

Elliot Park Neighborhood Archaeology

Why are we digging?



Archaeology is not just a search for “neat stuff”. To be useful, archaeology needs to address and – hopefully -- answer questions about how people lived in the past. What did they eat? Did they grow, gather, hunt, buy their food? How did their economic system work? What types of tools, utensils and aesthetic items did they value enough to make, buy, or otherwise acquire? How were their domestic lives arranged? What were their relationships with their neighbors and the larger community? How did people define their place in society?



Even sites of the recent past can give us valuable information to help answer research questions. Not every detail of life in the 19th century was documented in written records. And, sometimes the information gained from archaeology differs from what the written records tell us. We have to use both sources to put together an authentic picture of what life was like here in the past.



The archaeologists working at this site have identified a set of research questions that we will try to answer through our excavations. The things we find during the dig will be analyzed and interpreted in an effort to answer questions about topics such as:

- **Domestic Livestock.** The raising of livestock (at least smaller species like chickens and rabbits) is a generally (although not entirely) unfamiliar practice to modern city dwellers. We'll pay particular attention to evidence indicating whether and which animal species were being raised on site. What kind of evidence do we see indicating that food animals were being processed here as whole animals? What was done with secondary products such as bone? Ideally, in addition to identifying species that were raised on site, we might also find some evidence of the prevalence, intensity and chronology of this practice.

- **Consumer Behavior.** In what ways did the families participate in local and regional consumer markets, vs. more global ones? How did these overlap? Are there any obvious biases – mostly imported ceramics versus American-made, for instance? What can we learn about income from household goods, animal bones and other lines of evidence? Does retention or disposal of household items reflect changes over time in social standards on proper “style”?



Other research questions that might be addressed include how the physical features of these households (house and outbuildings) were arranged and modified or moved over the years; when the residents here began to use city services such as water and sewer; and how trash disposal practices changed as the area became more “urban”.