



VERMONT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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The Vermont Archaeological Society Electronic Newsletter

New Officers for 2012

Greetings!

At the VAS Board Meeting on November 19th, new officers were elected for the upcoming year.

MacDonough's War of 1812 Shipyard Project



Bob Brinck, who has served as Vice President for the past year, was elected President to replace **Shirley Paustian**, who remains a vital part of the Board. **Brigitte Helzer**, who has served as President in past years, was elected Vice President. The post of Secretary was left open. The appointed position of Treasurer will again be filled by **Charles Knight**.

During the winter of 1813-1814, Lt. Thomas MacDonough built a fleet of vessels on the Otter Creek near the falls at Vergennes, Vermont. This fleet would go on to face the British in the Battle of Plattsburgh on September 11, 1814 on Lake Champlain. MacDonough chose Vergennes as the site for his winter quarters and shipbuilding activities for a number of practical reasons. First, Vergennes is located seven miles up-river from Lake Champlain, providing protection from the British. Secondly, there were a number of established resource supplies in the town that were beneficial to the construction of his squadron of war vessels. The area was surrounded by abundant timber, and at the base of the falls in the small town there was an established ironworks. While the historic record gives some indication of where MacDonough's shipyard may have been located, its precise location remains a bit of a mystery.

Victor Rolando, who has edited the Journal of Vermont Archaeology since 2000 and has made the Journal a yearly publication, has indicated his desire to retire from this post. The VAS will be seeking a new, volunteer, Editor beginning after the publication of the 2011 Journal.

Officers and Board 2012

President

Bob Brinck

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In October, the Lake Champlain Maritime Museum (LCMM) carried out initial archaeological testing at a site along the Otter Creek that just may have been the location of the historic shipyard. With funding from the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection program, and permission from the state of Vermont, who owns the land, LCMM surveyed approximated 2400 square meters of shoreline along the Otter Creek. Our goal was to assess the integrity of this site in general, as well as to identify any cultural remains that may date to the era of the shipyard.

LCMM staff and a dedicated crew of volunteers from the Vermont Archaeological Society excavated 50x50 cm test pits, some reaching depths of over one meter. Throughout the week, school groups from Vergennes, Ferrisburgh, Northlands Job Corps and the Lake Champlain Waldorf School spent time at the site, and the general public was invited to stop by as well.

Our efforts did identify cultural materials that date to the time of the shipyard.

A number of decorated kaolin pipe bowl and stem fragments, as well as a nearly complete pipe, were recovered.

Decoration and size of the pipes indicate that they date to approximately

1780-1820. Ceramic pearl ware fragments that date to 1790-1830, in

addition to a number of square iron

fasteners and square nails, were also recovered. But work still remains to be

done. While excavations were successful in identifying undisturbed archaeological deposits that date to the time of the shipyard, LCMM will continue to research historical documents related to the property and the shipyard this winter.

A very special thanks to Bob Brinck, Bob VanArsdale, Brigitte Helzer and Les Myers for all their help in making the field work and public outreach component of this project such a success. LCMM would also like to thank the National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program for



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funding our work, and the State of Vermont for allowing the project to take place. An additional thanks to Scott McLaughlin for lending LCMM supplies for the project and to Kate Kenny for sending many helpful bits of information our way.

- Submitted by Joanne Dennis

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Vermont Archaeological Society