“He Himself Will Share in the Hardship, and Partake of Every Inconvenience”: Finding George Washington at Valley Forge

Joseph R. Blondino
Dovetail Cultural Resource Group
The Isaac Potts House (a.k.a. Washington’s HQ)
The Valley Forge Encampment
Dec. 1777 - June 1778
"The General’s apartment is very small; he has had a log cabin built to dine in..."  
-Martha Washington
Archaeological work at HQ
Archaeological work at HQ

Approx. location of 1986 monitoring work
Location of 2009-2010 excavations
Prehistoric artifacts
Stone-lined well
Feature 1
Washington-era teapot from Feature 1
Feature 16
Encampment-period objects from Feature 16
18th century ground surface
Feature 21
Encampment-period features

Main excavation block

- refuse pits
- well
- proposed footprint of dining cabin
- sill trench

Washington's Headquarters

Scale: 10’
Feature 21-
sill trench for dining cabin
Encampment-period features
Washington’s Headquarters area
Encampment-period features
“I don’t want to see a single gum wrapper or cigarette butt on the ground, got it?!”
Excavation blog

Washington's Headquarters Blog

**Learn about Washington’s Headquarters and the Excavation Project**

**June 2-6, 2009**

*A Lesson in Context*

The start of every archaeological excavation begins with laying in a grid. We are digging in 5ft x 5ft excavation units, and we have oriented them parallel to the foundations of the Potts house. Our grid is 10 feet by 30 feet, giving us a two-by-six layout of squares aligned to the building, and they are marked with neon green Mason’s line wrapped around galvanized spikes. We have assigned each unit a letter designation, starting with the northwest unit “A”. In addition to units being named by letters, we are designating each as numbered by number. Therefore, the topsoil of every unit is “Level 1”, and subsequent soil layers below topsoil in each unit will be called “Level 2” and so on.

Once our grid is on the ground, we will establish a “datum”, a point from which we can measure all elevations of the soil levels across the site. Having a datum is very important for archaeological excavation; it is the depth measurement, as well as the letter designation, used to give artifacts and features “context”. Archaeologists can understand a time period not only through the artifacts themselves, but from where those artifacts were found in the ground: the artifact itself, its historical function, and its location upon the site play a large role in interpreting what it may have meant to someone, or to whom it may have belonged. It is essential that something is found in unit A, level 3 is good, but recording exactly how the soil was deposited is important as well.

**June 23-27, 2009**

*A Lesson in Stratigraphy*

This week we had a lot of interesting things going on in the ground in terms of the soils and sediments we’re encountering, so it seems like an appropriate time for a quick lesson in how we “read” and understand the various layers we dig through.

*Stratigraphy* is the study of soil layers. We use it to aid us in what we call “relative dating,” which means studying the various layers and the features that cut across them and determining the order in which things were deposited. For example, in the very simplest of stratigraphic deposits, the layer on the bottom is the oldest, and will contain the oldest objects, and the layer on the top is the youngest, therefore containing the most recent objects, or at least objects that were deposited more recently.

Excavation unit G featured some particularly interesting stratigraphy, and provides an excellent example of how archaeologists “read” the soil. The important layers (or “strats”) in this unit were: 1) a dark layer of soil that marks the modern surface and consists of a fill, a soil that...