



# Archaeology Education Program

Fall 2002

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*The theme of this year's Archaeology Education Program newsletter is "Historic Archaeology." This issue will discuss what historic archaeology is and how it differs from prehistoric archaeology. The Winter issue will look into historic research and how written records help identify historic artifacts. The differences between historic and prehistoric site types and excavation techniques will be covered in the Spring issue. Research Archaeologist Vicki Twinde will be writing this series.*

## Introduction

Prehistoric archaeology is the archaeological record of people before written records, while historic archaeology is the archaeological record of people after written records. The definitions of historic and prehistoric archaeology are the same throughout geographic regions, but have different time periods. In the United States, written records came with the arrival of the Europeans,

however, in other areas of the world, the written records came much earlier, sometimes in the form of hieroglyphs or cuneiform.

## Written Records

One advantage to historic archaeology is written records. A site may be dated by looking at plat maps, deeds, tax records, etc. We can also rely on historical accounts about specific events to provide information. However, the historical archaeologist must use caution when relying on written records. As you know, people are human and mistakes are frequent. Historical accounts may consist of biased information. Population estimates and estimates of buildings or other cultural feature sizes may be just that – estimates. Often, the archaeological record can disprove the written record. Usually physical evidence is more reliable than written evidence. Using the physical evidence and the written record together can give the historical archaeologist a better understanding of a site.

## Dating Artifacts

An historic artifact may be dated by dates of manufacture printed on the artifact, researching dates of a company written on an artifact, or researching information about the manufacture of a specific artifact, such as its shape, color, design, or the material it is made out of. For example, many mid-19th century bottles were pale green in color. This was not a desirable color for many bottles by manufacturers, so the addition of manganese was added to glass to make the color clear. When manganese is added to the bottle glass, the bottle appears clear at first, but if these bottles are set outside, the ultraviolet rays of the sun will cause it to turn a light purple or amethyst color. The use of manganese is believed to have started about 1880, but may have started earlier in France. Manganese was used in bottle glass until approximately 1917, when the main source of manganese (German suppliers) was cut off by World War I. Therefore, the presence of a light purple or "sun colored amethyst" color in a bottle can be dated to approximately 1880-1917.

## Places to Visit

### Fort Crawford Museum

This museum focuses on Prairie du Chien's history, including an exhibit entitled "Second Fort Crawford Rediscovered." One whole room is dedicated to this display and it highlights the fort's history, Prairie du Chien treaty histories, and artifacts discovered during the 1999 excavation. Also on display is an 8'x5' diorama of the fort and hospital as it look in the 1600's. Open 10 a.m. - 5 p.m. everyday, May 1st through October 31st.

717 South Beaumont Road,  
P.O. Box 298,  
Prairie du Chien, WI 53821;  
608-326-6960.



*The buttons showcased on these pages came from the Second Fort Crawford Site.*

## An example of historic archaeology at the Second Fort Crawford



The button above is a gilted (gold plated) button from a 19th century Ordnance officers' uniform.

### How do we know that?

First, of all by knowing the context of where this button came from. This button came from the Second Fort Crawford excavations. Knowing that the Army was stationed here, look at Army designs in books dealing with military insignia and military buttons. To start researching, look at the design on the buttons. The cross cannons are usually a sign of the artillery division of the army, so we know to start looking there. However, the eagle on top of the cross cannons is not common, and the "O" around the outside face of the button indicates that the button is an Ordnance button. How do we know its an officers' button? Because it is gilted or gold plated.

### How do we date the button?

The Ordnance Department was established in 1812. By 1815, the duties of the department was increased dramatically due to difficulties in supplying ordnance material during

Applying  
what you  
have learned



*These two buttons were recovered during the Second Fort Crawford excavations. Using the references listed in this section, try to answer the following questions for each button.*

- *What year was the button issued?*
- *Was this a military button?*
- *Was this an officer's button?*
- *What important symbol is on both buttons?*
- *What is similar about the two buttons?*
- *What is different about the two buttons?*

the War of 1812. With the reduction of the Army in 1821, this department was merged with the Artillery, although it was recognized and preserved as a distinct entity. By 1832, the Ordnance Department was independent and fully restored to its earlier status. The earliest reference to buttons of the Ordnance Department dates to 1816. The uniform of the Ordnance Department was to be the same as that of the artillery, except in buttons, "which will have an appropriate device." It is generally accepted that this refers to the "eagle on crossed cannon" pattern especially since by 1836, the crossed cannons became the symbol of the Ordnance Department. Therefore, this button was issued between 1816 and 1821. However, one must use caution when dealing with dates on military buttons - "issued"

dates and dates of actual use are usually very different. In the early 19th century, the military wanted to "use up" excess stock before new was issued, so buttons were used sometimes many years after their issue dates.

### Historic Archaeological Resources:

Johnson, David F. 1948  
*Uniform Buttons, American Armed Forces 1784-1948.*  
Century House, Watkins Glen, New York.

Albert, Alphaeus H. 1969  
*Record of American Uniform and Historical Buttons.*  
Boyetown Publishing Company,  
Boyetown, Pennsylvania.

Wyckoff, Martin A. 1984  
*United States Military Buttons of the Land Services 1787-1902.*  
McLean County Historical Society,  
Bloomington, Illinois.

*Non-military buttons may be dated also.*  
*One reference to look at is:*  
Luscomb, Sally C. 1967  
*The Collector's Encyclopedia of Buttons.*  
Crown Publishers, Inc. New York.