

UT archeologists uncover bank barn foundation



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KINGSPORT - Archeologists with the University of Tennessee spent three days in the Model City last week excavating at Netherland Inn's bank barn, searching for artifacts and the building's original floor.

The Netherland Inn/Exchange Place Association announced in April plans to rebuild the bank barn - an early 1800s barn used as a stagecoach stop - to its original condition of 4,800 square feet on three levels. Preliminary plans call for the first level to be an open area for events, the second level to be a transportation museum for flatboats, and the third level may be a caretaker home.

Future projects around Netherland Inn call for a full-size wharf and flatboat and a salt warehouse.

Kingsport received a \$421,370 grant from the Tennessee Department of Transportation for the reconstruction of the bank barn. Total cost of the project is estimated at \$530,000. Construction is estimated to take about six months to complete.

The association discovered the original limestone foundation of the bank barn in 1972, but the foundation was covered with plastic and reburied until work could actually start on rebuilding the barn.

Elizabeth DeCorse, a research assistant professor in UT's Archaeological Research Laboratory, along with two other UT archeologists spent three days in Kingsport working at the bank barn site.

"We came in with a couple of objectives. One was to figure out the dimensions of the building and identify the foundation of the building," DeCorse said. "Two was to determine if there were any intact deposits, which are original surface levels of the barn with historic artifacts."

Starting from what was uncovered in 1972, DeCorse said her group followed the large limestone rocks around the perimeter of the foundation until they discovered all four

corners. The team spent three days working and mapping the site with a GIS unit seeing how all of the rocks aligned and taking measurements on the size of the foundation.

"We have uncovered what we believe is the original foundation of the building. A lot of the stones were robbed in the past, and we think they were used for the steps and walls up on the hill," DeCorse said. "I think we have enough in place where we've determined exactly where the foundation was. We've got historic mortar in between these stones, so we know that it's an old foundation. And we've determined how far back into the hill the foundation actually went."

Charlie Susano, who has been an archeologist with UT for about six years, said the bank barn is a "pretty early site" for the Northeast Tennessee region.

"Knoxville was founded in the early 1790s, but a majority of sites we dig are late 19th century, early 20th century sites ... mostly post-Civil War," Susano said. "We find a lot of old homesteads and farms, so this is a pretty special site."

DeCorse's team also worked to determine if any artifacts existed in the ground on the bank barn site by digging a 50 centimeter square hole in the ground and sifting through the dirt. What they found included the original floor surface of the barn along with tools, several horseshoes, pieces of metal and a stirrup.

The team also discovered a brick floor running along the front of the bank barn site.

"What we're seeing here is hand-made bricks, which are very different from modern, machine-made bricks, I do believe this is original flooring," DeCorse said. "Now we're trying to figure out if the brick floor is inside the barn."

DeCorse said plans call for the barn to be rebuilt around the original foundation and not directly on it.

"We don't want to put it exactly over the historic foundation or floor because we want to expose those as part of the exhibits of the building," DeCorse said. "If we determine the building to be 40 feet wide, the new foundation will be on the outside of the original foundation maybe a foot or so, so we can show the visitors what the original foundation looked like."