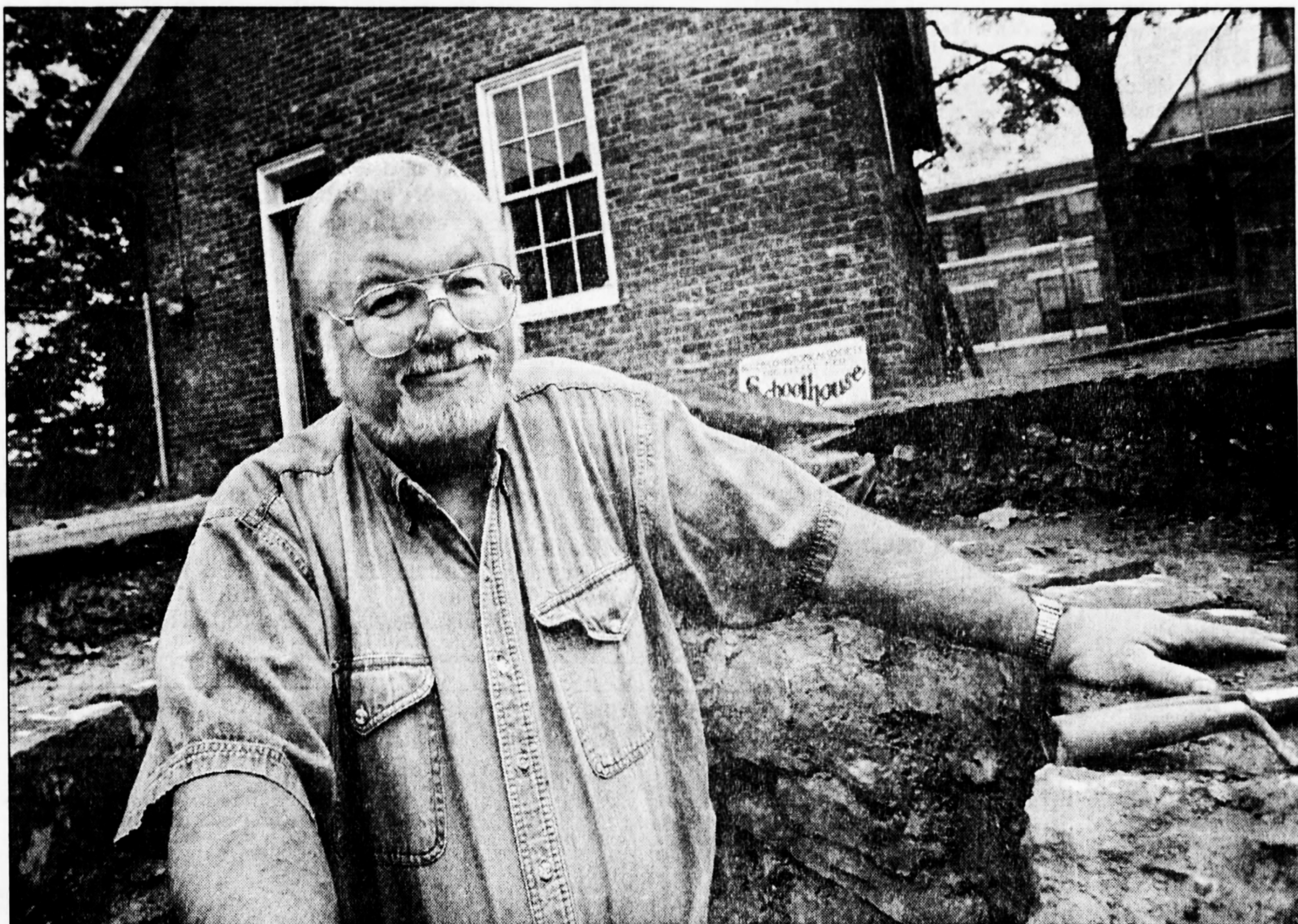


Archaeologist Ed Dlutowski is digging up two historic sites in Butler: the Lowery-Shaw House and the Little Red Schoolhouse. Both were built in the 1830s.



Lake Fong/Post-Gazette photos

Ed Dlutowski, an archaeologist poses at the well of the Little Red Schoolhouse in Butler. The schoolhouse, in the background, was built in 1838. Below, some antique books that were found at the Little Red Schoolhouse.

Digs uncover history, often in back yards

By Adrian McCoy
Post-Gazette Staff Writer

Old outhouses and schoolhouses may not seem like the most exciting places for archaeological digs, but to Ed Dlutowski, they're gold mines.

Dlutowski, staff archaeologist at the Butler County Historical Society, will be among several speakers at a seminar on Western Pennsylvania history and archaeology Saturday in Greensburg. The seminar is sponsored by the Westmoreland County Historical Society and the Society for Pennsylvania Archaeology's Allegheny and Westmoreland county chapters.

His talk, "Outhouse, Wash House, School House: Archaeology on a Shoestring," will include a slide presentation and brief history of the area.

Dlutowski knows a lot about archaeology on a shoestring. A self-taught archaeologist whose interest began while he was still in high school, he has been digging up local history for three decades. A high school teacher who brought in a collection of arrowheads one day piqued what would become a lifelong interest.

"I always had an interest in history," he said. "Because of my blue-collar background, I didn't consider it as a vocation."

Though he works days in engineering and electrical design, "My heart is in the ground," he said.

Dlutowski is currently leading digs at two historic sites in Butler now owned by the Butler County Historical Society: the Lowery-Shaw House and the Little Red Schoolhouse, the first public school in the town of Butler. Both were built in the 1830s.

At the Lowery-Shaw house, Dlutowski is excavating an outhouse and a wash house. The outhouse is unusual because it's brick with a stone foundation rather than the wooden structures typically found in this area. It is one indication that the main house's occupants were wealthier than most of their neighbors.

The building was a summer house for Walter Lowery, a U.S. senator from Butler. Its later owner, Isabella Shaw, donated the house to the historical society so it could be used as a house museum.

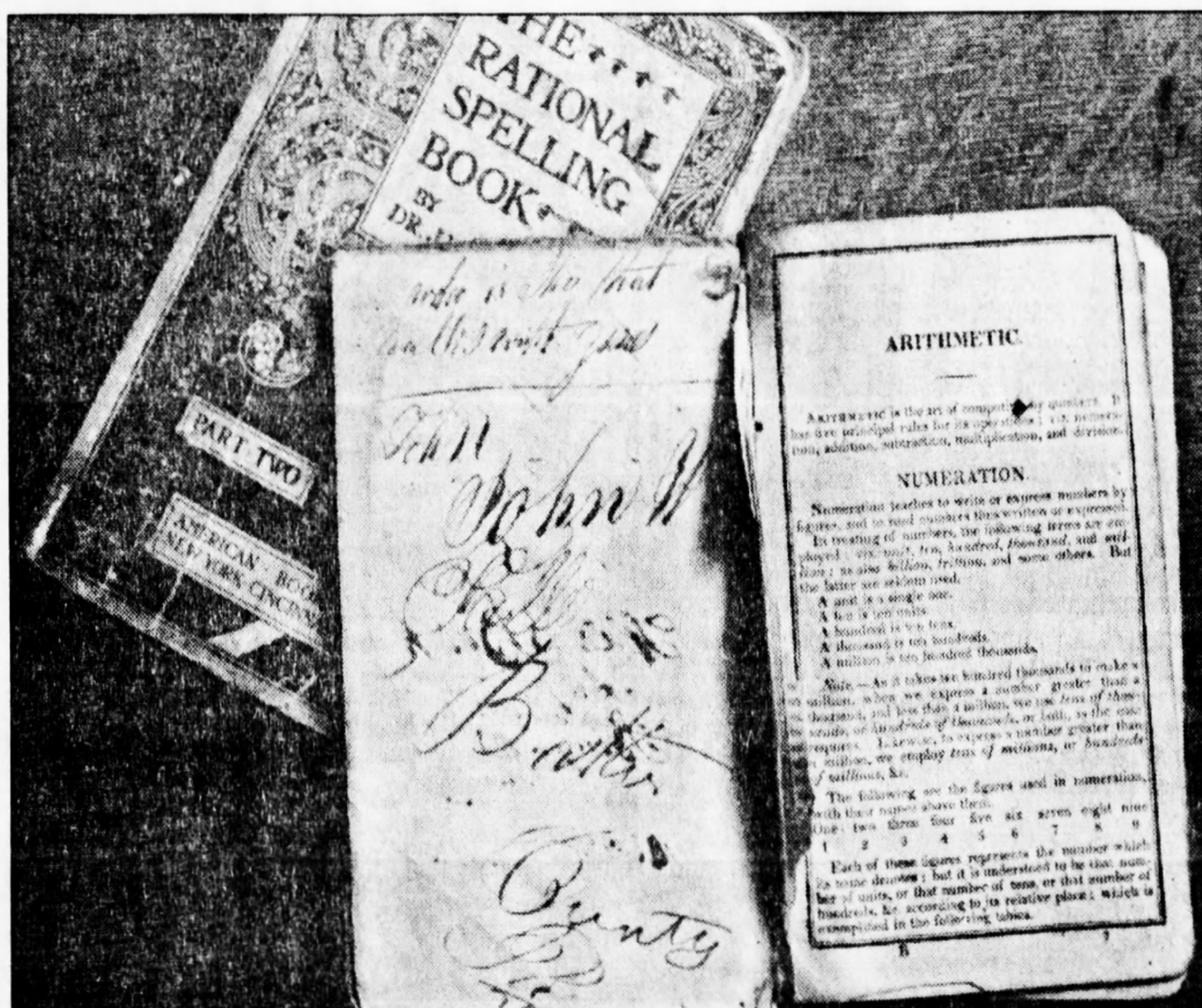
So what do you find under a 160-year-old outhouse?

"They didn't have garbage pickups. That's where you put stuff you didn't want to put in the regular trash," Dlutowski said.

Diggers have unearthed liquor and beer bottles and lots of buttons, which would pop off while people were using the facility. The items often are arranged in neat lines.

"You know, they fell through cracks in the floor," Dlutowski notes.

The second site is a well at the schoolhouse. That dig has yielded a good supply



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Ed Dlutowski

of the stuff children tended to throw away: pencil leads, ink bottles, slates, marbles.

"Little boys made the water blue by throwing ink in the well," Dlutowski said.

One of the most interesting artifacts found at the school was a stickpin bearing the name of a woman who taught there.

"You always hope to tie artifacts to the specific people who used them," he said.

The dig at the well started this summer and is still sorting through the top layers. Workers plan to dig to the bottom.

Because the city stopped using the building as a school in 1874, it is a little easier to determine the age of items found. Some of the items excavated will eventually be displayed at the house.

While most people think of archaeology in terms of digging up ancient artifacts from long-gone cultures, that's the realm of prehistoric archaeology. Historic archaeology hits closer to home — right in our back yard, in this case — and not that far away in time.

Dlutowski says there's plenty to learn in

our back yards, and he would like to see other groups start similar projects.

"As far as I'm concerned, there's not enough [research in the Western Pennsylvania region]," he said. "Whenever you put up a new development, what are you destroying that is lying underground?"

The Butler projects receive no funding. The digs go on because of the energies of an interested and committed group of volunteers. The Butler County Historical Society also runs an educational program for junior high school students who help out at the digs.

"That's making it all possible," Dlutowski said. "There's great interest in this sort of thing."

Other speakers and topics at the seminar include "Native North American Conservation of Selected Artifacts" by Joan Gardner of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History; "The First Americans: The Post Monte Verde Consensus" by James Adivasio of Mercyhurst College in Erie; "Biconcave Discoidals on Late Monongahela Sites" by Richard George of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History; "Monongahela Occupation at the Ashmore Farm Site, Washington, Pa." by Beverly Chiarulli of Indiana University of Pennsylvania; and "Excavation of the Fassine Battery at Fort Ligonier" by archaeological consultant Thomas Baker.

The seminar will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Greensburg Garden and Civic Center, 951 Old Salem Road, Greensburg. Fee is \$25, which includes lunch. For reservations, call 724-836-1800.