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# Beneath the Ivory Tower

The Archaeology of Academia

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EDITED BY

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## Foreword

### The Importance of the Past in the University of the Future

As president of Michigan State University (MSU), I saw the excavation of Saints' Rest, MSU's first dormitory, as a wonderful opportunity to connect with the past in a scholarly way. It was not until the completion of the dig, however, that I fully realized its importance. The archaeological dig combined the social and hard sciences; engaged students, faculty, staff, and the community; brought history to life; and formed a connection between the present and the past. I hope other campuses are fortunate enough to have a similar experience.

Learning about history through the remains helped to form associations with the past and created a sense of heritage in the modern campus and community. The excavation made it possible for us to hold a piece of history in our hands and reflect on its significance. Archaeology is the tangible link to those who came before us. The findings provided insights into years gone by and allowed the university to anticipate the challenges that it might face in the coming years.

Because the site fell victim to a fire in 1876 and was immediately leveled, we had no clear idea of what we would find. The information recovered added archaeological research to archival material, however, offering a more complete portrait of early student life on MSU's campus.

Benjamin Franklin once said: "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn." The Saints' Rest project accomplished just that. The enthusiasm of the dig was contagious and entertaining. I regularly visited the site and found it exciting to view the dig and learn about our history; I especially enjoyed engaging with the students and watching their quest for answers about the past. The community involvement through active learning reinforced the value of archaeology. The university and community also gained a real appreciation for the methodology involved in the project from observing the dig firsthand. Through Saints' Rest, the precise and time-consuming nature of fieldwork became evident to those of us not familiar with the process. Our diligence proved, or in some cases disproved, prior theories about campus life.

From a campus planning standpoint, we became aware that there is a university above and below the ground. As a university, we need to act more purposefully in terms of how we preserve our areas of archaeological importance. Because of this realization, a designated representative will be invited to participate on the planning teams of future projects that may have archaeological significance. The representative will ensure that archaeologically sensitive areas can be identified early in the planning process and protected from a disturbance when appropriate.

This experience reinforced our university's rich heritage, which requires more than reading books and manuscripts to understand. Saints' Rest has taught us that archaeology can enhance or call into question what we have learned from documents. As with archaeology involving ancient civilizations, campus archaeology reveals valuable information. The insights gained from this dig will help us to understand our place in the past as we look ahead to our place in the future.

Lou Anna K. Simon  
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