What’s your favorite NYC secret?

Nick Carr, founder of Scouting NY (scoutingny.com)
"There's a 150-foot hole in the sidewalk on Park Avenue between 36th and 37th Streets. It's fun to watch New Yorkers walk over it, completely unaware they're a sewer grate away from plunging 15 stories into Manhattan's depths."

Esther Crain, founder of Ephemeral New York (ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com)
"The next time you're lounging around Washington Square Park, Madison Square Park or Bryant Park, remember that these wonderful green spaces started out in the late 18th and early 19th centuries as burial grounds for indigent New Yorkers. Eventually they filled up with bodies, and after burials were banned in Manhattan for health reasons, the bodies were either transferred to Hart Island or left in the ground. The bones of some yellow-fever victim popped up in Washington Square Park during construction."

"There's about a dozen abandoned observation decks, mostly in prewar office towers. Some are office spaces or apartment terraces now, but many are just sitting there unused. Like on the Paramount Theatre building in Times Square, 22 William Street and the Williamsburgh Savings Bank building in Brooklyn. There are all these lost views, just sitting up above the city, that used to be there for anyone. Hopefully we can open some back up to the public."

Laura Itzkowitz, editor for Untapped Cities (untappedcities.com/newyork)
"I think New York's best secrets are the ones hidden in plain sight, like remnants of the Metropolitan Museum's original facade or a portrait of Vladimir Nabokov's uncle in a mural in the American Museum of Natural History. These landmarks are essential to the fabric of New York City, and their secrets are accessible to anyone who looks hard enough."

Nathan Kensinger (kensinger.blogspot.com), photographer and urban explorer
"I like the fact that New York City is so large; it once contained its own vacation getaways."

Some of them are no longer used, but some still exist, like Camp Pouch, the Boy Scouts' 143-acre summer camp in Staten Island, which is so large it has its own private lake and island. The city's oceanfront used to be lined with thousands of summer bungalows, some of which were served by private airports. A few pieces of these early-century old communities still exist in neighborhoods like Edgemere, Far Rockaway, New Dorp Beach and Brighton Beach."

Jen Messier, cofounder of Brooklyn Brinenery (brooklynbrinenery.com)
"I've always had a thing for the islands scattered around the city, and my favorite is probably U Thant Island. It sits in the East River right across from the United Nations in midtown, and it's named after a former U.N. secretary-general. And even though the land is entirely artificial and small, it's become a bird sanctuary. I love that this tiny little island can sit practically unnoticed in the middle of the city, all the while having a really interesting past and present."

Jeremiah Moss, founder of Vanishing New York (vanishingnewyork.blogspot.com)
"The Explorers Club is an amazing place. [Usually] for members only, the club's headquarters opens to the public for various book readings and lectures. Take those opportunities to explore the gorgeous building, which is filled with artifacts from various historic expeditions—a taxidermy polar bear, a flag carried to the moon, the globe used by Thor Heyerdahl when he planned the Kon Tiki trip. But maybe the weirdest artifact at the Explorers Club is the pen of a sperm whale. It resembles a large stalagmite, gazing somewhat forlornly out the window onto East 70th Street."

Gregory Wessner, executive director of Open House New York (openhny.org)
"In 1811, when Manhattan's street grid was first proposed, most of the island was fields and farms. When the surveyors were laying out the grid, they would bury heavy markers inscribed with the street numbers to identify where future intersections would be. Very few of these markers even exist anymore, but one of them is still in its rightful place in Manhattan. (The location is) kept a secret for fear that someone will try to take it. I first learned about it through the exhibition on Manhattan's grid at the Museum of the City of New York."

—Compiled by Nadia Chaudhary

For secrets from Benjamin Kabak of Second Avenue Sagas and others, visit timeout.com/newyork.