

# Digging Up the Past

## Wilson College Archaeology



Chambersburg in the 1870's

From 1870-72, the Masonic Temple rented out their lower room to the Episcopal church for \$30 per year for them to hold their Sunday service. In 1878, the Memorial Fountain and statue located in Memorial Square in Chambersburg were established. The fountain was erected to honor the town's role in the Civil War. The fountain contains a Civil War soldier. At the foot of that soldier is a memorial stone that describes the burning of Chambersburg. The statue was thought to be a symbol of rebirth. On July 17, 1878, 15,000 people came to the dedication ceremony of the Memorial Fountain.

### History of Lot 100

The prehistory of the Church reveals much about what Chambersburg was like during the late to early 18th to 19th centuries. Lot 100 was originally owned and operated by a blacksmith by the name of Dan Oyler. The site was also later the site of a

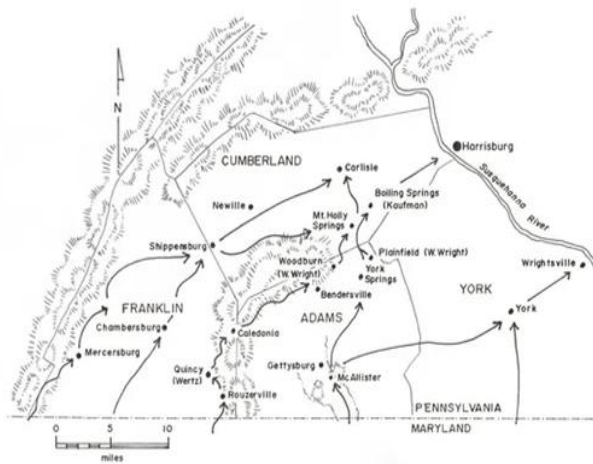
carpentry shop owned by Samuel Seibert and a lumber yard owned by Horace Riddle. Both can be assumed to have been damaged during the burning of Chambersburg. Seibert and Samuel Frey both created houses upon the site of lot 100, Seibert's is now the parish house; while Frey's is lost to history. The house fell out of the Church's hands for 50 years due to outstanding debts owed by the church, and had various owners during that period. Seibert sold the property that was the lumberyard in 1871 to the Trinity Episcopal Church, which still stands to this day.



### The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was a network of secret tunnels and safehouses established in the early 1800's used by African American slaves to escape to freedom. Franklin County's Underground Railroad tunnels were important links in the system because they had easy access to both the Susquehanna and Potomac Rivers and the easy entanglement of waterways and railways was an easy exit to freedom for the slaves. One of

the Underground Railroad tunnels leads to the basement of the Trinity Episcopal Church. Just three blocks from Trinity Episcopal Church, in the Old Jail on King Street, is a fireplace that was used to hide slaves. It is said that slaves were hidden in the boards of the fireplace and then a small fire would be started to through off any slave catchers nearby.



Map of the Underground Railroad



Holes were drilled through the brick cover of the enclosed well

## Early Settlements

The settlement of the Chambersburg area began in 1730 when water mills were built off the Conococheague creek. In the 1730's they built a 26 foot high waterfall that combined Falling Creek and Conococheague Creek. These mills ran through the center of town and even under houses allowing people to use their basements for a water and food source. The Trinity Episcopal Parish House basement had a well for the water and food source. The front room appears to be a kitchen with plaster and brick walls, while the back room was built of stone and was underground to provide a cool area to keep food in. In the basement there is also a fireplace, which could have been used for food preparation.

## What We Found

In the process of excavation, we found more than expected, so we divided the artifacts into categories. The artifact we found the most of was oyster shells. There were rocks that had components of coal as well as animal bones, nut shells, human teeth, and other rocks made of chalk. Most of the other artifacts found included broken iron and pottery, screws, textiles, and sherds of glass.

**Oysters:** Foundation packing is described as a mixture of material put together to help hold together the foundation of a building and fill in the cracks. Mussels were added to the mixture to make the foundation stronger. Also created from oysters was tabby. This was used like concrete for floors, foundations, roofs, or was made into bricks or used as oyster shell mortar or burnt shell mortar.

**Food:** Previously, little would be wasted from animal products in the kitchen. Every piece of the animal would have been boiled to the bone to at least obtain a broth if no meat was left on the bone. The teeth would have just been disposed of since there is no meat on them.



Screens were used to separate artifacts from dirt



Artifacts were taken from the test pits and placed into buckets



## The Burning of Chambersburg

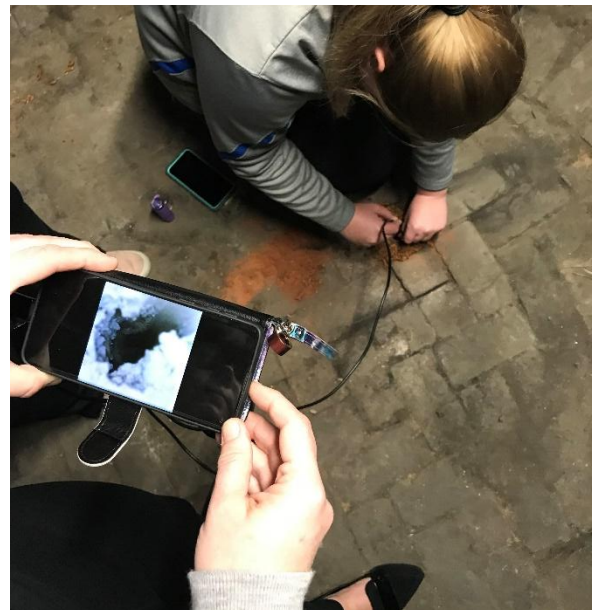
Chambersburg received word that Confederate soldiers were planning to burn Chambersburg. General Averill, the Union general in charge of protecting Chambersburg, left to warn other Union soldiers that the Confederates were coming. On July 30, the Confederate soldiers, under McCausland's control, surrounded the town. The residents refused the demands of the Confederate soldiers and the town was set ablaze. Chambersburg burned for three hours. Averill returned a few hours after the town was burned. Chambersburg was the only town north of the Mason Dixon to be burned by Confederate Soldiers.



A group of students interviewed several church members to learn what life in Chambersburg was like throughout their lives. Many of them told their theories and experiences of what happened in the basement of the church.

Parishioner Merle has been a devoted member of the Trinity Episcopal church for 44 years. He has a deep knowledge of the history of Chambersburg and was a member of a Shippensburg group of spelunkers. They studied the area tunnels and caves hoping to understand how they connected the underground railroad and the way to freedom for so many.

Father Randal, former reverend of Trinity who retired in 2000 after a 13-year service to the church, states "I am very curious of any findings during the excavation process". He has only heard rumors of the possibility of the church involvement in the underground railroad but is hopeful and assured that the people in this time period were willing and wanted to help people escape into freedom. He cannot hope for a better use of the tunnel system below the church.



Holes were drilled into the well and the underground railroad entrance, and cameras were sent through the holes to see what lied beneath. Unfortunately, we were not able to see anything but dirt because the well and tunnel had been packed tightly.