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Death and Rebirth of Public Archaeology at Strawbery Banke, 1970–1985

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For nearly a half-century, Strawbery Banke's archaeology program has contributed to and benefited from major trends in American urban archaeology. During the 1960s this outdoor museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, was a focal point for radically different approaches to the study of urban landfill by Roland Robbins and Daniel Ingersoll, at a time when landfill was largely neglected. Strawbery Banke also explored the variable practices of contracted and academic archaeology and realized early on that neither approach produced an enduring legacy of public engagement. In 1975 the museum experimented with retaining a resident archaeologist and soon committed to construction of the Jones House Archaeology Center and the hosting of an ongoing public archaeology program. This article reviews the genesis and evolution of this program during the period 1970–1985.

Depuis près d'un demi-siècle, le programme d'archéologie de Strawbery Banke a contribué et a bénéficié des grands développements en archéologie urbaine américaine. Au cours des années 1960, ce musée en plein air de Portsmouth, dans le New Hampshire, a été un point focal pour des approches radicalement différentes de l'étude d'un dépotoir urbain par Roland Robbins et Daniel Ingersoll, à une époque où les dépotoirs étaient largement négligés. Strawbery Banke a également permis d'explorer les pratiques variables de l'archéologie contractuelle et universitaire, mais s'est rapidement rendu compte qu'aucune des deux approches ne produisait un héritage durable d'engagement public. En 1975, le musée a expérimenté l'embauche d'un archéologue résident et s'est rapidement engagé dans la construction du Jones House Archaeology Center et l'organisation d'un programme d'archéologie publique. Cet article passe en revue la genèse et l'évolution de ce programme au cours de la période entre 1970 et 1985.

Introduction

For nearly a half-century, Strawbery Banke Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has contributed to and benefited from major trends in American archaeology. These developments are ably summarized by Mary Dupre and Sheila Charles in their articles on the history of Strawbery Banke archaeology (Dupre 1995; Charles 2010). In the 1960s the museum was the setting for innovative, research-driven approaches to the excavation and study of urban landfill. In the 1970s it focused on conducting terrestrial-sites archaeology, with both public and academic input, and several sites of regional and national importance were discovered. In the 1980s, its archaeologists generated and published comparative archaeological data on colonial and 19th-century Portsmouth neighborhoods. This was in concert with the methods and goals of urban archaeology programs being established at Alexandria, Virginia, and Annapolis and Baltimore, Maryland (Dickens 1982).

The most important discovery was the very positive public and professional response to public archaeology itself. Public archaeology, a term coined by Charles McGimsey in 1972, was in its infancy. Today, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA) defines it, in the words of Carol McDavid, as "engaging the public in order to share archaeological findings and/or promote stewardship of cultural resources or to otherwise make archaeology relevant to society by providing the public with the means for constructing their own past" (McDavid 2002: 3; SAA 2021). This article refers to "the public" both in the sense of people as well as their government. In Portsmouth, Strawbery Banke Inc. engaged the local public and supported archaeological activities using local, state, and federal funds.

This article presents an overview of Strawbery Banke archaeology from the 1960s to 1980s and focuses on public archaeology

Figure 1. A late-19th-century bird's-eye view of Puddle Dock from the north, now the Strawbery Banke Museum area in Portsmouth, New Hampshire (Ruger 1877).

projects conducted from 1975 to 1985, when I was either in residence or a frequent museum visitor. In the journal *Public Archaeology*, Peter Gould observes that case studies "provide a unique opportunity to explore complexities and report outcomes that are by their nature not easily reduced to statistical data" (Gould 2016: 6). The mid-20th-century beginnings of Strawbery Banke, Inc. are summarized to establish the institutional context for the archaeological case studies described for each following decade.

The Decade of the 1960s

The 1960s was a turbulent decade, especially in American cities. On one hand, Portsmouth benefited from being connected to the interstate highway system, but, on the other hand, was adversely impacted by urban renewal, otherwise known at the time as "urban removal." Both the Marcy Street/Washington Street parcel in Portsmouth's South End and the Deer Street parcels in Portsmouth's North End were designated for urban renewal, and the residents of these ethnic neighborhoods were subsequently displaced (Gumprecht 2014). The 8.9 ac. parcel bounded by Court, Marcy, Washington, and Hancock streets was slated for complete demolition. This neighborhood, focused on the inlet known as Puddle Dock, was lined with residences and workshops of colonial, Federal-period, and 19th-century craftsmen until filled in at the end of the 19th century (FIG. 1). One of its former properties, the Governor John Wentworth (1671–1730) House, had already been cannibalized for its elegant paneling, and its architectural elements were acquired in 1926 by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in Manhattan. In 1958, Strawbery Banke, Inc. was incorporated as a Portsmouth preservation agency, and, in 1960, was designated as the developer of the Marcy Street/Washington Street area. In 1964, Strawbery Banke acquired title to the property and 42 eligible historic structures were preserved.

Even after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) in 1966, archaeology was undertaken sporadically and often improperly. Cultural resource management (CRM) had not yet emerged as an industry, and existing institutions, including museums, were often ill-prepared to conduct fieldwork and report on results. The scarcity of historical archaeologists provided opportunities for self-trained amateurs. Popular publications by Ivor Noël Hume (1928–2017) and

Roland Wells Robbins (1908–1987) excited the interested public.

Archaeology at Strawbery Banke

Construction of a sewer in the Puddle Dock area in 1964 attracted the public as well as members of the New Hampshire Archeological Society to collect artifacts that were lacking context (FIG. 2) (Dupre 1995: 14). Dozens of colonial-period pilings discovered during the project were removed and deposited behind the Peter Lowd House. The museum's first archaeology excavation project was conducted in 1964 or 1965 by Jan Herman, described by Mary Dupre as a "former UNH student" who excavated a privy at the William Pitt Tavern as an independent-study project (Dupre 1995: 17). For reasons that are still obscure, in the spring of 1966 Roland Robbins excavated, with heavy machinery, some wharf faces on the north side of Puddle Dock. The photographs of this project show cribbing and wharf structures, however, there is no technical report and the contexts of artifacts were not documented (Dupre 1995: 14; Starbuck 2006: 109).

The first professional excavation at Strawbery Banke was conducted on the south rim of Puddle Dock by Harvard graduate student Daniel Ingersoll in 1968 and 1969 (FIG. 3) (Ingersoll 1971; this issue). The project attracted volunteers during its two-summer duration, but, similar to other 1960s museum excavations, no enduring program was established. Strawbery Banke and Portsmouth alike struggled with issues of architectural and landscape preservation, rather than archaeology (Candee 1996).

The Decade of the 1970s

Concern about wholesale destruction of the nation's historic resources led to the 1974 amendment of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. Executive Order 11953 required the first systematic inventory of archaeological resources on federal properties. American studies programs were on the upswing in America's academic institutions. Multigenerational community studies inspired by the French "Annales" school focused on New England towns; see, e.g., Demos (1970), Greven (1970), and Lockridge (1970). In Portsmouth, architectural historians, including Richard Candee and James Garvin, explored the material culture and architectural correlates of cultural change across several generations of Portsmouth residents (Candee 1996; Garvin

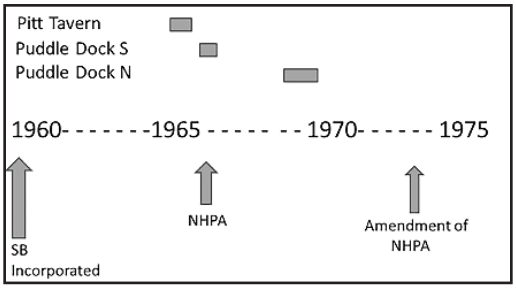

Figure 2. The chronology of preservation legislation and Strawbery Banke archaeology projects, 1960–

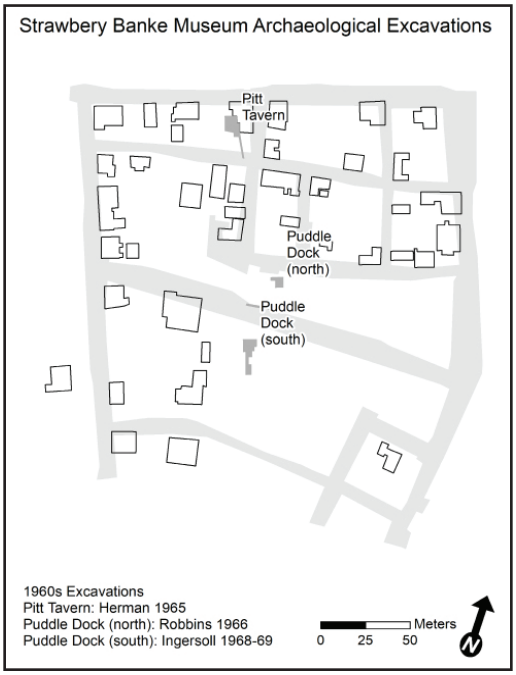

Figure 3. A map of 1960s archaeology projects conducted at Strawbery Banke. (Map by Alexandra Martin, 2019.)

1974, 2001). The field of historical archaeology, established as a professional organization in the late 1960s, gained recognition as a method of conducting research on social groups that were poorly documented in American history.

Outdoor museums, such as Old Sturbridge Village and Plimoth Plantation, conducted archaeology through their research departments. A fortuitous situation emerged when both Plimoth Plantation and Brown University simultaneously hired archaeologist James Deetz, a co-founder of the new discipline of historical archaeology (FIG. 4). As one of his undergraduate students, I was willingly steered from medieval archaeology in the direction of American historical archaeology and museum archaeology.

Archaeology at Strawbery Banke

No professional archaeology was conducted between 1970 and 1975 at Strawbery Banke after Daniel Ingersoll's departure (FIG. 5). Collections of excavated artifacts were stored in paper bags, and the 18th-century pilings removed from Puddle Dock continued to rot in the rear lot of the Peter Lowd House. At least one 19th-century privy was destroyed by construction work. In 1975, thanks to the efforts of the museum's dynamic young curator, Richard Borges, Strawbery Banke received the Patch Tool Collection, purchased and donated by Edward French of York, Maine. Mr. French also covered the costs of rehabilitating the Lowd House for housing and displaying the collection. This required installing an HVAC unit behind the Lowd House, on property documented as once having belonged to a mid-18th-century earthenware potter named Samuel Marshall (FIG. 6). Because of the project's anticipated construction impacts, Richard Borges contacted Professor Deetz at Brown University, due to his renowned program in historical archaeology. In the spring of my graduation year, I traveled from Providence, Rhode Island, to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to explore an offered one-month job opportunity. The prospect of moving to Portsmouth to conduct archaeological work and develop a small volunteer program at Strawbery Banke was irresistible.

The site behind the Lowd House contained deep and well-preserved stratigraphy documenting the entire history of land use (FIG. 7). In the last week of the project, a test pit excavated by Brown University graduate student Mary Beaudry exposed the top of the founda-

Figure 4. Historical archaeologist James F. Deetz in 1973. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery.)

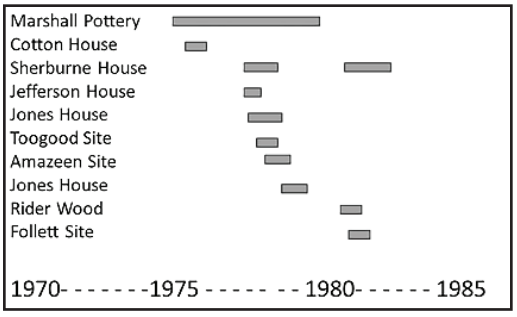

Figure 5. A chronology of Strawbery Banke archaeology projects, 1970–1985. (Chart by Steven R. Pendery, 2017.)

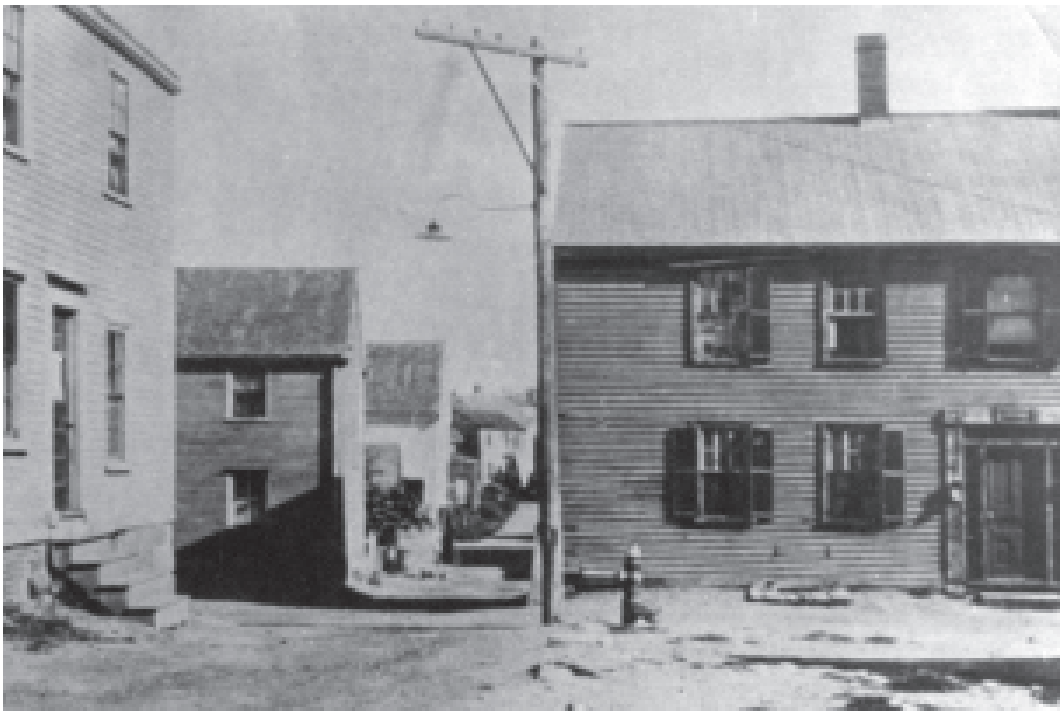

Figure 6. Potter Samuel Marshall's house on Jefferson Street, late 1940s. (Photo courtesy of the Patch Photograph Collection, Strawbery Banke, Inc.)

Figure 7. The Marshall Pottery site in 1977, with the foundation of Marshall House in the foreground. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery.)

tion of Samuel Marshall's circular kiln, backfilled with wasters and kiln brick. This project was the first professional excavation of a local pottery site in New England (Starbuck 2006: 109–110). Thanks to the generosity of Mr. Edward French, the Youthgrants Program of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and a New Hampshire Preservation Commission Survey and Planning grant the site was extensively sampled, reported on, and published (Pendery 1979, 1985; Pendery and Chase 1977). My one-month summer job was then extended to three years! Critical to maintaining momentum was the training and retention of volunteers through the long winter months. Additional excitement about Portsmouth's past was generated by the upcoming American Bicentennial in 1976.

The Strawbery Banke Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on 20 June 1975. Afterward, the museum took seriously its mandate to evaluate archaeological resources before ground-disturbing projects were undertaken. During this period the need to repair Strawbery Banke's infrastructure required testing of seven additional sites (FIG. 8). I followed the Plimoth Plantation model for site numbering, using, instead of the prefix "C" for "colonial," the prefix "SB" for "Strawbery Banke," and also revising the format of the plantation's artifact catalog sheet. Additional sites tested with staff and volunteers included the Peacock House (SB2) in 1975, Cotton House (SB3) in 1976–1978, Sherburne House (SB4) in 1977 and 1983, Jefferson House (SB5) in 1978, Jones House (SB6) in 1977–1978, the Toogood site (SB7), the Amazeen or Yeaton Winn House in 1978, and the Marden House in 1978 (Pendery 1981, 1984a; Pendery and Chase 1976).

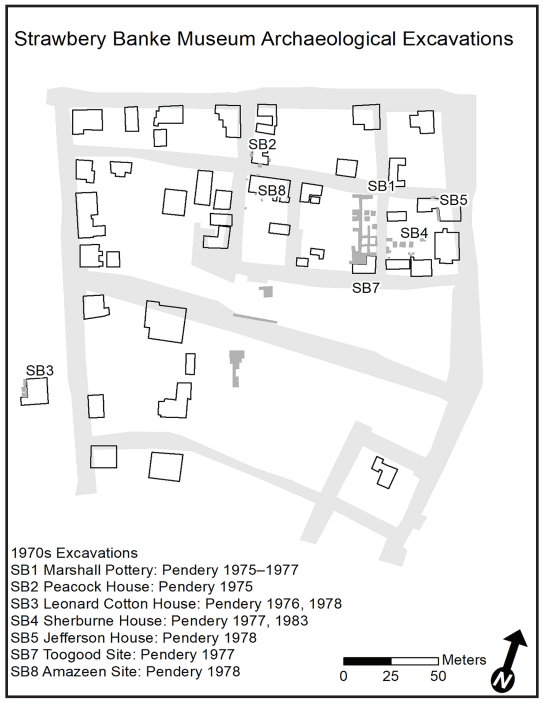

Figure 8. A map of archaeology projects at Strawbery Banke during the 1970s. (Map by Alexandra Martin, 2019.)

A year-round accessible lab is critical to the success of a nascent public archaeology program. In 1975 I set up a lab and residence at Strawbery Banke's Hough House and offered year-round volunteer opportunities to the public (FIG. 9). The family of Edward French continued to be generous benefactors of Strawbery Banke archaeology and funded the conversion of the Jones House into the Jones House Archaeology Center, where volunteers processing artifacts were also on display (FIG. 10).

While there was always paid staff, field crew and lab workers almost always consisted of a loyal group of volunteers and students. In 1975 and 1976, I taught a field class in historical archaeology for students from the University of New Hampshire at Durham, with a weekly field exercise at the Marshall Pottery site (FIG. 11). Scott LaPointe was one of these students, as was Christopher DeCorse (DeCorse 1979). We introduced the members of the Boston China Student's Circle to archaeological ceramics with the assistance of its president, Vivian Hawes, and Portsmouth resident Diana Edwards Roussel. An exhibit and publication resulted from this joint venture in the 1980s (Edwards et al. 1988).

Public interest in urban archaeology, combined with the requirements of state and federal preservation law, led to dialogue between the state historic preservation office and other state and municipal agencies about the need to con-

Figure 9. The Hough House archaeology lab, established at Strawbery Banke in 1975. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery, 1975.)

Figure 10. The Jones House archaeology lab in the 1980s. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery.)

duct archaeology at archaeologically sensitive Portsmouth construction sites. In 1976, Strawbery Banke archaeologists were mobilized to conduct excavations in Market Square in advance of a rehabilitation project involving tree planting and the resetting of curbing (FIG. 12). A smaller project took place at an industrial site at the west end of the North Mill Pond. Public archaeology proved to be more than just a museum asset as it spread across other Portsmouth neighborhoods.

I was drawn to Cambridge, Massachusetts, for graduate work in archaeology, wound up as the Peabody Museum's project manager for some of Boston's "Big Dig" archaeology, and later became the Boston city archaeologist. But there was continued engagement with the archaeology of Strawbery Banke and the city of Portsmouth during the decade of the 1980s.

The Decade of the 1980s

Urban archaeology in America came of age during the early 1980s. This is reflected by many of the contributions to the 1982 book edited by Roy Dickens, *Archaeology of Urban America*. Pamela Cressey started a very successful urban archaeology program in Alexandria, Virginia, based at the Torpedo Factory. The City of Baltimore provided strong support for its own public archaeology program under the leadership of Elizabeth Comer. The Annapolis Archaeology Program drew support from the University of Maryland at College Park Department of Anthropology under the guidance of Mark Leone, Paul Shackel, and Parker Potter. The critical perspective espoused by this program was one of its distinctive features.

Archaeology at Strawbery Banke

By 1980 the value of archaeology as an important visitor attraction and impetus for community involvement had been established at Strawbery Banke (FIG. 13). A New Hampshire Council for the Humanities grant supported "Project Discovery," for which Gray Graffam was hired in 1981 to conduct an excavation behind the Rider Wood House (SB11). This attracted 120 area residents (Graffam 1981). Faith Harrington, a Ph.D. candidate at

Figure 11. University of New Hampshire students assisting with the excavation of the Marshall Pottery site circa 1976. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery.)

Figure 12. Archaeological testing in Portsmouth's Market Square in the late 1970s. (Photo by Steven R. Pendery.)

Berkeley, was hired with funding from the National Trust for a 10-week excavation at the Follett Wharf site behind the Joshua Jones House and Lowell Boat Shop to delineate that part of the north wharf line of Puddle Dock. This project also attracted dozens of volunteers and was extended into 1982 (Dupre 1995: 20). Strawbery Banke was featured in an article for *Archaeology* magazine by Faith Harrington, illustrated with site, interior, and role-player photos (Harrington 1983).

During this period, Strawbery Banke archaeologists extended the museum's reach to the long-neglected Deer Street parcel in Portsmouth's North End. This once-vital colonial-period neighborhood had been cleared of its buildings in the 1960s and sat unused until the 1980s. A proposal for its redevelopment with a hotel prompted the formation of a research team, including Ron Lettieri of the University of New Hampshire, Strawbery Banke director James Vaughn, and me. Our group pulled together background information based on Portsmouth preservationist

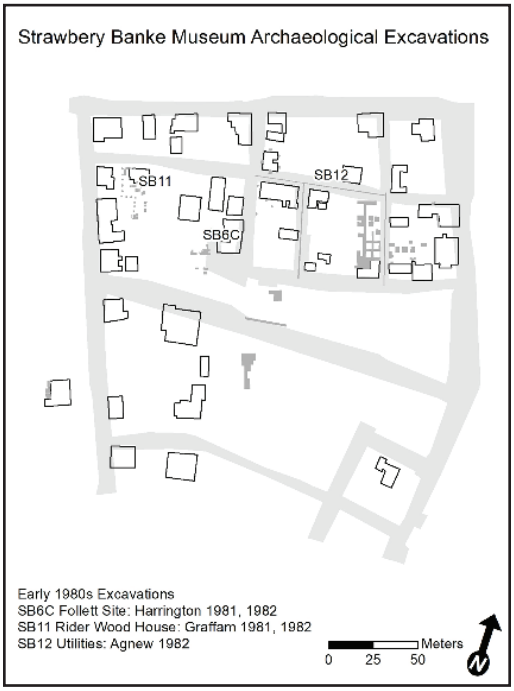

Figure 13. A map of archaeology projects at Strawbery Banke during the early 1980s (Map by Alexandra Martin, 2019.)

Dorothy Vaughn's notes and developed an archaeological research design. This project proved to be my first, but hardly my last, exercise in conducting urban archaeological excavations with backhoe assistance. Within the first few days, field sampling by archaeologist Scott LaPointe yielded an enormous cellar deposit of early 19th-century ceramic and glass vessels. These were painstakingly restored by dedicated volunteers and later were featured in a Museum of Our National Heritage exhibit and catalog, partnered by the Boston Ceramics Students Club (Edwards et al. 1988). In later years, fieldwork at the Deer Street parcel, carried out under the direction of Aileen Agnew, revealed multiple well-preserved sites throughout this former 18th-and 19th-century neighborhood.

Excavation of other Portsmouth historical sites outside Strawbery Banke provided valuable comparative data. Excavation of the mid-18th-century Marshall Pottery site was a significant milestone in New England redearthenware studies, but data on how Portsmouth's ceramics industry changed over the centuries was lacking. I negotiated with the owners of the Dodge Pottery site on Portsmouth's North Mill Pond to conduct some testing on the site before new residential construction began. A pottery was established there by Winthrop Bennett in 1789, but by 1796 he had moved in order to set up another pottery in Moultonborough, New Hampshire (Pendery 1985: 104). Bennett's Portsmouth pottery was subsequently purchased by Joseph Dodge and was operated by Joseph and his two sons until 1864. Ceramic artifacts from the site documented the ways local New England potters responded to increasing competition from inexpensive imported wares and North American stoneware containers during the first half of the 19th century. In like fashion, public salvage excavations undertaken at the Hall Jackson site, owned by the Richardson family, revealed a filled well containing a well-preserved 18th-century faunal assemblage that provided important comparative data on Portsmouth foodways (Pendery 1984b). These projects exposed other Portsmouth neighborhoods to the practice and public benefits of urban archaeology.

Discussion

After a bumpy start in the 1960s and sudden demise in the early 1970s, public archaeology emerged and flourished both within and outside Strawbery Banke in the decade between 1975 and 1985. Strawbery Banke crafted a model archaeology program that engaged the Portsmouth public and involved it in research-driven as well as CRM archaeology, both within the museum grounds and across the city. The case studies of Strawbery Banke archaeology projects explored in this article reveal that, under the surface, a delicate balancing act took place, where scarce archaeology funds and staff were leveraged to forge an enduring program out of what may otherwise have been a series of disconnected compliance projects. Periodic collaboration between the Strawbery Banke Archaeology Program and the anthropology and history departments of the University of New Hampshire was critical to this success, as was generous financial support from individual public benefactors.

The history of Strawbery Banke reveals a civic organization that never shirked from assuming responsibility for preserving, protecting, and interpreting the historical fabric contained within its museum grounds. Over the past two decades its financial resources have been stretched, and the primary focus has been on its aboveground historical architecture and historical landscapes rather than buried resources. Yet the museum must continue to exert stewardship over its archaeological resources, including sites and collections, if only to preserve and protect them until financing is in place to develop and implement a strategic archaeological research design for fieldwork and collections management.

Strawbery Banke archaeology during the period from 1970 to 1985 also reveals the multiple benefits of its direct involvement in Portsmouth-

area CRM projects, from the Market Square Project of the 1970s to the Deer Street Project of the 1980s. Important research data and collections from other Portsmouth sites were folded into the museum, ensuring both preservation and public access. Since the 1980s, private-sector archaeological contractors have played an important role in conducting CRM in the United States. At the same time, liability and professional issues often squeeze public volunteers out of the practice of archaeology in most CRM contexts, whereas joint city and museum-based enterprises multiply the public benefits of archaeological resources (Little 2002). Regardless of how it is accomplished, Strawbery Banke must continue to play a major role in supporting public archaeology, both within and outside museum grounds in Portsmouth, as it did successfully during the 1970s and 1980s.

Acknowledgments

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