ARCHAEOLOGISTS HIT PAY DIRT

In Kay Warren Swan's book of letters, CHAPEL HILL: UNC locality and students often head to far-flung locations to do archaeological field work, but this week, they were unearthing a big piece of the past in their own backyard.

On Monday, a construction crew was preparing to re-surface the driveway of UNC System President Tom Ross' house on Franklin Street. They found what they suspected were historical artifacts in the construction debris, so they contacted archaeologist Brett Riggs and Stephen Davis from the Environmental Laboratories at Archaeology in UNC's College of Arts and Sciences.

A crew of faculty, graduate and undergraduate students soon uncovered remnants of what is referred to as "the Second President's House," an historical accounts of the University. That house was occupied by UNC's first presi- dent, Joseph Caldwell, when he was elected president for the second time in 1823 and died in 1826. It was also the home of Pres- ident David Swain from 1840 to 1860. The house was then occupied by several UNC facul- ty members, including Thomas Hume, who moved in on Christmas Eve 1860. That night, a devastating fire started in an adjacent outbuilding and quickly de- stroyed the president's house. The archaeologists believe they have unearthed the home's original foundation. The house foundation lines are 24 feet apart, and Riggs said that description coincides with details of the house that Caldwell reported in a July 9, 1862 letter to his brother. (In 2004, UNC archaeologists excavated a well house and skeleton in the Low House yard, and Riggs and the team have evidence that the land was used by work crews and students ever since. Riggs and colleagues wrote about the well house excavations in this report.)

"We have also uncovered nails, broken glass, pottery and chimneys; and plaster from the house walls," Riggs said as he took visitors down Thursday morning. "What was left here is what wouldn't burn in a raging fire. Some of the structural nails look perfect because when nails burn at a very high temperature they don't rust."

Riggs said artifacts found at the house date from 1816 until his death in 1835. That night, a devastating fire started in an adjacent outbuilding and quickly de- stroyed the president's house. The archaeologists believe they have unearthed the home's original foundation. The house foundation lines are 24 feet apart, and Riggs said that description coincides with details of the house that Caldwell reported in a July 9, 1862 letter to his brother. (In 2004, UNC archaeologists excavated a well house and skeleton in the Low House yard, and Riggs and the team have evidence that the land was used by work crews and students ever since. Riggs and colleagues wrote about the well house excavations in this report.)

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Riggs said artifacts found at the house date from 1812 to 1835. They will be collect- ed, sampled and become a part of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology's N.C. Archæological Collection. Anthropology graduate students Mary Beth Fitts and David Conford said be- ing able to participate in fieldwork is an important part of their education.

"This is a continuation of an interest I have in campus history. In 2011, there were excavations at Battle, Vance and Pettigrew halls, and I helped to examine them and write up that research," Fitts said. "This is a period in time when the university was growing larger in land use and activity. Ross' house wasn't a focal point of the campus, but it had a lot of history." Conford said the house was described by Caldwell, who taught for the second time in 1823, as UNC's last spring, and one of the things he did was take students on an ar- chaeological tour of campus. "The students got a kick out of walking around and realizing that there are archaeo- logical features right under their feet. When they were doing the pre-work for President Ross' driveway, this was an ini- tiative that was started at the project site, on the town's Village and the Obey Creek commercial and residential con- ditions. The code eliminates most public buildings and lets the town manager approve or reject proposed plans. The mayors took a bus tour of the Ephesus-Ford- ham district, plus Southern Village and the Obey Creek project site, on the town's first step to making posi- tive changes, he said.

"None of us do it perfect- ly," he said. "That's the value of coming together and sharing ideas."

Got an idea? Send it to: kristen.chavez@biplc.com

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A Little Bit of History

The modern day town of Chapel Hill is the result of the town of Ephesus being purchased by the University of North Carolina in 1893. The town was named after the ancient city of Ephesus, located in modern day Turkey. Chapel Hill is known for its many historic buildings and landmarks, including the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, the UNC School of Medicine, and the UNC School of Law.

Archaeologists hit pay dirt

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