

Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship Report 2016

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Fort St. Joseph in Niles, Michigan, was originally established as a mission for French Jesuits in the 1680s, but soon became an important military and trading post. The fort, which was occupied from 1691 to 1781, was known only through limited documentary sources. Its discovery on the ground in 1998 has led to a series of archaeological field seasons and the discovery of numerous artifacts, ecofacts, and features that reveal information about everyday life in the 18th century on the frontier of New France. Western Michigan University has worked in collaboration with the City of Niles to investigate and interpret the site. This year I was able to participate in the field school, under the supervision of Dr. Michael Nassaney, principal investigator, thanks to the Jane C. Waldbaum Archaeological Field School Scholarship through the AIA and the William M. Cremin Scholarship through Western Michigan University.

We began the 2016 field season by digging shovel test pits on an island near the fort in an area referred to as 20BE10. No excavation had ever taken place here, and we were attempting to determine whether there was evidence of cultural activity on this landform. My partner and I dug a total of four shovel test pits. While dry screening soil from our second pit, we recovered a ramrod pipe that was most likely part of an 18th or early 19th century trade gun, or a replacement piece. Other interesting finds from the

island included several pieces of Native American pottery, a hammer stone, and a musket ball, all indicating that there was cultural activity at this location.

Our next step was to begin digging one by one meter units on the floodplain of Fort St. Joseph (20BE23). Our main objective for the 2016 field season was to continue investigations of the architecture of the fort. So, along with excavating new units, we reopened units from previous years. The unit that my partner and I opened (N21 W4) was located directly south of a one by two meter unit (N22 W5) that was first dug in 2015. A section of a foundation wall was discovered there, and we hoped to determine its extent. We shovel skimmed and used our trowels to dig down to 45 centimeters below datum. We recovered a piece of a catlinite pipe, a mouth harp, stones with mortar, and glass beads, but sadly did not find more of the foundation wall. Although the stones that we encountered were structural, plowing in the early 1900s had most likely over turned them. They were not in situ, or organized in a linear fashion like those in N22 W5.

The section of foundation wall in N22 W5 became known as Feature 26. We continued excavation in this unit for the remainder of the season. On the west half, we found a religious medallion displaying Jesus with a crown of thorns on one side, and Mary with a halo and Latin motto “mother of God” on the other. On the east we recovered a beaver tooth and complete femur. I am particularly interested in faunal remains at archaeological sites so that was very exciting for me. Dr. Terry Martin, Curator Emeritus of the Illinois State Museum, spent a week with us and I was able to learn how to identify and analyze animal bones. We identified bones recovered from the fort and even determined that a few exhibited cultural modifications (i.e., sawed, chopped, knife-cut, etc.)

We determined that there were other stones beneath some of the large ones by systematically probing between them. Upon realizing that the wall did not continue into our unit at N21 W4, we began to wonder if the stones in N22 W5 were actually a part of the corner of a French house. Perhaps to test this hypothesis, field seasons in the future could dig in adjacent areas. The documentation of our finds and progress was very precise. We photographed and filled out paperwork for every level of soil in our units and I learned the importance of careful recording. I really enjoyed clean scraping my unit for photographs because it allowed me to be very detailed. I was able to help take a core sample from my unit, as well as a sample of oxidized soil for flotation. Throughout the duration of the field school, we were out in the field Monday through Friday from 8:00 am to around 4:30 pm and washed or sorted artifacts each night (Monday through Thursday). I also helped with public outreach aspects of the season. I visited a nursing home to speak about the fort, helped at the annual open house, attended many dinners hosted by interested community members, and promoted archaeology at a small outdoor market in Niles. We also hosted three weeks of camp for people of all ages that wanted to learn about archaeology.

I learned how to conduct proper excavation procedures and the importance of public outreach to archaeological sites. Community members hosted us for at least two meals a week during the seven weeks we were in Niles. They were welcoming and in full support of the excavation at the fort. It was amazing to see so many people craving the historical knowledge and willing to support my fellow students and me. The open house theme this year was rivers and waterways, so along with gaining archaeological understanding we also focused on the importance of waterways in the present and in the

past. Before attending the field school, I took Dr. Nassaney's course in the spring, Anthropology in the Community, and helped to create informational panels that were exhibited at the open house. My experience at the field school was truly incredible and I am very grateful for that. I felt a personal connection with the unique finds from my unit and loved learning the history behind each artifact. We created long lasting memories and learned what the life of an archaeologist is like. I plan to pursue archaeology in my future career and the knowledge that I gained in Niles will be extremely beneficial. Featured below are some of the photographs that were taken throughout the field season.

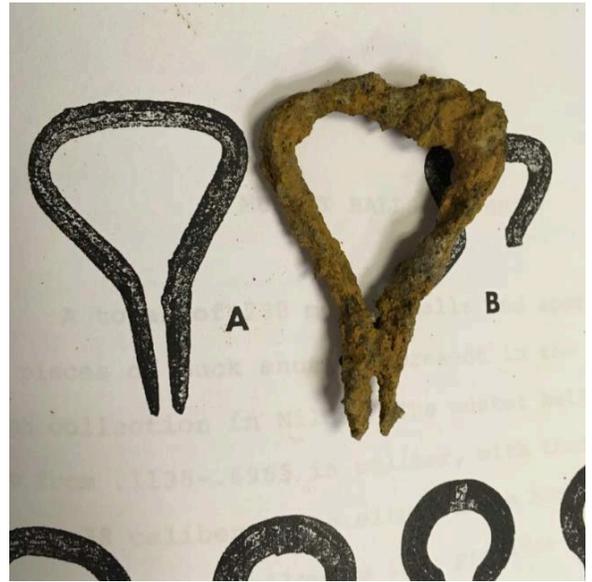


This top photograph features the 2016 field school crew and staff. The bottom left depicts me beginning to excavate at N21 W4 and the right was taken when Dr. Terry Martin ran a faunal remains lab for us.





The top left photo shows me taking notes, the top right is of other students excavating with a camper and bottom right is of the mouth harp that Tommy and I recovered in N21 W4.



The photograph on the left is of the religious medallion that we found. The bottom left was taken at the open house while I helped with a children's activity and the bottom right shows me excavating next to Feature 26.





The top left photo features me wet screening soil, the top right is of the beaver femur we recovered, and the bottom left shows Tommy and I excavating while Dr. Michael Nassaney takes notes.

The photograph below was taken during our daily pit tours after lunch. The photo to the right is of a fellow student wet screening.

