

Volunteers wield trowels at museum dig site

By Amy Ross
Staff writer

What do animal teeth, a rusted fork and a handful of square nails have in common?

Unearthed from the site of the first Stoney Creek farm in Rochester Hills, they are remnants of ages past and are providing an insight into what life was like in the area in the 1800s.

A group of amateur archaeologists have uncovered these secrets of yesterday in a special ongoing project sponsored by the Rochester Hills Museum at Van Hoesen Farm, and headed by retired archaeologist Tracy Rozelle.

Rozelle, an Oakland Township resident and past president of the Michigan Archaeological Society, "knocked on our door after hearing about plans for the dig," said museum operations manager Pat McKay.

McKay got the idea for the project earlier this year, and organized the excavation of the original log cabin site built in 1823. It lies directly in front of the present farmhouse-turned-museum.

THE MONTH-LONG project began with an orientation session Saturday, April 9, with actual digging sessions each Saturday after that. The last day for digging is scheduled for April 30, "but we could extend it further depending on what we find," Rozelle said.

About 50 individuals from local and surrounding suburbs have joined the excavation so far, according to Kathy Dziurman, a museum staff assistant.

Housewives, students, retirees, "nine-to-fivers" and those who've dabbled in archaeology before make up the team of diggers, said Dziurman. What they have in common,

she said, is "They are all curious and have all come to learn something."

"They're real troopers," Rozelle said, referring to the long hours the group has worked, at times in miserable weather conditions. When it was pouring rain one Saturday, Dziurman said, "everyone was so interested in what they were doing, they didn't pay attention to being wet and cold."

Rozelle is excited about the project for the simple reason that the site being excavated has remained undisturbed, owned exclusively by one family and passed on through five generations. "What we have here is a virtual time capsule of early Rochester pioneers," Rozelle said.

THE TEETH, fork and nails, a hand from a porcelain baby doll, old buttons, hand-made window glass

and part of a hand-made brick are among these items found from last Saturday's dig.

"It's been thrilling so far," said Rozelle, "because you never know what you'll discover on one of these digs — I had no idea we would find so much."

Museum personnel and local history buffs are hoping these items and whatever else is uncovered will further reveal the 19th century lifestyle of the Taylor family and their descendants.

The original settler, Elisha Taylor, traveled with 60 of his family members by boat from New York, to buy a 160-acre parcel of land located off Van Hoesen Road in Rochester Hills, which they purchased for \$1.25 per acre in 1823.

The village was named Stoney Creek by the Taylors, and by the mid-1850s was well inhabited. Many of the structures seen in the village

today were built by the Taylor family.

The farm changed hands when a man named Joshua Van Hoesen, also of Stoney Creek, married Elisha Taylor's daughter, Sarah, and bought most of the original Taylor property in 1853.

One Van Hoesen descendant was world renowned surgeon, and founder and first president of the American Medical Women's Association, Bertha Van Hoesen (1863-1952).

ANOTHER PROMINENT Taylor offspring is Sarah Van Hoesen Jones (1892-1972), who was known for her excellent cattle breeding techniques of Holstein-Friesian cows worldwide.

Upon her death Sarah Jones willed the farm house, built in 1923, and its surrounding property to Michigan State University, which in turn gave the house and 3 1/2 acre lot to Avon

Township with the stipulation that it become a museum.

The house was renovated into the museum in 1983, with the financial backing of the Rochester Hills city government, which still pays its operating expenses.

Rozelle and McKay will take the artifacts to Wayne State University for laboratory tests to determine more than they already have gathered about the pieces.

And what have they learned so far?

"That there must have been a blacksmith shop in the area, because of the square nails found — that means they are hand-made," Rozelle said. He hopes to match up the nails with others found to determine exactly where they were made.

"It's been absolutely phenomenal," Rozelle added. "Who knows what we'll come up with next."

Woman wins Pistons tickets

Shirley Abro of Farmington Hills won two tickets to the Detroit Pistons basketball game April 13 in a drawing at the AAA Michigan Farmington Hills office, 33133 13 Mile.

Abro was among the winners drawn at 36 Ticketmaster/AAA MI-

chigan Ticket Centers statewide. The winners and their guests watched the Pistons play the Cleveland Cavaliers at the Pontiac Silverdome.

The grand prize winner, drawn from 36 winning entries, was Paul

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