

# Students digging history

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By **TAMMY WHITE**  
JM Staff Writer

Local students could begin digging up Prince William County history next spring.

As part of New Dominion Alternative Education Center's curriculum, middle school students could be participating in an archeological dig at the Conner House, an historic estate on Conner Drive.

Conner Historical Society Executive Director Bill Malcom said the society will coordinate the excavation with the school and a local archeologist.

"I'm not looking for anything significant, but they could very well run into some interesting artifacts," Malcom said.

The rustic brick structure overlooking Osbourn Park High School on its southwest side was once a vast farm, stretching approximately 185 acres.

In the midst of the Civil War, the property served as a Confederate headquarters under Gen. Joseph Johnston for almost six months in 1861. The estate was later converted into a military hospital during the

- **Bernadette Toner-Whitney**

Second Battle of Manassas.

To date, Malcom said bullets, horseshoes and hatchets have been recovered on the property.

Toni Wilcox, a science instructor at the school, said the project is two-fold, teaching students about archeology while documenting more of the house's history.

"It's an exposure to a job or career field which most people aren't exposed to," Wilcox said, adding that her students often "aren't aware of the wide array of jobs out there."

She said the project would introduce students to survey equipment, archeological tools and instrumentation.

Weather permitting, Wilcox projected the program would run for three hours per day over a two- to three-week period. She estimated 15 students will be selected to participate in the dig, based on behavioral credits, student interest, and previously expressed talent.

Bernadette Toner-Whitney, the independent archeologist collaborating on the project, said construction of Osbourn Park, Conner Elementary and New Dominion have

disturbed the original site. She said the property may have undergone previous excavation.

"What we're looking to do is take some of the students over there (to) conduct some excavation of the property," Whitney said. "Now, we're looking to restore it as much as we can."

She said she is optimistic about the dig. She compared Conner House to structures in Colonial Williamsburg where pottery shards and eating utensils have been recovered.

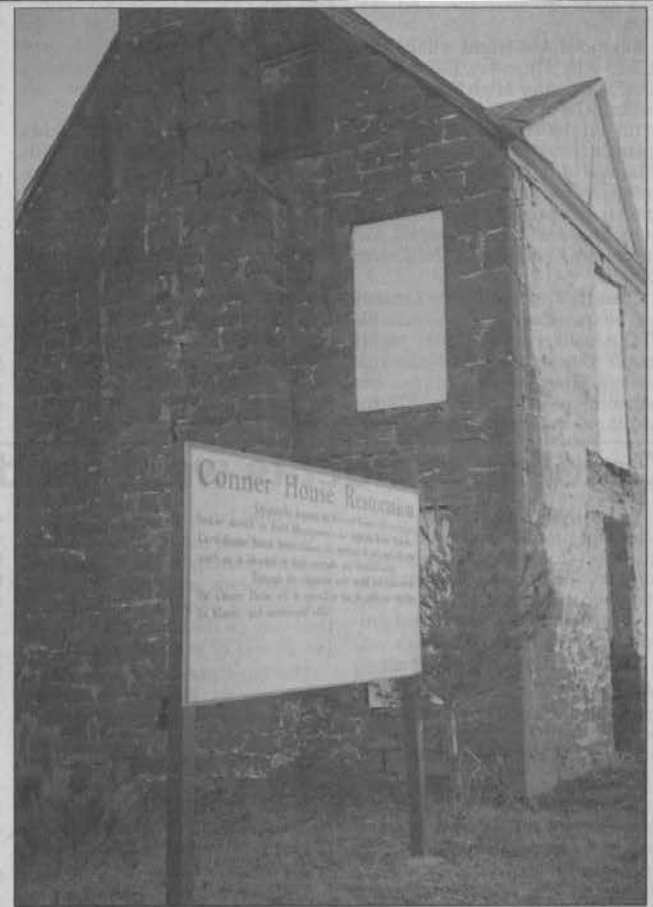
"We might find some artifacts from the house," she said. "I'm hoping that we'll find some sort of remains of previous structures."

Whitney said the soil may reveal "stains," areas where soil characteristics indicate previous structure sites.

According to an account of the property, the house was constructed during the early 1800s, probably using slave labor. Over its almost 200-year history, additions were added to the original structure which has passed through at least five family ownerships.

The house is currently on the Virginia Landmarks Register, a list of historic homes and properties worthy of preservation.

Whitney said she has reason to believe the house may date back prior to the 19th century, citing architectural aspects typical of previous eras.



The Conner House

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