Was Fort St. Joseph Effective at Defending the Frontier—Guarding the Fort, and Why Should We Care?

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Talking Points

• Brief History of Fort St. Joseph
• The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project
• What We Found and What We Found Out
• Community Involvement
• Why Should We Care?
Mer de L'Ouest
(DeLisle et Buache 1752)
French Colonial Sites in the Western Great Lakes Region (not intended for defense)
Finding the Fort
Map by Thomas Hutchins (1778) based on his 1762 visit
Early Interest in the Site

FORT ST. JOSEPH IS FOUND!

This photograph taken on Nov. 15, 1988, shows the site of Fort St. Joseph deserted even by the large, proposing nearby residents and ex-officers. For the area to be restored, it is believed the fort should be removed.

By Michael S. Nassaney and William M. Cremin
The Fort St. Joseph Archaeological Project

• A partnership between WMU and city of Niles
• Study of the fur trade and colonialism for the public good
• Where are French and Native sites located?
• What evidence was left behind?
• What activities do the objects represent?
• What does archaeology reveal about the fort?
Finding Site Locations

Eighteenth-Century Potawatomi Village

St. Joseph River

Early Twentieth-Century Landfill

20BE23

Locus IV

Locus III

Locus II

Locus I

Commemorative Boulder

Bond St.

Fort St.

0 50 M
Finding Features:
Stone Fireplaces
Finding Stone Foundations and Wooden Posts
Artist’s Reconstruction of a House at Fort St. Joseph

Drawn by John Cardinal
Finding Multiple Structures at Fort St. Joseph
Finding Animal Bones
Finding Plant Foods in Context
Smudge Pits

Feature 19A

[Diagram showing smudge pits and excavation units]

Lyne Site
20BE10
Locus II
Finding Evidence of Domestic Activities
Evidence of Cloth
Finding Evidence of Recycling
A Riddle: When Is a Thimble Not a Thimble?

When it's a tinkling cone!
Re-Imagined Objects
photos by Joseph Gagne
Potawatomi Woman Playing a Dice Game
Looking Good on the Frontier

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Finding Evidence of Religious Devotion
Partnerships and Community Involvement

- French-Canadian Heritage Society of Michigan
- Western Michigan University
- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
- City of Niles (Fort St. Joseph Museum)
- Fort St. Joseph Archaeology Advisory Committee
- Support the Fort, Inc.
- Joseph L. Peyser Endowment for the Study of New France
- Michigan Humanities Council
- Society of Colonial Wars in Michigan
- Society of The Colonial Dames of America in Michigan
- Northern Indiana Historical Society

- Archaeology summer camps, public lecture series, publications for a general audience, DVDs, social media, archaeology open house
Why Should We Care?

• We use the past to think about ourselves in the present. How are we different, how are we the same?
• The fort is a platform to discuss issues of interest to the present (e.g., housing, racism, resource depletion, cross-cultural interaction)
• An opportunity to examine our shared humanity and work collectively to solve problems in our immediate future.
• Why do you want to preserve historic places?