



# UNEXPECTED NEW YORK

87 DISCOVERIES IN FAMILIAR PLACES

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New York

**Photography and Text by  
Chester Burger**





## The forgotten train tunnel— How a 19-year-old college kid discovered it after 121 years

In 1979, Bob Diamond, a 19-year-old engineering student at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, heard a radio announcer tell of a long-lost railroad tunnel under Atlantic Avenue. It caught his interest. Municipal officials and utility company employees confirmed the tunnel's existence, but knew nothing more than that. They didn't know where it started, where it ended, or how it could be entered. That challenged Bob Diamond's imagination. He spent years searching old newspaper files and musty street records, and walked endlessly up and down Atlantic Avenue.

One day, at Court St. and Atlantic Ave., he noted a manhole cover that differed in size and inscription from all others. A year of his persistent pleading brought out a kindly city utility crew to lift the cover. Bob had found the roof of the tunnel.



*Bob Diamond stands on the manhole cover that's the only entry into the Tunnel.*

Then came another crew, this time from the gas company. They dug unsuccessfully all day. Just when they were ready to quit, Bob Diamond poked a stick into the dirt, broke through, and a blast of cold air hit him in the face. He had found the tunnel entrance.

It had been dug in 1844 for the Long Island Rail Road as an extension to the new Erie Canal. No reliable railroad brakes then existed, so the trains needed the tunnel to roll to a stop safely, without menacing street-level traffic.

But by 1859, Brooklyn was becoming well populated. It wanted no locomotive soot or smoke in the city. They banned steam locomotives, and appropriated a huge sum, \$130,000, to demolish the tunnel.

Corrupt public officials stole the money. They sealed the tunnel just as it was. That's the way Bob Diamond found it in 1980 when he entered it 121 years later.



Atlantic Ave. at Court Street  
Brooklyn

The tunnel runs under Atlantic Avenue for four blocks. Bob Diamond believes that when it was closed, an 1834 locomotive was abandoned in the dirt at one end. There's been no money to excavate and find out.

In 1986, the City of New York granted Bob Diamond a franchise allowing him exclusive access to the tunnel, and full rights to develop it as a non-profit rail or trolley museum. For more than 20 years, while working as a professional engineer, he poured large sums of his personal salary into lighting and cleaning the tunnel and improving access for the rare groups he allowed to tour it. But it hasn't been developed any further.

Someday surely, the Atlantic Avenue Tunnel will be one of Brooklyn's historic tourist attractions, even if Bob Diamond isn't around to see the results of his curiosity as a 19-year-old.





## CHESTER BURGER

November 2, 2007

Bob Diamond, President and Founder  
Brooklyn Historical Railway Association  
599 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street  
Brooklyn NY 11218-5911

Dear Bobby,

After all these years of our friendship, I take special pleasure in sending you one of the first copies of my book, *UNEXPECTED NEW YORK: 87 DISCOVERIES IN FAMILIAR PLACES*. You will find your photo and remarkable personal story on pages 62 and 63. Friends who saw the pages before publication have told me that the Bob Diamond story is perhaps the most remarkable in the entire book.

The six-year delay was due to the fact that no New York publisher could find a way to produce a 150-page full color book and sell it at a price that people would pay for a "non-coffee table book." Finally, my friend Jerry Goodwin decided to publish it himself, and located a printer in China. We will be selling it on our website, [www.UnexpectedNY.com](http://www.UnexpectedNY.com) at \$29.95 + S&H. I hope that there'll be enough interest and purchases to recover our costs and maybe even be profitable.

Bob, as you'll quickly note, you are the only living person in the entire book! The other individuals shown are what Green-Wood Cemetery calls "permanent residents." These include Alexander Hamilton and John Brown of Harper's Ferry. So you see how exceptional you really are!

If you think it merits it, would you consider a link from your website? Would you want to show the pages to your tour groups? Anything you may care to do would obviously help us very much.

With admiration and warm wishes always,

Sincerely,

