

Preserving History Through Archaeology



October 2023
Volume XII, Issue 8

GWINNETT ARCHAEOLOGY BULLETIN

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From the Vault: Chamber Pot

In the Fort Daniel Museum there is a grouping of cream-colored fragments that are usually one of the most interesting artifacts shown to visitors—especially the children. Separately these fragments are not anything special, but when you displayed them together you can see what they used to comprise: a cream-colored ceramic chamber pot.

Chamber pots served an important and humble purpose in the days before we had indoor plumbing. Instead of trekking outside to the outhouse or the privy (or the woods!) in the dark people would keep a pot under their beds and use it as a place to relieve themselves. Styles of chamber pots varied from chair or stools to pots or dishes. However, they all had the same function. One of the earliest examples of a chamber pot was discovered at the Tel-el-Amarna site



in Egypt and dates from the 1300s BCE.¹ Though the style of chamber pots remained moderately the same throughout the ages, their design altered slightly in the 1500s to what we are most familiar with today.

During the colonial period most of the chamber pots were made of earthenware that was lead glazed and had a slightly coarse texture.² Although this type was patterned after the silver styles popular in Europe, these pots were not as eye-catching as the delicate pots with tin glaze. In the 1600s Staffordshire potteries mass-produced chamber pots and exported them to the American colonies. These type of chamber pots were very affordable, and many have been discovered at colonial sites.

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More Diggin's

- **Elisha Winn Fair:** The Annual Elisha Winn Fair will be on October 7 and 8 from 10AM to 5PM each day. The Winn House and all buildings will be open for guided tours. There will be food vendors, craft vendors, period demonstrations, a period garden, blacksmith demonstrations, and live music. The cost is \$3 for everyone over 12. For more information visit the [Gwinnett Historical Society Web site](#).
- **Fort Daniel Cleanup Day:** In preparation for the annual Frontier Faire at Fort Daniel a cleanup day at the site will be on Saturday, October 14 from 9AM to 12PM. If you are able to help out, please email [Delana Gilmore](#).
- **15th Annual Frontier Faire:** The annual Fort Daniel Frontier Faire will be on Saturday, October 21 from 10AM to 4PM. *See below for more information.*
- **Poole Mountain Archaeological Dig:** Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS) will be returning to the Poole Mountain site on Sunday, October 29 from 10AM to 4PM. This will also be a public archaeology event inviting the public to come and see what we are doing and help bring awareness to the preservation of the Poole Mountain site. If you are interested in joining the dig, please email [Delana Gilmore](#) by Wednesday, October 25.
- **Society for Georgia Archaeology Fall Meeting:** The tentative date for the Society for Georgia Archaeology (SGA) Fall Meeting will be November 11 at the Veterans Curation Program (VCP) in Augusta. More details will be available at a later date.

Defending the Frontier

15th Annual Frontier Faire

Saturday, October 21, 2023

Rain Date: Saturday October 28, 2023

10AM–4PM

Fort Daniel Historic Site

(2505 Braselton Highway/GA 124, Buford)

FREE Admission

★Historic Interpretations ★Fort Daniel Museum

★Frontier Demonstrations ★Public Archaeology

For information visit Fort Daniel Foundation's Web site: [fortdaniel.com](#)

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Chamber pots were usually the only option for people to relieve themselves. Many historical homes did not have outhouses; people only used chamber pots or close stools.³ Generally, each bedroom would have its own chamber pot, but on the frontier there would probably be only one chamber pot for a small home. These pots were stored under or by the beds usually. However, in some homes a special piece of furniture called a *com-mode* contained doors to store the chamber pots. The commodes were used when a chamber pot did not have a lid and helped to reduce odor. To empty out a chamber pot the contents would be emptied in an outhouse (if there is one), dumped out a window, poured into a body of water, or spread on the garden.

Archaeologists commonly find ceramics, but it is not always easy to determine what these objects were used for—storage, food transportation, tableware, or décor. Testing any leftover material on the ceramic pieces is usually the only way to determine what the use was. In 2022 terra-cotta fragments that were found in a Sicilian villa dating to the 5th or 6th century CE were tested, and they were revealed that their purpose was as a Roman chamber pot. The pot (*pictured right*) is round with sloping sides, standing a foot high and 13 inches wide at the rim.⁴ Researchers do not know if people sat on the pot to use it or if it was placed beneath a chair equipped with a cover over the suitable hole.⁵ When the pot was found, it was in pieces, so archaeologists put the fragments back together and found some calcified material inside. They scraped a bit off for analysis hoping that it would help identify what the pot contained—resulting in the discovery of it being a chamber pot!

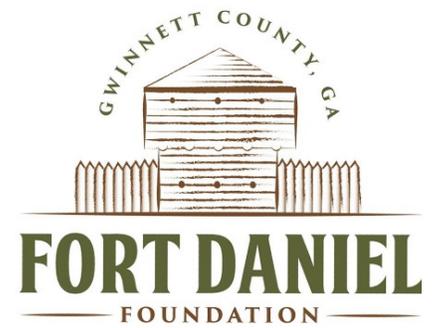


A Roman chamber pot dating to the fifth century, found at Gerace in Sicily.

We do not know for sure if the Fort Daniel chamber pot fragments make up one or more pots, but they reveal a personal side of life at Fort Daniel. Additionally, an interesting story can be told to people (especially children) on how the men went to the restroom during the night when the Fort was occupied. ■ **DMG**

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1. Miller-Wilson, Kate (May 2020). "What Is a Chamber Pot? History of a Unique Antique." Love to Know. October 2023. <https://www.lovetoknow.com/home/antiques-collectibles/white-chamber-pot>.
 2. Ibid.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Bakalar, Nicholas (February 2022). "A 1,500-Year Old Riddle Solved: Yes, It Was a Terra-Cotta Porta-Potty." *New York Times*. October 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/10/science/archaeology-rome-toilet.html>.
 5. Ibid.

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Prince Hall Masonic Lodge to Be Restored

Excerpt from an article written by Maria Saporta on [Saporta Report Web site](#) on September 25, 2023.

Nearly all of the money needed to restore one of the most significant historic buildings in Atlanta—the Prince Hall Masonic Lodge on Auburn Avenue—has been raised. The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation has made a \$1.5 million grant for the project, which is being coordinated by the building’s owner, the Masons, and the Trust for Public Land (TPL), which has been involved on Auburn Avenue for decades.

The Prince Hall Masonic Lodge was the home of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and the only office of Martin Luther King Jr. The building also was the home of the nation’s first African American-owned radio station, WERD.



With this grant the history of what occurred within the walls of the Masonic Lodge can be preserved, and lessons can be learned by future generations. Along with the gift from the Blank Foundation other organizations, like the Lettie pate Evans Foundation (part of

the Robert W. Woodruff family of foundations) and the National Park Service, have donated grant money to the Lodge’s preservation.

At this point TPL will complete acquisition of the building and plans to immediately turn over ownership to the National Park Service. The lower floors of the Masonic

Lodge will be incorporated into the Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Park and will be open to the public. ■ SR

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