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Archaeologists complete dig at Magruder House

by Elahe Izadi | Staff Writer

Archaeologist Tara Giuliano picked up a bucket of 2,000-year-old dirt and dumped it into a sifter as cars and tractor-trailer's rumbled past her on nearby Kenilworth Avenue.

"We're like history detectives," she said as she rocked the sifter back and forth, looking for a sign of human life among the rocks.

Archaeologists from the State Highway Administration, University of Maryland, College Park, and the Maryland Historical Trust finished their two-week dig at the Magruder House in Bladensburg on Friday.

The dig is the first phase of a \$50,000 SHA project to uncover historic information in anticipation of the bicentennial of the War of 1812. Archaeologists will next dig near the Market Master's House and the George Washington House, both in Bladensburg.

Archaeologists focused on finding evidence of a field hospital that is said to have been operating during the Battle of Bladensburg in 1814 on the Magruder House property.

The Magruder House was owned by famous and wealthy merchants and doctors such as Richard Henderson and David Ross. George Washington dined at the house in 1787, invading British troops passed by the house during the War of 1812 and there was reportedly civilian resistance coming from the house, chief archaeologist Julie Schablitsky said.

Schablitsky said although her crew didn't find artifacts relating to the hospital, archaeologists did uncover prehistoric spearheads that point to the existence of a several-thousand-year-old American Indian camping ground on the property.

"Archaeology is ubiquitous. It's all around us," Schablitsky said. "In reality, there was a group of Native Americans that lived here 5,000 years ago, and their history also has to be told."

By the conclusion of the two-week dig, archaeologists had filled trays with animal bones, ceramic pieces and doll parts. The discoveries show how both the successive rich white landowners and their slaves lived.

Schablitsky said there isn't much information on the day-to-day lives of slaves and historians are lucky to even get their names from Census records. Finding debris like animal bones can tell archeologists what they ate, for instance.

"It's important because it makes us better understand how they lived and what they engaged in," Schablitsky said. "It gives them

a voice. Their stories are in these little bits of ceramic and little pieces of bone."

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Raphael Talisman/The Gazette
Archaeologist Vincent Shirbach of Emmitsburg (left) hands a bucket of soil to archaeologist Benjamin Stewart of Brunswick to be sifted through at the archaeological dig Friday at the Magruder House in Bladensburg. In the background is archaeologist Tara Giuliano of Alexandria, Va.



Raphael Talisman/The Gazette
Michael Roller of Riverdale, a graduate student in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Maryland, College Park, writes down measurements as archaeologist Kristen Heasley of Rockville measures the different layers of soil Friday at the archaeological dig at the Magruder House in Bladensburg.

Multimedia: Click here to see the video <http://www.gazette.net/video/DigHY052109/DigHY052109>

