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A Strawberry from the Battlefield: A Cloisonné Object from a Bombarded Civil War Encampment at Fort Anderson

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A tiny copper and glass cloisonné object that we vernacularly referred to as “the strawberry” was found amidst the archaeological investigations of the Civil War soldiers’ overflow barracks of January and February 1865 at Fort Anderson. An unusual object on its own, it was equally unusual to find this traditionally feminine object in what was considered a predominantly male location, a Civil War barracks. Our brief study considers the recovery of this unique artifact in recent archaeological investigations during the 2009 and 2011 William Peace University archaeological field schools and offers a functional interpretation of this object as an item most likely from a woman’s chatelaine. As with many cases in archaeological research, the odd nature and context of this artifact raises more questions than it answers.

While the few Civil War era artifacts recovered from these excavations include the normal military issue array of bullets, buttons, buckles, and friction primers, as well as personal stub-stemmed pipes, one tiny decorative artifact stood out amongst all others. This small object was found in Test Unit 31, at the interface of the Civil War horizon (stratum A) and the colonial-period horizon (stratum B). Initially we recognized its decorative painting as the top of a metallic strawberry, a hemispherical cap-like piece made of copper alloy. After further searching we concluded it was from a woman’s cloisonné pendant or chatelaine. The bottom portion was possibly made of cloth, which had likely deteriorated.

Later referred to simply as “the strawberry,” as shown in Figure 1 the intricate painting clearly resembled the leafy cap of the berry; the red portion was also accented with black dots to represent tiny seeds. The interior of “the strawberry” is also enameled in a white engobe, mostly likely to make the exterior colors stand out. The metallic fastener loop is embossed with a vining pattern. Bits of gilding are visible on the exterior of the loop, which is secured to the main body of the strawberry by a splayed cotter pin. By no surprise this delicate object also exhibits minute cracks and chips where the enamel has spalled off. The base of the cap has a finished edge.

The lower portion of “the strawberry” was either metal or cloth but did not survive burial in the ground. After researching period jewelry and ladies’ sewing kits, we believe the bottom to have been made of cloth and filled with sand, like an emery bag or pin cushion. Pins and needles were often sharpened by running them through the emery bags, similar to how today’s pin cushions function.

Our initial thought was that this artifact was possibly a woman’s cloisonné pendant. In the eighteenth century, pendants worn by women could be composed of set stones (precious, semiprecious, or paste), set in decorative metalwork. Painted miniatures were also popular. Most pendants of this period were fairly flat but a few may have been three-dimensional. In the nineteenth century, pendants included colorful enamel and stones as decorative elements. They sometimes included human hair, as a memento of a family member either deceased or away. As in the eighteenth century, some pendants were three dimensional, while many were flat.

Further research and discussion with colleagues suggested this decorative fruit-like drop was part of a chatelaine. A chatelaine was an accessory used by women to keep certain useful tools close at hand, as seen in Figure 2. These small tool kits were attached to chains and attached to the waist of a dress or skirt. If the tools were suspended from a cord (rather than chain) or dated prior to 1828 (when the term “chatelaine” was coined), then they should be referred to as equipages. Hooks or brooch pins were used to attach the chatelaine to clothing. Some useful or fragile items were kept in small metallic containers that attached to the rest of the chatelaine, while other items, such as scissors or a notebook, could be directly attached with chain. If the chatelaine contained mostly sewing implements, there was sometimes a pincushion or needle sharpener made of cloth and metal.

Given the location of the Civil War barracks within the site, it is important to consider both occupation periods when trying to identify the function of the strawberry. Equipages or chatelaines were used in both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Surviving examples in British museums show that eighteenth-century examples tend to be mostly metal, and may be painted or enameled. Generally, the containers on equipages are cylindrical, or egg shaped. Decorations tended to be classically themed as well. Surviving examples from the nineteenth century continued to use metals for most of their construction. Some chatelaines made of steel or other base metals were even mass produced. Interestingly, a few examples from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Victorian era included strawberry-shaped pincushions or holders in chatelaine sets, as shown in Figure 3. The construction materials of our strawberry suggest that it dates to the nineteenth century, and therefore most likely corresponds to the Civil War occupation of the site.

What story can this artifact tell us? Given the recovery of this artifact in the overflow barracks of Fort Anderson from January and February 1865, the contextual conclusion is that it belonged to a soldier. A soldier would need to mend his own clothing, and a means to secure his pins and needles would be helpful. This follows the most common scenario of military culture of self-sufficiency, to be able to do one’s own cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Perhaps a family member or love interest gave this small item as a token to a soldier before he left for service. Not only would it serve as a memento of those left behind, but it would also be functional.

Though less likely, another possibility is that a woman visiting one of the soldiers simply lost it during the visit. Throughout much of the war, Fort Anderson was manned by soldiers from the surrounding counties. Duty at the fort was safe and fairly routine, so it would be possible for family members to visit from time to time. And even though the barracks area behind Battery A may not have always had barracks, the area would have been kept clear of trees and brush. Therefore, it would provide a nice place to take a stroll with a visiting female or family member, where this may have been dropped and lost. However, due to quarantine conditions and restrictions due to military secrecy, family members, especially females, were barred from coming to Fort Anderson in August 1864.

A third possibility, and least likely, is that this chatelaine piece was lost by one of the African-American refugees placed at Fort Anderson after the end of the war. Even if it was a mass-produced item, it may have been too expensive for one of these individuals to possess. That said, as refugees, these individuals would have carried few personal possessions with them. But the small size of the strawberry would make it easily transportable and may have been considered precious.

While a study of this enigmatic “strawberry” has provided a likely identification of what it was and its function, we may never know what it meant to the owner to have or to lose. Despite the dearth of personal items recovered in the 2009 and 2011 investigations, this “strawberry” does provide a focus point for questions regarding the everyday lives of the soldiers, and their visitors, at Fort Anderson.

Notes

The material in this brief article was first presented at the 47th Annual Meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology, Québec City, Québec, Canada, in the symposium entitled, “The Revelatory Power of an Artifact in Context.” These ideas were expanded upon by Linda F. Stine and Alexandra Salisbury in “Gender Ideals, Roles, and Activities in a Civil War Landscape,” included as Appendix H in Beaman and Vincent H. Melomo’s report, “At night we sleep in a shanty I have constructed of planks, logs, and sand... on a pile of pine straw”: Archaeological Excavations of the Fort Anderson Overflow Barracks Area West of Battery A (31Bw376**12) and Metal Detector Survey of a Suspected Barracks Area West of Battery B (31Bw376**7) at Brunswick Town/Fort Anderson State Historic Site (William Peace University, Department of Anthropology, 2016).

Figure 1 is reproduced here courtesy of William Peace University’s Department of Anthropology. Figures 2 and 3 are public domain images found through Google.



Figure 1. Fragments of the copper and glass cloisonné object recovered during excavations of the bombarded overflow encampment of January and February 1865 at Fort Anderson.



Figure 2. A chatelaine was a small tool kit attached to chains and most commonly worn on the waist of a dress or skirt.



Figure 3. An example of a Victorian chatelaine with a strawberry-shaped pincushion.

Design Our New NCAS Tee-Shirt

The North Carolina Archaeological Society has a long tradition of producing high quality, visually interesting, and affordably priced tee-shirts—and we plan to continue to do so. Past NCAS tee-shirt designs have included the ever popular projectile point chronology, different series of spear points, Cherokee pipes, and most recently, our “Drill into the Past” design.

For our next tee-shirt, the NCAS Board wants you to design it for us!

We are open to any ideas related to terrestrial or underwater archaeology, be it pre-contact or historic period. It can be of a single artifact, a series of similar artifacts, or a depiction of a cultural activity. Most of all, we want it to be an image that an NCAS member would be proud to wear!

Your submission does not have to be a finished design, but must be a clear depiction and description of what the back of the shirt will show. Our artists can dress up the image or use images of actual artifacts if needed.

If you wish to submit a design, or have an idea for a design, send it to NCAS President Tom Beaman at 5210 Carr Road, Wilson, NC 27893 (email: tbeamanjr@aol.com), by Wednesday, January 18, 2017. The NCAS Board will review the designs at our January meeting. If the Board selects your design, you will receive a free one-year NCAS membership as well as one of the tee-shirts with your design.

We look forward to hearing what you want our next tee-shirt to be!



NCAS Fall 2016 Meeting and Election of New Officers

The 2016 fall business meeting of the NCAS was held jointly with the North Carolina Archaeological Council on Saturday, October 8, at the Schiele Museum of Natural History and Planetarium in Gastonia, NC. The focus of the meeting was to honor Steve Watts and Stanley South, two very important members of the North Carolina archaeological community who passed away earlier this year (see NCAS Newsletter volume 26, number 2, 2016). About two dozen members of the Society braved the rains and winds of Hurricane Matthew to attend the meeting.

The 2016 election of new officers was concluded, in which the Society was to elect two new members to the Board of Directors for the 2017-2019 term. The final vote tally was extremely close, with a tie for the second board seat. In lieu of a run-off vote, the board voted unanimously to seat all three members running for the two board positions. We welcome January Costa, David Cranford, and Jim Daniel to the NCAS board, with David being re-elected to a second term and January and Jim elected to fill a vacant seat. Thank you all for your willingness to serve!



2017 Dues Reminder

It is time to renew your membership in the North Carolina Archaeological Society. Please fill out the dues form that was mailed with this newsletter and return it, along with your check, to: North Carolina Archaeological Society, Campus Box 3120, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3120. If you wish, you also may renew your membership through PayPal at <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Join/PayPal.html>.




NCAS Social Media Reminder

Looking for a way to stay up to date on the latest in archaeology news? Social media has become one of the most common ways to do so. Join the North Carolina Archaeological Society group on Facebook or follow @NCArchSociety on Twitter to stay up to date on news from North Carolina and the Southeastern US.



NCAS Merchandise

Looking for a holiday gift or just need to replace your old, worn-out NCAS tee-shirt? Then visit our website at: <http://www.rla.unc.edu/ncas/Merchandise/index.html>. In addition to our regular offerings, we have new tee-shirts with the re-designed projectile point chart on the back. They are available in blue and green, and also come in men's (crew neck) and women's (v-neck) styles.



Save the Date
**Upland Archaeology in the
East, Symposium XII**

**Appalachian State University
Boone, NC
February 24-26, 2017**

For the latest information about the upcoming archaeological conference, please go to: <https://sites.google.com/a/appstate.edu/upland/home>.

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**NCAS Newsletter
Publication Schedule**

All NCAS members should submit articles and news items to Steve Davis (rpsdavis@unc.edu) for inclusion in the Newsletter. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Winter Issue – January 31	Summer Issue – July 31
Spring Issue – April 30	Fall Issue – October 31

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