

Digging up and assessing facts does have something of the scientific about it, but there is more art than science to the discipline. As anyone who has dabbled in the field soon discovers, facts alone have little relevance.

The gaps between what is known must be bridged with what is likely, what might have been, and here the historian leaves the realm of science, leaning heavily on the whimsical Clio, muse of both poetry and history.

From Marilyn Simonds' Forward to
Before the Silence, Fifty years in the History of Alderville First Nation
by Ruth Clarke

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE OLD BUILDING

WHAT STORIES COULD THESE WALLS TELL?

For many years this old limestone building has been referred to simply as *"the barracks"* by the residents of Cobourg. Before that we see references to *"the stables"*. *Can we find the truth?*

In the fall of 2002, the Cobourg Museum Foundation engaged a local archaeological firm, *Advance Archaeology*, to investigate the building to determine its possible uses and, in particular, whether it was used as a military facility during the War of 1812.

The initial archaeological investigation consisted of one-metre square test areas, carefully excavated using trowels and 1/4 inch mesh screens, to recover any possible evidence of 19th century use. The project archaeologist, Donna Morrison, worked with field assistants as well as local volunteers and students from Cobourg and Whitby schools. A total of eight test units were excavated, five inside and three just outside the southern wall.

From 2004-2007 further work was performed by *Northeastern Archaeological Associates*. A total of 76 one metre square units were excavated inside the building.

This research uncovered four distinct layers of soil and sand inside indicating how the building was used over time.

The first, or uppermost, level is a thick layer of sandy soil containing modern 20th century debris, broken window glass, broken bottles. This layer represents the building's more recent uses over the past one hundred years or so.

A **second layer** was encountered at a depth of about three to six inches, containing late 19th century debris such as animal bones (particularly horse), broken glass and ceramics. These findings support the use of the building as a livery for horses.

Beneath this level is **a layer of sterile beach sand**, probably brought in to form a base for a clean floor, perhaps for the livery. It is from two to six inches thick.

Beneath the beach sand the remains of a wooden floor was discovered, lying on **layer number four**. This layer of soil contains artifacts such as ceramics, clay pipes, glass and animal bones from the early to mid 19th century. Charcoal and burnt bone and refuse suggest human habitation.

Beneath all this is a sterile yellow-orange subsoil layer believed to have been the original base when the building was constructed.

As to whether the building was ever used by the military, the findings are inconclusive. All that can be said at this point is that the archaeological evidence indicates the building was in use in the mid to late 19th century, that it has probably been used as a stable and possibly for human habitation.

