

Local Archaeologists "Dig" Pennsylvania Archaeology Month

By Heather A. Wholey, PhD, West Chester University, and
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WCU archeology research team (Wholey, second from right)

Did you know that all fifty states have a designated Archaeology Month? Pennsylvania celebrates Archaeology Month in October. Archaeology Month provides an opportunity to celebrate and learn about the archaeology and rich heritage of Pennsylvania, from Native Americans to the French and Indian War to the Industrial Era. A variety of events are held each year during Archaeology Month by universities, museums, and organizations throughout the state. Some goals are for people to become aware that interesting archaeological resources are not just encountered in "exotic" locations, to learn about archaeological resources in their area, and how they can advocate for the preservation of these resources as part of their community heritage.

West Chester University's archaeologist, Dr. Heather Wholey and her students in the anthropology program are collaborating with Ray Sarnacki, a board member of the Westtown Township Historical Commission, to excavate at the Huey House site. The Huey family owned 125 acres from 1731 to 1822 on land currently near West Chester University's South Campus. William and Genet (aka Jane) Huey emigrated from Ireland and Wales and purchased the property from Mordecai Maddock. Their former property spans several of today's neighborhoods in the northwest corner of Westtown Township, including Snow Drop Hill and parts of Radley Run. Historical estate records note that their farming operation included a small dairy and raising grain crops, such as oats and flax, as well as several head of cattle and sheep. Today, all that remains is a single set of stone ruins, which the archaeologists believe to be the remnants of a two-story springhouse



Huey Site ruins

or a farm structure with a spring in the cellar. The archaeological team is excavating to uncover evidence relating to local Colonial Era farm life. They hope to identify primary functions of the ruins as residential, agricultural, or mixed use, to possibly recreate an interior layout plan for the building, and to locate other structures on the site, which historical maps show existed. They also hope to develop an approximate timeline of any reuse of the building and identify the causes of the structure falling into ruins. To date, the archeologists have uncovered evidence for Native Americans having visited or occupied the land well before the Huey's arrival, as well as items related to the building itself, such as slate roofing, windowpane glass, and nails. They have also recovered fragments of bottle glass, ceramic crockery, dishware, and personal items, such as buttons.

The Huey ruins are in precarious condition due to long-term abandonment and the impacts of several storms and hurricanes, but the goal is to preserve the ruins (physically or virtually) and interpret the site with appropriate signage for local residents to learn about the history of the area in which they live. The archaeologists have recently partnered with StreamBend, LLC in West Chester to produce three-dimensional digital renderings of the ruins using laser scanning technology. This form of digital documentation is becoming increasingly important to archaeological and historical preservation and cultural sustainability. The non-intrusive nature of this method provides a hands-off means of cataloguing important, and often fragile, objects and documenting structurally unsound elements of older buildings and ruins. The results are permanent, precise, and detailed virtual records of the past that allow interactivity with objects and structures that are delicate, unsound, or difficult to gain physical access to. Researchers can study intricate details of an object without excessive handling or monitor changes to a site's integrity or building's structural soundness, as well as compare objects and sites with one another and track changes in their integrity over time. Through virtual tours, renderings, and fly/walkthroughs, the public gains access to resources that may otherwise be inaccessible or unavailable to them. These experiences have the potential to be of considerable educational benefit and provide another way to engage people with archaeology. For more information about Pennsylvania archaeology, Archaeology Month, and events being held throughout the state, visit <http://twipa.blogspot.com> to read the weekly blog of the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission.



Early 18th century ceramic shard from the Huey Site