

by: **Kelly Marshall Fuller The Sun News**

Uncovering pieces of history

Students from Socastee High School sank their hands in the rich, dark dirt at Mansfield Plantation in search of the past. The school's History and [Archaeology](#) Club, which included ninth, 10th and 11th-grade students, were eager to explore the plantation last week and assist the Waccamaw Diggers, a local volunteer archaeology group that has been searching for artifacts from a vanished slave village.

The archaeological project, which began earlier this year, is a continuation of work done by former Coastal Carolina University archaeologist Jim Michie, said Socastee history teacher Chris Boyle.

Michie, who died in 2003, researched the grounds at Mansfield Plantation in the fall of 1995 and found evidence of an earlier settlement pattern, Boyle said. While his students were getting hands-on learning experience, information was being gathered that will help preserve knowledge of slave life at the plantation and document an area where their cabins could have existed.

Mansfield Plantation, once a thriving rice plantation, is well preserved and is one the few plantations in the area with an existing slave village.

Knowledge of plantation life is being documented to add to the base of knowledge that has already been collected during earlier archaeological digs in Horry and Georgetown counties, Boyle said.

'I wanted the students to do a service learning project,' Boyle said. 'We need to give back to the community. These guys are pitching in to help the plantation owners and the future historians who write the history of this place.'

The Waccamaw Diggers became involved in the project this year, said Susan McMillan, who leads the group.

The Waccamaw Diggers, which includes some local retirees, have done other excavations at Brookgreen Gardens and Wachesaw Plantation, McMillan said. The Waccamaw Diggers have also taken classes in plantation archaeology, which were offered at one time through Brookgreen Gardens.

During Wednesday's outing, the students and the Waccamaw Diggers found pieces of pottery, known as colono ware, which the slaves once used for outdoor cooking, McMillan said. The amateur archaeologists found clay pipes, crumbling brick and other items to indicate that the slave cabins were located nearby. No written record of the cabins' location is now available, McMillan said.

'This is kind of like 'CSI,'" said Socastee student Toan Wang, a foreign exchange student who helped dig holes and sift for artifacts. 'History is my life.' The type of debris found in the loose soil is a sign that the cabins were near the main road leading to Mansfield Plantation, McMillan said. The debris could have been swept from the porches and scattered around the homes as a means of refuse disposal. The type of debris also shows that the people who left it behind were not wealthy and made many of their household items, she said. Bits of painted china would have indicated that the plantation owners or overseers owned the cabin, she said. 'We can reconstruct history that was never written down,' McMillan said. 'This is the footprint of the slave village.' The Waccamaw Diggers plan to be at the plantation for the next several years, McMillan said.

The artifacts found at the site will remain the property of the plantation owner, John Parker. The plantation is now open for some tours by reservation, and is also a bed and breakfast. The plantation also has the county's only remaining original winnowing house, a large, elevated structure once used to separate the husk from the grains of rice. Some information being gathered with ground-penetrating radar is being analyzed by geology professors at Coastal Carolina University. Boyle said he will also publish his work in a book and add it to information gathered by Michie. 'I thought it would be fun to see the artifacts,' said Jennifer Preslar, a student at Socastee High. 'It's the one chance we have to get dirty.'

History of Mansfield

1718 | John Green received a grant of 500 acres from the King of England, one of the earliest grants of land along the Black River.

1750 | Green and his wife, Elizabeth, settled on Green's Creek and had six children. Green died in 1750 and the tract was sold to James Coachman.

1756 | Coachman sold the tract to Susannah LaRoach Man, widow of Dr. John Man. Her son, John Man Taylor, inherited Mansfield at age 15 under his mother's will. At his death at age 37, he left it to his sister, Anna Maria Taylor.

1841 | Anna Maria Taylor traded Mansfield to her son-in-law Dr. Francis Simons Parker and her daughter Mary Taylor Parker in exchange for Wedgefield Plantation. Parker soon learned that producing rice on Mansfield was more profitable than being a doctor.

1865 | Main house destroyed by fire.

1868 | Mary Taylor Parker gives Mansfield to her sons.

1912 | Mansfield, no longer producing rice, is sold to Charles W. Tuttle of Auburn, New York.

1931 | Tuttle sold Mansfield to Col. Robert L. Montgomery and his wife, Charlotte.

1970 | Charlotte Montgomery dies. Mansfield is sold to Wilbur S. Smith of [Columbia](#), who buys adjoining land, bringing Mansfield to its present size of just over 900 acres.

2004 | Sarah (Sally) Smith sold Mansfield to John Rutledge Parker and Sallie Middleton Parker. John Rutledge Parker is the great-great-grandson of Francis Simons Parker.

Today | The plantation now operates as a bed and breakfast. Tours are available by reservation. Call 1-866-717-1776.

Source: www.mansfieldplantation.com