

## **Archaeological Work Could Continue at Courthouse**

Sponsor sought for funding of another dig on Green site

By Rebecca Bunch, staff writer, Chowan Herald

While the archaeological dig performed on the Courthouse Green last week didn't turn up any major findings it has opened the door for future exploration at the site to occur.

Edenton Historical Commission Chair Sally Francis Kehayes said she was pleased to see an effort being made to learn more about what lies beneath the Green.

"I was just fascinated with the whole process," she said. "And what we are seeing now is just the tip of the iceberg."

Kehayes said that could change if the EHC could manage to find a sponsor next a summer to fund the cost of another dig in a different area of the Courthouse Green. Piedmont Natural Gas funded the dig that occurred last week.

Kehayes added that the situation provided a learning experience provided a learning experience for all involved, including students of retired Elizabeth City State University Associate Professor Malcolm LeCompte who performed the first ground penetrating radar survey at the site a few weeks prior to the start of the dig.

"I personally found it very exciting that students attending this summer's Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) at Elizabeth City State University's Center of Excellence in Remote Sensing Education and Research (CERSER) who performed the first radar survey where young people who have learned something from this experience," LeCompte said. "It was heartwarming to me to see them have the opportunity to learn and use this as a stepping stone for future learning while making a significant contribution to local archaeology."

Linda B. Hayden, CERSER Founding Director, was also pleased that students had the chance to be a part of discovering local history on the Courthouse Green.

LeCompte said that he was looking for a summer project for his REU students when he had lunch one day with a childhood friend Guy Simmons of Edenton. Simmons introduced him to EHC board members Jerry Climer and Town Councilman Bob Quinn, who were having lunch at nearby table. They told him about the planned dig and, upon learning of the ECSU lab's ground penetrating radar CERSER might be able to provide and initial exploratory survey.

Intrigued, LeCompte took the idea to Hayden, who approved the project. Participating students including Dominique Marshall from Jackson State University; Shanecia Beckworth from Mississippi Valley State University; and Ryan Lawrence, an ECSU alum who is currently a graduate student at the University of New Hampshire and coincidentally a classmate there of Guy Simmons' son.

Interest among citizens and local officials in the project built as the ECSU team conducted their studies of the Courthouse Green. That interest continued last week as a Greensboro based team from New South Associates led by Shawn Patch, who serves as principal investigator/geophysics specialist for the group, arrived to perform their own radar-based imaging and to dig at selected sites.

Patch said his team chose nine excavation sites over a small area of the Courthouse Green that gave them a good view of that area. Contrary to their hopes based on what they thought was a possible foundation located on the first day of the dig, he said further

study found no evidence of a solid foundation that might have been part of the original Chowan County Courthouse built in the early 1700s.

Patch said what they did find was a mix of artifacts from many different time periods including pottery and chain shards, coins and even a ballast stone.

“In the upper layer (of soil) the older artifacts were mixed with younger, post-1960s artifacts,” Patch said, “We learned this coincided with when the soldier monument (now located at the foot of Broad Street) was moved on the Courthouse Green were constructed. Below that was a ‘cap’ of silt and clay with few if any artifacts. Then below that we found older artifacts from the 1780s through the 1820s give or take.”

Patch said his group would love to return should the EHC find funds to support additional excavation of the Courthouse Green.

“Edenton is an old town with a lot of time depth and tremendous archeology,” he said. “There’s a huge potential to engage local citizens and to complement heritage tourism. With the kind of community support we saw last week it’s clear that archaeology has a role to play.”

Karen Ipock, site manager for the Historic Edenton State Historic Site, agreed. She added that John Mintz, an archaeologist with the State of North Carolina who was present for the first day of the dig – plans to return to Edenton some time this fall to present a program for the public in the 1767 Chowan Courthouse to talk about the findings and what they mean.

Ipock said she joined Kehayes in hoping that additional studies of the Courthouse Green would result in additional knowledge about the site.

“We were only able to investigate a portion of the Green during this investigation. Ipock said. “I think there is more the Green can tell us, and it would be great to do more investigations in the future.”