

Black Archaeology in New England: Theory, Dialogue, and Interpretation

33rd Conference on New England Archaeology

Meeting at Kemper Auditorium, Phillips Academy

And

Reception at Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology

Andover, Massachusetts

April 20, 2013

The 2013 topic will focus entirely on aspects of historical archaeology of the African American experience in New England. Presentations will include historical and archaeological research from the maritime, rural and urban environments of the region. The presentations will underscore the importance of theory and practice in understanding the narrative as well as, representation of the past and descendant communities. The sessions will underscore the importance of confronting the history of race in New England. Special attention to the role of public dialog, interpretation and memorializing of the past will be addressed.

Morning:

Whitney Battle-Baptiste, PhD (Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, University of Massachusetts, Amherst) ***In Search of Lena and Lucy: Intersectional Narratives of Race, Gender and Class in New England***

For more than three decades archaeology related to African Diaspora populations have centered on the artifacts and landscapes of plantations. Whether in the Southern United States or the islands of the Caribbean, much of our focus has remained fixed on the period of captivity. However, two of the first excavations of African American domestic sites were located in the state of Massachusetts. The recent shift toward understanding the experiences of people through postemancipation sites, once again reminds us that African American and African Diaspora archaeology is not just about plantations and captivity, the very foundation of the discipline has been based on the complex nature of freedom and equality in the Northeast. This paper is an exploratory effort to think critically about the intersectional relationship between race, gender and class in both Eastern and Western Massachusetts and the larger implications for a more inclusive narrative approach to historical archaeology in the discipline and the region.

Matthew Lawrence, MA (Maritime Archaeologist at NOAA's Stellwagen National Marine Sanctuary) ***Voyage to Discovery: Revealing Dimensions of the African-American Maritime Experience in New England***

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is currently undertaking a nationwide initiative to educate the American Public about the significant role African-Americans have played in the nation's maritime heritage. In New England, the Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary protects the shipwreck remains of the steamship *Portland* lost in 1898 with all hands. Many of

the steamship's crew were African-American. Through examination of the *Portland* archaeological site and the historical record, sanctuary archaeologists seek to shed light on the lives of the *Portland's* crew and the African-American maritime experience.

Kathleen Wheeler, PhD (Independent Archaeological Consulting, LLC) ***Portsmouth's African Burial Ground: How, When, Who?***

In October 2003, Independent Archaeological Consulting, LLC (IAC) recovered the remains of eight African-Americans from beneath a city street, and in 2008, encountered several additional burials. The location had been long rumored to have been the site of the "Negro Burial Ground," and was posted as such along the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail. In the process of recovery, analysis and interpretation of human remains, IAC partnered with multiple groups, including:

- The African-American descendant community (researchers, pastors, students, members of the Portsmouth Black Heritage Trail)
- An avidly interested public
- Strawberry Banke Museum
- Forensic anthropologists
- Scientists from the University of New Hampshire and USDA
- DNA biologists
- Clients and contractors

In working with these various constituencies, we were challenged to tell a fuller, more compelling story of those individuals recovered from the segregated burial ground. This paper offers some of the lessons learned about how to inform both a professional and lay audience about the role enslaved labor played in the Portsmouth seaport. I will also review where the City is in the process of devising a memorial for/at the site.

Afternoon:

David Landon, PhD (Associate Director of the Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research, Department of Anthropology, College of Liberal Arts, University of Massachusetts, Boston) ***Constructing Community: Experiences of Identity, Economic Opportunity, and Institution Building at Boston's African Meeting House***

The African Meeting House in Boston became a center of the city's free black community during the nineteenth century. Archaeological excavations at this site recovered material from the Meeting House backlot and a neighboring apartment building occupied by black tenants. These artifacts reveal strategies the community used to negotiate a place for themselves, create economic opportunities, and build community institutions. The Meeting House helped foster community success and became a powerful center for African American action on abolition, educational equality, and military integration. This paper emphasizes how archaeological and historical evidence from the African Meeting House demonstrates the power of the actions of individuals in the black community.

(Pending) Jason Mancini (Senior Historic Researcher, Mashantucket Pequot Museum and Research Center) Interactions between “communities of color” in early 19th C. eastern CT

Kate McBrien, MA (Curator of Historic Collections at Maine State Museum) and Rob Sanford, Ph.D. (Professor of Environmental Science & Policy and Department Chair, University of Southern Maine) *Malaga Island: The Making of a Public Archaeology*

The Malaga Island Project represents an application of the public archaeology approach in which museum staff collaborate with archaeological researchers in multiple phases from field school to exhibit. Malaga Island was occupied by a predominantly Black community until 1912, when its residents were forcibly removed by the state of Maine. Four years prior to the 100th anniversary of this regrettable event, the Maine State Museum began planning an exhibit and initiated collaboration with archaeologists from the University of Southern Maine, and the island’s owner, Maine Coast Heritage Trust. The proposed exhibit required careful, honest treatment of controversial history of the island community, and included extended work with the community’s descendants. This informed partnership between educators, researchers, curators, descendants, and other stakeholders culminated in a year-long exhibit (May 2012 - May 2013). But the collaboration did not end there and will continue indefinitely. The mechanisms and consequences of a collaborative, public approach to archaeology are described.

Posters:

Kate E. McMahon (Doctoral Program in History, Howard University) *“A Sufficient Number”:
The African American Historic Community of Peterborough in Warren, Maine*

Warren, Maine is located in the midcoast region of southeastern Maine. The small town has a long history that is intrinsically linked to the maritime activities of the region, which began in the mid-seventeenth century. Sometime around 1780, Sara Peters was brought to Warren as a slave on a ship, owned by Captain James McIntyre. After slavery was outlawed in Massachusetts in 1783/1784, Sara successfully sued for her freedom and married a man named Amos Peters. Together, they raised a large, mixed-racial family, and settled near South Pond, a good distance away from the main village. By the 1820s, they had their own school district, a Baptist church, and had a good deal of land. Their population and wealth peaked in the 1850s, with as many as ninety mixed-race people living in the village of Peterborough. My research focuses on how African American and mixed-racial communities were able to establish themselves in maritime northern New England in the years prior to the Civil War, particularly during the antebellum period. I focus on their ability to financially support themselves in areas of relative isolation, and how the sea acted as a way for these people to make their way in a time that grew increasingly hostile towards people of color.

(Pending) Danielle Cathcart

Reception will follow the afternoon session
at the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology