

All the while, it's irking me that I can't get ahold of one of these Viele maps without shooting a hole in my bank account. I punch a code on a platform pay phone and by some miracle get Doc Schuring over in Newark. He's a professor at the new Jersey Institute of Technology, a geotech man who's come through on more than one occasion. I'm hoping he knows where I can get a cheap Viele.

After a moment he says, "Can't help. But you ever hear of UFC?"

"Underpinning Foundation Company? Big outfit."

"Underpinning and Foundation Constructors, yes. They have a map that's just as good. Better still, they give it away as a promotion."

Back at the office, I hand Al his hat and send him off to charm the folks at UFC for a copy of that map. In my chair I find a copy of a City report. It's the investigation of a collapsing wall near the circle. Inside it's got a tortured copy of Viele's map, and the text suggests that the wall is perhaps being collapsed by a "subterranean aquifer." I go in and drop the report on my boss's desk. "Is this what started the stream nonsense?"

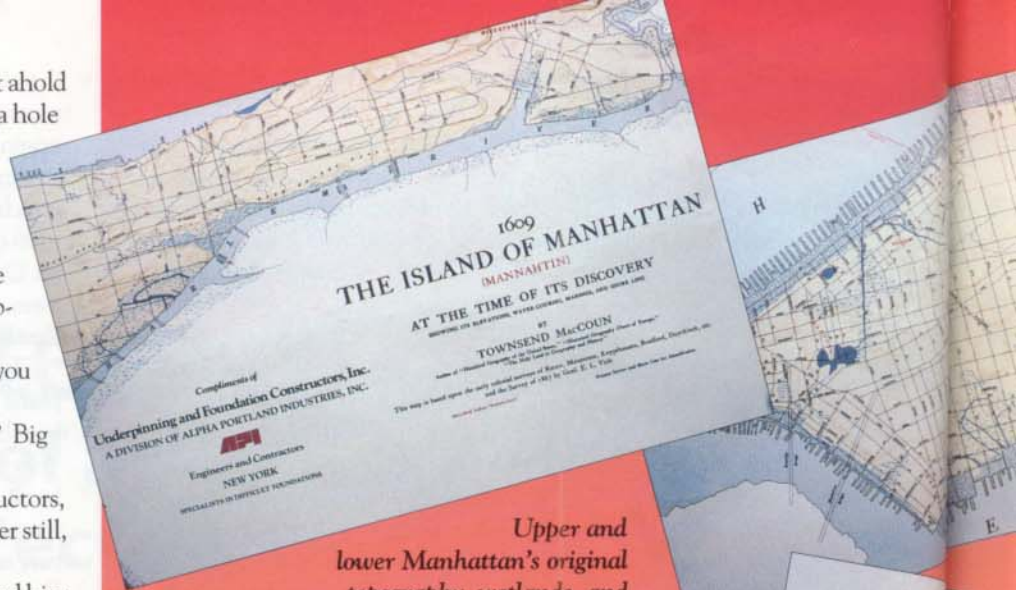
"It's on Vee-lay's map, isn't it? And now they're telling me that you can see the stream through a crack in the sidewalk. Say there's a sinkhole, too."

So now there's a sinkhole. I curl my lip. "We'll see."

I decide it's time to gather all my witnesses together in one room and see what they might divulge. I have the electric, gas, and telephone plates, as well as the WPA drawings. I even pull my collection of Electric Railroader's Association maps of abandoned trolley lines. Together with the TA maps, I spread them out on my desk and the floor and turn on a few desk lamps. By now, fellow employees less possessed than myself are piling out the door, leaving me alone with my task. Trench coat over his arm, my boss leans on the door frame.

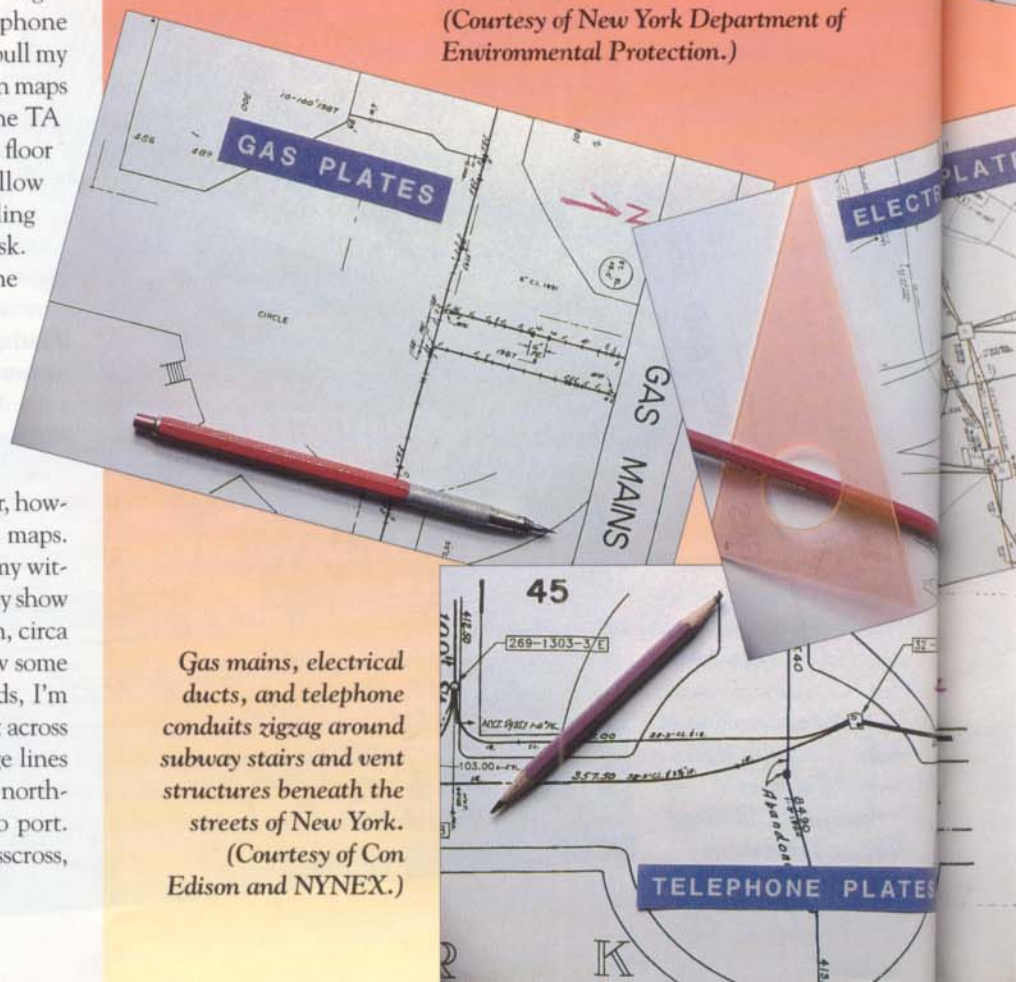
"Better just head up there and take a look, don't you think?" He takes a bite out of an apple and points it at me. "Think maybe the answers are in the sidewalk, not in your maps."

Maybe, maybe not. But I know the answer, however cryptic, is there in front of me in the maps. Rolling up my sleeves and bearing down on my witnesses, I find that the City sewer maps lie. They show the sewer as it was before the subway went in, circa 1932, and seem to suggest that there are now some abandoned sewer pipes. Par for City records, I'm afraid. Abandoned telephone ducts run right across the circle, and some oil-o-static high-voltage lines elbow through, too. Buried trolley tracks go north-south, with an attached duct bank hard to port. Some heavyweight gas and water mains crisscross,



Upper and lower Manhattan's original topography, wetlands, and watercourses are superimposed with current street grids, bridges, and the island's coastline on this 1609 map, The Island of Manhattan, by Townsend MacCoun. (Courtesy of Underpinning and Foundation Constructors, Inc.)

City sewer maps lie, but this Water Supply map may hold the secret to the "underground stream" beneath the circle. (Courtesy of New York Department of Environmental Protection.)



Gas mains, electrical ducts, and telephone conduits zigzag around subway stairs and vent structures beneath the streets of New York. (Courtesy of Con Edison and NYNEX.)