

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

# GPR scans to be performed at site of Fort Loudoun

By BRIAN BREHM The Winchester Star



French and Indian War Foundation President David Grosso (from left), Vice President Steve Resan and Secretary Donna Leight are seen with local historian Jim Moyer on Monday next to a covered well that George Washington had dug in the mid-1700s to serve Fort Loudoun in Winchester. On Saturday, foundation officials will use ground-penetrating radar to see if any artifacts from the fort are buried at its former location in the 400 block of North Loudoun Street.

**WINCHESTER** — One of the most historically significant structures ever built in Winchester has been gone for nearly three centuries, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have secrets left to share.

The [French and Indian War Foundation](#) on Saturday will be using ground-penetrating radar (GPR) to scan a portion of the approximately 1-acre site that used to accommodate Fort Loudoun, a military facility constructed in 1756 under the command of a young Col. George Washington.

There have been previous excavations at the fort in the 400 block of North Loudoun Street, including one in 2002 that located the site of the wooden barracks inside the defensive structure, but David Grosso, president of the French and Indian War Foundation in Winchester, said on Monday this will be the first time GPR has been utilized.

A GPR device is pushed or pulled across open ground and sends electromagnetic energy into the soil. The waves of energy detect solid objects and underground disturbances — pits, graves, pipes, bones, coins, tools and so on. Based on the size, shape and location of artifacts, researchers can determine if something should be excavated for further study.

This weekend's scans, to be conducted by archaeologists Mark Michael Ludlow and Mike Kehoe, will cover most of the backyard of a house at 419 N. Loudoun St. that is owned by the nonprofit foundation. The backyard is believed

to be situated inside the former fort, with a portion of it possibly located at the corner of one of the defensive structure's four bastions.

"We're not sure exactly how it's situated," Steve Resan, vice president of the French and Indian War Foundation, said on Monday about what would be the fort's northwest bastion. "We're going by Washington's plans but we haven't really seen it. The ground-penetrating radar will give us an idea where the foundations were."

In addition to determining the exact location of the northwest bastion, Resan said he also hopes the GPR will pinpoint a portion of the fort's breastworks, which were piles of dirt built up around the base of the exterior walls to provide an extra layer of defense.

If the GPR scans turn up something enticing, Resan said the French and Indian War Foundation hopes to work with Ludlow and Kehoe to excavate the location in question.

In order to give the GPR operators enough room to work on Saturday, spectators will not be allowed on site during the scans. A public report on the survey's findings will be published by the foundation at a later date.

Fort Loudoun was built at the direction of the Virginia House of Burgesses to help protect Winchester — then known as Fredericktowne — during the French and Indian War, which was a conflict between France and the British colonies that occurred from 1754 to 1760 to determine who would control North American territories. It evolved into the Seven Years War in 1756 when Great Britain declared war on France, and that clash lasted until 1763.

Fort Loudoun was located on present-day North Loudoun Street, on a small hill that overlooks downtown Winchester. Some of the dirt used to raise the fort's elevation, local historian Jim Moyer said on Monday, was dug from nearby land, creating a slope in what is now the 300 and 400 blocks of North Cameron Street.

The fort had timber and earthen walls that were 16 to 17 feet high and about 8 feet thick, plus bastions in each corner to store weapons and supplies. The barracks inside the fort were designed to house up to 450 soldiers, but Grosso said there were probably never more than 125 men staying there at any one time.

Fort Loudoun's defenses were never needed. By the time construction wrapped up in 1758, most of the French and Indian War battles were being fought well north of Winchester. The structure was abandoned by 1760 and picked apart by local residents who used its timbers for the construction of their homes. Two of the homes built using wood from the fort, Moyer said, are still standing at 1610 and 1612 S. Loudoun St.

Today, French and Indian War Foundation Secretary Donna Leight said, "The fort is covered by [North] Loudoun Street."

Other than a few scattered timbers, the only original feature of Fort Loudoun that still exists is a water well on the French and Indian War Foundation's property at 419 N. Loudoun St. that is 103 feet deep and 6 feet wide. In 2013, the foundation lowered a camera into the well, which is now covered with a slick concrete slab, and discovered that about 30 feet of sediment had accumulated at the bottom.

The French and Indian War Foundation is hoping to perform further archaeological research in and around the well sometime in the near future, and it also wants to use GPR to scan the rest of the property at 419 N. Loudoun St. That will take money, though, so Leight said she's already on the lookout for a grant that will cover some or all of the costs.

She noted that a \$1,750 grant from the Boxley-Fox Endowment Fund overseen by the Community Foundation of the Northern Shenandoah Valley is covering 60% of the cost of this Saturday's GPR scan, with the balance being paid by the nonprofit foundation.

To learn more about the French and Indian War Foundation and historic Fort Loudoun, visit [fiwf.org](http://fiwf.org).