

KANSAS DIG AT FT. ELLSWORTH

During the first two weeks of June, the Kansas Archeology Training Program (KATP) excavated three depressions at the site of Ft. Ellsworth, an Army post situated at the junction of the Ft. Riley-Ft. Larned Road and the Smoky Hill Trail from 1864 to 1867. This archaeological investigation was a joint project of the Kansas Anthropological Association (KAA), the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) and the Kansas City office of the Corps of Engineers. The majority of the fort site (14EW26) is located on the Corps property of Lake Kanapolis, southwest of Salina about 20 miles.

The KATP first dug at Ft. Ellsworth in 1996. The site is spread out over a quarter of a mile along the Smoky Hill River. Four years ago the dig confirmed significant archaeological resources related to military life still could be found. The earlier investigation also excavated two dugouts, a residence with a hearth and a bakery with a large brick-and-mortar oven. This year the Corps returned to the site as the three depressions closest to the river were threatened by erosion and unauthorized digging.

This year the excavations confirmed two of the depressions were dugouts, but further digging in July is needed before the usage of the third depression is determined. In this third depression, broken artifacts were found on one side of a line while complete objects, such as a spoon and a pocket knife, were located on the other side.

This year, like four years ago, many objects related to both military life and daily living were recovered. However, unlike the last dig, this time evidence of women at the fort was seen. A number of broken pieces of jewelry most likely belonged to women. One pin with yellow stones was complete. Even the clasp was unbroken. Many small mother of pearl buttons with decorative carvings most likely were on the clothing of women or children. One metal object with a fine chain may have been the back of a woman's watch. A thimble also may have belonged to a woman, although sewing repairs were not an uncommon practice for nineteenth century soldiers.

The KATP also involved test excavations at the nearby Page-Lemon (Lehman) Ranch, as the fort was established by the abandoned ranch. With the use of a 1862 land office survey map, investigators located the site of the corner of the ranch house. While no evidence of a structure was found, some artifacts, such as window glass, square nails, a horseshoe nail, a primer cap and a link of chain were recovered.

Kansas City area participants in the KATP included the Keck family (Dick, Cynthia, Sara and Beth), Gail Lundeen and Mary Conrad. KCAS visitors were Jim Roberts and Jim Feagins.

FRENCH CEMETERY EXPOSED IN APRIL

In 1986 graves from the frontier French cemetery near 12th and Jefferson streets in Kansas City, Missouri were removed and given to the Catholic Church for reburial. These graves had been found during a demolition project. Then in April of 2000, the Dunn Construction Company, while working on a new office project, ran into more human bones at that location. Archaeologists from Southwestern Missouri State spent a number of days recovering the remains of numerous skeletons.

A plaque at the location, erected by the Chouteau Society, tells the history of the French cemetery. The graves were removed in the 1880s when a lot of building activity occurred in the Quality Hill neighborhood.

Obviously all graves were not found in the 1880s since graves have turned up at least twice in later years. This is not unusual as some graves in early cemeteries may have been unmarked and tombstones easily could have been lost over many decades before disbanding a cemetery.

When pioneer graves are found, they often are reburied immediately. However, if the financial resources could be found, analysis by physical anthropologists could help add to the information known about pioneer diet and disease.