G.V.S.C. students unearth village

by Mike Wygarden

In the byward of lumbering in Michigan, the site along the Grand River near the border of Allegan and Coopersville townships was home for 100 people and boasted all the accouterments of civilization—a schoolhouse, a boarding house, a sawmill, a general store, and a saloon.

Today, the once-thriving settlement of Blendon’s Landing is a deserted gravelly meadow nestled in the woods along the Grand River with no visible indication of its previous settlers.

The only sign of civilization is the spot seen today are a group of students from nearby Grand Valley State College, who use the area as a favorite spot for outdoor parties, and a team of anthropologists studying from Grand Valley who are digging at the site to uncover its past.

Richard Flanders, associate professor at Grand Valley, has been taking his anthropology students to the site for the past three summers.

The site, Flanders says, is ideal for instruction. "It’s a very rich site," he said. "So much of archeology is digging in sterile sand. On this site, you hit something every time you put your shovel in the ground."

In the two pits they have dug so far, anthropology students have uncovered hundreds of items, including items that suggest a complex process that required meticulous planning and a layer-by-layer basis. The finds, which are numbered and classified, include ceramic dishes from England, clay pipe stems, machine-tooled nails, and beaver teeth.

The site, Flanders says, could not have been chosen at a better time for the G.V.S.C. anthropology class. Blendon’s Landing, located directly southeast of the college campus, is within walking distance of the campus, and is owned by the college’s Faculty Club. "Since it’s on college property, we don’t encounter the restrictions you have when you own private property," he said.

Flanders said the items found at the site are not complete. "We would like to find more artifacts," he said.

The settlement, according to Flanders, was a center of activity for the early settlers. "The site was used for the early settlers," he said.

By the 1860s, little was left of the settlement which once was home for about 100 people, according to Adams’s interview with descendants of the pioneers.

Descendants remain

Although a large number of Blendon’s Landing’s residents moved on to other lumbering camps, some stayed in the area.

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begetting descendants whose offspring still live in the area.

One of those who stayed in the area was Samuel Hall, a man who came from New York in the 1850’s to run a blacksmith shop at Blenon’s Landing. Hall is the great-great-grandfather of Sherry Schouw, a local historian and member of the Grandville Historical Commission.

Schouw said she can recall her grandfather — Hall’s grandson — taking her on tours of the landing site, and describing what the settlement looked like as it was told by his grandfather.

Schouw and Flanders last week visited the barren Blendon’s Landing site and compared notes on where they believe the buildings existed in the settlement.

The combination of the ancestral connection and a love for history has kept Schouw enthralled with the settlement. “When you consider that this was a place where once a hundred people had lived, and now there’s nothing, it becomes pretty fascinating.”

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