Louisiana

Archaeological

Survey and

Antiquities

Commission

March 8, 2022 Meeting

The Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission met on Tuesday, March 8, 2022, at 1:30 p.m. in a virtual meeting in accordance with Act 302 of the 202 Regular Session.

# Members Attending Electronically:

Dr. Chip McGimsey

Dr. Ryan Gray

Mr, Thurston Hahn

Dr. Heather McKillop

Ms. Kim Walden

# Members Absent:

Mr. Ray Berthelot

Dr. Mark Rees

Dr. Chaunda Mitchell

Ms. Julie Doucet

# Others Attending Electronically:

Dr. Brooks Ellwood

Dr. Rachel Watson

Ms. Maegan Smith

Ms. Renee Erickson

# Welcome & Introductions

The Chair, Dr. Heather McKillop, called the meeting to order at 1:38 PM. Dr. McGimsey took the notes for meeting.

In her introductory remarks, Dr. McKillop noted the just completed annual meeting of the Louisiana Archaeological Society. She also noted that plans currently call for the 4th Annual Conference on Salt to be held at LSU on October 12-17, 2022. One of the conference organizers currently lives in Ukraine. Everyone introduced themselves

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for the December 14, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.

# Old Business

Dr. McGimsey gave a brief update on Division of Archaeology. One new staff, Ms. Renee Erickson, has joined the Division as its Section 106 reviewer. The new site Files Manager, Mr. Sam Huey, will be starting March 21, 2022. He noted that the Division’s finances remain in good shape and for a pleasant change, there has been funding available to hire temporary staff. The Division currently has four student workers, and is hiring a full-time wage person to work on collections. Dr. McGimsey noted the recent reburial of a likely Civil War soldier in Pineville, as well as the upcoming reburial of a historic cemetery removed from the Shintech property in Ascension Parish. Both of these situations were handled under the Louisiana Unmarked Human Burial Sites Act. He also noted several recent opportunities to observe human remains detection dogs in action at several pre-contact and post-contact cemeteries. IN addition to the just completed LAS conference, the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office will be celebrating its 50th anniversary on Thursday, 21 April, at the Louisiana Trust for Historic Preservation Conference in West Monroe. Everyone is invited to attend. Finally he noted that the Red River canoe is scheduled to be installed in its exhibit at the Red River Wildlife Management Area headquarters in April or May.

Dr, McKillop commented on the use of detection dogs and asked to be kept informed on any future activities. Dr. Gray asked about the Shintech reburial and whether the report was available. Dr. McGimsey replied that the report was still in preparation.

# New Business

Archaeology Month Update

Maegan Smith provided a summary of this year’s Archaeology Month activities. There were 29 total events, some of which were virtual, with an estimated total of 10,200 attendees. The Division collaborated with the River Road African-American Museum on displaying the archaeology posters.

Dr. McKillop noted the 4th International Congress on Salt will be held at LSU in the fall of 2022.

LSU Campus Mounds Update

Dr. Brooks Ellwood provided an update on his ongoing research at the LSU Campus Mounds. The site has two mounds that have different construction histories. His analysis is based primarily on analysis of a sediment core obtained through each mound. His analysis has identified a series of strata interpreted as ash lenses overlying a burned surface. The ash lenses contain very high quantities of reed or cane phytoliths, suggesting they were the fuel used in the fires.

His research has also included GPR and magnetometry surveys over each mound. Mound A has an anomaly in the upper third whose signature suggests it was a hot fire. Based upon the remote sensing data nd the core analyses, he interprets there were two construction phases for each mound. There was an initial construction over a period of time, then the mound was capped. Some time later, a second stage was added to each mound

AT Mound B, a series of radiometric dates indicate that Stage 1 was built between 11,500 and 8,000 with a mean age of 9500, with the second stage being added between 7500 – 6000 with a mean age of 7010. At Mound A, the first stage dates span 10,000 – 7,000 with a mean of 8200, with the second stage being added between 6,000 – 5,000 with a mean ae of 5700.

Dr. Brooks noted that the initial mound construction happened about the same time as the end of the Younger Dryas period, while the ending Stage 1 dates fall near the time of a 8,200 meteorite impact in Greenland that had world-wide climatological effects.

The analysis of core sediments also revealed the presence of osteons, materials that reflect large mammal bone. These were concentrated in the ash lenses within each mound. Some ash lenses in Mound B also exhibited a high density of lead and chromium. Dr. Brooks interpretation is that this indicates the reed/cane fires were being used to cremate human remains with the lead representing decorated clothing or other materials burned with the bodies.

IN summary, his current interpretation of the mounds is that Mound B construction began around 9500 and continued until about 8300. During this construction episode, repeated fires burning red/cane were built on accretional surfaces; these fires may have been used to cremate human remains. Cessation of Mound B construction is tied to the abrupt climate change resulting from the meteor impact. It was about this time that the initial construction of Mound A began and continued for 1,000 years. Approximately the time that Mound A was paused, the second stage of Mound B was begun (7000) and continued until around 4500. The second Mound A stage was begun around 5700 and continued for about 1000 years. There was a minor reuse of Mound A about 800 years ago when a post placed on top of Mound B.

Dr. McKillop asked whether species cold be determined from osteons. Dr. Ellwood replied that in the absence of DNA analysis, it can only be stated that the osteons came from large mammals. He argues that the high lead levels imply human remains were being cremated. Dr. Gray asked if there were any evidence of early humans being tattooed and cremated. Dr. Ellwood replied that there was not at this time, and suggested the lead could have been on clothing or other materials placed with the remains. Dr. McKillop asked if there was other supporting data for the cremation hypothesis; Dr Ellwood indicated there was not and that he know of no other explanation that would fit the known data. She raised the concern that saying it was human cremations had many implications. Dr. Ellwood noted that it is presently not possible to test the human osteon interpretation as DNA analysis of osteons has not been approved. Dr. Gray asked if there were other sites where osteons have been dated or assess for DNA. Dr. Ellwood restated his overall interpretation but noted that the fires ae not necessarily human cremations; that is an hypothesis that cannot be tested at this time. Dr. McKillop notd that Dr. Saunders of LSU had partnered with Dr. Ellwood on some aspects of his study and asked whether Dr. Saunders agreed with his interpretations. Dr. Ellwood noted that Dr. Saunders did not agree with the old dates; he did not remember discussing the osteons with here. They did have a lot of back and forth about various aspects of his work and how to publish, although she is not currently an author of papers submitted for publication. Dr. McKillop thanked Dr. Ellwood for an informative and interesting presentation.

# Other Business

Therer was no Other Business on the Agenda.

***Motion:*** *Mr. Thurston Hahn moved that the Commission meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Dr. McGimsey. The motion passed unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 3:17 PM.

