

Campers dig into Albany's past

Ten Broeck Mansion becomes archaeological training ground for week

By KAREEMA PINCKNEY, Special to the Times Union

First published: Wednesday, July 18, 2007

ALBANY -- Fifth- and sixth-graders exhibited coins, bones and ceramics Friday that they unearthed at Ten Broeck Mansion.

Children participating in an archaeological summer camp at the 209-year-old historical site in Arbor Hill excavated and analyzed their artifacts, compiling an archaeological record.

"I found a glass button," said Taleb Sidig, 10, who attended the seventh annual camp, which lasts a week, for the first time. "I've never seen anything like that before, and I don't know if they even make them anymore."

Gen. Abraham Ten Broeck and his wife, Elizabeth Van Rensselaer, built the mansion. Thirty years later, Theodore Olcott and his family moved there. A century later, the heirs of Robert Olcott presented the mansion to the Albany County Historical Association.

The camp is supported by a grant from the Kiwi Foundation and other private donors. Professionals from the Hartgen Archeological Associates were on hand to help the eager middle-schoolers dig, wash, weigh and measure their findings. The local firm has also coordinated camps at the Van Schaick Mansion in Cohoes and the Schoharie River Center in Montgomery County.

"It's not just a treasure hunt or digging," said Angela Markessinis, project archaeologist and camp coordinator, acknowledging there are many misconceptions about archaeology. "We dig with a purpose. We dig with a goal."

For starters, she said, students learn about using tools, mapping and researching.

Eleven-year-old Eric Dunn waved his hand eagerly when Markessinis asked the group what it means to have participated in an archaeological camp.

"It means now I can help in an archaeological dig," said Dunn, a first-year camper.

Katharine Shadlock, who is also 11, has been a camper since age 7, and it's easy to understand why. "I love to learn about history," she said. "I love archaeology."

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