

Louisiana
Archaeological
Survey and
Antiquities
Commission

September 11, 2018 Meeting

The Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission met on Tuesday, September 11, 2018, at 1:30 p.m. in the 4th floor conference room, 1051 N. 3rd Street, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Members Present:

Dr. Chip McGimsey
Dr. George Riser
Mr. Ray Berthelot
Ms. Pat Arnould
Mr. Ed Britton

Members Absent:

Dr. Heather McKillop
Ms. Kim Walden
Dr. Mark Rees
Ms. Kathe Hambrick

Others Present:

Ms. Jessica Diez
Dr. Rachel Watson
Ms. Megan Kenny
Dr. Valerie Feathers
Dr. Diana Greenlee

Welcome & Introductions

The Vice-Chair, Dr. George Riser, called the meeting to order at 1:45 PM.

All persons at the meeting introduced themselves.

MOTION: *A motion was made by Mr. Ed Britton and seconded by Mr Ray Berthelot, to accept the minutes of the June 11, 2018, Antiquities Commission Meeting. The motion carried unanimously.*

Old Business

Budget and Division Update

Dr. McGimsey noted that the Division's FY 2018/2019 budget was essentially the same as the previous year, and there was no expectation at this time that there would be a 5% mid-year cut. There is no other staffing news at this point.

New Business

Poverty Point Station Archaeology Program Update

Dr Greenlee provided an update on activities undertaken by the Poverty Point Station program over the last 12 months.

The first topic was a review of recent investigations in the Mound B field part of the site. It has always been an interesting area, in part because of the paucity of the work done here, but also because it has a very different artifact assemblage than other parts of the site. Notable is the relative abundance of bifaces and paucity of PPOs. Last year when Binghamton University (BU) was working at the site, they undertook additional magnetometer survey of the Mound B field and identified a large circular anomaly that in one sector had a large anomaly overlying or attached to the arc. Dr. Greenlee undertook a series of soil cores across this latter anomaly with Mr. Thurman Allen in hopes of understanding what it was. The core transect across the circular anomaly did not reveal any soil or sediment changes from a normal profile. A transect across the large anomaly lying on the arc did reveal very different soils below the surface. These type of sediments have not been noted elsewhere on the site, and exhibit very different chemical characteristics. This feature is approximately 12x12x2.3 in size. No artifacts were noted in the sediment from the cores through the feature. BU hopes to organize a field school around the end of 2018 / beginning of 2019 at the site to explore this anomaly.

Another project was examining some of the negative perimeter anomalies along the site's main ridges. Magnetic survey by Dr. Mike Hargrave and Dr. Berle Clay in earlier years had identified a series of light bands (negative magnetic areas) paralleling many of the large ridges. There are also locations where similar linear bands are present but are not clearly associated with a topographic ridge, raising the question as to whether they represented the location of an earlier ridge that was later remodeled and shifted. One hypothesis for the negative linear anomalies is that they represent clay buttresses that helped stabilize the ridges. IN 2017, cores were pulled from within and without these linear anomalies and evidence of a significant increase in clay within the anomaly was not observed. However, the anomaly sediments did appear to be slightly sandier than the sediments outside the anomaly. This year several core transects were taken across several of the linear anomalies. These cores were 1 inch cores so that the core hole could also be used by Dr. Rinita Dalan for magnetic susceptibility (MS) studies. The MS data shows the anomaly has a low magnetic susceptibility. The difference is due in part to an increase in sand content that is creating the anomaly. The meaning and purpose of this sandy fill is unclear.

The third project at the site was to examine some possible circular anomalies in the area of the site north of Harlan Bayou. The magnetic data in this area is very messy due to the amount of historic materials in the ground. But one or more possible post circles can be suggested in the data. Dr. Greenlee taught a May field school (with one student) that explored one of these possible post circles. A trench of 3 1x1 m units was excavated across one of the possible circles. While the soils appeared normal for Poverty Point, the excavation did reveal charcoal pieces to a depth of 80 cm. Thurman Allen says the soils do look odd but there is no obvious evidence that it is fill. For now the interpretation of what is happening here is unclear and will require further investigation.

The Station Program also continued the Compatible Use Zone (CUZ) survey. Dr. Greenlee outlined what areas had been surveyed previously and which were surveyed this year, along with maps showing the location of all the artifacts collected. Ms. Arnould asked about how the survey was conducted. Dr. Greenlee replied that landowners had given their permission for the survey, using transects 3 m apart, flagging all the artifacts observed, and then mapping the location of each artifact with a GPS. Part of the analysis will be to examine the distribution of different artifact classes across the landscape. It was noted that the landowners are allowing the artifacts to be collected. Dr. Riser asked what types of artifacts are being found. Dr. Greenlee replied that the majority are flakes, but numerous points, plummets, pottery, and historic materials are present. Dr. Riser about PPOs, and Dr. Greenlee stated they have been found and tend to be concentrated in just a few areas. She noted that years of plowing would break down PPOs and thus their absence may not be a real reflection of abundance; she also noted that historic clearing using burning also produces a lot of burnt clay that can appear as PPO fragments and given a false distribution. Ms. Arnould asked what a PPO is; it is a Poverty Point Object or fired earth cooking ball.

Shovel-testing has been continued in one field bordering Bayou Macon and produced a lot of positive tests. In one area there is a possible mound and borrow area. Auger tests were placed into the possible mound; there is no buried A horizon below it but there is a thick elluvial horizon suggesting fill over the subsoil. They hope to take soil cores from this possible mound once the crops are harvested from the field.

One site of particular interest lies on the eastern bank of Bayou Macon across from Poverty Point (the Denning site). It lies on an elevated ridge in the bayou floodplain that had produced artifacts in the past but had never been systematically examined. Survey of this site has produced an extensive and dense Poverty Point assemblage with points, plummets, beads, PPO fragments, microblades, and perforators. It is possible that this elevated ridge could represent dredge spoil from when Bayou Macon was dredged in the late 1950s. It will be necessary to core this ridge to determine whether it is natural or spoil.

In 2018, the CUZ survey completed walkover survey across 358 acres and shovel-tested 47 acres. Overall, the CUZ survey has examined 880 acres via pedestrian survey and an additional 93 acres via shovel testing in two years of operation. This effort has identified a total of 22 new sites, and updated three previously known sites.

Ms. Arnould asked if there were any sites near Poverty Point with burials. Dr. Greenlee noted that there several historic-era burials in Mound D and a known historic cemetery in the plaza near the highway. When Dr. James Ford excavated Mound B in the 1950s, he reported finding a couple of infants near the top of the mound that he interpreted as historic in age. In addition, a single bone fragment was recovered from the base of the mound in a layer of gray silt with charcoal and interpreted as human. Dr. Ford interpreted this layer as a crematory layer within the mound. Subsequent researchers argued that this layer is an elluvial silt, and that the bone really isn't human. Ford's excavation materials are at the American Museum of the Indian and the bone cannot be located there. Ms. Arnould noted that in prior years the Office of Indian Affairs had conducted ceremonies there and had noted significant energies at the site.

Outreach and Education Program Update

Dr. Feathers began by providing an overview of the education and outreach program since its inception in 1980. As a way of learning about the programs past efforts, she read every outreach product that the Division had produced, along with reviewing all the presentations, exhibits, and other materials that were available to schools and the public. Over the last nearly 40 years, the focus has been on education and products that would tell the story of Louisiana's archaeological past. A number of booklets were developed and published between 1980 and 2003; these are all out of print now, but available on our website, and none have been updated over the years.

The Division also has a series of classroom activities for use in schools, also available on our website. These were developed in the 1990s, and include at least one activity in the French language. In 2000, the first brochure was published, with additional materials in 2008 and 2014.

Dr. McGimsey had posed the question to Dr. Feathers when she joined where she wanted the outreach program to be in five years. This is something she has thought a great deal about. One issue of great importance to her is continuing to integrate archaeology into the school system; where are we today with this effort, and how best to increase the information we provide to schools and students. She wanted to spend more time in schools observing how classes used our educational products and learning how teachers and students wanted to use them using modern teaching approaches. One emphasis would be the Poverty Point and El Nuevo Constante teaching exhibits; both were last updated in 2000.

She also considered the prehistory poster sets that the Division has. Some elements of these are considerably dated and need to be revised, but the basic content is still valuable. In 2016, the Division created a series of online exhibits and powerpoint presentations for the public and schools. But teachers are not generally aware that these resources are available. She noted that it would be possible to create many more powerpoint presentations covering many other aspects of the state's past.

Dr. Feathers presented a series of ideas on how she hopes to revise, improve and make more accessible the Division's existing resources. For the teaching kits, the information and materials needs to be update (move from DVD's to thumbdrives for example. In addition, we need to include more artifacts. It is hoped that we can create a series of 3D replicas for use in exhibits, allowing us to include rare or fragile artifacts that otherwise cannot be used in classroom settings. Dr. Feathers also wants to revise the powerpoint presentations to make them more visually appealing, and to make the language appropriate for the lower grade levels. It will also be necessary to make the educational products 508 compliant, meaning they are accessible by hearing and vision impaired students.

She hopes to update the prehistory posters, perhaps by producing them in color but certainly by revising the text and images. These can be produced as pdfs and made available on our website. For our existing classroom activity products, she wants to upgrade them to meet current educational standards. We have recently reprinted the Mounds Driving trail.

Dr. Feathers wants to utilize social media to a much greater extent. She noted that the discovery of the Red River canoe in June 2017 resulted in a Facebook post with 1,630,812 people liking the post. She intends to pursue developing a Facebook and Instagram account for the Division of Archaeology as one means to get word out about Louisiana archaeology.

For Archaeology Month this year, Dr. Feathers has organized the Living in the Past symposium at the Capitol Park Museum where a series of hands-on activities will be available for kids and adults to participate in. In addition, there will be a Archaeology Talks symposium at the museum where five archaeologists will present on five significant sites around the state and have artifacts from the site on display.

In the future, Dr. Feathers wants create promotional items that highlight Louisiana archaeology, and one example would be archaeology playing cards. She illustrated a prototype card, that could be used to teach people about points, ceramics and other artifact types. She also hopes to develop new posters illustrating the various time periods in Louisiana history, along with creating new brochures that could be distributed at welcome centers and state parks highlighting archaeological opportunities for people to visit. Another possible venture would be setting up an Ask an Archaeologist Day, perhaps at a state park

or somewhere where archaeology is being done or is visible (LSU Campus Mounds for example). Dr. Feathers recently had the opportunity to speak with individuals with the Florida Public Archaeology Network and would like to try and develop a site stewardship program modeled on Florida's efforts. This could be focused on those sites that are particularly threatened by coastal erosion and land loss. A final project would be to create an online database of artifact images that included short descriptions and interpretations of each item. Ideally, these images could be 3D that a viewer could rotate and manipulate to their interest.

She concluded her presentation by summarizing her activities in the first nine months she has been on the job. These include:

Working to redesign the Division's website;

Update and reprinting the Ancient Mounds Driving Trail;

Purchasing new suitcases for the teaching kits as well as beginning the process to update the materials in the kits;

Purchasing portable display cases for the Division to use in various contexts;

Developing text and images for two videos being produced by LPB: these include a video highlighting the Division, and one highlighting the Ancient Mounds driving trail;

Helping to create and man Mardi Gras shipwreck displays at the Society for Historical Archaeology annual meeting and at the Louisiana Archaeological Society meeting;

Giving public presentations at four St. Tammany Parish libraries and at Glasgow Middle School in Baton Rouge';

Organizing the Lifeways in the Basin symposium held at Vermillionville in Lafayette;

Organizing the Plantation Archaeology symposium at the Wedel-Williams State Historic Site;

Developing and helping to implement a series of panels in English and French at the Iberville Basin project in New Orleans, and;

Developing and coordinating the October Archaeology Month events, this will include a weekend mound cleanup event at the Marsden Mounds at Poverty Point State Reservoir State Park in partnership with the Louisiana Archaeological Society.

Ms. Diez asked what grade level of students our educational efforts are aimed at? Dr. Feathers replied that most of the teaching kits go to elementary and middle school classes, we rarely get requests from high schools. The emphasis has been typically on those grades where they begin taking Louisiana history. There was discussion of how many of the educational products are available in French, or even Spanish. It was noted that the Basin Street panels will include versions in French.

Ms. Arnould noted that back in the 1980s the official school curriculum only addressed Poverty Point and at a very small scale. She also noted that current curriculum guides don't address pre-contact or modern Indian communities at all.

She also noted that a member of the Houma Nation has written several books in both English and French about the Houma people. Dr. Feathers indicated that it would be a good goal to try and include information about current Indian tribes in our products.

Other Business

There was no other business.

Motion: Mr. Ed Britton moved that the Commission meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Mr. Ray Berthelot. The Motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.