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Battery Hooper dig unearths history

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FORT WRIGHT - In an effort to shed more light on its role in Civil War history, Northern Kentucky University lecturer Jeannine Kreinbrink recently led an archaeological dig of Fort Wright's Battery Hooper.

The public was invited to assist in the dig. They took two-hour shifts and were supervised and taught dig techniques by members of the Central Ohio Valley Archaeological Society.

"I hope the general volunteers gain an appreciation for local history and archaeology; that we are surrounded by our past and it can still impact our lives today," said Kreinbrink, who serves as a board member for the James A. Ramage Civil War Museum and as archaeologist for the Behringer Crawford Museum. "The students and other assistants gain experience in teaching and helping others to gain understanding of and importance of the past."

Battery Hooper was one of the cannon batteries that made up the 28 fortifications that defended Cincinnati.

"It has survived only as a collection of subsurface features in the front lawn of a house in the city of Fort Wright," Kreinbrink said. "When the landowners bought 17 acres in 1941, the previous owner had already begun construction on a house and apparently bulldozed away the above-ground remnants of Battery Hooper."

The Siege of Cincinnati took place in September of 1862 after Lexington was captured and Confederate Gen. Henry Heth was ordered to capture Covington and Cincinnati. The defense of the city was led by Union Gen. Lewis Wallace. The siege was short-lived and the Confederates quickly withdrew from Northern Kentucky.

"It is easy to see why the Union Army selected this particular location even though it is not on the highest point in the vicinity," Kreinbrink said.

The site is now the home of the James A. Ramage Civil War Museum.

Kreinbrink said the dig was important for two reasons.

"First, it provide us archaeological data on Civil War-era fortification sites - construction techniques for example. Secondly, the dig provides us with an educational opportunity to teach about local history and archaeology," she said.

The site contains a stone foundation wall, a small dry well and earth and stone fortifications.

Kreinbrink said she has collected a large amount of artifacts, but they don't all date to the Civil War.

"Most are modern or date to the early 20th century," she said. "Reportedly, Mr. Storer (a prior owner) dumped fill soil on top of the earthwork area in an attempt to get grass to grow on top of the stone walls. Recent excavations have added to the artifact collection at the site. These now include Civil War-period artifacts. These include brass harmonica parts, buckles and a Minnie ball. We also found a brass letter 'Z' that may be a hat pin from a Zouave military company."

