



PRESS RELEASE

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Archeological Dig on Statehouse Grounds May Unearth History

The Idaho State Capitol Commission has approved a request by the Idaho State Historical Society to conduct a small archeological dig on the grounds of the State Capitol Building from June 25 through July 4.

Although major restoration work won't be getting underway for awhile, as a part of the Capitol restoration project the dig is intended to raise public awareness about the overall plans to renovate the Capitol Building and to generate public interest in the history of the Statehouse and its grounds.

According to Steve Guerber, ISHS Executive Director and a member of the Capitol Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office staff and vocationals from the Idaho Archeological Society will staff the archeological project.

There will opportunities for public volunteers to participate in the dig, to take place at a site on the north side of the Statehouse, west of the entryway. Officials hope to locate the site used by the historic Central School when its early bathroom facilities existed on what is now the location of the Senate wing of the Statehouse. Mary Anne Davis, ISHS staff, will coordinate volunteer efforts.

The dig will encompass a total area of 7 feet by 7 feet (a 2 X 2 meter block), and will be dug at intervals to the prescribed exploration depth based on information gleaned from archival records. Screening will be done over a tarp so all sediment can be poured back into the excavation. The site will be shielded by a pavilion canopy and roped off, covered and secured at night. If needed, a small field lab will be set up for washing, sorting, and cataloging finds.

If there is success in finding artifacts during the dig, a display case will be placed in the Statehouse for an exhibit (with photos and discovered



items) related to the site's original inhabitants and usage prior to construction of the Capitol Building.

Dr. Ken Reid, State Archeologist at the State Historical Preservation Office, explained that early privy locations are good spots to find artifacts such as discarded bottles or other items simply thrown away. The specific location for the excavation was decided upon by looking at old maps, photos and other historic records—as well as working around Statehouse utilities, sprinkler systems and landscaping.

Reid said that if no artifacts or privy are found, there's a contingency plan to fill in the excavation, carefully roll the lawn back down, and move to a spot on the east lawn where it is known that the foundation for the original Territorial Capitol (since displaced by the House wing of the Statehouse) can be found buried underground. "There will ultimately be artifacts for the interested observer to see discovered at some point during the dig," Reid said.

Guerber got the idea for the project after he viewed a presentation on a similar dig held in downtown Hartford, Connecticut, when maps identified the location of a building from an early settlement in the middle of Hartford City Hall parking lot.

"The local Historical Society got permission to see what was there, much to the delight of tens of thousands of people who visited the site during the process," Guerber explained. He added that last fall he also saw a display created after a similar outhouse dig on the grounds of the original Statehouse in Kentucky that included Civil War era miniball bullets, a rusted pistol, glass shards, bottles, and a wedding ring.

"We're not sure just what we may find on the Idaho State Capitol grounds, but that only adds to the excitement of conducting such a dig. Idahoans have long demonstrated a keen curiosity in and great appreciation of our state's history based on their involved support at various historical events and activities held throughout the state."

The Capitol Commission will meet in mid-July, and is planning a future kick-off ceremony marking the beginning of official renovation activities, which will involve some exterior masonry repairs, and the east a west exterior stair replacement project.

For more information about volunteer activities, contact Mary Anne Davis at the Idaho State Historical Society, 334-3847.