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**Students in Pardeesville uncover village's past**

*By KENT JACKSON (Staff Writer)*

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**[](http://standardspeaker.com/polopoly_fs/1.1513290!/fileImage/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_490/image.jpg)**

ERIC CONOVER/Staff Photographer Jim Kuzma of Mahanoy City, a senior at Penn State University, checks elevations Thursday at an archaeological dig in Pardeesville.

**[Lightbox link](http://standardspeaker.com/polopoly_fs/1.1513291!/fileImage/httpImage/image.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_490/image.jpg" \o "Myles Schaller, left, of Berkeley, Calif., and Teresa Robbins, a Bloomsburg University student, work Thursday at an archaeological dig in Pardeesville.)**Archaeologists who spent the summer looking for signs of a 130-year-old mining village learnedthat they weren't the first to dig into a patch of present-day Pardeesville.

As the researchers excavated ground to find foundations of former homes, Pardeesville residents told them about old-timers who carted away garden soil when they moved out of the patch town.

"It's pretty amazing how they liked their soil and the taste of their vegetables," University of Maryland Professor Paul Shackel said.

Shackel, an anthropologist who leads the excavation in Pardeesville, started research in the area in 2010 when he organized a dig at the site of the Lattimer Massacre. Last summer, his team excavated along Canal Street in Lattimer where a cluster of miner's homes once stood. He also started the Lattimer Massacre Project that makes maps, photos, drawings and documents about the massacre available to the public.

In Pardeesville, formerly called Lattimer 2, Shackel and students from four universities this summer are digging on a wedge of ground where Upper Street diverges from Scamper Street.

Nothing but grass shows on the surface now, but miners and their families crowded onto the patch by the 1870s. They built the first St. Nazarius R.C. Church next to their homes in 1884. Archaeologists have found an old photo of church members in a procession. They think most of the miners who settled the village were of Italian descent, but they are trying to compile a lineage of the families that moved through homes in the patch town.

Originally, the miners, their wives, children, goats and chickens lived in ramshackle structures clustered close to open sewers, which a national magazine described 115 years ago.

"The Century Magazine" sent a writer and illustrator to the village in the aftermath of the Lattimer Massacre when 25 striking miners died of gunshots after Luzerne County Sheriff's deputies halted their march on Sept. 10, 1897.

Public support for the United Mine Workers Union grew after the massacre and the acquittal of the deputies at a trial.

Three years ago, Shackel and his students discovered bullets and shell casings at the site. The pattern in which they found the artifacts suggests that the deputies formed a firing line. Information that the Lattimer History Project makes available online at lattimer massacre.wordpress.com helps illustrate how the massacre advanced the labor movement and informed the public about the poverty in which miners and their families lived.

"It's really interesting to see how poor these people were, scavenging nails," said James Kuzma, a Penn State student from Mahanoy City, who became curious about the history of mining towns because he grew up in one.

Miners used to burn homes and salvage the nails, said Myles Schaller, a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley. He helped at the dig because he is interested in labor history.

Shortly after the Lattimer Massacre, the writer for "The Century Magazine" reported on the conditions in the village in Pardeesville.

"There is no sewage system, and the alley is the dumping-ground for all offal. At every few steps of this winding, reeking way are little openings leading into other passageways, not much wider than will permit a man to walk through," the article said.

The writer described buildings, some the size of dog kennels, that were hammered together from scraps of board, rusty metal sheets, shingles and hardware scrounged from the coal company's scrap heap.

"The roofs of the buildings slant at all angles, with no two sides the same length or deflection. One portion will have eaves, while its companion will scorn the luxury. The same incongruity prevails everywhere," the article said.

An illustration accompanying the article showed a room where 14 men lived.

As the decades passed, miners spread out to nicer homes, and they improved sewerage in the patch town, the archaeologists are learning.

Michael Roller, a graduate student at the University of Maryland, said the earliest property map, borrowed from the collection of retired Hazleton engineer Joseph Michel, shows miners lived in a barracks or row home. The home was parallel to what the miners called Church Street, but more recently was re-named Scamper Street after a family dog.



Later, a map shows the row home sectioned into fewer, single homes, which were enlarged.

"The building demolished becomes the yard for this house," Roller said while pointing to a stone foundation of a home that the dig uncovered.

Roller, who will write his doctoral thesis on what the excavations reveal about living conditions in the patch towns in Pardeesville and along Canal Street in Lattimer, digs with soup ladles that he buys at yard sales.

He scrapes away three-tenths of an inch of soil, takes photographs and bags the dirt to analyze in a laboratory later before digging a little deeper.

Following that method, Roller and the other students needed five weeks to dig a pit 5 feet deep where Roller figures that they uncovered a privy or cesspool.

The team of archaeologists includes Theresa Robbins of Bloomsburg University, Bev Hendricks, a recent graduate of Bloomsburg, and Justin Uehlein, a University of Maryland graduate now in graduate school at American University. They started work at the end of May and expect to finish by Wednesday.

In their other excavations, which they tied off with string and mapped carefully, the archaeologists unburied a porcelain sewer pipe and a concrete-and-stone pad with a drain pipe leading to an alley. Roller dates the pad to the early 20th century and said, perhaps, miners washed themselves and their tools there before entering the house.

Taken together, the privy, the sewer pipe and the washing pad - along with drain pipe fragments that the team dug up - show residents sought better sanitation.

"It seems," Roller said, "all of the these are efforts to take care of the stench to make the community healthy."

After the team dug up old medicine bottles, Roller theorized that people might have sought remedies for ailments caused by sewage problems.

Even the garden soil, so rich that residents took it with them when they left the patch town, could have added to intestinal illness.

While excavating a garden, Roller distinguished the dark soil from the yellow clay found naturally in the village.

"There's a lot of turning. It's thick and deep compared with the other sites at which we work," he said.

The diggers found artifacts such as bottles, tobacco pipes, jugs, crocks and porcelain dolls from various eras in the same soil levels. That suggests that gardeners tilling the soil jumbled together objects that were discarded or lost years apart.

But residents also might have emptied the privy's dirt into the garden periodically as fertilizer.

While excavating the privy, the researchers mainly found rubble and household trash from the 1950s, an indication it had been emptied regularly before being filled all at once about the time that St. Nazarius moved to a new building in 1947 and the patch town disbanded.

In the laboratory, tests will show whether the soil contains shells of parasites that might have lived in the digestive system of the miners and been transmitted through compost from the privy, Shackel said.

Another test will separate seeds, which float, from soil. By identifying seeds, Shackel hopes to learn more about what the miners ate and what they planted in their gardens.

The garden that the researchers dug out contained three post holes visible when the excavators went down about 2 feet from the surface. The posts might have supported fencing, which an old photograph shows strung through the village.

"The fence line is to keep the goats out," Roller said.

Another artifact, found near the top of the privy, was a rubber baseball. Roller said residents told the researchers that baseball teams from various villages developed rivalries while playing one another.

Pardeesville also had a dance hall called the Green Lantern that also showed movies. The building still stands south of the excavation site.

Although the homes are gone from the patch town, many of the families that moved built new homes a few blocks west along Pardeesville Road, where St. Nazarius relocated. The church closed in 2009 when the Diocese of Scranton consolidated parishes.

The Pardeesville residents' desire to remain nearby showed they developed an attachment to the community, Roller said.

Roller and the other archaeologists, likewise, said they felt welcomed into that community this summer. Residents stopped by to ask questions about the research, help with the dig or bring snacks, like a bag a peanut butter cookies that Andrea Cervasio dropped off on Thursday.

"I bring them every week," Cervasio said.

She said the excavation got her neighbors talking about the past of Pardeesville.

"You know it was an old mining town. You see how it is now. You don't realize how it was," Cervasio said.

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