

The Southern Battery at Mount Independence

By Dennis E. Howe, William Murphy and Marjorie Robbins

Historical Background

In July of 1776, thousands of Revolutionary War soldiers from Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey began the work of constructing defenses of stone and wood on an acropolis-like promontory at a narrow place on Lake Champlain opposite Fort Ticonderoga in Orwell, Vermont.¹ When these soldiers heard the news of the Declaration of Independence, they named the fortress they were building "Mount Independence" to honor the event. By October, Mount Independence would be a formidable military complex, manned by more than 10,000 soldiers who cantoned there. At the sight of the large number of defenders and Mount Independence's works, the British General, Sir Guy Carleton, leading a large invasion force from Canada, retreated with his troops without testing Mount Independence's defensive strength.

Not discouraged by the Americans' easy victory over Carleton, the British launched a second invasion from Canada led by General John Burgoyne in the early summer of 1777. This time the British found Mount Independence lacking the necessary complement of soldiers for a successful defense. During the night of July 5-6, its commander, General Arthur St. Clair, ordered a hasty retreat, and Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence were captured and garrisoned by a small number of British regulars and German mercenaries as Burgoyne continued south with the bulk of his army.² In October, General Burgoyne was defeated at the Battle of Saratoga where he surrendered his

army to the Americans, and Burgoyne's garrison at Mount Independence burned its works to prevent their immediate reuse. As the focus of the war moved to the Middle Atlantic States, Mount Independence lost its strategic military importance, and it was not reconstructed. Its 300 acres containing the ruins and artifacts of the Continental Army's first major cantonment has lain virtually unused since.

Except for a survey by Chester Bowie and David Robinson in 1966 and 1967 to locate surface features (Robinson 1968), no documented archaeology of Revolutionary War deposits on Mount Independence had been accomplished until 1989, 1990 and 1992, when, under the direction of Dr. David Starbuck, archaeological surveys and excavations were conducted to begin the systematic mapping and identification of a multitude of components. Much of the work was focused on southern areas of Mount Independence belonging to the State of Vermont, and which contained the remains of cantonments of the Continental Army's (1776) Second and Third Brigades, a very large general hospital, storehouses, blockhouses, and other defensive works. (See Starbuck et al. 1991, 1991 and 1993, Starbuck 1990 and 1993, and Howe 1991.)

This article discusses archaeological research which was accomplished on the remains of an artillery battery which guarded the only land approach to Mount Independence. It also compares the architecture of artillerymen's huts located at the battery with that of infantrymen's huts in the Second Brigade cantonment located elsewhere on the Mount Independence plateau.³

The ruins of the Southern Battery were located on a ledge near the top of a cliff which overlooks the military road that provided access to Mount Independence from the east. A map drawn by John Trumbull, dated August 1776, published in his *Autobiography* (Figure 1), illustrates two possible batteries at the southern edge of the mount as "Works Intended" (Sizer 1958). The northernmost of the planned works approximates the position of the features which were

1. The New England, New York, New Jersey regiments, and a Pennsylvania battalion invaded Canada in May, 1776. The expedition failed for many reasons, not the least of which was a smallpox epidemic and an over-extended supply line. Facing superior numbers of British troops, the Americans retreated and arrived at Fort Ticonderoga and Mount Independence in early July. Animosity between the New Englanders and Pennsylvanians caused the Pennsylvanians to be stationed at Fort Ticonderoga with the lake separating them from the New Englanders who helped develop the Mount Independence fortifications (Krueger 1982:173-174 and 1983:297-298).

2. On July 7, fifteen miles south of Mount Independence, at Hubbardton, Vermont, an American rear guard engaged in a fierce firefight with German and British pursuers. The American action, which included Seth Warner's Independent Continental Regiment of the Line and Nathan Hale's 2nd New Hampshire Regiment, slowed Burgoyne's advance (Williams 1988).

3. A discussion of the research of the Second Brigade cantonment can be found in "The Archeology of a 1776 Cantonment of New Hampshire Regiments," Dennis E. Howe, *The New Hampshire Archeologist*, Vol. 32(1).

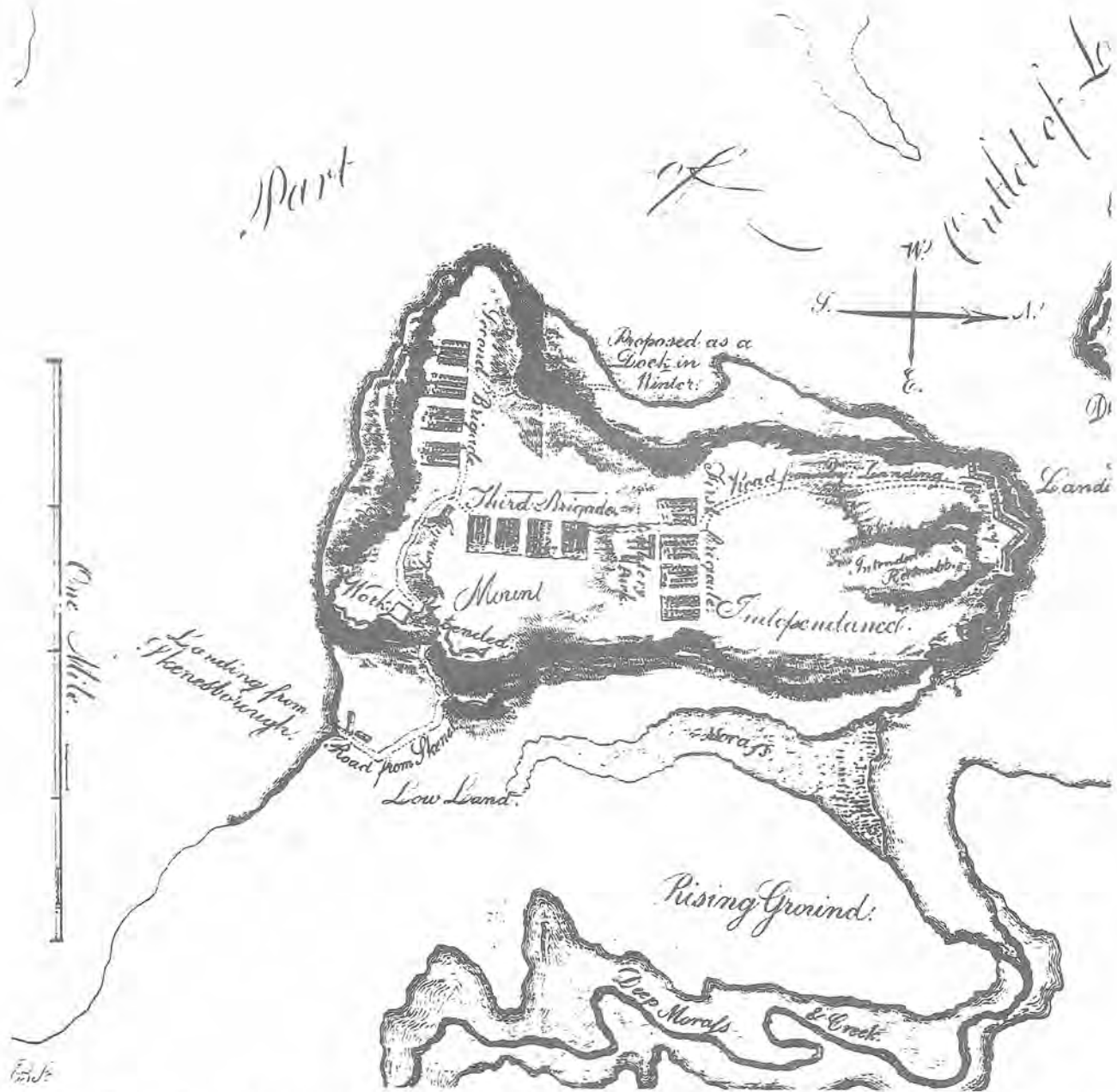


Figure 1. A map of Mount Independence, August 1776, by John Trumbull. From his Autobiography, it illustrates the approximate location of the Southern Battery which is the northernmost of the "Works Intended."

archaeologically tested and identified as the "Southern Battery." (A second map, Figure 2, used during the St. Clair court martial in 1778, also illustrates a battery in this approximate location.)

The landform which supports the battery features can be

described as a geological downthrust block having a ledge or platform which affords isolation from other military components of Mount Independence by limiting accessibility with its steep cliffs. The archaeological excavations of the battery ruins provided the opportunity to study the lifeways of Continental artillerymen which have rarely under

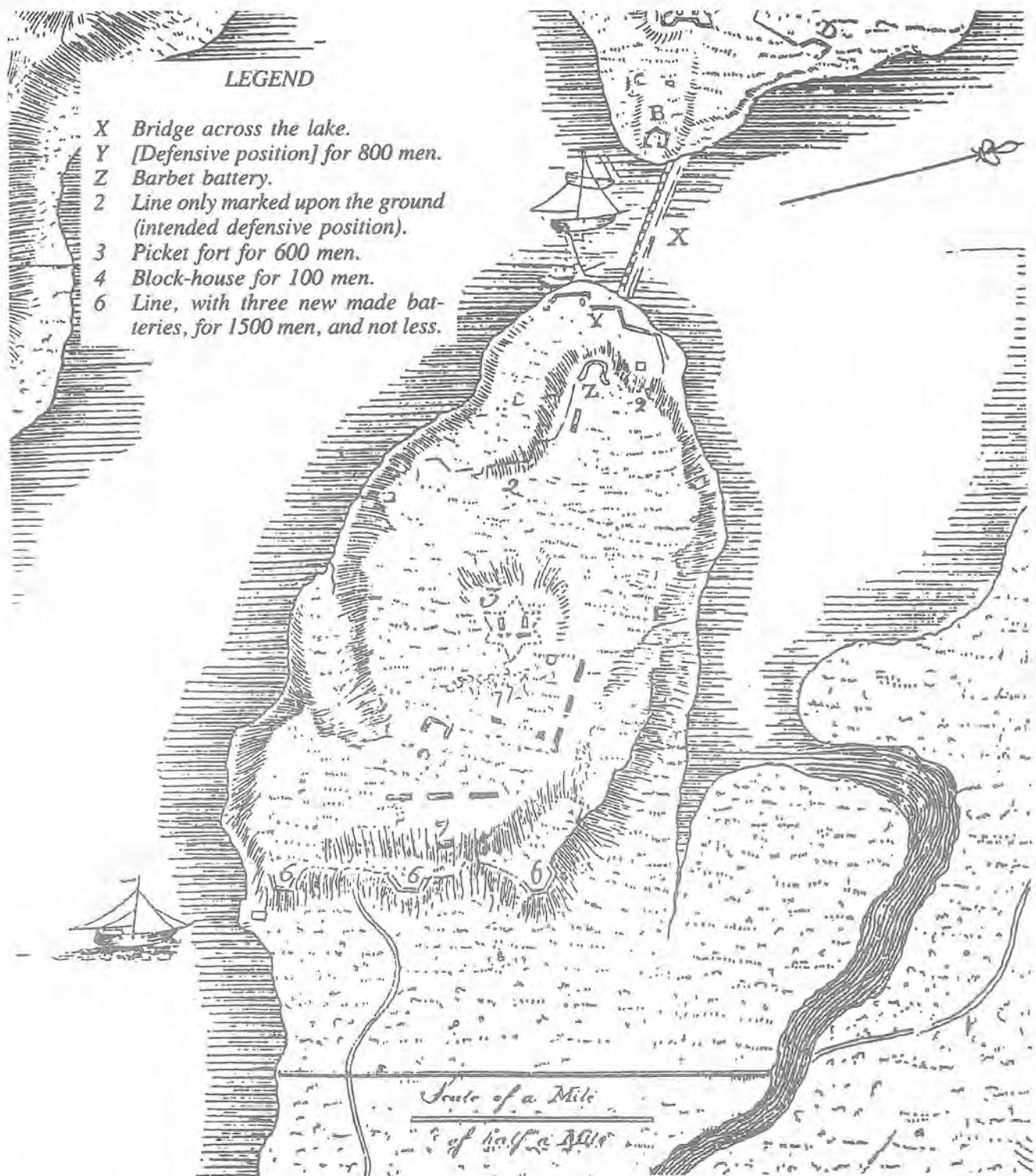


Figure 2. A plan of Mount Independence from the General St. Clair court martial Proceedings. The Southern Battery is located approximately at the center number "6" line of works.

PT 4
 AP "A"
 GRID POINTS (REBAR)
 GRID POINT (SPIKE)
 CONTOURS
 ROADS AND TRAILS
 TEST PITS
 POSSIBLE FEATURES
 1966 BOWIE AND ROBINSON MARKERS
 115
 SITE NUMBERS
 OUTLIER TEST PITS
 SHOVEL TEST PITS

ROCK CLIFFS
 STONE WALLS
 DEPRESSION
 LOW EARTHWORK
 SISWIS

SOUTH BATTERY

CONTOUR INTERVAL 1.0 M

0 10 20 30 40
 0 50 100 150

N
 MAG N 1985
 DECLINATION 14°30' E

130



Plate 1. Site 122 after excavation. The cliff face formed the north wall of the hut and a platform for its fireplace. David Starbuck photo.

gone archaeological research.⁴

The historical record suggests that the Southern Battery was never fully developed by the Americans. The non-specific testimony recorded at the court martial of General St. Clair recounting that some works were incomplete at the time of the retreat may be interpreted to mean that the Southern Battery was not ready for defense when it was abandoned to the British (New York Historical Society, 1881:90, 109). However, the site itself provided a superior advantage for artillery by its elevation and probably required little in the way of defensive works to provide protection from enemy fire. The survey and excavations accomplished at the site revealed foundations of probable gun platforms, remains of low earth and stone walls, a powder magazine, soldiers huts, and other structures.

The 1990 Excavations at the Southern Battery

In 1990, during the last days of the field season, limited excavations were conducted at the Southern Battery. Test pits were placed near its western edge at site 113 which exhibited the remains of a structure with thick stone walls, thought to be a powder magazine or laboratory. No artifacts

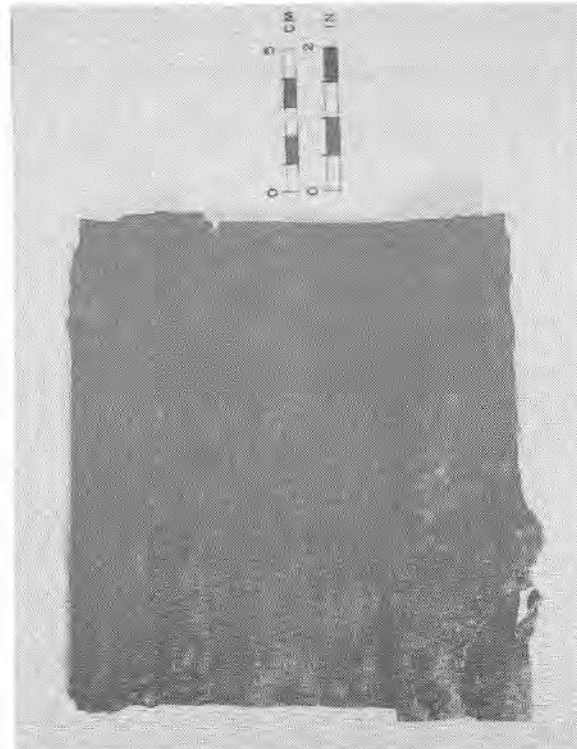


Plate 2. Sheet metal canteen body fragment recovered from Site 122. David Starbuck photo.

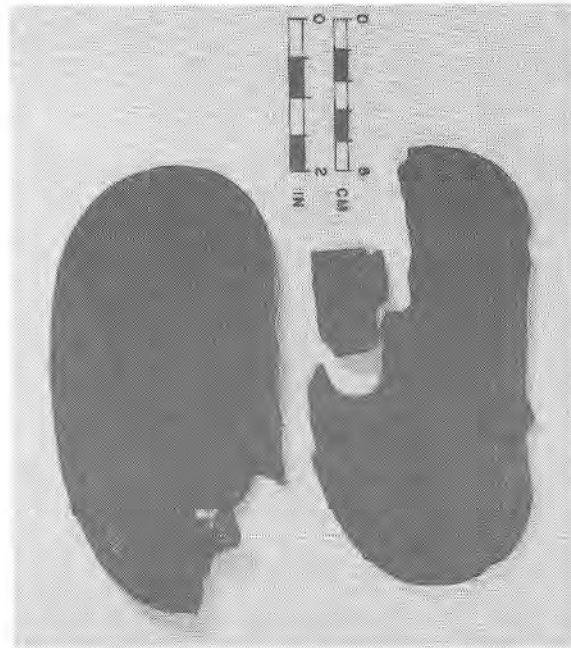


Plate 3. Sheet metal canteen bottom and top fragments recovered from Site 122. David Starbuck photo.

4. Important archaeological research was accomplished by John Seidel at an artillery cantonment in Pluckemin, New Jersey (Seidel 1987).

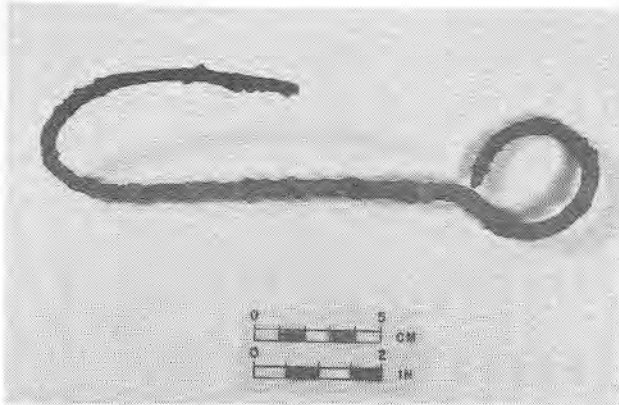


Plate 4. Iron hook recovered from Site 122. David Starbuck photo.

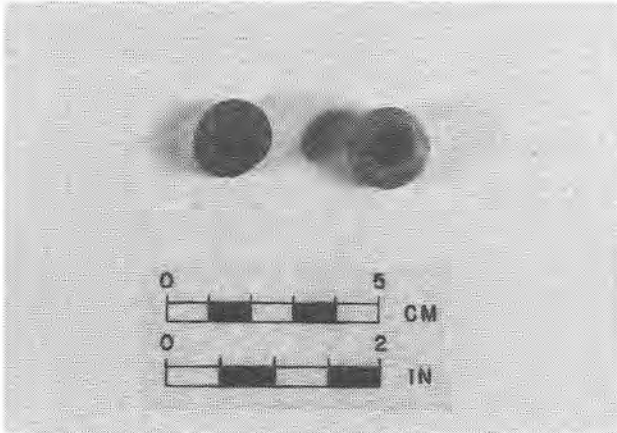


Plate 5. Lead weights recovered from Site 122. David Starbuck photo.

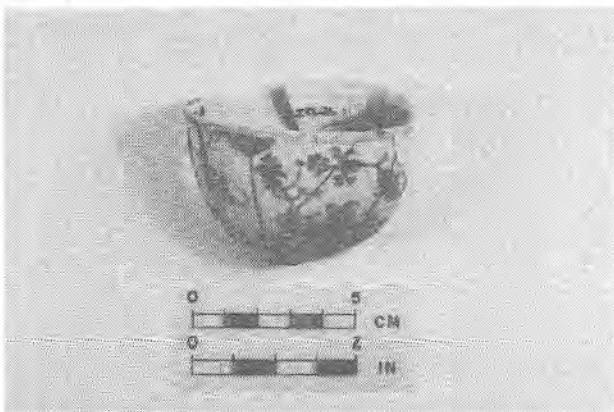


Plate 6. Tea bowl recovered from Site 217. David Starbuck photo.



Plate 7. Hearth excavated at Site 212. David Starbuck photo.



Plate 8. Surface of Site 217. David Starbuck photo.

were recovered from site 113. Pits were also placed in a shallow depression near the center of the battery area (later designated site 216). This work revealed little architectural information, but the artifact collection included bone fragments (food remains) and many iron canister shot or grapeshot.

A third ruin (site 115) excavated at the South Battery in 1990 was interpreted as a soldiers' hut. Three of its walls had been constructed of stacked rough stone blocks. (The stone blocks had been recovered from nearby talus which had formed from naturally foliated bedrock.) A cliff face had been used as the north wall of the hut. Recovered nails suggested that the hut had been built with a timbered roof and a wooden door. In addition to nails, the test pits produced a rich collection of animal bone fragments, and architectural, domestic and military artifacts. The excavations revealed a hearth which was located on a small ledge on the cliff face. Since chimneys were normally placed against an outside wall of a hut to maximize living space, the hearth beside the cliff wall suggested that the hut did not have a chimney; rather, an opening in the roof permitted smoke to escape. The findings of 1990 encouraged further survey and excavations at the Southern Battery in 1992.

The 1992 Excavations of the Southern Battery by William Murphy

After clearing vegetation and establishing a grid, limited excavations were begun in two regions which, for discussion, are designated the eastern area and the western area. The areas were divided by a north-south line between site 115 and site 116 (see Figure 3).

The eastern region:

Using the 1990 NOE0 datum at site number 115, the first pits were established, one in the depression area and two in front of the probable hut sites 121 and 122. Subsequently, other meter pits were placed in a modified depression near the battery itself (the probable gun platform bases), but one found bedrock at 10 cms with no artifacts, and the other yielded one nail before bottoming out at 30 cms. The other two pits held small fragments of brick and a few pieces of burnt bone above bedrock.

The larger depression area was given a separate designation as site 216. Test pits were eventually extended from the original N12E6 to N14E6 as artifacts ranging from a complete pig's jaw to a wine bottle bottom were uncov-

ered. In all, cow bones, pig bones, animal teeth, bottle glass, canister shot, lead fragments, nails, spikes and charcoal were removed for analysis, with the supposition that the depression had been used as a trash site.

The remains of huts which extended along the cliff wall dividing the ledge east-west had been tested in 1990 at site 115 which had revealed a stone wall foundation (see above discussion). Limited testing was continued at the other hut sites, designated as sites 119, 120, 121 and 122.

Site 115 included a small depression immediately adjacent to the hut remains that was excavated to a depth of 50 cm with only one nail, a lead sprue, several small bone fragments and some scattered charcoal uncovered. The hut area itself at 10 cm had some flat stones that might have been at floor level which, when removed, revealed small bone fragments, small bits of mortar, a nail and a gunflint.

Site 119 was partially covered with rock overburden that was mapped and removed. Bedrock was reached at 70 cm, and the pit contained nail fragments, nails, charcoal, chert flakes, burned and unburned bone fragments, brick fragments, burned wood fragments, and, at the bottom, board remnants that were left in situ. Site 120, which had been thought to be a hut site before excavations began, revealed nothing except small pieces of brick and a few chert flakes.

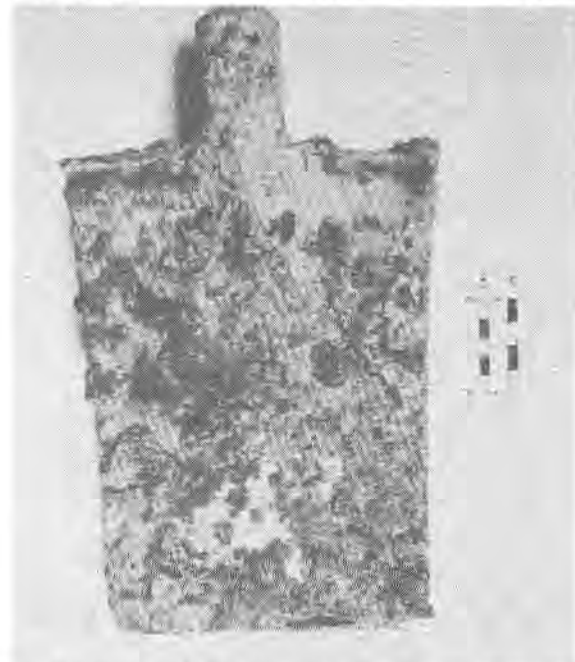


Plate 9. *Iron spade recovered from Site 217. David Starbuck photo.*

The Southern Battery at Mount Independence

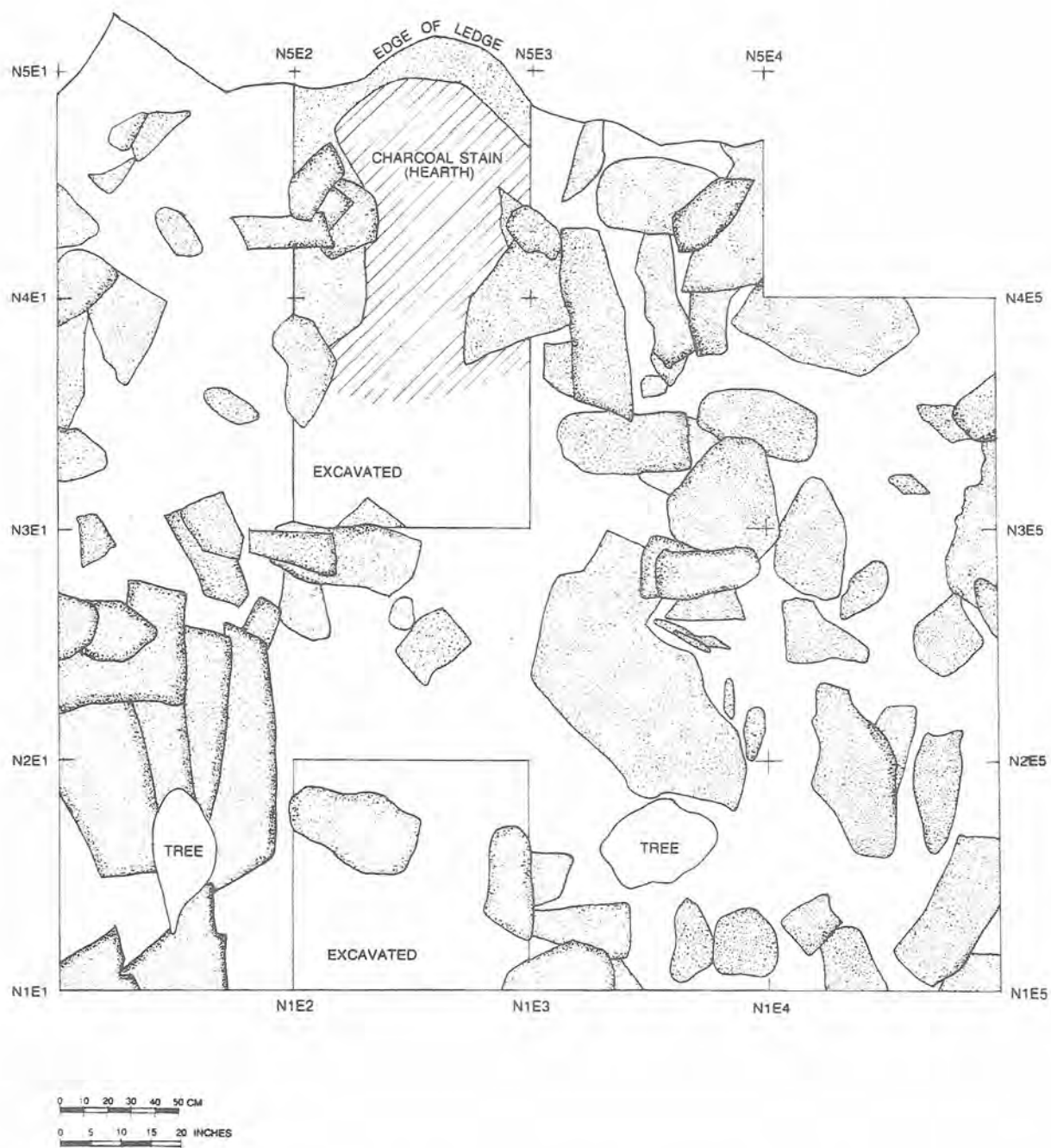


Figure 4. Plan of Site 115 (a hut ruin), illustrating the 1990 test pits. Drawn by Dennis Howe.

Table 1. Southern Battery Artifact Collection

ARTIFACT	Site Number									
	115	116	119	120	121	122	126	212	216	217
gunflint	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
musket ball	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	1	0
iron shot	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4
lead waste	1	1	0	0	2	1	1	0	3	14
button	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0
sheet metal	0	0	0	0	0	*	0	4	0	0
wrought iron	0	0	0	0	0	hook	0	0	0	spade
Common nail	1	2	3	0	4	34	0	42	12	9
rosehead nail	1	7	19	0	31	116	0	125	17	11
T-head nail	0	0	0	0	0	6	0	1	1	0
glass frags.										
wine bottle	0	0	0	0	0	94	6	0	64	0
tableware	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
animal bone fragments										
unburned	12	3	10	0	8	102	0	55	230	13
burned	1	9	7	0	46	88	0	80	3	31
ceramic sherds										
slipware	0	0	0	0	0	169	0	0	0	0
unglaze	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	1
delft	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
unident.	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	0	0	3

*Fragmented canteen.

Site 121 was excavated to a depth of 40 cms to bedrock. Many fragments of bone (some burned), sherds of glass, rosehead nails, brick fragments, charred wood fragments and charcoal were uncovered.

Site 122 was the most rewarding of the hut sites located against the cliff face. It had a heavy rock overburden that had probably prevented pot hunters from digging it. As soon as this overburden was removed it became obvious that it had covered a substantial stone foundation. Artifacts soon became apparent, and as additional pits were excavated south and west of the original meter-square pit, the variety, number and quality increased. Directly against the cliff wall that served as the north wall of the hut were located the remains of what may have been a brick fireplace. Heavy moisture which had seeped down the side of the cliff over the years had caused deterioration so that only a

thick, red residue remained. Nearby, large rosehead nails were uncovered, some in an almost pristine state, giving credence to the often heard tale that local iron was so pure that it did not rust. (Actually, a natural alloy which may have included nickel prevented rusting of the nails.) As the excavation progressed, bone (some burned), mortar, charcoal, ceramics, glass, musket balls, horn fragments, bottle glass, metal canteen parts and an iron hook were uncovered.

Of interest among the artifacts were the sherds of a wine bottle, which, when reconstructed, produced an almost complete vessel that exhibited the name and date, "James Hill 1777," scratched into its surface in two places. Also discovered were lead net sinkers that had holes through them created during casting, as well as slip-decorated earthenware sherds from a single mug, and fragments of at

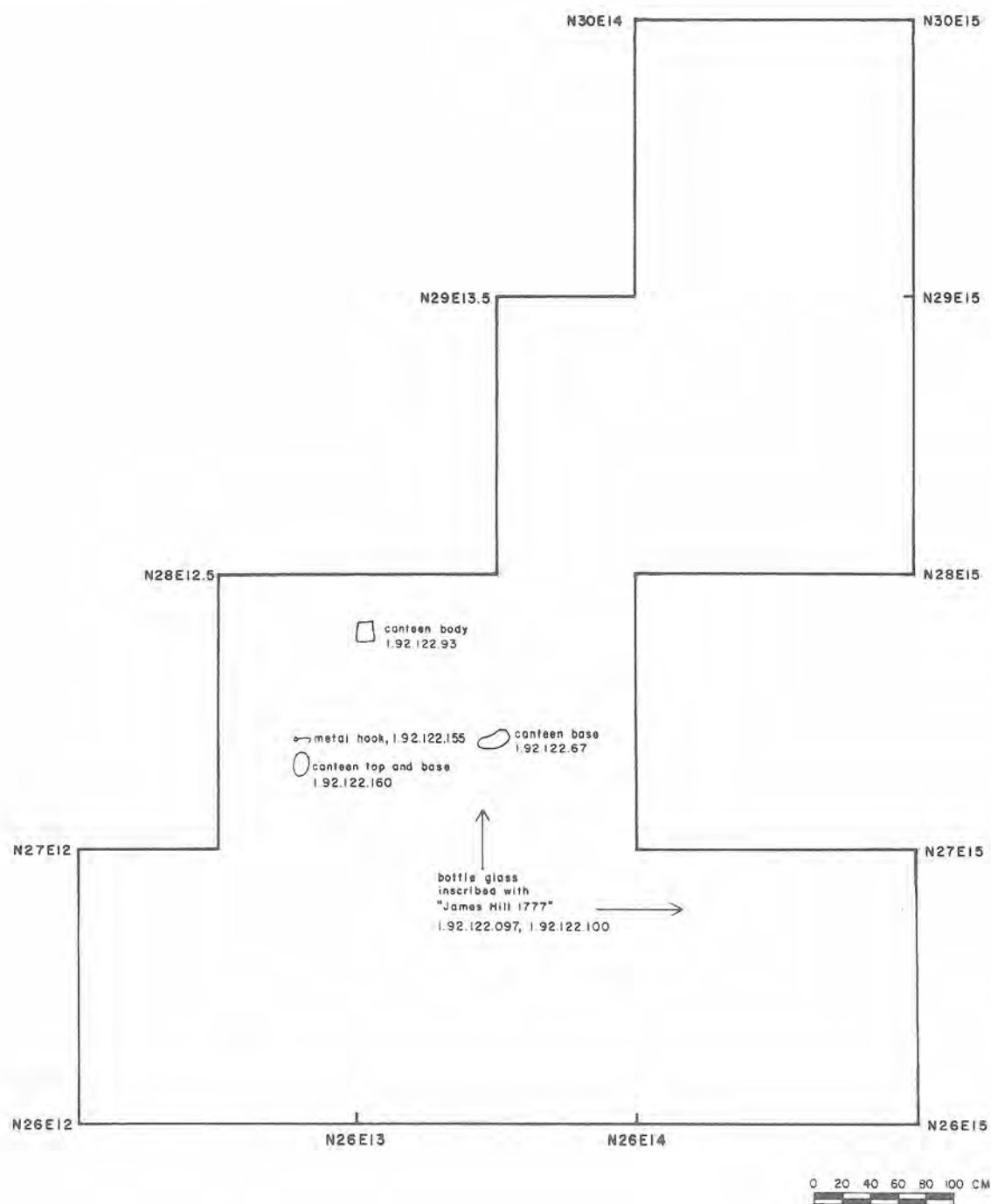


Figure 5. Plan of Site 122 (a hut ruin), illustrating locations of major artifacts. Drawn by David Starbuck.

least two sheet iron canteens.

Site 126, a long, low earth mound extending north-south on the east side of the battery, was investigated with a traverse cut through it. The soil was a heavy clay, mixed with a large amount of charcoal, overlaying a large stone grouping, complete with a possible builders' trench. An additional rock grouping was located on the surface 40 cm to the west, separated by a layer of loam, mixed with clay. To the immediate east of the feature was a rock wall that marked a later boundary line which also included a wire fence. It is probable that the person building the boundary wall in the recent past "borrowed" stone from the battery area.

The western region:

The area was cleared of vegetation, a new NOEO datum was established, and a grid was laid out. The northern side of the area included the cliff that extended westward from the hut sites described above and was suspected to contain remains of similar huts. A few meters to the south of the cliff, it was observed that there was a large deposit of stones that were not part of the natural landscape. Excavations were accomplished in both the suspected hut sites and the stone deposit.

Site 116 was identified by a rough stone formation extending out from the cliff and was partially excavated. Charcoal, bone fragments, nails, brick fragments, chert flakes and a burned plank were uncovered. The plank was protected, left in situ, and covered during backfilling. (The remains of two other possible huts, sites 117 and 118, identified in the Bowie and Robinson survey were not excavated.) Site 212 was identified on the surface by a stone outline, many brick fragments and some partially buried whole bricks. The topsoil was removed, and a stone platform with more brick was revealed. Artifacts recovered included nails, bone fragments (some burned), charcoal, slag and some tin fragments. The stone platform was identified as a fireplace base.⁵

Site 217 was covered with a large stone overburden which was removed in its entirety in an attempt to determine what type of foundation or structure it represented. It was observed that the structure which had occupied the site had sidewalls and was cut partially into the slope. Artifact density was low, but nails, brick fragments, and bone frag-

ments were found. Of note were sherds of a soft-paste porcelain cup, and a spade with the burned wood remains of its handle present inside the socket.

Hut Architecture

The archaeology of Mount Independence has provided an opportunity to study soldiers' huts which were constructed before the Continental Army had established specifications. The neat rows of uniform log cabins of the Continental Army's final cantonment at New Windsor, New York, in 1782 (Fisher 1983) provided a sharp contrast to the variety of structures which had been built on Mount Independence in 1776-1777. The excavations of hut remains in the Second Brigade cantonment on Mount Independence in 1989 and 1990 revealed two different types of huts. Interestingly, the huts excavated at the Southern Battery revealed a third architectural variation.

The remains of huts on Mount Independence appeared as low mounds of stone rubble. Except for the huts excavated along the cliff face at the Southern Battery, no recognizable foundations were noted, suggesting that sills rested on the ground (the cliff-face huts exhibited stone in their wall construction). Excavations revealed little below-ground structure, indicating that they were not dug out as was noted at Valley Forge (Trussell 1990:19-21). Associated with each rubble mound there was a rich collection of artifacts within a thin sheet of topsoil (the huts had dirt floors). While quantities varied among the hut sites, the artifact classes included architectural (nails), arms (balls, gunflints, musket parts, bayonet fragments), tools (ax head, knife blades), clothing (buckles, buttons, cuff links), kitchen (ceramic, glass, animal bone) and personal (coins, tobacco pipes), all of which would be consistent with a cantonment.

Briefly, the analysis of the materials and features uncovered during the excavations of ruins in the Second Brigade area suggested that some of the living quarters, or huts, were constructed with a frame and boards, while others had been built with logs. A frame hut had a hearth and chimney at one end, while a log hut had no chimney. Instead, the hearth of the log hut was in the center of the structure. An opening in the roof allowed smoke to escape. Both the frame and log buildings had dirt floors, field stone hearths (no bricks were found in the Second Brigade cantonment), and were estimated to be 12 by 18 feet in size. Rather than being aligned in orderly rows, the Second Brigade huts appeared to be clustered (Howe 1991:8-17).

At the Southern Battery, two types of living quarters were

5. While visiting Mount Independence, John Seidel (see Note 4), noted the fireplace base was similar to those uncovered in Pluckemin.

also uncovered. The first was a single ruin (site 212) which is thought to have been a frame building (suggested by the nail collection) of undetermined size. The remains of this hut appeared to be similar to the frame structures in the Second Brigade cantonment, except that it exhibited brick in its hearth construction.⁶ The second hut type was revealed in a row of ruined structures (sites 115, 116, 119, 120, 121, and 122) located against the cliff. As previously indicated, the cliff face functioned as the north wall of each. The other three walls of these structures had been constructed with stone. Wood had been used in the roof structure and possibly the upper portions of the walls. Their hearths were located against the cliff wall, suggesting, also as noted in the discussion of the 1990 work, that no chimney had been present. The size of the cliff-face structures was not determined but estimated to be smaller than the frame and log huts which have been investigated, perhaps no more than half their size. The excavations of the Southern Battery cliff-face ruins have added a third architectural style to the huts known to have been constructed on Mount Independence.

The archaeological research of the Second Brigade cantonment gave rise to the theory that the variation in architectural style of the huts there was related to the ranking and skills of the occupants. It was noted that the hut sites which produced many nails in the artifact collection (suggesting that they were of frame and board wall construction) also produce creamware ceramic sherds, while the hut sites which produced no nails (suggesting log wall construction) also produced no creamware. It was concluded that the huts built with scarce sawn boards and exhibiting expensive ceramics were inhabited by officers and that the log huts were enlisted men's.

Organization of Artillerymen

Applying the same reasoning used for the Second Brigade cantonment to the Southern Battery huts, it is thought that the hut at site 212 was also an officers' quarters, and the huts located along the cliff face were shelter for the matrosses (the enlisted men of the Artillery Corps). The variation among the huts of the Second Brigade and the Artillery Corps may be the result of the organizational differences between the two units.

The Continental Artillery Corps was organized in 1775

after Henry Knox engineered the transport of Fort Ticonderoga's cannon to the siege of Boston. The model was the Royal Artillery of the British Army which operated as a technically separate armed service rather than being attached to specific infantry regiments. The Royal Artillery consisted of a single regiment organized as four 8-company battalions. While the battalions and companies were administrative units, tactical flexibility was provided by establishing provisional artillery "brigades" with crews for eight to ten guns (Wright 1989:53-54).

As the Provincial Militia was reorganized into Continental units by Washington in 1775, Richard Gridley's Massachusetts regiment and John Crane's Rhode Island company of artillery were combined into a single regiment. Henry Knox was appointed artillery commander to replace Gridley in November of 1775. Knox formed his regiment with companies in an administrative organization similar to the British counterpart (with some variation in numbers of men) but did not use the tactical brigade. Instead, in 1776, Knox assigned his companies to specific fortifications or batteries, and the artillerymen would camp with nearby infantry brigades. When direct field artillery support was needed, it was furnished by assigning one or two officers and crews for several guns to infantry brigades (Wright 1989:53-54). Even under such tactical assignments, artillery units were considered "independent."

An artillery regiment's "staff was similar to that of an infantry regiment except that it included cadets undergoing on-the-job training. Each company consisted of 5 officers and 58 enlisted men. Eight non-commissioned officers, 8 bombardiers, 8 gunners, and 32 matrosses were allowed, but Knox followed a policy of filling those positions in proportion to the real strength of each company." The Northern Department "had the same organization except that it had sixty matrosses in deference to the added needs of detached duty" (Wright 1989:53).

"Knox's Artillery Regiment was designed to support only the main army. Separate companies performed the same mission for Schuyler. The remnants of John Lamb's 1775 company voluntarily reenlisted under Lt. Isaiah Wool. They were reinforced in the spring by Ebenezer Stevens' and Benjamin Eustis' companies of Knox's regiment, Capt. John Bigelow's company (in Burrall's regiment), and a Pennsylvania company. That colony had misinterpreted a congressional resolution and had directed Bernard Romans, an engineer, to recruit an artillery company for service in Canada" (Wright 1989:62).

6. This was the only hut among the 21 excavated in the Second Brigade cantonment and Southern Battery areas which exhibited brick in its hearth. It is thought that the brick was removed from Crown Point and transported to Mount Independence.



Figure 6. Drawing by Sarah Kinsella Waite of the wine bottle in which "James Hill 1777" was scratched in two places. The bottle was recovered in fragments from the Site 122 excavations.

Matrosses were recruited for their skills and constantly faced great engineering challenges in moving and positioning ordnance (not to mention its repair and maintenance.) They were also paid more. The stone walled huts at the Southern Battery differed from the log huts of the Second Brigade, in the greater effort required to build them, the use of sawed lumber, and their smaller size. Matrosses were accustomed to moving heavy objects, so they incorporated large slabs of talus in the walls of their huts (perhaps for protection from enemy fire), and they had access to the products of blacksmiths and sawyers (which were necessary to maintain gun carriages). Their small huts sheltered fewer men, perhaps only those assigned to a particular gun.

Conclusions

The excavation and analysis of the ruins of the Southern Battery have demonstrated that there is great variation in the use of space and the architecture of shelters among the defenders of Mount Independence. It also appears that the allocation of better and scarcer building materials for shelters, such as sawn lumber and nails, was related to both the status and roles of those who procured it. While much more research needs to be accomplished concerning the use of brick in shelters, it appears that the Artillery Corps officers may have had priority in its acquisition.

The rather limited archaeological research which has been accomplished at Mount Independence has produced some extraordinary results. Further analysis of the materials collected and the features that were recorded promises even more new information about provisioning and foodways. At Mount Independence there is the opportunity to better understand the dynamics and the lifeways of the Continental Army in its first year. It is perhaps the only place where one might learn through archaeology what it was truly like to be a soldier at that time.

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