Press Release

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Fort Drum Cultural Resource unearths new historic artifacts, to be featured at Fall History Tour September 28

FORT DRUM, N.Y. -- A recent sidewalk renovation project at LeRay Mansion unearthed some new artifacts for the Fort Drum Cultural Resources staff historical archives.

Heather Wagner, Cultural Resources education and outreach coordinator, said that community members can get a first look at them during the Fall History Tour on Sept. 28.

“We’re going to highlight some archaeology on this tour that has been done at LeRay Mansion, and part of that is what we’re calling the ‘What’s Under the Walk’ exhibit,” she said. “We literally only dug about four inches into the ground to put the new sidewalk in, and we were able to find some really cool things that we had never found on the mansion grounds before – and we’ve done quite a bit of archaeology on these grounds.”

Wagner said that among the discoveries were pieces of dishware belonging to the LeRay de Chaumont family.

“We didn’t expect to find that,” she said. “We previously only had one tiny fragment of Therese’s 50 place settings that she brought with her from France, and that was after years of excavations at the mansion,” she said.

She said that they were able to match fragments of a baby bunting plate from the early 1900s with one they found at an antique store.

“It’s heavier than a normal dish, but this is what they would have fed babies from,” Wagner said. “We found enough pieces of that to glue together and start forming the plate.”

Wagner said that finding artifacts like that tells a larger story of the families who had lived in the mansion.

“It was kind of fun for us to find this evidence that children were raised in the mansion,” she said. “It really tells the story of lives really well lived – from these beautiful plates.”

They also were able to add to LeRay’s French red wine bottle collection, in addition to finding parts of a pocket watch and pendant.

“What I think is most interesting is that in this little section of new sidewalk, we have about 200 years of history represented,” Wagner said. “We even found a military pin from the late 1960s – probably when there was an officer’s club at the mansion.”

The items that the Fort Drum archaeologists recovered from the ground will augment their artifact collections, some of which also will be presented at the tour.

“It was pretty shocking for us to find these things, because we thought that area was already pretty well disturbed,” she said. “We expected maybe to find a few pieces of glass and some nails, because you could find that almost anywhere you dig on the mansion, or anyplace with an older home.”

Wagner said that the Cultural Resources staff enjoys providing tours to community members because of the historic district’s significance to the North Country community.

“The mansion constantly evolves and changes the more we learn about it,” she said. “It’s not just historic, it’s an important part of our community. I love reaching out to our local community members who maybe only have seen the mansion as a child, or only heard about it, but never got to go inside.”

“Now we’re not only giving people a glimpse inside the mansion, but a glimpse of what is underneath the grounds too,” Wagner added.

Attendees also will visit the 10th Mountain Division and Fort Drum Museum, followed by a self-guided tour of the monuments at Memorial Park. The first tour will begin at 9 a.m., and the second will start at 1 p.m., with each expected to last three hours.

Tour registration ends Sept. 20, and seating is limited. To register, email drumhistorytour@gmail.com or call (315) 772-5463.

For further information regarding this release, media should contact Fort Drum Public Affairs at 315-772-5463 or email Kathleen.l.young4.civ@mail.mil.