

Archaeology @ Old St. Stephens

January 24, Next Volunteers Day at Old St. Stephens

January, 2009

Happy New Year!!!

We had a great dig to end a productive 2008 season. This new year promises to provide exciting opportunities at Old St. Stephens. The governor's office has designated 2009 as the "Year of Alabama History." St. Stephens, "Where Alabama Began," is planning numerous events and archaeology will play an important role in this celebration. We will continue our monthly volunteer digs (or lab days depending on weather). Our first is on Saturday the 24th. Tentative dates have been set for the remainder of the year. In the spring they are February 14, March 7, April 4, and May 9. June 6 will be our first summer dig and the Expedition program will begin on June 7. Consider attending! A great week of archaeology and fun.

Expedition 31

On June 7th the Alabama Museum of Natural History Expedition program will be starting a 4-week Archaeology Field Camp at Old St. Stephens. Expedition 31 will be the third we have hosted. Three one-week sessions will be followed by a mini-week (3 days) June 28-July 1. Hey, only \$400/wk (\$200 for mini-wk) for all food and equipment. The camp is offered to adults and students over 14 (unless accompanied)...maximum 25 campers per week. Food, supervision, tents, cots, etc. are provided. The program is well organized and great fun, as well as an excellent learning experience. Daily activities concentrate on archaeology, but a paleontology day will allow students to collect and study fossils from the adjacent quarry. Afternoon swims in the clear quarry lake and nightly programs round out the day's activities. This will be my 5th camp. I highly recommend it for you, a student, child, grandchild, wife, husband, friend...a great experience you won't forget.

November/December Dig



We had a great Saturday dig in November to end 2008. St. Stephens continues to provide good weather. We made excellent progress on the area behind the slave's quarters. Several interesting artifacts were found.



Horeseshoes, one large (Nick Aronson) and one small (Joan Sulzman)

The Steed family from Grove Hill also had a good time.



Trish Steed, Kie, and Kierstyn with a nice coin button



Chelsey Wilson and Ryan Boyd found lots of artifacts including most of a black glass wine bottle

Age Requirements for Volunteers

We encourage and welcome volunteers of any age, but we do require parents to accompany students younger than 14. Parents will need to sign a hold-harmless agreement for students under 18. We do “real” archaeology and volunteers are often excited when they realize they are finding artifacts unseen for almost 200 years. St. Stephens is a great educational experience for young people as well as adults.

Progress on the Archaeology Trail

Jim and his staff are working on the Archaeological Trail, a project assisted with a grant we just received from the state Conservation Department. The entrance pavilion is underway, the trail has been staked, and underbrush is being cleared. Additional lot markers have been installed and interpretive signs will soon be placed. We will have displays at the entrance pavilion as well as a short audio/visual program telling the history and archaeology of Old St. Stephens.

USA Field School

The USA field school will be working at various sites on Saturdays during the spring. Bonnie will be assisting Dr. Waselkov in teaching this class, so she will not be available to drive folks up in a USA truck. I usually go up on Fri and spend the night, but I may change my schedule. We would leave earlier (7:30) and get back later (5:00). Please email or call me if you are interested in a ride. We could also have folks meet at the lab at a set time for carpools. Please let me know if you need a ride or if you could volunteer to drive. As usual, tent and RV camping is available. No charge for tents and half price for RV, \$8.50. Come on up and spend the night.

No experience needed!!! Participants should bring lunch and soft drinks. Water provided. No park admission charged. For more information and a map check our web site, www.oldststephens.com or email me at gshorter@jaguar1.usouthal.edu. You may also call the St. Stephens office (251) 460-6790 or Mike Breedlove Sr., site manager at (251) 246-9788 or 769-4634. Hope to see you at Old St. Stephens. **We need and value your help.**

Volunteer Tuesdays in the Lab at USA

Some of you may know that we invite volunteers to help in the lab at USA on Tuesdays. Volunteers work on various projects, but three guys have been working for months cleaning the ceramics from St. Stephens. I am pleased to announce that they are nearly caught up, but alias...we just keep bringing in more. Their dedication and hard work is very much appreciated. No project of this size can be accomplished without a lot of hard work from volunteers.



Louis Scott, Brad Eklund, and Nick Aaronson washing St. Stephens ceramics in USA lab

Project Update

Some of you may wonder how long we have been working at the Globe/Chamberlain site. You may be surprised to learn that this year, 2009, will be our tenth anniversary. We completed a two year survey of the entire park in 1999 establishing a site grid system and identifying some 50 individual building sites. The Globe/Chamberlain site looked a lot different than it does today. Only a line of limestone blocks was visible to the north of a large cellar depression.



Front wall of the Globe, view to SE, 1999

In 1999 work started along the front wall of the Globe with only two volunteers.



Front wall and gallery of the Globe Hotel in 1999

During the first few days of excavation we realized that the site would be exciting and very informative. We found lots of melted glass suggesting that the building had burned. We also discovered a brick front gallery, not so unusual in itself, but the pattern employed by the masons was...a herringbone. This pattern is technically difficult and more expensive pattern than others that could have been chosen. All edge bricks must be cut to fit requiring more brick and time than common running-bond or basket-weave patterns. The Globe was designed and built to last decades and stand out based on the quality of its workmanship and materials. Indeed, the builders of St. Stephens expected the town to develop into a major city along the river. At its

prime, c. 1818, St. Stephens was larger and more impressive than Mobile. The river boomtown boasted a population of several thousand while the older city at the mouth of the bay could only claim about 800.

Expeditions 24 and 25, 2002-2003, moved significantly the project forward. We investigated the main building, a detached kitchen, uncovered the stables, began work on the cellar of the Globe, revealed a large slave's quarters, and followed a long wall leading to the west side of the property.



View to SE from Globe Hotel site in 2004



Slave's quarters looking west

The stone wall began at the southeast corner of the Globe and ended near the west property line of Lot 137, a lot that was 99 x 198 ft (1 ½ x 3 chains). Lot 137 is on the SE corner of High and Spring streets. While our site survey discovered examples of east/west streets, no evidence of north/south streets was found. This hindered a more exact location of the town plat reconstructed by Jack Elliot, MS Dept of Archives. We measured the distance from the southwest corner of the Globe structure to the west end of the wall, 98 ft. Shazam! We are now confident that we can tie down the town grid within a foot or two. This not only allows us to stake out lots and streets, but most importantly we are now able to associate historical documents with specific lots and archaeological sites. Future research will build on this important information thanks to the help of many and several years of work.



Stone wall looking west

With the help of Louis Scott and others, Mike Breedlove and I have finally made it to the west side of the cellar pit. We found a few artifacts, discovered the foundation for a center post, and located the cellar entrance at the southwest corner. In the process we measured and weighed thousands of bricks as well as thousands of pounds of limestone. As an example, the north side of the cellar was filled with about a meter of debris. Two brick chimneys fell into the cellar when the building burned. A single level, 25 cm, of a one meter square unit contained 15-25 buckets of large brick and limestone, a weight of 600-800 lbs. We then sorted and weighed all the remaining small fragments of building materials.

Most of this work was done by Mike Breedlove. Mike works at least 2-3 days a week on the project. His dedication has contributed significantly to our research. Without Mike's efforts we would be far behind where we are today. I sincerely appreciate his work and dedication.



Mike Breedlove with one of Hanna's spoons

New archaeology lab at Old St. Stephens

Last spring Jim and his crew built us a new lab at Old St. Stephens. The lab has been a great convenience as well as an important tool in moving our research forward. If you haven't been for a visit please do so. Mike would welcome your company...and help! Give him a call. (251) 246-9788 or 769-4634.



Jim and crew in front of new archaeology lab



Mike Breedlove and Louis Scott sorting artifacts in the new lab

Park Master Plan

Several hundred acres were added to park property through a generous long term lease from Cemex Corp. Most of this is quarry land and will be used to enhance the park's recreation program. Some of the proceeds will be used to support archaeology. A new master plan depicts future plans for the park.



A bad shot of the park master plan

Our new student researcher

I am pleased to announce that Chelsey Wilson, anthropology major at USA, is now working on the analysis phase of the project. She is concentrating on the extensive nail and ceramic assemblages. We have found thousands of well preserved nails in the burned Globe building site. We must have examples of almost every nail type and size used by builders in the early nineteenth-century. We also have a lot of building hardware. Chelsey is also classifying all the ceramic sherds that the guys have been cleaning. In the next step of the analysis process these fragments will be sorted into individual vessels. From the work we have already done I am sure we will have many vessels that are almost complete.



Chelsey working of ceramics in USA lab

Thanks for the support!!!

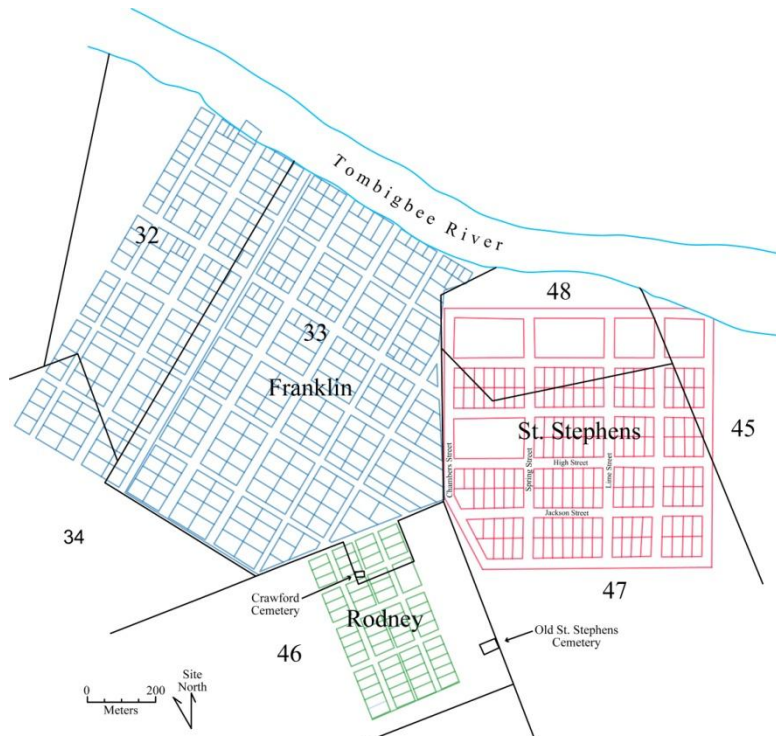
I would be terribly remiss if I did not express my thanks and commend the support of our research by the St. Stephens Historical Commission, in particular the director of the park, Jim Long. Jim and the members of the commission have supported and encouraged archaeology from the beginning, always pointing out the value of our research in bringing the history and culture of Old St. Stephens to life. I look forward to a continued relationship with Jim and the board. I know we can look forward to many exciting new discoveries in the next ten years.



Hey Jim!



Mike Breedlove and Louis Scott with Jim Long at the screen



This is a map of the three town plats. While St. Stephens and Rodney experienced considerable development, Franklin was little settled. All three were basically referred to as “St. Stephens” by outsiders, but the residents knew them separately. The Globe/Chamberlain project is located on Lot 137 at the southeast corner of High and Spring streets in St. Stephens.