



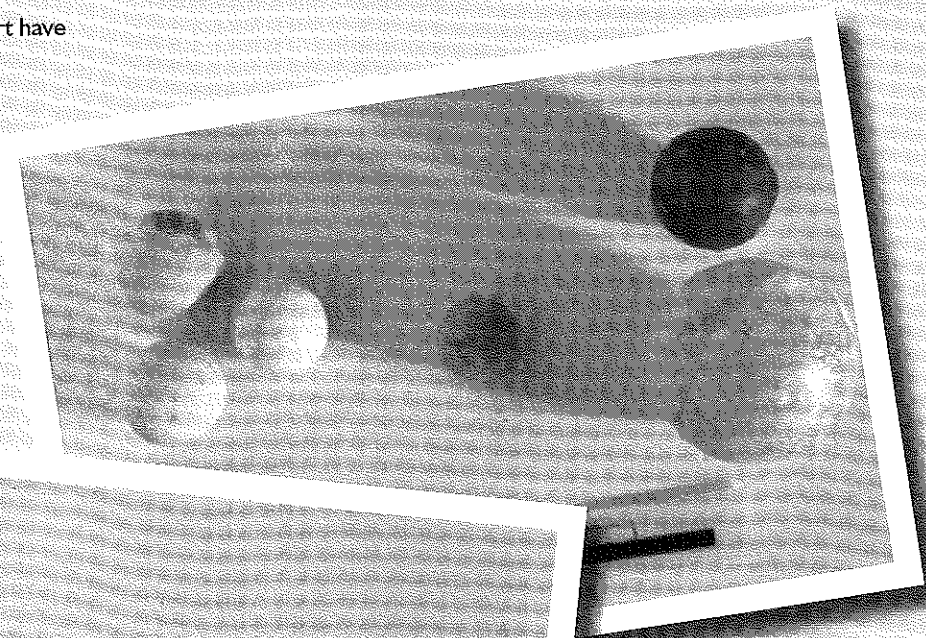
# Rediscovering the Youngsters of Fort Hays

The soldiers rode out earlier in the day, but the fort was not vacant. Several boys were gathered under the shade of a building porch, concentrating on their game of marbles. The time was the 1870s and the place was Fort Hays.

The fort was established in 1865, immediately after the Civil War, and was not abandoned until 1889. Fort Hays was one of many forts constructed to protect the various trails leading west.

Archeological investigations at the fort have unearthed artifacts that help illustrate how life was lived in those times. My task as a volunteer at the Kansas State Historical Society's archeology laboratory is sorting through boxes and finding objects that tell a story. Of particular impact on me are a number of items used by children.

Consider the marbles with which the boys played on that summer afternoon. At least three styles are represented in the Fort Hays collection. Earthenware or pipe clay marbles are plain white and sometimes are not perfectly round. Stoneware marbles, especially Benningtons, were popular. They are covered with an irregular brown glaze, often with "eyes"



(Above) Marbles (left to right): earthenware or pipe clay, Bennington stoneware, glass with spiral.



(Left) Little hostess toy pot metal teacups.

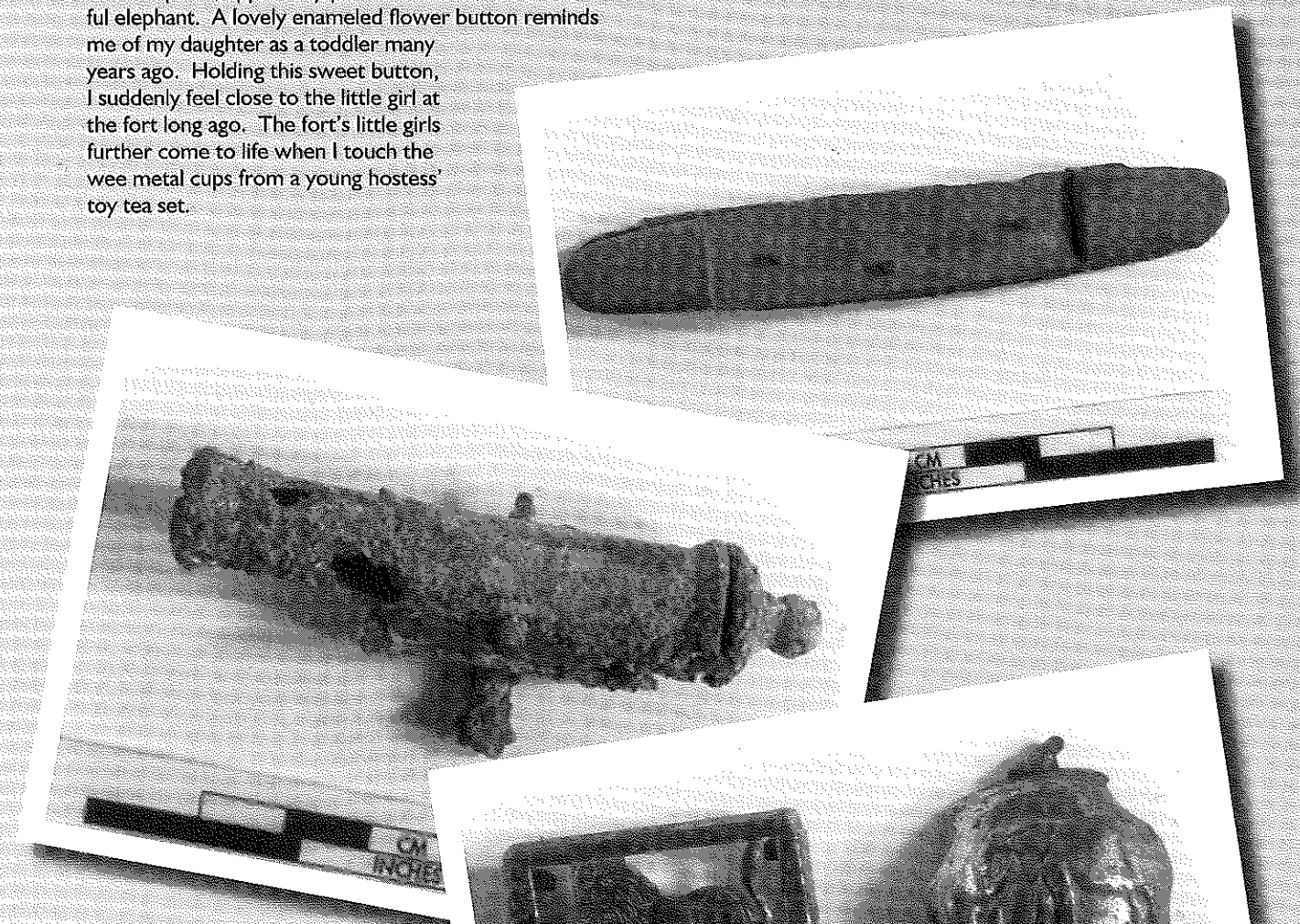
where they touched each other in the kiln. A third type is glass with spirals or helices in them. It is so easy to visualize a youngster 130 years ago, kneeling in the dust and hoping to make his next shot.

There's also a great little cast metal cannon, which must have sent a thrill through the young boy who received it for Christmas. And what boy would be without a pocketknife!

There are decorations from children's clothing, too. One strap fastener has a beautiful lion etched on it, while another piece, apparently part of a buckle, shows a wonderful elephant. A lovely enameled flower button reminds me of my daughter as a toddler many years ago. Holding this sweet button, I suddenly feel close to the little girl at the fort long ago. The fort's little girls further come to life when I touch the wee metal cups from a young hostess' toy tea set.

Also in the boxes are the remains of a harmonica and a mouth harp. Of course, musical instruments were played by adults as well as children because music was such an important diversion for the monotonous hours of fort life.

So as I sort through and touch these appealing objects, I clearly relate to each of them. Analysis leading to further knowledge of the times is important, but for me the personal reaction is the very heart and pulse of archeology.



(Top) Pocketknife.

(Middle) Cast metal toy cannon.

(Bottom) Lion and elephant decorations for children's clothing.

This article was prepared by Marshall Clark, a volunteer in the KSHS archeology lab.