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Archaeology, History and Activities at Fort St. Joseph 5: Project History

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Project History

Investigations at the long lost fort were begun in 1998 by WMU archaeologists.



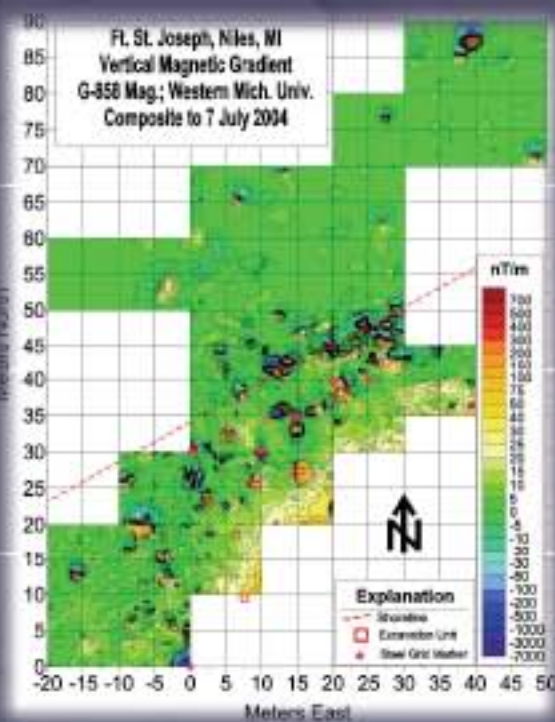
Local historians collect artifacts from Fort St. Joseph.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, local historians collected artifacts from the vicinity of the fort, but subsequent land-use changes made it difficult for archaeologists to locate the site. Contradictory local oral histories placed the fort at various sites along the St. Joseph River. Dr. Joseph L. Peyser used documentary sources to determine correctly that the site was on the east side of the river in Niles. A local organization called Support the Fort, Inc. interested in the preservation and interpretation of the fort, invited Western Michigan University archaeologists to conduct a survey to locate the site in 1998. Numerous French and English artifacts were found in the general area predicted by Peyser,

albeit beneath the ground water table, complicating excavations.



WMU archaeologists today at the site.



Magnetometry maps help archaeologists to plan where to place units.

Since 2002, WMU has conducted its annual archaeological field school at the site. To do this, a sophisticated drainage system is employed. A geophysical survey including magnetometry followed in order to guide further investigations. Excavations have identified undisturbed features, artifact concentrations, and activity areas at the site which have the potential to yield information on the social history of New France and the 18th century fur trade in the western Great Lakes.