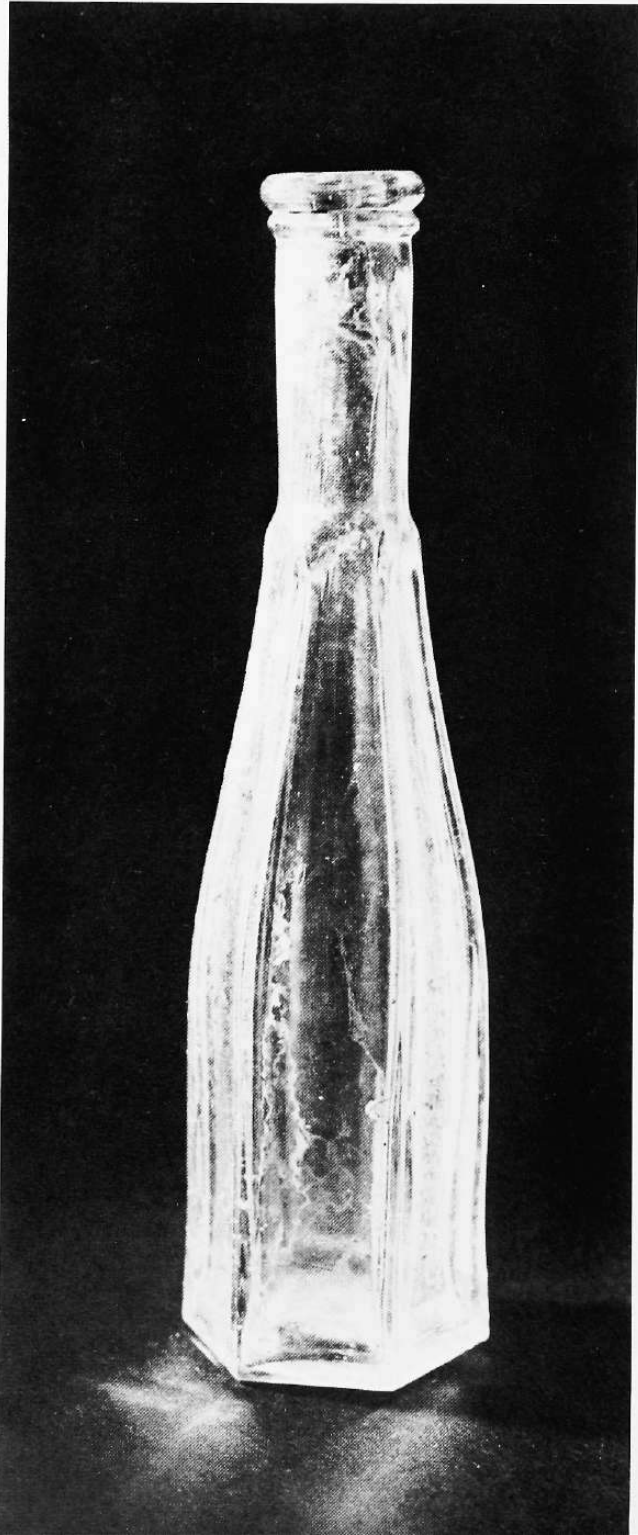

MHS collections

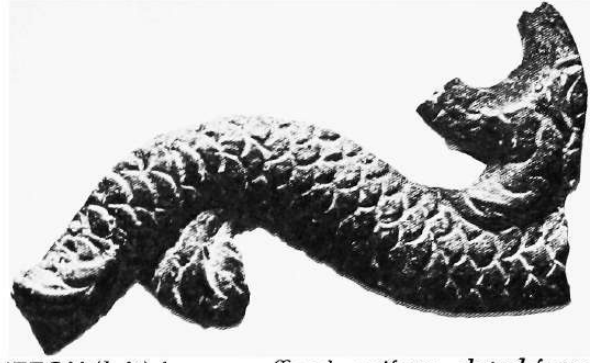


SINCE 1965, archaeological crews have recovered and cataloged an average of 20,000 artifacts a year from the excavated foundations of historic Fort Snelling. The magazine and Round, Pentagonal, and Hexagonal towers in particular yielded a variety of military and household items, including cartridges, percussion caps, strap leather, buttons, coins, bottles, and even the army's garbage. By far the most fertile dig, however, took place in 1968–69 in the area of the sutler's store and walled enclosure behind it. Sutlers were civilian merchants appointed for each post by the secretary of war to sell at set prices the necessities and little luxuries which soldiers could not obtain elsewhere in the wilderness. Fort Snelling's inhabitants patronized the store until it was torn down at the turn of the century. Thus, the artifacts recovered from the site reflect life at the old post during its first seventy-five years.

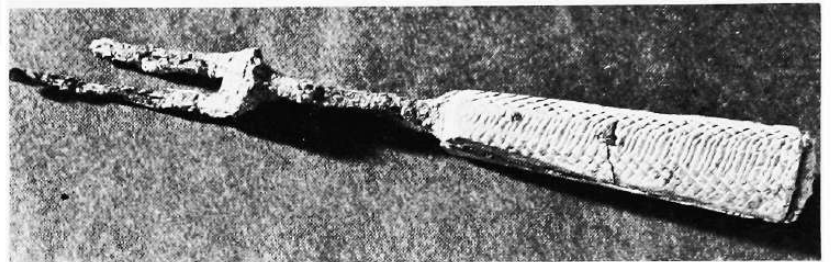
A rich assortment of the goods which once lined the sutler's shelves was unearthed during the excavation. Some 680 pieces of glass, representing windows, tableware, and bottles, were found. The tableware ranges from fragments of a delicate wine goblet to a short beer mug. Many of the shattered food, medicinal, beverage, and liquor bottles date to the 1850s. Recovered kitchen utensils — such as tin plates, knives, two- and three-tined forks, and a pewter spoon — crockery service vessels (783 sherds), and china dishes (12,032 sherds) offer insight into the life style of the men and women who lived at the fort. Archaeologists also discovered personal grooming accessories, including hairbrushes, toothbrushes, and bone and hard rubber combs, as well as jewelry, in the form of four cuff links, a pierced agate heart, a bone ornament, a pin, and a watch key.

A total of 315 military and civilian buttons, which lend themselves to dating more easily than most artifacts, was found during excavation of the store and

THIS SIX-SIDED, light green-tinted food bottle once held pepper sauce. It was found with other bottles and crockery in the Fort Snelling sutler's store excavation.



A **BUTTON** (left) from an officer's uniform, dated from the 1840-1854 period, was found at the sutler's store. The side plate fragment (above), shaped like a serpent, belonged on an inexpensive musket commonly used in the Indian trade.



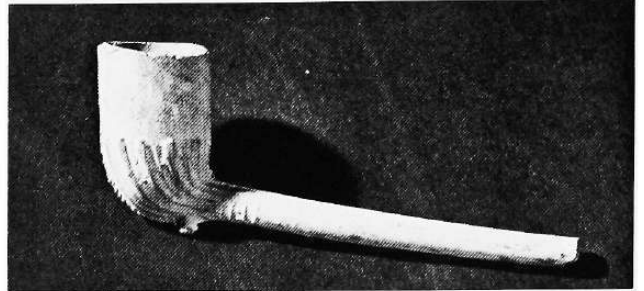
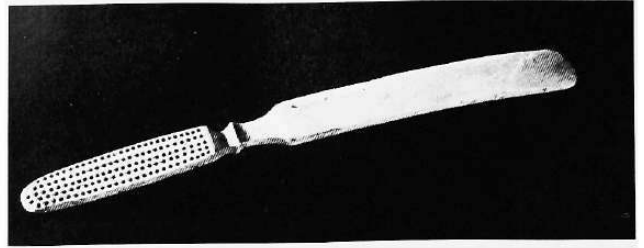
THIS **TWO-TINED** iron fork with a bone handle was among the many kitchen utensils unearthed by archaeologists.

COPPER CUPS such as this one (left) were common items on the frontier. The finely carved horse's head (below left) belonged to a chess set used to while away long winter hours at the fort. The effervescent beverage bottle (below) containing "Medical Waters" was made in Ireland.





A COLLAPSIBLE COMB (above) made of hard rubber, a bone toothbrush (above right), and a clay pipe (right) were personal accessories available to men on the frontier at the sutler's store.



enclosure. In addition to the common shell, glass, and brass service types, several bone blanks for use on underwear and eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century pewter buttons were discovered at the site. Twenty-six pieces of clothing, including belt buckles, hooks and eyes, and scraps of leather and cloth, were also uncovered.

Gun flints, lead shot, and percussion caps illuminate some of the activities which took place at the fort, as do the remains of files, jackknives, and building hardware. Three varieties of nails, 10,899 in all, were collected. These include numerous cut nails, which are still available for concrete work, rosehead nails, used to fasten hardware, and the more recent round or wire nails.

The crew found 16 sewing and 67 writing accessories, all visible remnants of two daily pursuits at the fort. Needles, thimbles, a pair of scissors, a tape measure, fragmented pen nibs, and slate pencils were strewn throughout the store and enclosure foundations. Eight gaming pieces, including dominoes, glass marbles, a handsomely carved horse's head, or knight, from a bone chess set, and a porcelain doll's head, indicate some of the amusements soldiers and their families enjoyed on the frontier.

Clay pipes also helped while away the long hours. Many of the 4,002 pieces of pipe bowls and stems excavated were found together. Some 40 bowls bear the same pattern and are of identical size, suggesting that they were part of a damaged shipment that the sutler discarded. Pipes were among the goods which he apparently traded with Indians. Other objects probably reserved for barter with the region's native inhabitants

were thin iron arrowheads, cheap hawk bells, and beads, all of which were found in the foundations of the sutler's store and walled enclosure.

The cracks in the store's wooden floor proved to be natural catchalls through the years. Coins were among the most common and interesting items to be trapped. Fifty-nine coins have been recovered from the store proper, and an additional 11 have been screened from the earth of the enclosure. The examples retrieved cover a time span of well over a hundred years and originate from such widely separated countries as Spain, Britain, and Canada. The oldest of the 11 Spanish coins, which date from 1743 to 1805, was minted in Madrid rather than the New World. Workers recovered a British bull-head shilling and a Canadian five-cent piece. American currency, represented by half dimes, quarters, and Liberty-head dollars, ranges from 1809 to 1877, with most minted in the 1830s.

An archaeological crew excavated the shops building during the summer of 1970. The structure, which originally housed workshops for the maintenance of the post, was converted to a hospital in the 1840s. The foundations yielded miscellaneous small objects, including iron from the smithy, ox shoes, nails, a lead flint pad, a toothbrush, and the only dragoon buttons yet discovered at the post. This site, like the sutler's store and walled enclosure, was rich in artifacts which will facilitate the restoration of Fort Snelling and remind Minnesotans of their frontier heritage.

Christina Jacobsen

PHOTOGRAPHS by Alan Ominsky

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