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Tides of Public Archaeology: Reseeding the Banke, 1985–2006

Martha Pinello

In the late 20th century, archaeological botanical and ethnobotanical studies supported Strawberry Banke Museum's interpretations of reconstructed landscapes. Curatorial and archaeological research expanded the comparative study collections of ceramics, glass, and personal-adornment artifacts, and encouraged decorative-arts scholars and archaeologists to use the collections for their research, publication, and programming. Field schools, study groups, and rotating archaeological exhibits were created annually to communicate current research. Internships, summer camps, and school programs introduced the public to archaeology and the diverse history of members of the waterfront community. With the commitment of the curators and the museum director, the program was staffed with archaeologists, interns, and community volunteers. The program adapted to its current role as a 21st-century historic-sites museum as institutional goals changed.

la fin du 20e siècle, des études botaniques et ethnobotaniques ont soutenu les interprétations des paysages reconstruits par le musée Strawberry Banke. La recherche muséale et archéologique a élargi les collections comparatives de céramiques, de verre et d'artéfacts de parure personnelle, et a encouragé des spécialistes en arts décoratifs et les archéologues à utiliser les collections pour leurs recherches, leurs publications et leurs programmations. Des chantiers-écoles, des groupes d'études et des expositions archéologiques itinérantes ont été créées à chaque année pour diffuser les recherches actuelles. Des stages, des camps d'été et des programmes scolaires ont permis d'initier le public à l'archéologie et à l'histoire diversifiée des membres de la communauté riveraine. Grâce au dévouement des conservateurs et du directeur du musée, le programme était composé d'archéologues, de stagiaires et de bénévoles de la communauté. Le programme s'est adapté à son rôle actuel, soit celui d'un musée de sites historiques du 21e siècle, à mesure que les objectifs institutionnels ont changé.

Introduction

At Strawberry Banke Museum, the early 1980s had seen an increase in archaeological excavations, archaeological volunteers and field participants, and interest from museum visitors. I arrived in 1984 for a six-week field school at the Sherburne House and was asked by the interim museum director to continue as the museum's archaeologist, a position I then held until 2006. During my time in this role, the Strawberry Banke archaeology department worked to refocus the archaeology program in two significant ways, both of which were grounded in the goals of public archaeology. First, we established practices to ensure that the pace of excavation and artifact collection did not outpace cataloging and interpretation. Second, we worked with other museum departments to integrate archaeological evidence more fully into the interpretive, furnishing, and landscape plans of the historical site. The archaeological programming evolved

over the decades as institutional goals changed to adapt to the museum's role in the beginning of the 21st century.

In this article, I will reflect on the development of the archaeology program and public-archaeology goals at Strawberry Banke. I do this with a huge measure of gratitude to the community volunteers, students, and colleagues with whom I worked. Our research expanded the comparative study of archaeological collections, especially ceramics, glass, and personal-adornment artifacts, encouraging decorative-arts scholars and archaeologists to use the museum collections for research, publication, and programming. Along with other archaeological programs, we integrated public history and community archaeology and science into our methods. While working with and engaging the public, the department produced valuable research into the lives of women in the 18th and 19th centuries, the architecture and business of 18th-century wharves, and the lives of

Russian Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century.

Collections Management

When I arrived in the summer of 1984, the recent Deer Street excavations in the North End of Portsmouth (FIG. 1) had produced a huge artifact assemblage and body of research to be completed. The Deer Street collection made up about one-half of the Strawberry Banke archaeological collection for which I became responsible. The Department of Housing and Urban Development had redeveloped the North End of Portsmouth, creating the Sheraton Hotel complex (coincidentally, the location of the 2017 Council for Northeast Historical Archaeology meeting). Strawberry Banke was the contractor for the archaeological component of the environmental impact statement. This was a large urban archaeology project by any standards: five adjacent lots spanning 10 ac. that were excavated from 1981 through 1986. The project

had produced 450,000 artifacts that were still being processed and analyzed when I came to the museum. Strawberry Banke had been paid only \$40,000 to do at least \$200,000 worth of work. Numerous people assisted with the Deer Street excavations and research, including archival researchers, Ph.D. students from the history department at the University of New Hampshire, archaeology students from Boston, professional archaeologists, ceramic historians, and community volunteers (FIG. 2). In 1989 I completed a master's thesis at the University of Massachusetts Boston concerning the archaeological formation processes at the four domestic sites at Deer Street (Pinello 1989), and Aileen Agnew filed the final report, completing the museum's contractual obligations (Agnew 1989).

The excavations, the lab systems, and the reports and exhibits of Daniel Ingersoll's and Steven Pendery's work set the path for my tenure at Strawberry Banke. My early years at Strawberry Banke were a time of exploration and surprises. I spent long days exploring the



Figure 1. Aileen Agnew, Scott Lapointe, Ruth Maloy, and Kathy Wheeler working at the Deer Street excavations. (Photo courtesy of Strawberry Banke Museum, 1984.)



Figure 2. Ceramics expert Vivian Hawes working in Jones House. (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1989.)

beer flats stacked two to six high and examining the artifacts I had read about (e.g., Edwards Roussel [1984]) or of which I had only seen portions. In March of 1986, Jane Nylander was named the museum director, and I had explored enough that I could bring an artifact, document, or citation to discuss at our weekly meetings. This helped her to understand the magnitude of the collection. She asked me to work with other departments on the future interpretation of houses and landscapes.

In order to plan for the care, access, and use of the collections, I began by having a cup of tea with museum professionals, decorative-arts scholars, academics, and researchers to develop a comprehensive strategy for the collection and the most effective roles for volunteers, students, and staff. On Friday afternoons, Jane, and later curator Gerry Ward, would bring a speaker, colleague, or patron to visit, and, with our cups of tea, we would “spend time with collection.” Later in the spring Mary Dupre joined me two days a week as an assistant.

Mary Dupre and I puzzled over how to make the collection accessible to others. I decided to put a hold on active excavations, much to the dismay of other archaeologists and some of the volunteers. We began reorganizing the ca. 1790 Jones House, a dwelling house on the museum grounds (FIGS. 3, 4). The museum’s archaeological collections went into storage boxes organized by site, material, and

provenience. The Deer Street phases were sorted and grouped together by lots and features. Once we had Deer Street in retrievable storage, we expanded the type collections and the curatorial access to study and reconstructed objects. Every six weeks the call went out to all departments to help us go to the “Cellars,” where we had created storage shelves. However, the storage boxes soon filled Jones House, and we decided to use the ca. 1803 Yeaton-Walsh House next door to Jones as the archaeology study and storage facility for a short period until something else could be arranged.

Mary Dupre and I also established various policies to ensure the success of the archaeological research and the integrity of the archaeological sites. For instance, excavations were to be conducted only if ground disturbance was planned there, or if the museum needed the information for exhibit houses and landscapes. The questions and research objectives of new excavations were focused on the interpretive plan of the museum, rather than general urban lot excavations undertaken on the eve of their destruction, as had been the case with the Deer Street projects. We began with archival and curatorial research and employed remote sensing and shovel testing before open-area excavation. We reduced the size of units from 5×5 m or 3×3 m squares to 1 or 2 m² units, and began using 1/4 in. rather than the older 1/2 in. screens, in line with methods of the time. We ensured that we were taking OSHA safety regulations seriously, including shoring or stepping excavation blocks deeper than 4 ft. Volunteers could not work alongside heavy equipment. In this same vein I took the gin out of the refrigerator, thus ending a tradition of afternoon cocktails in the lab.

All preliminary lab processing was conducted concurrent with fieldwork. At times excavation might be halted for a couple of days until the washing and sorting was caught up. Two-week excavations producing about 10,000–100,000 artifacts could be cataloged in a year with volunteers working one day a week. Around this time we also introduced com-



Figure 3. Lab work in the Jones House. (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1989.)

puters for cataloging the artifact collection. Our computers and software were acquired through community programs and volunteers who had retired from IBM. The team was interdisciplinary, including staff, community volunteers, and students. Each of us had talents and expertise, and so everyone had a job to do, ranging from tasks requiring specific archaeological expertise to identifying coral and sea shells, to sorting plastic.

Working with Volunteers

The volunteers in the archaeology program were very diverse. Many of them had started volunteering in 1981 with "Project Discovery" at the Rider Wood House, a project funded by the New Hampshire Council for the Humanities that drew over 120 volunteers (see Follansbee [1981]). About 10 volunteers would join us on Wednesdays and Fridays year-round to conduct work within the department. Volunteers would participate in nearly any task that needed to be done to process the archaeological collection, including numbering every artifact, collections care, and research. The volunteer demographic included retired people from many different professions, high-



Figure 4. Marshall Pottery ceramics on display in the Jones House. (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1989.)

school dropouts completing their GEDs, and other people exploring the next phases of their lives. Another group had been recommended by a therapist or court ordered to volunteer. In fact, nearly every volunteer came to us at a time of transition in their lives, whether it was a recent move, retirement, or the death of a family member.

In 1990, after five years of sorting, labeling, and researching the collection, we felt we could take on a limited excavation if we processed all the artifacts during the field season. Excavations at the Wheelwright House were scheduled for mid-July to late August to add another program during the museum's busiest time of year for public visitors. The field school was advertised in *Archaeology* magazine, bringing in participants from around the region and the country. We excavated at Wheelwright House for the 1990 and 1991 seasons. The combination of experienced local volunteers, new field-school participants, experienced archaeologists, and interns meant that there were 24 people in total working on the project: 12 in the lab and 12 in the field. This model worked well and continued to be the model for both field and study schools.

However, the fieldwork seasons at the Wheelwright House were different from that at Rider Wood in 1981, and some volunteers were reluctant to make the change. No longer could dozens of volunteers drop in for 15-minute shifts! Instead, volunteers signed up to work for at least one full week at a time. We also instituted an intern program and allowed teenagers to participate when accompanied by an adult. The grandfather/grandson team of Alexander and Andrew Munton was our first, and perhaps, the most memorable. Andrew was in high school; he eventually moved on to Bates College where he studied Mandarin and archaeology, and worked at archaeological sites in China. His grandfather, Alex, was a retired chemist for the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard and a former New Hampshire state health official who had volunteered at Deer Street and for Project Discovery at the Rider Wood House (FIG. 5). He created a useful set of

historical maps of Strawberry Banke all photocopied to the same scale, as well as a Plexiglas measuring device for ceramic rims and bases that the department still uses today. Alex was interviewed for an article in *Archaeology* magazine in which he said that he and Andrew "were blessed at having an opportunity to be involved in an archaeological project together. ... It's not always easy to find sites available to amateurs" (Wertime 1995: 72).

At Wheelwright, the reality of prior work done by regional restoration carpenters Roy Baker and his son Phillip posed problems that we discussed at length, including a misdating of the house, an error that informed many of their restoration decisions. Baker had estimated that the house was built in 1754, a generation older than its actual date of construction in 1784, when it was described in the documentary record as the "new house." We determined that corrections could be addressed by archival research and archaeology. Our responsibility was to identify outbuilding structures; define landscape features, including property and fence lines; and to determine the extent of the 1813 fire that had engulfed most of Portsmouth, stopping at the building lot next to the Wheelwright House. Much of the work locating features was facilitated by deed and probate record research conducted the previous year by Mary Dupre, and geophysical testing carried out by Bruce Bevan with a team of volunteers and staff before the field season. This was a milestone. For the first time, Strawberry Banke combined archival and geophysical data with limited excavation and interpretative analysis. This strategy permitted excavation in discreet locations to assemble the data needed by the interpretive team.

The Wheelwright household structure was evidently complex and fluid. Archival research identified three enslaved people working at the site: Nero, Jane, and Cato. After the death of cooper Jeremiah Wheelwright in 1768, Martha Wheelwright's dower right was evidenced by changed fence locations, thus demonstrating the reality of her experience as a widow. At 71, she was a grandmother living with two



Figure 5. Volunteer Alex Munton at Deer Street in 1984. (Photo courtesy of Strawberry Banke Museum.)



Figure 6. Rider Wood privy reconstruction by North Bennet Street. (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1993.)

teenage grandchildren and her daughter-in-law when her son John died at sea. In addition to the evidence concerning the social context of the Wheelwright household, the excavations provided information for the horticulture department to inform their interpretation of the fence line and yard. Their landscape restoration won an award from the Garden Clubs of New England.

In 1992, we returned to the Rider Wood site, 11 years after the initial museum public archaeology program, Project Discovery. The planned restoration for Rider Wood included the landscape and outbuildings. In Portsmouth as well as other urban sites archaeologists are fascinated by privy fill, sometimes to the neglect of the architectural surrounds and the way the privy fits into the lot and street landscape. This held true during the early excavations at Rider Wood, and so our 1992 excavations focused on the foundation of the building containing the privy. Excavating outside the corners of the privy box, the size of the build and the original foundation were identified. Working with the curatorial and carpentry departments, we visited privy buildings throughout the region. The North Bennet Street School then built a privy on the former foundations (FIG. 6). Around this time Kathy Wheeler also published an article in *The New Hampshire Archeologist* revisiting the lived experience of Mary Rider as a widow and arguing that the archaeological assemblage from the privy suggested that her finances remained stable throughout the 45 years she was a widow, and that she was a self-sufficient shopkeeper who was able to provide for her family (Wheeler 1995). This story of Mary Rider, based on the archaeological and documentary evidence, is still part of the house interpretation.

Shapiro House

In the mid-1990s, a new museum director encouraged the staff to refocus on excavation, as that is what the public best understands and expects of archaeologists. In 1995, excavations at the Shapiro House began. Curator

Susan Montgomery led the planned interpretation of this house and lot, which was about Abraham and Sarah Shapiro and their daughter Mollie, who were part of the wave of Russian Jewish immigration to Puddle Dock and the Eastern Seaboard between 1898 and 1917 (FIG. 7). I worked collaboratively with the restoration carpenters and the horticulturists to establish the areas of impact. Geophysical testing early in the spring was followed by a field school and excavation in the area of a planned access ramp. We designed the foundation drainage and the ramp supports to be placed directly in the excavated trench. I was skeptical that we would be able to provide detailed interpretive information. I was so wrong.

The Shapiros arrived in 1898 and moved out of their house in 1928. This was a very dynamic time for the Puddle Dock landscape.



Figure 7. Mollie Shapiro, ca. 1930. (Photo courtesy of Strawberry Banke Museum.)

Around the turn of the century the Puddle Dock tidal inlet had been filled in. The Shapiro House excavations gave us the opportunity to see the effect of that fill event on the landscape. Coal ash and waste from the gasified coal power plant, in the area we now know as Prescott Park, was available by the cart full. Household trash was also used to compensate for the displaced water from Puddle Dock.

A most dramatic yet simple feature at the Shapiro House illustrates this change in landscape. A granite-block pathway ran alongside the house in the 19th century. The Shapiros had embarked on an effort to fill around their house foundation after they moved in, covering the stone pathway. Once we excavated through a layer of coal-ash fill, we uncovered an 1898 Spanish coin on top of the pathway (Pinello and McKernan 1999). When we excavated on the east side of the building, we found that the fill was debris from a house fire in 1911. The fire-damaged debris was very helpful, since objects that were burned had been part of the household.

When horticulturist Anne Masury and other members of the horticulture department created their landscape design, they knew that they wanted to place a clothesline in the backyard, as Shapiro descendants had told Strawberry Banke staff of Sarah's mending, sewing, and cleaning of clothes for her immediate and large extended family. The restoration carpentry team recreated a period clothesline, so we excavated an area to provide a footing for the clothesline and to prepare for shrub plantings also reported by relatives. In this area we found children's toys laid in the ground—not burned and with no coal ash. The children had likely played under the clothesline and bushes in the yard. The toys included porcelain dolls, "Frozen Charlottes" (FIG. 8) and fragments of a cast-lead cart (Pinello and McKernan 1999). The horticulture department also wanted to interpret the edge of the Shapiros' north yard at Jefferson Street with a period fence and gate.

The fence and gate constructed are based on archaeological evidence.

The most compelling experience I had from this project was when Burt Wolf, Mollie Shapiro's son, came to Strawberry Banke for a symposium. I gave a presentation at the lab. Mollie at 11 years old was going to be the center of our interpretation, forming a bridge between her immigrant parents and her and her cousins' life in the United States. Mollie later died in childbirth, and her son was raised by his grandparents, Abraham and Sarah Shapiro. The artifacts were displayed on the lab table. I talked about the evidence for a kosher kitchen (plain and transfer-printed wares) and the pathway, the fire, and the toys (Pinello and McKernan 1999). Mollie's son and I made eye contact when we both realized that his mother had played with these toys—the mother he never knew.

Wharves

The capital campaign for the 1990s included a plan for the future visitors' center at the entrance of Puddle Dock, where 18th-century wharves had once lined the tidal inlet. At the direction of the New Hampshire state historic preservation officer and the state archaeologist, we designed a Phase II survey to define limits and boundaries. We were in the field for 10 months, starting in the winter of 1998.

This project was widely publicized, broadcast regularly on the nightly news for 13 weeks. The publicity for this project and subsequent outdoor panel exhibits brought people from all over the region to see the wharves we had exposed. Some told the stories of going to Mrs. Smart's store, while others wanted to see what an 18th-century wharf looked like. Volunteers helped by giving tours of the excavation and processing artifacts. The project also brought Strawberry Banke two photographic slide collections: the Roland Robbins collection on his excavations at Puddle Dock and the Ray Brighton collection on the installation of the sewer line



Figure 8. Artifacts—children's toys. (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1999.)

through Puddle Dock, which included images of the swing bridge that once spanned the tidal inlet.

There are several compelling stories from our excavations at the wharf sites. On the north side of Puddle Dock, the Marshall family was able to build its wharf 125 ft. long, extending from the edge of the road to the low-tide mark. The wharf surface was made of planks covered with a mixture of marine clay, mixed sawdust, and waster fragments from the Marshall Pottery (FIG. 9) (Pinello et al. 1999). This was a very smart way to increase one's real estate investment. The lot was given to the Marshalls as a wedding present, and, by the time of their deaths, their grandchildren had a 40 × 60 ft. lot and a 40 × 125 ft. wharf with buildings and access to the water.

The Paul Wharf to the south is named for Moses Paul (Pinello and Desany 1999) (FIG. 10). Originally from Boston, Paul moved north to Exeter, New Hampshire, and then to Portsmouth as a block builder. His name was given to enslaved men owned by his family. Black men named Moses became ministers involved



Figure 9. The Marshall Wharf excavation. (Photo by Pinello, 1998.)



Figure 10. The Paul and Manning wharves excavation (Photo by Martha Pinello, 1993.)

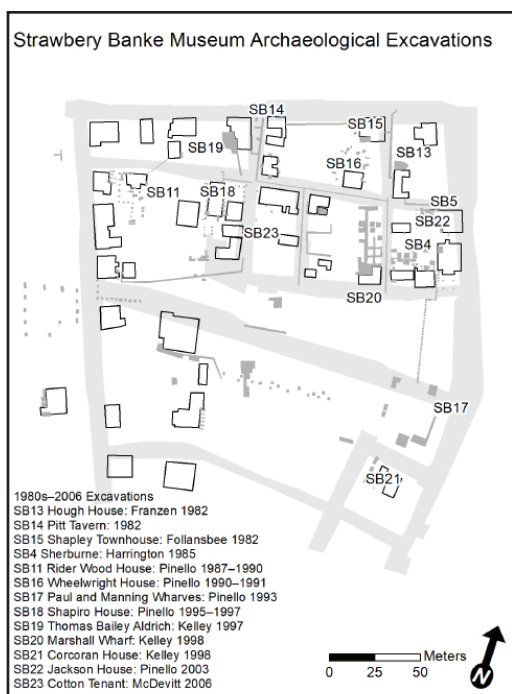


Figure 11. Excavations at Strawberry Banke, 1980s–2006. (Map by Alexandra Martin, 2019.)

in Boston's and Maine's establishment of schools, and later in the movement for abolition.

The Marshall family purchased the Paul Wharf and continued block making. The story line of the Marshalls' move from being supporters of the Crown to rebels is chronicled in these details: In 1737, the Marshall brothers donated black cloth to be draped on the pulpit of South Church upon the death of Queen Caroline. From their wharf, in 1766, a letter was sent to King George protesting the Stamp Act. The Marshalls and their workers provided the cutter, sails, and blocks for the USS *Ranger*, built under the supervision of John Paul Jones at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard in Kittery, Maine. And, finally, the 1852 probate inventory of the Marshall home listed a framed copy of the Constitution.

The third story of the wharves began in the late 19th century, when the large sail loft had morphed into a series of apartments, and other buildings were divided into small rental rooms. A brothel was established and

employed women in their late 20s to age 50 as "housekeepers." Census records reveal that the women were born in Quebec and the New Hampshire interior, came to the seacoast, and ended up working on the waterfront. Poignant and telling artifacts include rouge containers, teeth from an adult-sized doll, a lice comb from the navy, and a flag lapel pin for the first Red Cross campaign for WWI.

Conclusion

From 1999 to 2006, changing goals of the museum administration continued to drive archaeological programs. The museum's emphasis was on maximizing the site for visitation, exhibits, and events. Because the Jones House lab was only open to visitors when the volunteers were working, the archaeology exhibit and lab space were closed, and the education department repurposed the space as an interactive exhibit for families. Most of the archaeological collection went into storage. Seasonal excavations continued to be a draw for visitors to experience archaeology firsthand (FIG. 11).

The archaeology department also continued to work on offsite projects, including the Wentworth-Coolidge Mansion in Portsmouth in 1992, the Warner House in Portsmouth from 1993 to 1998, the James House in Hampton, and the Lamson Pottery site in Exeter in 1994. These projects increased community outreach and brought in new volunteers from the seacoast region. On reflection, community volunteers who communicated to their friends and neighbors about our work created social capital and investment in each project, contributing to the success of the museum's archaeological research as meaningful history. The community and the interests of museumgoers influenced our research as we shaped our volunteers as students of archaeology. It was these community scientists who helped us find and make connections among our visitors, our community, and history.

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