November 19 - Lab Work

On Monday November 19, our class continued our artifact analysis we began at the past Thursday section at the Carriage House. This analysis is an important part of the archaeological process: we are now able to process our findings in the field and see what conclusions we can draw about Hope College and the Quiet Green, and maybe even Brown University and its history as a whole.



1. Notes and Bags

For artifact analysis, the class divided into two groups, one working on each trench: Caitlin Deal, Caity Mylchreest, Chris Thompson, and Peter Johnson worked with the QG1 material, and Chris Kim, Eddie Cleofe, Ariana Gunderson, and Christina DiFabio worked with the QG2 material. The first step for artifact analysis was to compare the bags which were labeled and used during the excavation with the excavation forms which were completed for each context. The artifacts were separated in bags labeled by trench, context, date, and material. A number of bags were not noted, although it was

possible to retroactively account for all of them. Once everything is confirmed, the artifacts are ready to be washed and categorized for further analysis. Referencing back to the original notes was especially important as the artifacts were cleaned, as after analysis a few artifacts were placed into new groups.

2. Cleaning

Once the bags were cross-checked with our notes, they were ready to be cleaned. Brushes were used to gently scrape off the dirt. Most glass and ceramic pieces are fairly hard so they do not break easily. The metal, however, was not washed because doing so can oxide and damage them. Washing the asphalt was unpleasantly grimy. Once cleaned, the artifacts were laid out on drying racks to dry and be sorted.





3. Sorting and Counting

After the artifacts are washed and categorized on the drying rack, each team counts the pieces of material culture in each category for each context. These numbers will be useful in further analysis to help determine figures, such as the minimum number of objects for each material type present. The excavation of QG1 has quite a bit more artifacts than that of QG2, and has more diversity. An interesting note is the large ceramic fragments, which were found in QG1 and appear to be pipe pieces, span throughout different contexts, such as 6, 7, and 8. Both QG1 and QG2 have large amounts of glass

material. Where possible, the shards and sherds are also sorted and grouped by color, texture, etc. This is helpful later when we try to identify and join matching pieces together.



4. Photography

Once the artifacts were sorted and counted, photographs of the various groups were taken for each context of each trench. In order to know the context and material, ID cards were made for each group, which included the trench, context, and material type. Alex also made a reference scale to use in the pictures, so the size of the material can be referenced to a measurement. The photos were recorded onto a photo log, which will be transferred to a digital Excel format. Individual photographs were attempted for some objects of special interest, but due to issues with lighting and focus, completing these photos was put on hold until the next meeting.



5. Analysis

Our artifact analysis focused primarily on attempting to date each context from the available evidence. Generally, several techniques are employed to this aim. First, we attempt to join glass or ceramic pieces from the same vessel together. Most of the clay pipes were successfully joined, as well as a few glass and ceramic pieces. Afterward, we identify diagnostic pieces—that is, artifacts that can give us a relatively reliable terminus post quem or terminus ante quem. A good example is а coin, which effectively establishes the terminus post quem.

Other diagnostic pieces include cermanic sherds with identifiable designs and parts of glass vessels that clue us in as to what type of vessel they once belonged to. Bases, handles, and mouths are especially useful. The color and texture of objects can be informative as well, since vessels of certain textures and colors were only produced during certain time periods. At the end of the day's analysis, by consulting resources available online, we were able to conclude that the date range for our contexts is sometime in the past century. While still a fairly large span of time, this still narrows down the date range to just half of Hope College's history. It should be noted, however, that this date range was largely expected.



6. GIS/Spatial Analysis

While all of the above was ongoing, Morgan was working with GIS software to map all the points taken by the total station. She began with the grid provided by the state of Rhode Island and inputted the points from our trenches and survey units into the map. Inputting the points does not automatically create the correct polygons, however, so Morgan had to consult her notes to draw the polygons herself—once again a reminder of the importance of good note-taking in the field. It is also possible to superimpose jpeg images or satellite maps onto the grid through the GIS software. However, the satellite map we have is

angled somewhat, so it does not align perfectly with the grid. Once her project is complete, Morgan will have drawn a number of maps that will enable us to easily and quickly visualize some of the data we gathered on the field.