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## The Archaeology of Middle-Class Domesticity and Gentility in Victorian Brooklyn

### ABSTRACT

In 1995, John Milner Associates excavated three privies and four cisterns dating to the 1860s at the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, New York. Residents associated with the deposits were members of the burgeoning white-collar middle class. Examinations of the recovered ceramic and glass vessels, as well as children's toys and household furnishings, show that these middle-class households used material culture to create what contemporaries referred to as a "genteel" lifestyle. By setting their tables with specific ceramic wares and vessels, these families both advertised their "respectability" to other families and taught their children the class-specific values needed to maintain their middle-class status. The analysis shows that each of the excavated households closely followed the contemporary advice literature on household furnishings and dining etiquette. Indeed, the similarities between the assemblages and conformity to the advice literature suggests that the desire to "keep up with the Joneses" and the corresponding insecurities commonly associated with the middle class during the 1950s and 1960s were firmly established one hundred years earlier.

### Introduction

Between the Civil and Vietnam wars, a large white-collar middle class was one of the defining features of American society. Throughout this period, the middle class dominated popular culture and their lifestyle was upheld as the American dream. Despite their importance in the development of American culture, few archaeologists have studied the Victorian middle class (Praetzellis, Praetzellis, and Brown 1988:192-193). Considering its impact on modern America, one of the major topics in 19th-century history and archaeology should be the origins and development of this influential class.

As the white-collar middle class developed in the mid-19th century, its members adopted a distinctive world view and ideologies which distinguished them from both the working class and

elites. Stephanie Coontz (1988:192) explains: "In this rapidly changing economic and social milieu, with far higher rates of geographic and occupational mobility than before, middle-class children had to be taught not their parents' skills, rapidly being outmoded, but general values and appearances that would gain them entry to the places where new skills were taught." The most important of these values was the concept of gentility. For middle-class Americans, gentility was more than just a set of etiquette rules. It was a world view which defined codes of proper behavior and imbued them with moral connotations. Genteel behavior was a prerequisite for becoming a respected member of the middle class and for success in the white-collar world. With the separation of commercial and domestic spheres, middle-class mothers became responsible for teaching their children the class-specific values of gentility and "Christian morality." During the mid-19th century, numerous writers published manuals advising women how to transform their homes into "moral sanctuaries" to properly raise their children with these values. Historians have labeled this movement the "cult of domesticity" (Sklar 1973; Clark 1986; Marsh 1990).

Many recent scholars have focused on the development of the "cult of domesticity" and the related concept of gentility, basing their work primarily on etiquette books, fiction, and other forms of prescriptive literature (Williams 1985; Clark 1986, 1987; Mathews 1987; Kasson 1990; Marsh 1990). Most of these historians fully recognize these sources' short-comings (Green 1983:5; Mathews 1987:28; Marsh 1990:21, 26; Wall 1994:113). Margaret Marsh (1990:21) explains: "historians have become wary of advice literature and popular fiction as historical evidence, because used alone, they cannot help us to understand whether their strictures were followed." Furthermore, Harvey Green (1983:50) points out:

reliance on advice literature alone as a key to behavior is a flawed methodology. . . . First, such a strategy leads as often to contradictions as it does to a clearer

understanding, since these authors often disagreed. Second, etiquette book writers were often promoters of their own cause rather than accurate reporters of actual practices. [Finally,] the reality of everyday occurrences is often exactly what is most harshly criticized in the advice literature.

Archaeology provides an opportunity to see if aspects of the prescriptive literature were actually followed. This work will draw on archaeological evidence from the Atlantic Terminal site in Brooklyn, New York, to see how middle-class women used material culture to create domestic sanctuaries for their families, and to examine the extent these families practiced genteel dining. This, in turn, will provide insight on the role of material culture in class formation.

### Class as a Social Construction

Within sociological and historical literature divergent definitions of class abound. Following Marx, many define a person's class by their relationship to the means of production. Others, following Weber, use a combination of factors including relations to production, education, wealth, occupation, and ethnicity to estimate an individual's socio-economic status. Still others rely on empirically verifiable characteristics such as occupation or wealth to assign individuals, or households, to specific classes. Although class is rarely explicitly examined in the field of historical archaeology, archaeologists have adopted each of these approaches when trying to correlate patterns of material culture with households from different classes. These etic approaches to class, however, often ignore the symbolic behavior which people use to mark class boundaries and define membership.

Although scholars can rely on empirically verifiable categories, such as wealth or occupation, to define class membership, most individuals do not have access to this information as they meet people during their daily routines. As a result, class membership is often assigned to strangers based on displays of class-specific behavior. One's class membership is defined, thus, through

categorization by others during daily social interaction. To be a fully accepted member of a social class, a person must display the appropriate symbols in their speech, mannerisms, and material goods. These class-specific characteristics are defined by group members as taste or style and are often underlain by a shared symbolic system or specific world view. Although wealth affects the ability to purchase the correct symbols, it is the lack of appropriate symbolic behavior rather than wealth which precludes membership in a particular class (Martineau 1958; Dumont 1970; Fussell 1983).

Approaching class as a symbolic system elucidates that the members of separate classes view material culture differently and occasionally attach different meanings to identical objects and behaviors. In his study of class spending behavior among Americans in the 1950s, Pierre Martineau (1958:122-123), the Director of Research and Marketing for the *Chicago Tribune*, concluded:

It is assumed that a rich man is simply a poor man with more money and that, given the same income, the poor man would behave exactly like the rich man. The *Chicago Tribune* studies crystallize a wealth of evidence from other sources that this is just not so, and that the Lower-Status person is profoundly different in his mode of thinking and his way of handling the world from the Middle Class individual. Where he buys and what he buys will differ not only by economics but in symbolic value.

Martineau's conclusion is supported by a variety of subsequent historical, sociological, and anthropological studies which show that disenfranchised groups do not mimic the behavior of dominant groups but instead create their own lifestyle with its own world view, values, and symbols (Thompson 1963; Scott 1985; Stott 1990).

Viewing the classes as having separate symbolic systems allows archaeologists to treat material culture as active symbols which help define class membership. Following this approach, archaeologists can study how individuals used the symbolic aspects of material culture to define

themselves, maintain class boundaries, and also break down class barriers (Cook 1989, 1991; McGuire 1991; Wall 1991). Examining such topics will not only increase our understanding of how material culture is used in social strategies, but will also further our understanding of the concept of class. By looking at the variation of material culture both between and within classes, studies can illuminate strategies of class advancement, examine how individuals coalesce into classes, and discuss the shifting nature of class through time.

This study will utilize this symbolic approach to show how white-collar, American-born families used material culture in a particular manner to define membership in the middle class. The discussion will focus on how families used domestic furnishings and the practice of genteel dining to separate those individuals thought to be “respectable” from members of the working class. It is important to remember, however, that in the mid-19th century gentility was not the sole criterion for membership in this class; occupation, religion, ethnicity, and race were also important criteria. At this time, the white-collar middle class was dominated by native-born white Protestants who strongly associated gentility with Protestant Christianity. As a result, many members of the middle class excluded non-Protestants, as well as other racial and ethnic groups, from membership in “respectable” circles (Grier 1988:2). Each of these other ethnic groups had their own middling levels which eventually joined the more inclusive middle class of the 20th century; this paper, however, will only focus on the white, predominantly Anglo-Saxon middle class of the mid-19th century.

### Excavations at Atlantic Terminal

In the Fall of 1995 John Milner Associates conducted Phase II and Phase III archaeological investigations at the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn. These investigations focused on 12 contiguous historic lots (385 through 395

Cumberland St. and 442 through 452 Carlton Ave.) located on Block 2006 bounded by Fulton Street to the north, Carlton Avenue to the east, Atlantic Avenue to the south, and Cumberland Street to the west (Figure 1). During exploratory testing four privies and six cisterns were located. Of these ten features, three privies and four cisterns were fully excavated and the remaining features were sampled.

Each of the excavated privies was stone lined and approximately nine feet deep. Fitts and Yamin (1996) present a full description of the features and the related artifacts. The privies, which were periodically cleaned and deodorized with sand while in use, were finally filled with furnace debris and household garbage in the 1860s. The excavated cisterns were constructed of brick and lined with mortar. In each case this lining had been punctured to allow water to drain before the cistern was filled, a common practice in New York City (Griscom 1845:52; Howson 1987:88-93). The cisterns varied in diameter from five to eight feet, and in depth from five and a half to eight feet. All but one of the cisterns were filled with cinders and household refuse in the 1860s or early-1870s. Ceramic and glass cross-mends among the levels in each of these features indicate that they were filled over a short time period by the properties' residents and should be treated as a single assemblage. The excavated features provided data on six households dating to the 1860s and one household dating to the turn of the 20th century. This paper focuses only on the deposits dating to the 1860s.

### The Inhabitants

In the 1860s and 1870s the residents of the Atlantic Terminal site were part of the new middle class of suburban-dwelling white-collar workers. Many scholars agree that the American white-collar middle class emerged in the Northeast between 1820 and 1850 (Johnson 1978; Ryan 1981; Blumin 1989). Several factors including industrialization, the associated rise in

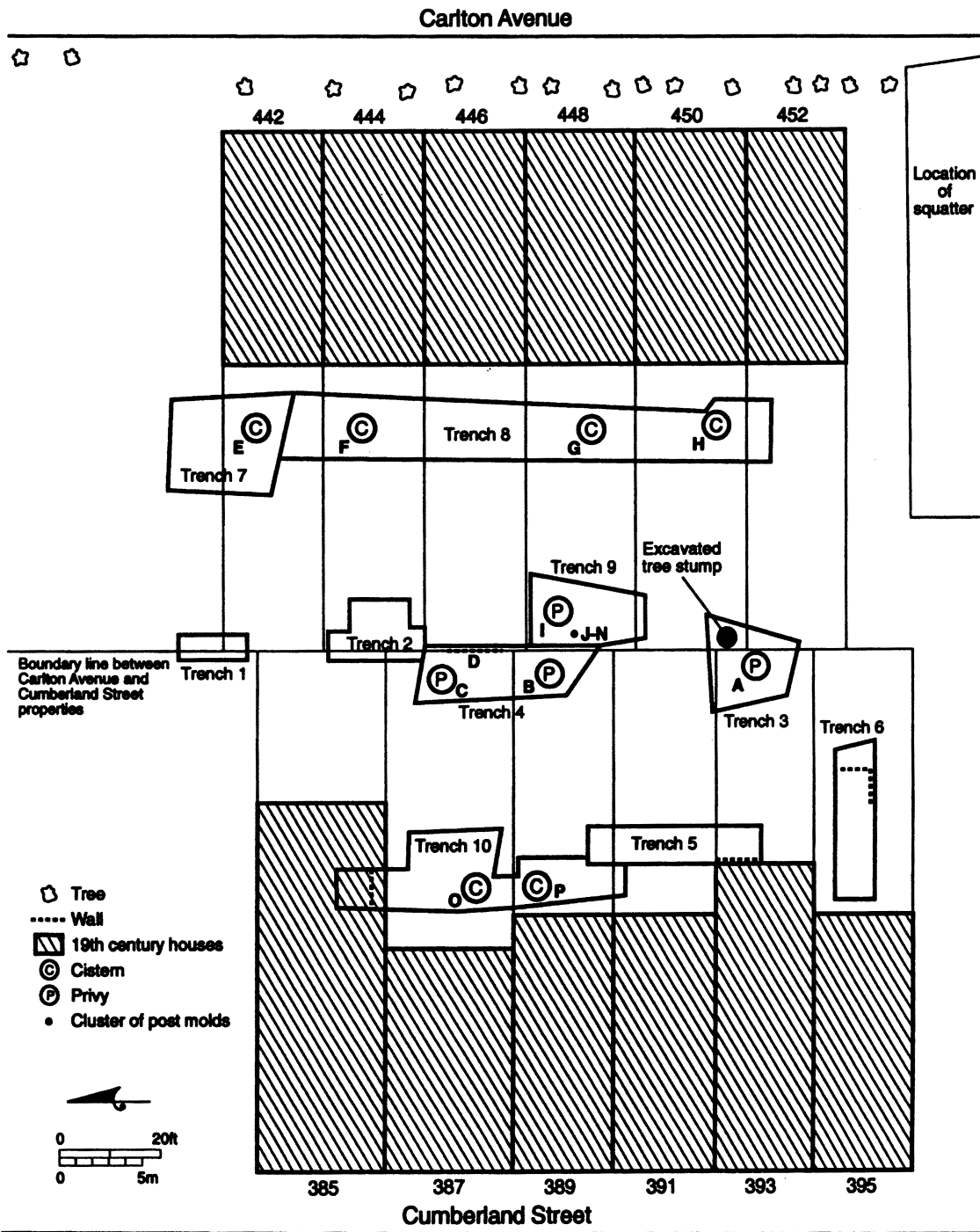


Figure 1. The Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area Site Plan (After Fitts and Yamin 1996:4.1).



consumerism, and improved transportation spawned a commercial transformation that led to the development of a white-collar work force. Concomitant with the rise of industrialism and the development of white-collar labor was the physical separation between the home and workplace. For a variety of reasons, New York's different economic classes separated their homes from their places of work during the late-18th and early-19th centuries (Blackmar 1989; Blumin 1989; Wall 1994). Manual laborers usually lived within walking distance of their jobs because they lacked the income to take public transportation, while white-collar workers, who could afford public transportation, were free to move away from commercial areas. During the 1830s to 1860s, this expanding middle class fled downtown New York and established commuting suburbs in uptown Manhattan, New Jersey, and especially Brooklyn (Spann 1981:108-109, 190; Jackson 1985:25-33; Wall 1994:52-53).

Brooklyn first became a commuting suburb in the 1820s when the establishment of a regular ferry service to New York City attracted Manhattan merchants to build residences in Brooklyn Heights (Lockwood 1972:89; Jackson 1985:31). The new suburb prospered and by the 1840s development pushed to the east into Fort Greene (Bridges 1847; Lockwood 1972:217). Developers marketed the area to status-conscious middle-class commuters. Auctioneer broadsides advertising lots and homes in the area repeatedly used phrases like: "a most desirable location, being in a most select neighborhood, and on a good om-

nibus route" (Cole 1853), or "some of the best property in Brooklyn" (Cole 1854). The lots were soon bought by "prosperous business and professional men" and were considered "second in fashion only to patrician Brooklyn Heights" (Lockwood 1972:217). Block 2006, which includes the project area, was developed in the mid- to late-1850s (Hearne and Hearne 1844-1855; Smith 1854-1857; Yamin et al. 1995:9-12). Most of the homes built in the project area were brick or brownstone row-houses constructed in the Italianate style, while the remaining houses were detached frame dwellings or frame row houses (Perris 1860; Morrell 1958). The residents of these houses for whom archaeological deposits were recovered are discussed below and summarized in Table 1.

#### 387 Cumberland Street

A privy (Feature C) and a cistern (Feature O) were excavated on the 387 Cumberland Street property. An 1863 penny and an 1870s-style doll's head found in Feature C and cross-mending ceramics between the two features indicate that both features contain assemblages deposited by the household of Aaron P. and Sarah Bates who lived in the house from 1865 to 1885. Aaron P. Bates (born 1836) purchased the property on 11 November 1864. Both Bates and his wife Sarah (born circa 1847) were born in Kings County, New York. They had four children, two boys and two girls, born between 1863 and 1869. Bates was a lawyer who worked at 83 Nassau

TABLE 1  
EXCAVATED FEATURES AND ASSOCIATED HOUSEHOLDS AT ATLANTIC TERMINAL

<u>Feature</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>TPQ</u>	<u>Household</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Servants</u>	<u>Home Owner</u>	<u>Address</u>
A	Privy	1864	Elmendorf	Merchant	Yes	Yes	393 Cumberland
B	Privy	1864	Atwater	Merchant	Unknown	Yes	389 Cumberland
C	Privy	1863	Bates	Lawyer	Yes	Yes	387 Cumberland
O	Cistern	1860	Bates	Lawyer	Yes	Yes	387 Cumberland
F	Cistern	circa 1870	McGuire	Japanner/Widow	Yes	Yes	444 Carlton
G	Cistern	1858	Goff	Merchant	Unknown	Yes	448 Carlton
I	Privy	1865	Goff	Merchant	Unknown	Yes	448 Carlton
H: Lower	Cistern	1864	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	No	450 Carlton

Street in Manhattan, and also served as a captain in the Civil War. In 1870, Aaron was listed as owning real estate worth \$3,400 and a personal estate of roughly \$1,000. From 1865 to the early-1880s, Aaron's parents also lived in the household. Both the 1875 and 1880 censuses show that the Bates family employed American-born servants (Kings County Land Evidence Liber 649:80, 1586:545, 1586:548; Lain 1855-1878; 1879/80, 1882/83, 1887; Stiles 1869:721; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1870, 1880; New York State 1865, 1875).

### 389 Cumberland Street

A privy (Feature B), a cistern (Feature P) and a trash pit (Feature R) were excavated on the 389 Cumberland Street property. An Indian head penny dated 1864 and the presence of doll parts dating to the late-1860s suggest that the assemblage in Feature B was deposited by John and Anna Atwater's household who occupied 389 Cumberland Street from 1866 until 1870. Ceramic cross-mends between Feature B and Feature R, and pattern matches between all three features indicate that each was deposited by the Atwaters. John Atwater was an American-born commercial merchant who worked at 61 Pearl Street in Manhattan. In 1870, the Atwaters had 4 children: a 16-year-old son, a 14-year-old daughter, a 9-year-old son, and a 3-year-old daughter. The 1870 Federal Census credits him with a personal estate worth \$1,000. The Atwaters sold the house on Cumberland Street and moved to another Brooklyn property in December 1869 (Kings County Land Evidence Liber 922:199; Lain 1855-1878; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1870).

### 393 Cumberland Street

A single privy (Feature A) was uncovered at 393 Cumberland. A terminus post quem (TPQ) of 1864 (from a penny) and the lack of artifacts dating after 1870 strongly associates the deposits

with the household of John A. and Fanny Elmendorf, who owned the property from 1864 until 1870. Elmendorf was born in New York about 1828 and married Georgia-born Fanny Lathrop in 1855. By 1865, the couple had five children, although only three are listed in the 1865 census (suggesting that two died young). The directories list Elmendorf as being a "merchant of varnishes" at 160 William Street in Manhattan. The family seems financially well off. In 1865, they owned an estate valued at \$10,000 and employed four servants (Kings County Land Evidence Liber 622:373, 973:405; Lain 1855-1878; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1860, 1870; New York State 1865; Barber 1937:75).

### 444 Carlton Avenue

A cistern (Feature F) was excavated on the property at 444 Carlton Ave. A pipe bowl form common in the late-1860s and early-1870s suggest that the assemblage was deposited by the McGuire household. George McGuire purchased 444 Carlton Avenue in 1857. He was born in Connecticut around 1801, while his wife Mary was born in Rhode Island five years later. They were married in the late-1820s and they had at least six children. George and his son Thomas were both Japanners working at 33 Cherry Street in Manhattan, while the eldest son, Frank, was a clerk. In 1860 George McGuire owned real estate worth \$4,000 and a personal estate of \$2,000. The same year the family employed two servants: a 23-year-old German woman and a 16-year-old American girl. George McGuire died between 1863 and 1870, but his wife, Mary, continued to raise her family at the house until 1875. After his father's death, Thomas left the Japanning business and became a bookkeeper for a fruit merchant. In 1870, the value of the property had risen to \$8,000 but Mary's personal estate was estimated at only \$800. The family did not take in boarders, but did employ a 23-year-old Irish woman as a servant (Kings County

Land Evidence Liber 444:114, 1197:423; Lain 1855-1878; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1860, 1870). 1855-1878, 1879/80, 1882/83, 1887, 1896; U. S. Bureau of the Census 1860, 1870, 1880).

#### 448 Carlton Avenue

Two features were uncovered on the 448 Carlton property. The first, a cistern (Feature G), was completely excavated, while the second, a privy (Feature I), was only sampled. Feature G has a 1858 TPQ, while Feature I's TPQ is 1865. Ceramic cross-mends between the features suggest that both assemblages were probably deposited at the same time by Mortimer and Susan Goff, who lived at 448 Carlton from 1863 until approximately 1870. The directories list Goff as a broker or merchant working at 135 Pearl St. in Manhattan. In 1866, Mortimer disappears from the directories suggesting that he may have died around 1865. With the exception of Susan's sale of the property in 1870, no other information concerning the Goffs has been uncovered (Kings County Land Evidence Liber 937:364, 937:387; Smith 1854-1857; Lain 1855-1878).

#### 450 Carlton Avenue

A large cistern (Feature H) was excavated at 450 Carlton Avenue. This feature contained two distinct assemblages: a lower deposit dating to the mid- to late-1860s (1864 TPQ), and an upper deposit dating to the early-1900s (1900 TPQ). Julia Draper owned 450 Carlton Avenue from 1856 until 1915; however, during most of the 1860s, she rented out the property. The 1860 Federal Census lists three households totaling 12 people as residents. The renters were employed in white-collar occupations typical of Brooklyn's middle-class. They included an engineer, a hardware merchant, a broker, and a jeweler. None of the occupants listed in the census, however, were located in the directories after 1861. Therefore, the occupants of 450 Carlton between 1861 and 1869 are unknown (Kings County Land Evidence Liber 258:533, 404:40, 419:235, 36:271; Lain

#### Summary of the Inhabitants

Most of the adult inhabitants of the Atlantic Terminal site in the 1860s were part of a generation influential in the development of America's middle class. Born as the bourgeoisie was coalescing into a separate class, this generation contained the first children to be consciously raised with values specific to the middle-class. This generation also reached maturity and was raising children in the 1860s and 1870s when popular magazines, such as *Harpers* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated*, helped spread middle class values throughout the country. Therefore, the assemblages from Atlantic Terminal provide an important opportunity to examine both the lifestyles of this newly emerging middle class and how parents passed on class-specific values to their children. This, in turn, will illuminate larger questions concerning the development of America's middle class.

#### Creating Domestic Sanctuaries

As white collar workers, small businessmen and professionals coalesced into the middle class, the social stigma attached to manual labor increased (Blumin 1989:107, 136-137; Bushman 1992:xv). Members of the middle class responded by distancing themselves physically, socially, and symbolically from the working class. Middle-class families flocked to the suburbs, leaving the cities to the wealthy and poor, thus segregating urban areas along class lines. Once geographically isolated, middle-class members rarely socialized with the other classes. Lydia Maria Child, an influential advisor on homemaking and etiquette, explained to Sarah Blake Shaw in 1877 that the upper "classes do not intermarry with the middle classes; the middle classes do not intermarry with the laboring class; nothing is said about it, but there is a systematic



avoidance of it. Moreover, they don't mix socially; they are as much strangers to each other, as if they live in different countries" (quoted in Blumin 1989:288). By the 1850s the middle class had developed a distinctive style of living and their own world view.

A fundamental aspect of middle-class culture was the emphasis on preparing children to maintain their parents' position. By the mid-19th century most middle-class families followed similar strategies to ease their children's entrance into the white collar world. To begin with, young men delayed marriage until they were financially capable of providing a family with the trappings of middle-class life. Ideally, this included purchasing a single family home (Ryan 1981:179). Mary Ryan (1981:179) found that in Utica, New York, only 35.3% of native-born middle-class males were married before their 29th year, whereas 50.4% of all native males and 66.3% of all immigrants were married before this age. Once married, middle-class couples limited the size of their families. In Manhattan during the 1850s, professional families tended to have 20% fewer children than native skilled artisans and nearly 30% fewer than immigrants from the British Isles (Scherzer 1992:130). Controlling family size was aided by ideologies which viewed genteel women as lacking sexual passion, thus, helping to promote sexual abstinence among married couples (Ryan 1981:156; Mathews 1987:28). The small number of siblings provided children with the necessary financial, emotional, and educational support needed for future success (Blumin 1989:187). Middle-class children also resided in the parents home until a later age than in previous periods. Unlike the laboring population, middle-class sons often did not start an occupation until their early-twenties (Ryan 1981:168). During this extended childhood, parents "initiated methods of socialization designed to inculcate values and traits of character deemed essential to middle-class achievement and respectability" (Ryan 1981:184).

The ideology surrounding the instruction of children in middle class values is known as the

"cult of domesticity" (Sklar 1973; Ryan 1981; Coontz 1988; Blumin 1989:187). Briefly stated: "the central tenet of the new canon of domesticity . . . was the assertion that the household should be a refuge from the outside world, a fortress designed to protect, nurture, and strengthen the individuals within it" (Clark 1986:29).

The "cult of domesticity" developed out of changing attitudes toward children and the reaction against orthodox Calvinism in the Second Great Awakening (circa 1800-1830). Orthodox Calvinists believed that humans were inherently evil and it was only through the grace of God that a select few would be allowed into heaven. These individuals were chosen by God before their birth and earthly accomplishments could not alter a person's fate. These doctrines, known as "total human depravity" and "predestination," mellowed during the 18th century, but they still formed the underlying assumptions of Calvinist religions in early-19th-century America.

During the Second Great Awakening, Calvinist doctrine was transformed to incorporate theological ideas of the enlightenment which argued that God was rational, kind, and forgiving. As a result, by the 1830s American Protestant religions bore little resemblance to the forms of orthodox Calvinism practiced in the 17th and early-18th centuries. Instead of the doctrines of predestination and total human depravity, most Protestants now believed that humans were naturally good and moral creatures who were born into a wicked world. God promised salvation to any human who would maintain a moral path and accept Jesus Christ as the savior (Ladies of the Mission 1854; Rosenberg 1971:60-69; Sklar 1973; Johnson 1978:95-115; McLoughlin 1978:98-140).

These new views on salvation helped solidify new attitudes toward children. Americans rejected the Calvinist doctrine of infant depravity and adopted the belief that children were born without sin, ready to be molded into Christians (McLoughlin 1978:116). This new attitude became part of the middle-class Protestant world

TABLE 2  
GOTHIC-SHAPED TABLEWARE OWNED BY HOUSEHOLDS  
AT ATLANTIC TERMINAL

Household	Gothic Table Setting	n Vessels in Gothic Shape	Total n of Dining Vessels	Percent of Gothic -Shaped Vessels
Elmendorf	No	6	57	10%
Atwater	Yes	24	103	23%
Bates	Yes	11	53	21%
McGuire	Yes	14	31	45%
Goff	Yes	10	55	18%
450 Carlton	Tea Set Only	4	45	9%

view. Preachers argued that it was children's "dependency and venerability . . . that made them susceptible to a Christian education" and thus salvation (Ryan 1981:99). In his 1848 book, *On Christian Nature*, Horace Bushnell argued that the most effective method of educating a child in Christian values was to raise them in a moral, "Christian home" (Mathews 1987:19).

With the spatial separation between work places and homes, and the development of commuting to work, women acquired nearly complete control of child rearing and domestic duties (Ryan 1981:101; Blumin 1989:184). With the very souls of their children in the balance, middle-class mothers began to transform their homes into sanctuaries designed to instill their children with Christian values and provide their husbands with refuges from the outside world (Grier 1988:5).

To create a suitable home, architects and designers brought ecclesiastical elements into family dwellings. The result was the Gothic style which in the 1840s and 1850s was touted "as the perfect place for Christian nurture" (Clark 1986:25). Although Gothic row houses in New York and Brooklyn were rare, elements of the Gothic-style were incorporated into many homes. Gothic iron work ornamented many facades, while interiors often contained Gothic mantels and, occasionally, Gothic door frames (Lockwood 1972:106-116). During this time, the Gothic style was also common in material culture. Gothic clocks, furniture, perfume bottles, glass

pickle jars, and particularly sideboards resembling church altars became popular among the middle class (McKearin and Wilson 1978:250; Williams 1985:64).

Although Gothic mantels and furniture rarely survive in the archaeological record, ceramics shaped in Gothic forms are common in the Atlantic Terminal assemblages. Table 2 shows the Gothic ceramics associated with each household. Note this table includes all ceramics in the general Gothic shape, not just the specific pattern known as Gothic. The data show that in the 1860s most of the families owned a set of Gothic tableware, and each household owned vessels in the general Gothic shape. Diana Wall (1991:25-26) argues that white granite ceramics in Gothic shapes became fashionable among middle-class families because they symbolically associated the home, and specifically the dining room, "with the sanctity and community of Gothic churches and contrasted them to the more competitive arena of the capitalist marketplace." In this manner, these families followed the prescriptive literature's suggestions for surrounding the family with symbols of Christianity which hopefully would lead their children towards a moral life and ultimately salvation.

Although not of ecclesiastical origin, the middle class also surrounded itself with plants and natural symbols to help foster the suitable "Christian" environment. Nineteenth-century planners and architects, such as Andrew Jackson Downing, viewed the country as the ideal place

for raising a family. The proximity to nature, it was thought, was not only healthy but its beauty also brought one in touch with God (Stilgoe 1988:33-37). During the mid- to late-19th century many women living in the more developed suburbs, like Fort Greene, Brooklyn, brought nature into their homes through backlot gardens and potted plants. Advice books and magazine articles abounded with directions on maintaining gardens and raising plants indoors (Beecher and Stowe 1869; Green 1983:37; Schlereth 1991:136-139). Plants were commonly incorporated into interior decorative schemes, and many middle-class homes contained bay window gardens, potted plants, and flower arrangements (Clark 1986:37,114). Nature motifs were also brought into the home through material culture: wallpaper, furniture, pressed glass, and ceramics commonly depicted floral and leaf motifs (Clark 1986:114; Moss and Winkler 1986). Both the plants and naturalistic furnishings helped create an environment emphasizing nurturing and beauty. This helped establish the home as a "Christian" sanctuary from the evils of the world, which could "tranquilize the agitated passions and exhilarate the man, nerve the imagination, and render all around him delightful" (Joseph Breck quoted in Stilgoe 1988:33). The adoption of these symbols implied acceptance of the "cult of domesticity" and maintenance of a Christian home, thus women were judged by the state of their houses (Green 1983:59). To be a respect-

able member of the middle class, the home had to be well-maintained and exhibit the appropriate material culture (Green 1983:59; Clark 1986:28; Marsh 1990:11).

A variety of artifacts recovered from the Atlantic Terminal site show that these households followed the prescriptive literature and decorated their homes with objects exhibiting naturalistic or floral designs. For example, the Atwaters' gas lighting fixtures were decorated with floral motifs and they probably fastened their drapes' pull-backs with large gilt florets (Moss and Winkler 1986:212). The Bateses owned a piece of furniture, probably a clock, with silver plated corners decorated with naturalistic designs. The McGuires decorated the interior walls of their home with beige plaster painted with a pattern depicting climbing vines and leaves, and used brass-alloy hardware in the shape of flowers to hang towels or drapes. Meanwhile, the unknown residents of 450 Carlton owned an ornate light fixture in a general leaf pattern.

Flowerpots recovered from the lots show that the families filled their homes with potted plants. Table 3 depicts the minimum number of flowerpots recovered from each household. Although the percentage of flowerpots in each ceramic assemblage varied, the data suggest that most of the households were decorated with plants. While the reasons behind the lack of flowerpots in the McGuires' assemblage remain a mystery, the few pots in the 450 Carlton assemblage is

TABLE 3  
FLOWER POTS RECOVERED BY HOUSEHOLD

<u>Household</u>	<u>Number of Flowerpots</u>	<u>Total n of Vessels<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Percent Flowerpots</u>
Bates	27	77	35%
Atwater	21	176	12%
Elmendorf	26	77	34%
McGuire	3	58	5%
Goff	47	84	56%
450 Carlton (1860s)	0	92	0

<sup>a</sup> Total number of ceramic vessels in each assemblage

probably the result of analytical methods. The deposit directly associated with the 1860s residents at 450 Carlton contained no flowerpots, yet, the stratum immediately above the deposit contained 201. As this stratum contained tablewares which cross-mended with ones found in the lower deposit, as well as late-19th century ceramics, it is possible that some of the flowerpots were also deposited in the 1860s. Nevertheless, this cannot be determined with certainty as the upper deposit dating to the early 1900s also contained hundreds of flowerpots.

The presence of Gothic ceramics, household furnishings with floral and naturalistic motifs, and flowerpots in nearly every assemblage at Atlantic Terminal show the persuasiveness of these symbols in Victorian middle-class homes. The artifacts show that these women followed the prescriptive literature and used material culture to envelop their homes with the symbols of domesticity. In doing so, women both created an environment designed to set their family on the road to salvation and proclaimed to visitors their morality and respectability.

### Middle-Class Genteel Dining

Raising children with “Christian” values not only included teaching the beliefs and traditions of Protestantism, but also included instruction on how to be a “civilized” and “moral” member of society. In attempting to differentiate themselves from animals, other cultures, and other classes, middle-class Victorians defined particular attitudes and behaviors as civilized. The basis of this civilized behavior was the adoption and elaboration of the etiquette of gentility.

For 19th century middle-class children, one of the most important lessons was the acquisition of proper dining etiquette. By the Victorian period, dining had become increasingly formalized into a ritual where the middle and upper classes displayed their knowledge of the etiquette of gentility (Green 1983:47; Williams 1985:21-22). “Table manners emerged as the supreme test of refinement, character, and . . . ‘good breeding’ “

(Kasson 1990:200). Similar to their views of architectural style and home maintenance, middle-class Americans believed that a person’s table manners were a direct reflection of their morality. The adoption of genteel dining quickly became a class marker. Members of the working class lacked the money to purchase the food, items, and servants needed to participate in genteel dining; probably lacked the time to stage formal dinners; and, as recent studies of working-class culture suggest, probably lacked the desire to emulate middle-class dining etiquette (Cohen 1982; Stott 1990). The middle class, noting the absence of genteel dining, quickly labeled the working class as rude and uncivilized. A mastery of dining etiquette thus became a prerequisite for becoming “respectable” in middle-class social circles.

Throughout most of the Victorian period, the middle class followed genteel dining etiquette during family meals as well as social occasions. For some families, meals were consciously used as a learning experience for children. For example, in Catharine Sedgwick’s 1835 novel *Home* (quoted in Mathews 1987:25), “Mr. and Mrs. Barclay regard meals as three opportunities a day for teaching ‘punctuality, order, neatness, temperance, self-denial, kindness, generosity, and hospitality’. The food may be frugal, but the table is set with ‘scrupulous neatness’. Meals proceed at a deliberate pace so that Mr. Barclay may instruct along the way.”

To initiate a child into the basic concepts of table manners, advisors such as *Good Housekeeping* suggested that each child should be given a “special cup, plate, [and] spoon” (quoted in Green 1983:48). Presumably this helped children learn that during a meal, tableware was considered the exclusive property of the diner. Sometimes ceramics displayed the child’s name or illustrations from a favorite story to help the child identify with the vessel. For example, at Atlantic Terminal a child’s mug with the name “Mary” printed on it was recovered from the Elmendorfs’ privy, and an alphabet plate displaying a scene entitled “The Guardian” was found

in the McGuire's cistern. Both the Bates and Atwater assemblages also included a child's mug. Many Victorian parents also gave their daughters toy table settings and toy tea sets to help teach them the appropriate manners and domestic skills (Ryan 1981:161; Calvert 1992:113, 118). These sets were found in all the excavated households at Atlantic Terminal.

Dining etiquette was also used to stress the importance of family life, thus providing a suitable home for raising children. Several scholars (Williams 1985:48; Wall 1994:111-112) have argued that dinners during the mid-19th century became more formal partly to celebrate the reunion of the family at the end of the workday. By placing special emphasis on time spent together, the meals reinforced the importance of family relationships and provided structured time for interaction between family members. Of course, most families did not practice genteel dining at home solely to instruct their children. For many middle-class individuals the etiquette was such an important part of their world view that it was completely ingrained.

To follow genteel dining properly, the table had to be set in a precise manner. Numerous publications explained the exact placement for each vessel and utensil. As Susan Williams (1985:149-150) notes, "setting the table was a ritual whose procedures were probably more rigidly prescribed than any other associated with dining." Before the Civil War, most tables were set following the Old English plan, where food was placed in uncovered serving pieces on the table at the start of each course. Both serving pieces and individual place settings were arranged in a balanced symmetrical pattern, designed to exhibit order and regimentation (Wall 1994:117-118). By the Civil War, some viewed the Old English plan as old fashioned and began to adopt a new table arrangement known as "service a la russe" (Lynes 1957:191-192; Williams 1985:151-152). In this plan, the table was set only with place settings and an ornamental centerpiece. Food was placed on a sideboard, usually in covered dishes, and served to each diner by servants.

Most middle-class households probably did not adopt this table plan until the late-19th century, and even then only for more formal occasions (Wall 1994:121).

Genteel tables were not only set in a specific pattern, but they also were set with certain wares. Most middle-class women laid their tables primarily with ceramic plates, dishes, cups and serving pieces, supplemented with glass and silver serving pieces. Just as the middle class stressed order and regularity in its architecture and landscapes, it was also required in their tablewares. By the mid-19th century, most middle-class households owned table settings in matched patterns (Williams 1985:76-78). Matching sets of ceramics "affirmed their [the middle class] faith in the power of science and rational thought to transform the world through the products of an industrial society. Matching tableware no doubt satisfied their mutual desire for order and symmetry, values which had been a prevalent inheritance from the Enlightenment, and which helped shape popular thinking about the forms and structures of daily life" (Williams 1985:90). Like other forms of genteel behavior, the presence or absence of the appropriate tableware was viewed as a sign of morality or immorality (Ladies of the Mission 1854:48-49; Eells 1856:112; Pease 1856:24).

Table 4 lists the ceramic sets associated with each household from the Atlantic Terminal site to determine if families followed the prescribed etiquette for setting an ordered, genteel table. The table breaks the sets down by ware type and categorizes them as matching or complementary (made up of vessels of similar patterns). The type of set (table, tea, or both) is also listed. To be considered a tableware set, the assemblage must contain at least three different vessel forms in the same pattern. Tea sets are inferred by the presence of at least one matching saucer/cup and sugar or slop bowl, or multiple cups and/or saucers of the same pattern. Complementary sets follow the same criteria except vessel patterns are similar instead of matching. For glassware a set is determined by two matching vessels.



TABLE 4  
TYPE AND NUMBER OF CERAMIC TABLE SETTINGS OWNED BY EACH HOUSEHOLD

Ware Type	Type of Table Setting	Bates	Atwater	Elmendorf	McGuire	Goff	450 Carlton
White Granite	Matching Table & Tea	2 sets	3 sets	1 set	2 sets	2 sets	1 set
	Matching Table no Tea	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Comp. Table & Tea	1 set	0	1 set	0	0	0
	Comp. Tea Only	0	0	0	0	0	1 set
	Matching Tea Only	0	0	0	1 set	0	1 set
Plain Porcelain	Matching Table & Tea	0	1 set	1 set	A	0	0
	Matching Table no Tea	1 set	0	0	0	0	B
	Matching Tea Only	0	1 set	1 set	1 set	0	1 set
	Unknown	0	0	0	1 set	0	0
Decorated Porcelain	Matching Tea Only	0	0	0	0	1 set	1 set
	Matching Muffin Plates	0	1 set	0	0	0	1 set
Decorated Whitewares	Matching Table & Tea	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Matching Table no Tea	0	1 set	0	0	0	0
	Matching Tea Only	0	0	1 set	0	0	0
Glassware	Matching Tumbler Sets	2 sets	0	0	1 set	1 set	0
	Matching Goblet Sets	0	2 sets	0	0	0	0
	Matching Tumbler & Goblet Sets	2 sets	0	0	0	0	1 set

**Key:**

Comp=Set of complementary patterns

A= Two matching compotes and two matching tea cups recovered. Could be remains of either a Table or Tea set.

B= A single recovered plain porcelain dining plate indicates that the inhabitants of 450 Carlton did own porcelain tableware even if the presence of a matching set cannot be determined.

A brief review of the ceramic sets owned by the residents at Atlantic Terminal show typical middle-class table settings. The Bates family seem to have owned four sets of dishes. They owned matching table and tea sets in plain white granite and in the Alternate Loops pattern. They also owned a handful of white granite vessels in the Gothic and straight-ribbed patterns, which when combined with other similar shaped, but non-matching, vessels formed a large complementary set in the general Gothic shape. For more formal entertaining, the Bateses used a matching set of plain white European porcelain.

The largest number of sets were recovered from the Atwaters's lot. The Atwaters owned three sets of white granite (one plain, one in the Wheat pattern, and one in Twelve-sided panel); a set of shell-edge; a matching table and tea set of plain hardpaste porcelain; a porcelain tea set in the Straight Ribbed pattern, and three gilded por-

celain muffin plates which could have been the remnants of either a tea or table setting. Despite their wealth and large household, the Elmendorfs only owned two sets of white granite dishes: a plain table and tea set, and a set in the general Gothic shape made up of vessels from five complementary patterns. The Elmendorfs also owned a plain hard-paste porcelain tea and table set, and a separate white porcelain tea set in a naturalistic pattern. Rounding out the dining sets was a pair was matching hand-painted whiteware teacups.

The McGuires owned two white granite table and tea sets: one in Boote's Union pattern and another in Twelve-sided panel. These sets could have been used separately or combined, and supplemented with other recovered complementary vessels, to form a large set in the general Gothic shape. Besides these sets, they owned a separate plain white granite tea set. For more

formal dining, the McGuires owned a white porcelain tea set in the Straight Ribbed pattern, and another set in the Twelve-sided panel pattern. This second set is represented by two tea cups and two compotes, making it ambiguous whether the full set included tablewares or just teawares.

Only three ceramic sets were recovered from the Goffs's lot. These included table and tea sets of plain white granite and another white granite set in the Twelve-sided panel pattern. There was no evidence of a porcelain table set, although vessels belonging to a gilded porcelain tea set were recovered. The unknown residents at 450 Carlton Avenue owned a table and tea set in plain white granite and could put together a complementary white granite tea set in the general Gothic shape by combining vessels from five similar patterns. They also owned a porcelain tea set in an unidentified molded pattern, and owned a second gilded porcelain set. This second set is represented by three muffin plates making it unclear if it were part of a table or tea set. A single plain porcelain diner plate was recovered, however, suggesting that this household did own a porcelain table setting.

The recovered ceramics from Atlantic Terminal indicate that these families closely followed the prescriptive literature and middle-class norms by setting their tables with matching ceramic sets and glassware. As Table 4 shows, each family owned at least one matching tableware and tea set in white granite. These sets were probably used as their everyday place settings. Five of the six households owned multiple sets of white granite. These extra sets could have been used as spares, as separate dishes for servants, or different patterns could have been used to differentiate breakfast and lunch from diner. Several households owned vessels in non-matching but complementary patterns to their sets. Assuming that these complementary vessels were used alongside the primary set, and that families strove to set an ordered, matching table, this suggests that the mid-19th-century definition of a match-

ing set differed from today. The middle class in the 1860s may have considered a group of vessels sharing the same basic shape and motifs to be a matching set (Praetzellis and Praetzellis 1992:89).

At least four, a perhaps five, of the six households owned a matching porcelain tablesetting. These sets were probably reserved for formal occasions, such as Sunday dinners and for entertaining. At least five of the six households also owned an extra porcelain tea set. The Goffs and perhaps the Atwaters and residents of 450 Carlton owned an extra gilded tea set. These fancy tea wares were probably used for the formal teas common among Victorian middle-class women (Wall 1991, 1994).

The presence of a gilded porcelain tea set but not a porcelain tableware set in the Goffs' assemblage provides insight on the development of entertaining at home. In her study of the upper-middle-class Robson family of Manhattan, Diana Wall (1991) identified a similar pattern. She argues that the lack of porcelain tablewares suggests that the Robsons did not entertain company for dinner, but instead "Eliza Robson probably used her fancy gilt-decorated and pedestaled teaware at the more elaborate and formal afternoon tea parties she gave for her friends" (Wall 1991:79). By the 1860s many middle-class families were holding dinner parties (Williams 1985:175-176), although the practice did not become universal until later (Clark 1987:154-156). The similar ceramic patterns between the Robson and Goff households suggest that both families may have been slow to adopt the new fashion of having company for dinner.

Not only did genteel dining etiquette dictate that tables should be set with matching wares, it also prescribed specialized vessel forms for specific functions. Although in the 17th and 18th centuries eating from a common vessel was a regular practice, by the mid-19th-century genteel etiquette strictly forbade sharing food. Likewise, different foods were not to be mixed on the

same serving vessel. As a result, vessels with specific functions were required on a genteel table (Williams 1985:35-39; Carson 1990:56; Kasson 1990:189). Following the proper manners when using these forms displayed one's knowledge of genteel etiquette and one's place in society. For example, etiquette manuals specified how to use an egg cup: "the small end of the egg should be placed in the cup, and an opening made at the top of the egg large enough to admit a teaspoon" (Grace Townsend 1891 quoted in Williams 1985:160). For members of New York's middle class, the general principles of segmented (non-communal) dining and the proper use of specialized vessels would have been a prerequisite for social success.

To practice genteel dining, households needed a basic tableware set consisting of dinner plates, soup plates, twifflers, muffin plates, sauce tureens, a soup tureen, a variety of platters in different sizes, covered serving dishes, open serving dishes, bakers, a butter dish, a pitcher, and a gravy boat. Tea sets were often included with the set, but were also sold separately. The basic tea set included cups, saucers, a tea pot, a slop bowl, a sugar, a creamer, and often muffin plates. In total these basic sets contained about 20 different vessel forms. These basic sets could be supplemented by numerous forms with specific functions, such as relish dishes, breakfast bowls, compotes, egg cups, punch bowls and

cups, coffee cups, chocolate cups, and custards (Wetherbee 1985:27-33, 1996:22-2; Williams 1985:80-847).

The ability of the families who lived on the Atlantic Terminal site to set a genteel, segmented table was determined by counting the number of vessel forms and specialized vessels recovered from each household. Following the work of Paul Shackel (1993:30-42), households exhibiting a variety of vessel forms and specialized forms are considered to have been following genteel dining etiquette. Table 5 depicts the number of vessel forms in ceramic and glass for each household. The households favored white granite and porcelain table settings, thus only ceramic vessels of these wares are depicted in this table. Vessel forms were identified by function only; therefore, minor variations in size or shape were not counted as separate forms. For example, tea cups with and without pedestals were counted as one form and only three types of plates were recognized—muffins, twifflers, and dinners.

As Table 5 shows, the assemblages from Atlantic Terminal contained between 11 and 17 different tableware forms in white granite and porcelain. As the features at the Atlantic Terminal site were probably filled over a short time period, it is unlikely that each vessel form owned by a household would be represented in the archaeological assemblage. Therefore, the inclusion of approximately 14 out of the 20 forms found

TABLE 5  
NUMBER OF VESSEL FORMS OWNED BY EACH HOUSEHOLD

Household	WHITE GRANITE			PLAIN PORCELAIN			GLASS	Total Forms <sup>a</sup>
	Tableware	Tea	Serving	Tableware	Tea	Serving	Serving	
Elmendorf	2	3	4	3	4	0	0	12
Atwater	5	5	6	4	2	0	0	17
Bates	5	4	3	4	3	1	0	13
McGuire	4	2	2	0	2	2	1	11
Goff	4	2	5	4	2	1	1	15
450 Carlton	3	3	3	2	2	1	3	13

<sup>a</sup> Identical vessel forms in white granite and porcelain were not double counted, thus the total number of forms is not a total for the row.

in the basic formal table setting suggests that these families were practicing the segmentation associated with genteel dining rather than the communal eating patterns practiced among most early-19th-century households.

Among the households' table settings at Atlantic Terminal were single-function vessels closely associated with genteel dining. These forms helped create an ordered and segmented table by requiring diners to use them for specific functions and in particular ways. For example, the Atwaters owned soup plates, sauce dishes, a child's mug, and a glass cake plate; the Elmendorfs owned a soup tureen and a sugar dish; the Bateses had soup plates and a child's mug; and the Goffs had a creamer, a butter dish, and a salt cellar. The McGuires owned two compotes, two dishes with drainers, a child's plate, and a salt cellar, while the inhabitants of 450 Carlton Ave. had a pickle dish, a celery/asparagus dish, and two glass compotes.

Furthermore, serving dish covers were recovered from the Atwater, Goff, and Elmendorf assemblages. Before the mid-19th-century, genteel tables were set following the Old English plan. In this style, food was placed on the table in open serving dishes designed to highlight the sight and smell of the upcoming course (Wall 1994:147). By mid-century, however, genteel families began to set their tables in a new style which emphasized not the food but the decorated table. Food was now served in covered dishes which both contained the meal's smell and hid it from sight (Wall 1994:148). Interestingly, this change in style became commonly practiced concurrently with new rules of etiquette designed to distance the diner from the act of ingesting food (Kasson 1990:195-208). For many genteel Victorians eating was a base act which brought humans down to the level of animals (Williams 1985:20), and according to a writer for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1868:434), only rigid adherence to dining etiquette could "place an infinite distance between ourselves and the brutes, even at the moment when we are enjoying a

pleasure which we have in common with them." The presence of serving dish covers among the Atlantic Terminal assemblages suggest that these families had adopted the new table setting style and were keeping abreast with current genteel dining etiquette.

Archaeology suggests that each of the six households at Atlantic Terminal followed the basic tenets of genteel dining. Most of the families owned matching table settings in both white granite and porcelain with a variety of forms, and vessels with specific functions, indicating that they practiced genteel dining both on formal occasions and at family meals. The Goffs, who may not have owned a porcelain tablesetting, probably followed the alternative practice of entertaining at tea instead of dinner. Yet, they still seem to have practiced genteel dining at ordinary meals. By following genteel behavior at home, these families were practicing what they considered to be proper, moral behavior and were teaching their children the skills needed to survive as members of the middle class.

Toy ceramics, which follow the same basic patterns of the adult table settings, show one way children were taught the basics of genteel dining. The Atlantic Terminal assemblages contained two types of toy ceramics: miniature table settings, often used in doll houses, which contained a variety of vessel forms; and play tea sets, made for girls acting out tea parties, which usually contained just tea wares. Most of the recovered toy ceramics were high quality porcelain; some vessels were even gilded. Three out of the six assemblages contained matching vessels, suggesting the presence of matched sets. Most of the girls also owned specialized vessels such as pitchers, soup tureens, or serving dishes, showing that their dolls also practiced segmented genteel dining. Furthermore, three assemblages contained serving dish covers. As noted above, dish covers, which hid the food from the eyes and noses of diners, were an important mark of genteel dining by the Civil War. It is interesting that even

TABLE 6  
TOY CERAMICS BY HOUSEHOLD

Household	n of Vessels	Toy Table Settings		Covers	Toy Tea Sets	
		Matching Vessels	Specialized Vessels		n of Vessels	Matching Vessels
Bates	2	Present	Present	Absent	1	-
Atwater	1	-	Absent	Absent	2	Present
Elmendorf	2	Absent	Present	Present	1	-
McGuire	2	Present	Present	Present	1	-
Goff	2	Present	Absent	Absent	0	-
450 Carlton	3	Absent	Present	Present	7	Present

children's toy table settings included covers by the 1860s. Table 6 summarizes the toy ceramics recovered at Atlantic Terminal. The presence of matched sets, specialized forms, and dish covers among the toy ceramics suggest that these middle-class children had acquired, or were going to acquire, the genteel manners needed to maintain their parents' social position.

#### Conclusion: The Culture of Conformity

As middle-class Victorians developed the ideology of domesticity and adopted their own form of genteel behavior, numerous books and articles advised readers, usually women, on how to create the proper domestic setting to raise genteel children. Many historians have examined this prescriptive literature, but most admit the difficulty of knowing how closely the advice was followed (Green 1983; Mathews 1987; Marsh 1990). The archaeological excavations at Atlantic Terminal provide an opportunity to see how middle-class women used material culture to create domestic sanctuaries for their families, and to examine the extent to which these families practiced genteel dining.

The assemblages from Atlantic Terminal indicate that the households owned the material culture needed to follow the ideologies of domesticity and gentility. In this manner, there was a strong correlation between the prescriptive litera-

ture and actual middle-class behavior. As discussed above, the households at Atlantic Terminal followed the advice manuals and transformed their houses into domestic sanctuaries by displaying items symbolic of Christianity and nature. Items such as Gothic ceramics, decorative hardware with natural motifs, and house plants (identified by flowerpots) were present in each assemblage.

Examination of the recovered ceramics shows that although there were minor variations, the households followed the general rules of genteel dining. Each household owned matched or complementary sets, and segmented both their tables with different vessel forms. Most of the families also differentiated between everyday and formal meals by using a different ceramic sets. Even toy ceramics followed this genteel pattern.

The degree of conformity among the assemblages from the Atlantic Terminal site is truly surprising. Not only did each household follow the rules of genteel dining, but each family chose to set their tables with the same types of ceramics. During the 1860s many types of ceramic tablewares were available, including a variety of transfer-printed wares, flowing colors, hand-painted wares, shell-edged wares, sponge wares, plain whitewares, white granite wares, and European porcelains. Yet, the excavated households chose to set their tables almost exclusively with white granite and plain white porcelain. Indeed,



white granite and European porcelain vessels made up between 65% and 81% of all table, tea, and serving wares for each assemblage. On the site as a whole, these two types of ceramics composed 71% of all table, tea, and serving vessels. This high frequency of white granites and plain porcelain ceramics is particularly unusual given the popularity of other ceramic types at the time. George Miller's study of New York merchants' account books shows that, although white granite was the most prevalent ceramic ware in the Northeast during the 1850s and 1860s, painted wares, transfer-printed wares, and plain whitewares were also popular among consumers (Miller 1994, 1996). Interestingly, while European porcelains were common at Atlantic Terminal, Miller (1994) found them to be rare in the merchants' account books. This uniform selection of white granite and plain porcelain table settings throughout the site suggests that the households may have purposely chosen material culture which conformed with their neighbors' possessions.

A comparison among New York's archaeological assemblages dating to the 1860s shows that the preference for white granite and plain porcelain table and teawares characterized New York's middle class. To provide a meaningful comparison for the Atlantic Terminal assemblages, ceramic data were analyzed from nine features from three New York sites deposited in the 1850s through 1870s by middle-class households. The strongest comparative assemblages come from four features (FA3, FA4, FB1, and FB6) from the Mugavero site in Brooklyn (Geismar 1992). These assemblages were deposited by middle-class households, living a short distance from the Atlantic Terminal site, in the 1860s and 1870s. Not only were the assemblages deposited about the same time in the same geographical location, but the occupations of the household heads were similar. Like the household heads at Atlantic Terminal, these were white collar workers employed in business, such as merchants and accountants. Three deposits (Privy 1, Privy 2A, and Privy 2B) from the Greenwich Mews site, in

Greenwich Village, also provide comparable assemblages (Geismar 1989). These assemblages were deposited in the 1850s through 1870s by "tradesmen, clerks, [and] mechanics of the better class" who were considered by their contemporaries as middle class, as well as households headed by merchants (Geismar 1989:69). The final comparative assemblage comes from 25 Barrow Street (Strata II & IV) also in Greenwich Village (Bodie 1992). This assemblage was deposited during the 1860s by Emeline Hirst, the widow of a baker, who worked as a nurse and eventually ran a boarding house in the late-1860s (Bodie 1992:2.7-2.11). Most contemporaries probably would not have considered Hirst to be middle class, but instead identified her as a member of the class of upper mechanics, those skilled laborers who owned their own businesses (Bodie 1992:5.15). Nevertheless, many members of this group practiced genteel behaviors and were considered "respectable" by members of the middle class (Blumin 1989; Bushman 1992).

The ceramic data from these features suggest that most of New York's middle-class households set their tables with white granite and porcelain ceramics. As Table 7 shows, these two ceramic types constitute at least 55% of the table and tea wares for 13 of the 14 assemblages. With the great range of ceramic styles readily available at the time in New York, it follows that these middle-class households actively chose white granite and plain porcelain table and tea settings over colored wares and decorative patterns.

Data from three assemblages excavated at the Five Points site in Lower Manhattan suggest that this penchant for white tablewares was not shared with working class. Feature H (Analytical Stratum III), associated with a tenement inhabited by Polish Jews, Italians, and Irish, was filled after 1857. Although the assemblage contained 77 table, tea, and serving vessels, only 26 (34%) were of white granite, and only one (1%) was made from hard-paste porcelain. Feature O (Analytical Stratum III) was filled after 1862 by the tenement's Irish inhabitants. Of the 128 dining vessels recovered from this deposit, only 27

TABLE 7  
PERCENT OF WHITE GRANITE AND PLAIN PORCELAIN TABLE AND TEAWARES AMONG MIDDLE-CLASS NEW YORK SITES

Site	Feat.	Date	Occupation	Vessels	n White Granite	% White Granite	n Euro. Porcel.	% Euro Porcel.	% WG & E.P.
Mugavero	FA3	1860s	Accountant or Stockbroker	138	24	17%	54	39%	56%
Mugavero	FA4	1860s	Merchant	96	57	59%	10	10%	69%
Mugavero	FBI	1870s	Manufacturer	91	46	51%	15	17%	68%
Mugavero	FB6	1860s	Merchant	60	28	47%	9	15%	62%
25 Barrow	Strat II & IV	1860s	Widow of Mechanic	28	21	75%	3	11%	86%
Greenwich Mews	Privy 1	1850s-1860s	Merchant	56	26	46%	8	14%	60%
Greenwich Mews	Privy 2A	1870s	Butcher	35	30	86%	2	6%	92%
Greenwich Mews	Privy 2B	1850s	Merchant	97	20	21%	18	19%	40%
Atlantic Terminal	C & O	1860s	Lawyer	53	33	62%	10	19%	81%
Atlantic Terminal	B, P, & R	1860s	Merchant	103	48	47%	18	18%	65%
Atlantic Terminal	A	1860s	Merchant	57	20	35%	19	33%	68%
Atlantic Terminal	F	1860s	Japanner/ Widow	31	15	48%	10	32%	80%
Atlantic Terminal	G & I	1860s	Merchant	55	28	51%	10	18%	69%
Atlantic Terminal	H: Lower	1860s	Unknown	45	23	51%	14	31%	82%

(21%) were of white granite, while five were hard-paste porcelain (4%). Finally, of the 113 dining vessels associated with the tenement containing Samuel Stone, a German-born Jewish tailor, just 7 vessels (6 %) were white granite. No hard-paste porcelain vessels were recovered. In total, only 21% of the ceramics used to set tables in the these working-class sites were made from white granite or plain hard-paste porcelain. The contrasting percentage of white ceramics in working- and middle-class assemblages suggests that middle-class families purposely chose these tablewares rather than just purchasing what was available. Indeed, in 1877 the household decorative advisor Clarence Cook (1877:235-246) complained that middle-class Americans favored uninteresting white ceramics over more decorative Continental ceramics.

The exact reasons behind the popularity of white granite and plain European porcelains are unknown; however one can speculate that the predominance of these ceramic types was influenced by the ideology of domesticity. The Gothic form, common in white granite patterns, had Christian connotations and their display emphasized a household's moral nature (Wall 1991:25-26). Both the whiteness and plainness of the white granite and European porcelain may have appealed to the middle class for similar reasons. In Western Civilization, and especially in the 19th century, the color white is associated with purity and virtue, just the values a mother adhering to the ideology of domesticity would want to emphasize to her family. Likewise, the lack of colorful and ornate decoration upheld the notions of thrift and modesty, two values associated by the middle class in the mid-19th century with morality and Christianity—it was not until the closing decades of the century that this class began to practice conspicuous consumption (Ryan 1981:200). It is unlikely that consumers regularly thought about these symbolic connotations when purchasing their tablewares; however, as the whiteness and plainness of these ceramics supported rather than contrasted with the ideology

of domesticity, these factors probably contributed to the ceramics' popularity.

The conformity to the advice literature and the homogeneity between middle-class households at Atlantic Terminal and throughout New York City suggests that these middling families consciously adopted the appropriate symbols and behaviors by reading the prescriptive literature and mimicking their neighbors' behavior. By adopting the material symbols of domesticity and gentility, these families both marked themselves as respectable members of the middle-class and created a suitable environment to raise their children with the class-specific values needed to obtain a successful white-collar job and stay in the middle class.

As membership in the middle class was defined by exhibiting appropriate behaviors, rather than just economic wealth, social insecurity and the fear of committing a *faux pas* became a defining characteristic of the class. Paul Fussell (1983:31) argues that "the middle class is distinguishable more by its earnestness and psychic insecurity than by its middle income. . . . they remain terrified at what others think of them, and to avoid criticism are obsessed with doing everything right. The middle class is the place where table manners assume an awful importance. . . ." This fear of social *faux pas* led members of the middle class towards conformity not only in social etiquette, but also in architecture, landscapes, speech, and material culture (Labov 1972; Fussell 1983; Kasson 1990:117-123; Marsh 1990). Blending into the crowd and not drawing attention to oneself minimized the opportunity of making social mistakes and opening oneself to the ridicule of peers.

The result was a distinctive middle-class worldview emphasizing uniformity over individuality. Although this world view seems to have originated in suburbs like Fort Greene by the 1860s, it reached its apex in the 1950s when social critics feared that conformity was stymieing creativity and social change (Whyte 1956; Lasch 1978:66; Baritz 1989:199, 201). The high degree of conformity in the late-19th century and

1950s were both preceded by a large influx of individuals into the middle class. In the late-19th century, the middle class expanded rapidly as white collar jobs were created, likewise the post-World War II prosperity and the G. I. Bill created the opportunity for many working-class people to become white-collar employees. Provided with greater economic opportunity and freed from the social stigma of manual labor, these individuals could enter the middle class providing they adopted the appropriate behaviors and material symbols. To learn the appropriate middle class behaviors, many of these individuals turned to the prescriptive literature and mimicked their neighbors' behavior (Whyte 1956:333). As a result, the norms of middle-class behavior became less varied and more rigorously followed. This phenomenon is seen both in the ceramics from the Atlantic Terminal site and in the ubiquitous tract housing that fills America's suburbs. Following this pattern, one might expect to see a high degree of conformity, both in behavior and in material culture, whenever a social class rapidly expands with members from a lower stratum.

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