



A presentation on a future dig in Noel in search of Acadian ruins left there by the East Hants Acadians was put on Dec. 6. Here Jeff Turner (left), a Nova Scotia Archaeological Society historian, Jonathan Fowler, an archaeologist with Saint Mary's University in Halifax and Shawn Scott, with the Heroes of Hants County Association who put on the presentation, discuss the site that is expected to be dug. (Healey photo)

# Archaeologist excited to begin Noel excavation

by Pat Healey

## NOEL

Jonathan Fowler is giddy about what history could possibly lay underneath the soil on a parcel of land at the end of Point Road in East Noel.

The most notable name of East Hants Acadians, Noel Doiron, once called the area home.

Fowler and Nova Scotia Archaeological Society historian, Jeff Turner, have done research, which tells them a piece of history that's not only important to Acadians from around the world but is a part of the region's past, exists under the ground.

It could also be the fact that maps they have found in their research note French improvements, such as dykes and buildings, had been noted by British army personnel in the area in the 1750s.

Fowler, an archaeologist with Saint Mary's University in Halifax, gave a passionate and fascinating explanation on the planned excavation he has for Noel Bay during a presentation Dec. 6, at the Noel Legion.

The event was used to launch the dig, which will

get its start in the spring of 2009.

"I'm very excited about this. Number one, doing the archaeology and finding something, advancing knowledge, is fantastic. And two, doing fieldwork and working with other people who have similar interests can be great fun.

"Different people have different backgrounds and research like this works best in a team-work environment, so this is great."

The community presentation was arranged by Shawn and Tod Scott of the Heroes of Hants County Association.

Two other events are also being worked on to commemorate Acadians living in the area. Those include making Dec. 13 an Acadian Day of

Remembrance and eventually creating a park.

The site to be excavated is in the same area where Doiron, whose name the village took, and his family lived until 1750 when they departed for Prince Edward Island.

Recently published research by the Scott brothers backs up the fact the village was named after Doiron, who lived in the community for more than 40 years.

Fowler said that in an informal way, the project began with the presentation.

"In terms of doing geophysics, we'd like to hopefully do that before the summer," he added. "We can use that to guide additional work into next fall and the following summer."

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Nova Scotia residents with demonstrated expertise in any of the four topics — biodiversity, forests, minerals or parks — are encouraged

# History hunt sparking big interest

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The 115-people in attendance were given the opportunity to visit the excavation site in person, walking over the land where past history could tell us about how they lived. Fowler encouraged the 75 or so who did go to the site to check the ground for any possible signs of history, during a tour of the site Dec. 6, although he admitted it could be hard to see anything with the ground not plowed.

"It is a case of us living in an environment that we've inherited," he said. "In this community, the name itself derives from this man (Noel Doiron).

"This brings us closer to his story and therefore I think it helps us to better understand our own."

A backgrounder on research the Scott's have done explains that Noel was captured, and imprisoned, by the New England Militia in Boston after burning the original settlement of Noel in 1704. But two years later, Noel returned, settling in Noel Bay. He built the dykes and a church, which was located in Burntcoat. Avoiding the threat of deportation, Noel and the East Hants Acadians left for Point Prim, P.E.I. in 1750, where they built a church.

However, they lived under terrible conditions for eight years before deportation was ordered on all Acadians in 1758. But, after weeks at sea aboard the Duke William, Noel, his wife, five of his children and more than 30 grandchildren along with the remaining East Hants Acadians died on Dec. 13, 1758, when the vessel sank in the North Atlantic. Almost 300 Acadians, including 120 members of the Doiron family died in the incident.

It's Fowler's hope he will come upon something big during the dig, something that would be the jackpot for any archaeologist.

"I'd actually hope to find the structure of the homes," he said. "However, because we're in a relatively undisturbed area (archeologically), I'd like to do some studies of the land around the homes, look at the yards, the garden plots, and try to get a sense of where things have been deposited around the land.

"It helps to get a better sense of the overall picture, not just the building, but what type of activities we're taking place in which parts of the yards. That strikes me as really interesting and that's not been done enough."

Fowler is hopeful the community is as fascinated as he is with the possibility of what they could find.

"When we get back here in a more organized fashion, you might find yourself doing this in a much more systematic way," he added. "At that time, we'll survey off the field and walk in line in an effort to really try to recover the scattered artefacts that show where things may have been."

At other sites that have been excavated, and Acadian ruins discovered, they have turned in to an economic spin off, Turner said. He pointed to a site near Windsor that Fowler excavated and how members of the Rivette family came to the area from Michigan, Vermont and other states. They spent \$10-\$12,000 during their visit to the site where their descendants once lived.

"Having this here... it draws people here to this beautiful shore," Turner added. "I've always thought of this shore as one of Canada's best kept secrets."

Although Turner wasn't sure what they would find, he's positive something of historical value is below the ground and tells a story. That assertion is backed up by the fact dykes, built by the Acadians, still exist in the vicinity of where Acadians are believed to have lived.

Fowler agrees, saying he has a good feeling the land they've researched has a large chunk of Acadian history buried beneath it.

"There's definitely something here," he said. "The mapping alone tells us that much. French improvements, cleared land, apple orchards.

"If it's not eroded into that bay, it is possible to

find. Where there's a will, there's a way."

In the map from the post-deportation era, likely dated 1767 Fowler said, there is a dyke wall, 12 acres upland and 24 apple trees listed among the French improvements.

"Here in Canada, there's something like 10 million air photos, not all of them of Noel," Fowler quipped. "Already, without going out my door I think we've got an archaeological site.

"That helps me identify the area where I should concentrate on."

But there is one thing he'd like that would enable him to do his research more efficiently and that's the size of the maps he has to work with.

"When I'm in a field, and I've got a shovel, I'd prefer a larger scale map," Fowler said.

Fowler said a geophysical survey is the first thing that will get done to help them begin the process.

"It induces a magnetic field into the ground that reads what kind of soil you're dealing with under there," he explained. "It allows us without digging any holes - just by walking - to get a sense of whether there is any buried material that is of substantial, human made quality and quantity. Even though it might just be a pasture, and you don't see a thing perhaps, the survey will.

"Once we study the ground a bit more and take some geophysics, we would presumably go out and do a

limited program of excavation," Fowler said. "Here's the problem. Excavation is a structured process. Every time you excavate an archaeological site, you destroy it by the time you finish."

He said people shouldn't expect a result very quickly. Just like Rome not being built in a day, the process for excavation is slow. Fowler encourages people to pitch in and help out once the excavation begins, because the more that helps out the faster the process will end up being.

"We document everything we do," Fowler said. "For that reason, we don't always move as fast as we could. For our research, the questions we're asking here, funding is always an issue. We overcome that by just operating without any. That just means we dig small holes, work on weekends, we write little thin reports that have interesting notes and usually conclude more work has to be done. That could be the case here. I'm in and ready to get my boots on. We have a small group of people who have nothing to do on the weekend.

"The trick will be to see if we want to take this to another level and make it a bit more substantial, we'll look at community resources and whether they can support that. That might mean time. That might mean getting your own shovel. Ideally, we'll find some measure of financial support as well."