Professional Archaeologists of New York City Newsletter

Issue 192 | December 2024

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President's Message

Greetings Fellow PANYC Members,

I hope you are all well and having a good start to the holiday season.

As your new President for the next two years, I extend great thanks to the officers and board of the previous term, who kept PANYC going strong through challenging post-pandemic times, and welcome the new officers and board: Kelly Britt (President Elect), Lynn Rakos (Secretary), Elizabeth Meade (Treasurer), and Board members Joan Geismar, Matt Reilly, Matt Spigelman, Nan Rothschild, Kevin Wiley, and Linda Stone (ex officio).

I also thank Kevin Wiley for his fantastic work as newsletter editor for the past two years and his innovative content. See, for example, his Member Spotlight featuring Nan Rothschild in the March 2023 issue, in case you missed it.

Our new newsletter editor, Meghan DeVito, brings her expertise from Landmarks Preservation Commission and the South Street Seaport Museum to this endeavor. Thank you, Meghan, for volunteering and for such a great first issue! In this issue, you will find not only meeting minutes but also news and notes, announcements about new publications, and a short article written by Linda Stone about a few curious artifacts.

I encourage everyone to send Meghan material to include in the spring edition of the newsletter. If we each send just one small thing, it will make her job easier and will result in a robust issue. Some ideas include news of new publications; updates about excavations, artifact-based work, community engagement, or other archaeology-related projects; short articles about PANYC history; photos; and queries about unusual or mysterious artifacts. We are open to your ideas!

Our next meeting will be on January 23rd at 6:00pm. It will be another "working meeting" with no separate Board meeting, as the past two have been. The January meeting will be on Zoom only, however. The Board will be in touch beforehand about coordinating break-out rooms for committee work that will follow brief announcements.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy holiday season and a wonderful new year!

Meredith B. Linn
PANYC President (2024-present)
info@panycarchaeology.org

NEWS AND NOTES

CONGRATULATIONS

Please join us in congratulating Jessica Striebel MacLean on her new position as Historian at the Central Park Conservancy. In this role, Jessica will help develop a new plan for interpretation, inspire in the public a deeper understanding of Central Park's history and the impact of the Conservancy's work, and promote new forms of civic engagement. Congratulations Jessica!

LPC's NYC Archaeological Repository: The Nan A. Rothschild Research Center was awarded a *Save America's Treasures* grant from the National Park Service. This grant will be used to make a portion of the Repository's collection from the Stadt Huys Block and 7 Hanover Square sites available to the public online. As part of the grant-funded project, 20,595 documents will be digitized, 8,400 artifacts will be photographed, and two online exhibits will be created to share the data with researchers and the public.

NEWS

Archaeologist April Beisaw and her students at Vassar College investigate how construction of New York City's largest reservoir a century ago uprooted thousands of rural residents.

The American Museum of Natural History is reviewing more than 1,800 items as they work to comply with the requirements, and has removed the ceremonial Ohtas, or Doll Being from public view for over 6 months in response to new NAGPRA requirements. Some tribal leaders are skeptical of the long process.

NOTES FROM NYAC

NYAC's Fall Meeting was held on September 28, 2024 at SUNY-New Paltz facilities and hosted by NYAC Vice President Joe Diamond. Highlights from the morning Board meeting and the afternoon general membership virtual meeting follow. Rachel L. Johnson's application to NYAC was reviewed and accepted. Welcome Rachel! The NYAC President, NYAC Secretary, and a Board seat are up for election in 2025. The current president, Carol Weed announced that she is not running for re-election, Dan Mazeau (current Secretary) is, and the candidates for the Board seat will be sought after the first of the year. Old Business items (AI/ChatBot protocols, an Early Conversation with Nation/Tribes protocol, and additional culling cheat sheet development) are now advancing as are New Business items including earning initiatives (workshops and classes). NYAC's Spring meeting afternoon program on May 2 is being set at the Winter Meeting. And, if you are interested in nominating someone for one of NYAC's three awards (Student Research, Founders, and Lifetime Achievement), please submit nominations to Nina Versaggi by January 15, 2025.

The call for papers is open for NYSAA's 106th annual meeting (May 2-4, 2024). Submissions along with registration must be received by April 1. See here for more information.

WE HAVE A NEW NEWSLETTER EDITOR!

If you have items you'd like included in any upcoming newsletters (new publications, notes, events, etc.) please send them to Meghan DeVito at **meghanldevito@gmail.com**.



Help us improve our website!

At our September meeting, we took time to identify ways to improve the look of our website (shoutout to Linda Stone for providing live website updates, like making our logo larger.)

If you have any suggestions for our website, or any photos we can use on it, please email info@panycarchaeology.com

Check out our website here: www.panycarchaeology.org

NEW PUBLICATIONS

ENVISIONING SENECA VILLAGE

Envisioning Seneca Village (envisioningsenecavillage.github.io/) is a digital project that imagines what this significant nineteenth-century village might have looked like around the year 1855, shortly before its destruction for the building of Central Park. The project is anchored in existing and ongoing research of many historians, archaeologists, educators, and descendants about this community of which there are no surviving photos, drawings, or above-ground traces. The project seeks to amplify this scholarship, help visitors to learn more about the village, catalyze new research, and above all, honor the people of Seneca Village and the community they created. This is a living project, so continue to visit to see updates and new features. Project team: Gergely Baics, Meredith Linn, Leah Meisterlin, and Myles Zhang.

Form or Function? Attempting to Identify a Reason for Decorating Kiln Stilts Linda Stone published a chapter in *Artifacts that Enlighten: The Ordinary and the Unexpected*[1] published by the Society for Historical Archaeology on kiln stilts found on Governors Island which are marked and unusually decorated. Read the chapter in full at the end of the newsletter. (Reprinted by permission from the Society for Historical Archaeology.)

Policing, Power, and Protests: Landscapes of Surveillance in Private and Public Spaces in Lower Manhattan by Madison Aubey, Kelly Britt, and Kellen Gold was published in Volume 58, Issue 2 of Historical Archaeology. It explores the history of these practices beyond the 21st century using a documentary archaeological approach. Download the open access article here.

[1] Chapter 8 in Stone, Linda, Barbara J. Heath and Patricia M. Samford (editors) 2020. *Artifacts that Enlighten: The Ordinary and the Unexpected.* Germantown, MD: Society for Historical Archaeology.

GENERAL MEETING MINUTES

Minutes
PANYC Board & General Meeting
17 September 2024, 6PM
Hybrid

NEXT MEETING: Tues. Nov 19, 2024

Attendees: Britt, Cantwell, DeVito, Geismar, Linn, Meade, Mollin-Kling, Rakos, Rothschild, Spigelman, Stone, Wiley

As agreed at the May 2024 meeting, a single meeting was held for all members, as opposed to PANYC's usual Board meeting followed by the General meeting.

President's Report:

Linn brought up the possibility of PANYC becoming an "Affiliated Society" with the Register of Professional Archaeologists. The cost is nominal, $100/year, and it comes with benefits to PANYC and to members including discounted dues. She will email further information for further research and discussion, also see link below:

https://www.rpanet.org/affiliated_societies

Membership: A membership application was received for Hannah Kate Simon. Her application was approved by the board and shared with the membership. Stone motioned to accept, seconded by Rothschild, all were in favor of accepting Simon for membership. Welcome to PANYC, Hannah!

Newsletter: DeVito is soliciting content for the Newsletter! Please send content to: meghanldevito@gmail.com by October 7th.

Parks: Linn reported that Jessica MacLean is now the historian with the Central Park Conservancy. Congratulations Jessica!

Public Program: DeVito reported that South Street Seaport Museum director is interested in working with PANYC on a space for the Public Program in their newly renovated facility. There is a possibility that PANYC and the museum could be co-sponsors but further discussion with the museum is needed and will be on-going.

Old Business: none

New Business:
Britt noted that she had received a Wenner-Grenn Engaged Research Grant for work at the

Flatbush African Burial Ground. Congrats, Kelly! There will be activities in late October, including a GPR survey. She will share information with PANYC and she encourages members to attend.

Committee Breakout Session:
As agreed in May, this was to be a "working" meeting when committees could address tasks that do not get completed given members' busy schedules. There was discussion of the By-laws Committee and their charge. The Website Committee was able to achieve success in getting people interested in looking at the website and providing comments! Stone did real-time edits to the site but much more is needed.

Check out the PANYC Website:
https://www.panycarchaeology.org/

Members are encouraged to provide comments on the website – and more importantly – provide content and photos! Please send comments/content/photos to lrakos@hotmail.com.

UPCOMING PANYC MEETING DATES (2024/25):
Tues. Nov 19, 2024
Thurs. Jan 23, 2025
Weds. Mar 19, 2025
Tues. May 20, 2025

Meeting adjourned at 7:45

Minutes prepared by:
Lynn Rakos
PANYC Secretary

Minutes
PANYC General Meeting
13 May 2024, OnZoom

Attendees: Britt, DeVito, Geismar, Linn, Maclean, Martin, Meade, Mollin-Kling, Rakos, Spritzer, Wiley

Treasurer's report: $7,807.13 across the Chase and PayPal accounts.

President's Report:

All in attendance agreed with Linn's suggestion that rather than a Board meeting followed by a General Meeting we hold one meeting. A Board meeting can be called if needed. We will begin this in September and will likely meet at 6PM, rather than 6:30, when the General meeting now starts.

All in attendance were in favor of Linn's idea that some meetings could be working meetings when committees could devote time to committee tasks that often do not get completed given busy schedules.

There was a discussion about using a questionnaire being sent to the membership to aid the board in determining why people do not attend meetings, what they might like to see at meetings, etc. Meade had drafted a questionnaire previously and will look for it to send to the board for review and use.

There was discussion on PANYC providing an honorarium for invited speakers. It was noted that in the past we had helped pay for travel expenses. People were generally in favor of an honorarium if the presentation is at a PANYC meeting and not the public program although travel money might be appropriate for the public program. The amount for honoraria would be decided on a case-by-case basis.

Archive: We need to have the old board upload documents that should be saved to the PANYC Dropbox. There is a logistical problem now with accessing Dropbox as a two-factor authentication is required.

Membership: A membership application was received for Celia Bergoffen, who had been removed from membership since she was more than two years in arrears. As per PANYC's bylaws, members two years or more in arrears must reapply for membership. Her application was shared with the membership. Kelly motioned to accept, seconded by DeVito, all were in favor of accepting Bergoffen for membership.

Met Chapter: Speaker on May 28, Dr. Jeff Bendremer, Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians. Information was emailed to PANYC members.

Maclean reported that the joint Met Chapter- AIA Scholarship of $1500 to fund work related to archaeology in NYC will be announced shortly. Look out for it soon to get all the details!

Information will be sent to PANYC members for consideration and distribution.

Parks: Linn reported that the Central Park Conservancy is collaborating with the Seneca Village Project on a 3-D visualization project.

Public Program: MCNY has not returned Linn's emails regarding the public program. Attendees were enthusiastic about DeVito following up on possible space at the South Street Seaport Museum.

Old Business: none

New Business: Czerkowicz, who could not attend the meeting, had brought to PANYC's attention the fact that the Merchant's House, on East 4th St., is being threatened by proposed development of a building on the lot next door. This structure, from 1832, is at risk of losing elaborate plaster work, and possibly structural failure and collapse, during construction of an adjacent building. NYC Landmarks recently approved the construction with the proviso that a vibration monitoring plan is implemented. The Merchant House Museum has been fighting this threatened development and are seeking support from the community and historic preservation professionals. PANYC will write a letter. Members are encouraged to do so as well. Information can be found here:

https://merchantshouse.org/calltoarms/

Mark your calendars for our next round of PANYC meetings!

MEETING DATES:
Tues. 17 Sept 2024
Tues. Nov 19, 2024
Thurs. Jan 23, 2025
Weds. Mar 19, 2025
Tues. May 20, 2025

Meeting adjourned at 7:45

Minutes prepared by:
Lynn Rakos
PANYC Secretary

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Form or Function? Attempting to Identify a Reason for Decorating Kiln Stilts

Linda Stone



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Mysterious kiln stilts have been found in fill on Governors Island in New York Harbor. The mystery has to do with both how the stilts got to Governors Island and why they were embossed with repetitive decoration, if one could call it decoration.

A sizable amount of kiln waste from an unknown source has been identified in historic fill unearthed on Governors Island, New York. There is no history of ceramic production there. The kiln waste is representative of a variety of ware types and several forms of kiln furniture, but primarily stilts. The embossed stilts include examples with maker's marks, numbers, letters, or motifs. However, on a given stilt, there is typically only one of these elements.

Governors Island is now a 172-acre park in the middle of New York Harbor off the tip of lower Manhattan in New York City (Figure 1). Prior to European settlement, Governors Island was used intermittently by Native Americans. Once the Dutch arrived, recognizing the strategic position of the Island within the harbor, they quickly set up shop there, building a small fort. Throughout much of its history, Governors Island remained a military outpost. British and then American armies occupied the island. After the American army relocated in 1966, the U.S. Coast Guard moved in. They stayed until 1996 when the island was deeded to New York by then President Bill Clinton. Much rehabilitation to Governors Island has taken place since and continues to date.

Although all this background information is relevant, the most important thing about Governors Island is that it is shaped like an ice cream cone. The ice cream portion was the original landform and now contains Governors Island National Monument and Governors Island Historic District, which includes two forts and other historic structures and features. The cone portion of the island was added beginning in 1911, more than doubling the island's size, with the addition of fill from the excavation of the Lexington Avenue subway. This part of Governors Island has recently been transformed into parkland for public enjoyment.

The legend of the Lexington Avenue subway fill on Governors Island overshadows a smaller, lesser-known fill episode that happened about thirty years earlier. In 1883, a seawall perimeter was constructed around the entire then extant island (the ice cream). It is the fill added during this project in which the kiln waste was found, not in the well-known, and later, Lexington Avenue subway fill.

The 1867 map of Governors Island "from a survey made under the direction of General John G. Barnard" provides a snapshot of the shoreline at that time, showing primarily a beach with shoreline retention structures present only in limited places (Figure 2). A second map dating to 1906 was drawn by J.M. Hilton after the new seawall had been constructed. Figure 3 is a copy of that map overlaid with the footprint of the original landform thereby showing just how much land was added.

The majority of the kiln waste has thus far been documented in fill primarily located near South Battery, where the largest exposure of that deposit was disturbed as a result of landscaping and work on utility upgrades. Plans for that project triggered archaeological excavation dictated by historic preservation and environmental review laws. Although this is the largest area of kiln waste fill documented on Governors Island to date, the kiln waste deposit has also been identified near the former shoreline in other places on the island.

Recovered kiln stilts were often marked or decorated, but many more undecorated pieces were also present. The only maker's mark represented in the deposit is B & Co, which was found on a number of the stilts (Figure 4). This mark is attributed to W.W. Buller and Company of Hanley in Staffordshire, England. They were in business under that name from 1862 to 1883 (Allied Insulators Ltd. 2011). Other artifacts found in association with the fill narrow the date of deposition to no earlier than the early 1880s (Stone 2016:66–67). In addition to the maker's mark, other stilts are marked with numbers, or letters, or both (Figure 5). These marks may represent stilt sizes (Dransfield 2009:14).

Examples of the decorated kiln stilts are shown in Figure 6. Research conducted as part of several archaeological projects and subsequent presentations on the subject has resulted in no information on these designs. Therefore, the author has

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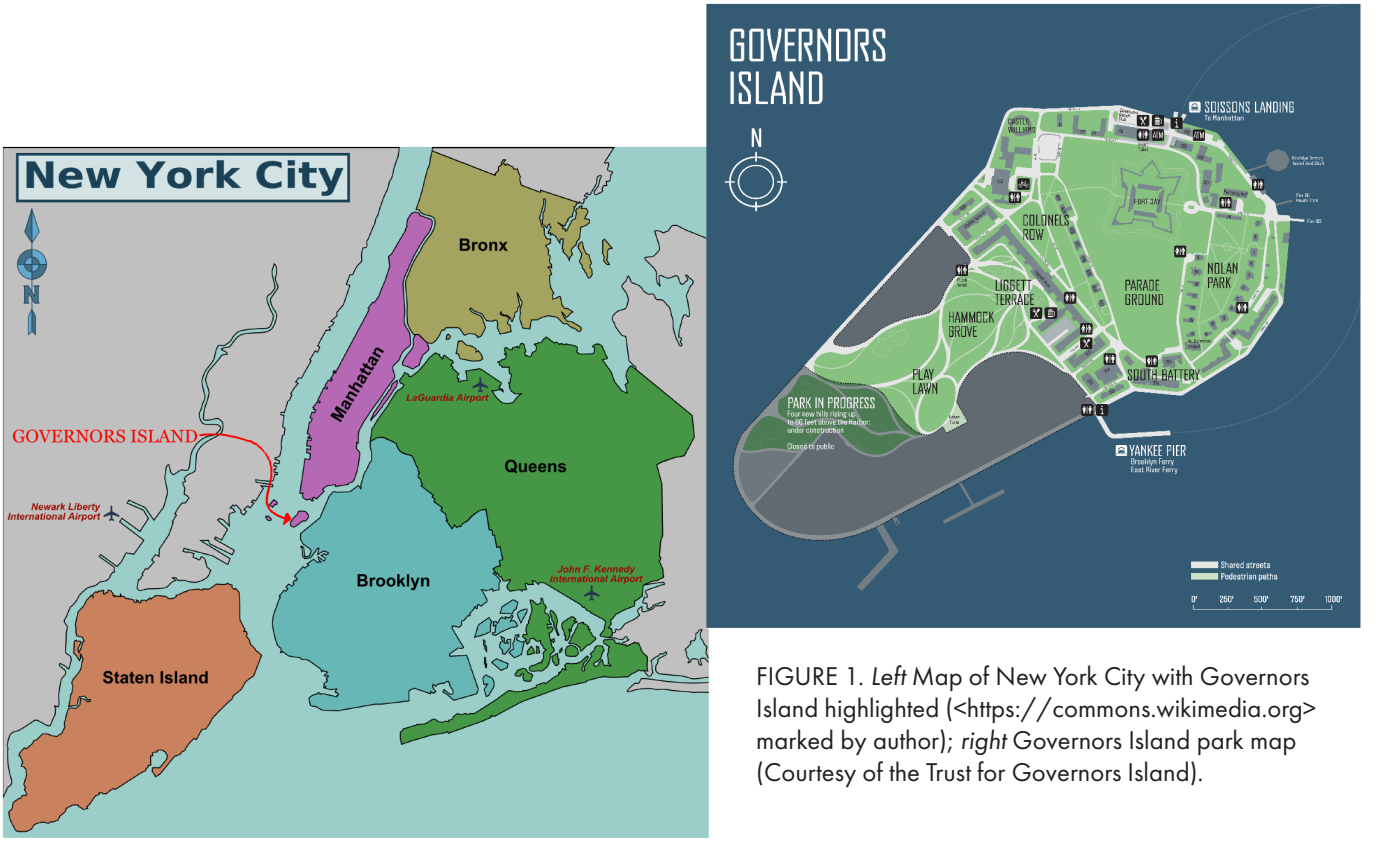

FIGURE 1. *Left* Map of New York City with Governors Island highlighted (<https://commons.wikimedia.org> marked by author); *right* Governors Island park map (Courtesy of the Trust for Governors Island).

ascribed pattern names to the embossed motifs: snail shell, triangles, leaf (perhaps multiple triangles), and cross hatch. The patterns, when present, occur on two faces of the stilt arms. Among the Governors Island samples, the only pattern that is also sometimes marked is the cross hatch.

After consulting with numerous ceramic specialists in the United States, including those represented in this volume, it appears Governors Island is the only archaeological site in the country where marked or decorated kiln stilts have been found.

Only one ceramic researcher has thus far been identified who had seen these types of stilts in archaeological context, or any other context for that matter. David Barker, a ceramic specialist in Staffordshire who has conducted research on W. W. Buller & Company, has seen these types of decorated stilts. However, he does not know if they were produced by that company. When asked about the decorations and whether he knew of any pattern names for them, his answer was surprising. He had not previously thought of these embossings as decorations, but rather as utilitarian texturizing designed to prevent the potters' fingers from burning (David Barker 2015, elec. comm.).

Identifying a researcher in England who has seen these objects leads one to conclude that England was the original source of the kiln stilts. This conclusion implies one of three scenarios: either the stilts were purchased from a British supplier for use in a kiln(s) in the United States; they were inadvertently included in shipments of ceramics from

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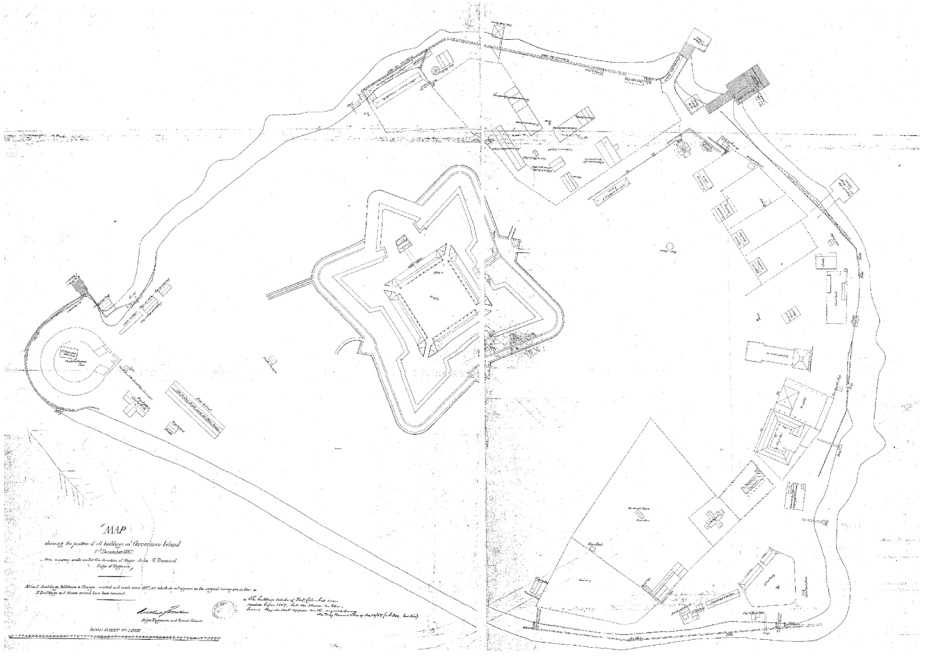

FIGURE 2. 1867 Map of Governors Island. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Surveyed by Major John G. Barnard (National Archives Fortification File, Drawer 37, Sheet 55).

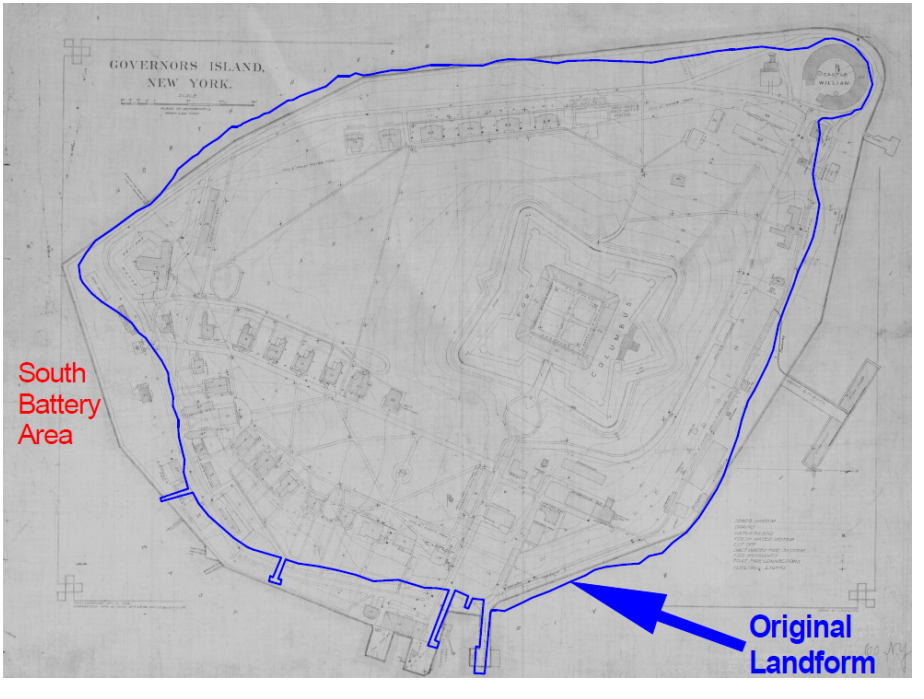

FIGURE 3. 1906 Governors Island, New York overlaid with the footprint of the shoreline prior to landfilling. Map drawn by J.M. Hilton, "photographed Oct.10, 1903, corrected Apr. 16, 1906, Apr. 24, 06, May 23, 06, Jun. 21, 06." (National Archives, College Park Maryland. RG 92; Blueprint File; Governors Island, NY).

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FIGURE 4. Governors Island kiln stilt marked: B & Co (Photograph by author, 2018).

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FIGURE 5. Governors Island kiln stilts embossed with numbers and letters: *top to bottom,* 7, 6, E, and 30 (Photograph by author, 2018).

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FIGURE 6. Governors Island kiln stilts with repetitive embossed motifs; *clockwise from upper left,* shell, leaf, triangle, and cross hatch (Photograph by author, 2018).

Staffordshire; or the fill containing the stilts originated in England. A potential importer of these types of kiln stilts in the New York City region has not yet been identified, but this seems the most likely scenario. The possibility that the stilts were inadvertently contained in a shipment of ceramics seems unlikely because of the presence of wasters, some only bisque fired, in the deposit. The presence of imported fill, however unlikely it seems, may not be totally out of the question. The importation of fill as ballast has been documented at archaeological sites throughout the northeastern United States (LeeDecker et al. 1994:table 6.1). However, all of these sites date from prior to 1883 when Governors Island was filled and none of those sites have documented fill coming from across the Atlantic.

So, whether it be form or function, the mystery remains as to why the stilts were embossed and how they got to Governors Island in New York. Any information on these stilts you may have or come across would be much appreciated by the author.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Trust for Governors Island for the opportunity to work in such a magnificent setting, to Jenna Wallace Coplin for her research in identifying the maker of the marked stilts, and to Meta Janowitz for her research suggestions and for showing the stilts around at "dish camp."

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