

# Record-Argus

Serving Greenville, PA since 1848

2017-09-19 / Front Page

## LOST SETTLEMENT

### Diggers try to piece together clues from freed-slave community

By MARSHA FLEEGER

[mfleeger@recordargusnews.com](mailto:mfleeger@recordargusnews.com)



**EAST LACKAWANNOCK TOWNSHIP — Rich Wentling and Brady Johnson, of DuBois, use a shaker screen to separate artifacts, including bits of glass and pottery, from soil Saturday. Photos by Marsha Fleeger/R-A**

EAST LACKAWANNOCK TOWNSHIP —

Hidden away in Mercer County's Amish country is a rare glimpse of the Antebellum life, in the archaeological site at the Pandenarium.

It has no remaining buildings — only a well and partial foundation — from a freed-slave community where 52 former slaves arrived from Belmont Plantation, in Virginia, on Nov. 12, 1854.

“Rosy Allen said it was ‘just like heaven,’ because the country roads were golden with fallen leaves,” local historian Ruth Woods said.

While the historical record, taken from documents including the census, tells how many people lived in the community and their official occupations — mostly farmers — it doesn't always tell a lot

about how they lived.

“The historical record and the archaeological record don't always match up,” Angie Jaillet- Wentling, PennDOT archaeologist, said. “A lot of what we are doing is asking questions about a site and accumulating data to answer those questions, then asking more questions.”

Archeology shows things that records may not reveal, which is a good thing.

Jaillet-Wentling completed her master's thesis on Pandenarium and focused on the home of Robert Allen, the son of original settlers John and Rosy Allen.

“Out there, I found a little tea cup that probably belonged to his daughter,” she said. “Imagine that: She was probably the last person



to touch it before I found it. It is my favorite.”



**EAST LACKAWANNOCK TOWNSHIP — Chris Thompson, an archaeology student at Indiana University of Pa., carefully scrapes off soil in a hole at the archaeological site at the John and Rosy Allen home at Pandenarium Saturday. Marsha Fleeger/R-A**

The ex-slaves who lived at Pandenarium have a remarkable story, having been liberated by their master, Dr. Charles Everett, a wealthy Virginia doctor and plantation owner, in his will.

Everett not only freed his slaves but provided money for them to purchase family members from other plantations. He had also planned to set them up in a utopia that included a church, school and homes for each of the families.

The Everett family had advertised looking for 1,000 acres. Although Pandenarium is believed to be only about 100 acres, it was selected because it was in a “free state,” and the land was owned by local abolitionist John Young.

When the family arrived, there were 24 houses waiting, with gardens and an orchard full of fruit trees.

“According to our findings, most of the people that came here hadn’t worn shoes,” Woods said. “When they arrived, they found shoes and bolts of cloth waiting for them.”

Although they had houses waiting for them, the former slaves chose to build shacks down by the creek, instead of living in the two-story houses provided.

Jaillet-Wentling questioned why they would do that; the best answer she came up with was that the houses lined up along the road reminded them of the slave rows of Albemarle County, Va.

“That’s not what they want now,” she said. “They are free citizens, they want to be down by the water, in houses they built themselves.”

Unfortunately, the stream flooded and destroyed the shacks, prompting the ex-slaves to move up the hill into the houses.

The census lists almost all of the men of the community as farmers, but it’s believed that many also worked as laborers in sawmills and other local industries.

John Allen, who moved there with his wife Rosy and three children, was possibly a blacksmith.

Samantha Taylor, a second year master’s degree candidate in archaeology at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, is focusing her research on John and Rosy’s home, which is tucked away in the woods.

She selected them because of their role in the community — Rosy was called “Aunty Rosy,” and the whole community came to her for advice and a helping hand. She mothered everyone in the community, in addition to her own 21 children.

John and Rosy’s home was the site of many social and even religious gatherings in the community.

**EAST LACKAWANNOCK TOWNSHIP — Local historian Ruth Woods examines an object found in the dirt at the Pandenarium archaeological dig site Saturday.**

Taylor wants to compare the crockery that she is finding at John and Rosy's home at Pandenarium with pottery from the same time period from Timbuktu, a fugitive slave community in New Jersey; Monticello, the neighboring plantation in Virginia; and Old Economy Village in Pennsylvania.

She is looking to see if the Pandenarium settlers brought their pottery with them, or made their own using a style learned in Virginia; bought local stoneware, or if there is something larger at play with the freed and fugitive slaves all using a similar style.

The area around the dwelling has yielded richly thus far, with a lot of glass, stoneware and nails being found.

Although the site is being searched for evidence of life in the last half of the 19th century, it has also at least one item that dates back to the period between 800 B.C. and 200 A.D.: An adena flint projectile point from a spear or atlatl.

"History is everywhere; it is right under our feet," Taylor said. "One of our goals is to get more people out here to experience it."

**[Return to top](#)**