

09/13/2018

On September 7th we held our annual student dig at the Warner farm. Nearly 40 sixth grade students from University Liggett in Grosse Pointe Woods attended as well as several U of M-Flint students in Dr. Beverley Smith's historical archaeology class. The students listened to a presentation on the historical, genealogical, and archaeological research of the Warner farm inside the Hicks school. The ever popular mystery artifact session was met with lively participation as students vied for the highly sought after squeeze cows donated by Duane Watters Masonry. After a group photo in front of the house, the students took a tour of the 1855 Greek Revival home that included braving the cellar (despite the hype most of the students didn't find the cellar too creepy...) . They also tried stilt walking, corn shelling, and mowing grass with an antique push mower. The students, under the supervision of experienced volunteers, assisted in the excavation of soil in the former garden area moved from the current location of the school. The students recovered a number of artifacts including animal bone, nails, glass, and ceramics. Many thanks to all of the volunteers who helped make this event happen: Elroy Warner, Beth Carr, Mike Brodzik, Dr. Beverley Smith, Joe Smith, Mike Wilczynski, Jan Wilczynski, Sarah Talley, Stephen Bush, Rhonda Haggerman, Kerry Bennett, Anna Bennett, and Megan Bennett.

One of the U of M-Flint students, Mike Wilczynski, shared an interesting article discussing methods of excavating wells. Mike is a retired geologist and was intrigued, as I have been, by the construction of the well at the Warner site. In essence, we've been trying to figure out how hand dug wells were actually constructed. Construction of wells like this is largely a lost art despite being common until the early 20th century and seem to me a bit of an engineering marvel. Some of the boulders in the well shaft easily weigh 100 to 200 lbs each. The article suggests that dry set stone wells such as the one found at Warner were excavated with a shovel by hand (and in some cases a pickax). The author notes that wells extending over 75 meters deep have been found in the American West. Typically a small one like that at the farm would be excavated by one or two people. Wood cribbing was pushed down the sides with wood cross supports to prevent slumping and fill-in. As the excavator went deeper, the cribbing was pounded down until the desired depth was reached. Boulders were then placed from the bottom up replacing the cribbing.

We received several nice donations recently. Beth Carr donated a substantial dinner service set in the tea leaf pattern. The set consists of plates, saucers, cups, and hollowwares from several manufacturers dating from the mid to late 19th century. The dinner service was set out on the large late 19th century table in the dining room. Several vessels in the tea leaf pattern have been recovered archaeologically at the Warner farm particularly from feature 19, the dry set stone well. She also generously donated a large 19th century portrait of Abraham Lincoln that now hangs in the Hicks school. Many thanks to Beth!

I regret to share the news that Simba has passed away. Many of you might recall that Simba was my uncle's Siberian husky that had originally unearthed 19th century artifacts eleven years ago in the back yard in pursuit of a ground squirrel. My 3 year old daughter, Megan, found what had later been identified as a sherd of a blue transferware pattern called "Lozere" in Simba's dirt pile among other artifacts. This discovery led to the excavation of over 4400 sq ft and the identification of 21 features and recovery of tens of thousands of artifacts. Simba certainly captured the hearts of all who interacted with her especially the students that visited the site and will be missed.

The Michigan Archaeological Society has a new website, www.micharch.org/wp/. The revamped website has just surpassed 10,000 hits. Information on area digs, site identification, as well as a prehistoric point typology is available on the site. Many thanks to MAS vice president, Dan Wymer, for all of his time and effort to get the new site up and running.

Michigan Archaeology Day this year will be held on Saturday, October 13th, at the Michigan History Museum in Lansing (702 W. Kalamazoo St). The event features displays by archaeologists from across the state, presentations, and activities for both kids and adults. It runs from 10:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The event is free, admission to the museum is free, and parking is free. Last year over 1,000 people participated and this year appears to be shaping up to be even bigger and better. It has truly become the premier archaeology event of the year in Michigan. We will have displays of artifacts from both the Warner and Hicks school sites. Hope to see you there!