

Latest Archaeological Dig Raises New Questions About Chatham's Founding Family

by Debra Lawless

CHATHAM – Last Friday the team excavating William and Anne Busby Nickerson's circa 1664 homestead in Chatham made an exciting discovery – a “ton” of “individual little kernels” of corn and “little beans” dated to the 17th century.

“It's pretty unprecedented in New England archaeology,” says Craig Chartier, director of the Plymouth Archaeological Rediscovery Project, who is leading the dig. He does not know of any other New England site where beans — burned beans, no less — have been discovered. It is not clear how the beans and corn were burned, but one possibility is in a house fire. Another possibility is that they were

full of insects, and someone tossed them into a fire in the hearth.

A second exciting find on Friday was a fragment of a skimmer used at the hearth “to take the gunk off whatever you're boiling,” Chartier said. Shortly after that, team member Gary Nickerson found the hand-punched lid of a 10-inch brass bed warmer and devoted the remainder of the day to removing it intact from the soil.

Slowly, the domestic life of the 17th century founders of Chatham is being revealed.

The team began the current dig July 30. As has been the case on most mornings since then, temperatures begin at 78

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