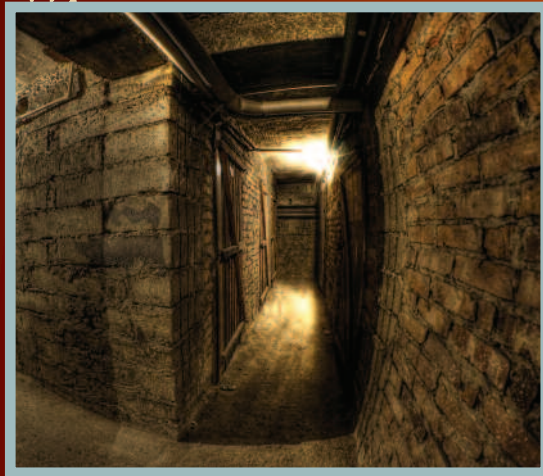


Secrets UNDERGROUND

North America's
Buried Past



Elizabeth MacLeod



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SECRETS BURIED DEEP UNDERGROUND

Brush past the cobwebs, duck under the crumbling archway, and discover some of history's greatest hidden subterranean mysteries. Deep down, down, down below the earth's surface is a completely different world—sometimes terrifying, often baffling, and always fascinating.

The air is murky and dank, and the darkness is velvety thick as tiny creatures scuttle past. “Underground” is a place of spine-tingling mysteries and surprises that lurk concealed and forgotten, just waiting to be rediscovered. Eerie sounds drift through the air and inky shadows obscure and confuse.

You can find these buried secrets right across North America—beneath buildings and busy city streets or deep in sheltering mountains:

- Which cave in West Virginia concealed a Civil War secret?
- What closely guarded equipment lies deep below Grand Central Terminal in New York City?
- Which prairie town covers a network of tunnels that once hid victims of racism—and illegal liquor?
- Could the biggest city in North America have disappeared without a trace?
- How can an entire sailing ship be completely buried without anyone noticing?
- What did the U.S. government hide beneath an exclusive resort?

And why do these lost subterranean passages, spaces, and caves matter? Why not let their old, broken-down contents stay hidden and forgotten? Well, historians and experts who are curious enough to investigate the gloom—and brave enough to venture into the unknown—probe these mysteries to discover what it was *really* like to live in long-ago times.

Delving belowground can also uncover the answers to cryptic puzzles. For instance, thanks to underground investigations, historians now know how the Confederate side in America's Civil War managed, against impossible odds, to supply its soldiers with ammunition. And deep below one of North America's largest cities, deductions have led to the likely identification of a mysterious train car.

The discoveries made deep underground can help us understand our own past, explaining why some parts of the country have developed the way they have. They've also brought to light the profound misery and human cost of discrimination, and have explained why areas in one west coast city are especially prone to earthquake damage. Uncovering abandoned places underground even gives us insight into the future: from helping us prepare for possible natural or man-made disasters to bracing an ancient city, such as Mexico, against further damage to its very foundations.

In these forgotten tunnels and caves you can meet brave soldiers, greedy fortune seekers, and terrified immigrants. The shadows may also conceal mighty leaders, inscrutable officials, and ruthless spies. So get ready to take a sometimes moldy, often muddy walk through history to discover what amazing things are hidden underground. Who knows—some might be waiting right under your feet!

HIDDEN TEMPLES

**The biggest city in North
America, buried for 500 years**



**THE PLACE:
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO**

**THE BIG EVENT:
THE SPANISH CONQUEST
OF MEXICO (1519-1521)**

Wiping the tears from her eyes, the Aztec woman gazed at the ruins of her beloved city. It was one of the largest cities in the world and now it was demolished. She had watched thousands of brave Aztec warriors fight the Spanish invaders, but they had lost. Utterly. Her husband and sons were dead, slaughtered in the streets. Thousands of other wounded Aztecs cried out and moaned their dying breaths.

Their beautiful city of massive stone temples and gorgeous palaces lay in pieces, savagely destroyed. Even worse, the Spanish soldiers vowed to erect their new buildings right on top of the ancient Aztec structures. The invaders were determined: when they were finished, there would be no trace of the incredible city. It would be as if it had never existed.

The woman turned and sadly hurried away, before the Spanish could come after her. If only she had known that the foreign conquerors wouldn't really succeed in obliterating her city. Not entirely, not forever ...

THE BEGINNINGS UNCOVERED

An Island Home

For 200 years, the Aztecs had been searching for a homeland. They'd been told by their god of war, Huitzilopochtli (pronounced *wee-tsee-loh-POHCH-tee*), that they should settle at the place where they saw an eagle on a cactus eating a snake. So they kept moving throughout the area now known as Mexico, searching for that cactus with the eagle and the snake.

Finally, in 1325, the Aztecs arrived at Lake Texcoco. Many other tribes had come and gone from the shores of the lake, but no one had ever really lived here. However, the Aztecs looked out at a small swampy island in the middle of the lake and saw the eagle, the cactus, and the snake, just as Huitzilopochtli had foretold. They knew they had found their home.



AN EAGLE ON A PRICKLY PEAR HOLDING A SERPENT

The legend about how the Aztecs chose the site for their capital city of Tenochtitlán—where Mexico City stands today—is very important to the country's history. When Mexico's flag was designed in 1821, an image representing the legend was placed in the center. Take a close look and you'll see the eagle holding a serpent, perched on a prickly pear cactus.

The bars of color on the flag have special meanings too. They represent hope (green), unity (white), and the blood of Mexico's heroes (red).



AZTEC, INCA, MAYA: WHO ARE THEY?

Many people confuse the Aztec, Inca, and Maya cultures. The Aztec empire was at its peak between the 1300s and 1500s, and focused around the area where Mexico City is now. Many Mexicans are descended from this group.

The Maya empire was at its greatest long before the Aztecs—from about 2000 BCE to 250 CE—and was located in the jungles of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Yucatan. Their descendants still live in those areas.

At its height in the early 1500s, the Inca empire stretched along the west coast of South America from Ecuador to northern Chile. It reached its peak slightly later than the Aztec empire did. Many Inca now live in Peru.

The Largest City in the World

The Aztecs named the island Tenochtitlán (pronounced *tay-NOTCH-tee-TLAHN*)—it means “among the prickly pears growing among rocks” in the Aztec language—and built a city there. It became the largest and most powerful city in the area that’s now known as Mexico and Central America, and was one of the largest in the world by the 1500s. It was at the heart of where Mexico City is today.

The island city was connected to the mainland by beautiful wide causeways and bridges. The place where the cactus stood was sacred, so that’s where the Aztecs built their main temple: the Huei Teocalli (pronounced *way-TAY-oh-kawl-ee*), or Templo Mayor in Spanish. The temple was shaped like a vast stepped pyramid, and there were shrines at the top.

The Aztec empire grew, gradually dominating the other tribes in the area. But the powerful empire made a lot of enemies along the way, and they would come to regret it.



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