Background

Based on research conducted at the MSU Archives, CAP archaeologists believe this site was likely used as a dumping ground to increase the height of the river bank. It’s believed that the refuse originated during the renovations of a former faculty house that was located where the West Wing of the Main Library currently stands. The house belonged to Horticulture Department faculty member, Professor Thomas Gunson. An experimental greenhouse was attached to his home which could be the explanation for the laboratory glass.

Professor Gunson was employed at MSU as the foreman of grounds, and later as a horticulture professor from 1891 until his death in 1940. He maintained residence in this house with his first and second wives the entire time. His obituary in the January 1941 MAC Record describes him as, “…the gardener, the counselor, the philosopher, the honest citizen”. Blueprints located in the MSU Archives indicate that major renovations occurred at the residence and greenhouse in approximately 1924.

In this blueprint you can see where the greenhouse was attached to the rest of Gunson’s home. Renovations of the greenhouse could be the result of the laboratory glass we found in the assemblage behind the Hannah Administration Building.

Why Study Lab Glass?

Scientific research has always been a significant part of what makes MSU a renowned research institution. Identifying the types of laboratory glass found on campus broadens our knowledge of what students and faculty were using in the past and what types of experiments they might have performed. While most of the artifacts we find give us a look into the domestic life of students and faculty, this laboratory glass gives a look into the classrooms experience. The Gunson assemblage is not our first instance of finding lab glass on campus and probably will not be our last.

Gunson Lab Glass Artifacts

As the cataloguing process continues, CAP interns have identified equipment such as beakers, stir sticks, syringe stoppers, microscope slides, and a wide assortment of test tubes. Images courtesy of Lisa Bright.

Discussion

The Campus Archaeology Program has unearthed laboratory glass from MSU’s campus during several previous excavations. Since MSU is a historically important research university (especially in the agriculture field) it is expected that more glass equipment will be discovered as CAP continues to dig on campus. Studying the large amount of glass recovered from the Gunson Assemblage last summer will help us know what to expect when encountering these artifacts in future excavations.

Works Cited


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