

Wiscasset Newspaper

Next Woolwich archeological dig starts July 17

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Courtesy of Ed Friedman



In 1654, at the home and trading post of Thomas Ashley on what is now Thwings Point in Woolwich, a group of early settlers met and signed papers forming the first European-style government in the Merrymeeting Bay region. From July 17 to July 28 on weekdays, volunteers are invited to join Friends of Merrymeeting Bay (FOMB) in continuing excavations of this important historical site along the Kennebec River. This location has been described as possibly the most significant unexcavated historic archaeological site in Maine.

A Phase 1 survey is the initial archaeological exploration for a new site. The purpose is to quickly cover a large area in a methodical manner. Small test pits are dug, soil stratigraphy and any artifacts found are recorded and the pits are back-filled. This was done in 2007 by FOMB volunteers and Maine Historic Preservation Commission (MHPC) staff. Results indicated future and more complete excavations were desirable and so a 2009, Phase 2 survey focused on an area of artifact concentration unearthed previously, while a 2011 dig located two cellar holes and unearthed a wealth of artifacts. The 2014 dig determined approximate size of one cellar hole and found three sides of the other, also determining which hole was associated with which period of occupation. Our 2015 excavation focused on defining perimeters of each cellar and this work will continue this year on at least one of the holes. Leading the dig is retired MHPC historical archaeologist Lee Cranmer, assisted by former seasonal MHPC staffer Kathy Bridge.

FOMB invites volunteers to assist. Volunteers are required to pre-register with minimum time commitments of a half-day, though multi-day assistance is encouraged, space permitting. A \$20 minimum donation to FOMB is suggested to help defray costs of the \$7,000 project. Non-members donating at least \$50 will get a one-year membership. Any artifacts recovered remain the property of the landowner.

Volunteers will work closely with and learn from archaeologists while making an important contribution to our knowledge of Maine history. There will be a maximum of six volunteers per half-day session. For more information or to register, contact Dig Coordinator Tom Walling at 666-5837.

The focus of this year's dig is property protected by purchase and conservation easement. It was part of a larger parcel now owned by the State of Maine and managed by the Department of

Inland Fisheries & Wildlife. The entire property was protected through efforts led by FOMB in partnership with the Nature Conservancy and Maine Wetlands Protection Coalition and acquired with funds from a previous Land for Maine's Future Bond.

In other FOMB news, the Little Swan Island Evening Paddle led by Warren Whitney, is set for July 26, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Pre-register with Whitney at 666-3376. The Outside Series outing schedule is available at www.friendsofmerrymeetingbay.org