

BROOKLYN COLLEGE EXCAVATIONS AT THE NEW UTRECHT REFORMED CHURCH



SUMMER 2002

The New Utrecht Reformed Church is the fourth oldest church in Brooklyn. Founded in 1677, in the heart of the Dutch town of New Utrecht (Fig. 1), the first church was built in 1700 at 16th Avenue and 84th Street, a few blocks away from where the present structure stands (Figs. 2, 3). The current Gothic Revival style church at 18th Avenue and 84th Street was constructed in 1828, incorporating some stones from the original church (Figs. 4-7). It was designated a New York City Landmark in 1966, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although primary source materials have been difficult to obtain, there are several conflicting references concerning a small academy for boys that once stood on the grounds of the second New Utrecht Dutch Reformed Church building. Teunis Bergen, in his manuscript *History of New Utrecht* indicates that the “first school in New Utrecht stood on 84th Street near 18th Avenue and was moved in 1800 to a nearby location and designated as District No. 1”. The *Brooklyn Eagle*, in a booklet published in 1946, states that “the old New Utrecht school house near [the church] was torn down to make way for the new church” (p.7). Thus, it is obvious that the grounds of the New Utrecht Reformed Church have archaeological potential. The only way to test this potential was to conduct test excavations to determine what features or structures remained, the state of their preservation, and their possible significance. This was the object of the archaeological excavations.

From June 12 through June 26, 2002, fifteen students in the Brooklyn College Summer Archaeological Field School, under the direction of Dr. H. Arthur Bankoff conducted archaeological test excavations on the grounds of the New Utrecht Reformed Church. Excavation was conducted completely with hand tools. All soil was sifted through ¼” mesh screening. Five trenches were opened in an area immediately to the southeast of the church and east of the newer addition (the office and storage facility) (Figs. 5b, 6). Four of the trenches measured two by two meters, the fifth measured three by three. While no structures were uncovered in the peripheral smaller two by two meter trenches, the larger trench laid bare the remains of two adjoining fieldstone foundation walls, preserved to a height of approximately 45 cm (18”) and 50-60 cm (2’) thick (Fig. 8). The walls extended about 3m (10’) from north to south, met at a corner and ran almost 2 m (6’) toward the west (Fig. 9). The complete dimensions of the building could not be determined.

Artifacts from within the structure and its surrounding surfaces were consistent with a late eighteenth to early nineteenth century date. These artifacts included ceramics, both locally-produced and imported. Most notable among these were a glazed red earthenware chamber pot, possibly of local Rockingham ware (early 19th century) (Fig. 12), Pearl Ware with blue transfer printing (Figs. 14, 15), which could also be from ca. 1830), and blue and green shell-edged Pearl Ware plate fragments (1780 – 1830), all of which may have been imported from England. Glass bottles and bottle fragments are also well-represented. The illustrated example (Fig. 13) dates to before 1840. Of outstanding interest are the coins and medallions found in the excavation. The most striking is a gold quarter-eagle (2 ½ dollar coin) (Fig. 16) found in very good condition, with the initials A[?]WB engraved on the reverse. This medallion was not associated with the structure, and is probably a watch fob lost by someone going to church. It most likely dates to the first decade of the twentieth century. Probably more closely connected

with the academy building is a 1780 Mexican *real* (Fig. 17). These coins were common tender in the colonies and early decades of the United States, especially before U.S. coins were minted and widely circulated. The inscription on the obverse reads “*Carolus III, Dei Gratia*”, which is completed on the reverse with “*Hispan[ia] et Ind[ies] R[ex]*” [Charles III, by the grace of God King of Spain and the Indies]. Other artifacts such as marbles (Fig. 18) and clay smoking pipes (Fig. 19) also speak to activities on the academy and church grounds. Animal bones include butchered cow bones and teeth and pig tusks and molars. The artifacts and pictures of the excavation have been prepared for exhibit and await installation in a location within the church buildings.

The test excavations of 2002 (Fig. 20) indicate that there are potentially well-preserved deposits from the Colonial period on the church grounds. Any proposed expansion of the church structure should take this into account. The artifacts and bones give us a sense of the everyday life of the academy and the students, as well as glimpses into later activities on the site. The church and the Friends of New Utrecht should be conscientious and vigilant in their role of protector of the archaeological resources. The site can be ruined and its significance lost by pot hunting and amateur digging. Further responsible archaeology of the academy might throw some more light on the life of an important community institution of the times, and can be important in a program of educational outreach and fostering pride in the local community.



Figure 1: The six original towns of later Kings County

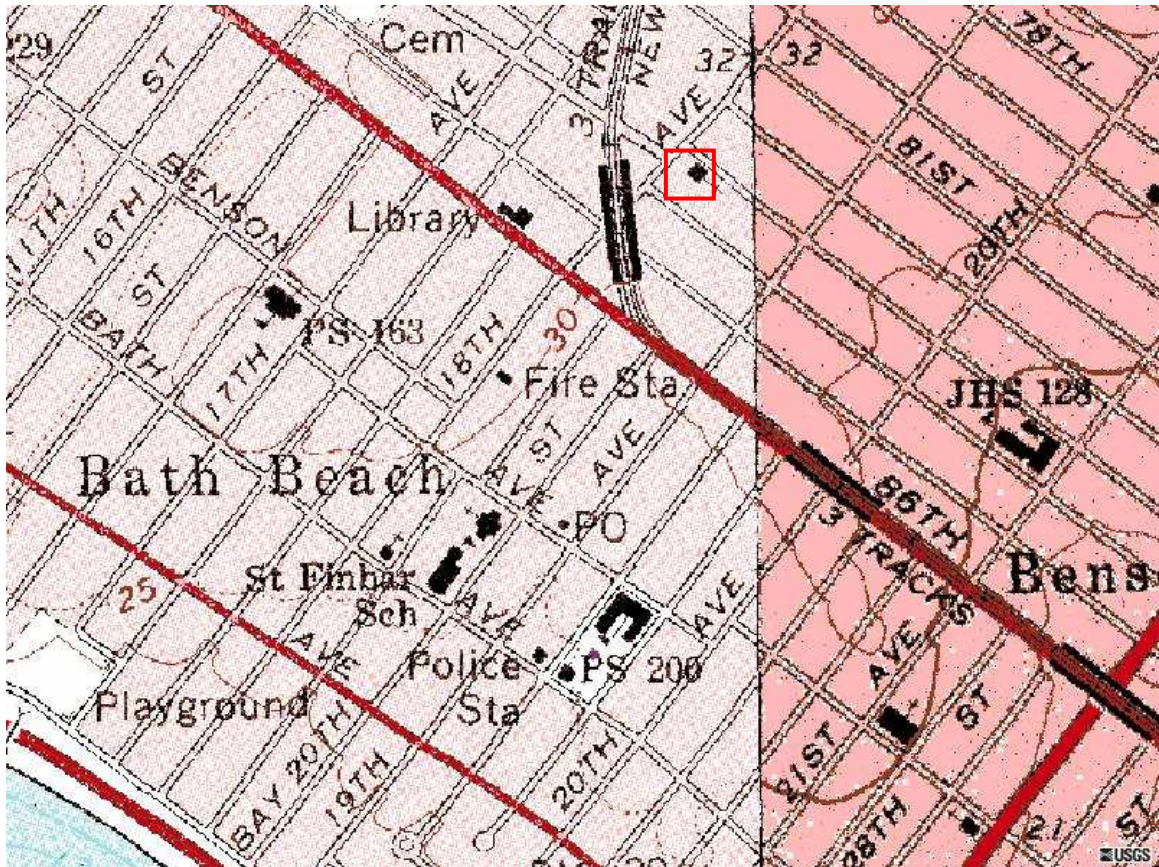


Figure 3: USGS Map (1994), Location of New Utrecht Reform Church



Figure 4: Aerial view of New Utrecht Reformed Church site



Figure 5: a) Aerial photo of New Utrecht Reformed Church site
 b) Close up of same photo, excavation site outlined



Figure 6 : Schematic map of New Utrecht Reformed Church site, excavation area outlined in red.



Figure 7: Church facade



Figure 8: Foundation wall



Figure 9: Entire foundation exposed



Figure 10: Wall detail



Figure 11: Wall detail



Figure 12: Glazed red earthenware chamber pot



Figure 13: Bottle fragment; pre-1840

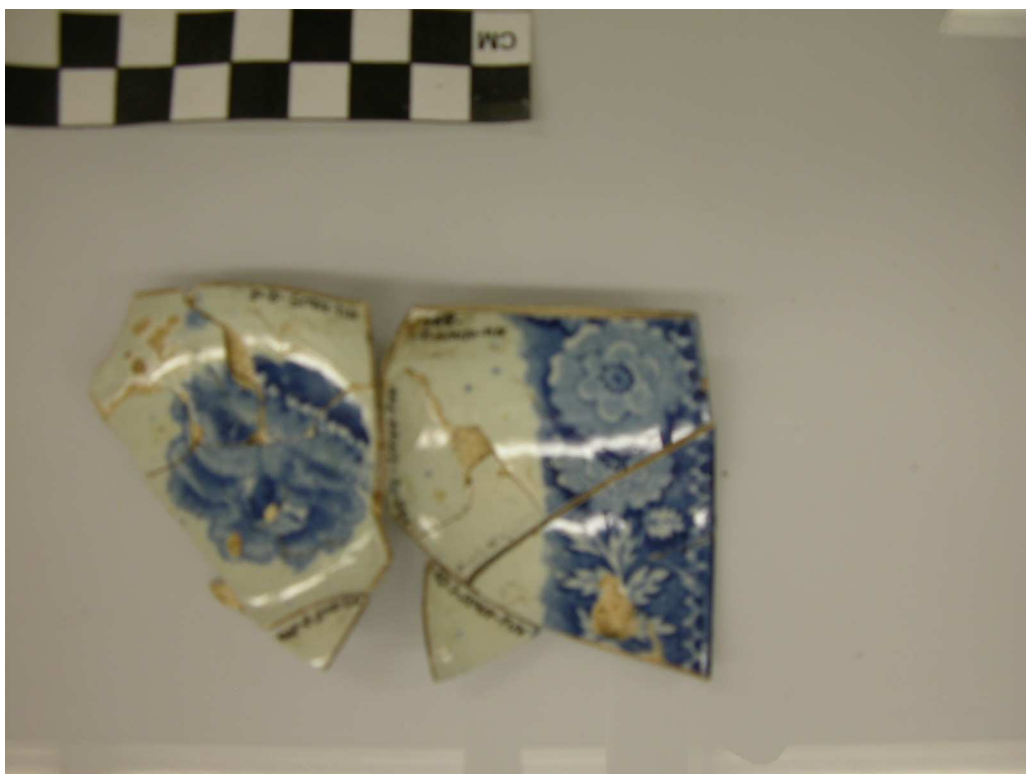


Figure 14: Pearl Ware teacup with transfer decoration

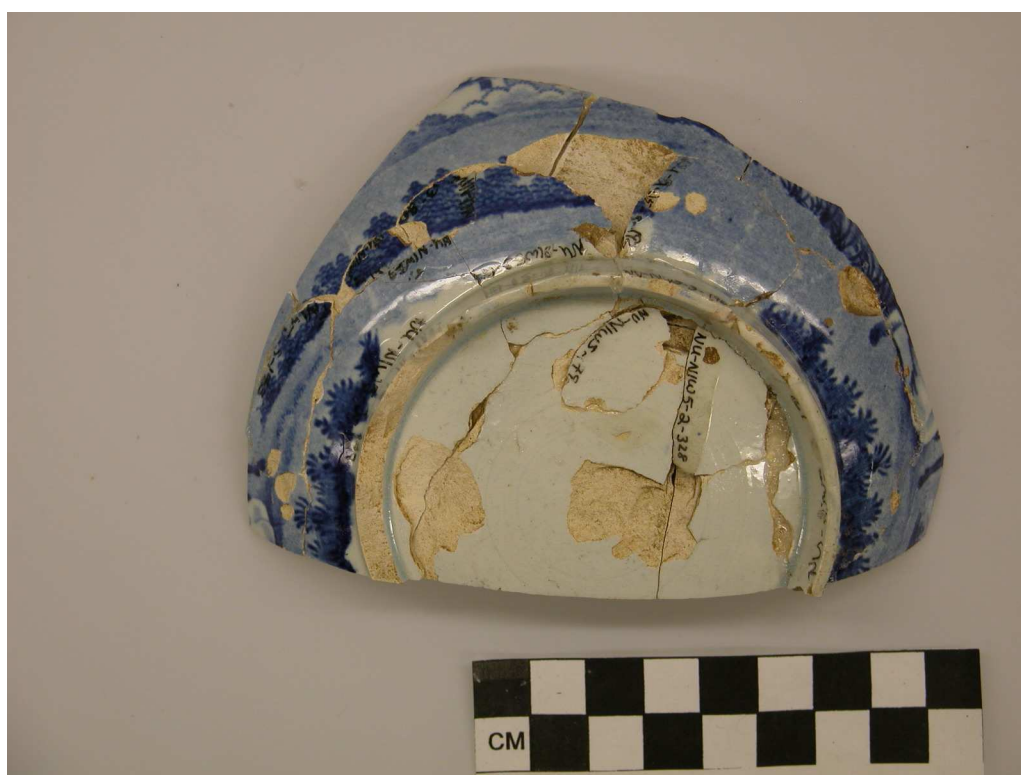
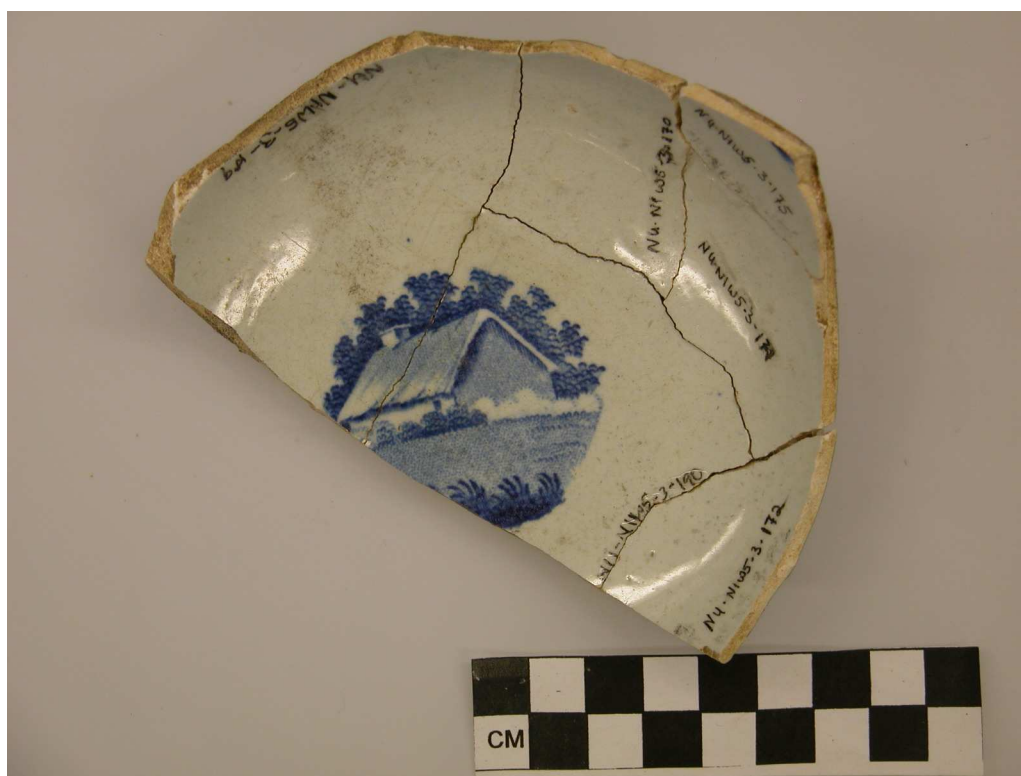


Figure 15: Pearl Ware transfer-printed small bowl

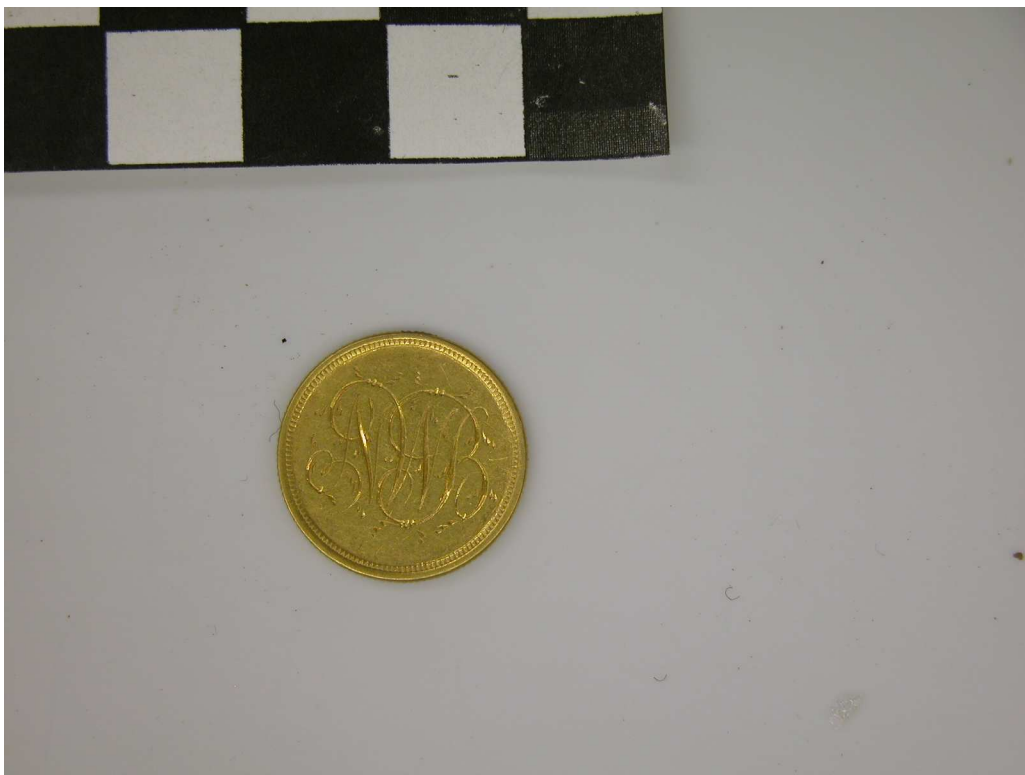


Figure 16: Obverse and reverse of gold Quarter Eagle watch fob



Figure 17: Obverse and reverse of Spanish (Mexican?) *real* (1780)



Figure 18: Glass marbles (19th century)



Figure 19: Ceramic smoking pipe fragments



Figure 20 : The New Utrecht Reformed Church site in the course of excavation.