

Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project



2021

Annual Report



Introduction

The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project continues to investigate and interpret Fort St. Joseph—one of the most important archaeological sites in the western Great Lakes region. Although the pandemic forced us to postpone and modify some of our traditional activities, we are pleased to report that we continue to make progress in revealing the hidden history of the fort. This report will discuss our accomplishments and exciting new discoveries.

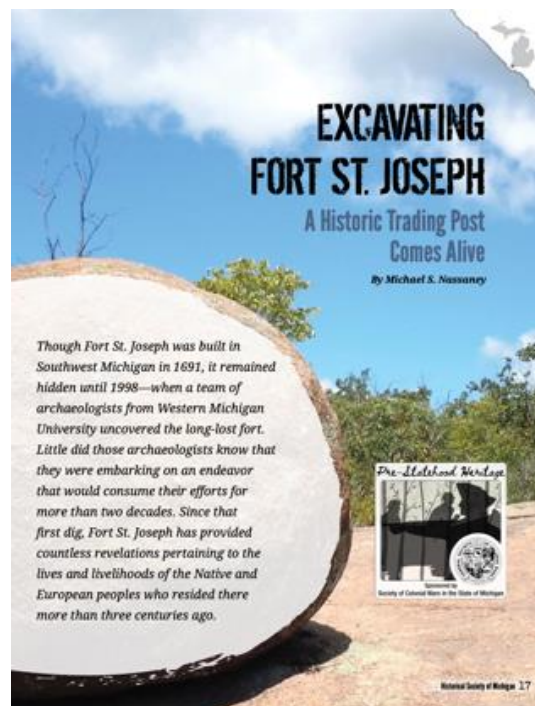
Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee

Chair and Vice Chair

Christina Arseneau
Mollie Watson

Committee Members

Bob Ahrens
Jamie Bennett
Andrea Burns
Matthew Bussler
Mary Ellen Drolet
Leona Hein
Erika Hartley
Neil Hassinger
Michael Nassaney
Larry Sehy



Students and staff of the 2021 WMU archaeological field school on the first day of the course (top left) and during the midst of the field season (bottom left). Findings from our excavations are presented at conferences and published in articles such as the one featured in the Michigan History Magazine.

Highlights

- ⊕ A virtual winter lecture series, *Fort Talk Thursdays*, was initiated. Presentations in this series focused on archaeology and public outreach at colonial sites.
- ⊕ We resumed excavations at the site revealing more undisturbed deposits of eighteenth-century artifacts, including an unusual lead adornment item (top left) and bone crucifix (top right).
- ⊕ The annual summer lecture series focused on the theme “People of the Post” and featured presentations by José António Brandão, Loraine DiCerbo, Robert Myers, and Michael S. Nassaney.
- ⊕ Nine students attended our online archaeology summer camp program. Visit the [Niles History Center’s website](#) to find out how you can participate!
- ⊕ The 2021 Archaeology Open House welcomed nearly 800 visitors who explored the site and our excavations, viewed artifact displays, learned about the people of the post through a living history village, experienced a canoe ride on the St. Joseph River in a replica birchbark canoe, and much more!
- ⊕ The Fort St. Joseph Curatorial Fellow, Erika Hartley, continued the process of organizing and making accessible the archaeological collections.
- ⊕ In November 2021 the book, *Fort St. Joseph Revealed: The Historical Archaeology of a Fur Trading Post*, was released in paperback.



Living history (above) and wet screen (bottom right) demonstrations occurred throughout the Archaeology Open House. Recent finds such as the lead adornment piece and bone crucifix (top right, respectfully) were also available for the public to see.



Archaeological Fieldwork

2021 Excavation Summary

Since 2002, the site has been investigated by the Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project—a partnership between WMU and the city of Niles. These excavations have provided a better understanding of eighteenth-century life at the fort, particularly in regard to adornment and dress, architecture, foodways, religion, cultural exchange, and the fur trade (see Nassaney 2019). Research conducted in the past several years has been focused on identifying and investigating the architectural remains associated with the fort and their spatial extent.

To determine the site's southern boundary, we conducted excavations in 2019 beneath the landfill. Three 25 x 5 m trenches were excavated through nearly 2 m of landfill consisting of glass bottles, appliances, tires, and domestic and industrial debris. Underneath the landfill deposits, we encountered a plow zone similar to that observed on the floodplain. Core samples and test excavations in several locations beneath the landfill have led to the recovery of eighteenth-century artifacts, ecofacts, and a bone midden, designated Feature 29.

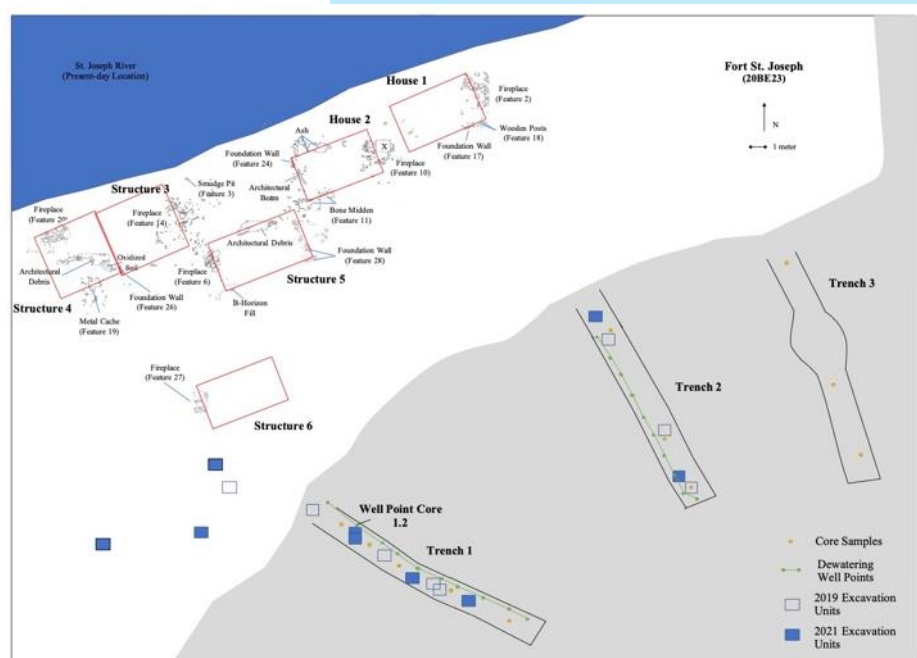


Students of the 2021 WMU archaeological field school.

11
Students

8
Test Units

10,115
Artifacts



Map of the proposed structures, twentieth-century landfill, backhoe trenches, and 2021 test excavations at Fort St. Joseph. Illustration by Jason Glatz and Erika K. Hartley.

After a hiatus in excavation at Fort St. Joseph due to Covid-19, we resumed investigations this past July and August. Project members excavated on the floodplain and in the trenches to identify further evidence of eighteenth-century activities. We focused on exploring the areas in the southern portion of the floodplain and in Trenches 1 and 2 to identify structural features, specifically in the area of the bone midden.

Eight 1 x1 m units were excavated in 2021; eighteenth-century artifacts were identified in seven of the units. In Trench 1, our excavations revealed the top of a potential bone midden located in close proximity to Feature 29. In addition, a large square stone was exposed about 4 m to the north. This cut stone is uncommon at the site; other architectural stones tend to have little modification.

Though we were unable to definitively establish the southern boundary of the site and locate additional structures, we did confirm that a variety of eighteenth-century artifacts were deposited beneath the landfill. These and the 2019 findings indicate the need to remove more of the landfill and expand our excavations.



Students were trained in standard techniques of site survey and excavation, as well as the processing, cataloging, and analysis of artifacts and feature data (left). Eighteenth-century artifacts recovered include: a bear mandible (top right), a glass bottleneck (middle right), a lead seal (top middle), and a faience bowl rim fragment (bottom right).

Public Outreach

Activities, Events, Media, and Volunteers

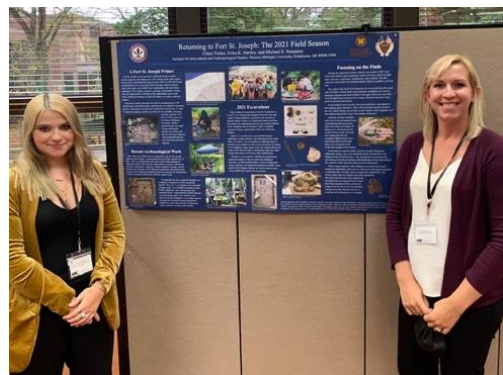
This past year, members of the Project increased their visibility by hosting and participating in various outreach opportunities across the state and online. For more information, please see our most recent contribution to the [Society for Historical Archaeology's Newsletter](#).

	2019	2020	2021
Archaeology Campers	27	-	9 (virtual)
Archaeology Open House Attendees	800	-	800
Lecture Series			
Winter	-	-	250 (virtual)
Summer	200	-	250 (virtual)
Online Presence			
<u>Avg. Blogs Views</u>	109	128	63
<u>Facebook Likes</u>	1,663	1,761	1,890
<u>Instagram Follows</u>	368	514	626
Newsletter			
Avg. Active Subscribers	-	160 opens	130 opens
Outreach Activities and Events	21	8	15



Open House visitors can learn about eighteenth century building techniques (left) and the daily lives of fort occupants (center), and our archaeological excavations.

The Niles History Center welcomed several field trips and group visits to the museum. In total, **254 participants came to learn about the history of the fort and the archaeological work** taking place at the site. We welcome those interested in scheduling a program or partnering in an event to reach out to [Erika Hartley](#) or [Mollie Watson](#).



During the summer, middle school students who sign up for our summer camps can excavate alongside university students (top left and right). We were also able to provide free voyageur canoe rides thanks to our friends at Support the Fort, Inc (middle left). At the end of the season, our findings and activities were summarized in the form of a poster for the Midwest Historical Archaeology Conference held in Lansing.

Events

- [Archaeology Open House](#)
- Michigan Archaeology Day
- Niles History Walks
- Niles History Center's
Holiday Open House
- Niles' Summer My Way
Site Visit
- Niles' Third Thursdays
- Summer Lecture Series
- T-Shirt Design Competition
- Winter Lecture Series

Presentations to:

- Center for French Colonial
Studies Conference
- [Heritage Museum and
Cultural Center](#)
- [Michigan Archaeological
Society – Huron Valley](#)
- Midwest Historical
Archaeology Conference
- Conference on Historical
and Underwater
Archaeology
- Wayne State University's
Historical Archaeology
Class

Questions? Want to join in the fun?

Are you interested in archaeology, but not sure if this career is right for you? Or, perhaps you are looking to fulfill your childhood dream? Or, maybe you are in search of an adventure and looking for some fun! If you answered yes to one or more of these questions, we suggest you look into WMU's archaeological field school and our archaeology summer camp program. We hope to see you in the field!

Another way to join our team is by supporting the Project! Your contribution assists with transporting and housing students, maintaining field equipment, supporting student scholarships, hosting outreach events, defraying the costs of excavations, developing public programming, and preserving the Fort St. Joseph collection for the future. If you would like to designate your gift for specific needs, please check out a few items on our wish list below.

Cloth Artifact Bags (2)	\$20 per 15/pack
Custom Storage Boxes (10)	\$25 per box
Munsell Soil Book (2)	\$250 each

Various volunteer opportunities are also available throughout the year. Please inquire about how you can become a member of our team at coas-ias-fsj@wmich.edu.



Thank you!

To all of our fort followers and volunteers, we would like to thank you for your ongoing support! It has been difficult for many of people and organizations across the globe since the COVID-19 pandemic began and our Project is no exception. However, your continued encouragement and engagement with our virtual and in-person activities have helped keep us motivated and made this past year a huge success!

