



NEWPORT RESTORATION FOUNDATION
Founded by Doris Duke

The Newport Restoration Foundation / Salve Regina University Archeology Project

In the summer of 2007, The Newport Restoration Foundation (NRF) and Salve Regina University's Cultural and Historic Preservation Department (CHP) formed a partnership regarding archaeological investigations and historical research of NRF's historic properties. The purpose of the partnership is twofold: first, to provide NRF with archival and archaeological data supporting ongoing efforts to interpret NRF's historic properties and the neighborhoods surrounding them; and second, to train undergraduate students in archaeological and preservation research techniques. Several undergraduate theses from Salve students, and at least two graduate theses, from the University of Massachusetts Boston will result from this partnership. The benefits of collaborative faculty-student research on these properties are clear. Ultimately, the general public will also benefit as a more nuanced and accurate interpretation of eighteenth-century life will be derived from these activities.

Archeologist and Cultural and Historic Preservation Department Chair Dr. Jim Garman and his field school students conducted archeological digs in the yards of two Newport Restoration Foundation houses in 2007: 415 Thames Street, which now serves as the NRF Museum Store, and the house at 12 Dennison Street. In addition, two Salve Regina University students completed research internships by delving into archival records (chains of title, maps, directories and other records) on these and other NRF properties in the area. During fall semester 2007, CHP students completed class reports on several of the most intriguing categories of artifacts, including tin-glazed earthenware, tobacco pipes, Chinese porcelain, and "small finds," the objects of everyday life.



Excavations at the Thames Street site identified unexpected and exciting deposits associated with Thomas Richardson, a prominent Newport merchant who may have lived at the site between about 1750 and his death in 1786. The artifacts also suggest a tantalizing link with British troops who occupied Newport during the Revolution. Moreover, ground-penetrating sonar tests have caused speculation that evidence of a distillery may be hidden beneath the surface of the yard.

For these reasons, Dr. Garman and the Salve Regina Archeological Field School returned to the site for the summer of 2008. A large quantity of material was uncovered which continues to intrigue the

scholars and raise as many questions as have been answered so far. Here are some highlights from the 415 Thames Street excavation and associated student research:

1. Six weeks of archaeological investigation at 415 Thames resulted in the discovery of a previously unknown eighteenth-century site: the Thomas Richardson House lot. The site, deeply buried in the back yard of a nineteenth-century house, is associated with merchant Thomas Richardson (d.1785), a prominent Newporter who traded extensively in the Caribbean. Richardson also had four enslaved Africans living and possibly working at this site. The house may have been occupied by British officers during the Revolution.
2. The site contains an abundance of information related to the life of a prosperous 18th-century merchant and his extended household. Data from ceramics, glass, tobacco pipes and architectural artifacts contributes greatly to the interpretation of life in colonial Newport.
3. The two eighteenth-century levels contained more than 2,000 well-preserved animal bones and shells. They represent one of the most complete collections of animal bones from a Newport archaeological site, and have the potential to inform us about markets, food preparation and consumption, and the availability of food during the Revolution and post-Revolutionary periods.
4. Salve Regina's CHP Department has an ongoing relationship with the Fiske Center for Environmental Archaeology at the University of Massachusetts-Boston. Staff at the Fiske Center are very interested in the 415 Thames Street collection and have been analyzing it and interpreting it along with several soil samples.
5. The report of all the investigations will serve multiple purposes: public interpretation, possible exhibits, and a report written in language that the layperson will understand. It will serve as a springboard for future investigations and ensure the continued success of the project.



Salve Regina University and the Newport Restoration Foundation are continuing this collaborative project to gain a deeper understanding of the world of the eighteenth-century merchant in Newport. The project uses archaeology, architectural history, and archival research to interpret the lives of merchants established along the Southern Thames Street waterfront from approximately 1740 to 1820, and members of their extended households.

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