



*MVAC at the University  
of Wisconsin-La Crosse*

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*1725 State Street  
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# Archaeology News

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## Under City Streets: The 2nd Avenue Project in Downtown Onalaska

*Kathy Stevenson and Wendy Holtz-Leith*

Archaeologists at MVAC have been studying late prehistoric Oneota sites in the La Crosse/Onalaska area for over three decades, but there are still plenty of surprises in store. Last summer, hundreds of intact features from an Oneota village site were found in downtown Onalaska underneath 2nd Avenue (STH 35), a road traveled by thousands of cars every day. This amazing find, which garnered regional and nationwide media coverage, was the focus of a long and busy field season.

During the planning phase of the 2nd Avenue project, MVAC archaeologists conducted historical research about the project area. Numerous newspaper accounts, some as early as the 1800s, recorded finds of Native American pottery, other artifacts, and human remains. Extensive pavement and buildings made it impossible to tell whether any of the site remained intact. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) worked with the Wisconsin stakeholders to develop a plan for archaeologists to monitor construction activities and, if necessary, excavate remnants of the site if they appeared.

In 2011, during building demolition in advance of construction, remnants of two Oneota storage or refuse pits were found when a foundation wall was removed from a commercial building. This find was the first confirmation that

intact features could still be present at the site, but since everything surrounding them was disturbed, there seemed little chance of finding much more than other feature remnants.

In April of 2012, after the main construction began, four more pit features were discovered during installation of a gas main. Shortly after that, deeper trenching under the roadway itself revealed more features—first dozens, and then hundreds, all buried under three or more feet of surface soil and fill. In all, some five hundred features were found, mapped, and excavated within a five-block-long section of 2nd Avenue, and human remains were encountered in over thirty locations.

This enormous task was carried out right in the middle of construction, and the safety, security, and scheduling requirements were daunting. MVAC staff and crew members matched the construction crews' long hours, and

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## From The Director: Joseph A. Tiffany



**Joseph A. Tiffany**

Hello, everyone! We had a very busy and productive fall. Much of the work focused on processing the numerous soil samples and collections from the work we did in Onalaska last summer on the STH35 project (47LC288). Kathy Stevenson and Wendy Holtz-Leith have prepared a feature article on our work in this newsletter. This fall MVAC received a Tribal Excellence Award from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), for our work on the project. These awards are given for helping build partnerships between WisDOT and Wisconsin Tribal communities. We are honored to receive this award!



Upcoming events include the Artifact Show at Valley View Mall (March 2), and a lecture on “Trade and Technology of the Indus Civilization: New Discoveries from Excavations in Pakistan and India” presented by Professor J. Mark Kenoyer of the Anthropology Department at the University of Wisconsin-Madison on April 9. Dr. Kenoyer has spent a lifetime working in Pakistan on the Indus Valley civilization and the study of early urbanism and state level societies. He has been excavating at the site of Harappa, Pakistan, since 1986. We look forward to his talk!

For all of you wired in, please check out MVAC’s Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/UWLMVAC>). Please be sure to follow us and like us (as they say) on Facebook. Also, a reminder, if you have not already done so, there is an on-line survey for members on our web page (<http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/survey.htm>). We appreciate your input!

Sadly, we note that Lyall Silbaugh, a long-time MVAC supporter and collector, recently passed away. The majority of Lyall’s collection came from his home farm in Vernon County, and we are very appreciative of the time Lyall spent with us each year at the Artifact Show, sharing his collection and stories with the public.

Membership renewal letters are out, and we thank all of you for your continuing support. One final note, I am retiring at the end of this summer. It’s been great! MVAC is in excellent hands, the unit is the pride of the university (OK, I am a bit biased), and I am certain that MVAC will continue to build on its 30 year record of education, research and public service.

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**MVAC Educational Programs are supported by:**  
The United Fund for the Arts and Humanities  
The National Endowment for the Humanities

## Education News

**Matching Funds Grant:** Teachers interested in using MVAC’s Archaeology Education Program resources in their classrooms can get financial help with our Matching Funds Grant. The grant matches a teacher or school’s cost dollar for dollar. Thanks to the UW-L Foundation for providing funds for this program. To view MVAC’s Teacher Resource Brochure, check out the Educators section of MVAC’s website at [www.uwlax.edu/mvac](http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac).

**La Crosse School District:** Funds are available from the La Crosse School District for their elementary and middle school teachers to use MVAC presentations and resources in their classrooms.

For information on the Archaeology Education Program, Matching Funds Grant, or La Crosse School District Program, contact Jean Dowiasch at (608) 785-8454 or [jdowiasch@uwlax.edu](mailto:jdowiasch@uwlax.edu).



thanks to outstanding cooperation between everyone involved, the data recovery was completed successfully, and the construction project finished ahead of schedule. For its work on the project, the MVAC team received a 2012 WisDOT Tribal Excellence Award, given for "providing exemplary contributions and services to building and enhancing partnerships with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Wisconsin Tribal communities."

The rest of the work is just beginning. MVAC staff and lab crew have been processing and cataloguing the huge numbers of soil samples and artifacts recovered. So far it looks as though the site is



*UW-L archaeology student Nate Cummings processing pottery recovered from the 2nd Avenue project.*



*UW-L students processing artifacts from 2nd Avenue under the supervision of MVAC archaeologist Wendy Holtz-Leith (standing). Students (l-r): Hannah Lingenfelter, Max Pschorr, Casey Hintz, and Nate Cummings.*

dominated by materials from the earliest of the three phases identified for local Oneota sites: the Brice Prairie phase, dating to about A.D. 1300–1400. There are also some materials from the later Pammel Creek (A.D. 1400–1500) and Valley View (A.D. 1500–1625) phases. This situation looks similar to the Sanford Archaeological District in south La Crosse, where Oneota features and living areas have also been found preserved in an urban area. In Onalaska, the roadway itself, along with a railroad track that used to angle across it, probably helped to preserve the site through decades of urban development.

## MVAC MEMBERSHIP FORM

### Consider becoming a member of MVAC

MVAC's innovative Public Education Program brings the excitement of archaeology to children and adults throughout the area. Become a member of MVAC and receive our newsletters, which report on programs, current research, upcoming events, and volunteer opportunities. Also, as a member, you will receive reminders of special "members only" events. Please remember that your contribution is tax-deductible.

Yes! I want to support the Mississippi Valley Archaeology Center Programs!  
Enclosed is my contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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### Membership Categories

**Patron: \$1000 and above**  
**Benefactor: \$500 - 999**  
**Supporting: \$100 - 499**  
**Contributing: \$50 - 99**  
**Active: \$35 - 49**  
**Students: \$10**

Please make checks payable to UW-L Foundation, Inc. for MVAC and send to MVAC, 1725 State St., La Crosse, WI 54601. Gifts to the UW-L Foundation for MVAC qualify as charitable tax deductions to the full extent of the law as applied to the individual circumstances of each donor. You can increase your gift's value if your employer has a matching gift plan. Check with your human resources office.



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## Upcoming Events

Contact MVAC at (608) 785-8454 for more information or visit our web site: [www.uwlax.edu/mvac](http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac)

### Artifact Show

Come to Valley View Mall and see artifacts representing the area's long history. Local collectors will display their personal collections of artifacts. See artifacts recovered from the 2nd Avenue excavations in Onalaska last summer. Archaeologists will be on hand to answer questions. Bring in your own artifacts for help in their identification. Call MVAC at (608) 785-8454 or e-mail Jean at [jdowiasch@uwlax.edu](mailto:jdowiasch@uwlax.edu) if you would like to display your artifacts.

Date: Saturday, March 2, 2013

Time: 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Location: Valley View Mall, La Crosse

### Trade and Technology of the Indus Civilization: New Discoveries from Excavations in Pakistan and India

This illustrated lecture will present an overview of the Indus Civilization in Pakistan and western India. A special focus will be on the recent discoveries relating to trade and technology that linked the vast regions of the Indus and also extended to external societies in Oman, Mesopotamia, and Central Asia. The main evidence will be from the site of Harappa, Pakistan which has provided new evidence on the origins of writing and urbanism in the Indus Valley. Other sites with important new discoveries include sites in India, Oman and Mesopotamia. Throughout the presentation the important contributions of the Indus culture to later civilizations in South Asia and other world regions will be highlighted.

Date: Tuesday, April 9, 2013

Time: 7 p.m.

Location: Port O'Call, Cartwright Center, UW-La Crosse

Speaker: Dr. J. Mark Kenoyer, Professor, Department of Anthropology, UW-Madison

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### Volunteer Field Survey Opportunity for MVAC Members

Celebrate Wisconsin Archaeology Month with MVAC. Volunteers will aid in the survey of local fields to find unreported archaeological sites.

Date: Saturday, May 4, 2013 (raindate Sunday, May 5)

Location: Archaeology Center & Laboratories, UW-La Crosse.

Time: 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. **Registration is required**, please call (608)785-8454 or e-mail Jean at [jdowiasch@uwlax.edu](mailto:jdowiasch@uwlax.edu).