



*MVAC at the University  
of Wisconsin-La Crosse*

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# Archaeology News

Volume 28 Number 3

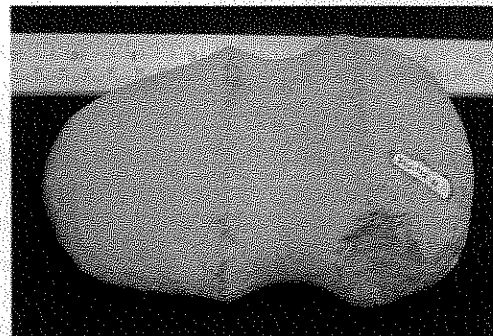
June 2011

## Archaeology of Olmsted County, MN

*Constance Arzigian, Research Archaeologist*

Thanks to a grant funded by the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, MVAC spent two months during summer 2010 investigating Olmsted County, Minnesota, which includes Rochester. The goals of the project were to (1) conduct an archaeological survey of the county, (2) summarize what is known about its prehistoric human occupation, (3) update the site files with current information on the status of previously recorded sites, (4) find new sites, (5) evaluate the landscape for the potential for deeply buried sites, and (6) build a narrative predictive model of prehistoric site locations. The work was done in conjunction with geoarchaeologists from Strata Morph Geoexploration, Inc., who examined several site locations to evaluate the landscape formation processes, evolution through time, and the potential for deeply buried sites.

Olmsted County is in an interesting environmental location, transitional between the blufflands and valleys landscape of eastern Minnesota near the Mississippi River, and the tall-grass prairies of central and western Minnesota. Precontact Olmsted County was covered with oak savanna, tallgrass prairie, and gallery forests along the waterways. Fire would have been a common occurrence, and fire-dependent communities such as tallgrass prairie and bur oak savanna would have been common. The 1850s GLO maps show large areas of prairie interspersed with "thickets," shallow depressions with wetlands, and small streams, as well as the major rivers. The main animal resource on the prairie would have been bison. Plant foods would have been limited but might have included tubers such as the prairie turnip. Woodlands lining the streams and in areas protected from fires would have provided wood for fires and tools and would have supported a wide range of nuts such as hickory, walnut, hazel, and acorn, and a variety of fruits and berries. Fauna would have included deer but



*The ground-stone axe from newly reported site 21OL50.*

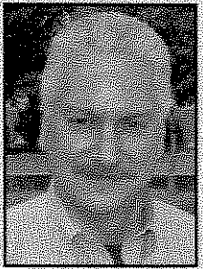
also small mammals. The rivers would have provided abundant fish. Three major rivers drain the county, with the Root along the south, the Whitewater in the northeast, and the Zumbro through the center and west.

Prior to the 2010 survey, only 38 precontact sites had been reported for Olmsted County with a sufficient level of documentation to warrant receiving a site number. An additional 19 lettered sites had poorly known locations. No mound sites have been confirmed by archaeologists, though six possible mound sites have been reported.

The 2010 survey by MVAC crews and volunteers examined a total of 866 acres on 32 parcels of land, with much of this on types of terrain not previously examined, such as rolling uplands drained by intermittent streams but otherwise distant from major rivers. Walk-over or surface survey was conducted on 845 acres, and shovel testing on 31 acres in eight parcels. We identified an additional nine sites and refined the location and recovered diagnostic artifacts from one previously reported site, as well as conducting subsurface testing on four sites to look for the possibility of buried deposits. The project also examined all of the Native American artifacts curated at the Olmsted County History Center and identified the source of a major collection of materials.

*-continued on p.3*

## From The Director: Joseph A. Tiffany



**Joseph A. Tiffany**

Hello everyone. We are keeping busy on a number of projects. Connie Arzigian talks about her on-going work in Olmsted County Minnesota in this issue. Kathy Stevenson, Wendy Holtz-Leith and I have been monitoring demolition associated with the Great River Cultural and Tourism Center complex in downtown Onalaska.

There were reported sites in the area in the 19th century, and Wendy and Kathy identified two surviving Oneota storage pits from one of those sites. They are currently under 12 feet of fill and the sidewalk and shoulder of State Highway 35. We all know about the substantial nationally important archaeology of the La Crosse area, but it continues to amaze me that prehistoric sites have survived over 100 years of modern development. Few modern urban areas can boast of such a rich archaeological heritage than what is literally right under our feet!

Wendy completed the site report for the Jackson-Farnum Street project for the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). Wendy and Kathy have also been working with the Wisconsin Veterans Home in Waupaca County, helping them to manage cultural resources on their properties. Our retired colleague, Jim Theler, continues to work with students and MVAC staff on a number of projects. His dedication is much appreciated by all of us. Jim and I are wrapping up a final report on an important late prehistoric farmstead of the

Glenwood culture in southwest Iowa. More on this project next time.

MVAC will again host a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers this summer. Activities will include work in the Cade 9 National Historic Archaeological District and visits to several important regional sites as well.

We are pleased to have Dr. Jon Baker as our newest faculty member in the Archaeological Studies Program at UW-La Crosse. Jon is a La Crosse area native who got interested in archaeology through MVAC's public archaeology field program when he was in Middle School. That is correct—when he was in Middle School. He went on to graduate with a degree in Archaeology from UW-L and did his dissertation work at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville. We are very proud of his accomplishments, and Jon will tell you all about himself and his teaching and research interests in a future Newsletter.

Kathy and I with our colleague Mark Dudzik of the WisDNR have completed a massive revision of the Wisconsin Archeological Survey's *Guide to Archaeological Work in Wisconsin*. This has been a daunting project, squeezed in among our other work, and would not have gotten to final draft stage without the input and support of our professional colleagues in the Wisconsin Archeological Survey. We look to have the final product approved by the Survey this fall.

Mark your calendars! MVAC and the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse are hosting the 2011 Midwest Archaeological Conference this fall from October 13-15, 2011 at the La Crosse Center. We expect more than 500 archaeologists from across the Midwestern United States will be coming to La Crosse. Many of our colleagues will be bringing their spouses and family to enjoy the city and the river, restaurants, vineyards, orchards, stores, museums, and all of the other amenities the Coulee Region offers. Visit the web page at: [www.uwlax.edu/mvac/mac2011.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/mac2011.htm). We will send out more information on the conference in the early fall.

Our calendar of activities for next year will be out shortly. Excellent talks are scheduled, including the fall meeting of the Wisconsin Archeological Society that MVAC is also co-hosting. The featured activity will be the re-dedication marking the preservation 100 years ago of a large effigy mound group in Wyalusing State Park in September. This is an excellent opportunity to explore a remarkable group of mounds and camp out at a beautiful state park over the weekend!

We thank all of you for your continued help and support. Have a great summer!

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

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## Olmsted, continued from p. 1

Culturally, the county shows evidence of occupation beginning with the earliest documented cultures in the region, represented by Paleoindians making Clovis projectile points. One unique collection previously found and reported by a local resident is the Kreisel Cache, a collection of Hixton silicified sandstone biface preforms and large flakes, including some with red ocher staining. The nature of the blanks suggests that they date to the Paleoindian period. The origin of the raw material in Silver Mound, Jackson County, Wisconsin indicates that early people were actively moving and trading throughout the region. The Kreisel Cache is on display at the Olmsted County History Center in Rochester.

The 2010 survey found artifacts diagnostic of the Late Paleoindian and Archaic periods. A Late Paleoindian point similar to a Kirk Corner-Notched was found at a site that had been previously reported, but had never been surveyed by archaeologists. This site was on a terrace of the North Branch Root River. The Archaic period is well represented in Olmsted County, with projectile points as well as several dozen stone axes found in museum collections. MVAC crew members found a beautiful stone axe during surface survey of an area on a terrace over the Root River. One edge is well polished from use as a woodworking tool. The other end shows signs of use as a hammer or maul, possibly for crushing

bison bones to extract bone marrow. The site is in what was probably a "fire shadow"—an area protected from regular fires by a bend in the river. Thus, this might have been a prime location to find wood. Finally, a Middle Archaic Raddatz Side-Notched point was found in a generally upland setting near a permanent water source, a small tributary stream of the South Fork Whitewater River. Additional sites without diagnostic artifacts were found near intermittent and small streams in the otherwise dry uplands.

MVAC crews also examined several previously reported Woodland sites along streams, but did not find any deeply buried deposits. Elsewhere in the county, the Woodland period is best represented by Late Woodland occupations. The last precontact culture in the region, Oneota, has no large villages in the county, but might be represented among the many sites that lack diagnostic artifacts.

We would like to thank all of the landowners who let us survey their property, the crew and volunteers who braved the rain, mud, and mosquitoes, The Office of State Archaeologist. This project was funded by the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund as part of the Statewide Survey of Historical and Archaeological Sites.

## Education News

**Matching Funds Grant** The UW-La Crosse Foundation has once again provided a grant to encourage teachers to use MVAC educational resources. The grant matches a teacher/school's cost dollar for dollar. For more information, contact Jean at 785-8454 or [dowiasch.jean@uwlax.edu](mailto:dowiasch.jean@uwlax.edu).

### 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

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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)

### Public Archaeology Field Experience, multiage

Field and lab opportunities for those who want to learn the  
process of archaeology. Participate in an actual excavation  
working with Connie Arzigian at a local site. Lab work may  
include washing pottery and stone tools. Supervised dorm  
facilities are available for high school students for an ad-  
ditional fee.

	3 Day Experience	5 Day Experience
Dates:	Aug. 8 - 10, 2011	Aug. 8 - 12, 2011
Time:	7 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.	7 a.m. - 3:30 pm
	Aug. 8: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.	Aug. 8: 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Location:	259 Cartwright Center, UW-La Crosse	
Fee:	\$350	\$500

To register for any Archaeology Program, contact the UW-L  
Continuing Education Department at 608-785-6508.

### Summer Youth Events

Introduction to Archaeology, gr. 1-4 \$75  
-Monday, August 8 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Egypt, gr. 4-6; 9 a.m. - 3 p.m. \$75  
-Tuesday, August 9 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Introduction to Archaeology, gr. 5-9 \$75  
-Wed. August 10 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Middle School Field Experience, gr. 5-9 \$175  
-Thurs. & Fri. August 11-12 from 9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

### Midwest Archaeological Conference

October 13 - 15, 2011 @ the La Crosse Center

We expect more than 500 archaeologists from across the  
Midwestern United States will be coming to La Crosse. We  
have hosted the Midwest Conference twice in the past, and  
we have always had a great draw. We are planning for MVAC  
member access to the banquet presentation by Professor Mark  
F. Seeman of Kent State University who will be talking on  
the Hopewell culture. Visit the web page at [www.uwlax.edu/mvac/mac2011.htm](http://www.uwlax.edu/mvac/mac2011.htm).