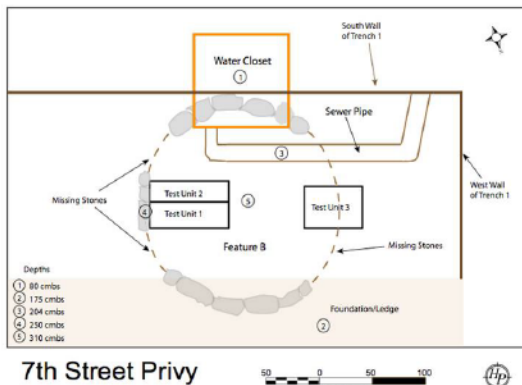


LOWER EAST SIDE GIRLS CLUB

Avenue D and East 7th Street, East Village, New York City

Before it became one of Manhattan's most famous slums, the Lower East Side was home to a thriving population of residents engaged primarily in the shipbuilding professions. In 2009, Historical Perspectives, Inc. (HPI) completed archaeological investigations on a vacant lot proposed as the site of the Lower East Side Girls Club at Avenue D and East 7th Street. The site was formerly part of a vast salt meadow fronting the East River, but after landfilling of the area in the 1820s, this block was thick with adjoining houses for local waterfront workers and their families.



Archaeological testing revealed the remnants of that early settlement, including two privy shafts, or backyard outhouses, which had been used by residents prior to the introduction of public water in the 1840s, and which once abandoned were buried beneath layers of subsequent building episodes. Archaeologists found that even in their truncated condition, the two privy shafts were teeming with household refuse. The privies contained a wide range of artifacts, including kitchen dishes, bottle fragments, chamber pots, shoes, smoking pipes, bricks and nails. There was also a large collection of seeds, pits, and nuts from cherries, watermelons, peaches, prunes, plums, peanuts, and chestnuts. Butchered animal bones in the privies showed that some residents were keeping livestock, such as pigs, goats, and chickens, in their yards and butchering them on the premises. Archival research showed that the heads of households from families using the two privies – one from a lot on Avenue D and the other from a lot on East 7th Street – had different levels of affluence, based on positions as managers versus skilled workers.

Sites like the Lower East Side Girls Club property allow archaeologists to explore important issues related to diet, activities, customs and technology of former occupants, and combine this data with what records tell us about their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and environment. HPI has presented results of the archaeological field investigations at the Council For Northeast Historical Archaeology's 2009 conference and the Society for Historical Archaeology's 2010 conference. Artifacts from the excavations will be exhibited in the lobby of the new Lower East Side Girls Club facility.