

Archaeology Day at Boxley Cabin

IUPUI undergrads get hands on archaeological experience at the site of abolitionist George Boxley's cabin.

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Transcript

[B. Bush] Well, Boxley was our first area settler. Let me go back a little bit and tell you the story of Boxley and Virginia. In February of 1816 it is alleged that Boxley came together with a group of slaves, and they set out to have a rebellion. They arrested Boxley. They got the rebellion stopped. Five men were hung. Boxley escaped jail because his wife came in with a saw sewn into the hem of her dress. He made his way to the Midwest from Virginia over a period of years.

In the past this whole area was covered by an 1878 Italian mansion, and it burned in the 90s and revealed a clapboard, covered building that now you can see is all log, and people did not realize that this site was here.

[J. Rice] Right now we're digging near what's now the back of the property where we have had a lot of shovel probes done indicating a lot of artifacts in what may have been a trash pit. And that's a great place to find what we're looking for to give us an idea of how the Boxleys and later the Staffords lived. You know, what kind of items they used in their daily life.

As an undergrad you square off the units, make sure that the documentation is correct and relevant. You dig, screening everything that you have dug up so you get even the smallest bits of human material remains.

Earlier in the summer, over Summer I, we had a lot of units open. We found a couple of coins which are great because it's not just the coins. They go along with the the other artifacts that we were pulling out of that particular unit, but those coins and anything like that, like newspaper or anything that we might in some way, shape or form be able to date, not only tells us when and where that came from, but it tells us where and when the other things that we've found around it have come from.

There were rumors and stories about the Staffords owning exotic animals. We've been able to corroborate that because in another outhouse, a privy that we dug in, we found four or five exotic bird skulls. So they definitely had birds like peacocks, parrots - those sorts of things on the property.

[J. Bautista] You want to make sure that when you're digging, you dig like a table. You dig level so you don't dig pits and that kind of stuff, which is difficult at first to see because you know, the ground, the terrain, is not flat so you want to make sure that you're digging on a theoretical level, not based on the terrain. And then you want to make sure when you find something, you don't pry it loose with your trough. You want to dig around it and get it out that way. You want to get everything in context with when it was put in the ground. It was nice to be able to actually put into use what we've learned in the classroom.