

Frost Town Archaeology: Preliminary Results from the 2019 Field Season

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Frost Town as a Place

The Cumming Nature Center, affiliate of the Rochester Museum and Science Center, is situated north of Naples, New York in the town of South Bristol. The center provides six miles of trails on 900 acres of forest, and hosts a Forest School, summer camps, and public archaeology events. Within these 900 acres of property lies the remains of saw mills, multiple 19th century houses, and a now-abandoned cemetery just outside the property boundary. This collection of buildings is known as Frost Town (Figure 1).



Figure 1: 1874 map of Frost Town. The H. Abbey site, W. McGeary and J.H. McCumber Site have all been subject to excavation in the past.

Frost Town is a now-abandoned Euro-American logging settlement founded by Jonathan Frost, who operated sawmills there in the late 19th century (see figure 2 for reference). Timber was harvested from the area's old growth forests, then floated on dammed creeks to nearby Canandaigua and beyond. The economy of Frost Town was dependent on the timber harvested, which led to the exhaustion of the forest's resources. The town was home to a modest population and sawmills continued to operate until the early 20th century, with families relocating to nearby Naples as resources dwindled.



Figure 2: South Bristol Historical Society marker of Frost Town.

Frost Town as a Project

Frost Town Archaeology (FTA) is a historical archaeology project dedicated to the remains of Frost Town. Currently, FTA is focused on the site of the Hall Residence. During the summer of 2019, Dr. Alex Smith with SUNY Brockport conducted a field school on the site. The Hall Residence is also the location of public archaeology events. During the field school, the site was surveyed and excavation trenches were opened. Using a relative point system, the site was organized into a grid. 9 excavation trenches located south of the main Hall Residence were opened, leading to a potential partial structure being found.



Figure 3: excavation trench area during the 2019 field school

The Hall Residence

The Hall Residence site is located in the north of the Cumming Nature Center property, adjacent to the nearby abandoned cemetery.

Immediately visible on the site are the remains of a dry-stone foundation (figure 4) and a well. The site is believed to be the remains of a home built by Simon Hall, a farmer. Since construction, the home has had multiple owners. The final owner of the home was David O. Pierpont, who left the home abandoned after his death in 1914, when his nephew Pierpont L. Green inherited then subsequently sold the property. The property was acquired by the Bonbrights, then the Gleasons, to the Cummings, where it was then acquired by the Nature Center in the 1970s.



Figure 4: remains of a stone foundation in the northeast area of the site.

Test Trenches and Artifact Distribution

During the first week of the field school, the site was systematically placed on a grid system and survey test trenches (STTs) were dug (see figure 5 for an example). The purpose of the test trenches was to have a greater understanding of artifact distribution on the site, visualizing where it would be worthwhile to excavate. The first test trenches were located in the southwest area of the site and did not yield much material. More test trenches were dug in subsequent weeks in the northwest area of the site and yielded an abundance of material, especially metal objects.

Figure 5: STT7, an earlier test trench.



See figures 6 and 7 for a comparison of artifact distribution.

Left; Figure 6: map showing concentration by weight in grams of metal artifacts found in test trenches 1-27



Right; Figure 7: map showing concentration by weight in grams of glass artifacts found in test trenches 1-27



Excavation Units

During the 2019 Summer Field School, a series of excavation trenches were opened south of the visible dry-stone foundation. The trenches were mapped on a one meter by one meter grid, relative to an absolute point taken with an emlid. The excavation units were organized with an alphanumeric system and excavated systematically using the wheeler box-grid method (refer to figure 3 for an example).



Figure 9: assemblage of a glass pane and ceramic plate *in situ* in trench P15.



Figure 8: a hinge found during the 2019 field school.



Figure 10: layers of flat stones and bricks found in trench R15 suggests a collapsed wall.

Nine excavation trenches were opened during the summer 2019 excavation season. In these trenches, an abundance of artifacts were found consisting of metal, brick, ceramic, glass, bone, charcoal and leather. A majority of the artifacts found were construction materials like nails and brick. Through the excavation process, evidence of structure was found. This includes; collapse patterns, shimming stones, hinges (figure 8), and large panes of glass (figure 9). In trenches P15, R15, and Q14 there are large rocks and bricks on top of artifacts suggesting there was a wall that collapsed inward (figure 10). The presence of the construction materials with the absence of foundation in the area has led us to the hypothesis that the area of excavation must be an addition to the house.

The Scullery

The preliminary data acquired from the excavation trenches during the Summer 2019 excavation season points towards a utility room or washing area. Figures 11 through 16 showcase a metal clawfoot, glass buttons, a metal button for jeans, and a plate with an intact stamp dated to 1897. Not pictured are remnants of a leather shoe and large scalloped pieces of ceramic from a wash basin.



Figures 11 + 12: Alfred Meakin stamped plate dated 1897, photographed in the lab and *in situ*.



Left; figure 14, metal button from denim.



Below; figures 15 and 16: two of many white glass buttons found.



Figure 13: large metal clawfoot

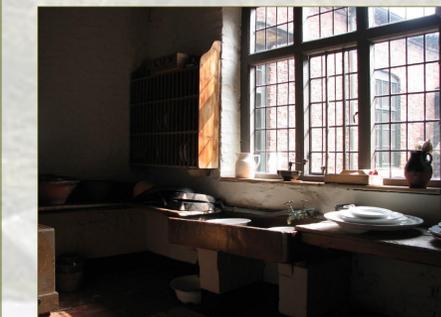


Figure 17: "Erddig scullery 2" by Tim Herrick is licensed under CC BY 2.0

With the many factors taken into account, the addition to the Hall Residence was most likely a scullery. A scullery is a room in the back of the house, often used as a kitchen and washroom (see figure 17 for reference). Sculleries were often additions to houses due to cooking being a fire hazard and were in the rear of the house near the water supply/well. Floors were often lower than the rest of the house made of brick, cement, terracotta tiles due to water spillage or flooding being a constant problem. American sculleries typically serve as utility rooms, washrooms, or laundry rooms. This explains the clothing items ceramics, and bricks. The clawfoot could account for a wood-burning stove to heat water and for cooking.

The Future of Frost Town

The findings described in this poster are only hypotheses at this time, and further excavation and data processing is needed to confirm these hypotheses. In the coming years, the nature center will continue to hold Family Archaeology Days at the Hall Residence, and the field school through SUNY Brockport will continue there.

Acknowledgements

This project is made possible by the support of the Department of Anthropology and the School of Arts and Sciences at the College at Brockport, as well as the Cumming Nature Center of the Rochester Museum and Science Center. Thank you to Dr. Alex Smith for providing the opportunity to become more involved with the Frost Town material and for all the help along the way. Thank you to fellow field school students Alyssa Bressette, Chris Vidler, Max Traub, and Brandon Amthor for their help during the field school. Thank you to volunteers Bekah Leathersich, Michael Garth, Sam Russello, Emma Wagner, and Rani Gill for their supervision and support on the field.