

A DAY AT MICHILIMACKINAC

[June 29, 2012 Lynn Evans Day of Archaeology, Excavation, Museum Archaeology, Post Medieval Elizabeth may, Fort Mackinac, Fort Michilimackinac, Fur Trade, fur trader, Mackinac Island, Michigan, Michilimackinac, Northern Michigan, park manager, Upper Peninsula of Michigan](#)

My primary responsibility this time of year is to direct the excavation at Colonial Michilimackinac State Historic Park. Fort Michilimackinac was established by the French around 1715, taken over by the British in 1761, and dismantled and moved to Mackinac Island with the establishment of Fort Mackinac in 1781. Archaeological excavation has taken place at Michilimackinac every summer since 1959 and provided the foundation of the reconstruction of about half of this fortified fur trading outpost. We are currently excavating a fur trader's house.

Today started, like most days, with a quick check of e-mail and the weather forecast: sunny and warm. The crew and I met at our equipment shed, gathered our tools and supplies, and headed out to the site. They got started and I had a brief meeting with the park manager about the possibility of regrading some of the park paths so that they direct rainwater away from our site, which is in a low spot within the fort walls.

In addition to our core paid staff of five, we have a rotating group of trained volunteers. My next task for the day was to finish mapping some quads where they had been working, so the next volunteers could start fresh.

After that it was a routine field day. I'm digging in a sandy area, probably approaching the glacial beach the fort was built on, so I did not find much, only some fish bones, burned corn and small pieces of chinking from between the upright posts of the house. In other areas of the excavation, the crew was finding more typical (for us) artifacts: fish bones, seed beads, broken glass and lead shot. Most of what we find is very small, the size that might have fallen through cracks in the floorboards. Because of this we water screen all of our deposit through window screen mesh.

Elizabeth may have uncovered an additional section of the south wall trench of the house in her square. The house was poteaux-en-terre, post in the ground, a traditional provincial

French style. The posts were placed in trenches dug into the beach sand. The trenches were then filled with clay and rocks surrounding the posts. These dark strips of soil with clay, rocks and sometimes charred posts make it easy to see the outline of the house in the natural sand.

The other thing we did today, like every day, was talk to park visitors. Our site is in the middle of a popular living history museum, and we talk to hundreds of people each day. We had two motorcoach tours this morning and families throughout the day.

It was warm, as predicted, but with a very nice breeze and clouds in the afternoon, so it turned out to be pleasant digging weather.