Summer 2014

Fort St. Joseph Post - Summer 2014

Department of Anthropology

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Greetings from the Director!

It’s hard to believe that it was 17 years ago when Hal Springer, then President of Support the Fort, Inc., contacted me to ask if I wanted to help him find an 18th century French trading post. Armed with little more than some knowledge in historical archaeology, Western Michigan University student archaeologists took up the challenge under my direction and with a little luck (and lots of local help) we identified a collection of 18th century French and English artifacts that Tom Kelley had found in an area where Joe Peyser predicted. The rest of the story has been told numerous times in newspaper accounts, local lectures, and professional presentations throughout the United States (Albuquerque, NM; Sarasota, Florida; Memphis, TN; Milwaukee, WI; among others), and in Canada, England, and France.

The project has truly been one of the most gratifying experiences of my career that has now spanned 5 decades beginning in the 1970s. I have spent 11 field seasons (1998-2013) at Fort St. Joseph and have introduced over 250 students and volunteers to the site. Students in the program have gone on to do graduate work all over the country and a number are gainfully employed. Our summer camp program has trained just as many middle and high school students, teachers, and life long learners, many who continue to stay involved with the project. Perhaps most amazing has been the response the open house has received. From its modest start in 2006, the open house has attracted nearly 20,000 people to witness ongoing archaeological excavations at one of the most important sites in the western Great Lakes. By teaming up with living history enthusiasts, the project makes the past come alive each summer on the bank of the St. Joseph River.

One of the obvious outcomes of the work we do is the mountain of information we have created and the need to make sense of it all, along with the thousands of artifacts in need of a home. The time is right for the project to take stock of where we’ve been and where we are going. Toward this end, the Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee is organizing a conference this September 26-27, 2014 in Niles to ponder the future of the past at Fort St. Joseph. We are urging all interested parties to participate in listening to presentations, touring our sites, and discussing future plans as we aim to chart a path to develop facilities, programs, and partnerships to help us fulfill the mission of investigating and interpreting the site for a wider community.

Dr. Nassaney demonstrates soil coring. Photo by Katelyn Hillmeyer.

It’s an exciting time to be involved in the project and we welcome your input. I hope to see you at the conference. For more information, including how to register for this free conference, see our website: http://www.wmich.edu/fortstjoseph/

Cordially,

Michael S. Nassaney, Ph.D.
Professor of Anthropology
Principal Investigator, Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project
Unveiling Colonial Life at Fort St. Joseph: 2013 Field Season

By Skylar Bauer

WMU hosted its 38th annual archaeological field school this past season at Fort St. Joseph under the direction of Dr. Michael S. Nassaney. This year marked the tenth field season for the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project. The Project, established in 1998, has forged a valuable partnership between WMU's Anthropology Department, Support the Fort, Inc., the City of Niles, the Fort St. Joseph Museum, and other community groups. Their shared goal—to better understand the Fort's role in the Great Lakes fur trade—continues to guide archaeological investigations. A total of 16 students and staff joined Nassaney in the field, where they conducted field work and engaged in a variety of public outreach activities.

Excavations in the floodplain and the adjacent terrace produced exciting results as well as new questions to be addressed. A line of 14 shovel test pits spaced 10 m apart were excavated to ground truth a magnetic gradiometer survey conducted in 2012. The survey indicated magnetic anomalies west of the dewatering system in an area that had not been tested since 1998. Shovel testing carried out in 2013 yielded a low density of 18th-century material west of the dewatering system.

With no historic maps of the fort, physical evidence of buildings found during excavation greatly assist in understanding and interpreting the site. This year's excavations uncovered a concentration of stone and mortar wall debris, which appears to be an example of colombre pietro, a typical construction method in New France, which used mortar and stones to fill the interstices between upright wooden posts. Excavation nearby uncovered a well-preserved, flat lying hewn timber in line with several large mortar-covered stones thought to be a building foundation. Its orientation and proximity to a fireplace suggests the stone wall and wooden artifact are remains of a domestic building. If the wooden artifact is in fact a sill, this may be evidence of a post-on-sill construction known as poteaux-sur-sole, where sills supported wall posts. Alternately, the timber may be the remains of a door sill and represent an entrance into the structure.

Public education and outreach has always been a cornerstone of the Project. Throughout the field season students helped maintain the Project's social media presence by updating our blog and Facebook page. The summer camps for youths and adults attracted 23 participants, and the Fifth Annual Summer Lecture Series drew a sizeable audience for four presentations. The series highlighted several noteworthy events such as the 250th anniversary of Pontiac's Rebellion, the rededication of the seventy-ton boulder used to commemorate the location of Fort St. Joseph, and an award-winning documentary film depicting a Militia Muster at Fort St. Joseph. The Project was also visited by a film crew who will feature Fort St. Joseph in a PBS television series titled America: From the Ground Up! scheduled to air in 2014.

The season's education and outreach activities culminated in the annual weekend-long Open House event which offers free tours of the site, one-on-one interaction with student archaeologists and living history re-enactors, lectures by public scholars, and hands-on activities for all ages. The 2013 Open House was attended by over 1,500 people.

This season's collaborative efforts and research goals continue to reinforce the Project's commitment to community involvement. To insure public input into future investigations, the Project will host a symposium in Fall 2014 to assist in determining next steps in making the history and archaeology of Fort St. Joseph more accessible to an increasing audience both in Niles and beyond.
Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference

On October 19th, archaeologists gathered at Ball State University for the 9th annual Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference. Dr. Michael Nassaney and Alex Brand presented a paper on the history of Fort St. Joseph and the French in the St. Joseph River Valley. Brand also presented a poster on the field work from the past three years. The conference was well attended and provided an opportunity to share recent project outcomes and discuss future goals of the Project.

Michigan Archaeology Day

On Saturday, October 12th, archaeologists from across the state gathered at the Michigan Historical Building in Lansing for Michigan Archaeology Day. Last year’s attendance was estimated at between 500-600 people throughout the day. This year almost half that amount of people came through the door in the first hour. Students representing Fort St. Joseph brought several posters, artifact cases, and publications in order to promote the project to the local audience.

Fort St. Joseph Archaeologists Gather in Quebec

Fort St. Joseph archaeologists gathered for the 47th annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology, sponsored by the Society for Historical Archaeology, from January 8-12 in Quebec City, Canada. Fourteen faculty, students, and alumni who have worked on the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project were in attendance, including Andrew Beaupré, Erin Claussen, Erica D’Elia, Catherine Davis, James Dunigan, Anna Gerechka, Jayne Godfrey, Joseph Hearns, Terry Martin, Michael Nassaney, Emily Powell, Lisa Marie Malischke, Andrew Robinson, Andrew Zink. The theme of this year’s conference was the questions that count in historical archaeology in the 21st century. Despite the numerous flight cancellations and sickness due to extreme winter weather, conference attendees were given a warm welcome in Quebec.

Conference attendees were offered a wide variety of presentations on the fur trade and the archaeology of New France. Andrew Beaupré organized a session highlighting the forts and families of New France that included paper presentations by himself, Lisa Marie Malischke, and a co-authored paper by Alex Brand, Erin Claussen, Ian Kerr, and Dr. Michael Nassaney. Nassaney presented a second paper in a session on critical reflections on the fur trade organized by Amelie Allard of the University of Minnesota. His paper examined significant questions concerning fur trade archaeology, extracted from his forthcoming book on the same topic. Dr. Terry Martin also presented a paper featuring Fort St. Joseph archaeology in a symposium dedicated to the historical archaeology of French Colonial America.

With the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project’s strong emphasis on public outreach, engagement, and collaborative learning, the conference was an excellent venue to share our work while engaging in lively discussions regarding contemporary archaeology and the role of archaeology in the modern world. FSJ archaeologist Emily Powell noted: “Continued involvement in a professional organization such as the SHA is integral to students’ success in the field of archaeology. We learn the benefits of networking, the importance of sharing our work with others, and the need to maintain dialogue among peers. Communication is everything in our line of work.”

As in previous years, the Project entered the annual photo competition at the conference. Once again we came away with several awards, including two second-place and two first-place prizes in various categories.

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Center for French Colonial Studies Annual Meeting

On November 22-24, the Bullock Texas State History Museum in Austin, TX, provided an excellent venue for the annual conference of the Center for French Colonial Studies. The museum was constructed recently with the purpose of displaying Robert de La Salle’s lost ship: La Belle. The exhibit looks striking with an estimated one million artifacts found on the ship, including 800 axe heads, thousands of glass beads, three bronze cannons, and Jesuit rings. Dr. Michael Nassaney assisted in assembling an extensive list of experts to participate, and presented a paper titled *La Salle’s Michigan Dream Realized: Seventeenth-Century Developments in the St. Joseph River Valley*. In the paper he examined the long history of French interest in the St. Joseph River valley, beginning with La Salle’s abortive effort to establish a permanent settlement at the mouth of the river. Of course, the strategic importance of the area became realized with the founding of the Jesuit mission along the river and the subsequent fort that became one of the lost important trading posts in the western Great Lakes. The Texas audience enjoyed hearing about recent archaeological findings and the significance of La Salle’s early wandering in southwest Michigan even before he descended the Mississippi River to its mouth in 1682.
I’ve been spending most of my days this past semester in the lab identifying the numerous animal bone remains recovered from the decade’s worth of excavation. Before I bore even myself describing the ins and outs of data collection, I’m going to take this opportunity to explain what we might possibly learn from this project, and how that might add to our knowledge of life during the fur trade.

So why study animal bones in the first place? Granted, those of us who grew up in Michigan certainly have a relatively clear idea of what animals are around, whether it’s the pesky raccoons digging through our trash bins, the deer never looking both ways before crossing the road, the beaver that builds a secluded dam on a forgotten creek deep in the forest, or even the Canada goose honking over our heads and the wild turkeys spotted near the tree lines of our fields. However, odds are against running into a black bear, the ever diminishing and protected tree lines of our fields. However, odds are against running into a black bear, the ever diminishing and protected

Site formation processes is a fancy term for asking, “How did all of this stuff get here?” We do different activities in different places. For example, my dad is a teacher and former high school administrator, but he is also an active gardener and does many household projects involving woodworking. Think of how the contents of a trash can in his home office looks compared to a much larger trash can by his work bench. Now, compare these two trash cans to the bin for yard waste, or even the compost heap by his garden. All of this waste disposal looks different and is different because of the activities my dad engaged in that produced this garbage. So, by looking at the Fort’s animal bones, we might be able to see different activities in the form of specific areas of activity, as cooking and hide production are very different activities that will produce distinct patterns of “production waste,” or, as I like to think of it, garbage.

The Gete Odena site on Lake Superior’s Grand Island might serve as a comparison for the Fort’s animal bone assemblage in regards to examining processing animal hides (see Skibo et al. 2004). This site, dated to the period following European contact, yielded over 1400 animal remains throughout the two seasons of excavation. The overall species composition was dominated by large mammals, such as moose, white-tailed deer, and black bear. In addition, smaller fur-bearing mammals, especially beaver, marten, and muskrat, were also recovered. Although this would have been a prime spot for exploiting waterfowl and spawning fish in the warmer months, these species were not recovered to any large degree. The absence of seasonal animal visitors to the site in the archaeological record highlights a focus on the processing of mammals.

The researchers at Gete Odena also noted the presence of five “smudge pits” at the site. Smudge pits were used in processing to smoke animal hides (Skibo et al. 2006). Essentially, these small narrow pits were dug and filled with pinecones, small maize cobs, or other recently acquired, green plant material placed at the bottom. The narrow walls, which reduce the amount of oxygen available to the fire, and green material created a smoky, nearly flameless fire. Hides were then wrapped around cone-shaped wooden framework constructed above the smoldering fire. This process preserved the hide in a usable form, whether for personal use and later manufacturing of clothing or as tradable goods, and also added the golden color of processed hide.

Between the species composition and the recovering of these smudge pit features, the authors argued the inhabitants of this site primarily focused on medium and large-sized mammals for the purpose of hide extraction and processing, although it is certainly reasonable to suggest these animals were used as a food source as well as a hide source.

On a recent trip to work with Dr. Terry Martin at the Illinois State museum, I was able to analyze data from three excavation units at the Fort St. Joseph site. Similar to Gete Odena, the animal remains were, by and large, medium and large-sized mammals, especially white-tailed deer. Although some remains enhanced the known diversity at the site in regards to the presence of fish and waterfowl, the emphasis was mostly on these mammal species. Similarly, past field seasons uncovered several smudge pits at the Lyne site on the terrace to the south of the Fort. More data needs to be collected and more work needs to be done to draw connections between these pits and the animal remains recovered at Fort St. Joseph, but these preliminary results suggest that hide processing may very well have been taking place around the Fort St. Joseph community.

These preliminary data only begin to scratch the surface of my faunal analysis and have only posed more questions. Once I start to discern patterns resulting from daily activities, broader questions can be asked. Did production change over time as prices shifted in the global fur market? Did it shift due to over-hunting of species? Through these and similar questions, importantly, we can begin to understand how the people living at the Fort used animal resources to organize their lives in relation to one another within the larger structure of the fur trade.
This past academic year has been a whirlwind of planning, research, and data management. The artifacts and soil samples from the 2013 field season were processed and organized, and were entered into our database in order to track and organize the collections. John Cardinal produced sketches of some of the buildings that have been featured in a variety of our publications and presentations.

Aaron Howard analyzed tobacco pipes recovered from the site, using Binford’s formula to find a mean date of occupation from the area excavated. The mean date of 1764 suggests that we are excavating in an area that was inhabited near the end of the Fort’s occupation. Other students organized data, washed artifacts, participated in conferences, and grew their skills and abilities in a variety of archaeological research methods and database systems.

The goals of the off-season are often to process data, but they go far beyond that. Through the work in the lab we equip students with the skills and knowledge to be competitive in the job market. Through team work and public outreach students gain experience in interacting with strangers, conveying ideas and theories, and working together to meet goals throughout the semester. As we continue to process data and make new discoveries we learn the importance of the process and the benefits of doing it right the first time. If you want to follow our work in the lab during the off-season, check our blog and follow us on Facebook! Thanks for your support!

Crunching Data and Sorting Samples: Lab Update

Museum Exhibit: A Preview

During the off season Dr. Michael Nassaney has been collaborating with the Kalamazoo Valley Museum and Joseph Hines, a designer with Project Arts and Ideas on a museum display on archaeological research. In February 2015, an exhibit called “Evidence Found” will open at the Kalamazoo Valley Museum. The exhibit is designed to communicate in an interactive format what archaeology is, what archaeologists do, and the presence as well as the importance of archaeological sites in southwest Michigan. The primary archaeological site presented in the exhibit is Fort St. Joseph. Artifacts uncovered at FSJ and photos of the site will be on display. One section of the exhibit will include the presentation of information and artifacts from five other sites in southwest Michigan. Those five sites are the Native American mound in Bronson Park, the Warren B. Shepard homestead site, Ramptown in Cass County, the Late-Woodland Dieffenderfer site, and Schilling, a pre-contact sweat lodge. In accompaniment to the photos and artifacts, archaeological procedures and tools will be on display and interpreted for the visitors.

Tabitha Hubbard, a 2012 Archaeological Field School student, collaborated with Dr. Nassaney and Mr. Hines on the preparation for this exhibit. Participation in this project is part of her thesis for the Lee Honors College. She has been conducting the research on the sites and selecting artifacts and photos associated with them. Look for more updates on the museum exhibit in the next few months, and plan on visiting the Kalamazoo Valley Museum to see FSJ represented!
Looking to the Past: Project History and Highlights

The Fort St. Joseph Project was established in 1998 through a partnership between Western Michigan University, the Fort St. Joseph Museum, Support the Fort, the City of Niles, and other community groups who share an interest in the preservation and interpretation of the site. Although there have been scores of publications, presentations, and papers presented, we have highlighted some of the most important events from the birth of the Project to the present. We hope to continue this excellent record of public outreach and education as we look to the future.

1998:
- WMU students and volunteers conducted the Phase I survey that identified material evidence of French and English activities along the banks of the St. Joseph River where Dr. Joseph L. Peyser predicted the site would be.

2000:
- WMU students tested the Lyne site (20BE10) and found both ancient and colonial-era artifacts.

2001:
- The first multi-week field school was conducted through a partnership that formed the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project. Excavations consisted of exploring the Lyne site to reveal more ancient and colonial-era artifacts.

2002:
- The Project utilizes a dewatering system for the first time to explore the fort site. Several units were excavated resulting in the recovery of thousands of 18th century artifacts, identification of architectural remains, and undisturbed deposits. The results of the field season proved that the site of Fort St. Joseph had been found and it contained undisturbed deposits that could provide information about the fur trade society and Native American and European interactions. This season also featured the first week-long summer camp programs that invited participants to excavate at the fort and learn about the archaeological process. The Project also produced its first, in what would become a series, of videos: "In Search of Fort St. Joseph: Lessons in History, Culture and Scientific Methodology."

2003:
- The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project received the Michigan Governor's First Annual Historic Preservation Award.

2004:
- Excavations continued with the aid of dewatering. The field season hosted the first open house that welcomed over 250 visitors to the site to learn and share in the archaeological process. The summer camp program continued to involve the public. A temporary museum exhibit ("Shared Waters") included information on the search for, and discovery of, Fort St. Joseph.

2005:
- The Open House was expanded to a two-day program and brought in nearly 2,000 visitors to the site. Excavations continued to identify further architectural remains and provided further insight into 18th century New France.

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- The Open House was expanded to a two-day program and brought in nearly 2,000 visitors to the site. Excavations continued to identify further architectural remains and provided further insight into 18th century New France.

2007:
- This year saw the continuing public outreach efforts of the project. The Niles City Council appointed the Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee to make recommendations for site investigations and interpretations. The Open House again attracted nearly 2,000 visitors. The Project produced a promotional video "Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project: Service and Learning in the Community," and was the recipient of the Michigan Historical Society's Educational Program Award.

2008:
- This year marked the end of the first decade of site investigations and public outreach. Western Michigan University and the City of Niles signed a 10-year agreement, solidifying the partnership between the communities. The project received a Michigan Endowment for the Humanities Grant to conduct the Open House.

2009:
- The third video, "Making the Past Come Alive: Public Archaeology at Fort St. Joseph," was released and distributed. The Project launched its new website in order to have information readily available to the public. Public outreach and excavations continued to produce excellent results through the field school program. The first issue of the Fort St. Joseph Post newsletter was distributed.

2010:
- The project was the winner of the prestigious Archaeological Institute of America’s first Education Outreach Contest. A grant was received from the Michigan Humanities Council to support our annual open house. A grant was awarded from Digital Antiquity to upload, store, and make accessible digital data associated with Fort St. Joseph. This Open House brought the total number of visitors to the site to over 10,000 since 2004.

2011:
- The project was the recipient of a grant from the Michigan Humanities Council to support the annual open house. An educational booklet on the Women of New France was published and distributed to over 280 schools, libraries, and museums. A new blog was created to keep followers informed of findings, activities, and events. The Project established the Volunteer of the Year award for service to the project.

2012:
- A film crew collected footage for a new DVD "Militia Muster." The Project obtained a new 5-year permit to continue excavations on the floodplain. The Open House and public outreach events continued to attract a large audience with excellent feedback. The second issue in the booklet series, The Fur Trade, was published.

2013:
- The newly released DVD, "Militia Muster on the eve of Revolution," was given the 2013 Golden Aurora Award for excellence in Social Studies-related educational films. The blog reached over 25,000 unique views since its inception. A film crew visited the site to collect footage for a new PBS series titled America: From the Ground Up!

2014:
- The blog continues to be updated. Plans for the summer conference on the future of the project continue to take shape, as students and volunteers continue to process data and discover new information about Fort St. Joseph and the people of the past.
Alumni News

Tabitha Hubbard, a participant in the 2012 field season, was recently accepted to the graduate program at Indiana University in Indianapolis. She will begin her museum studies program in the fall. Congratulations Tabitha!

Cassie Mohney, a participant of the 2012 field school, has continued her work in CRM and was recently accepted to the graduate program at University of Sheffield. Congratulations Cassie!

LisaMarie Malischke, M.A. & Ethnohistory Certificate (2003 – 2009), is currently a Doctoral Candidate at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Her dissertation, currently titled *The Heterogeneity of Early French and Native Forts and Settlements. A Comparison to Fort St. Pierre (A.D. 1719-1729) in French Colonial Louisiana*, compares whole artifact assemblages using both a statistical approach and an artifact-in-context approach to examine the situational experiences of French and Native people during the early decades of the eighteenth century. Nowadays she is drafting the last few chapters of her dissertation and applying to both summer and long-term jobs. She is hoping to complete and defend her dissertation at the beginning of summer. She is looking forward to warmer weather (yes even in Alabama!) and whatever the future has in store for her.

Erica D’Elia worked with the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project for two summers. In 2011 she served as the graduate teaching assistant for the field school. Then, she returned the following summer as the public outreach coordinator helping to organize the Open House and Media day as well as serving as a Project representative at public lectures, the Niles French Market, and around town! During her two years at Western Michigan University she worked in the lab and helped with the processing and cataloging of artifacts recovered through the summer field season.

After wrapping up her second summer with FSJAP she accepted a position as the archaeology laboratory manager at James Madison’s Montpelier, the plantation estate of our nation’s fourth president. At Montpelier she works cataloging artifacts, supervising a team of students, interns, and volunteers, and speaking with the public as they tour our work space to see what they are working on and learn more about archaeological processes. She also acts as an instructor for their week-long expedition programs teaching participants about archaeological lab processing.

In November, 2013 she successfully defended her thesis “An Assessment of Public Outreach with Children and Educators Conducted by the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project” and finished her Master’s degree at Western Michigan University. Her thesis project explored the intersections between archaeology, public outreach, and education. She worked with the Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Summer Camps where she interviewed students and teachers about their experiences in the program and their understandings of formal education. She also had the opportunity to design several hands-on interpretive activities for the camp program and Open House.

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Project Outcomes: 2013-14

July 2013

*B Barb Cook, May Ellen Drolet, Michael Nassaney, and Candace Skalla participated in the Boulder Rededication Event, Niles, MI.

*The 2013 field season began with students arriving in Niles, MI for the 38th annual archaeological field school.

August 2013

*The annual Open House took place with an emphasis on foodways at Fort St. Joseph and provided a variety of activities for all to enjoy. Over 1,500 people attended the event and provided positive feedback.


*Nassaney traveled to Wisconsin and Minnesota to visit fur trade sites and collections for his research on the archaeology of the North American fur trade.

*Nassaney lectured to the Parchment Public Library on recent findings at Fort St. Joseph.

*Nassaney, Dr. José António Brandão, and Tim Bober discussed the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project at the annual meeting of the Historical Society of Michigan.

October 2013

* Students from the Project attended Michigan Archaeology Day in Lansing, MI. The Project was well received and interacted with over 500 visitors.

* Nassaney presented at the annual Michigan Museums Association Conference in Bay City, MI.

* Nassaney and Alex Brand presented a paper on the history of Fort St. Joseph and the French in the St. Joseph River Valley at the Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference. Brand also presented a poster summarizing the finds and work of the 2011-2013 field seasons.

* Nassaney delivered an invited lecture to the Clements Library at the University of Michigan.

November 2013

*Nassaney presented at the annual conference of the Center for French Colonial Studies.

* Skylar Bauer prepared a summary of the field season for the Society for Historical Archaeology Newsletter.

* Erica D’Elia defended her M.A. thesis entitled “An Assessment of Public Outreach with Children and Educators Conducted by the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project.”

December 2013

* Lab students completed sorting soil samples, and continued to inventory and record the artifacts collected during the 2013 field season.

January 2014

* Nassaney presented a co-authored paper by Brand, Erin Claussen, Ian Kerr, and Nassaney at the 47th annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology sponsored by the SHA.

* Project alumni, Andrew Beaupré, organized a session highlighting the forts and families of New France.

* The Project was awarded two first-place and two second-place awards in the SHA’s annual photo competition. The Project was particularly proud of placing first in the new diversity category.

March 2014

* Nassaney presented an invited lecture to the Chicago Archaeological Society in Evanston, IL.

April 2014

* Brand presented on work in the lab and recent research outcomes to project supporters in Niles, MI.

September 2014

* The 10th annual Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference will take place in Niles, MI.
On August 8, 2013, Seth Allard, a graduate student at WMU, spoke during the media open house at Fort St. Joseph and shared his experience from the field school.

Anii, Mueshkamiikaan Bemosed Ndzihnicaa, Mukwa Dodaim, Bowheting Ndoonjibaa.

What I just said in Anishnaabemowin, the language of the Native Americans who historically resided in this area, is an introduction. Translated, I stated that my name is Man Who Walks the Red Road, I am of the Bear Clan, and my home is in the gathering place near the rapids now known as Sault Saint Marie, Michigan.

A common question asked by visitors to the Fort Saint Joseph archaeological site is: So what did you find? This year the most common answer is: Some bone, lead shot, beads, wampum, pipe stems and bowls, gunflints and gun parts, and structural evidence of homes; and we have read some historical documents, as well. But what do these discoveries tell us? What story can these artifacts give us that make the painstaking extraction of these items and the associated historical research worthy of our attention? After all, as the placards lining the drive up to the site say, "Archaeology is not about what you find; it's about what you find out."

What we have learned from these artifacts and the supporting documents is that the French and Native American people who lived in and around the Fort enjoyed a mutual relationship. They prepared and consumed meals, hunted and trapped, traded goods, created artwork, smoked the pipe, built homes, fought, lived, and died together; as neighbors, friends, and eventually as family. As a Native American of the Ojibwa nation, these findings are significant because it is rare to find a story in which my ancestors experienced anything but warfare, forced relocation, poverty and destitution, racism, and deep cultural loss as a result of Native and non-Native interaction. But this place and the people who lived here give me hope—for my people and future generations of all people—that we can live with and for each other, in a way that not only tolerates cultural differences, but embraces and shares cultural identity for the benefit of all. I would be remiss if I did not tell you that the story of Fort Saint Joseph reminds me of another, very similar and also inspirational story.

Like the French explorers, traders, soldiers and missionaries who established the Fort in the late 17th century, another group of people, all foreign to this area, entered and established themselves here over the past six weeks. This group had a common goal as well, and like the French, they knew that without the support and friendship of the local Natives, their goal could not be met. Six weeks later, the Western Michigan University archaeology field school students and staff attained their goals with the help of the residents of Niles, Michigan. Both student and local volunteer ate, lived, worked and made great discoveries together, meeting a common goal of unearthing this important piece of a larger historical and cultural puzzle, one trowel of dirt at a time. It seems that the initial residents of Fort Saint Joseph not only became an aim of archaeological discovery, but intentionally or unintentionally, they also turned out to be a lasting example of tolerance, partnership, and hope for the future. All this we have learned from some bone, lead shot, beads, wampum, pipe stems and bowls, gunflints and gun parts, and structural evidence of homes.

I invite you all to enjoy the discoveries of Fort Saint Joseph, to review the results of the hard work of a community of archaeologists, and capable and essential volunteers. While you tour the site, make discoveries and theories of your own, because as you do, you also become a part of this amazing process. But remember, archaeology is not about what you find; it's about what you find out. As for me, I have to go back to work; to be the first person in my family to return to a Métis French and Native American home in over 200 years.

Chi Miigwech,
Thank you very much.

Seth Allard