

Integrating Technology and Data Curation for the Public at the Frost Town Archaeology Project

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About Frost Town Archaeology

The Frost Town Archaeology Project is a collaboration between SUNY Brockport's Department of Anthropology and the Rochester Museum and Science Center's Cumming Nature Center to excavate and educate on the historic logging town that was once located in modern day Bristol, NY from the late 18th to the early 20th century. In its early years Frost Town was a rapidly growing and successful community due to its connections to the extensive trade routes of Western New York with wood from Frost Town sawmills being sold in across the state through the Erie Canal. As local forests were depleted the families of Frost Town either left for nearby cities or shifted to agriculture, primarily of hops, for an income. After prohibition banned the production and sale of alcohol in 1920, the remaining inhabitants of Frost Town swiftly abandoned the site which was largely forgotten until the land was purchased by the Cumming Family in the 1940s and donated to the Rochester Museum and Science Center in 1973 as a nature preserve. The Frost Town Archaeology Project began in 2017 and the first archaeological field school was held in 2019.

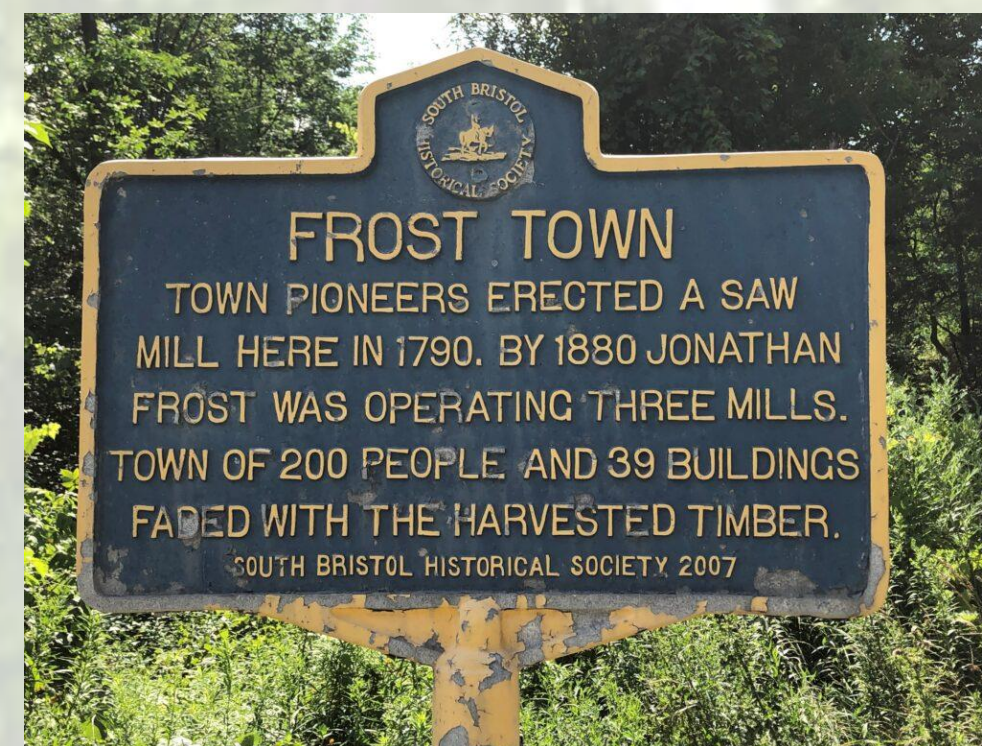


Figure 1: The sign dedicated by the South Bristol Historical Society marking where the main crossroad of Frost Town was once located



Figure 2: The crew of the 2019 archaeological field school at the site.

The Frost Town Archaeology Project includes the work of student interns from SUNY Brockport's Departments of Anthropology and History who conduct research and continue work on the project outside of the field season. This work includes the continued gathering and input of data into the Frost Town Archaeology database and the analysis and use of that data in public tools such as the project's website: frosttownarchaeology.com. My work on this project has included work gathering data in lab as well as current work on creating additional visual educational tools to improve the visible impact and interactivity of the website.

Frost Town Archaeology Lab Work

Cleaning and Preservation of Materials

The data collection of the Frost Town material culture occurs in the lab at the Cumming Nature Center site or in the SUNY Brockport Department of Anthropology lab. Artifacts that come in from the Frost Town field schools, summer camps, and public archaeology days are organized by date excavated and are cleaned, measured, documented, and stored so that they can be used for future study and research. Students learn the proper methods of cleaning and preserving artifacts based on material in order to preserve them for future study and exhibition. Objects such as brick, glass, ceramics, and mortar are wet-brushed and allowed to thoroughly dry, objects which are metal and prone to oxidation are dry-brushed to remove excess dirt and dust, and delicate objects such as wood, leather, and charcoal are not treated to excess cleaning to avoid damage. Students learn the significance of being able to preserve the artifacts once they are excavated so that the knowledge that these objects can provide is not lost for future generations. Students then collect both quantitative and qualitative data on the materials and enter that information into the Frost Town Archaeology database.



Figure 3: Frost Town Archaeology intern Thomas Verhay demonstrates the cleaning and preservation of Frost Town artifacts in the SUNY Brockport Anthropology lab



Figure 4: Frost Town intern Bailey Hartman enters data on objects from the 2022 field school into the Frost Town database in the SUNY Brockport Department of Anthropology lab



Figure 5: A lab bench in the SUNY Brockport Department of Anthropology lab filled with artifacts from the 2022 field school waiting to be cleaned and databased

Gathering and Preserving Data

The artifacts are categorized in the database by information such as material and purpose. Materials which are considered diagnostic, meaning they are identifiable and provide us with new or significant information about an area of the site, are recorded in more detail. Diagnostic materials are given unique artifact numbers and photographed, research into these objects that yields important information is also recorded in the database. This lab work allows Frost Town students to experience the analytical aspects of archaeology while also gathering data which is used to draw conclusions about life at the site. This data is significant because it preserves information about these artifacts which can be saved, shared, and utilized by many people without having to have constant access to the materials, it also allows for these objects to be preserved digitally so that they may be taught and learned about long after the objects themselves are gone.

Unit #	Context #	Date Collected	Initials on Bag	Bag Type(s)
STT 30	000	7/26/2022	EY	Brick, Metal
T11	Surface	7/25/2022	AS	Metal
Q11	001	7/27/2022	RG	Brick, Glass, Ceramic, Metal
STSTT	Surface	7/25/2022	TS	Metal
STSTT	001	7/25/2022	TS	Glass
STT 29	000	7/26/2022	CV	Glass
S13	001	7/27/2022	KS	Brick, Glass, Ceramic, Metal
Q11	002	7/28/2022	RG	Brick, Glass, Ceramic, Metal, Misc
S14	001	7/28/2022	SHS	Ceramic
P12	002	7/28/2022	RG	Glass, Ceramic, Metal, Misc.
STSTT	Surface	7/26/2022		Metal
Q15	001	7/27/2022	MT	Metal, Misc., Glass
S12	001	7/27/2022	BS	Metal, Ceramic, Glass
S12	001	7/28/2022	BS	Metal, Ceramic, Glass
S11	001	7/27/2022	MG	Ceramic, Glass
S11	001	7/28/2022	KC	Metal

Figure 6: A sample of the Master Bag log sheet of the Frost Town Archaeology Database showing how information on material culture recovered from the site is documented by students

Frost Town Archaeology Website and Database

Technological Engagement at Frost Town

In addition to traditional archaeological methods such as excavation and ground survey, a number of technological data collection methods have been employed at the Frost Town site. These include LiDAR survey and infrared thermal imaging of the modern-day site in order to examine the ground for both surface and underground remains of historic Frost Town that have gradually disappeared due to decay and plant overgrowth as the land became a hunting ground and later a nature center. This work has created maps and images of the site which allows us to better understand the remaining structures and material culture without having to conduct extensive excavation or disturb the foliage in order to do regular overhead imagery. From these methods we have been able to locate many areas of interest throughout the site, some of these have been identified through ground survey and comparison to historic maps and records and have allowed a direct comparison of the historic town to the modern-day site, allowing us to create a modern map of the remains and many artifacts of Frost Town.

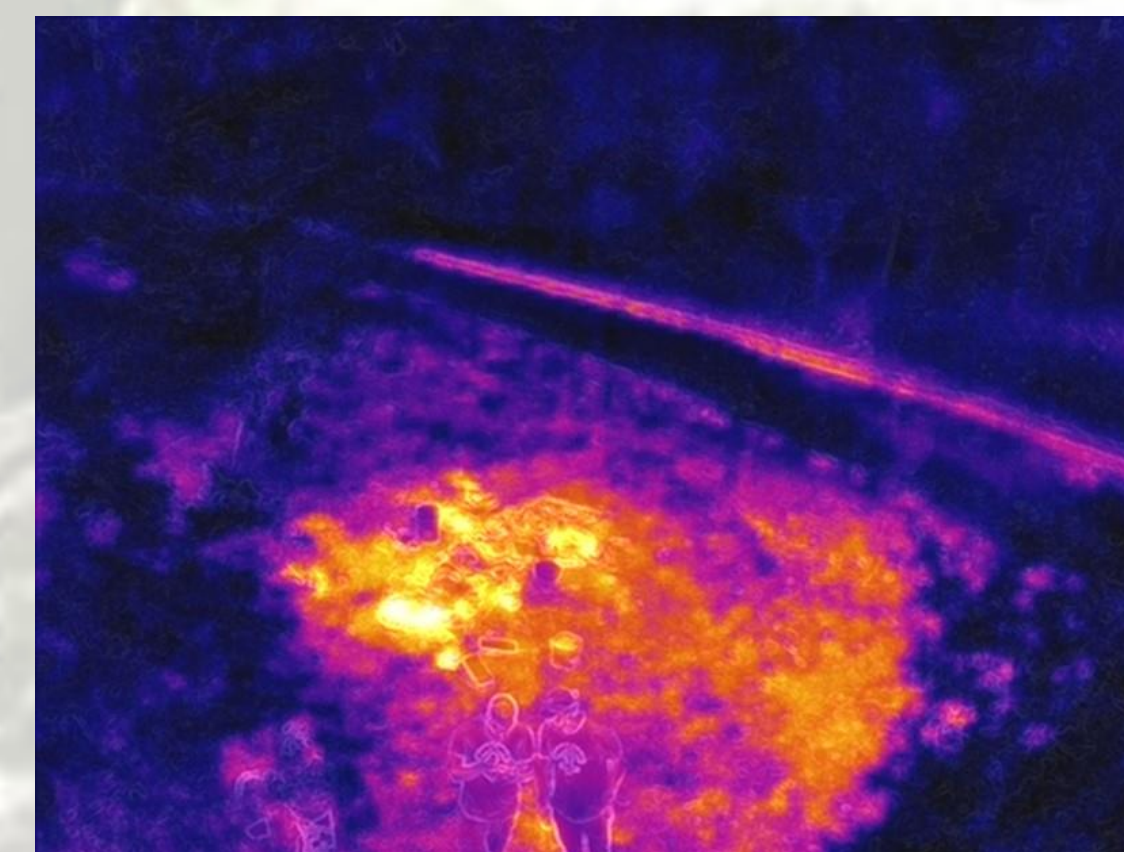


Figure 7: Thermal photo of the exploratory trenches. Photo and analysis by Seth Price.

Creating Tools of Accessibility:

The Frost Town Website

While the primary efforts of the Frost Town Archaeology Project have been to bolster engagement and education through archaeological field schools and public events such as the summer camps, public archaeology days, and the exhibit, the data collection and research of the Frost Town project have been made even more accessible with the launch of the Frost Town website: frosttownarchaeology.com. The website contains information about past seasons work on the excavation sites at Frost Town, pictures and information about artifacts recovered from the site, the full history of the site from pre-settlement to modern day, and information on the *Frost Town: The History and Ecology of a Ghost Town* exhibit and symposium. The website allows for anyone to access information of the project from anywhere, even without having physical access to its objects or databases. While the website is a step forward in the preservation and accessibility of information, it has run into struggles regarding funding and ownership which has made it more difficult to maintain.

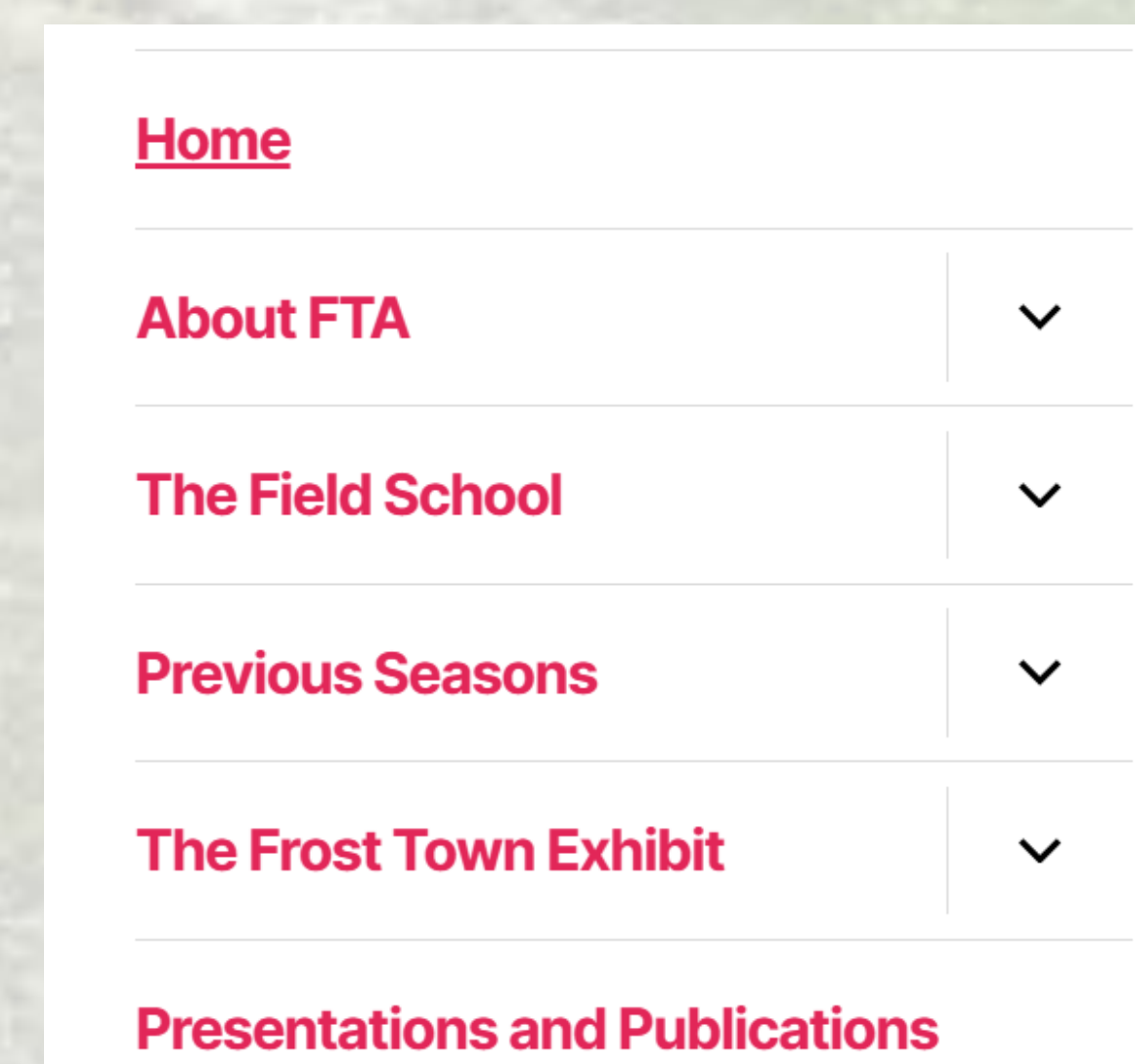


Figure 8: The dropdown menu of the Frost Town Archaeology website showing the various types of information that can be found on the site

Expanding the Website by Creating Public Maps and Data Resources

Throughout my work on the Frost Town Archaeology Project I have continuously worked toward expanding the possibilities of the website to include more access to information and data regarding the site. This includes researching the possibilities of including a rollover map of the site that includes significant areas of Frost Town identified through historical maps and research as well as marking areas of past or current excavations. Each marker on the rollover can provide imagery of the area as well as link to a separate page that provides more information on the history as well as any significant finds recovered from the excavation. This work is ongoing and has required research on map widget capabilities for a WordPress website and work with learning to edit and create pages for the site. Despite some difficulties in managing functionality and ease of use with the cost and availability of many widgets, this work is ongoing and the hope is for this work to be completed by the spring or summer of this year. There has also been discussion of including pages to make publicly available some of the Frost Town Archaeology database including significant finds and summaries of the material recovered from previous seasons so that this data may be used by other archaeologists in the Upstate New York region to better understand other sites.

This work aims to expand the availability of the knowledge gained at Frost Town and to help the public to better understand the work and history of the site and increase public engagement in the project. This work is integral to helping to fulfill the core values of the Frost Town Archaeology Project, namely to provide Community Accessibility through every step of the project. It is the goal of Frost Town to break down barriers between the practice of archaeology and the communities that it exists within and affects. These contributions to the project help it to create a culture of archaeology that pushes against the academic exclusion traditionally found in archaeology that often prevents members of local communities and individuals without access to academic institutions and extensive resources from becoming involved in learning about and investing themselves in work such as this. By emphasizing the involvement of the community, we can create an environment that allows for and encourages more collaboration and more contributions of knowledge that inevitably makes our practice and our results better.

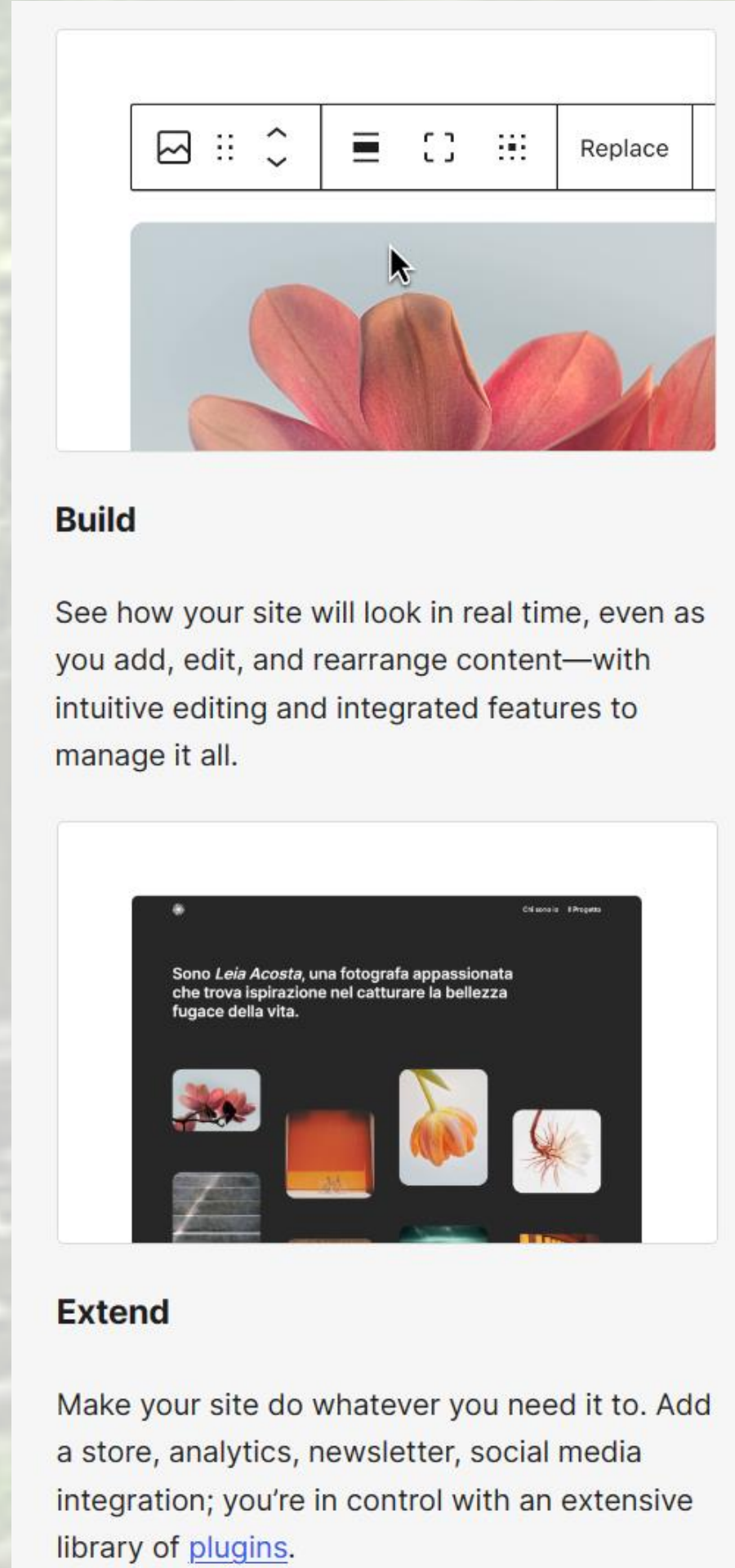
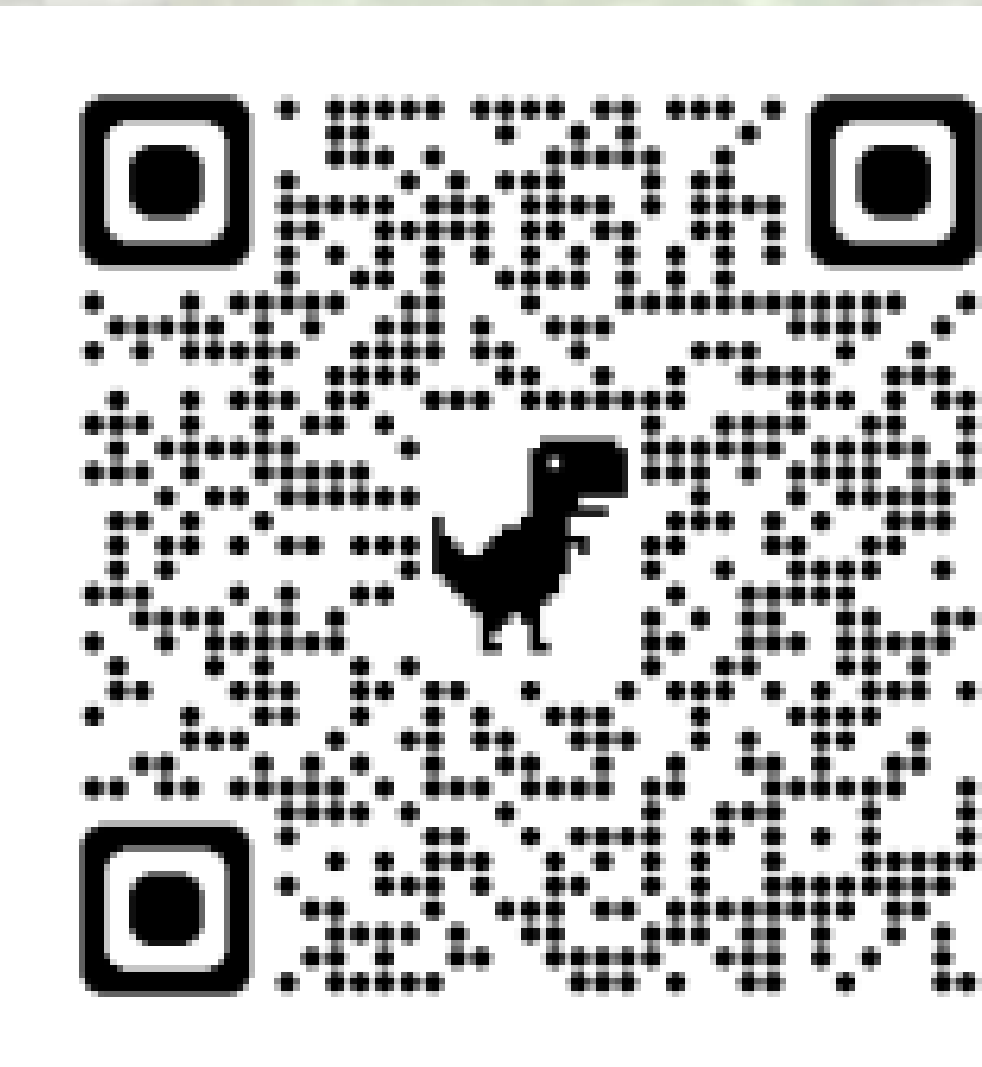


Figure 9: The types of functions Frost Town interns learn in the maintenance and expansion of the website. Image taken from wordpress.com.



For More Information

For more information about the Frost Town Archaeology Project, you can visit the SUNY Brockport Department of Anthropology homepage or go to <https://frosttownarchaeology.com/>. For updates on events and the work of the Frost Town archaeological field schools including the upcoming 2024 field school season check out our Instagram @frosttownarchaeology. For more information about the Cumming Nature Center including hours and public archaeology day schedules visit <https://rmsc.org/cumming-nature-center/>. For all other information scan the QR code to visit our website.

Acknowledgments

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