Mark Reese, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, gave an update on the New Acadie Project Saturday.

**THE SEARCH FOR THE FIRST CAJUNS**

yields clues

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In a word, anomalies. In another word, artifacts.

And that's what's new with the New Acadie Project after two summers and one winter along the Teche Ridge and on the enigmatic trail of the founders of Acadiana, the forefathers of Cajuns.

Mark Reese, associate professor of anthropology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, gave an update on the New Acadie Project, Saturday, in St. Martinville's Acadian Memorial and the Cultural Heritage Center amid La Fête Nationale des Acadiens celebration.

The archaeological research mission seeks to locate, identify and investigate the 18th-century homesteads and unmarked grave sites of Acadian exiles in Iberia and St. Martin parishes.

Rees said the search took place in four sites predominately along the Teche Ridge near the bayou of the same name.

Rees said remote sensing indicated something of interest may lie below the surface on the known property of Amand Broussard (the house is now in Vermilionville), a son of Joseph "Beausoleil" Broussard and Agnes Thibodeaux, south of Loreauville.

Rees said shovel tests have produced sherds, including a couple "manufactured in the 1700s, which was found fairly near the surface — which is interesting — I mean, just below the grass," said Rees. "And then also some very deep deposits, more than three feet in depth, to give you an idea. So there's

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some very deep deposits at the site.”

Remote sensing images exhibited some anomalies that could be unmarked graves amid an area already known as the Berard Cemetery.

“One thing I would note is that this, in particular, appears to be the same alignment of the concrete vaults,” Rees said, using a laser pointer during the PowerPoint presentation. “Now if you stood on that ground, it’s just leaves. There’s nothing there. But the term, anomaly. We really don’t know what this is, but it’s a good bet that this kind of disturbance is a burial; an unmarked burial.”

Rees said following an idea called the “Sacred Ground Hypothesis” or the “Continuity in the use of Consecrated Ground” could lead to the graves of the some 30 to 40 who died in some kind of epidemic. including Beausoleil Broussard.

“The hypothesis is fairly simple, and it just states that once a ground is consecrated as a cemetery, it will tend to be used that way, or remembered as a cemetery and be reused as a cemetery,” said Rees. “Particularly among a group of people who are related to one another, or married to one another.”

Rees said that if that is true, it makes places like the Berard Cemetery “important places to investigate,” he said. “These places may contain earlier burials. The Sacred Ground hypothesis then can state that if we found burial grounds dating from the 1800s, the hypothesis would simply suggest that there may well be earlier unmarked burials, or earlier marked burials in these same cemeteries.”

Come this winter, the crew may return to the sites in question where the anomalies “need to be investigated,” Rees said, adding they can use the same remote sensor or a different instrument or technique for greater resolution.

“Another thing we can obviously do is dig,” he said. “That would be an exploratory excavation, asking the question: What is this anomaly?”

And when the question is answered, the mystery of the whereabouts of the first Cajuns could well be solved.