

The Collect Pond: New York's First Source Of Water Was Filled In To Become "Five Points," The Worst Slum In American History



Lopsided buildings along Mulberry Street, a legacy of the soggy ground on which they were built.

18th-century Manhattan was a decidedly beautiful and peaceful place. Home to roughly 30,000 people in the years just after the Revolutionary War, New York was a far cry from the glass-and-cement jungle of 8 million it has become today. It was a relatively pristine utopia of rolling hills, old-growth trees, and babbling brooks ambling into a series of small ponds.

One of the more notable of these ponds, which was actually fed by an underground spring, became known as "Collect Pond." For nearly two centuries after the Dutch first settled Manhattan Island, Collect Pond was the bustling village's main source of water. It covered approximately 50 acres and was up to 60 feet deep in places. For a growing town, nothing was more important than a constant supply of clean, drinkable water, and the Collect Pond provided just that. And, as an interesting note, it was in Collect Pond that, in 1796, Connecticut inventor John Fitch tested the first successful steam-powered paddle boat. Later

iterations of this invention would revolutionize American industry.

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