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Job Lane House (JLH) 300th Anniversary

Archaeological Dig Log

July 8 – 12, 2013

Submitted to The Bedford Citizen by
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We may have had merely a six member crew of children, each around 10-years-old, but all participants declared our 300th Anniversary Archaeological Dig (AD) a raving success! Here is what happened.

The Prep: Co-chairmen of the AD, Don Corey and Ralph Hammond, along with Mike Hand used a metal detector to locate two 1 meter X 2 meter sites; used surveying equipment to determine the fixed reference points and elevations; and removed the sod. Paul Pellegrini and Ralph built two wooden frames and made a grid using firm wire set at 20 cm intervals. Back in February Pat Pellegrini and Don Corey had met with Bedford Recreation Department Director Amy Hamilton to submit a written description of our dig for the Bedford Summer Recreation Program. As July approached Pat consulted Nick Cacciolfi, Bedford Assistant Recreation Director, for advice on preparing legal, medical, and photo release forms for parents to sign. Early Monday morning, July 8th, Don, Ralph, Pat, and Judy Barber placed tents over the two pit sites and we were ready for the crew to arrive. That's when the learning and the fun began!

Day 1: The Crew consisted of 10 year-olds Vincent, Kayla, TJ, Justin, Paris, and Kathrine who listened to dig leader Ralph with rapt attention. After a brief welcome and orientation, Ralph explained the test pit co-ordinates, soil elevation levels, abbreviations for labeling and classifying artifacts, and showed the crew how artifacts would be plotted later on each test pit grid. He reviewed a few photocopied pages which showed a horizontal time-line from Native American settlement to the present, some 1917 photos of the north side of the house and its' extended storage room, the location of the test pits, and an overview of the plan for the week. Don used the surveying equipment to show how the soil horizon levels were found and gave each crew member a kit consisting of a trowel, a notebook with graph paper, a pencil, a pair of garden gloves, a small paint brush, a toothbrush, and a ruler with centimeters. Ralph cautioned everyone that if any Native American artifacts or other human bones were found, we would stop immediately and notify the Archaeology Department of Harvard University. (None were found.) The crew members chose to work as 3 boys at Test Pit I, just north of the house storage room extension, and 3 girls on Test Pit II, just north of the kitchen. As each crew member found an artifact, they called out its' co-ordinates and elevation level and passed the item to one of the adults, who bagged and labeled each one. That kept Don, Ralph, Judy and Pat quite busy recording, labeling and bagging. As each crew member filled a bucket of dirt, he or she took it to a wheel barrel to

sift for any artifacts which may have been missed from his /her site. Sifted items also went to the artifacts' boxes and were bagged and labeled. Sifted soil from wheel barrels were deposited on heavy plastic sheets to refill the pits at the end of the week. At the end of two hours, crew members brought their notebooks home to plot their most memorable finds and write their diary entries. Ralph brought home a box of identified artifacts from each test pit to plot for both crews and Pat researched colonial pottery and porcelain.

Day 2: Ralph opened the day's dig by telling the crew how at one time people didn't know if Troy had been a real city. He used a mold of dirt and a trowel to show them how not one, but eleven cities, had been found by archaeologists once the Troy site had been excavated. He then led a discussion about how we were learning about the daily life of the Lane family from the artifacts we had found so far and everyone went back to work. **Jen Zhang**, who is entering eleventh grade, joined Test Pit I's crew to assist with labeling and bagging artifacts. Jen proved to be a very hard worker and returned to do the same work for the rest of the week. **Sharon McDonald** also joined us for days 2 through 5 to help supervise the children, to keep their spirit up, and to work in any way needed. Pat told the group about early colonial "red ware" pottery and showed them pictures of it. Ralph encouraged the crew to dig deeper into soil level B (21-40 cm.) in smaller areas. However, the crew of Test Pit I found large flat rocks covering about one third of the pit, which proved to be the floor of a building we did not know existed. From other objects found in Test Pit I (parts of 2 different hinges, a piece of a shovel/hoe, 2 hand-forged nails dating to c.1830, part of an antique key) we concluded that there had been another shed or workshop there. Future digging in this area, along with the 1917 photo of the north side of the house and its' storage room extension, may enlighten us further. Perhaps the current storage room attached to the north side of the house is a replacement of an earlier one which had a stone floor and different dimensions. The crew in Test Pit II found numerous artifacts: (pottery shards of varying colors, a few chicken and pig bones, a small decorated piece of metal (aluminum?), a piece of a clay pipe stem, pieces of brick and roofing material on both days. Pat's homework was to research the pipe stem for possible dating.

Day 3: Ralph opened the day's discussion with archaeology author, Jim Deetz's discovery of the first known ear of corn in southern Mexico. Pat showed the group photos of a burial mound in Ireland and its archaeological reconstruction (the New Grange site at Drogheda, about 25 miles north of Dublin). Then Pat and Ralph turned their attention to dating the clay pipe stem. Pat had phoned Ralph early that morning to ask him if he had anything which could be used to measure the diameter of the hole in the pipe stem fragment, which Paris found on day 2 in test pit II. Ralph brought in some small drill bits and the hole was half way between 1/8 and 1/16th of an inch. The reference book which they used, A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America, by I. N. Hume, and the drill bits allowed them to date the pipe stem to between 1710 and 1750 or c. 1730. The same reference had helped date the 5" and 6" hand-forged nails to c. 1830. Pit I Crew dug outside the stone flooring to soil horizon level B. Very few artifacts were found at level B.

Day 4: Ralph opened the day with a discussion of the archaeological excavations done in Plymouth, MA at the site of Miles Standish's home, and in the yards and cellars of 20th century residents. Pat told them about how excavations done in Plymouth after the 1960's showed the foundations of several homes that had belonged to free African Americans. The land had been given to them along with their freedom for their service in the American Revolution. Ralph gave each crew member a plastic Rx bottle to think about what they might want to leave inside it as a buried time capsule in their section of their test pit when we replaced the soil in each pit on the last day. The crews recovered more artifacts, which were bagged, labeled, and identified. Pat was able to identify a piece of porcelain found in Pit I as

English white pearl ware with salt glaze c. 1740-85 from a section of rim patterns in Hume, p.116. Justine dug one section of Pit I to Level C, 80 cm. Levels B and C were loam and sand, and sand respectively.

Day 5: Don showed everyone a display of early Native American artifacts: (arrow heads, a spear point, a stone axe head found on the Concord River, and a stone pestle found near the corner of Concord and Davis Roads on land now belonging to the Davis School. Don asked the crew what a pestle would indicate as opposed to arrowheads and they concluded that most likely a village had been there. Ralph and Sharon talked about the excavation of the foundation of Thoreau's cabin at Walden Pond. After much discussion, everyone buried their notes in plastic snack bags as time capsules. The crew cut sheets of plastic to separate this year's dig from the sifted loam and sand which was replaced on top. (After several days to let this settle Don and Ralph would return to replace the sod.) Ralph distributed a photocopied booklet of the entire dig report, which he had written during most of the previous night, to each member of the crew, to Jen, and to each adult for their participation. Another copy of this report will be kept in the Bedford Historic Society Archives as well as in the Bedford Public Library. Several children and parents had asked if a second dig would be done next year. That decision will have to be decided at a Friends of the Job Lane House Board of Directors meeting, but just in case, Ralph asked the crew for their suggestions for next year and Pat noted them.

So what did we learn? Test Pit I reaped a flat stone floor which ends about 250 cm. north of the current house storage room as well as 83 artifacts. From pieces of tools and building materials, this may have been a workshop, which we did not know about previously, or it may indicate a previous storage room with different dimensions from the current one. Test Pit II yielded 153 artifacts: architectural artifacts, pottery fragments dating as far back as possibly 1710, and a few pieces of coal, a few animal bones, and two personal items (the clay pipe stem and the piece of decorative aluminum, which may have been part of a box.) Granted, the excavated sites were small, only (two) one meter X two meter pits, but on the basis of what we have so far, we can tell that the Lane and Abbot families were largely vegetarian, burned mostly wood, and kept items for centuries. If another dig is conducted next year, who knows what we may find?