Unearthed bones helped determine what residents ate. "After the Civil War, we knew they not only ate typical domestic meats such as pigs and cows, but they were also hunting coons and 'possum, catching turtles, gar fish and oysters," he said.

Simmons recovered wild, boar teeth and shotgun shells, along with scales from a gar. He said the slaves were either purchasing fish and meat from a local butcher or hunting and fishing themselves.

"There's still so much work that needs to be done. We've only scratched the surface," he said. His crew will soon excavate other areas to make comparisons with the first cabin.

They also hope to find more artifacts from years prior to the Civil War and emancipation.

Simmons was awarded research support funds from the Louisiana Endowment for Humanities in July. With financial assistance, he was able to involve more members of the community and students from surrounding schools.

"We want descendants to come forward and tell stories about their families so we will have information to accompany the artifacts that are found," she said.

"We want to know about the ways they cooked and how they raised their children."

Now director of the Greater New Orleans Archaeological Program at the University of New Orleans, Simmons said the project is expanding as more artifacts are found and more participants get their hands dirty.

"This is a very intense, hands-on way of learning about archaeology, and the Quarters is an area with great research potential," Simmons said.

October and November were the busiest digging months.

"The field work helped everyone get to understand what archaeology is all about, how it's done and how it can help us understand the past," Simmons said.

"Our biggest goal was not only to learn about the people who lived in the Quarters, but also to clear up any misconceptions about archaeology."

Simmons and his volunteers are now processing, categorizing and cleaning the hundreds of artifacts.

The most significant remnants will be showcased at the plantation after they are processed and cleaned at a UNO laboratory.