Exhibiting Mounds in Wilkinson County: Implications for Diverse Community Engagement in Public Archaeology and Museum Education

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Abstract
Native American mound sites in the Lower Mississippi Valley can tell us a lot about past peoples but are rapidly disappearing due to land development, looting, and erosion. The communities local to these important archaeological resources are the best equipped to protect them due to their proximity, but many locals are unaware of both their importance to archaeological research and the meaning they hold for Native people. This thesis presents a case study on how to engage with a diverse rural community, some members of which are already invested in archaeology, but most of which have not expressed interest. I posit that the best way to engage with the community is by focusing on its children. In Summer 2019, I co-curated and designed an exhibit about the history of Lower Mississippi Valley moundbuilding in the Wilkinson County Museum in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. The exhibit showcases artifacts from local sites and includes information about how mounds and their associated sites were constructed and used through time. In addition, my team hosted an archaeology fair on the day the exhibit opened. Hands-on activities during this festival and an exhibit-focused activity booklet helped children to understand archaeological information and methods. The festival was well-attended, but there was a notable racial discrepancy between the community that the exhibit attracted and the Wilkinson County community more broadly. Future phases of this project will focus on local schools to ensure that we engage with a more representative sample of the population. A field trip program will provide Wilkinson County children with more opportunities for hands-on learning, and a children's book about a local mound site will provide a personal link to archaeology for a regional audience.

Keywords
public archaeology, museum studies, education

Disciplines
Anthropology

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EXHIBITING MOUNDS IN WILKINSON COUNTY: IMPLICATIONS FOR DIVERSE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN PUBLIC ARCHAEOLOGY AND MUSEUM EDUCATION

By

Erin B. Spicola

In

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Department of Anthropology

University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Megan Kassabaum

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Abstract

Native American mound sites in the Lower Mississippi Valley can tell us a lot about past peoples but are rapidly disappearing due to land development, looting, and erosion. The communities local to these important archaeological resources are the best equipped to protect them due to their proximity, but many locals are unaware of both their importance to archaeological research and the meaning they hold for Native people. This thesis presents a case study on how to engage with a diverse rural community, some members of which are already invested in archaeology, but most of which have not expressed interest. I posit that the best way to engage with the community is by focusing on its children. In Summer 2019, I co-curated and designed an exhibit about the history of Lower Mississippi Valley moundbuilding in the Wilkinson County Museum in Wilkinson County, Mississippi. The exhibit showcases artifacts from local sites and includes information about how mounds and their associated sites were constructed and used through time. In addition, my team hosted an archaeology fair on the day the exhibit opened. Hands-on activities during this festival and an exhibit-focused activity booklet helped children to understand archaeological information and methods. The festival was well-attended, but there was a notable racial discrepancy between the community that the exhibit attracted and the Wilkinson County community more broadly. Future phases of this project will focus on local schools to ensure that we engage with a more representative sample of the population. A field trip program will provide Wilkinson County children with more opportunities for hands-on learning, and a children’s book about a local mound site will provide a personal link to archaeology for a regional audience.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Humans have a penchant for learning about the past. Most everyone is interested in where they came from, and it seems like most people are infatuated with stories from long ago. Archaeology is a science that seeks to understand the human past via the analysis of material culture. It is thus a discipline that many people are naturally fascinated by, which explains why the Indiana Jones movies are so popular. However, access to real archaeology can be highly limited, with information about the methods and results of excavations at best available only to those who are able to visit museums, take college classes, or understand academic papers. Most archaeological information is only published in academic papers, if published at all. Some of this information is then taught in college classes, and even less information is filtered to the general public in museum exhibits. Such formal learning spaces are disproportionately inaccessible to rural, marginalized communities who may neither have museums in their immediate vicinity nor the resources to travel into more urban areas to visit them. Additionally, science more broadly is becoming increasingly difficult for non-specialists to understand due to the use of increasingly esoteric techniques and language (Hayes 1992), leaving many to believe that science must not be for them.

However, in archaeology and many other scientific disciplines, public understanding and interaction is imperative. It is, in fact, an ethical requirement of professional archaeologists to engage with and educate the public about their work to the best of their abilities (“Ethics in Professional Archaeology” 2016). There are a number of reasons for this. For example, the communities local to archaeological sites are the best equipped populations to protect and preserve the sites, as they often have legal control over the land and resources and can constantly be on the lookout for damage. Moreover, saving archaeological sites benefits the whole of
humanity. Understanding the past helps us to prepare for the future, and we cannot do this without material remains. Therefore, it is important for archaeologists to teach and collaborate with the local public. This statement is the basis of public archaeology, a term officially coined by Charles McGimsey (1972) but a tradition that has been a part of archaeological practice for at least 200 years.

Museums are ideal places to learn about archaeology due to the material nature of the discipline’s data. In museums, visitors can view and engage with artifacts, thereby forming connections with scientific information that are much more meaningful than reading a report (Borun 1977). Because of their educational power, museums are particularly important in rural areas with local archaeological sites. However, only about 25% of museums in the United States are located in rural areas (Grimes et al. 2014), and the most well-known (and well-funded) museums are located in big cities (e.g. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., the Field Museum in Chicago, etc.). Rural populations that most rarely have regular access to museums are also the ones regularly interacting with archaeological remains. This makes public outreach in archaeology particularly important, because the education of these groups is necessary for site preservation.

If archaeologists can create museums in rural areas that have nearby archaeological sites, then local communities will have a place to learn about the importance of their landscapes. It is not enough to have the information available, though; archaeologists also must find ways to encourage public engagement with the information. I argue that the best way to get a whole community invested in archaeology is by engaging with its children, and in this thesis, I outline a number of methods for doing this. Children are open-minded and curious by nature and are not yet as encumbered by societal norms, so they are less likely than adults to believe that something
is inherently not for them (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999). When children are interested in something, they are likely to share it with the adults in their lives, thereby spreading the information (Leeming et al. 1997). Also, childhood passions can be carried into adulthood and passed along to the next generation, thus increasing the likelihood of continual community interest.

In the summer of 2019, I traveled to Wilkinson County, Mississippi, with the Smith Creek Archaeological Project (SCAP). SCAP is a project out of the University of Pennsylvania that focuses on Native American mound sites in Wilkinson County. Thousands of earthen mounds are scattered along the Mississippi River, especially in Louisiana and Mississippi, where moundbuilding was practiced for approximately 6,500 years. Smith Creek is a particularly important site because its chronology encompasses a number of very important social transitions; for example, it covers the transition between two major subsistence strategies—hunting and gathering and corn agriculture—meaning that the archaeological record of Wilkinson County holds key information for understanding exactly when and how Native Americans in the Lower Mississippi Valley began to rely on agriculture.

Alongside excavating at Smith Creek and other local mound sites, an important part of SCAP’s mission is to engage with the local community. The purpose of the 2019 field season was to excavate at Lessley Mound and to install an exhibit about mounds in the Wilkinson County Museum (WCM). The Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit and associated programming is the focus of this thesis. Though the WCM has been in existence for decades, it has primarily functioned as the office of the Woodville/Wilkinson County Main Street Association. Prior to the installation of our mound exhibit, the space looked more like an office and storage facility with an exhibit in the back than an official county historical museum.
During Summer 2019, I worked with a team to install and open a new exhibit in the WCM that focused on the long history of Native American moundbuilding in the Lower Mississippi Valley. I co-curated and designed the exhibit and planned and advertised for the opening day festival, alongside another undergraduate, Arielle Pierson, and our project director, Dr. Megan Kassabaum. This thesis will discuss our summer work as well as steps that we have planned and/or taken to extend the impact of the exhibit.

Wilkinson County is largely poor and largely Black. Some of the affluent White residents are very interested in archaeology and visit us regularly when we are excavating in the field, but much of the community has not directly expressed interest in SCAP. Thus, our main goal for the exhibit and festival was to bring local archaeology to a wider audience. During my time with the project and for the reasons discussed above, I focused specifically on creating opportunities for Wilkinson County kids to interact with archaeological information and principles. We created an activity booklet for kids to complete while they tour the exhibit, worked with the county librarian to showcase picture books about archaeology, and offered kid-friendly activities during the festival. In addition, we are currently working towards educational initiatives that will expand the impact of these ideas. Finally, as a companion to the exhibit, I have developed a manuscript for a children’s book about Smith Creek that I hope to eventually publish. I want the kids in Wilkinson County to know that their home is incredibly unique and encourage them to be proud of the long history of their county.

In the following chapters, I will reflect upon the success of the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit and the opening day festival in meeting our goal of engaging with the local community, and I will highlight the ways in which we engaged with children throughout the project, as well as discuss how these efforts are continuing today. In Chapter 2, I present necessary background
information, including a history of Native American moundbuilding in Louisiana and Mississippi, an introduction to the demographics and geography of Wilkinson County, and a summary of the field of public archaeology. In Chapter 3, I explain the impetus for the exhibit and detail how we designed and executed the exhibit and festival. I also evaluate our success based upon quantitative survey data and personal observations and interactions, positing hypotheses for the differing trends. In Chapter 4, I focus on children, examining the benefits of blended formal and informal learning experiences and of archaeology as a school subject. I conclude this chapter by discussing our future plans for working with children in Wilkinson County and presenting the manuscript for the children’s book that I wrote about Smith Creek. Chapter 5 serves as a conclusion, drawing these various threads together.
Chapter 2: Archaeology and the Public in the Lower Mississippi Valley

Culture History of the Lower Mississippi Valley

For thousands of years, Native American groups in the eastern United States have built massive earthen mounds as ritual and community centers. These sites vary widely across time and space, from the animal effigy mounds in the Upper Midwest to the earthen enclosures of the Hopewell Culture in Ohio to the flat-topped platform mounds scattered across much of the American South. There are thousands of conical and platform mounds and various other earthworks scattered along the Mississippi River, which provided abundant natural resources to the populations that lived along it. Moundbuilding was a particularly prevalent activity throughout Mississippi and Louisiana, in a region known as the Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV) (Kassabaum 2015).

Native Americans began constructing mounds in the LMV as early as 5000 BC (Saunders 2012). This approximately 6,500-year history of moundbuilding distinguishes the region as having the longest tradition of earthen moundbuilding anywhere in the United States, and the earthen monuments that were built there predate many other monumental traditions elsewhere in the world (e.g., the European Neolithic, the Olmec and Maya in Mesoamerica, the Great Pyramids at Giza, etc.). Southeastern archaeologists have organized this expanse of time into a series of culture-historical periods based on artifact types and styles, technologies, behaviors, and belief systems. The periods during which mound construction took place are known as the Middle and Late Archaic, Early, Middle, and Late Woodland, Mississippi, and Historic periods. Moundbuilding began in the Middle Archaic and slowed significantly towards the end of the Mississippi period in the AD 1500s (Rees 2010a). The practice continued in a smaller capacity into the Historic period at certain sites, and it continues in the present in some communities, such
as the Muskogee Creek in Oklahoma (Miller 2015) and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina (Kassabaum 2015).

There are at least 16 Middle Archaic mound sites known in the LMV. The best known is Watson Brake, located in northeastern Louisiana. Watson Brake consists of eleven mounds with connecting earthen ridges surrounding a central open space, or plaza. The people who built it were nomadic hunter-gatherers, who likely gathered there seasonally (Saunders et al. 2005).

Though fewer Late Archaic earthworks have been found, one of the most significant mound sites in the United States dates to this period. Poverty Point, located in the northeastern corner of Louisiana not far from Watson Brake, consists of at least five mounds—the largest of which is the second largest mound in the country—as well as six massive, semi-circular earthen ridges. Poverty Point people were hunter-gatherers and were part of a substantial trade network that extended north into Illinois and Indiana and east into North Carolina. The site was likely a gathering place for large, community events, rather than a year-round home (Gibson 2001).

A small number of LMV mound sites date to the Early Woodland period, including Batesville in northwestern Mississippi. Seven mounds were originally recorded there, and four remain today (Johnson 2002). During the Early Woodland, people began to live in permanent settlements and bury their dead in mounds. They were hunter-gatherers, and they started using pottery to cook their food (Hays and Weinstein 2010).

Moundbuilding picked up during the Middle Woodland period, beginning around AD 1. Settlements were bigger and more permanent than in the previous periods, and while people still hunted and gathered food, it is likely that they also planted and tended small gardens. People began to bury some of their dead with grave goods, perhaps signifying a degree of social stratification. Marksville, located in eastern Louisiana, is a large Middle Woodland site
consisting of at least seven mounds surrounded by a C-shaped wall. Similar to what the people at Poverty Point had done approximately 1,500 years prior, the people who lived at Marksville participated in a massive trade network known as the Hopewell Interaction Sphere, which extended across much of the eastern half of the United States (McGimsey 2010).

Many mounds in the LMV have been dated to the Late Woodland period. It was during this period that people expanded on the earlier practice of building platform mounds; some of these were topped with important structures. High-ranking people may have lived on top of some of the mounds, while other structures were likely used for ceremonies or rituals. Hunting and gathering remained common, but people also started to plant crops in more significant quantities (Kassabaum 2014). The three mounds at Smith Creek, the focus of this thesis, were built during the Late Woodland period. The largest mound once had structures on top of it, and the second largest mound was used for burials (Kassabaum and Graham 2018).

Many mounds in the LMV have also been dated to the Mississippi period. Some of these were used by small groups of people, while other mound complexes became large villages that were ruled by chiefs. The largest Mississippian mound in the LMV is at the Emerald site, located in southwestern Mississippi. Emerald once consisted of eight mounds surrounding an open plaza space on top of a very large, constructed platform, though only two of the summit mounds remain today (Cotter 1951). Mississippian people relied on corn agriculture and had complex religious beliefs (Rees 2010b).

The latest mound site in the region is the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, located in Natchez, Mississippi. The six mounds there were built around AD 1350, during the Mississippi period, but the site was occupied into the Historic period and represents one of the only occupied mound sites for which we have written documentation (Neitzel 1965). The Natchez had an
elaborate political system. Their chiefs lived on top of the mounds and ruled over both the Grand Village and the surrounding smaller villages and settlements (Lorenz 1997). The Natchez continued to occupy the site during the colonial period until 1730, when French colonists seized the site and massacred the Native community. Those that escaped death or enslavement assimilated into the Chickasaw, Creek, or Cherokee tribes (Neitzel 1965).

An Introduction to Wilkinson County

Wilkinson County, Mississippi, is located approximately 30 miles south of the Grand Village along U.S. Highway 61. It is the southwestern-most county in the state (Figure 1), and its 688 square miles are home to approximately 8,800 people, 70% of whom identify as Black or African American and 28% of whom identify as White. It is one of the poorest counties in the state, with a median household income of $26,599. Thirty percent of people live in poverty (“QuickFacts: Wilkinson County, Mississippi” 2018). Mississippi itself is one of the poorest states in the nation, with the highest poverty rate at 19.8% and the second lowest median household income at $43,529 as of 2017 (Suneson 2018).

Wilkinson County consists of three incorporated towns—Woodville, Centreville, and Crosby—as well as multiple unincorporated communities (Figure 2; “Wilkinson County, Mississippi” 2018). This project was focused in Woodville, which we chose for myriad reasons. Its proximity to Smith Creek and Lessley, the two known mound sites in the county, and its location right off of a main highway give it lots of potential for tourism (see Figure 2). Additionally, Woodville is the county seat, so there is a constant flow of residents from all over the county in and out of the downtown area.
Figure 1: Map of Mississippi counties with Wilkinson County highlighted in blue (adapted from https://www.mapofus.org/mississippi/).
Downtown Woodville is located just west of U.S. Highway 61 and is made up of a few gridded streets surrounding the county courthouse. There are a few chain establishments, such as a Family Dollar and a Sonic Drive-In, on the main highway, but the downtown is comprised of small, locally owned businesses, such as Foster Insurance, JR’s Auto Parts, and The Orchard Cafe. The county school district, sheriff, and tax assessor’s offices are also located in the downtown, as well as the town police and fire departments, the public library, and eight churches. Despite its small area of just one square mile, Woodville proper is an active town where everyone knows each other.

Woodville is also a very historical place, boasting sixteen listings on the National Park Service’s National Register of Historic Places and 51 official historical markers (“National
Register Database and Research” 2020; Prats 2020). Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States from 1861 to 1865, grew up just outside of Woodville at Rosemont Plantation, and William Grant Still, a celebrated African-American classical composer and musician, was born in Woodville in 1895. The town is also home to Mississippi’s oldest continuously run newspaper, *The Woodville Republican*, and was one end of the West Feliciana Railroad, one of the earliest rail lines built in the United States (Prats 2020). The Wilkinson County Museum (WCM) and the African American Museum (AAM) are located one block apart on the main square of the downtown. The former inhabits the building that was once the Office and Banking House of the West Feliciana Railroad Company. Both museums, along with Rosemont Plantation, are owned and operated by the Woodville Civic Club. The properties were built in the early 1800s and acquired by the Civic Club in the early 1970s in an effort to preserve them. Preservation of Woodville’s historical resources is one of the organization’s main goals (“Welcome to Woodville!” 2011).

Smith Creek and Lessley are located fifteen to twenty miles west of downtown Woodville. Wilkinson County citizens are generally familiar with the mounds because they are clearly visible from Mississippi Highway 24, the primary road that runs east-west across the county. Additionally, because the county is largely a rural farming community, people regularly find artifacts such as pottery and stone tools when tending to their properties or collect artifacts from the many creeks and rivers that run through the county, raising awareness of its pre-contact inhabitants.

In 2013, a state-funded public archaeology project known as the Mississippi Mound Trail (MMT) was undertaken to link 33 publicly-visible mound sites throughout the state, mostly located along the Mississippi River. Signs were erected at each site to provide some information
about the site layout, the material culture excavated there, and the people who constructed the mounds (“Mississippi Mound Trail” 2019). Smith Creek and Lessley are both featured on the MMT, and it is from this project that the Smith Creek Archaeological Project (SCAP) was born.

SCAP director Dr. Megan Kassabaum of the University of Pennsylvania was one of the archaeologists who worked on the MMT, and in 2015 she returned to Smith Creek to continue excavations there. The site consists of three platform mounds surrounding an open plaza. The mounds date to approximately AD 600–1300, but more recent excavations have confirmed that people occupied the site at least as early as 200 BC. There is also a later occupation of the site around AD 1300-1400. Little is known about Smith Creek’s early occupants at this time, but it is known that the populations that used the site during the middle period were hunter-gatherer-gardeners and that the latest occupants practiced corn-based agriculture (Kassabaum and Graham 2018). Lessley, just five miles down Highway 24, consists of a single platform mound that dates to approximately AD 1350 (Kassabaum, Steponaitis, and Melton 2014). Much less is known about this site, though more information is expected to come to light as the material from the summer 2019 excavations is processed.

Importantly, Dr. Kassabaum has developed relationships with many Wilkinson County residents throughout the seven years that she has worked in the county. Our main collaborator for this project was Polly Rosenblatt, the director of the Woodville/Wilkinson County Main Street Association. Main Street has been a significant advocate for community development in Woodville since its formation in 2004. It hosts multiple annual community events and festivals, the largest being the Woodville Deer and Wildlife Festival, and it recently submitted an application for Woodville to be featured on HGTV’s Home Town Takeover show which, if chosen, would completely revitalize the town (“About” 2020). Mrs. Rosenblatt is skilled at
knowing what her community wants and needs; in working with her, we were able to tailor the decisions we made directly to the people for whom we were doing the project.

**Public Archaeology**

Public archaeology is a broad subfield of archaeology that involves a variety of interactions between archaeologists and the communities they work with. The first major work dedicated to public archaeology was published in 1972. Sites were being rapidly destroyed due to land development, so public interest in archaeology was deemed necessary in order to preserve these important cultural resources. In this case, “public” referred mostly to state and federal governmental bodies and the support and funding that they could provide (McGimsey 1972). Subsequent works significantly expanded the field, exploring ways that the general public could get involved with local archaeological efforts. In the 1980s and 1990s, “educational archaeology” became a popular method of engaging people with the past and helping people to understand the connections between the past and the present (Jameson 2004). In 1996, the Society for American Archaeology (SAA), the leading professional association for archaeologists who study the Americas, published a set of ethical guidelines that established public education and outreach as a responsibility of professional archaeologists (“Ethics in Professional Archaeology” 2016). Schadla-Hall (1999) defines archaeology as an inherently public activity because it deals with the history of humanity, and thus public understanding is imperative to the process.

Site destruction is a continuous problem in the United States, one that has been noted since at least the late 1800s (Thomas 1884). The Smithsonian’s Bureau of Ethnology recorded thousands of mounds across the eastern United States in a massive, systematic undertaking
between 1881 and 1891 (Thomas 1894). Many mounds, however, have since been lost due to land development. Speaking specifically of Arkansas, McGimsey (1972: 3-4) states that the second half of the 20th century was particularly devastating as land was cleared and leveled for new construction, destroying by one estimate 90 percent of sites. Though McGimsey’s research was focused in Arkansas, there is reason to believe that the same may be true across the Southeast. Climate change is the current major challenge in site preservation for coastal areas, such as in Florida and Louisiana. Rising sea levels and severe natural disasters are submerging and destroying sites faster than archaeologists can study them (Mehta and Skipton 2019; Byrd and Neuman 2010). In the LMV, erosion, farming, building, and looting are the main culprits of mound destruction (“Mississippi Mound Trail” 2019). Once a site is destroyed, the information it held can never be restored, and it becomes impossible to learn about the people and cultures who occupied that land in the past. Involving the public is a major way to combat these issues; communities local to archaeological sites are the best equipped populations to protect them because they can constantly watch for damage. Additionally, in the United States, many archaeological sites are privately owned; if landowners are unaware of the importance of such places, they may choose to level or otherwise damage the sites and develop the land instead of preserving the important historical contexts.

In this paper, I will draw from Gabriel Moshenska’s definition of public archaeology as, broadly, “practice and scholarship where archaeology meets the world” (Moshenska 2017: 3). In popping archaeology’s academic bubble and letting the general public in, the past can become easier to understand and connect with (Sànchez 2010). Public archaeology is thus a discipline “that seeks to encourage, equip, and enable archaeologists to share their work with public audiences” in a variety of ways (Moshenska and Zuanni 2018: 1). This can include anything
from television shows about archaeology, to open source archaeological data, to livestreamed lectures, and more. The type of public archaeology that is most relevant to this project is what Moshenska defines as archaeological education. Archaeological education offers a way for experts to disseminate their interpretations of the past in an accessible manner. It generally takes place in museums and at heritage sites, often involving informational displays and/or guided tours from museum or archaeological professionals, though it may also take place in formal classroom settings, often at a post-secondary level (Moshenska 2017).

Case Studies

There are many local, state, and national public archaeology programs in the country. For a wide variety of reasons, these programs have had variable levels of success, and their study can teach others undertaking such work valuable lessons. Here, I will detail four that are particularly relevant to this project.

One of the most successful public archaeology undertakings in the country is the Florida Public Archaeology Network (FPAN). Its general mission is to preserve archaeological sites around the state through education and community engagement (Lees, Scott-Ireton, and Miller 2015). It does this through public site tours, classes, and volunteer excavation programs, and also provides training for scuba divers to monitor underwater historic sites. As sea levels have risen in recent years, professionals could not keep up with monitoring and maintenance, so the Heritage Monitoring Scouts program was created in 2016 to get the public involved. In its first year, the program garnered 233 volunteers who monitored 312 sites that otherwise would have been neglected (Miller and Murray 2018). This is just one example of FPAN’s extensive array of
successful community engagement endeavors, which demonstrate that education can empower the public to preserve their local archaeological resources.

Project Archaeology is a national archaeological education program jointly sponsored by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Montana State University. It was founded in the early 1990s with the purpose of protecting archaeological sites through education. It provides school teachers with lesson plans about archaeology based in Common Core education standards and facilitates professional development workshops so that teachers can learn from each other and from professional archaeologists (Moe 2002; “About Project Archaeology” 2020). There are currently 27 different curricula available that range in target age from grades 3 to 12 and in topic from food to rock art to Native American houses. Students draw connections between science, history, language arts, and math via hands-on activities and imagination exercises and learn about how these seemingly unrelated subjects are culturally relevant. In doing so, they also learn about cultures and histories that may differ dramatically from their own (Brody et al. 2014). Since 1990, approximately 18,000 educators have been trained to teach archaeological principles, and approximately 466,000 students have engaged with Project Archaeology curricula (Project Archaeology 2019). Their work is helping people from all over the country understand and appreciate the history of humanity.

The National Park Service’s Junior Ranger program is an activity-based program that rewards children for learning in the parks. At almost all National Parks, kids can ask for an activity booklet full of games and questions that help them to more fully understand where they are and why the place is important. Once the booklet is completed, they are sworn in as Junior Rangers, promising to protect and teach others about the parks, and they receive a badge (“Become a Junior Ranger” 2020). One study found that the Junior Ranger program at the Great
Smoky Mountains National Park “had immediate, positive, and significant impacts on participating children’s awareness, interest, and engagement pertaining to park resources,” and these positive attitudes were maintained for at least six months after their visit to the park (Powell, Vezeau, and Stern 2010). One of my crewmates, Oscar, had a lot of fun collecting Junior Ranger badges in our travels (Figure 3). While the activities tended to be geared toward a much younger audience, searching the displays for the necessary information encouraged him and other members of the SCAP team to spend more time engaging with the exhibits than we otherwise would have. The Junior Ranger program also encouraged him to seek out more historical sites. Oscar has now visited approximately 15 National Parks, due in no small part to the promise of a Junior Ranger badge. Learning about history is more exciting for children and adults alike when they can participate in engaging activities.

Figure 3: Oscar Aguila, University of Pennsylvania undergraduate student and SCAP team member, wearing his Junior Ranger badges in the field. Photograph by Megan Kassabaum.
Broadly, public archaeology programs provide people with a tangible connection to the past via material culture, giving rise to opportunities for hands-on learning which can leave a much longer-lasting impression than reading from a book or watching a documentary. Museums are a common place where the public can interact with artifacts, but they are not the only place. Since 2011, the Archaeological Institute of America has organized International Archaeology Day, a worldwide celebration of the field of archaeology and its contributions to society. On the third Sunday in October, hundreds of institutions and organizations around the world, from local libraries to state archaeological societies, host programming and activities to engage with the public. These can range from guided tours of sites and exhibits, to simulated digs, to archaeology fairs, and more (“International Archaeology Day” 2020). Archaeology fairs are a particularly useful tool for community outreach because they “promote greater public understanding of archaeology [and] raise awareness of local archaeological resources” by providing opportunities for face-to-face communication with local archaeologists and hands-on interactions with artifacts (Thomas and Langlitz 2016: 466). Physically holding the past in your hands is a powerful way to make potent connections with peoples of the past with whom you could never interact directly (Henson 2017). Through this, communities can gain a better appreciation for their land and the people who lived there before them, ideally encouraging them to take care of their local archaeological resources.
Chapter 3: The Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit

Planning the Exhibit

When Dr. Kassabaum visited the WCM for the first time, the building functioned more as an office and storage facility for the Woodville/Wilkinson County Main Street Association than a museum exploring the history of the county. The small exhibit in the back discussed the ante- and post-bellum history of Woodville and Wilkinson County; objects such as furniture and china were displayed alongside panels detailing prominent figures, such as Jefferson Davis, historical places, such as plantation homes, and significant industries, such as cotton. There was no real narrative to the space; it was cluttered and disjointed and was not a place where many visitors would feel welcome. Alongside the nineteenth and twentieth-century history, Dr. Kassabaum also expected to see some information about Smith Creek, Lessley, and the Native Americans who once occupied the Wilkinson County landscape. However, the only mention of Native peoples was a sign on a corkboard about a number of small Wilkinson County communities which was titled “Indians, Legends, and Steamboats” and had a single photograph of a local store beneath it (Figure 4). The one institution claiming to tell Wilkinson County’s historical narrative had entirely left out its earliest inhabitants.

This was the impetus for the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit. At first, Dr. Kassabaum just wanted to take down the board and put up a new one that actually provided information about the county’s pre-contact history, building off of the MMT and SCAP excavations. But, student interest – first from Arielle Pierson, another of her undergraduate students, and then from myself – made it possible to expand the panel into a more comprehensive exhibit.
Due to European colonization, there are no federally recognized descendants of the Natchez, the Native American tribe whose ancestors likely lived at Smith Creek and Lessley, and the Native population of Wilkinson County is very low (<0.4%) (“Wilkinson County, Mississippi” 2018). It was thus clear that we needed to find a way to make the Native history relevant to the contemporary community. The connection we chose to focus on was their shared landscape. Drawing on archaeological theories of persistent place, Arielle developed the term *familiar landscapes*, focusing on the idea that these two communities separated by culture and time are very much related by the land they occupy (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019). Our main goal for the exhibit project was to utilize the established museum space to educate Wilkinson
County residents about the long history of Native American moundbuilding cultures in the LMV and connect the past peoples’ daily activities to those of current Wilkinson County residents. By making the strange familiar, we hoped to increase interest in and respect for both indigenous peoples and local archaeological resources. We also hoped that our new exhibit would encourage tourists to come into Woodville, helping to foster economic growth and knowledge about Wilkinson County’s rich cultural resources.

Producing the Exhibit

With funding from the Mississippi Humanities Council, Visit Mississippi, the Penn Museum, the Hassenfeld Foundation Social Impact Research Grant, and other assorted grants and donations, Dr. Kassabaum, Arielle, and I designed an exhibit consisting of three display cases of artifacts from Wilkinson County and a set of large panels detailing a timeline of the moundbuilding cultures that existed in the LMV throughout each of the aforementioned archaeological periods. We chose chronological organization for our informational panels to provide an explicit path from the past to the present, helping visitors to understand where they fit in.

Official writing and graphic design of the exhibit components began in early May 2019. At that time, and though we had previously agreed to a space, the curator of the WCM and the AAM had been repeatedly changing his mind about where he wanted our exhibit to be set up and whether or not we could use wall space or move or block existing exhibit materials. With the potential of these constraints in mind, we designed the timeline on retractable panels that can be moved around and set up in different locations if need be.
Each panel is split into three sections (Figure 5). The top third explores the architecture, social structure, foodways, and technology of the period of focus. We chose these topics because they are some of the primary cultural traits that archaeologists use to create cultural divisions in the past. Each is represented by an icon: three mounds for architecture, people surrounding the state of Mississippi for social structure, a catfish for foodways, and a projectile point for technology (see Figure 5). These icons were specifically chosen to be relatable for this particular community; local people are familiar with mounds because they are part of their quotidian landscape, catfish are commonly caught in the local lakes and rivers, and many county residents find projectile points and other artifacts on their properties. The middle third of each panel provides a case study of a mound site in the LMV that dates to the time period (see Figure 5). We wanted to highlight examples of regional sites that are particularly well-studied. Whenever possible, we chose sites that are open for public visitation, so that interested visitors could explore further. The bottom third of each panel provides a map of mound sites in the LMV from the time period that are either open to the public or visible from the road, mostly, though not exclusively, highlighting sites that are on the MMT and Louisiana's Ancient Mounds Driving Trail (see Figure 5). We wanted to give visitors an idea of the number of mounds that date to each period and also separate the large number of sites listed on the two extant mound trails in case someone was particularly interested in visiting sites from a specific period.

Upon receiving permission to use the main gallery in the WCM, we set up the panels so that the timeline wrapped around the walls of the exhibit space with the display cases in the center. This lets visitors see the artifacts from all angles. Because of the small size of the space, we also wanted to use the timeline to encourage visitors to walk in one direction, creating a clear entrance to and exit from the exhibit. When visitors walk into the WCM, they are greeted by the
title panel and a brochure stand encouraging them to take an exhibit guide (Figure 6). Then, turning to their left, visitors see a panel introducing them to mounds in the LMV. Continuing around the space, visitors can read about each archaeological period of moundbuilding, beginning with the Middle Archaic and ending with the Historic period (see Appendix A). The exhibit guide defines archaeology and mounds and explains the icons that are on each panel. It also talks briefly about SCAP, the MMT, the Louisiana Mound Trail, the mounds along the Natchez Trace Parkway, and how mounds are used by Native groups today (Figures 7–8). Our goal in designing the pamphlet this way was to make the guide useful both while touring the exhibit and after visitors take it home.

The final panel, which is the back of the title panel, is entitled Familiar Landscapes (Figure 9). It connects the architecture, social structure, foodways, and technology of the past inhabitants of Wilkinson County to those of the present ones, using the nearby Lake Mary as the case study. Lake Mary is a common fishing and recreation spot in Wilkinson County, and its proximity to Smith Creek and Lessley means that it likely served similar purposes for past peoples. The final panel’s design mimics that of the other panels, further emphasizing the similarities between the past and present. Personalizing the information helps visitors to recognize that they are tied to the past via both activities and land—they build community spaces, gather together, hunt and fish for game, and utilize and protect their land, just as the moundbuilders would have done.

Next to the final panel is a brochure stand that holds information for further exploration of archaeological sites in the region. It includes the MMT, Louisiana's Ancient Mounds Driving Trail, the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, and Poverty Point brochures, among others. As visitors exit the exhibit space, they can enter the gallery of ante- and postbellum objects from
Late Woodland Period
AD 400-1200

During this time, people started regularly building large mounds with flat tops called platform mounds. These served as foundations for important structures or stages for special activities.

It is possible that important people lived in these mound-top structures, but many probably also served as temples or other public buildings that the community could use for special events.

For the first time, people in this area started planting crops. Though they were not the crops that we think of today, many of the plants they ate as staple parts of their diet still grow around here as weeds.

People also continued to hunt lots of animals, especially deer, which they hunted using a new type of tool—the bow and arrow. You can distinguish arrow points from earlier spear points because they are much smaller.

Case Study: Smith Creek

The Late Woodland culture in this area is called Coles Creek. Coles Creek people built three large mounds (A, B, and C) at Smith Creek, just past Lake Mary on Highway 24. We know that Mound B is a burial mound and our excavations have shown us that Mounds A and C might have supported structures or been sites for community feasting. Excavations in the plaza have shown that people lived at Smith Creek both before and after this period, which tells us how important this place was to the early residents of Wilkinson County.

Late Woodland Sites to Visit

Many sites in Mississippi and Louisiana date to this period and you can visit 24 of them! We have chosen some of our favorites to list here.

1. Smith Creek
2. Bayou Pierre
3. Aden
4. Marsden
5. Irelsey
6. Fildes
7. Landreau
8. Wade Landing
9. Shackleford Church
10. Sundown
11. Belmoral
12. Mound Plantation
13. Peck
14. Forgmor
15. Elkhorn Plantation
16. DePrato
17. Troyville

Figure 5: Late Woodland Period panel showcasing the three-part panel design. Design by Erin Spicola.
Figure 6: View of the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit from the front door. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
As you walk through the exhibit, look for these symbols to learn more about different aspects of the lives of the Native Americans who have lived in the Lower Mississippi Valley for millennia.

**Architecture**
- Where did they live?
- What did they build?
- How did they build it?

**Social structure**
- How did they organize their communities?
- What types of religious and political systems did they have?

**Food**
- What did they eat?
- How did they procure it?

**Technology**
- What tools did they make and use?
- What types of art did they create?

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**UMB**

The Town of Woodville
Wilkinson County Industrial Development Authority
Woodville Civic Club

Cover image courtesy of the Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution, Catalogue Number 225488

Figure 7: Side 1 of the exhibit guide. Design by Erin Spicola.
What is archaeology?
Archaeology is the scientific study of past societies through the material record they left behind. This often involves the study of artifacts. However, archaeologists are also interested in the features found on archaeological sites, such as trash deposits called middens, hearths, and post holes left behind by ancient structures.

What is a mound?
Earthen mounds have been built by Native people in the Eastern United States for over 5,000 years. The mounds were built by hand, using dirt that was gradually piled up one basketload at a time. Some had rounded tops and were used for burial, some had flat tops and were used as foundations for important structures, and others remain mysterious to archaeologists today.

The Smith Creek Archaeological Project
Smith Creek is located only 15 miles from Woodville on Highway 24 West near Fort Adams. An archaeological crew from the University of Pennsylvania has been excavating there since 2015. The three mounds at Smith Creek surround an open space called a plaza. These architectural features were built and used during the Late Woodland and Mississippian periods, but archaeologists have also uncovered unexpected evidence of an Early Woodland occupation. In 2019, the Penn crew is focusing on Lessley, a Mississippian mound 5 miles from Smith Creek. Both Smith Creek and Lessley are stops on the Mississippi Mound Trail.

The Mississippi Mound Trail
There are over 30,000 recorded archaeological sites in Mississippi, including Emerald Mound, the second largest mound in the United States. The Mississippi Mound Trail links 33 of the best-studied and most accessible mounds in the state. Each site on the trail features a roadside marker and can be viewed from a public pull-off.

The Louisiana Mound Trail
There are 700 recorded mound sites in Louisiana. The Ancient Mounds Heritage Area and Trails Initiative has linked 39 mound sites in northeast Louisiana along four driving trails. Visitors can explore them and visit the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Poverty Point.

The Natchez Trace
There are 7 additional mound sites to visit along the Natchez Trace Parkway. This 444-mile recreational road and scenic drive guides you through three states from Natchez to Nashville. The route roughly follows the Old Trace, a historic trail used by Native Americans, European settlers, slave traders, and soldiers.

Modern Mounds
While most mounds in the United States were built before European contact, some Native groups still build and use them today. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in North Carolina still holds an annual mound-building ceremony, while the Mississippi Band ofChoctaw Indians still use an ancient site called Nanih Waiya as a sacred site for community rituals and ceremonies.

Figure 8: Side 2 of the exhibit guide. Design by Erin Spicola.
Familiar Landscapes
Then and Now

Just as moundbuilding created important places for past local and regional communities to interact, today we build municipal buildings, schools, libraries, and museums.

Today’s Wilkinson County residents work jobs, raise families, maintain traditions, and celebrate special events. Early Native Americans would have interacted with their friends, family, and acquaintances in similar ways.

Food abounds in Wilkinson County. People hunt deer, fish for gar and catfish, and harvest local plants. We find many of the same foods you eat today in the archaeological record... showing that people here have appreciated a catfish dinner for thousands of years!

Just like you, early Native Americans used a variety of tools to hunt and cook their food. Where you use metal knives, they used stone tools. Where you use fine china or tupperware, they created containers out of clay.

Case Study: Lake Mary

Lake Mary is an oxbow lake. This means that it was created by the meandering of the Mississippi River. The River has created many paths over time and the communities who settled near its shores have always benefited from the fertile landscape it created. In Wilkinson County, Lake Mary provides locals and tourists with sustenance and sport. People value the rich bounty it offers. This place connects the present-day inhabitants of Wilkinson County with its past occupants. You protect your land because it is part of your identity and your shared community, and the Native people who used to live here undoubtedly felt the same way.

Archaeology keeps people’s stories alive by studying their material culture. It has taught us about ancient traditions and highlighted how similar life in Wilkinson County has been through time. By understanding and preserving the archaeology we have here, we are protecting the history and future of the place we call home.

Figure 9: The Familiar Landscapes panel. Design by Erin Spicola.
Wilkinson County. This gallery existed in the WCM prior to our mound exhibit; another major reason for setting up our exhibit the way we did was to create an easy historical transition between the two spaces. That said, if we were to design the exhibits that focus on the later history of Wilkinson County, we would undoubtedly make some dramatic changes. Visitors can also browse the existing museum shop, to which we added tote bags bearing the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit logo and a number of publications available for purchase.

The display cases in the center of the exhibit space are not meant to be viewed in any particular order, nor do they connect directly to one part of the timeline. Rather, they represent three main categories of material that archaeologists in the American South typically find at mound sites including our investigations at Smith Creek: ceramics, lithics, and cooking remains. We chose to organize the artifacts in this manner instead of by time period because we felt that it was more useful for visitors to walk away with a general understanding of the broad range of artifacts that one may find at a site in the LMV than to learn specifically which artifacts were associated with each archaeological period. Additionally, we did not have artifacts available to us from each time period; we utilized surface collections from Smith Creek, which date mostly to the Late Woodland and Mississippi periods, as well as surface collections made by a local collector.

For each display case, we designed a corresponding explanation sheet (Figures 10–12). We chose to do this because the cases were too small to include individual object labels without either crowding the objects or having to remove some objects. Explanation sheets also gave us the space to provide more details than we would have been able to had we placed object labels in the cases. The sheets are organized in a web style, with a line drawing of the case layout in the center of the page. Each object or set of associated objects is labeled with a number that
corresponds to numbers inside the cases. Photographs and illustrations showcase the objects in action, tie them to material and concepts more familiar to Wilkinson County residents, and create visual interest.

The ceramics and cooking remains cases hold materials that were surface collected at Smith Creek. We chose artifacts from only the surface collections, rather than the entirety of the Smith Creek collections, because surface collected materials have lost a lot of their context; we know generally where at the site they were collected, but we have no way of knowing exactly where and how deep they were originally buried and therefore do not know what other artifacts or features they were originally associated with. Because of this lack of context, surface collected materials are less useful in site analyses than materials that were excavated, so if something were to happen to them in transit or at the museum (e.g., loss, vandalism, etc.), it would be less devastating than losing materials that have detailed context. Regardless of their surface collected status, all materials were thoroughly documented before being moved to the WCM and remain the property of SCAP.

The ceramics case (Figure 13) highlights six common types of decoration applied to pre-contact Native ceramics in the LMV: cordmarked, incised, punctated, slipped, brushed, and engraved. This case thus shows visitors how archaeologists in the LMV classify ceramics. We chose two to three particularly clear examples of each type to showcase on a buildup in the case and piled other examples below them. The case also includes a replica plate made by Tammy Beane, a well-known potter based in Alabama. The replica serves to help visitors connect the fragmentary archaeological ceramic sherds from Smith Creek with a more recognizable object and demonstrates the high degree of skill and artistry that Native ceramics display.
The main component of the cooking remains case is a large replica cooking pot, also made by Tammy Beane (Figure 14). We placed it on a buildup and piled animal bones, fired clay, and fire-cracked rock around the buildup’s base. These artifacts show visitors how archaeologists see fire in the archaeological record. Some of the animal bones such as deer long bones and fish vertebrae may also be specifically recognizable to visitors, as hunting and fishing are common activities for local residents. This further instills the idea that the past and present communities are connected, as they still eat some of the same game today that we find archaeologically at Smith Creek.

The lithics case (Figure 15) holds materials from a private collection from Wilkinson County. We chose to display artifacts from a private collection because we felt that lithics were both important to the story that we were trying to tell and something that Wilkinson County residents are naturally interested in. The stone material in the Smith Creek surface collections is, from a museum visitor’s standpoint, rather unimpressive. There are only a couple of small projectile points – not enough to fill a case – and we imagined that the average visitor would find piles of flakes and debitage less than visually exciting. The private collection allowed us to discuss a wide variety of tools, such as scrapers, drills, and gravers, as well as the process of flintknapping. This gives visitors a significantly better idea of the wide variety of technologies that Native Americans used in the past. We never would have been able to achieve the same level of detail using solely Smith Creek surface collections.

I recognize that the existence and display of private collections in museums is a contentious subject in the field of archaeology. The Society for American Archaeology warns that displaying objects adds to their commercial value; an ill-intentioned individual could benefit financially from collecting and selling objects that professionals have deemed special ("Ethics in
Professional Archaeology” 2016). However, there is an important distinction between collectors, who view sites as sources of artifacts, and avocational archaeologists such as our collaborator, who, like professional archaeologists, view sites and artifacts as sources of information (Davis 1991: 175). There is a long history of avocational archaeologists making significant organizational and policy contributions to the field of archaeology (Kassabaum and Terry 2020: 13). In collaborating with an avocational archaeologist for the mound exhibit, himself a longtime Wilkinson County resident, we strengthen existing relationships of mutual trust and respect between the community (insiders) and ourselves (outsiders).

Figure 10: Ceramic case explanation sheet. Design by Erin Spicola.
Figure 11: Cooking remains case explanation sheet. Design by Erin Spicola.
Figure 12: Lithics case explanation sheet. Design by Erin Spicola.
Figure 13: The ceramics case, featuring the replica plate. Photograph by Erin Spicola.

Figure 14: The cooking remains case, featuring the replica pot. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, of particular importance to us throughout this project was engaging with the children who visit the exhibit. We were inspired by the Junior Ranger program to create an activity booklet that would guide children through the exhibit using accessible language and engaging activities. Arielle painted the booklet cover to represent a map of downtown Woodville and Smith Creek so that when kids look at the front and back covers side-by-side, they see a clear path from the WCM to the mounds to the Mississippi River (Figure 16). The first page of the booklet introduces archaeology and mounds (Figure 17). The following activities encourage kids to fill out a word search, design their own pot sherds, unscramble site names, connect ancient objects to their modern counterparts, and answer questions about early life in the LMV (Figures 18-22). These activities require kids to engage with the artifacts and the panels, helping them to understand the information presented and encouraging them to spend more time in the exhibit than they otherwise may have. Kids who fill out the booklet get an
Archaeologist-in-Training pin, inspired by the Junior Ranger badges (Figure 23). The pin, the booklet, and the title panel all feature our exhibit mascot, Gary the Gar. Garfish are a common local food source for both past and present communities; we regularly find gar scales at Smith Creek, and many contemporary kids have caught gar while fishing. Gary provides local children with a recognizable, tangible link between the present and the past.

Figure 16: The front and back covers of the activity booklet. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.
(Left) Figure 17: Page 1 of the activity booklet. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.

(Right) Figure 18: Page 2 of the activity booklet. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.
Native Americans made pottery to eat, drink, and cook out of. Find the display case with the beautifully decorated pot sherds, and then design your own below!

A sherd is a broken piece of pottery.

Case Study Scramble
Unscramble these letters to reveal the names of some famous mound sites.

---
ASVLELMRIK
---
MISHTRECEK
---
AWOSNTKBEA
---
DGNARLVEGLIA
---
VORPTEYIPOTN
---
TVBLISELEA
---
RELDMEA

(Left) Figure 19: Page 3 of the activity booklet. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.

(Right) Figure 20: Page 4 of the activity booklet. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.
Draw a line from the ancient objects on the left to the modern objects on the right that serve the same purpose.

Follow the exhibit to answer these questions about early life in Mississippi and Louisiana.

1. How many mounds are at Watson Brake?
2. How tall is the largest mound at Poverty Point?
3. During which period did people start burying their dead in mounds?
4. Name three things brought to Marksville from far away.
5. During which period did people start to plant crops?
6. What type of leader ruled Mississippian cities?
7. What was the name of the war chief of the Historic Natchez?
The Opening Day Festival

In addition to creating the exhibit itself, our funding also allowed us to host a festival on the day the exhibit opened. It was free to attend and open to the public. In the weeks leading up to the event, we advertised extensively on Facebook, both through paid ads and by sharing the event directly to regional archaeology pages. We created posters and flyers (Figure 24) and distributed them throughout downtown Woodville in shops, restaurants, and municipal buildings, as well as in surrounding towns and cities. Mrs. Rosenblatt introduced us to a local pastor, who agreed to distribute the flyers at local churches. We also met with Sheridan Montgomery, the Woodville librarian, who excitedly agreed to feature the flyers and our activity booklet alongside her summer reading programming. Finally, we ran various advertisements in local newspapers,
including *The Woodville Republican* and *The Natchez Democrat*, and Dr. Kassabaum was interviewed for papers and Mississippi Edition, a radio show on Mississippi Public Broadcasting.

The festival took place in downtown Woodville at the WCM, the AAM, and in the adjacent park. Approximately 400 people attended. We invited visitors into the WCM to view the mound exhibit, and Dr. Kassabaum, Arielle, and I stood by to answer any questions they may have had. At the AAM, we hosted an artifact identification booth where visitors could speak with regional archaeologists about the artifacts they had found on their own properties (Figure 25). The archaeologists did not assign value to the objects; rather, they taught the visitors about the objects’ cultural significance and learned from the collector about potential sites in the region. We knew that community members would be interested in this because local people often bring artifacts to us and ask us to identify them while we are excavating at Smith Creek and Lessley. This “Artifact Roadshow” event was an opportunity for professional archaeologists to interact with local people more personally and instill in them a sense of responsibility for the past, encouraging them to think of themselves as stewards of the objects’ stories rather than as owners of the objects themselves. We placed the Artifact Roadshow inside the AAM to encourage visitors to view the exhibits there, bringing it new exposure and demonstrating important connections between the stories being told in the two museums.

In the park adjacent to the AAM, we hosted an archaeology fair. We offered two activities for kids to try that mimic archaeological techniques: cookies excavations and flower pot puzzles (Figures 26-27). In using a toothpick to remove the chocolate chips from a cookie, kids learn that archaeologists have to be gentle with their tools (toothpick) when digging in the soil (cookie) so that they do not destroy important artifacts (chocolate chips). In trying to put broken flower pots back together, kids learn how difficult it can be to make sense out of piles of
pot sherds (and how exciting it can be to find sherds that fit together). We also offered coloring pages for kids to design their own pots (Figure 28). These activities had previously been successful for Dr. Kassabaum during archaeological programming at the University of North Carolina’s Research Laboratories of Archaeology, where she did her graduate work and served as their public outreach coordinator, so we knew that kids would find them engaging. They were a popular part of our fair; kids and adults alike enjoyed trying their hand at being an archaeologist. As an additional activity, Ms. Montgomery scanned a picture book about Watson Brake and set up a book walk around the courthouse square for kids and their parents to read together. Book walks are a favorite activity at the library.

Also at the archaeology fair, our crewmates processed artifacts from our excavations at Lessley, washing and sorting in real time for the public to watch (Figure 29). This had a few significant benefits. First, it contextualized the artifacts in the exhibit, helping visitors to understand what artifacts look like when they come out of the ground. Next, it showcased how much important archaeological work takes place outside of the field context, which is a side to archaeology that the community rarely gets to see. Finally, it created a bridge between the field and the museum, teaching them what archaeologists do with artifacts after excavation but before display. Many visitors, both children and adults, were excited to examine the artifacts and asked our crewmates lots of questions about what it is like to be an archaeologist.

In the evening, there was food and entertainment. Terral Macdonald, owner of The Orchard Cafe in Woodville, sold some of his popular dishes. Mr. Macdonald is a leader in the community, and his restaurant is well-liked among locals. We hoped that catering the festival would increase his customer base and would directly inject money into the community. YZ Ealey, a well-known local blues musician, performed with his band. Mrs. Rosenblatt chose to
hire him because she knew that he is very popular in the community, and in fact, some people were drawn to the festival just to see him perform. With Mrs. Rosenblatt’s expertise, we created a draw for parts of the population who otherwise would not have attended the festival, and in doing so we exposed new people to archaeology.

Figure 24: Flyer for the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit opening day festival. Design by Erin Spicola.
Figure 25: Archaeologists Dr. Vincas Steponaitis (left) of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Sam Brookes (center) of the U.S. Forest Service examine artifacts and speak with festival attendees at the Artifact Roadshow. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.

Figure 26: A festival attendee tries the cookie excavation activity at the archaeology fair. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
Figure 27: A festival attendee pieces a broken flower pot back together at the archaeology fair. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.

Figure 28: Festival attendees design their own pots at the archaeology fair. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
Figure 29: SCAP crewmembers Rebecca Dolan and Ben Davis wash and sort artifacts and answer questions from festival attendees about SCAP’s excavations at Lessley mound. Photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.

Evaluating the Exhibit and Festival

To evaluate the success of our exhibit in fostering interest in local archaeology, we created a survey and encouraged visitors to fill it out as they exited the exhibit space (see Appendix B). We also left surveys on the activity tables outside during the festival to catch people who did not fill them out inside, and they are still currently available to visitors as the exhibit remains open to the public in our absence. The survey asks the following questions:

1. Did the exhibit meet your expectations?
2. Did you learn something new?
3. Was the exhibit fun?
4. Was the exhibit informative?
5. How did you hear about the exhibit?
6. Would you come back or recommend that others visit?
7. Have you ever visited a mound site?
8. If yes, which mound site(s)?
9. If no, are you now more likely to visit one?
10. What is your age?

Questions 1–4 let us measure how interesting and educational the exhibit is. Question 5 tells us which forms of advertising were most successful for engaging with this particular community. Question 6 tells us whether or not visitors feel the exhibit is worthwhile for others to see. Question 7 tells us whether or not visitors were interested in mounds prior to viewing the exhibit and had the ability to visit them. Question 8 tells us which mound sites people living in and around Wilkinson County are most likely to visit. Question 9 tells us whether or not our exhibit increased visitors’ interest in mounds. Question 10 gives us demographic information about our visitors.

Out of 33 survey responses, 32 (97%) people said that the exhibit either met or exceeded their expectations, 32 (97%) people learned something new, 32 (97%) people thought the exhibit was fun, and 33 (100%) thought it was informative. Everyone who filled out the survey would visit again or encourage others to visit. Most people heard about the exhibit and festival via Facebook or newspaper advertisements. Twenty-six (79%) people had previously visited at least one mound site. The most common sites were Smith Creek, Lessley, Emerald, and the Grand Village, which makes sense because they are the closest sites to Woodville. Seven (21%) people
had never previously visited a mound site, but after viewing the exhibit, all seven reported that they are now more likely to do so.

These results are strong evidence of our success. They imply that our exhibit was both educational and enjoyable. The majority of respondents indicated that they had previous interest in mounds, but all of the respondents who had never visited a mound site were inspired by the exhibit to learn more. These results represent a small subset of the festival attendees – approximately eight percent – but all of my personal interactions with attendees were positive, which leads me to believe that the exhibit was generally well-received and valuable. In the future, it will be necessary to develop better measures for determining the success of public outreach ventures such as these.

In addition to the positive intellectual outcomes, the exhibit and festival also had, and continue to have, positive economic outcomes for the town of Woodville. We estimate that about 400 people attended the festival, which is a large number for a town of about 1,000 residents. In speaking with the Mississippi Development Authority, it was determined that the festival brought in around $11,000 in food and gas revenue to the town of Woodville. The approximately 50 museum visitors per month bring in additional revenue. Mrs. Rosenblatt confirmed that museum visitorship is now consistently higher than it was before our exhibit was installed. She also stated that the exhibit has had many positive cultural and community outcomes, including the creation of infrastructure for educational programming for local school children to learn about the prehistory of their county, which I will discuss further in Chapter 4.

However, though our exhibit has certainly benefited the community in more ways than one, I do not think that it has been a complete success. Wilkinson County is almost three-quarters Black, but the exhibit visitors during the festival were almost exclusively White. Some Black
community members attended the festival for the music and activities, but few actually went into the WCM. Therefore, I cannot conclude that the exhibit was successful in engaging the entire community. I posit that this has a lot to do with institutionalized town politics. When the Woodville Civic Club bought the buildings that would become the AAM and the WCM in the 1970s, Wilkinson County history was physically separated into Black and White. The AAM tells stories of local Black historical figures, like classical composer William Grant Still and civil rights activist and author Anne Moody, while the WCM, prior to the mound exhibit, told only stories of White figures and families, making very few mentions of the substantial Black community that has called Wilkinson County home for centuries. At the time of the festival, there were a small number of very dedicated Black stewards of the AAM who opened it to the public every Thursday and relished in opportunities to engage with visitors. However, they had little interest in the WCM; perhaps because there was nothing for them to relate to there. Additionally, Jefferson Davis, who was born just outside of Woodville, is prominently featured in the WCM, both on detailed wall panels and in the museum store. I recognize that Davis, having been the president of the Confederacy, is an incredibly significant person in Wilkinson County history, and I am in no way attempting to erase that fact; however, the emphasis on Davis in the museum and the tone in which he is written about is certainly likely to be unappealing to the descendants of the people he advocated for enslaving. It is no wonder that few Black locals were interested in visiting.

I posit that these nuanced and longstanding racial tensions doomed us from the start. Because of the existing relationship (or lack thereof) between the Black community in Wilkinson County and the WCM, it would have been difficult to get most Black residents to come see our mound exhibit no matter how much we advertised. Our exhibit was never going to bring the
community together and fix race relations in Wilkinson County. However, it did pave the way, both socially and financially, for educational opportunities for children which I believe do have the potential to, over time, unite the community in a shared interest in archaeology. In the following chapter, I discuss the next steps for our project, including implementing educational programming for all Wilkinson County fourth graders in which they learn about archaeology and visit the mound exhibit, as well as publishing a children’s book about our work at Smith Creek and what it can tell us about the Native Americans who once lived there.
Chapter 4: Engaging Children Through Education

_Educating Children: Formal and Informal Learning_

Countless studies have suggested that children benefit from informal learning experiences (DeWitt and Storksdieck 2008). Formal learning is academic and structured, taking place in the classroom under the guidance of a teacher. It is commonly associated with K–12 education, in which students are expected to learn facts and skills that create a foundation for their futures. Informal learning, on the other hand, is self-directed and exploratory. It is commonly associated with spaces like museums and zoos, where students can have authentic experiences and engage in hands-on activities. Informal settings help students to contextualize what they are taught in the classroom; rather than taking their teachers’ word that they will need to know something for the future, students internalize the information’s relevance because they are participating in it (Pumpian, Grant, and Wachowiak 2006).

Field trips are a common and effective method of integrating formal and informal learning experiences. When planned well, they support cognitive learning, promote affective learning, increase self-motivated learning, and spark curiosity about the subject matter (DeWitt and Storksdieck 2008). Field trips also provide students with opportunities for social interaction with both peers and adults. Exploring the space and participating in group activities gives students a semi-unstructured space to ask questions, discuss and debate problems and solutions, and explore knowledge through physical means (Ross 2006). It is common for museums to offer field trip programming like guided tours and interactive workshops to K–12 school groups. Some institutions bridge these two strategies, offering special programs that blend formal tours or information sessions with hands-on activities. For example, the Metropolitan Museum of Art offers a combined tour and studio art workshop, in which student groups explore sculptures in
the galleries with a docent and then create their own sculptures to take home (“K-12 School Groups” 2020). The National Museum of Natural History offers several programs in Q?rius, an interactive learning space, that allow students to engage with museum educators and explore museum collections in workshops about biology, geology, forensics, and more (“School Programs” 2020). The Penn Museum’s *Unpacking the Past* program takes things a step further, providing students with an extended multi-day experience that includes a lesson from a museum educator in their own classrooms, a visit to the Penn Museum, and a post-visit project that utilizes online Museum resources (“Unpacking the Past” 2019).

One particularly successful program that takes the blend of formal and informal learning to the next level is School in the Park (SITP), a partnership between two public schools located in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego, California and ten of the museums and institutions located in Balboa Park, San Diego. Teachers and museum educators collaborate to create curricula and lesson plans that address California state education standards through dynamic, hands-on learning experiences (“Our Mission” 2020). For SITP students, “going to school” does not necessarily mean sitting in their classrooms and listening to their teachers; they spend between four and eight weeks each school year in Balboa Park attending museums, learning from museum professionals, and engaging with objects and exhibits to make their new knowledge real (Pumpian, Wachowiak, and Fisher 2006).

This approach to elementary and middle school education has had significant positive impacts on students and the community. When the program began in 1999, City Heights had long been considered one of the most disadvantaged sections of San Diego. Poverty, crime, and unemployment rates were high, median household income was low, and the schools were among the lowest performing in the state of California. SITP was part of efforts to revitalize City
Heights, and the impact that these newly accessible cultural experiences had on the students was quickly evident. In the first three years of the program, test scores rose significantly, and the local elementary school rose from fifth place to first place in a ranking among its ten comparison schools (Pumpian, Wachowiak, and Fisher 2006). Teachers reported that they were “constantly increasing the level of difficulty and sophistication of their lessons” because their students were consistently exceeding their expectations (Pumpian, Wachowiak, and Fisher 2006: 9).

Lessons that are enjoyable and applicable to students’ own lives help students to be excited about learning and confident in their abilities. SITP students take great pride in the knowledge they gain from the museums they visit, and they are better prepared for future learning because they are exposed to a variety of topics at a young age. Many return to the museums with their families on weekends to share what they have learned with their parents and siblings (Schell 2006).

Learning at the museums can also help to break stereotypes about what types of people go to college or have certain jobs. For example, for some people, the word “scientist” conjures up mental images of white men with wild white hair or nerdy glasses. At SITP, meeting with and learning from museum educators or docents who do not necessarily fit this stereotype helps children understand that anyone can be a scientist—even themselves (Ross 2006). Classroom teachers can encourage their students to pursue such careers, but interacting with the people who hold those jobs makes them a lot less abstract. This is particularly important for disadvantaged children for whom school field trips may constitute their only chances to visit museums and engage with associated professionals.
Benefits of Archaeology: What Archaeology Offers

Archaeology is often not taught as a subject in K–12 schools. Most people learn about archaeology through popular media or in college classes that they elect to take. However, the discipline has a lot to offer to young students and to the formal educational system. Its multidisciplinary nature means that it can draw connections between many different, traditionally-taught subjects, including science, history, and art. It can also help students develop life skills such as teamwork and critical thinking. A commonly cited theory of learning developed by Benjamin Bloom (1964) suggests that teaching is most effective when it combines cognitive, affective, and psycho-motor objectives. In other words, students are best prepared for the future when they are able to develop thinking, feeling, and technical skills in school.

Archaeology provides opportunities to engage with all three; interpreting objects and sites requires research and analysis, interacting with materials from the past helps students to understand their individual and community heritages and be more empathetic towards others’, and excavating and caring for objects requires physical precision (Henson 2017). Learning about and participating in archaeology can provide young students with a holistic educational experience that creates a foundation for learning throughout life.

Archaeology can also have many societal benefits. For example, local communities can benefit economically from tourism to archaeological sites and museums, descendant communities can benefit spiritually from the identification of sites and objects that connect them to their ancestors (Little 2012; McManamon 2002), and preservation of archaeological sites can benefit the environment by restricting land development (McGimsey 1972). Importantly, archaeology also has the potential to correct myths and untruths about non-White peoples’ place in history and challenge some of the White-centric narratives that are commonly taught in public
schools (Little 2012). For example, the Bureau of Ethnology’s investigations of mounds across the eastern United States in the late 1800s helped dispel the myth that the mounds were built by some unknown, extinct group of people who were more “sophisticated” and “capable” than Native Americans (Thomas 1894). Also, excavations of the President’s House in Philadelphia in the early 2000s provided a look into the lives of the enslaved Africans who lived and worked there, helping to tell new stories that had not been written down in history books and reframe narratives about American history (Levin 2011). Engaging with archaeology means engaging with diverse histories; learning about different cultures of the past can help children to understand diversity in the present and to be more tolerant of others’ experiences in childhood and adulthood (Little 2012).

**Plans for Educational Programming in Wilkinson County**

In hopes of further increasing interest in archaeology among Wilkinson County residents, the next phase of our mound exhibit project will focus even more explicitly on educating children. We have received funding for this initiative from the Southeastern Archaeological Conference Public Outreach Grant. Working with local collaborators, including Mrs. Rosenblatt, Ms. Montgomery, and former and current teaching professionals, we will develop a three-phase field trip program and implement it in all fourth-grade classrooms in the two Wilkinson County primary schools. We are targeting fourth grade because Mississippi state educational standards for that year are closely aligned with the themes of our exhibit:

- **H.4.6** Compare and contrast between the different Mississippi Native American cultures: Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Natchez.
- **H.4.6.1** Identify the location of major tribes within Mississippi.
- **H.4.6.2** Describe the reason for Native American removal in Mississippi and the impact of the removal of Native Americans.
**H.4.6.3** *Examine how Native American tribes lived, including their homes, roles, beliefs, clothes, games, traditions, and food.*

Our proposed program will add a new dimension to the existing curriculum by teaching students how we know what we know about past peoples and by emphasizing local connections to the past via a study of their shared landscape.

Our proposed program is based on the Penn Museum’s *Unpacking the Past*, whose three-step curriculum has proven highly effective in engaging students. The first phase involves a classroom visit from a museum educator, during which students learn about archaeology and interact with replica objects. In the second phase, students travel to the Penn Museum and receive a guided tour and hands-on workshop. The third phase is carried out back in the classroom, where students engage with online materials provided by the Penn Museum. The pre- and post-visit lessons provide students with necessary background knowledge and help them to contextualize their experience at the Penn Museum (“Unpacking the Past” 2019).

With some logistical modifications, the Wilkinson County program will follow the same three-step model. Because it is not feasible for SCAP team members to visit classrooms during the school year, the first phase visit will instead consist of videos of SCAP team members explaining archaeological principles and methods. We will also develop loaner kits that include supplies for activities that mimic archaeological techniques, including cookie excavations. We will offer face-to-face training sessions to teach educators how to use the kits. The second phase will include a field trip to the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit, where students will fill out the activity booklet and examine real artifacts. This field trip will also involve travel to see the Smith Creek and Lessley sites. A guide will be provided to teachers to allow them to interpret the archaeology for their students. Our goal is to have the trip paid for with grant money so that cost
is not an obstacle for the schools. The third phase lesson will focus on contemporary Native Americans, connecting the archaeological remains that students have interacted with to living populations and stimulating respect for indigenous peoples. We plan to create and test the kits and lesson plans in Summer 2020 so that the program can be implemented during the 2020–21 school year.

**Writing a Children’s Book**

Another plan for the next phase of our project is to publish a children’s book about archaeology at Smith Creek. This idea arose after meeting Ms. Montgomery for the first time. She had only been working at the Woodville Public Library for about three months when Mrs. Rosenblatt introduced us to her, but she had already transformed the space, adding new furniture and decorations to the children’s section, as well as a comfortable, kid-sized reading nook. Ms. Montgomery had also introduced new programming to the library. At the time, she was focused on summer reading, creating incentives like a basket raffle that kids could earn tickets for as they completed their reading goals. We showed her a mock-up of our activity booklet and the Archaeologist-in-Training buttons. She loved them (and Gary the Gar) and came up with a new incentive on the spot—kids who completed the booklet at the museum and showed her their button would get an extra raffle ticket. It was really inspiring to meet someone so invested in getting kids to enjoy reading and learning, and it got me thinking about ways in which we could further cultivate a powerful relationship between the Library and the WCM.

Ms. Montgomery asked us to find a picture book about mounds or mound archaeology that she could feature in the library and use for a book walk during the opening-day festival. After some digging online, we found very few options, and nothing looked particularly relevant
to the LMV. The two books that we considered were *Journey to Cahokia: A Boy’s Visit to the Great Mound City* (Figure 30; Lorenz and Schleh 2004) and *Mounds of Earth and Shell* (Figure 31; Shemie 1995). However, we chose not to purchase them. The former is about Cahokia, a site in Illinois; because it does not discuss the LMV, it would not have been clearly relevant to our project. The latter discusses southeastern mounds generally, and though this likely includes the LMV, it also includes the shell mounds found along the southern Atlantic coast. Again, we did not feel that it was the best companion to our exhibit. Dr. Kassabaum ended up stumbling upon a picture book about Watson Brake in an antique shop that we thought was pretty well done (Figure 32; Moore, Couvillon, and Anderson 2010), and we gave it to Ms. Montgomery. She used it during the festival with success, but the situation inspired me to write a children’s book of my own that the kids in Wilkinson County could better relate to.

In the following section, I present the manuscript, narrated by Gary the Gar, that I have written about archaeology at Smith Creek. Potential illustrations are described in italics at the end of each paragraph. I chose to write about Smith Creek specifically, rather than the history of moundbuilding more generally, because I wanted to build upon the exhibit, rather than reproduce it. Additionally, with knowledge from our SCAP excavations, writing about Smith Creek allows for a more multi-disciplinary narrative that walks children through the science of how we know what we know about this part of history. I cite my own experiences in the field and working with artifacts to create a factual and realistic narrative that children can learn from. Importantly, this book, unlike the others discussed above, will be exceptionally personal for children in Wilkinson County. Many have driven by Smith Creek countless times in their lives, and some of the illustrations will showcase scenes from Wilkinson County that local kids will recognize. I hope
to collaborate with either a local illustrator or a Native American illustrator and produce at least enough copies for the school libraries, the local library, and the WCM.

Figure 30: The cover of Journey to Cahokia: A Boy’s Visit to the Great Mound City (image courtesy of Amazon.com).
Figure 31: The cover of *Mounds of Earth and Shell* (image courtesy of Amazon.com).

Figure 32: The cover of *Ancient Mounds of Watson Brake*, the children’s book used by Ms. Montgomery for library programming as a companion to the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit (image courtesy of Amazon.com).
Welcome to Wilkinson County! My name is Gary the Gar, and I live in Smith Creek. People have been living in Wilkinson County for a very long time. It is a very special place, and I’d like tell you about it. [Gary pops up from the water to narrate the story.]

This is the Smith Creek mound site. Over one thousand years ago, Native Americans built these giant piles of dirt that we call mounds. They were used for important ceremonies, and sometimes group leaders lived on top of them. [View of the site from the road. The MMT sign is visible.]

The Native Americans that built Smith Creek didn’t write anything down, so now a group of specially trained scientists called archaeologists are excavating the site to learn more about their lives. Archaeologists study the past by examining the objects, or artifacts, that they dig up. They also look for changes in the soil. Different colors or textures can tell them a lot about what used to be there. [Wide shot of a group of archaeologists in the northeast plaza. Some are screening. One holds up a large sherd. Others are standing in a unit and pointing at post holes. Still others are digging in a different unit.]

At Smith Creek, archaeologists excavate both the mounds and the plaza. The plaza is the flat space between the mounds, where Native Americans would have conducted a wide range of important activities. They would have lived around the edges of this plaza. [Illustration of a village. The illustration is slightly sepia-toned to show that the time period is different. Inset of an aerial view of the site, labeled with the mounds, plaza, and the creek.]
The archaeologists are digging square-shaped holes called units. Once they dig the hole, they can never put the dirt back in exactly the same way, so they take detailed notes and photographs and draw lots of maps. Their units are squares so that they can record exactly where they are digging. The deeper they dig, the older the artifacts they find are. [Close-up of a unit wall showing a simple stratigraphy with different artifacts visible in it.]

In these units, the archaeologists have uncovered some post holes. Native Americans built their houses out of wooden posts and then wove grasses and other materials between them to make the walls and roof. They first dug holes in the ground and put big branches in them to make their house frames. When those branches were removed from the soil, the holes got filled in with new dirt. Archaeologists can see post holes because the new dirt looks different. The shape that the post holes make tell us the shape and size of the house that once was there. [Close-up of a unit with post-holes. A partially transparent house sits on top of them.]

In this part of the plaza, the archaeologists are excavating a trash pile called a midden. There are a lot of artifacts to find. To make sure they don’t lose anything, the archaeologists fill buckets with the dirt they excavated from the unit and dump that dirt through a screen. The dirt falls through the screen, leaving all of the artifacts behind. The archaeologists collect them and put them in a paper bag that is labeled with the unit number. It is important to write down where the artifacts came from so that they don’t forget later. [One person is shoveling dirt into a bucket. One person is carrying a bucket to the screen. One person is screening. One person is collecting the artifacts and putting them in the bag. One person is sitting on a bucket and making a new bag.]
A lot of people probably helped to build the mounds. Building them hundreds of years ago was a lot of hard work. The Native Americans didn’t have metal shovels or backhoes. Instead, they dug dirt with wooden or stone tools, carried it in baskets, and then dumped it in piles to slowly build the mounds. It took a long time to make the mounds tall. The biggest mound at Smith Creek is taller than a three-story building! [A group of Native Americans carry baskets toward a medium-sized mound. Another group stands on the mound dumping their dirt. The illustration is slightly sepia-toned to show that the time period is different.]

In this unit at the base of the mound, the archaeologists have found lots of different types and colors of dirt. This means that the Native Americans were using dirt from a lot of different places around the site. It is possible that different dirt served different purposes in the mound. Clay might hold the mound together with its stickiness while sand might be used to make the mound look a certain color. [Close-up of a deep unit with clear wall stratigraphy of different colors.]

Down by the river, some of the archaeologists are recovering other artifacts using water. They use a special machine called a flotation tank to gather tiny bones, seeds, and pieces of charcoal that would have fallen through the screen. Even the small artifacts are important and can teach us a lot about the past! For example, archaeologists can identify seeds like these to tell us about what people ate in the past. [View of the float set-up by the creek. In the foreground, artifacts are drying on screens. Inset includes a close-up of a couple seeds or other small objects using a penny as scale.]

In the evenings, the archaeologists clean the artifacts they found that day. They dip them in water and carefully scrub them with toothbrushes to get the dirt off. When the
artifacts are clean, the archaeologists can see what they are and what they look like. Tonight, they are processing the artifacts from the midden. They find a lot of broken pieces of pottery, called sherds. Some of the sherds have pretty designs on them. Sometimes, the archaeologists find sherds that fit together like a puzzle. They can glue the pieces together and figure what shape the pottery was when it was used.

[Archaeologists sit at a picnic table with bags of artifacts and tubs of water. Some are placing artifacts on trays in the sun to dry. Inset of a pile of sherds and someone trying to fit them together.]

They also find some burned animal bone. Bones can teach us what kinds of animals the Native Americans who lived at Smith Creek liked to eat. The archaeologists find a lot of fish and deer bones. By examining where the bones have been burned, archaeologists can tell how Native Americans cooked their food. [A Native American cooking in two different ways—grilling meat over an open fire and stewing something in a pot. Slight sepia tone to the illustration. Inset of a pile of recognizable bone fragments.]

The archaeologists also find a projectile point while washing artifacts. A long time ago, someone spent a lot of time breaking a stone in just the right way to make this tool. Then, they attached it to a stick to make a spear and hunted with it. [A Native American hunting with a spear and atl-atl. Slight sepia tone to the illustration. Inset of a projectile point.]

Archaeology can help us learn a lot of new things about the past. It can also help modern communities to connect with their ancestors. Some of the Native Americans who live in Mississippi now still hold ceremonies on the mounds that their ancestors built.
[Contemporary Native Americans from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians utilizing the mound at Nanih Waiya.]

It is important for us to protect archaeological sites like Smith Creek and the artifacts that we find there from damage so that we can keep learning about the history of the earliest Mississipians for generations to come. [A group of children looks at the artifacts displayed in the Wilkinson County Museum.]

Summary

The exhibit activity booklet and Archaeologist-in-Training button, family-friendly activities at the opening-day festival, upcoming educational programming, and in-process children’s book are all steps that we have taken or are planning to take in order to increase Wilkinson County children’s interest in archaeology. Each emphasizes the many connections between past Native American peoples and contemporary Wilkinson County residents, particularly in their shared activities and landscape. In engaging with local children, we hope to foster appreciation and respect for both archaeological sites and contemporary Native Americans in the entire community.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

In rural areas with nearby archaeological sites, local communities are the best-equipped populations to protect them from harm, but many locals are unaware of the power that they hold. Thus, public outreach by regional archaeologists is key to site preservation and protection. In this thesis, I have argued that the best way to engage with a community is through its children. Children are inherently curious and open-minded and are thus compatible with archaeology’s investigatory nature. They have not yet been fully indoctrinated into societal norms that say this type of historical science is not for them. Moreover, they are likely to share their interests with the adults in their lives, thereby spreading the information. Childhood passions can continue into adulthood and be spread to the next generation, thus increasing the likelihood of sustained community interest.

As part of a public outreach initiative by SCAP, I co-curated and designed the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit for the WCM to teach the local community about the mounds in and around their county and to encourage them to protect these important resources. This exhibit’s panels, which detail a timeline of moundbuilding cultures in the LMV, and three display cases holding artifacts from Smith Creek and a local private collection served (and continue to serve) to educate visitors about the long history of Native Americans in the region, express the wide variety of technologies that past Native Americans utilized, and connect past and present inhabitants of the landscape. In addition, the exhibit guide and activity booklet we created helped adults and children alike to better understand the information presented in the exhibit. An Archaeologist-in-Training button provided incentive for children to finish the booklet, thus encouraging them to spend more time interacting with the displays and artifacts than they otherwise may have.
The festival we hosted on the day the exhibit opened included local food, entertainment, and an archaeology fair. Activities that mimicked archaeological methods allowed kids to investigate archaeology in a tactile manner and see themselves as archaeologists. Our crewmates working to wash and sort recently excavated materials from Lessley showed attendees what happens to artifacts after they come out of the ground and what archaeology looks like outside of the excavation site. Regional archaeologists taught attendees about the cultural significance of artifacts that they had found on their own properties, encouraging them to think of themselves as stewards of the objects’ stories rather than as owners of the objects themselves.

Local communities are important stakeholders in site protection and preservation; combined, the activities undertaken by SCAP during Summer 2019 aimed to expand Wilkinson County residents’ understanding of and appreciation for their landscape and the information it can provide. The festival was well-received and drew in approximately 400 locals. Visitor surveys indicate that the exhibit was enjoyable and informative, and all respondents who had never before visited a mound site were more likely to do so after viewing the displays. Therefore, I argue that our exhibit was a success in fostering interest in archaeology and mounds and in inspiring further investigation into local history and culture.

However, there was a noteworthy racial discrepancy between the community that the exhibit attracted and the Wilkinson County community more broadly. Though Wilkinson County is majority Black, the exhibit attendees were majority White. I argue that this discrepancy is related to longstanding racial tensions and perceptions of the WCM and the AAM as inherently and purposefully telling separate histories. The AAM discusses significant Black historical figures while the WCM discusses significant White historical figures, making very few mentions of the Black community that has called Wilkinson County home for centuries, and prominently
featuring Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy. For these reasons, I posit that Black locals were and are less interested in visiting the WCM than the AAM, which could be a reason that we saw striking demographic differences in the population of exhibit attendees as compared to the Wilkinson County population at large, despite our efforts to advertise to the entire community.

To extend the impact of the exhibit and engage with a more representative subset of the population, the next phases of our project will be focused on further educating children about archaeology. By implementing educational programming in all public and private fourth-grade classrooms in the county, we will provide students with new knowledge that is not currently part of the curriculum. By combining an outreach lesson involving hands-on activities, a free field trip to the WCM and local mound sites, and a post-visit lesson that connects Native Americans in the archaeological record to contemporary Native American populations, this educational program will contextualize the local landscape and artifacts that many local children are already familiar with. Integrating museums into K–12 education through field trip programs levels the playing field so that all children, no matter their race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, can learn about the deep history of their surroundings. When children are interested in something, they are likely to share it with their families. In this way, we can foster a more unified community by creating a shared understanding of the local past.

Additionally, due to a noted gap in children’s literature surrounding moundbuilding in the LMV, I wrote a manuscript for a children’s book about archaeology at Smith Creek and how we know what we know about the past inhabitants of Wilkinson County. This book will provide a personal link to archaeology for Wilkinson County children. I hope that the field trip program and the children’s book will help the local kids, and by extension their parents and other
community members, to recognize that their home is incredibly unique and therefore needs to be protected. Through education and targeted community outreach, we can both engage diverse communities and inspire the next generation of archaeologists.

The implications of this project extend far beyond education. Our outreach work in Wilkinson County has the potential to increase people’s knowledge of and respect for unfamiliar cultures of all kinds. Archaeology gives voices to people whose narratives are often presented in a skewed way or are altogether missing from history books. In studying past cultures through the things they left behind and disseminating the resulting information to the public, particularly through museums and public programming, we can create more compassionate and empathetic citizens of the world.
Appendix A

The following images are the remaining panels that create the timeline in the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit. Design by Erin Spicola.
Middle Archaic Period
6000-3000 BC

At least 16 mound sites have been dated to this period, showing that people in the Lower Mississippi Valley were building impressive monuments over 1,000 years before the Great Pyramid in Egypt and around the same time as Stonehenge in England.

The mounds were built by small, mobile groups of people who did not stay in one place for very long, moving around the landscape as the seasons changed.

These groups were hunter-gatherers. This means that they relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild plants to feed themselves.

They hunted with spears and spearthrowers called atlatls. They used baskets to collect, cook, and store their food. Mounds were built by hand using baskets to carry the dirt, which was dug without the help of metal tools.

Case Study: Watson Brake

One of the earliest mound sites in the country is Watson Brake, pictured above. This site is located in what is now northeast Louisiana. Built over 5000 years ago, it has 11 mounds surrounding a central open space. The largest mound is 25 feet tall. Now these mounds were used remains a mystery, but we think they probably served as important gathering places for people to visit repeatedly throughout the year.

Middle Archaic Sites to Visit

1. Watson Brake
2. Lower Jackson
3. Caney Bayou
4. Taw Lake
5. LSU mounds
Late Archaic Period
3000-500 BC

Mounds during this period got much bigger but we have not found very many of them. The tallest one is the second largest mound in the country and contains approximately 17,000 dump trucks worth of fill.

Late Archaic people traded with other groups up to 800 miles away and came together at important places for large community events, which is when they built their mounds.

These groups continued to hunt, fish, and gather their food. They roasted it over open fires or boiled it in baskets by adding hot baked-clay objects to the water.

Late Archaic people created beautiful stone artifacts including these tiny beads shaped like owls, all made with metal drills.

Case Study: Poverty Point

Just 50 miles away from Watson Brake, the site of Poverty Point (pictured to the right) is one of the most dramatic man-made landscapes in the United States. The site consists of one enormous, 70-foot tall mound, at least four smaller mounds, and six massive ridges surrounding a central open area. Archaeologists have found the intact floors of houses within these ridges. These show us where people lived when they visited the site from all over the Southeast.

Thousands of these baked-clay objects, used as pendants, were found on the ridge at Poverty Point.

Late Archaic Sites to Visit

1. Poverty Point
2. Jaketown
Early Woodland Period
500 BC-AD 1

People began burying their dead in mounds during this period, though they also continued to build mounds for other purposes as well. They also started to settle down on the landscape. This means that they did not move around as much and probably called one spot home for much of their lives.

People still hunted and fished for meat and collected wild plants, but some groups might have started experimenting with bringing their favorite plant foods closer to their settlements and planting them in small gardens.

Some of the earliest pottery was used to cook, store, and serve food during this time. Painted pottery quickly became one of the most common and important artifacts we find on archaeological sites.

Case Study: Batesville

Calvin Brown’s 1926 book The Archaeology of Mississippi reports seven mounds at Batesville, but only four of these are still visible. The people who built the mounds used them for ceremonies and feasts associated with burial of the dead. Excavations at the site revealed lots of broken pottery and fire-cracked rock that was thrown away after the feasting events. Batesville recently became one of Mississippi’s newest archaeological parks, located in Panola County.

Early Woodland Sites to Visit

1. Batesville
2. Galloway Place
3. Boothe Landing
Middle Woodland Period
AD 1-400

Burial mounds became very common during this period. In addition to creating large groups of mounds, people began building large earthen walls around some of their sites.

People placed special objects in some graves during this time. These fancy goods might indicate that some people had special roles within society, perhaps as religious leaders.

As people began to live in even bigger, more permanent settlements, they probably planted small gardens to supplement the seeds, nuts, and fruits they collected and the animals they hunted.

Middle Woodland people created very beautiful art objects from lots of different materials. Many of these artifacts were shaped like animals and tell us that Middle Woodland religious beliefs might have focused on birds and other creatures.

Case Study: Marksville

Marksville (pictured above) consists of a C-shaped wall that encloses 40 acres including at least seven mounds. Alignments with the sun, moon, and stars suggest that this area was a carefully planned sacred space. About 2000 years ago, people at Marksville chose to participate in a large trade network known as the Hopewell Interaction Sphere. This brought in materials such as copper from the Great Lakes, obsidian from the Rocky Mountains, and shell from the Gulf Coast.

Middle Woodland Sites to Visit

1. Marksville
2. Harrisonburg
3. Alexander
4. Crooks
5. Boyd
6. Nanib Waiya
7. Bynum
8. Pharr
9. Ingomar
**Mississippian Period**

**AD 1200-1682**

During this period, people built platform mounds in large groups around central plazas. Some sites continued to be used only for ceremonies, while others became major cities.

The dense populations of these cities were overseen by powerful chiefs who lived in houses built on top of the mounds.

Mississippian cities relied on corn agriculture. Chiefs probably gained their political power by controlling the surplus grain from large farm fields.

These corn fields required tending with large stone hoes, like the one to the right. Mississippian people also had religious beliefs that were often depicted on special artifacts.

**Case Study: Emerald**

The Mississippian mound sites closest to here were not huge cities. They continued to serve as ceremonial centers for people who lived in smaller villages. Leslie Mound, just south of Hwy. 24, is the closest but Emerald Mound on the Natchez Trace is the biggest. It covers the area of almost six football fields. Though only two remain today, Emerald originally had eight smaller mounds on its flat summit. Its builders were ancestors of the Natchez Indians.

**Mississippian Sites to Visit**

Many sites in Mississippi and Louisiana date to this period and you can visit 9 of them! We have chosen some of our favorites to hit here.

1. Emerald
2. Lesley
3. Edgefield
4. Johnson Cemetery
5. Beavard
6. Carston
7. Winterville
8. Arcola
9. Swan Lake
10. Mount Helena
11. Rolling Fork
12. Lake George
13. Haynes Bluff
14. Pecahontas
15. Windsor
16. Foster
17. Bear Creek
18. Owl Creek
19. Transylvania
20. Ghost
21. Flowery
22. Venable
23. Scott Place
**Historic Period**
AD 1682-1730

Though moundbuilding slowed after Mississippian times, we know some mounds were still used by local Native people after European settlers arrived.

The Historic Natchez lived in permanent villages and had an elaborate political system. Their ruler was called the Great Sun and their war chief was called the Tattooed Serpent.

Natchez people maintained fields of corn and continued to eat lots of deer meat, but also traded with the French, Spanish, and English explorers for foods such as watermelon and peaches.

The Natchez continued to make traditional pottery, which they traded to European colonists for guns, iron kettles, glass beads, and a variety of other goods.

**Case Study: Grand Village of the Natchez Indians**

Beginning around AD 1500, the Grand Village was the capital of the Natchez chieftain. Its most important political and religious leaders lived on and around the mounds there. The French visited this site in the early 18th century and recorded accounts of the Tattooed Serpent’s funeral. Three mounds are still visible at the site today, which also has a museum and gift shop.

**Historic Sites to Visit**

1. Grand Village of the Natchez Indians
2. Tunica-Biloxi Museum
Appendix B

This is the survey we provided to Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit visitors during the opening day festival to gather data about the success of the exhibit. Design by Arielle Pierson and Erin Spicola.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you have fun? Did you learn something new?</th>
<th>Tell us about your experience!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exhibit met my expectations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ 5</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned something new.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 1    ☐ 2    ☐ 3    ☐ 4    ☐ 5</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was the exhibit...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun? ☐ Yes</td>
<td>☐ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you hear about the exhibit?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you come back or recommend that others visit?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever visited a mound site?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, which mound site(s)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, are you now more likely to visit one?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How old are you?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 0-14 ☐ 15-18 ☐ 19-24 ☐ 25-39 ☐ 40-60 ☐ 60+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions? Comments?
Write them here, or email us at scopupenn@gmail.com

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