

# UNEARTHING DETROIT: REVISITING COLLECTIONS IN CURRENT CONTEXTS

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I am [Kaitlin Scharra](#), the Senior Student leader of Digital Media and Public Outreach with the **Unearthing Detroit** project at Wayne State University under the direction of Dr. Krysta Ryzewski. We are a collections-based research unit working with artifacts from mid-20th century salvage excavations during the construction of some of Detroit's most prominent features. Many of these collections, due to time and budget restraints, have remained under-analyzed since they were unearthed. Our focus is to discover the cultural narrative of these areas through reanalysis of the artifacts and archival research. In turn, we bring the knowledge forth to the community in the form of public days, classroom archaeology, and social media. We can be found at <http://unearthdetroit.wordpress.com/>, as well as, on twitter [@UnearthDetroit](#) and [facebook](#).

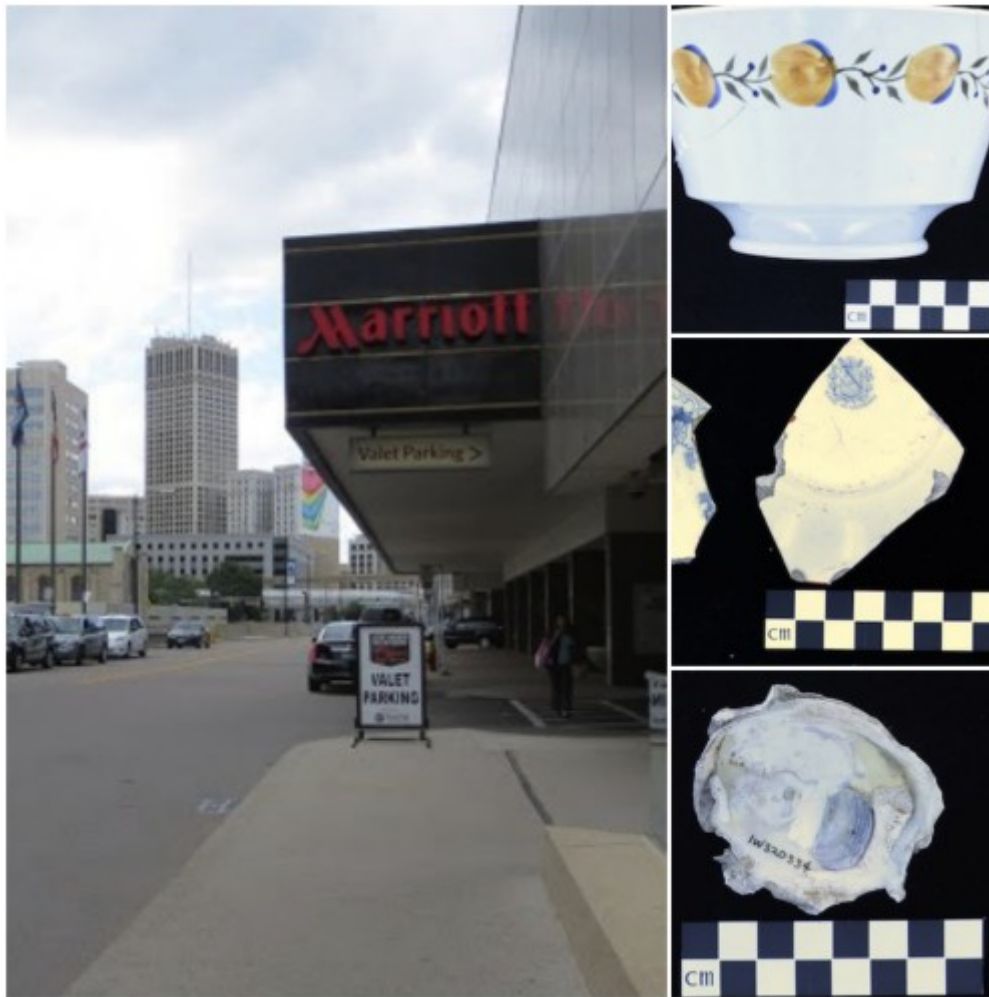


*The GM Ren Cen is located at Jefferson and Randolph Street along the Riverfront in downtown Detroit, MI.*

Here is a look at how the Unearthing Detroit project links Detroit's present with its past using our most explored collection- the Renaissance Center. By compiling map data over the past weeks, our team has determined where sectors from the 1970s salvage excavation were located in respect to the current Renaissance Center buildings. Each of the following sets (representing individual sectors) will show a current photo of the sector location alongside a sample of the area's artifacts. We included with each an explanation of what we have discovered about each sector and where we hope to go. We reference both a faunal analysis completed by Karen Mudar (1978), and an investigation into the ceramics completed as a master's thesis by Stephen Demeter (1990).

## Sector F

The westernmost sector of the excavation spanned the historic block northeast of the intersection of Randolph and Atwater. Notably, this was downtown Detroit's eastern border during the 19th century. It is currently the area in front of the Marriott Detroit Downtown's main entrance.



*Sector F (Clockwise from left): (1) Downtown Detroit Marriott entrance view of Renaissance drive leading to Randolph. (2) Whiteware (3) German Printed Ironware (4) Oyster Shell*

Historic research shows that this area belonged to the Berthelot family. Senior student leader and archival researcher, Kate E. Korth, postulates that the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, which coincided with mass immigration, altered the economic landscape of this property. Artifacts, likewise, show evidence of the transition to a bustling marketplace and hub for incoming populations. Trade interaction between French and Native Americans is also indicated. This sector as well as the following are our oldest dated collections (ca 1790-1890).

## **Sector J**

Sector J was at the historic intersection of Franklin and Brush streets. Currently it is located to your left as you head onto the bridge to the main tower.



*Sector J (clockwise from top): (1) View of 100 tower from central bridge over GM Showroom (2) Leather Buttons (3) Sewing Kit (4) Transfer-Print Whiteware*

Sector J artifacts have not been widely reanalyzed yet. We do know that according faunal and ceramic analysis that this area was economically wealthy. We hope to look into who these artifacts belonged to and complete a reanalysis of dates.

## **Sector G**

Taking up the western half of the block Southwest of the historic Brush and Franklin intersection is Sector G. The central tower stands over this area today.



*Sector G (Clockwise from left): (1) View of central tower from GM Showroom (2) Plate from which newspaper article was taken- dates to April, 3 1833 (3) Leather Shoe*

Faunal analysis and ceramic analysis led to disagreement as to the economic standing of this area. While we know this area was apart of the brush family farm, we are encouraged to reanalyze the socioeconomic status of this area. The large amount of shoes recovered from this area inspire further questions about the craft and trade in this area.

## **Sector I**

The shopping area between the 200 and 300 towers was constructed atop what was Sector I and the historic second half of the block shared by sector G.





*Sector I (Clockwise from upper left) (1) Shopping area located between the two western towers (2) A Pepsin Bottle (3) Industrial Stoneware (4) Pocketknife (?)*

A minimum vessel count, done by Samantha Malette and Kate E. Korth, concluded that the artifacts in this assemblage were from a boarding house. Historical records indicate that this area was highly influenced by traffic of working class population due to its proximity to the shoreline and Grand Trunk Railroad. This neighborhood, dating later than other sectors, had artifacts consisting largely of everyday objects. We believe this means the area was well traveled point for visitors as opposed to static households.

## **Sector K**

Sector K was a survey to the east of the main buildings across Beaubien street. It was where the 500 and 600 buildings stand today. Historically, it is known that this was an area of the Brush Family Farm located Northeast of Beaubien and Franklin.



*Sector K (clockwise from left): (1) Port Atwater Parking Structure in the shadow of 500 and 600 Towers (2) Stoneware Rim (3) Whiteware Teacup (3) Sherd of Rockinghamware Spittoon*

Ceramics made up the vast majority of this collection. There was a mix of rockinghamware and large amount of plainware. While this indicates a lower economic standing and much later date than the other sectors, there was also a large amount of transfer prints. The markers marks on such high class goods date them to the early 1800s. The question being investigated is, “Are these outliers in the collection due to different stratigraphic levels or were they hand me downs used alongside plainware?”.

**Our collections-based research of over 2,000 artifacts has a long way to go. We estimate we have touched only about 3% of the collection in reanalysis. We look forward to learning and outreaching even more as we discover more exciting facts about the changing landscape of this area from the late 1700s to today.**