

# **NEWPORT TOWER PROJECT EXTENSION**

May 30 – June 4, 2008

by

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The Newport Tower, a Romanesque-style round structure located in Touro Park in Newport, Rhode Island, has been the subject of considerable study and controversy over the past two centuries.

To date, there is neither proof as to who built this unique structure, nor when. The predominant theory has been that it was built by Gov. Benedict Arnold as a windmill. This seems unlikely since its construction is not suitable for a windmill.

Several archaeological studies have been conducted, the most notable being that of William Godfrey in 1948–1949, and Arlington Mallory in 1955. Despite enormous effort, no evidence of pre-colonial origin was found.

Most recently, the Chronognostic Research Foundation (CRF) of Tempe, Arizona, conducted exhaustive archival research and extensive geophysical studies, leading to archaeological excavations in 2006 and 2007. A report from those studies is pending.

A prevailing theory over the years concerned a possible exterior structure surrounding the tower, either an ambulatory (as at several European round churches) or staging used during construction. Efforts to look for evidence of a surrounding structure have been hampered by the existence of walkways around the tower. In 1949, Godfrey had received tentative approval to dig under the walkways, but he was denied permission by an irascible park superintendent at the time the cement walkways were replaced with asphalt.

In the spring of 2008, CRF learned that the asphalt walkways were being removed, to be replaced by concrete. A brief opportunity to conduct exploratory digs under the walkways presented itself.

On Friday May 30, several people who had volunteered in the previous CRF digs gathered at the Newport Tower. An initial attempt to open exploratory Unit “A” was hampered by and abandoned due to large pieces of cement and rock, making digging with small tools nearly impossible. A backhoe was then used to open three units opposite the East, Northeast, and North pillars, under the walkway.

Uniform stratigraphy was found in all three units, immediately under the

asphalt. First was a layer of very sandy gravel, followed by a layer of large chunks of cement (probably from the original walkways) and granite, then a layer of trash fill (coal slag, nails, etc.). Beneath this, there was usually a layer of gray clay, suggesting that the topsoil layers had been removed when the walkways were replaced.

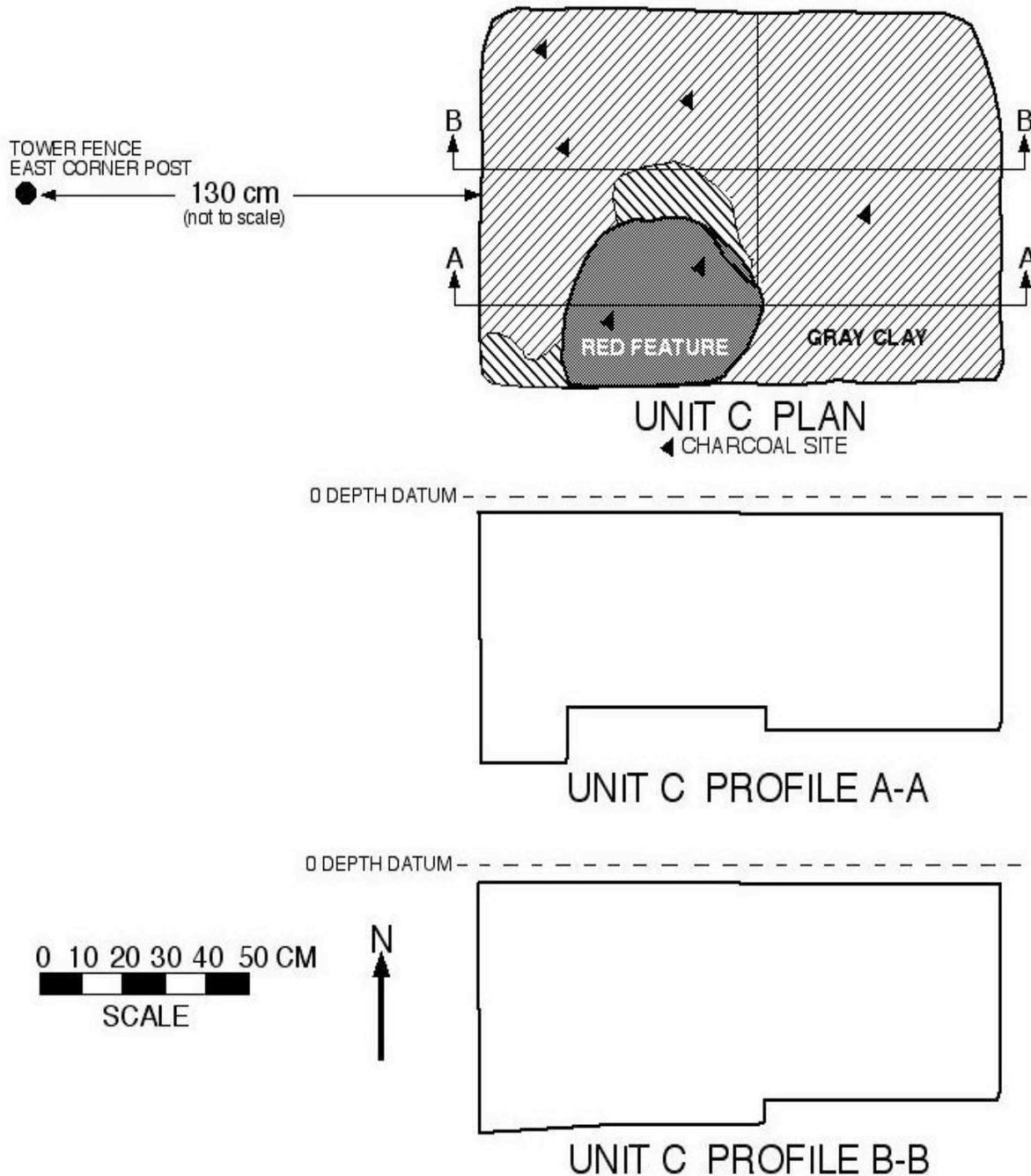


Figure 1. Unit "C"

Unit “C” (Figure 1) was approximately .75m x 1.25m and oriented east-west directly opposite the east pillar, beginning 1.5m from the east corner post of the iron fence surrounding the tower. At 45cm below ground level, a round, red discolored feature was found within the gray clay layer. The feature measured 38cm x 35cm, although it appeared to continue beyond the south edge of the unit. The center of the feature was 3.8m from the base of the east pillar. Unit C was extended down an extra 10cm adjacent to the feature to see if it continued deeper, which it did. Some additional red was noted either flaring or extending from the feature. A sample of the red feature was collected. Within the gray clay layer as well as within the red feature, several bits of charcoal were found and collected.

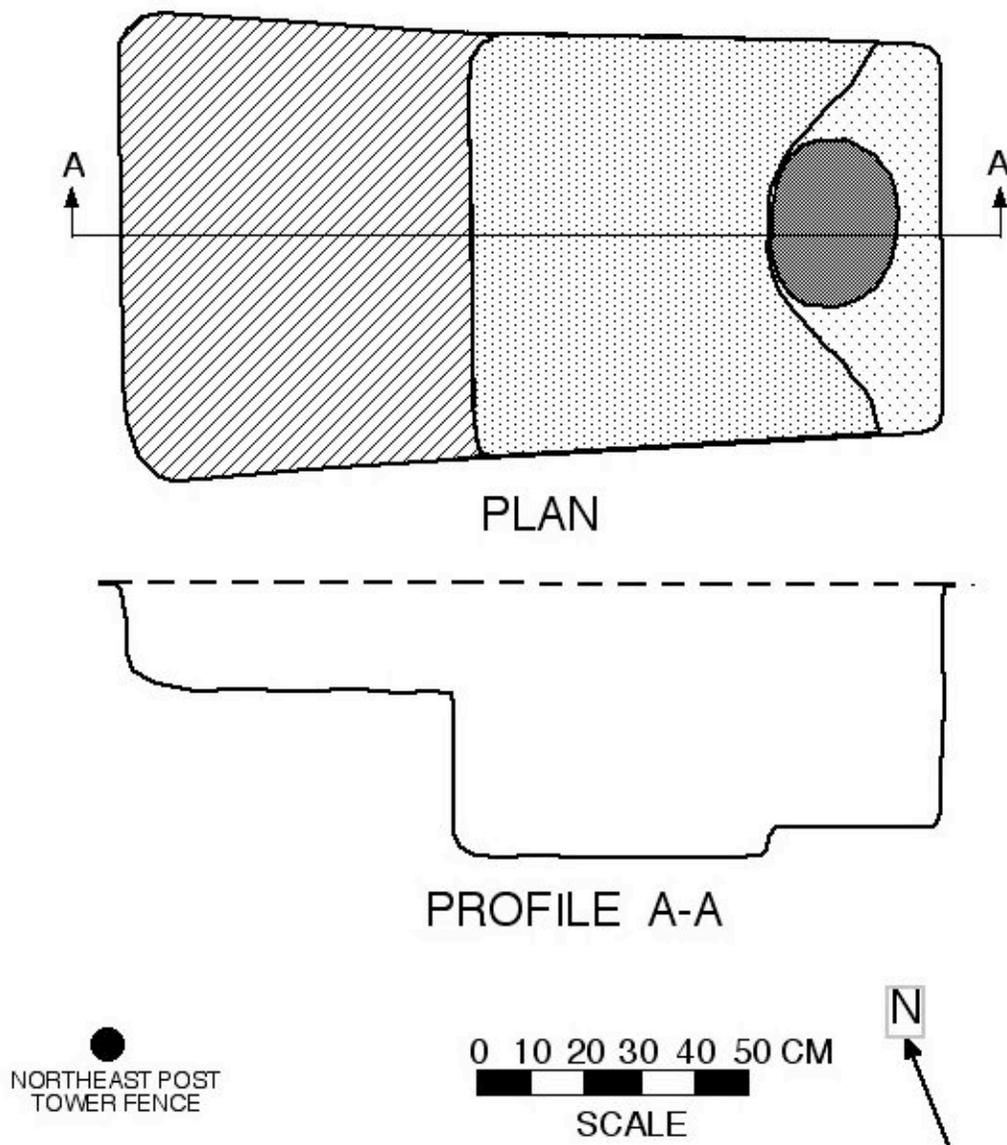


Figure 2. Unit “B”

Unit “B” (Figure 2) was approximately .75m x 1.5m and oriented east-northeast to west-southwest running diagonally across the northeast axis from the northeast pillar. The trash fill layer continued a little deeper but, at approximately the same depth, a similar red discolored feature was found. This feature was 4.0m from the base of the northeast pillar, not quite as apparent as the Unit C feature, and a little smaller, approximately 25cm in diameter.

Unit B was excavated 10cm deeper, but not adjacent to the feature. It was not determined if the feature continued deeper, and unfortunately a sample of this feature was not collected.

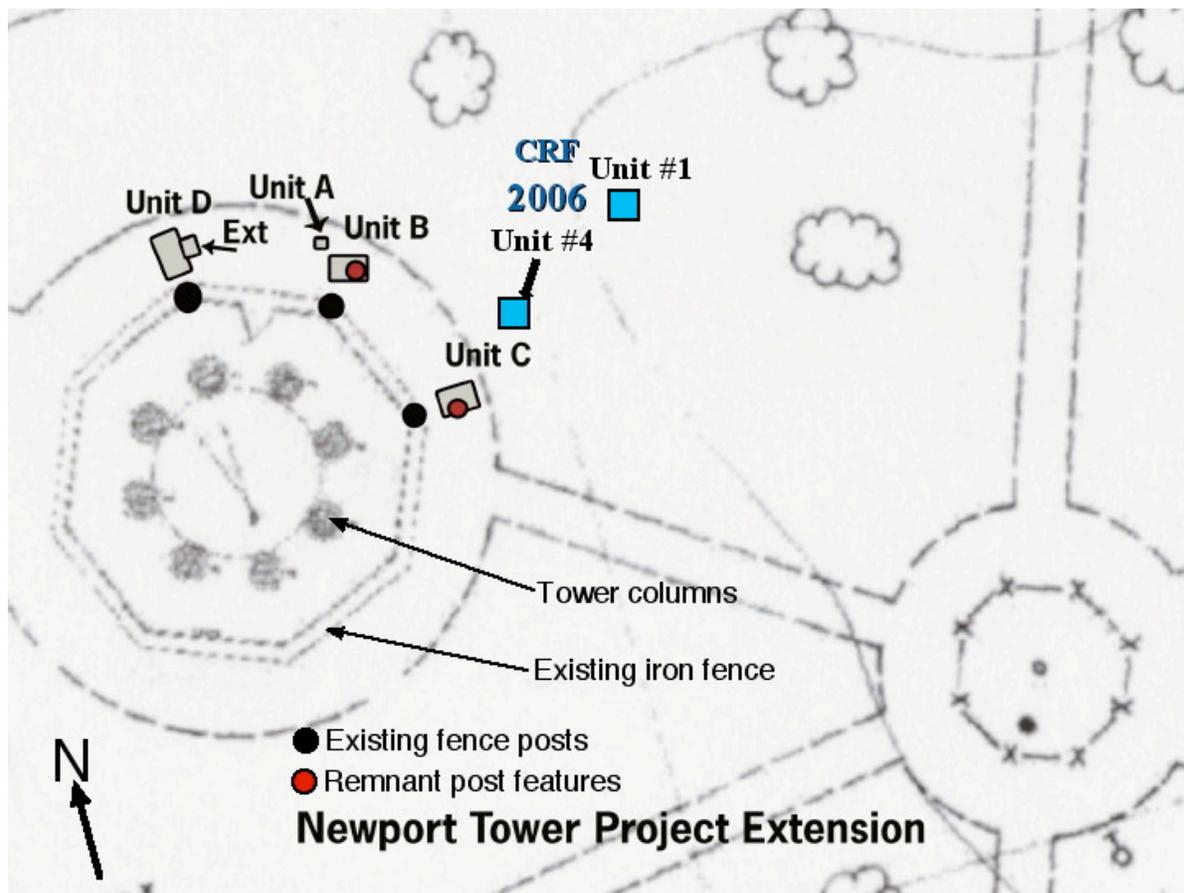


Figure 3. Newport Tower excavation units context

Unit “D” was approximately 1.25m x 1.75m and oriented north-south, opposite the north pillar. The trash fill layer was deeper in this unit (at approximately 50cm), and under that layer was a black clay soil containing nothing of interest. The distance between the C and B features was 5.3m. This distance measured from the B feature toward D, ended in its east wall. An “extension” was added to the east side of D, in which similar gray clay layer was found at the 45cm depth. Some fragments of pottery were found in “D-ext” as were some pieces of “old-looking” mortar and a piece of shell with mortar on it.

The dig was suspended due to darkness and then by bad weather the following day. The decision was made to end dig without further investigation, and to begin refilling the units.

In mid-June, CRF President Jan Barstad was in Newport to attend the introduction of the U-Haul supergraphic, depicting the Newport Tower. At that time, we met to discuss the results of the exploratory dig and how to have the samples tested. Arrangements were made with Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution to have samples processed and dated by its National Ocean Sciences Accelerator Mass Spectrometry (NOSAMS) facility. Samples were prepared and submitted in accordance with their guidelines. Results of those tests are pending.

## CONCLUSIONS

The exploratory dig under the walkways produced indications of a previously unknown structure near or around the Tower. Further studies will be required to determine the size and nature of this structure, and how it relates to the tower.

This study may produce the evidence needed to determine when Newport Tower was built, by whom, and for what purpose. The mystery of Newport Tower might then finally be solved.

Respectfully submitted,

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Newport Tower Project Extension

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