

Dig resurrects a feud over which town is a state's oldest

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An archaeological dig is rekindling a feud between two towns over which was the first in Connecticut.

Experts have unearthed artifacts they believe date to the 1630s in Wethersfield, where town signs declare it the state's "most ancient," founded in 1634. But a few miles up the Connecticut River to the north, Windsor boasts it is the state's "first town," settled in 1633.

The long-running dispute on which was the first English settlement in Connecticut centers on how you define "town." Settlers from Plymouth, Massachusetts, established a trading post in Windsor in 1633. Advocates for Wethersfield say settlers from Watertown, Massachusetts, made Wethersfield their home in 1634 and claim Windsor didn't become a town until 1635, when people there built homes.

"I don't think it ever will be settled," state archaeologist Brian Jones said.

Jones pointed out the Dutch built a fort in Hartford in 1633 that predated the Windsor trading post, and there is some evidence there was a Dutch trading post in Hartford as early as 1623.

Archaeologists at the Wethersfield site say they have uncovered the earliest evidence of European settlement in the state. Among the buried finds: a fence believed to be from the [17th century](#) and built for defense against Native American tribes; coins and ceramics dating to the 1630s; beads used in trade with Native Americans; clothing hooks and buttons;

and remains of meals including seafood shells and animal bones.

"The 17th-century stuff was the most exciting because nobody knew it would be here," said Sarah Sportman, senior archaeologist for the nonprofit Public Archaeology Survey Team. "We have been able to document the lives of the people who live here."

The pro-Windsor camp says the find makes no difference. It points to written records including settlers' diaries and other evidence favoring Windsor.

"It doesn't change our opinion," said Christine Ermenc, executive director of the Windsor Historical Society. "We maintain that Windsor really is the earliest European settlement. They helped the Native Americans. They helped some of the traders going to Wethersfield."

The nonprofit group will preserve the items for public display and document the artifacts in a report. The survey began two years ago and wrapped up Thursday.

The dig took place on a small plot behind both the Joseph Webb House, where George Washington and the French general Rochambeau met in 1781 to devise battle plans that led to the end of the Revolutionary War, and the Silas Deane House, named for the Connecticut delegate to the Continental Congress in 1774 and diplomat to France who worked with Benjamin Franklin.

The plot is the future site of a visitor center for the Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum, which includes the Webb and Deane homes and other locations in the historic section of Wethersfield. The [archaeological study](#) was required by the state Historic Preservation Office to ensure any significant artifacts would not be destroyed.

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