Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters

A collaborative community-based archaeology project
Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters Excavation

Key Points:

• Finding the Archaeological Site
• The Pilot Study – 2017
• Upcoming Excavations
• Preliminary Research Questions
Finding the Archaeological Site

- Using the historic maps as a guide, in 2017, Heritage Services laid a net-like grid over an area that likely encompassed the buildings depicted on those maps.

- Before digging, they used magnetometry to gain a below-surface picture of the area
  - Scanned for burned areas, metals, or strange patterns in soil or rock
The Pilot Study - 2017

- In Spring of 2017, Heritage Services and students in an Archaeological Survey course tested within the grid that had been laid out in the Arboretum.

- At each intersection on the grid, the students and the Heritage Services staff dug either a shovel test pit (STP) or dug with an auger.
The Pilot Study - 2017

- The grid allowed for a systematic way to see where artifacts were and were not present.
- The artifact data helped provide archaeological confirmation of the Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters Site.
The Pilot Study - 2017

- Digging with a grid also helped show where the largest number of artifacts (and the highest weight of artifacts) were found on the site.

- The larger the dot (and hotter the color), the more artifacts found.

Areas rich with artifacts

Area less rich with artifacts
Preliminary Investigation

- Heritage Services used the artifact data to determine where they would dig more intensively.

- This resulted in the discovery of a midden, which is a large concentration of artifacts, associated with a kitchen.

- The archaeologists dug square test units (which measured 1 meter by 1 meter) in a vertical line. When they finished, they had a trench that measured 1 meter wide and 8 meters long.
Preliminary Investigation

- The trench revealed that the southern part of the kitchen midden was lost, due to the installment of a water pipe, while the northern portion remained intact, due to the presence of thick bushes.

- The deepest part of the midden stretched down 85 cm (just under 3 ft) below the ground surface.
Preliminary Investigation

- The trench produced over 3,000 artifacts, including ceramic storage jar and plate fragments, glass bottle pieces, thousands of animal bones (some showing evidence of having been in cooking fires), and metal fragments.
Upcoming Excavations

- This coming Spring Quarter, there will be an Archaeological Field Methods course and excavations will continue with Heritage Services in the summer.

- The grid has been expanded
  - We will test each intersection with shovel test pits or an auger
  - As more artifact-rich areas are found, we will dig more square test units
  - We will also continue to dig around the kitchen midden
Preliminary Research Questions

- The biggest research question that we currently have:
  - What were the residents of the Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarter doing when they were not working?
Preliminary Research Questions

- Some ways of exploring the residents’ lived experiences include asking:
  - Were there any women or children?
  - What did the residents eat and drink?
  - What activities did they do in and around the Labor Quarters?
  - Is there any evidence of any gatherings or celebrations?

A wall-mounted rotary mixer

A Mellin’s Baby Food bottle

Chinese porcelain bowl fragments with Four Seasons pattern
Preliminary Research Questions

- We are also interested in comparing and contrasting the archaeological data from the Arboretum Chinese Labor Quarters with other Overseas Chinese sites
  - Chinese Railroad Workers in North American Project
  - Market Street Chinatown Archaeological Project
  - China Point at Hopkins Marine Station
  - Highland City, Montana
Research Questions

● What research questions are you most interested in asking?
  ● How would you like to be involved?