

'80s tape, toy dino: Chinatown archaeological dig cut short

July 31 2019, by Philip Marcelo



In this July 8, 2019 file photo Sarah Keklak, archaeology lab manager for the city of Boston, sorts samples at the first historical excavation, in Boston's Chinatown. The archaeological dig has been cut short after it turned up a 1980s music cassette, a toy dinosaur and other bric-a-brac. The city's Archaeology Program tweeted Tuesday, July 30, that it was wrapping up its three-week excavation at a vacant lot near the neighborhood's distinctive gateway because researchers have reached the water table, and it is unsafe to dig further. (AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File)

An archaeological dig in Boston's historic Chinatown has been cut short after it turned up a 1980s music cassette, a toy dinosaur and other bric-a-brac.

The city's Archaeology Program tweeted Tuesday that it was wrapping up its three-week excavation because researchers reached the [water table](#), and it was unsafe to dig further.

The excavation of a vacant lot near the neighborhood's distinctive gateway had been expected to last until early autumn.

In recent days, researchers have been humorously tweeting some of their "finds," including a cassette by Boston R&B group New Edition, a dinosaur toy, linoleum flooring and other items from the 1970s and 1980s.

They've also showcased small porcelain pieces, some of which likely came from nearby Chinese restaurants as they dug methodically through layers of brick, concrete and other material.

Researchers had hoped to turn up artifacts shedding new light on Boston's immigrants—not only those from China but also Syria, Ireland and England who sought new lives in Chinatown from 1840 to 1980.

City archaeologist Joe Bagley said the dig was the first in Chinatown, and his team will "now have a better understanding of how complex and deeply buried backyards may be" there.



In this July 8, 2019, file photo, volunteers dig and screen soil at the first historical excavation in Boston's Chinatown. The archaeological dig has been cut short after it turned up a 1980s music cassette, a toy dinosaur and other bric-a-brac. The city's Archaeology Program tweeted Tuesday, July 30, that it was wrapping up its three-week excavation at a vacant lot near the neighborhood's distinctive gateway because researchers have reached the water table, and it is unsafe to dig further. (AP Photo/Elise Amendola, File)

"We were tantalizing close to the older deposits," Bagley said. "It was frustrating to see the water on the site after weeks of work trying to get down to deeper/older deposits."

The neighborhood, at the edge of the city's Theater District, drew

thousands of newcomers attracted by cheap housing and plentiful warehouse jobs in the adjacent Leather District starting in the late 1800s.

"Boston is a city of immigrants, and this is an important piece of Boston's history," Mayor Marty Walsh said when the dig, the city's first in Chinatown, commenced.

The city Archaeology Program has excavated dozens of sites over the years.

Two years ago, researchers unearthed an outhouse next door to the home of famed colonial leader Paul Revere in the city's North End. They recovered fragments of pottery, bottles and a tobacco pipe.

In 2016, they dug at the boyhood home of Malcolm X in the city's Roxbury neighborhood.

Researchers turned up artifacts from the 1940s to 1960s likely belonging to the slain civil rights activist's family, but also Native American stone tool pieces dating to the time before Europeans came to Boston.

And in 2015, they surveyed the courtyard at the old Boston City Hall building downtown and found remnants of the original Boston Latin, the nation's first public school.

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