

## Historical Archeology of the Great Salt Lake

Christopher W. Merritt, Ph.D., State Historical Preservation Officer employed by the Utah Division of State History, was our speaker at the March meeting. He has his Ph.D. in Anthropology and is presently teaching at Salt Lake Community College.

Historical archeology began in America in 1492 when the first written documents were recorded. Of course, in Europe the records go back much further. In the West historical archeology began when the Spanish came West.

Everyone throws trash away, and these artifacts help tell the history. For instance, at Fort Douglas which was excavated for “trash” thrown away from 1880-1920s, a glass catsup bottle was found. This was mind-boggling for a thirteen-year-old kid who was astonished that catsup came in a glass bottle, not plastic.

Merritt loves history and because he does, he wants to touch it and see it, not just read about it. Those of us who read about history know that many Chinese were forced out of China and came to the United States to help build the Transcontinental Railroad. Many ended up in Utah as their final destination as the Golden Spike was the last spike to be driven, connecting the West to the East by rail. The Golden Spike photos don't show the people who built the railroad, but the artifacts tell their story.

The Great Salt Lake holds a fascination for not only Utahans, but for the rest of the world. This is the area of expertise which holds the greatest fascination for Merritt. The area has evidence of human existence that goes back 12,800 years ago. Archeologists have found evidence of mastodons, and because the Indians preserved their food using salt and talked to the trappers, they found artifacts that go back thousands of years.

Joe Walker created the first map of the Great Salt Lake, mapping Ute and Shoshone territory. The Stansbury Expedition of 1849 produced a very accurate map. He used geometry to ensure the map was as close to perfect as possible.

The first resort was the Black Rock Beach Resort (1880s-1950s). Heber Kimball started this large resort. One side note is that back in 1964, 400 high school students met at the resort for a fight. Police were dispatched.

Later Garfield Beach was the most elaborate recreation resort on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, with its railroad station, lunch stand, restaurant, bath houses and pier leading to the dance pavilion. It continued being popular until 1893 when Saltair Resort was built.

Saltair Resort was built in 1893 by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. It was in the Moorish style designed by the same architect who designed the Salt Lake Capital and the Salt Lake County building. It boasted the largest dance floor in the world. It burned in 1925 and was

replaced by Saltair Resort II in 1926. Now it became an arcade resort with games, roller coaster, and other rides. The Great Depression and WWII had an impact. Then a drought hit, and the lake receded; finally, in 1966, the last train made its way to the resort. In the 1970s, another fire started, probably arson.

Where the site used to stand, excavators have discovered purple glass, which happens when UV rays turn clear glass to purple. Cow bones, porcelain tile, and drinking goblets have been uncovered. It was a high class resort, so alcohol consumption was allowed by the LDS church in the fine restaurants, but contraband was brought in, and beer bars flourished, as well.

This land is sovereign land and is protected. Remember this means it is public land and is “ours” not “mine.” We need to engage people to preserve the integrity of the land. When we see something being done that is unlawful, we need to report it to the BLM. Some ongoing projects are graffiti removal from Black Rock and a bird watching area which is being built.