

III.

Recording and Evaluating Historic Archeological Properties

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Introduction

There is no simple formula for determining the significance of an historical archeological site, but general parameters can be set. Certainly, sites considered eligible should have archeological deposits sufficiently intact to address the questions being asked. Additionally, any of the following qualities argue strongly in favor of a site's eligibility:

1. rarity of site type (based on time period, function, ethnic affiliation, etc.)
2. short-term occupations (providing clarity of data)
3. long-term occupations with vertically or horizontally separated deposits
4. historical documentation of residents' identities (allowing more specificity in questions)
5. representation of a historic theme

Phase I: Identification

Background Research

In addition to the standard resources for pre-historic sites (ASI, Burial Sites Inventory, Charles E. Brown Mss., landowner interviews,

etc.), background research for the project area should also include the systematic examination of early plat books, aerial photographs, county histories, oral histories, HSI (Historic Sites Inventory database), Wisconsin Land Economic Inventory Field Sheets and, for urban areas, Sanborn insurance maps. This work will provide potential locations of historic sites within the project area, and in some instances, a ready identification of these sites. Much of this research should be done prior to the initiation of field work. Once sites have been identified, census records and tax rolls for those properties should be examined.

Field Work

Phase I field work should identify the nature of the resource, provide a preliminary assessment of the site's condition, and provide sufficient information to design an effective testing strategy for Phase II investigations. An archeological site is defined as an area of focused human activity that is at least 50 years old. Areas of widely scattered historic ceramics, with no archival or archeological evidence of structures or focused activity areas, are generally not considered sites. Properties with standing structures that are over 50 years old should also be evaluated for their archeological potential. Archeologists are encouraged to work closely with historians.

Results

At minimum, reports on Phase I investigations should include the following information:

- site function through time
- rough dates of occupations

- photographs of all existing structures
- descriptions/analysis of recovered artifacts (also note any classes of artifacts present but not recovered)
- data on ownership and land use from mapped archival materials
- site layout and estimation of site boundaries (should include sketch map drawn to scale)
- assessment of the site's integrity, based on subsurface testing unless otherwise justified
- assessment of the site's potential significance

Phase II: Evaluation

Background Research

Research should focus on establishing a historic/cultural context within which to understand the relationship of individual sites to the broader historical development of a particular region or, in some instances, to the development of particular industries. A first step, if it has not already been done for the area, is to examine successive plat books and chart the history of development by recording numbers of structures through time within a specific geographic area (decided in concert with the SHPO—e.g., township, county, drainage, road corridor). Developing a cultural context will depend upon the nature of the property being examined. For example, if a site was occupied by a particular ethnic group, the focus of the historic context could be the immigration, acculturation, and land use practices of that particular group. If a site was known to have been a dairy farm, the focus of the context could be the development of the dairy industry in that particular region. Background information on Wisconsin's ethnic groups, industries, and numerous other resources and themes deemed significant has already been synthesized in the *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* (Volumes I–III). These study units are

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|--------|---------------------|
| Vol. 1 | 1. Historic Indians |
| | 2. Fur trade |
| | 3. Government |

4. Euro-American settlement
(German, Norwegian, British Isles, Yankee, etc.)

Vol. 2 5. Agriculture (wheat, dairy, tobacco, farming the “cutover”, etc.)

6. Industry (mining, logging, brewing, tanning, etc.)

7. Transportation (Mississippi, Great Lakes, railroads, etc.)

8. Architecture (vernacular forms, agricultural outbuildings, etc.)

Vol. 3 9. Education

10. Social Movements

11. Religion

The *CRM* provides good introductions to each of these topics through relatively brief discussions and accompanying bibliographies.

Field Work

Phase II work should provide sufficient data to assess the research potential and integrity of the site. Specifically, testing should focus on providing an assessment of artifact and feature diversity and determining whether there is vertical and/or horizontal separation of deposits at the site.

Results

At minimum, the Phase II report should include

- a detailed history of past ownership and land use
- a detailed site map with established boundaries and landscape features
- descriptions of features and artifacts, including an assessment of the clarity of the data (i.e., at sites with a long history of occupation, are there temporally discrete features or levels within features?)
- an assessment of site integrity
- an assessment of research value/NRHP eligibility
- a Determination of Eligibility form if the site is considered significant

According to National Register Bulletin 15, properties may be eligible for the National Register under four different criteria:

Criterion A: association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of history

Criterion B: association with significant individuals

Criterion C: representation of distinctive design or construction (of a type, period, or method of construction)

Criterion D: potential to yield information important in prehistory or history

Although archeological sites can be eligible under Criteria A, B, and/or C, this generally requires that the site be in overall good condition with excellent preservation of features, artifacts, and spatial relationships. Integrity requirements under Criterion D are not as stringent. For this reason most archeological sites are generally nominated under Criterion D, the potential to yield *important* information. The “importance” of information should be measured in terms of its ability to address research questions identified within the disciplines of historical archeology, archeology, history, or anthropology. In addition to the topics identified in the *CRM*, SHPO historians and archeologists have suggested the following list of significant research areas:

- ethnicity
- gender
- social/class inequalities
- consumerism
- transportation networks
- evolution of technology
- settlement studies (frontier settlement, settlement patterns)
- adaptation to natural and cultural environments
- material culture studies

In preparing a Determination of Eligibility or nomination under Criterion D, it is essential to explain a site’s potential to address one or more questions related to themes in *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* and/or the listed research areas. For example, can ethnicity be identified by artifact types or site lay-

out? Does this vary across regions within Wisconsin? How quickly did acculturation occur? How dependent were a site’s occupants on local, regional, or world markets?

When preparing a Determination of Eligibility or National Register nomination, archeologists are strongly encouraged to examine the appropriate National Register bulletins.

