

Louisbourg Public Archaeology Program 2008 Field Season Review

The 2008 public archaeology program lasted a busy and exciting two weeks in the middle of August and revealed yet more information about activities that took place in the De la Vallière yard during the 18th century occupation of the Fortress of Louisbourg. Two groups of participants (one group per week) learned about archaeological excavation, survey, and recording techniques, and experienced the history of Louisbourg. The participants were given presentations on the history of the De la Vallière family and property, the Louisbourg fortifications, and the 18th century sieges. They went on behind-the-scenes tours of the archaeological collection, the conservation lab, and the costume department, as well as tours of the forge and Wolfe's Redoubt (a large British siege site). They also had hands-on experiences in the armoury, the DeGannes garden, and the Engineer's Kitchen. To finish off each week in style, each group enjoyed a relaxing and well deserved 18th century dinner at the upper class l'Epée Royale restaurant, located in the heart of the reconstructed Fortress.



Figure 1: Cooking in the Engineer's Kitchen

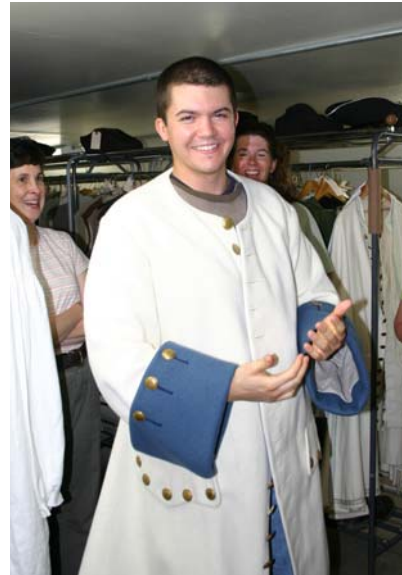


Figure 2: Tour of the Costume Department

Figure 3: Visiting the Armoury



Figure 4: Finishing off the week with dinner in the restaurant

Overview of Previous Public Archaeology Excavations

Prior to 2005, the archaeological studies of the De la Vallière property within the Fortress of Louisbourg concentrated mainly on the structural features (the houses, storehouses, and workshops), located along the perimeter of the property, surrounding an interior yard/courtyard. These

buildings have been excavated and well researched before being either reconstructed as part of today's Fortress, or covered back over with soil (only those buildings which were standing in 1744 have been reconstructed within the town). The yard itself within the De la Vallière property had never been investigated and this presented a significant gap in our understanding of daily life as it would have taken place on the De la Vallière property in the 18th century, particularly outdoor life. As such, the yard was chosen as the first site to conduct excavations on as part of the Louisbourg Public Archaeology Program.

In May of 2005, in preparation for the public archaeology program in August, a test excavation was conducted by the Louisbourg Archaeology Department and twelve CBU historical archaeology students. The 12m x 0.5m excavation trench was laid out running east-west across the yard with the intention of identifying the location of a sub-surface French drain, which had been previously excavated on an adjacent property and which was known to run through the De la Vallière property. This trench also allowed us to examine the depth and nature of the soil stratigraphy (layering) and the artefact density in the yard.

As a result of this test excavation, we now know that the 18th century soil deposits in the yard are very shallow (turning up approximately 30cm under the sod and topsoil) and that the 18th century periods of occupation are nearly impossible to distinguish from each other. We also now know that the original terrain within the yard was very rocky and completely unlike the flat grassy green we see today. The artefact density within the yard is quite high, and consists primarily of fragments of domestic materials. Interestingly, instead of identifying the location of the French drain, the team of excavators uncovered the location of a stone well and a cobble layer, which may have been a rough outdoor working surface.

With the commencement of the public archaeology program that August, we decided to widen the excavation areas around both the well and the rough cobble surface in an attempt to gain a better understanding of these two features. During the two-week program, we began the excavation of the dry-laid stone well (although we did not finish it) and determined that it had been filled in during the 18th century and that the site had continued to be used after that. The cobble layer was discovered to run in a north-south direction along the western side of the foundation of a New England artisan's workshop, which bordered the eastern side of the De la Vallière yard. This layer may have been a rough working surface or a pathway that extended along the outside of that building.

In the 2006 public archaeology program we continued on with the excavation of the well and the terrain in its immediate vicinity. The interior of the well was excavated to a depth of 0.8m and the artefacts uncovered within the well indicate that the well was filled in during the late 18th century British occupation of Louisbourg. Also, during this year, another rough cobble surface or pathway was uncovered to the north of the well, and two drain capstones emerged in the vicinity of the well, indicating the location of the sub-surface French drain which we had tried to locate in the spring of 2005.

The public archaeology program for 2007 continued again with the excavation of the well, this time to a depth of 1.3m, where we deemed it unsafe to continue until such time as an engineer could rig up some kind of bracing for the interior of the well that we could work around. We also opened up more of the area along the drain, exposing several more capstones before our excavation concluded for the season.

The 2008 Public Archaeology Season

During the 2008 public archaeology program we set out to further explore the area of the drain, which had been partially excavated the previous season (16L97V, W, & X), as well as to investigate a new area of the yard adjacent to (and southeast of) the drain (16L99A & B). Our team of two archaeologists, an archaeological assistant, a field lab supervisor and the first session participants began by re-opening the excavation units 16L97V, W, and X which contained the drain (a 3m x 2m block of units), and opening two new units adjacent to these: 16L97Y (1.5m x 0.5m) and Z (2m x 1m).

The soil layers (lots) within the 16L97 units V, W, X, Y, and Z, had very similar compositions: lot 1 in these units (i.e. 16L97V1) consisted of the sod and topsoil; lot 2 (i.e. 16L97V2) was a dark brown gravelly sandy clay loam with pebbles and small stones, fragments of charcoal and lots of 18th



Figure 5: Excavating in the De la Vallière yard

century artefacts; lot 3 (i.e. 16L97V3) was a dark brown sandy clay with gravel (although less gravel than lot 2), flecks of charcoal, and 18th century artefacts on the surface of the lot but fewer and fewer the deeper we went down. In these units lot 3 bottomed out onto pre-occupation terrain, except along the drain. In the 18th century the French had dug down into the pre-occupation terrain to create a channel to lay the stones in and form the drain. The soil they used to backfill around and over the drain stones was more mottled in color and distinctive from both the pre-occupation soil and lot 3. We labelled this mottled soil lot 4, and the stone drain itself lot 5 (in the excavation units where the mottled soil and the drain appeared: V, W, X). The drain capstones began emerging just below lot 3. Interestingly, in unit 16L97Z, within the lot 3 soil, a flat-lying layer of angular cobbles emerged in the south and southeast parts of the unit, similar to the cobble layers uncovered in the De la Vallière yard in previous years. This appears to be a continuation of the same working surface.

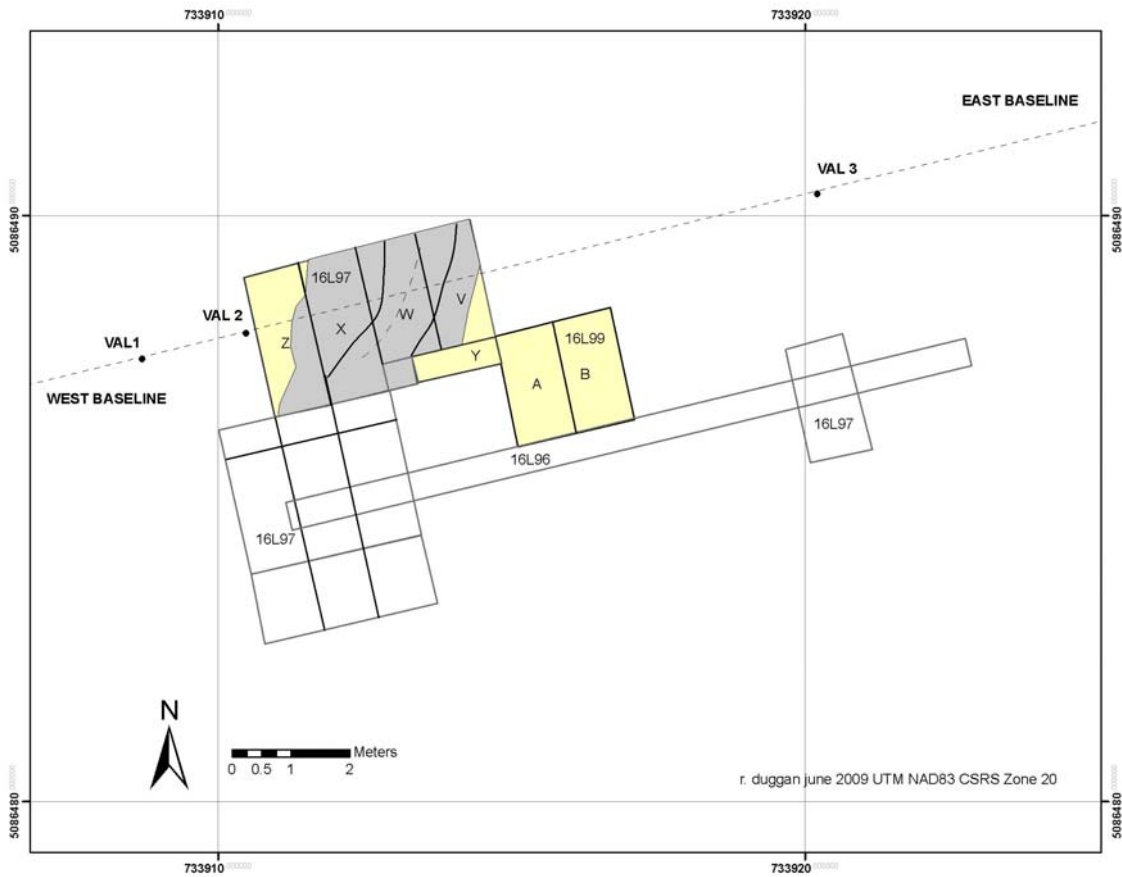


Figure 6: Overhead view of layout of excavation units 16L97V,W,X,Y,Z and 16L99A,B

With the arrival of the second session participants in the second week of the public archaeology program, we continued excavating units 16L97V, W, X, Y, and Z, and we opened a block of two new units just southeast of the drain, 16L99A and B (each measuring 1m x 2m), in order to explore a new area of the yard. Some of the soil lots we encountered within these units were slightly different from those encountered in 16L97. Lots 1 and 2 were primarily the same soil compositions, with a few modern nails and scraps of plastic just beneath the sod in a lens of reconstruction spill soil. Lot 3 was a dark brown silty clay with charcoal fragments and less gravel than lot 2; it was harder packed soil than lot 2, and it had artefacts on the surface of the lot. Instead of lot 3 coming down onto pre-occupation terrain, it came down on lot 4, which was similar to lot 3 but with more gravel and small stones. No structural features have emerged in either of these units, but nonetheless they still help us to understand the layout and usage of the De la Vallière yard. Unfortunately, we did not have time to fully excavate these units down to pre-occupation soil, but we will continue on with them when we return for the 2009 public archaeology season.

Also during session 2 of the 2008 public archaeology program, we fully exposed the drain capstones, and took some overhead photos of the section of drain that we had uncovered in our excavation units, before deciding to remove two of the capstones to reveal the drainage channel underneath. For the most part, the narrow drainage channel was silted up, but there still remained a small pocket of air between the top of the silt and the bottom of the capstones. No artefacts were visible within the channel, but we took many photographs of the channel, the drain, and the extent to which we had excavated in all the other units (as well as taking photographs of the top of each soil lot in each unit along the way). We recorded survey points along the edges of the drain and the drain capstones, as well as along the



Figure 7: Overhead view of drain capstones in units 16L97VWX

edge of the angular cobble surface and the corners of the new units. We also recorded elevations of all of these features and the depths to which we had excavated in all the units.



Figure 8: Excavating and taking elevations

The Artefacts

For such a short period of excavation, we found loads of artefacts (3803 to be exact)! We found a great amount and variety of ceramic fragments: coarse earthenwares from a variety of different countries, tin-glazed earthenwares (mostly French), coarse and fine stonewares, pearlware, creamware, and Chinese porcelain. We found clay pipe stem and bowl fragments, dark green bottle glass, blue-green bottle glass, table glass, window glass, mammal bone and teeth, mussel and oyster shells, iron hardware (mostly nails), and brick (including two fragments of



Figure 9: Screening the excavated soil



Figure 10: Small brass watch winding key

glazed brick), flint, coal, mortar, and plaster fragments. We also uncovered a small brass watch key (a very rare find), a glass sleeve-link, a shoe buckle, several copper alloy buttons, a multi-faceted black glass button, and a small cut circle of glass which may have been an insert for something like a button, or even a home-made gaming piece.

Overall, the artefact assemblage is domestic in nature. Most of the pieces (fragments) are relatively small, which makes sense if they were scattered about a yard where people may have been walking over them during the 18th century. The small personal items, like the watch key or the sleeve-link, are things that could have been easily lost while traversing the yard and difficult to find again. They may have even fallen

off (or out of) clothes that were being laundered. In the 2007 public archaeology review a cluster of clothing related items north of the well was interpreted as potentially being an area where laundering activities may have taken place. The few clothing related items from the 2008 excavation were found both to the north and east of the well's location, which may indicate the possibility of a relationship with the 2007 cluster of artefacts. However, it is difficult to draw any certain conclusions at this time, perhaps further excavation will help throw more light on the relationships of the artefact assemblages and the structural yard features.



Figure 11: Labelling artifacts in the field lab

The 2008 Louisbourg public archaeology program was a huge success and well enjoyed by all involved. We even had two visitors/participants from the *Canadian Geographic Travel* magazine, who published an article on the program in their May 2009 edition. We uncovered a wide variety of interesting artefacts, we finished excavating a section of a sub-surface French stone drain, and we discovered yet another angular cobble surface, the purpose of which has yet to be determined. As usual, we now have even more questions concerning the De la Vallière yard than when we began, but in trying to find the answers we will only help broaden the understanding of the daily use and activities which took place within the yard. In the upcoming 2009 public archaeology program we will continue on in our pursuit of answers (and more questions) by finishing the excavation of units 16L99A and B, and by opening up a new area of the De la Vallière yard to be excavated. One can only guess what we might find!

-N.Gracie & R.Duggan, June 2009



Figure 12: Examples of some of the artifacts we found in 2008



Figure 13: Crew shot, session 1 participants



Figure 14: Crew shot, session 2 participants

PHOTOS: PARKS CANADA AGENCY