of the New Yorkers who reposed there.

African Funeral Practices in New Amsterdam/New York

The spatial relationship between the African Burial Ground and the city changed radically during the eighteenth century. As New York’s population rose and its economy expanded, the built environment advanced northward, bringing private homes, factories, municipal institutions, and pleasure gardens to the cemetery’s surrounds. The interplay between urban development and population growth would leave a mark in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground, particularly in regard to the distribution of graves. The concerns of those who looked to the cemetery as a place of repose for

their relatives and friends would also leave a mark in the excavated burial ground.¹⁹ But black New Yorkers’ efforts to care for their dead did not enter the documentary record until late in the day, as seen in the chronology of events that affected the cemetery’s use. And although documentation about the African Burial Ground is rather thin, it is considerably more substantial than the paper trail on funeral practices in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century black New York.

No eyewitness accounts of how Africans buried their dead in New Amsterdam/New York have come down to us. No domestic ledgers or personal diaries have come to light that tell us whether household heads customarily footed the funeral bills of the Africans who resided in Manhattan homes. A handful of records touch on burial logistics and labor, but these records date to the first half of the eighteenth century. Among them, as noted, are the Reverend Sharpe’s 1713 remark about Africans conducting “Heathenish” graveside rites and city ordinances from 1722 and 1731 that restricted the hour and size of African funerals and banned the use of palls. Cabinetmaker Joshua Delaplaine’s daybook rounds out the list. The daybook has entries for 13 slaveholders who purchased coffins for African men, women, and children between 1753 and 1756 (see Chapter 10).

These writers were sparing with narrative detail. John Sharpe, for example, omitted the sights and sounds of the graveside rites. He did not mention how long the rites lasted or note whether they varied in relation to a person’s age, sex, or manner of death. Nor did he reflect on how the rites orchestrated the expression of private grief, strengthened or attenuated attachments between the living and the dead, or transformed the once-living person into constituent qualities, forces, or parts. Sharpe lived in a Manhattan made nervous by the anticipation of conspiracies and revolts. So, too, did the city officials who envisioned a world in which the funerals of unfree Africans would be small in size, short on pomp, and finished by sundown. Whether large processions, cloth-covered corpses, and nighttime burials had been the norm when the restrictions were enacted is unclear. Delaplaine’s daybook provides a glimpse of the monetary side of mid-eighteenth-century funerals, but it does not reveal

¹⁸ Two months later, the process of closing down the Trinity Church African cemetery got underway when the Vestrymen made plans to survey and divide the ground into lots (see discussion in the entry for 1773).

¹⁹ Chapter 5 provides an overview of the mortuary program that entered the African Burial Ground’s archaeological record. Chapters 6–9 track the interplay between the mortuary program, the built environment, and the African population through the eighteenth century.



Figure 26. Detail from the Taylor-Roberts Plan, 1797, drawn by city surveyor Benjamin Taylor and engraved by John Roberts, showing the newly laid street grid that crossed the African Burial Ground at the end of the eighteenth century (The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

whether colonial Manhattan's slaveholders typically paid for coffins for the African dead.

Although the experience of death and the organization of interment cannot be teased from the documentary record, population histories assembled by the New York African Burial Ground History Team indicate

that funeral practices in black New Amsterdam/New York were part of an Atlantic world of enormous complexity and scope. To help clarify the material signatures left by those who interred the individuals in the archaeologically excavated portion of the cemetery, we draw on two core aspects of the History Team's

work. One aspect concerns documentary evidence on the origins of the city's African community. The other aspect concerns documentary evidence about the care of the dead in central and western Africa and the Caribbean, the primary regions that furnished the workers on whom white New Yorkers relied.

Population

Black New Yorkers formed a critical mass during the colonial era and in the decades immediately following the Revolutionary War. The numbers in Table 9 make it clear that this was a community sizable enough to fill a cemetery. Blacks constituted over 14 percent of the city's population at the end of the seventeenth century, fully 20.9 percent in 1746, and a low of 7.9 percent just after the Revolution.

Table 9. Black Population of New York County, 1698–1800

Year	Population
1698	700
1703	799
1712	975
1723	1,362
1731	1,577
1737	1,719
1746	2,444
1749	2,368
1756	2,278
1771	3,137
1786	2,107
1790	3,092
1800	5,867

Note: From Foote (1991:78) and White (1991:26), except 1703, which is from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909). The count of black male city residents was recorded incorrectly in a version of the 1703 census (see tables reproduced in Green and Harrington [1932: 95]), and the miscount—resulting in a figure of only 630 total blacks for that year—has often made its way into the literature.

“What proportion of the city's black population was enslaved during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and what proportion was free?” is a ques-

tion that has been asked often. Free blacks were not counted separately from the enslaved until the first federal census of 1790. White (1991:153) has suggested that there were probably “never more than 100 free blacks in New York City during the colonial period.” Historian Christopher Moore (personal communication 2003) has suggested that following the restrictive British colonial legislation of the early eighteenth century, most, if not all, of those in families that had been free or “semi-free” under the Dutch simply left New York. The count for 1790, which reflects post-Revolutionary War demographic changes, includes 1,036 free and 2,056 enslaved blacks. The count for 1800 includes 3,333 free and 2,534 enslaved blacks (see Table 9).

Manhattan's black workforce was always ethnically diverse, but the pools that supplied it shifted during the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Members of New Amsterdam's black community were taken from captured Portuguese and Spanish privateers bound for the Caribbean and from Dutch ships that plied the lanes linking New Netherland to Brazil and West Central Africa (Heywood and Thornton 2009a:9–12; Medford, Brown, Heywood, et al. 2009a:6–7). After the onset of British rule in 1664, the routing of people from West Central Africa to New York via the Caribbean continued. Direct importation from western Africa also got underway. Profit-seeking city merchants sometimes cast a wide net to fill their shares of the hold. During the 1690s, for example, several hundred Africans were brought to New York from Madagascar, an island off the east coast of Africa. Another 117 Malagasy captives reached New York in 1721 (Hershkowitz 2003). As the eighteenth century advanced, the commercial networks that brokered the slave trade reached deeper into the African interior and spread farther along the coasts. Five key areas in western Africa funneled adults and children into colonial Manhattan's homes, shops, and industrial yards: the Senegambia, Sierra Leone–Liberia, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Niger Delta (Heywood and Thornton 2009b:29–34).

The two maps in Figure 27 call attention to the discrepancy between the magnitude of the eighteenth-century slave trade and the dearth of European knowledge about African lives. That era's educated Europeans were avid readers and writers of travel accounts, and European publishing houses marketed multivolume compendia of cultural, historical, and geographical lore from around the globe. Informa-

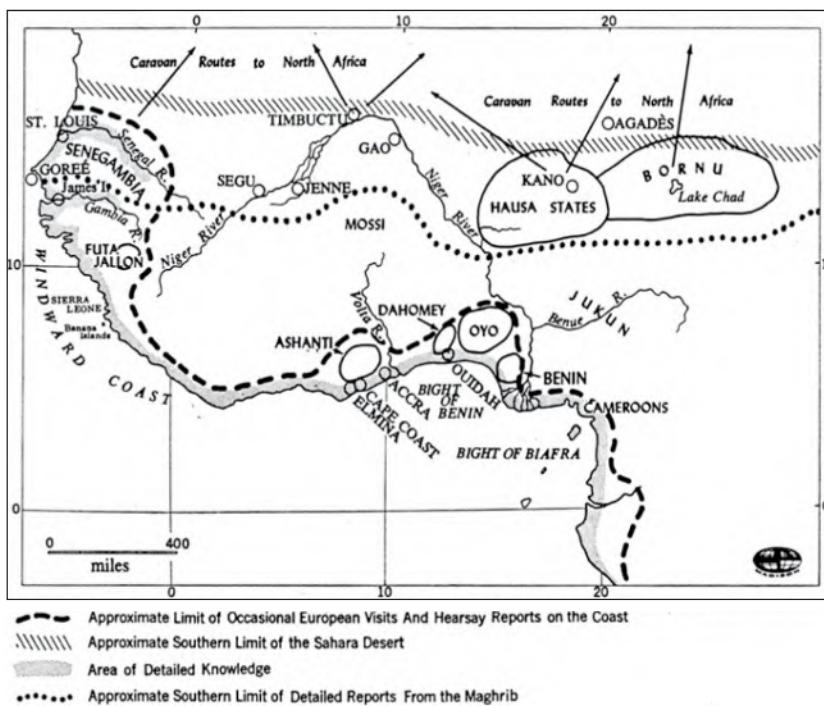
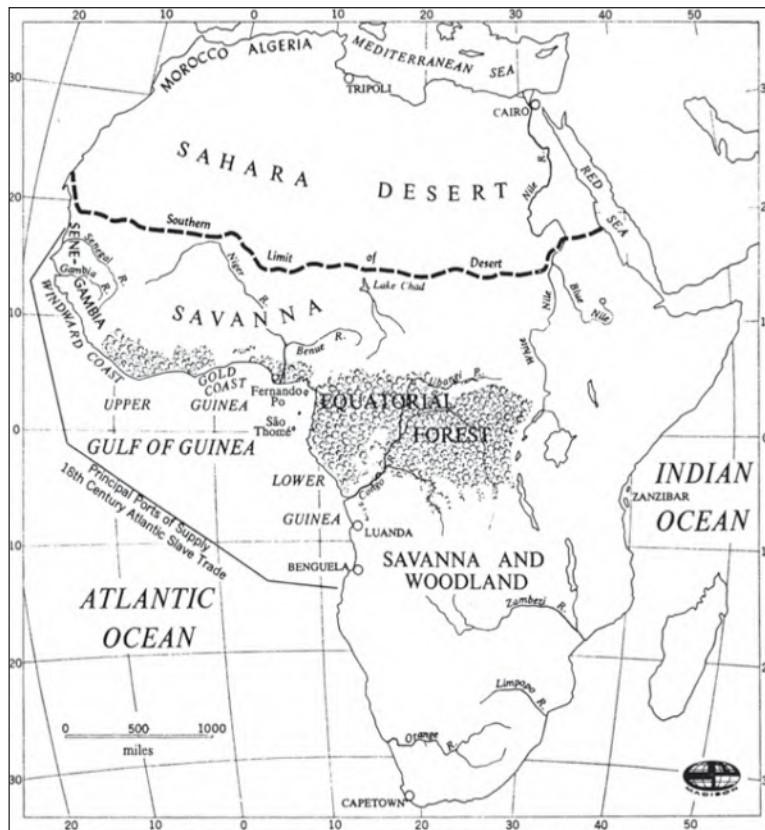


Figure 27. Europeans and Africans, 1700s: (top) sources of captives from Africa, eighteenth century; (bottom) limits of European knowledge of Africa, eighteenth century. (Curtin, Philip D. *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action 1780–1850, Volume 1*. ©1964 by the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. Reprinted by permission of the University of Wisconsin Press.)

tion about Africa collected by Arabic-language geographers also reached European centers of learning during the eighteenth century, but as historian Philip Curtin (1964:9–27) has explained, few principal works were known, and the heyday of Arabic scholarship on Africa had already ended by the time Europeans began trawling for African labor.²⁰ European merchants, scientists, and missionaries who recorded observations about African societies seldom ventured far from the shorelines and navigable rivers where captives were embarked. The interiors that supplied the trade were relatively unknown.

The Africa that Europeans described was characterized by a mix of religions (animism, Christianity, Islam), a range of polities (including hierarchically organized kingdoms), and various methods of reckoning descent. Political and religious offices and authorities were intricately entwined, and mutual aid associations were organized around age, gender, and occupation (see Heywood and Thornton 2009b:29–34; Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009a:65–70; Medford, Brown, Heywood, et al. 2009b:16–22; Medford, Carrington, et al. 2009:40–41). Africans also had a wide array of understandings about the reciprocities that bound the living and the dead.

Burial Logistics and Labor

Europeans who visited central and western Africa during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took note of typical burial places. Journal keepers and letter writers recorded that Africans were laid to rest in cemeteries located on the outskirts of homesteads and settlements, under house floors, and in the churchyards Christian missionaries established in African political and economic metropolises (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:85–87; Medford, Brown, Heywood, et al. 2009b:22).

European visitors also took note of how the dead were treated. The treatment of the dead encompasses a range of activities that are undertaken when a death occurs. These activities—announcing the death, preparing the body for burial, selecting a burial site and digging a grave, transporting the body to the cemetery

and conducting graveside rites, marking and visiting the grave—provide the framework for our review of burial logistics and labor. Although the review touches briefly on documentary information from Africa, the Caribbean, and the antebellum American South, it is mainly concerned with raising questions about the everyday forms of oppression black New Yorkers faced when they laid their relatives and friends to rest. Accoutrements and actions on which the archaeological excavation of the New York African Burial Ground sheds light are identified in boldface type. These include burial attire (in the form of winding sheets, shrouds, and street clothes), personal adornment and other possessions, coffins, grave digging, the placing of goods in the coffin and on the surface of the grave, and grave markers.

Announcing the Death

It is not known how news of a death traveled in black New York during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but chances are good that it would have spread quickly without the aid of the licensed funeral inviters that many white New Yorkers employed.²¹ Manhattan was geographically compact when the African Burial Ground was in use, as the maps reproduced in the first half of the chapter attest. Although Africans were residentially dispersed rather than clustered in a handful of neighborhoods or homes, the city was only 1 mile wide by 1.5 miles long. Enslaved men, women, and children traipsed through its streets and alleys and greeted one another at its markets and wells. Men gathered in the morning at the foot of Wall Street to be hired out for the day. Men and women visited their families and friends on Sundays and drank and danced at night in private homes (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009a:70–76). The expanding network of neighbor-

²⁰ On the political twists and turns of the production of knowledge about Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Mudimbe (1988) and Appiah (1992).

²¹ Funeral inviters went door to door to notify mourners about when and where to pay their respects. During the seventeenth century, funeral inviters performed their duties under the watchful eyes of the Reformed Dutch Church as well as the town—inviters were instructed to comport themselves in a civil manner (Minutes of the Burgomasters, March 4, 1661, in *New York Orphanmasters* 1902:2:80–81), obtain and renew annually a license (minutes of April 18, 1691, *New York City Common Council* 1905:1:217), and attend to the funerals of the poor without charge (minutes of April 22, 1691, *New York City Common Council* 1905:1:221). During the first half of the eighteenth century, inviters were authorized to charge 8 shillings for announcing the death of a child, 12 shillings for a person between the ages of 12 and 20, and 18 shillings for an adult (*New York City Common Council* 1905:4:101).

hood chapels mapped by archaeologist Nan Rothschild (1990:43–56) eventually became a conduit for funeral news: the number of Africans attracted to Christian services and catechumen classes increased as the eighteenth century advanced.

Preparing the Body for Burial

Washing and laying out the dead was women’s work in many colonial American communities. In rural areas, women, singly or in groups, performed these services as a mark of respect for the deceased, the family, and the community. Often, these women were midwives as well. This arrangement endured for varying lengths of time—African American women prepared the body for burial well into the twentieth century in some pockets of rural America (Roediger 1981:169; Rundblad 1995). In urban centers like New York, African women probably also would have washed and laid out their community’s dead when the burial ground was in use.

African men’s participation in preparing the body for burial did not enter the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documentary record. Given that Islam was probably a part of the religious repertoire of eighteenth-century black New York, it is likely that washing and laying out the dead was not solely a female domain. In Islamic tradition, men wash and cover men, and women wash and cover women.²²

Generation as well as gender might also have been a consideration for black New Yorkers who prepared the bodies of friends and relatives visited by death. Two examples illustrate how these fundamental organizing principles can be entwined when preparing the body for the grave. Among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, where Islamic and traditional practices overlap, a male friend, a son, or a senior wife past her childbearing years attends to a dying man. After death, the man’s male friends, assisted by his granddaughters, wash his corpse in fresh water and daub it with oil (Jackson 1989:69). The Muslim dead in the Sakalava area of Madagascar are washed and covered by close male or female kin, “with the exception of parents whose grief is too great” (Feeley-Harnik 1991:33).

Many of the individuals interred at the African Burial Ground would have had family and friends who could discuss and perhaps help furnish appropriate burial attire, be it **a winding sheet, a shroud, or**

street clothes.²³ Yet surely some of the graves held people whose preferences were unknown because their stay in the city had been too brief to make deep social ties.

Europeans noted that in Africa the dead were wrapped in cloth. Accounts from the 1700s refer to cloth-wrapped corpses among the Wolof of the Senegambia region and among a range of coastal and inland peoples in the geographical precursors of modern-day Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Angola, and the Congo (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:85–87). For those who followed the teachings of Islam, the prescribed wrapper would likely have been made from unstitched white cloth (Barratt 2005:181). Sugarcane planters in Barbados did not mention whether their African workers were cloth wrapped or clad in everyday clothing when interred (Handler and Lange 1978:185). White winding sheets, sometimes supplied by women like Fanny Kemble, were used in parts of the antebellum American South. Kemble had been importuned “for a sufficient quantity of cotton cloth to make a winding-sheet” for a neighbor (Foster 1997:196; Roediger 1981:169).

Did **personal adornment and other possessions** remain with the deceased, or were they removed when the body was washed and covered? According to a late-eighteenth-century account of burials in Jamaica, the African dead were arrayed with their jewelry—“all the trinkets of the defunct are exposed in the coffin” (Brathwaite 1981:9). The deceased were interred in their jewelry and clothing in parts of the Gold Coast (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:86). Probate records for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century white New Yorkers indicate that jewelry was typically bequeathed to descendants and heirs rather than placed with the dead.

Was the use of **coffins** widespread in black New York? As with the preparation of the body, decisions about a coffin would have mobilized the deceased’s kin, friends, and neighbors, either to ensure that a slaveholder provided what was “customary” or to

²² For a discussion of Islam among Africans in colonial America, see Gomez (1998:59–87).

²³ Winding sheets and shrouds were integral to English and Dutch burials during the period when the burial ground was in use. These two coverings are not always differentiated in documents of the day. A length of fabric wound around the body and fastened with pins or hand-tied knots was sometimes called a winding sheet and sometimes called a shroud. A shroud also referred to a particular type of ensemble that might include a loose-fitting, long-tailed shirt or chemise, a cap, and “a small piece of cloth to cover the face” (Barratt 2005:180–181; Earle 1896:305).

help raise cash for the accoutrements that Africans considered proper and correct.²⁴ Joshua Delaplaine was one of many artisans that a person in search of a coffin could call upon. Black cabinetmakers like William Miller might have been approached for coffins—Miller is known in the annals of the African independent church movement for having opened his Cross Street home in 1795 for planning meetings of black Methodists who broke away from the John Street Methodist Church (see Walls 1974). Enslaved Africans also might have made coffins. Carpentry and coopering were two of the trades in which New York's black workers were clustered (Foote 1991:41–44; Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009c:55–64). Boards cut from cedar and pine could be had from lumberyards, such as the one Thomas Shreve, a carpenter and joiner, kept near William Walton's warehouse on Hunter's Key (*New-York Gazette, or, the Weekly Post-Boy*, June 3, 1754).²⁵

Coffin burials for Africans in Barbados and the French West Indies entered the documentary record at the end of the eighteenth century by way of plantation work logs and eyewitness descriptions (Delpuech 2001; Handler and Lange 1978:191). Reports and recollections about coffin burials of Africans in the American South also date from the end of the eighteenth century (Roediger 1981:169). A coffin carried through the streets of New Orleans in the late 1700s had six white ribbons attached to its lid; the end of each ribbon was held by a girl dressed in white (Foster 1997:196). European travel accounts place coffin use in western Africa in the early 1700s, decades before Delaplaine's daybook was filled in. The accounts suggest that coffin burials were becoming common in parts of the Gold Coast and in the city-states of the Niger Delta during the eighteenth century. In the Loango region of central Africa, eighteenth-century reports indicate that coffins were made from woven

thatch or grass (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:86). Coffin burial appears to have become typical in England and the Netherlands by the end of the seventeenth century, and perhaps in colonial Manhattan as well (Earle 1896:297; Gittings 1984; Litten 1991; Singleton 1909:253–255; Talman 1968a:13).

Selecting a Grave Site and Digging the Grave: New York's African Sextons

Did each funeral party select its own grave site and supply its own grave digger? Or did a handful of men routinely undertake these tasks, thereby serving as de facto caretakers of some, perhaps all, portions of the African Burial Ground?

In New Amsterdam/New York's public cemeteries and private churchyards, **grave digging** was centralized rather than ad hoc: grave diggers, acting under the auspices of city officials and congregational governing boards, charged a standardized fee for clearing the surface and breaking the ground. In 1703, when the city granted Trinity's Vestrymen the right to operate the town cemetery situated on the north side of the church, the Common Council set the fee schedule at 1 shilling for the grave of a child under age 12 and 3 shillings for the grave of a person age 12 and over (Stokes 1915–1928:4:443).

Churchyard grave diggers sometimes doubled as sextons (church officials in charge of property), a role that conferred community and congregational esteem. In addition to breaking the ground, sextons typically oversaw the ringing of the death bell and the rental of funeral equipment such as palls and boards. Sextons also helped organize funeral processions and sometimes officiated at the grave.²⁶ The centrality of the grave digger–sexton to the material and spiritual sides of interment figured in New York's municipal code. Grave diggers, as mentioned in the chronology entry for 1731, were excluded from the head count when the Common Council limited the attendance at African funerals to 12 people.

The names of Manhattan's black grave digger–sextons did not enter the documentary record until the years immediately after the American Revolution, a period when the city's churches were slow to groom black leaders (Hodges 1999:180–183) and to make provisions for the burial of black communicants. Five African American grave digger–sextons who

²⁴ Official voices entered the decision-making process when death pushed Africans in the direction of men like city coroner John Burnet. At an inquest Burnet attended on March 20, 1758, the jurors were unable to discover the identity of the African whose case they heard; among the man's possessions were seven Spanish dollars, a pair of silver cuff links, a silver ring, a pair of wrought metal buttons, and an old key (Sypher 2004:82). Whether the man was buried in a coffin did not enter the record, but municipal arrangements for burying strangers would have come into play. When black residents of the Almshouse died, the wardens apparently were responsible for providing a coffin, as suggested by Joshua Delaplaine's daybook (see Chapter 10).

²⁵ Newspaper advertisements placed by New York City artisans are used throughout this report. Unless otherwise noted, such advertisements are from Gottesman (1938).

²⁶ In Manhattan's seventeenth-century Dutch community, the funeral inviter (*aanspreker*) typically took on these tasks (Talman 1968a, 1968b).

mobilized resources to ensure the safety and dignity of their community's dead might have dug graves or officiated at interments at the African Burial Ground during the 1780s and 1790s. Among them are Scipio and Virgil Gray (they may have been brothers, or father and son), who resided at 47 Beekman Street, near the intersection of Beekman and Gold adjacent to Anglican St. George's Chapel. It is likely that Scipio Gray was a grave digger for the congregation and that the lot he made available for African interments during the height of the grave-robbing scandal was part of St. George's yard (see the chronology entry for 1788). Virgil Gray was listed as St. George's under-Sexton in the 1794 city directory.

African Society member Lewis Francis—his name appears at the end of the list on the petition reproduced in Figure 25—was the first known grave digger at the new African cemetery on Chrystie Street (see the chronology entry for 1795). The Chrystie Street cemetery, which became the final resting place for black city residents immediately after the African Burial Ground had closed, was eventually ceded to St. Philip's Church, Manhattan's first black Anglican congregation. Francis served as one of St. Philip's churchwardens (St. Philip's Church 1986:18, 90).

Peter Williams, Sr., who, in 1795, helped lead the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church, was a grave digger for the John Street Methodist Church. Williams used the fees he earned from grave digging to buy his own and his family's way out of bondage from the John Street congregation, which had purchased Williams in 1783 (John Street Methodist Church Archives, New York, Accounts 1783–1795, Record No. 249). When the AME Zion Church erected a permanent meetinghouse in 1801 at Church and Leonard Streets, it provided burial vaults for its members. Samuel Day, a sexton at Mother Zion, as the church was known, helped oversee the vaults, which were rapidly filled. Between 1801 and 1807, there were some 150 interments annually there (Duffy 1968:1:219; for information on Samuel Day, see Municipal Archives of the City of New York, Death Libers, Liber 1).

Direct linkages between the African Burial Ground, the African Society, and the African independent church movement are likely, but it should be kept in mind that securing burial space would have been a key concern long before the names of black church leaders and community activists entered the documentary record. It should also be kept in mind that a "commitment to the dead" (Wilf 1989:512) was not unique to

black New York. African Americans in Philadelphia, Newport, Charleston, and Richmond also established benevolent associations and independent churches with the explicit goal of providing their communities a proper place for burial (see Kuyk 1983; Nash 1988; Wilder 2001).

Transporting the Body to the Cemetery and Conducting Graveside Rites

Given the location of the African Burial Ground, some form of procession was probably customary from early on. Did members of the procession congregate at the house where the deceased had lived? How large was a typical funeral party? Recall that the 1731 amendment to the ordinance governing black funerals set a quota for the attendees but excluded the bearers from the count. Did the number of bearers increase after 1731 to exploit the loophole in the law? Was the body transported to the cemetery in a handbarrow or a horse-drawn cart, or did the bearers shoulder the coffin on a bier or a board through the city streets and, ca. 1745–1760, one of the palisade gates? Did the cortege proceed to the African Burial Ground in silence, or with prayers, shouts, dancing, and song? In Boston, in 1723, a black funeral "zig-zagged across town and into the night," an "adaptation of meandering funeral corteges common in West Africa" (Desrochers 2002:648). African funeral processions in the late-eighteenth-century Caribbean and in the antebellum South were large, song filled, and slow moving (Handler and Lange 1978:186–191; Roediger 1981:170). In Jamaica, bearers raised and lowered the coffin. In Antigua, they danced a reel (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:87).

Oppression affected the scheduling as well as the size of African funerals. Night funerals were common in both the colonial and the antebellum eras; after toiling for others from sunup to sundown, Africans used the night as their own (see Roediger 1981). Night funerals would have provided opportunities for geographically distant kin and friends to attend the graveside rites. Prior to the banning of night funerals in New York in 1722, black city residents may well have buried their dead at dusk or after dark. Whether sundown became a typical time for holding black funerals after 1722 is unclear.

Did the mourners place any **goods in the coffin or on the surface of the grave**, such as food and drink, utensils and crockery, or flowers and herbs? Expensive mats decorated the surface of eighteenth-century

graves in parts of Sierra Leone–Liberia. Objects reminiscent of a person’s life were placed atop graves in Gold Coast locales; mourners returned to the grave to care for the objects. Offerings of food and drink and personal belongings, such as tobacco and pipes, were placed on graves in some Niger Delta regions (Medford, Brown, Carrington, et al. 2009b:86). Direct historical evidence for grave offerings exists for Jamaica. During the late 1680s, enslaved Africans in Jamaica supplied the corpse with “bread, roasted fowles, sugar, rum, tobacco, & pipes” (Handler and Lange 1978:199). An African American folk belief prevalent in parts of antebellum rural Georgia held that “the last objects touched by the deceased” should be placed on his grave lest his spirit retrieve them from his house. A variant of the belief was recorded in 1980 among the Kongo of Central Africa (Thompson 1983:134).

Marking and Visiting the Grave

Were **grave markers** used to memorialize the dead? Simple stone slabs like the ones at Trinity Churchyard (see Figure 12) were common in eighteenth-century Christian cemeteries in rural and urban America, but whether headstones were typically provided for churchyard burials of blacks is not known. In 1798 in Barbados, the manager at Newton Plantation requested a small stone marker for the grave of one of the plantation’s “much-valued slaves” who had been interred in an Anglican churchyard. Such requests were rare (Handler and Lange 1978:203, 175–178).

Did the deceased’s family and friends return to the cemetery to visit the grave, either on their own time, or by absconding from work? Were postinterment rites conducted?

In Jamaica, during the last half of the eighteenth century, Europeans noted that Africans heaped dirt on the month-old graves of their dead. Known as “covering” the grave, the practice was one of many postinterment rituals that involved returning to the cemetery to care for the grave and the spirit of its occupant (Handler and Lange 1978:203–204). Philip Madin’s 1779 account of his journey through the West Indies

called attention to the consequences of neglecting postinterment rites. Madin learned from a Barbados planter that the departed husband of an African woman had troubled her dreams because a graveside ritual had been delayed (Handler and Lange 1978:205). Large, noisy Sunday gatherings in Philadelphia’s African cemetery were cause for complaint during the eighteenth century (Nash 1988:13–14). Barbados-born Africans were said in 1789 to be “superstitiously attached to the burial places of their ancestors and friends” (Handler and Lange 1978:209).

In sum, only a fraction of the funeral customs in the black Atlantic world entered the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documentary record. Although there is no doubt that burial practices in black New York drew on deep and varied African roots, using written documents to identify the epicenters of these practices is a difficult task. Funeral customs in captive-sending areas in the interiors of West Central and West Africa were largely unknown to cultural outsiders.

Archaeologists who study African Diaspora communities have long grappled with uneven documentary records (see Jamieson 1995; Posnansky 1999; Samford 1996). Yet the archaeology of the African Diaspora is far more than a search for material signs of African ethnic identities. Contemporary archaeologists seek to understand how the experiences of Africans in the Americas differed from the experiences of other newcomers. In the words of archaeologist Theresa Singleton (1999:17): “To ignore the consequences of forced migration, enslavement, legalized discrimination, and racism misses the very essence of how African Americans created their world and responded to that of the dominant culture.” If the challenge for archaeology is “to pry open places where the material world can inform the analysis of these complexities,” then the New York African Burial Ground is an especially important site. It was the setting for a rite of passage (burial) that connected the desires of the living to the treatment of the dead in America’s urban north, where the pervasiveness of slavery during the colonial and early federal periods is only now coming to wide public attention.

CHAPTER 3

The Archaeological Site

Jean Howson and Leonard G. Bianchi

This chapter focuses on the archaeological site as such. We discuss the original landscape in the vicinity of the historic African Burial Ground and then turn to the 1991–1992 excavation site, which was a much smaller area, and show its location superimposed on historic maps. We look at physical impacts to the African Burial Ground that occurred during the active life of the cemetery and then summarize the development of the site over the 200 years between the closing of the cemetery and its rediscovery. Damage sustained to the site during the archaeological project is described. We then discuss overall site stratigraphy, the condition of the graves, and preservation factors.

The Landscape, the Site, Postcemetery Development, and Site Preservation

The Historical Landscape

It is small wonder that New Yorkers of the late twentieth century were unaware of the presence of the African Burial Ground beneath the densely developed lower Manhattan civic and commercial district (Figure 28). The modern topography in the vicinity barely suggests the original landform. The cemetery was on uneven terrain that sloped down from the flat of the Common on the south, the “spine” of Broadway on the west, and “Pot Baker’s Hill” on the southeast to the “Little Collect” pond or swamp (Figure 29). Depictions of the land surrounding the Collect Pond show undulating terrain, with high bluffs—presumably the Calk-Hook itself (the shell or chalk hill from which the farm and the pond got their original name)—on the north (Figure 30).

Today, a vestige of the original slope can be seen along Elk Street, with a decrease in elevation of approximately 20 feet from Chambers Street to Duane Street (Figure 31). During the period that the African Burial Ground was being used, this slope would have been much steeper. We now know that the bottom of the hill was approximately 24 feet lower in elevation than it is today—at sea level. “Pot Baker’s Hill” has been leveled, and Chambers Street’s elevation has changed little. The historic and current elevations of the African Burial Ground National Historic Landmark are discussed in the National Historic Landmark Nomination (see Appendix A, Part 3 of this volume).

The hillside may not have been ideal for farm fields,¹ but animals grazed on the Common and may have been a nuisance at the cemetery. The pollen data (see Appendix G, Part 3 of this volume) registering the African Burial Ground landscape suggest that the flora was dominated by grass with some insect-pollinated herbs, such as relatives of goosefoot, chicory, asters; members of the pea sub-family; and probably some ragweed. Land clearance and tree removal on Manhattan and in the surrounding region are registered among the average total tree-pollen percentage, but it does not appear that there were trees actually within the portion of the cemetery that was excavated. The northeastern edge of the African Burial Ground would have been marshy—note the proximity of the small “Swamp” depicted on Mrs. Buchnerd’s Plan (see Figure 17 in Chapter 2); this body of water was also called the “Little Collect” on historical maps. Pollen analysis suggests that the marsh itself did not extend into the excavated portion of the cemetery, although sedge

¹ Pollen analysis (see Appendix G, Part 3 of this volume) identified a small quantity of cereal-type pollen grains but indicated that the African Burial Ground site had probably never been farmed.

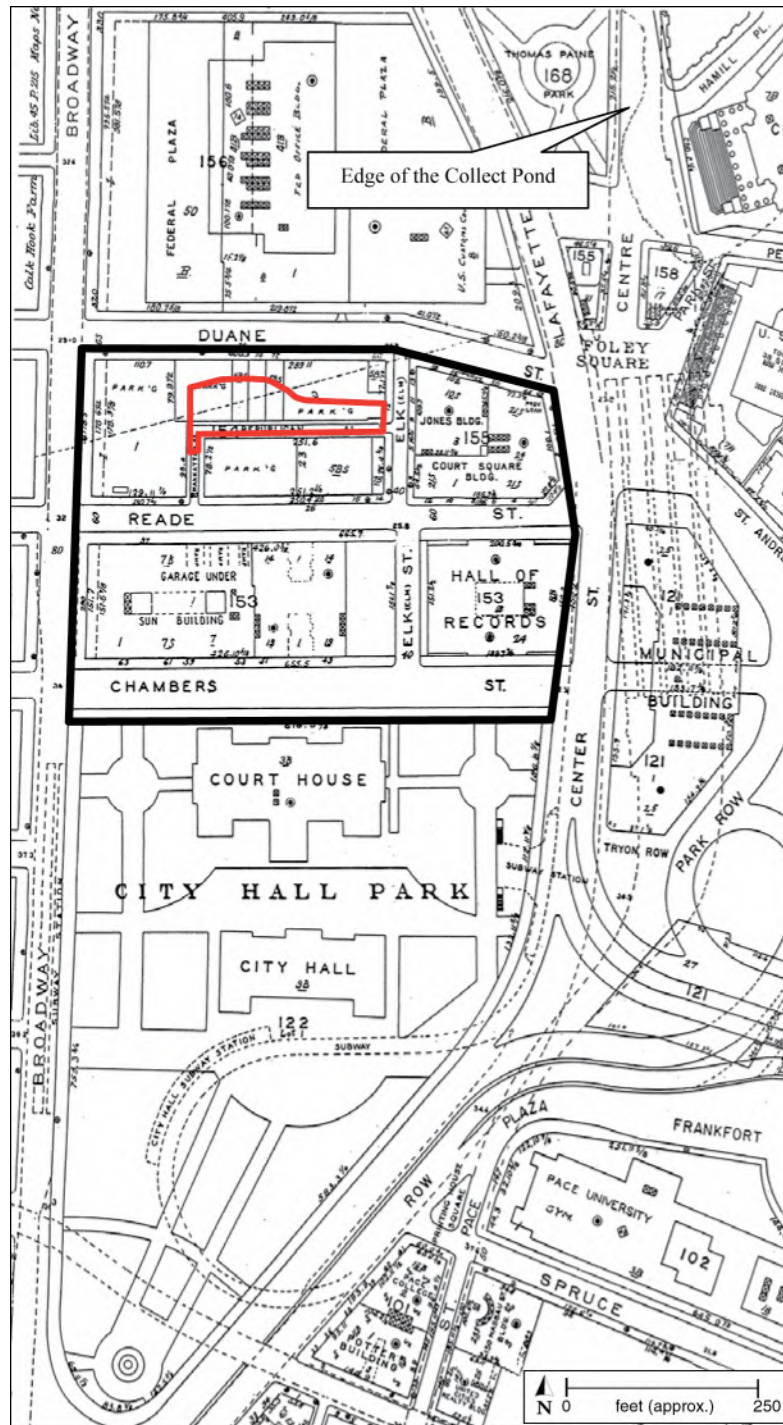


Figure 28. Sanborn Map (Manhattan Land Book 1984-85) of New York’s civic center area, encompassing the historic African Burial Ground at the time of the initial cultural resources investigation in 1989. Most of Block 154, bounded by Broadway and Duane, Reade, and Elk Streets, was covered by parking lots. The map shows the historic “Calk Hook Farm” (labeled in upper left corner) and its southern boundary running diagonally from Broadway across the block. The historic edge of the Collect Pond is shown at the upper right. The small portion of the cemetery that was excavated in 1991–1992 is outlined with a red line within the boundary of the African Burial Ground National Historic Landmark (outlined with a thick black line). New York City’s designated “African Burial Ground and the Commons Historic District” encompasses a larger area that includes all of City Hall Park as well as Foley Square (use of 1984-85 Sanborn Map 290 Broadway, New York, NY, reprinted/used with permission from the Sanborn Library, LLC).



Figure 29. Detail from cartographer John Montessor's plan (1766) showing the topography in the general location of the historic African Burial Ground (circled in white). Hachures show downward sloping north of "Pot Baker's Hill" and from west to east, beginning about 250 feet east of Broadway, toward Fresh Water Pond. *E* denotes the Powder House; *F*, the soldiers barracks; *L*, the Gaol; *M*, the Almshouse/Workhouse; and *R*, St. Paul's. Ranelagh was a public pleasure garden (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).

Figure 30. A 1798 watercolor of Collect Pond and vicinity, attributed to Archibald Robertson (American, 1765–1835). The view (to the south) is rather bucolic and idealized considering the industries such as tanneries that lined the shore. (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Edward W. C. Arnold Collection of New York Prints, Maps, and Pictures, Bequest of Edward W. C. Arnold, 1954 [54.90.168]. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.)





Figure 31. An October 2005 view of the slope on Elk Street within the African Burial Ground National Historic Landmark, looking south toward City Hall Park (photograph by Rob Tucher).

pollen may indicate intermittently wet conditions in low spots. Anthony Rutgers and his heirs drained the low-lying portions of their Calk Hook Farm during the eighteenth century, reducing the size of the Collect and “Little Collect” ponds (Stokes 1915–1928:3:540, 965–966). It is likely that this action affected the drainage of the ground within and at the edge of the cemetery. As the swampy ground surrounding the Little Collect became drier, the area used for interments may have been extended to the northeast.²

The Archaeological Site in Relation to the Historic Cemetery

“How much of the African Burial Ground did the archaeologists excavate?” is a question that has been

² The Collect was fed by deep springs. In the early to mid-eighteenth century, it teemed with fish and its water supplied households as well as industrial yards. The pond was surveyed in 1801, 2 years before it began to be drained (see Stokes 1915–1928:1:Plate 58A), but the contours of the adjoining meadowlands and swamps had shifted by then. Rutgers started draining the swamp in 1733–1734, to the consternation of nearby tanners, who complained that the lowering of the pond’s water level had compromised the water supply in their manufacturing yards.

asked often during the course of this project. The maximum historical extent of the cemetery is not known, and the maps in Chapter 2 depict its general location rather than its precise boundaries. Broadway (a road leading northward from town that would be called Great George Street in the early eighteenth century) may have formed the western edge of the cemetery. When houses were built along the east side of that thoroughfare (in place by the 1760s), the west side of the cemetery would have been truncated. To the north, the boundary between the Van Borsum patent and the Damen patent/Calk Hook Farm may have been maintained, with burials limited to the south side of the line throughout much of the cemetery’s life (this will be discussed further in Chapter 4). Eastern and southern limits are more problematic. The pottery manufactories would have hemmed in the burial ground on the east starting in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, but interments may have extended along the south side of the pond before that time. Municipal use of the northern part of the town Common, now City Hall Park, would have “pushed” the cemetery northward in the same period, and the palisade constructed in 1745 would have formed an



Figure 32. Site location overlaid on Lyne-Bradford Plan (1730). The ropewalk (shown lined with trees) is the alignment of present-day Broadway. The dashed north-south line that runs through the excavation site represents the boundary between the North and West Wards of the city. Scale is 1 inch = approximately 350 feet (Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

effective southern boundary, at least while it was in place (until approximately 1760).³

It is possible the cemetery grew in area during its early period (whether in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century) and then constricted during the second half of the eighteenth century, as various kinds of development encroached. With this constriction, the density of interments and the superimposition of graves within the remaining ground would have increased.

The excavated site was located in the north part of the cemetery along the Van Borsum patent/Calk Hook Farm boundary. In Figures 32–34, the outline of the New York African Burial Ground archaeological excavation is superimposed on eighteenth-century maps provided in Chapter 2. As can be seen from these figures, the excavation site was in a portion of

the cemetery that remained “available” for interments throughout the eighteenth century—that is, it did not see construction of private houses and industries, military structures, or public buildings, as did the perimeter area. The only known structure within the excavation site that dates to the life of the cemetery (other than the graves themselves) was the fence that apparently ran along the boundary between the Van Borsum patent and the Calk Hook Farm.

The archaeological site thus sampled a part of the historical African Burial Ground where interments continued to take place until the property was subdivided and developed by the Barclay and Kip families (1787 and 1795 respectively) and the cemetery was closed. And, because the overall area that could be used for interments was constricting owing to surrounding development (the potteries, the palisade, the barracks, public buildings, and houses) we believe that the archaeological site included a part of the cemetery that would have been intensively used during the second and third quarters of the century. We also posit, however, that it included a part of the cemetery (to the north of the Van Borsum patent–Calk Hook Farm boundary) that was only used during the final quarter of the century and thus is less densely packed with graves. This argument is further developed in Chapters 4 and 9.

³ The boundary given for the National Historic Landmark (NHL) was partly based on historic documentation but was partly drawn with reference to the likelihood of preservation in the blocks surrounding the archaeological site (see Appendix A, Part 3 of this volume). The southern extent of the cemetery was never clearly established for the NHL nomination, and later excavations at the north end of City Hall Park and on Chambers Street revealed the presence of graves near the north foundation of the Tweed Courthouse and at the perimeter of the northern part of City Hall Park. The cemetery probably extended farther south than the NHL boundary.

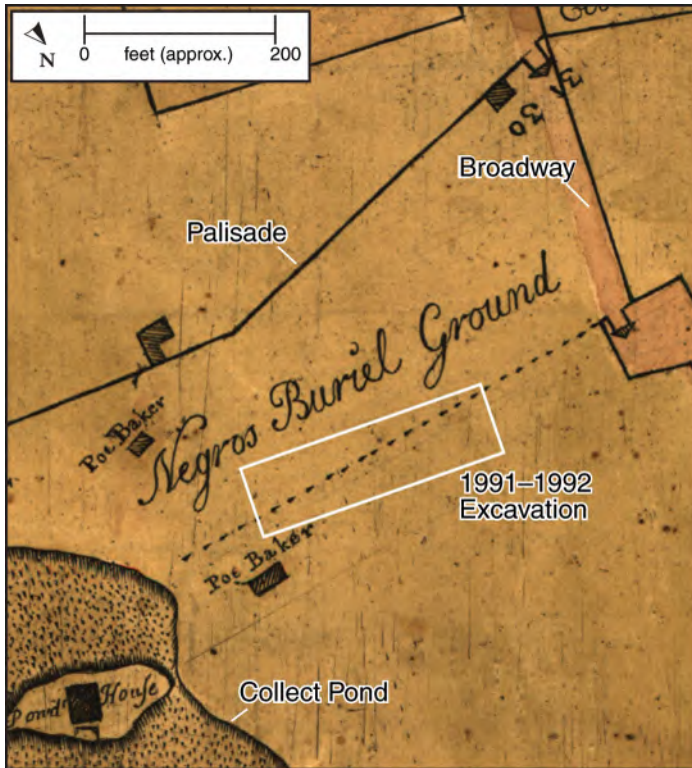


Figure 33. Site location overlaid on the Maerschalk Plan (1754). The dashed line crossing the excavation site may represent the boundary between the burial ground and the Rutgers Calk Hook Farm at the time the map was made. The area containing excavated graves spanned this line. Scale is 1 inch = approximately 200 feet (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).



Figure 34. Site location overlaid on the Ratzer Map (1767). The solid line crossing the excavation site may represent the boundary between the cemetery/Van Borsum patent and the Calk Hook Farm at the time the map was made. The area containing excavated graves spanned this line. The dashed-dotted line parallel to Broadway is the ward boundary (Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress).

The total area designated an NHL is approximately 7 acres, and the Van Borsum Patent comprised approximately 6.6 acres. The area investigated archaeologically covered 27,000 square feet of Block 154, and the portion where burials were excavated comprised about 9,500 square feet. Using 6 acres as a low-end estimate of the historic expanse of the African Burial Ground, the excavated area containing burials may represent just 3.6 percent of the original cemetery. The number of graves excavated within the archaeological site was 424. If we were to assume that the density of burials was similar over the whole of the African Burial Ground, 6 acres could have accommodated over 11,600 burials. Based on the density encountered within the excavated portion, it is estimated that an additional 200–300 graves were left unexcavated on Block 154, within the “Pavilion” site (now the reinterment and memorial site) alone. As noted, the excavated site contains a portion of the cemetery that was very densely used and a portion that was relatively thinly used, so there is room for error in either direction.

Another way to estimate the total number of people buried in the African Burial Ground is to attempt to project the total number of Africans who might have died in the city during the years of the cemetery’s use. This is problematic, because although we do have census data for blacks for some years, we do not have any data on death rates. Bills of mortality available for Philadelphia in the period 1767–1775 indicate an average of 75 burials of Africans per year; this represents about 7 burials for every 100 blacks per year, a rate about 50 percent higher than among whites (Nash 1988:34). If a similar death rate applied to New York, about 219 blacks would have been buried in 1771 based on that year’s census count of 3,137. If we use this same death rate for each census year, and smooth the rate of population growth (or decrease) between the census years, the numbers of deaths of Africans in New York would be calculated at 14,010 for the period 1698–1795.⁴ This number is close enough to the

⁴ Neither a constant death rate nor a smooth population trend is historically likely, of course. Disease may have created spikes in the death rate, and importations would have caused fluctuations in the rate of population growth. The period of the British occupation during the war saw both a swollen black population and increased deaths. It is also very likely that infants—and especially newborns—were consistently undercounted in the census (as well as in the mortality bills). Infants also may be underrepresented in the burial ground owing to poor preservation. If the total number of blacks who died in New York is estimated at 30 percent higher in order to include “missing” infants, then the total population of the African Burial Ground may have been well over 15,000.

estimate of 11,600 individuals based on area to allow for a general estimate of 10,000–15,000 individuals for the cemetery as a whole. Using the estimates based on area, the 419 individuals that are represented by skeletal remains would be a 3.61 percent sample of a mortuary population spanning a 100–150-year period. Using estimates based on projecting numbers of deaths from population statistics, the 419 individuals would be a 2.97 percent sample.

Impacts to Graves during the Cemetery’s Use

It is impossible to know for certain all of the times and places graves would have been disturbed over the life of the burial ground, especially because the date of its inception and its full geographical extent (particularly on the south and east sides) are not known. Known and likely impacts are summarized here.

- The development of the pottery industries would have been the first major impact. It is not known whether the stoneware potteries located east of the excavated site stood within the original burial ground. If so, their construction surely would have destroyed existing graves. We do know for certain that pottery waste was dumped on the cemetery, because such a dump was encountered in the eastern part of the site.
- The construction of dwellings (with associated gardens, fences, and outbuildings) is likely to have disturbed graves. The locations of eighteenth-century dwellings—on Broadway and possibly on the east side of the cemetery at the stoneware potteries—were outside the area excavated archaeologically.
- The construction of municipal and military facilities in what is now City Hall Park during the eighteenth century may have impacted the southernmost graves. This area is south of the excavated site.
- The construction and maintenance of the town palisade probably disturbed graves along its alignment. The palisade was located to the south of the excavated site.
- The interments of prisoners in the southern part of the ground by the British army during the occupation may have disturbed or destroyed existing African burials. Again, this impact was probably to the south of the excavated site.
- The archaeological excavation revealed that tannery waste (i.e., cattle bone, hoof, and horn) was

dumped in the northern part of the cemetery while it was active.

- Graves were robbed for cadavers in the 1780s.

It was not unusual for eighteenth-century cemeteries to have been encroached upon by construction and intrusions by animals. The African community may have suffered these depredations largely in silence, although protests may have gone unrecorded. Efforts to protect the burial ground from depredations were not documented until the most egregious of the encroachments—the exhumation of newly interred bodies for dissection—caused a public outcry (see Chapters 2 and 9). In the case of intact coffins that proved empty, body snatching by medical students may be an explanation, and two individuals, in Burials 323 and 364, were probably reburied after dissection (see burial descriptions in Part 2 of this volume and discussion in Chapter 9). By and large, however, within the small portion of the cemetery that was excavated archaeologically, severe disturbances to burials appeared to date to later periods, after the cemetery ceased to be used for interments.

Postcemetery Development

The Earliest Street and Lot Development and the Fill

The African Burial Ground was subject to 200 years of building construction and demolition, street maintenance, and utility installation once interments ceased. The portion of the cemetery that was excavated survived not only the early development of urban residential lots but also much more massive, later construction phases, owing to three factors: (1) an alley was laid out in the 1790s through the middle of the block, and portions of this alley were relatively undisturbed subsequently; (2) some of the structures built on the lots had relatively shallow basements; and (3) most important, in the final years of the eighteenth century and the early years of the nineteenth century, the low-lying terrain of the African Burial Ground was covered with landfill to bring the area up to a level grade, thus protecting graves from later construction damage.

After the streets crossing the cemetery were mapped out (Table 10), and the Barclay land (part of the old Calk Hook Farm) and the Kip land (the old Van Borsum patent) were surveyed and subdivided into lots (see Chapter 2 and Figures 22 and 24), the way was open for intensive residential and commercial devel-

opment of the African Burial Ground. As discussed in Chapter 2, African community leaders petitioned for and received a subsidy to purchase land and establish a new cemetery elsewhere at this time.

During the period of its confiscation by the purchasers and developers of individual lots—a process that probably took a decade or more (at least from the 1787 survey of the Calk Hook until the 1795 survey of the Kip property)—the African Burial Ground may have witnessed an almost daily struggle on the part of the relatives and descendants of those buried there to maintain their ties to the place and the dignity of grave sites. There were doubtless many visible, marked graves at the time of initial development of some of the lots—evidence from the archaeological excavation indicates that markers such as headstones or cobble outlines were used (see section on overall site stratigraphy). These would have been covered over, if not destroyed, in the first phase of lot development.

Reade Street and Anthony (later called Barley and subsequently renamed Duane) Street were laid out perpendicular to Broadway, but since the property line between Barclay and Kip lands was not, an “extra” triangular piece of property remained through the middle of the block when the rectangular Reade Street lots were first laid out. An alley, later to be called Republican or Manhattan Alley, was laid out running north from Reade Street and turning at a right angle to run east-west behind the Reade Street lots, taking up a portion of the “extra” triangle and providing additional frontage to maximize the potential for building houses. But this still left a small “gore,” a triangular piece of land, on the north side of the alley, abutting the rear yards of the Duane Street lots. The pieces of the gore were all eventually purchased and consolidated with the Duane Street lots, but the alley remained in place through the twentieth century. Burials survived beneath a portion of this alley.

What about the new building lots? The history of property transactions from 1787 onward within Block 154 has received detailed scrutiny, although properties on blocks surrounding this one have not been researched in as much detail.⁵ The important

⁵ Preliminary research was conducted for the Stage IA background study on the site (Ingle et al. 1990). Subsequently, more-detailed research on postcemetery ownership and occupation of lots that were excavated was conducted by both Historic Conservation and Interpretation (HCI), by Jean Howson, Richard L. Porter, and Stephen Barto, and later John Milner Associates (JMA), by Thelma Foote and Reginald Pitts. Research relevant to the time periods represented archaeologically is presented in the report on the nonburial component of the 290 Broadway site (Cheek 2003).

Table 10. Streets Laid Out through the African Burial Ground

Street	History
Duane Street	The segment of this street to the east of Broadway was called Anthony Street when it was mapped at the time of the Calk Hook Farm subdivision in 1787 (see Figure 22). It was known as Barley Street at the turn of the century and renamed Duane Street in 1809. Proprietors of abutting lots were ordered to “dig out and fill in” [Minutes of the Common Council, May 18, 1795, in New York City Common Council 1917:2:149] the street in 1795. (This street should not be confused with the later Anthony Street two blocks to the north.)
Elk Street	This street was known as Ann Street when mapped at the time of the Van Borsum patent subdivision in 1795 (see Figure 24). Regulated in 1803, at which time it was called Elm Street.
Reade Street	Laid out in 1795 at the time of the Van Borsum patent subdivision (see Figure 24). Formerly Reed Street.
Republican Alley	The alley was called Manhattan Place or Alley in the nineteenth century. Laid out in 1795 at the time of the Van Borsum patent subdivision (see Figure 24), although its position shifted south and west compared to the alley shown on the map. The proprietors of abutting lots were ordered to “fill up” the alley in 1803.
Chambers Street	In 1796, a triangular wedge out of the “Negros Burial Ground” (i.e., the southern edge of the Van Borsum Patent—see Figure 24) was acquired by the city from the patent heirs for laying out this street to the east of Broadway (New York City Common Council 1917:2:250).

Note: See Hunter Research (1994) for details and sources for each street within New York’s African Burial Ground and the Commons Historic District. Figures 22 and 24 are in Chapter 2.

issues for understanding the final years of the excavated portion of the African Burial Ground are (1) the timing of initial building construction on the new city lots and (2) the possible construction of a new fence at the rear of some Duane Street building lots, along the old Calk Hook Farm–Van Borsum patent boundary.

The excavated portion of the cemetery spanned the line between lots laid out in 1787 (on the north) and those laid out in 1795 (on the south). Did burials continue on the lots until houses were actually built, and when was that? Or did burials continue only in the southern area in the years between 1787 and 1795? The Barclays began to sell and lease lots on Duane Street after 1787, but documentary evidence indicates that Lots 12–17 were all developed (built on) in the period 1794–1799, and the first house within the excavated portion of Block 154 was built in 1794 on Lot 12 (Cheek 2003:Chapter 4). Thus, it is possible burials continued over the entire area up until 1794. However, if a new fence was built along a stretch of the diagonal boundary line in order to demarcate the rear of Duane Street lots, it is possible those lots were off-limits for interments even before the construction of houses began.

Houses on Lots 12, 15, and 16 were the earliest built (Cheek 2003:Chapter 4). Damage to graves was

caused when various types of pit features were dug in the rear parts of these lots (Figures 35 and 36).

The earliest houses were not destined to last long. Beginning in the 1790s and into the first decade of the nineteenth century, the city undertook the filling in of the marshy areas around the Collect Pond, then of the pond itself, along with the grading of the hills in the area and the leveling of streets. Property owners were obliged to fill their own lots as well as “regulate” (build up or dig out) the streets on which they fronted. Filling of the low-lying properties and streets on the African Burial Ground commenced in the 1790s. Duane Street property owners were required to build up the street in 1795, and Republican Alley was ordered to be filled up in 1803 (Hunter Research 1994:29–31, 55–56, 59–61). Once streets were leveled, the Common Council ordered “sunken” (low-lying) lots along them to be filled in (New York City Common Council 1917:2:327–328). The pit and shaft features in the rear yards of Duane Street lots that had been built on before the filling were covered over and buried, just as were the graves of the African Burial Ground. Houses had to either be raised to the new street level or torn down and replaced. Once a lot was filled, building construction would begin at the new surface, and new building foundations and



Figure 35. In situ photograph of Burial 153. A privy shaft at the rear of Lot 15 truncated the entire eastern part of the grave (bottom of photograph). The disturbed parts of the skeleton had been tossed aside and were found on the opposite side of the privy in a pile. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

basements often extended only into the fill, not into the graves.

Fill encountered at the New York African Burial Ground archaeological site was approximately 13 feet deep on the west (behind Lot 12) and approximately 24 feet deep on the east near Elk Street, reflecting the original lay of the land. Some of this fill was from the time of the initial leveling of the area (notably behind Lot 12, where it was sampled and could be dated on the basis of artifacts it contained), but much of the site also contained heavy demolition fill from various demolition and rebuilding episodes over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even these episodes failed to destroy hundreds of underlying graves, however, because they were so deeply buried.

Building Construction in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Maps from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries depict the density of development on Block 154 (Fig-



Figure 36. In situ photograph of Burial 297. A privy shaft at the rear of Lot 16 truncated the entire western part of the grave (top of photograph), leaving only the legs below the knees and the eastern portion of the coffin. Scale shown is in inches; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

ures 37–39). Every one of the lots that the Kip and Barclay families sold had structures on them before the middle of the nineteenth century—many had houses at the street front and at the back, along the alley.

On some lots, successive buildings eventually obliterated all physical traces of the cemetery. This was true for all of the lots along Broadway, where the graves were not protected by deep fill and where large commercial structures had deep basements. We know from a newspaper reference that bones were removed during the 1845–1846 construction of the A. T. Stewart Store on Broadway between Chambers and Reade Streets (*New York Times*, November 14, 1878). Lot 12 was in a part of the site where fill was relatively shallow, but a building with a deep basement extending to the rear of the lot had never been constructed there, so graves were intact in that area. The most recent structure on Lot 13 had a deep basement, and no graves were preserved within its footprint (see Figure 7, pocket map). Because of a combination of shallower basements and deeper fill to the east, buildings in Lots 14–18, 20½, and 21 did not destroy all of the graves (see Appendix A, Part 3 of this volume, for schematic cross sections through the blocks within the NHL that show the projected level of graves in relation to building basements). Graves were preserved in place within the alignment of Republican Alley

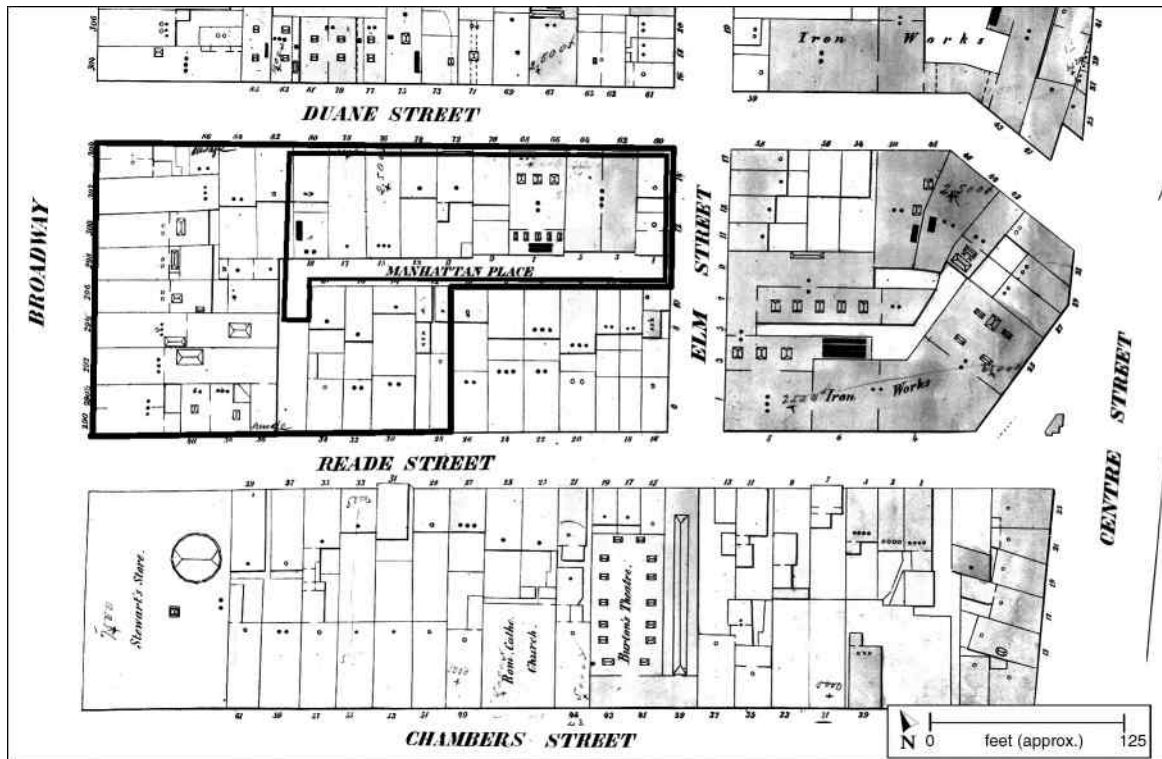


Figure 37. Detail from Perris Map of 1853. By the mid-nineteenth century, every property that had been laid out in the 1780s and 1790s had been developed, some having already seen successive building phases. Republican Alley was known as Manhattan Place at this time, and most of the lots that backed onto it had buildings at both front and rear. Elm (now Elk) Street had not been laid through to Chambers Street yet. The footprint of the Federal building at 290 Broadway (as originally proposed) is indicated with a heavy black outline. The outline of the archaeological site is indicated with a thin black line within this footprint (The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

along a short stretch of the north-south leg and behind Lots 12–15, but to the east, all graves that once lay beneath the alley had been disturbed by the excavation of the foundation for 22 Reade Street.

Even though hundreds of graves were preserved beneath the alley or the lot fill, considerable damage was caused by successive building episodes and related excavations. The site map (see Figure 7, pocket map) indicates areas where historic excavations for structures such as foundation walls, footings, drains, or elevator shafts clearly disturbed or destroyed graves. Known burials that were damaged prior to the archaeological investigation are listed in Table 11. For ease of reference, the historic lot numbers are used, but it should be remembered that the lots postdate and have no relevance for the New York African Burial Ground itself. “Feature” numbers are arbitrary consecutive numbers assigned to pits, privies, drains, footings, etc., that were encountered during the archaeological excavations. These are described in full in the report

of the 290 Broadway nonburial component (Cheek 2003). Examples of graves damaged in the second or third phases of development at the site are shown in Figures 40 and 41. Table 11 lists only those graves for which historical impacts resulted in removal of skeletal remains; compression also caused damage.

Damage Sustained during the Project

Burial 1, the first grave discovered at the New York African Burial Ground, was uncovered during backhoe excavation of a test trench and was truncated by the machine. Subsequently, excavation proceeded so as to delineate burials by identifying the outline of the grave shafts prior to beginning meticulous hand excavation. Nevertheless, numerous graves were partially disturbed during backhoe clearing of demolition fill

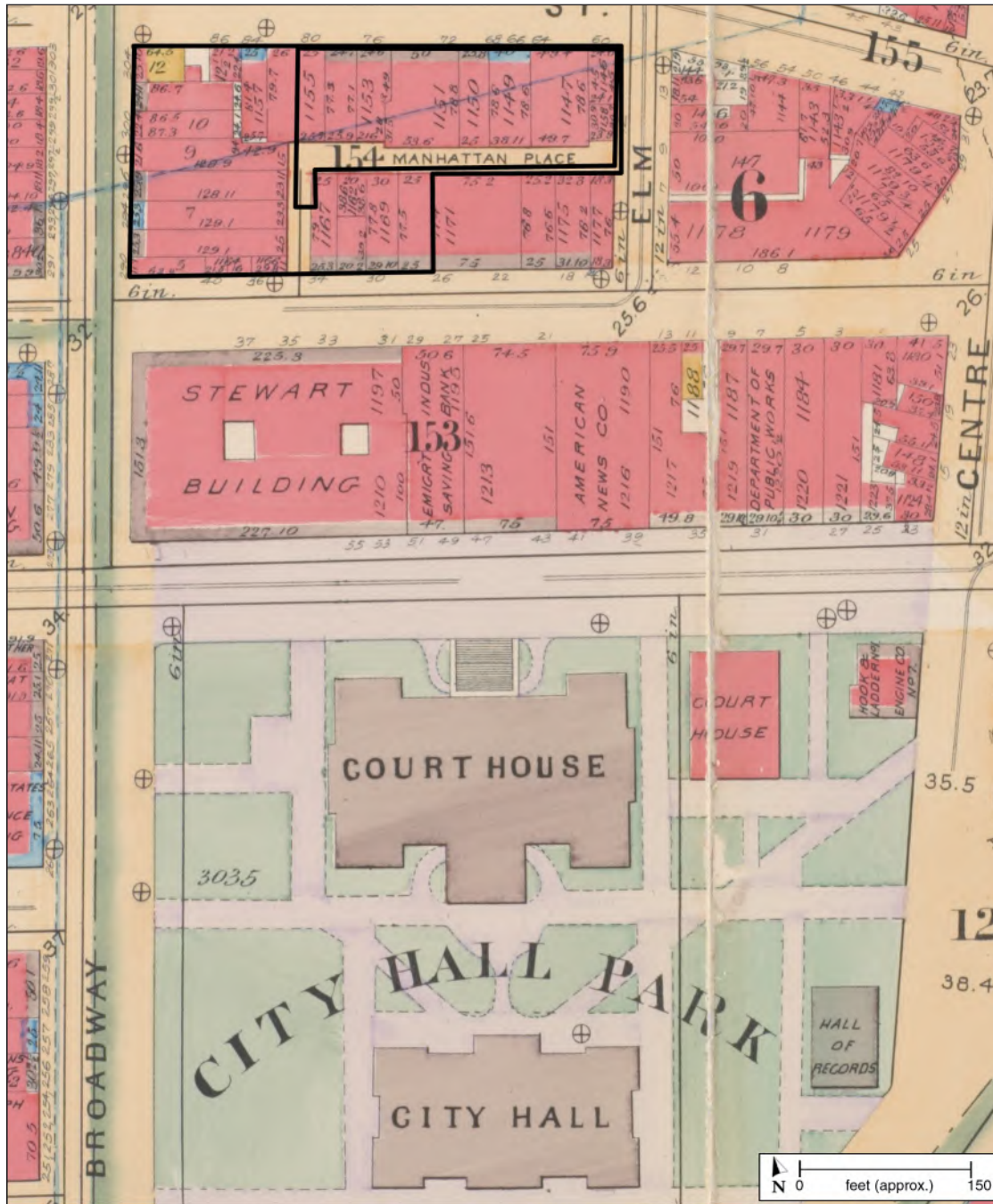


Figure 38. Detail from Robinson and Pidgeon Atlas (1893) showing late-nineteenth-century development in the area of the African Burial Ground. The former boundary between the Van Borsum Patent and the Calk Hook Farm was shown running diagonally across Block 154. Brick structures that covered entire lots now characterized the blocks in the area, and the “Tweed” Court House, facing north onto Chamber Street, had been built in City Hall Park. The footprint of the Federal building at 290 Broadway (as originally proposed) is indicated with a heavy black outline. The outline of the archaeological site is indicated with a thin black line within this footprint (The Lionel Pincus and Princess Firyal Map Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations).

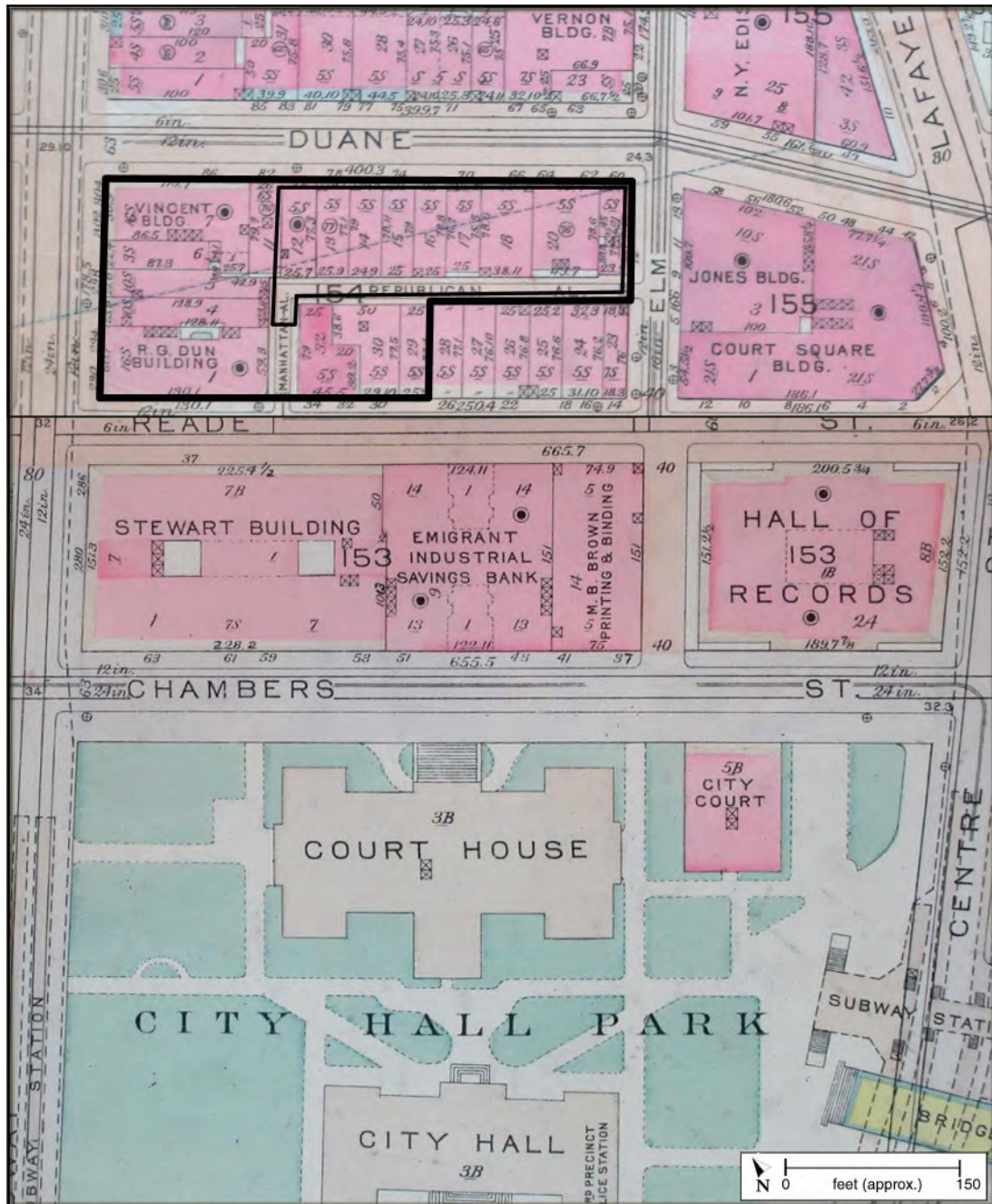


Figure 39. Detail from the Bromley Map (1934) showing development in the area of the African Burial Ground. The former boundary between the Van Borsum Patent and the Calk Hook Farm was shown running diagonally across Block 154. The eight-story Hall of Records, on Block 153 on the east side of Elm (Elk) Street, was built on the leveled eighteenth-century “Pot Baker’s Hill.” Because of the previous leveling and the deep sub-basement of this building, it is unlikely any burials survive on the block. Burials may be extant beneath the “Jones” and “Court Square” buildings on Block 155 just across Reade Street, however, as this would have been a lower-lying area and the basements are not as deep. Buildings are discussed in the National Historic Landmark nomination (see Appendix A.2 in Part 3 of this volume) and in the designation report for New York’s African Burial Ground and the Commons Historic District. The footprint of the Federal building at 290 Broadway (as originally proposed) is indicated with a heavy black outline. The outline of the archaeological site is indicated with a thin black line within this footprint (use of 1934 Bromley Map reprinted/used with permission from the Sanborn Library, LLC).

Table 11. Damage to Known Burials Caused by Historic Development

Type of Feature, by Lot	Impact
Lot 12	
Cistern	truncated Burials 58 and 63
Lot 13	
Concrete foundation	truncated Burials 10, 97, 102
Stone foundation	truncated Burials 25, 26, 32, and 52; damaged Burials 83 and 84
Lot 14	
Foundation	truncated Burials 125, 162, 188, 228, 275, 277, 287
Basement at front of lot	disturbed Burials 152 and 178
Shallow pit (Feature 106)	possibly damaged Burial 125
Lot 15	
Privy (Feature 56)	truncated Burial 153; damaged Burial 203
Privy (Feature 77)	damaged Burials 192, 193, 252, and possibly 225
Pit (Feature 91)	slightly damaged Burial 158
Brick drain (Feature 100)	damaged Burial 213
Lot 16	
Privy (Feature 58)	truncated Burial 297; damaged Burial 181
Lot 17	
Foundation	damaged Burials 351, 370, 428
Lot 18	
Foundation excavations	damaged Burials 410, 413, 420
Footing	damaged Burial 414
Elevator shaft	damaged Burials 417, 418, 423, and 434
Broadway lots	
Foundations	damaged Burials 15, 36, 41, 46, 54, 67, 81, 89, and 93
Reade Street lots	
Foundations, mid-block	damaged Burials 66, 70, 118, 168, 170, and 189
Foundation, 22 Reade St.	damaged Burials 308, 316

over large areas. Such damage is noted in the burial descriptions contained in Part 2 of this volume. It is worth noting that 30 of the 31 skulls that were considered to be “intact” for the purposes of skeletal analysis were recovered among the first 100 burials excavated, which suggests that the quality of excavation suffered as pressure to speed the work increased.

Construction of 290 Broadway proceeded throughout the archaeological field project, and damage to the burials continued despite the presence of the

archaeological team. Excavations for massive footings in the eastern part of the site were responsible for the destruction of many graves (Figure 42). Four openings for these 10-by-10-foot footings were excavated along a north-south alignment, each disturbing a 15-by-15-foot area (one is shown on the site plan, Figure 7, pocket map). Based on the density of burials in the southeastern part of the site (an area that was not even fully exposed), it is likely that dozens of graves were destroyed by each of the footings. Construction



Figure 40. In situ photograph of Burial 97. A concrete wall between Lots 12 and 13 obliterated the eastern half of the grave. Ruler is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

in 1991 of a perimeter wall for 290 Broadway also destroyed or damaged an unknown number of graves along Elk Street and possibly also along Duane Street. Another large area was disturbed during construction activity in the rear part of Lot 16. The use of heavy machinery on the site caused damage to additional graves, although the extent of the damage is more difficult to assess.

Overall Site Stratigraphy

As noted, clearing in most areas was done mechanically down to a level where graves were clearly visible and sometimes to the very tops of coffins. It appears that pressure to speed the excavation often led to the disregard of deposits above this level. It is possible that historical development had already destroyed the earlier ground surfaces. But any historic surfaces that may have been extant beneath the fill may have been stripped in the interest of reaching the burials quickly. In some areas, stripping proceeded until the tops of coffins (readily recognizable from wood stain-



Figure 41. In situ photograph of Burial 213. A brick drain constructed some time in the nineteenth century extended down through the grave, removing a portion of the coffin and skeletal remains but leaving the rest of the burial remarkably intact. Ruler alongside the grave is marked in feet; north is to the right (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

ing and in situ nails) were observed. This destroyed the opportunity for the archaeologists to examine most of the site for evidence of grave markers and items that had been deliberately placed on the tops of graves. The exception was the north-south leg of Republican Alley, where the surface of some graves was present (Figure 43). This was the first site area excavated archaeologically and also the shallowest, requiring hand excavation of upper layers; it is possible that there the excavators had the luxury of time enough to carefully look for old surfaces.

Despite not having the original or eighteenth-century ground surface over the majority of the archaeo-

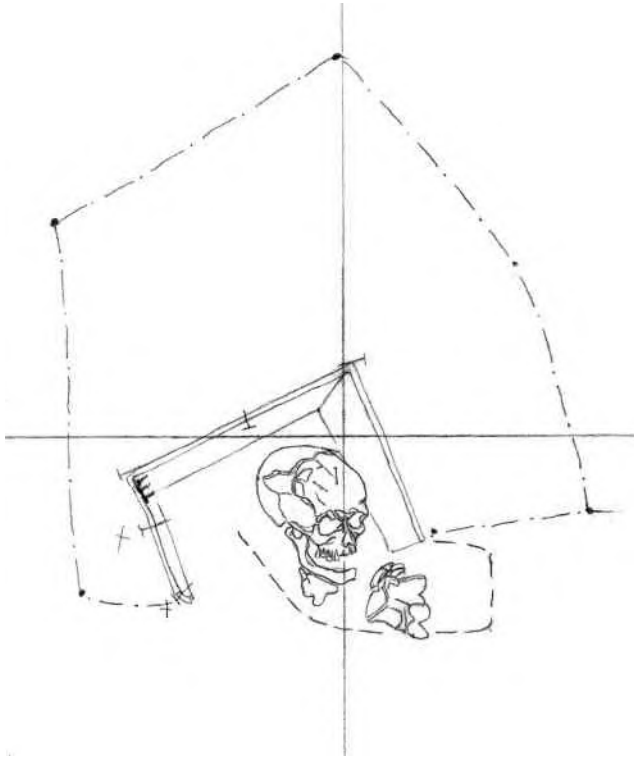


Figure 42. In situ drawing of Burial 362, which was nearly destroyed by the installation of a massive concrete footing for the 290 Broadway building in February of 1992. The grave held a man of undetermined age. His cranium and a portion of the coffin were left relatively undisturbed. Numerous other burials were also damaged or destroyed by this footing and three others in the eastern part of the site. Scale is 1 inch = 1 foot; north is to the right (drawing by M. Schur).

logical site, it is possible to get a sense of the lay of the land by looking at the recorded elevations of burials. The microtopography of the portion of the cemetery that was studied archaeologically appears to have included a general northeast-trending slope and possibly also “terrace” areas, where the ground was flatter and where burials were concentrated. Figure 44 is a schematic profile of the excavated graves from west (closest to Broadway) to east (at Elk Street). Concentrations of burials are seen at 50–100 East and at 110–145 East. The apparent precipitous drop-off at 100 East is the effect of the construction disturbance at the rear of Lot 16.

When each interment originally took place, the soil from the surface of the ground and from the grave shaft was removed and then redeposited in the shaft. Thus material from the surface at the time of burial ended up mixed in with the fill in the grave shaft. In many cases, nonburial deposits surrounding or overly-

ing the burials, but contemporary with the cemetery, are reflected in the contents of the shafts. For instance, some burials found in the area where the stoneware potteries were dumping kiln waste contained large amounts of that waste in the grave shafts. In other cases, the grave-shaft contents reflected the presence of a sparse sheet scatter of domestic debris (bits of glass, brick, smoking pipes, or ceramics) or of a fairly heavy deposit of animal bone and horn (probably waste material from a tannery). Materials present in the grave shafts can be used to reconstruct the eighteenth-century ground-surface deposits over the site area. For our purposes, this information is useful for dating graves and for understanding the series of encroachments that affected the burial ground (see further discussion in Chapter 4).

Post-burial-ground features and deposits, which were located north of the cemetery or which overlay or cut into the cemetery deposits, were also excavated during the field project (Cheek 2003). Some of these represented distinct phases of use of Block 154. Cheek (2003) designated development Phases 1–6 for the site as a whole:

- Phase 1 (through 1787)—African Burial Ground and contemporary uses including the potteries
- Phase 2 (1788–1803)—initial “urbanization”
- Phase 3 (1799–1807)—the raising of Anthony-Barley-Duane Street
- Phase 4 (1807–1890s)—development
- Phase 5 (1900–1990)—development [also the razing of structures in the 1960s in advance of an aborted civic center development project]
- Phase 6 (1990–1992)—construction of 290 Broadway

The African Burial Ground cemetery was still in use during the first part of Cheek’s “Phase 2,” through 1795.

Condition of Graves

The wet conditions at the New York African Burial Ground site were not a surprise, given the proximity of the Collect Pond and surrounding wetlands (the latter possibly at one time extending into the area of the cemetery). Moreover, many of the graves were themselves at or below modern sea level. During excavations, the water table often was high enough to flood burials, and it is assumed that fluctuating moisture levels affected them throughout the period



Figure 43. In situ photograph of Former Republican Alley, as the surface of graves was revealed. View is toward the south (photograph by Dennis Seckler).

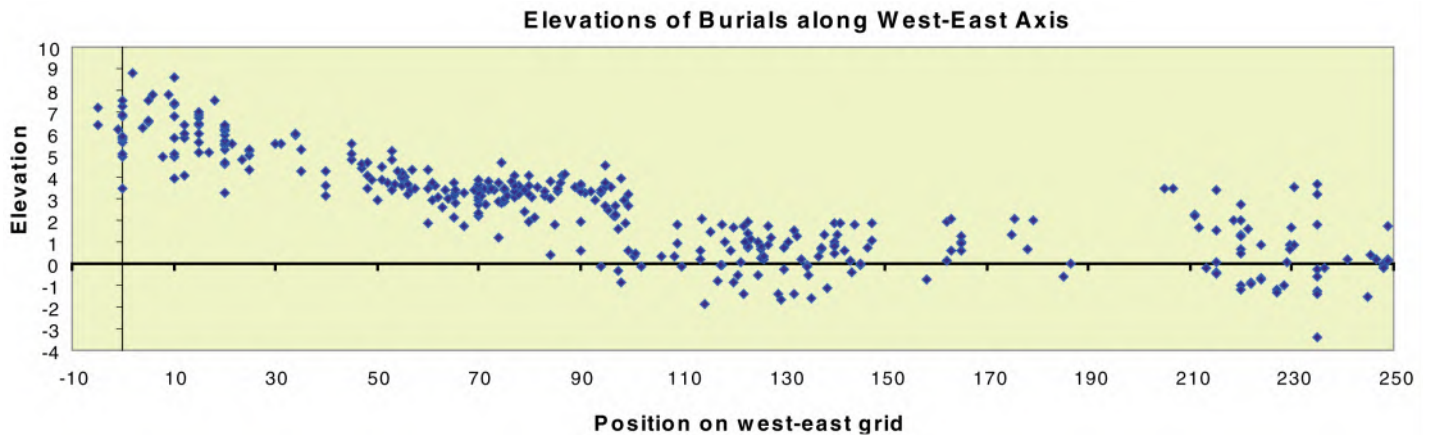


Figure 44. Schematic diagram of elevations of burials (shown as diamonds) from west to east. Elevations are in feet above/below current sea level (measured at the highest point of the in situ skeletal remains). West is to the left. Grid line "0" on the West-East site grid is 280 feet east of Broadway. Differing scales along the X- and Y-axes exaggerate the variation in elevations.

of their interment, which in most cases would have been more than 200 years.

Preservation of both skeletal remains and artifacts was dependent on soil conditions. Project conservator Cheryl J. LaRoche (2002:17) described these as follows:⁶

The presence of naturally occurring alluvial clays with lenses of Cretaceous sands . . . contributed to the variety of environmental conditions. . . . Many of the natural catalysts of artifact and skeletal deterioration were in these soils. Sand allowed water seepage, while the alluvial clay acted as a hydrophilic substrate, binding

free water to the adjacent artifacts and skeletal materials. The wet, gelatinous consistency of [some of] the skeletal remains upon excavation was indicative of waterlogged conditions. The abundance of oxygen, inherent in alluvial clays, increased acidity (lowered pH), which broke down organic resins. Furthermore, this oxygenated environment encouraged the deterioration of ferric alloys through oxidation as the free oxygen was tied to the groundwater. Thus, iron preservation at the 290 Broadway Block was poor due, in part, to oxygenated conditions and electrochemical activity.

When a catalyst, such as oxygen, is depleted, the soil becomes anoxic, and agents of deterioration that are dependent on an oxygenated environment rapidly decline while there is a

⁶ The African Burial Ground project conservators were Gary McGowan and Cheryl J. LaRoche. This text is from an unedited draft report of conservation activities prepared by LaRoche.

corresponding increase in anaerobic activity. This anoxic environment harbored anaerobic bacteria, which accelerated the rate of degradation of organic materials. Several artifacts exhibited blackened surfaces, evidence of metal sulfides produced by sulfate-reducing bacteria associated with anaerobic conditions. The microenvironment produced by the permeable sand lenses fostered its own unique degradation pattern. While these more permeable loci are less biologically reactive, they can be more chemically reactive. As one agent of deterioration diminished, another flourished.

In addition, the chemical environment caused by decomposition of the human remains in each grave would have affected the preservation of items such as cloth or artifacts.

Soil chemistry was not tested during excavations of the graves or subsequently in the laboratory. Differential preservation conditions generally cannot be determined from burial to burial (unless obvious factors such as excessive moisture are mentioned in the notes), and this has implications for studying the distribution of burial artifacts. In other words, the presence or absence of burial items cannot be checked against preservation conditions. For graves where no artifactual material was recovered, the possibility of total decomposition should be considered. For example, pins were often noted in the field but not recoverable, and it is possible some were so decomposed that they were not distinguishable to the naked eye in the field. Similarly, recovered pewter- and bone-button fragments were very poorly preserved, and it is not inconceivable that such items were simply no longer extant in some burials. Where field notes indicate that the preservation was poor, determinations as to the absence of burial artifacts (or skeletal elements, for that matter) should be qualified.

Post-interment animal activity (worm action and small mammal burrows) was noted in numerous graves. Changes in drainage caused by filling and construction over the centuries would have created fluctuations in moisture conditions, and such fluctuations themselves are very damaging. Pollutants from nineteenth- and twentieth-century use of the property that seeped through the soils may have altered the preservation environment of graves. Finally, the exposure of skeletal remains through excavation presented an immediate danger of deterioration. Most important, if the bones were soft from moisture, drying would

cause them to become friable.⁷ Field protocols for ensuring maximum stabilization of remains and artifacts are noted in Chapter 1.

All recorded observations of the in-field condition of individual graves are noted in the burial descriptions in Part 2 of this volume.⁸ The condition of artifacts and products of decomposition noted during laboratory processing are discussed in the appropriate artifact chapters (Chapters 11–14).

Preservation Assessment

Field records were reviewed for information pertinent to the likely presence or absence of artifacts in graves based on preservation factors, including damage sustained to burials, degree of disarticulation and disturbance, and whether excavation was complete. This is crucial to the analysis of artifact-frequency distributions, which should only include burials for which the preservation of items was at least possible. A simple logic was applied, taking into account the fact that in an intact grave, artifacts might survive even where bone does not (recall the number of coffins, especially very small ones, that did not contain extant human remains). Burials were assigned “yes” or “no” values depending on whether artifacts could be expected. For a small number of burials, we also needed to take into account which part of a burial had survived. Pins were most frequently found on the cranium, so burials with missing crania but good preservation otherwise were noted. The “preservation” field in the burial data table contains a value for each burial as defined in Table 12.

This artifact preservation assessment does not correspond to the cranial and postcranial preservation value assigned to the skeletal remains for each

⁷ Conservation measures, such as consolidation of friable material with PVA (polyvinyl acetate), were sometimes taken in the field. Trained conservation staff was not always on hand during the fieldwork, however. The professional conservators subsequently indicated that the overuse of PVA sometimes caused soil to bind to bones and artifacts.

⁸ Field recording was highly variable. In general, recordation of the condition of the skeleton, element by element, was much better than that of the overall grave (notes on the observed condition of in situ skeletal elements were recorded on forms by the excavation staff of the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team [MFAT] and are retained in the project archive). For some burials, detailed notes were taken on the soil; moisture conditions; consistency and surface condition of the bone, wood, and artifacts; and damage from exposure. For others, little or no information on these factors was recorded.

Table 12. Preservation Values Used for Burials

Value	Definition
“y”	Overall preservation of grave is such that artifacts might be expected to have survived. Skeletal elements from the upper half of the body and/or the coffin outline with nails were found in situ.
“n”	Heavily disturbed or redeposited remains; or the upper body was missing because of truncation by later feature, and no artifacts were found with lower body.
“y (no cranium)”	Otherwise intact grave where just the cranium had been truncated (cranial pins would be missing, but survival of other artifacts may be expected).
“y (cranium only)”	Only the cranium was still in its apparent original burial location (pins may be expected, although other artifacts would be missing, as they are rarely present on the cranium).
“n (empty coffin)”	Human remains (and possibly artifacts) appear to have been removed from otherwise intact coffin. These are rare cases for which it is believed decay cannot account for the lack of skeletal remains.
“n (not excavated)”	Artifacts were not found, but the burial was not fully excavated at the time the field project was halted, so their presence cannot be ruled out.

burial (see *Skeletal Biology of the New York African Burial Ground*, Appendix D [Blakey and Rankin-Hill 2009b]), which serve a different purpose. Although some of the factors affecting bony preservation also apply to artifacts, others do not. For example, even where the preservation of skeletal remains was minimal, such as in the case of many of the infants, coffins were clearly defined, and preservation of any other artifacts that had been placed with the deceased might be expected. It is worth noting that in several cases of extremely disturbed remains, copper staining from pins or tiny pin fragments were nonetheless noted with the bone.

Discussions of artifact frequencies in subsequent chapters will indicate the total numbers of burials considered based on the preservation assessments or other relevant criteria.

Graves Remaining in Place at the Site

The field excavation was halted by the General Services Administration (GSA) at the end of July 1992. Graves for which excavation was already underway at the time the excavation was halted were filled with vermiculite, and soil was placed over them. Some were subsequently removed in October 1992; others were left in place. At

that time, only some areas had been fully excavated (i.e., all burials removed).⁹ The site plan (see Figure 7, pocket map) depicts the boundary line between the area that had been fully excavated and that which had not. It should be noted that between grid lines 110 and 150 East, excavated burials seem to be equally dense on either side of this line. The excavation team, however, clearly indicated that the area eastward of the line had not been fully excavated and that therefore additional burials might be present.¹⁰

Based on the distribution of burials in areas that were fully excavated, it is likely burials are present throughout most of the northern portions of former Lots 17–19, 20½, and 21 (one possible grave outline was noted in the northeastern part of the site prior to halting the excavation). This indicates that the current memorial site, in fact, contains an intact portion of the original cemetery containing perhaps 200–300 graves beneath up to 25 feet of fill soil within the grass-covered enclosure.

⁹ The field excavations were stopped only after all burials had been excavated within the entire footprint of the 290 Broadway 34-story tower. The redesign of the building thus only had to address the relatively minor “Pavilion” section.

¹⁰ The draft site plan was prepared by field personnel Brian Ludwig and Margo Schur under the direction of Field Director Michael Parrington. This plan was used to plot foundations, nonburial features, limits of excavation, site disturbances, and the site grid on Figure 7, pocket map.

