

MY DAY OF ARCHAEOLOGY...

July 29, 2013 Philadelphia Archaeological Forum Day of Archaeology 2013, Historical Archaeology, Public Archaeology Anthropology, federal law, Franklin Court, Independence National Historical Park, Jed Levin, National Constitution Center, Park Archeologist and Chief Historian, Philadelphia, United States, US National Park Service

By Jed Levin, Chief, History Branch Independence National Historical Park Philadelphia, Pennsylvania USA (Posted by the Philadelphia Archaeological Forum webmaster)

Did I really spend over an hour today trying to arrange for a technician come to the park and install a tape backup drive on a new computer server...and then, spend additional time trying to figure out where we would house the darn thing once we finally go it set up? I did, and it is hard to reconcile those efforts with my job title.

I work for the US National Park Service where I serve as Park Archeologist and Chief Historian at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The park's mission is to preserve sites associated with the founding and early history of the United States, and to interpret to those sites and their associated history to the public. In support of those goals Independence Park has had an active archeology program since the early 1950's.

My day today was fairly typical, which is to say it was filled with tasks that often ranged far afield from what I thought I'd be doing when, decades ago, I first decided to become an archeologist. Also typical is the fact that, like many of the archeologists I know, I wear several hats. I split my time between managing the history program, which involves overseeing historical research conducted to fulfill the parks mission and coordinating the park's efforts to comply with federal law and regulations related to the preservation of both cultural and natural resources. We have to carefully consider how what we do might affect everything from historic buildings and landscapes to archeological sites and air quality. And, yes, I am also responsible for the park's archeological studies.

I started my day by checking my e-mail, then I gave a presentation to a group of high school students who are participating in a summer program here at the park that offers students the opportunity to explore history as they develop their writing and artistic skills. We talked about the President's House site, one of our recent excavations here in the park.

After my adventure in IT, which I mentioned at the start, I spent much of the rest of the day reviewing two construction projects: one planned and one on-going. In one case I had to determine if a list of proposed last minute changes to the renovations to the underground museum in Franklin Court, a project nearing completion, might adversely affect archeological or historical resources on the site. The other project involved the same kind of review for a new underground power line the electric company wants to install.

Before the day was over, I did get to visit the park's archeology lab were the staff and a dedicated group of volunteers are working to complete the cataloging and analysis of artifact recovered during excavation

at the National Constitution Center site, here in the park. I went specifically to review the progress of our efforts to scan the thousands of pages of field notes and thousands of photographs that document the excavation of the National Constitution Center site. Once digitized, an electronic copy these irreplaceable paper and film records can be used in the analysis and report production, while a complete backup copy of the data can be stored safely off-site, in case of a disaster. We still have a long way to go, but accumulated data for this project currently exceeds 275 gigabytes. Hence the need for that new server we are installing.

My days always end happily if I get to spend at least some time, however brief, in the lab (or, when we have an excavation underway, in the field). When I see the freshly turned earth or the trays of artifacts that the soil yielded up, it never fails to reignite the sense of excitement that first drew me to archeology. These tangible connections to the past fill me with wonder and raise countless questions.

