

Central Park before the City: Recent Work on the Historical Archaeology of New York City

Presenter: Suanna Selby Crowley, PhD, RPA

Talk Abstract: During the summer and fall 2004, a team of archaeologists, historians and soil scientists from New York City conducted a subsurface testing program to identify remains of the 19th century Central Park settlement of Seneca Village. Located between 81st and 89th Streets on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, the site of Seneca Village was an established, integrated community of freed African slaves and European immigrants. Founded in the 1820s, this community was a stable population of working and farming families who were swept out of their homes by the creation of Central Park in the late 1850s. Most remnants of the village have since been forgotten or lost. Recent renewed interest in the memory of Seneca by local historians inspired archaeologists to test for any remaining physical evidence of the settlement. As team geoarchaeologist, I conducted minimally invasive sampling of the subsurface for indicators of site preservation. This talk will highlight the history and social significance of Seneca Village and summarize results of the testing program.

Speaker Biography: Suanna Selby Crowley is an independent archaeological and geoarchaeological consultant in New England. She has conducted fieldwork in Pakistan, Syria, Israel, France, and across the United States. Dr. Crowley pursues archaeological and geoscientific research in the prehistoric and historic contexts of both the Old and New World. Her most recent domestic work has been on site formation processes along the Upper Susquehanna River in New York and the Upper Ohio River in Pennsylvania. She has taught at New York University, through a consortium program at Columbia, Barnard, and City Universities in New York, and at Bridgewater State College in Massachusetts.

