

Peripheral Memory: New York's Forgotten Landscape

By
DEBORAH ANN BUELOW

Bachelor of Architecture
Iowa State University (2000)

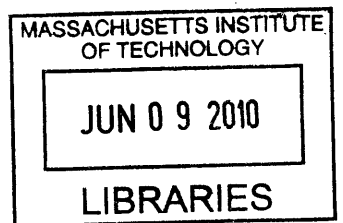
Submitted to the Department of Architecture in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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Signature of Author

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Deborah A Buelow
Department of Architecture
20 May 2010

Certified by

Handwritten signature of Mark Jarzombek in black ink.

Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by

Handwritten signature of Julian Beinart in black ink.

Julian Beinart
Professor of Architecture
Chair of the Department Committee on Graduate Studies

**Thesis Supervisor: Mark Jarzombek
Professor of the History and Theory of Architecture
Associate Dean, School of Architecture and Planning**

**Thesis Readers: Julian Beinart
Professor of Architecture**

**Anne Whiston Spirn
Professor of Landscape Architecture and Planning**

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Submitted to the Department of Architecture on 20 May 2010 in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Architecture Studies.

ABSTRACT

Hart Island, New York City's largest public burial ground, reveals an alternate history of the city through the lens of the interment of the abject. Historically, the state has provided for remains not otherwise cared for through what are commonly referred to as "potter's fields" - municipally owned burial grounds for the poor, the friendless, the alien, and the unknown. The location and lack of iconography act to erase the memories of so-called abject members of society rather than preserve them. New York City houses the country's largest of these municipal burial grounds on Hart Island, remotely situated away from the city. The management of these burials is left to the Department of Correction, which daily ships inmates from nearby Riker's Island to bury unknown members of society.

Although since 1869 approximately three quarters of a million bodies have been interred there through the penal system, many of New York's inhabitants are not aware of its existence. A major contributing factor to the absence of public knowledge is the lack of information either about the phenomenon of the potter's field or about Hart Island itself. Reference to Hart Island today is limited to on-line curiosity blogs and op-ed columns in the daily newspapers, but even then references are infrequent. Yet the area of the island is equivalent to fifty New York City blocks - a large swath of land to be ignored in a dense urban context.

This thesis addresses the landscape of Hart Island, which acts as a depository for identity shaped through memory. Urban landscapes reveal social and cultural biases in their physical characteristics. Identity is made evident through, or paradoxically denied by, these terrains. Hart Island exemplifies one such landscape of negated identity. By looking at the history of Hart Island and its physical relationship to the constructed city, this thesis uncovers socioeconomic disparities that manifest themselves even in death.

Thanks goes first of all to Mark Jarzombek, my thesis advisor, for being open to working with me on this project. Even when I would show up with a jumble of papers to his office, he somehow was always able to make sense of them. I could not have found the thesis direction I did without those clarifying conversations and his inspiring leadership.

And to urban guru Julian Beinart, and Anne Spirn, my thesis readers, who were constant sources of encouragement even in the initial stages of development of this project.

To the New Yorkers who helped me along the way - Melinda Hunt, whose passion toward making a real change on Hart Island constantly reminded me of the validity in studying this landscape, Stephen Morello from the Department of Correction, Melanie Bower at the Museum of the City of New York, the staff at the New York Historical Society library, and my many friends there who entertained conversations of the grave and plotted to find ways to get me to Hart Island, especially Alicia, Alyssa, Carisima, and Piper.

To help and conversations nearby - John Stilgoe, Professor in the History of Landscape, Michelle Baidon at MIT's Humanities library, and Marilyn Levine at the Writing Center, whose constant smile and words of encouragement backed her wise editorial help. Everytime I went to her office feeling despondent about the thesis, I would leave feeling invigorated and ready to work.

To my local gang - Ash, Azra, Claudia, Jay, Priyanka, Shelby and Yesica for putting up with my death discussions on a daily basis. Without this core group, I'm not sure inspired conversations even exist. And to Ethan Lacy, for really putting up with my death obsessions. Hopefully that phase will be over now.

And of course to my family but especially my parents, who quite literally are the right sort of parents to have in this situation! Early conversations with my mom inspired the theoretical framework, and were full of enthusiasm. And to my dad, who stayed up with me, via phone calls and emails, helping me put this thing together throughout the process and even into the final hours. He literally taught me how to write, something I didn't know that I didn't know how to do until now. It would not have been accomplished without this tremendous help.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. db

dedicated to the memory of

August A. Winkler, April 11, 1917 to January 3, 1987

John F.W. Buelow, June 27, 1917, to June 23, 1992

Margaret Buelow, July 1, 1911 to Dec. 25, 2003

Peripheral Memory: New York's Forgotten Landscape

DEBORAH ANN BUELOW

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Figure 1: Photograph of New York City Department of Correction (DOC) dock on City Island. Source: Author

“Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things.” - Roland Barthes¹

1 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York,: Hill and Wang, 1972). 110.

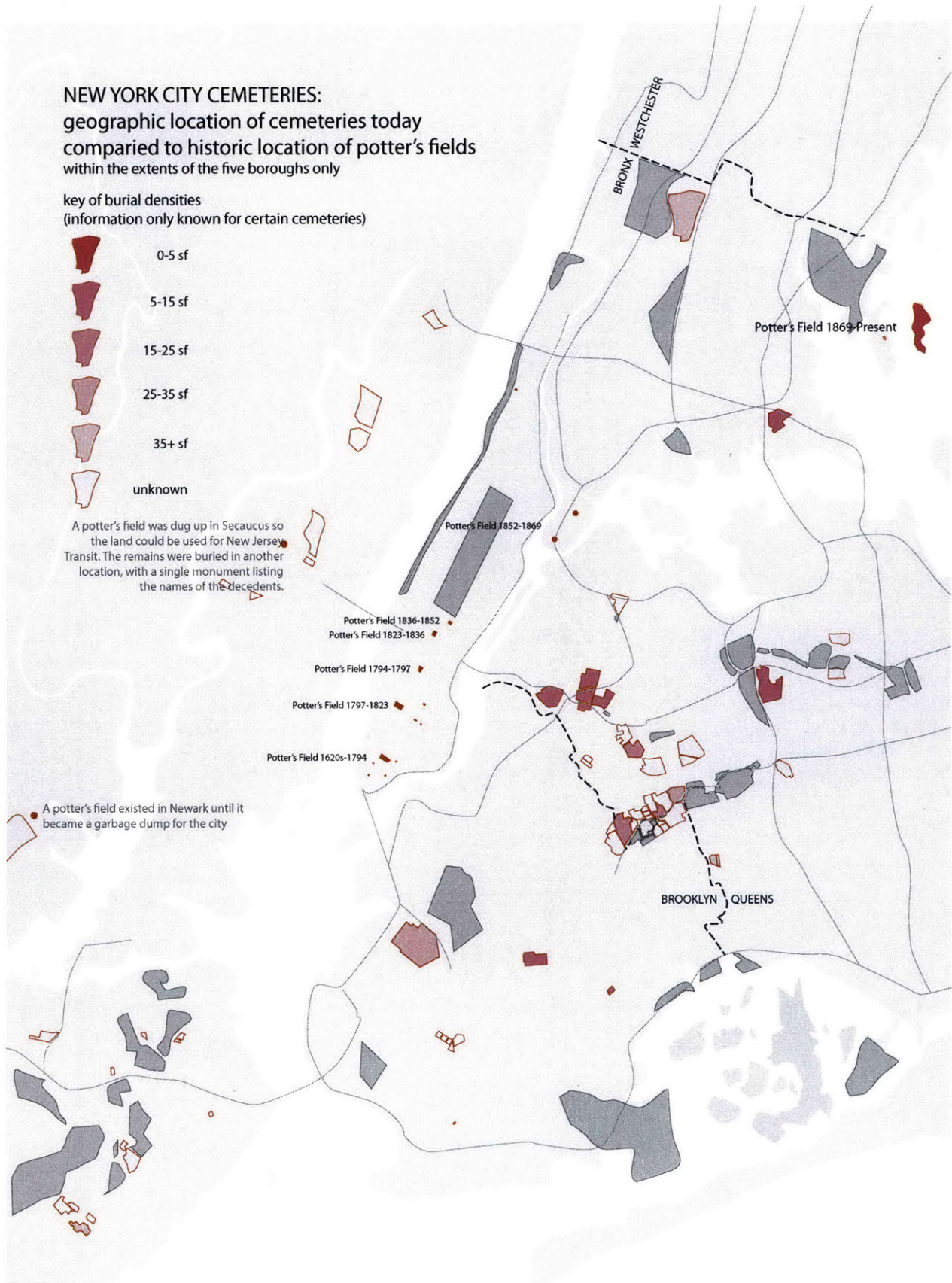
Driving in City Island, a small enclave island off the Bronx, means driving down one spinal avenue with streets as ribs that break off to the east and to the west, running only a quarter of a mile long before they stop short of plunging the driver into Pelham Bay. These streets often end in access to the shoreline or beaches, sailboat-lined docks, or in the case of the photograph above, a dock so off-limits that it is monitored by barbed wire, security cameras and warning signs. Large postings flanking either side of the portal shout “Prison KEEP OFF” and “New York City Correction Department RESTRICTED AREA,” warning the accidental visitor against proceeding further, yet enticing her to understand more. What reformatory activity is happening off the shores of this quiet island populated by middle- and high-income residents?

An image such as this one, juxtaposed against a peaceful seaside community, jars the visitor’s senses. One would expect to see these signs near a loading dock into one of New York City’s several courthouses, or its

infamous prison on Riker's Island to the south. The photograph entices the viewer to wonder where the road ends - does it carry one out to sea? Does it suddenly stop, with no connection beyond? An island landscape beyond the gated portal tapers off to the right, suggesting the landmass' southern perimeter. A few buildings are visible. The island has seen signs of inhabitation, but upon closer inspection it becomes apparent that the building's are in various states of decay. Together these elements suggest an abandonment of place. What role might this island play in the city, and why have its past developments been relinquished? Is there a relationship between the island and the reformatory portal through which it is viewed?

The truth behind the image, and the duty that this gateway serves, is not one of reform, or punishment; rather, it acts as a final exit for New York City's unidentified and unclaimed bodies. The remains of those people who died in New York with no means of their own are buried by the city on an isolated island three-quarters of a mile away from this vantage point in what is known as "potter's field." This rib, along with many others, is anchored to the main avenue by a sign warning "Dead End." Ironically, on this street that sign carries significance far beyond that which any other of City Island's side streets can claim.


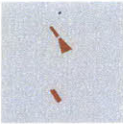


Yet, the provocation of the image is vastly different from the reality. The city provides for the burial of those who would not otherwise afford to do so on their own. The burial program is in service to the city, yet many of those who are aware of its existence are appalled. The myth, in this case, speaks stronger than the reality. Rusted fences and an overgrowth of vines display a lack of care to make one think image is the least important aspect of the place. But, in fact, past the immediate neglect a barbed wire guardianship of place emanates through. These types of mechanisms of intimidation make one wonder: is the public being protected from something? Or is it the city that is being protected from confronting the reality of the place?











Taxonomy of New York City Cemeteries by Borough, Date of Incorporation, and Size

source: Author










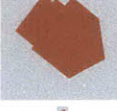

BRONX



















-  1880s Pelham Cemetery, City Island, Bronx
-  1869 City Cemetery (Potter's Field) Bronx
-  1863 Woodlawn Cemetery (Bronx)
400 acres, 300,000 interments.
-  1842 St. Raymonds Cemetery (Bronx)
180 acres. 500,000 interments. One of the busiest American cemeteries with 4000 interments/year. Garden of Innocents for stillborns and infants.

QUEENS

















-  1982 All Saints Cemetery
-  1926 New Union Field Cemetery
-  1914 Mt. Lebanon Cemetery. 88,000 interments
-  1908 Mt. Judah Cemetery
-  ca 1900 Ahawith Chesed Cemetery
-  ca 1900 Mt. St. Mary's Cemetery
-  1893 Mt. Zion Cemetery. More than 210,000 interments
-  1909 Mt. Hebron Cemetery 217,000 interments
1893 Cedar Grove Cemetery.
36,000 interments. Like many non-sectarian cemeteries, it allows for 3-deep burials

BROOKLYN









-  1947 Knollwood Park Cemetery
-  1906 Mt. Carmel Cemetery, 85,000 interments
-  1900 B'Nal Jeshurun and Shereth Israel Cemetery
-  ca 1880s Mt. Hope Cemetery
-  1852 Salem Field Cemetery
-  1849 Cemetery of the Holy Cross
96 acres, 725,000 people
-  1847 Washington Cemetery
-  1843 Canarsie Cemetery
13 acres, 65,000 interments.
-  1841 Most Holy Trinity Cemetery.
-  1838, Greenwood Cemetery
478 acres, 600,000 interments. Popular tourist attraction in the 1850s
-  1658 Gravesend Cemetery

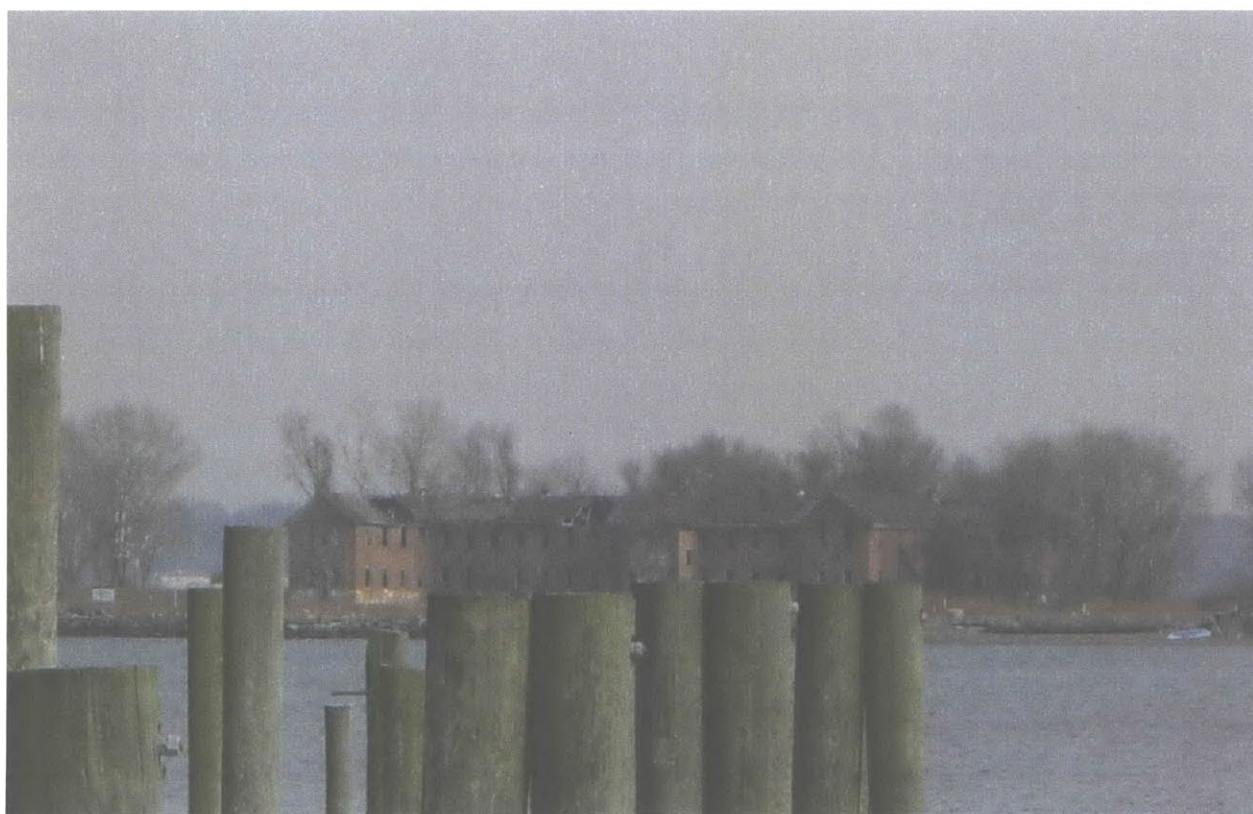
-  National Cemetery
-  1879, St. John's Cemetery (Roman Catholic).
-  1878 Union Field Cemetery, 60 acres
-  1875 Maple Grove Cemetery, 65 acres
-  ca 1865 Hungarian Cemetery
-  1853 All Faiths Cemetery (Lutheran)
225 acres and 540,000 interments
-  1853 Mt. Neboh Cemetery
-  1853 Flushing Cemetery
-  1852 St Michael's Cemetery
88 acres. Provides space for those who cannot otherwise afford burial.
-  1852 Lutheran Cemetery
-  ca 1850s Machpelah Cemetery
-  1850 Linden Hill Cemetery
-  1850 Mout Olivet Cemetery. 71
-  1849, Cemetery of the Evergreens. 225 acres, 526,000 interments
-  1848 Cypress Hills Cemetery. First non-sectarian cemetery in NYC. The Union soldier remains from Hart Island were moved to tis location (along with the remains of 35,000 people from manhattan after the rural cemetery act)
-  1848 New Calvary Cemetery in Woodside, Queens.
-  1848 Calvary Cemetery in Woodside, Queens. Approximately 3 million interments
-  1842 Bayside Acacia Cemetery, 37 acres, 34,800 plots

STATEN ISLAND

-  ca 1910 Ocean View Cemetery
47,000 interments
-  1909 Mt Richmond Cemetery.
The second HFBA cemetery
-  ca 1890 Baron Hirsch Cemetery
-  Silver Mount Cemetery
1880s Silver Lake Cemetery, filled 1909. HFBA - indigent Jewish burials.
-  1876 Fairview Cemetery
-  19th C Woodland Cemetery
-  1866 United Hebrew Cemetery
-  Charlestown Cemetery
-  ca 1850s St Lukes Cemetery, now abandoned
-  early 1850s St Josephs Cemetery
-  ca 1850 Zion Cemetery
-  1848 St. Mary's Cemetery
-  1848 St. Peter's Cemetery
-  Douglas Cemetery
-  1885 Vanderbilt Mausoleum
1740 Monrovia Cemetery
113 acre, 4500 interments
-  18th C(?) Bethel Cemetery

MANHATTAN

-  1842, Trinity Church (Manhattan)
-  1830, New York Marble Cemetery.
-  1832, "Other Marble Cemetery".
-  1829 Shearith Israel Cemetery
-  1764, St. Paul's Chapel and Churchyard of the colonial era.
-  1683 Shearith Israel Cemetery. The first Jewish cemetery recorded.
-  1660, St. Marks in the Bowery Church. Established by Peter Stuyvesant, who was interred in a vault here in 1678.
-  1633, Dutch Reform Church, first church built in New Amsterdam



One: An Introduction to a Lost Geography

Figure 1.1: (previous page) Hart Island. Source: Author

Figure 1.2: (opposite page). Hart Island Illustration. Source: Google Maps and Author

Harrison, Robert Pogue. *The*
¹ *Dominion of the Dead*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993) 19.

² Melinda Hunt and Joel Kleinfeld, *Hart Island* (New York City: Scalo, 1998). 23.

³ Leslie Corn, "New York City's Potter's Field: A Visit to Hart Island's City Cemetery in Bronx County," *New York Genealogical and Biographical Society*, <<http://www.newyorkfamilyhistory.org/modules.php?name=Sections&op=viewarticle&artid=60>>.

figure 1.3: Birdseye of Hart Island
 Source: DOCHS



An Introduction to a Lost Geography

"We dwell in space, to be sure, but we dwell first and foremost within the limits of our own mortality."

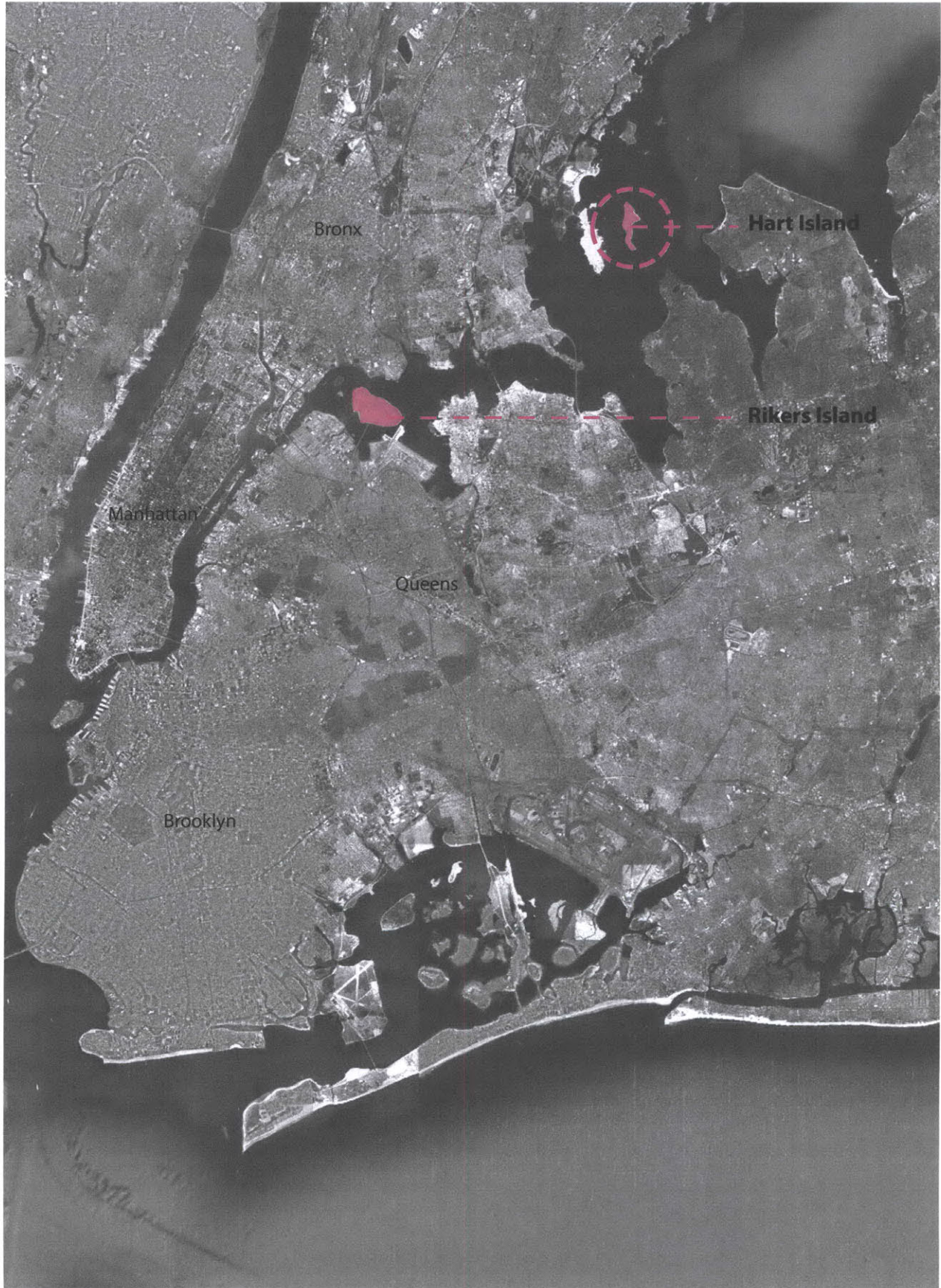
-Robert Pogue Harrison¹

1.1 Hart Island

A forlorn landscape in the thriving city, Hart Island is New York City's seventh potter's field. It is the city's northernmost island along the eastern shoreline of the Bronx, anchoring the Long Island Sound to the East River. Although its 101 acres have been used for various purposes through the years, the landscape is reminiscent of what it might have looked like centuries ago when people other than European settlers occupied the region. The island is easily viewed from City Island, the wealthy Neo-Victorian settlement directly to the west, where sailboats and yachts are as numerous as people. Seen from here, Hart Island evokes an image of a place somewhere between a New England coastline and an eerily empty ghost town. The latter is not only because the buildings that are immediately within view are in an evident state of extreme disrepair, but also because the only access to those shores is from a single dock off City Island, accessible only to the Department of Correction and Riker's Island inmates.

Judging from this portal alone, one might assume the city's major penitentiary on Rikers Island has expanded its lot coverage to its neighboring island to the north. While this was true for some time until the 1970s, today Hart is connected to Rikers only through the labor of inmates brought daily to perform burials of the city's unidentified former inhabitants.² Because this program is run by the Department of Correction and includes prisoners, the country's largest tax-funded burial ground is not accessible by the public.

Before Hart Island was publicly owned,³ it was host to a variety of programs outside mainstream culture. Prior to the Civil War, part of the island was leased by the U.S. Army to use as a formal training ground for more than 50,000 Union soldiers preparing for battle only to subsequently become a POW camp for Confederate Soldiers. After the war the city utilized the island to ease pressure on Randall's Island's industrial school



4 Sharon Seitz and Stuart Miller, *The Other Islands of New York City : A History and Guide*, 2nd ed. (Woodstock, Vt.; New York City: Countryman Press ; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 2001), 127-134.

5 Ibid.

6 Hunt and Kleinfeld, *Hart Island*. 27.

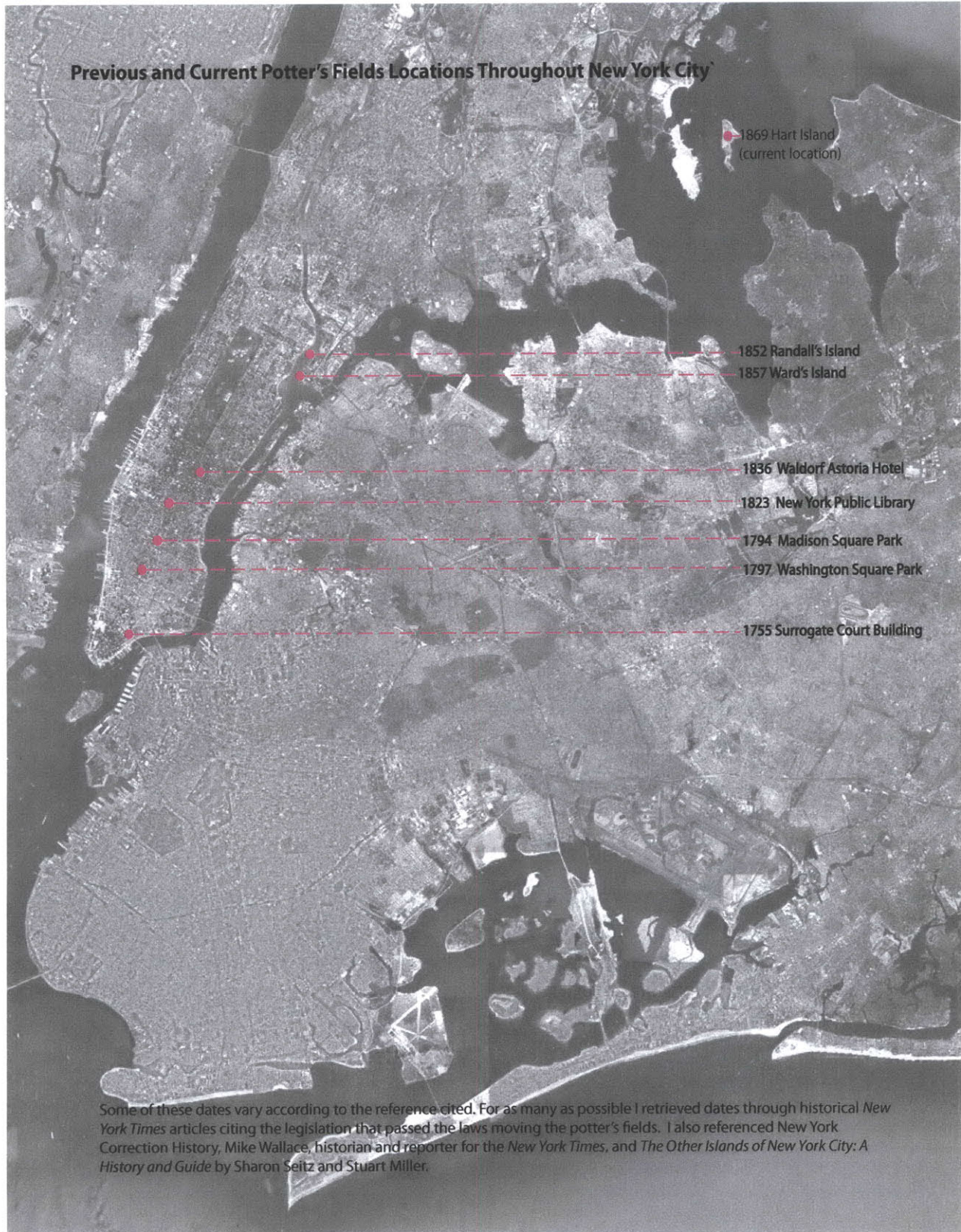
7 Emily Kies Folpe, *It Happened on Washington Square*, Center Books on Space, Place, and Time (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 55-69.

8 Ibid.

of destitute boys. In 1895 the Department of Welfare and Corrections introduced a reformatory and jail workhouse.⁴ These programs were supplemented by a variety of other occupancies throughout the decades, including a lunatic asylum, an almshouse, a school for traffic violators, and a city-funded homeless shelter. The island came under federal recognition one more time beginning in the 1950s as the Cold War set in and fears of air attack drove the U.S. Army to establish Nike Missile bases along the coastlines. The area where the Nike Missile silos were built is now abandoned, with no plans for reuse.⁵

None of these city or national ambitions persisted in operation as long as the potter's field, perhaps because it has proven to be an efficient use of prison labor to perform an overlooked civil action. As bucolic cemeteries became city icons, Hart Island antithetically acted as a lone soldier, defining its new identity in 1869 via the burial of a single 24-year old orphan who died in Charity Hospital on Welfare Island. Since then approximately 800,000 burials have taken place there.⁶

New York is no stranger to potter's fields. The area around City Hall in downtown Manhattan marks the first known potter's field in the city. After this burial ground was filled it was moved northward several times, first to the area of Madison Square Park, until it reached the present-day location of Washington Square Park. The burial ground remained in place until 1823.⁷ The city grew until this graveyard was surrounded by active urban life, forcing it from its location to an area approximately 40 blocks north to an area now occupied by Bryant Park and the New York Public Library. From that location a series of moves were undertaken over the next several decades, from 49th street and 4th Ave (site today of the prestigious Waldorf-Astoria Hotel), to Randall's and Ward's Islands, and finally in 1869 to its present site on Hart Island.⁸



9 These notes are based on Julia Kristeva's writings on the concept of otherness and abjection in Judeo-Christian society. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror : An Essay on Abjection, European Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), *passim*.

10 Ibid. 1.

11 Ibid. 4 This concept is discussed in detail in the chapter "Suffering and Horror," 140-156.

1.2 Landscapes of Abjection

New York City was pluralistic from its beginning, and continues to be so defined. Diversity is one of its equalizing hallmarks, but class still plays an important role in social distinction. Perhaps this distinction has steadily decreased as open prejudice has proven to be considerably less acceptable, but in death these distinctions are still made.

With burial records indicating personal information (when known) only in so much as name, age, date and place of death, it is difficult to ascertain key characteristics of the people who are buried in the potter's field. Without any additional background to give clues to the former personalities, it is no wonder they are assumed to be indigent. Who, unless they had no other recourse of action, would choose this landscape for their final resting spot? Yet, close to half are infants, indicating other factors are at work. The answers to this question are not easy to find, and there may be many. The identity of the potter's field as we understand it today began to fully develop at the turn of the 19th century when the agrarian mode of life shifted to a primarily urban one. The social change that resulted from industrialization and expansion of cities forced Americans to confront identity in a collective sense unknown before, and thereby craft a sense of the abject in individual and collective identity alongside that of the perceived normal. It was in great deal in the identification of the abject that a society was able to craft its own definition - if one thing could be rejected, then everyone would know what was accepted.

The concept of abjection, described by the French theorist Julia Kristeva, operates within the formation of individual identity.⁹ One is not abject as a detached an autonomous subject, rather, abjection is "that of being opposed to I."¹⁰ Identity is formed first through the collective and then compared to the other. Abjection, according to Kristeva, is defined by the body and place. The corpse, "the most sickening of wastes, ... a border that has encroached upon everything" stands as the ultimate sign of abjection of the human body - "death infecting life."¹¹ It displays in crude fashion human mortality, something that exists outside our human boundaries and therefore cannot exist within the realm of the ruled society. The corpse of the unknown or the indigent - those who exist outside mainstream, would then represent the ultimate abjection. outside mainstream, would then represent the ultimate abjection.

Abjection can be defined in relation to place, letting the process of city-building act as a defining characteristic of one's individual self. Through the process of early urbanization, because of the proximities city inhabitants were forced to confront, an opportunity to draw a line between what belonged inside and what was excluded emerged. The purpose of this was to preserve individual identity in relation to the other, necessarily preserving systems of order and identity. By partitioning and creating separation between that which was pure and impure, the individual could control aspects of human nature that were outside a coherent order. In the collective sense this concept played out through the urban form, dividing that which was healthy and wholesome from that which was considered foul and improper.

Because it carries the label of "abject," a landscape such as the potter's field cannot be lifted out of its own continuum on the periphery of society. As long as this burial ground is experienced in contrast with normality, it will be stuck in early-industrial mentalities of uncleanness and lack of worth. It will not receive commemorative devices or aesthetic landscaped features, because it is not perceived by the collective society as worthy of such respect. The moral signifier still plays its role, although more subtly today than previously throughout history.



Figure 1.5: Hart Island potter's field. The concrete marker is centered at one end of a common plot after it is filled with either 150 adult burials, or 1000 infants.
source: nydochs

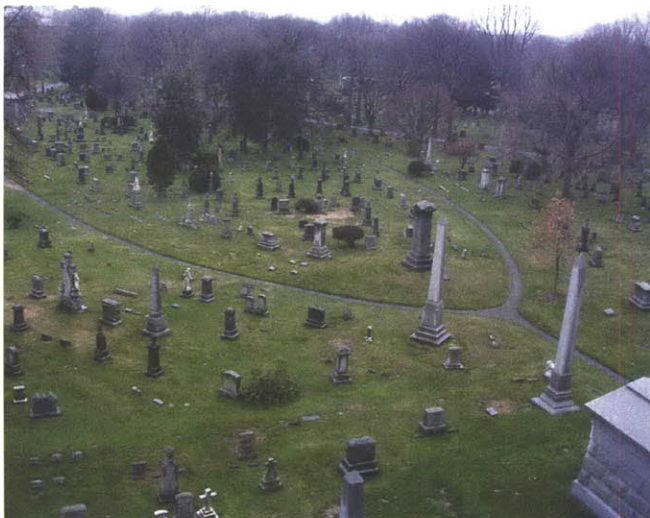


Figure 1.6 (bottom): Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Source: open source (www.flickr.com)

- 12 John P. Bodel, "Dealing with the Dead: Undertakers, Executioners, and Potter's Fields in Ancient Rome," in *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, ed. Valerie M. and Marshall Hope, Eireann (New York City: Routledge, 2000). 129.
- 13 Ira Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City* (Syracus: Syracuse University Press, 1972).16, 58.
- 14 Cemeteries were not always seen this way through the reform period. When Josef Haussmann wanted to close the Paris cemeteries to enact his far-reaching formal reformation of the city, Parisians would not have it. In the streets they cried, "Pas de cimitiere, pas de cite!" (No cemetery, No city!).

1.3 Where the Invisible Finally Falls

Preparing for the death of the poor has long been a governmental problem, recorded at least since ancient Roman times. In *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, John Bodel makes the claim that "a certain number of urban residents living in abject poverty and without the support of a patron must have fallen through the cracks. When these hapless souls gave up the ghost, the disposition of their corpses became, for them, a source of anxiety, for others, at the very least, a problem of urban maintenance."¹² In this chapter Bodel refers to this problem as "death-pollution". Subterranean grave pits called "puticuli" were set-aside near the Esquiline Hill for the purposes of dumping the bodies of the poor, the outcast, the diseased, or the slave. Because extreme poverty continues to pervade society, this problem of urban maintenance must still be addressed, albeit perhaps a bit less crudely than these historical examples.

There are a number of reasons why this particular cemetery was moved around so frequently in the rapidly expanding city. Although there were many migrations, remains were exhumed only one time - to Ward's Island from 49th Street. The remains of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers still lay below the pavement. The potter's fields emerged in the late-18th, early-19th Century as the city's population was expanding at unprecedented rates. In 1800 the population was around sixty thousand, but by 1850 it had reached over five hundred thousand, and by 1900 it was almost 3.5 million.¹³ In one century the city's population increased more than eight hundred percent, forcing the city and its residents into unanticipated proximities.

A surge in immigration and a vision toward expanding the built city across the entire island of Manhattan played some of the largest roles in dictating the formal organization of the urban landscape. Negative perceptions toward death and burial in part forced cemeteries to the suburbs, removing the dark city from the vibrant one, where families disposed of their dead members.¹⁴ Through this process, graveyards and cemeteries throughout the city (and the country, following European trends) were relegated to the outer boroughs, concretizing a new sentimentality the living had toward the dead. The churchyards were running out of space and were beginning to be seen as dirty, vile places

that overcrowded not just the dead inhabitants but also the living. All burial grounds were subject to regulations in the mid-1800s forbidding additional interments within city limits, and a great many of them moved their operations to Queens and Brooklyn.¹⁵ A tremendous exhumation process ensued, resulting in the removal of tens of thousands of corpses from the main island. Still, many remained in place, subsequently built over and forgotten. Death took on new significance, evidenced in urban planning practices throughout the country. This relocation created an unexpected unanimity; suddenly the city's sacred graveyards shared geographic placement with the potter's fields. The first, however, carried the honor of becoming the precursor to the modern urban park, while the other revealed a steadily deepening prejudice.

Yet, the newly privatized cemeteries needed to have paying customers in order to stay afloat, ensuring those who could not afford to do so would not be able to geographically equalize themselves after death. Those with little means were sometimes taken care of by burial societies, such as the Hebrew Free Burial Association or certain Catholic Charities. Not all, though, could be easily classified by religion, or were fortunate enough to have been recognized by the religious affiliation. In that case, those remaining were sent to the potter's field, embraced by the city where no other family could be found.

New York City Interment Figures, 1838 - 1850

Category	1838	1839	1840	1841	1842	1843	1844	1845	1846	1847	1848
African	179	159	164	167	164	157	190	192	263	273	298
Baptist	165	152	139	153	140	134	139	184	181	171	212
Dutch Reform	316	278	261	341	260	257	214	278	242	267	231
Episcopalian	625	370	381	397	397	387	371	341	327	365	496
Friends	53	56	39	77	55	49	52	53	37	51	46
German Lutheran	141	166	159	173	220	174	325	380	450	412	535
Hebrew	25	57	51	75	65	73	60	72	78	122	141
Marble	181	206	200	221	184	168	143	147	102	132	122
Methodist	1190	1451	1505	1619	1643	1395	1409	1791	1621	1679	1790
Presbyterian	979	961	918	1085	970	861	753	889	741	785	993
Potter's Field	1514	1495	1727	1692	1776	1545	1248	1439	1680	3662	2897
Removed	-	-	-	-	546	983	1419	1602	2215	4863	4760
Roman Catholic	2685	2543	2914	3088	3272	2923	3043	3794	3990	5646	3292
Others	0	59	16	27	35	24	25	4	4	8	3
Total	8053	7953	8474	9115	8475	8693	8955	10983	11318	15788	15919

Source: "Annual Report of the Interments of the City and County of New York for the Year," in *Documents Aldermen* (New York, 1839-51) (as reprinted in David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity*, p68)

Today there are greater than five 15 million dead buried in Queens, more than double the living population.

Table 1: New York City Interment Figures, 1838-1850. The numbers for the potter's field are some of the highest in the city. Notice also the new category of "removed" starting in 1842, describing an increasing number of interments happening outside city limits. These numbers coincide with the rise of the rural cemetery and the increased value of city land. Cemetery lots were sold off, and many bodies were exhumed to make way for new development.

- 16 Fernwood Funeral Home, "Fernwood Funeral Home, Crematory, Cemetery," Fernwood Funeral Home, <http://www.foreverfernwood.com/>.
- 17 Cremation Association of North America, "2007 Statistics and Projections to the Year 2025 and 2008 Preliminary Data," Cremation Association of North America (CANA).
- 18 Katie Zezima, "Indigent Burials Are on the Rise" *New York Times*, 10 October 2009.
- 19 Los Angeles County Department of Coroner, "General Information, Faqs," Los Angeles County, http://coroner.lacounty.gov/html/faqdet.cfm?faq_id=13.
- 20 Not the only exception to the rule is Phoenix, Arizona, where a chain gang performs an operation like that on Hart Island. The Phoenix program is different in three major ways, however. There, each grave has its own marker, visits are openly allowed, and there are approximately three hundred burials per year (as opposed to New York's two thousand).

Figure 1.9 (Opposite page):
Indigent Burial Map. Source:
Author

Table 2: Death Statistics in the
United States and NYC, 2006.
Death Statistics - USA 2006

2006 Total Deaths - CDC
2,426,264

2006 Death Rate
810.4 per 100,000 people

2006 Infant Mortality Rate
6.69 deaths per 1000 live births

Death Statistics - New York City 2006

2006 Total Deaths
55,391

2006 Infant Mortality Rate
5.9 per 1000 live births

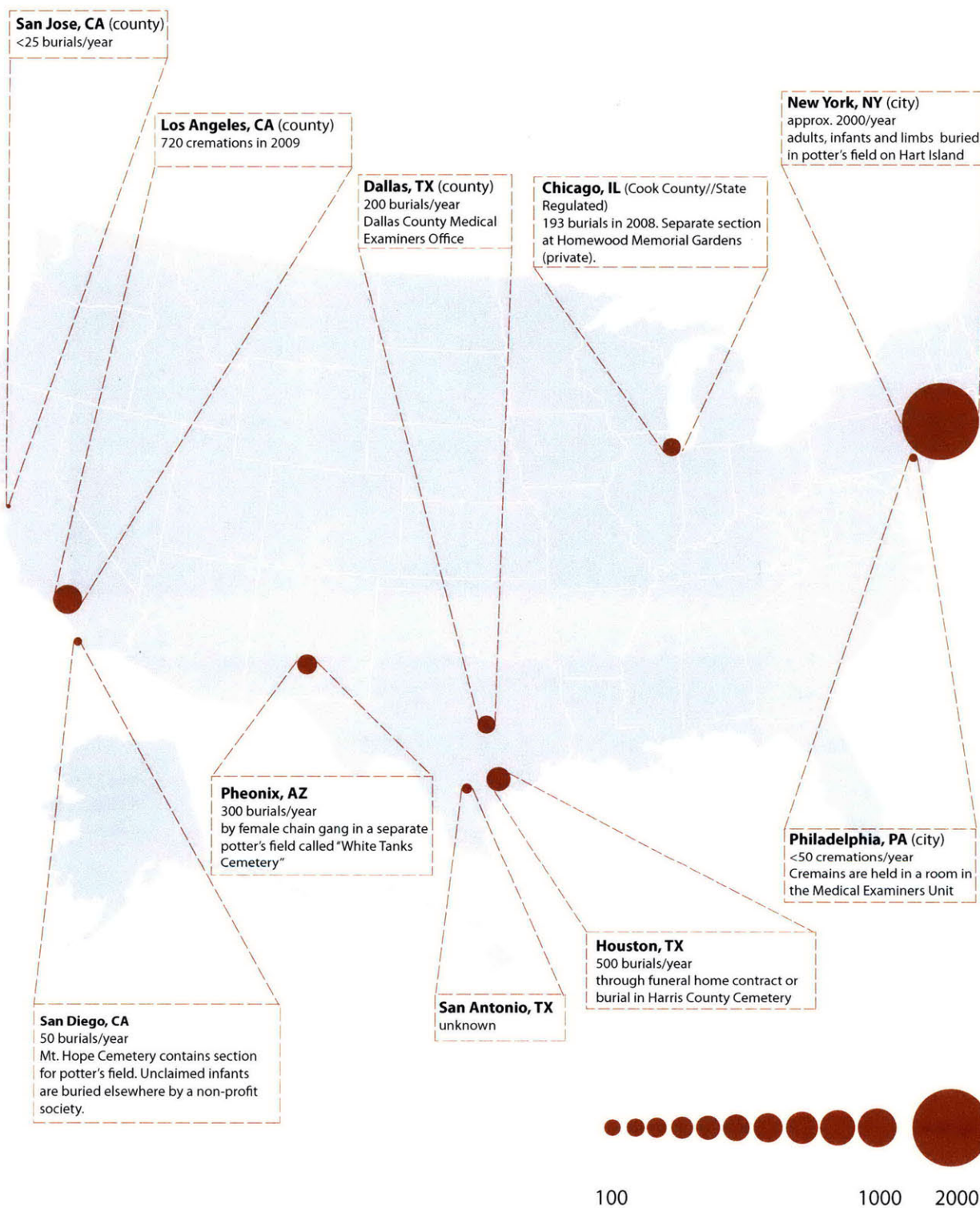
Sources: National Center for Health Statistics
(<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/deaths.htm>) and
New York City Department of Health
(<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/pr2008/pr002-08.shtml>)

Today, burial landscapes are diminishing in their constructed commemorative aspects. Outside of San Francisco a burial reform can be found in a small number of cemeteries throughout the country. Shrubs and trees replace headstones; grave locations are no longer physically demarcated but instead found through surveillance tools such as GPS. The permanent landscape of human remains is kept as an ecological habitat, but the hillside is actually a rolling green necropolis. Homage is paid through nature rather than artifice. Time will only tell if this "alternative death movement"¹⁶ takes hold. Cremation is an inclination far more likely to surpass casket burial as the primary method of body disposal. It is growing in popularity as an alternative to burial, and in 2008 was projected by the Cremation Association of North America to account for 38 percent of all burials.¹⁷ Some municipalities such as Los Angeles County resort to this as their sole means of body disposal for their indigent dead.¹⁸

Municipalities are not only running out of funds to subsidize the cost of funerals for families who cannot afford inhumation, but also in many cases space for those burials. States vary in the way they deal with the issue. The majority of states send the responsibility down the line to cities or counties, many of which do not set aside enough money to address the needs adequately.¹⁹ Several prefer to subsidize burial or cremation and let private interests take responsibility for the action. These private interests are typically funeral homes and mortuaries, or a family member or close friend who is granted an allowance and is able to organize the arrangements. While there are many municipalities that apportion space within larger cemeteries, they are typically supplemented through these other measures described above. The exception to this multi-pragmatic approach is New York City, which funnels the great majority of publicly funded burials through the Department of Correction onto Hart Island, the largest tax-funded cemetery in the United States.

Likewise, municipal burial grounds have seen major changes over the past century and half. Counties and cities across the country have in large part ended the practice of keeping a separate potter's field for the burial of invisible or unknown people,²⁰ but historical examples of potter's fields exist in or near many major metropolises. Washington D.C., through the mid-1800s, ran a similar program to be found in New York City today, where prison labor was used to perform burials. From the photograph

Indigent Burial Map of 10 Largest U.S. Municipalities

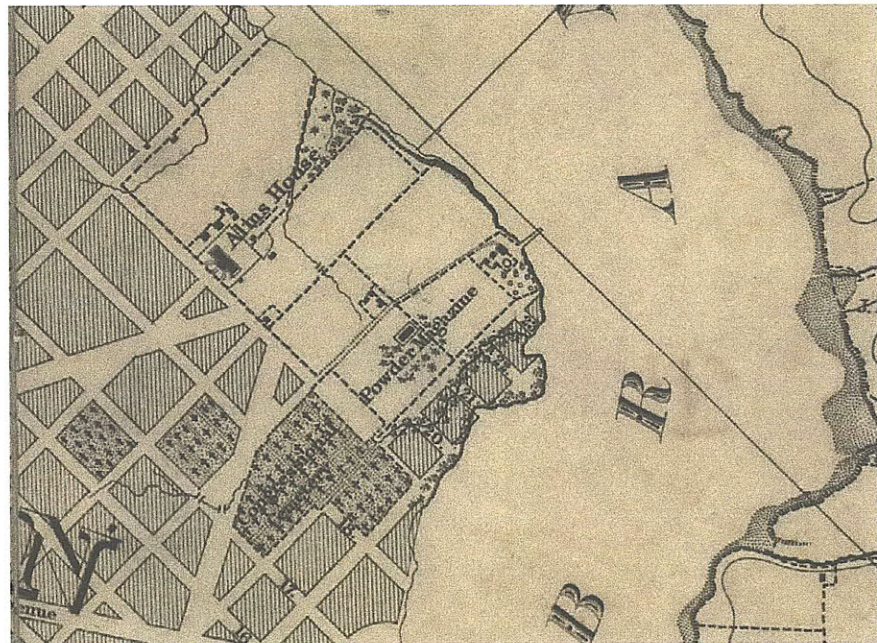


shown below, burials were in individual plots, or at the most three-deep per plot. The map shows the historic location of the potter's field now fully integrated back into the city fabric. D.C. today, through the U.S. Department of Human Services, subsidizes the expenses but asks funeral directors to take the responsibility of indigent burial.

Figure 1.10: Washington DC potter's field being worked by a chain gang, 1904. Source: *Washington Times*, Sept 9, 1904



Figure 1.11: Washington DC map of location of former potter's field source: Source: *Washington Times*, Sept 9, 1904



Chicago's Lincoln Park and San Francisco's Golden Gate Park were each public burial grounds dedicated to the poor at one time, but both now are celebrated urban green spaces. A few states, such as Tennessee, still enforce the Anatomy Acts of the mid-19th century that allow unclaimed remains to be used for medical research. Not many states choose this option because of fear of liability. Places like Los Angeles and Philadelphia (the latter has a historic potter's field under its own Washington Park) choose cremation rather than burial, favoring the lower costs and easier storage. (Philadelphia's cremains are stored in a room off the office of the medical examiner).

With a few exceptions, these necessary burials have been folded back into the city with little or no negative response, following an order of diminishing commemorative practices. The social reactions have changed alongside the landscapes of death. A century ago the topic of death was actively avoided, and euphemisms replaced reality. To paraphrase James Ferrell, author of *Inventing The American Way of Death, 1830 - 1920*, we can learn quite a bit about a society through a focused look at the way it handles death.²² The act of dying is a personal one, but the process surrounding it is cultural; it reveals characteristics of a people in time and place.

There are a few notable examples of literature that approach the topic of death, either from a societal perspective or an architectural one. One of the most widely-read examples was Jessica Mitford's *American Way of Death* (1963) where she "exposed" the funerary industry as marketing excessive funeral rites to a population that was in no position to argue, thereby raising the price of the funeral exorbitantly. This position received a great amount of attention, but what real affect it had on changing the course of the industry is hard to say. At the time of her writing, an average funeral (with all the embellishments) cost nearly \$1450.²³ Today, Federal Trade Commission outlines what to expect when planning a funeral. "Funerals rank among the most expensive purchases many consumers will ever make. A traditional funeral, including a casket and vault, costs about \$6,000"²⁴ The report goes on to suggest that the inclusion of embellishments such as flowers and obituaries can raise that price up to \$10,000. Considering inflation, these two prices imply little change over time.²⁵

Most states, cities or counties are willing to pay between \$200 to

James J. Farrell, *Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830-1920*, American Civilization (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980). Introduction.

Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978). 19.

Federal Trade Commission, 24 "Shopping for Products and Services: Funerals," Federal Trade Commission, The United States Government, <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/menus/consumer/shop/funeral.shtm>.

According to the Consumer Price Index, the value of \$1450 in 1963 was equivalent to \$10,330 in 2010. Department of Labor Statistics U.S. Bureau of Labor, "Cpi [Consumer Price Index] Inflation Calculator," U.S. Bureau of Labor, <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.



Figure 1.12: Burial Marker at White Tanks Cemetery (potter's field) in Pheonix, Arizona. Small brass knobs with each individual name imprinted on them take the place of a headstone at this potter's field. Source:

26 Matthew 27: 7-8, New International Version.

27 The Gospel story associated the term with other, less prosaic names such as Akeldama, meaning "field of blood," in reference to verses found on the Old Testament. Thomas Badhe, "The Common Dust of the Potter's Field," www.common-place.org.

28 N.A., "New-York City:... The Alms-House Department..." *New York Daily Times*, 21 April 1852.

29 Badhe, "The Common Dust of the Potter's Field."

\$1500 per indigent burial. The majority of this money is placed into burial relief funds that go directly to either the family, if there is one, or funeral directors who take the charge. The funds do not go to superfluous commemoration or landscaping. The implications of this are that a landscape that has no money put into it will never be as good as that which is supported by a constant flow of revenue.

A Potter's Field by Any Other Name is Still a Cemetery

The idiom "potter's field" is traceable back to Christian biblical accounts preceding Judas's betrayal of Jesus in the Book of Matthew. Judas, in his guilt, refused the money given to him by the chief priests, "so they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it has been called the Field of Blood to this day."²⁶

A "potter's field," says historian Thomas Badhe, "referred to a place where potters dug for clay, and thus a place conveniently full of trenches and holes for the burial of strangers."²⁷ In 1852 New York City's Aldermen decided to officially rename the potter's field "City Cemetery." They wanted to remove the stigma from the place.²⁸ The word "cemetery", Greek for "sleeping place," hails back to the ancient Roman underground catacombs. In the middle of the 19th century, however, "cemetery" became the popular replacement for the words "churchyard" or "graveyard". Cemetery meant a societal burial ground, and the name of the place lost religious connotation while gaining secular, social meaning. For the burial of indigents and unknown persons, the idea of a "potter's field" remained appropriate. Writing about how rapidly-crowding antebellum New York City buried its indigent dead, Badhe says, "The biblical veneer of the term was perhaps an antidote to one of the distressing costs of life in the chaotic new democratic city. At least in Potter's Field they lay under a vague biblical scope."²⁹

Whether or not this shift in name had significant effect on the perception of burial landscapes is unclear, but it coincided with a national movement in Antebellum America to relocate cemeteries outside of cities. Based on new European ideals of creating picturesque landscapes, this gesture was one link in a chain connecting dense urban areas with surrounding forests and farms. Graveyards, once seen as the devil's

stomping grounds, became places where souls were able to rest in peace.³⁰ The cemetery's geographical positioning is in question today. The space of the cemetery is for the most part ignored in contemporary urban planning, but burial sites, often considered social or ritualistic spaces, do serve an important function. According to Ken Worpole, "...they embody the beliefs of many people that the return of the dead to the earth is anthropologically a transition back from the social to the natural."³¹

The movement to rid the city of graveyards dates back to the mid-19th century. Writing about new towns of the 20th century, William H Whyte said, "Some kinds of under-use will not be so easily resolved. For planners, the most frustrating open spaces to contemplate are the cemeteries of the city. Together they take up a large amount of space.... Many a planner has toyed with the thought of all the good things that could be done with the land were there a relocation effort."³²

Some would argue that the removal of cemeteries from the urban center to the suburban periphery has enhanced a dearth of commemoration within communities.³³ This argument possibly indicates certain truths about the communities buried in New York's potter's field. In contrast to centralized urban churchyards, the potter's field consistently has been placed on the periphery. It was uprooted with every public outcry as the city grew to meet its periphery and come in contact again with the functions once relegated out of sight.

1.3 The aims of this thesis

This thesis addresses the landscape of Hart Island, which acts as a depository for identity shaped through memory. Urban landscapes reveal social and cultural biases in their physical characteristics. Identity is made evident through, or paradoxically denied by, these terrains. Hart Island exemplifies one such landscape of negated identity. Local governance created a system of oversight, dropping the potter's field into the bureaucratic category, the Department of Correction, where it fell with little question as to if actually belonged there. Governmental action relegated the burial ground out of the public purview, allowing memory no space to actively define this landscape.

John R. Stilgoe, *Common Landscape of America, 1580 to 1845* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). 219-231.

Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes : 31 The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion, 2003). 20.

William Hollingsworth Whyte, *32 City : Rediscovering the Center*, 1st ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1988). 343.

See Worpole, *Last Landscapes : 33 The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West.*, for example.

By looking first at an overview of Hart Island in Chapter one, the reader will get a sense of how landscape, geography, and identity are implicit in the making of place. Chapter two describes the meanings behind each of these categories and how they are interrelated. It begins by describing how landscape, a material and tangible aspect of the city, is fundamentally generated through identity, a metaphysical construct created by social communities that inhabit a particular territory. It goes on to demonstrate how memory and identity are inextricably linked, a concept that that only intensifies the potter's field as a landscape of abjection. Burial landscapes since the 18th and 19th centuries have acted as sites of cultural and personal commemoration, yet this particular burial ground exists in contradiction to that accepted norm. Over time, as the potter's field moved further from the realm of daily life, both memory and history were lost on this terrain, replaced instead by bureaucratic function. Where tombstones stand to recall a person or family in a traditional cemetery, whitewashed concrete pillars locate one end of a massive burial trench holding one hundred fifty adults, or as many as one thousand infants. A possibility for remembrance and recollection does not present itself in this negated landscape.

Chapter three illustrates the historiographic study of the potter's fields of New York City, detailing the placement of the burials in relation to the built fabric of the city. This chapter demonstrates the ebbs and flows of negative perception surrounding burial landscapes, and how the potter's field was the magnet for the worst of these. Still, it remained in the memory of the city, and perceptions held tight throughout history, until the potter's field was pushed further to another more isolated island where all memory of the place faded. Chapter four gives an in-depth look at New York City's current potter's field on Hart Island. By understanding the history of the potter's fields, layered with the history of the island itself, patterns emerge that display the inevitability of the place as it is today.

Through these chapters this thesis explores a contemporary landscape that never reached modernity. Rather, it is one that remains stuck in a medieval setting. Only through reconsidering jurisdiction, location and perception, can the status of Hart Island be neutralized enough to finally become a contemporary lanscape.



Two. Identity, Memory and Landscapes

Figure 2.1: Hart Island's concrete burial markers lining the landscape. Source: Joel Sternfeld, *Hart Island*.

- 1 Pierre Nora and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, 3 vols., European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
- 2 Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall, *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, Routledge Classical Monographs (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000).132
- 3 John R. Gillis, *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994).

TWO: Identity, Memory and Landscapes

2.1 Identity Theory and the Shaping of Landscape

One of the primary ways funerary landscapes are shaped is through architectural mnemonic devices. Spaces of death serve the purpose of allowing the living to connect to the memories of their dead through a physical link; the barren burial landscape of Hart Island lacks these elements. What happens when there is no place “where cultural memory crystallizes and secretes itself”?¹ The knowledge of where bodily remains are located after death is, to many, an important indication of the role and status one had in life. As a cemetery, Hart Island fulfills a major function of society (the burial of the dead), but with no grave markings, landscaping, or visitors, its function is devoid of physicality.

Thousands of years ago, the potter's field was dedicated primarily to the foreigner - one who had no place in society in which he or she died. Beyond strictly supplying space for the alien dead, the potter's field supplied burial space for the poorest of the poor. These deaths were city maintenance problems, and were treated as such. In ancient Rome, *puticuli*, burial pits to which the poor were often relegated, were established on the outside of town for the disposal of the dead that otherwise would not have been cared for.² The identities of those buried in ancient Rome, like those in New York before them, may have been established well ahead of their burials, but it was certainly concretized after.

2.2 Fundamental relationship between memory and identity

Identity, implying either an individual sense of self or a collective group definition, is partially derived out of a fundamental study of memory that has undergone frequent philosophical scrutiny. In the words of Historian John Gillis, “The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.”³ Identity and memory are easily coupled, but neither is a fixed phenomenon. Rather, both are in a constant state of flux; a changing definition that mimics and creates a parallel reaction in the other.

Identity, like memory, often requires a constructed artifact through which to be validated. The built places that manifest these notions are monuments that recall fixed points in time, memorials that slice through constantly adjusting definitions, or static objects that immortalize the dynamically mortal. Although a built form can represent a particular memory such as a war memorial does, it could be argued that neither identity nor memory will ever be fully developed through the constructed form, because they change with each re-telling. New stories are invented each time they are told.

The identity of the potter's fields throughout New York manifested in both the identities of the people buried in them as well as the perception in the early-19th century that burial grounds were vile places that could infect citizens with disease. At first viewed as necessary but distasteful, these burial grounds stored the bodies of paupers, criminals, and disease victims. The identity of the place overtook the identity of the people buried within, mixing place with people and prejudice with fact. With each successive move through the city, the perception of the potter's field carried a more tangible weight than any physical artifact, of which there are virtually none. That perception enforced a certain memory that ensured that the unclaimed or the unknown never stood a chance of achieving a positive immortal identity. In this case, both identity and memory were changed through constructed artifacts, but neither within a positive social context.

Identity gives rise to the social systems within which we all operate. Individual identity, formed through memory, is influenced by the collective. Individual identities define our personal beings and relate from one person to the next, creating a collective consciousness. Identities define not just thoughts and emotions, but also space through their social contexts. In any particular urban landscape shaped by identity, memory provides the framework through which identity operates. Additionally, individual identity cannot exist outside the realm of the collective. Maurice Halbwachs, who introduced the idea of "collective memory," said that, "what we call the collective framework of memory would then be only the result, or sum or combination of individual recollections of many members of the same society."⁴ Each individual thought goes into the creation of collective thought. It is through the individual that the collective exists, but it is equally through the collective that the individual

Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. 4
Coser, *On Collective Memory, The
Heritage of Sociology* (Chicago:
University of Chicago Press,
1992). 39.

5 Benedict R. O'G Anderson, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London ; New York: Verso, 1991), 6.

finds his or her own place. When memories exist collectively, they are ensured of being preserved indefinitely within their social construct. Without this collective framework, memory has nothing to attach to or be maintained by, and its very act of creation is demolished. In an environment absent of memory, identity has no place to reside.

Identity and the Potter's Field

Like people, places have identities. No landscape leaves a more lasting imprint of identity and memory than the cemetery. Funerary landscapes demonstrate social customs particular to their eras, carrying the same biases, prejudices, and predilections seen in other parts of the urban geography. Functionally simple places that store human remains, these landscapes supersede their utilitarian functions by also acting as concretions of cultural memory. Some, though, carry the burden of acting as sites of cultural obliteration. As in life, people without means or family are often left on the periphery when they die. When a landscape meant to serve the function of preserving memory is completely removed from public perception, identity is effectively eliminated. Yet, the identity associated with these landscapes is created out of perception rather than fact, idea rather than reality. Benedict Anderson says "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by the falsity or genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined."⁵ The imagination of the identity of the potter's field comes from the perception of the people buried there.

Landscapes are dictated by imagined contexts. Urban neighborhoods reflect specific architectural modes of representation, and rural village landscapes are shaped by the work that keeps the village functioning. The imagination comes from collective identity shaping; several individuals who share common characteristics create a common perception around them that resonates both inwardly and outwardly, and defines a collective consciousness. Constructed terrains act as depositories for identity shaped through memory. Spaces crafted by human hands carry the weight of their past and employ memory on a constant basis to be explained - to strengthen the collective sense of identity that went into making them. The crafting of a landscape does not imply a singular collection or a linear process. No single group shapes

the identity of a place. Although a dominant group may define its most outward attributes, it does not work in isolation. There are those who are not seen or known, a subtle persuasion that equally molds the shape of a city and dictates its tangible nature. The anonymous people, unknown in life, remain unknown after death, and the landscapes that contain them embody this plain fact.

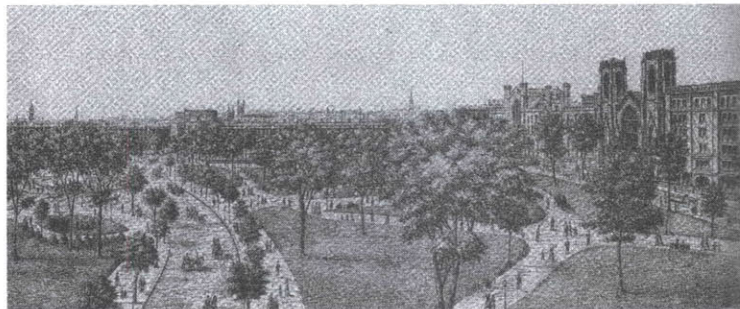
One may look at almost any neighborhood in New York that has gone through various degrees of attrition and gentrification in order to illustrate this point. The neighborhood around Washington Square Park in Manhattan provides a good example. Washington Square once stood as a potter's field, well before the neighborhoods of New York had reached this northern perimeter. Prior to being utilized for unwanted burials, it was farmland, and afterward it became a public square surrounded by wealthy New Yorker retreat homes. Multiple changes mark this landscape, today fully folded into the urban fabric and reinvented as a collegiate point of relaxation in a bustling neighborhood. Washington Square Park was not the city's only potter's field, being in use for fewer than thirty years. All of the potter's fields in the city were forced to shift to make way for population expansion, and the land that cradled unwanted bodies folded back into the city with little sign of its past use.

Newspaper articles from the mid-19th century reveal part of the reason for the multiple moves. "Is our city always to be disgraced by some public exhibition?" asks a *New York Times* subscriber in 1858. "For the sake of decency, do call the attention of our City authorities to the exhibition of coffins, skulls and decayed bodies lying exposed on the corner of Fiftieth-street and Fourth-avcnue. I learn [sic] this is the spot formerly called 'Potter's Field.'⁶ Displaying a total disregard for the unknown human remains and an irritation at having to confront such a place at all, the citizens of New York employed various methods of ensuring the potter's field would be moved out of their daily purview.

Letter to the Editor, "For 6
Decency's Sake," *New York Times*,
21 April 1858. 4.

Figure 2.2 (left): Washington
Square Park Aerial Photograph.
Source: Mike Varley

Figure 3.3 (right): Washington
Square Park in the 1880s. Source:
ephemeralnewyork.com



- 7 N.A., "Saved from Potter's Field," *New York Times*, 2 January 1894. 2.
- 8 Nora and Kritzman, *Realms of Memory : Rethinking the French Past*.
- 9 Spinoza, Benedict de. *The Ethics*. London: Penguin Books, 1996.
- 10 Without room to expand on the origins of immortality and beliefs on the afterlife, I refer to other texts on death and funerary landscapes that grew from philosophical roots. See James Stevens Curl, *A Celebration of Death : An Introduction to Some of the Buildings, Monuments, and Settings of Funerary Architecture in the Western European Tradition* (London: Constable and Company Limited, 1980).

These responses indicate that the potter's field became a marker for social standing - a place that aided in the making of moral judgments. In 1894 the *New York Times* published another article entitled "Saved from Potter's Field", where a charitable man saw to it that a woman, who was "neat and clean and ladylike" but whose life was "[debased] from liquor" was given a proper burial. "No pauper's or criminal's grave is fit for her...and I won't see her remains put in Potter's Field."⁷ Historical documentation such as the information derived from these select *New York Times* articles creates a linear and continuous storyline that allows for access to all parts of a society's past dictated by memory.

History plays an important role in preserving memory where it otherwise is not preserved. There is a fine balance to be found in this role - history, through its dictates of preservation, exists on a level par with memory in its importance to the identity of a place. The positions each have, relative to each other, been faulted and exonerated by historians, especially since the 1980s and 90s when Pierre Nora reintroduced the importance of memory in society by suggesting that real environments of memory (*milieux de mémoire*) have been replaced by sites of memory (*lieux de mémoire*).⁸ The following sections will investigate this more.

2.3 Commemoration and the Role of Memory in Death

The 17th Century philosopher Baruch Spinoza said, "The correct study for a wise man is not death, but how to live."⁹ Perhaps these words mark the beginning of the end of demarcating death as a symbolically important tool toward gaining immortality and eternal remembrance. Certainly a philosophical truth exists here, as the Enlightenment ushered in reason over belief and immortality lost its stronghold in dictating modes of life. Contemporary attitudes reflect this view insofar that death has largely become a detail on the fringes of life, euphemistically discussed, and confronted only when absolutely necessary.¹⁰

Yet, although death is largely ignored, still we engage in the process of memorialization - in commemoration after death, after war, after nationally monumental events take place. This is in large part a trend that was initiated through the rise of nationalism in the late-18th and 19th Centuries. This trend is evident everywhere one looks in society - in town centers with statues of revolutionary war leaders, in museums dedicated to national events, in memorials attempting

to rectify past national grievances. Cemeteries in particular became overpopulated with these loci of memory as an appropriate location for a final commemorative device. It leads one to wonder, what is the real significance of remembrance?

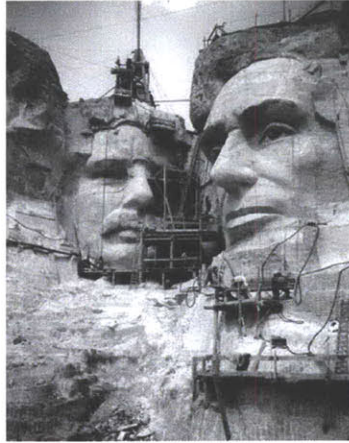
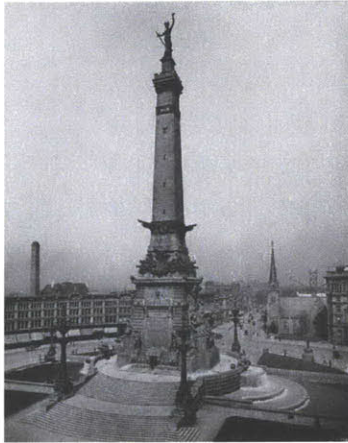


Figure 2.4 (left): Indianapolis Soldiers and Sailors Monument in the city center, 1898. Source: google images

Figure 2.5 (center): Mount Rushmore. Source: google images

Figure 2.6 (right): The Capital Building, Washington Monument, Lincoln Memorial and Mall, Washington DC. Source: Anders

Origins of Memory Theory

First perfected through methods of oration and rhetoric, memory devices, or mnemonics, originally took shape through architecture. Architecture presents an ordered spatialization of memory that organizes thoughts according to rooms, allowing one to mentally walk from space to space, picking up new memories through this activity, in a sequential order. This relationship of architecture and memory is a singular one, illustrating individual memory, which is mainly useful for the purpose of recalling. In the 1st century BCE Cicero clearly elaborated on this classical understanding of how memory is shaped through loci and imagines (places and images) in his story of Simonides' invention of the art of memory.¹¹ In it Cicero tells of Simonides' luck at having left a banquet hall minutes before the roof caved in, killing all who were present. The corpses were beyond recognition from the destruction, and only Simonides could identify them based on his memory of where each person sat. This act allowed Simonides to determine that orderly arrangement was essential in order to remember.

It is in this context that this classical technique of "artificial memory" was first conceived.¹² Artificial memory is reliant on an unrelated object or image in order to be brought into existence - a reference point

Michael Rossington and Anne Whitehead, *Theories of Memory: A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007) 11

Frances Amelia Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966). 12

- 13 Plato, "Phaedrus, 249d-250c," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, n.a.). 520, found in Rossington and Whitehead, *Theories of Memory : A Reader*. 27.

around which to organize a series of thoughts. Centuries earlier Plato warned against the use of mnemotechnics as a replacement to real memory, suggesting that artificial memory aides enact a desecration of the truth. This is what Plato referred to in his writing of Phaedrus, when he makes the first clear distinction between actual memory and the act of physically capturing it through words or objects.

*When it came to writing Theuth said, 'Here, O king, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories; my discovery provides a recipe for memory and wisdom.' But the king answered and said, 'O man full of arts, to one it is given to create the things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and of profit they have for those that shall employ them. And so it is that you, by reason of your tender regard for the writing that is your offspring, have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will implant forgetfulness in their souls; they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. What you have discovered is a recipe not for memory, but for reminder. And it is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing, and as men filled, not with wisdom, but with the conceit of wisdom, they will be a burden to their fellows.'*¹³

Architecture was often used as the first mnemotechnic device. One would pick up ideas as he mentally moved through the rooms of a building. Each room acted in a representative fashion for an individual notion. Although the relationship between architecture and memory continues to exist, the constancy of one's dependence on the other has varied over time. The written word has replaced the need for mnemonics in most aspects of society. Because of this an increased need to highlight certain historical artifacts has contributed to an increased reliance on monuments, memorials, and museums to call attention to specific memories.

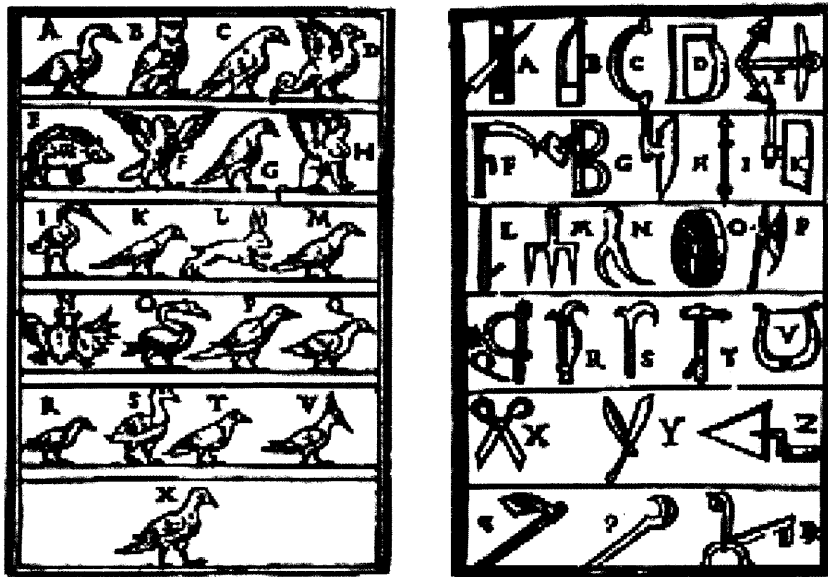


Figure 2.11: Visual Alphabets used for the Inscriptions on Grammar From Johannes Romberch, *Congestorium Artificiose Memoriae*, ed. of Venice, 1533 (pp. 119-20) Source: *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates. p 112

What is real memory, and what is a reminder? What is history? Twenty-five centuries ago Plato, through his protagonist Socrates in *Phaedrus*, told us that history was distinctly different from real memory. History, he suggested, created an appearance of knowledge where there was none. The implication was that human existence was embedded in memory; therefore any attempt to replace memory was an attempt to detach the human from the soul.

Plato, "Phaedrus, 249d-250c." 14 in Rossington and Whitehead, *Theories of Memory : A Reader.* 25, 26..

Socrates: For only the soul that has beheld truth may enter into this our human form - seeing that man must needs understand the language of forms, passing from a plurality of perceptions to a unity gathered together by reasoning - and such understanding is a recollection of those things which our souls beheld aforesaid as they journeyed with their god, looking down upon the things which now we suppose to be, and gazing up to that which truly is.¹⁴

The Shift from Generative Memory to the Monument as Memory

The act of remembering and the idea of memory carry multiple layers of distinction that makes them a singularly difficult topic to address. Memory is implicated both consciously and unconsciously, it

- 15 John Sutton, "Memory," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (2003, 2010).
- 16 Pierre Nora and trans. Marc Roudebush, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux De Memoire," *Representations*, no. 26 (1989). 7-12.

exists in deference to individual associations as well as collective ones; remembering how to do something is not the same thing as remembering that something is.¹⁵ Two forms of memory are derived in the context of this thesis: personal recognition of individuals or places, and collective commemoration of societal groups or landscapes. In both cases a mnemonic is often employed through the means of physical demarcation, whether a tombstone or a landscape or a building. It is these mnemonic devices that are the most applicable here, especially in the context of Hart Island, a place so devoid of commemoration that it is primed to receive them. These embodiments of memory, referred to as "*lieux de mémoire*" in the writings of the French historian Pierre Nora, are called into question as to their real significance. In order to contextualize this funerary landscape, it is important to first understand the role memory plays in society today.

Pierre Nora brought the subject of real and artificial memory again to light in the 1980s and 90s with his influential work on the *lieux de mémoire* - places of memory. Nora argues for a reflective look at the role memory plays in society in order to bring it back by suggesting that memory allows a "language of forms" to further the collective human consciousness. Instead, he says, history bends this language for its own devices. In this argument Nora aligns himself with Plato and furthers that this division has only intensified in the modern age. History is told through the *lieux de mémoire*, which exist to a greater and greater degree in the post-industrial world because they are replacing a part of society that no longer exists - the role of the story.

*Our interest in lieux de mémoire where memory crystallizes and secretes itself has occurred at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn - but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists. There are lieux de mémoire, sites of memory, because there are no longer milieux de mémoire, real environments of memory.*¹⁶

The implication here is that real environments of memory lost

ground as the role of history “...which is how our hopelessly forgetful modern societies, propelled by change, organize the past”¹⁷ prevailed. Memory, no longer just a method of recall, has been subjugated through its manifestations in the physical dimension (as in lieux de mémoire). It ceases to carry the weight that it once did, replaced instead by history, a shallow interpretation of everything that memory once was. Nora argues that in modern society there is an equilibrium disruption between the past and the present because we no longer rely on tradition and custom to carry our society forward. In fact, Nora takes it as far as to say these things no longer exist, replaced instead by an historic sensibility. To understand memory is to understand that it exists in contrast with history, which argues for an elusive objectivity in our retelling of the past. Although this argument romances the role of the story and bedevils the role of history, it has often been referred to by other historians and authors dedicated to the preservation of memory. The reasons are not because of Nora’s interpretation of the use of history, but rather because he uncovered that these lieux de mémoire replaced a necessary part of society. History is not the problem; memory devices, that tell its story, are.

Ibid.8 17

Yates, The Art of Memory. 4. 18

In the book *The Art of Memory*, Frances Yates also refers to our contemporary problem of memory in juxtaposition with the classical tradition:

*We moderns who have no memories at all, may, like the professor, employ from time to time some private mnemotechnic not of vital importance to us in our lives and professions. But in the ancient world, devoid of printing, without paper for note-taking or on which to type lectures, the trained memory was of vital importance. And the ancient memories were trained by an art which reflected the art and architecture of the ancient world, which could depend on faculties of intense visual memorization which we have lost.*¹⁸

What might we have lost through the dissolving oral (memory) tradition? What have we instead gained through the widespread introduction of monuments, memorials, and museums, loci or lieux de mémoire, all of which are places to generate memory? And perhaps most central to this argument, where does memory exist in landscapes designed, intentionally or not, to forget?

19 Ibid..8.

This thesis has been interjected into this semantic debate because history in any sense of the word must utilize memory in order to imbue cultural significance into its own retelling. History cannot act without memory, even if memory, either collective or individual, can exist in isolation. The study of Hart Island and its potter's field is historical by nature; its current existence does not make sense without an attempt to objectively unravel its pieces. Yet, history does not actively present itself for this place. References to Hart Island number many among the historical editorial writers for the New York Times and contemporary thrill-seeking bloggers, but few exist within literature. There is only one book entirely dedicated to the island, written by an artist/activist who has dedicated her life to families wondering where their lost loved ones were buried. Within thanatological literature only a handful peripherally mention potter's fields at all, and most references are made by socially motivated historians. Historical New York Times editorials and articles have proven to provide the most objective information, but even those sources drop off toward the middle and second half of the twentieth century as the burial ground became more and more invisible. Indigent burial, as it is more commonly referred to today, has resurfaced in the news as the recent recession swept through, but almost all of the articles ask how the governments will continue to afford these public service programs. If history has in fact replaced memory as the most common form of recall, then New York City's potter's field is headed toward permanent invisibility. As an historic landscape, that's one thing to consider. As an active one, it's an entirely different issue.

Nora's argument is embedded in nostalgia for the memory that once contributed to the shaping of identity, whether familial, social, or national. Subcultures that exist outside the realm of mainstream history no longer accumulate through reserves of memory either, effectively eliminating their historical place. Nora's argument looks specifically at the peasant culture that has virtually disappeared with the advent of industrialization. This replacement of terms has the effect of a loss of values and ideologies that "once smoothed the transition from past to future or indicated what the future should retain from the past, whether in the name of reaction, progress, or even revolution."¹⁹ In essence, *lieux de mémoire* take the place of real memory, and yet do not fulfill the same functions.

*If we still dwelled among our memories, there would be no need to consecrate sites embodying them. Lieux de mémoire would not exist, because memory would not have been swept away by history. Every one of our acts, down to the most quotidian, would be experienced, in an intimate identification of act and meaning, as a religious repetition of sempiternal practice.*²⁰

Lieu, meaning “place” in the French language, linguistically embodies more than the physical properties associated with a singular place. The word encompasses the qualities of each place that give it its unique distinction. Most commonly used in English with the phrase “in lieu of”, it suggests that one thing replaces something else. It is in this sense that we should think of *lieux de mémoire*. Not only as distinct places, but as places or objects in place of other things, suggesting alternate meanings and giving additional significance.

The Surfacing of *Lieux de Mémoire* in America

In the mid 19th century, following European trends, the United States began to craft its national identity through these lieux de mémoire. The United States Civil War where an estimated 620,000 people died (including a vast amount of civilian casualties)²¹ forced the country to confront death in a new way. The historian Drew Gilpin Faust writes about the transformation of American society through the tremendous loss of life during this catastrophic war in her recently published book *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. The Civil War had such a traumatic effect in part because it demonstrated death’s impartiality- not just the sick or the elderly were chosen to go, but in this case a large percentage of the young healthy male population as well. In other words, people that weren’t supposed to die, did, and the public struggled to define an appropriate reaction.

Nora and Kritzman, *Realms of Memory : Rethinking the French Past*. 8.

Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering : Death and the American Civil War*, 1st ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008). xi.

figure 2.8: There were so many bodies lining the battlefields that commemoration became a national problem.

A Harvest of Death by Timothy O’Sullivan, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, July, 1863 Source: Getty Museum



22 Ibid. xiii.



Figure 2.9: Taken from Final Report on the Battlefield of Gettysburg (New York at Gettysburg) by the New York Monuments Commission for the Battlefields of Gettysburg and Chattanooga. Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1902

23 Annette Becker, "From Death to Memory: The National Ossuary in France after the Great War," *Representations*. no. 26 (1989). 32-49.

The Civil War introduced a civic responsibility never before seen in the United States. If so many men were willing to die for their country, then their country must in turn take responsibility for them. The war linked the nation with the person because men gathered together to fight for individual freedom. Faust states, "At war's end this shared suffering would override persisting differences about the meanings of race, citizenship, and nationhood to establish sacrifice and its memorialization as the ground on which North and South would ultimately reunite."²² This newfound relationship was among the reasons remembrance of the fallen was introduced through monumental mnemonic devices placed in cemeteries and town squares throughout the country. It created a union of state and civilian that in turn introduced new ways of dealing with death.

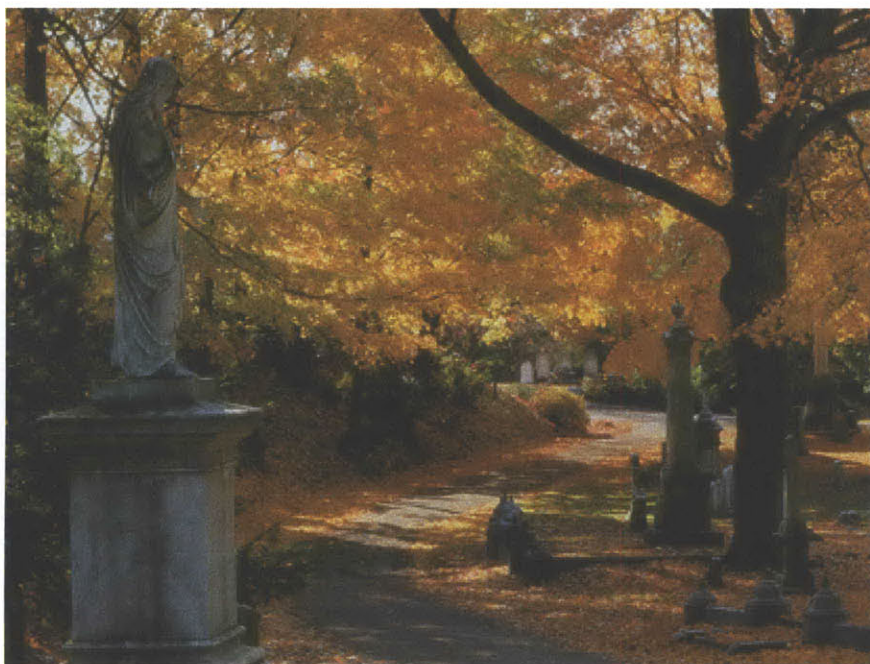
The idea of embracing the war dead to create a national identity prevailed in post-revolutionary France and England, and was largely adopted as a unifying concept through the United States Civil War. In order to put some people on a pedestal, there must be others to stand below it. This shift of identity was exemplified in a speech at the founding of the Notre Dame de Lorette national cemetery, created in 1918 after World War I:

*Rise up you dead! ...come from everywhere... We will not be foolish enough to speak of you in the same way we speak of really dead people. The really dead are those forgotten by men. Now we are here to keep your memory alive in the immortal memory of your country. The really dead are those forgotten by God. But we are here to obtain for you the grace of eternal life.*²³

The forms of this sentiment took shape through monuments erected to the fallen heroes of country, whether political leaders or soldiers in battle, national icons or celebrities. The monuments belonged to the class of people who shaped a specific image of the country, or ones who could afford to do so. The prevalence of landscaped cemeteries coincided with this growing patriotic movement. The lyrics to the original United States' anthem "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" were written in the same year that Mount Auburn Cemetery opened (1831).

*My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing;
Land where my fathers died,
Land of the pilgrims' pride,
From every mountainside
Let freedom ring!²⁴*

While the country was singing, it was also crafting its new identity around the very edges of life. Mount Auburn Cemetery marked a turning point in American history in relation to death and interment. Its physical creation was the first visible reaction to the undercurrents of displeasure that ran through the cities about their burial spaces. Its design was rooted in the Picturesque landscape movement in England and France in the early 19th century, an early movement toward disengaging death from daily life and instead giving it its own position and physical description took shape.²⁵



In response to this growing trend of creating places to demarcate or embody memory, it has been argued that the role of memory has been taken too far. The historian Charles Maier suggested this when he aptly asked, “Can there be too much memory?”²⁶ Maier agrees with Pierre Nora that there is an evident distinction between the role memory used to play in society - as a “medium for reconstructing the world as it was perceived” and the way it is understood now, as a

Samuel Francis Smith. Smith 24
was a student at the Andover
Theological Seminary in Andover,
Massachusetts in 1831 when he
wrote the lyrics to this famous
song, which for the next century
was the de facto national anthem
until “The Star-Spangled Banner”
was officially adopted in 1931.

Linde, B. *Silent City On A Hill*, 65. 25

Charles S. Maier, “A Surfeit of 26
Memory? Reflections on History,
Melancholy and Denial,” *History
& Memory* 5, no. 2 (1993).136.

Figure 2.10: Mount Auburn
Cemetery. Source: www.flickr.com
(open source)

27 Ibid. 141.

“semi-opaque and self-referential activity.”²⁷ When Maier uses the term “memory”, he does so in this context.

28 Ibid..142.

29 Ibid. 143.

30 Ibid. 144.

Memory (or rather places of memory) then “has become the discourse that replaces history”²⁸ rather than an extinct aspect of society. He argues that real history, alternately, “must be reflective and inevitably discordant and plural.”²⁹ History stands independently, not because it can reasonably attain an objective status, but that it must always be in pursuit of one.

31 Ibid. 145.

Maier’s argument is placed within the context of Nora’s lieux de mémoire. He suggests that history is not to blame for this loss of meaning, rather a lack of responsibility exhibited by society in its use of memory tools over the more objective “causal sequencing” history is required to follow. It is the surplus of memorials, monuments and museums, what Maier calls “the memory industry”, that detracts from the true history of a culture or a society. Because of this, he says, “collective memories tend to focus not on the long history of an ethnic people but on their most painful incidents of victimization.”³⁰ Maier does not mean to trivialize collective memories, but that they are by nature exclusionary. Collective memories serve the purpose of organizing a single group or culture, but when they are displayed through the memory industry, they become didactic and a quest for external respect.

For example, why is so much attention paid to the Holocaust, and not other devastating tragedies? Maier argues that teaching a lesson cannot possibly be the only reason. A museum devoted to the tragic events of the Holocaust is built in Washington D.C., around the same time as another museum devoted to American Indian history. The Holocaust Museum is dedicated to the tragedy, but the American Indian Museum is dedicated to the culture. This museum does not highlight the atrocities committed toward the tribes living in this country prior to European expansion. The intentional and unintentional wars the two groups fought have been reworked through history to the point where Christopher Columbus has become a celebrated icon, and American Indians are seen as brut savages.

Why commemorate one crime toward humanity and not the other? To continue Maier’s hypothesis, these commemorations signify “recognition and honor by the wider civic culture”.³¹ Respect for the

targeted members of the Holocaust comes in the form of remembrance of how and why they were targeted. Respect for the Native Americans comes in the form of changing the schoolbook perception of the “savage” into a deeper understanding of the complexities between tribal nations and even within them.

Ibid. 151. 32

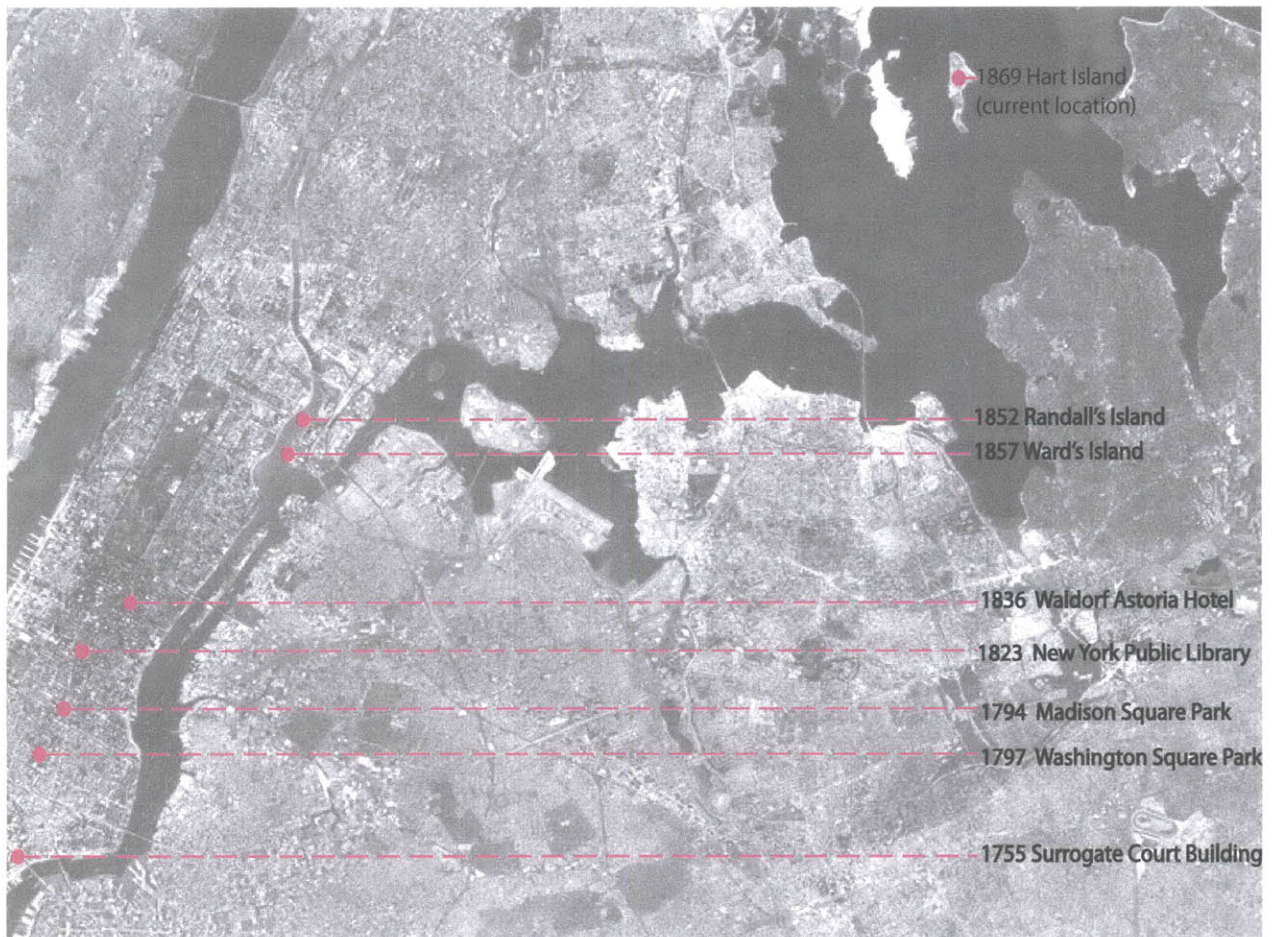
Ibid. 145. 33

Ibid. 146. 34

None of this is in itself questionable, and a right exists to all groups to gain respect from outside interests. Maier agrees with this, but there must be a division. He says, “Still, the past cannot accompany us. Memory can, but only insofar as it leaves behind the past it must be kept in its place as servant, not master, as a reflection on experience and not experience as a whole.”³²

Not much fault can be found with this argument, and the role of the lieux de mémoire needs to be examined more in the context of a place so completely devoid of them. But in fact, there is a distinction between the ways Nora and Maier uses the term “memory”. Memory, according to Nora, faded into extinction as is evident in what he referred to as the loss of the peasant culture. Along with the extinction of this memory went an entire class of people. Memory in Maier’s terms took a turn toward wealth, and no longer represented intact cultures, but only those who could afford to be represented. The ‘surfeit of memory’ that Maier suggests exists only does so in one realm, that of the privileged minority that have more available investment in a national identity than those who don’t have such opportunity.

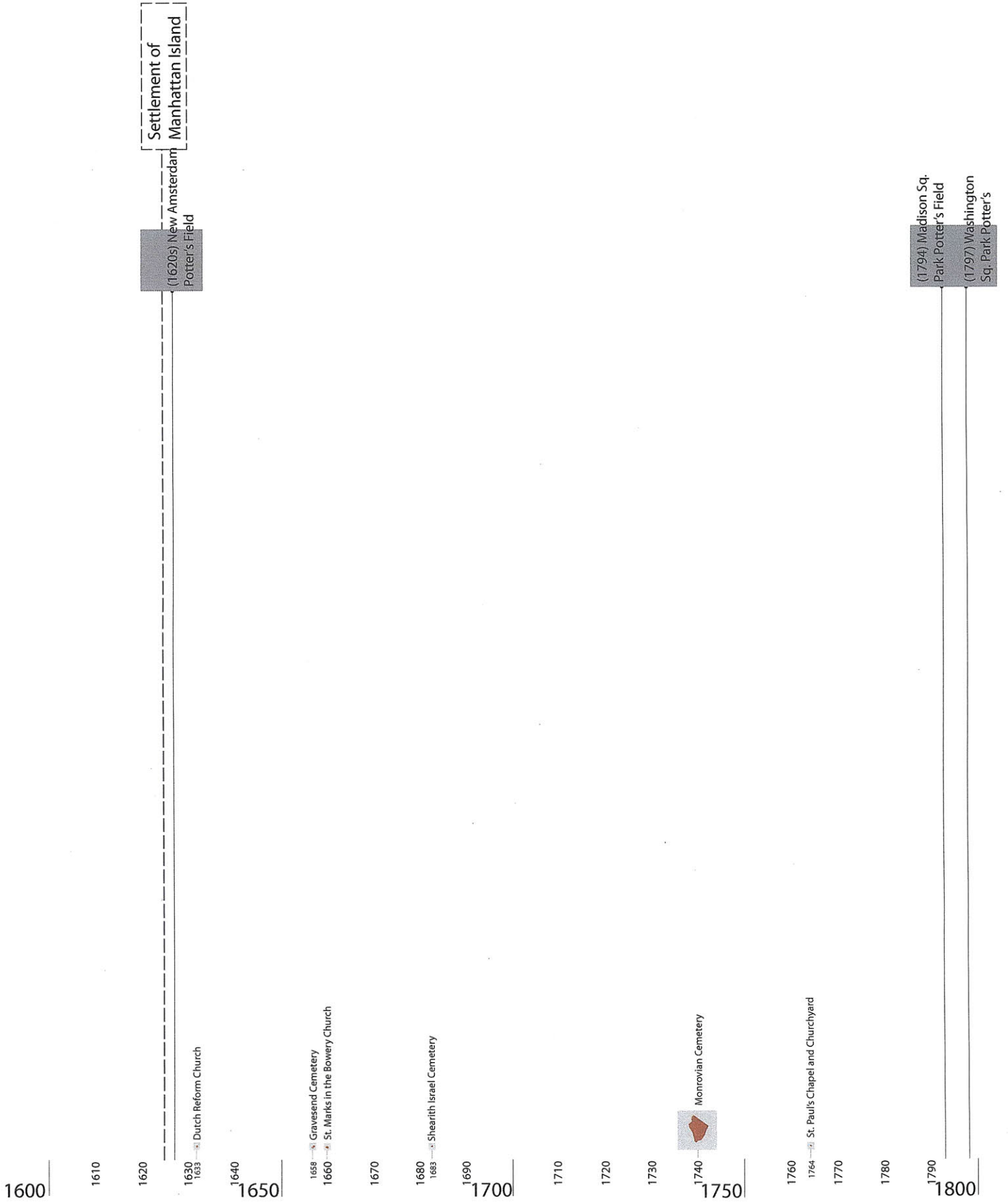
Where does this leave the other half? “My quarrel with this objective is not that it is not necessary - for I believe that in modern democracies it is - but that it is not enough. And too much preoccupation with respect from the others may divert from other political agendas.”³³ But to deny respect denies one of the basic tenets of community function. In other words, this respect may not be “sufficient as a principle of politics”³⁴, but that does not negate the fact that denying the respect then can preclude community. What of the urban spaces that carry neither political agendas nor respect?

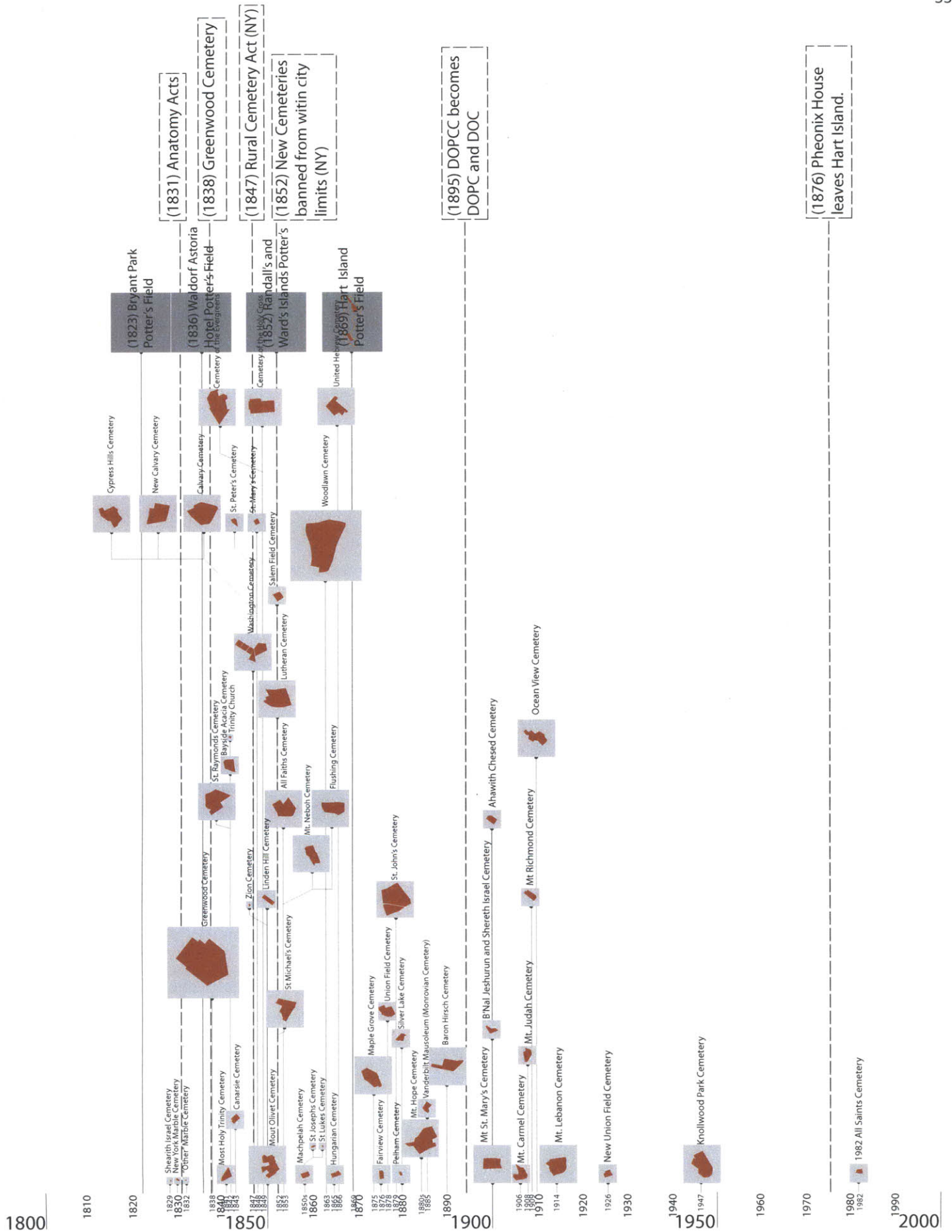


Three. Mapping the Graveyards: The Historical and Geographical Shifts of the Potter's Fields

New York City Cemetery Timeline from 1600-present

Source: Author





- 1 New York Correction History Society, "New York Correction History Society," *New York Correction History Society*, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/>.
- 2 Carolee R. Inskeep, *The Graveyard Shift : A Family Historian's Guide to New York City Cemeteries* (Orem, Utah: Ancestry, 2000). @2.
- 3 Ibid.@2.

THREE: Mapping the Gravyards: The Historic and Geographic Shifts of New York City's Potter's Fields

Although accounts conflict of the definition of a potter's field in New York City, this project identifies seven graveyards plus Hart Island that conform to the same definition, that of a burial ground for unknown, unidentified, or indigent persons. The Department of Correction Historical Society (DOCHS) website maps ten potter's fields,¹ but two do not fit the classification. One is a site on Chrystie Street in downtown Manhattan, and the other Bellevue Hospital. The only evidence that connects Bellevue Hospital to burial is that for many years its morgue has sent a large number of corpses to Hart Island. Bellevue, then, is implicated only by association.

As for the former, no argument contradicts the fact that a burial ground existed at the Chrystie Street site. It is considered to be the city's second African American burial ground, and was discovered in Manhattan in the early 1990s. For the purpose of this project, however, African burial grounds will not be considered potter's fields. The historical prejudice with which slaves and former slaves were treated in life may appear similar to the way the white indigent, foreigner, and anonymous person received burial, but for the early African-Americans the very homogeneity of their interments renders purely African cemeteries *sui generis* and beyond the scope of this work. This distinction becomes blurred when a mixture of races has been buried in one place, as for instance in the first African Burial Ground in New York City. This cemetery fits the potter's field categorization for two reasons: various maps label the area as either "Negro Burial Ground" or "Potter's Field" (see figures 3.2 and 3.3). Also, while the remains uncovered in 1991 were primarily of African descent, analysis done by Howard University found remains of other races as well.² Other sources cite the burial in this cemetery of Revolutionary prisoners of war, paupers, epidemic victims, and Native Americans.³ A commemorative urgency was made evident in the discovery of the first African Burial Ground, part of the first potter's field. When this combined potter's field and African burial ground was closed in 1794, the two were no longer joined in use.



Figure 3.2: The area below The Collect is labelled in this map from 1730 as “Negro Burying Ground.” Source: *Manhattan in Maps*, 58.

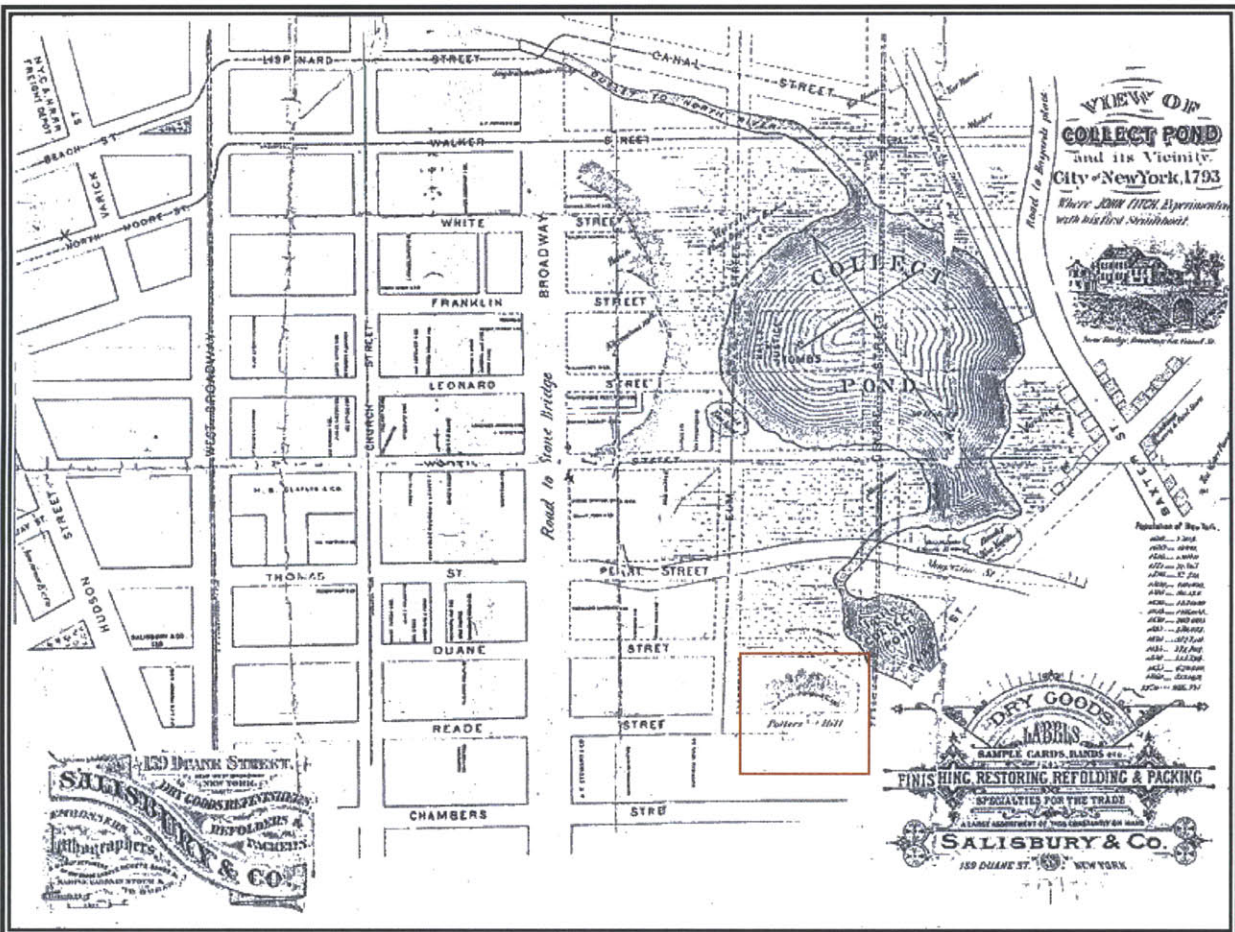
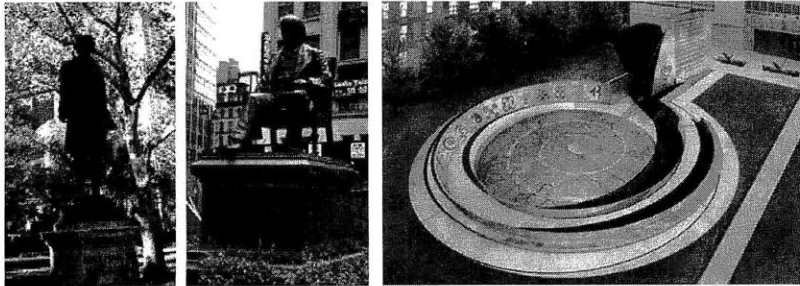
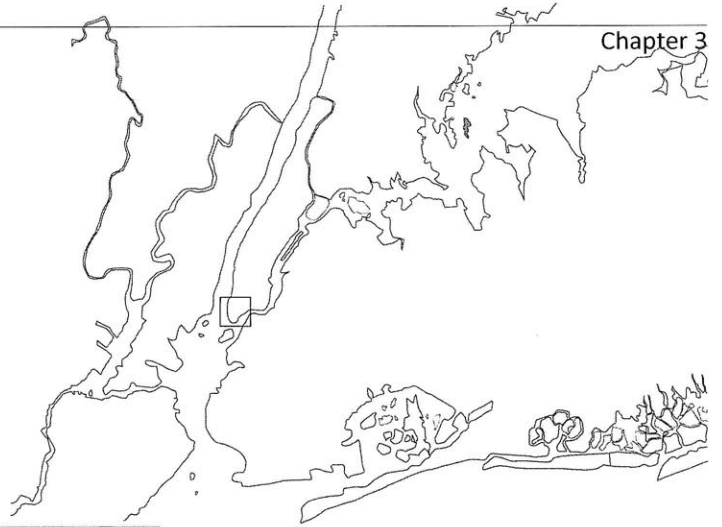


Figure 3.3: The area below the Collect in this map from 1793 is labelled “Potter’s Field.” Source: New York Public Library.



figures (from left to right): open source images (www.google.com)

- 1. Statue to Alexander Lyman Holley
- 2. Horace Greeley Statue
- 3. African Burial Ground Memorial





Figure 3.3 (previous spread, right): Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1755, with the location of the potter's field.

Source: Author

Figure 3.4 (previous spread, left): Google Map and images of monuments in the area of City Hall today. Source: Google and open source images.

3.1 [1664] New Amsterdam

population: approximately 270 people

Downtown Manhattan operates as if on a timed switch, on during the workday, off at night. Not since the Dutch settlement there has the area been the active social or cultural center of the New York City, but it embodies the city's earliest history and is today considered the civic center. City Hall and City Hall Park mark the epicenter of New York's civic structure. The park is a peaceful addition to a bustling nine-to-five neighborhood, supplemented on the weekend only by tourists and activity-seekers emerging from the Brooklyn Bridge and passing through its manicured gardens on their ways to more dynamic neighborhoods. Just north of City Hall the New York City Municipal Archives sits among other structures above the site of the city's first potter's field, and help to form the larger civic structure of the neighborhood. All contribute to federal, state or city governance. The Archive building holds a collection of the city's charitable burial records from 1874 through the early 1980s. Unfortunately, 1874 is the earliest date for which tangible records have been found from any of the city's potter's fields.

Timeline of events in New York City Related to the Potter's Field.

See Appendix at end of Chapter 3
for full timeline and citations.

Year	Event
1609	Henry Hudson sails through the Hudson Harbor to a land ripe for exploration and potential settlement. Dutch name it "New Netherland."
1624	Dutch families begin to arrive on Noten Eylant (renamed Governor's Island in 1784) and spread around the larger coastal region from the Delaware Valley to the northernmost part of the Hudson Valley in present day Albany.
1625	Families move from Governor's Island to the island of Manhattan as a protection against attack from other colonizing Europeans. A fort meant to enclose the community within its walls is established at the southeastern tip of Manhattan.
1626	Slavery of Africans is introduced in New Netherland with first ship of 11 Africans delivered by the Dutch West India Company.
1620s	First potter's field established ¹
1654	Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews arrive in the new town. Maps indicate that well into the 18 th century burial grounds for Jews and blacks are separated from those for whites, and are situated near swamps or other undesirable land.
1664	New Netherland becomes New York when the British force a Dutch surrender.
1665	In response to bubonic plague, English law requires burials six feet deep to prevent the spread of disease.
1668	First yellow fever epidemic hits New York City.
1702	Second yellow fever epidemic hits New York City, killing approximately 500.
1760s	The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the American colonies.
1776	-Great New York fire. Fire destroys a quarter of the city immediately after the British captured it during the Revolutionary War. ² - In France, Louis XVI decrees that all French cemeteries should be moved out of towns. ³
1782	Picturesque Movement introduced in England; sets the tone for cemetery design from the early 19th century onward. ⁴
1788	So-called Doctors Riot in New York City; as many as 5,000 people storm Columbia Medical School because of grave robbing by medical students. ⁵
1789	George Washington's Inauguration as first President of the United States after the Constitution is ratified (1787). New York City is (for a short time) capital of the new country.

- 4 The majority of the New England towns that cropped up in the 17th Century were formed under a singular religious and cultural identity (Puritan and English). These towns have historical markers that vary only little. New York was influenced by many religions and cultural identities and thus does not have a similar, singular thread of identity from its beginnings. Theodore Roosevelt, *New York: A Sketch of the City's Social, Political, and Commercial Progress from the First Dutch Settlement to Recent Times*, Bartleby ed. (New York City: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906; reprint, 2000). *Passim*.
- 5 Henry William Elson, "New Amsterdam," in *History of the United States of America*, ed. Kathy Leigh, transcriber (New York City: MacMillan Company, 1904).
- 6 Paul E. Cohen and Robert T. Augustyn, *Manhattan in Maps, 1527-1995*, (New York: Rizzoli International Publications,, 1997). @60.

Figure 3.5: Redraft of the Castello Plan from 1660 drawn in 1916. Source: New York Historical Society.

This map depicts the town extents, which today would extend up to the southern tip of City Hall Park in downtown Manhattan. A freshwater pond rested to the north of the colony, which supplied the drinking water for the first century and a half of its existence. The pond was located in swampy land, and the potter's field rested directly to the south of it

Perhaps partly because it was Dutch, the settlement that became New Amsterdam was noted for its polyglot nature and diversity, marking the new town as one of a kind in the colonial settlements to operate under this system.⁴ The Dutch were the first Europeans to lay claim to the land, but from almost the beginning immigrants came from other parts of the world as well, knowing that this colony would not refuse them. It has been suggested that no fewer than eighteen languages were spoken in the early colony⁵, a characteristic of the place that has only multiplied over time. However, despite the multiplicity of ethnic backgrounds, even the open-minded Dutch failed to treat everyone equally. Discrimination reared its head in all manner of social life, including treatment of the dead. Historical depictions of early burial grounds bear witness to prejudice. People of inferior status, such as the Jews or the African slaves, were buried next to swamps outside of town.



Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews arrived in 1654,⁶ and although they were considered outsiders, they were allowed the same basic rights as everyone else. The Jews were allowed in as refugees fleeing the European crusades and landed all along the North and South American coastlines. Most new towns showed considerably little tolerance, but New Amsterdam prided itself on a lack of open prejudices, making it an ideal place to settle. Peter Stuyvesant, then Governor, was not immediately sure how to accept the new people, but he did nonetheless, and they

established a home and a congregation with their own burial ground.⁷ To this day Jews that cannot afford individual burial are still not sent to the greater New York City potter's field. The Hebrew Free Burial Association provides for traditional religious burials for its people who cannot be claimed by family, or who are too poor to afford their own private burials.⁸

A potter's field was introduced to New Amsterdam, used to bury the unknown or unwanted foreigners, although the exact date is unknown. One part of this burial ground was rediscovered during a site excavation in lower Manhattan during the early construction of the new Foley Square Federal Office Building by the General Services Administration (GSA). The GSA was forced to confront its ancestral ghosts with the discovery of human remains of primarily African descent dating back to the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹ The African Burial Ground is part of the first documented potter's field in New York, evident in maps from the early 18th Century. The GSA halted the project due to public uprising that the found remains must be adequately preserved rather than built upon.

Slaves were brought to New Amsterdam starting in 1635 from Africa and the West Indies, and were immediately employed in the construction of the new town. They began clearing forests and building streets, growing food for the colony and building public buildings.¹⁰ When

N.A., "An Old Cemetery, 7
Burial Ground of Early
Hebrew Immigrants to New
Amersterdam," *New York Herald*,
9 November 1890.

<http://www.hebrewfreeburial.org/> and "On Staten Island a Jewish Burial", *New York Times*, 31 April 2009.

Although exact dates cannot 9
be determined for the found
remains, records match European
accounts through maps and
written records depicting the
early origin of the potter's field.
See maps attached to these
pages and African Burial Ground
project of Duke University Lee
D. Baker (compiler), "Research
Bibliography African Burial
Ground Project," Duke University,
<<http://www.africanburialground.duke.edu/>>.

Douglas Harper, "Slavery in New 10
York," Douglas Harper, <http://www.slavenorth.com/newyork.htm>.

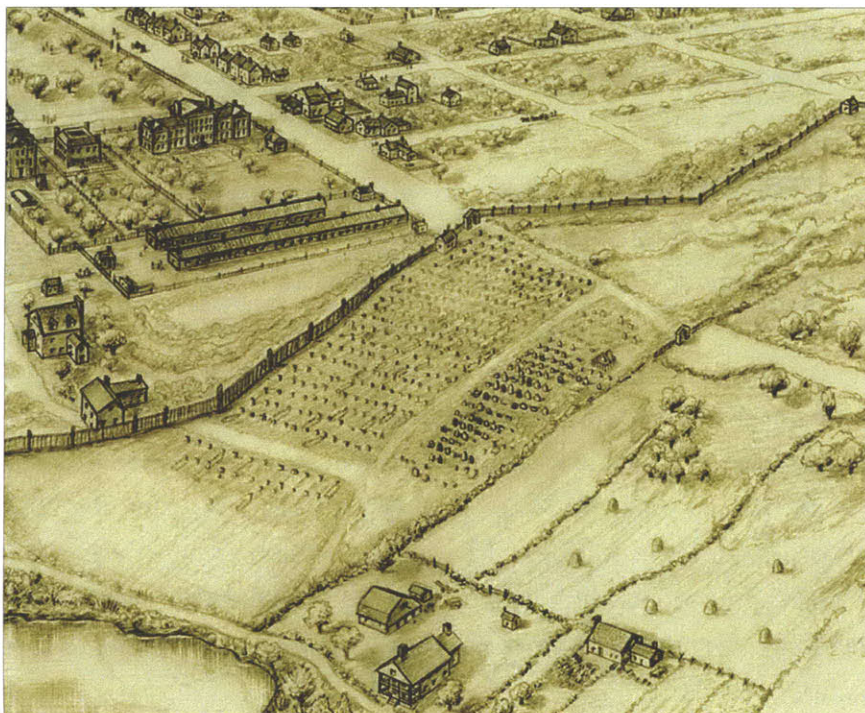


Figure 3.6:
Called "The Negroes Burying
Ground" or the "Potter's Field"
on various maps from the 17th
and 18th centuries, this five
and a half-acre plot of land
held approximately 20,000
people until it was closed up
and forgotten in the growing
city. Source: Taylor, Clarice. *The
African Burial Ground Project*,
1992. 4.

- 11 Philip Ernest Schoenberg, "Evolution of City Hall Park and Foley Square," New York Map Society, <http://www.nymapsociety.org/FEATURES/SCHOENBERG.HTM>.
- 12 Baker (compiler), "Research Bibliography African Burial Ground Project."
- 13 Refer to the map made by DOCHS depicting the historical sites of the potter's field in New York. The author modified this map for this project. <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/hart/html/slide1.html>
- 14 Baker (compiler), "Research Bibliography African Burial Ground Project."

the West Indian and African people died, they were buried in the swampy land that lay to the south of the fresh water pond. Investigations indicate that some graves are located as deep as 16 to 28 feet below street level, implying stacked burial. This area once was a series of marshes that the native people boated across during the rainy seasons, but during Dutch rule became site of the city commons, which was land free to the public where livestock could graze and public celebrations took place.¹¹ At the northern end lay the burial ground for slaves of the new colony, but other groups such as South American, European, and even those of Native American descent were also buried there.¹² It remained operative as a place of interment until 1794, when land far to the north was designated as the next potter's field (site of current day Madison Square Park).

Land surrounding this complex was not cultivated for city life yet, but rather acted as valuable farmland. On the outside of the protective wall enclosing the city lay the City Commons. In 1811 City Hall was moved to this land for its third and final location. The commons became City Hall Park, and today the entire area is dedicated to governance - local, state and federal. Where the Tweed Courthouse now sits was once a hospital and almshouse. Only 14,000 square feet has been excavated today, and the Department of Corrections Historical Society suggests that the potter's field rests under the current day Surrogate Court Building.¹³ The total extent of the potter's field is much larger, however, and while walking through these structures of governance, one is very likely walking over the bones of early slaves and other social outcasts from centuries ago.

With the discovery of the African burial ground in the 1991, many actions immediately went into effect in an effort to remedy centuries of forgotten memory. The GSA created a steering committee to determine future use of the land after the burial ground was discovered. Until the memorial park was built the construction site was quickly brought back to a state of serene identity when construction workers filled the site back in, and covered it with grass and a prominent sign providing a historical perspective on what might have occurred 300 years ago until the final National Monument was built. An African-American architect was hired to build a memorial, which is, according to the GSA, is "the single-most important, historic urban archeological project undertaken in the United States."¹⁴



Today at least a portion of the old potter's field has been reconstructed into a memorial park, designed by New York architect Rodney Leon. Responding to the awarded commission, Leon stated, "The African Burial Ground represents a unique opportunity and responsibility for all of us to tell our story to the world and to specifically honor the memories of the ancestral Africans. Our generation has been entrusted with this awesome responsibility and we're honored."¹⁵ This burial ground was quickly forgotten, buried under land utilized for various constructed purposes. The discovery of so many graves created an opportunity to reconnect with past cultures and events. Evidence of previous cultures provides an opportunity to confront unknown historical events, thereby bringing the elusive goal of historical objectivity a step forward. Without this action, that moment of history is likely to depart into the forgotten past.

The site was recently remembered again through the opening of the African Burial Ground Visitor Center in February of 2010. A New York Times article highlighting the opening asked the question, "Among the scars left by the heritage of slavery, one of the greatest is an absence: where are the memorials, cemeteries, architectural structures or sturdy sanctuaries that typically provide the ground for a people's memory?"¹⁶ The question calls attention to the significance of objects of memory precisely because, in the words of Charles Maier, they demonstrate "recognition and honor by the wider civic culture."¹⁷ Because of the monument and the memorial, the African Burial Ground shows through

N.A., "Rodney Leon Tapped 15
to Design National Historic
Landmark; Winner to Create
Memorial for 17th, 18th-Century
Africans," EXODUS On-line,
[http://www.exodusnews.com/
HISTORY/History025.htm](http://www.exodusnews.com/HISTORY/History025.htm).

——, "A Burial Ground and Its 16
Dead Are Given Life," *New York
Times*, 26 February 2010.

Charles S. Maier, "A Surfeit of 17
Memory? Reflections on History,
Melancholy and Denial," *History
& Memory* 5, no. 2 (1993). @1.

- 18 Jesse Lee Farber, "Early American Gravestones," in Introduction to the Farber Gravestone Collection (American Antiquarian Society, 2003).
- 19 David Charles Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History, Creating the North American Landscape* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), @36.

a commemorative process that society regrets the actions it once took toward members of the African community. The other burials, however, remain footnotes in the commemorative story.

Comparative death predilections

The Europeans who moved to the new land in the 1600s brought with them their beliefs and practices; among them were rituals associated with death. There was a longstanding relationship between living space and death space that was not severed by the move across the Atlantic Ocean; rather, the customs of the settlers followed those of the Europeans very closely even after the new country was established as governmentally autonomous. Burials were seen as dirty but absolutely necessary in order to ward off evil spirits that came alongside death. As was common throughout the new colonies dotting the eastern coastline, burial yards were often attached to churches or meetinghouses, or on town commons. The oldest of these yards are not dissimilar from what we see today with the gravestones sunken or tilted, close together and disorderly.



Figure 3.7: Winged Death 1700 - 1790 with "here lies" or "here lies the body of." Source: Google images/open source.

The lawnmower became the orderly device that transformed the pits of urban death from chaos into seemly serenity. Even three or four centuries ago, when religiousness formed a puritanical fervor that kept death vividly attached to life, burial was a less instrumental movement toward peace for the human soul than it was a reaction to fear of damnation. The headstones, when they appeared, were usually facing west (in response to the grave facing east following religious custom) with simple stone slabs depicting a skull and bones with wings attached, implying a soul's departure toward heaven. Gravestone art is an honest reflection of the social culture of which it originates, and the carvings found on the early settlers tombstones indicates a ready acceptance of death and mortality.¹⁸

Gravestones do not exist for every person from this time, however. Trinity Church in downtown Manhattan holds over one hundred thousand bodies in a space the size of a large building, making it physically impossible to demarcate every individual.¹⁹ Headstone recognition was not a primary motivating factor in choosing a burial site, but locating the body as close as possible to the church was. This meant that several bodies might have been buried on top of each other, in the same graves,

or next to each other. In Medieval European tradition, the focus was not on how one was buried, but rather where.

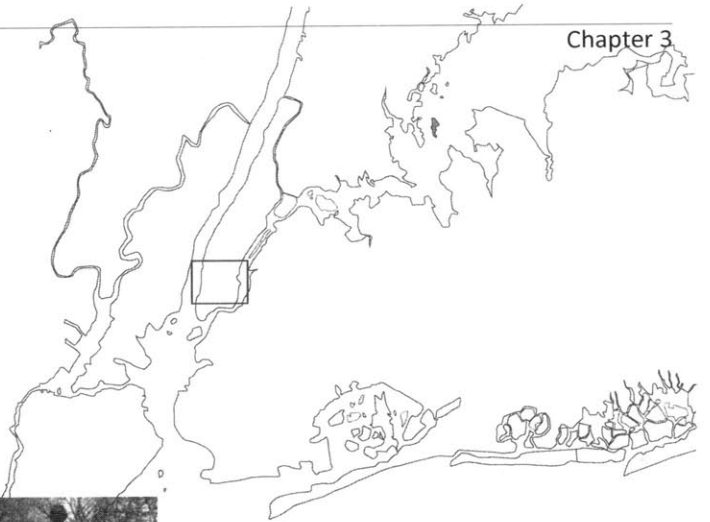
Blanche Linden, in her book about America's most famous 19th century cemetery, Silent City on a Hill, suggests until the 18th Century in both Europe and America, "Denying burial in consecrated ground was an ecclesiastical punishment. Medieval man did not think in terms of having an individual grave in a fixed place in aeternum. He cared only that the Church accept his body, to dispose of it as it pleased but within sacred ground so that he might be included in the regular prayers for the collective dead."²⁰ Only those who were unaffiliated with the church because of some moral or personal wrongdoing were not included in the churchyard. These bodies were often left in shallow graves or discarded outside the city walls, exposed to the elements and to predators, unprotected by religious faith and by cemetery walls.

Blanche M. G. Linden and 20
Library of American Landscape
History., *Silent City on a Hill*
: *Picturesque Landscapes of*
Memory and Boston's Mount
Auburn Cemetery (Amherst:
University of Massachusetts
Press in association with Library
of American Landscape History,
2007). @15,16.

Thomas Hardy
"The Leveled Churchyard"

O Passenger, pray list and catch
Our sighs and piteous groans,
Half stifled in this jumbled patch
Of wretched memorial stones!
We late-lamented, resting here
Are mixed to human jam,
And each to each exclaims in fear,
"I know not which I am!"²¹

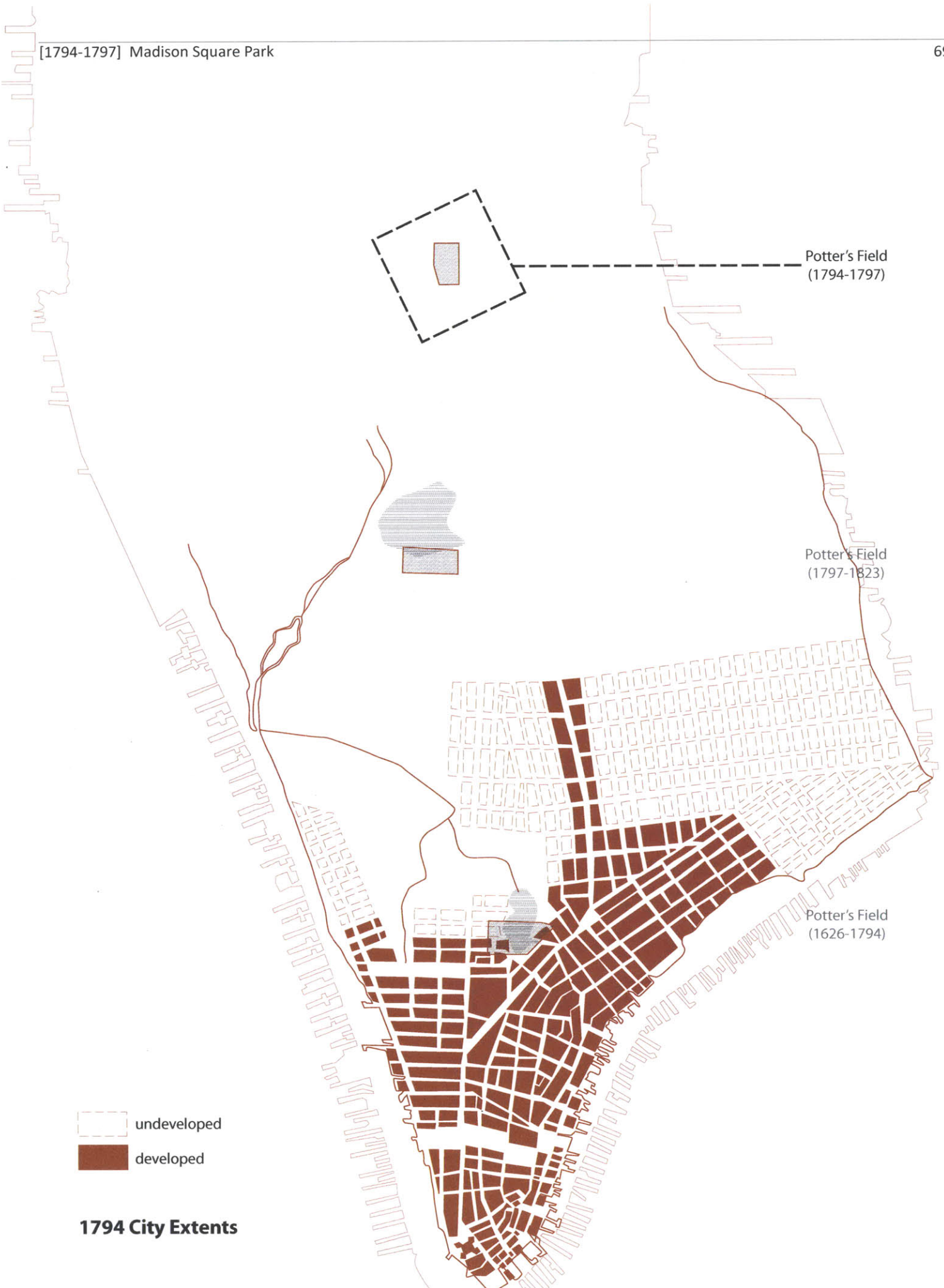
Thomas Hardy, (Gutenberg 21
Project, 1902).



figures (from left to right): open source images (www.google.com)

1. William Jenkins Worth Monument
2. Chester Arthur Statue
3. Statue to Alexander Lyman Holley (open source images/www.google.com)
4. Statue of William H. Seward





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1794 City Extents

Figure 3.8 (previous spread, right):

Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1794, with the location of the potter's field.

Source: Author

Figure 3.9 (previous spread, left): Google Map of Madison Square Park today and sculptures that exist in the park.

Source: Google and open source.

- 22 Ira Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City* (Syracus: Syracuse University Press, 1972). @18.

- 23 New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, "Madison Square Park 2," New York City, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/madisonsquarepark>.

3.2 [1794] Madison Square Park

Population (1790): 33,000²²

Madison Square Park today is situated among skyscrapers, anchoring the southern end of New York's midtown and providing a bit of relief from the concrete, steel and glass that surrounds the park. A popular public space, the grounds are utilized as a sunny lunch spot by young professionals who work in the office buildings surrounding it. Temporary art exhibitions are often on display through the park in the summer months, but permanent sculptures were designed into the parkland in 1870 in its re-landscaping, highlighting a few of New York City's notable, and less well-known, figures and heroes.²³

The 6.8-acre park hosts a variety of public activities from movies to art installations, and even boasts one of New York's favorite fast food joints, where people wait up to two hours for a hamburger and a milkshake. More prevalent landscaped cemeteries throughout the cities sponsor public events throughout the year, encouraging lively activity among the dead. Typically, though, they will not allow food gatherings or picnics. It makes one wonder: if people knew they were eating above some of New York's 18th century less appreciated inhabitants, would they enjoy their hamburgers as much?

Timeline of events in New York City Related to the Potter's Field

- 1760s** The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the American colonies.
- 1776** -Great New York fire. Fire destroys a quarter of the city immediately after the British captured it during the Revolutionary War.²
- In France, Louis XVI decrees that all French cemeteries should be moved out of towns.³
- 1782** Picturesque Movement introduced in England; sets the tone for cemetery design from the early 19th century onward.⁴
- 1788** So-called Doctors Riot in New York City; as many as 5,000 people storm Columbia Medical School because of grave robbing by medical students.⁵
- 1789** George Washington's Inauguration as first President of the United States after the Constitution is ratified (1787). New York City is (for a short time) capital of the new country.
- 1795** Yellow fever epidemic kills 732 people in New York City; officials send many bodies to the potter's field at the area of present-day Madison Square Park for quarantined burial.⁶
- 1798** Perhaps as many as 50,000 people flee New York's most deadly Yellow Fever epidemic, which killed 2,086 people in the city. Victims' bodies are interred in the site that would become Washington Square Park, at that time well north of the city's population.⁷
- 1804** Père Lachaise Cemetery opens in Paris, marking the beginning of landscaped cemeteries and ending churchyards as the prevalent form of corpse disposal in France.⁸
- 1805** Yellow fever epidemics add to the fervor against burial grounds near populations; also in 1811 and 1822.⁹
- 1824** Connecticut passes first Anatomy Act, providing for a legal use of certain bodies for dissection purposes.¹⁰
- 1830** New York Marble Cemetery and New York City Marble Cemetery are privately established in New York as alternatives to churchyard inhumation.¹¹ Although privately owned, these cemeteries resemble potter's fields in their lack of religious orientation.
- 1831** The first American "rural" cemetery, Mount Auburn Cemetery is established outside Boston, Massachusetts, sparking a trend for the next century in cemetery design.¹²
- 1831** Massachusetts passes "Anatomy Act", allowing medical schools the use of unclaimed bodies for research.¹³
- 1832** The first cholera epidemic hits New York City; kills 3,515.¹⁴
- 1838** Greenwood Cemetery opens in Brooklyn,¹⁵ New York.
- 1845** First baseball club, the New York Knickerbockers, develops at Madison Square Park.¹⁶

See Appendix at end of Chapter 3 for full timeline and citations.

24 Roosevelt, *New York: A Sketch of the City's Social, Political, and Commercial Progress from the First Dutch Settlement to Recent Times*. "The Closing of the Colonial Period" @1.

25 Ibid.@3.

26 Public property at that time did not refer to land available for common use such as a city park but rather to house publicly funded programs and institutions. These publicly designated lands were turned over to the Parks Department in the 19th Century, including Bowling Green, City Hall Park, and the Battery. Their initial uses were not for the sole purpose of providing open space, something that was deemed needed only one to two centuries later. New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Earliest New York City Parks," New York City, http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_about/parks_history/earliestparks.html.

27 ———, "Madison Square Park 1," New York City, http://www.johnmuir.nycparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=10764.

28 Recreation, "Madison Square Park" 2.

Figure 3.13: Madison Cottage, 1852. Source: NYPL Digital Library

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, New York City contained some 20,000 inhabitants.²⁴ At that time, according to Theodore Roosevelt in his history of the city, New York was smaller than either Boston or Philadelphia, but diversity played a dominant role in the formation of society. This fact alone set New York apart from every other American city. In the eighteenth century New York provided space for a variety of religious denominations, unlike the similitude of the people of Boston or other early Puritanical societies.²⁵

Before the unobjectionable use of public land as pleasure grounds, the area was host to a number of other public purposes. The area around where Madison Square Park now sits was designated as public property in 1686, marking it as one of the oldest public places in the history of the city.²⁶ This potter's field was in primary operation for the city for only three to four years, from 1794 to 1797, when it moved to the area now occupied by Washington Square Park. A decade and a half after the burial ground moved, the land was used as a United States Army Arsenal and part of a military parade ground. The arsenal was used for two decades at most and was overtaken as a house of refuge for juvenile delinquents.²⁷ In 1839 the area was leveled by fire and subsequently opened as a park in 1847, named for James Madison who was the fourth President of the United States. The park has been witness to many commemorative events of the city, including the 100-year anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence.²⁸



On death and beauty

Toward the end of the 18th Century, the Enlightenment era was marked by questions of aestheticism and the sublime. The English were some of the earliest Europeans to espouse a rural retreat in favor of the old order. The new aestheticism revolutionized the way Europeans constructed their relationships with life and with death. Neoclassicism combined with rural nature to create a new mode of design called the Picturesque. This movement sought to construct that which was outside of the control of humanity by imitating nature and utilizing it for human purposes. This allowed civilization to enter into a natural setting in order to enjoy its beauty without the inconsistency that the wilderness forced one to succumb. The landscapes created through picturesque ideals were done so as if viewed through a picture frame, thereby idealizing nature in the most controlled of settings.²⁹

Commemoration grew out of these aesthetic principles as a generalized fear of death was replaced by a grander contemplation of life. Constructed landscapes “designed to stir the sentiment of melancholy appealed to this new mentality. They came to be perceived as appropriate places for commemorative structures.”³⁰ David Sloane, in his book *The Last Great Necessity*, writes:

*The picturesque offered an opportunity in which nature could be more fully exploited as an instructor about moral and ethical behavior in an increasingly profane and commercial world. The changing seasons reminded visitors of their mortality; the wildness of a thunderstorm, of their vulnerability; and nature’s aura, of their insignificance... At a moment when urbanization and industrialization were isolation people from the forces of nature, the picturesque offered them a view of unhampered nature.*³¹

In England and France, memorials, monuments and family mausoleums were surrounded by trees, lakes, and flowers, bringing serenity to the commemoration of death. It would, as will be pointed out later, begin to apply to cemeteries as well in the beginning of the 19th century. For the common population this aesthetic shift marked a new relationship with landscapes and death. The less fortunate were not able to move themselves out of the old order, an unchanged aspect of society even today.

Linden and Library of American Landscape History., *Silent City on a Hill : Picturesque Landscapes of Memory and Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery.*@29-35;Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity : Cemeteries in American History.*@49; Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes : The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion, 2003).

Linden and Library of American Landscape History., *Silent City on a Hill : Picturesque Landscapes of Memory and Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery.* @29.

Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity : Cemeteries in American History.*@50. Sloane explains in this chapter that the most symbolic movement toward landscaped cemeteries came with the death of Jean -Jacques Rousseau in 1778. The public saw a grave that was surrounded by gardens and liked it.

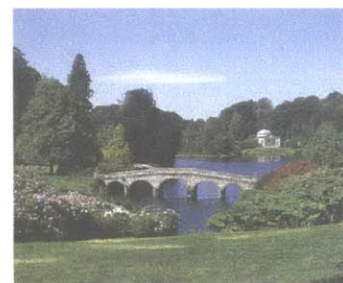


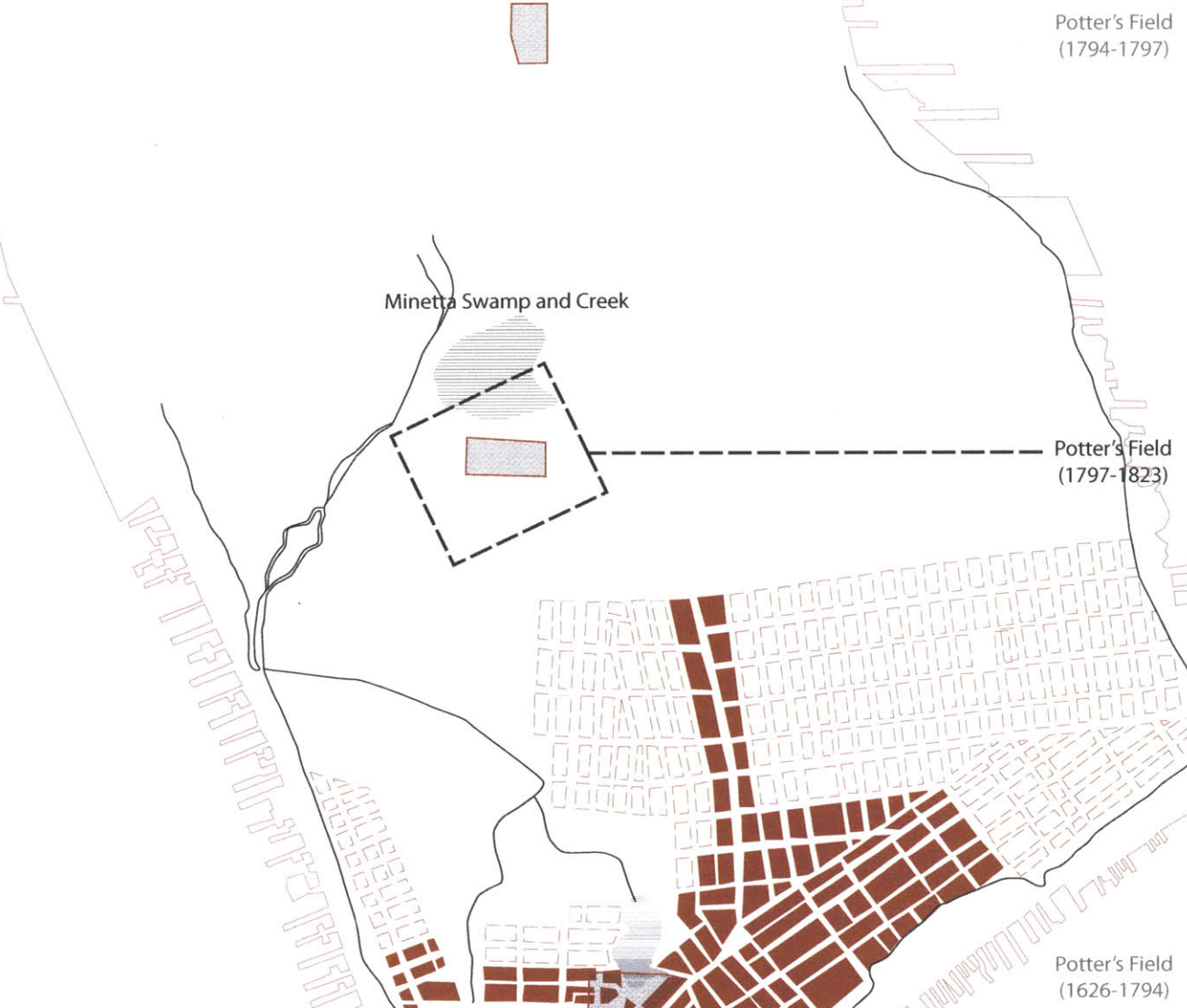
Figure 3.10: Stourhead. A famous example of a picturesque landscape. Source: <www.flickr.com>



figures (from left to right): open source images (www.google.com)

1. Washington Square Park Arch with an inscription reading: *Let us raise a standard to which the wise and the honest can repair. The event is in the hand of God.* - George Washington
2. Statue to Guiseppe Garibaldi
3. Statue to Alexander Lyman Holley





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1797 City Extents

Figure 3.11 (previous spread, right):
 Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1797, displaying the location of the potter’s field.
 Source: Author

Figure 3.12 (previous spread, left):
 Diagrams of this location today
 Source: Author

32 Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City*. @18.

33 Eric Homberger, *The Historical Atlas of New York City: A Visual Celebration of 400 Years of New York City’s History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005).@57, 58.

34 Claude Edwin Heaton, “Yellow Fever in New York City,” *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 34, no. 2 (1946). @67-78.

3.3 [1797] Washington Square Park

Population (1790): 33,000³²

The Manhattan neighborhood of Greenwich Village today is teeming with the collegiate lives of New York University students and young urban professionals. Central to Greenwich Village is Washington Square Park, an active urban space where artists display their talents and musicians perform their melodies. It maintains a vitality of life as people flow through the park, sitting for lunch or to meet friends, unaware of its dark history. The site of this vivid urban node has been used as public ground since the end of the 18th century, when it was utilized as a municipal burial ground.

In the Revolutionary War occupation by British forces, the city’s boundaries did not stretch as far north as the location of the square. By the late 1790s the built-up area had grown to the present line of Houston Street. Before it provided the pedestal for Fifth Avenue’s course toward Central Park, Washington Square acted as space of interment of the slaves and the poor.³³ A farm in the northern outskirts of the city became the land on which the Washington Square stands, surrounded by a few wealthy New Yorker’s country retreat houses.

The land had been attractive to the elite class for its salubrious air and bucolic surroundings, but by 1795 the Yellow Fever epidemics began their devastating campaigns against the city and the land was required for use as an infectious graveyard. The population was around 50,000 people, and most chose to flee the city with the second round of this terrifying disease. There was no understanding yet as to the cause of the disease or how to treat it, so many theories formed medical and official reactions toward protecting the city. The death toll was high, partially due to fear. Hundreds of citizens were guillotined and hanged to prevent passage of the disease in a fearful gesture lest New York repeat the great epidemics seen in Philadelphia only a few years before.³⁴ It was not only the living that were in danger of transmitting disease, but the dead as well. The corpses were seen as toxic and highly contagious, and actions were taken to insure that they were not kept in contact with civilized society.

Timeline of events in New York City Related to the Potter's Field

- 1760s The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the American colonies.
- 1776 -Great New York fire. Fire destroys a quarter of the city immediately after the British captured it during the Revolutionary War.²
- In France, Louis XVI decrees that all French cemeteries should be moved out of towns.³
- 1782 Picturesque Movement introduced in England; sets the tone for cemetery design from the early 19th century onward.⁴
- 1788 So-called Doctors Riot in New York City; as many as 5,000 people storm Columbia Medical School because of grave robbing by medical students.⁵
- 1789 George Washington's Inauguration as first President of the United States after the Constitution is ratified (1787). New York City is (for a short time) capital of the new country.
- 1795 Yellow fever epidemic kills 732 people in New York City; officials send many bodies to the potter's field at the area of present-day Madison Square Park for quarantined burial.⁶
- 1798 Perhaps as many as 50,000 people flee New York's most deadly Yellow Fever epidemic, which killed 2,086 people in the city. Victims' bodies are interred in the site that would become Washington Square Park, at that time well north of the city's population.⁷
- 1804 Père Lachaise Cemetery opens in Paris, marking the beginning of landscaped cemeteries and ending churchyards as the prevalent form of corpse disposal in France.⁸
- 1805 Yellow fever epidemics add to the fervor against burial grounds near populations; also in 1811 and 1822.⁹
- 1824 Connecticut passes first Anatomy Act, providing for a legal use of certain bodies for dissection purposes.¹⁰
- 1830 New York Marble Cemetery and New York City Marble Cemetery are privately established in New York as alternatives to churchyard inhumation.¹¹ Although privately owned, these cemeteries resemble potter's fields in their lack of religious orientation.
- 1831 The first American "rural" cemetery, Mount Auburn Cemetery is established outside Boston, Massachusetts, sparking a trend for the next century in cemetery design.¹²
- 1831 Massachusetts passes "Anatomy Act", allowing medical schools the use of unclaimed bodies for research.¹³
- 1832 The first cholera epidemic hits New York City; kills 3,515.¹⁴
- 1838 Greenwood Cemetery opens in Brooklyn,¹⁵ New York.
- 1845 First baseball club, the New York Knickerbockers, develops at Madison Square Park.¹⁶

See Appendix at end of Chapter 3 for full timeline and citations.

35 Pollio Vitruvius and Morris Hicky Morgan, *Vitruvius: The Ten Books on Architecture* (New York, : Dover Publications, 1960). @ Book 1: Siting the City, p. 17.

36 Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces (1967), *Heterotopias*," (1967).@19.

Today we are apt to blame buried corpses for groundwater contamination more than anything else, something that is taken into consideration in the planning of any cemetery. At the turn of the 18th century, though, groundwater contamination from the buried corpses was not considered to be the cause of pollution so much as the air that people breathed. There was a prevalent theory for centuries that diseases were caused by "miasma", which in Greek means "pollution". Miasmas were noxious vapors that spread through the air, especially at night, causing people to breathe in the very diseases that were killing so many of them. Architectural and City planning principles were often partially constructed around these theories, evident in Vitruvius' writings:

*First comes the choice of a very healthy site. Such a site will be high, neither misty nor frosty, and in a climate neither hot nor cold, but temperate further without marshes in neighbourhood. For when the morning breezes blow toward town at sunrise; if they bring with them mists from marshes and, mingled with the mist, the poisonous breath of the creatures of the marshes to be wafted into the bodies of the inhabitants, they will make the site unhealthy.*³⁵

Figure 3.13: Depiction of miasmatic disease traumatizing a community.

Source: "A Short History of the National Institute of Health." National Library of Medicine photographic archive.



The yellow fever epidemics contributed to this misunderstanding of the infectiousness of diseased corpses, and miasmatic theories frightened citizens into believing that dead bodies spread noxious vapors through the night, contaminating the air and water around the city. Some two hundred were burned on the Battery, but the vast majority was sent uptown to the site of the current potter's field, at a protective distance from society, where buried bodies could not leach into the groundwater and transmit the disease to the living. Michel Foucault exemplifies this shift in "Of Other Spaces", where he says:

*The dead, it is supposed, bring illness to the living, and it is the presence and proximity of the dead right beside the houses, next to the church, almost in the middle of the street, it is this proximity that propagates death itself.*³⁶

The previous potter's field had been filled to capacity, so by 1797 the area around current day Washington Square Park was used to bury all of those groups of people whose social identities did not conform to the larger New York collective identity - the slaves, the diseased, the impoverished, the anonymous. The identities of the people who filled this land shaped a negative memory of place and enforced additional

unscrupulous activity to further define current perception and on-going memory. During this period events like duels and public hangings added another layer of activity above the graves, further enforcing the stereotype the burial ground already confronted.³⁷ After the potter's field was decommissioned the land was used as the Washington Square Military Parade Ground, training civilian soldiers for battle in 1826.³⁸ By 1849, the parade ground was remade into a public park, and has existed in that context since.

Cemetery Reform

In Europe throughout the 18th Century cemetery changes were in the air. Churchyards were depraved and overcrowded. Although it was once considered important to be buried as close to the altar as possible, it became a liability for urban governance. It was not possible to continue burial in these small churchyards, but more importantly, it was no longer desirable. There was a marked belief that the cemeteries were part of the cause of disease in cities and were seen as health hazards. As early as the beginning of the 18th Century, architects and city officials advocated for the removal of burial grounds from city centers to the outskirts of town. It was not just the potter's fields that belonged outside, but all forms of burial no longer had a place in the center of the city. In 1786 Paris instituted a ban on cemeteries in cities,³⁹ and from that point on cemeteries were constructed outside the city limits. Other urban centers followed suit, although New York would not officially retract burials within city limits until more than half a century later.

Today, many of these cemeteries can be found within the city limits as the population grew to meet the rural periphery. For the landscaped cemeteries, this posed less of a problem, as people were willing to coexist with the dead as long as landscaped burial space signified peaceful serenity. For a brief moment, until the living population grew to meet the new locations of the dead, private cemeteries were given the same geographic placement as the potter's field. At this time in the United States, there were what we might consider "environmental reformers," people who were beginning to make linkages between the quality of the environment in the city and human health. This followed in the European trends that began in the early 18th Century and described previously, aiming to link burial grounds with landscaping, thereby creating park-like settings for the recently deceased as well as outdoor grounds for the living to occupy.

Emily Kies Folpe, *It Happened on Washington Square*, Center Books on Space, Place, and Time (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). @55-69.

New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, "Washington Square Park," New York City, <http://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/washingtonsquarepark/>.

This belief was part of the creation of the famous catacombs in the Roman and Parisian churches

40 N.A., "Père Lachaise Cemetery," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pere_Lachaise_Cemetery.

41 ———, "Saints Innocents Cemetery," Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saints_Innocents_Cemetery.

42 Sloane, *The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History*.@49.

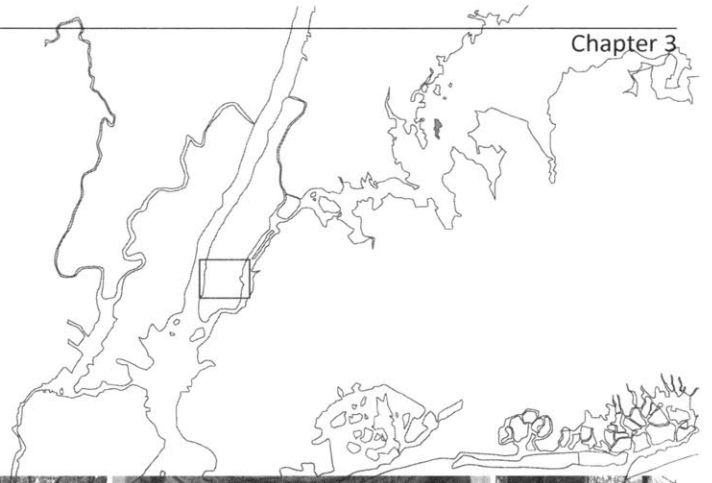
Père Lachaise marked the first of such cemeteries, coming into existence in 1804 through the dictates of Napoleon I on the Eastern outskirts of Paris.⁴⁰ Père Lachaise was founded in response to the overcrowded conditions of Paris' inner-city cemeteries, specifically the Cimetière des Innocents, which was used as a mass grave from the 12th to the 18th centuries.⁴¹ Through governmental and public reaction to the extremity of such death and decay in full view, this new cemetery was situated outside city limits on the former estate of King Louis XIV's confessor. The grounds were taken care of by this confessor who was considered to be an enthusiastic gardener, which allowed the cemetery to take on a picturesque quality never experienced before.⁴² Père Lachaise was a transitory symbol because it was built with conflicting designs of formal and picturesque, but enforced naturalistic notions.



Figure 3.14 (left): Père Lachaise. Source: <www.flickr.com/vineyard>.

Figure 3.15 (right): Père Lachaise aerial map. Source: Google Earth Maps.

Paris' decision to move cemeteries began a tradition of separating death from life, and since then the gesture has not been questioned in western culture. Geographically, potter's fields and cemeteries were joined in the periphery of the city limits, de-polarizing them in terms of location. This was as far as the similarities end, however, as both public and private cemeteries became hallmarks of landscaped beauty, while the potter's field was moved further from sight. Previously, graveyards in their upheaval and disorderliness were earthly indications of purgatory - a necessary waiting zone until one might reach the grander space of eternal delight. With this shift, cemeteries could now represent eternal paradise, an Eden on earth. Those who were not to be buried in peaceful solemnity were stuck in an antiquated landscape of death, furthering the distinction between the common and wealthy classes with those of little means. Burial landscapes clearly indicated the divisions of personal heavenly worth.



figures (from left to right): open source images (www.google.com)

1. Monument to Benito Juarez
2. Monument to Gertrude Stein
3. Monument to Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
4. Monument to William Cullen Bryant
5. Monument to William Earl Dodge



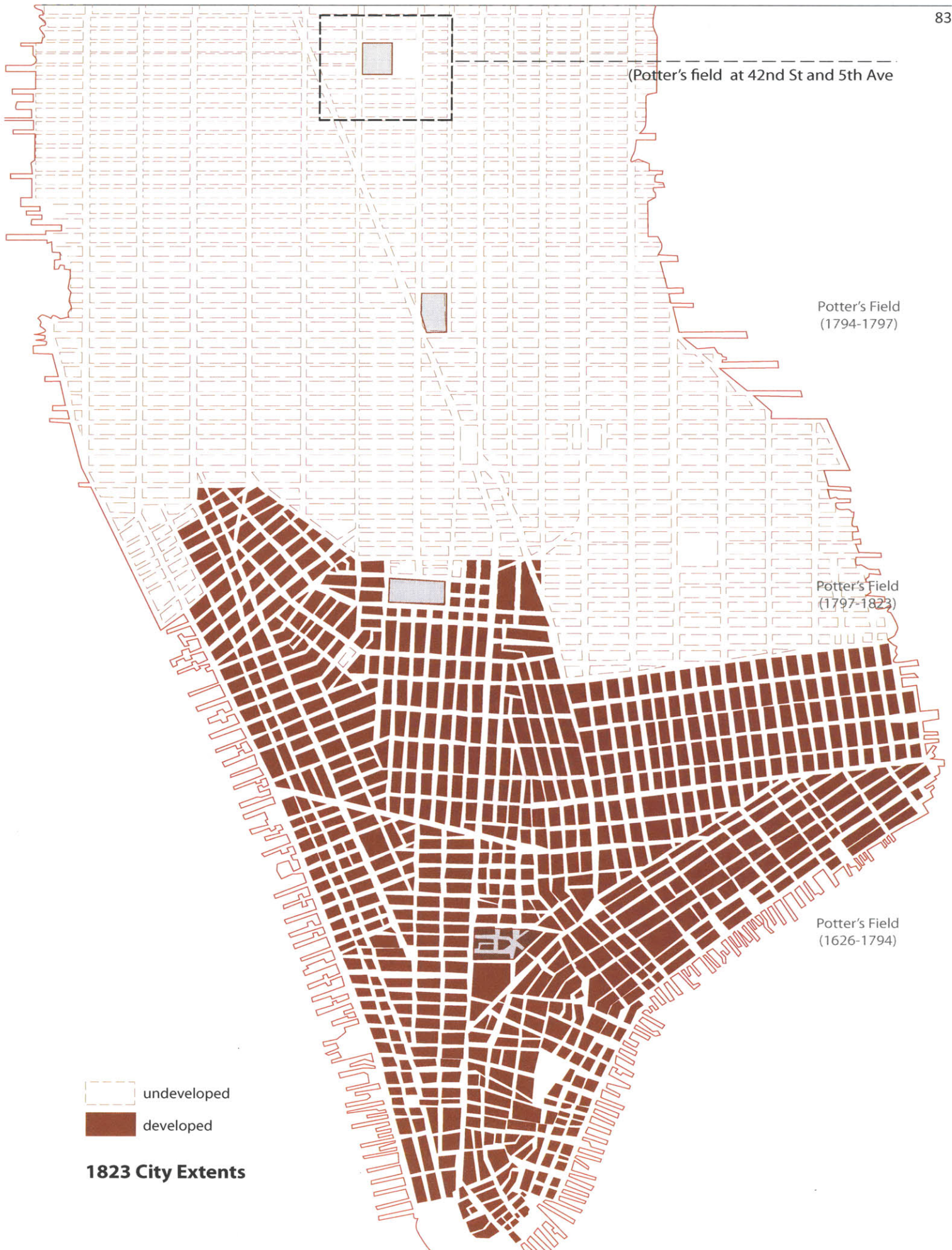


Figure 3.15 (previous spread, left):
 Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1823, with the location of the potter's field.
 Source: Author

Figure 3.16 (previous spread, right):
 Site of this area today as Bryant Park. Source: Google Maps and open source images.

- 43 Rosenwaik, *Population History of New York City*. @18.
- 44 N.A., "Bryant Park History; Early History: Potter's Field," Bryant Park Corporation, <http://www.bryantpark.org/history/reservoir-square.php>.

3.4 [1823] Bryant Park and the New York Public Library

Population (1820): 123,706⁴³

Bryant Park suffered serious neglected from the 1930s on, but made a major come back in the late '80s after decades of drug infestations and criminal dealings. Today it is a calm green lawn in the heart of the city occupied by professionals checking their email or taking in an evening movie on the lawn. Flanked by Times Square to the west and the United Nations Headquarters to the East, the park and the New York Public Library fit squarely among the iconic constructed figureheads of New York.

The potter's field was sent to a northern reach of the city not long after the Commissioner's Plan of New York City was published in 1811 and finalized in 1821, which determined a strict new layout for the entire city and eliminated any natural inconsistencies within the land that interfered with the new grid. The city planners at the turn of the century understood the potential and future breadth of the city and swept a grid over the entire island of Manhattan. The grid conflicted with existing farmland and public land, a piece of which was turned over to a new potter's field when necessity arose. This land was similar in characteristic to the area of Madison Square Park in that it was designated as public property since at least 1686.⁴⁴ At the time it was still wilderness and hunting grounds, and this area of Manhattan to the north did not begin to receive permanent residents until well into the middle of the 19th century.

The potter's field was decommissioned in 1836, when the constructed city began to overtake the area around it. The city was beginning to boom, and urban planning projections were key issues. Before the city grew to meet the public land, and after it was used as a potter's field, the Union Army used this ground as military training

Timeline of events in New York City Related to the Potter's Field

- 1795 Yellow fever epidemic kills 732 people in New York City; officials send many bodies to the potter's field at the area of present-day Madison Square Park for quarantined burial.⁶
- 1798 Perhaps as many as 50,000 people flee New York's most deadly Yellow Fever epidemic, which killed 2,086 people in the city. Victims' bodies are interred in the site that would become Washington Square Park, at that time well north of the city's population.⁷
- 1804 Père Lachaise Cemetery opens in Paris, marking the beginning of landscaped cemeteries and ending churchyards as the prevalent form of corpse disposal in France.⁸
- 1805 Yellow fever epidemics add to the fervor against burial grounds near populations; also in 1811 and 1822.⁹
- 1824 Connecticut passes first Anatomy Act, providing for a legal use of certain bodies for dissection purposes.¹⁰
- 1830 New York Marble Cemetery and New York City Marble Cemetery are privately established in New York as alternatives to churchyard inhumation.¹¹ Although privately owned, these cemeteries resemble potter's fields in their lack of religious orientation.
- 1831 The first American "rural" cemetery, Mount Auburn Cemetery is established outside Boston, Massachusetts, sparking a trend for the next century in cemetery design.¹²
- 1831 Massachusetts passes "Anatomy Act", allowing medical schools the use of unclaimed bodies for research.¹³
- 1832 The first cholera epidemic hits New York City; kills 3,515.¹⁴
- 1838 Greenwood Cemetery opens in Brooklyn,¹⁵ New York.
- 1845 First baseball club, the New York Knickerbockers, develops at Madison Square Park.¹⁶
- 1847 Rural Cemetery Act in New York¹⁷
- 1849 Second cholera epidemic kills 5,071 people in a population of 500,000.
- 1852 City Council prohibits new burials within the city limits.¹⁸
- 1854 -New York passes Anatomy Act.¹⁹
-John Snow, a British Physician, associates cholera with contaminated drinking water, refuting theory of miasmatic transmission of disease.
- 1858 Disinterment of those buried at 49th Street, moving 100,000 corpses to Ward Island²⁰
- 1861 -Beginning of the American Civil War
-Embalming becomes common practice in the United States because of the large number of dead bodies transported home during the war.
- 1866 Cholera epidemic kills nearly 600.²¹

See Appendix at end of Chapter 3 for full timeline and citations.

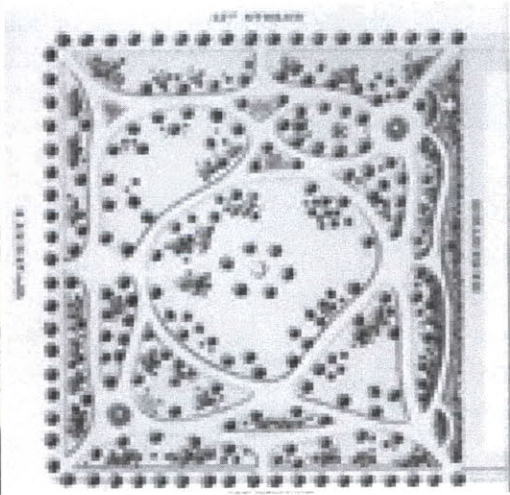
- 45 Leslie M. Harris, "The New York City Draft Riots of 1863," in *The Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (University of Chicago Press, 2003).



Figure 3.17: Original caption: "The Rioters Burning and Sacking the Colored Orphan Asylum." Source: *Harper's Weekly*, 1863.

Figure 3.18 (left): Croton reservoir from Fifth Avenue looking south. (1879). Source: New York Public Library.

Figure 3.19 (right): 1871 Plans for Reservoir Park (now Bryant Park) Improvements. Source: New York Parks and Recreation Department.



ground, like Washington Square Park before it. It became a polarized space when, in March of 1863, Abraham Lincoln introduced a federal draft law that required all male citizens between twenty-five and thirty-five years of age to be prepared for military duty. By July of that same year, five days of draft riots ran rampant throughout the city. Anger was turned toward the black people who were viewed as the cause of the war and, invariably, the cause of the draft. Because of the wartime symbolism of this parkland, perhaps, much of the Civil War Draft Riots took place around this land. The riots culminated in one terrifying act of savagery with the burning down of the Colored Orphan Asylum directly northeast of the old potter's field.⁴⁵ The riots were limited to Manhattan, but wartime activities took place on other potter's fields sites, most notably Washington Square, Madison Square, and Hart Island.

The land directly to the west also served a useful function for the city. The Croton Reservoir, which supplied the city with its water until 1899, was built next to the former burial ground in 1847. Fresh Pond was too filthy to continue to use for potable water supply, and the city determined a need to carry water from the north as a means of fresh water supply. The new fresh water system was considered to be one of the greatest engineering marvels the United States had seen, but its final destination remained only until the 1890's.

- 46 N.A., "Bryant Park History; Early History: Potter's Field." <http://www.bryantpark.org/history/reservoir-square.php>

Next to the reservoir, the old burial ground was built over briefly during the 1853 World's Fair by New York's own magnificent Crystal Palace, which burnt down in 1858.⁴⁶ Over one million people visited the Crystal Palace during the fair; over one million walked across another of New York's forgotten burial grounds.

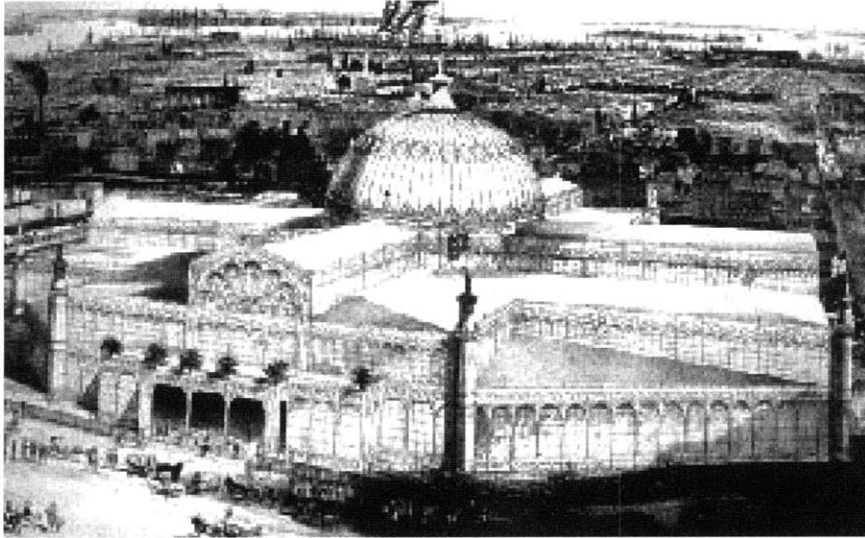


Figure 3.20: Crystal Palace.
Source: <<http://www.bryantpark.org/history/reservoir-square.php>>.

The Shifting Perception of Death

Public perceptions of death slowly began to change from an event of terror to one of peaceful sleep. Mount Auburn Cemetery opened outside of Boston, Massachusetts, marking the first of what were known as “rural cemeteries.” These cemeteries followed directly in line with European movements toward natural landscapes beginning a century before with the Picturesque ideals. Americans, like Europeans before them, had begun to think of cemeteries as decent and natural places to inhabit, both for the living and the dead. Landscape architects across the country mimicked this scenic landscape in their cemetery designs, making cemeteries precursors to some of the most celebrated urban parks.

One other very important change occurred with the introduction of this new cemetery type: that of the individual lot-holder. Bodies no longer were relegated to the common pit; instead, families bought three hundred square foot lots, ensuring sufficient space for coming generations. Mount Auburn was in part designed in reaction to Père Lachaise material ostentation, encouraging families to create memorials out of the natural landscape. Families bought their lots far ahead of ever needing them, allowing them opportunity to enjoy the setting. Many began to place family monuments, encouraged by local and even national attention.⁴⁷

Through these spatial gestures a class distinction was inflicted on the dead in much the same way as it already existed among the living. Those who could not afford family lots were relegated to the single plot section of the cemetery, where the owners were granted no rights

in decisions made about the place. Even those, though, had enough means to guarantee burial among the accepted social classes. Those with no means did not have this opportunity.

Changes in spatial design coexisted with intellectual ideals that prevailed throughout society. The Church exerted the strongest influence on social change, progressing from a medieval focus on an angry God to a loving and forgiving one, easing anxiety about the end of life. Through the Age of Enlightenment, a questioning of old morals and values took place, uprooting commonly held beliefs and replacing them with radical new ideas. Aside from the geographical and aesthetic changes made to places of death through ideas of naturalism, science began to creep into the discussion, also impacting cemetery location.



Figure 3.21: Tombstone showing the willow and the urn and reading “In Memory Of...” as was common from the end of the 18th Century throughout the 19th Century. Source: <www.flickr.com>.

American cities were expanding rapidly, and the “respectable classes” found themselves in too-close proximity to those of ill repute. Cholera struck the city for the first time in 1832, replacing the fear and havoc wreaked by the Yellow Fever Epidemics of the previous century. Cholera was misunderstood in its cause, just as all diseases at the time, but it was evident that the disease hit the lower class immigrant populations to a much greater degree than any other. Determined to be due to the filth and unsanitary conditions of the overcrowded slums, cholera proved to act as a disease of racial discrimination. In conjunction with the growing movements toward removing cemeteries from urban livelihoods, urban graveyards took an additional hit as miasmatic theories grew to their strongest. Fears about the role death played toward causing additional death abounded.

Another prejudice emerged in medical practices in the 19th century. As medical schools proliferated throughout the country, so too did the need for medical cadavers. The medical profession associated itself with anatomy over customary earth-based methods of healing, and required bodies for study. Problematically, however, custom dictated a protection of the dead from any form of maltreatment, including dissection for medical purposes. In America in the early 1800s, many states allowed executed criminals to be used for anatomical dissection, but this did not provide enough resources for the growing numbers entering into the profession. According to Michael Ragon, who wrote *A Traffic of Dead Bodies: Anatomy and Embodied Social Identity in Nineteenth-Century*

America, the United States experienced no less than seventeen anatomy riots between 1785 and 1855 because, “the unearthing and dissection of bodies was seen as an assault upon the dead and an affront to family and community honor.”⁴⁷ The only source of bodies that did not offend the sensibilities of the outspoken communities was the potter’s field.

State legislatures passed what were known as “anatomy acts”, starting with Connecticut in 1824. These acts provided that medical schools could use the bodies of unknown or unclaimed dead for dissection and research, ensuring that honorable citizens would not have to worry over the protection of their bodies after reaching the graves. Those who had no resources to imply value in life became valuable only after death to the medical community.⁴⁸



This new legislated distinction furthered the perceptions that burial in the potter’s field was the most foul of endings. Ragon states, “Incarceration in the almshouse and burial in the potter’s field already signified social death: anatomy acts added to that the penalty of dissection, hitherto associated only with heinous capital crimes.”⁵⁰

The two events in 1831 in Massachusetts’ - the founding of its celebrated cemetery and its anatomical laws could not have contrasted more. Burial in the rural cemetery was a tangible reenactment of Paradise, while burial in the potter’s field, “as an expression of [the pauper’s] vulnerability, powerlessness, and marginality,”⁵¹ was purgatory with the possibility of descending into the depths of the Inferno.

Michel Ragon, *The Space of Death : A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983).@ 3-4. 47

Thomas Laquer, “Bodies, Death, and Pauper Funerals,” *Representations* 1(1983).@109-131. 48

Tombstone inscription of Ruth Sprague, d1816, from Maple Grove Cemetery, Hoosick Falls, NY:

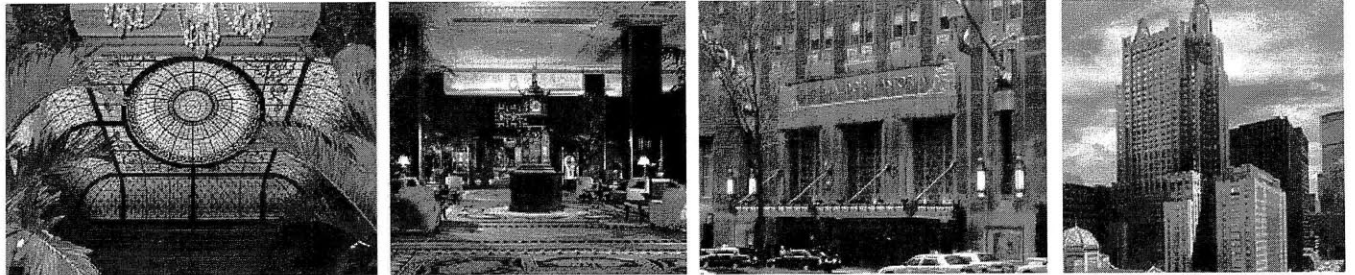
Ruth Sprague, daughter of Gibson and Elizabeth Sprague, died Jan. 11, 1846, aged 9 yrs., 4 mos., and 18 days. She was stolen from the grave by Roderick R. Crow & dissected at Dr. P.M. Armstrong's office in Hoosick, N.Y. from which place her mutilated remains were obtained & deposited here. Her body dissected by foolish men, her bones anatomized, her soul we trust has risen to God where few physicians rise.

Jason Soles, “The Resurrectionist: American Grave Robbers,” <http://www.moritorium.com/resurrectionist/graverobber.html>.

Figure 3.22: Grave Robbers stealing corpses for medicine, 19th Century. Source: Getty Images.

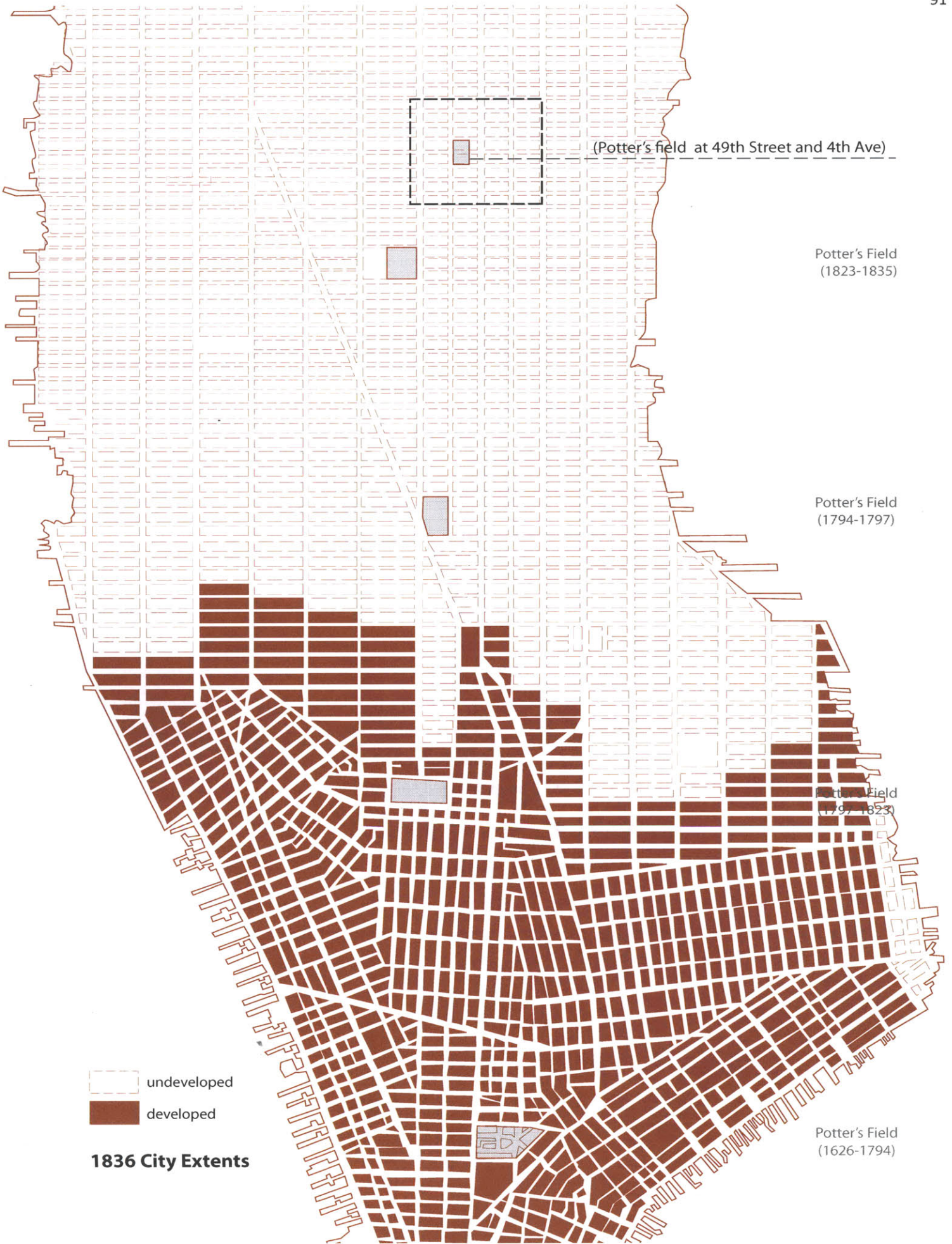
Ragon, *The Space of Death : A Study of Funerary Architecture, Decoration, and Urbanism*. @4. 50

Laquer, “Representations.”@122. 51



figures: open source images (www.google.com)
Waldorf Astoria Hotel





undeveloped
developed

1836 City Extents

(Potter's field at 49th Street and 4th Ave)

Potter's Field
(1823-1835)

Potter's Field
(1794-1797)

Potter's Field
(1797-1823)

Potter's Field
(1626-1794)

Figure 3.23 (previous spread, left):
Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1836, displaying the location of the potter's field.
Source: Author

Figure 3.24 (previous spread, right):
Diagrams of this location today
Source: Author

52 Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City*. @18.

53 Stanley Turkel, "The "New" Waldorf-Astoria Hotel (1931)," <http://www.hotelinteractive.com/article.aspx?articleID=7644>.

54 Charles King, "Columbia at the Outbreak of the Civil WarUnknown," *Columbia University Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1907).@ 157.

3.5 [1836] Waldorf Astoria

Population (1835): approximately 250,000⁵²

The Waldorf Astoria hotel is one of the most famous landmarks in New York City today, but it started as two hotels in a different location in the city. Two cousins of the Astor family opened competing hotels in the last decade of the 19th century side by side, unintentionally creating the largest hotel in the world. The hotel that transformed the hospitality business was torn down to make room for the Empire State Building, and in 1931 a new building was erected at its current site at 49th Street and Park Ave. Since then the hotel claims that, in addition to many foreign dignitaries, kings and queens, every president of the United States has stayed there.⁵³

The Waldorf Astoria was the largest hotel in the world when it opened in 1931. Before the land was granted to the hotel it was used as a Women's Hospital and Deaf and Dumb Asylum. In 1856 the land became a temporary home for Columbia College, which shared the area with the city's fifth potter's field. For the first and only time in the recorded history of indigent burial in New York, the remains located in this area were exhumed and transferred to Ward's Island, where 75 acres of land was made available to accept both those previously buried, and new burials to come. The Columbia University Quarterly of 1908 describes the potter's field as "a malodorous neighbor much in evidence, and disrepute during the long process of disinterment in '58 and '59."⁵⁴ After the exhumations, and during the Civil War, the open land was used as a makeshift hospital to care for sick and wounded soldiers.

The American Way: The Privatization of the Cemetery

Five years before the potter's field moved off Manhattan, the New York Legislature passed the Rural Cemetery Act, following a Massachusetts act from 1841. The legislation created an opening for private corporations to create commercial burial grounds, breaking with the tradition of churchyard burial. The purpose behind such a provision was several-fold: cities were growing at an unprecedented rate and New York was leading the charge in the United States. Rural cemeteries, such as Greenwood in Brooklyn, did not experience profitability in their early years, and the city wanted to ensure that there was a market for such an enterprise. Local governance did not want control of burial grounds, and

instead saw benefit in incorporating them into private commercial and social institutions. New York State required the new corporations to be non-profit organizations to reduce the likelihood of corruption (excessive profit from death carried a negative moral tinge), but they also provided state protection. With the advent of this act, several new cemetery organizations were formed across the state, and an interest grew in burial outside the city. Still, burial continued until the city outlawed the activity entirely in 1852.

Timeline of events in New York City Related to the Potter's Field

- 1800 - Yellow fever epidemics lead to the terror against burial grounds near populations; also in 1811 and 1822.⁹
- 1824 - Connecticut passes first Anatomy Act, providing for a legal use of certain bodies for dissection purposes.¹⁰
- 1830 - New York Marble Cemetery and New York City Marble Cemetery are privately established in New York as alternatives to churchyard inhumation.¹¹ Although privately owned, these cemeteries resemble potter's fields in their lack of religious orientation.
- 1831 - The first American "rural" cemetery, Mount Auburn Cemetery is established outside Boston, Massachusetts, sparking a trend for the next century in cemetery design.¹²
- 1831 - Massachusetts passes "Anatomy Act", allowing medical schools the use of unclaimed bodies for research.¹³
- 1832 - The first cholera epidemic hits New York City; kills 3,515.¹⁴
- 1838 - Greenwood Cemetery opens in Brooklyn,¹⁵ New York.
- 1845 - First baseball club, the New York Knickerbockers, develops at Madison Square Park.¹⁶
- 1847 - Rural Cemetery Act in New York¹⁷
- 1849 - Second cholera epidemic kills 5,071 people in a population of 500,000.
- 1852 - City Council prohibits new burials within the city limits.¹⁸
- 1854 - New York passes Anatomy Act.¹⁹
-John Snow, a British Physician, associates cholera with contaminated drinking water, refuting theory of miasmatic transmission of disease.
- 1858 - Disinterment of those buried at 49th Street, moving 100,000 corpses to Ward Island²⁰
- 1861 - Beginning of the American Civil War
-Embalming becomes common practice in the United States because of the large number of dead bodies transported home during the war.
- 1866 - Cholera epidemic kills nearly 600.²¹

See Appendix at end of Chapter 3 for full timeline and citations.



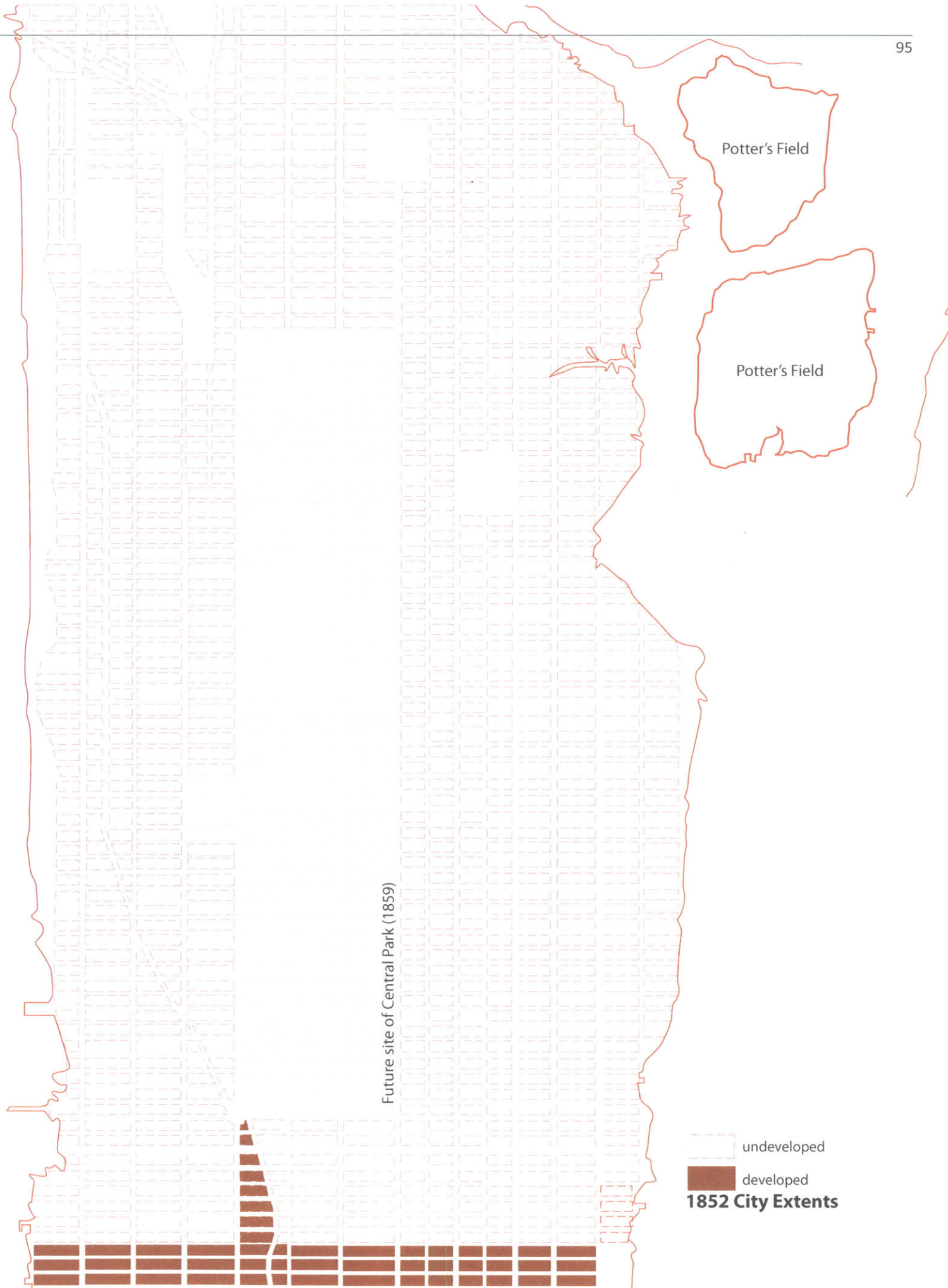


Figure 3.25 (previous spread, left):

Diagram of the extents of New York City in 1852, displaying the location of the potter's field.

Source: Author

Figure 3.26 (previous spread, right):

Google Earth map of this location today

Source: Google

Figure 3.27 (opposite spread, inset): Randall's and Ward's Islands in 1863. New York City's Potter's Field was relocated from Randall's Island to the southern end of Ward's Island in the 1850s. The "dead boat" from the city docked at the southern end of the island to deposit its cargo. Image from Map of New York and Vicinity (New York, 1863). Courtesy of David Rumsey Map Collection.

3.6 [1852] Randall's and Ward's Islands

Population (1850): 515,547⁵⁵

One would not know that Randall's and Ward's Islands were once two, or even that the islands are as deeply embedded in the history of the city as they are. Known mostly today for supporting one of Robert Moses' most vigorous projects - the Triborough Bridge - the islands have not carried much visibility in the past century for much else. Similar to programs hosted on Hart Island, Randall's and Ward's have hosted a large number of New York's asylums and public welfare institutions so as to keep them on the periphery of society. Through the joint work of the city and a not-for-profit organization called the Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), which arrived on the scene in 1992, the two islands have returned to a favorable status in the city. With the introduction of sports and recreational facilities, the islands have been restored and serve as vast public parkland for thousands of city children and sporting events.

55 Rosenwaike, *Population History of New York City*. @18.

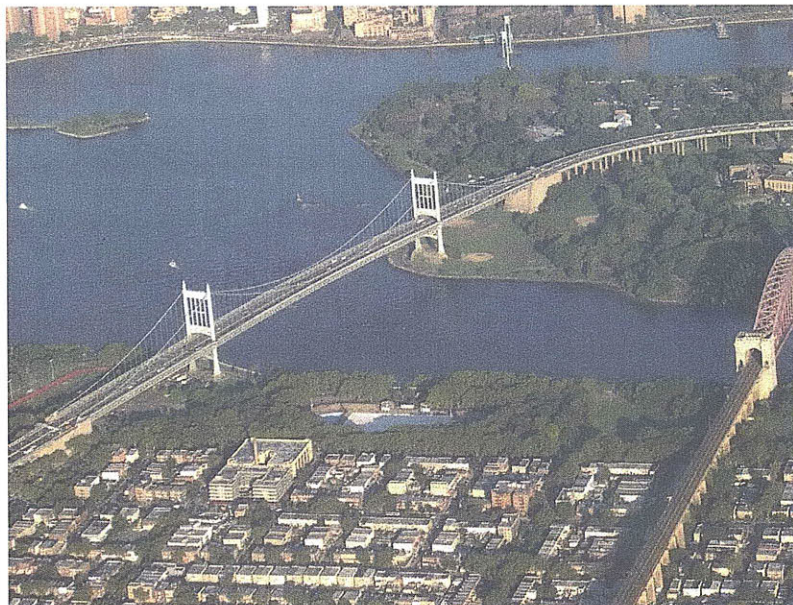
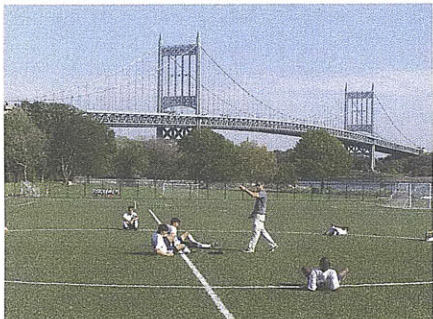
56 Thomas Badhe, "The Common Dust of the Potter's Field," www.common-place.org.

Figure 3.28 (left): Randall's Island utilized as park land and sporting facility with the Triborough Bridge in the background.

Source: <www.flickr.com>.

Figure 3.29 (right): Aerial view of Randall's and Wards Islands.

Source: <www.flickr.com>.



In 1835, New York City bought Randall's Island from private owners. Since then, the island has hosted a variety of ancillary programs for city agencies. The island was likely used as a potter's field in addition to the field already in use on Manhattan. The first gestures toward moving the potter's field off Manhattan were taking shape, and eventually succeeded in 1852 in its permanent relocation to Randall's Island. During this time, and because of the prohibition of further burials on the main city island, the City Aldermen made purposeful pursuit of finding a suitable location for the next potter's field.⁵⁷ Ward Island was used to transfer the remains of 100,000 corpses from the potter's field's previous site at 49th Street.⁵⁸ This is the only recording of pauper graves moving from their original sites. The others were built over and incorporated into the city without much thought of who lay below.

Throughout the 1800s the potter's field was synonymous with poverty, but was one aspect of misfortune that was easier for the city to hide rather than confront. The city Aldermen were tasked multiple times with the job of finding an appropriate burial site for the indigent. Discomfort and a call for change became public, apparent in an 1852 editorial in *The New York Daily Times*:

*The Assistant Aldermen have resolved to purchase 67 acres on Ward's Island, paying \$100,000 for the same, to arrange and adorn it with suitable shrubbery, and devote it to a place of burial for the poor who die and are buried at the expense of the city. Instead of Potter's Field, the new city of the dead is to be called the 'City Cemetery.' Do push this resolution along, Messrs. Aldermen, and have this project faithfully carried out. Let us have at last, a respectable place in which to bury the children of poverty.*⁵⁹

Although Ward Island was not put to use as the City Cemetery until 1857, to this day New York's potter's field is still referred to as "City Cemetery" in official language.⁶⁰ The newly pronounced City Cemetery was initially run by the Almshouse Department, which was charged with the care of those who were "destitute, sick, homeless or otherwise unable to care for themselves."⁶¹ Further ingraining these services within the state system, a bill went before New York State Legislature in March of 1860 to drop the

According to an outraged citizen, the aldermen were not doing the duty they ought, rather, they were wasting tax-payer funds by holding lavish dinners during their potter's field-selection-outings and without actually selecting a site. N.A., "Article 4," *New York Daily Times*, 21 February 1852. 57

Society, "New York Correction History Society." 58

N.A., "New-York City:... The Almshouse Department...." *New York Daily Times*, 21 April 1852. 59

In 1852 New York City's Aldermen decided officially to rename the potter's field "City Cemetery" in an effort to remove the stigma from the colloquial terminology. As mentioned above, the word "cemetery", which comes from the Greek word κοιμητήριον, means "sleeping place. In mid-19th century, the word "cemetery" became a popular as a replacement for the words "churchyard" or "graveyard," losing its religious connotation in favor of a social one. 60

New York City, "Almshouse, 1758-1953," New York City, http://www.nyc.gov/html/records/html/collections/collections_almshouse.shtml. 61

- 62 N.A., "Bills before the Legislature," *New York Times*, 1 March 1860.
- 63 ———, *The New York Supplement*, Volume 51, *New York Reporter*, Volume 85 (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company, 1898).@ 376.
- 64 *The New York Supplement* Volume 51, (*New York State Reporter*, Vol. 85), Containing the Decisions of the Supreme and Lower Courts of Record of New York State. Permanent Edition. National Reporter System. May 12-June 1898. St Paul: West Publishing Company. Albany: W.C. Little & Co., 1898. 376.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 *Ibid.*

Almshouse Department in favor of a Department of Public Charities and Correction.⁶²

Until 1895, The Department of Correction remained one half of the larger Department of Public Charities and Correction.⁶³ The joint department provided for the following:

Year after year we have endeavored to urge upon the consideration of our fellow-citizens, as well as the authorities for the State and city, objects of great public importance, tending to the amelioration of the condition of the poor, the more just and proper correction of the criminal, the more humane treatment demanded by the lunatic, and the comfort and happiness of the aged, the decrepid [sic], and the unfortunate, not forgetting those who have through indulgences reaching even to statute criminalty [sic], thrown themselves upon the care, support and benevolence of our institutions.⁶⁴

A full page *New York Times* spread, describing the departments workings for the previous year, allowed for a minor section accounting for the existence of the City Cemetery (then on Randall's Island) as being one of the "various objects of lesser importance"⁶⁵ along with the city bakery (which supplied food for the prison systems) and the auxiliary prisons. The amount spent in that year on the City Cemetery accounted for approximately one percent of the total funds spent throughout the department, with two hospitals and care for "out-door poor" accounting for the highest expenditures, and various building maintenance accounting for the least.⁶⁹

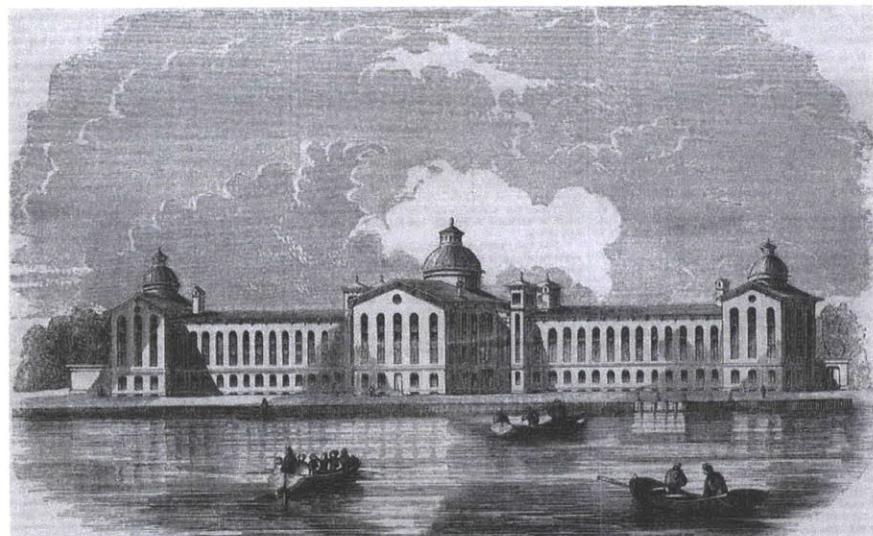


Figure 3.30: "House of Refuge, Randall's Island, New York." A wood engraving published November 1855 in

Permanent removal of Burial Grounds from the Living City

In 1852 the city instituted a major change to its burial proceedings by disallowing any new burials to take place on Manhattan. This forced the previously not-established cemeteries to the outer boroughs, where Queens took up the majority of the inhumation activity. Private ownership cemeteries took advantage of the Kings County-Queens County divide and established multiple cemeteries along the border. This allowed cemeteries to exceed their maximum lot coverage otherwise permitted per county. A "cemetery belt" developed out of this loophole, and today the geography of queens is marked with large open swaths of land in between dense construction.

Timeline of New York City Events Related to Indigent Burial

¹ SLOANE, D. C. 1991. *The last great necessity : cemeteries in American history*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press. @ 24.

² Encyclopedia of New York

³ City of the Silent, A timeline for Taphophiles

⁴ LINDEN, B. M. G. & LIBRARY OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE HISTORY. 2007. *Silent city on a hill : picturesque landscapes of memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press in association with Library of American Landscape History.

⁵ BELL, W. J., JR. 1971. Doctors' Riot, New York, 1788. *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine*, 47, 1501-1503.

⁶ HEATON, C. E. 1946. Yellow Fever in New York City. *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, 34, 67-78.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ N.A. 2010. *Père Lachaise Cemetery* [Online]. Wikipedia. Available: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%A8re_Lachaise_Cemetery [Accessed 2010].

⁹ HEATON, C. E. 1946. Yellow Fever in New York City. *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, 34, 67-78.

¹⁰ SAPPOL, M. 2002. *A traffic of dead bodies : anatomy and embodied social identity in nineteenth-century America*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

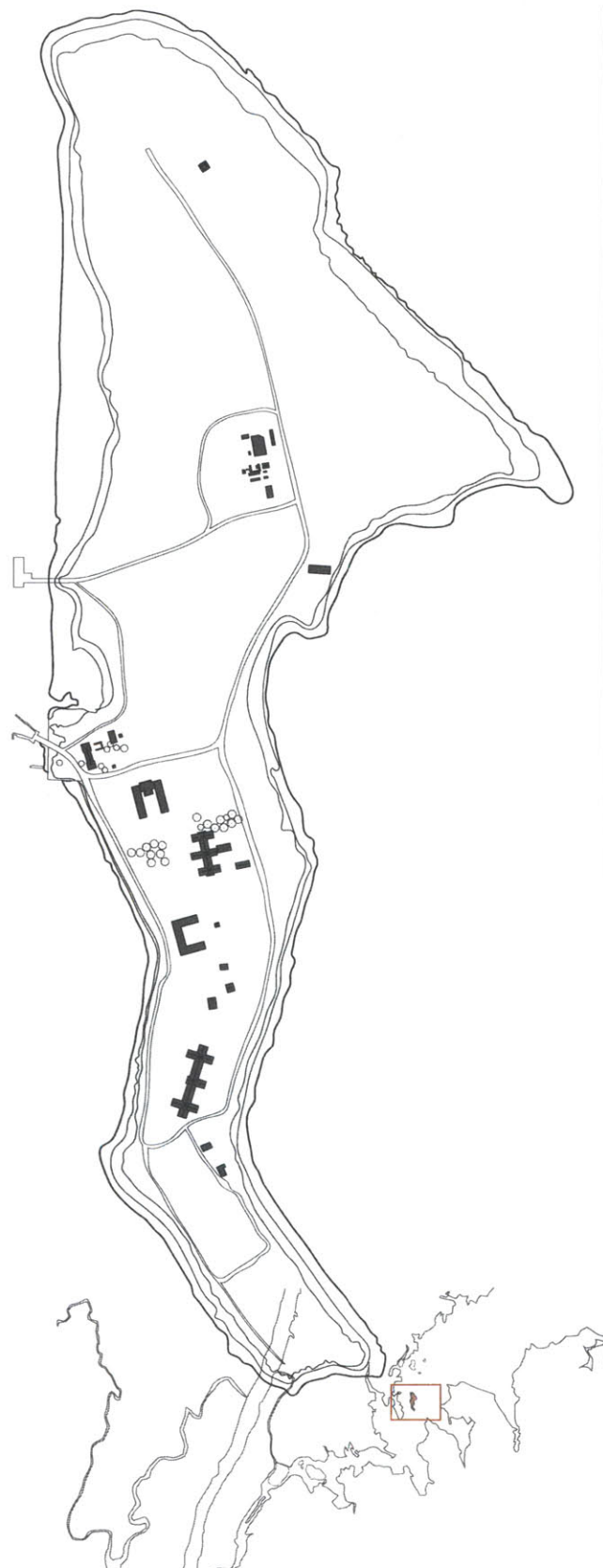
¹¹ SLOANE, D. C. 1991. *The last great necessity : cemeteries in American history*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press. @ 40.

¹² LINDEN, B. M. G. & LIBRARY OF AMERICAN LANDSCAPE HISTORY. 2007. *Silent city on a hill : picturesque landscapes of memory and Boston's Mount Auburn Cemetery*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press in association with Library of American Landscape History.

Year	Event
1609	Henry Hudson sails through the Hudson Harbor to a land ripe for exploration and potential settlement. Dutch name it "New Netherland."
1624	Dutch families begin to arrive on Noten Eylant (renamed Governor's Island in 1784) and spread around the larger coastal region from the Delaware Valley to the northernmost part of the Hudson Valley in present day Albany.
1625	Families move from Governor's Island to the island of Manhattan as a protection against attack from other colonizing Europeans. A fort meant to enclose the community within its walls is established at the southeastern tip of Manhattan.
1626	Slavery of Africans is introduced in New Netherland with first ship of 11 Africans delivered by the Dutch West India Company.
1620s	First potter's field established ¹
1654	Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews arrive in the new town. Maps indicate that well into the 18 th century burial grounds for Jews and blacks are separated from those for whites, and are situated near swamps or other undesirable land.
1664	New Netherland becomes New York when the British force a Dutch surrender.
1665	In response to bubonic plague, English law requires burials six feet deep to prevent the spread of disease.
1668	First yellow fever epidemic hits New York City.
1702	Second yellow fever epidemic hits New York City, killing approximately 500.
1760s	The beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the American colonies.
1776	-Great New York fire. Fire destroys a quarter of the city immediately after the British captured it during the Revolutionary War. ² - In France, Louis XVI decrees that all French cemeteries should be moved out of towns. ³
1782	Picturesque Movement introduced in England; sets the tone for cemetery design from the early 19th century onward. ⁴
1788	So-called Doctors Riot in New York City; as many as 5,000 people storm Columbia Medical School because of grave robbing by medical students. ⁵
1789	George Washington's Inauguration as first President of the United States after the Constitution is ratified (1787). New York City is (for a short time) capital of the new country.

- 1795** Yellow fever epidemic kills 732 people in New York City; officials send many bodies to the potter's field at the area of present-day Madison Square Park for quarantined burial.⁶
- 1798** Perhaps as many as 50,000 people flee New York's most deadly Yellow Fever epidemic, which killed 2,086 people in the city. Victims' bodies are interred in the site that would become Washington Square Park, at that time well north of the city's population.⁷
- 1804** Père Lachaise Cemetery opens in Paris, marking the beginning of landscaped cemeteries and ending churchyards as the prevalent form of corpse disposal in France.⁸
- 1805** Yellow fever epidemics add to the fervor against burial grounds near populations; also in 1811 and 1822.⁹
- 1824** Connecticut passes first Anatomy Act, providing for a legal use of certain bodies for dissection purposes.¹⁰
- 1830** New York Marble Cemetery and New York City Marble Cemetery are privately established in New York as alternatives to churchyard inhumation.¹¹ Although privately owned, these cemeteries resemble potter's fields in their lack of religious orientation.
- 1831** The first American "rural" cemetery, Mount Auburn Cemetery is established outside Boston, Massachusetts, sparking a trend for the next century in cemetery design.¹²
- 1831** Massachusetts passes "Anatomy Act", allowing medical schools the use of unclaimed bodies for research.¹³
- 1832** The first cholera epidemic hits New York City; kills 3,515.¹⁴
- 1838** Greenwood Cemetery opens in Brooklyn,¹⁵ New York.
- 1845** First baseball club, the New York Knickerbockers, develops at Madison Square Park.¹⁶
- 1847** Rural Cemetery Act in New York¹⁷
- 1849** Second cholera epidemic kills 5,071 people in a population of 500,000.
- 1852** City Council prohibits new burials within the city limits.¹⁸
- 1854** -New York passes Anatomy Act.¹⁹
-John Snow, a British Physician, associates cholera with contaminated drinking water, refuting theory of miasmatic transmission of disease.
- 1858** Disinterment of those buried at 49th Street, moving 100,000 corpses to Ward Island²⁰
- 1861** -Beginning of the American Civil War
-Embalming becomes common practice in the United States because of the large number of dead bodies transported home during the war.
- 1866** Cholera epidemic kills nearly 600.²¹
- ¹³ SAPPOL, M. 2002. *A traffic of dead bodies : anatomy and embodied social identity in nineteenth-century America*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.
- ¹⁴ BEARDSLEE, G. W. n.d. *The 1832 Cholera Epidemic in New York State: 19th Century Responses to Cholerae Vibrio* [Online]. Available: http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2000_fall/1832_cholera.html [Accessed 2010].
- ¹⁶ CONSERVANCY, M. S. P. n.d. *Park History* [Online]. New York City: Madison Square Park Conservancy. Available: <https://www.madisonsquarepark.org/about/historicalfacts.aspx> [Accessed 2010].
- ¹⁷ INSKEEP, C. R. 2000. *The graveyard shift : a family historian's guide to New York City cemeteries*, Orem, Utah, Ancestry.
- ¹⁸ Inskeep, Carolee. *The Graveyard Shift: A Family Historian's Guide to New York City Cemeteries*.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.moritorium.com/resurrectionist/graverobber.html>
- ²⁰ *Columbia University Quarterly*. 10.1 (1907): 157.
- ²¹ ROSENWAIKE, I. 1972. *Population History of New York City*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press.

Present conditions



Hart Island: The Potter's Field's Final Residence

1869 City Extents



Figure 4.1: site plan, drawing by Author

Figure 4.2: Google Earth Map of Hart Island

All Timeline Citations come from two sources: Seitz and Miller, *The Other Islands of New York City : A History and Guide*, 50.; Society, N. Y. C. H. (2010). "New York Correction History Society." 2010, from <http://www.correctionhistory.org/>.

Four: Hart Island: The Potter's Field's Final Resting Place

1830s/1840s - Hart Island sees quite a bit of unofficial pugilistic activity

1860s. Act providing for a Department of Public Charities and Correction. Almshouse is dismantled. (See 18600207 NYT)

1863. (Fed) Union Soldier training grounds//Civil War. Commanding Officer had his own cottage, other officers had a nice building with library and concert room on south end of island.

1865. (Fed) Confederate POW camp on extreme southern tip. Prepared for 5000.

1868. (DOPCC) City purchased Hart Island from Hunter family for \$75,000 for the DOPCC. 45 acres at the northern end were for the potter's field.

1870. (DOH) Yellow Fever epidemic quarantine housing on southern end of island.

1877. (Fed) Granite Monument built to commemorate Union Soldiers and Sailors buried on Hart Island. (Exhumed early 1900s. Monument still in place).

Late 1800s. (DOPCC) Charity Hospital for women, insane asylum, jail for prisoners who worked on the Potter's Field burial detail 1880s. Industrial School

1895 (through WWII). (DOC) Branch workhouse for drug addicts and aged and infirm prisoners.

1898 - Five boroughs merged to become New York City

1908 - Adolf Loos writes "Ornament and Crime", pushing monuments to a nostalgic past

Early 1900s. (DOPC) "Old Men's Home" // Tuberculosis hospital. (1917 NYT article criticizes Tuberculosis Hospital, saying it was not sufficiently caring for either patients or staff.)

1902. Granite Cross memorialized the buried children, reading "He Calleth His Children By Name." (figure: granite cross?)

1903/1904. Brush fires destroy wooden grave markers. Concrete markers take their places.

1917 - crematory is recommended in addition to potter's field. Not established.

1918 Spanish Influenza epidemic kills millions of people across the globe, and 37,000 in New York alone.

1904 (or 1905). (DOC) Reformatory for male misdemeanants aged 16-30 (called reformatory for vicious boys) (figure: school room for vicious boys). Those prisoners were transferred off the island or to another part of the island to separate between the older and younger prisoners. (when?) (in 1925 NYT calls the prison a juvenile reformatory)

1914. (DOC) The same building(s) was/were used for aged male prisoners and other city prison overflow.

1925. Construction begins on an amusement park for Harlem's African-American community.

1930s. Jesuit Chapel built and still stands (in poor shape)

1939-1945. (Fed) World War II. Hart Island is taken into federal jurisdiction. Disciplinary barracks for Marine, Coast Guard and Navy personnel, housing 2800 servicemen. Three German soldiers were found near Long Island and imprisoned for a short time on Hart Island.

1946. (DOC) DOC reactivated jail.

1948. (DOC) Inmates build thirty-foot high concrete monument to the "unfriended dead", bearing the inscription "PEACE" (figure: Concrete monument)

1950. (DOPC) Department of Welfare houses male derelicts. Board of Estimate rehabilitates and houses approx. 2000 homeless men.

1954. (DOC) Department of Correction uses Hart Island for jail as prisoner population rises.

1955-1960(61). (Fed) U.S. Army installs a Nike missile base on the north end of the island.

1960. two Catholic Societies established burial sites elsewhere for their religious followers. (Determining religious background is not always possible, however.)

1966. (DOC) Jail from 1954 is closed. Pheonix House opens as a narcotic rehabilitation program. Pheonix House closed permanently in 1976 because of the cost of the ferries.

1982. Small Jail opens for those who work on burial detail. It closes in 1991.

1981-1984 AIDS epidemic strikes New York, infecting more than four thousand people.

1955-1960(61). (Fed) U.S. Army installs a Nike missile base on the north end of the island.

Remnant of Nike Ajax war missile silo

Joel Sternfeld, Hart Island



1948. (DOC) Inmates build thirty-foot high concrete monument to the "unfriendly dead", bearing the inscription "PEACE"



DOCHS

1939-1945. (Fed) World War II. Hart Island is taken into federal jurisdiction. Disciplinary barracks for Marine, Coast Guard and Navy personnel, housing 2800 servicemen.



Joel Sternfeld, Hart Island

1902. Granite Cross memorialized the buried children, reading "He Calleth His Children By Name."



DOCHS

1925 (Private). Construction begins on an amusement park for Harlem's African-American community. (Never Completed)
1982. (DOC) Small Jail opens for burial detail workers. Closes in 1991.



DOCHS

1877. (Fed) Granite Monument commemorates Union Soldiers and Sailors buried on Hart Island.

1904 (or 1905). (DOC) Reformatory for male misdemeanants aged 16-30



Ian Ference

1950. (DOPC) Department of Welfare houses male derelicts. Board of Estimate rehabilitates and houses approx. 2000 homeless men.

1954. (DOC) Department of Correction uses Hart Island for jail as prisoner population rises.



New York Public Library

1895 (through WWII). (DOC) Branch workhouse for drug addicts and aged and infirm prisoners.



Ian Ference

convalescent hospital and housing

Late 1800s. (DOPCC) Charity Hospital for women, insane asylum, jail for prisoners who worked on the Potter's Field burial detail 1880s.

Early 1900s. (DOPC) "Old Men's Home" // Tuberculosis hospital.



Ian Ference

1930s. (Private) Jesuit Chapel built and still stands



Ian Ference

1863. (Fed) Civil War//Union Soldier training grounds and buildings on south end of island.



Joel Sternfeld, Hart Island

1966. (DOC) Jail from 1954 is closed. Phoenix House opens as a narcotic rehabilitation program, but closed permanently in 1976 due to cost of ferries.
1946. (DOC) DOC reactivated jail.

1865. (Fed) Confederate POW camp on extreme southern tip

1830s/1840s - Hart Island is home to frequent but unofficial pugilistic activity

1870 - Yellow Fever Epidemic. Many people are quarantined at the south end of Hart Island

The Historical Adaptation of Place

If the previous potter's fields have been stitched back into the fabric of the city, then Hart Island still awaits its sutures. With the possible exception of Randall's and Ward's Islands, none of these locales has carried the institutional weight that Hart Island has. The island also shows the residue of many previous uses that in some sense were targeted toward the same population as the burial ground.

Melinda Hunt, artist/activist who has been pushing the city since 1991 to rethink its methods of burial on Hart Island, once said that Hart Island was a modern day interpretation of Dante's Purgatorio, a place on earth that fit neither an otherworldly description nor an earthly one.¹ The idea is not a new one. In 1874 a *New York Times* article under the heading "Local Miscellany" described the process of burial at Hart Island, which at that time had been active for five years.

*Once, or sometimes twice, a week in the Winter, and some three or four times a week in the Summer, a steamer leaves the wharf at the end of Twenty-sixth street, East River, with a freight consisting of the unknown and unclaimed dead of a great City. Those poor waifs and strays of humanity had a melancholy ending. They went out of the world without any friendly solicitude concerning them, and public charity accords to them the decencies of burial.*²

Even at this distance in time, one can feel pity for those interred there through this portrayal. "Those poor waifs and strays of humanity"³ are given a description - appropriate or not - without request. The article ends with its own description of purgatory: "There are, of course, no mortuary records in the cemetery on Hart's Island, nothing but the simple grave or the common trench. And yet, 'after life's fitful fever,' may not these poor unknown ones 'sleep well' in this rude sepulchre?"⁴ Using terms not normally associated with urban geography ("ghastly" and "melancholy") the article informs the reader of place they may not know about, and place the dead forevermore within the confines of one of two categories: unclaimed, or unknown. The writer's tone stuck to Hart Island, but it enforces a specific mood that the island has been hard-pressed ever to shake.

Melinda Hunt, 12 January 2010. 1

N.A., "Local Miscellany; Where 2
the Unknown Dead Rest..." *New
York Times*, 1 February 1874.

Ibid. 3

Ibid. 4

5 Seitz and Miller, *The Other Islands of New York City : A History and Guide*, 50.

6 Ibid.

In 1874 a physical distinction was made between the unclaimed and the unknown dead. Burials on Hart Island were divided between those who were identified but not claimed for lack of money or caring relatives, and those who were not identified at all. The identified were buried in mass trench graves without the possibility of future disinterment. They, in some sense, had their chances of reclamation and lost them. Special care was given to those who were not identified, allowing them the benefit of a doubt that their worth may have surpassed that of burial in a forsaken landscape. Photographs were taken and physical descriptions recorded in the hope that someone might claim this body, redeeming him or her from permanent invisibility. It was the concept of hope that distinguished between the unclaimed and the unknown.

Although this is largely focused on demographics, the marks left by the inhabiting population on the terrain are quite visible. By looking at the history of the island through the national, state and local uses that have passed through its topography, one can begin to get a sense of the shaping of the landscape and how it has become a forbidden piece of geography in the city today.

4.1 The reality behind the mythology

In 1654 the Island currently known as Hart came into European hands. Thomas Pell, an Englishman living in Fairfield, Connecticut, purchased in that year a large portion of land around the Long Island Sound, including portions of today's Bronx, from the Siwanoy Indians. Hart is part of an archipelago of eleven islands in this western part of the Long Island Sound, only one of which, City Island, is currently inhabited by the living. At the time of purchase the islands were collectively known as Minneford, taking after a secondary name for the Indian tribe that had controlled the land.⁵ It was not until the mid-18th century that the Europeans began to utilize the island. The property passed to state ownership about a hundred years later.

The name "Hart Island" is a subject of speculation. Some suggest that the shape is similar to a human heart organ and earned its name through that association. It was once referred to as "Heart Island" on at least one map⁶ but in subsequent years the "e" was dropped in favor



of "Hart Island," first appearing as such in 1775. Others suggest that it was taken from the Middle English word for deer, or stag, an animal that populated the island for millennia. The island has been labeled with other names such as Lesser Minneford⁷ and Spectacle Island, likely because at one time the geographical shape at one time was of two rounded landmasses separated by a narrow channel. If so, the channel would have been filled in until the two outcroppings became one larger island, and since then the shape has been referred to as a "t-bone", a dog's hind leg, and an oval.⁸

Death has taken different forms on this landscape, not all six feet under, and often relative to wars that the United States has been involved in. Death associated with war is both real and perceived - those who die in the name of versus those who are threatened with death as a form of control and victory. The Federal Government leased half of the island from a private owner prior to the city's eventual purchase of the whole island prior to the American Civil War. Beginning in 1863, the land was first used as a training ground for more than 50,000 Union Soldiers. Soldiers were housed in facilities on the island throughout the war.⁹ In April of 1864 one of New York State's three Colored Troop Regiments began training on these grounds. They took part a year later in the fall of Petersburg leading to the end of the Civil War.¹⁰

What is now called City Island⁷ was called Greater Minneford Island. The Lesser and Greater were the largest islands in the archipelago. N.A., "Local Miscellany; Where the Unknown Dead Rest..." *New York Times*, 1 February 1874.

Fred Bartel, "Hart Island,"⁸ Correctionhistory.org, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/hartisland/bartelshartisland/bartels1908hartisland1.html>; Seitz and Miller, *The Other Islands of New York City: A History and Guide*. 50

Bartel, "Hart Island.;" Wayne⁹ Kempton, "In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; and in All Things Charity: A Historical Account of the Mission of the Diocese of New York of the Protestant Episcopal Church to the Institutions and the Potter's Field on Hart Island," ed. Diocese of New York Protestant Episcopal Church (New York: Diocese of New York of the Protestant Episcopal Church, 2006). 7.

Bartel, "Hart Island.;" Kempton,¹⁰ "In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; and in All Things Charity: A Historical Account of the Mission of the Diocese of New York of the Protestant Episcopal Church to the Institutions and the Potter's Field on Hart Island."7.

Figure 4.3: detail, Joseph Rudolf Bien, *Atlas of the State of New York*, 1895

11 Lonnie R. Speer, *Portals to Hell : Military Prisons of the Civil War*, 1st ed. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1997). 7; Bartel, "Hart Island.;" "Hart Island: City's Concentration Camp."

12 Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island: A Historical Resume of Potter's Field." 2.

13 N.A., "Purchase of Hart's [Sic] Island," *New York Times*, 27 February 1869.

14 City of New York Correction Department, "City Cemetery/ Hart Island/(Potter's Field)," Correction Department, City of New York, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/nycdoc/html/hart.html>.

15 N.A., "Saluting Ny Reform School Ship as Suny Maritime College Ancestor?," Department of Correction, City of New York, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/school-ship/Hart%20Island%20start%20of%20Fort%20Schuyler%20Marine%20Academy8.html>. The author of this website published a long statement describing the use of the Mercury as antecedent to a greater New York tradition of maritime training, but without credit for having existed at all. In his writing he describes why it was left out of the standard histories because it was a "reformatory rig" up against a "good boys boat."

Perceived death stepped aside as a prison for Confederate Soldiers was established in 1864, but not used until the end of Civil War in April 1865. According to a book entitled, *Portals to Hell: Military Prisons of the Civil War*, approximately thirty-five hundred prisoners-of-war were crammed into four acres of land. Over two hundred of them died in that camp after the war had already ended.¹¹ It is unclear where these men were buried.

Hart Island's first substantial relationship with the containment of death resulted from the location there of a Civil War Cemetery for Union Soldiers. A granite memorial was erected to the Union Soldiers in 1877 at the foot of the burial trench that held the bodies of the veteran soldiers and sailors. Nearby a wooden arch with an inscription read "Soldiers Cemetery, Defenders of a Nation." The graves were exhumed in the early part of the 20th Century, and the soldier's bodies were removed for a more appropriate burial location at Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Queens.¹²

The Civil War began the island's relationship with abjection through treatment of confederate soldiers. Abject functions continued as New York City purchased Hart Island in 1869 "for the purpose of establishing industrial school for destitute boys"¹³ for \$75,000. This price included buildings the federal government had already erected on the land; they were useable for the new school purposes. As the industrial school was being established, a yellow fever epidemic struck through New York once more. A quarantine area was set aside for those confined to isolation.¹⁴

New York City kept, through its Public Charities and Correction department, a training ship called the "Mercury," used as a form of reformatory, providing a nautical training program to young boys who proved to be miscreants.¹⁵ A great many of these boys were orphans. The ship was based at Hart Island and was initiated there in the same year as the public burial ground. It lasted only until 1875, however. Thomas McCarthy, the author of the New York Correction Historical Society website, wrote "Hart's remoteness made it ideal for programs aimed at populations not much welcomed elsewhere." Eight sailors who boarded that ship were also buried on Hart Island, commemorated with plain wooden and stone slabs.

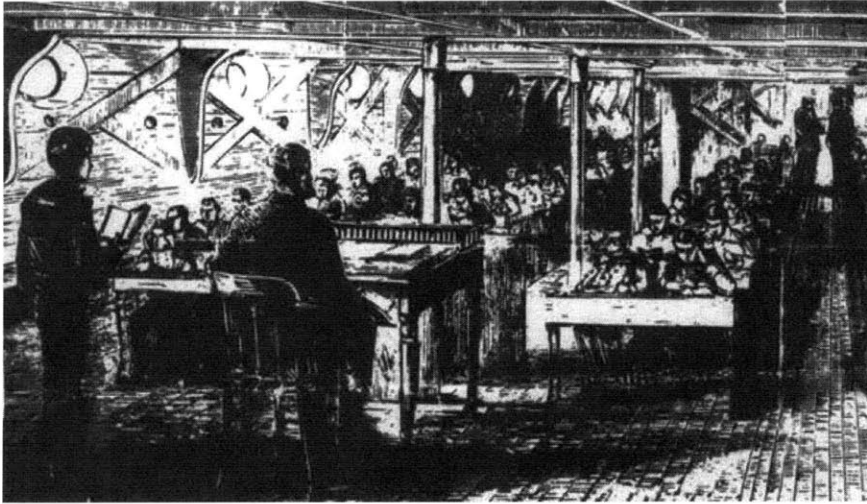


Figure 4.4: NYC Public Charities & Correction's school-ship, Mercury, based at Hart Island circa 1869-76. This image depicts the ship classroom teaching maritime trades. source: NYCHS website

Only six other documented inhumations are on the island, kept separate from the mass graves. The burials were of the bodies of caretakers and employees of the institutions on the island. There are only six such graves. One is of a woman named Catherine Ryan, who was employed in the laundry room and who requested burial on Hart Island.

In 1923 a private developer from Harlem found an opportunity to buy part of Hart Island for a development venture he was sure to be successful. Solomon Riley, owner of Spectacle Realty Company, began a two-year design and construction project that would introduce a "miniature Coney Island"¹⁷ for the African-American community of Harlem. Four acres of land were in the process of development when resistance by the State Board of Correction caused the city to utilize eminent domain and purchase the land from Riley.¹⁸ Part of the boardwalk, a dance hall and several cottages were completed before the project was pulled.

The planned park was to be located too closely to the prison already on the island and might act as "not only a means of escape [for the prisoners] but as opening an avenue through which contraband weapons, drugs, &c., could be introduced."¹⁹ The State Commission of Prisons adopted a resolution against it, and the City Aldermen eventually bought the land from Riley, and the entire island was completely under City control until the United States government stepped back in during World War II to utilize the land as another prisoner-of-war camp, this time for captured German Soldiers. However, only three of the latter ever set foot on the island in this capacity.

N.A., "Special to the New York Times. Oppose Resort on Hart's [Sic] Island: State Prison Commission Tells Mayor Hylan City Should Acquire Property," New York Times, 7 May 1925. 3.

— — —, "...Officials Oppose Amusement Report on Harts [Sic] Island Close to Prison..." New York Times, 4 June 1925; — — —, "City Decides to Take Hart's [Sic] Island 'Coney': Will Get Pleasure Resort by Condemnation-- Valued at \$20,000 in 1922, Now \$160,000...." New York Times, 17 June 1925. 18

N.A., "Special to the New York Times. Oppose Resort on Hart's [Sic] Island: State Prison Commission Tells Mayor Hylan City Should Acquire Property." 3. 19

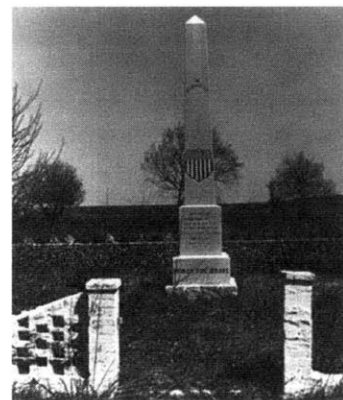


Figure 4.5: Memorial erected in 1877 after the Civil War. This monument still stands, although the graves of the men it commemorates have been relocated. New York Correction Historical Society

- 20 ———, "Mayor Strong Will Sign/He Believes Unfortunates Should Not Be with Criminals. Hearing on Bill for Separation/ Mrs. Charles Russell Lowell, Charles S. Fairbanks, Carl Schurz, and Others Speak in Favor--No Opposition," *New York Times*, 8 May 1895. Hartbook 1967, 2.
- 21 New York State, "Split Public Charities and Correction (Chapter 912, Nys Statutes) " State of New York, <http://www.correctionhistory.org/html/chronicl/nycdoc/html/100years.html#Chapter>.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 N.A., "William L. Strong for Mayor...." *New York Times*, 6 October 1894.

4.2 In the Context of Bureaucracy: The role of the Department of Correction.

In New York City, the Public Charities and Correction Department underwent some major changes toward the end of the 19th Century. The newly elected mayor of New York City, William Strong, rolled into action a bill that proposed to divide the agency into two autonomous entities. Supporting the change, a member of the State Board of Charities stated, "The mixing up of everything and everybody [in the former scheme of organization] has produced a disastrous effect upon the appointing power, upon the Board of Estimate and Apportionment, and upon the Commissioners and their subordinates. Everyone who has made any real study of the department, during the last twelve years at least, has recommended that a change and division be made."²⁰

On January 1, 1896, Governor Levi Morton signed the law into effect, putting the newly instated Department of Public Charities "in charge of all hospitals, asylums, almshouses and other institutions belonging to the city or county of New York which are devoted to the care of the insane, the feebleminded, the sick, the infirm, and the destitute, except the hospital wards attached to the penitentiary and to other prisons and institutions under the direction of the department of correction."²¹ The Department of Correction (DOC) was assigned "the general charge and direction of all prisons and other institutions for the care and custody of criminals and misdemeanants which belong or shall belong to the city and county of New York."²²

William Strong, a life-long Republican, was a last minute replacement to run for the mayoral office in an effort to beat the Tammany Hall Democrats, who had been controlling New York City politics since the 1850s (and despite Strong's election would continue to do so for decades longer). Strong was elected on a "fusion" ticket, supported by members of both parties who wished to see reform happen to their local governance.²³

This move toward the end of the 19th century marked a major turning point in the way the city looked at poverty. It became a moral imperative to separate poverty, once seen as a contributing factor to the underlying foulness of the city, from malefaction. The implication was that poverty could be controlled rather than corrected, but only through

that poverty could be controlled rather than corrected, but only through the state or other benevolent sources. Because of this poverty carried a different stigma than delinquency did, which had the opportunity for reform. A person may commit a serious crime, but with the right type of state intervention, he or she would be able to break free of the implications of violence. A silver lining surrounded the cloud of imprisonment; but none on the dark cloud of poverty. Essentially, violence does not an identity make, but poverty does.

This idea gains ground in the context of the types of public institutions that were built in response to poverty and crime. The litany of programs attached to Hart Island was almost entirely within DOC direct control, with only one major exception from 1869 until the present.²⁴ This exception resulted from the fact that Pelham Bay was ideally located for defense of the city. It served military purposes by guarding the northern entry to New York City from the Long Island Sound. Hart and David's Islands in particular were useful for this purpose, as they were the main bases for Fort Slocum. The fort, named for Major General Henry W. Slocum from the Civil War, was primarily on David's Island, but in 1955 it controlled a Cold-War Nike Ajax air-defense missile system stored on Hart Island. These missiles remained operational until 1960 when they were decommissioned, in favor of north-polar ICBM defenses.

In 1967 the New York City Department of Correction published a booklet entitled "A Historical Resumé of Potter's Field" in an apparent response to questions of the role the DOC played and the projected outcome of the burial ground. It opens with this statement by the department's commissioner at the time, George McGrath:

There has been much written about The Potter's Field on Hart Island and the involvement of the Department of Correction of the City of New York in this important community activity.

While many other projected plans are being officially studied for the burial of indigents, this Department in the interim must maintain the present Potter's Field at Hart Island as mandated.²⁵

The exception was during the 24 Cold War era when the Federal Government built Nike Missile bunkers on the island. During the Civil War the island functioned as a Union soldier training camp and then as a Confederate soldier prisoner of war camp, but these programs, obviously, operated prior to 1869.

Gale Silver, "Potter's Field Hart 25 Island: A Historical Resumé of Potter's Field," ed. Public Relations Unit (New York City: Department of Correction, 1967).
1.

- 26 Gale Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island: A Historical Resume of Potter's Field," ed. Public Relations Unit (New York City: Department of Correction, 1967).
1.

The mandate McGrath referred to was Chapter 24, Department of Welfare, Title A, Section 603.10.0 Potter's Field, amended twice in 1942 and 1953 by Local Law. The code says that the Department of Welfare (DOW) was responsible for the potter's fields in the city, those already in existence or those that may be needed in the future. The Potter's Field on Hart's Island, however, was still to remain within the confines of the DOC. An interesting distinction was made by the city in this ruling, as the Potter's Field on Hart Island is the city's only tax-funded municipal burial ground since 1869.

Section 603-10.0 Potter's Field. *The Commissioner shall have charge of the Potter's Field, and when the necessity therefore shall arise, shall have power to lay out additional Potter's Fields or other public burial places for the poor and strangers and from time to time enclose and extend the same to make enclosures therein and to build vaults therein, and to provide all necessary labor and for interments therein. The Potter's Field on Hart's Island ... shall remain under the control of the Department of Correction, and the burial of deceased paupers therein shall continue under rules and regulations established by the joint action of the Department of Welfare and Correction, or in case of disagreement between such departments, under such regulations as may be established by the Mayor. (As amended by Local Law 1942, No. 50, October 29; as amended by Local Law 1953, No. 136, August 5.)*²⁶

This publication came as a defensive response to the role of the DOC in the face of the city. No further mention is made of "further projects" as suggested by DOC Commissioner George McGrath - perhaps they were vetoed suggestions, or perhaps they were never carried through. The joint role of the DOC and the DOW never materialized, giving the penal system jurisprudence over that of public assistance. This was likely because the DOW did not last in operation long, breaking down into several separate departments, all under New York City's Human Resource Administration (HRA). The NYC HRA does run an indigent burial program, not dissimilar from that of other cities and counties across the country.

Through a caseworker staff of twelve people, they provide burial assistance to those who otherwise could not afford it, but primarily for decedent veterans. HRA Burial Claims Unit director, JoAnn Orr, stated, "We want to ensure that deceased veterans who served our country will be buried in the veterans' cemetery rather than in Potter's Field."²⁷ Yet, burial in the potter's field exceeds that of the majority of cemeteries across the country.

4.3 A Geography and Demography of Politics: How Population Reveals Land Management Policies.

An excerpt from a *New York Times* article from March 3, 1878 described the burial process at the city's potter's field approximately a decade after its establishment:

*..they were coffins of children - the children of the poor, of the vicious, the vile - picked up, many of them, in the streets in dark nights, found carelessly thrown in ash barrels, or brought, most mercifully, from dying mothers in crowded hospitals before their lives of suffering and want had fairly begun. One of the little bodies (how small it must have been; and how happy, happy, it must be that it is dead!) was in a square, slight packing case, no larger than those in which type-founders do up their smallest founts of type.*²⁸

Contemporary writings have lost the hard moralistic edge that was prevalent in articles throughout the 19th century about burial at the potter's field, but nonetheless still impart judgment difficult to overlook in an objective reading of the place. In 2008, 8,008,278 people resided in New York City. Of that population, 54,193 died in the same year. 127,680 newborns contributed to the overall population, but 5.5 infant deaths also occurred for every 1000 live births.²⁹ Based on this data, approximately 700 infant deaths in 2008 contributed almost one-half the body count on Hart Island. New York is too efficient with its municipal burials. If no identification is made within twenty-four hours of receipt at the morgue, the body is prepared for burial at Hart Island.

The standard practice when someone in the city of New York dies outside of a hospital is to send the body to the morgue of the county in which the death occurred.³⁰ If the body is not claimed within 24

N.A., "HRA Obtains Reform in 27 Indigent Burial Regulations," New York City Human Resources Administration Perspective, no. February (2008), http://www.nyc.gov/html/hra/downloads/pdf/february_bulletin_08_2.pdf.

— — —, "In the Potter's Field: 28 Burying the City's Pauper Dead. The Voyage of the Bodies to Hart's Island on the Dead-Boat-Forty Thousand Coffins in Four Acres--Rattle His Bones," *New York Times*, 3 March 1878.

New York City Department 29 of Health, "Summary of Vital Statistics 2008 the City of New York," New York City Department of Health, <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/vs/2008sum.pdf>.

Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island: 30 A Historical Resume of Potter's Field."

- 31 Tony Horwitz, "Necropolitan Diary," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 August 1998.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island: A Historical Resume of Potter's Field." 2.

hours from receipt of notice of death by mail, the Health and Hospitals Corporation is authorized to send the body to the City Cemetery. The body is first frozen, covered with shroud paper (now plastic), and packed in a pine box manufactured in the Bronx, and then delivered via truck to the City Island loading dock where it is shipped across the small expanse of water to Hart Island. Coffins arrive four days per week, one day devoted to each borough (Brooklyn and Staten Island share a day). Mondays are for grounds keeping and preparation for continued grave expansion.³¹

A group of inmates, "hand-picked for their strong stomachs," volunteer for burial duty at Hart Island as opposed to spending their days inside at Riker's Island.³² The "death crew,"³³ as they are called at Riker's, ranges from 25 to 30 men, all considered "short-timers" in the prison system. The thought according to the Department of Correction, is that burial duty will give them valuable work experience that they will be able to apply once released from the prison system.³⁴ Work makes a man honest, so the saying goes. According to various newspaper articles and interviews, the inmates welcome the chance to work in the open air, even if it does come at the cost of burying unknown babies.

The inmates pull the pine coffins from the truck and unload them into the trench after marking each box with a name, or a number where not identified. The adult coffins are then passed from one inmate to another and stacked in the trench, three coffins high and one hundred fifty in length. The infant coffins are a half the size and are stacked five high but the trench is the same length as the adults.

A cold wind whistled across Hart Island the other morning. It bent the leafless trees and swamp grass, and sent whitecaps dancing on Long Island Sound.

Inmates in orange jumpsuits moved briskly, spoke little and didn't smile. In armfuls of three, they unloaded 53 foot-long pine boxes from the rear of a Ford dump truck onto the muddy ground. For 50 cents an hour, they were burying New York City's poorest infants.

"It's good they're getting buried and not thrown in a garbage pail," said an inmate who is the father of eight children.

"It takes some getting used to," said another inmate. "It takes some getting used to."³⁵

Burials on Hart Island are not comprised of unknown or poor adults only. In fact, the numbers vary every year, but somewhere between one-third and one-half of all burials are infants who did not live long enough to establish their own identities. According to *When the Bough Breaks* by Sylvia Ann Hewlett, an in-depth look at the welfare of children in America, the majority of stillborn deaths are fundamentally attributable to insufficient health care for pregnant women.³⁶ The United States carries a very high infant mortality rate for a developed nation.³⁷ This country ranks 46th in the world for infant mortality with 6.26 deaths out of 1,000 births, according to the CIA Factbook.

The number of infant deaths is often directly related to disease or drug epidemics that may be occurring at any given time. In the late 1980s New York City's Coalition for the Homeless did a study that showed that 47% of infants who die in the city are sent to Hart Island.³⁸ In the 1980s infant burials with an indigent classification were on the rise. This is not surprising, since that decade was marred by a crack cocaine epidemic in major cities throughout the United States³⁹. The drug problems led to a significant rise in fetal death rates.

Douglas Martin, "A Heavy Burden: 35 Burying Eileen, Sam, Liz and F/C," *New York Times* 1990; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks : The Cost of Neglecting Our Children* (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 1991).

Hewlett, *When the Bough Breaks 36 : The Cost of Neglecting Our Children*. 33-35.

United States of America Central 37 Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook; North America, the United States," Central Intelligence Agency, United States of America, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

New York City Coalition for 38 the Homeless, "Coalition for the Homeless," <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/>.

N.A., "Crack Epidemic (United 39 States)," Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crack_epidemic_\(United_States\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crack_epidemic_(United_States)). According to the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), this epidemic lasted from 1984-1990 and was a major cause behind a surge in homelessness, violent crime, and major hospital emergencies.

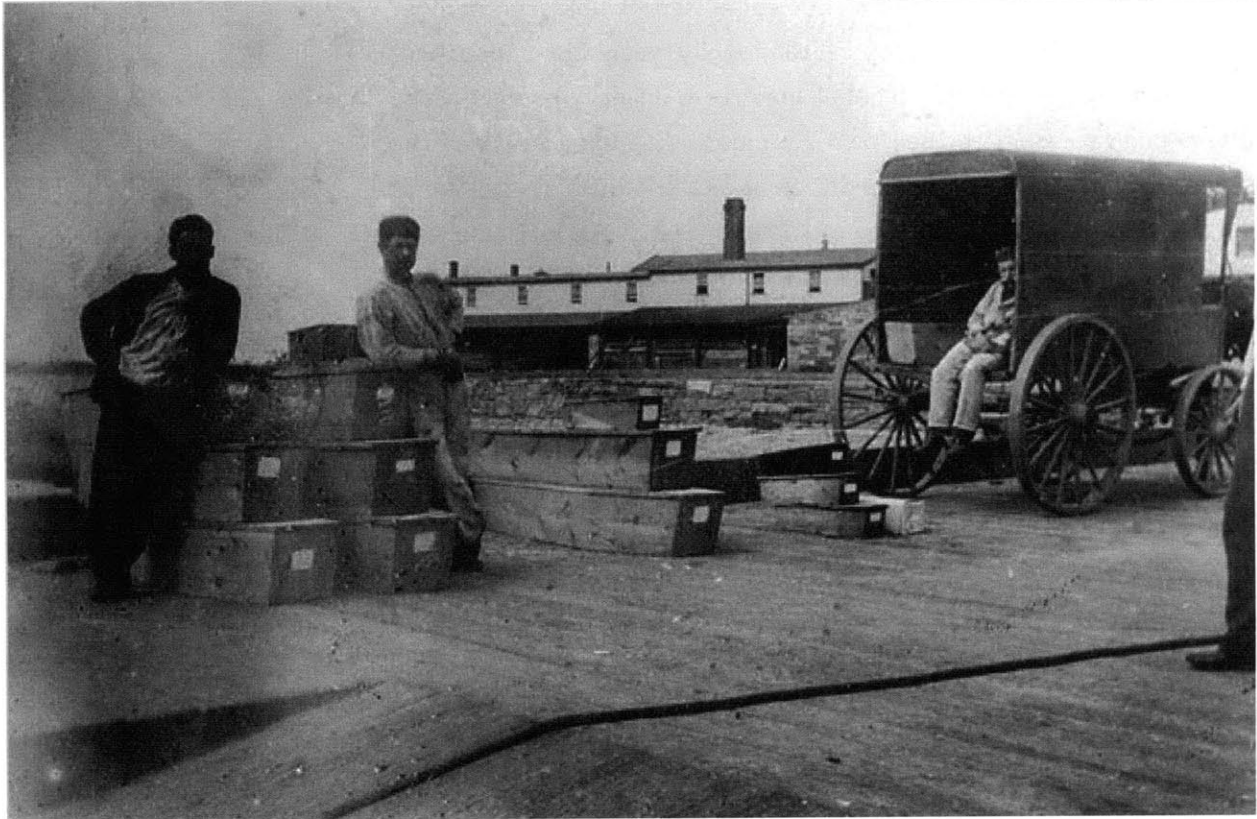


Figure 4.6: Coffin Delivery.
Source: Museum of the City of
New York, Jacob Riis collection

- 40 Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island:
A Historical Resume of Potter's
Field."
41 Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island:
A Historical Resume of Potter's
Field."

1908 NY Sun article and (Image
below): Fred Bartels History of
Hart Island



A Pictorial History - Circa 1890s

Jacob Riis changed the way poverty was perceived in New York with his photodocumentary book called *How the Other Half Lives*. In his images, one senses a desolate landscape, treaded over and treeless, exposed to the surrounding bay. The dirt was considered good for cultivation, but aside from a small garden near the penitentiary, the land has not been used for this purpose. Pine box coffins, still in use today, were labelled with the number of the death certificate in order to trace the burial.⁴⁰ Note the number of trenches apparent by the small white markings dotting the ground beyond in figures 4.8 and 4.9. The trench width or height has not changed, but the digging and filling is no longer a manual job. Until 1874, individual burials were not recorded, only quantities. After that a "great big death book preserved in the little office which overlooks the last abode of the 'lower ten' is all that tells where the burial was made."⁴¹ There is a certain respectability to the scene above. The coffins are stacked horizontally according to scale. There seem to be fewer than are present in following photographs, although that may have just been this photograph.

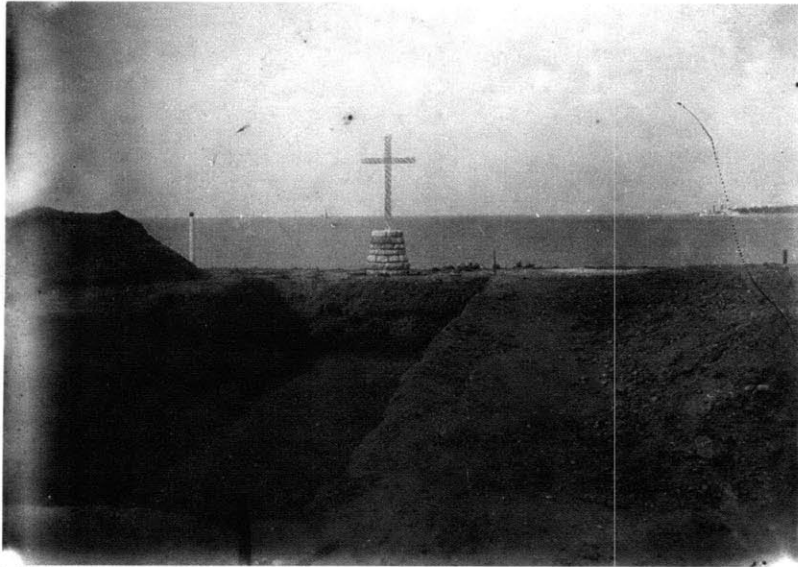


Figure 4.7: In 1889 Roman Catholics were buried in separate, consecrated trenches. The president of the Health Board issued an order that these burials be marked with a cross. (NYT 1889)

Source: Museum of the City of New York, Jacob Riis collection



Figure 4.8: A prisoner finishes adding the final layer of dirt atop the trench after it is filled to capacity with coffins. Note the scale of shovel to trench- the amount of manual labor was formidable.

Source: Museum of the City of New York, Jacob Riis collection



Figure 4.9: Prisoners lower a coffin into the trench, as a prison guard watches over.

Source: Museum of the City of New York, Jacob Riis collection

Figure 4.10: Coffin Delivery.

Source: New York Correction Historical Society

- 41 Silver, "Potter's Field Hart Island: A Historical Resume of Potter's Field." 4-8.



1967 - A Historical Resume of Potter's Field

Regardless of creed or color, everyone is buried immediately next to, on top of or below another person. According to the Department of Correction: "The coffins are placed in trenches 15x40 ft. dug 7 to 8 ft. deep. The adults coffins are piled in stacks of three deep: the babies, children and limbs are placed in rows according to alphabetic order."⁴¹ The automobile replaced the wagon as the transportation device for the coffins, yet the assembly line remains the same. The pine boxes have become more utilitarian and quickly assembled. Names are scrawled across the sides of the coffins rather than placed on placards on the front face of the coffins.



Figure 4.11: Inmates unload coffins of infants and "refuse" from the morgue truck. Infant coffins are stacked vertically, awaiting final placement.

Source: Department of Correction Historical Society

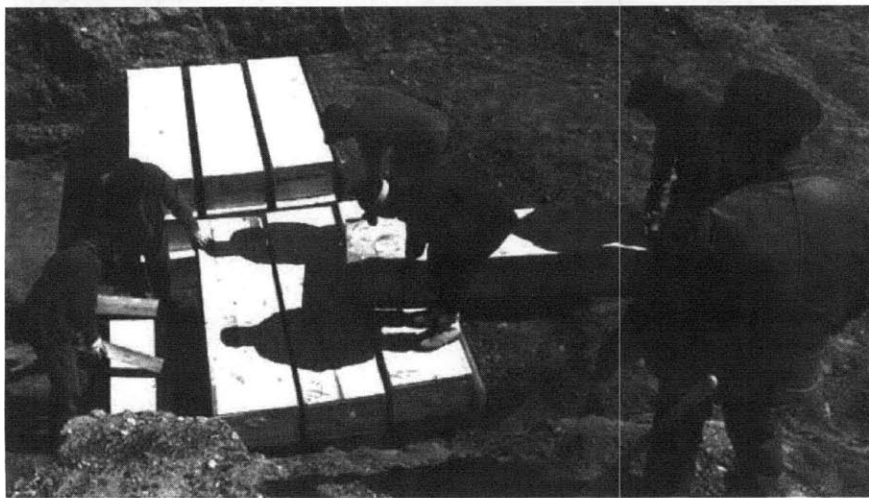


Figure 4.12: The coffins must be sturdy enough to support labor and up to two additional coffins.

Source: Department of Correction Historical Society



Figure 4.13: Adult coffins come in two sizes: regular and large.

Source: Department of Correction Historical Society



Figure 4.14: A plot covered with mussel shells, 1991. Source: Joel Sternfeld, *Hart Island*

42 Stephen Corello, Telephone Interview, 26 January 2010.

21st Century

The landscape now is dotted across with small white concrete markers, minimally telling the story that approximately 800,000 lives took place, once upon a time, in this great city. The burial process is remarkably similar to the burial process a half a century ago, or even a century ago. Notable differentiations are in the common use of machinery, today, where everything would have been hand dug a century ago. Also, color photography. Somehow that makes the landscape seem even bleaker. Stephen Morello of the Department of Correction suggested that the few buildings that remain today will be demolished when and if necessary to create more space for burial. The island will not be fully used for decades. He said that perhaps before that time, Donald Trump will come in and build a golf course.⁴²



Figure 4.15: Hart Island landscape showing extent of burial trenches

Source: Joel Sternfeld, *Hart Island*



Figure 4.16: A burial trench awaiting additional coffins.

Source: Ian Ference



Figure 4.17: Prisoners on burial detail lifting adult coffins into the trench. No description of what is done with the large mound of dirt.

Source: Joel Sternfeld, *Hart Island*

Figure 4.18 (top): Adult and Limbs burial register from 1881.

May

AGE	DATE OF BURIAL	BIRTHPLACE	HOW LOST BY	DATE OF DEATH	CAUSE OF DEATH	SIGNATURE OF CERTIFICATE	PLACE OF DEATH
John	31	U.S.	Age	31		James J. Doyle	Providence Hospital
John	27	Germany	Age	27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	27	U.S.	Age	27		J. J. Doyle	"
James	60	England		27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	27	U.S.	Age	27		J. J. Doyle	"
Patrick	40	"		27		J. J. Doyle	"
Thomas	23	Ireland		27		J. J. Doyle	"
William	19	New York	Age	27		J. J. Doyle	"
James	37	Ireland		27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	46	"		27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	21	39		27		J. J. Doyle	Providence Hospital
John	30	Italy		27		J. J. Doyle	Providence Hospital
William	17	Germany		27		J. J. Doyle	Providence Hospital
Charles	35	Germany		27		J. J. Doyle	Providence Hospital
John	19	Germany	Age	27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	27	Germany		27		J. J. Doyle	"
John	36	Germany		27		J. J. Doyle	"

Figure 4.19 (center): Infant Burial Register from 1949, depicting plot 128.

128

BABIES

GRAVE NUMBER	PERMIT	NAME	AGE	PERMIT	DATE OF DEATH	CAUSE OF DEATH
635	903	HUGHES 'B'	6 6/16 mos	3113	3/10/49	STILL BIRTH
636	904	TARRAD	32 wks	3113	3/12	"
637	894	MELE	12 "	3112	3/10	"
638	895	MANCINELLI	14 "	3112	3/10	"
639	963	DRUCKER	16 "	3117	3/15	"
640	967	HARDARO	40 "	3117	3/15	"
641	905	MOORE	20 "	3113	3/11	"
642	945	OUTLAW		3115	3/14	"
643	946	LEVY		3115	3/14	"
644	965	COZORAN	18 wks	3117	3/15	"
645	1104	BELL	19 "	3119	3/19	"
646	1168	DOBETI	38 "	3115	3/10	"
647	1186	MURRAY	20 "	3115	3/10	"
648	1170	GREEN	20 "	3119	3/19	"
649	1169	DAVIS	8 "	3115	3/10	"
650	1187	JOHNSON	28 "	3115	3/10	"

Figure 4.20 (bottom): Adult Burial Register from 1991, depicting Plot 215, Section 1. The information supplied on the registers has very little since they were first kept. The Department of Correction is responsible for the blanked out sections, claiming privacy rights.

PLOT 215 SEC I

GRAVE NUMBER	NAME	AGE	DATE OF PERMIT	DATE OF DEATH	CAUSE OF DEATH	SIGNATURE OF CERTIFICATE	PLACE OF DEATH
7171	King Hodge	84	12-10-90	12-14-90			
7175	Dominick Jasso	57	1-12-91	12-14-90			
7180	Tina Luwelo	47	3-5-91	1-18-91			
	NO BOX						
7106	Unknown Male Black	38	3-1-91	2-17-91			
7173	Unknown Male White	20	3-1-91	2-19-91			
7199	Angelo Atilio	47	3-1-91	2-19-91			
7103	Thomas Oconnor	67	3-1-91	2-20-91			
7113	Unknown Male Black	23	3-1-91	2-14-91			
7110	Unknown Male Black	50	3-1-91	2-20-91			
7115	John Hancock	50	2-27-91	2-15-91			
7107	STEVEN Petrali	52	3-1-91	2-12-91			
7108	Nicole Vivona	45	3-1-91	2-11-91			
7170	Steve Cameron	30	1-10-91	12-31-90			
7112	Patricia Bussel	61	12-27-90	11-6-90			
7179	Arturo Sanchez U.M.W.	45	11-13-90	11-4-90			
7156	William Kenneth Blackley	53	2-22-91	2-18-91			
7171	Arturo Beauchamp	66	12-19-90	12-8-90			
7140	Unknown Male Black	43	1-4-91	12-25-90			

Figure 4.21 (opposite page, bottom): Concrete Grave Marker indicating location of burials in Plot 215.

Documentation of the Forgotten

Stephen Corello, Telephone Inter- view, 26 January 2010.

Even though so many are buried in what amounts to mass graves, as many as one hundred fifty are disinterred each year. Extant records are detailed enough to provide the location. This must be the case since virtually no markers dot the landscape save a single concrete pile indicating each trench number. Unless these concrete markers can stand the test of time, perhaps one day there will be no markers at all to indicate that a population greater than that of many cities rests beneath the ground of this small northern New York island.

The burial registers used by the Department of Correction have not been modified since the first burial was recorded in 1869. In 1967 the burial ledgers each contained 400 pages and took approximately six months to fill. One hand fills in registers at a time, entering burial permit number with burial location, plot and grave numbers. The name of the deceased is recorded, if known, along with cause and date of death. The hospital or location of death is also recorded.

Since 1869, the registers have changed only in the hand that fills them in. The format and information have remained the same for one hundred and fifty years. Today, when it seems that everything is digitized, these records are still entered in pen, by a single officer. The Department of Correction alluded to a digitized system that is in the works, but the evidence has yet to emerge.⁴³



Epilogue

- 1 Stephen Corello, Telephone Interview, 26 January 2010.
- 2 Conlon, E. (1993). To the Potter's Field (A Reporter at Large). *The New Yorker*. New York City, The New Yorker: 13.; N.A. (1928). Potter's Field. *The New Yorker*. New York City, The New Yorker: 2.; N.A. (1931). Drift. *The New Yorker*. New York City, The New Yorker: 5.

Early in research for this project, I spoke on the phone with the Department of Correction (DOC) Deputy Commissioner and spokesperson, Stephen Morello, who told me about the current state of affairs on Hart Island.¹ I was hoping to charm him into granting me access to the island, but there seems to be a wall built between researchers, journalists, photographers, and the landscape of the unknown dead. It really is an invisible terrain. Families can be granted access, but only once, and after they prove beyond a shadow of doubt that they have a family member buried there. It was an eyebrow-raising moment to learn that families have to go through New York City's Correctional system in order to visit a grave. Even then, the grave cannot be visited, since burials are done per trench rather than plot, and a person's remains are geographically unknown until a disinterment order is placed and the trench has to be opened. Many who are already marginalized are targeted with an additional stigma of the penal system beyond their current position. In some ways more effort is placed into disallowing graveside visits than into granting them.

Of course, much of this is hearsay, even if it was learned from the DOC spokesperson, since I have not visited the island or witnessed any of the rites associated with the burials myself. The information to be found beyond this interview and the Department of Correction Historical Society, which operates only on-line and has no physical location, is limited to two books: one squarely devoted to the potter's field and the island itself, and one devoted to all of the smaller islands surrounding Manhattan. Otherwise, recent writing about the potter's field is for the most part limited to *New York Times* op-ed columns and blogs. The *New Yorker* has published three articles about the potter's field: in 1928, 1931, and most recently in 1993.² The *New York Times* has proven to be the most reliable source, and even provides information as far back as the newspaper's inception in 1851. The potter's fields that existed prior to those on Randall's and Ward's Islands have received very little written attention.

Death and burial in general are not topics often referred to. In an email conversation with John Stilgoe, longtime professor of the history of landscape at Harvard and author of many seminal books on the early American landscape, he told me that he used to be very interested in graveyards but not many others were, so he stopped focusing on the topic. It's a strange reality, that there is so little attention devoted to something that each of us unavoidably will go through. Perhaps the

aversion is rooted in the causes of what we do to avoid death on a daily basis - great lengths are gone to keeping ourselves out of the grave, so why would anyone want to focus on what it means to actually be in it? Perhaps it is, like the lack of attention shown to Hart Island, simply an oversight.

So much can be discovered by looking at this aspect of society. Some of America's earliest folk-art in the headstones lined the earliest graveyards, and first steps toward urban landscape design created the cemeteries of the mid-19th century. A public relationship with death made a visible shift from the churchyard to the suburb, marking a decreased involvement both with the church and with death. Yet these demarcations are relevant only to the strata of society that can afford a private burial. An entire segment of the population struggles to find enough money to pay for a funeral. And although death is a fairly taboo topic, the idea of bodily abandonment after death is even more unwelcome. People want to know where their bodies will end up, and that they won't be dumped in the potter's field - even today (those that know what a potter's field is, of course). This fear led to the formation of burial societies, as early as ancient Rome, to ensure a person's proper burial rather than the alternative of being thrown in the pile outside the city.

Historically, not only has so much been done (and still is) to avoid the topic, but as much has been done to avoid an unwanted burial in the potter's field. Poverty became acquainted with morals in this burial ground, an implication that those buried there deserved such a fate for leading a less than pure life.³ Beyond all of the historical and societal taboos, the simple closure of this landscape does more harm to the perception of the island and subsequently to the people buried there than any other factor today. Understandably, there is a cost issue. The Phoenix House, Hart Island's final institution to shut its doors in 1976⁴, closed because of transportation costs going to and from the mainland. And there is the criminality factor. Mingling criminals with civilians is not a task that the Department of Correction wants to take on. Phoenix, Arizona, however, has proven that it is possible at their potter's field. A dry landscape that is managed through a similar chain-gang program as New York's, anyone is allowed to visit the graveyard. None too many are impressed by the lack of commemoration, but they are not withheld from the graves of their family members.

Many early *New York Times* articles provide clues for this sort of perception. "Saved from Potter's Field" provides the most poignant example; N.A., "Saved from Potter's Field," *New York Times*, 2 January 1894. 3

This does not include the prison that remained on the island through 1991, but this prison was operational only insofar as it supported the burial ground. 4

- 5 Corrello. This is not such a far-fetched idea, as Trump already proposed a golf-course on neighboring David Island, which shared national duty with Hart Island through World War II.
- 6 Through another attempt at gaining access to the island, I called in a favor with a friend who was able to contact the Mayor's Director of Operations to see if he might be able to pull some strings. The Director of Operations response was that he had never heard of Hart Island and would have to get back to me. That was the last I heard about that conversation.

In that conversation with Stephen Morello, I asked him what he thought might become of the island in the future. He said that he didn't know if it would even continue as a burial ground, although there is plenty of space for burials to continue if need be into the far future. He speculated that for all anyone knew, Donald Trump would sweep up the island and plop a country club and golf course above it.⁵ For that reason alone, I chose to postpone the idea of a design proposal, focusing instead on understanding the root causes behind the existence of such a place. The landscape has existed in exactly the same way for one hundred and fifty years, before that in other locations it was likely not much different either. New York City, though, changes every day - it is hardly the same place ten years ago when I first moved there as it is today while I study its urban geography. Neighborhoods change in their racial make-up, in their commercial offerings, and in their housing prices. Then there is Hart Island - the nameless, faceless, final resting place for almost a million New Yorkers, and yet some of the most influential local political leaders do not even know of its existence.⁶ These are not good signs for an improvement of place.

The contemporary potter's field is a landscape that has not escaped from a medieval setting. It has never had the chance to move into the realm of commemoration because it never reached the era where this form of memorialization was layered into other burial grounds. Perception has everything to do with the shaping of landscape. In looking forward, I propose to change the perception through four agendas. These are proposals that should take place in order to create a neutralized, and perhaps celebrated, space. They would work together in this effort, not only allowing New Yorkers the chance to connect with this strange history, but also opening up a beautiful landscape in the city for public use and enjoyment.

1. Share the responsibility with those given the responsibility 150 years ago.

In 1847 cemeteries were opened up to private, non-profit corporations, and with that simple privatization the cemetery industry boomed. Not to say that it did not come without its own problems (the topic for another thesis), but it did alleviate pressure from the New York government in dealing with these particular landscapes. The major flaw was that marketing only went so far as the public could afford to spend, and those with no means were still left to the care of the state. However, since then, many other municipalities throughout the country have determined methods of subsidizing these burials for the funerary care industry in order that they might streamline the process of burial for the unclaimed and the unknown. The burials then no longer occur in potter's fields, but rather are placed in the same cemeteries as others, in a complete de-stigmatization of place.

Fernwood Funeral Home,
 “Fernwood Funeral Home,
 Crematory, Cemetery,” Fernwood
 Funeral Home, [http://www.
 foreverfernwood.com/](http://www.foreverfernwood.com/).

2. Use the landscape to express history.

On the website of the Forever Fernwood Memorial Gardens outside of San Francisco, California, a caption reading “If you seek my monument, look around you” sits atop an image of rolling green hills.⁷ The cemetery’s main product is in the provision of so-called “natural burials” - no embalming, no finished caskets, no headstones - in an effort to suggest a cyclical nature of life going back to the earth. It’s a concept that is catching on in the United States, especially with this hyper-environmentalist attitude taking over the country. When applied to a place like Hart Island, where there are no excess resources to go into commemoration through monuments, this strategy might actually prove a good one. Shape the landscape to become the monument, if bringing a monument to the landscape is not possible.

Landscapes, as this thesis has sought to prove, describe the nature of place and the society within which it exists to a great degree. Many cultures have used the burial mound as a tombstone built into the earth, as a natural place-making tool to describe what lies below. When seen as a landscape, it creates a timeline through history, an expression of what once was, and a celebration of what it has become. This is just one form that the landscape could take in describing the history of the place. Monuments need not take only the form of carved granite statues or tombstones. Recognition could exist within the landscape itself, earth crafted to reveal a history. By calling attention to these burials through pastoral means, the terrain changes from invisibility to commemoration.

Figure 2 (bottom left): Korean Cemetery
 Source: Ian Ference, photographer

Figure 3 (bottom right): Burial Mounds of unidentified North Korean POWs in South Korea
 Source: *New York Times/AP*

Figure 4 (opposite left): Burial Mounds of unidentified North Korean POWs in South Korea
 Source: *New York Times/AP*

Figure 5 (opposite right): Gyeongju Burial Mounds, Korea. Source: Amy Elise Keel.





Figure 1: Open prairie on Hart Island
Source: Ian Ference, photographer



Figure 7 (bottom left): Storage found on Hart Island
Source: Ian Ference, photographer

Figure 8 (bottom center): Storage found on Hart Island
Source: Ian Ference, photographer

Figure 9 (bottom right): Cremated remains stored in copper canisters of those who died at the Oregon State Asylum (now defunct). Source: David Maisel, photographer

Figure 10 (opposite left): Doria Pamphilij Archive in Rome. Source: Open source.

Figure 11: (opposite center): Trinity College Library, Dublin. Source: Candida Hofer

Figure 12 (opposite right): Yale's Beinecke Library. Source: Timothy Sang.

3. Create a vital records archive on the island, in one of the historic buildings that can be made habitable again.

In many cases, the only physical link remaining for some of the people buried here exists in the burial records that are still kept by hand by the DOC. Problematically, however, the current records, beyond what is stored at the Municipal Archives building in lower Manhattan, sit in a trailer on site, unprotected and inaccessible.⁸ The municipal archives only keeps the records on microfiche, making copying and sometimes legibly reading rather difficult. In 1977 a fire, suspected to be arson, burned down a large portion of the records before they had been turned over to the City archives. Imaginably, it was not a hard fire to set. The years worth of people whose names burned down in that fire are lost to everyone, forever.

If treated carefully, these records could become the potter's field's lieux de mémoire, taking the place of headstones, and doubly acting as genealogical and historical devices alongside commemorative ones. People could be taught again about the potter's field, creating a distance from the old perception by linking the place to a new one.





Figure 6: Building Shell on Hart Island
Source: Ian Ference, photographer



Figure 15 (bottom left): Proposal For Governor's Island. Source:West 8 with Rogers Marvel Architects, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, Urban Design+

Figure 16 (bottom right): Proposal For Governor's Island. Source:West 8 with Rogers Marvel Architects, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, Urban Design+

Figure 17 (opposite left): Proposal For Governor's Island. Source:West 8 with Rogers Marvel Architects, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, Urban Design+

Figure 18 (opposite right): Proposal For Governor's Island. Source:West 8 with Rogers Marvel Architects, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, Urban Design+

4. Change the myth: Open up Hart Island to the public.

Hart Island, through all accounts and even viewed from City Island, is a pristine and natural setting that does not exist anywhere else in New York City. Until the middle of the 20th century, citizens were employing use of the land for their own pleasure - beach-going, park-walking, sailboat landing. By reintroducing the island to the city, the mythological landscape that is crafted from the first moment one reaches the DOC dock with its barbed wire and security cameras changes into a new landscape, crafted through openness and acceptance of what is.

Precedent Studies:

Proposals for Governor's Island

Source: West 8 with Rogers Marvel Architects, Diller, Scofidio + Renfro, Urban Design+ (4 images)





Figure 13: Hart Island Shoreline, with washed up gravemarkers sitting along the beach (see bottom of picture).

Source: Joel Sternfeld/Hart Island



Figure 14: Adaptation of shoreline.

Source: Author



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Abbreviations

DOC - Department of Correction

DOCPC - Department of Correction and Public Charities

DOW - Department of Welfare

NYCDOCHS - New York City Department of Correction Historical Society

HRA - Human Resources Administration

NYPL - New York Public Library