

Archeological Highlights of Western Kentucky and
The Archeological Program of Murray State University

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Kenneth C. Carstens, Ph.d.
Professor Anthropology and Director
Anthropology Program
Murray State University
Murray, Kentucky 42071

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A history of the archeology program at Murray State University and our current understanding of the prehistory and early frontier history of extreme western Kentucky are, by no coincidence, considerably intertwined.

The MSU archeology program began under the initial direction of Dr. Jack Nance, MSU's first archeologist. Nance was hired in the summer of 1971. He held a part-time academic position with the university and the Tennessee Valley Authority, teaching a pair of introductory classes in archeology and anthropology while also surveying parcels of federal property for the government, in compliance with President Nixon's Executive Order 11593.

From a historical perspective, E.O. 11593 proved to have a major impact on the direction of archeology in western Kentucky. This presidential decree mandated cultural resource surveys (that is, the locating of archeological sites), on federal lands about to be developed, as well as for federally-funded developments taking place on state or private property. Part of our current understanding of the prehistory and early history in extreme western Kentucky is due in part to this early work of Jack Nance and the 1971 federal mandate.

Between August, 1973, and January, 1974, Nance was under contract to TVA to finish writing reports about archeological materials he had recovered from the Land Between the Lakes area (Nance, personal communication). Then, between January, 1974 and August, 1974, Jack took the job of Acting Director of the Alberta Archaeological Survey in Canada, prior to his present position at Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, Canada. Although Jack's stay in western Kentucky was brief, he initiated an archeological program that would be maintained until the present. Jack began a report and survey series for the LBL region (Nance 1972, 1975, 1976a-b, 1977a-b), published a small booklet

about the prehistory of the western Kentucky region (Nance 1973), and initiated a rudimentary outline of the area's prehistory (Nance 1976c, 1979). Jack Nance left MSU having initiated an academic program, an amateur archeological following, and the seeds that sprouted our current archeological and anthropological program.

A few years later, Jack returned to lead one of the most systematic, and detailed, archeological reconnaissance and testing projects yet undertaken in extreme western Kentucky at the Morrisroe, Cox, and Whalen sites (Conaty 1985, Nance 1980a-c; Nance and Conaty 1982). Studies from these projects culminated in several major publications (Casey 1987; Conaty 1987; Gatus 1987; Gatus 1980; Leach and Jackson 1987; Kusmer, Leach, and Jackson 1987; Nance 1980c, 1981, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1987a-b, 1988, Nance and Ball 1986; Nance and Conaty 1982; Wymer 1987), three master's thesis (Bobrowsky 1982; Casey 1980; Leach 1981), and two doctoral dissertations (Conaty 1985, Leach 1991). In summary of MSU's archeological genesis, I would conclude that Jack Nance had a very positive impact on the advancement of archeology in western Kentucky.

William McHugh followed Nance's tenure at Murray State. Bill continued the CRM program between 1973 and 1976 (McHugh 1975, 1976a-d, 1977a-c), but found the political arena of western Kentucky not to his liking. Although McHugh's academic position, unlike Nance's, was full-time, his university appointment at MSU would be short-lived. Disagreements with local governmental officials had two very negative impacts on the archeological program at MSU and on the academic career of Bill McHugh while at MSU. MSU came close to dropping the academic archeological program altogether. Fortunately, MSU did not, but it did divest itself of Dr. McHugh. Although his career at MSU was short, McHugh's years were productive, and his work at the Stone site in Stewart County, Tennessee (Carstens 1992), and his investigations at the Late Archaic Mofield Farm site in Calloway County, Kentucky, (1976) stand out as particular contributions.

In 1978, a third phase of archeology began under my direction. Like Nance, I was hired on a half-time basis to develop an archeological program, teach two anthropology/archeology courses, and conduct archeological contracts for the general service region of the university.

This was no easy task. When I came here in the fall of 1978, I found that archeology in general, and archeologists in particular, had politically fallen from grace with local community and university

officials. The majority of my first year was spent healing wounds, which when finally mended, allowed, the archeology of the region to be studied once again and the academic program of Murray State to spring forward into a position of leadership. It was an uphill battle at first, but it has turned out to be very worthwhile.

Between 1978 and 1981, MSU's archeology program did an about face. In the classroom, courses grew from five or six loyal students, to a steady "mass" of 30 or more. First housed in the basement of Wrathier Hall, the archeology laboratory felt the growing pains of several field research studies and moved to larger accommodations in a "new," 2400 sq. ft. laboratory on the third floor of Ordway Hall. Although contract archeology projects were both my personal bread and butter and that of the MSU archeology program (Carstens 1979; Carstens and Carpenter 1979), field research programs, utilizing amateurs and students alike (Hensley 1981), built on the work of Nance and McHugh and began to piece together a culture history of Kentucky's western region. In 1979, field investigations took place at the Ford site near Benton, Kentucky, where 8,000 year old remains of a flint-knapping work station were uncovered (Carstens 1979; Carstens and Carpenter 1979). In 1980, our amateur archeological society gained acceptance into the Kentucky Archeological Society, and by 1981, was the largest amateur organization in the state with more than 80 members. With the help and assistance of the amateurs, many new archeological sites were identified and reported to the Office of State archeology in Lexington. Sites like Fuqua, 15Cw65, near Backusburg, Kentucky, which dates to the 9th century A.D., were systematically surface collected by MSU students. The results are being studied today by our professional staff, headed by Dr. Charles Stout, and student research assistant, Kathy Tucker (Stout, Tucker, and Carstens 1994).

In 1981, MSU hosted its second archeological field school. Our excavations were at the Reed Site, 15McN51, near Paducah, Kentucky (Hensley 1981). This site, located underneath the I-24 bridge on the Kentucky side of the Ohio River, was threatened by flood waters of the Ohio River. Amateur archeologist Fred Biggs brought the site to our attention and we, in cooperation with the Jackson Purchase amateur archeological society and students from Murray State University, partially excavated the site. Not only did we expose an A.D. 1200-1325 Mississippian house in our excavations (which also contained the first evidence of prehistoric corn in western Kentucky), but we also uncovered the remains of an Early Woodland, Baumer phase (800-300 B.C.) occupation beneath the Mississippian stratum.

By 1981, the MSU anthropology program also graduated its first archeology undergraduate, and sent him to the University of Arizona to attend graduate school. The student was Jim Piggott, co-founder of our amateur archeological society, and my right-hand man in the lab. Jim showed much promise, but his graduate career was cut short by cancer, and he died before he could complete his Ph.D. It is fitting to note that following in Jim's footsteps at MSU was Christine Hensley. Chris recently completed her Ph.D. at Washington University in St. Louis, where she continued her studies in Kentucky prehistory. That would have made Jim very happy!

Also in 1981, Murray State University began negotiations for custodial care of Savage Cave, an extremely significant prehistoric cave site in Logan County, Kentucky. The site contained a wealth of information spanning more than 13,000 years of Kentucky prehistory (Carstens 1981). By 1983, Murray State University received this nationally-significant site from the Archeological Conservancy for fee simple. By doing so, MSU became the first university in the Commonwealth to own its own archeological site. But, not only was MSU working at Savage Cave, we had continued our long term investigations at Mammoth Cave, too, inventorying the prehistoric aboriginal remains in the world's longest cave (Watson and Carstens 1982).

Our program proceeded to grow and prosper and 1981 continued to be a very successful year. Our archeological program joined forces with MSU's Mid-America Remote Sensing Center, an official research/transfer-station of NASA. We applied state-of-the-art remote sensing techniques, such as T.I.M.S. satellite imagery, thermal and infra-red spectography, and conventional black and white, and color aerial photography, toward the discovery of archeological sites in western Kentucky. We were quite successful, predictively locating archeological sites with an 85% accuracy average, ranging from prehistoric mound centers to 19th century historic tenant farms. Only one other school in the nation, at that time, was dabbling in remote sensing applications to archeology, so you might say we were on the cutting-edge of technology. We have continued our successful working relationship with the Mid-America Remote Sensing Center, and today are applying its technology toward the building of archeological Geographic Information Systems (Carstens, Bomba, and Brown 1993).

In the meantime, both the academic program and contract work continued to prove successful. Classes were now more than full, which convinced administrators to make my academic position full-time and tenure track. In addition, a second archeologist, Dr. Kit Wesler, was

hired to take over the archeological contract business on a full-time basis (with profits turned back into the archeology program), and perform archeological grant writing in support of the archeological program.

Wesler was very successful at what he did, both as a contract archeologist and as a grants-person. His early work at Whitehaven (Wesler 1982; 1984a), the Paducah welcome center, was very well received. Soon, two additional part-time contract archeologists, Randal Boedy and Charles Moffat, were added to our growing contract staff. Although this addition would be short-lived, as dictated by changing markets in the contract field, our hiring of two additional archeologists added impetus to our young program. MSU's archeology program was no longer skating on academically-thin ice. Our program had matured, and we were making a very positive impact.

In 1983, Murray State became the owner of a second archeological resource. The site, then called Ancient Buried City, was located in Wickliffe, Kentucky. It was a prehistoric Mississippian village and mound complex dating to the 13th century A.D. It had been partially excavated and turned into a tourist attraction between 1940 and 1970. Dr. Wesler was put in charge of our operations at Wickliffe, and it was his task to turn the place around from a tourist trap to an educational and research facility. Ancient Buried City was renamed Wickliffe Mounds Research Center, and excavations at the site by Wesler have demonstrated a complex series of mound and village building episodes, a cemetery area, and unique preservation of prehistoric textiles and house floor paintings (Matternes 1994; Wesler 1984b; 1985; 1991). Wickliffe Mounds is now an academic center where undergraduate and graduate students from Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, and Tennessee universities earn six hours of academic credit each summer, and where Kentucky Junior Historians come to assist in the scientific excavations and learn more about the fascinating field of archeology. MSU now has academic consortium ties with Southeast Missouri State University and the University of Tennessee at Knoxville for both graduate and undergraduate research at Wickliffe Mounds and the surrounding areas. The facility is no longer a tourist trap, but rather an accurately-interpreted, prehistoric Native American site and scientific research center. We hope you will take the time to visit Wickliffe Mounds while you are in the Paducah area.

As importantly, Murray State University, as owner and caretaker of the Wickliffe Mounds site has, unlike other private enterprises and universities who own prehistoric cemetery sites, demonstrated it can

work with modern Native Americans to tastefully and respectfully interpret and display remains of the past so that all may learn. Murray State's relationship with Native American groups has proven to be a role model for other private and public agencies in the Midwest and Midsouth.

Also in 1983, the MSU Archeology Program assisted William Marquardt and Thomas Gatus from the University of Florida and the Kentucky Heritage Council in their pursuit of Paleo-Indian remains in western Kentucky (Marquardt and Gatus 1984). Because of our amateur network, Marquardt and Gatus were able to work at several late Paleo-Indian sites dating to the 9th millennium B.C., which were among the oldest, context-based sites in Kentucky. Had an amateur network not been established, the Harpeth River remains from the Young site in Graves county may never have been found and reported.

On a slightly different note, back in 1981, but continuing to the present, I initiated the Fort Jefferson Research Project. Fort Jefferson was an American-occupied fort and civilian complex, located near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and dating to 1780. The military leader of this frontier outpost was General George Rogers Clark. Prior to 1981, the early frontier history of western Kentucky had been completely ignored by historians and archeologists, alike. The Fort Jefferson research turned that situation around by conducting archeological field study projects, applying remote sensing techniques, using magnetometers, instituting deep coring, and accomplishing archeological field testing. Archival and historic studies were also concluded for the purpose of locating the fort's remains and attempting to piece together a history of the fort which appeared simply not to exist. Supposedly, all of the fort's original paperwork had been lost during the War of 1812 when the British burned Washington, D.C. That information turned out to be wrong; quite wrong.

In 1984, a very tiny footnote at the bottom of a ninety year old publication stated that several bundles of General Clark's papers had been found in Virginia. I acted upon that footnote, wrote a grant proposal, was funded, and went to Virginia. There were the lost papers, numbering more than 20,000 original documents. Four thousand of those papers pertained specifically to Fort Jefferson. The papers had been stored in the basement of the then, "new" (1780), Governor's Mansion since 1781, then moved to the Virginia State Archives in 1912, where they again sat untouched until my research in 1984 and 1985.

Throughout the last ten years, the MSU Archeology Program has continued its academic programs, field enterprises and contract work, but it has also focused on the re-writing and publishing of the early frontier history of the Midsouth through numerous publications and professional papers stemming from the Fort Jefferson research project (Carstens 1994a-1993, 1991a-b, 1990, 1984). And in doing so, MSU undergraduates have worked side-by-side in the field and in the laboratory, literally piecing together the prehistory and early frontier history of western Kentucky.

In 1985, MSU, hired another contract archeologist, Ms. Pamela Schenian, from Northwestern University. Pam brought analytical, computer, and organizational skills to the MSU Archeology Program. Throughout her tenure, between 1985 to 1993, Pam conducted more than 160 contract studies (too numerous to list here), and grossed more than \$300,000 in revenue for the archeology program (Schenian 1986a-b). Such statistics are a fitting testimony to her hard work and endurance in the grueling contract profession that continues to support the archeology program at Murray State.

In 1986, a local farmer brought in a bushel basket containing the remains of 45 Early Woodland, ca., 800 to 300 B.C., turkey-tail projectile points. He wanted to know if they were important. I informed him they were --indeed, his collection of 45 turkey-tails from a single cache made it the largest collection of its kind in the United States. I asked him if the MSU Archeology Program could examine the area where they were found --I had explained to him the uniqueness of his collection and its importance to archeology. He consented. Within a week, myself and two students, Kathy Lyons and William Lawrence, were busy excavating the area. To our surprise, another 42 turkey-tail points were exposed in our excavations in an undisturbed cache. This was highly significant, and the experience afforded by this atypical situation launched the archeological careers of those two students.

Our newest member of the MSU Archeology Program is Dr. Charles Stout. Although Chuck has joined our program only recently (June, 1994), he brings much western Kentucky field experience into our program. Chuck will be teaching part-time for us, doing archeological contract work, and also conducting original research throughout western Kentucky. Chuck is no stranger to western Kentucky, having worked on several of the most significant Mississippian village mound complexes in Fulton, Hickman, Carlisle, and Ballard counties for his doctoral degree at the University of Illinois. Chuck will utilize MSU

undergraduates in his on-going research of the Adams site in Fulton county this fall.

Lastly, our most recent undertaking is the study of a Federal Civil War period gun emplacement site in Livingston county, Kentucky. This study is exciting for several reasons. First, no one has archeologically studied a Civil War site in western Kentucky previously, let alone a gun emplacement site. This unique, horseshoe- and star-shaped earthen embankment complex, is architecturally complex and somewhat unique. Also atypical in Kentucky is Murray State University's use of high school students --from Livingston Central High School-- in an effort to put the Kentucky Educational Reform Act (KERA) to work. This past Spring, more than 204 high school students and faculty worked side by side with MSU faculty and students mapping the site, excavating a brick foundation, working on the main gun emplacement, and exhuming what may be the fort's ammunition magazine. Excavations will probably continue throughout the next five years at this very important, historic period, archeological site.

Summary

The Archaeology Program at Murray State University is relatively new --we've only been in operation since 1971. But throughout those 23 years, we have been very busy unearthing the evidence of the first Kentuckians, involving the public and our undergraduate students in that work, and piecing together the early frontier and Civil War history of the Jackson Purchase region. Archeology is an exciting, romantic discipline, full of intrigue, mysteries, and fascinating discoveries. If you ever get the chance, try an archeology class at your local university or an archeological field school at Wickliffe Mounds; join your local amateur archeological society and get involved. You will find the experience to be exhilarating and rewarding. Thank you.

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