Students Uncover 19th Century Artifacts at St. Patrick’s in Lowell

Perhaps the prayers of St. Patrick’s pastor, Rev. James Taggart, helped. On the first day of the excavation of a former shanty town located on parish grounds and inhabited by Lowell’s early Irish settlers, University students unearthed a section of 150-year-old rosary beads, remnants of a clay pipe and several iron nails.

The dig—part of a collaboration between UMass Lowell and Queen’s University in Dublin—has resulted in extensive media coverage, both locally and as far away as the Dublin-based Irish Times.

“The Irish laborers who came to Lowell to help build the canals to power the mills left a lasting legacy in the city, and it’s fascinating to be able to piece together clues of their lives here,” says Frank Talty, co-director of the UMass Lowell’s Center for Irish Partnerships.

“Archaeology is a lot like an onion—there are layers upon layers,” explains Dave McKean, archivist at St. Patrick’s. “Each time you reach one layer, there is another underneath it. The students sprinkled water on the top layers of soil to make color variations, which help archaeologists assess what the land was used for. Looking for answers brought more questions. Was a foundation located? Is this coal? Does this mean there was a hearth here?”

McKean reports that many interested parties dropped by the site and that some old research is being revisited. Antique maps are being adapted to new GPS technology to pinpoint locations, 19th century photos are helping identify structures and their foundations and primary source documents are giving leads to new findings.

The findings will help form a picture of the lives of the Irish who emigrated to Lowell looking for work during the Great Famine, a period of mass starvation and disease in Ireland between 1845 and 1852.

As part of the exchange program, students will excavate an abandoned rural settlement in County Fermanagh, Ireland next summer.

The Lowell dig is one of many outcomes resulting from the University’s initiative to develop international partnerships to expand global learning experiences for students and enrich the research portfolios of the faculty.
Professor Examines Civil War Mutiny at Fort Jackson

“Mutiny at Fort Jackson: The Untold Story of the Fall of New Orleans,” written by Assoc. History Prof. Michael Pierson, earned the prestigious 2010 Albert Castel Book Award, made biennially to the author of the best recent book on the Civil War in the western theater. Prof. Pierson answers questions about this little-known event.

What happened at Fort Jackson?

The short answer is that Fort Jackson protected New Orleans, the strongest Confederate city. In 1862, most of the 600 Confederate soldiers in Fort Jackson participated in a mutiny against their officers, caused the fort to surrender and, in some cases, joined the Union ranks. It was an enormous win for the Union, and a terrible loss for the Confederates.

But it was the longer answer I was interested in when I began writing my book. Who were these men? Why did they turn on the Confederacy?

What did you discover?

After culling through everything I could find relating to these soldiers – their lives before, during and after the mutiny – through diaries, anecdotal information and other period accounts, a picture emerged. This was a group of men – many first-generation immigrants, with no loyalty to the Confederate cause – who were treated poorly, suffered bad living conditions and were generally disconnected from the Confederate cause. This is not the usual picture we have of white Southerners – these whites wanted a more egalitarian future than the Confederacy promised them.

What about Lowell’s famous attorney and commander of the Union’s occupation forces at Fort Jackson, Benjamin Butler?

Butler got a bad reputation in New Orleans, but only some of it is deserved. In truth, he effectively reached out to people in New Orleans who supported the Union. By fostering a large Unionist community in the city, he proved that many whites in the South disapproved of the Confederacy. Many of the mutineers from Fort Jackson were helped by the Butler administration, and that strengthened the Union cause during the rest of the war.

Leaping Lizards! Discovery Channel Features University Researchers

Show Will Highlight Studies on Vertebrae of Snakes and Lizards

Well, yes, UMass Lowell researchers Bruce Young and Amy Reichlen conducted studies of the backbones of lizards and snakes that caught the eye of a Discovery Channel Canada producer, but it is actually an Asian water monitor lizard that will star in the program.

Assoc. Prof. Young, director of the Anatomical Laboratory in the Department of Physical Therapy, and biomedical engineering Ph.D. student Reichlen will be featured sometime this fall in an episode of “Daily Planet,” an hour-long TV series that features news, documentaries and discussions on the scientific aspects of current events.

“The show will focus on the mechanics of the vertebral column during locomotion,” says Young. “The Asian water monitor lizards that Amy and I are studying were filmed in my lab exercising on a treadmill and swimming in a special tank.”

Young’s project centers on the mobility of the vertebral column and how that mobility can evolve.

“Specifically, Amy and I are interested in the transition from a lizard vertebral column, which only moves laterally, to the snake vertebral column, which moves laterally and up and down,” he says. “While Amy is looking at the vertebral mechanics, I am exploring related issues such as how the transition in the vertebral column is related to the loss of legs in snakes and how this is different in vertebral mechanics regulated by spinal nerves.”

Online MBA Most Affordable Internationally Accredited Program in New England

UMass Lowell’s online master’s degree in business administration gets high marks for quality and value, according to a new national ranking by GetEducated.com. UMass Lowell ranks No. 27 on the list of online MBA programs considered “High-Quality Buys, All Under $20,000.” It is the only New England program to make the list. UMass Lowell was also rated the most affordable online MBA in the region in the last ranking by GetEducated.com. UMass Lowell was considered among the 133 online MBA programs nationwide accredited by the international Association to Advance College Schools of Business (AACSB), considered the gold standard in business education. In addition, UMass Lowell’s online MBA was ranked No. 9 overall in affordability for graduate business students nationwide.
River Hawks Ranked Among Top NE-10 Schools in Preseason Polls

Women’s Teams Boast Three Teams in Top Four

Three UMass Lowell River Hawk squads were ranked in the top four of their respective sports’ Preseason Coaches Polls. Field hockey earned the second spot, women’s soccer came in third and the defending Northeast-10 tournament champion volleyball team was picked fourth.

The field hockey team, coming off an 18-6 season in 2009 and its third consecutive appearance in the NCAA national championship game, is reloaded with fresh talent and returns its top two scorers in Sammy Macy of Tewksbury and Katie Enaire of Amesbury.

The women’s soccer team, fresh off a 12-5-4 showing in 2009, was selected to place third in the NE-10 after finishing third last year, as well.

Volleyball looks to follow its record-breaking season with another impressive showing in 2010. The team finished last season with a 22-10 record and captured 180 votes in this season’s poll.

The puck drops on the new season of exciting Division One Ice Hockey on Sunday, Oct. 3, when the River Hawks face off against St. Francis Xavier at 3 p.m. at the Tsongas Center at UMass Lowell. To purchase your tickets for the 2010-11 season, contact Scott Donnelly at 978-934-4988 or go to www.GoriverHawks.com.

School Days, School Days...

UMass Lowell Welcomes Its Biggest Class Ever; Students Met by Improved Facilities

The campus burst to life on Sept. 1, when UMass Lowell opened its doors to more than 13,000 returning and new students, including undergraduates, graduates and continuing education learners.

The class of 2014 is the biggest incoming class ever—1,641 freshmen and nearly 900 transfers—for a total of 2,505 new students. That is an 8 percent increase over the incoming class last year and the third time in three years that incoming enrollment numbers have increased significantly.

Both high school grade point average and SAT averages are up over last year’s numbers to 3.19 and 1089, respectively.

This year’s 8 percent jump in diversity among incoming students follows an upward trend established three years ago.

As students met their professors, bought books and supplies and settled into residence halls, they were greeted by a rapidly changing campus. Over the summer, Smith Hall was demolished to make way for a new emerging technology building. This fall, ground will be broken for a new academic building on South Campus.

All classrooms now offer the latest teaching technologies. New signage is popping up around campus, making it easier for students and visitors to find their way around and parking lots have been reconfigured to create additional spaces for cars.

Look Out Wall Street

UMass Lowell Students Rock Standard & Poor

Call it a three-peat. Maybe even a dynasty.

For the third year in a row, UMass Lowell’s team has beaten competitors from other UMass campuses in the system’s annual Student Managed Fund competition. UMass Lowell remains the only winning team in the contest’s history.

The competition began in 2007, when teams from the campuses in Lowell, Amherst, Boston and Dartmouth were each given $25,000 by the UMass Foundation to invest in the stock market for a real-world lesson in fund management. The winner is selected based on the largest return on investment.

In this most recent round, UMass Lowell’s team again beat the competition—and the Standard & Poor 500 stock index—by a substantial margin. The fund earned 15.88 percent compared to 14.42 percent for the S&P 500. The team built its initial $25,000 seed fund to more than $33,000.

“Since its inception, the Student Managed Fund’s return is up 22 percent while the market’s return is down almost 25 percent. That’s a difference of almost 47 percent,” notes Asst. Prof. Ravi Jain, who has advised the students all three years.

Why does UMass Lowell’s team consistently beat the competition and the market?

Jain says it is because the team “follows a simple investment style and does not change it with market conditions. Rather, market volatility helps us by offering good prices for stocks. We haven’t lost significant money in any of our investments.”
Following the horrific collapse and fire of the Pemberton Mill in 1860, it was rebuilt on its original site where it still stands today.

Tragic Industrial Disaster
Killed 145

On the afternoon of Jan. 10, 1860, the Pemberton Mill in Lawrence buckled and crashed without warning, instantly killing dozens of people and trapping hundreds more under tons of rubble.

As rescuers frantically tried to free victims from the debris, a fire broke out, igniting the piles of splintered wood and oil-soaked cotton bales at the site. In all, an estimated 145 workers perished and 166 were injured in the horrific collapse and ensuing conflagration.

The collapse of the Pemberton, a five-story brick factory, ranks as one of the worst industrial disasters in the Commonwealth’s history.

“The largest number of workers who lost their lives were women, some as young as 15 and 16; most were Irish immigrants,” says History Prof. Robert Forrant, co-director of UMass Lowell’s Center for Family, Work & Community. “Industrial work in the 19th century was nasty, violent and physically demanding, and most factory owners knew that with fresh numbers of immigrants coming all the time, workers could literally be ‘used up’ and replaced.”

“Why did the Pemberton Mill collapse? Civil Engineering Asst. Prof. Tzu-Yang Yu concluded that there were three main causes:

• The structural system was inherently weak due to the mill’s excessively large windows and thin walls.
• The mill was built quickly, suggesting quality problems. One of the cast-iron support columns was found to have an irregular cross section—evidence that the engineers on the site didn’t do their job.
• Heavy machinery was excessively loaded on the mill’s fourth floor on the day of the collapse. “This produced stress/load concentration, which crashed the floor slabs and led to progressive failure of the building’s structure,” says Yu.

Charles H. Bigelow was the designer and chief architect of the Pemberton Mill.