

# Researchers find evidence of original 1620 Plymouth settlement

November 30 2016, by Colleen Locke

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UMass Boston students have affectionately named this calf Constance. Credit: David Landon

Three hundred and ninety-five years after Pilgrims celebrated the first Thanksgiving in Plymouth, Massachusetts, researchers from UMass Boston's Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research can say they have definitively discovered evidence of the original 1620 Plymouth settlement. Part of the proof involves a calf that UMass Boston students have affectionately named Constance.

For the fourth summer, David Landon, associate director of the Fiske Center, led a group of undergraduate and graduate students in a field school in Plymouth offered through UMass Boston's College of Advancing and Professional Studies. Landon and the students spent five weeks on Burial Hill looking for the site of the original Pilgrim [settlement](#). Landon's goal when he started was to find evidence of the original settlement prior to the 400th anniversary of the founding of the Plymouth Colony in 2020. He met his goal four years early, in the first year of a three-year, \$200,000 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) grant.

Because the original structures weren't built with bricks, the research team couldn't look for foundations. Rather, they had to look for "post and ground construction" – basically holes for wood, and dirt.

"While we're digging, we're constantly in the process of trying to interpret what we're finding. It really goes to just moving slowly and trying to see if there are any patterns in the flow that we can map out. As soon as that starts, it becomes a slow process. It's about much more than the artifacts – it's about trying to pin down soil color and trying to understand constructed features that are no longer there," Landon said.

But then Landon's team did start finding 17th century artifacts: 17th century pottery, tins, trade beads, and musket balls – around that post and ground construction. Landon says the students and researchers were at this point cautiously optimistic that they had found a location inside the settlement walls. And then they found "Constance" – a calf buried whole in the bottom-most pit. Because native people didn't have domestic cattle, Landon says we know that she lived – and died—in the confines of the original Plymouth settlement.



Credit: UMass Boston

"Constance is a great symbol of this. Oftentimes success in the colony depended on herds of cattle. It became a centerpiece of the economy. So the calf does connect us to that story," Landon said.

Kathryn Ness is the curator of collections at Plimoth Plantation, UMass Boston's partner in this project. She says this discovery is huge.

"Finding evidence of colonial activity inside the original 1620 Plymouth settlement is an incredibly exciting discovery that has the potential to change dramatically our understanding of early European colonization in New England. For the first time, we have proof of where the settlement was located and what kinds of items the Pilgrims owned and used," Ness said. "At Plimoth Plantation, the team's findings will help us further refine our exhibits, as we use archaeological evidence and historical documents as the basis for our portrayal of the past and to ensure that

our buildings, activities, and reproduction objects are as accurate as possible. We are looking forward to learning more about their discoveries and seeing what they find next season!"

Landon and more students and researchers will be back next summer.

"We've opened the first window but we want a bigger view. We want the bay window. We want to see if we can find other components," Landon said.

For now, researchers and students are cleaning, labeling, and researching what was found this past summer. They're also going to be trying to figure out how Constance died and why she was buried, rather than eaten.

Provided by University of Massachusetts Boston

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