

Professional Archaeologists of New York City, Inc.

PANYC

NEWSLETTER

No. 131

November 2007

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Next Meeting:

January 23, 2008
Neighborhood Preservation Center
232 East 11th Street
New York, NY
6:30pm

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**Professional Archaeologists of New York City (PANYC)
Minutes of the General Meeting, 23 May 2007**

*Notice of upcoming meeting, 19 Sept. 2007, 6:30 pm.
Neighborhood Preservation Center, 232 E. 11th St, NYC*

Secretary's report: The minutes from the March meeting were approved.

Treasurer's report: PANYC has \$3073.20 in the bank, and 27 paid members, which is fewer than last year. Spritzer will send out a letter reminding lapsed members of their situation. There was a brief discussion of recruiting (see below, New business).

President's report: Rakos wrote two letters, both of which were reprinted in the newsletter. The first was to Governor Spitzer commending him on his efforts in conjunction with the preservation of the so-called "Survivors' staircase" at Ground Zero. The second was to Commissioner Benape, copied to the Mayor, Amy Freitag, Charles McKinney, Deborah Howe, Robert Tierney and Amanda Sutphin. This letter raised the issue of the NYC Dept of Parks' billing procedures which seem to only pay for fieldwork hours. The letter reminded the Commissioner that the archaeological process requires analysis of recovered materials and the preparation of a report on the project and suggested some possible modifications of billing procedures. Thanks were extended to Rothschild, Geismar, Pickman and Stone for assistance with the letter.

The President reported on a meeting she and Rothschild had had on the 21st with Amanda Sutphin at LPC about the letter sent to Commissioner Benepe, and about LPC's understanding of NYC Dept. of Parks' procedures. Amanda reported that Parks projects that do not involve landmarked structures fall into one of two classes, the first involving routine maintenance, minor procedures and modifications, replacements in kind, etc; and the second class involving capital projects. Archaeology is only regularly called for on capital projects. Sutphin noted that archaeology was not required at the project in question at Martin's Field, but was conducted because of the possibility of burials. She said that Parks' auditing department had decided that archaeologists should bid on projects lumping all cost categories into field hours (so that an archaeologist anticipating 2 hours of lab analysis and 1 hour of report preparation for each field hour would propose an hourly rate of \$400, rather than eg. their \$100/hr fieldwork rate). She also noted that Amy Freitag, Parks' Deputy Commissioner for Capital Projects, whose responsibility includes archaeology, was on maternity leave until Sept. Amanda believes that things will be worked out when she returns. She also suggested we wait until we receive Benepe's reply to the letter before writing again. It was suggested that, in future, letters might also be copied to Patricia Harris, Deputy Mayor, and Christine Quinn, City Council speaker.

Schuldenrein noted that Parks was notoriously difficult to deal with as information was impossible to obtain about bills, responsibilities, etc., and Spritzer reported likewise. It was agreed that there were two issues here, one being the way in which LPC and Parks administer CEQR procedures and the second being the opacity of Parks as an agency so that it is unusually difficult to get information about projects, reimbursements, procedures, etc.

Committee reports:

The following committees had no report: **Awards** (none were given at the Public meeting and members were urged to find submissions for next year's meeting), **Events, Membership, Metropolitan Chapter, Newsletter** (Chris Ricciardi was commended for the current newsletter), **Outreach, Public Program** (Lynn Rakos was congratulated for an outstanding program), and **Repository**.

Landmarks/Parks was discussed above.

Municipal Arts Society: Geismar had reported that the MAS will do a lecture series next year and is planning for one lecture to be on archaeology. No subject or speaker is known yet but Joan will assist MAS with the program.

NYAC: Stone reported that it will be revising its by-laws (last revised in 1988) and that the Burial Bill is still in committee. She requested that members write to their legislators urging its passage. Schuldenrein reported that there was some debate at the recent NYAC meeting about the relevance of shovel tests in all situations, and whether geoarchaeological modeling might be better in some settings.

Research and planning: Schuldenrein said that he is still hoping to arrange a lecture in the fall from the London archaeologists with whom he met.

Website: Possible locations for the PANYC website were considered.

New business: there was discussion of creating a new category of members, Associate members, replacing the current "subscriber" category. Since meetings are open to the public, it was thought that this might bring in new people who might ultimately become members. After a consideration of whether the by-laws would need to be revised for this to take effect, it was suggested that the by-laws be included in the next newsletter. There was no resolution on the membership category.

Future meetings: set for 19 Sept, 14 November, 2007; and 23 January, 19 March and 21 May, 2008.

Meeting adjourned, 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted: Nan Rothschild

On the Trail of Brooklyn's Underground Railroad

By JOHN STRAUSBAUGH
Published: October 12, 2007

LAST month the City of New York gave Duffield Street in downtown Brooklyn an alternate name: Abolitionist Place. It's an acknowledgment that long before Brooklyn was veined with subway lines, it was a hub of the Underground Railroad: the network of sympathizers and safe houses throughout the North that helped as many as 100,000 slaves flee the South before the Civil War.

With its extensive waterfront, its relatively large population of African-American freemen — slavery ended in New York in 1827 — and its many antislavery churches and activists, Brooklyn was an important nexus on the “freedom trail.” Some runaways stayed and risked being captured and returned to their owners, but most traveled on to the greater safety of Canada.

Because aiding fugitives from the South remained illegal even after New York abolished slavery — and because there was plenty of pro-slavery sentiment among Brooklyn merchants who did business with the South — Underground Railroad activities were clandestine and frequently recorded only in stories passed down within families. Corroborating documentation is scarce.

Still, it's possible to follow some likely freedom routes through Brooklyn. You begin in Brooklyn Heights, where the Promenade offers sweeping views of the East River waterfront. In the decades before the Civil War, this waterfront bristled with the masts of sailing ships. Many were cargo vessels bringing cotton and other goods from the South. Sometimes they brought secret passengers: slaves fleeing to freedom. The fugitives slipped ashore and filtered into Brooklyn, where they were hidden and helped along on their journeys. Acquiring its railroad imagery by the 1830s, this antislavery network had its own “stationmasters” and “conductors,” who helped organize runaways' passages north, and its own “stations” and “depots,”

where they hid. Several Brooklyn churches participated. Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims, a few blocks from the Promenade on Orange Street, between Hicks and Henry Streets, was called its “Grand Central Depot.”

Strolling up the tree-lined street to this simple, New England-style brick church (constructed in 1849, succeeding the smaller structure that still stands behind it on Cranberry Street), it’s hard to imagine that this serene spot became a lightning rod of national debate when the Congregationalist founders invited Henry Ward Beecher to be their first preacher in 1847.

Beecher, a brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the 1852 best-selling, controversial antislavery novel “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” was both celebrated and reviled for his abolitionist stance. The archives of the Brooklyn Historical Society (nearby, at Clinton and Pierrepont Streets) contain some of the hate mail he received. One letter bears a drawing of a lynching and the note:

“Henry Ward Beecher, here is the fate of all traitors. We are making a rope for you.”

Beecher’s Sunday services packed Plymouth Church to the rafters, not just with locals but also with Manhattanites, who crossed the East River in such numbers that the ferries docking at Fulton Landing were nicknamed “Beecher Boats.” In 1860 a long-shot presidential candidate named [Abraham Lincoln](#) paid the two-cent fare to ride a Beecher Boat to hear Beecher preach; a plaque at the end of a pew marks the spot where he sat. Walt Whitman, who was fired from his newspaper job at The Brooklyn Eagle for his abolitionist views, and who set the type for his self-published “Leaves of Grass” in a nearby print shop, was a great fan of Beecher’s sermons.

Beecher also invited antislavery giants like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass and Wendell Phillips to address his congregation. Other guest speakers over the years have included Booker T. Washington, [Mark Twain](#), [Charles Dickens](#) — who read “A Christmas Carol” to capacity crowds for three nights running in 1868 — and the Rev. Dr. [Martin Luther King Jr.](#), delivering an early version of his “I Have a Dream” speech.

“A lot happened in this church,” Lois Rosebrooks, the church’s director of history ministry services, said when I visited recently. “We know that this was a stop on the Underground Railroad. Charles B. Ray, an Underground Railroad conductor in Manhattan, brought people over and dropped them here. They were hidden in the church — we assume in the basement, as that would be the safest place for them.”

Beecher’s most successful tactic for arousing what he called “a panic of sympathy” for slaves was to stage mock slave auctions in the church, with the congregation bidding furiously to buy the captives’ freedom. The 1914 bronze statues of Beecher and two girls in the church’s courtyard by Gutzon Borglum, who later sculptured Mount Rushmore, depicts the first such auction, in 1848.

The most famous auction occurred in 1860, when Beecher urged his congregation to buy the freedom of a pretty 9-year-old from Washington, Sally Maria Diggs, called Pinky for her light complexion.

“After the service he called her to the platform and told the congregation her story,” Ms. Rosebrooks said. “He said, ‘No child should be in slavery, let alone a child like this.’ I’m sure he played on this. She could be your niece. She could be your sister. Your next door neighbor. So they passed the collection plate and raised \$900, which is about \$10,000 in today’s dollars.”

Congregants gave jewelry as well as cash. In a theatrical flourish Beecher fetched a ring from the collection plate, slipped it onto Pinky’s finger and declared, “With this ring, I thee wed to freedom.”

In 1927 when Plymouth Church celebrated the 80th anniversary of Beecher’s first sermon there, one who attended was Mrs. James Hunt, a stately woman of 76. She was Pinky and had grown up to marry a lawyer in Washington. According to Plymouth Church lore, she brought the ring with her; Ms. Rosebrooks showed me a simple gold band set with a small amethyst. (A Brooklyn Eagle article from 1927, however, quotes Mrs. Hunt as saying the ring had been lost.)

From Plymouth Church, it's a 10-minute walk to the corner of Fulton and Duffield Streets, where the new Abolitionist Place sign hangs. The abolitionists Thomas and Harriet Truesdell lived at 227 Duffield Street in the 1850s, and William Harned, an Underground Railroad conductor, lived near Duffield and Willoughby Streets.

Even as the city unveiled the new sign, however, it was considering plans to demolish the small houses on Duffield Street as part of an economic development plan for downtown Brooklyn. New hotels, underground parking and a public square would replace much of what now stands on the block.

Joy Chatel, a cosmetologist who lives at 227 Duffield Street, and Lewis Greenstein, a retired city employee who owns 233, have fought that plan since it was announced in 2004. They believe their houses, both probably dating to the 1840s, were stops on the Underground Railroad and should be preserved.

In his sub-basement, Mr. Greenstein showed me what appeared to be a capped well and an exit shaft to the surface. Former tenants told him of finding old stoves and iron cauldrons there, since removed. It all led him to believe his house was "a feeding station" for escaped slaves passing through Brooklyn.

Ms. Chatel said that years ago she looked through an opening in a neighbor's sub-basement to see what she thought was an abandoned subway tunnel under Duffield Street. There's a low arch in her own subbasement, sealed with a large stone, that might lead to this tunnel.

No subway ever ran below Duffield Street. Ms. Chatel and Mr. Greenstein speculate that the tunnel was used by the Underground Railroad, and might have led toward the former Bridge Street African Wesleyan Methodist Episcopal Church, the first African-American church in Brooklyn and a known depot, just two blocks away. (It's now Wunsch Hall of the Polytechnic University, on the Metrotech Center commons.)

Mr. Greenstein acknowledged that they have only circumstantial evidence. A planning and environmental firm commissioned by the city found no conclusive proof of their claims. The consultants made no attempt to excavate that mysterious tunnel, noting in their report that “assuming that a tunnel was discovered, there would be no way of knowing if it served as a passageway for freedom seekers without corroborating artifacts.”

Still, Mr. Greenstein said, “I think there’s enough evidence here to say, ‘Let’s do an archaeological dig.’”

From downtown Brooklyn I rode the A/C line to Utica Avenue in Crown Heights, then walked four long blocks to another cluster of small 19th-century houses enjoying a happier fate. Like a sliver of the rural past, a row of freshly painted wooden homes stands on green grass near the corner of Bergen Street and Buffalo Avenue, surrounded by modern red-brick monotony.

They’re all that remains of the African-American community of Weeksville, which thrived from the 1840s through the 1930s, then was swallowed up by Brooklyn sprawl and all but forgotten. In 1968 the last dilapidated houses were scheduled to be demolished to make way for public housing when preservationists identified and saved them. They were restored and opened for public tours as the Weeksville Heritage Center. Each house is furnished to represent a specific decade, from the 1840s — simple wooden furniture and no indoor plumbing — to the electric lights and washing machine of the 1930s.

“Weeksville was founded in 1838, 11 years after the end of slavery in New York state,” Kaitlyn Greenidge, a research assistant, told me. “It was a community founded on land purchased by James Weeks, a free African-American, along with two other investors, buying land in central Brooklyn and cutting it up into plots to sell to other African-Americans.”

By 1855, Weeksville was home to more than 800 residents. They included doctors, craftsmen and businessmen. Weeksville had its own elementary school, orphanage, old-age home and churches, and its own abolitionist newspaper, *The Freedman’s Torchlight*.

Ms. Greenidge said that although Weeksville was widely known as a safe haven for African-Americans, and many blacks from Manhattan relocated there after the vicious draft riots of 1863, there was no documentation to confirm that it was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

“But we do know from census records that up to 30 percent of the black people who were living in Weeksville in the 1850s had been born in the South,” she said, which suggests that at least some were escapees.

Pamela Green, Weeksville’s executive director, said its mission today is to have an impact on young people. “We want them to see that here were a group of people who were active post-enslavement, who were able to create institutions, to persevere, to create communities,” she said. “What is it about their lives that enabled them to do that in arguably one of the worst periods in history? What can you learn from what they did that will help you in facing the challenges of the 21st century?”

On Abolitionist Place, Ms. Chatel said she would like to see her house put to similar use.

“There’s no black museum in Brooklyn to celebrate the Underground Railroad,” she said. “This is the house to do it in. It’s important that the children and all of the people can see what people had to go through to be free.”



[The Freedom Trails of Brooklyn](#)



A painting of the “Pinky sermon,” depicting the church’s abolitionist pastor, Henry Ward Beecher, in 1860, persuading congregants to buy the freedom of a young slave known as Pinky.



Julien Jourdes for The New York Times, top
Top, Lois Rosebrooks, director of history ministry services for the Plymouth Church, known as the “Grand Central Depot” of the Underground Railroad in Brooklyn. Beecher’s Sunday services were often packed to the rafters, bottom.



Julien Jourdes for The New York Times
Lois Rosebrooks, director of history ministry services for the Plymouth Church of the Pilgrims in
Brooklyn, home pulpit of the fiery abolitionist pastor Henry Ward Beecher.

Mystery of Pits Is Solved, Just in Time to Fill Them In

By BARBARA WHITAKER

Local residents and researchers have apparently solved the mystery of the underground rooms in Ossining, but they will probably not be able to save them.

The network of rooms, at the entrance of a condominium complex, has been identified as a rare 19th-century pit silo where food for livestock was stored.

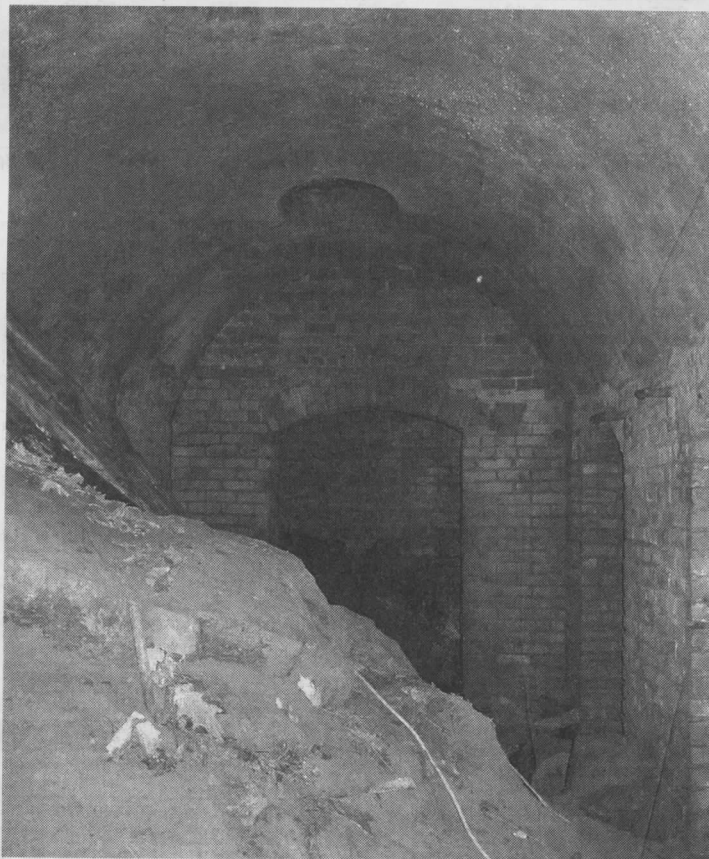
Road work is scheduled to begin this week that will destroy the subterranean brick silo despite a finding by the state's Historic Preservation Office that the silo, which appears to have been built in the late 1870s, is probably eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

"We are hoping that something can be done to secure the silo and eventually make it accessible so that it can be interpreted," wrote Peter D. Shaver, a specialist in the Historic Preservation Office, in a letter on Thursday to the property manager of the Mystic Pointe condominiums.

But being listed on a historical registry does not necessarily mean that the structure must be preserved.

"Even if it has historical value, safety comes first," said Sal Faruggio, president of the condominium board.

The board has been weighing what to do about the private roadway since it developed a sinkhole in the spring. An excavation revealed the mysterious structure, which was the apparent cause of the hole.



GAY MARGLIN

Underground rooms in Ossining, N.Y., held food for livestock.

Some area residents had known about the rooms for years, but they could only speculate what the structure had been used for. Perhaps it was a root cellar or a stop on the Underground Railroad.

One resident, Anne Marie Leone, has spent the last few

months pursuing the mystery with the help of neighbors, condominium board members and the Ossining Historical Society. She was able to establish that the structures were ensilage pits used to preserve green fodder over the winter. It appears they were built by Orlando B. Potter,

who bought the property as a summer residence in the 1870s.

The underground structures feature detailed brickwork and arched ceilings with vents. Ms. Leone's research found old newspaper articles that chronicled farmers' experiments with new ways of storing fodder. The silo that is to be filled in is made up of about 10 rectangular, interconnected rooms that create a tunnel-like space.

"The modern-day silo apparently evolved from these earlier pit silos," Mr. Shaver said.

Ms. Leone and other members of the community have sought help from the Village of Ossining, historic groups and state officials, without success.

About a month ago, officials in the Westchester County village ordered the condominium to fix the road, which it shares with St. Augustine Catholic Church and School.

"If that road opened up, we would be held responsible," Mr. Faruggio said. "With all the facts presented to us, our only goal is to make the road safe."

The cost of repairing the road and saving the underground structures is estimated to be at least \$200,000, which is more than four times the estimated \$50,000 needed to save just the roadway and fill in the pits.

"It comes down to money," Ms. Leone said, noting that because the site is on private property, it is more difficult to attract grants or other types of assistance. "If I were a millionaire I'd write them a check."

ANNOUNCEMENT

2008 BERT SALWEN AWARD FOR THE BEST STUDENT PAPER ON NEW YORK CITY ARCHAEOLOGY

A prize of \$100.00 will be awarded by Professional Archaeologists of New York City (PANYC) to the author of the best paper on New York City archaeology written by a student in fulfillment of an academic requirement. Although preference may be given to papers written using materials from contract archaeology projects in the city, the competition is not limited to such research. Both graduate and undergraduate students are urged to apply. Papers should not be longer than 50 pages and must be submitted in triplicate. The deadline for submission is March 1, 2008. Please send three copies of the manuscript to Anne-Marie Cantwell, PANYC Awards Committee, Apt. 5C, 14 Stuyvesant Oval, New York, New York 10009. The Bert Salwen Award will be presented at the annual PANYC Public Program at the Museum of the City of New York.

PLEASE POST

ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE MEMBERSHIP

**NOMINATIONS REQUESTED FOR
SPECIAL PANYC AWARD
FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY A NON ARCHAEOLOGIST TO
NEW YORK CITY ARCHAEOLOGY**

PANYC (Professional Archaeologists of New York City) is pleased to request nominations for a special award honoring non archaeologists or institutions who have made outstanding contributions to the furtherance of New York City archaeology. Please send three copied of letters of nomination documenting the nominee's qualifications to Anne-Marie Cantwell, PANYC Awards Committee Chair, Apt. 5C, 14 Stuyvesant Oval, New York, New York, 10009. Nominations must be received by March 1, 2008. The award will be presented at the PANYC Public Program at the Museum of the City of New York.

If you are interested in joining PANYC or if you would like to subscribe to the PANYC Newsletter, please complete the form below and return it to:

Elizabeth Martin, PANYC Secretary
250 East 90th Street – Apt. 4N
New York, NY 10128

NAME:			
ADDRESS:			
PHONE:		E-MAIL:	

Please indicate preferred mailing address and check below as appropriate.

I wish to apply for membership to PANYC and would like to receive the application form _____

I wish to subscribe to the PANYC Newsletter (Fee \$10) _____

I wish to make an additional donation to PANYC _____

EVENTS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST - Compiled November 2007

EVENT	SPEAKER	TIME	DATE	LOCATION	CONTACT INFORMATION	FEE
Exhibit: Listening to Our Ancestors: The Art of Native Life, North Pacific Coast			9/12/07-7/20/08	George Gustav Heye Center, NMAI	http://www.nmai.si.edu/	free
Exhibit: The Age of Rembrandt: Dutch Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum of Art			9//18/07-1/6/08	Metropolitan Museum of Art	www.metmuseum.org	pay what you wish, but something
Discussion: Bringing 17 th Century New Amsterdam to Life	Joel Grossman, Courtney Haff, George Janes, and Warren Shaw	2 p.m.	11/17/07	New Amsterdam History Center Event at Marble Church office 3 West 29th Street	212.799.4203 or kchase@westendchurch.org	Free but reservations required
Lecture: The Abri du Poisson Affair: the untidy beginnings of French antiquities law	Randall White	6:30	11/28/07	Columbia University, Schermerhorn, room 612	(212) 242-5228 or erik.axelson@parks.ny.gov	r.s.v.p.
Lecture series: Gifts for the Gods: Images from Egyptian Temples			12/2/07	Metropolitan Museum of Art	www.metmuseum.org	
Sustaining Egyptian Culture: Priests, Military Men and Officials as Temple Builders in the Late Period	Neal Spencer	3pm				
Images of the Divine: Manufacturing Immortality?	Regine Schultz	4 pm				
Symposium: Soldiers, Cities, and Landscapes: Papers in Honor of Charles L. Fisher			12/1/07	New York State Museum, Albany	www.nysm.nysed.gov	

EVENT	SPEAKER	TIME	DATE	LOCATION	CONTACT INFORMATION	FEE
Professional Meeting: American Anthropological Association			11/28/07-12/2/07	Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, D.C.	kminter@aaanet.org	
Professional Meeting: Archaeological Institute of America			1/3/08-1/6/08	Hyatt Regency, Chicago,IL	www.archaeological.org/webinfo.php?page=10096	
Professional Meeting: Society for Historical Archaeology			1/9/08-1/13/08	Hyatt Regency Albuquerque, Albuquerque, NM	505-842-1234	
Professional Meeting: Theoretical Archaeological Group			5/25/08-5/28/08	Columbia University		
Professional Meeting: World Archaeological Congress			6/29/08-7/4/08	University College, Dublin	www.ucd.ie/wac-6/	

In addition, a new permanent exhibit on human evolution has opened at the American Museum of Natural History; other permanent exhibits relevant to archaeology include those at the Metropolitan and Brooklyn Museums of Art on Egypt, at the AMNH's Hall of South American Peoples, and at the Metropolitan on Western Asia and the Far East; there are also permanent exhibits that might be of interest to archaeologists, including one on slavery at the New-York Historical Society and one on the history of Brooklyn at the Brooklyn Historical Society.

If anyone knows of archaeological events or exhibits which they would like listed, please contact Diana Wall either by e-mail at ddizw@aol.com or by mail at Department of Anthropology, The City College, New York, NY 10031.

*Happy Holidays
to all and best
wishes for the
coming year!*