

Archival Research

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Introduction

Archival or background research conducted in association with archeological investigations involves compiling a project-specific summary of known archeological properties, known archeological contexts, previous investigations, and relevant environmental variables. Archival or pre-field research should be undertaken prior to conducting field investigations and should not be limited to Wisconsin if the project is located near the border of Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, or Michigan. The specificity and focus of archival research varies with the level and scale of the associated investigation. However, most projects can be assigned to one of three broad categories.

First, and probably most common, is research undertaken in support of planned field work. In this case, the purpose of archival research is to obtain background information adequate to (1) develop an effective research design, (2) select an appropriate field methodology, (3) allow for later interpretation of the results of field work, and (4) provide a basis for preliminary evaluation of identified sites. Archival research undertaken in conjunction with Phase I identification studies will be more broadly based than research associated with Phase II testing and evaluation or Phase III data recovery projects. A second application of archival research is as an information-gathering tool for non-field-based research projects. Such background studies are often designed to furnish information necessary to develop a formal historic context or provide data required by a specific research objective.

The sources described in this chapter represent a comprehensive list and would not be relevant

for every Public Archeology project. At minimum, the following sources should be checked prior to conducting field investigations:

- the Archaeological Site Inventory (ASI) with associated USGS quadrangles (Office of the State Archaeologist)
- the Wisconsin Burial Inventory (WBSI)
- the Bibliography of Archaeological reports (Office of the State Archaeologist)

These sources will identify any previously reported archeological sites and survey in the area.

Land Use History

A third application of archival research is as a screening technique to determine the necessity for actual field observations or to help define an appropriate scope of work for a particular investigation. In this case, the goal of archival research is often the compilation of a land use history (LUH). A land use history represents an attempt to develop a detailed history of a particular parcel of land with regard to usage and alteration of the original landscape. Such a study typically consists of three components. The first is directed toward compiling the actual history of the parcel in question. The second focuses on compiling a record of natural and cultural processes that may have affected any resources potentially present. The final component provides an assessment of the parcel's potential to harbor historic resources.

An LUH should reference any record of past use of the property. Of particular concern are documented developments such as structures; sewer, water, and utility improvements; land-

scaping; or other land alterations. The LUH should be reviewed also in relation to community and regional histories and physiographic studies, to assess the parcel's potential for archeological or historical significance. Particular attention should be paid to presettlement vegetation, soil type, and landform class. Finally, an effort should be made to document individuals or groups associated with the property through time. The degree to which any LUH is developed for a project should be based on the project's size and the severity of potential impacts to archeological properties. The following list encompasses all possible sources; not every one would be relevant for a specific project.

In addition to the archival resources discussed in a later section, the following resources are particularly cogent to the development of a land use history:

- county histories
- county soil books
- regional physiographic studies or landform analyses
- maps and aerial photographs
- plat books
- Government Land Office (GLO) survey notes and field sheets
- deeds and tract indices
- county atlases
- Wisconsin Land Economic Inventory
- tax records (rolls and judgments)
- post-GLO survey records
- census data
- state-level development permits
- municipal building permits
- local newspaper archives
- local historical collections and photographic archives
- oral histories
- informant interviews

The second component of the LUH should focus on identification of various land use practices that may have affected cultural resources on the parcel. Essentially, this part of the study consists of developing a list of disturbances associated with the historic uses of

the property. Disturbances may include natural processes such as erosion, inundation, sedimentation, mass wasting, or eolian episodes. Disturbances traceable to cultural events include various land-clearing practices; agricultural utilization; timbering or other logging-related operations; mineral or petroleum exploitation; construction of facilities, structures, or roadways; and emplacement of utilities.

This part of the LUH should pay particular concern to the nature of specific disturbances. For example, disturbances such as land leveling, deep plowing, or excavation of basements and structure foundations destroy or radically transform most archeological resources affected. However, massive fill episodes or episodic flooding and accompanying sedimentation may have very limited adverse effects or in certain cases actually act to preserve some kinds of archeological resources.

The final component of the LUH consists of a synthesis of the data compiled in the first two components. The goal of this effort is a practical assessment of the probability that a particular parcel of land may harbor potentially significant resources. The assessment should be made with explicit reference to the kinds of prior land use, the nature and extent of documented disturbances, the range of prehistoric or historic resources potentially present, and the potential of the landscape to harbor intact or remnant archeological deposits.

Land use histories are most effective when dealing with clearly circumscribed project boundaries of limited areal extent; i.e., individual lots or parcels of less than about 100 acres. The LUH approach does not readily lend itself to areally extensive corridor surveys or to reconnaissance of tracts in excess of several hundred acres. Archeological investigations that target urban settings or former or present industrialized land will readily benefit from compiling of an LUH prior to initiation of field studies. However, land use histories centered on rural tracts can also provide useful data, depending on the nature and extent of the rural developments involved. In general, the LUH approach can lead to more cost-effective field studies guided by robust, focused research designs.

Archival Resources

Listed below are major Wisconsin archival resources housing essential information for archeological investigations. The list is neither exhaustive nor exclusive and is intended to serve only as a basic frame of reference.

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW)

The State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW), located on the campus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, houses the most essential resources for archival research. The SHSW includes a number of related departments or resources. Major SHSW resources are listed below.

The Division of Historic Preservation, Compliance Section. This department maintains a computerized database and paper files of all federally and state-mandated archeological and architectural investigations that are currently under review or have been reviewed in the past three years. After three years, the Compliance Section purges its files and transfers the purged records to the Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA). Purged records are reviewed by the OSA staff and extraneous materials are discarded; the remaining records are filed by county, year, and project. These records may contain copies of survey reports as well as correspondence, project maps, and miscellaneous documents.

Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA). The Office of the State Archaeologist (OSA) acts as a clearinghouse for information related to archeology in Wisconsin. The office is responsible for administering and overseeing a number of programs related to preservation and management of historic properties in Wisconsin. Among the direct responsibilities of the OSA are overseeing the Regional Archaeology Program, awarding Survey and Planning Grants, and approving Archeological Field Permits. The OSA is also responsible for preparing State and National Register of Historic Places nominations, coordinating the state tax exemption program, and assigning trinomial state site numbers to newly

codified archeological sites. In addition, the OSA maintains the archeological site records for the state and also compiles the Bibliography of Archeological Reports (BAR).

The Burial Sites Preservation Office (BSPO). The BSPO is responsible for coordinating a statewide effort to record and protect human burial sites. The BSPO maintains the Wisconsin Burial Sites Inventory (WBSI), which contains records of burial places or likely burial places (e.g., places where human bone has been found) recorded to date. In addition, the BSPO maintains a set of USGS 7.5' quadrangle maps showing the locations of all codified burial sites and cemeteries in Wisconsin.

Archives Division. The Archives Division, housed in the SHSW building on the UW-Madison campus, contains a wide range of primary materials including correspondence, maps, and photos relating to archeological sites and archeological investigations in Wisconsin.

State Historical Society Library. The State Historical Society Library, housed in the SHSW building on the UW-Madison campus, houses an extensive collection of published sources relating to Wisconsin prehistory and history. The collection includes books, scholarly journals, popular magazines, and pamphlets.

American Geographical Society (AGS)

The American Geographical Society collection, housed at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Golda Meir Library, comprises one of the premier geographical research facilities in the western hemisphere. Included are maps, charts, photos, atlases, books, journals, and satellite imagery of most areas of the earth. The collection contains a fair selection of archeological and anthropological resources, including maps, historical atlases, and various geographical and geological data sets.

Area Research Centers

The various Area Research Centers established throughout the state offer regionally

specific information dealing with the prehistory and history of portions of Wisconsin. Regional coverage and holdings are uneven, and emphasis varies from center to center. Other sources to check at Area Research Centers include map and air photo libraries, such as the Robinson Map Library at UW–Madison.

State Regional Archaeology Centers

The regional offices house a number of resources useful in archival research. For example, each regional site has hard copy records of the ASI files and a set of 7.5' USGS quad maps with archeological data keyed to the ASI for the counties within its region. The regional centers also have computerized ASI records, online access to the SHSW's database, or both. Each regional office also has a microfilm copy of the Charles E. Brown archeology manuscripts for the counties within its purview.

Centers commonly have recently generated site and survey data not yet reported to the SHSW or codified in the ASI. In addition, most centers maintain a library of cultural overviews, cultural study units, and other reports produced by the center along with reports of regional compliance-driven investigations. Regional centers typically curate a variety of reference collections along with names and addresses of individuals, agencies, and institutions that may have information regarding sites, planning documents, and other pertinent data. Regional centers also have site files, notes, maps, and photo documents that can be more extensive than those of the ASI.

Local Historical/Archeological Societies

Local historical societies are typically county-wide in focus. However, city-oriented institutions occur also. These facilities range widely in the nature and extent of their holdings. Curation and retrieval capabilities vary also. Holdings may include artifact collections, first-hand accounts of historical significance, and a variety of historical records. Local archeological societies tend to be more widely focused in terms of a geographical area of interest. Only rarely do such organizations maintain curated research collections. How-

ever, individual members often maintain well-provenanced and readily accessible collections of archeological materials and site location data.

Tribal Preservation Offices

Many tribal governments have formally organized historic preservation offices. Often these facilities include archival materials relating to the tribe's regionally specific history. In some cases, museum-quality exhibits and research collections are available also.

Avocational Archeologists and the Public

Residents with special knowledge of a particular area may possess a variety of unpublished data relevant to the local cultural resource base. Material may include artifact collections, historical documents, photos, and maps. Such individuals are often extremely knowledgeable concerning details of the local prehistoric and historic sequence.

Serial Files and Map Collections

It is recommended that the following list of resources be consulted during the course of a comprehensive archival search. Major categories include serial and map collections, published materials including journals and other serial publications, and physiographic reference materials.

Archeological Site Inventory (ASI)

The Archeological Site Inventory (ASI) is maintained by the Office of the State Archaeologist. The archeological site records consist of two related components, the Archeological Site Inventory (ASI) and a set of USGS 7.5' quadrangle maps. The ASI files are maintained as a computerized database containing listings for all codified archeological and burial sites in Wisconsin. Access to the ASI is provided by Borland Paradox™, a relational database manager for IBM-compatible computers that is currently supported by the SHSW computer system. The ASI records

are updated daily. Hard-copy records (updated monthly) are available upon request. ASI database information is also available at each Regional Archaeology Center. The OSA map file consists of USGS 7.5' quadrangle maps showing the location of codified archeological sites and areas that have been subjected to formal archeological survey. Site locations and survey areas represent approximate depictions of actual size and configuration. It is important to note that the OSA map file does not contain a complete listing of recorded burial sites or cemetery locations; that listing is available from the Burial Sites Preservation Office (see below).

Wisconsin Burial Sites Inventory (WBSI)

This file is a subset of the ASI database. Essentially, the WBSI contains all records of burial places or likely burial places (e.g., places where human bone has been found) recorded in the ASI to date. Some of these sites are sufficiently well-documented to be considered cataloged burial sites and are identified as such. The data are compiled largely by the Burial Sites Preservation Office (SHSW).

National and State Registers of Historic Places (NRHP)

The Division of Historic Preservation at the SHSW maintains a list of all Wisconsin properties listed on, or officially determined eligible for listing on, the National Register of Historic Places. The Division also maintains a list of all properties listed on, or determined eligible for listing on, the State Register of Historic Places.

Inventory of Historic Structures (IHS)

The Division of Historic Preservation maintains a computer-based inventory and associated card file of all known structures of historic and/or architectural interest. All sites in the inventory and all areas surveyed are plotted on either 15' or 7.5' USGS quadrangle maps. Some historic archeological sites not listed in the ASI are listed in the IHS.

Bibliography of Archeological Reports (BAR)

The OSA maintains a bibliography of reports compiled under the SHPO-reviewed compliance program, including compliance archeology reports (active and inactive), reports of survey and planning studies, and Regional Archaeology Center reports. The BAR was begun in 1977 and contains references dating to 1975. Bibliographies are compiled by calendar year, updated by December of the following year, and available in print or as a computer file.

Charles E. Brown Manuscript Files (CEB Mss.) and Archeological Atlas (CEB Atlas)

The Brown manuscripts, housed in the Archives Division of the SHSW, consist of 50 years of notes, correspondence, sketches, maps, and other data relating to historic and prehistoric archeological sites. Information is organized according to county. These manuscripts are also available on microfilm in the SHSW Library. Pertinent portions of the CEB Mss. are also available at each Regional Archaeology Center. The Charles E. Brown Archeological Atlas is housed in the Archives Division. The Atlas provides the locations of archeological sites plotted on county plat maps. The prehistoric and historic sites include camps, villages, mounds, springs, rock art, workshops, quarries, cemeteries, trails, and various other archeological manifestations. Pertinent portions of the CEB Atlas are also available at each Regional Archaeology Center.

County Archeological Site Files

A set of files indexed by county are maintained by the OSA. These files contain more detailed information on some of the sites listed in the ASI. These records often include unpublished reports, photographs, sketch maps, feature forms, letters, and miscellaneous information.

Museum Archaeology Program Files

An additional set of county files is maintained by the Museum Archaeology Program (MAP). These files include extensive maps,

field notes, photographic materials, project correspondence, and reports generated by field investigations conducted for highway construction projects and other public archeology projects undertaken by the program since 1957. The MAP also maintains a bibliographic database, ethnobotanical database, and project-tracking database.

Wisconsin Land Economic Inventory (WLEI)

The WLEI consists of a set of maps depicting land use by section for most of Wisconsin. The inventory was conducted in the 1930s and 1940s and reports a variety of cultural and natural features. A complete set of maps is housed in the Archives Division; a less complete set is available at the AGS collection in Milwaukee.

Trygg Map File

The Trygg map file is a privately published composite of the GLO land survey records. These maps are less detailed than the GLO plats; however, the file is an important source of data relating to regional development during the late historic period (ca. 1850).

UW–Madison Map Library

The UW–Madison Map Library contains a wide selection of cartographic resources. It is located in Science Hall on the UW–Madison campus.

Wisconsin State Cartographer’s Office

This facility, located in Science Hall on the UW–Madison campus, functions as a clearinghouse for mapping-related topics. The Cartographer’s Office publishes a periodically updated Wisconsin Catalog of Aerial Photography. Currently, this catalog lists all known aerial photography taken from 1936 to 1993.

Journals/Serial Publications/Published Sources

The Wisconsin Archeologist

This quarterly journal of the Wisconsin Archeological Society has been published continuously since 1901. The *Archeologist* is a valuable source of information on Wisconsin prehistory, history, and archeology.

Bulletin of the Milwaukee Public Museum

This now-defunct series contains detailed accounts of archeological investigations, ethnographic studies, and historical narratives dealing with Wisconsin.

Milwaukee Public Museum Yearbook

Once published annually, the yearbooks contain accounts of various archeological and ethnographic projects undertaken by museum personnel in Wisconsin and elsewhere.

Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology

This now-defunct series includes scholarly treatments of anthropological and archeological investigations.

Wisconsin Magazine of History

This is the journal of the SHSW and contains a wide range of articles dealing with Wisconsin prehistory and history.

County Plat Books

Newer editions provide information on current ownership, and older editions often contain information that allows reconstruction of changing land use patterns and determination of original date of settlement.

County Histories

County histories range from unpublished narratives and personal diaries to professionally researched studies. Often these histories contain accounts of contacts between early

county settlers and historically known tribal groups.

Physiographic Data and Standard References

The Government Land Office (GLO) Maps and Notes

The Government Land Office records consist of plats and survey notes that contain information regarding presettlement vegetation, topography, and aquatic features. Also noted on the maps is cultural information such as the locations of Indian trails, camps, and villages; maple sugar processing stations; pioneer settlements; and early industrial improvements such as mills, roads, homes, and farmsteads. The GLO records are available at the Wisconsin State Archives. Microfilmed facsimiles are available at some Regional Centers.

County Soil Survey Maps

County soils maps and accompanying documentation are available from Soil Conservation Service offices located in each county.

County Cartographic Catalogues

These compendiums are issued by the Office of the State Cartographer.

Wetland Inventory Maps

This series of maps delineates formally recognized wetland areas within Wisconsin. The maps are available from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).

Wisconsin Natural and Scenic Areas

This relatively recent program, developed by the WDNR, is not yet fully documented. However, the proposed scheme will delineate a number of natural regions defined with reference to a complex set of environmental variables. The resulting divisions may be more useful for archeological interpretation than conventional divisions based solely on vegetation or physiographic data.

Standard Physiographic References

Curtis, John T.

1959 *The Vegetation of Wisconsin—An Ordination of Plant Communities*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Finley, Robert W.

1951 *The Original Vegetation Cover of Wisconsin*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison.

1970 *Geography of Wisconsin, A Content Outline*. College Printing & Publishing, Madison.

1976 *Original Vegetation Cover of Wisconsin from U.S. General Land Office Notes (1:500,000 map)*. North Central Forest Experiment Station. Forest Service, USDA, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Hole, Francis D.

1976 *The Soils of Wisconsin*. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Martin, Lawrence

1965 *The Physical Geography of Wisconsin*, 3rd ed. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison.

Paull, Rachell Krebs, and Richard A. Paull
1977 *Geology of Wisconsin and Upper
Michigan—Including Parts of Adja-
cent States*. Kendal/Hunt, Dubuque,
IA.

Checklists for Archival Research

The *Archaeological Literature and Records Review Checklist* form was developed by the Museum Archaeology Program at the SHSW to record information generated by the literature and records search prior to undertaking field investigations. The *Historic Structures* checklist was developed by the Great Lakes Archaeological Research Center.

These forms are presented as a possible tool for easily summarizing literature search information for inclusion in a technical report. Not every source listed is relevant for every Public Archeology project; the forms include those sources commonly checked prior to initiating field investigations.

