Louisiana

Archaeological

Survey and

Antiquities

Commission

March 11, 2025 Meeting

The Louisiana Archaeological Survey and Antiquities Commission met on Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 1:30 p.m. in the 4th floor conference room, 1051 N. 5th street, Baton
Rouge, LA.

# Members Attending:

Dr. Chip McGimsey

Dr. Mark Rees

Dr. Heather McKillop

Mr. Thurston Hahn

Dr. Ryan Gray

# Members Absent:

Dr. Chandler Vidrine

Ms. Kim Walden

Ms. Julie Doucet

Mr. Ray Berthelot

# Others Attending:

Ms. Karla Oesch

Ms. Helen Bouzon

Dr. Diana Greenlee (via Teams)

Dr. T.R. Kidder (via Teams)

# Welcome & Introductions

The Chair, Dr. Heather McKillop, called the meeting to order at 1:40 PM. Dr. McGimsey took the notes for the meeting.

Everyone attending the meeting introduced themselves.

**Approval of Minutes**

***Motion:*** *Mr.Thurston Hahn moved that the Commission accept the December 10, 2024 meeting minutes. It was seconded by Dr. Mark Rees. The motion passed unanimously.*

# Old Business

Dr. McGimsey gave a brief update on the Division of Archaeology. He noted that Dr. Senna Chapman was hired as the new Site Files Manager and has been with the Division since 30 December 2024. He noted that most of the Division staff were participating in a field trip assisting the Pointe Aux Chien Indian Tribe in a Traditional Cultural Places nomination for their homeland.

Dr. McGimsey provided a brief update on the state of the State budget for 2025/26. It is anticipated the Office of Cultural Development and the Division will operate with the same funding level as the current year. He also noted that as of the now, all indications are that the federal Historic Preservation Fund will also operate at current funding levels for another year. The HPF monies support all of the Division staff to one degree or another.

Dr. McGimsey noted that he will be retiring as State Archaeologist around 4 July 2025. The exact date is uncertain as the position hasn’t been advertised yet and it is hoped that Dr. McGimsey and his successor can overlap for a week or two to ensure a smooth transition. Dr. McGimsey has been State Archaeologist, and a member of the Commission, for the last 18 years.

# New Business

 16WC5 Permit Request

Dr. TR Kidder made a presentation on his research proposal via Teams. A fundamental question about Poverty Point is whether it represents a ‘great town’ or a vacant ceremonial center that was only visited by large numbers of people on special occasions. Embedded in this question is whether the model of the site’s growth is one of a long, slow gradual process where the mounds and rings were built over generations, or whether the site was built in a small number of short-term events. The “Standard Model” (in Dr. Kidder’s perspective) of Poverty Point is one of a classic political economy framework where over time a series of elites gradually obtained greater and greater power to control and direct the evolution of the site. For the last 75 years, this model has framed most of the research and interpretations about the site.

He introduced a different view of the site by illustrating the distribution of all the radiometric dates from the site, which spread over nearly 3,000 years with a dominant cluster within a roughly 500 year period between 3700 and 3200 BP. However, if the dates are parsed by those that mark definable events (episode of construction for example) and have small standard deviations, a very different picture emerges where the dates cluster in a very narrow 200-300 year span. In other publications about the site Dr. Kidder has argued that several mound-building events such as Mound A and Mound D occurred within a span of weeks or months, rather than over years. If much of the site represents a massive construction effort within a short time period, then a new theoretical framework to explain why people would be so motivated is necessary.

Dr. Kidder and his collaborators are exploring a model whereby people see themselves as interconnected in all parts of the world and universe. In this framework every living and inanimate entity has a role in making the whole work correctly. Humans, by virtue of their ability to make many more changes than other entities, have a special responsibility to ensure the process ensures the world remains in balance. If things are out of balance, humans have a responsibility to try and restore that balance.

Dr. Kidder notes that the time around 3,500-3,000 BP was a period of significant environmental change. The Mississippi River shifted course away from the site, there is evidence for major flood events in many river basins, and in many areas of the US coast, sea levels were changing. In this new model, people may have come together to try and mediate these changes and restore a balance to the world. The goal is not to ‘fix’ the problem but to reestablish and mediate the relationships that will enable the systems to reach a new equilibrium. In this model, the construction of Poverty Point can be seen as one of the efforts by people across the US to try and create a new balance amongst the interconnected relationships that sustain the world.

Testing this model is challenging but one approach is to better understand the construction histories of the various components that comprise the site. An earlier permit examined an old test unit in Ring W3 where new analyses suggested this ring segment was built in a single episode of construction. For this specific proposal, they plan to reopen 6-10 test units that explore various segments of the rings to better understand their construction histories. Once the units are open and the walls cleaned, the various strata will be sampled for radiometric dates, pOSL dates, micromorphology, magnetic susceptibility, loss-on-ignition, particle size, and geotechnical analyses of the sediments used to build the ridges. All of these data will contribute to a clearer understanding the timing, age, and sequence of construction of the sampled ridges.

If time permits, they also hope to obtain a series of deep soil cores from the northern and southeastern ridges to assess whether the builders of Poverty Point may have filled in some or all of the extant Harlin Bayou and Quincy Hale Gulley channels in order to position the site as this specific location.

Dr. Rees asked if they plan to test any of the mounds. Dr. Kidder replied that while he would love to reexamine Mound B, that is beyond the scope of their current funding and research goals. He sees this project as a real proof-of-concept for the overall strategy and if it works as hoped, can then be expanded to other aspects of the site in future projects.

Dr. Rees asked what information does testing for soil density provide? Dr. Kidder responded that it is specifically looking for evidence of weathering and whether that sediment was exposed for any length of time. Dr Rees also asked if they were going to sample for phosphorus; Dr. Kidder replied that at this stage it wasn’t a critical issue as they were not examining the intensity of occupation in any one area.

Dr. Ryan asked what their plans were for public outreach during the project. Dr. Kidder said they hoped to undertake the work in May and he has been working with Mark Brink, the site manager, to participate in any efforts the Park wants to put on. He is more than willing to do one or more public talks, not just at the park, but also elsewhere in the state during the 2025 Archaeology Month. Dr. Ryan indicated he hoped to organize field trips for University of New Orleans students to see the investigations and perhaps volunteer to help excavate the old units. Dr. Kidder noted that he has funds to support 6-8 graduate students from Washington University and Mississippi State University. Dr. McKillop indicated she would like to organize a Fall Forum at Louisiana State University for Dr. Kidder to present on his research.

***Motion:*** *Mr. Thurston Hahn moved that the Commission meeting approve the 16WC5 permit request. It was seconded by Dr. Mark Rees. The motion passed unanimously.*

# Other Business

There was no other business before the Commission.

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

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 PM.