

Archaeologists digging at Malcolm X's boyhood home in Boston

March 29 2016, by Philip Marcelo



Signs call attention to the house where slain African-American leader Malcolm X spent part of his childhood, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)

Archeologists are digging at a boyhood home of Malcolm X in an effort

to uncover more about the slain black rights activist's early life as well as the property's long history, which possibly includes Native American settlement.

The two-week archaeological dig began Tuesday outside a two-and-a-half story home in Boston's historically black Roxbury neighborhood that was built in 1874.

City Archaeologist Joseph Bagley said his office chose to dig up the site because it's likely that work will be needed soon to shore up the foundation of the vacant and run down structure.

"This is kind of a now-or-never dig," he said. "If we don't do this, the site will be destroyed. We can't afford to wait."

Among Tuesday's early finds was a large piece of fine porcelain that Bagley says was likely part of a dish set owned by the family of Malcolm X's sister, which still owns the house.

"We're literally just scratching the surface," Bagley said as he and volunteers used a sifter to carefully pore over mounds of rubble on a side yard.

Bagley says once the initial rubble is cleared, a ground-penetrating radar survey will be used to determine the best locations to dig. Major excavation work is expected to dig up to four feet into the ground. The site will be open to the public throughout to observe the work.



City archeologist Joe Bagley holds a potshard from what he believes is set of dishes used by Ella Little-Collins, the older sister of Malcolm X, at the house where the slain African-American activist spent part of his teen years, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)

"We don't actually go in looking for anything," Bagley says. "It's more like we're looking for anything that might tell us something about the people that lived here."

Rodnell Collins, a nephew of Malcolm X who lived with him in the house, hopes the survey can raise public awareness of his family's deep roots in Boston. He's been working for years to renovate the dilapidated structure for public tours and other uses.

The former Malcolm Little was a teenager in the 1940s when he lived with his sister Ella Little-Collins and her family at 72 Dale St.



City archeologist Joe Bagley, right, digs as volunteer Rosemary Pinales sifts soil for items at the house where slain African-American activist Malcolm X spent part of his teen years, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)

The house was designated a city landmark in 1998 because it's the only known dwelling from the outspoken activist's formative years in Boston still standing.

"No physical move in my life has been more pivotal or profound in its

repercussions," Malcolm X wrote in his autobiography about his time in Boston. "All praise is due to Allah that I went to Boston when I did. If I hadn't, I'd probably still be a brainwashed black Christian."

Born in Omaha, Nebraska, Little had bounced around from foster homes following his father's death and his mother's institutionalization for a nervous breakdown.



City archeologist Joe Bagley, center, with volunteers Asia Greer, left, and Rosemary Pinales, look at an item sifted from dirt at the house where slain African-American activist Malcolm X spent part of his teen years, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)

Little-Collins eventually became his legal guardian. But Little rebelled against family life and landed in a Boston prison for burglary charges in his early 20s.

There, he became a Nation of Islam follower and dropped his surname in favor of "X" to represent his family's lost African ancestral name.

A charismatic speaker, Malcolm X quickly became the Detroit-founded Nation of Islam's principal spokesman during its rapid rise in the 50s and 60s.



City archeologist Joe Bagley, right, and Rosemary Pinales pull items from dirt sifted at the house where slain African-American activist Malcolm X spent part of his teen years, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)

He founded temples and mosques up and down the eastern seaboard, promoting a message of black nationalism and denouncing white American culture.

Malcolm X's fiery rhetoric came in stark contrast to that of more non-violence-minded civil rights contemporaries like Martin Luther King, Jr.

But he eventually left the Nation of Islam, adopted a more conciliatory tone and converted to Sunni Islam before being gunned down by Nation of Islam adherents at a speech in New York City in 1965 at the age of 39.



Rodnell P. Collins carries a painting of his uncle, Malcolm X outside the house where the slain African-American activist spent part of his teen years, Tuesday, March 29, 2016, in the Roxbury section of Boston. Archeologists are undertaking a two-week dig at the home in an effort to uncover more about his early life, when he was known as Malcolm Little and lived there with his sister's

family in the 1940s. (AP Photo/Bill Sikes)



In this March 5, 1964 file photo, Black Muslim leader Malcolm X poses during an interview in New York. Archeologists in Boston are digging at the boyhood home of slain black rights activist Malcolm X. The two-week archaeological dig begins Tuesday, March 28, 2016, in Boston's Roxbury neighborhood. (AP Photo/Eddie Adams, File)

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