

Preliminary Report on the Michilimackinac 2005 Archaeological Field Season

The 2005 excavation was a continuation of work carried out in 1966 and 1998-2004 on the easternmost unit of the south-southwest rowhouse within the palisade wall. The original structure was built during the 1730s. The 1749 Lotbinière map indicates that a Des Riviere owned the house. This is probably Jean Noel Desrivieres, who held trade licenses for Michilimackinac from 1747 through 1750. The structure was rebuilt in the 1760s and occupied by British foot soldiers for a time prior to completion of the soldiers' barracks. Based on the analysis of artifacts recovered through 2001, Todd Reck has suggested that French-Canadian traders resided here in the late British era.

The main 2005 field season ran from June 6 to August 21, with preliminary excavation starting May 17 and wrap-up work continuing through August 24. Dr. Lynn Evans, MSHP Curator of Archaeology, directed the excavation with the assistance of field supervisor Dr. Todd Reck. Conrad Latuszek, Janie Bloomfield, Justin Baetsen and Tiffany Adams were the crew members. Eight volunteers provided a combined 394.5 hours of screening and excavation. We had no full time interpreter this season, instead, each archaeologist devoted one day a week to public interpretation. Our goal for the season was simply to continue excavating previously opened areas.

Todd Reck and Tiffany Adams excavated in the root cellar this season (270L30 quads 1 and 2 and 280L30 quads 3 and 4). They continued to better define the wall posts; a total of 18 are now exposed. During the last full week of excavation, beach-type rocks began appearing in the northwest corner of the cellar and wall trench, about four feet deep, perhaps signaling the beginning of the bottoming out of the cellar. All summer we noticed that soil layers in the cellar seemed to start in the west and tilt down to the east.



A tremendous number of artifacts were recovered from the cellar this season, ranging from pockets of concentrated fish bones to a George II copper coin, the first colonial coin found at Michilimackinac since 1979. The coin is in very poor condition, but is either a half penny or a farthing, minted between 1729 and 1754. Some larger artifacts than usual were recovered from the cellar, probably pitched in the hole to fill it after the house was moved to Mackinac Island. These include large sections of barrel band, sizable fragments of brass kettles, an intact kitchen knife blade and part of a scissors. Several gun parts were found including a French triggerguard, a British military buttplate and a buttplate that cannot be identified because it is wrapped in bark. The bark was preserved by the copper salts in the buttplate. Another rare survival is a 5 x 3 inch scrap of leather. An intriguing artifact is a small strip of lead with reversed letters on it. Apparently the lead was buried next to a piece of paper with printing on it. The paper did not survive, but the printed letters adhered to the lead. Not enough letters are present to make out any words. Small but notable artifacts recovered include numerous buttons, an intricately carved MicMac pipe and a Jesuit ring. One pre-contact artifact, an unidentified ground stone implement, was found between two cellar wall posts, obviously removed from its original context.

To the east of the cellar Justin Baetsen and Lynn Evans worked in the quads under the hearth (270L20 quad 1 and 280L20 quad 3). A large timber, running north-south, was uncovered near the west edge of these quads, perhaps related to the hearth or a collapsed mantel. A large rock was removed adjacent to this, the right size to have been part of a chimney. Similarly-sized rocks have been removed from the cellar. The rock from the edge between 270L20 q1 and 280L20 q3 is particularly interesting because it was carved with an arrow and some triangles containing dots. A square bone gaming piece engraved with an "X" was

found in the same general area. Conrad Latuszek completed the adjoining quad to the south (280L20 quad 1). It ended with some large postmolds or small pits. Hopefully their function will be more obvious once the quad to the north is complete. Unfortunately the eastern wall of the house in all three of these quads was mostly destroyed by a water line. More of the pipe was exposed by erosion this summer.

The final area to be excavated was the southwest corner (290L30 quad 1 and 290L40 q2). Janie Bloomfield, Conrad Latuszek and volunteers worked here. The final section of the south wall (F.959) was identified here at the end of the 2004 season. It was better defined this season and the doorway was located, right on the eastern edge of 290L40 q2. The most interesting artifact to come from this area was a wrist escutcheon from a French trade gun.

Cataloging of this season's finds is currently under way. All interpretations offered here are preliminary, subject to further excavation and analysis.

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