

## **Someone Lost Their Marbles!**

In partnership with the City of Annapolis, AECOM archaeologists have begun archaeological investigations of the Newman Street Site (18AP39) at the intersections of Newman Street and Compromise Street. Site 18AP39 was first discovered in 1984 and has been subject to two archaeological investigations and one geophysical survey since then to learn more about the history of the site. Evidence from these studies suggests the site dates to as early as the eighteenth century and was occupied until the early twentieth century, making it nearly as old as the City of Annapolis itself. We're hoping to learn more about the site, those who lived there, and how it contributes to the development and history of the City of Annapolis.

One of the best ways to learn more about the individuals or families who occupied a site is to look at what they may have left behind, either intentionally or unintentionally. We have found a plethora of personal items at the Newman Street Site that provide insight into the date of the site and to the lives of the people who lived there.

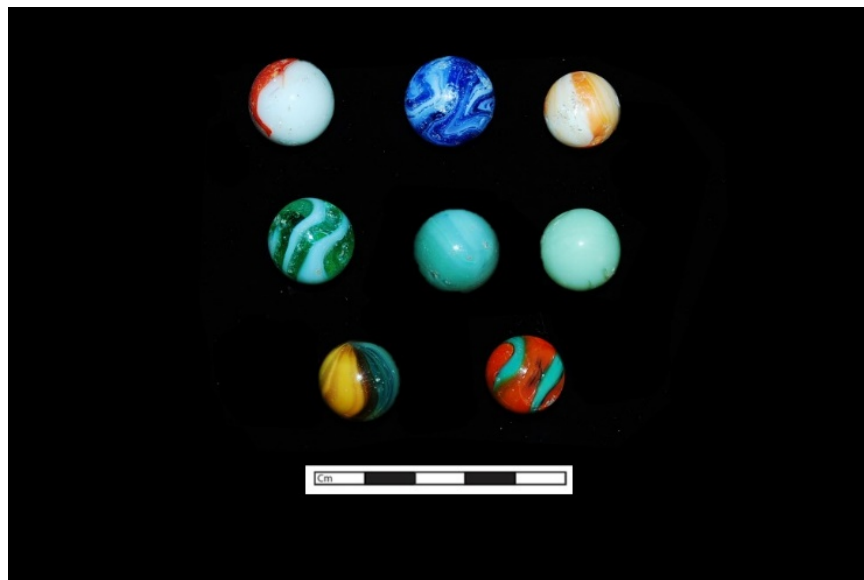
One of the interesting artifacts archaeologists found during the first week of excavations are marbles. Marbles are one of the most common toys uncovered on North American sites. This popular toy has been found on ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman sites in the form of polished nuts or stones. The earliest settlers brought marbles from Europe to North America and it has been a favorite past time ever since. The earliest marbles were typically made from stone or clay. Commercial production of stone marbles began sometime in the seventeenth century in Britain and Holland, but by the eighteenth-century Germany became the leading manufacturer of marbles. Marbles were made from several stone types including agate, alabaster (marble), quartz, and limestone. Limestone appears to be the most prevalent on North American sites (MAC Lab 2018). Germany began production of clay marbles sometime in the mid-eighteenth century.

Though more expensive to produce, the alabaster "alley taws" were considered superior shooters to the cheaper, clay "commonneys" (National Toy Hall of Fame 2021). Glass marbles were available at the time, but had to be made by hand, making them much more expensive. However, in the mid-nineteenth century, a German glassblower invented a special pair of "marble scissors." This allowed the glassblower to cut the molten glass, making it easier and less expensive to produce glass marbles. Glass marbles quickly dominated the market after that, and production of stone and clay marbles began to steadily decline. Glass marbles were handblown until the advent of the marble making machine in 1901. By 1910, machine-made glass marbles were readily available in the United States (Samford 2018). Glass marbles come in a variety of styles and colors. Amazingly, stone, clay and glass marbles have been recovered from the Newman Street Site!

Tune in next time for more exciting finds at the Newman Street site!



Clay and Stone Marbles from 18AP39



Glass Marbles from 18AP39

References:

National Toy Hall of Fame

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Samford, Patricia

2018 Marbles. *Diagnostic Artifacts in Maryland*. Maryland Archaeological Conservation Lab. Electronic document, <https://apps.jefpat.maryland.gov/diagnostic/SmallFinds/Marbles/index-marbles.html>, accessed March 7, 2021.