

Project 400: The Plymouth Colony Archaeological Survey
Report on the 2019 and 2021 Field Seasons
Burial Hill and Carver Street,
Plymouth, Massachusetts



Christa M. Beranek and David B. Landon, editors
with contributions by Dennis V. Piechota, Anya Gruber, Jocelyn Lee, Mariah Hendricks,
Linda Seminario, Lissa Herzing, Mikayla Roderick, David Spidaliere,
Justin Malcolm, and Zachary Guttman

University of Massachusetts Boston
Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research

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ABSTRACT

In May and June of 2019 and 2021, a field school from the Fiske Center for Archaeological Research at the University of Massachusetts Boston, in partnership with Plimoth Patuxet Museums (formerly Plimoth Plantation) and the Town of Plymouth, undertook their final two seasons of work as part of Project 400: The Plymouth Colony Archaeological Survey. Excavations had been taking place yearly in Plymouth since the summer of 2013. The 400th anniversary (1620-2020) of the founding of Plymouth Colony, New England's first permanent English settlement, provides a unique opportunity to revisit our scholarly understanding of the Colony's history. Working with community partners, including the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe, descendant organizations, and local museums, we undertook a series of initiatives focused on the Plymouth Colony to help advance a complex, inclusive, and scholarly understanding of the region's Colonial and Native communities. The work was funded in part through a Collaborative Research Projects grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

In 2019 and 2021, we continued work on Burial Hill. In 2019, we also tested a plot of land on Carver Street (reported here), and in 2021, we conducted data recovery excavations on Pilgrim Hall's lot on Cole's Hill (previously reported).

Since 2016, excavations on Burial Hill have focused on an area at the south end of School Street where we found the first known archaeological deposits from the early 17th-century English colony including a yard space, an earthfast structure, the colony's palisade, and an extensive area outside the palisade. In 2019 and 2021, units were placed adjacent to excavation units from previous years to continue to define the footprint of the house discovered in earlier seasons and to connect this structure with the landscape to the north. By the close of the 2021 season, we had excavated units that covered 21 continuous meters north-south. At the southern end, these units focused on an earthfast structure with two major parts, a northern sunken hearth room, cut more than a meter into the surrounding hill slope, and a southern portion closer to the surface. The artifact assemblage suggests a date of 1620 to 1660 and contains domestic material as well as a number of objects connected to trade and exchange. North of this structure was the colony's palisade. The portion that we uncovered exhibited multiple construction methods. North of the palisade was an activity area that contained a large pit feature and a roughly cobbled surface, as well as dispersed artifacts, predominantly Native ceramic fragments and local lithics, with some European material as well. The co-occurrence of these materials in features and surfaces suggests that this assemblage was used contemporaneously with the occupation of the house, possibly predominantly by Native people.

This report describes the excavated strata and archaeological features, groups deposits into analytical units (which are termed Lots), reconstructs the construction methods and abandonment and filling sequence of the house, and summarizes many of the 17th-century artifact assemblages, including a ceramic minimum vessel count. This report also contains a summary of Anya Gruber's pollen and phytolith analyses from Burial Hill. Gruber's major findings were that English colonists used, processed, and likely consumed maize (*Zea mays*) on a household basis and that colonists used wetland plants in their building construction in the form of thatch, mats or baskets, or rushes on the floor. Two Masters' theses analyzing Burial Hill artifact assemblages--the lithics and artifacts found inside the house--are in progress.