Exploring Familiar Landscapes: The Importance of the Local In Lower Mississippi Valley Community-Based Archaeology

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Abstract
This thesis explores the community-based projects that the Smith Creek Archaeological Project has implemented in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, as well and its goals for future community-oriented work by expanding on current methodology and archaeological theory. I deal mainly with the problems of identifying and inspiring local stakeholders to be future stewards of sites in a region marred by the violence of the colonial encounter, which left few local descendant populations. I argue that combining certain aspects of archaeological theory with community archaeology methodology can create an engaged community of stakeholders that are connected to the past through a shared, familiar landscape. I contend that locally engaged and locally collaborative work aimed at connecting local populations with past populations through emphasizing the shared lifeways and landscapes that are part and parcel of their quotidian lives is key to protecting sites and engendering respect for past and present Native communities. People feel more connected and comfortable with different cultures and groups when they feel like they share in similar lifeways. For that reason, identifying lifeways and landscapes that overlap in time and space can make people feel more comfortable with the different groups and cultures that have inhabited the land before them and encourage them to protect it for those who come after. By building upon the archaeological theory of persistence and combining it with methodologies used in community archaeology, I suggest that communities can be inspired to care about and preserve cultural heritage that may not be their own by experiencing the similarities and connections they have to shared lifeways and place.

Keywords
community archaeology, public archaeology, anthropology, collaboration, cultural heritage, landscapes, persistent places

Disciplines
Anthropology

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EXPLORING FAMILIAR LANDSCAPES: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LOCAL IN LOWER MISSISSIPPI VALLEY COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY

By

Arielle M. Pierson

In

Anthropology

Submitted to the
Department of Anthropology
University of Pennsylvania

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Megan C. Kassabaum

2020
Abstract

This thesis explores the community-based projects that the Smith Creek Archaeological Project has implemented in Wilkinson County, Mississippi, as well and its goals for future community-oriented work by expanding on current methodology and archaeological theory. I deal mainly with the problems of identifying and inspiring local stakeholders to be future stewards of sites in a region marred by the violence of the colonial encounter, which left few local descendant populations. I argue that combining certain aspects of archaeological theory with community archaeology methodology can create an engaged community of stakeholders that are connected to the past through a shared, familiar landscape. I contend that locally engaged and locally collaborative work aimed at connecting local populations with past populations through emphasizing the shared lifeways and landscapes that are part and parcel of their quotidian lives is key to protecting sites and engendering respect for past and present Native communities. People feel more connected and comfortable with different cultures and groups when they feel like they share in similar lifeways. For that reason, identifying lifeways and landscapes that overlap in time and space can make people feel more comfortable with the different groups and cultures that have inhabited the land before them and encourage them to protect it for those who come after. By building upon the archaeological theory of persistence and combining it with methodologies used in community archaeology, I suggest that communities can be inspired to care about and preserve cultural heritage that may not be their own by experiencing the similarities and connections they have to shared lifeways and place.
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We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time. - T.S. Eliot
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CHAPTER 1 Introduction

Archaeology is both scientific—in its methodologies that focus on artifacts, sites, and physical remains—and humanistic—in its concern for past human experiences and cultures (Rees 2010a). It is anthropological in its ability to answer complex questions about who we are and where we come from (Gillespie et al. 2008). Archaeology helps us learn from the past by revealing parallels between it and the present. The past, full of humans’ failures and successes, teaches us about important social, political, and cultural changes that share relevance with contemporary society. “Knowledge of the antiquity and uniqueness of the archaeological record can benefit society by producing informed decisions on what might be lost, what should be furthered studied, and what must be preserved for future generations” (Rees 2010a:3). When used in conjunction with social theory, archaeology is often able to provide an alternative narrative that is not constrained by the biases, omissions, and prejudice of many historical narratives. Thus, archaeologists are able to advise, critique, and engage with the contemporary issues of society because of their comprehensive approach to the human condition. Folded within the discipline of anthropology and taught holistically alongside biological, linguistic, and cultural approaches, archaeology has developed a vast set of skills that are transferable across fields and can benefit discourse and inspire change when implemented accordingly (DeLeon 2015).

However, issues of relevance, questions of audience, and concerns over who benefits from archaeological research continue to plague its practice. Funding often competes with economic and social issues such as public health, environment, and human rights that have very clear real-world implications, and in the face of these impactful issues, it is easy to consider archaeology a luxury (Atalay 2012). Fritz and Plog’s (1970:412) words on this topic are still
relevant today: “We suspect that unless archaeologists find ways to make their research increasingly relevant to the modern world, the modern world will find itself increasingly capable of getting along without archaeologists.”

There is a misguided obsession with archaeology in pop culture; from Indiana Jones to Ancient Aliens, however, it stems largely from a fascination with understanding where we come from and what we left behind. In 2009, a study found that about 8 in 10 leisure travelers participated in cultural and heritage activities. More specifically, 78% of all U.S. leisure travelers (or approximately 118.3 million people) and $192.3 billion (USD) can be attributed to cultural and heritage tourism (Mandala Research LLC 2009). This fascination with archaeology and recent increase in tourism to related sites means that there is a responsibility to make archaeological research more accessible, engaging, and even collaborative among those who express interest. It also means that archaeologists engaging in collaborative projects need to offer direct support to communities who will inevitably be affected by increased tourism, heritage management responsibilities, and the associated sociopolitical and economic impacts that come with being culturally or physically associated with a site (Gould 2018a; Meskell and Pels 2005; Zimmerman et al. 2003; Pyburn 2011)

In recent years, due largely to global development and political engagement, archaeology has sought to embrace newer approaches in social theory, human rights law, gender studies, and feminist and indigenous scholarship. As these approaches have become more commonplace in scholarship and the sociopolitical aspects of archaeology have become more widely accepted by the field, researchers have simultaneously become more aware of the politics and ethical implications of fieldwork (Meskell 2010). In the past two decades, archaeology has been in a transitional stage as it seeks out and engages public interest through community-oriented projects
(Atalay 2012). The focus of projects has shifted to engage, educate, and collaborate with indigenous, descendant, and local communities by incorporating oral traditions and local knowledge into archaeological narratives, developing stewardship and preservation efforts, rethinking and sharing in knowledge production, and confronting issues of equity within the practice (Silliman 2008). These goals have led to the development of practices, methodology, and theory within the field of archaeology that explicitly focus on collaboration and partnership (Marshall 2002). Collaborative inquiry “is a process consisting of repeated episodes of reflection and action through which a group of peers strives to answer questions of importance to them.” (Bray et al. 2000). Self-reflexivity combined with collaboration leads to transformative learning for all those involved who desire rigorous and insightful outcomes of their combined questions and research (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2008). As archaeological practice continues to dismantle the esoteric barriers that it once set in place between itself and the public, experts in the field are now held more accountable for considering how the ethical implications of their work and associated choices directly impact and change the contemporary communities with whom they work and the descendants of those they study (Atalay 2012; Zimmerman et al. 2003; Meskell and Pels 2005).

Once a project has a positive relationship with their community and decides to engage in community work, a difficulty that often arises is piquing the interest of a wide variety of actors and maintaining and evolving that interest into a genuine desire to respect, preserve, and protect heritage. Given the perspective of archaeology in pop culture, preserving and protecting sites are usually not the first instincts of the public who interacts with them. Often sites in the American Southeast are seen as economically valuable for development or agricultural annoyances. It takes time to convince people that the archaeological resources themselves are also valuable. Since
archaeological projects can last years in a specific place, researchers should use that time to continually interact and update the community on their work in hopes of engendering this sort of long-lasting recognition of the value of cultural resources.

This thesis focuses on the community-based projects currently being conducted by the Smith Creek Archaeological Project (SCAP), which will be discussed in conjunction with the project’s ongoing research interests. SCAP is a research project and archaeological field school based in Wilkinson County in southwestern Mississippi (Figure 1) and run through the University of Pennsylvania.

The North American Archaeology Lab within the Department of Anthropology houses and analyzes the project’s finds with support from the Penn Museum. When SCAP began in 2015, its goals were two-fold. The primary goal was to increase archaeological understandings of the Native history of Wilkinson County with respect to three major topics: foodways, mound construction, and sociopolitical organization. Thus far, this has been accomplished through excavations at two sites, Smith Creek (22Wk526) and Lessley (22Wk504), and analysis of the recovered materials. The second goal was to engage the Wilkinson County community with the rich archaeology and history of their surrounding landscape. Mound sites are common in the Lower Mississippi Valley (LMV) region and artifacts are plentiful in the agricultural fields that dot the rural county; thus, archaeology is part of the everyday landscape with which local populations are intimately familiar.

In this thesis, I focus specifically on the second of these goals and explore the community-based projects that SCAP has implemented, as well and its goals for future community-oriented work in the area. I expand on past public archaeology initiatives in the area that SCAP has been a part of and consider ways in which we can continue to expand those projects with an even more inclusive methodology. I deal mainly with the problems of identifying and inspiring local stakeholders to be future stewards of sites in a region marred by the violence of the colonial encounter which left few local descendant populations. I use R. Edward Freeman’s definition of stakeholder as “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the organizational purpose” (Freeman 2010:52). I argue that combining archaeological theory with community archaeology methodology can create an engaged community of stakeholders that are connected to the past through a shared, familiar landscape. I contend that locally engaged and locally collaborative work aimed at connecting local
populations with past populations through emphasizing the shared lifeways and landscapes that are part and parcel of their quotidian lives is key to protecting sites and engendering respect for past and present Native communities. People feel more connected and comfortable with different cultures and groups when they can identify familiarities and connections. For that reason, identifying lifeways and landscapes that overlap in time and space can make people feel more comfortable with the different groups and cultures that have inhabited that space before them.

Implementing community-based projects requires first identifying the communities the project seeks to serve and to understand their connection and interest to the work and site. More specifically, I seek to establish ways in which enriching heritage through a local community’s connection to place encourages preservation and appreciation for Native American groups in the American Southeast by combining archaeological theoretical perspectives on persistence and social memory with archaeological practice developed around community-based approaches.

Within Wilkinson County, SCAP was preceded by public archaeology projects and educational programs dating back to the 1950s that have influenced how current research projects in the region generally, and at Smith Creek specifically, have been conducted (Mississippi Department of Archives and History 2016; Kassabaum and Terry 2020). This continuity of research displays how local community approval and engagement has been essential to the accessibility of archaeological resources in the area and to the success of the projects currently taking place there. It also provides examples that can be used to augment current methods of community engagement in the American Southeast and more generally.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In Chapter 2, I explain the archaeology and history of the LMV through a presentation of the chronology of major periods and cultures established through the archaeological record. In doing so, I explain the archaeological
significance of SCAP’s two research sites, Smith Creek and Lessley, and how they fit into the cultural chronology of the LMV. I also discuss European contact and the Natchez Diaspora, detailing where the descendants of the LMV moundbuilders are now and how they came to be there. Finally, I detail some of the history of Woodville, Mississippi, the town in which much of SCAP’s outreach efforts have been focused. This information emphasizes the continued use of the land that constitutes the LMV, Wilkinson County, and the state of Mississippi over thousands of years. In Chapter 3, I briefly define community archaeology from its development to current methods used in its implementation. I then discuss archaeological theories of persistence and social memory in the context of North American archaeology. I conceptualize how these two distinct theoretical and methodological approaches can be combined in order to connect communities with archaeological sites and associated heritage and encourage them to become stakeholders who take pride in protecting and respecting these sites. I define my theory of familiar landscapes and explain how it can be used in practice. In Chapter 4, I detail the history of archaeological work and public outreach initiatives that have influenced SCAP and its current community-oriented work. I explain how we implemented the theory of familiar landscape in our exhibition in a local Wilkinson County museum and the associated opening day event. In Chapter 5, I offer a critique of our work by assessing and analyzing the issues that arose throughout the course of the project and offer improved recommendations for future implementations based on these shortcomings. I also discuss the positive impact that our work had on the local community both economically and educationally. In Chapter 6, I discuss my outlook on the field and what I see as the potential of the familiar landscape approach for influencing future archaeological outreach work in the Southeast and beyond.
CHAPTER 2 Archaeology and History of the Lower Mississippi Valley

The archaeological region of the LMV is one of the richest on the continent and encompasses much of modern-day Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mississippi. However, since modern state borders do not appropriately account for the cultures that pre-date and transcend these borders, archaeologists instead study the LMV as a geographic region that encompasses specific periods and cultures (Saunders 2010:2). The Mississippi River defined the development of the pre-contact landscape of the LMV and continues to do so today. Its fertile floodplains and the natural resources associated with its meanders were particularly impactful on human habitation in the area. Likely due to this natural abundance, the LMV is home to thousands of earthen mounds, whose impressive engineering and careful construction and maintenance means that many have resisted destruction and erosion to still exist today. Mounds vary across time and space in their size, use, and form and are often used to measure the social and political complexity of certain archaeological periods and cultures (Kassabaum 2014a). These sites “stand as a testament the vitality, creativity, and skill of their builders” (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019:2). The changes in construction processes and the use of mound sites throughout these archaeological periods were part of, and reflect parallel shifts in, social, religious, and political practices (Milner 2004). In this chapter, I will focus on the significance of mound construction within various temporal periods through a discussion of archaeologically-defined cultures. Understanding why the landscape of the LMV has held significance and seen occupation over thousands of years is essential to understanding why it still has relevance to those who live there today.
Major Periods and Cultures of the LMV

Archaeological periods in the LMV are defined using major changes in material culture that span broad geographic areas, while definitions of archaeological cultures focus more narrowly on the material culture that characterize specific groups of people that are both spatially and temporally limited. Archaeological phases fit within periods and cultures and are used to track change through time on a smaller scale. In other words, cultures fit within broader temporal periods and can encompass numerous phases, they are defined by their shared geographic and material similarity (Kassabaum 2014a). Patterns of mound construction are one line of evidence that can provide insight into shifts and continuities within and among archaeological periods, cultures, and phases (Figure 2)

Figure 2. Temporal and cultural chronology of the Lower Mississippi Valley (Kassabaum 2014b:Figure 1.3).
No known mound construction occurred during the Paleoindian and Early Archaic periods; however, these periods encompass the earliest known presence of humans in North America. Their presence coincides with the transition from the late Pleistocene to early Holocene, from 11,500 to 6,000 BC, and the impressive geomorphological changes that occurred in the region at the end of the last Ice Age (Rees 2010b). This 5,000-year span shows cultural developments and ecological changes that led to an increase of indigenous populations (Rees 2010b), but it is a largely understudied time period with sites in the LMV requiring further research and preservation.

Mound construction began in the Middle Archaic period (6000–3000 BC) with radiocarbon dates verifying that construction occurred at some sites around 3700 BC, though it is possible that some are much older (Saunders 2010). This coincided with a continuation of an egalitarian lifestyle that relied on hunting, fishing, and gathering wild foods, and populations coming together at residential base camps occasionally. At least 16 mound sites in Mississippi and Louisiana have been dated to the Middle Archaic, and though very little is known about what activities occurred on and around their dome-shaped and conical mounds (Saunders 2010), they reveal that occupants of the LMV were building monumental architecture over 1,000 years before the Great Pyramid in Egypt and other more well-known archaeological sites.

Middle Archaic mound construction ended suddenly around 2700 BC and did not resume until 1,000 years later during the terminal Late Archaic with the construction of the Poverty Point site in northeastern Louisiana and the development of the Poverty Point culture (Gibson 2010). An architectural feat, Poverty Point consists of six mounds, six ridges, and a central plaza. Mound A, the largest mound at the site at over 70 feet tall, was constructed rapidly with very few
breaks in labor. It is an excellent example of the artistic and engineering prowess of moundbuilders, whose knowledge of regional geomorphology meant that the materials chosen for construction and maintenance processes prevented erosion and destruction (Sherwood and Kidder 2011). The visual appearance of mounds was also carefully maintained; there is growing evidence that moundbuilders veneered the sides of some mounds in an array of contrasting colors of sediment that were both practical and visually appealing (Sherwood and Kidder 2011). This Late Archaic culture also saw the development of elaborate trade networks that spanned much of eastern North American and large communal gatherings that occurred exclusively at the regional center of Poverty Point (Gibson 2010).

A major shift in mound construction occurred in the Early Woodland period (500 BC–AD 1) in the LMV with the Tchefuncte culture. Moundbuilding traditions transitioned from being focused on a small number of large, regional centers to constructing dispersed conical burial mounds, and the interregional trade network that had developed in the Late Archaic ceased to exist. Tchefuncte material culture is marked by the first widespread use of ceramic technology in the LMV. The development of ceramic technology and its uses for cooking, storage, and serving food coincides with the relatively permanent settlement of autonomous groups around burial and mound sites (Hays and Weinstein 2010).

The Middle Woodland period (AD 1–400) saw the expansion of burial mound construction alongside the construction of complex earthworks and occasional platform mounds. The associated Marksville culture was extravagant compared to its Early Woodland predecessors, characterized by elaborate and decorative ceramic styles, the long-distance exchange of raw materials, and ceremonial events held on the summits of platform mounds (McGimsey 2010). The practices that occurred on the platform mounds, involving fire pits and
post erection, remained important parts of ceremonialism throughout the rest of LMV prehistory (Kassabaum 2019).

The Late Woodland period (AD 400–1200), like the Early Woodland, once again saw the decline of the extravagant artifacts and interregional trade that had been common in the Middle Woodland. However, there is a rich archaeological record reflecting the important social, religious, political, and economic changes that took place in the LMV during this time. The construction of platform mounds became commonplace and the resulting structures were variable in their functions, showing evidence of the continuation of long-standing methods of use such as ceremonial feasts or interment of the dead, and the development of new traditions like serving as foundations for elite structures (Kassabaum 2014b). The Baytown and Troyville cultures of the early Late Woodland period (AD 400–750) are associated with a time of population growth with regional differentiation between the northern and southern regions of the LMV. The localized developments in socioeconomic and political organization that occurred during this time are considered to be the foundation for the development of the more complex Coles Creek culture that followed it (Lee 2010). Late Woodland sites show sizable remound components that reveal that locations were symbolic prior to mound construction and were likely sites of intercommunity events that show evidence of large-scale food consumption (Kassabaum 2014a). They also show cultural continuity between the earlier Marksville culture and the later Coles Creek culture, which spans the Late Woodland into the Mississippi period in the southern LMV and has been a major focus of investigation for SCAP.

Mound construction during Coles Creek times was characterized by two or more flat-topped mounds surrounding an open, often purposefully constructed plaza. These centers remained largely vacant with the surrounding populations visiting occasionally for ceremonial
reasons. They are larger than their earlier counterparts and some may have supported elite structures, while others likely maintained communal functions (Kassabaum 2014a; Roe and Schilling 2010). Throughout Coles Creek times there are some indications of a shift from egalitarian to hierarchical forms of social organization. While there is no significant evidence of long-distance trade or accumulation of status associated with mortuary practices, there is a shift in assemblages found at mound and non-mound sites as well as a change in site sizes and the prevalence of decorative ceramics (Kassabaum 2014a; Roe and Schilling 2010). In addition, some Coles Creek people began domesticating indigenous starchy and oily seeds (Kassabaum 2014a), most of which come from plants that would be considered weeds today.

The Mississippi period (AD 1200–1730) and its associated Plaquemine culture is characterized by chiefdom-like, hierarchical societies who practiced large-scale maize agriculture and built large platform mounds at more densely occupied residential centers (Rees 2010c). Many of these mounds supported chiefly residents with high religious and political status. The understanding of this hierarchy in the LMV comes largely from ethnohistoric accounts of the Natchez Indians, the descendants of the pre-contact occupants of the region. Considered to have the most advanced political system north of Mexico at the point of European contact, high-ranking Natchez officials lived permanently at mound centers while the average person lived on dispersed homesteads (Barnett 2007). The moundbuilding and mortuary practices associated with this culture are well recorded in the archaeological and ethnographic records (e.g. Knight 1990; Brown 1997). Understanding the continuity of the chronology of the LMV through European contact and the history of the Natchez and their contemporary descendant communities is important to the discussion of landscape and connection to place and will be the focus of a later section.
The sites at which SCAP is conducting its research were chosen because they offer important insight into the chronology of the LMV. This work contributes to broader scholarship and academic discourse on the area. The community work on which this thesis is based is indicative of SCAP’s long-term presence in the area. Years of work have led to connections with local businesses, relationships with community members, and an established reputation in the area. For this reason, the positionality of the sites and the excavations themselves work in conjunction with each other to provide continuity in the archaeological record as well as continuity within the community. This means that preserving and understanding the archaeological record is highly dependent on the type of relationship that we have with communities in the present. It is highly indicative of the importance of place at Smith Creek in the past and in Wilkinson County today that there is a continued appreciation for the land and its history by a variety of situated actors engaging in a wide range of activities that continue to define and change the region. Uniting these actors through their shared connection to the landscape could serve to create a more unified community with a deeper appreciation for each other’s cultures and traditions as well as establish a richer respect for and desire to protect the important features of that landscape.

Smith Creek and Lessley

Smith Creek (22Wk526; Figure 3) is a Native American mound-and-plaza center in the Natchez Bluffs region of the LMV. It is located in Wilkinson County, Mississippi near the historically important but now largely abandoned town of Fort Adams, and about 15 miles from the county seat of Woodville. The Smith Creek landscape was utilized from at least 500 BC to AD 1350. Its impressively long occupation spans the Woodland and Mississippi periods and was intensely utilized by the Tchefuncte, Coles Creek, and Plaquemine cultures. As discussed above,
this time span encompasses important social transitions and offers insight into shifts from egalitarian to hierarchical political organization and from hunting-and-gathering to corn agriculture (Kassabaum and Graham 2018). Better understanding these social transitions at Smith Creek has added significantly to the story of the pre-contact moundbuilding populations that inhabited the LMV and current excavations at Smith Creek (Figure 4) illuminate the range of activities that constituted daily life across the landscape now known as Wilkinson County (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019).

Initial excavations within the Smith Creek mounds as part of the Mississippi Mound Trail Project in 2013 and the first SCAP season in 2015 revealed that construction began during the Coles Creek period and continued into Plaquemine times. On- and off-mound excavations suggested that during the primary period of mound construction, dispersed Coles Creek people
were gathering periodically at Smith Creek for mound construction and other ritual events. People of the Plaquemine culture during the Mississippian occupation later created permanent settlements at Smith Creek, which are evident in massive midden deposits and structural patterns of post molds and other features (Kassabaum and Graham 2018; Kassabaum et al. 2014). During the 2016 excavations at Smith Creek, an unexpected Early Woodland component was discovered in the Northeast Plaza. It is evident by several features including a trench and series of structural posts associated with a large circular building about 10 m in diameter. This occupation was overlain by a series of thick, Plaquemine midden deposits that contained a large number of post mold features (Kassabaum et al. 2019). Analysis of the 2018 assemblages tentatively suggest that large-scale food consumption played a role in the activities associated with the Tchefuncte structure, while the Plaquemine midden likely built up during more typically domestic activities.

These assemblages share patterns with other regional, contemporaneous sites that suggest a pattern of persistent use and reuse of sites over long periods of time, a topic to which I will return later. The 2018 excavations confirmed this interpretation of the use of Smith Creek through time, beginning with the Tchefuncte structure, followed by a period of abandonment, then the construction and use of the mounds during Coles Creek times, and finally as a location of intense habitation during Plaquemine times. Combined with radiocarbon data from previous excavation seasons, a site history spanning 1,500 years indicates a persistent use and re-use of the landscape, including a return after a significant period of abandonment (Kassabaum et al. 2019; Figure 5).
Especially important questions to both the broader SCAP research project (see Kassabaum et al. 2019) and to my particular interests in community archaeology in Wilkinson County are: How and why did this site remain a locus of important activities over the 1,500 years of its use, particularly considering the 800-year hiatus during the Middle Woodland and early Late Woodland periods? Did the Coles Creek people know about the Tchefuncte site and if so, how was knowledge about the site communicated over time? Southeastern archaeologists have begun to identify locations like Smith Creek as “persistent places,” defined by Schlanger (1992:97) as “places that were repeatedly used during long-term occupations of regions…they represent the conjunction of particular human behaviors on a landscape.” At Smith Creek, potential natural features, like Smith Creek itself and the Mississippi River floodplain and its associated fertile landscape, and cultural features, such as potential earlier mound construction to
physically mark an important place, “may have served as a guide to later mound-builders”
because “places continued to be meaning laden for centuries after the collective action of
construction and reuse” (Thompson 2010:225; see also Kassabaum et al. 2019). While SCAP
continues to consider these questions in relation to the pre-contact history of the LMV, this paper
uses this research to expand on the notion of continual, or persistent uses of significant places on
a contemporary landscape as a form of connecting disparate people to a shared, familiar place.

The 2019 SCAP excavations took place at Lessley (22Wk504; Figure 6), another site
located in Wilkinson County, about 5 miles from Smith Creek, near the small community of
Lessley, Mississippi. The choice to excavate there developed out of relationships built with the
community over time. The landowner, Bobby Webb, had observed our work in the past and was
one of the landowners who gave permission to conduct excavations during the 2013 Mound Trail
season; he was very interested in having us excavate there again. His permission, enthusiasm,
and friendship contributed to the success of the field season and SCAP’s ability to extend its
research beyond the Smith Creek site itself. Lessley is a well-preserved, single-mound
Mississippian site associated with the Plaquemine culture with a historic family cemetery on its
summit (Kassabaum et al. 2014:122). Excavations in 2019 focused on the summit and base of
the mound (Figure 7). A summit excavation showing a living floor with a clear upper boundary
and a lower boundary that was more gradual, resembling a natural A-horizon suggested a more
complex and prolonged use of a site that was once assumed to be a single-phase site. We also
uncovered evidence of a structure having stood atop the mound, which fits with typically
understood Plaquemine mound usage.
Artifacts from Lessley were concentrated in small, sub-mound midden deposits. These deposits differ from the Plaquemine midden at Smith Creek perhaps suggesting less intensive occupation or different preservation conditions (Graham and Kassabaum 2020). While Lessley does not constitute the same persistent landscape that Smith Creek does, it contributes to this thesis because the choice to excavate at Lessley and the research done there provided both evidence for continuity of the use of the broader Wilkinson County landscape in the archaeological record as well as evidence of the effects of SCAP’s continuity within the community. It exemplifies both the importance of archaeological research and the ways in which that research intersects with community relationships.
The Natchez Diaspora

It is important to note that the chronology put forth in the previous section easily reduces emerging Native American communities with very distinct social and ethnic identities into a series of generalized archaeological cultures within a set period of time. Such a chronology is useful for piecing together the archaeological cultures of the pre-contact LMV (Rees 2010c); however, as historically known groups like the Caddo, Tunica, Houma, Chitimacha, and Natchez emerged throughout the region and their stories became muddled in biased historical documentation, lack of archaeological information, and the violent legacy of European contact, it is essential that discourse on community and collaboration such as this thesis does not overlook the unique identity of the Natchez that often goes overlooked in contemporary research.

Smith Creek and Lessley were likely constructed by the ancestors of the historic Natchez Indians. In the centuries prior to European contact, Native Americans were traveling and interacting throughout the LMV in politically and economically dynamic groups that engaged in alliances, trade, intermarriage, and warfare (Milne 2015; Galloway 1982; Barnett 2007). At the point of contact, the Natchez had the most elaborate political system north of Mexico (Smyth 2013:60) before their tense relationship with the French led to their murder and displacement in 1730, and then to the formation of a diaspora. French and Spanish records (Galloway 1982; Clayton et al. 1995; McWilliams 1988) demonstrate that mounds were an important materialization of the complexity of Natchez culture. Ceramic style, patterns of mound construction, and other cultural features all indicate continuity between the Natchez and the Mississippi- and Woodland-period groups that inhabited the LMV prior to contact (Rees 2010c; Kassabaum 2014a).
The earliest European account of the Natchez came from the Spaniard Hernando de Soto’s gold-seeking expedition. Upon their empty-handed return from Texas, De Soto died and his destitute band of men stumbled upon a powerful chiefdom who, unlike the tribes whose granaries they had ransacked along the way, violently opposed them on the Mississippi River led by a mysterious and great chief named Quigualtam. The warrior’s impressive knowledge of the river, ability to maneuver on the water, and extraordinary military performance led to the Spaniards writing detailed accounts of their brief encounter with them. Nearly a century later, the French would arrive to find a region drastically diminished in population through demographic shifts brought about by infectious diseases indirectly spread throughout the southeastern tribes as a result of the De Soto expedition (Barnett 2007). Despite these factors, the Natchez maintained a larger population than the French throughout the entire period of early contact, and it was not until the allied Choctaw and French forces overthrew them in 1730 that their populations dropped significantly due to disease, warfare, economic instability, and displacement (Smyth 2016:25).

French expeditions led by Rene-Robert Cavelier de La Salle in 1682 would encounter an initially friendly Natchez nation who eagerly invited them to be the guests of the Great Sun, the Natchez Chief (Milne 2015). The timing of contact between the Natchez, known as the Sun people, and the French settlers of the Sun King, Louis XIV, would build the illusion that the two groups shared parallel social and political practices. Initial discourse between the French and the Natchez revealed that both were nations on the rise who respected one another. The French saw the Natchez as powerful, like themselves, with a centralized, hereditary hierarchy organized around a monarch with a noble class and political offices that oversaw surrounding polities. The Natchez saw Catholicism’s rites and symbols as familiar to their own practices and priests as
parallel to their own shamans and healers, similarities that English protestant missionaries lacked (Milne 2015). However, these apparent similarities were transient at best and Milne (2015) correctly points out that the tensions that arose around the knowledge that the French did not plan to aggregate with the Natchez but instead wished to control the region, led to rising antagonism and eventually the First Natchez War. The French coveted Natchez land for both its aesthetic appeal that reminded many of France, and for the militaristic and environmental boons it provided. The Natchez lived above the Mississippi River on the towering bluffs that created natural advantages for trade and warfare along the river (Smyth 2016). The bluffs also protected the land from flooding and provided valuable resources for architectural construction, clay production, and agriculture.

Between 1716 and 1729, war between the French and Natchez broke out four times, ending with the Natchez rebellion of 1729 (Barnett 2007; Milne 2015; Smyth 2013). These conflicts, caused by military and economic greed, were exacerbated by internal conflict among the Natchez, of which the French took advantage. While the population at the Grand Village of the Natchez, ruled by the Great Sun and his brother the Tattooed Serpent, were largely at peace with the French, the Natchez of White Apple Village to the north were hostile towards both groups. This internal fighting had many causes, including the great distance between the Grand Village and White Apple Village as well as White Apple Village’s proximity and trading relationship with English settlers. The French meanwhile saw opposition from any of the Natchez people as the fault of the Great Sun and the Grand Village and expected their intervention whenever issues arose (Milne 2015; Galloway 1982; Barnett 2007).

After nearly a decade of tense relations that included hostage situations, diplomatic oversight, blatant murder, and land disputes, as well as intermittent peace sought out by a variety
of actors on both sides, the Natchez finally had enough and revolted on November 29, 1729, killing 230 French colonists and burning Rosalie, the French fort near the Grand Village, to the ground. In retaliation, the French army, aided by the Choctaw who saw the opportunity to boost their relationship with the French, brutally defeated the Natchez in 1730, enslaving all who surrendered and shipping them to Saint Domingue (present day Haiti) in the Caribbean (Milne 2015; Barnett 2007). Some Natchez escaped and fled to the northwest where they integrated into the Chickasaw Nation, while others stayed and sporadically led small-scale attacks on remote French communities. In the 1730s the Natchez who settled with the Chickasaws moved and established towns among the Cherokee in colonial South Carolina. Most of these groups would eventually be displaced by the United States government to “Indian Territory” in Oklahoma along the Trail of Tears.

The Natchez adjusted and adapted to their uncertain and strenuous times, establishing networks and communities wherever they could survive (Smyth 2016, 2013). Contrary to the established narrative that is maintained among many contemporary scholars who problematically speak of the Natchez as though they no longer exist (e.g., Barnett 2007; Milne 2015; Galloway 1982), they in fact did not disappear but rather became a classic example of a diasporic community. They responded to this drastic change by integrating into both European colonial society and other Native American groups while maintaining their “Natchez-ness” through connection to their culture and language, influencing their surroundings to meet their needs and organizing themselves within the contexts in which they assimilated (Smyth 2016).

This layering of multiple actors across time and space in the LMV, from native inhabitants to the subsequent French, Spanish, and English colonists, shows a persistent, and distinct appreciation for the variety of natural resources the landscape offered. As the French
settled the area that would eventually be named Natchez, Mississippi, they slowly began to alter the landscape such that, within ten years of displacing the Natchez people, the thousands of years of indigenous occupation had blended into the background of mansions, plantations, and slave labor (Smyth 2016). Mound sites and associated material culture existed silently yet visibly, steeped in the myths and misconceptions created by the new occupants of the landscape. Eventually, archaeology and Indigenous voices would deconstruct these narratives and bring the mounds back to light (National Museum of the American Indian 2004; Kassabaum 2015). Thus, not unlike the history of the Smith Creek site, throughout the broader history of the LMV we see a period of occupation, a period of absence, and a return to place that bears witness to the persistence and social memory of these sites, their landscape, and those who are connected to it through sharing that space.

For the past 250 years, documentation of the Natchez has misconstrued and misrepresented their history, while focusing almost exclusively on their relationship with the French and their subsequent disappearance from written history (Smyth 2013). Smyth (2013:56) identifies three common themes across literature on the Natchez that have led to inaccurate yet influential contemporary notions of their history: (1) it seeks to romanticize their past and downplay the violence between the French and Natchez; (2) it has a fascination with understanding the supposedly rigid hierarchy and social control within their customs, which served to explain why the Natchez were seen as “partially civilized” and thus initially treated differently than other tribes; and (3) it contains a dominant narrative of the vanished Indian reinforced by the notion that the Natchez disappeared completely, leading to an effort by historians to preserve what they saw as “authentic” Natchez culture (see DuVal 2006; Fabian 2014; Galloway 2002; Lorenz 2000).
A surprising amount of seminal work by early Western researchers, politicians, and scientists have discussed the Natchez. For example, the romanticized novels of Francois-Rene de Chateaubriand (1872) tell the story of a Natchez man who falls in love with a Christian woman, a representation that created an ideal Natchez for the reader to imagine and did little to tell the true history of the people. William Robertson (1842) used the Natchez to promote his ideas of the monogenetic origin of humanity in which human civilization grew from savagery and thus promulgated the idea that European society was the pinnacle of progress and the Natchez were near the bottom of the progression of humankind. He believed that the Natchez were somewhere below the Aztec in terms of civility, but above other indigenous people of North America because of their more organized political systems. Scottish geographer John Pinkerton (1817) compared the Natchez to the Inca and called them the “Chief Tribe in North America.”

Related directly to the relationship between the University of Pennsylvania and southwestern Mississippi, Samuel George Morton included the Natchez in his infamous “Crania Americana” (1839). Through his classifications of the “four distinct races of humankind,” distinguishable through skull size, Morton determined that the white race was superior to all others. He discusses the Natchez directly, arguing that they had migrated from Mexico and were descendants of the Toltecs due to obvious analogies such as sun worship, hereditary politics, and human sacrifice (Smyth 2013). Morton’s controversial work included a collection of skulls gathered from around the world for his research. These skulls were often obtained through murder, grave robbery, and other forms of desecration and theft (Trope and Echo-Hawk 1992). Crania 143277, still within the collection at the University of Pennsylvania, is labeled as a Natchez Indian and was taken from a mound in Jefferson County, Mississippi in 1838 by James Tooley, Jr. (Morton 1839; Stacey Espenlaub, personal communication). Morton’s science
solidified Robertson’s idea that there was a bottom-up progression of human culture, and when combined, these arguments formed the foundation for arguments in support of scientific racism, or eugenics.

Anthropologists in the twentieth century shifted from focusing their attention on the vanished tribe to compiling data on the vanishing tribe, in an attempt to salvage what they could from disappearing Native American cultures, believing that they were doing them a great service (Bruchac 2018). James Mooney mentions contemporary Natchez among the Chickasaw, Choctaws, and Creeks in Oklahoma and South Carolina but largely focuses on locating them before, as he believed, they would inevitably die off instead of documenting their ongoing existence (1899). John Swanton conducted ethnographic work with Natchez living in Oklahoma, five of whom still spoke the language (Smyth 2016). Yet in his publication, Indian Tribes of the Lower Mississippi Valley and Adjacent Coast of the Gulf of Mexico (1911), his mentions of the Natchez focus mostly on their history from 1682–1731, with only five of the seventy pages covering the ethnographic work he had done with living members. This salvage anthropology is just another example of how the exotification of the Natchez past and a focus on their disappearance has erased their contemporary existence from the public’s eye.

While the Natchez struggle for Federal recognition to access funds for programs such as housing, social services, and language revitalization many Americans seem content to regurgitate false ideas about the Natchez without ever acknowledging that the Natchez survive. In order for a full history of the Natchez to be written, the scholarship on the Natchez must begin to address its problematic intellectual roots and also recognize that Natchez history, indeed, continues. (Smyth 2013:72)
When scholars discuss the Natchez, they often overplay the power of the French and assume that the Natchez were largely powerless (e.g., Barnett 2007; Milne 2015; Galloway 1982). Understanding the rebellion and subsequent revolt of the Natchez should be viewed within the broader context of escalating tensions and conflict within multiple, diverse, and powerful groups (Smyth 2016:12). The revolt was a seminal moment resulting from the escalating violence caused by colonial encroachments and power struggles already persistent within the region and marked a dramatic change in how the Natchez were seen and defined as a culture. In Restall’s *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (2003) he discusses the myth of native desolation and the myth of superiority. The myth of native desolation reduces the complex vitality of native cultures before and after the colonial encounter to a “nothingness.” The myth of superiority assumes that man and native are entirely different entities, in which one has superiority in religion, culture, and politics that is far superior than the others and thus explains why they were easily conquered. Both myths deny the agency of indigenous groups. For this reason, assuming that the pinnacle of Natchez history was in their struggle against the French denies the larger historical context of their impressive existence leading to their act of rebellion and revolt and their resilience in their continued survival after the devastating attack by the French.

**Descendant Communities**

Unfortunately, the ways in which this myth of native desolation is built into scholarship and public awareness means that it is difficult for SCAP to engage with contemporary descendants of the Natchez Indians. It also means that we must go out of our way to do so. Initially, within archaeology more generally, outreach and consultation with indigenous communities occurred largely due to policy requirements such as those necessitated by the
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This is an area that absolutely requires more focus and understanding if community-based work is to move forward in Wilkinson County. SCAP has interacted with regional tribes before, however, their interest in the pre-contact archaeological record at Smith Creek has been minimal except when related to the potential discovery of human remains. With increased focus on community and their perception of Native American culture becoming an important focus of our work, it would benefit the projects to update the tribes on our objectives and engage in face-to-face consultation with them. The following information on descendant communities provides useful data about whom archaeological projects in the LMV focusing on ancestral and historic Natchez sites could potentially contact. While consultation with many of these groups would not be required under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act due to their recognition status and the location of Smith Creek on private land, our desired project outcomes should reflect that of a multiplicity of voices who should share in the decisions we make, especially when they directly involve or affect those voices. In this way our work becomes “rewarding in ways that transcend narrow academic accolades” (Marshall 2002:218).

The Natchez-Kusso of the Four Holes Indian Organization live along an isolated stretch of land along the Edisto River in Dorchester County, South Carolina (Natchez-Kusso Tribe of South Carolina 2018). The Kusso were natives to the Charleston area. When the Natchez arrived fleeing the French, and the English government allowed them to settle on the same area of land as the Kusso, the two tribes assimilated (Alani and Behre 2019). A combination of racial prejudice and a desire to remain secluded from European society meant that there was severe poverty and marginalization within this community throughout much of the twentieth century. The community severely lacked public education, health facilities, and employment. In 1976, the
Natchez-Kusso began to demand funding for educational opportunities and acquired a renewable federal grant of $50,000 for basic adult education (United States Government Accountability Office 2012). Within five months, 49 people had signed up, averaging 29 years old with a fifth-grade educational background. This demand for education stemmed from a desire to better understand their Native heritage and regain the skills that identified them as members of the Natchez Nation (Smyth 2016:195) The Natchez-Kusso Tribe who dwell in South Carolina are considered active and recognized by the state, however they have been unsuccessfully seeking federal recognition since 1976 (Porter 2019).

The Natchez diasporic communities in Oklahoma also suffer poverty and marginalization enforced by their status and geography. They arrived in the area in the 1830s during the decade of displacement brought about by the Trail of Tears when southeastern Native American groups were forced to give up their homelands and migrate west to Oklahoma territory. They have tribal land within the geographic bounds of the Cherokee Nation. They are a treaty tribe of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation by virtue of being signatories on signed treaties that established the modern Muscogee Nation, which is federally recognized. However, their website clearly states, “the traditional government of the ancient nation is still strong and alive today” (Natchez Nation 2020a). They have managed to maintain and embrace cultural traditions. Their Great Sun, Hutke Fields, bears the traditional facial tattoos marking him as their leader. The Natchez Nation (Natchez Nation 2020b) is currently working on reviving the Natchez language with plans to digitize the American Philosophical Society’s collection of Natchez language recordings (McAlpin 2018). “Much research and significant data is available in scholastic collections and is readily available on the internet. The Natchez warn that much of it was written from a non-native
perspective or understanding and should be interpreted carefully, with the assistance of the Natchez government and strong oral tradition” (Natchez Nation 2020a).

The Grand Village of the Natchez Indians, now run as a historic site by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, hosts an annual Powwow every March. Native Americans from the Choctaw, Comanche, Kiowa, Natchez, Otoe and Pawnee tribes, among others, gather for traditional dancing and singing along with festivities, food, and crafting (Mississippi Department of Archives and History 2019). It is representative of the close connections that the Natchez have developed with other tribes throughout their diaspora and the incredibly beautiful and resilient traditions that have arisen from their forced removal.

While the Natchez are directly descended from those who inhabited the sites at which we work in the LMV, it is important to note that due to their displacement, integration into other tribes, and movement of different native groups across the landscape, there are now other Native American groups who currently live and interact with these spaces and are connected to them through shared aspects of culture and geography. Federally recognized tribes such as the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians, the Choctaw Nation, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, and the Chickasaw Nation all claim connection to the region and actively consult on NAGPRA claims. Some still engage in mound construction today while others continue to make use of ancient mounds in contemporary ritual practices. For example, the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians have returned to the mound of Kituwah, which was sold in auction when the Cherokee people were forcibly removed during the Trail of Tears, and now 175 years later engage in a yearly ritual of mound construction (Kassabaum 2015). Similarly, the Choctaw continue to utilize the Middle Woodland Nanih Waiya mound in Winston County, Mississippi (Myers 2010). These practices reflect the deep seeded and persistent identity and history of the
southeastern Native group on their landscape, a strong enough identity that even forced removal and marginalization could not erase. It is also important to note that there are other non-federally recognized groups who claim connections to the sites and associated artifacts in Wilkinson County and the LMV more broadly. We must deal with individuals claiming Native heritage cautiously and honestly. Not being federally recognized does not mean there is not a legitimate claim, however, there are instances during which SCAP has dealt with individuals who use membership within non-recognized tribes as a way to manipulate their way into interacting with sites for their own personal gain. Sometimes, archaeologists are forced to use their position as experts and supervisors to ensure the safety of sites and overrule individuals who might threaten them. In these cases, the archaeologist should reach out to federally recognized tribes for aid in identifying the person or persons and ask for their input on how to proceed.

This continued connection to the landscape even after the removal from and the return to place that these groups have experienced is significant to identifying and building upon familiar and shared lifeways so that the importance of these places and people becomes evident through understanding that they continue to exist and thrive today.

Wilkinson County Today

Wilkinson County has a population of around 10,000 people with about 30.3% of the county classified as impoverished. This is measured through the official poverty measure (OPM) that looks at income threshold, and family size which are estimated by drawing from the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Wilkinson County is 70% Black or African American and 29% White, with American Indians making up only 0.3% of the population (U.S. Census Bureau 2010; Figure 8).
Though not absolute, the disparity between the wealthier, white, landowners and the poorer, rural African American community is painfully visible in Mississippi with around 30% of the African American community living in poverty compared to only about 10% of the White community (Figure 9). Mississippi is the sixth poorest state in the country and Wilkinson County’s median household income is about two-fifths of the U.S. average (U. S. Census Bureau 2018). Poverty is thus a significant problem here among all demographics and needs to be considered when trying to understand the extent of community interest in our projects.
Woodville, the county seat of Wilkinson County, is about 40 miles south of the much more popular tourist destination of Natchez in adjacent Adams County. It is the closest sizeable town to both Smith Creek and Lessley. It is a quaint town of about 938 people according to 2018 population estimates (U.S. Census Bureau 2019), however its population is on the decline. It is a town full of history, antiques, food, and a community that is genuinely warm and engaged with those who detour off the famous “Blues Highway,” U.S. Route 61, to visit its charming town center. It was incorporated in 1811 and is one of the oldest towns in the state. The town was largely supported through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the cotton and lumber industries with a period of Jewish occupation when Woodville became known as “Little Jerusalem” and businessmen controlled the local cotton economy until its collapse due to the boll

Figure 9. Poverty rates by race/ethnicity in Mississippi (Kaiser Family Foundation 2019).
weevil. It now sees commercial activity associated with lumber and oil and gas drilling (Pitts 2015).

Generations of Woodvillians are represented in the history of the town’s businesses and politics. The town’s grocery store, Treppendahl’s Super Foods, was opened in 1924 and is run by the great-grandson of the original owner who emigrated from Denmark. Wettlin Treppendahl is the sixth generation of Woodvillians to carry the name (Treppendahl’s Super Foods 2020). The oldest newspaper in the state, The Woodville Republican, founded in 1823, is still published weekly by the great-grandson of one of Woodville’s first settlers, John S. Lewis (National Endowment for the Humanities 2015). According to many Woodvillians, their claims to fame include: the nearby childhood home of Jefferson Davis, president of the confederate states (Barnes 2009); the fact that the region surrounding Woodville was a place of inspiration for John James Audubon where he documented and painted a variety of species for his Birds of America and also opened a dance school in the town itself (Rhodes 2006); and the fact that Woodville was home to famous African-American blues musician Lester Young and classical composer William Grant Still (Mississippi Blues Commission 2017). The few, slightly outdated websites maintained by and about the town emphasize the pride that the small community has in their rich southern heritage and traditions and encourage visitors to come experience it for themselves (Town of Woodville 2020; Withers Place Publication 2008).

Woodville is a town that, upon first, misguided glance, seems stuck in the past. My experiences there have shown me that it is not; instead, Woodville comprises a highly resilient and progressive community that has continually demonstrated their love for their town. The town was recently awarded a Mississippi Humanities Council grant to create a centennial video on the history of their town as a means to increase tourism (Rosenblatt 2019). In addition the
Mississippi Main Street Association (MSA) and local Woodvillians applied to be a part of the HGTV hometown take over, a show meant to help revitalize and restore historic towns (Rosenblatt 2020; Haynes 2020). Their collaboration with SCAP has been funded by Visit Mississippi and the Mississippi Humanities Council, as well as support from multiple local groups and businesses. As the town seeks to restore their historic buildings, attract and educate tourists on their rich history, and support the businesses that have continually invested in its success, it has become increasingly evident to me that SCAP’s work fits well with these goals. As an archaeological research project with a community-outreach focus, SCAP is in a unique position to provide both valuable insight into the pre-contact history of the LMV and to support, educate, and engage with the people who call it home today. The following chapters outline precisely how this collaborative work has been and could continue to be done.
CHAPTER 3: Community Archaeology and the Theory of Persistence in Motivating Community Engagement

“Understood as a distinctive set of practices within the wider discipline,” community archaeology “is a relatively new development. Its most important distinguishing characteristic is the relinquishing of at least partial control of a project to the local community” (Marshall 2002:211). In the United States, community-based approaches were largely influenced by Native American activism, specifically the Red Power movement in the late 1970s, which was built upon a resistance to archaeological inquiry which was seen as unethical and invasive (Colwell 2009:180). Based in the violent legacy of colonialism, early archaeological practice had little awareness or care for the traumatic impacts its work had on Native American groups. The violation of sacred sites and ancestral remains were all justified in the pursuit of research. Indigenous Elders and community members who rightly saw themselves as the most appropriate caretakers of their cultural heritage began to speak out (e.g. Deloria 1969, 2010; Banks 1976; Johnson 1996). Public protests against the ethical misconduct of archaeological practice were headed by the likes of activist Vine Deloria, Jr. who publicly denounced archaeology and anthropology as studying Native Americans exclusively for the benefit of the researcher (Deloria 1969). In addition, Native groups challenged museums, actively protested at excavation sites, and participated in often-heated debates in sessions at professional conferences throughout the 1970s and continue to do so today (Atalay 2012). Significant impacts of the social, political, and ethical pressures of this activism included legislative changes such as the 1990 passage of NAGPRA and the 1992 amendment of the National Historic Preservation Act that required that indigenous groups be consulted and included in conversations about sites and repatriation. Scholars also began to consider alternative methods and approaches after being harshly criticized
for their arrogance and lack of respect by the American Indians Against Desecration project at the World Archaeological Congress in 1986 (Atalay 2012:35). In a post-processual drive for self-reflexivity and multivocality, the focus of many archaeologists turned towards humility and collaboration by examining archaeology’s relationship with contemporary society. It is now acknowledged by most scholars that contemporary society and its political, cultural, and economic needs are deeply embedded in the functionality of archaeological method and practice and vice versa. For this reason, archaeology, regardless of its research objectives, cannot remain a purely academic endeavor when its effects have direct impacts on and influence contemporary society and individuals (Matsuda 2004).

Community Archaeology in Practice

In the past two decades, archaeology has continued to address the tensions and ethical dilemmas that have plagued the discipline. In an attempt to have meaningful relationships with the people directly affected by their research and interpretations, archaeologists are finding ways to shift their relationships with indigenous, descendant, and local communities from researcher to collaborator. Archaeologists have found new ways of combining traditional archaeological science and method with more contemporary approaches of heritage management, community stewardship, and cultural tourism that have led to more accessible and shared knowledge production (Atalay 2012:19). Community archaeology is implemented in a variety of ways based on the needs of the project and community, but common themes in methodology across various scholarships include:

1. Observing and Identifying
This entails asking community members how they situate themselves within a community and how they define that role. This requires working ethnographically with the community through their varying degrees of political and economic power and considering how those influence both the project and its interpretations as well as the community’s interactions with and understanding of the project. How this work is done varies based on how the community becomes involved with the project and could happen at any time throughout the course of a project (Pyburn 2011; Marshall 2002).

2. Communicating and Collaborating

Engaging with the community involves achieving a continuous dialogue that enables interpretation and presentation of heritage that is valued by and interesting to the community. This can be achieved through working with local organizations, schools, and governments. Continually providing updates on the project through public talks, outreach, and accessible scholarship keeps communities invested and engaged. Providing educational resources for ongoing learning and walking communities through the processes and objectives of a project opens a dialogue for open and honest discussions of ownership, preservation, and looting. When applicable, explaining and understanding policy and expectations concerning indigenous groups and their rights are essential to building trust. Co-production of knowledge and presentation of data is important to reciprocal respect and ensures that future work can continue to happen, these sorts of collaboration lead to a richer outcome for the project. Archaeologists must understand the community, and the community should understand the archaeologist (Moser et al. 2002; Atalay 2012).
3. Training and Development

Responsibility to the community means considering the economic needs and political conditions surrounding the development of the project. Providing training and resources for community members to maintain and protect sites, as well as the means to educate the public and tourists when projects are not actively excavating, is essential to the longevity of the site, project, and community’s involvement. This also allows for local economic development surrounding heritage tourism and management from the perspective of the community and their needs. However, projects should always be aware of the potential imbalances of political and economic power between local groups and larger government or corporate groups. Being able to navigate that tension is important to advising and supporting all those situated within the narrative (Pyburn 2017; Pierson and Kassabaum 2019; Gould 2018b).

4. Analyzing and Evaluating

It is important to be able to quantify the success of community archaeology projects. For example, one must be able to ask: What have the researcher and the community learned? Did educational outreach achieve the desired goal of increasing awareness among the targeted audiences? A significant problem in community-based projects is the ability to assess the effectiveness of a project that often produces intangible results. Valuation methods should be carefully developed at the beginning of the project and implemented throughout to fully measure and manage the impact of the work. The value of heritage lies in what the site means to those who interact with it, and the impact of heritage tourism lies in its effects on the region’s economy and society. Being able to show communities that there is an economic and educational
benefit to the project’s work is important and can be done through impact analysis. A successful and sustainable project encourages local organizations and town governments to work with the project. They then are able to provide impact data that opens doors to additional funding and support (International Culture Centre 2015:52; Wallman-Stokes et al. 2013; Gould 2018c).

There are many ways in which communities and archaeologists become involved with one another. Marshall (2002) identifies two kinds of communities that typically emerge once archaeologists have identified and begun work at a site. The first are proximal communities, or those who live on or close to the site and are defined by their contemporary relationship to the site as part of their quotidian landscape. The second are the descendant communities, or those who can trace ancestry to people who once lived at or near the site and are defined by their cultural relationship to the past people connected to the site. In practice, these two kinds of communities can certainly overlap; however, in reality, the two types (or even various communities of the same type or individuals within the same community) are often disparate or in opposition, and often one or more is disinterested or non-existent. As Marshall (2002:215) states:

*Communities are seldom, if ever, monocultural and are never of one mind. They are aggregations of people who have come together for all kinds of planned and contingent reasons. There are therefore many ways in which the community relevant to a particular archaeological project may emerge. None is unproblematic and in many cases the interest community changes over the course of a project.*

Therefore, discovering a community is a unique and personal experience for the project that develops and changes throughout the course of its work in the area. How the local and
descendant communities choose to interpret and interact with a project’s work are complex and thus archaeologists must be willing to figure out their dynamic positionality within that relationship over the course of a project.

Faulkner states that “field projects are diverse and organic. The social sciences are different from the natural sciences because humanity has the ability, through conscious collective action, to transform nature, society and itself” (2000:26). This means that while there may be patterning in material culture that can aid in understanding the similarities and differences in past cultures, nothing is ever exact when comparing or characterizing human behavior in the past. While they may share similarities, there is no typical LMV site or indigenous inhabitant, and no generalized culture that perfectly matches the archaeological record. For this reason, we are often making interpretations, adapting our research, and changing our data to fit into our ever-evolving understanding of the past. In the same way, archaeological projects are diverse and vary greatly in their objectives, research, and outcomes. Projects are full of variables—members come and go, relationships are built and lost, things go extremely wrong and extremely right, nothing ever goes quite as expected. From the initial project proposal to the realities of the excavation, human influence and the unknown knowledge a site represents leads to a highly organic outcome for each individual project. For these reasons, no single method or approach is correct when implementing community archaeology. For Faulkner (2000), archaeology should be practiced from below, in a way that not only makes the people to whom heritage belongs active in the process of creating and preserving it, but also makes archaeology a truly scientific discipline where active knowledge creation replaces standardized data collection, where “material, method and meaning interpenetrate in dialectical tension.” (Faulkner 2000:32). Or as Atalay so beautifully puts it “braiding knowledge” between western science and community knowledge
where “research partners engage in situated weaving to create complex histories that are grounded in specific locations” (2012:207).

Sometimes this method is not effective at combating the challenges that arise when different forms of “correct” knowledge are brought together, especially when local knowledge conflicts with academic knowledge. Hodder mentions examples of this when he had to take a stand and argue that archaeological evidence did not support racist views held by local leaders at the site of Çatalhöyük in Turkey or had to defend his decision to hire women workers contrary to the desires of the local community (Hodder 2011). Alternatively, the opposite is also true, sometimes the “correct” knowledge is assumed by the researcher only to be told otherwise by the community. In Tihosuco, Mexico the local community explained that they felt little connection with the ancestral Maya whose monumental sites like Chichen Itza are the basis for tourism in the Yucatan Peninsula. Leventhal, whose early career was spent as a Mesoamerican archaeologist focused on the Classic-period Maya, became intimately aware of the hierarchical structure of the type of archaeology that he conducted, and began to continually visit and develop a relationship with the community of Tihosuco. They told him that the history and representations that mattered to them were the Caste Wars of Yucatan in the late 1800s and so Leventhal made their knowledge and interest his priority and became a collaborator and advisor (Leventhal et al. 2014). He emphasizes that the ideas in his academic work “are connected to all of us and are the result of a series of conversations and discussions among ourselves and with many of the people of Tihosuco, Mexico” (2014:213). While the details of the paper from which this quote is taken are his because they are written in English for specific publications, the co-authors are all Spanish speakers and the team conducts their project fully in Spanish. Some projects, like many in the United Kingdom (e.g., Wilkins 2019; Faulkner 2000; Bradley et al.
2015), start out as community-centric and are committed to that approach because the public is already invested in the outcomes of archaeological projects that they feel connected to through an established and persistent relationship with the landscape over a long period of time. Most of the U.K.’s general public identify archaeological material as part of a shared past and national history and view archaeologists as accessible blue-collar laborers. In British contexts, it is thus often easy to implement community-based work due to the presence of an already engaged public and the lack of contestation over whose culture or narrative is being displayed (Pyburn 2011). In other cases, communities seek out archaeologists to provide advice and aid in their project goals, as was the case with Eastern Pequot Tribe of southeastern Connecticut, who wished to conduct formal cultural and historical preservation efforts on their Reservation to document material aspects of their history. In 2003, they collaborated with the University of Massachusetts archaeological field school to perform an archaeological survey that is ongoing today (Eastern Pequot Tribal Nation 2020). This highly collaborative project allows the tribal members to meet their preservation needs at minimal cost, it includes and encourages tribal community members’ participation in the excavation, and the project’s research, practice, and results fall under tribal community supervision (Silliman 2008). Others have likewise sought to develop and integrate community archaeology projects into their current work based on their experiences with the community over the years and are meant to be community-driven and reciprocal in their benefits to both the community and the researchers. (e.g., Pierson and Kassabaum 2019; Atalay 2010; Moser et al. 2002).

Thus, while producing knowledge through partnership still requires further implementation and success to drive the field further along the continuum of practice that is community archaeology, it is clear that many researchers are thinking critically through these
approaches and attempting to implement them in accordance with their specific relationship(s) with specific communities. As community archaeology becomes more commonplace, there are sure to be further examples of the attempts, successes, and failures that will contribute to strengthening its practice (Atalay 2012).

The Theories of Persistent Places and Familiar Landscapes

The previous section provided an introductory definition of community archaeology and elucidated how its methodology enriches archaeological practice by fostering ownership of the past among indigenous, descendant, and local communities through collaboration with the archaeologists. The question of how to pique the interest of communities and encourage them to engage with their cultural sites and archaeological projects is equally complex and will be the focus of this section. Britain has had success in this matter because they view community work as being an essential part of archaeological research and heritage preservation (e.g. Bradley et al. 2015). Many other projects are located in parts of the world where there are far more pressing issues of economic, social, and geopolitical unrest that understandably renders the community disinterested or focused on priorities different from those of the researcher (e.g. Isakhan and Meskell 2019). However, in American archaeology, where there has been a concerted effort on the part of archaeologists to recompense for past treatment of Native American tribes and to undo the static pasts it imposed on their cultures, as well as make public engagement central to the discipline, there seem to be plenty of opportunities to begin piquing community interest into these issues.

In approaching my work, I have taken the stance of other southeastern archaeologists that our work is theoretically eclectic and that, as individuals and within our own work, we draw
upon multiple approaches and build upon different theories to create something novel (Kassabaum 2014b). My methodology is meant to develop connectivity between co-existing communities and cultural heritage in order to encourage preservation and appreciation. By building upon the archaeological theory of persistence and combining it with methodologies used in community archaeology, I suggest that local communities can be inspired to care about and preserve cultural heritage that may not be their own by experiencing the similarities and connections they have to shared lifeways and place.

The concept of persistent place is defined by Schlanger as “places that were repeatedly used during long-term occupation of regions” where “they represent the conjunction of particular human behaviors on a particular landscape” (Schlanger 1992:97). These places may have one or more of the following characteristics:

- Unique qualities, such as environmental/economic resources, that make it an appealing and sought-after place for specific activities, practices, or behaviors. These resources can include rivers, timber, clay, farmland, etc.
- Marked by certain cultural features, such as hearths, mounds, and structures that encourage reoccupation. The place can merely consist of the feature, or the feature can mark the place, or they can work in tandem.
- Formed on a landscape over extended periods through a long process of occupation and revisitation that is dependent on the presence of cultural materials.

In applying this concept to the Southeast, Thompson (2010) uses mound construction as an example of cultural features meant to mark a landscape for continued use and re-use. He points to the 1000-year hiatus in moundbuilding that occurred between the end of the Middle Archaic and the terminal Late Archaic construction of Poverty Point (Gibson 2010; Saunders
2010) and suggests that, despite this hiatus, moundbuilders used earlier mound sites and their associated cultural features as a guide for choosing the landscape on which they constructed new mounds. The Lower Jackson mound near Poverty Point, which was built during the late Middle Archaic and explicitly referenced in the layout of the later mound center, is evidence of this. Such examples point to places being meaning-laden for centuries even after periods of abandonment, construction, and reuse (Thompson 2010:225). We see similar persistence at Smith Creek where we have a site history spanning 1500 years starting with a Tchefuncte communal structure constructed 800 years before Coles Creek people began to build mounds at the site, followed by an intense occupation during Plaquemine times, and ending with the site’s apparent abandonment around AD 1400 (see Figure 4). Tchefuncte pottery found at the base of Mound C could indicate that mound construction at Smith Creek began during the Early Woodland period, a rare time for mound construction in this region (Kassabaum et al. 2019). However, Early Woodland mound construction occurred at Lafayette Mounds, about 100 km south of Smith Creek. Excavations at this site revealed a similar Tchefuncte structure located under Mound 1 (Ford et al. 1945:fig. 6). A thousand years later, Plaquemine groups reoccupied the Lafayette landscape, which, when combined with the data from Smith Creek, suggests the possibility of a regional pattern of persistent use and re-use based on marked cultural features (Heller et al. 2013). However, at this point, we cannot be confident that such early moundbuilding existed at Smith Creek, and thus we must also consider the possibility that site re-use was determined by aspects of the natural environment. Smith Creek is located on a bluff between the Mississippi River floodplain and a major tributary stream. Lafayette is located on the floodplain of the Vermillion River (Ford et al. 1945). Poverty Point was built along Maçon Bayou and is surrounded by many rivers, including the Mississippi (Gibson 2010). The natural
and unique resources these rivers and their floodplains provided undoubtedly made these sites appealing and sought-after places for subsistence and trade. Combined, these natural and cultural resources may indicate why and how sites were marked as important places and were persistently used and re-used over vast periods of time.

In the same way that the archaeology of persistence can decipher and explain the long-term ancient history of a site or region, it seems fitting that it could also be used in a similar way to understand the shifts in contemporary history on the same landscape. In this way the archaeology of persistence has the ability to clearly show the commonalities that a landscape engenders within the various cultures that inhabit it over time, which in turn reinforces archaeology’s ability to learn from the past by revealing parallels between it and the present (see Figure 10). Culture-in-place remains dynamic and yet it is continually shaped by previous experiences and linked inexorably to earlier and shifting versions of itself (Bauer 2009). Culture is continually building upon itself, in the same way that a site builds upon its natural and cultural features. A place is recreated and reinterpreted through how it is engaged with in the present, yet it retains lifeways and features that established it as a space to be simultaneously lived in and created in the past. It is, as Bauer points out, extremely hard to wipe out an entire way of life regardless of how history may have intervened and new traditions are always the results of earlier ones (2009:87).

Foundational archaeology and westernized history have often ignored the complexity and dynamic nature of pre-contact history and thus have often homogenized the past by defining globalization as the impetus for dramatic change within communities (Cobb 2005). However, the Mississippi period in the Southeast was categorized by frequent population movement in which places “were in a constant state of flux, in which relations of power, population movement, and
ties to the landscape constantly shifted” (Cobb 2005:570). Applying Schlanger’s (1992) theory to these dynamic shifts means that cultures and places have continually built upon each other and will continue to do so, revealing their patterns of use and reuse across time and space. The way of life that characterized Wilkinson County for thousands of years prior to European contact was not completely wiped out, rather it seems plausible that the persistent LMV landscape has tethered the past to the present through shared familiar lifeways, such as hunting, fishing, and communal use of the land.

Much like the contemporary town of Woodville, Smith Creek and other Wilkinson County mound sites were once thriving communities that relied on many of the same natural resources to establish cultural practices and create lasting landscape features. Contemporary local communities use Lake Mary, a fluvial oxbow lake created by the meanders of the Mississippi River, for both sustenance and sport, just as the Native residents of Wilkinson County did with other similar waterways for a millennia before contact. Because it has been an important location for subsistence and social activities for both ancient and modern communities, the natural landscape of Mississippi’s backwater lakes provides an ideal way to emphasize the persistence of culture-in-place. As cultural features are changed and adapted, they still maintain a connection to natural features that mark important spaces. The methods for using these features may change, but they stem from a shared tradition of using local resources (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019).

This distinctive and localized trait of using these shared resources emerges from an intersection of practice and place “shaped and constrained by both local tradition and the land itself, giving a local cultural expression a distinctive quality that persists as continuity in the face of change.” (Bauer 2009:88). According to Lefebvre (1991:13), “it seems to be well established that physical space has no ‘reality’ without the energy that is deployed within it.” Both the
physical and tangible—objects, symbols, and technology—and non-physical and intangible—beliefs, ideas, and values—occupy spaces and times in which multiple actors and communities engage. While past places and objects represent cultures that differ dramatically from contemporary rural America in many ways, this energy employed by culture-in-place has maintained and created a multiplicity of lifeways and heritage that are connected through their shared local environment that persists due to its natural and cultural features (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019).

Cobb points out that anthropology is faced with the daunting but potentially useful task of accommodating differences that are not easily reconcilable. One such example is accepting that perhaps some global processes may share similarities even if the root culture or feature are different (Cobb 2005:572), meaning that archaeologists must be able to engage the dynamic life histories of a variety of cultures while also acknowledging the existence of common experiences and situations that can link people and create a common discourse. Looking at a dynamic culture in a persistent place while considering the similarities it shares with other cultures on the same landscape over time can reveal shared lifeways. This can help to reconcile the false assumptions of the homogenized noble savage often perpetuated by contemporary communities that interact with landscapes shared with Indigenous groups.

Jean Baudrillard said, “forgetting the extermination is part of extermination because it is also the extermination of memory” (1994:49). The effects of the genocide of Native Americans and the purposeful rewriting of their history to fit the narrative of a fledgling country establishing its dominance is still felt and seen today. Contemporary communities often do not deliberately destroy or replace Native American memory and history. But in a landscape that is largely lacking Native American voices and representation, the collective community cannot help but
cultivate its own memory overtop the existing landscape (Young 1993). Nora writes that “memory is blind to all but the groups it binds” (1989:9). The monumental features of these persistent spaces remain; however, time has separated past and present so that similar lifeways are only made familiar through deliberate efforts to connect community to place. While sites such as Smith Creek are able to remain persistent through their association with important natural and/or cultural resources, they rely on people’s intentions to remember, return, and reuse. Without the intention to remember a place, the memory becomes indistinguishable from the history of a place (Nora 1989). That is, the site becomes a place merely acknowledged as a part of the past, but not valued for its connection to the present. A place of persistence and the memory it contains only exists because of its capacity for metamorphosis (Nora 1989). The type of change we seek, to preserve and protect archaeological heritage sites, can come from the intentional binding of disparate groups through a shared connection to that place. I have termed the methodology that focuses on enacting this change “familiar landscapes.” Focusing on a local community as a potential and important stakeholder, we can make the strange familiar and present a dynamic view of the past that reveals the shared lifeways across an indelible landscape. To emphasize the purpose of anthropology, we can make the strange familiar (Miner 1956). This method can create a sense of community and connection that increases interest in and respect for Native groups and the fragile material remnants of their long history in the LMV (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019).
In the previous chapters, I have outlined the many real and hypothetical stakeholders that can emerge throughout the course of an archaeological project. Likewise, I have argued that community archaeology is necessarily complicated by the presence of such numerous and variable groups and suggested that each individual project must situationally decide what the most effective route forward is in any given moment. In the remainder of this thesis, I will emphasize the importance of encouraging the contemporary local communities associated with a site, whomever they may be, to connect with and take stewardship of the past landscape and its associated objects.

This argument necessitates a distinct focus on public education generally and community archaeology and collaboration specifically. The increasingly esoteric and specialized nature of archaeology means that many scholars are not practiced at presenting their work to a broader audience or engaging in accessible discourse with those impacted by their work. Despite the importance of public archaeology for both educating the public and preserving the archaeological record, scholars in the Southeast have largely failed at stimulating public interest in holistic ways. Concerns over looting, destruction, and commodification of cultural heritage are constant and continuous concerns among professionals (Connolly 2015), yet approaching archaeology from below, through a process rooted in community, is still a relatively new concept (Faulkner 2000) with the potential to have significant impacts.

When SCAP restarted work at Smith Creek in 2015, the community was immediately interested in our research and it became clear that community-centered archaeology would be a primary focus of our work. A family home sits in the middle of the site and a highway divides the big...
mound from the rest of the property, making the site accessible to visitors and looters alike. However, little to no looting has occurred since the landowners, the Dooley family, bought the property. In fact, they take great pride in the work we do there and protect the mounds and site with great care and respect. During our field seasons, people consistently visit the excavations and the site has become increasingly popular and well known throughout our time there. People ask us to examine other nearby sites or collections from their property, local children help us screen and process artifacts, we attend social events at people’s homes where we often share our work and the latest news from the site, and we present public talks at various venues throughout the region. These interactions have made it clear the degree to which the site’s continued existence and the additional work we have been able to do within the area is thanks to the ongoing interest of the local community (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019; Spicola et al. 2019). This type of community interest and archaeological engagement has a long history at Smith Creek, and I will use this chapter to review these various efforts and their successes and failures.

The impetus for SCAP was the Mississippi Mound Trail (MMT), a state-sponsored public archaeology initiative that marked publicly visible mounds with markers throughout the state (Kassabaum et al. 2014:201; Nelson et al. 2013; Mississippi Department of Archives and History 2016). In the 1950s, Smith Creek was excavated by the Baton Rouge-based Junior Archaeological Society (JAS), which offered formal archaeological training to children in the area (Kassabaum and Terry 2020). Both of these initiatives were meant to draw local communities’ focus and interest to the archaeological process and the results of that research in a productive way. In addition, the SCAP materials have been utilized in a Penn Museum exhibit that focuses on Native American mounds and their history in the United States, allowing the Smith Creek objects to help tell the important story of pre-contact Native American monumentality to visitors from around the globe (Penn Museum 2017). Because of these community-focused projects and the relationships we have built with locals and
tourists who express interest, we have seen that there is now a track record of mitigating issues of looting and destruction through the grassroots support for preservation and protection by local individuals and groups.

Mississippi Mound Trail

The impetus for SCAP was the MMT, which placed markers at 33 publicly visible mound sites in the western part of the state (Mississippi Department of Archives and History 2016). The MMT and other Mound Trail initiatives like it (e.g., Indian Mounds of Northeast Louisiana Driving Trail and the Alabama Indigenous Mound Trail) are exceptional examples of southeastern collaborative projects. The MMT project collaborated with six federally recognized Native Nations, three government agencies, three universities, and over thirty private landowners, engaging in braided knowledge production that led to a successful and effective instrument of public archaeology and heritage tourism (Kassabaum et al. 2014:201; Jackson and Kowalski 2015; Johnson et al. 2017). However, as with most collaborative projects, measuring the impact of an intangible experience has proven difficult. Louisiana State Archaeologist Chip McGimsey argues that, beyond high demand for printed Trail Guides, it has been nearly impossible to determine the public’s engagement with the Louisiana’s mound trail or if larger sites such as Poverty Point (which is both on the Trail and a UNESCO World Heritage site) have seen an increase in tourism because of it. As always, when I ask archaeologists how we can better quantify the impact of our outreach, the discouraged response remains, “I wish I had better data for you” (Chip McGimsey, personal communication 2020). The recent mound trail projects in the Southeast present an excellent opportunity for SCAP to combine forces with an already-established public initiative on better quantifying how the public interacts with sites and if they feel more connected to their state’s Native American history because of these efforts. I will return to this possibility in the Conclusion of this thesis.
The Junior Archaeological Society

In the 1950s through 70s, Smith Creek was excavated by the Baton Rouge-based JAS. This was an organization designed to offer middle- and high-school students the opportunity to learn about anthropology, archaeology, and history alongside active excavations. Baton Rouge-based teacher, J. Ashley Sibley, directed the group with his wife. Attaining JAS membership involved rigorous training and testing. The Society expected a deep understanding of social sciences, Native American history, and emphasized the importance of proper archaeological practice with a focus on context. To maintain their status as Junior Archaeologists, members were expected to meet regularly and attend talks by professional archaeologists, to take excursions to sites and museums, and to conduct excavations at nearby mounds, presenting their finds at science fairs and at their own small museum (Kassabaum and Terry 2020). The time they spent at Smith Creek over several seasons yielded valuable knowledge on the Coles Creek people who built the site. They were also educated on the difference between archaeology and looting, noting instances of looting at the site in their field notes and attempting to mitigate the damage done to the mounds (Kassabaum and Terry 2020:30). Even so, contemporary regional archaeologists have generally put a negative spin on the work of the JAS, viewing them as unpracticed with no understanding of theory and method. Current professionals have often accused them of looting, the very thing the society tried to prevent.

However, a recent historical-ethnographic project that brought together recently recovered JAS collections, JAS documents, and ethnographic interviews with former members has challenged this assumption (Kassabaum and Terry 2020; Terry 2016). This work has made it clear that the JAS offered formal archaeological training with meticulous excavation techniques, appropriate documentation, procedures for scientific analysis, and even publishing of results in the Society’s journal, *The Junior Archaeologist* (Terry 2016). The small museum in which the JAS displayed their research projects was open to the public, encouraging school groups and locals to visit and learn
more about the archaeology, history, and geology of the LMV. The Society received public and academic recognition for their work in educating elementary-, middle- and high-school children on archaeology and other social sciences (Terry 2016:86). Kassabaum and Terry (2020) argue that the JAS should be commended for their formal training, meticulous techniques, and focus on preserving local sites for future generations. Moreover, their analysis and collected materials have greatly benefited current research and understanding of the Smith Creek site. The level of influence that the professional archaeologists who mentored the JAS students had on the outcomes of their projects is clear. While not all avocational archaeology is practiced holistically, it is often avocational archaeologists who are responsible for making the esoteric work of archaeologists more accessible and interesting to the public (Masse and Gregonis 1996). Those who were members of the JAS as children have emphasized the positive impact it had on their lives and how they have shared their knowledge with others. They have gone on to work in anthropology, law, and nonprofit leadership. They care about sharing what they have learned with their own children and seek out educational experiences for them (Terry 2016:20). The accessible nature of Sibley’s work meant that those who were engaged with the group felt a sense of connection to the site, the history, and the science that encompassed their experience. That connection has made them more attuned to archaeological sites, and likely more inclined to preserve and protect endangered sites if asked (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019).

SCAP continues to try and destigmatize avocational archaeology. Artifacts are plenty in this region and most people have encountered and collected a variety of lithics and ceramics. Rather than criticizing their actions, we have chosen to engage directly with collectors. We often help them identify their collections and visit and record the places where they have found them. We have found that people are happy to engage with us and tell us about their findings and are much more inclined to learn about proper excavation techniques when approached with respect. During our 2019 field season, when we hosted an opening day event for our exhibit in the Wilkinson County Museum in
Woodville, we also offered an “artifact roadshow” that encouraged people to bring their collections for regional archaeologists to identify (with no monetary value assigned). It was a highly popular event and people were excited to learn more about the objects they had collected and valued. SCAP also worked with a local collector to use lithics that he surface collected from his private property in the exhibit itself. His approach to collecting resembles avocational archeology as he records details on where he finds the material within a variety of plowed fields and erosional gullies on his land. In addition to their use in the exhibit, a ceramic analysis class at the University of Pennsylvania used his material to learn to analyze an assemblage and formulated a nearly 50-page report summarizing the importance of both the material and the site on his property. This site is still largely intact and could be an important location for future archaeological investigations and is being well cared for by this landowner. This type of relationship between collector and archaeologist could only come from a willingness on the part of both parties to work together on advancing our knowledge of the area. The collector was incredibly proud to see his collection in the exhibit and was grateful for the analysis of his collection, just as we were grateful for his contribution to furthering our public outreach and knowledge of the archaeological record of Wilkinson County. The more we can work with a community and not around or above them, the more we will benefit them and archaeology as a whole.

**Moundbuilders: Ancient Architects of North America**

The exhibit “Moundbuilders: Ancient Architects of North America” opened at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum) in 2017. Curated by SCAP director Dr. Megan Kassabaum, it is a fascinating exhibition meant to elucidate the impressive mound sites that are scattered throughout eastern North America but
commonly go unrecognized by the Museum’s traditional audiences by showing them that ancient monumental architecture as important as the Egyptian or Mayan pyramids exists in their own backyards. As Dr. Kassabaum stated in her introduction to the exhibit, “you don’t need a passport to visit extraordinary ancient monuments… I hope this exhibition will encourage more Americans to visit mound sites and gain a better understanding of the deep history of Native American peoples who’ve lived in North America for many thousands of years.” (Penn Museum 2017).

“Moundbuilders” explores Native American moundbuilding through contemporary photographs, artifacts, archival materials, and excavation records. These records include an explanation of methodology used in both the field with SCAP and in the North American Archaeology Lab in Penn’s Department of Anthropology in order to help visitors understand how archaeologists collect data for the creation of such exhibitions. By contextualizing the mounds in the exhibit through observing the work it takes to discover and understand them, visitors are better able to comprehend the importance of these monuments, many of which are often overlooked or mistaken for hills.

The impact of this exhibit is evident in a variety of ways. Not only is it evocative—the stunning black and white photography and warm, verdant atmosphere immediately draw the wandering visitor in—but it has inspired many to visit mound sites on vacations. Dr. Kassabaum has a road-trip mound trail guide that she has distributed to many Penn Museum visitors who have asked, and she has received postcards in return detailing the positive experiences of visiting these sites. Visitors from the museum have traveled to the Smith Creek site and have even aided in excavations. The type of impact this exhibit had was crucial to the inspiration for the collaborative work in which SCAP would engage in the upcoming seasons. Those Penn Museum
staff members who created and developed it became a foundational support system in our efforts to better connect with the community in Woodville. They offered invaluable resources, time, and input on the work we would accomplish there.

Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit

In this section, I return to the second goal of SCAP and the emphasis of this thesis: to engage the Wilkinson County community with the rich archaeology and history of their surrounding landscape by connecting them to it. In collaboration with the director of the Woodville/Wilkinson County MSA, Polly Rosenblatt, SCAP members worked to conceptualize and install an exhibition focusing on nearby mound sites and the history of LMV moundbuilding in the Wilkinson County Museum, located in downtown Woodville. This idea was born out of a long-term relationship with the community, and would never have emerged had Polly, a respected and important member of the Wilkinson County community, not expressed interest in working further with us on ways of expanding SCAP’s work beyond the walls of our excavation units. In this section, I will first situate this aspect of the project within the theoretical context of community archaeology, then I will describe the process of creating and opening this exhibit, and finally, I will assess its successes and failures.

There is an often-valid critique within community archaeology that the quick and easy response to questions of collaboration are to offer a public archaeology activity day and slap down a site museum that the archaeologists assume will do good for the community (citations). This form of public outreach often fails to consider the community’s actual interests and needs, ignores concerns about whether a community is able to maintain and support a site museum, and begs the question: does the local community really learn anything from this and do they even
care? Rather, this type of outreach often dictates a one-sided narrative that could benefit greatly from greater reciprocity in its initial planning stages (Silliman and Ferguson 2010). However, this critique of museum-based public outreach brings us back to the previous discussion of the methodology of community archaeology, which is meant to be flexible and cannot be fit into a standard model because of the dynamic relationship each project has with its respective community. I argue that while museum based collaboration may not work well in situations where the goal is to serve descendant communities who have a direct stake in the narrative and production of knowledge that occurs (e.g., the Maya in Tihosuco) in the case of SCAP, where the community that directly interacts with the site has little to no understanding of its history, this method of public outreach can be highly effective in stimulating their interest. Collaboration must start somewhere and to judge a beginning effort too harshly along a continuum of practice that leads to full-fledged community involvement is likely to create unnecessary animosity that counters or stymies efforts of collaboration among colleagues (Colwell-Chanthaphonh 2008). In building on current methods in community archaeology my familiar landscape approach is meant to encourage a variety of methods of engagement with a community; it is meant to connect people to various familiar aspects of a place, including both its cultural and physical features, in a way that will inevitably make them care more about that place and its continued existence. Thus, the familiar landscapes approach lends itself to a variety of projects and situations; in other words, the model is mutable in order to the needs of the adaptive methodology of community archaeology.

For SCAP, the idea of a community museum flowed seamlessly from a foundation of experience with the Penn Museum’s “Moundbuilders” exhibit and from the invitation extended to us, as a result of long-standing relationships with Polly and other members of the Wilkinson
County community, to develop something substantial surrounding our work. The exhibit project was particularly well suited for a community that takes great pride in their historic status and local attractions. However, in order to encourage engagement with the exhibit, we knew immediately that its opening needed to be an event for the community, and that it needed to be accessible to every demographic and age group. This became the focus of our work and drove our decision-making processes.

The project was funded through various organizations and institutions. The student curators received a combined total of $6,200 for the cost of travel, lodging, food, and the production of the exhibition through the Hassenfeld Foundation Social Impact Research Grant, the Penn Museum Student Field Funds, and the Department of Anthropology Undergraduate Research Fellowship. Dr. Megan Kassabaum, the director of SCAP, used $2,000 of a Penn Museum Director’s Field Fund Grant to support the exhibition. Through the MSA, the exhibition received $5,850 from the Mississippi Humanities Council (MHC) and $2,500 through Visit Mississippi. These grants were used to cover the costs of implementing the exhibition and opening day event through marketing initiatives, honoraria, and production costs. It is important to note that this funding came from a variety of sources that are not normally considered by or accessible to archaeologists, such as MHC and Visit Mississippi. This highlights one of the benefits of collaborating with communities; by working with organizations outside our field with objectives distinct from our own, our funding pool became broader and the project gained attention from a variety of groups who might otherwise have never become interested or involved.

I developed the concept of making lifeway connections through emphasizing familiar landscapes through my own experiences within the field of anthropology and my own
observations of our interactions with interlocutors in the field. Joining a field like anthropology as an undergraduate student is daunting; the idea of it is exciting and adventurous, but the reality of it is extremely different. One can only imagine what it must look like from the outside looking in. Finding my niche in archaeology felt like digging my way through clay—so much theory, so many names, so many rights and wrongs, constant debate over method. While I now recognize the value of these things in allowing me to think critically about complex topics, from the outside, this world looks terrifying and unknown, and it isolates those who do not understand it or have the ability and privilege to learn about it from those that do. It is important for us who have been through this process to not forget that our communities likely view academics generally and archaeologists specifically as intimidating and privileged. To begin the process of correcting this, we must be cognizant of how we communicate, educate, and collaborate. As a student, I know that the patience, kindness, and accessible nature of the mentorship provided to me by my professors is one of the reasons I was able to grasp the knotted web of theory and method required of my major, and thus I understand that this is unquestionably how we should also be treating the communities with whom we work.

In addition to these considerations, the time that I have spent in the field with SCAP over four years was invaluable to developing not only a professional relationship with the Wilkinson County community, but also deep and lasting friendships with some of its members. What can easily be defined as ethnographic work, which always takes place alongside archaeological excavation, was an important opportunity to get to know and hang out with the newfound friends and experience life with them in Woodville.

The example presented earlier of Lake Mary and its connection to the community, both past and present, developed from my relationship with Jacob Dooley, the nephew of the
landowners of Smith Creek. He actively dug with us in the field and would often accompany us on excursions to Lake Mary where we would swim, fish, and enjoy a break from field work. Jacob often talks about the fish he catches there, explaining their size and tastiness in appetite-inducing detail. He also talks about the fun gatherings that revolve around the lake and the food it provides. As a fluvial oxbow lake, Lake Mary is often flooded by the Mississippi River and the homes along its banks are threatened by the water almost annually. It was through these conversations with Jacob that it struck me that Lake Mary provides an ideal way to emphasize the importance of respecting and protecting shared lifeways for people who lived or are living in Wilkinson County. Jacob and the rest of the community unfailingly protect Lake Mary and the structures that have been built along its banks; thus a familiar landscapes approach can help them conceive of monumental indigenous spaces in the same way (Pierson and Kassabaum 2019; Figure 10). It was from this basic idea that we began to develop the exhibition around the idea that specific places share similar lifeways, even if the cultures vary drastically (Figure 11). We decided that the exhibit would highlight the fundamental lifeways shared by pre-contact moundbuilding populations and contemporary rural communities.

Much like the town of Woodville, Smith Creek, Lessley, and other local mound sites were once thriving communities that interacted with one another through trade, social events, and religious gatherings. The exhibit connected visitors to these similarities through interactive signage meant to encourage consideration of how a common landscape has led to similar lifeways through time. We did this by focusing on aspects of daily life most familiar to rural Woodvillians: hunting, fishing, and cooking similar game, using familiar vegetation and natural resources, and constructing communal and ritual structures that differ dramatically in appearance but served a similar purpose.
Within the exhibit, there are three cases displaying artifacts from sites in Wilkinson County. One case contains surface-collected ceramics from Smith Creek, organized by type to showcase their elaborate decoration. The next case contains stone tools from a private collection made in Wilkinson County and outlines a lithic reduction sequence. The final case contains a cooking-related assemblage from Smith Creek, including animal bone, fired clay, and fire-cracked rock. Two replica vessels created by artist Tammy Beane and are meant to help connect the fragmentary archaeological remains with recognizable objects, once again drawing on the familiar to help interpret the unfamiliar. Each case has an attached schematic that details every object and explains its use (Figure 12). The cases are surrounded by a series of chronological panels that guide visitors through a timeline of moundbuilding cultures in the LMV from 6000 BC to the historical period (Figure 13). Each chronological panel details the development of four key cultural traits associated with four relatable key icons meant to symbolize social organization, subsistence, architecture, and technology, as well as a case study of a mound site in

Figure 10. Images showing examples of the shared lifeways between the pre-contact and contemporary communities who share a quotidian landscape in Wilkinson County; (left) artwork by Martin Pate of a Native American fisherman; (right) photograph by the author of fisherman returning to dock on Lake Mary.
either Louisiana or Mississippi (Figure 14). The exhibit ends with a panel that explains the familiar landscape concept using the Lake Mary case study (Figure 15). It elucidates why this connection to place is so important and how archaeology is enabling these stories to be shared and preserved. An exhibit brochure defines the icons and encourages visitors to visit Smith Creek and the many other sites along the Louisiana and Mississippi Mound Trails. An activity booklet, modeled after the National Park Service’s Junior Ranger program, helps kids explore the exhibit through a series of fun activities that comes with a reward if completed (Figure 16; see Spicola 2020).

Figure 11. Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit; photograph by the author.

Figure 12. Lithics case in the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit including artifacts demonstrating the reduction sequence and showing schematic attached to case; photograph by the author.
Figure 13. Example panels in the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit showing different periods and cultures in the LMV; photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.

Figure 14. The four key cultural traits as presented on the panels in the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit (left) and defined in the formal exhibit guide (right).
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 catfish and bass, and harvest the local plants. We find many of the same foods you eat today in the archaeological record—showing that people have appreciated a certain 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 landscapes it created. In Wilkinson County, Lake Mary provides locals and tourists with sustenance and sport. People value the rich beauty it offers. This place connects the prehistoric 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 unintentionally felt the same way.

Archeology 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 archeology we have here, we are protecting the history and future of the place we call home.

Figure 15. Panel in the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit explaining Familiar Landscapes: Then and Now.
One of the fascinating parts of implementing this project was the inevitable disappointments, disruptions, and changes of plans that occurred. The Wilkinson County Museum is small and, prior to our work, focused primarily on the ante- and post-bellum history of the town. Much of the space was used for storage and the single reference to Native American communities was a sign on a corkboard that read “Indians, Legends, and Steamboats” (Figure 17).

We faced a great deal of pushback initially from the Museum’s curator. He, understandably, felt that we were forcing our narrative on his museum. This was difficult for us because his narrative exclusively told the story of the white population of Woodville and the associated commentary sometimes bordered on being racist. We knew that we must respect his position in the town and the work that he had put into opening and maintaining the Museum, but we also knew that if we were going encourage respect for Native American people and culture, we would need to make significant changes that would require him to accept our knowledge and position regarding what was appropriate content for the exhibit. We acquiesced to many of his requests, but firmly stood our
ground on others. It helped immensely that we had so many community members excited about our work; as many people donated time, money, and resources (including a collection for display) to the exhibition, we were able sway the curator’s opinions on many things.

![Figure 17. Views of the Wilkinson County Museum before our installation; photographs by Megan Kassabaum.](image)

Polly Rosenblatt was a driving force behind our success within the community. Her experience and understanding of what the community would benefit most from led to important funding, decisions regarding festivity locations, and quick approval from local government and other organizations for any of our needs. For example, we knew that we wanted to ensure that our outreach included the African American population in Woodville, who have historically been the least involved with our work, yet we were unsure how to encourage this engagement. Polly immediately introduced us to local pastors who were willing to share details about the exhibit and our opening day event with their congregations. In addition, we became
regulars at The Orchard Café, a nearby restaurant owned and operated by Terral McDonald, a prominent African American businessman in the town. Finally, Polly suggested we use the African American Museum, a separate building across the town square from the Wilkinson County Museum as the venue for our opening day festival. It was clear that doing so would not only bring additional exposure to the rich African American history of the area but would also encourage the attendance of local African Americans at the event. Polly also hired famous, local blues musician, YZ Ealey as the entertainment for our event (Figure 18). As a local legend and celebrated musician, this choice is an example of the particular attention given to addressing the community’s interests in addition to our own.

![Figure 18. YZ Ealey performing outside the African American Museum next to the Blues Highway Marker; photograph by the author.](image)

Polly was also in a unique position that enabled her to demonstrate to the local community that there was a positive economic impact associated with this project. As director of the MSA she had access to important impact analyses from previous events that allowed her to apply for external funding not typically accessible to archaeologists, such as the Mississippi
Humanities Council (MHC) and Visit Mississippi. There were certainly times throughout our marketing campaign that it felt as though a lapse of communication had occurred between SCAP and MSA. Due to the complexity and variety of our funding sources it was difficult to communicate and coordinate across our two distinct ways of doing things. It would have been more useful to amass this data ahead of time in order to better coordinate spending and improve communication. There were definitely times when it became increasingly clear how essential it was to relinquish this desire to be in charge and enable the community to evolve our ideas into what best suited their needs even with such trivial matters as painting the doors of the museum.

In the weeks before the opening festival, planned for June 29, 2019, an advertising campaign was implemented that included putting up posters and flyers in businesses and historic sites around Baton Rouge, St. Francisville, Woodville, Natchez, and Poverty Point, creating and posting daily updates on a Facebook event page, running ads in the Woodville, Natchez, and McComb newspapers and on Facebook, and setting up a radio interview with Mississippi Public Broadcasting. The opening day festival was free and open to the public with the goal of giving back to the community that has welcomed SCAP for the past six years. The previously mentioned artifact identification booth alongside a variety of family-friendly activities were hosted in the African American Museum and an adjacent park. Guests toured both the Mound exhibit and the African American exhibit (Figure 19); had regional experts identify their collections (Figure 20), and engaged in a variety of fun and engaging activities led by our SCAP team. Our kid’s activities ended up attracting just as many adults with an interest in excavating a cookie or reassembling a broken flower pot. The idea of these activities was to help local people better conceptualize the specific methods of excavation and analysis archaeologists utilize and why (Figure 21).
Figure 19. Visitors to the Wilkinson County Museum and opening day event; Photographs by Grace Vargo-Willeford.

Figure 20. The Artifact Roadshow where regional specialists Vin Steponaitis and Sam Brookes are telling visitors about artifacts they have found on their property; photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
Visitors were invited to view artifacts from past excavations and watch materials from Lessley being actively processed by crew members; some even helped wash artifacts (Figure 22). Regional archaeological sites such as the Grand Village of the Natchez Indians were also represented and provided tourists with brochures and information on visiting surrounding mound sites. Because of a local ordinance, we could not serve food or alcohol for free, so we opted to support The Orchard Café who served food for the event with all proceeds going to them. YZ Ealey was a highlight of everyone’s night, I distinctly remember looking around and noticing how much everyone was smiling and engaging with each other and the music.

This opening day event attracted over 400 locals and visitors to downtown Woodville, which is a very significant number for a town with a population of around 1,000. The event in many ways was an example of familiar landscapes in practice. This contemporary communal celebration was a shared lifeway, tethering the present to a past in which the Natchez engaged in similar communal festivities on the same persistent landscape.
Figure 22. SCAP team members get help washing artifacts and explain the latest findings from the 2019 Lessley excavations; photograph by the author.
CHAPTER 5 Critiques and Positive Impacts

As a relatively young project, SCAP is in the early phases of bringing community outreach and collaboration to Wilkinson County. Thus, it was and is important for us to think critically and systematically about the successes and failures of the 2019 undertakings. Surveys created by MHC and SCAP were used to understand how people reacted to the event and museum exhibition and assess whether they felt more connected to the heritage of the area through them (Figure 23). The first part of the survey asked about visitor experience and shows an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the exhibition (Table 1). Our marketing was highly effective; this is undoubtedly due in part to the fact that we took the advice of locals and advertised in regional newspapers instead of advertising exclusively through social media as we had originally planned. Fifteen people (45%) said they heard about the event through social media, while 11 (36%) read about it in the newspaper, and 4 (12%) through word of mouth. Our social media outreach was also extremely successful; we posted excavation videos from the field, did Q&A’s with team members, and even had prize drawings to entice people to the opening day event. Of the 33 visitors surveyed, 32 (97%) would come back and/or recommend that others visit the exhibit.

As part of understanding how visitors perceived their surrounding landscape in connection with Native American cultures, we asked about their familiarity with mound sites in the area. Most (78%) of those surveyed had visited a site, probably in part because mound sites in the American Southeast are a common part of the landscape and many are preserved thanks to the Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama mound trail initiatives. The sites mentioned included: the Louisiana State University Mounds, Poverty Point, Moundville, the Grand Village of
Natchez Indians, Emerald Mound, and Smith Creek. Significantly, all those who had not visited a mound site before said that they would be more likely to visit one after experiencing the exhibition (Table 2).

The results of these surveys and our own reflections on the process form the basis of this chapter. There were mistakes made and missed opportunities during the 2019 season that we have learned from and will improve upon going forward. Regardless, the success of the event was evident in many ways: it had a significant and ongoing economic impact on the town; the successful educational outreach meant that 400+ visitors left with a better understanding of regional archaeology; and it strengthened our bond with the community. It is thus apparent that this project will form the basis for our ongoing community-based and collaborative work within Wilkinson County and could be used as model for similar initiatives to be started elsewhere.

![Figure 23. 2019 MHC Survey (left) and 2019 SCAP Survey (right).](image-url)
Table 1. SCAP Survey Part 1: Visitors Experience at the Exhibition.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 (Strongly disagree)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Strongly Agree)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The exhibition met my expectations</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned something new</td>
<td>1*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Misunderstood the survey metrics

Table 2. SCAP Survey Part 5: Heritage Site Experience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever visited a Mound Site?</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If no, are you more likely to visit one?</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Critiques

Three significant critiques stood out when we evaluated the project upon completion. First, it was difficult to get visitors to the exhibit to fill out the survey and thus, response rates were very low. SCAP has 33 of its own surveys from the opening day exhibition and is still waiting on the results from MHC and for the rest of the completed SCAP surveys to be shipped. While the survey clearly sought to understand how people perceived the cultural value of their experience, it may have benefited the project more to implement a before and after evaluation of
visitor experience. There was a clearly a failure to enforce the evaluation method and it could have benefited from a much larger subject size. The average age of those who filled out the surveys was 60+. This could explain why so many were able to visit and experience mound sites, as the majority were of retired age with the means to travel. The actual turn out included families with young children who were highly engaged with the exhibition, event activities, and the children’s activity booklets (Figure 24). The failure to gather more data was probably due to two factors. First, the age group of the people who primarily filled out the surveys were more inclined to fill out paper surveys. We probably could have appealed to a younger demographic through web-administered surveys. Second, the paper surveys were costly, harder to keep track of, and were not widely distributed whereas a web based survey has the advantage of less time, less cost, and increased reliability (Hayslett and Wildemuth 2004). Getting more people to participate in the surveys as well as evaluating the effectiveness of the activity booklets at educating children on the exhibition were not well-planned out but if re-evaluated and planned for ahead of time have the potential to be significantly improved in future installments.

Second, we did not have a complete understanding of how to quantify the impact of our work or what exactly that impact should look like. This is a perennial problem in archaeological outreach. We wanted people to learn something and feel more connected to their home through its history; however, measuring that sort of intangible experience was not something we thought about in depth before the project and is actually quite hard to do, as we saw with the mound trail initiatives.
It is not enough to anecdotally report that our project was a success as this does not allow us to candidly evaluate whether or not our project met its specific, listed objectives. With respect to this issues, Castañeda (2016:79) says:

> in order for archaeology to contribute to the improvement of mankind (including all subgroupings), it is an ethical imperative that we know the effects, implications, and consequences of archaeology — from the most individually unique to the most broad and encompassing consequences.

Any effort by archaeologists to develop and use effective methodologies, whether they originate in our field or in other disciplines, to conduct more systematic and cumulative research will yield better results and secure the type of funding and support needed to maintain the growth of the project (Gould 2016). SCAP could benefit from better data sourcing and evaluations in
future projects, and while this type of evaluation is relatively new to the field of public archaeology there are excellent sources to draw from which present evaluations for determining if a project met their stated objectives, present evaluations with rich data-sets, and report results within a consistent framework (see, Smith and Burke 2005; Bonacchi 2013; Lewis 2014; Simpson and Williams 2008).

Finally, I believe that we could have considered the African American community and surrounding Native American tribes more in our work. As archaeologists focused on our own research goals, deadlines, and academic expectations, we are often subconsciously capable of ignoring certain communities if there is a perceived lack of interest on their part or a difficulty in engaging with them. That seems to be especially true when that community does not wield political or economic power. However, we are quick to engage with the communities who offer us support, which are often the ones with the socio-political power. My goal here is not to invoke archaeological guilt but rather to foster archaeological consciousness over these issues of participation within community archaeology. While SCAP has never and would never exclude any group from participation in our work without just cause and has worked with federally recognized tribes on past projects, I believe that, as our community outreach increases and develops, so should the diversity of the communities with whom we engage. Each of these communities will have varying degrees of interest, needs, and expectations from our work, defining those through initiating dialogue shows a conscientious effort on our part to include all the situated voices in this narrative we are producing for and with them.

Positive Impacts

Other minor critiques include the limited crossover between SCAP and the MSA’s funders and the specific funding requirements of each organization, which sometimes made it
difficult to keep track of the spending across the two groups. Additionally, the occasional lapses in communication between SCAP and MSA given distance and differing responsibilities means that our data is presented somewhat anecdotally in this thesis. However, in future collaborations I feel better prepared to deal with all the critiques presented above and develop better strategies for mitigating these problems as they arise in future initiatives. I believe that the exhibit was overall successful for a number of reasons. This exhibit and event, and the work that went into creating, developing, and implementing them, provide a good template for recreating this type of outreach for other small archaeological projects hoping to begin working more with their communities.

In total the material cost of developing and implementing the exhibit and hosting an opening day event was $6047.47. In addition to this cost we also received an in-kind donation of display cases worth $4,000 from the Penn Museum, as well as various donations from local Woodville businesses. The commitment and participation of these various groups greatly aided in the success of the exhibition and revealed that this project had a lot of support from both academic and public audiences.

The Mississippi Development Authority (MDA) informed SCAP and MSA that:

*The long-term effects of the exhibit, which include (but are not limited to):*

*creating the foundation and infrastructure for additional exhibits of local artifacts as they become available for display, opens the door to educational opportunities for local school children to become familiar with pre-history of our area. Secures the Wilkinson County Museum as a viable location for future expansions to the exhibit, and proves our community’s willingness, ability, and enthusiasm for exhibiting archaeological finds in our county. In other words, the economic impact is not so significant as compared to the ongoing opportunities this exhibit affords the Wilkinson County community.*
These are clear and exciting effects that offer insight into the way the community and local government see the outcomes of SCAP’s work and presence in the area. This is specifically important to the historical preservation of Woodville, which is already a large part of the local community’s efforts to maintain their small town and attract tourists.

By combining the “prehistoric” with the historic, the project has helped to showcase the impressive timeline and landscape that makes Wilkinson County such a persistent place. In addition, the exhibit and event did increase tourism in the town of Woodville (Figure 25). Four hundred people were estimated to be in attendance and Visit Mississippi estimates that brought in around $11,000 that day in purchases such as gas, food, and goods. We started a small museum store with 100% of proceeds from tote bags and other goodies going back into supporting and maintaining the exhibition. The exhibition also continues to see about 50–70 visitors a month which provides continued economic growth to the town. This is a benefit to the relationship with the community as a whole.

The familiar landscape model is reflected throughout this analysis. A concerted effort was made to re-connect people to something that they had lost a sense of because of the inherent biases and racism built into the American education system towards Native American groups, as well as due to a past mired in the enslavement and segregation of African Americans in the region. Setting the perceived strange cultural and social differences aside, all of these groups share a connection through the land that they occupy, and while the methods for using associated lifeways on that landscape may differ, they stem from a shared tradition of inhabiting and using that land. While this model certainly does not claim to resolve issues of bigotry and racism, it
does take a step towards reconciliation between disparate peoples by making them more familiar with each other.

Figure 25. Visitors enter the Wilkinson County Museum in Woodville, MS during the opening day festival; photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
CHAPTER 6 Future Goals

The highly malleable and innovative nature of the field of community archaeology means that its methods can be developed and adapted to fit the needs of the community with whom it is interacting. This makes it undeniably feasible for most projects to engage on some level with the communities who are directly impacted by their work. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, there are a variety of successful projects implementing outreach-based programs through collaboration and engagement in vast and unique ways that are both impressive in their implementation as well as their self-reflexivity when it comes to considering the implications of their work. In a similar way, archaeological theory is also eclectic and flexible. We should not shy away from theory building (i.e., using theory as the tool that it is to adapt and draw upon a multiplicity of approaches to formulate new and improved ways to benefit our work) (Kassabaum 2014b).

In this thesis, I have proposed that we should borrow theories such as persistent landscapes and adapt them to fit our developing applied archaeological concepts like familiar landscapes. This nuanced approach creates a more flexible methodology that can be adapted to answer very specific archaeological questions while also broadening our field’s scope from focusing exclusively on how the past influences the present to the ways in which we can actively improve the present’s connection to the past. For SCAP, the theory of persistence was already being used in our work to help us better understand the past usage and associated material culture of the Smith Creek site. Developing it to fit into our community outreach only served to broaden the theory and its applications.
Familiar Landscapes serves to mobilize the understanding of culture and heritage in a way that has profoundly transformative effects that create local communities more likely to accept a variety of disparate stakeholder groups. Emphasizing the commonalities shared on a familiar landscape engenders increased respect and a desire to preserve what is shared across time and space. It creates a more empathetic, compassionate, and respectful group of people who are more likely to consider the implications of destruction and looting at important sites and take steps to protect that which they perceive as important to both their present community and future generations.

SCAP will continue to engage in community-based work as part of its project goals. Reinforcing these concepts of familiar landscape through continued public outreach serves two purposes: (a) it provides further opportunities to collect data on whether the impact of this theory actually works, and (b) it commits these concepts to the memories of the people who interact with them, guaranteeing that our work continues to influence communities even after we are gone. Currently SCAP is engaged in conceptualizing and implementing the following two projects.

Children’s Book

One of the wonderful and unexpected developments that occurred during our planning was the interest and engagement of the local librarian, Sheridan Montgomery. Upon our introduction, she was immediately enthusiastic and supportive of our work and requested that we inform her of any books we thought the library should have for adults and children alike on mounds and Native American history. In addition, she offered any child who completed the kid’s activity booklet and brought their prize to the library an additional entry into the summer reading
program’s prize drawings. When we brought her a book on mound construction and archaeology in the Southeast, she made copies of the pages and created a story garden walk for our opening day that encircled the courthouse in the town square adjacent to the Museum. This additional support from a community member was helpful and added another important level of impact. We had already made plans to increase our educational outreach to the public schools in the area, but Sheridan’s involvement provided extra support and showed us that accessible literature on the area’s Native American history is sorely lacking. Because of this Erin Spicola, a member of SCAP and a senior at the University of Pennsylvania, is working on a children’s book inspired by our exhibit’s kids’ activity booklet, which emphasizes the familiar landscapes model by encouraging children to think about how modern objects share the same functions as ancient objects (Figure 26), as part of her senior thesis (Spicola 2020).

Figure 26. Excerpts from the Kids Activity Booklet from the Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit.
Educational Outreach

SCAP has recently been awarded the Southeastern Archaeological Conference Public Outreach Grant for continued work on our project. One of the driving factors behind “familiar landscapes” is education, in essence, teaching people to appreciate other cultures by creating feelings of connection through the familiar aspects they share. Mississippi is the poorest state in the United States and the Wilkinson County public school district has been formally deemed “failing” (Rozier et al. 2019). We specifically designed the exhibit to provide educational resources that were friendly to all age ranges, including a small library of books available for reading in the museum (Figure 27) and the aforementioned kids activity booklet.

Figure 27. The Wilkinson County Mound Exhibit library including books for adults and children; photograph by Grace Vargo-Willeford.
This grant will allow us to continue to work with an educational consultant and local collaborators on developing and implementing a three phase, field-trip and in-class curriculum with the goal of bringing all local fourth graders to the exhibit and local archaeological sites, including Smith Creek. This field trip will provide teachers with resources to teach a pre-visit lesson on archaeology and Native American history and a post-visit lesson that focuses on the continued presence of Native people in the region. The program has been developed to meet Mississippi State Educational standards for fourth grade while also continuing SCAP’s goal of interconnecting the landscapes of pre-contact indigenous groups with those of the contemporary residents of Wilkinson County in order to make the unfamiliar landscape of the past more familiar to its current young residents. The outreach will be implemented through loaner kits which will include the supplies for three activities that explain methods of archaeological investigation and interpretation, two books to read in class, and video of SCAP team members explaining different techniques used in the field and lab. There will also be replica artifacts that will encourage students to think about the uses and stories surrounding objects before seeing them in the context of the site and exhibition. The field trip to the site and exhibition will focus on student inquiry, asking them what they see and think about what they experience. Kits will be used during their time in the Museum to record real, surface-collected artifacts and compare them to those on display. These will also include with written guides with questions to encourage critical thinking about what they experience. Upon returning to the classroom, students will focus on contemporary Native groups in the area. The goal of this lesson is to remind students that the archaeological sites and artifacts they have experienced are directly tied to living populations. In collaboration with federally recognized tribes, we hope to develop a lesson that details contemporary local Native traditions, stories, and material culture and connects those with
the archaeological objects used in previous lessons. This will serve to increase dialogue between SCAP and Native groups in the area as well as begin conversations that may not have occurred before between tribal members and the Wilkinson County community.

It will be essential to this project that we evaluate the before and after experience and knowledge of students as well as the opinions of the teachers. We will design an online evaluation form intended to understand the degree of interest from the teachers and their reactions post-implementation. Developing an educational impact analysis for the students is an essential next step in this project. As discussed above, it is very difficult to quantify the level of impact from intangible experiences with heritage; however, it is feasible and essential to do so. Using such models as theory of change could greatly benefit the outcome of this program (e.g. Wilkins 2019; Gould 2018c). A theory of change model is a specific method for planning and evaluating the objectives and outcomes of a project. They are often used in philanthropy and by not-for-profit organizations to create, understand, and promote social change. The implementation of such an approach would be a cross-disciplinary approach that could greatly benefit a community-based archaeology project if used from the outset and maintained as a comparative evaluative method throughout to ensure that the project is sticking to its objectives.

I developed a theory of change model for SCAP after the 2019 project and believe that it could greatly benefit future work (Figure 28). I received input from Brendon Wilkins, archaeologist and projects director at DigVentures (a crowdsourced archaeological field school), who reminded me that theory of change models are not just about measuring how well you attain your objectives but should also be used to show you where you are failing and give you the rapid feedback needed to implement improvements (personal communication, February 2020). It will be interesting to see how the children’s perspectives change over time, much like the JAS
members that Terry interviewed during her research (2016). This outreach program will allow Wilkinson County’s youngest residents to engage in a fun and meaningful way with their shared history and will encourage a responsible and respectful approach to interacting with Native American history in the past and today.

Mound Trails

The successful implementation of mound trails in Mississippi, Louisiana, and Alabama involved collaboration efforts among local governments, universities, and federally recognized tribes. Many people have visited the sites along the trails, and they are clearly an attraction for tourists and locals alike. However, as pointed out earlier, there is no feasible way to quantify

Figure 28. Theory of social change developed specifically for SCAP (adapted from Wilkins 2019:fig. 1).
how people interact with these trails and if they have learned anything in the process. SCAP continues to expand its outreach, and in so doing will also have to develop better ways to understand the impact and outcomes of their work. Doing so with current, established, mound trail initiatives could benefit both groups. In addition, SCAP continues to seek out publicly visitable sites throughout the Eastern United States. Using internet and library research alongside crowd-sourced information, they are ensuring that the locations are correct and mapped in a database and updating available information about sites including whether they have associated museums or interpretive signage, whether they are on private or public property, and what time periods they date to. This information can be used in future projects to understand how people interact with sites and what sort of knowledge they are disseminating about them both at the site and online, as well as if there are opportunities for further engagement through the familiar landscapes approach at other sites and regions.

Conclusion

The field of archaeology often looks back on its past and wishes it had been a better collaborator and ally to the communities it studied; over time it has sought to improve its ethics, methodology, and sociopolitical engagement and become a more self-reflexive and conscientious field that supports those with whom it engages. In a field whose primary purpose is to understand and explain human culture, we are doing ourselves a disservice by not engaging with contemporary communities who are by definition connected to our work through a shared local landscape and are setting ourselves up to repeat the failures of our fields past. For that reason, whenever we approach a project today, we should consider how it will be perceived 150 years from now by the most vulnerable observers and interlocutors affected by our work. A universal attribute of humanity is the ability to create culture. Archaeology does not exist without culture,
and culture does not exist without a community to create it, foster it, and protect it. Our job then, which is directly tied to preserving the past, requires us to teach and inspire communities to better understand and protect that past by emphasizing their shared connection to it. In this way our work becomes increasingly relevant to the contemporary communities engaged with it and protects it for future generations. When we look back on our work let us ensure that we have created a more sustainable, inclusive, and accessible future for both archaeology and the public and that we have become better allies and collaborators in the process.
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