

This Old Cabin: 2006 Excavations at a 19th-Century Log Structure

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The series above shows some of the color changes we see in the soil. In the picture on the left you can see the arrow pointing to a change in coloration, known as a post hole. This is where a post once stood. In the middle picture, the arrow is pointing to what we believed to be the floor of the cabin was. The student is using rulers and a line level to help to profile or map the soil color changes. The last picture on the right is of a corner of the cabin, and the trench that was constructed around its base.

The idea for excavating in the Muskegon DNR game area was provided by one of the game area employees. A review of the State Archaeologist's Office records indicated that there was a prehistoric and possibly a historic site in the area. Historic documents revealed that the land once belonged to Henry N. Smith who settled in Egelston Township sometime after 1850. He owned 175 acres along the Maple River, and proved to be a force to be reckoned with. He lived close to Maple Island, and the strategic location of his land brought him into the limelight more than once. Mr. Smith was often found in the courthouses of Muskegon County, taking on the Booming Company of Muskegon.



It is always important to do shovel or pit tests of the area you are looking at if you cannot see the surface - like in a plowed field. This method of selecting areas of a grid, helps to save time and effort. It also helps when artifacts are found, to show a distribution of where people were.



One of the trenches used to trace the cabin dimensions is pictured here. These often start as smaller units, and can then be expanded to any size needed. You can see the first 50cm by 50cm test unit in the top left corner. This was then expanded into the 1m x 3m unit shown above.



A student is using a line level and tape measure to get elevations. Here she is using a datum point that is on the grid, to record elevations of all the corners of the unit from this point. This helps us reconstruct what the cabin was like and the relationships between objects and architecture after excavation.



After several days of excavations, this is almost a complete excavation unit. Several units were left at different levels, some because there was no more cultural material and some because we wanted to leave some of the structure in tact.



From the original unit, we expanded in a grid formation, carefully dividing the area into a 2 m x 2 m unit system. We worked within the confines of the lines to excavate down until soil or color change appeared. This was a process that took careful digging and experience to notice the changes. The arrow is pointing to the floor of the structure revealed in a profile.



On a typical day at the site you can see on the left an example of how mapping is done. The student bent over is outlying the important color changes. In the middle, the student with the shovel is scraping the floor, so that she may begin mapping, and the pair on the right are getting the elevations of their unit.



The picture on the left shows a brown jug *in situ*, or in context. It was found in amongst a pile of plaster and wood. The picture on the right is of another corner of the cabin. In the picture you can see the wood pieces that make up the corner and the shape of the logs. The logs were mostly pine, chinked with several kinds of plaster suggesting that repairs might have been made over time. Some of the plaster had pink and white paint or wash on it, indicating that the interior may have been finished.



Of course no successful excavation can be done without the help of a great crew. On the left is a picture of the special crew who worked extensively with the site. On the right is the day we had a group of school children come and visit the site. This was a public archaeology day, that was a great success and really showed the children what real archaeology is all about.

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