

City Archeologist, Dr. Andrea White, March 25,2025

Transcript

Narrator:

You've tuned into another edition of The Break Room. A weekly conversation about how the city of St. Augustine works from those who work every day, hosted by the city of St. Augustine's Communications Director Melissa Wissel. The Break Room offers a closer look at the different city departments and provides updates on current and upcoming projects and events. And now your host Melissa Wissel.

Melissa Wissel:

Welcome to The Break Room Thanks for tuning in. March is not only Woman's History Month, but it's also archaeology month. As we wrap it up, I've invited the city of Saint Augustine's Very own archaeologist, Doctor Andrea White. To join us and dig in this week and fill us in. See what I did there Andrea?

Dr. Andrea White:

I love it.

Melissa Wissel:

What's happening underground around Saint Augustine Welcome back.

Dr. Andrea White:

Thanks for having me back!

Melissa Wissel:

Having a little fun.

Dr. Andrea White:

Always great to come and chat.

Melissa Wissel:

Having a little fun. So, the big the latest biggest news if correct me if I'm wrong, is the British redoubt. Yes, yes, redoubt tell us everything. The British redoubt Everybody was. We have a lot of media inquiries on this one.

Dr. Andrea White:

Oh, we did. I think there's still some stories here that are in works

Melissa Wissel:

So, tell us what that tell us. Is so exciting and important About it that everybody 's calling about

Dr. Andrea White:

Of course. So, there is a small section of St. Augustine history where the British were in charge here in town. From 1763 to 1783. So, between the French and Indian war and the American Revolution. And what the British did when they were here is they remodified a lot of the defenses that the Spanish had already built, like the Castillo de San Marcos. But they also built a series of seven redoubts. Along the San Sebastian River, some sort of West side of town outside of the colonial city in this time period.

Melissa Wissel:

So, tell me, what is a redoubt?

Dr. Andrea White:

A redoubt is I spent.

Melissa Wissel:

'Cause, it's spelled like redoubt d o U B T.

Dr. Andrea White:

Like I have doubts, read yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

It's a redoubt. Not a redoubt like a piece of paper redoubt.

Dr. Andrea White:

You're not reading something, yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

And we call the circle. By the clock tower. At the Vic is a redoubt, right?

Dr. Andrea White:

That's a great example, right?

Melissa Wissel:

But So, what does that mean?

Dr. Andrea White:

Usually, redoubts are sort of small outposts. Often, they're connected with a larger wall, so the one that is reconstructed by the visitor center is in redoubt. It's reconstructed out of concrete, but it's made to look like palm logs. So, it's sort of an area along a defensive wall. Or along something that's sort of a defensive outpost. Sort of the first Line of defense if you will. So, the British had planned to build a series of redoubts of which they did construct. A

lot of them are in Lincolnville and then they planned to link all of these by a secondary wall that would have circumscribed part of the city as a defensive mechanism. so, if anybody was coming. From the West, or up the San Sebastian River This would serve as sort of a first line Of defense.

Melissa Wissel:

OK.

Dr. Andrea White:

What happened was that these were built in 1781, and soon after, if we can recall our American history, the American Revolution ends. Even though Saint Augustine was in British East Florida, the British turned over East Florida back to the yeah, back to the Spanish.

Melissa Wissel:

The Spaniards? Yup.

Dr. Andrea White:

So, at that point, there was no longer a war, and they were soon forgotten. Right. They never finished their plans to connect all of these redoubts with a larger defensive. System. So, we're not really sure what happened in terms of how long these were maintained, how they were constructed. The historical documents are a little silent on the information that's there. Do have a fantastic master 's thesis. From Cecile Marie Sastry. She wrote it in, I believe. 1990 And it was a fantastic master 's thesis. She was a historian, and she looked at all sorts of records and documents. Historical maps which a lot of the redoubts do show up on. To better understand where they might be archaeologically, what we might look for archaeologically as well as historical information on how they were constructed, how big were they? Were they made out of earth? Were they made out of brick? What did they look like? And then how long they might have been maintained. So, one of the interesting things is we have never located any of these archaeologically. We've seen them on maps. They all have slightly different sizes and dimensions on historical maps, so each one is different. Each map is different, so we're not really sure.

Melissa Wissel:

Depends on whose ruler they were using or if it's to scale or?

Dr. Andrea White:

Right. Yeah. So, and they're all different shapes like. Some of them are diamonds, and some of them are odd Polygon shaped. We're like. Okay, what did they look like? And did the Spanish reuse them and modify them. There's Spanish records do not say a lot about certain redoubts. They reuse some of them and we have documentation, but the specific one that we were looking at had no name and had no more information, sort of that we've been able to find in the in the archives. So, to speak.

Melissa Wissel:

And where did you? So. So here's my this is always my sort of. Which makes me scratch my head. Where did you find it and how do you know? Or how does someone know? When they're digging. Oh my gosh, I've just come across something important and it's not just a root to a tree.

Dr. Andrea White:

Yeah, a lot of.

Melissa Wissel:

How do you know how to bet now and then you see that and then of course, we've seen the pictures of you guys out there measuring and the trowel and.

Dr. Andrea White:

A lot of years of practice. Doing all of our science.

Melissa Wissel:

Doing all your science. But how do you know?

Dr. Andrea White:

So, we had a rough idea of the locations but based off of Sastry's master's thesis she had pinpointed rough boundaries of where she thought that these could be located. Plus, we've had a lot of GIS work. Where we geo referenced historical maps. But we had a, you know, a rough idea. So, what happened was this was a particular project on private property. Was going to build a new home. It was a vacant lot. We went out and did our initial testing where we dug some small one foot by one-foot holes in the ground. And the soil just looked odd to us. And what does that mean When you say it looks odd, right? It was modeled like it was not. It's kind of like rye bread. It had different colors mixed in altogether. So that tells us someone has dug the soil up before. Why they've dug it up? We may not know right away, but we know it's been excavated in the past at some point. And it had one or two artifacts not enough, but you know not a lot, but enough from a certain time period that we're like, something's going on. We know somethings here.

Melissa Wissel:

So, when you say you go out on this, you've got this big piece of property. Yeah. And you're going to go pick a spot. Did you know when you went there that this had the potential? of being that. OK. And then did you know within that you're like? We're not going to go over there because I don't think it was there, but I think it could be near this. So, did you strategically pick where you were digging to try to find it?

Dr. Andrea White:

Yes. So, we knew that there had been several different past activities on the property. We knew that there had been a Native American mission in the early seventeen hundreds called Palika, we also knew that in the eighteen hundreds it had been part of a larger orange grove plantation. And there was always the possibility of finding one of these redoubts on the property. That's sort of our testing strategy was meant to answer those questions. Are we going to find any evidence of this. So, what we did find was an evidence of something deep that was likely a ditch. And there were two possibilities what that ditch could be. One was the redoubt and one could have been sort of a larger ditch that should have could have circumscribed this Native American mission. So what we did, and this is one of the things that I think is super awesome that we get to work in the city and it really shows the collaboration with a city as a large team is we were able to talk to our public works department and say "Hey we to answer some of your questions we really need some heavy equipment and could you possibly loan us a backhoe to do some mechanical stripping?"

and we were able to mechanically strip an area, a large area because we knew whatever we had in the ground was big. We just didn't know how big it was, right?

Melissa Wissel:

That a lot of shoveling. Thats a lot of shoveling.

Dr. Andrea White:

Right, a lot of shoveling. So, in terms of expediting our time and using it more wisely as well as being able to answer some of our research questions, we were able to work with our public Works department and get them to strip a large area. Of course, we were working with the contractor and the homeowners on the property as well, so they knew what was happening and prior to that what we were able to do is use one of our preservation partners, the Florida Public Archaeology Network, Northeast. And they had a ground penetrating radar, which sort of can help us see below the ground in some instances, and so this was the right conditions where we could use a ground penetrating radar. So, they came out with wonderful Emily J Murray was fantastic in helping loan the equipment and work the equipment with us so we could also sort of see can we see what we think this ditch is? So based off of the collection of that data, we went out and did mechanical, mechanical stripping, and lo and behold, we found a very large archaeological signature of a large ditch or Moat. It was about fifteen feet wide. Extends off of the property, so we can only chase it so far. And then we were able to sample that ditch, and we're also using a wonderful public works department able to use wellpoints because the excavation extended well into the water table. So, WellPoint sort of act like a big, giant straw that sucked water out of the ground and spew it somewhere else temporarily.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, OK.

Dr. Andrea White:

So, we can actually excavate safely down to the bottom of this ditch. Which meant about five feet deep and at the very bottom it had tons of organic remains, all sorts of seeds that we've been able to recover. We have to keep them wet and we're working with Lee

Newsome who is an archaeo ethno botanist who studies basically seeds and other organic remains. So, we're pretty excited. We've just started that work. We're going to see what all is being found in all of those organic remains, but. Thousands and thousands and thousands of seeds.

Melissa Wissel:

And when you say seeds, that's like plant seeds, tree seeds?

Dr. Andrea White:

Plant seeds, yeah.

Melissa Wissel:

Just sitting in there.

Dr. Andrea White:

Just sitting in there some of.

Melissa Wissel:

So, they didn't sprout? That sounds strange to me that you would find seeds underground that hadn't actually grown.

Dr. Andrea White:

Well, they could because they fell into this ditch, and they were reburied, and they probably just were kept wet so they couldn't because they were in a wet environment. They would not have actually sprouted, but.

Melissa Wissel:

Shows you how much I know about plants.

Dr. Andrea White:

Well, I can't say that I have a green thumb myself.

Melissa Wissel:

That's why I have. That's why I have fake plants in my house.

Dr. Andrea White:

But there would have been tobacco. We have found evidence of okra. Definitely muscadine, which is type of grape. So, it should be interesting to see the results. Because this could be from cultivation, from the plantation activity, it could be stuff that was being grown either in the moat or on part of the rampart to kind of hold the dirt because the foot was made out of Earth. It wasn't made out of coquina or brick it was all earthen, so it could have been some type of grass or other seeds or other organic plants to hold the dirt together, you sea oats to help hold.

Melissa Wissel:

OK, right.

Dr. Andrea White:

You know the sand dunes together, so it'll be interesting to see

Dr. Andrea White:

We're very preliminary in our research.

Melissa Wissel:

And I want to circle back on something that you said, which is so important to the work that you do. If you're just now tuning in, we're actually already almost at the end of our episode. But you're listening to The Break Room with Doctor Andrea White. She's our city archaeologist. You mentioned. Partnering with the contractor, the homeowner, because

when you are called in, it's because there's a property in the historic district. And so, I want to just touch on that a little bit some people may be thinking why? Why did the archaeologist have to go? If they're building a new house. I might be building a new house. That's not everywhere.

Dr. Andrea White:

Yes. No.

Melissa Wissel:

But because of the location being in the historic district, you have to come in and do what it's like if you're going to dig more than three inches.

Dr. Andrea White:

Three inches and one hundred square feet. We have an awesome Archaeological preservation ordinance. That's very unique to St. Augustine, there's only a few other places in the country that have something like this. And the goal as part of the planning and building review process, like if you're going to do some type of right away or construction building permit, we get an opportunity in certain areas to come in and document what's there prior to construction, we do not stop construction. That is not the goal. The goal is to just be able to document what's there before it might be impacted, and in fact this project still has not started construction. There's other things that are holding up, so we're able to get in there, do our work and not sort of slow the construction schedule at all. And this is so important because our entire community is very much a part of the historic fabric of what's here. It is very important part of Saint Augustine is our history and our heritage, and it is not only is it important to us, but it is also a very large economic generator. It generates over three billion dollars.

Melissa Wissel:

B, billion.

Dr. Andrea White:

For heritage tourism, so it's really an important part of even if you're building a house because you just love this community and want to live here. You want to move your partly because of the history that's here, so it's all it all ties back into how important it is to document what we have and to constantly be finding new things like history. We are learning constantly about our past and our history.

Melissa Wissel:

Well, and that that house is going to get built. So, it's not like you're going to stop building, but it's sort of this the thinking is OK. "So, before you go build that and I can't get into the dirt let me make sure Let us make sure that there's nothing there." "Opp, look, there is." We document it. You save. You take all your goodies back to the lab and then they get to continue on with their construction and we've documented an important part of history. Yeah. Well, we are just about out of time. So, I hate that we didn't even get to the other stuff.

Dr. Andrea White:

We never do.

Melissa Wissel:

We'll have to come back, but I do want to.

Dr. Andrea White:

Thank you for the work that you do.

Melissa Wissel:

Tell us really quick during archaeology month. You did have a small workshop. In a quick minute, can you tell me how did the workshop go? We will look for it again next year. It was a 3D printing.

Dr. Andrea White:

Yeah, it was also in combination with the Florida Public Archaeology network. They have a lot of the fun tools. They have 3D printers. So, what the workshop was taking some of 3D laser scanning of art. Some of the artifacts and being able to replicate and 3D print them. And then this workshop showed how that process worked, and participants were also able to paint some of the artifacts. Yeah, it was very cool, and it was great, and we have great archaeology staff. Fantastic volunteers, we cannot do any of the work we do without them and our preservation partners.

Melissa Wissel:

Will do it again next year. OK, we're going to call that a wrap. I'm gonna have you come back and talk about all the other cool stuff that we didn't get a chance to talk about. So, if you missed a part of this broadcast and want to go back and listen from the beginning, you can find a complete listing of that and our previous episodes at CityStAugRadio.com Be sure to follow us on social, you'll find us on Facebook, Instagram and X at CityStAug. Thanks again for tuning in, until next time.

Narrator:

You'd be listening to The Break Room, a weekly program addressing projects and programs offered by the City of Saint Augustine. Join us each week as the city's communications director Melissa Wissel has in-depth conversations with the people who make our town work to meet the needs of our community. See you at this time next week for another edition of The Break Room.