

WORDS TO KNOW ABOUT ARCHAEOLOGY

Much of what we know about the Oldest House, and historic St. Augustine in general, we have discovered through the science of **archaeology**. Here are some words that archaeologists use in their work.

ARCHAEOLOGISTS are scientists who study the ways people lived in the past by investigating the things they left behind, usually remains left in the soil. (Archaeologists do not study dinosaurs or other fossilized life forms; *paleontologists* do that.)

ARTIFACTS are objects made by people. They can be as large as a building or as small as a pin. (Objects found in nature—plants, rocks, animals—are, when collected, called *specimens*.)

CONTEXT is the location in which an artifact is found—its depth in the ground and the other artifacts that are found around it. Most of the information gathered by archaeologists comes from the study of artifacts in context—that is, in relation to what was found with them. That is why the uninformed digging and collecting of artifacts is harmful. Artifacts without their context cannot tell us much about how people lived in the past. They have little, if any, scientific value.

COQUINA is the local stone in St. Augustine that was used to build the fort and many of the houses. It is a type of limestone made of millions of tiny seashells. Deposits of coquina are found along the east coast of Florida from St. Augustine south to Palm Beach County.

DAUB is clay that was used, along with interwoven sticks called “wattle,” to make the walls of many early houses in St. Augustine. Both the Indians and the Spanish built houses like this but not the English. If a house made of wattle and daub burns down, the clay daub becomes hard like fired pottery.

DIG is a quick way of saying “archaeological excavation.” because excavations are almost always holes dug in the ground.

EXCAVATION is the term for a scientifically controlled study that involves removing layers of soil to discover and record the location of artifacts and features.

FEATURES are visible changes in soil that give evidence of human activity. For example, a trash pit will look different from the surrounding soil because it will contain a concentration of artifacts, bones, and other trash. Soil in a feature is often a different color than the soil around it.

PIPE STEMS are broken pieces of the long clay pipes popular in the 17th and 18th centuries. Since the size of the holes in the stems changed in a regular way over the years, pipe stems give archaeologists a way of dating a site.

POST MOLD is the stain left in the ground when a wooden post rots. A type of feature, it often marks where a building or a fence once stood.

SHARDS are broken pieces of pottery or china. Usually they are big enough for the trained archaeologist to identify the type of pottery and to know when and where it was made. Pottery shards are among the most useful artifacts for dating a site, and they are often good indicators of the wealth and social status of the people who once lived there.

TABBY is an early form of concrete made of lime, shells, sand and water. The mix is poured into a wooden form, where it hardens to form a building foundation or a wall.