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THE BEGINNINGS OF MODERN HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE NORTHEAST AND THE ORIGINS OF THE CONFERENCE ON NORTHEAST HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Paul R. Huey

Historical archaeology entered a remarkable period of growth and development following World War II and continuing through the 1950s and the first half of the 1960s. In addition to the pressing need for salvage archaeology at threatened sites, excavation occurred at many other sites for research purposes including reconstruction of historic buildings. New techniques of underwater exploration increased accessibility of shipwreck sites in the 1950s, and attention also focused increasingly on the problem of developing artifact typologies. Early in the 1960s statistical analysis and comparative study of archaeological data set a new direction, while an increasing number of excavations also occurred at military sites. In 1960 Stanley South organized the first professional society for historical archaeologists. Following this, Jack Mead in 1966 organized a separate group for historical archaeologists working in the Northeast, called the Symposium on Historic Site Archeology. The federal Preservation Act followed later in 1966, and the Society for Historical Archaeology was formally organized in January, 1967.

The year 1986 marked the 20th anniversary, on April 2, of the first meeting of the Symposium on Historic Site Archeology, now the Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology, at New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site, New York. Moreover, October 15 was the 20th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act, and in

New York the New York State Historic Trust was established October 1, 1966. Review of a sampling of projects representative of the development of historical archaeology in the years preceding 1966 in the Northeast makes it possible to understand more clearly the origins of modern historical archaeology and the ideas that have influenced its present direction. Not included, however, is the work that was done in this period at historic contact Indian sites, since that research, at least initially, generally followed a separate course of development (Wilderson 1975: 116–117).

Modern historical archaeology had its direct origins in the late 1950s and early 1960s during a remarkable period of growing interest in and awareness of archaeology and its potentials for research and historical interpretation. Archaeological methods that had been applied primarily at prehistoric sites, which often had shallow stratification or none at all below plow zone, were attempted with varying degrees of success at sites for which documentation from historical sources was also available in order to supplement the historical record. Knowledge of ceramics and other artifact typologies vital to the interpretation of archaeological evidence was only in its earliest stages. Some excavators cared little about artifacts, except for rare or unique objects and conducted excavations to reveal foundations or ruins, often with the result that conjectural reconstructions were built and sites totally destroyed. A third element in historical archaeology became increasingly apparent during the 1950s with the need for salvage archaeology as new construction following World War II threatened numerous sites, particularly flood-control projects in the Missouri River Basin in the West. Salvage excavations at threatened historical sites along the Missouri in the Dakotas began in the late 1940s and continued in the 1950s, resulting in the important publication of the *River Basin Surveys Papers*, Numbers 15-20, by the Smithsonian Institution in 1960 (Roberts 1960).

In the Northeast, five years of digging at

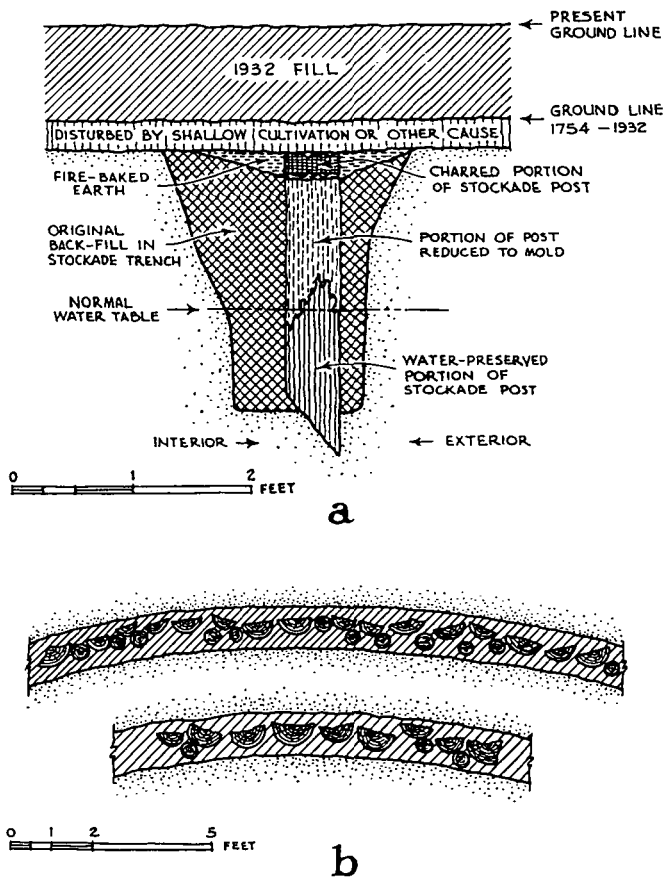


Figure 1. Cross section (a) and plan (b) of the stockade trench uncovered at Fort Necessity in Pennsylvania in 1952 and 1953 (Harrington 1957: 40).

the site of the Saugus Ironworks in Massachusetts between 1948 and 1953 ultimately led to a reconstruction of that site (Robbins and Jones 1959: 38, 48). In Pennsylvania, a classic project of careful documentary research and excavation occurred in 1952 and 1953 with the work at Fort Necessity (FIGS. 1, 2; Harrington 1957). Other very early efforts to conduct historical archaeology in the Northeast occurred at sites such as Franklin Court in Philadelphia and Fort Pitt in Pittsburgh. Excavation of a distinctive delft tile fragment at the site of Franklin's house in Philadelphia by the National Park Service in 1953 aroused considerable interest, and at the same time the Park Service initiated

its systematic program of testing areas where new construction was scheduled in Independence National Historical Park (Cotter 1960: 29-31). In Pittsburgh, meanwhile, the Carnegie Museum that same year commenced salvage excavations at the site of Fort Pitt in conjunction with park development (Swauger and Hayes 1959: 247). Near Albany, New York, amateur archaeologists excavated the site of the 18th-century Vereberg Tavern, discovered during New York State Thruway construction, in 1953-1954 (Feister 1975: 5).

In Canada, excavations were resumed between 1948 and 1951 at the 17th-century site of Ste Marie I, and in 1949 a detailed

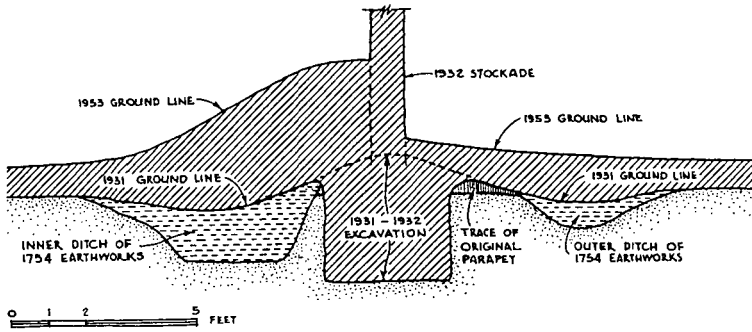


Fig. 25. Typical cross-section through 1932 stockade and across line of 1754 earthworks.

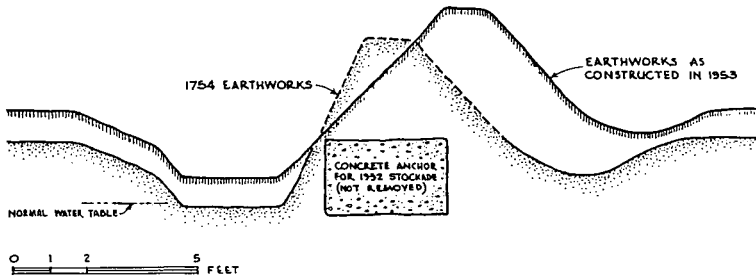


Figure 2. Cross section of 1754 earthworks and of earthworks constructed in 1953, with conjectural parapet, at Fort Necessity (Harrington 1957: 45).

report on the previous excavations earlier in the 1940s was published (Kidd 1949, 1969: 15). Other excavations had occurred as early as 1951 in Quebec under the Société historique de Québec as a search for remains of the Champlain chapel, a memorial constructed in 1636 in honor of Samuel de Champlain (Dumas 1958). At Sillery, excavations in 1953 revealed an early feature at the "Old Jesuit House" dating perhaps from the 17th century, while between 1952 and 1954 excavations in Ontario uncovered remains of the War of 1812 Fort Penetanguishene south of Georgian Bay (Kidd 1969: 14, 18). In 1955, excavations also focused on another 17th-century French site, Fort La Tour in New Brunswick (Harper 1956).

Jamestown became the focus of extensive excavations between 1954 and 1956 as a

prelude to Virginia's 350th anniversary in 1957, and this work gave historical archaeology wide and unprecedented public recognition (Cotter 1958). Work elsewhere in 1954 included excavations at the 17th-century "De Vries Site" in Delaware (Bonine 1954), and in 1955 excavations were begun in a French village site (FIG. 3) at Crown Point, New York, under the sponsorship of the then owner-developer (Huey 1959). The commercial development of Fort William Henry at Lake George as a reconstruction in 1957 was preceded by excavations, and three years of extensive excavations at Johnson Hall State Historic Site in New York also commenced at that time. On the Niagara River, in New York, excavators uncovered the French "Joncaire trading post" site of 1720 (McCarthy 1957: 101), and Fort Ticonderoga sponsored excavations in the French

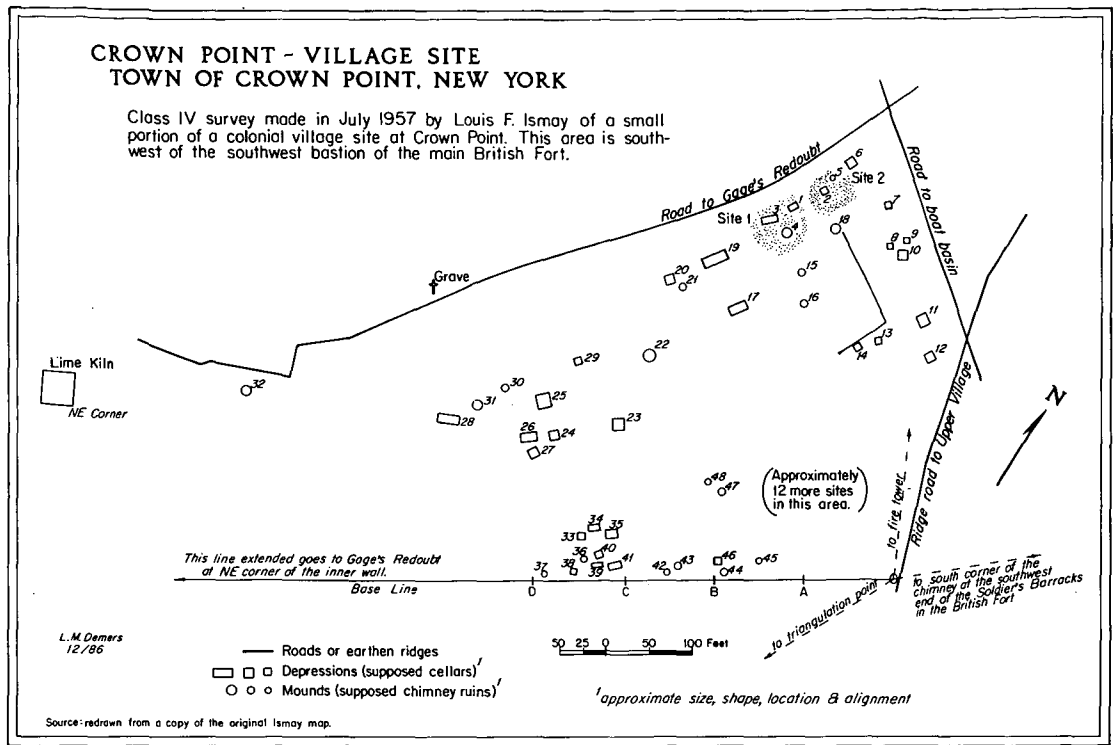


Figure 3. Plan of the colonial village site at Crown Point, New York, surveyed in July 1957. The area is now a part of Crown Point State Historic Site (after Huey 1959).

village site at Ticonderoga (Campbell 1958). Excavation work also began in 1957 at Batsto Village State Historic Site in New Jersey. Ivor Noël Hume arrived at Williamsburg, Virginia, that year as Chief Archaeologist, and books on British archaeological methods exemplified by Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *Archaeology from the Earth* and others served to emphasize the critical importance of close attention to stratigraphic contexts in historical archaeology (Wheeler 1956: 94).

A variety of amateurs and academically-trained professional archaeologists continued to expand the scope of historical archaeology in the late 1950s in the Northeast. Reconstruction-oriented excavations at Philipsburg Manor in Tarrytown, New York, began in 1957 and continued through subsequent years (Robbins and Jones 1959: 105). The "New York City Archeological Group"

in 1958 excavated the site of Fort Independence, a Revolutionary War site in Bronx County (Lopez 1978), while in 1958 and 1959 a group of Rome Free Academy students excavated a late 18th-century site located on the Great Oneida Carry in New York (Hagerty 1960: 5-6). The National Park Service began excavations at the Schuyler House at Schuylerville, New York, in 1958, and in 1960 expanded the work to include testing in Saratoga Battlefield (Starbuck 1986: 5). At Fort Tompkins, a War of 1812 site at Sackets Harbor, New York, excavations in 1959 produced remains of rare military insignia of that period (Campbell and Howell 1963: 22). The same year, excavations were commenced at Fort Michilimackinac (FIG. 4; Maxwell and Binford 1961; Petersen 1963). In Massachusetts, James Deetz conducted excavations during the summer of 1959 at the 17th-century

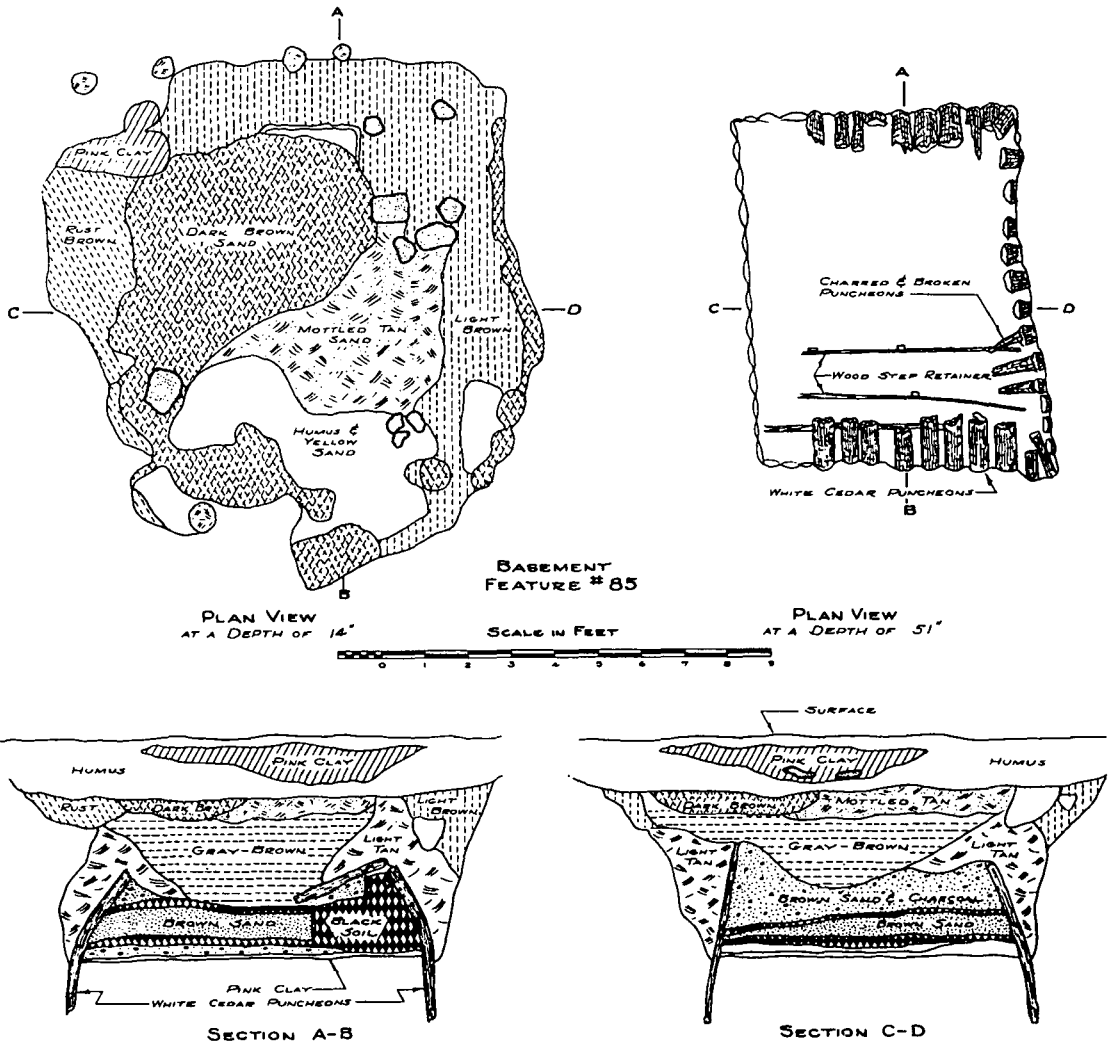


Figure 4. Plan and cross section profile drawings of a "British Trader's House" excavated at Michilimackinac, Michigan (Petersen 1963). Courtesy of Mackinac Island State Park Commission.

Joseph Howland site (Deetz 1960: 2). In Canada, Kenneth Kidd commenced excavations at Quebec in the Cartier-Brébeuf Park, which contained mid-17th-century to 20th-century artifacts and features (Kidd 1980: 94-95). The National Historic Sites Service commenced an archaeological survey of the Fortress of Louisbourg site in 1959, and in Newfoundland, the site at Ferryland occupied in 1627-1628 by Lord Baltimore was also partially excavated. Meanwhile, as a result of an aerial survey in 1959, excava-

tion of the Norse site at L'Anse-aux-Meadows was commenced the following year (Kidd 1969: 9, 10, 12-13).

The study of shipwrecks and the use of new techniques of underwater exploration developed rapidly in this period. The earliest efforts, however, were often rough and clumsy. In 1949 the remains of a War of 1812 ship were partially dragged ashore in East Bay at the southern end of Lake Champlain, and it is said that in November 1952 the burned remains of a gunboat from the

American fleet destroyed in 1776 were recovered from Arnold Bay on the east side of Lake Champlain. By 1957, attempts at diving to greater depths in Lake Champlain in search of vessels from the American fleet of 1776 were sometimes dangerous and resulted in injuries. In 1958 residents of Whitehall, New York, raised the wreck of the War of 1812 schooner *Ticonderoga* from East Bay and placed it on exhibit (Hammersley 1959: 22-24; Crisman 1986: 22). Finally, in the summer of 1960 remains of bateaus from the French and Indian War were raised from Lake George, preserved, and subsequently exhibited at the Adirondack Museum (Gardner 1967: 8-A). In Canada, between 1958 and 1960, underwater exploration in Georgian Bay focused on several 19th-century wrecks as well as a search for the *Griffon* sunk in 1679 (Kidd 1969: 24).

The 1950s ended with increased attention to the problems of artifact typology and identification. There had been few general references on artifacts except for the useful *History Written with Pick and Shovel* published in 1950 by the New-York Historical Society (Calver and Bolton 1950). The phenomenon of dating tobacco pipe stems through bore sizes was published as early as 1954 (Harrington 1954), but in 1959 significant information on 18th-century English pipemakers including Robert Tippet was also published (Oswald 1959). In 1960 the Smithsonian publication on North Devon pottery offered new directions and questions for research (Watkins 1960). A basic typology of wine bottles (FIG. 5) appeared in 1961 largely as a result of Virginia excavations (Noël Hume 1961), the same year the Binford formula for pipe stem dating was published (Maxwell and Binford 1961: 108).

Following the intense activity and enthusiasm of the 1950s, statistical analysis and comparative study clearly set a new direction by about 1960. Efforts representing a wide diversity of levels of research, of course, such as the excavation of the John Alden site in Duxbury, Massachusetts, would continue (Robbins and Jones 1969), but 1960 was also the first of six years of work at Fort Ligonier

in Pennsylvania (FIG. 6; Grimm 1970). At Brighton, New York, excavations at the late 18th-century Stone Tavern site produced data for comparison with Late Historic Seneca sites (Hayes 1965). In Canada, excavation of the site of Fort Albany, built in the 1670s or 1680s, was commenced in 1960, while in the city of Quebec the "Holland Family Burial Ground" was excavated (Kidd 1969: 14, 17; Kenyon 1986: 12-13). During 1960 and 1961, excavations in Ontario revealed the outline of Willow Fort from the War of 1812 (Kidd 1969: 18). Historical archaeology had entered a new, more serious phase, but historical archaeologists had not yet organized themselves in order to communicate and discuss future directions. Most belonged only to state or national organizations devoted primarily to the archaeology of prehistory.

Stanley A. South, the archaeologist at Brunswick Town, North Carolina, took the initiative and established the first organization specifically for historical archaeology. The first meeting of the Conference on Historic Site Archaeology was held at Gainesville, Florida, on November 3, 1960. Papers on Spanish beads, ceramic types, glass wine bottles, and iron artifact conservation were presented. The second meeting of the Conference was on November 30, 1961, at Macon, Georgia, and topics included the Binford pipe stem dating formula, glass beads, ceramics, and brass kettles. Regional topics included archaeological research in central Alabama, the lower Mississippi Valley, Virginia, and the Northeast. Lewis Binford presented a paper contrasting the development of settlement at Fort Michilimackinac under British and under French rule. Membership in the Conference, at one dollar per year, grew rapidly as it continued to meet once each year to present papers and facilitate discussion of research problems. There was no formal organization, and the membership fee was used for printing the program and for postage. Each year the meeting was held in the Southeast, but historical archaeologists nationwide rapidly discovered the value of the conference in promoting commu-

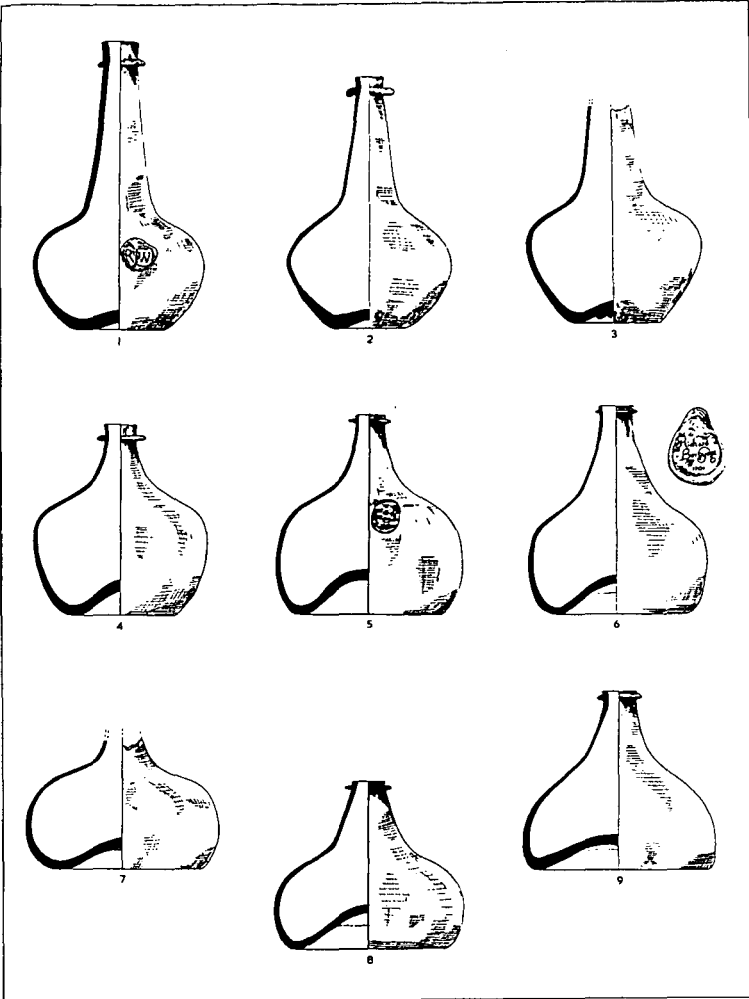


Figure 5. Typology of glass bottles, about 1650-1720, published by the Corning Museum of Glass in the *Journal of Glass Studies* in 1961 (Noël Hume 1961: 99).

nication. Historical archaeologists increasingly accepted as their responsibility “not only. . . properly recovering the data from the ground, but analyzing and interpreting it to its fullest meaning within the context of the culture. . .” (South 1962, 1964: 61).

In the Northeast, both amateur and professional excavation at historical sites continued, but at a more modest pace, perhaps, than in the 1950s. Excavations in the early to mid 1960s also tended to focus mostly on military sites. In addition to the continuing work at Fort Michilimackinac, Saratoga Battlefield, and Sackets Harbor, there were excavations in the blockhouse site at Fort Plain, New York, in 1961, at Morristown, New Jersey, beginning in 1961, at the site of Fort Lernoult in Detroit in 1962, and at

Valley Forge (Lenig 1972: 52; Rutsch and Peters 1977: 33; Mason 1964; Olsen 1964). Canadian contributions included work beginning in 1962 at Fort Amherst, Fort Beau-séjour, and Fort Anne (Kidd 1969: 11, 12; Rick 1970: 15, 17, 20). A small but noteworthy colonial site of the 17th and 18th centuries was discovered and excavated on Staten Island, New York, between 1961 and 1963, and the first excavations at the Amelung Glass Factory site in Maryland, at the Albany Glassworks site in New York, and at the Caleb Pusey House in Delaware each began in 1962 (Anderson and Sainz 1965; Noël Hume 1965: 2; Huey 1980: 37; Alexander 1978: 1). Non-military sites in Canada where work commenced in 1962 included Port Royal Habitation National Historic

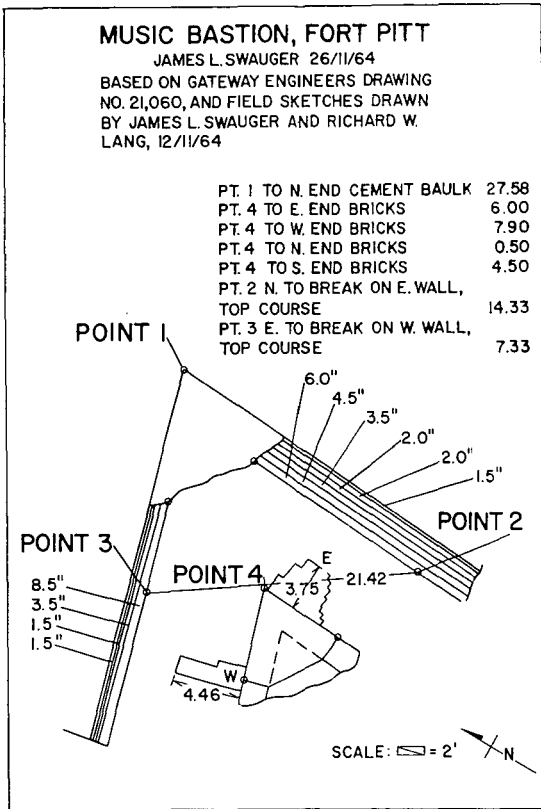


Figure 7. Excavations in November 1964 at the Music Bastion of Fort Pitt at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (Swauger and Lang 1967: 41). Reproduced by permission of Carnegie Museum of Natural History.

late 18th- and 19th-century structural remains (Rick 1970: 28-29). Military remains of the same period were also uncovered in 1965 and 1966 at Coteau du Lac, southwest of Montreal, and at Fort Wellington, built in 1812 at Prescott, Ontario (Rick 1970: 31, 32). Meanwhile, in 1965, in New York the Rome Urban Renewal Agency sponsored the excavations that indicated that substantial evidence of Fort Stanwix remained (FIG. 8). This site, like Louisbourg, was destined for an extensive reconstruction (Hanson and Hsu 1975: 1). Finally, another major project was commenced in 1965 in Maine in the spring when a group began excavation of a colonial settlement site located on private

property at Pemaquid. Within eight years, remains of 14 structures and one Indian burial had been excavated, and the State had acquired the site (Camp 1975: 6).

The status of historical archaeology as of 1965 was carefully summarized by Norman F. Barka in his Ph.D. dissertation at Harvard that year (Barka 1965). He reported on his own recent work at Fort La Tour in New Brunswick, a 17th-century French site with a later 18th-century English occupation above. Significant publications in 1965 included the report on the Stone Tavern site near Rochester, New York (Hayes 1965). Other projects, meanwhile, were continuing at Louisbourg, Morristown, Albany Glassworks, Caleb Pusey House, Fort Michilimackinac, Fort Ligonier, and numerous other sites.

In New York State, New Windsor Cantonment had become another center of activity. New Windsor Cantonment, a site west of the Hudson River about 40 miles north of Manhattan, was the last encampment of the Continental Army in 1782-83. The National Temple Hill Association was formed in 1933 to commemorate the site and to reconstruct the historic "Temple" that had stood in the Cantonment. Having acquired part of the necessary land, the Association decided in 1959 that archaeological excavation would be necessary to determine the exact location of the Temple building. The excavations in 1959 and 1960 by Ernest Rodman, a chemist and amateur archaeologist, occurred under pressures to acquire additional land and to develop the site. The work revealed evidence that was interpreted to be remains of the Temple, and the Temple was subsequently reconstructed on the site. The Association conducted further testing of a Revolutionary War burial site and of hut sites in 1962, 1963, and 1964, but these projects were inconclusive. Finally, in the spring of 1965, the National Temple Hill Association hired John H. Mead, director of the Trailside Museums in Bear Mountain State Park, on a part-time schedule to continue the field work (Mead 1980: 28-31, 43).

Mead began his work with a systematic

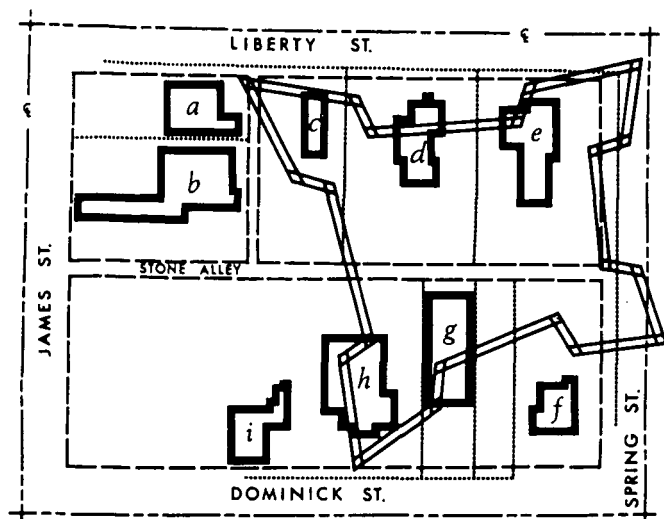


Figure 8. Plan of Fort Stanwix imposed over existing structures on the site, in Rome, New York, about 1965 (National Park Service 1967: 20).

analysis of the entire Cantonment site based on documentary evidence and on inspection of features visible in the field. Working weekends with a very few volunteers, he began a systematic and meticulously recorded excavation of one hut that was hypothesized to be a part of the camp of the 4th Massachusetts Regiment. His careful work, rather than simply confirming previous assumptions, served to emphasize the importance of all archaeological evidence at the cantonment and of not destroying it through reconstructions before it could be properly studied (Mead 1980: 45-46).

With many major continuing historical archaeological research projects underway in the Northeast by 1965, Jack Mead was well aware of the increased need for communication among the many amateurs and professionals who were involved. Site development and interpretation questions had become a key issue as, in many cases, archaeological evidence was ignored and destroyed during reconstruction work or historic house restoration. Col. Frederick P. Todd, Director of the New Windsor Cantonment, proposed holding a symposium on the New Windsor excavations and suggested that Mead contact Charles F. Hayes III and William S. Cornwell at the Rochester Museum of Arts and Sciences to discuss the possibility. They thought it was a good idea. Accordingly, on February 11, 1966, Mead

sent a letter on behalf of New Windsor Cantonment and the National Temple Hill Association to various historical archaeologists announcing that a symposium on historic site archaeology would be held at Hotel Thayer at West Point on April 2. With the recent excavations at Temple Hill as a key theme, the symposium was broadened to include colonial and Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey and Pennsylvania as well as New York. The program at the first symposium included papers not only on the recent work at New Windsor Cantonment but also at Fort Ligonier (Grimm), Morristown, Valley Forge, and Fort Stanwix (Campbell), West Point (Stowe), Fort Montgomery (Mead), and the Joncaire site (McCarthy). William S. Cornwall spoke on his research on military canteens, and Charles F. Hayes III spoke on excavations in the Genessee Country. The evening speaker was Richard Koke of the New-York Historical Society, and the movie was *Washington's Greatest Victory*.

Under the continuing guidance and direction of Jack Mead, the Symposium on Historic Site Archeology in subsequent years brought in additional speakers and participants including Gilbert Hagerty, Wallace Workmaster, Stanley Vanderlaan, Roland Robbins, Edward Lenik, Wayne Daniels, Albert Anderson, and Loring McMillan. The program on April 6, 1968,

included a discussion of "the kind of organization we need to develop to best serve Archeologists & related fields." The Symposium until this time had provided the first and only conferences in the Northeast devoted specifically to the subject of historical archaeology, and it was the first organization of its kind other than the Conference on Historic Site Archaeology. Subsequently, the Society for Historical Archaeology was organized at an historical archaeology conference held at Dallas, Texas, in January 1967, and the Society's first annual meeting was held in January 1968 at Williamsburg, Virginia.

The development of historical archaeology as a significant research area, combined with growing recognition of the value of archaeological resources, coincided with a new general awareness during the 1960s of the need for a national historic preservation program. Historic buildings and sites were under increasing pressure from new development as urban areas expanded, and the problem was carefully examined during a seminar on historic preservation and restoration at Williamsburg sponsored by the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation in September 1963. A committee of seminar participants was assembled to prepare a statement on principles and guidelines for historic preservation, which was presented in October 1964 and which set clear objectives for historic preservation. Historic preservation was clearly becoming directed toward preserving not just historic structures but also landscapes, open spaces, settings, and archaeological sites with buried evidence. It was also recognized that complete reconstruction of an historic structure, or its restoration to a single date or period by removal of later additions, was frequently very destructive "of much archaeological and historical evidence, as well as of aesthetic values arising from age and picturesque-ness." With increased attention by architects, historians, museologists, and craftsmen trained in historic restoration toward non-destructive interpretation and *in*

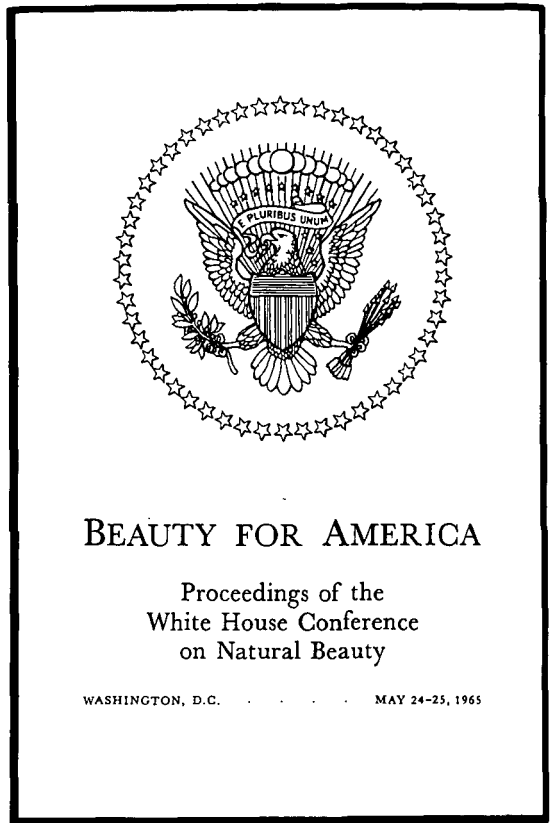


Figure 9. Cover from the published proceedings of the White House Conference on Natural Beauty (Johnson 1965).

situ preservation of historic structural evidence for future study, a direction was established that was to become more consistent with archaeological research and resource conservation (Short 1970: 244-245, 251-253).

The continuing sprawl of urban areas resulting in ugliness and losses of historic structures, landscapes, and natural areas nationwide prompted President Lyndon B. Johnson on February 8, 1965, to call for a White House Conference on Natural Beauty to meet in mid-May (FIG. 9). Emphasizing the necessity of government assistance to local historic preservation efforts "which have an important national purpose," he commended the Registry of National Historic

Landmarks "and the new wave of interest it has evoked in historical preservation" (Johnson 1965: 4-5). The National Historic Preservation Act, which became law on October 15, 1966, authorized the National Register of Historic Places to include landmark buildings, districts, objects, and sites of significance not only on the national but also on the state and local levels. The act also provided for a Federal Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and a matching grant-in-aid program with the states. In New York, meanwhile, on October 1, Governor Nelson Rockefeller had created the New York State Historic Trust, which was given the responsibility of developing the State Historic Sites as well as an effective statewide historic preservation program qualifying for funding and grants-in-aid under the National Historic Preservation Act. Charged by Rockefeller "to develop the State Historic Sites and to reveal to all people the countless ways that New Yorkers have contributed to the history of our State and Nation," the New York State Historic Trust acquired New Windsor Cantonment as a State Historic Site in 1967 (The New York State Historic Trust n.d.: 3).

The Preservation Act of 1966, with additional federal and state legislation, has protected the nation's heritage of archaeological resources from the pressures of uncontrolled development and has encouraged intelligent planning and careful conservation in the use of these non-renewable resources for research. These accomplishments would not have been possible, however, without the efforts of those leading individuals in the field of historical archaeology who in the 1950s and early 1960s awakened public awareness and strove to contribute new knowledge. Many excavations occurred and much data was generated in the years before 1966, and one hopes that in the future increasing attention will be devoted to those collections in light of refined analytical techniques, improved typologies, and revised research questions.

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