

Teachers' Companion to the 2012 Michigan Archaeology Poster *Fayette Historic Town Site*

For High School Teachers

Iron mining is an important industry in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Michigan ranks second in iron ore production in the U.S. Minnesota is the only state that produces more.

In the fall of 1844 while surveying land in the Upper Peninsula, William A. Burt noticed that his magnetic compass needle was acting strangely. He and his surveying crew discovered that iron deposits were the cause. Burt and his men had found what came to be known as the Marquette Iron Range.

In 1845 Philo Everett and several other members of the newly formed Jackson Mining Company, traveled to the U.P. to search for mining opportunities. Their intention was to look for copper, but when Native Americans showed them huge deposits of iron in the Marquette area, they decided to file a claim to mine iron.

They built a forge at a site on the Carp River, and in 1848 the Jackson Mining Company produced the first iron forged in the U.P.

In the early 1860s, the company began making plans to build a blast furnace to process iron ore. In 1867 Fayette Brown, manager of the renamed Jackson Iron Company, bought land around picturesque Snail Shell Harbor on the Garden Peninsula.

The company built two blast furnaces, several charcoal kilns, and a large dock to accommodate ships that brought in iron ore, and took out smelted iron. Housing for workers sprang up, along with a school, a company store, a hotel, a doctor's residence, a blacksmith shop, and barns for livestock. The iron-smelting town of Fayette was born.

The poster features a photo of the men who worked at Fayette unloading iron ore from incoming ships, operating the blast furnaces, and loading iron bars on outgoing ships. There are also some kids in the foreground of the photo; they are undoubtedly children of the workers. Kids did not work at the furnaces; they probably just wanted to be in the photograph.

Historians have collected quite a bit of information about Fayette from documents like newspapers, letters, and company records. But, **archaeology** also helps us learn about the people who lived at Fayette.

Archaeology studies artifacts – the things that people made and used – to learn about people who lived in the past. Historians go to libraries and archives to gather information. **Archaeologists** dig in the earth at places where people used to live to recover artifacts that were lost or thrown away. Artifacts can be almost anything. At **archaeological** sites where Native American people lived hundreds or even thousands of

years ago, **archaeologists** find spear points and arrowheads made of stone, and pieces of pottery made of clay. At more recent **archaeological** sites like the town of Fayette, **archaeologists** find household items like pieces of broken dishes, bottles, and even toys. They also find artifacts like nails and bricks from structures at the site, and tools used in the iron work that took place there.

Look closely at the four photographs in the lower left-hand corner of the poster. Can you identify the artifacts? What do you think archaeologists might learn about the people who lived and worked at Fayette by studying those items?

The town of Fayette flourished for over 20 years, from 1867 to 1891. In the 1880s, changes in iron-making technology, and the depletion of the surrounding forest as a source of wood for fuel, led to the decline of Fayette's ability to compete in the iron market. Eventually, the Jackson Iron Company was not willing to continue to invest in Fayette, and in 1891 the company closed its iron smelting operation, and left Fayette.

The four artifact photos in the lower left-hand corner of the poster:

Upper left: shoe leather
Upper right: bottles
Lower right: tools
Lower left: ceramic vessels

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