



KRISTEN CHAVEZ

'It's important to document this site now before it gets covered over again,' says anthropologist Anna Agbe-Davies.

# Archaeologists hit pay dirt

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**CHAPEL HILL** UNC faculty 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 archaeologists Brett Riggs and Stephen Davis from the Research Laboratories of 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" in historical accounts of the University. That house was occupied by UNC's first president, Joseph Caldwell, when he was elected president for the second time in 1816 until his death in 1835. It was also the home of President David Swain from 1849 to 1868. The house was then occupied by several UNC faculty members, including

Thomas Hume, who moved in on Christmas Eve 1886. That night, a devastating fire started in an adjacent outbuilding and quickly destroyed the president's house.

The archaeologists believe they have unearthed the house'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 Feb. 9, 1812, letter to his brother. (In 2004, UNC archaeologists excavated a well house and filled-in well in the Love House yard, and Riggs said the debris found there matches the kind of material they have found this week. Riggs and colleagues write about the well house excavations in this report.)

"We have also uncovered nails; broken glass, pottery and chinaware; and plaster from the house walls," Riggs said as the hot sun beat down Thursday morning. "What was left here is what wouldn't burn in a raging inferno. 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 1812 to 1886. They will be collected, analyzed and become a part of the Research Laboratories of Archaeology's N.C. Archaeological Collection.

Anthropology graduate students Mary Beth Fitts and David Cranford said being 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 excavate there and write up that research," Fitts said. "This is a period of time when the university was growing hand in hand with the town."

Cranford taught his first course at UNC last spring, and one of the things he did was take students on an archaeological tour of campus.

"The students got a kick out of walking around and realizing that there are archaeological features right underneath their feet. When they were doing the prep work for President Ross' driveway, this was an incidental find," he said. "A lot of times you go out looking for sites, but sometimes the sites find you."