

Interim Report – Further investigations at Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05)

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Back in 2010, our brief field season at Sunnyside 1 (CIAI-05) was productive and informative; however we were left with just as many questions as answers. With the help of the Provincial Archaeology Office, we returned in the fall of 2013 in hopes of better understanding this seventeenth-century occupation. The next phase of research had two specific goals. The first was to further expose the large wall rock/rubble feature (Feature 1) first tested in 2010 so as to determine if it is a chimney collapse and fireplace and, if yes, what is its size and orientation. Positive proof of a fireplace and its placement in relation to the surrounding landscape would be an important step in delineating the remaining architectural remains. The second goal was to expand excavations on the associated midden southeast of Feature 1 to ascertain more about the nature and duration of occupation, and the possible cultural affiliation (French or English) of the European descendants who once dwelled here.

From September 30th to October 4th, the authors and several volunteers (mostly MUN archaeology graduate students and professional staff) attempted to achieve these goals. As demonstrated below, the 2013 field season although very brief was successful in many ways. The results of this ongoing research will provide the impetus for a larger, multi-year archaeological investigation into the origins and development of European transhumance and winter housing in Newfoundland and Labrador.

After removing 3½ years of overgrowth from the site, locating our datum points and re-establishing and extending our grid, half the crew began exposing Feature 1 while the remainder started excavation on a 1x5m E-W trench in the midden area perpendicular to the N-S trench excavated back in 2010. Feature 1 was exposed to the north, south and east but the western extent was not fully explored due to its proximity to Feature 2 – an earth-walled ‘cellar’ adjacent to and running west of Feature 1. Once this clearing operation was completed and the extent of the chimney collapse recorded (Figure 1), we began removing rocks from the uppermost part of the feature in an effort to locate the fireplace. Many of the rocks used in the construction were



Figure 1: Exposed chimney collapse (Feature 1), looking west. Feature 2 (possible root cellar) is partially visible in the background.

red sandstone/siltstone with one or more square sides, likely acquired from several nearby outcrops exposed along the shore's edge (See King 1980). A full day of rock removal was rewarded with encouraging evidence for the outline of a fireplace. Excavation proceeded in this area for the remainder of the week and by the last day of fieldwork, the remains of a fireplace and hearth area were partially exposed (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Partially excavated fireplace and hearth, looking north.

A rough estimate for the fireplace/hearth opening is 7ft (2.1m) wide. If the sides (or arms) of the stone fireplace are 1½ - 2½ft wide then the width of this stone feature should be in the vicinity of 10 - 12ft (3-3.6m). Further investigation is needed to uncover the remainder of the fireplace so as to determine its full length and width. What we can say at present is that it opens up to the south and we believe it encompasses the entire north end of the building. It is therefore reasonable to suggest that the house was oriented north-south along its long axis and the main entrance situated on the east side where the majority of domestic refuse was deposited.

The hearth area inside the fireplace contained a black, greasy matrix of charcoal and artifacts upwards of 15cm thick at the back of the hearth and tapering out to 5cm thick at the front. As expected, there were many seventeenth-century objects in this deposit. Iron nails, flint flakes and clay pipe fragments were the most numerous but there were also significant quantities of small lead shot and bits of calcined bone, some of which are unidentified mammal and avian species. The pipe bowls in the hearth re-confirmed the occupation date of 1650-80 and the presence of several decorated Jonah/Raleigh type pipes demonstrate that the former residents had a variety of pipes from which to smoke (Figure 3). Some of the iron artifacts found in the hearth were in an excellent state of preservation owing to repeated heat exposure. This allowed for the

identification of small metal objects such as tacks once fastened to chests and other such furniture. It is also worth mentioning that all cultural strata (both in the hearth and nearby midden) were wet screened using a ¼ inch mesh, allowing for much greater recovery. Several soil samples were collected from the hearth for further examination using finer sieves located in the Department of Archaeology at Memorial University.



Figure 3: Relief-moulded, Jonah/Raleigh type clay pipe.

A recent tree fall at the western end of Feature 2 also allowed for a preliminary investigation and interpretation of this associated structure. An exploratory trench was dug N-S across where the upturned roots had exposed the rear wall and, to a lesser degree, a narrow section of the floor to this cellar-like feature. This investigation exposed a dark brown organic linear depression with defined corners at the north and south ends. The organic deposit measured 1.15m (almost 4ft) long, about 6cm deep and ended sharply where the earthen walls began to rise upwards to a height of 75cm. The deposit continues to the east into the unexcavated portion of the feature. Tentatively the dark organic deposit has been interpreted as the remains of a wooden floor.

An interior width of approximately 4 feet along its short axis is reasonable considering that its length appears to be upwards of twice that dimension. Although no other structural remains or iron nails were found in the exploratory trench, we can tentatively suggest that Feature 2 was built by mounding sods, rocks and loose soils against low wooden walls. As there was not much of a discernable organic overburden inside this doughnut-shaped feature, it probably had a wooden roof, perhaps even covered in snow. Earthen cellars, known in Newfoundland as “root cellars” were ubiquitous in rural areas and in some communities are still used to store vegetables and other perishables in a dark and cool environment. Often times the cellars were created by digging into the side of a hill, or even a slight rise in the forest floor. A wooden frame, sheathed on one side and roofed over, would be constructed into the resulting depression and then soils and sods banked over the entire structure. The resulting subterranean cellar effectively keeps the winter food supply from freezing. For illustrative purposes, see Figure 4 for a modern photograph of a nineteenth-century root cellar still in use in Twillingate, Newfoundland.

The entrance way into Feature 2 was intentionally positioned at the west side of the massive fireplace (Feature 1) which would have provided at least some radiant heat to help keep

provisions chilled but unfrozen. If our interpretation is correct, this would be the earliest root cellar recorded in the province!



Figure 4: Root Cellar in North Side, Twillingate. This cellar was built by Wilfred Nell c. 1888 and currently owned by Hayward Dove. Photograph taken in 2008 by Otto Sansome. Source: Memorial University Digital Archives Collection, Intangible Cultural Heritage Collection (http://collections.mun.ca/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/ich_nature&CISOPTR=873&CISOBOX=1&REC=19Otto)

In conjunction with the work undertaken at Features 1 and 2, other crew members spent the week excavating the 1x5m E-W trench. The wet, boggy conditions encountered at the eastern end, combined with the large number of artifacts, made for slow digging. Several iron objects were uncovered including a boat pintle, a partial iron heel tap and a heart-shaped padlock (Figure 5). The base of a tin-glazed bowl or porringer (Figure 6), as well as fragments of a previously recorded Portuguese redware storage vessel and glass case bottle was also found. Overall, the artifact assemblage remained much the same as that recovered in 2010 – lots of iron nails, clay pipe bowl and stem fragments, flint flakes, crudely-worked gunflints and tinder flints, but very little in the way of ceramics or glass. The large quantities of ceramic and glass storage vessels found on seventeenth-century fishery sites on the outer coasts of the Avalon Peninsula are simply not present at Sunnyside 1.

The dearth of evidence for certain artifact types may reflect the nature of occupation. If this is a winter residence, as proposed in earlier reports and presentations then the archaeological record should manifest the different subsistence practices, daily activities and perceived needs of these people during the winter months (Mills and Gaulton 2010, Gaulton and Mills 2011, Gaulton 2011, Mills 2013a-b). The hectic spring/summer seasons during the cod fishery necessitated large quantities of imported provisions and beverages both for Newfoundland residents and the

large influx of migratory fishermen who frequented the same locations. Come fall, some of the resident planters would move inland to seek shelter and to hunt, trap and cut wood. This seasonal movement (by land or by sea) required people to transport only that which was deemed necessary, while the rest of their possessions were kept at the primary summer residence. With access to wild game and more time to hunt and trap, it seems that clay pipes and tobacco, flint and ammunition were transported in significant quantities to these winter quarters; whereas large numbers of ceramic vessels filled with butter, lard and other preserves were not. Recognizing this divergence in the quantity and variety of artifact assemblages between summer and winter residences may be the first step in identifying the more isolated and/or ephemeral winter occupations. However it is important to note that these results are preliminary and based on one partially excavated site.



Figure 5: (left) Heart-shaped padlock found in the midden.

Figure 6: (right) Base of a tin-glazed bowl or porringer found in the midden.

As of the writing of this interim report, the artifacts from the 2013 excavations have been cleaned and catalogued and the iron objects are in the early stages of conservation. Several of the soil samples from the hearth area were analyzed by MUN students in Dr. Michael Deal's ethnobotany course over the fall semester, for which we are awaiting the results. All of the artifacts will undergo a thorough analysis in the coming months, after which we will have more to report. Although much more excavation is needed, and the results are preliminary, it appears that Sunnyside 1 has the potential to enlighten us about the origins of a lesser known part of Newfoundland culture but one which was commonplace in rural communities until the early twentieth century (Smith 1987a-b).

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