

Hayti: Uncovering An African American Neighborhood

Who lived in Hayti in the 19th century?

PURPOSE

This lesson uses artifacts excavated at the Coleman Site, a free black site in Alexandria. Students examine maps, census and tax records to determine who used the artifacts from four different features at the site. These activities demonstrate the importance of the step-by-step process followed in archaeological research.

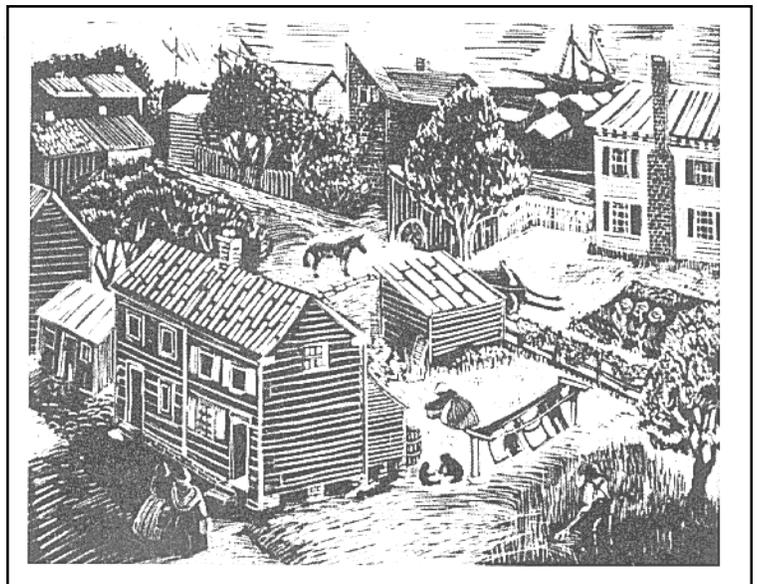
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Student will

- define & identify an archaeological feature.
- reference data on artifacts to determine function and date of manufacture.
- reference maps, census and tax records to determine occupancy dates and occupant data for a site.
- determine who used and discarded artifacts based on their function and date of manufacture.
- write a fictional paragraph in the first person interpreting an artifact assemblage.

SYNOPSIS

Students examine artifacts to determine what they were used for and when they were manufactured. Census records from Alexandria are then referenced to identify who may have actually used the artifacts before they were deposited in the earth. Finally, students look at historic photographs and oral history and then write a fictional letter or diary entry describing what life was like for African Americans at this time using oral history data.



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Walking along an Old Town Alexandria street, everything looks old. But there used to be many more houses, particularly wooden ones, lining the streets. Most of the small wood buildings where the craftsmen and laborers lived deteriorated or burned. They were replaced by newer structures.

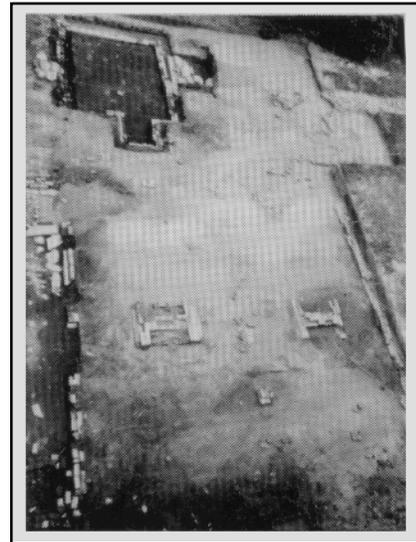
The archaeological clues to these homes still lay within the soil under parking lots and in backyards. Excavation of the Coleman Site began in 1980 and continued for three years. The site was selected for investigation because it presented a good opportunity to study African American families living in Alexandria from 1830 to 1910.

Alexandria had a large African American population, ranging from 20 to 40 percent of the residents. While the majority had a legal status of slave, by 1810 about one third of African Americans were free people. These people were either born of free black parents, or more often, worked extra jobs to purchase themselves and others out of slavery. They purchased or rented homes in a few areas of Alexandria which became the first African American neighborhoods.

The numbers of free people expanded before the Civil War. Even more blacks moved into Alexandria during the Civil War (1861 to 1865). African American neighborhoods also grew in size, and two new neighborhoods began.

The Coleman Site on South Royal Street once had three rental properties which were predominantly occupied by African Americans from 1830 to 1890. The first occupants were free blacks, many of whom lived here for several years. They called their neighborhood "Hayti," the name at that time for the island we call Haiti today. This name was a symbol of freedom. The African peoples in Hayti won their freedom from the French in the second colonial revolution in the Western Hemisphere, 1791 to 1803. [Note: the American Revolution was first].

African Americans continued to live on the Coleman Site until 1910 when the last homes were torn down. Until quite recently, descendants of some of the early black families in Hayti continued to live on Royal Street. The Coleman site now has new townhouses on the property. The 75,000 artifacts excavated from the site, the historical documents and oral histories permit us to step back into the past and touch African American life in Hayti.



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VOCABULARY (See Appendix I: Glossary, for more words and definitions)

- *Archaeology*—The scientific study of the human past through excavation and related research
- *Archaeologist*—A person who specializes in the study of material remains of past human life and activities.
- *Artifact*—An object made or modified by people.
- *Assemblage*—A group of artifacts which were found together.
- *Census*—An official, periodic count of the population.
- *Feature*—A distinct physical aspect of a site which is treated as a separate or discreet entity, for example, a trash pit or well. Each feature is recorded and analyzed separately (i.e., not grouping the artifacts with those found in surrounding soil layers).
- *Midden*—A trash pile or pit originally deposited on the ground surface, such as a midden outside a kitchen doorway, and later covered with soil was deposited on the ground surface.
- *Primary Resources*—The original written documents from the time period being studied; for example, tax and census records, newspapers, diaries, photographs and maps.
- *Relative Dating*—The determination of the chronological sequence of artifacts, assemblages or sites, rather than their actual date.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Docents will discuss these topics with your students

- What would it be like to live in a house like the one on the Coleman site at 418 S. Royal Street? The house did not have running water, electricity or gas and many people shared just two small rooms.
- What would it be like to be freed after living as a slave? What would you do? Where would you live?
- Think about the artifacts in your assemblage. Were they used by a man, woman or child? What would a 1990s assemblage for each look like?

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I. Coleman Site Map: Look at the site map and answer the following questions.

1. What is the number of your feature? _____
2. What kind of feature is it? _____
3. What is the address of your feature? _____

II. Artifact Identification: Look at the artifacts and artifact cards to answer the questions.
 What is it? Can you tell when it was made?

- | | |
|----------|-------|
| 1. _____ | _____ |
| 2. _____ | _____ |
| 3. _____ | _____ |
| 4. _____ | _____ |
| 5. _____ | _____ |

III. Feature Date: Determine when all these artifacts were thrown away by answering the questions below.



What is the oldest artifact? _____

What is the newest artifact? _____

If all these artifacts were thrown out at the same time, on which date would it have been?

IV. The People at Your Site: Now that you know when the artifacts were thrown away, look at the census. Write the name of the person who could have used them below.



Name: _____

School: _____

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Now that you know who used the artifacts, write a letter to a friend or your diary pretending that you are that person. What kind of work do you do? What do you use the artifacts for? How did you lose them or why did you throw them away?

