



The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project: 2015 Field Season

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History of Fort St. Joseph

Fort St. Joseph was founded in 1691 along the St. Joseph River in Niles, MI as a French mission, garrison, and trading post complex. The fort became one of the most important eighteenth-century outposts in the western Great Lakes region, serving as a vital link in the commercial and communication network of New France. Goods and ideas were exchanged between the French and local Native Americans who maintained close interactions and alliances throughout the western Great Lakes region. Fort St. Joseph fell into the hands of the British during the French and Indian War and was attacked during Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763. French traders continued to occupy the fort until it was abandoned in 1781. In 1998 Western Michigan University (WMU) archaeologists used documentary sources identified by Joseph L. Peyser to locate the physical remains of the fort.



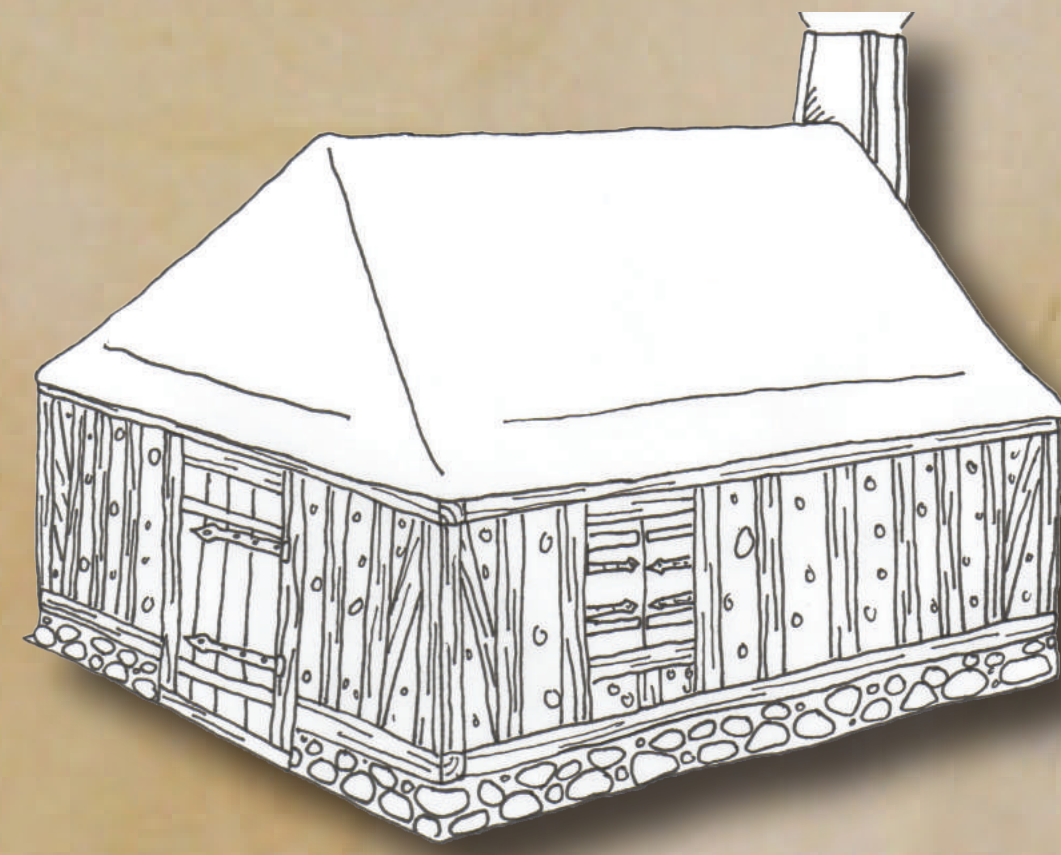
Artifacts from this past field season include: a Type D French flintlock sideplate (top; 15-2-22W); a lead seal (bottom right; 15-2-15W); and a ring with blue glass insets (bottom left; 15-2-48).

History of the Project

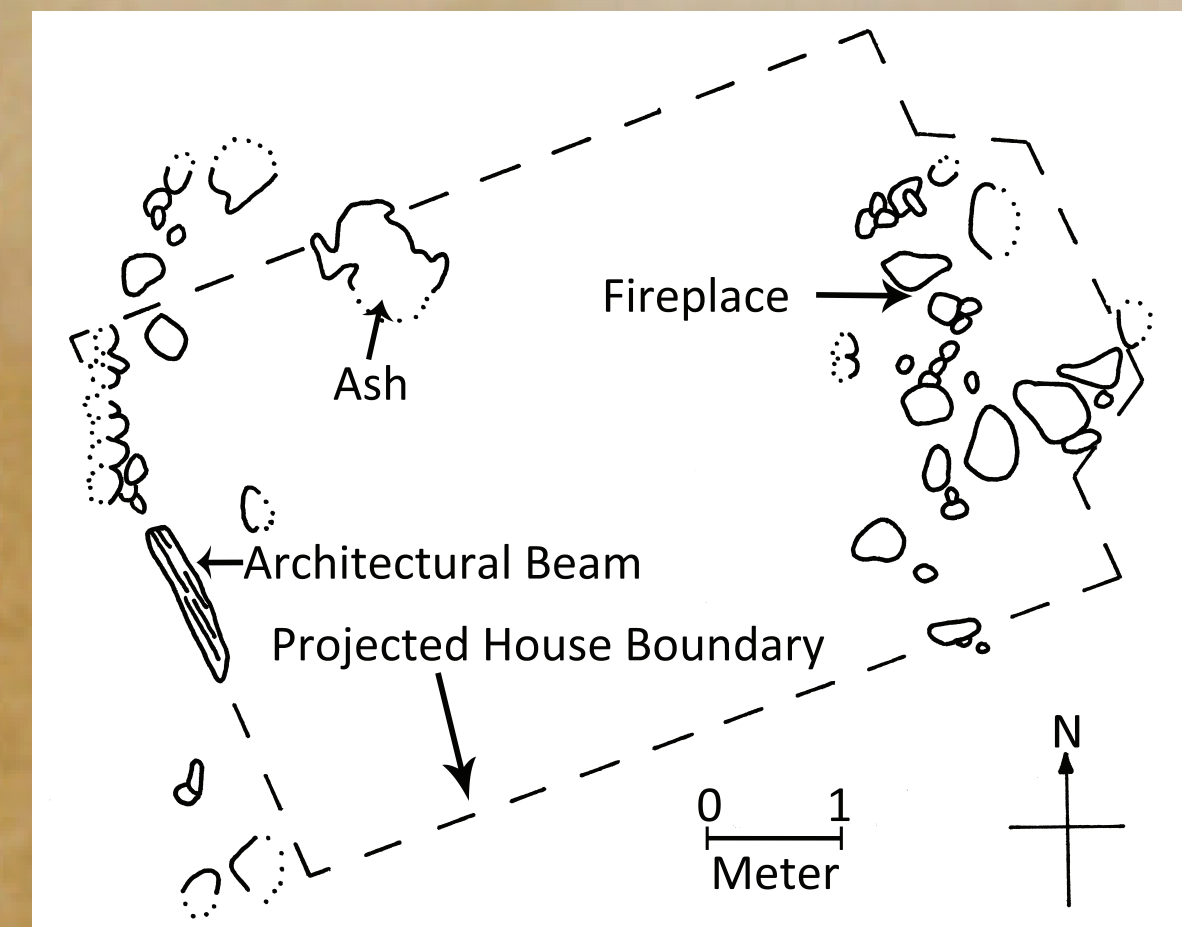
The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project is a partnership between WMU and the City of Niles, MI. It began when Support the Fort, Inc., a local history group, contacted WMU to search for the fort. A shovel test pit survey revealed eighteenth-century French and English artifacts including Jesuit rings, glass beads, flintlock hardware, hand-wrought nails, faience, creamware, and knives stamped with the names of French cutlers. Subsequent excavations over 11 field seasons have uncovered features and artifacts that reflect the daily lives of the fort residents. The Project was certified by the Register of Professional Archaeologists in 2015 and was selected as the best among registered field schools. It has also won awards from the Archaeological Institute of America, the Historical Society of Michigan, and the Office of the State Archaeologist in Michigan.



The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project is a partnership
between Western Michigan University and the City of Niles.



An artistic recreation of a house discovered over multiple field seasons.



Plan view of House 2 exposed in excavation.



Stones interpreted as an eighteenth-century foundation.



Students and campers observe Michael Nassaney, the Project's principal investigator, extracting a core sample.



Amelia Harp (left) and Erika Loveland were the recipients of scholarships from the Society for American Archaeology.

Summary of Excavations

Our current research design is oriented toward identifying evidence of eighteenth-century activities in the vicinity of Fort St. Joseph and collecting architectural data to understand the building styles and construction techniques at the site. Excavations have identified eighteenth-century artifacts throughout the Niles vicinity, although most of the archaeological materials contemporaneous with the fort have been found adjacent to a series of fireplaces uncovered since 2002.

Six 1 x 2 meter units were opened this field season in locations where we expected to intercept walls in order to ascertain the size, orientation, construction methods, and contents of the buildings associated with the fireplaces along the river. In one of these units, four structural stones (10 to 15 cm long) were found in a linear orientation, which we designated as Feature 26. These stones appear similar to ones found in two other partial foundation walls associated with other buildings on the site. Further excavation is needed to determine their function and association with other architectural features.

Notable artifacts found this year include: a French marine military button, a Type D French flintlock sideplate, a copper alloy bell, a ring with blue glass insets, and two lead seals (see artifacts). The seals testify to the volume of cloth that was imported to the site.



Over 800 students visited the site on school field trips to learn about the history and archaeology of Fort St. Joseph.



Living history re-enactors demonstrate timber framing techniques like those used at Fort St. Joseph.



An Open House visitor is mesmerized by a hand-wrought nail, similar to those found at Fort St. Joseph.



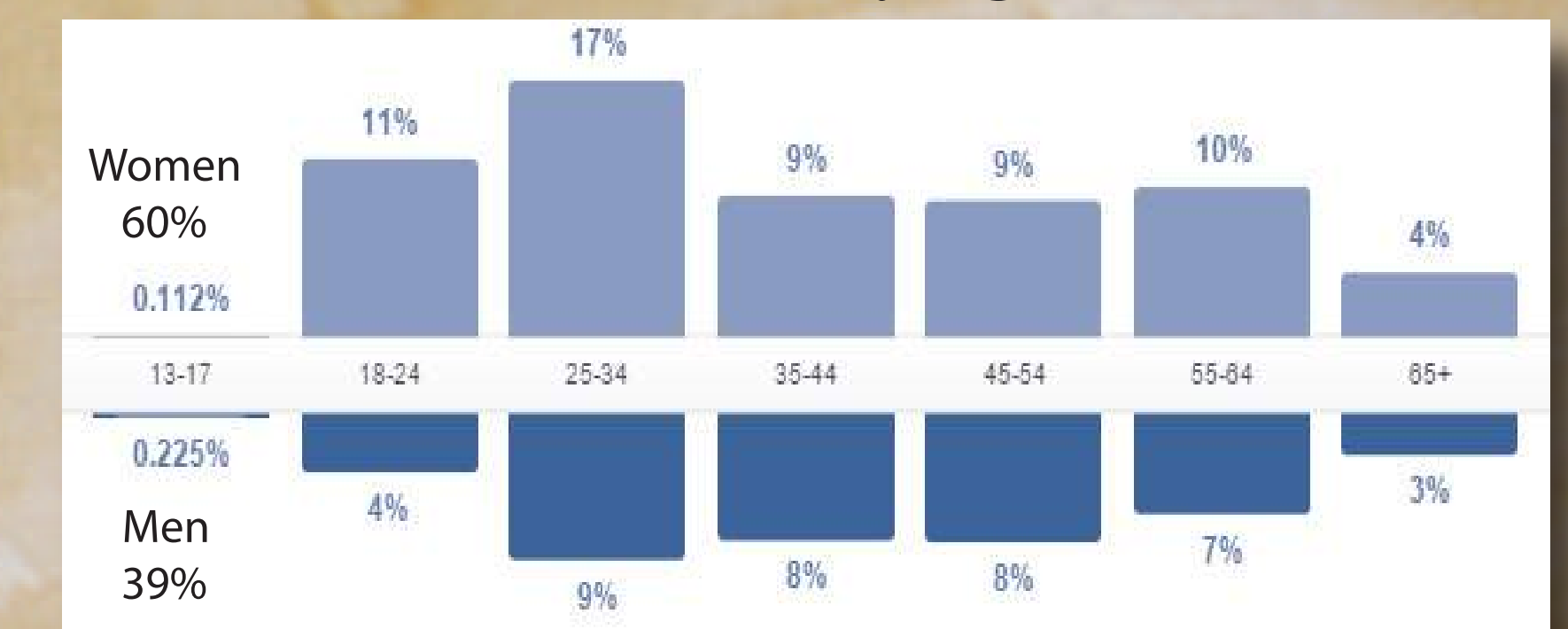
Our Public Education Instructor, Tim Bober, and a camper examine an artifact found during excavation.

Public Outreach at Fort St. Joseph

The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project has maintained a longstanding commitment to engage the local Niles community. Examples of public involvement include:

- The Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee contributes input regarding all aspects of the research design.
- Lifelong learners, teachers, and students can attend our week-long summer camp programs to participate in recovering and interpreting the history and archaeology of Fort St. Joseph.
- An annual Summer Archaeology Lecture Series features prominent speakers who discuss topics of both historical and archaeological interests.
- The annual Open House has drawn over 20,000 visitors since its inception in 2006. Visitors can view ongoing excavations, interact with living history re-enactors, and meet archaeologists and public scholars.

Facebook Followers By Age and Gender



The majority of followers are women (60 percent), while the modal range is between 25 and 34 years old for both genders.

Expanding the Project's Social Media Presence

Over the past year, the Project has strategically expanded our social media presence in an effort to explore the advantages of using several new platforms to reach a larger and more diverse audience. Previously, the Project utilized a blog and Facebook page, but now we have added both Instagram and Twitter. Instagram reaches 150 million active users and is focused on visual marketing. Twitter also has an enormous reach and allows us to connect and engage with our followers. This venture has also fostered our efforts to communicate and collaborate with other archaeological projects with a shared interest in colonialism and the fur trade.

Look for us on:

- Blogspot: fortstjosepharchaeology.blogspot.com
- Facebook: Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project
- Instagram: [fsjarchaeology](https://www.instagram.com/fsjarchaeology)
- Twitter: [@fsjarchaeology](https://twitter.com/fsjarchaeology)



A strap hinge found at Fort St. Joseph (04-2-137).