



Saints' Rest Field Report (20IN169)

Prepared By: Terry Peterkin Brock, Campus Archaeologist, Department of Anthropology, Michigan State University,
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Abstract

In the fall of 2008, the MSU Campus Archaeology Program conducted salvage archaeological investigations at the site of potential tree plantings by Michigan State University's Landscape Services Department. These excavations resulted in the discovery of a mid-19th century refuse pit, most likely related to Saints' Rest (20IN169), MSU's first dormitory. The dormitory underwent extensive excavations in 2005. In addition to these excavations, a limited shovel test survey was conducted in another area that was to receive plantings. In the summer of 2009, the Campus Archaeology Program returned to the site of the refuse pit, and opened another excavation unit in order to further investigate the extent of the feature. Additionally, this excavation was conducted to correspond with the MSU Grandparents' University weekend, a large campus event that brings the public to participate in a number of courses.

Based on these excavations, it is recommended that any construction in the area of Saints' Rest be reviewed and mitigated by the MSU Campus Archaeology Program. Additionally, due to the shallow depth of the feature, and its proximity to large 20th century features such as a road, fire hydrant, and sidewalk, it is advised that the Campus Archaeology Program and MSU Physical Plant take measures to ensure that low impact construction and landscaping work continue to undergo rigorous archaeological mitigation.

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Introduction

In 2008, while planting a number of trees throughout MSU's old campus, MSU Landscape Services revealed mid-19th century ceramics, glass, and animal fauna near 20IN169, the MSU's first dormitory complex. Called Saints' Rest, 20IN169 was excavated extensively in 2005 by the MSU Department of Anthropology. Archaeological investigation conducted by the MSU Campus Archaeology Program revealed what appears to be refuse pit dating to the third quarter of the 19th century. CAP returned to the site in 2010 to gather further evidence.



Figure 1: Map showing location of the Beal Street Site, indicated by circle # 1 (<http://www.maps.msu.edu>).

This report will examine the survey and test excavations conducted at 20IN169, and provide a series of recommendations for future mitigation at the site, as well as precautions for construction and landscape projects across the campus. All excavations on this project were conducted by the MSU Campus Archaeology Program, under the direction of Terry Brock, and supervised by Lynne Goldstein, the program director.

Physical Setting and History

Michigan State University is located in East Lansing, Michigan, in the center of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. The Red Cedar River, a tributary of the Grand River, flows through campus. The site in question is located to the north of the Red Cedar River, at the intersection of West Circle and Auditorium Drive. West Circle, named because it is a large circle that takes up the western portion of the campus, encompasses the oldest portion of Michigan State's campus, founded in 1855. Heavily wooded and swampy, this area has been extensively cleared and modified, largely by the early members of campus.



Figure 2: Saints' Rest Dormitory, ca 1865. (Photo Courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections).

MSU has occupied this spot along the Red Cedar since 1857. Then the State Agricultural College, and later the Michigan Agricultural College (MAC), the school's original focus was on reforming agriculture. The State of Michigan hoped that the Agricultural College would bring a scientific approach to farming. The early

college was small. Six brick buildings were built to the northeast of the investigation area: a classroom building called College Hall, a dormitory called Saints' Rest (Figure 2), and four brick farmhouses for the faculty. After the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act in 1862, the college was able to expand. A large building campaign took place, adding additional classrooms and laboratories along the Eastern part of campus, expanding the row of faculty homes, and adding industrial and facility structures to the South, along Red Cedar River (Widder 2005; Kuhn 1955).

Part of this expansion was the addition of a second dormitory in 1870, Williams Hall (Figure 3). This structure was built between College Hall and Saints' Rest. As part of this new building, a number of



Figure 3: Williams Hall, built in 1870. Photo ca. 1900 (Photo Courtesy of MSU Archives and Historical Collections).

functions transferred from Saints' Rest to Williams Hall, including the kitchen, dining, and laundry facilities, as well as the public parlor and the steward's room (Lewis 2010:14). Saints' Rest is then referred to as the "dormitory", while Williams was called the "Boarding Hall", indicating that the former only served to house students, while the latter provided a number of different functions.

In 1876, during a winter break, Saints' Rest caught fire. Maintenance work was being conducted in the northeast corner of the building during the break, and it was suspected that the workers may have left a stove on. Due to the long distance between the college and the nearest fire station, located in Lansing three miles away, the building burnt to the ground before help could arrive. The building foundation was filled in with the debris, and the building was capped until 2005, when archaeologists uncovered it.

Previous Investigations

In 2005, the Department of Anthropology conducted an archaeological field school at the site of the first dormitory. 29 units were excavated over six weeks, revealing the north, east, and western walls. Due to the presence of large and important trees that were part of the campus arboretum, the southern portion of the structure were not surveyed or tested archaeologically. Some geophysical survey was conducted, but the results were inconclusive (Mustonen 2006). Therefore, there was no investigation into the possibility of finding intact middens.

According to Kenneth Lewis (2010), the transfer of the boarding hall functions from Saints' Rest to Williams Hall had a significant impact on the items discovered at Saints' Rest. Because of this shift, the material record only reflected the period of time at the moment of the 1876 fire. There was very little to no record of the kitchen, parlor, laundry, or the steward's quarters, as these were all moved to Williams Hall. Also, winter break was the long break for students in the 19th century, meaning that the number of personal items were also minimal. Because of this, conclusions about the lives of the earliest students were compromised by the circumstance of the historical event (Lewis 2010).

The MSU Campus Archaeology Program has conducted additional excavations throughout the older part of campus. In 2009, excavations beneath MSU's Beaumont Tower revealed the foundation of College Hall (Lewandowski and Brock 2010). Additionally, excavations along the Red Cedar River revealed a brick dump, which turned out to be the remaining brick of College Hall, which collapsed in 1918. These bricks were reused to provide drainage and landscaping fill for the alluvial floods that decimated parts of the expanding campus in the early 20th

century (Brock 2010). In 2008, mitigations were completed at Faculty Row (Goldstein, Brock, Stawski, Pruitt n.d.). Faculty Row excavations revealed extensive modification to the landscape as the college expanded and developed. Lastly, in 2007, construction workers came down on a foundation of Williams Hall. Unfortunately, extensive archaeological investigations were unable to be completed.

In order to better organize and understand the results from a number of small archaeological excavations scattered about MSU's large campus, CAP has developed a research model to better explain the transitions and modifications to the landscape that have occurred (Goldstein, Brock, Stawski, Pruitt n.d.). A four-stage model, it argues that the campus went through a number of important transitions from 1855 to 1955 that are reflected in the landscape and material record. The first stage, from 1855-1870, represents the early college. A remote, small, and self-sustaining campus, the college was underfunded and lacked support from the rest of the State. It was not until the passing of the Morrill Land Grant Act that significant funding began to come to the college, bolstering the college's growth. This phase, from 1870 to the 1890s, is reflected by a more structured and intentional organization of the built environment. Phase I and Phase II are the important phases for Saints' Rest, as it burned in 1876.

Methods and Techniques

Excavations were conducted in three different installments, first as an immediate response to the disturbance of *in situ* features by MSU Landscape Services, second to survey areas that were threatened by additional landscaping, and third as an opportunity to further interrogate the area under question.

The first and third installments were located at a space disturbed by a back hoe being used to excavate two tree holes. Initial investigation by archaeologists who were passing by noted a high quantity of ceramics, glass, and faunal materials in one of the holes. Located between the sidewalk, West Circle Drive, and a fire hydrant, the findings were unexpected. However, because the area was located behind the location of Saints' Rest, the project was halted so that excavations could be carried out. Two units, Units 30 and 31, were immediately excavated, one for each tree hole. 5 x 5 ft squares were excavated in order to maintain consistency with the units from the 2005 Field School. The site was included within the same site number as the 2005 excavations, and unit numbers began where the previous excavations finished. 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth was used to screen each excavation unit. The following summer, an additional unit, Unit 32, was excavated to further investigate the area.

Shovel Tests were excavated to an area located to the east of the Saints' Rest foundation. This area was an island of grass between three sidewalks, located to the northeast of units 30-32. Six STPs were excavated, in three 10 ft. transects. 1/4 inch mesh hardware cloth was used to screen each STP.

Results

Shovel Test Survey

STPs 1,2, 4, 5, and 6 revealed similar stratigraphy and artifacts. In each of these STPs, a charcoal or gray sand level was evident, possibly remnants from the burning building. Additionally, these lenses were deeper as the STPs moved away from the structure. This suggests that there might have been a slope to the landscape. Construction materials such as bricks were also present in these STPs, indicating that some of the remains of Saints' Rest may have been scattered into other parts of the landscape surrounding the building after its destruction.

Unit 30

This unit was opened surrounding most of the backhoe intrusion. The backhoe had revealed ceramics, glassware, and faunal bone fragments, suggesting that this unit had the potential for a cultural feature. After a foot of topsoil was removed (Level 1), the top of level 2 showed a clear division in soil colors (Figure 4). The western half of the unit contained a dark brown, sterile sand, while the eastern half contained a yellow sand, full of cultural material. A soil core indicated that the yellow sand was on top of the brown sand. This half of the unit was labeled Feature 125, and was excavated until it reached the top of Level



Figure 4: Photo of Unit 30, facing the south wall. The cultural feature 125 is located to the right, with artifacts visible. The black streaks from the back hoe cross the unit.

2, the dark brown sand. Feature 125 reached a depth of 1.5 feet. Unit 30 reached a total depth of 2.7 ft.

Unit 31

Unit 31 was placed over the second backhoe intrusion, and was located to roughly 10 feet west of Unit 30. Unlike Unit 30, this unit did not yield very many artifacts, and no intact features were present.

Unit 32

This unit was placed seven months after Units 30 and 31 were excavated, and was excavated



Figure 5: Unit 32, with Feature 125 completed excavated.

along the western wall of Unit 30. The expectation was to determine how much further Feature 125 extended. At 1.3 feet, Feature 125 was exposed, extending 2.6 feet from the eastern wall. The western half of the unit was the same dark brown sand found in Unit 30, suggesting that Feature 125 was dug into this sterile soil. The sterile soil was not excavated, although Feature 125 was excavated to a depth of 2.6 feet. Unit 32 reached a total depth of 4 ft. (Figure 5).

Feature 125

Feature 125 extends east to west across Units 30 and 32. It was excavated using trowels, and the light sand made excavating the sometimes deep feature difficult. The northern and southern boundaries have not been located, as they extend beyond the limits of these units. The feature measures at a width of 5.5 ft. on the north wall, 4.5 ft. along the south wall, and approximately 5 ft. wide throughout the center of the feature. The feature depth is shallowest at the eastern end, measuring only 1.5 ft. Additionally, this end appears to be more sloped. The eastern end, however, dives sharply downward, reaching a depth of 2.6 ft. A 0.5 ft. bulk in Unit

32, which was not excavated, prevents an understanding as to how these two depths are reconciled.

Artifact	Count	Weight (g)
Bone- Faunal	490	5544.3
Brick	154	1321.1
Button	1	1.2
Ceramic	497	7106.8
Coal	23	137
Glass	1126	6109.4
Metal	188	939.5
Mortar/Plaster	11	112.7
Nail	80	169
Slate	9	18.9
Wood	8	9.7

Table 1: Summary of Artifacts

Artifacts in Feature 125 include high quantities of ceramics, glassware, and faunal material.

Ceramic data includes basic utilitarian ironstone dishes, with no decoration. Ceramic maker's marks with "Liddle, Elliot & Son" suggest a *terminus post quem* of 1862-1870 (Figure 6; Kowalksy and Kowalsky 1999:256). A number of ceramics carry this mark. Other diagnostic materials include a piece of an amber glass bottle with the numbers

"186" on it. Part of a Drake's Plantation Bitters bottle, one of the most popular bitters produced during the 1860s and 1870s, the full piece would have read "1860". Drake's was a very popular bitters with a high alcohol content, but advertised for its medicinal qualities. It was popularized through the movement westward, and lost popularity during the Temperance movement in the late 19th century. Faunal materials include cow, sheep, and pig. Additionally, cut marks are located on a number of the bones, indicating these animals were used for eating (Figure 7).



Figure 6: An ironstone plate with the maker's mark of "Liddle, Elliot & Son", providing a TPQ of 1862.

Discussion and Recommendations

A number of important conclusions can be drawn from these excavations, having implications on both the understanding of MSU's cultural past, in addition to the continued modification of archaeological mitigation strategies on MSU's campus.

The STP survey may tell us more about the final days of Saints' Rest. An ash layer and

construction rubble may be the remains of the burning, collapse, and/or disposal of the building. Additionally, the downward sloping of the ash layer indicates that the landscape has been modified since 1876, being raised and flattened. A photo taken from the earliest days of the campus shows Saints' Rest's western wall (Figure 8). Additionally, it shows the undulating landscape of hills and tree stumps. The landscape now is flat. Similar raising and flattening of the landscape is evident at the Faculty Row site and at Beal Street, where spaces were filled in and raised to better accommodate the flooding (Goldstein, Brock, Stawski, Pruitt n.d.; Brock 2010). This limited STP data suggests that this pattern may also be taking place at Saints' Rest.

Excavations at Saints' Rest provided a significant contribution to the understanding of the early years at Michigan State University. While excavations at Saints' Rest, conducted in 2005, provided a great deal of information about the dormitory from 1870-1876, the transfer of the boarding hall functions to Williams Hall in 1870 prevented assemblages from informing archaeologists about a number of different parts of daily life for the earliest students and staff (Lewis 2010). Feature 125 contains large quantities of artifacts that were only found in small quantities in 2005: ceramics, glassware, and faunal remains. These quantities suggest that this feature may contain objects that reflect human behavior before 1870. Insight into diet, foodways, and nutrition of those who lived on the early campus, as well as how and where food and goods were coming from can provide important clues into the first decade of the



Figure 7: Animal bone recovered during excavation.



Figure 8: A photo of Saints' Rest, with College Hall in the background, from the early years at the State Agricultural College (Miller 2002).

college. The inexpensive wares, as well as the high quantity of dishes from the same manufacturer, suggest that these dishes were used for the cafeteria. The bitters bottle, popularized during the movement west as a medicine during the 1860s, also suggests that alcohol was being used medicinally on campus. Also, feature 125 may also fit into a larger examination about how MSU has historically managed and disposed of their trash. This

contribution helps the interpretation and understanding of Phase I of the model developed by the Campus Archaeology Program.

Feature 125 still raises questions. While the artifact concentration was high, the amount of sand that was a part of the feature is unlike typical 19th century middens. It is possible that Feature 125, therefore, is not an *in situ* trash pit, and has instead been relocated, or used as fill. Extensive interrogation of the artifacts, however, need to be conducted to establish a better date range for the assemblage. Additionally, the boundaries of the feature must be delineated, in order to determine its final shape and size. This could lend additional evidence to determine the nature of this feature.

Based on the evidence available, the hypothesis can be made that this is a deposit of artifacts that were disposed of during the 1860s or 1870s. Due to the spatial alignment of Saints' Rest, and this deposit's position behind the building, it can also be argued that these are artifacts are associated with the dormitory. Again, further analysis and archaeological excavation will be necessary to draw such a conclusion.

Based on this evidence, the Campus Archaeology Program recommends that no further construction or landscaping be carried out in the area of Saints' Rest, or a perimeter of 100 ft. from the northwest corner building's foundation (where the historical marker is located). All

other work in the West Circle area should continue to undergo extensive archaeological mitigation.

These excavations also highlight the likelihood of finding archaeological deposits on MSU's campus, particularly in the West Circle area. While it has been initially believed that large construction projects would have the most impact on the material culture of MSU's campus, it is the smaller landscape projects that have resulted in the discovery of most of the discoveries. In part, this is due to the fact that landscape projects are the large majority of the projects carried out on the old part of campus, due to the preservation of the historic landscape. Also, these projects tend to act as archaeological surveys: ten trees planted across a wide area give archaeologists an opportunity to identify sites over a large space quickly. What these projects have identified, however, is that there are a number of intact archaeological deposits on MSU's campus, that they are very close to the surface, and that they are in areas that many would expect to be disturbed.

This project is a perfect case study. It is possible that Feature 125 has been buried since the 1860s, making it one of the longest preserved historical and archaeological features found at MSU. Additionally, it is located along a major road that has been modified extensively since the 1900s, located directly adjacent to a fire hydrant, and also located near a major sidewalk. The likelihood that it survived over 150 years is unlikely, yet this is becoming more the norm than the exception on MSU's campus. Therefore, it is imperative that all landscape projects that disturb the earth are regularly surveyed by the MSU Campus Archaeology Project.

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