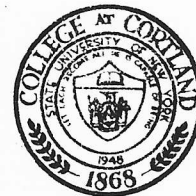


State University of New York ♦ College at Cortland

Cortland, New York 13045



January 8, 1982

The following report is a short summary of the archeological research and analysis of the SUNY Cortland College Archeological Field School Project at Erie Canal Village, Summer 1981. Actual field and laboratory work began on June 1, 1982, when the writer, her assistant, and a crew of 12 field school students, investigated the potential site for Fort Bull I, and observed when Mr. Brainerd scraped the sod from an area of the site in preparation for site gridding, mapping, and controlled excavation.

A total of 9 ten-foot squares, and 5 three-foot squares, were excavated in 3-inch arbitrary levels, with all soils screened through ¼-inch mesh screens, and all artifacts placed in labeled bags separated by depth and square. Within some of the squares, at the base of the soil layer which had been disturbed by plowing, there appeared circular soil discolorations which proved to be post molds of several sizes. In addition to these soil disturbances, there were two large areas where we encountered the outlines of earlier excavations and one area where we relocated the brick walkway referred to by Hagerty and National Park Service personnel in their notes from their searches.

Much of the artifactual material found during our excavations dates from the middle and late 1800's; some materials are of modern varieties--broken tin cans, pop tops, and beer or liquor bottles, as well as plastic fragments and oily rags, for example. However, we did encounter two musket balls which Hagerty has studied finding them of varieties which are old enough for the Fort Bull times, a few nail fragments and file-like tools which could be old enough, and some blue earthenware, "flow blue", which could be old enough to pertain to the times of Fort Bull.

The post molds, exciting because they appeared in the area where Hagerty's study suggested that they should be if the fort were located as he interpreted DeLerys' diagrams, did not contain any diagnostic artifacts of the time of Fort Bull. On the other hand, they did not contain other artifactual materials of a more

recent time. If this had been the case, it would have been likely that we would have to assume that the posts which had left us the mold (or "fossilized post") had been pounded into the earth at a later date, pressing whatever artifacts were located in their path down into the soil. Alternatively, if posts had been pounded into the ground, then, removed again, surrounding soils, and whatever artifacts they contained, might have been washed, kicked, or plowed into the holes left when the posts were removed, causing such artifacts to be intrusive into earlier soil layers.

In any case, we did not find any artifactual materials in these post molds. However, two or three had gray ash in them, suggesting that an extremely hot fire had destroyed the post. We would like to believe that these posts date from the Fort Bull times and that they represent part of the intense fire debris from the destruction of the fort itself.

To be fair, however, we are aware that there was a barn a few feet away from the main portion of our excavations, that the area where we were excavating had been the pig pen (we found direct evidence of that), and that there was a large dump close to the area where we were excavating during the time of the pig pen, in the 1950's. Burning off of dumps is a common practice, so it is quite possible that we should consider that possibility as an explanation for the ash in the post molds, as well as the more desirable earlier hypothesis.

One other type of archeological information was found during our excavations. This material is typologically older than Fort Bull. It consists of small, side-notched and stemmed projectile points and flakes of flint and jasper, which represent, probably, prehistoric Native American (Indian) occupation of this area before the early European settlers began to move into the area, introducing metal tools and weapons. This is not a surprising find as Arthur Parker (1922: 634-636) reported campsites, a village (with ceramics and "flints"), and scattered traces of Indian usage all around the area. Certainly, prior to use by the English, French, and their allies, this route between Oswego and Schenectady had been an Indian trail, a war trail, so it is said (Vrooman 1942: 6). During the 1700's, the Indian allies of English and French troops used these same trails to guide the troops along

what was to become the "Oneida Carry", one of the reasons why the need for forts such as Fort Bull became essential.

Despite the quantities of artifactual material found during our excavations, our evidence is inconclusive where it relates to Fort Bull itself. On the other hand, although three different excavations have been carried out in/on/adjacent to the probable site of Fort Bull, the land surface to be tested has not been exhausted. Each of the excavations has been limited by time, personnel, money, and the nature of the focus of the project. While Hagerty excavated virtually alone, the Park Service had two excavators, and we had a crew of 12. There is a large area where none of these investigations have gone. Our work concentrated in an open area where the Victorian House might be placed, if no significant archeological reasons could be found to avoid this spot.

At this time, it is still impossible to assure Erie Canal Village authorities that we have made certain that the site of Fort Bull either IS, or IS NOT, where Gilbert Hagerty has hypothesized that it should be. There is tenuous evidence for argument either way! Ideally, the area would be left undisturbed, for the time being, and the Victorian House would be placed closer to the "Clinton's Ditch" area, downslope from the excavations of Hagerty and the others.

The suggestion was made to us during the summer research that an alternative location for the Victorian House might be within the so-called "sheep pen". One of the problems of the relocation of the site of Fort Bull and whatever evidence for it there may be, has been all the previous soil-disturbing activity that has occurred where we were excavating--activity which may well have obliterated much of the evidence of what happened in that location. As we understand, there appeared to have been less disturbance within the sheep pen area, in which case, it would be informative to attempt some controlled sub-surface testing in that area before selecting it as a site for the Victorian House. This is especially important as, with just a few adjustments to DeLery's calculations, one might well hypothesize that the fort could have been there!

In summary, our excavations provided only tenuous clues to Fort Bull. We were not able to exhaust the entire area where evidence might be, and we feel that more investigation would be informative before

the Victorian House, or other "final" construction/destruction of the potential site occurs. It really would be exciting to have a segment of an early "Oneida Carry" fortification, or even an earlier site of a trailside Indian encampment, as part of the overall historic picture portrayed by Erie Canal Village, wouldn't it? As several time periods for canalside usage are represented by the current structures and the museum displays within the village, it seems as though the inclusion of additional ones might be advantageous and instructive for visitors.

Hagerty, Gilbert

1971 Massacre at Fort Bull: the DeLery Expedition against Oneida Carry, 1756. Mowbray Company, Publishers. Providence.

Hansen, Lee, Craig Davis, and Joseph Corradino

1975 National Park Service Study of Fort Bull Site.

Field Notes and Personal Communications to Authors. Rome.

Parker, Arthur C.

1922 The Archeological History of New York. Part 2, New York State Museum Bulletin 237, 238. Albany.

Vrooman, John

1942 Forts and Firesides of the Mohawk Country, New York. Elijah Ellsworth Brownell, B.E.E. Philadelphia.

report by:

Dr. Ellis E. McDowell-Loudan
and
Mr. Gary L. Loudan