

[Back](#)

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Digging for details

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In less than seven weeks, the Rochester Elevator will move to its new home alongside the Clinton River. When that happens, local historians can rest assured the elevator won't disturb or cover up anything important.

Students in Oakland University's Archeology Club and their adviser, Richard Stamps, made two small digs April 25 at the site just east of the south bridge. Using small hand tools, the students cut neat, tidy squares into the earth on the vacant, city-owned land. Two boxes of items retrieved are now awaiting identification.

"What these guys have been finding corresponds with what I saw in the soil borings," Stamps said. He said the digs revealed a top layer of soil and a deeper layer of fill.

"The bad news is we haven't found anything exciting or exotic. The good news is we can move the elevator here and won't be disturbing anything exotic," Stamps said. "If we thought King Tut's tomb was here, we would make the hole bigger, bring in equipment and dig deeper."

Greg Doyle, president of the Rochester-Avon Historical Society, which will move the donated elevator from its present site on Water Street to make way for redevelopment, said things are falling into place. The History Channel has confirmed it will film the move, and the Michigan Department of Transportation has granted permission to use space under the south bridge for parking and access to the site. The next step is to confirm a basement is feasible.

"That's a lot of extra space we can use.," Doyle said. The Society is looking for someone to donate their services to dig the basement.

Work will really begin to pick up this month.

The present elevator business is expected to close, and a portion of the building that isn't being moved will be dismantled. Clean up and removal of any artifacts are expected to be conducted as well. It will take two weeks to prepare the building for the move.

"It's going to be quite an event," Doyle said. "This is the largest project we've undertaken so far. ... We're getting down to the wire."
