

Final Excavations: 19th Century Privy

Archaeologists completed excavations at the Newman Street Site last week. The final feature excavated was a 19th century privy. Privies were outhouses built for the purpose of human waste disposal. The small buildings were typically behind residences or at the corner of property lines. In urban settings, like Annapolis, regulations required that below-ground privy boxes be regularly cleaned out. In addition to their primary use, privies were often used for general refuse disposal. And once the privy was no longer functional, it became a trash pit. Therefore, we often find large numbers of artifacts in privies.

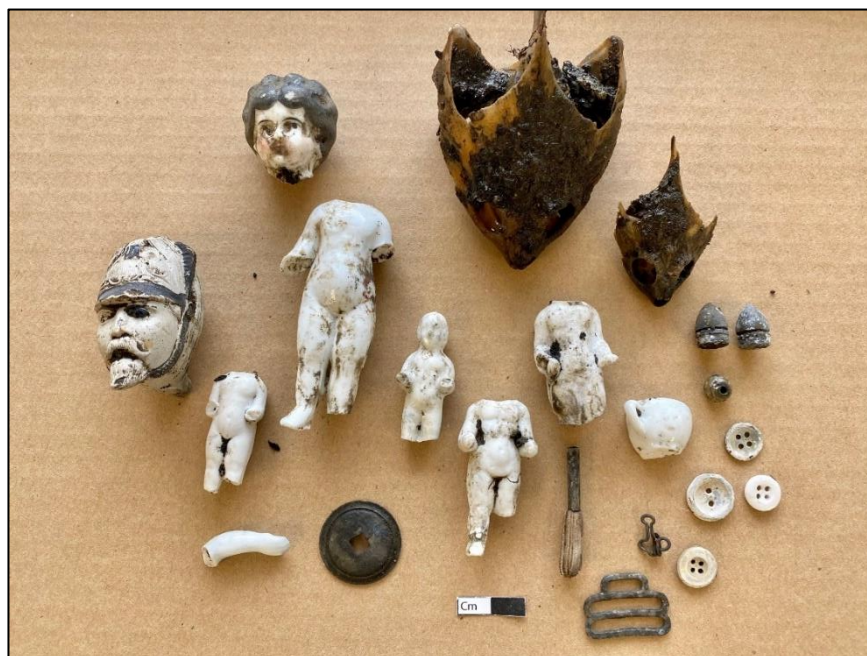
The privy excavated at the end of the Newman Street Site investigation (Feature 59) was the second privy recorded during the excavations. Feature 59 contained a significant number of turn-of-the-twentieth century ceramics and glass, including a set of plates that appear to have been disposed of at one time since they were still stacked.

Perhaps a family was moving, or the dishes had become unfashionable? Lower layers of the privy contained mid-

to late nineteenth century ceramics, glass, and other items, including the remains of a pair of shoes. An elk-shaped cufflink suggests residents had been members of the Order of Elks, which was formed in New York City in the 1860s. In addition to household items, remains of historic meals were found, including mammal, turtle, and fish bones; crab claws; peach and cherry pits; and watermelon, persimmon, and grape seeds. Small doll fragments and a tiny toy teacup reflect the presence of children on the site.



Possible Elks Lodge Cufflink



Sample of small finds from the Feature 59 Privy, including a tobacco pipe bowl in the shape of a soldier's face, small "Frozen Charlotte" dolls, a toy teacup, snapping turtle skulls possibly reflecting preparation of turtle soup, small caliber lead bullets, a bead, oyster shell and glass buttons and other closures, and a paintbrush.