Louisiana

Archaeological

Survey and

Antiquities

Commission

March 14, 2023 Meeting

The Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission met on Tuesday, March 14, 2023, at 1:30 p.m. in the 4th floor conference room, 1051 N. 5th street, Baton   
Rouge, LA.

# Members Attending:

Dr. Chip McGimsey

Dr. Ryan Gray

Mr. Ray Berthelot

Dr. Mark Rees

# Members Absent:

Mr. Thurston Hahn

Ms. Kim Walden

Dr. Chandler Vidrine

Ms. Julie Doucet

Dr. Heather McKillop

# Others Attending Electronically:

Ms. Renee Erickson

Dr. Diana Greenlee

Mr. George Gelé

Ms. Karla Oesch

Mr. Sam Huey

Ms. Helen Bouzon

# Welcome & Introductions

The Vice-Chair, Dr. Mark Rees, called the meeting to order at 1:38 PM. Dr. McGimsey took the notes for meeting.

Everyone attending the meeting introduced themselves

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for the September 13, 2022 meeting were approved unanimously.

# Old Business

Dr. McGimsey gave a brief update on the Division of Archaeology. The presentation focused on the discovery of the Brookhill on the bank of the Mississippi River in early October 2022. A total of 36 news interviews were conducted and over 850 stories mentioning the Brookhill circulated worldwide. Dr. McGimsey also noted the publication of Dr. Brooks Ellwood and colleagues paper claiming the LSU Campus Mounds were as much as 11,000 years old. Dr. McGimsey and others provided a response to that article that was published in the Society for American Archaeology newsletter in the Fall of 2022. He also noted the ongoing consultations developing a new traffic and walking plan for the Campus Mounds along with preservation and interpretation efforts.

# New Business

Mr. Ray Berthelot mentioned that an Interpretative Ranger position was being advertised for Poverty Point World Heritage Site and asked everyone to distribute it.

Archaeology Month Update

Ms. Maegan Smith could not be present at the Commission meeting so Dr. McGimsey provided a summary of 2022’s Archaeology Month activities. There were 46 total events, including 19 Louisiana Archaeology trivia contexts held at various establishments around the state, with an estimated audience of 3,000 participants. The poster was designed in collaboration with members of the United Houma nation.

Poverty Point Station Archaeology Program Annual Update

Dr. Greenlee gave her annual report for FY 2021/2022. She noted that a new exhibit on the archaeology of NE Louisiana had been completed and installed at the University of Louisiana Monroe Natural History Museum.

At the Poverty Point World Heritage Site, she and others investigated two anomalies that appeared in the magnetic and ground-penetrating radar (GPR) data sets within the plaza in an effort to understand what they represented. GPR Anomalies 1 and 2 have the appearance of small buried mounds lying on the original surface in close proximity to several of the wooden post circles. The circles come right up to but do not overlap with the anomalies. Soil cores were taken in a transect across each anomaly. The sediments within the body of each anomaly, including dark, waxy-like materials, are very distinct from those encountered elsewhere across the site. In addition, the magnetic susceptibility and electrical resistivity values are much lower inside the anomaly than outside it. In some respects, the sediment inside the anomalies appears more typical of the Pine Island loess, rather than the Memphis loess representing the surface deposits at the site.

One hypothesis is that these two anomalies are pimple mounds but they lack the soil structure and sediment type typically seen in a pimple mound. Nor are they sand blows resulting from earthquakes as have been seen elsewhere in NE Louisiana based upon the absence of sandy sediments within either anomaly. The waxy material within the anomaly may be detritus from bacteria that fed on a natural gas blow. Poverty Point overlies a known natural gas field and there are historic accounts of natural gas seeps in other areas. It is possible these two anomalies were natural gas blow outs; perhaps they were even active at the time the site was occupied.

Dr. Greenlee also conducted limited investigations at the Cater-Aplin Mound (16CT67). The landowner is interested in putting the house and mound on the National Register and wanted evidence on the age and construction of the mound. Two soil cores were pulled from the mound. The surprise is that both indicated at least portions of the mound were constructed of upside-down sod blocks. Very few other mounds are known to have this construction method, but it was noted at one of the Lake Providence site mounds. Currently Dr. Elizabeth Scharf is analyzing the cores in an effort to determine the lithology and pollen content of the sod blocks.

She has also been looking into a possible lodestone plummet. This iron plummet was found by Joe Rolph who runs the Starr Home Place in Oak Ridge, LA. He had found it some years ago in a cultivated field near his home. When the plummet is suspended, a line apparently incised onto the plummet always points to magnetic north. Dr. Greenlee has been surveying the field where the plummet was found to see what other artifacts occur in that area. Not much has been found, but a light scatter of euroamerican and pre-contact artifacts have been observed. No ceramic sherds or other temporally diagnostic materials found to date, leaving the age of the plummet uncertain. She is hoping to complete the survey of the field this spring.

# Other Business

Mr. George Gelé gave a short update on his ongoing effort to investigate a submerged site behind the Chandeleur Islands (16SB184). He distributed an advertisement for fishing trip to the site, and noted that a podcast he had given six months ago had attracted 60,000 listeners so far. He is currently contacting marine archaeologist in an effort to enlist someone to work on a project to conduct additional investigations at the site to define what it is. To date he has not been successful in locating a qualified marine archaeologist willing to join the project.

He showed illustrations of other piles of material on the sea floor in the vicinity. These data were obtained from visual examination of publicly available satellite or lidar imagery. He also noted that the History channel may include this site in a docu-series they are developing.

Dr. Rees noted that archaeologist would need to be funded to work at the site. Mr. Gelé replied that he has donors who have expressed a willingness to do support such an effort, but have not committed until an archaeologist is on board.

Dr. Rees thanked Mr. Gelé for the update. Dr. Gray noted that Earth Search, Inc. had undertaken a project with Mr. Gelé in the past but a report had never been completed due to differences between Mr. Gelé and Earth Search. Dr. Rees noted that a marine archaeologist will be necessary to provide additional information on the age and purpose of the materials present at the site. This will require a clear source of funding to support the archaeological investigation. Mr. Gelé agreed and noted that the site is very important in his view but he is looking for help to get the project moving forward.

***Motion:*** *Mr. Ray Berthelot moved that the Commission meeting be adjourned. It was seconded by Dr. Gray. The motion passed unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 PM.

