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UTSA ANTHROPOLOGY STUDENTS DIG INTO ALAMO HISTORY

(SAN ANTONIO) – For five weeks in July, twelve UTSA anthropology students and a few community volunteers braved the hot Texas sun to dig a little further into the history of San Antonio’s most recognizable landmark, The Alamo.

A partnership between the 2006 UTSA Archaeological Field School and the Daughters of the Republic of Texas allowed students to excavate areas of the historical attraction previously undisturbed by archaeology experts.

“The field school at the Alamo proved to be a valuable experience for these students,” said project archaeologist and research scientist with UTSA’s Center for Archeological Research Kristi M. Ulrich. “The students were able to get their first field experience at a historically rich site and learn much in the way of actual field techniques.”

Focusing on three areas inside the Alamo grounds and digging to a depth of 150 cm (nearly five feet), the sites provided investigators with clues to the historical sequence of events that occurred at each dig location.

The first dig site, and largest area investigated by the students, was the southwest portion of the Well Courtyard where the Long Barracks wall meets the south wall. Despite significant disruption to the site from demolition of the Hugo & Schmeltzer mercantile store that occupied the Long Barracks until the early 1900s, the students were able to unearth a wealth of artifacts during the excavation.

Colonial pottery sherds, an intact glass poison bottle, grapeshots fired from a cannon, buckshots fired from a rifle and an entire undamaged glass flask (an extraordinary find on such a site), were just a few of the items that were painstakingly plotted, catalogued and cleaned.

The second dig site, located just south of the Calvary Courtyard north wall, unearthed materials that spoke to the history of the siege on the Alamo on March 6, 1836 and the tragic days that followed. The dig site revealed a distinct burned and charred area on top of an unearthed cobble floor. Burning was a practice employed by the Mexican Army, to ensure that the Alamo and its contents would not be used against them again during the war.

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Further excavation beneath the charred cobble floor presented investigators with additional Texas history treasures, including a Guerrero point. This stone arrow point commonly used from 1718 to 1790, is from the Spanish Colonial period when the Alamo served as a mission for Franciscan missionaries.

The third dig, located along the north wall of the Well Courtyard, was chosen to provide students and teachers with additional insight as to how the *convento* - the residence area for the Franciscan priests - was constructed and utilized. In addition to several archeological artifacts, another large burning episode was unearthed at this site.

Ulrich believes that the students learned more than just archeology on the dig. “The students also developed some public relations skills by interacting with the tourists who were visiting the Alamo,” added Ulrich. “Nearly every day visitors lined the barricades around the dig sites trying to get a glimpse of what we were doing and asking the students a lot of different questions. The most common of course was ‘Have you found the silver yet?’”

A notable community volunteer on the project this summer was San Antonio illustrator, artist and author George Nelson. Nelson is the author of *The Alamo: An Illustrated History*. This work, an in-depth review of the long and complex story of this intriguing site, contains more than 100 maps and pictures along with a review of 300 years of historical records. He is also the artist of a bronze relief map that is currently located in Alamo Plaza as well as several paintings which are located on the Alamo Wall of History.

Ulrich hopes the dig, which still remains unearthed, can be excavated further with hopes of revealing even more secrets of the famous Texas landmark.

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