Buried Beneath the City emerged through a collaboration between the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission’s Archaeology Department, represented by Amanda Sutphin, director of the department, Dr. H. Arthur Bankoff, special advisor to the chair, Dr. Jessica Striebel MacLean, urban archaeologist, and Dr. Nan Rothschild, research professor at Barnard College and professor emerita at Columbia University. The book uses artifacts and information uncovered in archaeological investigations in the five boroughs of New York City to help understand and illuminate the history of the city and its people.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) is the largest municipal preservation agency in the nation. It is responsible for protecting New York City’s architecturally, historically, and culturally significant buildings and sites by granting them status as landmarks or historic districts and regulating them after designation. The agency is comprised of a commission of eleven commissioners, ten volunteers and a paid chair, all of whom are appointed by the mayor with the advice and consent of the city council, and supported by a staff of approximately eighty preservationists, researchers, architects, historians, attorneys, archaeologists, and administrative employees.

The commission was established in 1965 through groundbreaking legislation signed by the late Mayor Robert F. Wagner, in response to the losses of historically significant buildings. Most notable among these was the old Pennsylvania Station, which was demolished in 1963. There are now more than 37,500 designated buildings and sites in New York City across all five boroughs; most of them are located in over 150 historic districts.

LPC prioritizes designations that tell the stories of all New Yorkers and that reflect the city’s history and communities. Archaeology can help reveal what the lives of everyday people of the past were like, as will be demonstrated throughout this book. The work of the Archaeology Department will be discussed in chapter 1. The Landmarks Preservation Commission is one of the few city agencies in the United States to
have an Archaeology Department. After many years of effort to consolidate the city’s archaeological collections in one central location, in 2014 the department established the NYC Archaeological Repository: The Nan A. Rothschild Research Center (“Repository”) to curate the city’s archaeological collections and to make them accessible to archaeologists, researchers, teachers, students, and the public. It is still an important part of the department’s work. Located in Midtown Manhattan, in space donated by The Durst Organization, the Repository houses hundreds of thousands of artifacts from sites throughout the city and is open by appointment to researchers and scholars. As part of this project, the LPC worked with the Museum of the City of New York from 2013 to 2016 to create a comprehensive database of these collections, so they are available digitally to everyone. The Repository also launched a public website in 2016. Besides catalog information about the artifacts, the website has online exhibits, quizzes, and other features; it also accepts queries from the public. The collections in the Repository reveal the results of excavations and site assessments over the past forty years. The archaeological reports can be found online at the Landmark Preservation Commission’s website. Almost all of the artifacts discussed in the book are curated in the Repository.

Archaeologists often seem to write only for other archaeologists. This book, on the other hand, is for anyone interested in New York City and its past. While containing technical material, it never forgets that history, especially as revealed through archaeological excavation, has a lure of its own. People are connected to their place, their city, their neighborhood, and they want to connect even to those who lived there before them. It is intriguing to know that mundane objects that were new in the past can still tell us something about their former users or owners, no matter that they are now battered and broken fragments.
BURIED BENEATH THE CITY
Riverdale Archaeological Research Project, Bronx
Van Cortlandt House, Bronx
Pelham Bay Park, Bronx
Tubby Hook, Manhattan
Inwood Hill Park, Manhattan
Inwood African Burial Ground, Manhattan
Seneca Village, Manhattan
Harlem African Burial Ground,  Manhattan
Ward’s Island, Emigrant Refuge, Manhattan
Hunts Point Burial Ground, Bronx
Throgs Neck, Bronx
College Point, Queens
Bay Terrace, Queens
Old Towne Flushing Burial Ground, Queens
King Manor, Queens

Elmhurst African Burial Ground, Queens
Onderdonck Sita, Queens
Sankofa Park, Brooklyn
Flatbush African Burial Ground, Brooklyn
Erasmus Hall High School, Brooklyn
Lott House, Brooklyn
Gravesend Cemetery, Brooklyn
84 Tillary St, Brooklyn
Empire Stores, Brooklyn
Spring Street Presbyterian Church Burial Ground, Manhattan
Five Points, Manhattan

World Trade Center Ship, Manhattan
Corbin Building Well, Manhattan
Fulton Street and Peck Slip Reconstruction, Manhattan
Beekman St Reconstruction, Manhattan
South Ferry Terminal Project, Manhattan
Stadt Huys, Manhattan
Stone Street, Manhattan
Coenties Slip, Manhattan
7 Hanover Square, Manhattan
Governors Island, Manhattan
Quarantine Grounds, Staten Island
Sailor’s Snug Harbor, Staten Island
Old Place Neck, Staten Island
Richmond Hill, Staten Island
Sandy Ground, Staten Island
Port Mobil, Staten Island
Aakawaxung Munahanung (Island Protected from the Wind) Archaeological Site, Staten Island
H.F. Hollowell Site, Staten Island