

Canadians Lend Their Expertise of French Artifacts

As the sun heats up on the South Texas Coastal plain, archeologists labor away at one of the most important archeological finds in Texas history — La Salle’s Fort St. Louis colony that met an early demise in 1685.

The work can be backbreaking at times, and the meticulous nature of excavating artifacts requires intense concentration as well. But the only whining you’ll hear at the site is the buzz of dive-bombing mosquitoes. With the exception of battling hungry insects, the archeologists who have found their way to the site on the banks of Garcitas Creek near Victoria are thrilled about the opportunity to take part in the project.

In particular, three Canadians made the trek to Texas, part out of curiosity for the project, and part out of wonder for the Lone Star State.

“I was intrigued by the Frenchman (La Salle), what brought him here to Texas,” said Stephanie Cloutier, a field archeologist from Quebec City. She’s referring to Robert Cavelier, Sieur de La Salle, the French explorer who more than 300 years ago briefly established a fort in present-day Texas. The Texas Historical Commission (THC) is excavating the site in Victoria County to uncover the fort, a Spanish presidio and hopefully, a French cemetery.

Joining Cloutier from Quebec City are Manon Goyette and Charles Dagneau. Although they did not previously know each other, an interest in French artifacts provided a common bond. They heard about the project because of the connection to the THC’s 1996-1997 *Belle* excavation. Cloutier and Goyette heard about the *Belle* project through friends, but Dagneau had first-hand knowledge from participating in a 1998 analysis of



the casks found at the site. Goyette, vice president of the THC, is very knowledgeable about early French colonial settlement in North America. Still, she is intrigued by the Spanish finds because they are not as familiar to her, she said.

Dagneau, a graduate of Laval University in Quebec, said that he and his fellow Canadians have an extensive knowledge of French artifacts from the 17th century, which made them a logical choice to help in Victoria.

“We have some experience with French material, so that’s why they want us here, for that knowledge,” he said.

Although Dagneau imagined Texas to be big and wild, he hasn’t yet had the opportunity to explore much of it yet.

“I like the natural environment...and Victoria is a nice place,” he said. But all work and no play makes a dull archeologist. So Dagneau added that when the crew gets a break, he hopes to head to Austin to sample the music and nightlife.



“I want to go to Sixth Street,” he said, referring to the capital city’s thriving entertainment district. ★

This article was written by Rob D’Amico, Medallion managing editor

Above top: Stephanie Cloutier and her fellow Canadians lend their expertise with French artifacts at Fort St. Louis.

Above: Charles Dagneau dumps load after load of excavated dirt on to screens for clearing away mud from artifacts.