

BETSY ROSS'

PITCHERS

June 30, 2012 Philadelphia Archaeological Forum Day of Archaeology 2012, Historical Archaeology archeologist, Betsy, Betsy Ross, British Navy, Drexel University, Flags of the American Revolution, Franklin, Franklin Court, head, Independence National Historical Park, Jed Levin, museum curator, National Constitution Center, Outhouse, Park Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania in the American Revolution, Person Communication and Meetings, Philadelphia, U.S. National Park Service, United Kingdom, United States, United States Navy, Women in the American Revolution

I have been an archeologist in the U.S. National Park Service for 24 years (can it really be that long?), where I now serve as head of the History Branch at [Independence National Historical Park](#) (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Today, June 27th, I spent several hours working with colleagues preparing a small exhibit commemorating the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812. This temporary exhibit will feature two ceramic pitchers we recovered in Independence Park during the excavations at the site where the [National Constitution Center](#) now stands. The pitchers were found in the bottom of a privy pit (outhouse) that once stood in the backyard behind the house where Betsy Ross spent her last years. Did Betsy throw them away?



Pitchers found in the bottom of a privy pit

Made in England between about 1816 and 1820, the pitchers bear images of two War of 1812 naval engagements in which the fledgling U. S. Navy was victorious over the mighty British Navy. English potteries produced many such designs specifically for export to the American market. In so doing, they were helping an adversary celebrate a victory over their own navy. I don't know if they appreciated the irony in that. I do know that they were glad to find a willing market for their goods. Whatever they meant to the British potters, for Betsy Ross' family they probably marked the stirrings of national pride sparked by the War.

During the course of the day I also spent time meeting with a colleague from our maintenance staff trying to figure out the safest way to remove an obsolete 1970's ventilation duct from inside the vault that protects some of the remains of Benjamin Franklin's house at our in-ground archeology exhibit in Franklin Court. There was yet another meeting today. This last one involved deciding on how the archeologists and the museum curator in the park could best assist a team of faculty and students from Drexel University's Digital Media program in adding accurate details to a 3D digital reconstruction of the 18th century house in which a African American coachman lived. The reconstruction is base on another site we excavated within the park...and of course, as every day, there was lots and lots of paperwork to fill out. I do work for the government, after all.

Jed Levin

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