Archaeologists got a unique glimpse into what life was like in Louisiana in centuries past through the recent excavation of the old sugar mill at the 575-acre Chatsworth Plantation in south Baton Rouge.

Searching through and around the base of the caved-in brick building that once housed a giant steam-powered sugar mill near La. 30 and Gardere Lane, the team found several unique items, such as a Gay-Ola Cola bottle from the early 1900s, a human molar and more than 200 French gun flints believed to have been used by slaves and workers to build fires.

Now they are working to catalog the items they unearthed for an exhibit at the LSU Rural Life Museum researchers hope will paint a broad picture of the time period for interested residents.

Dennis Jones, the LSU Rural Life Museum’s principal archaeological investigator for the excavation, detailed the tunnels where workers would tighten the screws holding the mill’s grinder in place so the vibrations did not cause the grinder to shake free, Jones said.

“These whole plantations, you just don’t finish these things together. There’s an engineer’s design to this and this is just one of the features in that engineer’s design,” Jones said.

They also found areas where double-pen slave and worker cabins sat as well as privies and trash sites.

In his hourlong presentation, Jones explained how sugar was at one time one of the more sought after commodities in the world and industrial innovations made it easier, though still risky, to harvest the cash crop in southern Louisiana.

Transporting the sugar cane via steamboat was also dangerous because of the dangers in riverboat travel.

Steam grinders had replaced the animal-powered grinders that had limited the amount of sugar cane farmers could harvest at one time, Jones said. Soon, more than 1,000 large mills popped up all over Louisiana, as plantation owners realized the windfall of a successful sugar cane crop.

The history of the Chatsworth Plantation goes back to Fergus Duplantier, son of Magnolia Mound owner Armand Duplantier, who bought about 2,000 acres of land near the Mississippi River around 1830 to begin planting and harvesting sugar cane, Jones said. The first crop was harvested in 1844, which was the same year Fergus Duplantier died.

One of his adopted sons took over running the sugar cane operation and built the plantation in 1859, Jones said. The plantation went through several owners, including Francois Gardere, until the federal government ordered the by then dilapidated homes torn down in 1930 to build new levees following the flood of 1927.

Years passed and the vegetation took over, growing back where sprawling sugar cane fields once sat and erasing most of the existence of the Chatsworth Plantation.

“By 1992, you would have never known anything was ever there,” Jones said.

Dennis Jones, principal archaeological investigator directing the excavation of the historic Chatsworth Plantation and sugar mill on River Road in Baton Rouge, on Friday holds a cast iron blade that was excavated from the mill.

A bottled embossed with the early 20th-century soda company Gay-Ola is one artifact excavated from the historic Chatsworth Plantation and sugar mill in Baton Rouge.