

Archaeological Field School Summary and Recommendations (preliminary)

Upper Fort Garry, DILg-21

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Summary

Western Heritage conducted Ground-Penetrating Radar imagery of the parking surface between 100 Main Street and the Grain Exchange Curling club and south of these two buildings to Assiniboine Avenue. This imagery, together with nineteenth century written documents, sketches, drawings, and photographs of Upper Fort Garry, as well as archaeological research conducted in Bonnycastle Park in 1981 - 1983, provided a basis for placing excavation areas within the parking lot (Appendix A). The excavation areas were prepared by mechanical removal of asphalt and obvious fill in the week preceding field school excavation. As well, a series of excavation units, each 1 x 1m were laid out within these excavation areas, and every other unit was excavated initially. As excavation progressed, some units with heavy disturbance were abandoned, and other excavation units in more critical locations were opened.

Area 1 was intended to intercept the "Office", built between 1848 and 1857. It was this building that may have been occupied by Louis Riel's provisional government in 1869 -1870. Because of the historic nature of the building, a series of excavation units were put in this area. The southernmost of all the units encountered two large boulders surrounded by mortar in a 50 cm-wide exposure on the second-to-last day of digging. This feature may be the north wall of the "office".

Area 2 was intended to locate the north wall of the HBC's "yellow store", the middle of the three along the west wall of the original fort. We immediately found the northwest corner of the warehouse foundation in the excavation unit closest to the driveway from Assiniboine Avenue. In the excavation units 3 - 5 m east of the east wall of this first unit, the remains were found of what is interpreted as the chimney. This chimney was a retrofit, added in 1846 to provide heat for the soldiers of the 6th Regiment of Foot whose barrack the warehouse became. On the last day of excavation, the east wall foundation was also exposed, approximately 10 m east of the west wall foundation of the warehouse. It is confirmed that the warehouse was about 30 ft wide and that it had a stone foundation.

Area 3 was not examined due to time limitations.

Area 4, located between Area 1 and the footprint of the former 100 Main Street building, was intended to identify the location of the well that was dug there after 1849. Four excavation units were dug here, and the remains of what is tentatively thought to be the stone cribbing of the well was observed. The westernmost excavation unit contained a feature consisting of large limestone pieces and mortar. Beside it to the east was an unexcavated unit. Beside that to the east was an excavation unit that contained huge amounts of crushed Tyndal Stone, some of which fell away along the south wall of the unit revealing what appeared to be large limestone pieces that were consistent in form and location with stone cribbing for a well. This unit was expanded to the south by 50 cm, and a large stone, wood and mortar feature emerged on top of the proposed well cribbing. The next unit east was unexcavated, but the next one east revealed a stone, mortar and wood feature lying along its east wall in an alignment consistent with the long axis of the fort. Put together, the evidence from these three excavation units suggests that the well may have been discovered and that portions of the north and east foundations of the building that was built over it were also located.

Area 5 was located just east of the northwest bastion of the original fort. The excavation units placed there were intended to identify the location and orientation of the original north wall and to expose the west wall of the northwestern warehouse within the original fort. The north wall foundation was exposed in vertical profile, and it appears that several trenches were originally dug to hold the foundation. Efforts to locate the west wall of the warehouse did not bear fruit; it appears to be several meters east of the trench we put in at a location that was designed to avoid underground power supply lines that were evident in the GPR imaging.

Area 6 was designed to locate the west wall of the fort and the west wall of the northwestern warehouse. The west wall was exposed horizontally and vertically, but excavations did not proceed far enough east to intercept the west wall of the warehouse. Again, it appears to be several meters east of the excavated area. Interestingly, two large wood timbers were exposed just inside the west wall of the fort. One timber lay parallel to, and against, the wall foundation, while the other lay perpendicular to the first with its western end about a meter from the first. In each timber appeared to be a hemispherical depression about 5 - 10 cm in diameter, and in the E-W timber there was a rectangular hole about 5 x 10 cm filled with mortar. Between 2 and 5 meters east of these timbers, the layers of fill are deep and indicate a subsidence within a former hole that is aligned roughly N-S. In combination, these features and soil profiles suggest that there was a substantial hole at one time between the fort wall and the warehouse wall. That hole has been filled in on several occasions as it has continued to compact. As well, the timbers may be part of a building associate with that hole. The placement and modifications to the timbers may suggest a wall and doorway set on a sill log that had a mortice joint cut into it to receive the tenon of a vertical timber that is now gone. These details are consistent with Red River frame construction. In Bonnycastle Park, two privies were discovered between the southwestern warehouse and the west wall of the fort.

Area 7 was the northernmost excavation area. The units placed in this area were designed to locate structural features of the Governor of Assiniboia's house. In the northernmost two excavated units, and under the unexcavated intervening unit, a large feature of rock, brick and mortar was located. The feature is interpreted as the foundation of the eastern chimney in the Governor's house. The configuration of soil layers suggests that there is a former depression to the northwest of this feature. As well, soil layering in three excavated units to the south also suggest that there is another sub-surface depression to the west.

Recommendations

1. Place a protective cap of soil over the site as a foundation for park development. It may be necessary for tree growth to remove the two layers of asphalt and gravel fill before laying down this protective layer. Such a protective cap should be at least 30 - 50 cm thick, in my opinion, although an engineer may provide a better number.

Rationale

There was considerable difficulty in clearly identifying the original nineteenth century ground surface. There has been much disturbance and modification to the site over the past 120-160 years, and some early material is mixed with later material. As well, where disturbance has occurred, it is massive and obliterating. The site has been well served by two protective layers of asphalt, but if these layers are removed, and if ongoing pedestrian traffic is anticipated, a substantial form of protection for the remaining artifacts and features is essential.

Further, if trees are to be planted in the park, scrupulous care must be taken that the root systems of these trees do not penetrate and disrupt any remaining features that are still buried underground.

2. Proceed slowly and at a small scale with any subsequent archaeological investigations.

Rationale

There are many unanswered questions about the archaeology of UFG. The field school was only able to touch on several important ones, and new questions became evident. Depending on what the FUGG wish to accomplish, some of these questions may have higher priority than others, but neither broad-scale nor rapid examination of the UFG remains is necessary or desirable. It is often the case that a picture of what one is seeing emerges slowly, so rapid, large-scale excavations may not allow sufficient time for the picture to be understood as it is revealed. On the contrary, exploring small parts of the remaining fort area for specific, prioritized reasons would provide an opportunity for more publicly visible archaeology to be conducted as a living part of the park. Any such excavations could easily be closed up and re-landscaped after field work, and analysis and interpretation could be done in the interpretive center.

3. Call for backup.

Rationale

Some of the materials that may emerge from any future excavations at UFG may involve extensive (and expensive) conservation and maintenance procedures. Expertise from the Manitoba Museum and the Canadian Conservation Institute may be required, and consultation with these bodies on any excavation plans and budget estimates must occur well in advance of any planned work.

Conclusion

More detailed analysis and reporting will begin in July. The first task will be to provide a report in satisfaction of the Heritage Resources Branch Permit # A23-10, and copies will be distributed to all parties when they become available. Thanks to the Friends of Upper Fort Garry, The Forks North Portage Development Corp., the Historic Resources Branch, Western Heritage Services Ltd., the University of Winnipeg Department of Anthropology, and the University of Manitoba Department of Anthropology.

Slice 14 - 1.0 m

