

Archaeologists resume search for clues to local miners' lives

KENT JACKSON

Published: July 7, 2014

ARTICLE TOOLS

FONT SIZE: [A] [A] [A]

OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS



FACEBOOK


SIGN UP NEWSLETTER



Carlos Torres, left, and Jonathan Nick, both seniors at Hazleton Area High School, wash artifacts found at the site.



Students participate at the archeological dig, sponsored by the University of Maryland, on Yanac Street in Pardeesville.

 [Image Gallery for Archaeologists resume search for clues to local miners' lives](#)

Bottles of liniment for rheumatism and other aches, pieces of pottery, and even a hip bone give clues to the lives of miners and their families who lived in Pardeesville when it was a coal company town known as Lattimer No. 2.

Archaeologists from the University of Maryland unearthed those artifacts while digging beneath a yard of a double house and former privy shared by two homes in Pardeesville this summer.

The pieces of history that they found help them piece together information on the diet, coping skills and role of women in the village during the previous century.

Excavations near Yanac Street build on the picture of the community that anthropology professor Paul Shackel and his students compiled when digging in Lattimer and Pardeesville during the past four summers.

This summer, they are digging where families of Slavic heritage lived in company homes. Shackel wants to contrast their lives with those of the families of Italian descent who lived in shanties at Scamper and Upper streets, where they dug last summer.

The team also studied four years ago at the site where striking miners were shot dead by deputy sheriffs in the Lattimer Massacre of 1897. They shoveled through lots where houses once stood along Canal Street in Lattimer in 2012, and then compiled a website about Lattimer at lattimermassacre.wordpress.com.

Now, they are noting differences between their excavations during the past two summers in Pardeesville.

Justin Uehlein, a graduate student studying what the miners ate, said the residents seemed to borrow from each other's menus. He found seeds of pole beans imported from Italy in the garden of Slavic families.

Maurice DeLorenzo, a lifelong resident, told the researchers that friction developed between Italians and Slavs in the mines and in the village. After his mother taught a young woman of Slavic descent to speak Italian, however, she became an interpreter and peacemaker, DeLorenzo said.

The translator and her sister lived in the home where the team is digging this summer. Census records spell the sisters' surname as Berish, although it might have been Americanized to Biros. They lived in the home from girlhood in 1910 through 1940, said Michael Roller, a graduate student who has spent the past few summers in Hazleton.

When the sisters moved, they left behind a box of photos that the next owner, Ed Yanac, found in the attic of the home, which is now for sale.

The old photos let Shackel see how the backyard changed from a terraced garden for vegetables to an ornamental garden by the 1950s.

He has read that miners terraced their gardens to grow extra food while they prepared for a strike.

Examining the age of the seeds, which floated when the archaeologists mixed the backyard soil with water, will help him learn if the terracing occurred before a major strike, as in 1902, or, perhaps, during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

"We have an arch of poverty. We're finding very little protein in people's



Image Gallery for Archaeologists resume search for clues to local miners' lives

diets,” Shackel said.

Uehlein said he found more bones at the yard of the company home this year than he located near the shanties last year. A hip bone unearthed this summer probably came from a cow, he said, but he said the families still lacked protein. Fish might have been on their menus, but fish bones disintegrate easily, and the team only found one fish bone this summer.

The Yanac Street neighborhood had backyard ovens, including one shared by several families who kept stores of flour. Historic cookbooks that Uehlein collects indicates that the families had diets heavy in starches such as pierogies, vegetables and fruits. They spread out the meat that they obtained in stews, soups and casseroles to feed large families.

Bottles of home remedies such as one marked “Dills Balm of Life” indicated the miners acted as their own doctors when possible to save money. They

also uncovered a clear glass bottle that said “McHugh and Moran Hazleton” and a ceramic stopper labeled “Jacob Steinmetz Hazleton Pa.”

While miners and sons went to the mines, their wives and daughters worked in garment factories.

Most of the area’s garment factories have closed, but graduate student Camile Westmont doesn’t want the contributions of the women who worked in them to fade from history.

Westmont became interested in their stories after swapping spaghetti recipes with a Pardeesville resident, Mildred DeLorenzo, and learning that she worked in the Duplan Silk Mill.

The Duplan Corp. opened the world’s largest silk mill in Hazleton in 1898 and operated it until 1953.

Women employed at Duplan and other garment and textile factories also raised and cooked food for their families and maintained their households — decades before the rise of women’s liberation and the era when sociologists noted American women taking jobs outside their homes.

“To say women didn’t work until the ’60s is almost disrespectful,” Westmont said.

kjackson@standardspeaker.com