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One Dollar



Red Apple Award Winner... Wendy Smith (center), GHS parent and president of Glastonbury Friends of Robotics, is one of three individuals who were recently honored with a PTSO Red Apple Award. Smith is pictured with fellow robotics volunteers Eva Saftler-Wong and Al Chin. See story on page 11.

Hollister Dig Yields Historical Finds

By Shawn R. Dagle

A palisade wall dating to the late 17th century that is believed to have been constructed by John Hollister Jr. during King Philip's War was further explored during a recent archaeological dig near the Connecticut River in South Glastonbury.

Following a month-long effort, the Office of State Archaeology last week wrapped up the most recent work at the Hollister site, including the further excavation of the palisade wall that is believed to have been constructed by Hollister in an effort to fortify his farm along the Connecticut River in South Glastonbury against a potential Native American attack during the war.

Also discovered during the recent dig were numerous European flint flakes, a gunflint fragment, stoneware, white clay pipe stems and a re-worked brass object. Animal remains, including a couple of pig teeth and deer bones, were also unearthed.

Lasting from May 20 to June 20, the fieldwork was performed Monday through Thursday each week.

"This year, one of our areas of focus was to learn more about the King Philip's War-era palisade," explained State Archaeologist Sarah Sportman, who oversaw the dig.

"We know from the documents that John Hollister Jr. asked permission to fortify his farm in October of 1675 as fears that the war would come to Connecticut were on the rise," she added.

The war—which broke out in 1675 after a longstanding alliance between the colonists and Wampanoag tribe fell apart following repeated violations of their agreement by the colonists—was bloody and destructive. Raids were conducted in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Maine and Connecticut during the war, which lasted until 1676.

"There is no recorded attack on what is now Glastonbury, but settlement in this area was pretty sparse at that time—the town wasn't formed until almost 20 years later," explained Sportman.

Colonial documents do indicate, however, that enemy forces were spotted on the east side of the Connecticut River during the war, she explained.

"Colonial authorities had people taking precautions—storing food in secure locations, sending out scouting parties to look for hostile Native people, putting severe restrictions on the movements of allied Native groups near the river towns," said Sportman.

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The first section of the palisade believed to have been built by Hollister was discovered in 2021. Another section of the wall was also discovered in 2023.

“This year, we found the end of one wall,” said Sportman. “We have now documented a long, linear section of wall that runs for 20 meters (65 feet) in a northwest/southwest orientation. We plan to explore this area further later in the season.”

A cellar on the property was also further explored during this month’s dig.

“Excavating around Cellar 5 indicates that it was probably a post-in-ground structure,” said Sportman. “The cellar was not lined with stone, but may have been lined with planks. We excavated around the northern end of the cellar and found a series of deep wooden posts around the cellar feature.”

Numerous cellars have already been discovered on the site. The hypothesis at this point is that two of the cellars (five and six) were not attached to homes on the property but were some type of agricultural outbuilding associated with the farm.

“The cellars suggest they were used for storage,” said Sportman. “My sense is that these cellars contain more utilitarian ceramics like dairy and storage vessels, compared to some of the other features on site, which seems to support the idea that they may not have been houses, but we are not certain.”

Work at the site began in 2015 after the Office of State Archaeology was approached by the Historical Society of Glastonbury and the property’s owner—a descendant of Hollister himself—to see if there was any interest in a public excavation of a large horse pasture believed to have been the original location of John Hollister’s farm.

Ground-penetrating radar was brought to the site, which identified three large rectangular cellars along with pits and other features. A one-day historical society dig was conducted that year, which produced some artifacts that it was felt warranted further exploration.

The following year, in 2016, a more extensive excavation was conducted. That year, work focused on the three cellars identified with the ground-penetrating radar. Numerous artifacts were uncovered, including trade beads, ceramics (including English, Dutch and Portuguese) and red clay smoking pipe fragments. Various food remains were also unearthed, including fish and deer.

Work continued over the next three seasons and included the discovery of more ceramics,

German stoneware, glass fragments and earthenwares. The three cellars and others discovered on the site were further explored and Lithic artifacts believed to be as old as 6,000 years were also found on the site.

Work at the Hollister property was temporarily postponed during the pandemic. No excavation was conducted in 2020. The following year, in 2021, work resumed. A fire-cracked rock hearth was found (believed to have been potentially ancient indigenous).

A portion of the palisade wall was also discovered along with clay pipes, trade beads, gun-flint and ceramics. A large piece of coral was also found while exploring one of the cellars that is believed to have originated in the Caribbean and may have made its way to Glastonbury through colonial trade with the West Indies.

During last year’s dig, Sportman and her group were surprised by how many 17th century indigenous artifacts were discovered on the property, including pottery. Wampum beads were also uncovered, leading to speculation that wampum may have been manufactured on the site. Two brass arrowheads were also unearthed.

This year, students from the UConn archaeological field school took part in the excavation work. Numerous European flint flakes, a gun-flint fragment, stoneware, white clay pipe stems and a reworked brass object were found early on. Animal remains were also unearthed, including a couple of pig teeth and deer bones.

In the area of the palisade, excavators from the historical society also found what is believed to be the remains of a post from an early 20th century tobacco barn that was on the property until a flood in the ‘30s.

Interestingly, a small pipe with a maker’s mark believed to have been Dutch and made sometime between 1640 and 1660 was also uncovered this year.

According to Sportman, the most significant find was the continued exploration of the palisade walls.

While the most recent work on site wrapped up June 20, Sportman said there are plans to further explore the property.

“We plan to continue the project going forward. Our next excavation will target the palisade, looking for a corner or entrance. We also plan to expose the area around the three stonelined cellars in the northern part of the site to try and sort out the architectural styles and possible connections among these structures, which were more likely candidates for houses,” she explained.



Artifacts discovered above Cellar 5, including a reworked brass object, a flint pebble, a decorated pipe stem fragment, and a sherd of lead-glazed red ware, during this month’s Hollister dig.



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