

Here, too, are lanes and alleys, paved with mud knee-deep; underground chambers, where they dance and game; the walls bedecked with rough designs of ships, and forts, and flags, and American Eagles out of number; ruined houses, open to the street, whence, through wide gaps in the walls, other ruins loom upon the eye, as though the world of vice and misery had nothing else to show: hideous tenements which take their name from robbery and murder; all that is loathsome, drooping, and decayed is here.

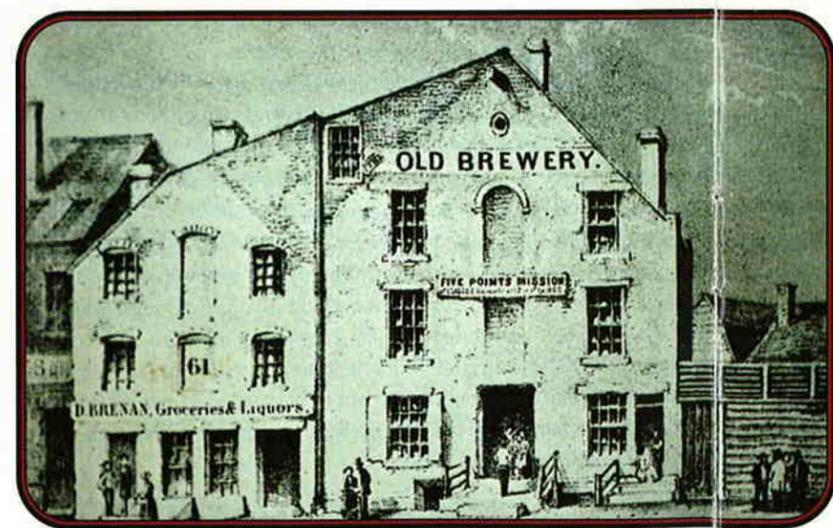
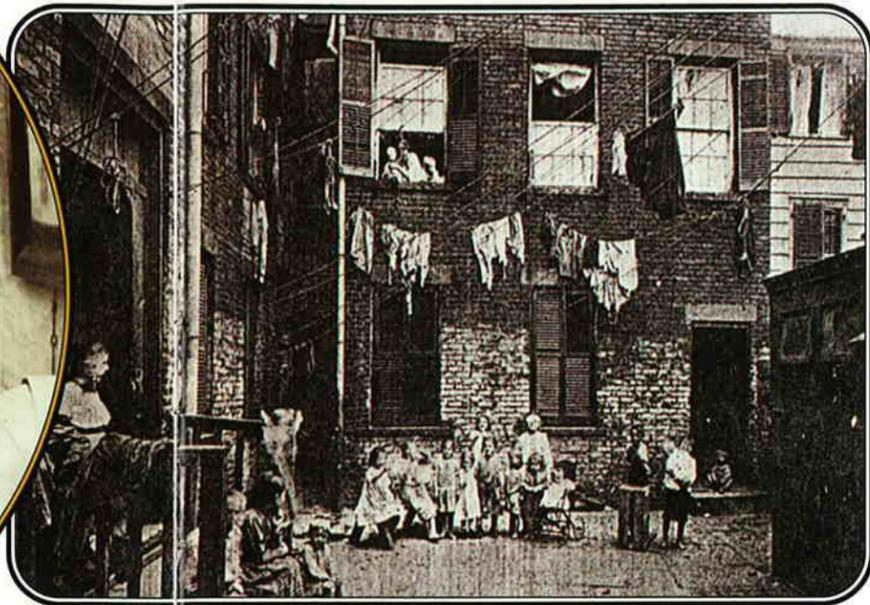
Originally published in 1842 in *American Notes for General Circulation*, Charles Dickens' description of Five Points displays his horror and fear of a neighborhood he refused to visit without a police escort. In fact, his language was typical of middle-class observers, to whom working-class districts were threatening and alien places.

George Foster, a reporter for Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune* in the 1840s and 1850s, took readers on vicarious visits to every seedy corner of the city. Compiled in *New York by Gas Light* (1850), his sketch of Five Points begins at midnight and describes the inside of the Old Brewery, an industrial building that had been converted into one-room apartments:

Every room in every story has its separate family or occupant, renting by the week or month and paying in advance. In this one room, the cooking, eating, and sleeping of the whole family and their visitors are performed. Yes, and their visitors, for it is no unusual thing for a mother and her two or three daughters—all of course prostitutes—to receive their "men" at the same time in the same room.

While Dickens and Foster bear much of the responsibility for the image of Five Points that has come down to us, it was Herbert Asbury's *The Gangs of New York* (1927) that established Five Points as New York City's mythic slum. For Asbury, Five Points was the "cradle of gangs," where the Dead Rabbits, Plug Uglies, Shirt Tales, and Roach Guards were nurtured. Like others before him and some since, Asbury equated poverty with vice and corruption. "The gangster," he wrote, "was a product of his environment; poverty and disorganization of home and community brought him into being, and political corruption and all its attendant evils foster his growth."

Recent archaeological work at the site of a new federal courthouse at Foley Square in lower Manhattan uncovered a complex of foundation walls, courtyards, cellar floors, and backyard features that have dramatically changed our perception of this infamous neighborhood, named for the five points created by the intersection of three streets—Orange (now Baxter), Cross (now Park), and Anthony (now Worth). The courthouse was built on a block abutting the intersection to the southeast. Fourteen city lots within the block were investigated, and nearly one million artifacts were uncovered from 22 stone- or brick-lined privies and cesspools. Historic Conservation and Interpretation, a consulting firm in Newton, New Jersey, conducted the excavations; the analysis was



Clockwise from top left: Photograph of woman making a braided rug from scraps was taken by Jacob A. Riis and published in his 1890 book, *How the Other Half Lives*; view of tenement backyard includes a shed housing a school sink, a kind of multiple privy; Staffordshire teacup dating to the 1830s or 1840s depicts Father Mathew, an Irish leader in the temperance movement; the Old Brewery, which became a Five Points mission established by the New York Ladies' Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church; Staffordshire teaware found in an Irish tenement cesspool

undertaken by John Milner Associates (JMA) of Philadelphia under contract to the General Services Administration, a federal agency charged with constructing and managing government buildings.

The artifacts recovered from Five Points are mundane: toothbrushes, tea sets, thimbles, spittoons, lice combs, marbles, medicine bottles, and food remains. Yet they provide a fresh glimpse into the lives of the mostly immigrant residents of the overcrowded tenements on Pearl Street, the subdivided wooden shanties along Baxter Street, and the commercial establishments on Chatham. Sealed beneath a parking lot since the 1960s, when the last of the residential structures on the block was taken down, the artifacts are evidence of daily life in a place that until now has been portrayed as a living hell.

In the late eighteenth century the courthouse block was part of the industrial district that surrounded the Collect Pond, the city's largest body of fresh water. Potteries, rope walks, bakeries, breweries, tanneries, and slaughterhouses spewed noxious fumes into the air and left their refuse along the banks of the pond. By the turn of the nineteenth century the Collect was so polluted that the Common Council called for it to be filled, a process begun in 1803. At least five tanneries were located on the block near what would have been the southeastern shore of the Collect Pond. During construction of a prisoners' transit tunnel connecting the Metropolitan Corrections Center on the south side of Pearl Street to the new courthouse on the north side, excavators found a tanning vat, a liming pit for softening hides, animal bones, cattle horn cores, and an iron hook that would have been attached to a long wooden handle for moving hides around in the vats.

There were also bakers and brewers on the block. Tobias Hoffman, a German baker, lived with his family at 474 Pearl Street, and his oven was next door at 476. A wood-lined privy filled in at the time of Hoffman's death in 1812 yielded a sample of this artisan household's possessions. The Hoffmans set their table with elegant Chinese porcelain and fancy glassware—wine glasses with twists and gauze in their stems and tumblers engraved with garlands of flowers. They had teaware for different occasions, some made of porcelain and some of hand-painted earthenware, and an unusual teapot made of white stoneware. A more personal item was a German-style porcelain smoking pipe, gilded with geometric and floral patterns on a cobalt blue background.

We know from census records that after her husband's death, the widow Hoffman headed the household on Pearl Street, renting out the bakery and taking in more boarders, including a doctor and two grocers. She also rented a back building on the lot to a stabler and his family, and some yard space to the cabinet and coffin maker next door. The privy built to service these residents was filled in the 1830s, by which time many single-family houses such as the Hoffmans' had been subdivided into rental apartments to accommodate the city's bur-

RAW, DE FOREST, L. VILLER, THE TENEMENT HOUSE PROBLEM, ARNOUD PRUSS, NEW YORK TIMES BOOKS

PAUL BECKNER

DOVILLE NELSON

VALENTINE'S MANUAL OF OLD NEW YORK 1853



Excavations in 1991 at the site of a new federal courthouse at Foley Square yielded the remains of Five Points tenements.

geoning working class. Even though the neighborhood already had a reputation as a down-and-out slum, the household goods from this privy suggest that the residents of 474 Pearl Street continued to set a respectable table with matching tablewares imported from England and glass stemware. Glass containers for snuff, ink, perfume, and mustard, in addition to a variety of smoking pipes, were also recovered, indicating that some income was spent on nonessential goods. The bones of old hens suggest widow Hoffman kept chickens for eggs; she also raised pigs (part of a litter of newborns was discarded in the privy). There was a least one cat in the household, and there may also have been pet birds. Well-worn redware mixing bowls with deep scars from years of stirring probably belonged to the bakery.

After the widow Hoffman's death, her sons sold the property to an absentee owner. By 1850, 51 people, all but two of the adults identifying themselves as Irish, had moved in. The tenement erected next door at 472 Pearl Street in 1848 held at least twice as many newly arrived Irish immigrants living in a variety of household arrangements. This five-story tenement was built by Peter McLoughlin, an Irish immigrant who had already estab-

lished himself in New York. McLoughlin was concerned with the mass emigration from Ireland and had been working since 1842 on the executive committee of the Irish Emigrant Society. His tenants worked in a variety of occupations. There were shoemakers, food vendors, tailors, masons, grocers, cigar makers, liquor dealers, and laborers. In 1855, 49 percent of the adult men were unskilled laborers, another 49 percent were skilled laborers, and the remaining two percent ran retail establishments, among them the ground-floor saloons at both 472 and 474 Pearl Street. A few of the women identified themselves as seamstresses or cap makers, but there were probably many more doing piecework at home for the garment industry. The numerous widows in the tenement took in boarders, some as many as six in addition to their own children, even though apartments generally consisted of two small rooms. Typical of the tenants was Thomas Murphy, a native of County Kildare who arrived in Philadelphia on the *Hibernia* from Liverpool in 1850; five years later he was employed as a porter in New York and lived at 472 Pearl Street. Timothy Lynch, a tinsmith from Kerry in Killarney County, his wife, and three children also lived at 472. They had come on the *Java* from Liver-

pool in 1847, the worst year of the Great Famine. In all, some 1.5 million people left Ireland between 1845 and 1855, many of them making New York City their home.

The relationship of building foundations to open spaces gives some idea of living conditions at 472 Pearl Street. The sanitation system, including a large, stone-lined cesspool, shafts to carry away overflow, and a school sink—a multiple privy built above a trench that could be flushed out with water flowing through a pipe—took up most of the yard behind the tenement. Called a school sink because such privies were originally thought to have been associated with schools, it was probably not installed until the early 1870s, when a second tenement was built at the back of the lot. Although school sinks were, in theory, an improvement over the old dry privies, in practice they were just as unsanitary, since the flushing systems either did not work or were not activated often enough to keep the trench free of waste. Household trash was deposited in the cesspool and the cistern next to the school sink from the 1850s until about 1875, when the

back tenement was built over the edge of the cesspool.

While most of the artifacts from this filled-in sanitation system are not specifically Irish, they provide insights into what newly arrived Irish immigrants owned and used in their homes. The ceramics, for example, were manufactured in Staffordshire, England, and include matching sets of white granite and blue transfer-printed tea- and tablewares. The amount of teaware recovered suggests the importance of tea, either as the continuation of an Irish tradition or as a bit of respectable Victorian behavior. Why would tenement dwellers spend a portion of their limited incomes on relatively fancy dishes? Research by Stephen Brighton, JMA's ceramic analyst, indicates that ceramic prices in New York would have allowed, with some difficulty, even those near the poverty level to purchase items recommended in the household guides of the day. A book entitled *Six Hundred Dollars a Year*, published in 1867, allotted \$10 for a white granite dinner set and \$5 for a white French China tea set. Using census estimates of incomes by occupations it was possible to deter-

Monkey in the Privy!

BY PAM CRABTREE AND CLAUDIA MILNE

When zooarchaeologists study animal bones from archaeological sites, they are usually examining the remains of past meals. Most of the bones recovered behind the tenements at Five Points were from fish, chicken, cows, and pigs, but there were also the remains of cats, dogs, rats, and other animal residents of the area. In a stone-lined privy on Baxter Street used by several Italian households, we identified the humerus, femur, scapula, and mandible of a monkey. Physical anthropologists Cliff Jolly and Terry Harrison of New York University confirmed that we had recovered the remains of a male New World *Cebus* monkey. These bones were the first nonhuman primate remains recovered from a historic site in North America. But what was a monkey doing in a New York City privy?

Italian migration to America began slowly in the 1860s, and a Little Italy gradually developed on the southern end of Mulberry Street. Federal census data and other documents place at least 50 Italian men and their families on this block in lower Manhattan in 1870. Thirty-nine of these men were employed as organ grinders. The stereotypical im-



The mandible, scapula, humerus, and femur of a New World *Cebus* monkey were found in a privy used by Italian organ grinders.

age of Italian men and boys became that of the street musician, grinding a hand-held organ and accompanied by a small monkey who collected coins from bystanders. According to Helen Campbell, a Victorian visitor to Five Points, organ grinders seldom owned either their organs or their monkeys. Organs were rented for four dollars a month, and trained monkeys could be worth as much as 20 or 30 dollars. Monkey training schools were represented in *Harpers Weekly* and elsewhere as violent places where the animals were mistreated.

By the 1880s Italians were the most visible immigrant population in lower Manhattan. By then only seven Italian men, or 6.7 percent of the total number of Italian men living on the block, still played music on the streets. Most of them had

moved into commercial food trades or construction. ■

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mine that 30 percent of the families at 472 Pearl earned less than \$600 a year, and at least 13 percent of the families earned less than \$300, but 57 percent were at or near the \$600 level. Brighton's research also suggests that imported tablewares were readily available. There were at least three crockery shops within easy walking distance of the Pearl Street tenements, and newspaper advertisements indicate that some shopkeepers may have offered special bargains to their Irish compatriots. It is also possible that some immigrants brought treasured household goods with them. In his 1985 study, *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*, Kerby Miller claims that those who left Ireland in the 1840s had "sufficient belongings to fill several carts."

Olive oil bottles from Lucca, Marseilles, and Bordeaux; gin bottles from Holland; and perfume vessels from Paris indicate that the Irish tenants used goods imported to New York City from all over the world. Hundreds of medicine bottles, most of them probably from the New York Dispensary, which distributed medicine free to the poor, once held "female restoratives" and cures for cholera and coughs. Michael Bonasera, JMA's glass analyst, says that mineral and soda waters were used by the 472 Pearl Street residents as cures for a variety of ailments. Advertisements promised relief from constipation, diarrhea, asthma, bronchitis, skin diseases, dyspepsia, diabetes, kidney and urinary tract infections, paralysis, and nervous prostration from mental strain and physical excesses. This least expensive remedy was a practical choice for people of limited means and may also have satisfied the local proponents of temperance, who saw mineral water as an appropriate substitute for alcohol.

Excavations revealed, from top, engraved drinking glass from the eighteenth-century home of a German baker; mineral and soda water bottles from a nineteenth-century Irish tenement; stemmed glasses from the baker's home; and marbles, dominoes, and a die from a tenement.

Photo credits: top three photos by Paul Reckner, bottom by Doville Nelson



There is other evidence that the 472 Pearl Street residents were able to treat and prevent disease. Parasitologist Karl Reinhard of the University of Nebraska, working as a consultant to the project, found no evidence in privy deposits for the roundworm carried by pigs that causes trichinosis, or for diseases caused by tapeworms ingested with pork or beef. The large quantity of bone recovered suggests that meat made up a significant portion of the diet, but it was apparently cooked thoroughly enough to kill parasites. There is evidence, however, for whipworm and the *Ascaris* parasite, which comes from contaminated food and water, but these parasites were more prevalent in the remains from the late eighteenth-century

households on the block than in those from the Irish tenements. The Irish evidently controlled *Ascaris* with oil of *Chenopodium*, an extract made from *Chenopodium ambrosioides*, a plant they may have grown on the lot or in pots indoors. Leslie Raymer, the project ethnobotanist, has identified chenopodia from soil samples taken during the excavation.

The many shapeless woolen rags recovered from the cesspool and restored to recognizable form by JMA conservators Gary McGowan and Cheryl LaRoche suggest how Irish women augmented their meager incomes in New York's needle trades. McGowan and LaRoche believe the women, who had easy access to scraps and rags, collected them for recycling into shoddy, a cloth made from the shredded wool of old cloth. They also speculate that the long strips of wool found were used to make hooked and braided rugs, probably for use in workers' apartments. According to George Washington University historian Richard Stott's study of personal letters written by workers in antebellum New York, rugs were valued as a symbol of the American high standard of living.

Other items suggest the attention workers paid to decorating their apartments. One deposit from 472 Pearl Street included 19 plain redware flowerpots with matching saucers and one pot with a scalloped edge and glazed exterior. There were also ceramic figurines, including the head of a Staffordshire dog, a fixture of Victorian decor, and "Toby" jugs, with their modeled comic faces. Like

middle-class boys and girls of the time, Five Points children had china cups with their names printed on them (a practice believed to inculcate respect for private property), miniature porcelain tea sets, marbles, and dice. A unique decorative item associated with the tenement was a teacup depicting Father Mathew, who founded the temperance movement in Ireland.

The development of Baxter Street was significantly different than that of Pearl Street. Almost 50 years before the tenements were built on Pearl, single-family wooden houses along Baxter were being subdivided into three and four apartments. Early in the nineteenth century, free black households clustered at the corner of Baxter and Park, one of the points of the intersection; there were 11 black households in 1800 and 25 in 1810. Shane White, author of *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (1989), found that by 1810 most free blacks had settled in a broad band stretching across lower Manhattan from the Hudson River to the East River. Within this band, the greatest concentration of free black households was located southeast of the Collect Pond. By 1820 they had begun to move north and west, possibly following the industrial jobs relocated after the Collect Pond was filled, but also in response to the arrival of immigrant groups who competed for the same

jobs. By 1855 there was only one black household on the courthouse block. Eastern Europeans with names such as Aaron, Solomon, Schwab, Smerlzel, Levi, and Finelight lived along Baxter Street from the 1840s until the 1890s. Although census records do not include religious affiliations, the 1861 *Trow New York City Directory* lists the Beth Hamidrash Synagogue at 8 Baxter Street, with J. Middleman, rabbi, and Simon Webster, sexton, suggesting many Jews lived in the neighborhood. With characteristic prejudice, George Foster described this block of Baxter Street in 1850 as "a center for fences—shops kept entirely by Jews where stolen goods were bought and sold." Virtually all of the archaeological features associated with these lots produced artifacts relating to the needle trades, and in fact this area was well known as New York's garment district up to the turn of the century. One deposit contained 226 papers-of-pins and 1,000 individual pins; dozens of buttons; the handle of a tambouring hook, used in embroidery; and thimbles of varying sizes, many the distinctive type without tops used by male tailors. The combination of industrial debris and personal items suggests that while male tailors remade old uniforms into second-hand clothes for sale, their wives did the more delicate sewing tasks.

Tea at the Brothel

In 1843 John Donahue was indicted for running a cellar brothel at 12 Baxter Street, one of the lots investigated within the courthouse block in lower Manhattan. The indictment described a

disorderly house—a rest for prostitutes and others of ill fame and name, where great numbers of characters are in the nightly practice of reveling until late and improper hours of the night, dancing, drinking, and carousing.

The quality of the household goods found in the privy behind 12 Baxter far exceeded that of goods found anywhere else on the block. The prostitutes lived well, at least when they were at work. One attraction was the opportunity to live in a style that seamstresses, laundresses, and maids could not afford.

Afternoon tea at the brothel was served on a set of Chinese porcelain that included matching teacups and coffee cups, saucers and plates, a slop bowl, and a tea caddy. Meals consisted of steak, veal, ham, soft-shell clams, and many kinds of fish. There was a greater variety of artifacts from the brothel than from other excavated areas of the courthouse block. Heather Griggs, who is analyzing sewing remains, thinks the prostitutes used the contents of a sewing box—a stiletto

for piercing holes in fabric or whitework, the bone handle of an embroidery tool, knitting needle covers, a thread winder, and beads for thread bobbins—to mend petticoats and stockings and embroider handkerchiefs and sleeves. Other personal items suggest the occupational hazards of prostitution. Two glass urinals, designed especially for women, were probably used when venereal disease confined a prostitute to bed.

Business was apparently good on Baxter Street, if 37 chamber pots are any indication of the number needed in one night. Charles Dickens may have required an escort to enter the Five Points, but other men were less intimidated. It is not unlikely that the brothel catered to the politicians who worked just two blocks away at City Hall. It would have been easy to combine a visit to a Baxter Street tailor with one to a favorite prostitute. Perhaps the brothel's ceramics, decorated with scenes of war and patriotism—Commodore McDonough's 1814 victory on Lake Champlain during the War of 1812, Lafayette contemplating the tomb of Benjamin Franklin, and the inscription, "E Pluribus Unum"—appealed to clients' sense of civic pride. Along with finches in their cages (several glass bird feeders were recovered), the genteel decor would have made middle-class men feel right at home.—R.Y.

By the mid-nineteenth century, clay pipes had become an insignia of the working class, the better-off having given them up for pipes made of wood or meerscham. The clay pipes found at the homes of Eastern European immigrants at 22 Baxter Street are distinct from those found at the Irish site on Pearl Street. Twenty percent of

the more than 150 pipes from Baxter Street depict American patriotic motifs, the most common of which are the federal eagle and 13 stars. The cistern in which they were found was filled ca. 1860, when the property was occupied by three households, one headed by German-born Samuel Stone, who had a second-hand clothing shop on the premises; the second by Lambert Blower, a Dutch tailor; and the third by Samuel Lubra, a German tailor. Paul Reckner, JMA's pipe analyst, thinks the patriotic motifs may reflect participation in early trade unions. According to labor historian Sean Wilentz, New York's German tailors were well organized and radical, playing a key role in strikes and protests in 1850. While factory owners felt unions were the enemies of democracy, organized labor used patriotic symbols to proclaim their rights as members of the working class and committed members of the American republic. No documents tying the residents of 22 Baxter to trade unions have been found, but the motifs on the pipes suggest that the men expressed patriotism in areas where public drinking and smoking were going on. In contrast, only a handful of the 276 pipes recovered from the cesspool at the Irish tenement had patriotic symbols. The influx of Irish workers, and thus cheap labor, renewed civic debates over immigration and the moral standing of immigrants, especially those who were Roman Catholic. The attachment of anti-Irish rhetoric to patriotic symbols may have prompted the Irish to avoid such motifs entirely.

Immigrant workers were able to afford meat as a regular part of their diets, sometimes with each of their three daily meals. The analysis of the faunal remains, conducted by New York University zooarchaeologist Pam Crabtree and Claudia Milne of JMA, has revealed ethnic differences in food choices and cooking styles. More than half of the bones left by the German residents of 22 Baxter Street were from sheep, suggesting that lamb or mutton was their preferred food. This choice does not reflect any known German dietary tradition. Mutton and lamb, which were more expensive than beef and pork, were not

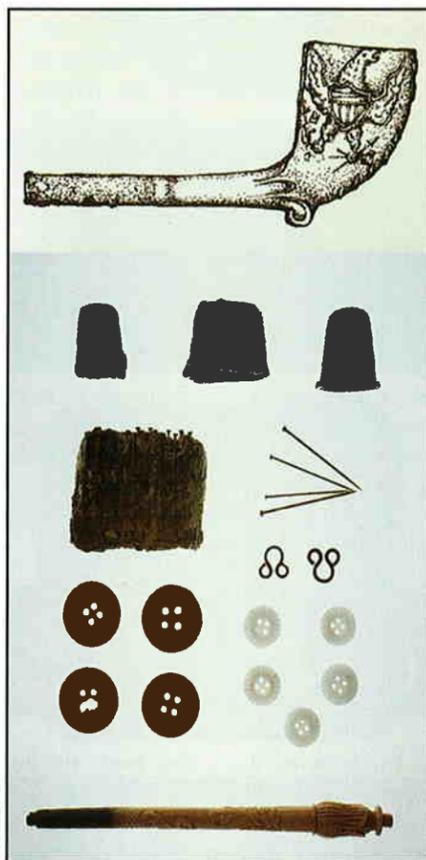
widely eaten by other immigrant groups in the neighborhood. Most of the bones from the cesspool associated with the Irish tenement at 472 Pearl Street were from pigs. Pork was the least expensive meat, and evidence of on-site butchering suggests that residents were raising pigs in the small lot behind the tenement, further lowering the

cost. They also ate pigs' feet, probably cooked in wine and spices in a traditional *crubeen*, served at the harvest in the old country. In the 1890s, 8 Baxter Street was occupied by five families of Italian immigrants. More than half the food remains from their privies were from fish and clams, the least expensive foods in nineteenth-century New York, yet also part of a traditional rural Italian diet.

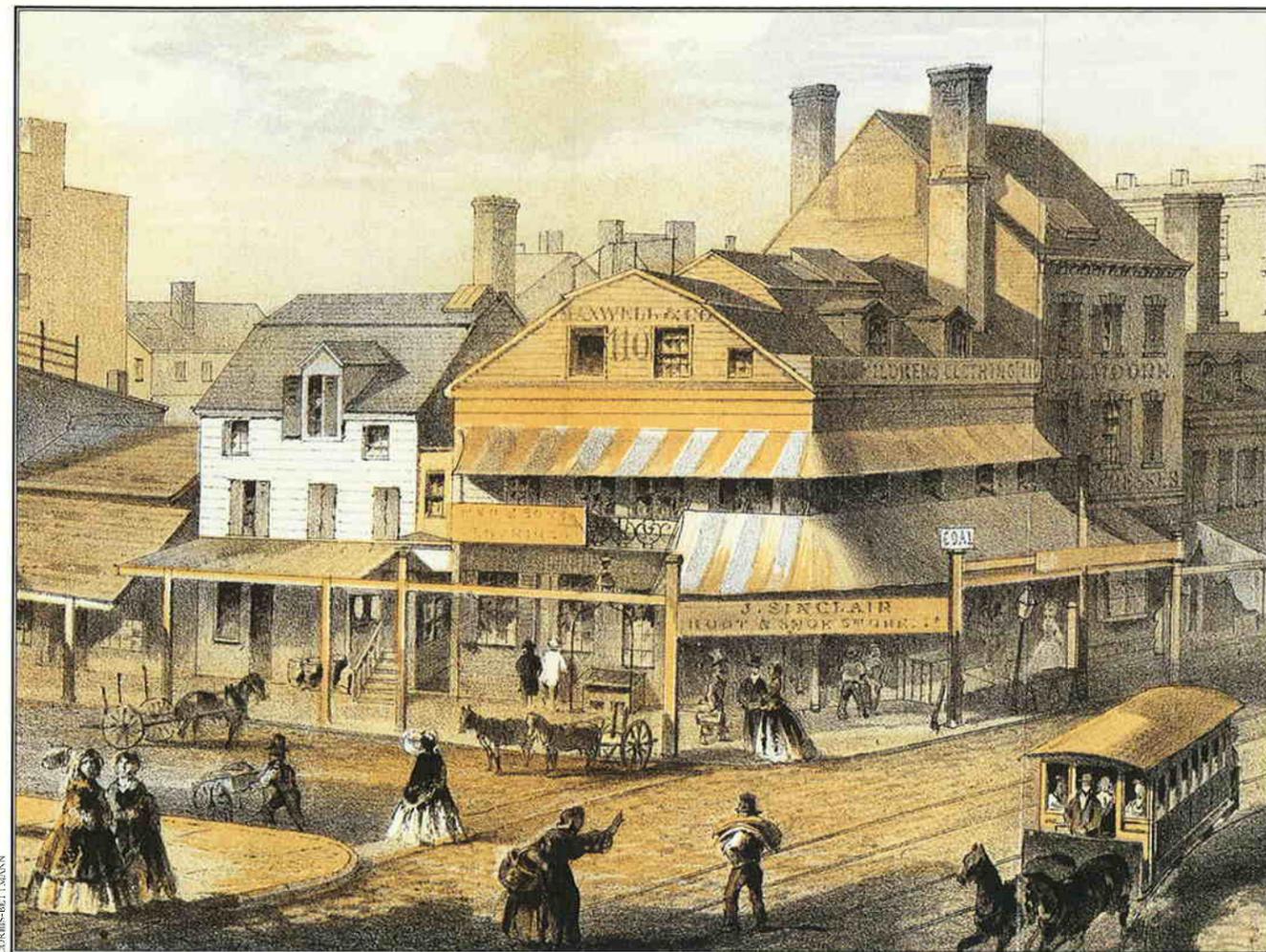
From the archaeological perspective, Five Points looks different from the myth that has endured in the annals of New York history. There were brothels and saloons on the block where the courthouse now stands, but there were also many immigrants attempting to lead respectable lives in a strange new city. A doctoral dissertation written in the early 1970s by historian Carol Groneman, now at John Jay College, also noted the discrepancy between the contemporary accounts of working-class life in the Sixth Ward, including Five Points, and the primary documentary record. Her study of the 1855 New York State household census showed immigrant residents of the Sixth Ward had strong kinship ties and worked together to survive economic and living conditions that were largely beyond their control. The image of Five Points as a notorious slum reflected a common attitude to working-class neighborhoods that were the product of the Industrial Revolution. According to Australian historian Alan Mayne, working-class districts throughout the English-speaking world were described using the same list of negative terms. Dickens' words are typical:

This is the place, these narrow ways, diverting to the right and left, and reeking everywhere with dirt and filth. Such lives as are led here, bear the same fruits here as elsewhere. The coarse and bloated faces at the doors have counterparts at home, and all the wide world over. Debauchery has made the very houses prematurely old. See how the rotten beams are tumbling down, and how the patched and broken windows seem to scowl dimly, like eyes that have been hurt in drunken frays.

This approach uses the rhetoric of middle-class values to



Drawing of clay pipe shows a patriotic decoration. Sewing items, from top, include thimbles, a paper-of-pins and individual pins, eyes, buttons, and a tambouring hook.



This lithograph from Valentine's Manual of Old New York depicts a wooden building at the corner of Chatham and Pearl streets. Signs advertise several businesses. Backyard features associated with the building included an icehouse and oyster shells, presumably from a restaurant at the address from 1840 through at least 1855.

homogenize ethnic variation and working-class style, masking the reality of working-class life in the overcrowded districts of the inner city. Dickens' descriptions of Five Points are classic, but the same words and images were used to describe the Rocks in Sydney, Australia, the back slums of Birmingham, England, and Chinatown in San Francisco.

The archaeology of domestic trash is no equal for dramatic tales of thieves, prostitutes, and gang wars. The physical remains, however, speak of a determination to maintain respectability no matter how difficult the circumstances, to carry on ethnic traditions in the face of vicious stereotyping, and to endure abysmal, unsanitary conditions. The Irish on Pearl Street continued to fill their humble homes with pretty things, while using every conceivable means—scavenging rags, peddling fruit, taking in boarders—to make ends meet. They maintained traditions that had been important in Ireland and raised their children with values that would help them succeed in America. The German and Polish Jews on Baxter Street worked as family units in the clothing industry.

They appear to have been less interested in consumer goods than the Irish, using their resources instead to employ help, maintain their businesses, and eventually buy property. They, too, brought Old World customs to New York, but they also participated in the labor movement, which bridged ethnic boundaries in the struggle for workers' rights.

The diversity within the one block we studied is enough to question the uniform image of Five Points as a "nest of vipers," a phrase often used by nineteenth-century journalists. Five Points was a working-class neighborhood where newly arrived immigrants and native-born workers struggled to find their way. Unable to afford property, they expressed themselves through the consumer goods that were readily available in the marketplace. As archaeological data, these goods provide intriguing new insights into the working-class life of old New York. ■

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