CONNECTICUT'S STATE ARCHAEOLOGIST DISCUSSES THE MOST IMPORTANT IN-STATE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS OF 2025



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Connecticut's state archaeologist discussed 2025 archaeology discoveries and projects in the state to an audience at the Mansfield Public Library on Saturday, Jan. 31.

State Archaeologist Sarah Sportman presented new findings and focus areas from 2025 at different Office of State Archaeology (OSA) sites around Connecticut. The OSA is responsible for managing the state's archaeology collections curated by the Connecticut State Museum of Natural History, and it works with other organizations to preserve archaeological sites and history.

Sportman first paid tribute to Scott Brady and Jim Trocchi, active members of the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology group who died earlier this year. Sportman said they were both committed to assisting the OSA in any way possible, whether in the lab, the field or wherever else help was needed.

One of the main updates Sportman provided was discoveries at a burial site in Ridgefield, Conn. In 2019, homeowners were renovating their basement when they stumbled on human remains buried beneath their home. Further examination revealed there were five men buried, all of whom were likely soldiers from the 1777 Battle of Ridgefield between Great Britain and the Continental Army.

Sportman said researchers from the University of Connecticut, Yale University, the University of Florida, Quinnipiac University, Dartmouth College and Purdue University have been working together to find more information about the men buried. She said their work will help "build a life story for all of them" and in turn learn more about the lives of Revolutionary War soldiers.

Different analysis techniques have looked at dental health, skeleton damage, DNA extraction and more. Sportman said researchers are in the process of using stable isotope analysis to determine where the men were from. They have also successfully excavated a variety of buttons that would have been used by soldiers and civilians alike.

"It's really hard because we're hoping we can say we figure out who these guys are, we can get them buried, we can honor their memory and their sacrifice," Sportman said. "We might never know their names, but we can build as much information as possible about their lives."

Sportman briefly touched on the Fifth Camp of Rochambeau's Infantry, a campsite in Bolton used by Rochambeau's army in 1781 during the Revolutionary War. She said that this year, Reflectance Transformation Imaging, a newer technology that reveals near-invisible details on objects, allowed the OSA to discover a coin depicting King George III that was defaced.

"This is potentially a significant act of resistance used throughout the Revolutionary War, and this is an artifact associated with that," Sportman said. "We're very excited about it."

Another archaeological site the OSA made progress in was a Paleo-Indian riverbank site in Farmington, Conn., which Indigenous Americans occupied between 3000 to 1200 years ago. The site was originally discovered and damaged by a nearby resident, and the OSA has been trying to mitigate the damage and excavate carefully.

This year, the OSA worked through two nine-meter blocks, each two meters deep. Among the artifacts discovered was a spear point from the Terminal Archaic period and pottery shards from the early Woodland period. They also discovered remains from hearths near the riverbank.

The final site Sportman discussed was the Hollister site, the location of a 17th century farm owned by John Hollister in South Glastonbury. This year, the OSA focused on two cellar locations that received less attention in previous years of excavating. Their efforts led to the discovery of the first stone chimney at the site. Sportman said that while they found other artifacts — like German stoneware, pipe stems and a cow mandible — there were less artifacts found compared to other locations on the site.

Sportman concluded by discussing work done by Gary Red Oak O'Neil, a ceramics artist who has made and showcased pottery based on Wangunk artifacts found at the Hollister site.

After the talk, Sportman took questions from the audience. Those in attendance were also free to see, feel and learn more about artifacts found at the sites this year.

Ronald Bender, a resident of Lebanon, Conn., found out about the lecture in the newspaper and said it looked like a fun way to spend the afternoon. He was most impressed by "what they were able to find out" about the past based off technological advancements.

For others who attended the event, there was some personal connection that drew them there.

Carol Goldstein, a resident of Lebanon, Conn., has always had an interest in archaeology and the history of Connecticut. Her daughter now specializes in the field, and she said this made the event even more enticing to go to.

"The one that interested me the most was the Hollister site in Glastonbury," Goldstein said. "And that was because I lived in Glastonbury for a period of time. And I actually knew somebody with that name [Hollister]."

Thomas Ford, the vice president for FOSA, said he was excited that the annual lecture occurred and that people were interested in the field. He explained many of the showcased objects and sites in detail to attendants who wanted to know more.

"It's really good to have people interested," Ford said. "We get a lot of joy out of this; it gets your mind working."

Anyone interested in getting involved with the OSA or FOSA, which hosts educational events and adult field experience camps in the summer, can learn more at the CS- MNH website.



An archaeologist uses equipment to dig at an archaeological site. Connecticut's state archaeologist discussed 2025 archaeology discoveries and projects in the state at the Mansfield Public Library on Saturday, Jan. 31.

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