



"Discovering Dated Artifacts"

A Mercer Museum Scavenger Hunt



How old is it? That's a question that archaeologists often ask about a site that they are excavating or exploring. Archaeologists use different methods to determine the age of a site, or of the layers within a site. One thing that helps is to find "artifacts of known age." Certain objects actually have dates on or in them (a coin, for instance). Or, archaeologists might know that a certain type of tool or artifact was only in existence at a particular time or within a certain range of dates.

In this archaeological "above ground" scavenger hunt, see if you can find each of these "artifacts of known age" around the Mercer Museum! Which is the oldest object? Which is the most recent in time? Record the dates of the objects you find.

1. Look under the bucket and next to a ladder, up on a column, for this object made of tin (it is part of a downspout for a house).

1812

(Level 2, Central Court)

Date of Object: _____

2. Find a fireplace and you will find this object of iron, shaped sort of like a tombstone (it's a fire back, to protect the back of a fireplace and reflect heat)

1728

(Level 2, Central Court)

Date of Object: _____

3. This object is made of clay, but you'll have to look very carefully to find it and its date (it's a mold for making pottery plates)

1794

(Level 2, Room 9)

Date of Object: _____

4. "Christina" received this object of painted wood as a present on the date inscribed.

1775

(Level 3, Near Door to Stair Tower)

Date of Object: _____

5. You'll have to look very carefully to find this piece of iron, numbered "982," once used on a Conestoga wagon (it's a "hound band").

1831

(Level 4, Room 37)

Date of Object: _____

6. These look like torture devices but they're used to clean and prepare wool fibers for spinning (they're "hetchels"). One has a carved-in date that's easy to spot.

1739

(Level 4, Room 38)

Date of Object: _____

7. Look for this heavy stone used for grinding corn or grain (it's called a "quern").

1735

(Level 5, inside the white fence)

Date of Object: _____

8. Find this iron weathervane, a product of the blacksmith's trade, with name and date.

1764

(Level 5, Room 46)

Date of Object: _____

9. On this heavy iron plate, a couple dances to a fiddler's tune (it's part of a stove).

1746

(Level 6)

Date of Object: _____

When you've found all of the dated objects, here's a thinking question for you. If all of these objects ended up in the ground for future archaeologists to try to find, which ones are the most likely to survive a hundred years from now? Which would "rot," and which would not? Why do you think so?

Wooden chest, hatchel of wood and iron, tin downspout,

Mostly like to rot or decay: _____

hound band, weathervane, stove plate

Pottery mold, stone quern

Most likely to survive the longest in the ground: _____

(could also include stove plate, fire back, weathervane, hound band & nails from

hetchel but all these will rust and eventually crumble, depending on soil conditions)