

Archaeology Sets the Tavern Table

How do archaeologists relate artifacts to historic documents?

PURPOSE

This lesson uses real artifacts in a hands-on format to describe the 18th century Gadsby's Tavern in Alexandria. It emphasizes the sorting and analysis components of the laboratory step of the step-by-step process of archaeological research, as well as the importance of referencing primary sources.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The Student will

- discriminate between two types of ceramics: pearlware and creamware.
- discriminate between different artifacts made of glass, including tumblers, window and bottle glass artifacts.
- refer to a primary source to confirm the artifacts' presence at Gadsby's Tavern.

SYNOPSIS

Artifacts excavated from Gadsby's Tavern courtyard are inventoried by the students. These artifacts include pearlware, creamware and porcelain ceramics, several types of glass and clay pipestems. Once counted, the sherds are compared to a primary resource, tavernkeeper Mary Hawkins' 1777 tavern inventory.

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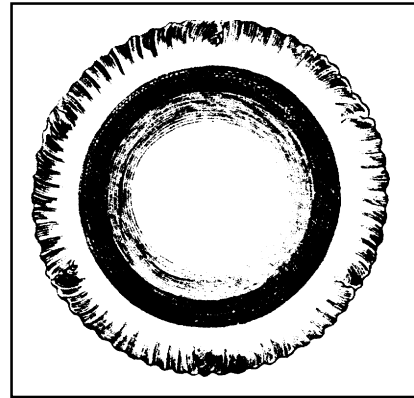
How do archaeologists relate artifacts to historic documents?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Gadsby's Tavern was first built in 1770. Following the death of her husband, Mary Hawkins leased the tavern building in the 1770s. It was considered all right for a woman to be a tavernkeeper. Mary had five children and five slaves who helped with the operation of the tavern.

The tavern is now named for John Gadsby who ran the tavern from 1796 until 1808. A second building, the City Hotel, was added in 1792. By 1929, after many years of use, the buildings had deteriorated, but were purchased and saved by the American Legion Post 24. The Tavern's courtyard was excavated in 1974, in time for America's 200th anniversary.

The artifacts excavated at Gadsby's Tavern are important because they allow us to date the site and help shed light on the activities that took place there. The sherds excavated include transfer-printed pearlware, a more expensive type, confirming other evidence that the Tavern was considered one of the best in the area. Ceramic and glass sherds of punch bowls, wine glasses, plates and wine bottles provide clues as to what food was served at the Tavern.



Many people in Alexandria came to Gadsby's for food, drink and social events. Guests were served meals of duck, oysters, bread, cheese and a variety of other fare, along with wine and ale. In addition to serving food and drink, the tavern had room for travelers to spend the night. The Tavern held many events and performances.

George Washington was a guest of the Tavern on several occasions, he attended balls and reviewed militia volunteers from its steps in 1798. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams were also guests. The artifacts that are used in this lesson may even have been used by these important men.

Today, we know about the history of Gadsby's Tavern because we have deeds, tax records, newspaper ads and inventories, including that of Mary Hawkins, compiled at her death in 1777. We also know more about the Tavern because of the ceramics uncovered in the excavation unit that extended under the coach house, GT21. These artifacts are some of the oldest historic artifacts in the City of Alexandria's Archaeology collection.

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

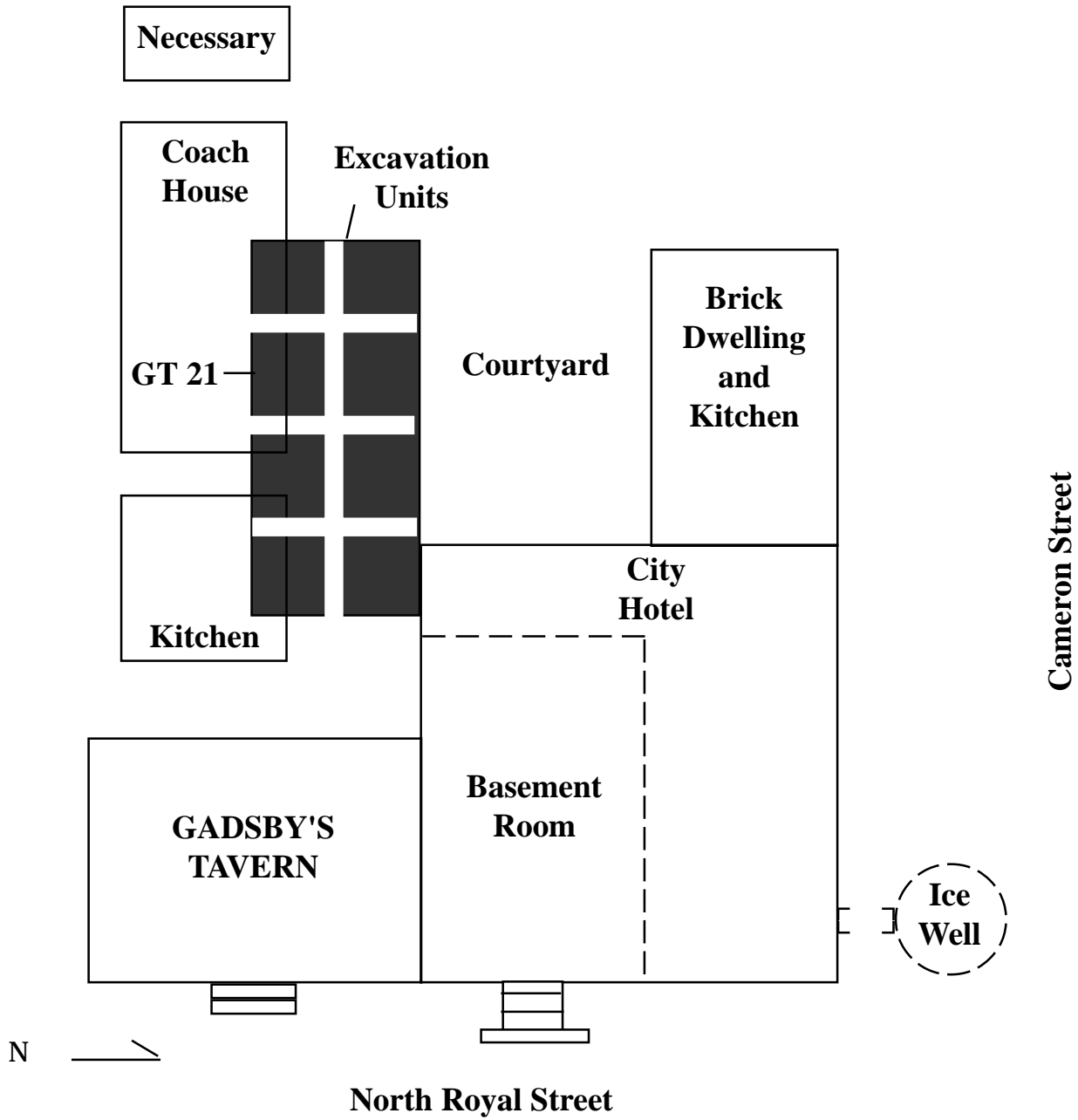
- *Archaeology*—The scientific study of the human past through excavation and related research.
- *Archaeologist*—A person who specializes in the study of material remains of past human life and activities.
- *Artifact*—An object made or modified by people.
- *Ceramics*—Pottery or objects made of clay.
- *Glass*—A hard, transparent substance made of sand, soda and lime; or a container made of glass.
- *Manufacture*—The act of making a raw material into a finished product.
- *Primary Resources*—The original written documents from the time period being studied; for example, newspapers, deeds, tax and census records, diaries, photographs and maps.
- *Sherd or Shard*—A fragment of pottery or glass.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Docents will discuss these topics with your students

- Who might you see if you visited Gadsby's Tavern in the late 1700s?
- What kind of foods do you think were served at the tavern?
- Do you ever go out to eat? What kind of plates, cups or containers do the restaurants use today?
- Since Gadsby's Tavern was also a hotel, what other types of artifacts might you find there?

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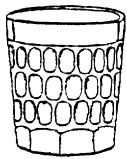
MAP OF GADSBY'S TAVERN AS OF 1796 AND EXCAVATION AREA. (1" = 20')

Gadsby's Tavern served food and drink to customers in the 18th century. Mary Hawkins ran the tavern until 1777. One of her customers was George Washington who wrote in his diary on January 17, 1774:

*Supp'd at Mrs. Hawkins'
and came home afterward.*

Many artifacts were found in the courtyard when it was excavated by archaeologists. Look at the artifacts to see how the tavern table was set.

I. Glass: Write the number of each artifact you have in the blank.



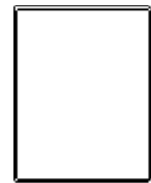
Tumbler



Glass

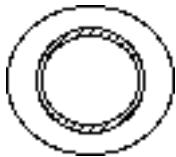


Bottle



Window Glass

II. Ceramics: Write the number of each artifact you have in the blank.



Creamware (*yellowish, plain*)
1762-1810



Pearlware (*bluish, plain or decorated*)
1779-1820

Did you have ceramic sherds that were not creamware or pearlware?

III. What could this be?

IV. What did people do at this 18th-century tavern?

Mary Hawkins
1777
INVENTORY
from
GADSBY'S
TAVERN

**Circle any of
the artifacts
you have on
the inventory.**