

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY'S CAMPUS ARCHAEOLOGY'S "AHA" MOMENTS

July 11, 2014 Kate_Frederick Community Archaeology, Day of Archaeology 2014, Education, Excavation, Public Archaeology Campus Archaeology Program, Michigan, Michigan State University, social media strategy

For this year's Day of Archaeology Michigan State University Campus Archaeology decided tell the story of our "Aha" moments, those moments when the archaeology comes together perfectly with the other evidence and answers all (well most) of the questions. So we asked our CAP crew to describe one of their CAP "Aha" moments.

KATE FREDERICK- MOORE ARTIFACT

The MSU Campus Archaeology Program helps to mitigate and protect archaeological resources on MSU's campus, while working with multiple departments to instill a sense of stewardship of the cultural heritage of MSU. The goal of our work on campus, both in research and in archaeological investigations, attempts to make visible a past that has been stored away, forgotten, or pushed aside by progress. We use archival material and historical records to help piece together a history of campus that is accessible to the public. This historical context is used to provide us with a framework for our survey, excavation, and research. Our discovery of the "Moore artifact" is one example of how all these pieces came together.

The first building on MSU's campus was College Hall, which was built in 1857 by the original MSU students. It was poorly constructed and though repairs were made several times, it actually collapsed during marching band practice in 1918. Generally, that would be the end of the story for a building...but CAP uncovered more life history of College Hall.

In 2009 CAP excavated an area next to the Red Cedar River, which winds through campus. During these excavations we uncovered a large amount of building debris. While the debris was odd, the area was a very low section near the river that historically often flooded, so it made sense that this area would be shored up in order to prevent erosion.



However, it was the what, not the why that was interesting. A piece of wall plaster with the name "Moore" signed on it, was discovered in the building debris.

We were able to match this artifact to a picture found in MSU Archives of College Hall; students who built College Hall signed their names on the basement wall.

Artifact found during excavations on the Red Cedar

This led to our "Aha" moment; after College Hall collapsed the debris was hauled a few hundred yards away to a low spot on the river, this

R. act was never recorded in MSU's history. CAP was able to track the life history of College Hall to its final resting place on the Red Cedar.

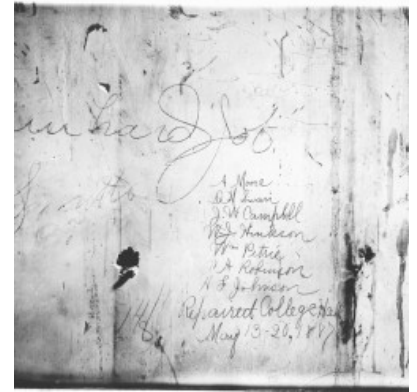
JOSH SCHNELL- VETERINARY LABORATORY

MSU Campus Archaeology has to work closely with the Infrastructure and Planning Facilities Department and mitigate with construction companies on areas with a high potential for cultural heritage. One of CAP's "Aha" moments came at the start of our summer field season this year. It started with a phone call from one of the construction foreman's on campus; he said that they had found a pile of bricks while digging and that we should come check it out. Upon arrival, and after some cleanup, it was clear that we were looking at the foundation of a building. Because of our proximity to the main steam substation, our original hypothesis was that the foundation was an early rendition of MSU's steam power infrastructure. However, we kept finding artifacts that we couldn't quite put a finger to, such as small animal bones, a metal tag, and a group of three keys. After the first day we cleared and mapped a section, and took GPS coordinates of the corner of the structure.

One huge advantage to our work on campus is that we have easy access to MSU historical documents; therefore, in an effort to figure out what the foundation was associated with, we visited the MSU Archives. Initially, our research left us with no definitive answers, all we could find was the presence of some barns and several more permanent structures, but not much beyond that. The pieces started coming together when, while researching, I remembered that I had done a map overlay and georeferenced an 1899 map of campus with GIS data pertaining to modern campus for a previous CAP project. There was one building that



matched the location of the structure we found, and whose southwest corner coordinates matched the GPS coordinates we'd taken the day before, leading us to the conclusion that we had found the MSU's first veterinary laboratory. This "Aha" moment was further clarified when we connected the interesting artifacts (i.e. animal bones and metal ID tags) to the original functions of the vet lab. Built in 1885, the Vet Lab was a huge step towards making MSU the leading veterinary research institute it is today.



Note on College Hall wall left by MSU students in 1887. Courtesy MSU Archives



CAP crew excavating the west wall of the Old Vet Lab

IAN HARRISON- MUNN FIELD

CAP is often required to shovel test around campus, in areas where construction will potentially damage the cultural heritage of historic campus. Recently, we were shovel testing an area known as Munn Field, which has a long history of campus activities, like tailgating.



Ian and Josh excavating metal pit at Munn Field

One of the shovel test pits turned up a large amount of metal wiring. Upon expanding the unit we found bundles of metal wire, 5 horseshoes, a graphing compass, metal ingots, coal, ash, and a Benzedrine inhaler.

While the results of the excavation appeared to indicate a waste/trash pit of some sort, we lacked the background information and context necessary to get a more complete understanding. Upon going to the MSU archives however, everything started coming



Metal wire filled pit at Munn Field

together. By analyzing the make and model of the Benzedrine inhaler, we were then able to search the University's records for previous uses of the Munn Field area that fell within our timespan. As we found out, there was an army ROTC building, a horse track, as well as a series of Quonset houses (built following the end of WWII) in that area of the field. Further, due to the distinct evidence of burning (slag, ash, and coal) found in the pit, it seemed to be associated with a forge, which rules out its creation due to the horse track and Quonset houses. As such, we determined that the strange pit was likely associated with a forge in or near the army ROTC in the years surrounding the Second World War.



One of the horseshoes found at Munn Field

LYNNE GOLDSTEIN, DIRECTOR, MSU CAMPUS ARCHAEOLOGY – SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY

When I created Michigan State University's (MSU) Campus Archaeology Program (CAP), one of the critical pieces in the program was public archaeology – we wanted to make sure that the broader public knew about MSU's past and how archaeology contributes to knowledge about the past. We have participated in Day of Archaeology since its beginning. We developed a social media strategy, and we make sure that the regular print media also know about what we do. We have

made a concerted effort to publicize our work across as many different kinds of media and across as many different kinds of communities as possible. Lately, however, we have begun to see that sustainability is a real problem for us (and probably for lots of other public archaeology programs too). This is a different kind of “Aha” moment.

The CAP program itself is now sustainable, but the knowledge about the program is not. At a university, students come and go each year – lots of new students entering, and lots of current students exiting. In addition, faculty, staff, and alums change. If you look at CAP’s short history, we have done well in keeping people up on what we do, but we have not done as well in ensuring that new community members know about us and what we do. We have also discovered that they don’t know about MSU’s past either. This is not an easy problem to fix, since there is not one place or medium that everyone in our broader public uses to be informed about things. Further, CAP does not have a permanent place on campus where people can visit or go for information, beyond our website, Facebook page, Twitter feed, etc. – they have to know those exist in order to visit. People don’t necessarily read the campus newspaper anymore, they may or may not be on Facebook or Twitter, etc. This is turning out to be a thornier problem than we anticipated. During July, I am teaching a class on Methods in Cultural Heritage Management, and the class is developing a draft cultural heritage plan for the university. One aspect of that plan will have to be communications and sustainability of communications. We will keep people up-to-date on what we are doing, but I think that we may be experiencing a small piece of a larger problem in public archaeology. We’d be interested in hearing about how others are handling these problems.