

Introduction

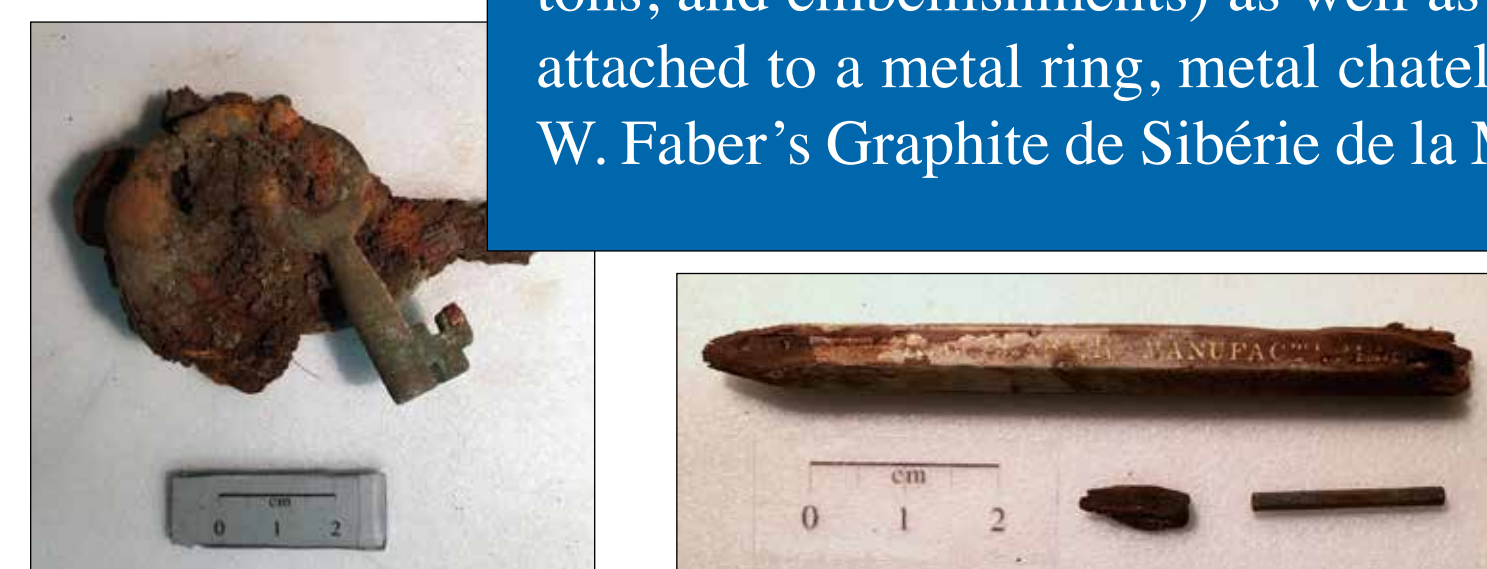
During Project 400 excavations, carried out by the Fiske Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston, archaeologists uncovered a cache of deeply personal items from the 19th century on Cole's Hill in downtown Plymouth. This collection of over 100 artifacts consists of Victorian-era jewelry, clothing items (a belt, numerous buttons), two daguerreotypes, two ambrotypes, and several very fragile paper, leather, and textile fragments. This unexpected cache provides a rare glimpse into the town's rich history that continued beyond the 17th-century Pilgrim settlement.

Fieldwork

The excavations on Cole's Hill consisted of five 1 x 2 m units placed to investigate features identified through GPR and FDEM surveys and to test the rest of the lot for other features or deposits. The unit containing the memorial cache, excavation unit 3, was located in the northwest corner of the lot. There was a strong signal from the FDEM indicative of a concentration of metal, probably caused by pieces of slag in levels 2 and 3. The upper three layers consisted of topsoil and two layers of fill with gravel and slag inclusions and a notably lower artifact density than other nearby units. Beneath these three layers, a concentration of cobbles running east-west divided the unit into northern and southern contexts. In the northern context of EU3, in a pit cut into the subsoil, a cache consisting of three distinct organic sections, a syringe, numerous pieces of jewelry, clothing items, a thimble, daguerreotypes and ambrotypes, and eye glasses emerged.



One of the artifact clusters consisted of a piece of knit fabric and artifacts associated with sewing (including a gold plated thimble, straight pins, buttons, and embellishments) as well as other objects (a key attached to a metal ring, metal chatelaine fobs, and an A. W. Faber's Graphite de Sibérie de la Mine Alibert pencil).



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dennis Piechota, the archaeological conservator at the Fiske Center, for his incredible work on these artifacts. Unless otherwise specified, all of the photographs were also taken by Piechota. We would also like to thank Dr. David Landon and Dr. Christa Beranek, the project directors, for their support and encouragement. These excavations were on property belonging to Pilgrim Hall Museum, and we thank them and the Town of Plymouth for their support of the project.

Meet the Jacksons

Deed and genealogical research on families living on the lot enabled us to propose that the images in the daguerreotypes and ambrotypes are most likely of members of the Jackson family. The southern half of the building on Cole's Hill was occupied by Judith Smith (Stetson) Jackson (1817-1905), her husband, Edwin Jackson (1812-1887), and their children Elizabeth (Lizzie) A. Jackson (1842-1897), Henry H. Jackson (1845-1877), and Mary E. Jackson (1849-1853).

Daguerreotypes were popular in the 1840s-1860s. Portraits became more possible when exposure time decreased from 30 minutes to less than a minute by application of bromine to the plate. To the left is young girl in a gingham dress. To the right is an adolescent boy resting a hand on his leg. Photo: Northeast Document Conservation Center.



As a photographic technology, ambrotypes became popular from 1854 to 1865, with an exposure time of less than 5 seconds. To the left is the same young girl from the daguerreotype in a gingham dress. To the right is a woman. Photo: Northeast Document Conservation Center.



Jewelry items made from the hair of the deceased became popular during the Victorian period. Rings, lockets, brooches, wall wreaths, and photographs were just some pieces that incorporated hair to express the remembrance of loved ones (Sheumaker 2007). This braided lock of blonde hair is unique in the sense that it was found placed on top of the four photographs.

This set of a brooch and earrings dates to the mid-Victorian period (1861-1880), based on the tassel and fringe (Etruscan style) decoration (Romero 2013: 48).



Black brooch: French jet, or black glass, is an imitation of jet found in jewelry of the middle and working classes. Wearing black jewelry in and out of mourning became popular during the mid-Victorian period (1861-1880) when the death of Prince Albert and the beginning of the American Civil War brought an end to the Romantic period (Romero 2013).



These ebony rings measure in two different sizes, which indicates that either they belonged to two separate people or an individual wore them on two different fingers. That these rings are made of ebony, a popular material for mourning wear, suggests they were worn during a period of mourning (Hesse 2007).



Resources

- Gere, Charlotte and Judy Rudoe 2010 *Jewelry in the Age of Queen Victoria: A Mirror to the World*. London, UK: British Museum Press.
- Hesse, Rayner W. 2007 *Jewelrymaking Through History: An Encyclopedia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Romero, Christie 2013 *Warman's Jewelry Fine and Costume Jewelry: Identification and Price Guide*, 5th Edition. Iola, WI: Krause Publications.
- Sheumaker, Helen 2007 *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Additional information about the excavations and artifacts can be found on our blog: <http://blogs.umb.edu/fiskecenter/>

Conservation

Under the direction of conservator Dennis Piechota, the authors mechanically cleaned the artifacts of soil matrix and applied archival consolidants, e.g., Paraloid B-72, to strengthen those artifacts too fragile and embrittled for normal handling. The daguerreotypes and ambrotypes were stabilized by specialists in photographic conservation at the Northeast Document Conservation Center.



Double-sided silk: After using conservation cleaning methods on what was a muddy fibrous lump in the field, a woven double cloth was revealed. Looking under the microscope made visible a silk composition that forms a tan and blue checkered pattern on one side and a solid blue on the other.

An X-ray Fluorescence analysis discovered a lead compound on the exterior and interior of this 19th-century glass irrigation syringe.



This belt, found rolled with its buckle, provided us with the cache's TPQ, with an engraved patent date of December 15, 1885. Whether this is a men's or women's belt is still unknown.

Interpretation

Currently, this deposit is being interpreted as a memorial cache possibly dedicated to mourning a member of the Jackson family. The number of items made of materials associated with mourning and the evidence for the intentional breakage of several of the artifacts including the key, the metal chatelaine fobs, and the double-sided silk fabric, all support the notion of this as a cache of mourning. The discovery of three distinct organic materials underlying the artifacts leads us to believe that these items were purposefully placed in this pit. In addition, the stack of daguerreotypes and ambrotypes was wrapped in paper and topped with the braid of blonde hair prior to deposition. The coiled belt in the corner of the north wall also supports the idea of careful, purposeful placement. Given the TPQ of 1885 from the belt buckle and the terminus ante quem of 1920 when the house was demolished due to eminent domain, the date range for deposition is 1885-1920. These combined factors imply that the act of depositing these artifacts occurred during a single event.



Shell cameo of Venus, ca. 1870s-1880s. As shell cameos were quick and inexpensive to produce, they served as popular souvenirs from the Victorians' travels to Italy. The clasp, the degree of ornamentation, and the female subject's nose in profile all aid in determining the date of production (Gere and Rudoe 2010; Romero 2013).