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Geismar

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# Archaeological Monitoring and Assessment of Wood Timbers Wall Street Triangle Park, New York City

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## Letter Report



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Prepared for New York City Department of Parks and Recreation  
Prepared through Trocom Construction Corporation, Inc.  
Prepared by Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D. LLC  
April 2005

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Given the site's development history, that is, a long-established slip at the foot of Wall Street, known as the Wall Street, or Coffee House, Slip<sup>2</sup>, adjacent to Murray's Wharf,<sup>3</sup> and, therefore originally land under water, the discovery of wood is not entirely surprising. As part of land reclamation, local Water Lot Grants typically call for the construction of wharves and piers to support streets and infrastructure. For example, the City issued successive Water Lot Grants in the vicinity of the park to William Brownjohn, a prominent New York City chemist and druggist. One from 1762 (Water Lot Grant [WLG] D205), for lots between Water and Front Streets on the north side of the slip, and therefore on or along Wall Street west of the park site, required that he build a wharf, a street, and a "firm drain of brick" within six months of receiving his grant. Brownjohn received two subsequent grants east of Front Street (then Burnett's Key) between the slip and King (now Pine) Street, and therefore north of the park (WLG Liber D:472). This grant also called for the construction of wharves within six months of the grant, noting they had to be strong enough to support streets and buildings.

Although the Coffee House Slip, which included the future park site, was not entirely filled until sometime between 1827 and 1834 (Goodrich, A. T. 1827 and *The Firemen's Guide* 1834 in Cohen & Augustyn 1997:114-115, 116-117; not illustrated), at least a portion of the park site was structured before this to create the slip. This structure would have included the piers and wharfs that water lot grants required of the grantees.

An 1812 manuscript map documents what appears to be a street or wharf bordering the north side of the Coffee House Slip, that is, in the vicinity of the park site. It also indicates lots on the block between Wall and Pine (Poppleton 1812; not illustrated). It could not be determined whether the timbers uncovered during construction were disturbed remnants of the wharves that defined the slip or merely trashed wharfage or cribbing brought in from other landfills. It should be noted that soil borings drilled in 1937 document wood on the north and south sides of Wall Street and on South Street at depths of about 11 to 20 feet below the surface (WPA 1937; Figure 10), well below the depth of park excavations. These wood or timber deposits undoubtedly were from wharves or piers constructed by or for water lot grantees.

Other than these possible wharf or cribbing components, as noted above, no archaeologically significant material was encountered directly within the area of impact during the relatively shallow excavations required to introduce catch basins, a manhole, and a fountain into the park. A concern that proved not to be an issue was a slave market on Wall Street. Known as the Wall Street Market, or Meal Market since cereals and grains were its principal commodity, it is documented from 1709 to 1762 east of Pearl Street (then Queen Street) on Wall Street but well west of the park site. In 1762, the Meal Market was "affixed," that is, moved, to the Broadway, or Oswego, Market, located on Broadway south of Cortlandt Street; this market operated from 1738 to 1771 (DeVoe 1862:263, 330).

<sup>2</sup> Named for the original Merchant's Coffee House that operated on the northwest corner of Wall and Water Streets from April 27, 1772 until it was destroyed by fire on December 18, 1804; for more than a decade, the Coffee House was "one of the most popular taverns of its time" (Stokes V 1922:1148, 1429).

<sup>3</sup> Murray's Wharf extended east from the foot of Wall Street and what became Front Street beginning in the 1760s (Stokes III 1913:990)

While several sources indicate slaves were hired out by day at the Meal Market (e.g., DeVoe 1862:242), others disclose that it was also a market where slaves were bought and sold (e.g., Villard 1897:97). A good example of its slave market function is a 1751 advertisement that announced "a number of likely Negro Slaves, lately imported...[were] to be sold at Publick (sic) vendue (sic), on Friday the 17th Instant, at 10 o'clock in the Morning, at the Meal Market" (Stokes 1922 IV:628 [May13, 1751]). Maps locate the Meal Market on Wall Street just east of Pearl Street on what would prove to be the first of several episodes of land reclamation east of Pearl Street (e.g., Bradford/Lyne 1730 depicting 1728; Figure 10); that is, well west of the park's impact area, or area of potential effects (APE).

As noted, the Meal Market was removed to the Broadway, or Oswego, Market in 1762, apparently at least a decade before piers and wharves that undoubtedly underlie the northern part of the Wall Street Triangle defined the Coffee House Slip. A 1776 plan of the city indicates "Murray's Wharf" at the foot of Wall Street east of what would become Front Street (Holland 1776; Figure 11). It also shows the Oswego Market on Broadway south of Cortlandt Street (K on the map) as well as other markets. It does not, however, document any market in the project area.

In 1801, the East River slips between the Fly Market [Maiden Lane] and Whitehall Street, and therefore including the Coffee House Slip, were to be extended east of South Street using a specified block-and-bridge wharf construction (Minutes of the Common Council [MCC] II 1917:745). However, the Minutes of the Common Council document a protracted resistance to this proposal. The Coffee House Slip was ultimately extended east of South Street and housed a ferry slip for a Brooklyn ferry (e.g., Valentine 1858:frontispiece; not illustrated).

It should be emphasized that although excavations for catch basins, a manhole, and a fountain did not impact any significant archaeological material, this does not preclude the possibility of historically significant intact archaeological features remaining at greater depths. It is more than likely that any such features would comprise elements of the 18th- and 19th-century wharves and cribbing that created the Coffee House Slip, and could include scuttled ships adapted into cribbing (e.g., Geismar 1983) or abandoned hulks incorporated into fill (Kardas and Larrabee 1978).

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D.  
Joan H. Geismar, Ph.D., LLC.

cc. John Krawchuk, Director of Historic Preservation, Parks  
Anthony Santoro, Trocom Construction Corporation, Inc.

## WALL STREET TRIANGLE MONITORING (February 12, 13, and 16, 2004)

Reported by Shelly Spritzer

The park site was archaeologically monitored during excavation on Thursday, February 12, Friday February 13, and Monday, February 16, 2004. Monitoring occurred throughout the park site wherever catch basins (CB), drop inlets (DRI), and manholes (MH) were installed. This concentrated mainly along the northern part of the park and in the mid-section near its southern limit. The first catch basin pit was excavated approximately 60 feet east of Front Street about 15 feet from the north curb of Wall Street. All succeeding pits were measured from this location.

Existing utilities, that included electric, telephone, and fiber optic lines, water and gas mains, and sewers, made it extremely difficult to excavate the pits (see Figure 13b for a view of the site's complexity). Some duct banks were relocated to accommodate the new installations. Excavations were carried out with a 446B Caterpillar backhoe with a 30-inch bucket and by a laborer who hand shoveled as necessary.

The top of the sidewalk curb, about 1 foot above the surface of the roadway, was used as a reference (datum). The upper 2 to 3 feet of soil contained building rubble, mainly bricks and mortar with some small pieces of roofing slate, wood splinters, and bathroom and kitchen tiles. Ash, in layers no more than .085 to .25 feet thick, was noted in several pits.

The excavated soils, all fill, were a medium brown sandy silt, sometimes interlaced with reddish brown or black sandy silt. In the pit for MH5, the black silt had a slight organic odor and contained some oyster and clam shell. Water from a previously damaged water main, located approximately 4 feet west of the pit, seeped into this pit. Hand excavation was used to reach the main at about 5.5 feet below the curb.

The pits, which averaged 6 feet by 6 feet, were excavated to between 4.5 feet below the curb datum in a drop inlet feature (DRI 2), a drain-like construction, and 6.34 feet below the curb in CB4.

Artifacts noted in the fill but not collected included small fragments of shell-edged pearlware, whiteware, and blue transfer prints. Very little glass, either bottle or window fragments, was noted. Mollusk shells, both oyster and clam, were present, as was Belgian Block. Excavation also uncovered sheeting (or shoring) from previous excavations in two of the pits, one for DRI 2, the other for CB3.

A curved, brick feature was glimpsed approximately 15 feet from the park's south curb at the southern edge of the pit excavated for DRI1. Perhaps a sewer<sup>4</sup> or drain, since it was beyond the pit's limits it was not explored. The pit, which was about 4.68 feet deep, was in line with a brick manhole with a metal cap several feet to the west [not shown] that still functions. Plastic tubing in shallow trenches will connect the catch basins, drop inlets, and the manhole. A masonry duct bank encountered 3 feet below the curb about 7 feet north of DRI1 was traced for 85 feet until it turned toward the north curb of Wall Street (see Figure 13a).

The fountain pit at the NW corner of Wall and South Streets was initially hand trenched to locate duct banks and other buried features. The pit, which was then excavated with a backhoe, was 20 feet by 20 feet by 3 feet deep. Excavation halted until utility personnel could examine the duct banks, etc. The backhoe uncovered the top of a brick manhole 2 feet north of an existing storm drain partially in the sidewalk. The storm drain and an attached street catch basin were removed. Trenching terminated at about 2:30 Monday

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<sup>4</sup> The depth of the feature appears to be too shallow at 3.8 feet below the curb datum to be confirmed as the sewer since its inverts are documented between 10.2 and 8.5 feet below grade on a WPA subsurface survey (WPA 1938-1939; Figure 14a). This is especially so since street grades in the area have been raised over time. While the 1938-1939 survey places the area of discovery where the sewer is indicated (Figure 14a), a cross section suggests it was located about 12 feet further south (see Figure 14a and 14b). It is impossible to determine which of the two plans is more accurate [JHG].



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<sup>5</sup> In his index to *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, Stokes names Major John Joseph Holland as the mapmaker of the 1776 Plan of the City (VI 1928:482), but according to Cohen & Augustyn (and others), Major Samuel Holland was Surveyor General of the Northern District of the British colonies in North America from 1765 through the Revolutionary War (Cohen and Augustyn 1997:83). The plan of the city was an inset in Holland's larger map, *The Province of New York, and New Jersey: with Parts of Pennsylvania, and the Province of Quebec*, Sayer & Bennett, London, 1776.

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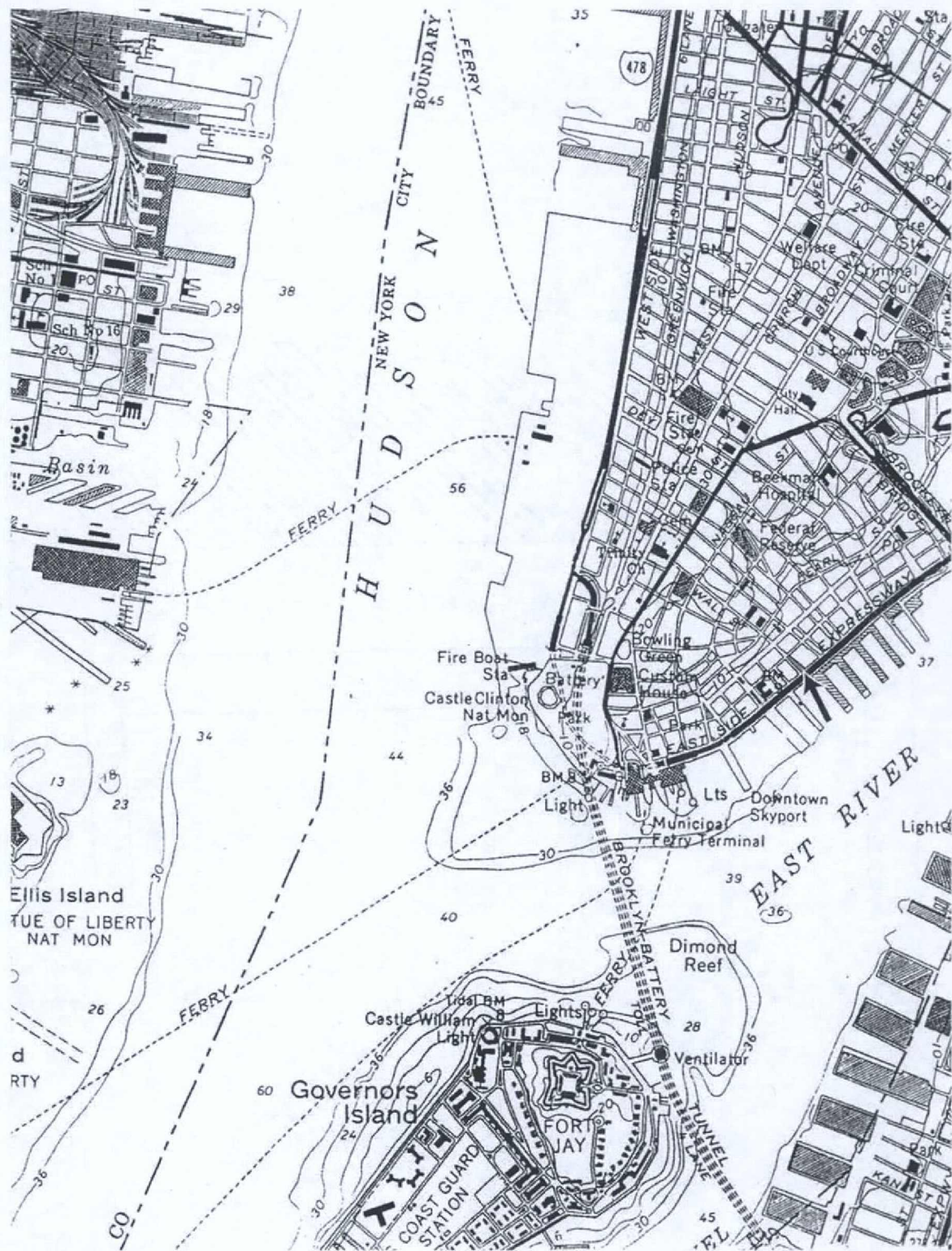
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11. Project Location and Meal Market 1728
12. Project Location and Oswego Market 1776
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14. Subsurface Survey Plan and Section 1938-1939

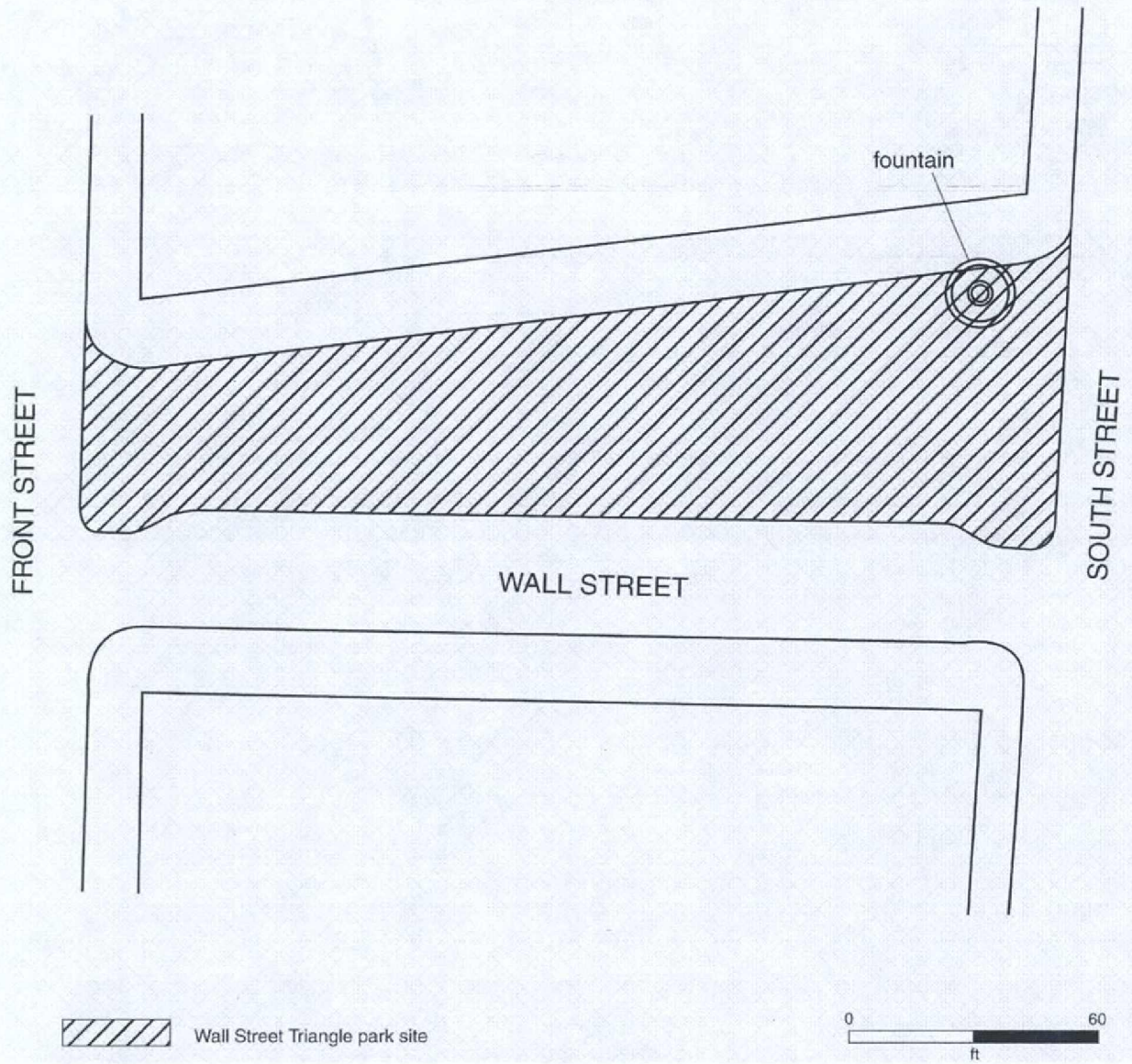


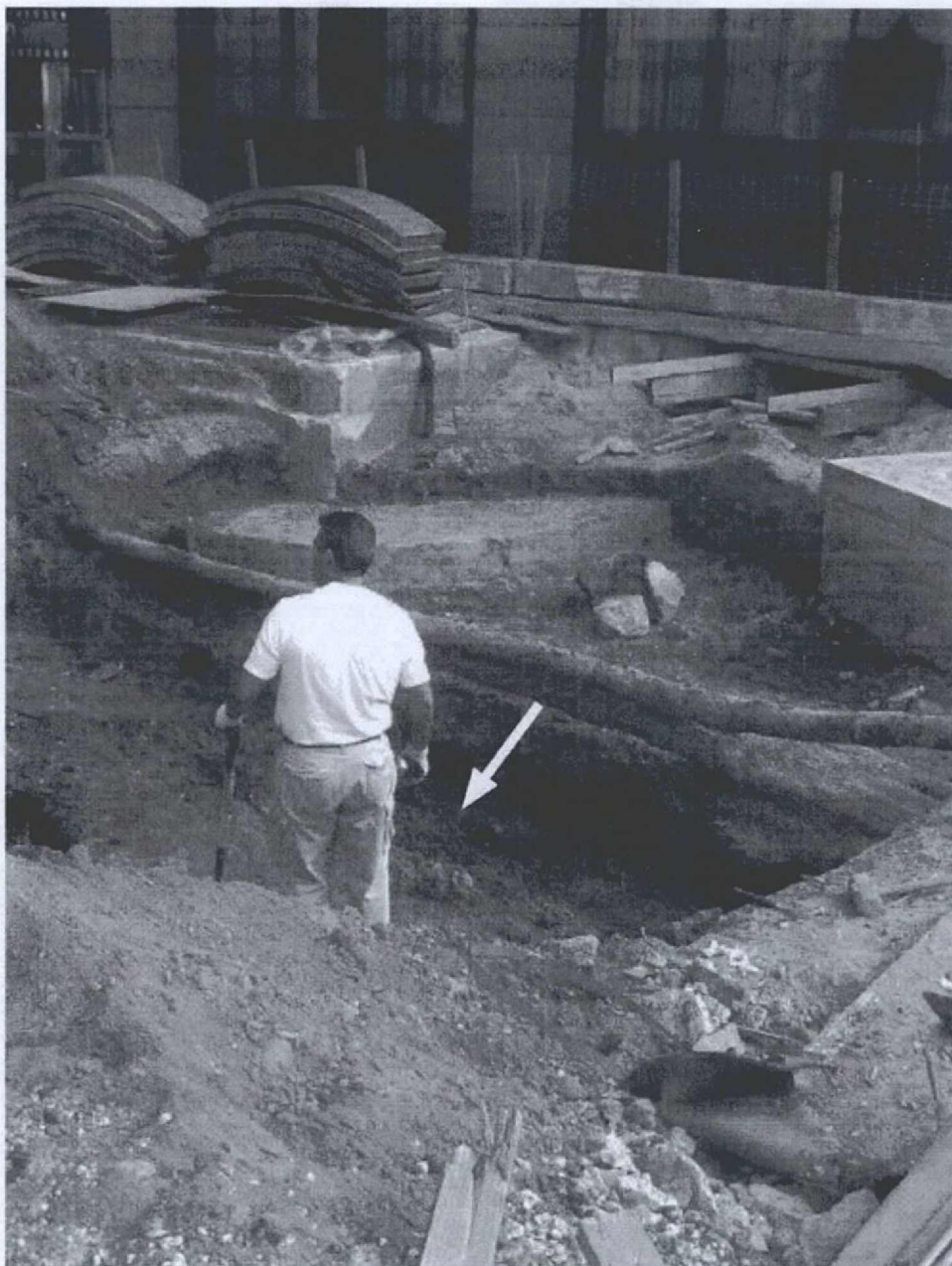
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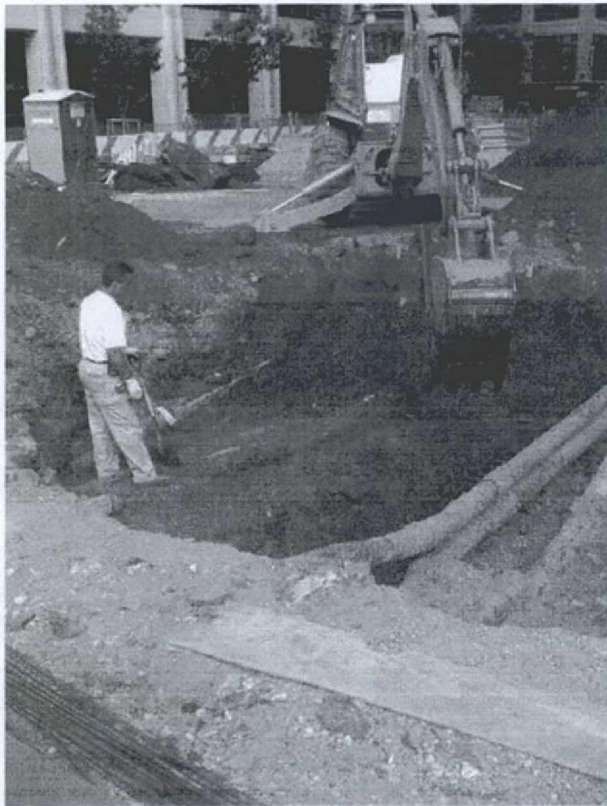




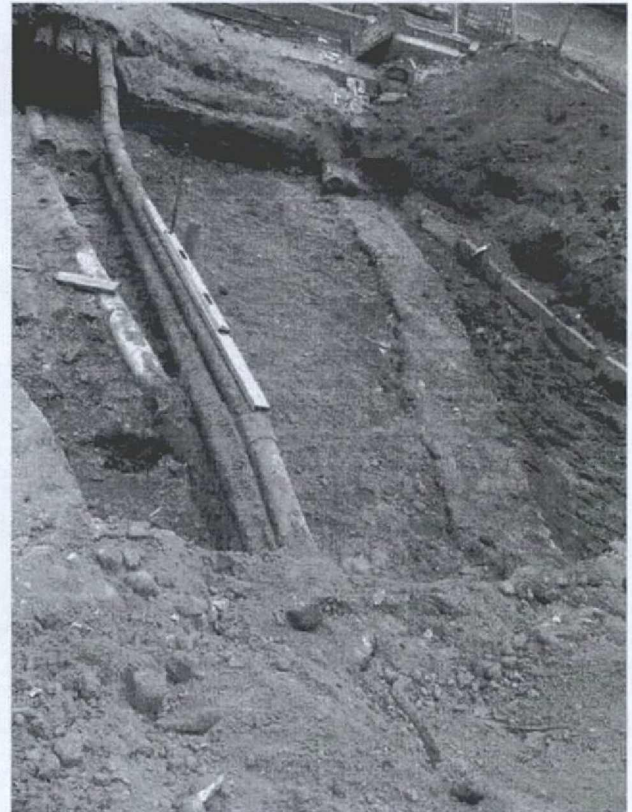


**3** Northeast corner of the Wall Street Triangle Park looking north shortly after a concentration of timbers was removed on July 9, 2004. An arrow indicates the general area of the find. Note the shallowness of the discovery area. (Photo: Joseph Atanga, Resident Engineer, Parks)





**4** Grading where timbers were uncovered in the northeast corner of the Wall Street Triangle. (Photo: Joseph Atanga, Resident Engineer, Parks, 7/9/04)



**5** Same as Figure 4, fully graded. (Photo: Joseph Atanga, Resident Engineer, Parks, 7/9/04)

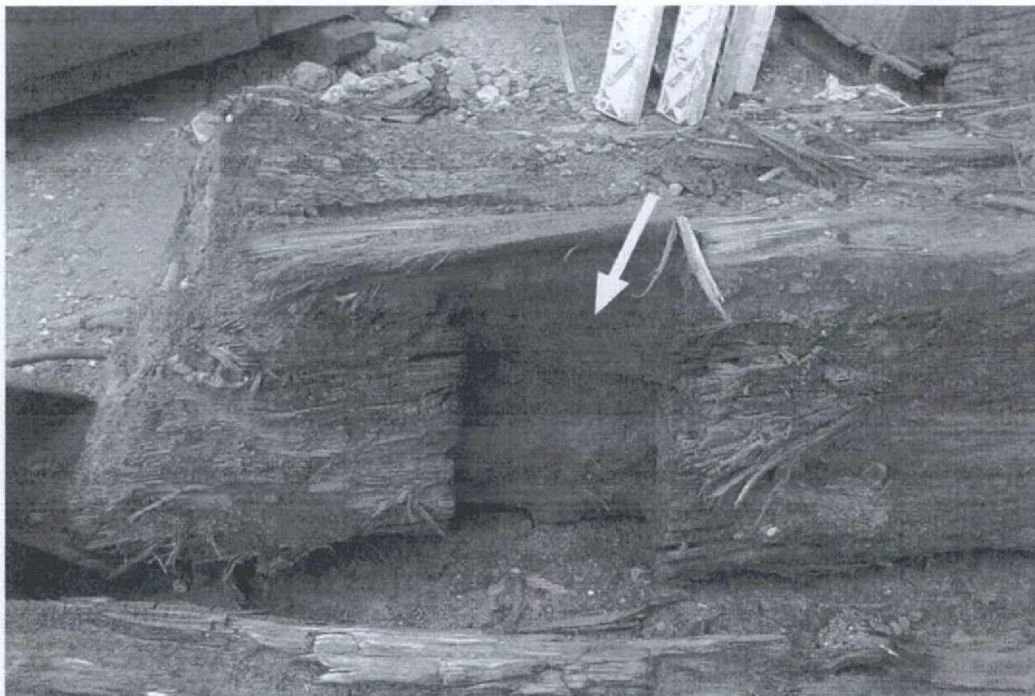


**6** Cache of timbers (arrow) removed from fountain area in the northeast corner of the Wall Street Triangle, about one month after the discovery. View is west toward Wall Street. (Geismar 8/11/04)



**7** Close-up of above; note notches (arrows) in large squared-off timber and smaller log fragment (left foreground), possibly a post. (Geismar 8/11/04)



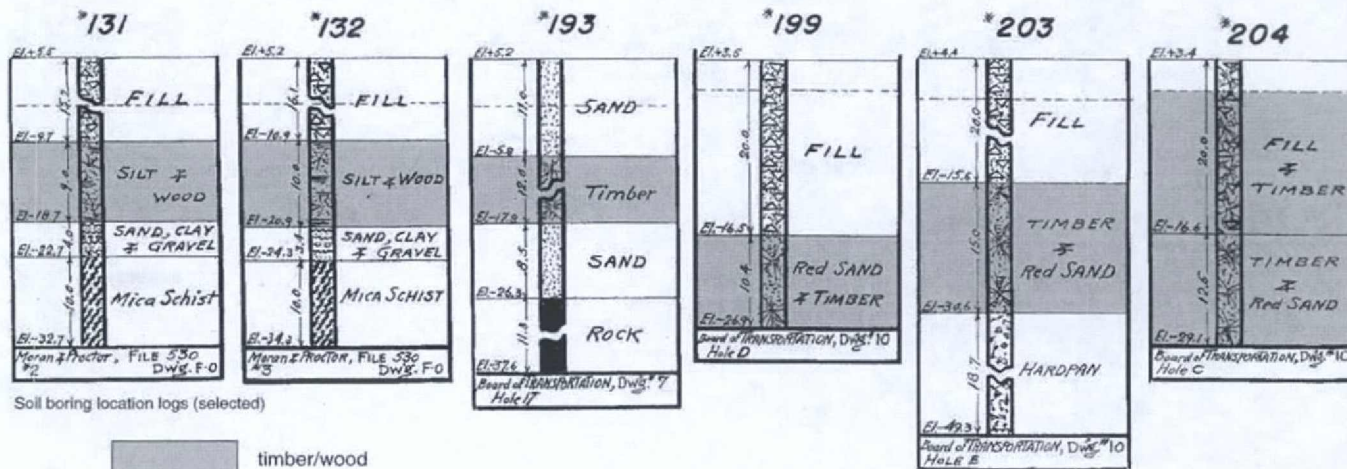
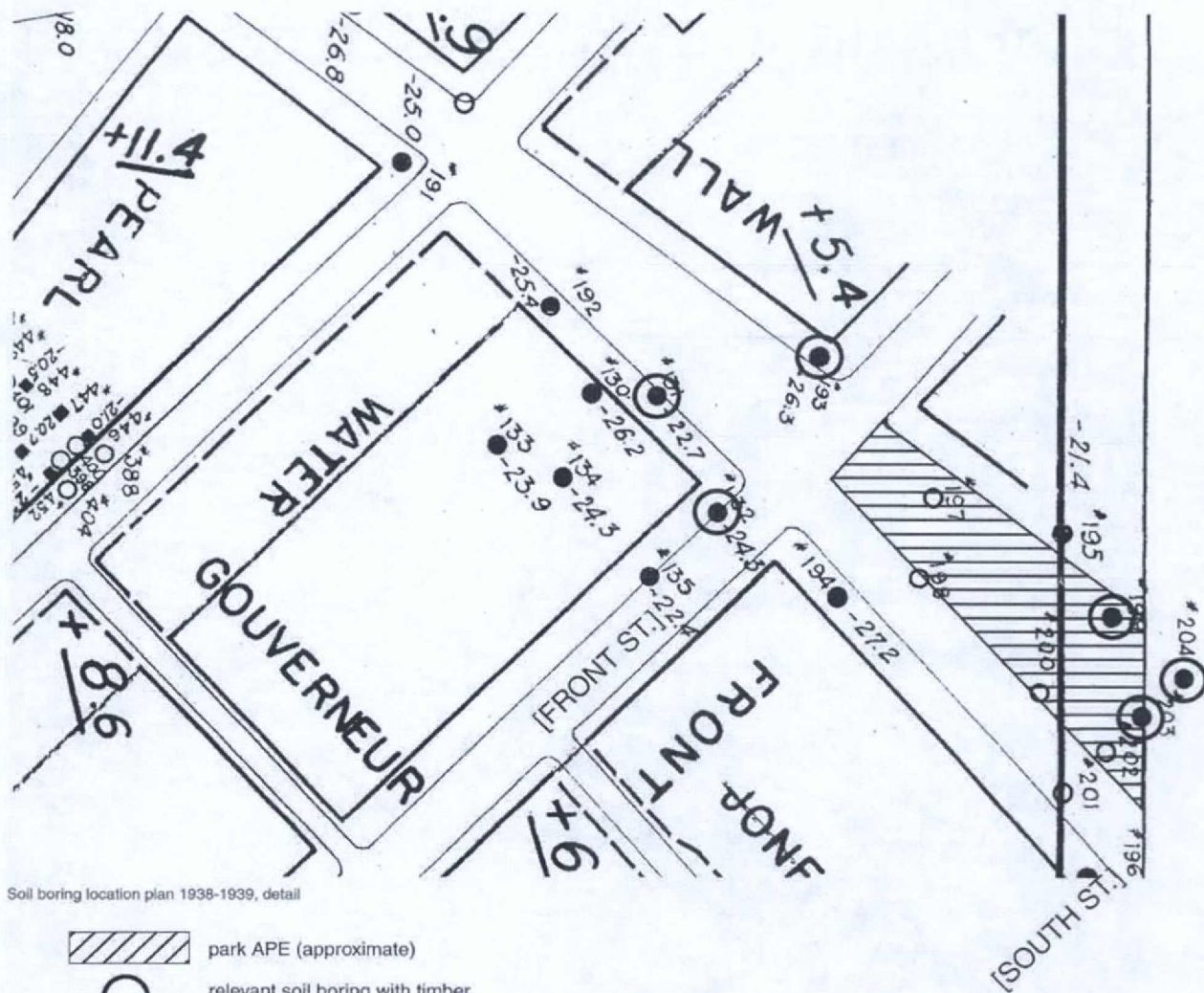


**8** Detail of notch (arrow) in squared-off timber. (Geismar 8/11/04)

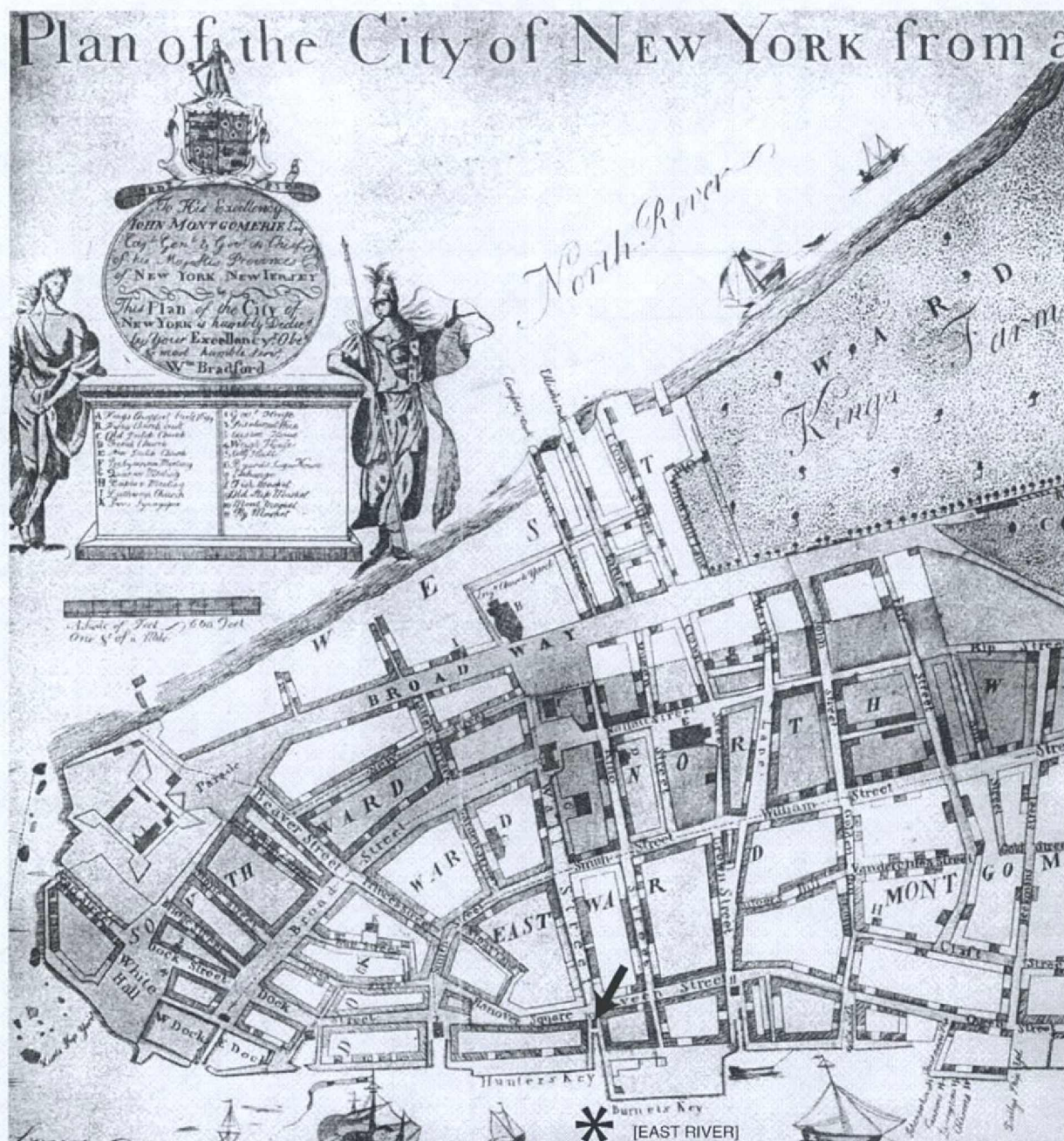


**9** Bark from a log set into a notch (arrow). The fit suggests it could have come from a support post for the wharf or crib construction. (Geismar 8/11/04)









Source: Bradford/Lyne 1730, detail; from Jenkins 1911:30

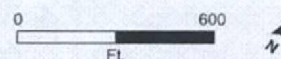


APE (approximate)

example of block with development



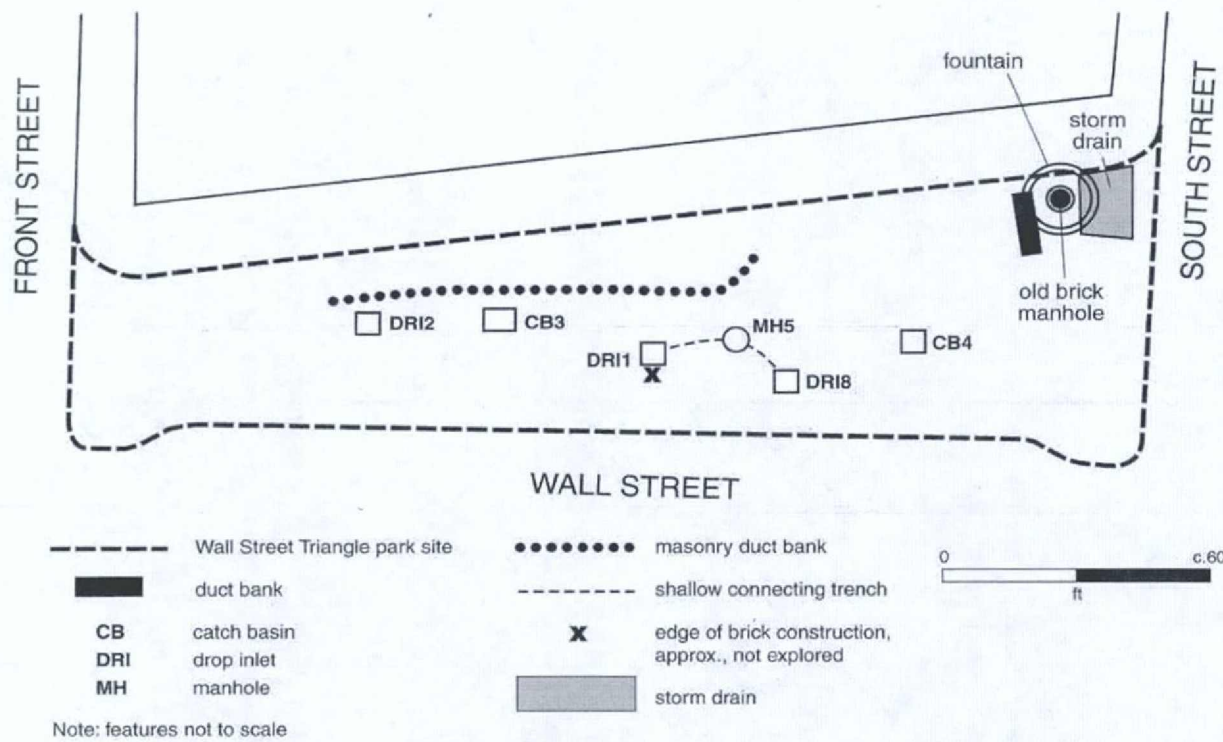
Meal Market (1708-1762) in 1728







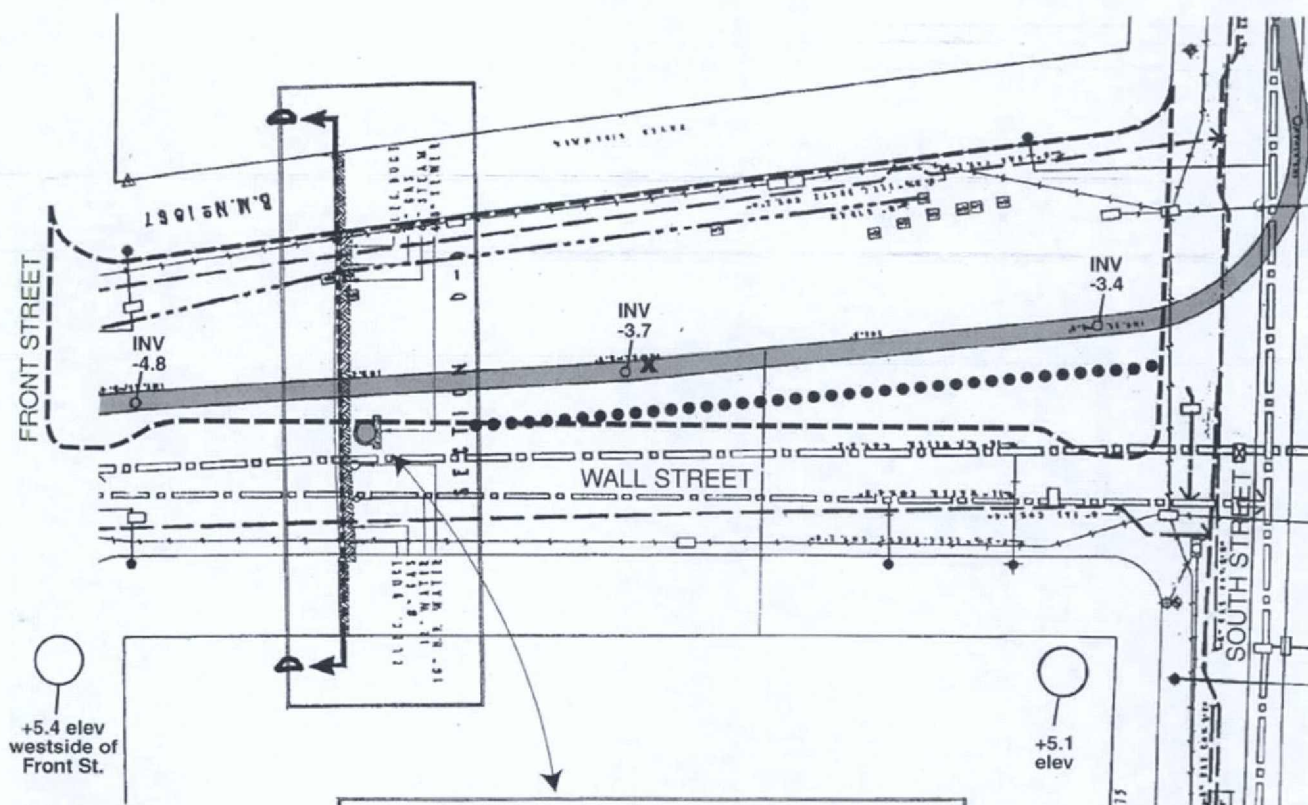




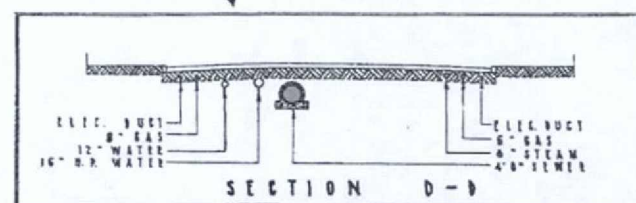
### 13a Schematic Plan



**13b View:** monitored area in vicinity of DRI1, MH5 and DRI18 looking southwest toward Front Street. (Spritzer 2/16/04)



14a Plan



14b Profile: Section D - D

- Wall Street Triangle park site
- 4.0 ft. diameter brick sewer (after 1857?)
- ..... sewer trajectory in park based on Section D-D
- X location of brick construction beyond APE, approx.