

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

Carroll's Yesteryears
28 April 1993

Dig It: Local history from archaeology
By Joe Getty

Historical archaeology in Maryland has received national attention with the discovery and excavation of 17th century lead coffins in St. Mary's City. Public interest in other projects throughout the state has led to a greater understanding about the role of archaeology in the study of local history.

Before the construction of Oriole Park at Camden Yards, extensive excavations were completed at the stadium site. An exhibit about the artifacts recovered was recently installed at Camden Station in time for the All-Star Game in Baltimore this year. These artifacts provide evidence about the industrial and residential areas of Baltimore beginning in the late 18th century.

R. Christopher Goodwin, the archaeologist who coordinated the Camden Yards excavations, will make a presentation at the Historical Society of Carroll County this Thursday. His slide program "Bottles, Buildings and Baseball: Archaeology and History of Baltimore's Camden Yards" describes the artifacts uncovered and analyzed as part of this project. The presentation begins at 7:30 p.m. in the Shriver-Weybright Auditorium, 210 E. Main St., Westminster.

Cultural artifacts that are deposited in the soil often provide historical evidence that is not available in written documentation. Although historical archaeology work in Carroll County has been limited, the few sites that have been investigated have helped us gain a better understanding of everyday life in our communities.

Archaeological investigations at Union Mills Homestead in 1985 identified distinct Pennsylvania German patterns in the use of household ceramics in Carroll County. The site contained a high proportion of redware artifacts and virtual absence of stoneware for food storage and preparation vessels. It is surprising that the Pennsylvania Germans preferred lead-glazed redware over other utility wares because health hazards from the glazing were well-known.

By the late 18th century, the dangers of lead poisoning from foods tainted by glazed vessels were recognized. Lime juice to combat scurvy aboard whips was not stored in lead glazed vessels for fear that the lead would decompose in the acidic juice. During the early 19th century, stoneware quickly replaced redware as the predominant type of utility ware used in households throughout most of the United States. The advantages of stoneware included its superior strength and stronger surface, permitting greater sanitation as well as safety in storing acidic foods.

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

In the Pennsylvania German cultural region, however, redware retained a dominant role in household use. A long tradition of redware use has been documented by historians in central Pennsylvania. The persistence of this tradition reveals much about the conservative nature of the Pennsylvania Germans.

The excavations at Union Mills reinforced several historical concepts about the Pennsylvania German influences in central Maryland. This project also prompted a study of 19th century redware potters in Carroll County. This study identified the following potters: Samuel Baumgardner and Samuel Crouse, Taneytown; George Trumbo, Lewis Trumbo, Lewis C. Trumbo and Thomas Mering, Westminster; John Wike, Snyderburg; Jacob Ditzler and George Sauble, Manchester; William Wenzel, Hampstead; James C. Mackley, J. Winemiller, U. T. Winemiller and Wesley C. Winemiller, Middleburg; Theodore Crawford, Uniontown; Henry Von Werder of New Windsor; and Leonard Kopp of Lineboro.

An excavation at the Historical Society's Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House was undertaken in 1988 to assist with plans for the restoration of the house. Research of the architecture suggested the possibility that a bakeoven had once projected from the rear of the interior kitchen fireplace. There are surviving examples of this bakeoven type at houses in Carroll County dating from the same period. Historical archaeology in the rear yard provided the documentation to test the architectural theories about the house.

The first unit was placed against the back wall of the house, and the remains of a stone foundation were exposed about 1 ½ feet under the ground. Other units were placed to uncover the entire stone foundation and the remains of a brick gutter that dated from the 1880 to 1900 period.

Once the remains of the foundation were measured and documented, it was determined that this was not the style of bakeoven that projected from the kitchen in the main house. Instead, this bakeoven operated like a freestanding structure even though it was attached to the back wall of the house. The archaeological study provided documentation that was essential for creating plans for the reconstruction of the bakeoven at a later date.

The archaeological process also involves the study of areas other than just the exposed features beneath the surface of the ground. The soil profiles along the sides of the units provided a sequence of historical periods identified by strata of loamy soils, clays and building debris. The artifacts retrieved included ceramics, glass, metal, bone, brick and food wastes such as nutshells and oyster shells.

Carroll County Times “Carroll’s Yesteryears” Articles

These artifacts provide data for studying the elements of daily life of the household. The fragments of once-whole objects recovered during the excavation are crucial for creating accurate interpretive exhibits at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman house. For example, the recovered ceramic fragments show exactly what patterns were used at this Westminster house. Original examples or reproductions of these patterns can be acquired for display in period room restorations.

By studying the artifacts of Carroll County archaeological sites, we can learn significant facts about local history – how people used their homes and landscapes, their tastes in decorative arts (especially ceramics), and the kinds of foods prepared by the household.

Each summer, we explain the theories and techniques of historical archaeology at a field school for middle school students. The process of discovery and problem solving provides a valuable learning experience about Carroll County history. Analysis and interpretation of the artifacts gives students a broad perspective on the lives of earlier generations in Carroll County.

Photo credit: Joe Getty photo

Photo caption: Middle school students, left, participate in an excavation as part of the Historical Society of Carroll County’s summer historical archaeology field school. The dig teaches them the tools and techniques of historical archaeology. In 1988, an archaeological excavation at the Sherman-Fisher-Shellman House, below left, uncovered the foundation of a bake-oven that once stood at the rear of the house. Artifacts such as ceramics, glass, metal and bone, provided data about many aspects of daily life at this house during the 19th century.