

Carroll County Times "Carroll's Yesteryears" Articles

"Artifacts"

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By Joe Getty

Mason Thomas Durbin constructed a jailyard wall around the Carroll County jail in October 1838. Using local stone bonded with a lime and sand mortar, Durbin built the wall 17 feet high. The wall encircled the rear portion of the stone jailhouse and formed an imposing barrier around the jailyard.

In 1912, the stone wall was demolished as part of a major jail improvement project. In addition to written records of the wall, we know about its existence through a photograph taken in May 1882 after the interior of the jail was consumed by fire. By its height alone, the wall symbolized physical and emotional separation between prison life and freedom.

Searching for the wall's foundation was one goal of the archaeological field school sponsored by the Historical Society at the old Carroll County jail this month. The students aligned Unit 1 so that it would straddle the wall's foundation as it projected from the gable end of the original jail. After digging down about one foot, we learned that the foundation for the wall at this location was a solid rock outcropping that probably served as the quarry for the stone used to construct the jail and its wall.

A shovel test in the side yard hit a layer of stone approximately 18 inches below the surface. This test pit was extended as a trench one foot wide and seven feet long. Here, the remains of the foundation were uncovered to reveal its two-foot width. The students dug in soil that had been untouched since 1838 when Durbin placed his stone footer 33 inches deep.

Other architectural artifacts were uncovered as part of the archaeology project. At unit 3 located against the stone wall at the rear of the 1865 jail addition, building materials were found representing the entire history of the site. The structure apparently had a slate roof because of the amount of roofing slate in the unit. Rusted nails, screws and bolts were examples of the types of metal found.

Green-tinted window glass from the mid-1800s was found along with other glass fragments including an unusual form of 20th century wire and glass windows that were scored to prohibit seeing through them. Pieces of brick, mortar, cinder block and wood were also uncovered in this unit.

A highlight of the archaeological dig was finding a small slip of paper still intact about 18 inches down in the shovel test. It was part of a printed form and contained the letters "oll County Jail" in the style of early 20th century typography. This and several 38 caliber bullet casings were examples of artifacts relating to the public use of the property as a jail.

There were also many artifacts relating to the domestic use of the jail structure. The person elected sheriff in Carroll County moved into the stone jailhouse with his family. The ceramic, glass and metal artifacts from the residential activities of the household were typical of those found on other sites in central Maryland.

Redware was the predominant household ceramic and was found along with a number of stoneware artifacts. However, these types were found in smaller quantities than at other archaeological sites in Carroll County. Historical research indicates that the south side of the house where we were digging

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may have been the location of less domestic activity than the north side where several outbuildings were located.

Other ceramics included early 19th century English tablewares that were popular in this region. The majority of tablewares were late 19th century in origin and are of the types found in newspaper advertisements of Westminster stores.

A similar pattern appeared with the glass artifacts found throughout the site. Some glass tablewares were uncovered but the majority of fragments were from bottle glass. Medicine bottles and liquor flasks cover the full time period of the occupation of the house.

Glass and clay marbles gave the students some indication of the differences in the toys and games of earlier generations as compared with their gadgets of today. The exploration of the site and interpretation of the artifacts provided the class with a broad historical perspective of the daily lives of residents and prisoners in the old Carroll County Jail.

Photo Caption 1: Representative artifacts found at the Old Carroll County Jailyard archaeological dig include ceramic and glass fragments. Bullet casing and a printed form relate to the use of the property as the county jail.

Photo Caption 2: The stone wall enclosing the jailyard is shown in this 1882 photograph after the interior of the jail was destroyed by fire. Identifying the location of the stone wall was one of the challenges of the archaeological field school sponsored by the Historical Society.