

Preserving History Through Archaeology



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GWINNETT ARCHAEOLOGY BULLETIN

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From the Vault: Soapstone “Carpenter Pencil”

This month I wanted to highlight an artifact that we came across while digging in the Fort Daniel Southwest Blockhouse a couple years ago. It has an unique cylindrical shape with a rounded-down point on one end (*pictured below*). We speculated that it might have been used as a “carpenter pencil” to mark where the wooden logs would be chopped that were later used to build Fort Daniel. This is just an

assumption but a good one. While growing up I would always get into trouble when I used my father’s carpenter pencil that he had in his workshop. I would usually use it for drawing or writing my next great novel. When I could not find a pencil in my collection of writing utensils, I knew that I could find something to use from his workshop—hence getting punished. Though I did not know why he had a weird looking pencil, I did understand that it was used only by my father when he was working on items around the house—it was a part of his tool belt.

The first versions of a carpenter pencil were not invented until the 1500s when graphite was discovered, and the

first “pencil” was created by wrapping string around graphite sticks. In 1560 an Italian couple named Simonio and Lyndiana Bernacotti most likely created the first modern, wood-encased carpenter pencil. Their version was a flat, oval, more compact type of pencil and involved the hollowing out of a stick of juniper wood.¹ During the Napoleonic War the French scientist, Nicholas-Jacques Conte, needed to find a solution in creating pencils since there was shortage of graphite (most of the graphite came from England). He used clay powders and fired them in a kiln to form solid rods. He was able to adjust the mixture ratio to make the solid rods harder.² This technique is still used today to produce variations of pencils.

Carpenter pencils are typically manually sharpened with a knife. If you look closely at the picture of the soapstone pencil, you can see the strike marks of where it was sharpened (maybe by a knife or something else!) Just think since the carpenter pencil was invented in the mid 1500s, we have been sharpening carpenter pencils this way for over 450 years! ■ **DMG**

1. “Wood and graphite.” Applewood Builders. January 2023. <https://www.applewoodremodelers.com/carpenterandtheartist-blog/2020/2/24/187e9t0oz1sro3ef4j7yy011wfmal2>.
2. “The remarkable history of the pencil.” The Pen Company. January 2023. <https://www.thepencompany.com/blog/pencils/history-pencil>.

MEMBERSHIP FEES ARE DUE:

If you would like to join or renew your GARS membership, please contact [Delana Gilmore](#); and for FDF membership please contact [Cindy Horsley](#).



Volunteer Opportunity: Fennell Plantation in North Alabama

Did you know that the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama has numerous archaeological sites dating from hundreds to thousands of years ago? Right now, archaeological excavations are being conducted at the Fennell Plantation site (ca. 1820-1940) and you are invited to participate! These excavations are conducted on behalf of the Missile and Space Intelligence Center (MSIC) in order to facilitate the expansion of their facilities. The site was probably the location of the main house for the Fennell Plantation owned by members of the Fennell family from 1843 to 1918. The same location was owned by Moses Love, a local African-American farmer, from 1919 to 1943 when the US government purchased the land.

Isham J. Fennell (1811-1891) was one of the wealthiest planters in Madison County and owned thousands of acres of land throughout north Alabama. He bought this plantation in 1843 and made it his primary residence. Before Fennell bought the land, it had two previous owners, Thomas and William Brandon from 1831 to 1833 and John F. Mills from 1833 to 1843. The plantation was subdivided and sold off in the early 20th century. In 1919 the parcel where the site is located was bought by Moses Love. Love sold the land in 1943 as part of the land acquisition for the Huntsville Arsenal.

The site was first discovered in 1999 during an archaeological survey in support of management of power lines on the Arsenal. At that time, the site was considered insignificant. The site was revisited in 2000 and was carefully delineated. At that time, an extensive midden containing 19th century artifacts was documented, and the site was recommended for additional testing. In 2019 SEARCH Inc. was contracted to do small-scale excavations on the site to evaluate its significance. They uncovered a portion of a large rectangular cellar filled with artifacts dating to the mid-19th century and determined that the site was significant and eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

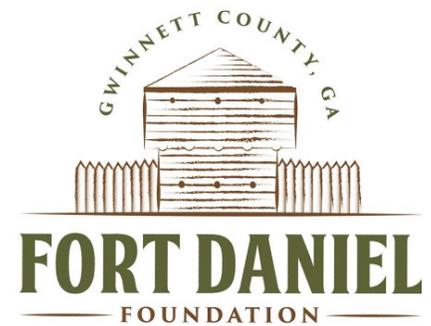
The current excavation is in support of planned upgrades and expansion of the Richard C. Shelby Center for Missile Intelligence of the Missile and Space Intelligence Center (MSIC). The archaeological work is being done in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement between the Garrison-Redstone Arsenal, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The goal of the excavation is to preserve data from the site before it is impacted by construction for the Shelby Center.

New South Associates, Inc. (NSA) is contracted with excavating the site, conducting historic research, and analyzing the data from the dig. A ground-penetrating radar survey conducted by NSA provided insight regarding the location of archaeological features, which often hold the most valuable data sets for interpreting past lifeways. The archaeology team, led by Anne Dorland (GARS President) and June Weber, was able to use the GPR data to quickly identify and target subsurface features, such as cellar pits and structural remnants. Artifacts found at the site include items like buttons, keys, nails, cutlery, ammunition, container glass, horseshoes, and pig remains. There is a lot left behind by the people who lived here in the 1800s and 1900s! Funding was provided by MSIC, and project administration and oversight is being done by the Redstone Arsenal Cultural Resource Management program of the Environmental Management Division of the Garrison Department of Public Works. All artifacts and documents related to the dig will be permanently curated at the Erskine Ramsay Archaeological Repository in Moundville, Alabama. Efforts will be made to put significant artifacts and information on the site in an interpretive display somewhere on the Arsenal or surrounding community. The findings of the dig will be detailed in a technical report that will be made available to local public libraries.



Volunteers are invited to excavate features in the second half of January, and on January 20 there will be an open house with site tours from 9AM-3PM. If you are interested in learning more about the project and how you can get involved, email adorland@newsouthassoc.com! ■ AD

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Oregon State Archaeologists Uncover Oldest Known Projectile Points in the Americas

Excerpt from an article featured on the [Oregon State University Web site](#) on December 23, 2022

Oregon State University archaeologists have uncovered projectile points in Idaho that are thousands of years older than any previously found in the Americas—helping to fill in the history of how early humans crafted and used stone weapons. The 13 full and fragmentary projectile points (pictured right), razor sharp and ranging from about half an inch to 2 inches long, are from roughly 15,700 years ago, according to carbon-14 dating. That's about 3,000 years older than the Clovis fluted points found throughout North America, and 2,300 years older than the points previously found at the same Cooper's Ferry site along the Salmon River in present-day Idaho.



Previously, Loren Davis (an anthropology professor at OSU and head of the group that found the points) and other researchers working the Cooper's Ferry site had found simple flakes and pieces of bone that indicated

human presence about 16,000 years ago. However, the discovery of projectile points reveals new insights into the way the first Americans expressed complex thoughts through technology at that time, Davis said.

The points are revelatory not just in their age, but in their similarity to projectile points found in Hokkaido, Japan, dating to 16,000-20,000

years ago. Their presence in Idaho adds more detail to the hypothesis that there are early genetic and cultural connections between the ice age peoples of Northeast Asia and North America. ■ OSU

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