

Alabama Archaeology Month 2020

Interviewing Women in Archaeology



“The great thing about our field is how constantly our perceptions change about the past. There are plenty of examples of our interpretations changing because of a woman’s suggestion. One of the more obvious cases of this is the inclusion of women in our analyses of the archaeological record. I think our field can only improve as we better understand approaches to identity and the creation and management of space.”

Allie Smith

3rd-year Ph.D. candidate,
The University of Alabama

Alabama Archaeology Month 2020

Saluting Women in Archaeology



Allie Smith

**3rd year Ph.D. candidate
at The University of Alabama**

1. What is your educational background?

B.A. in anthropology at Auburn University in 2013 and a MA in anthropology at the University of Mississippi in 2017.

2. What are your primary research interests?

My research focuses on the early contact period of the southeastern United States. Specifically, my dissertation work examines a complex of sites dated to the earliest colonial interactions between the Spanish and native populations in central Alabama. The research will contribute to scholarship concerning the social processes

occurring between sites during colonial engagement, and it will also better define the chronology and organization of historic communities across the region.

3. Who was your most influential mentor? How did they influence your work?

I count my undergraduate archaeology professor, the late Dr. John W. Cottier, as my most influential mentor. Though he is no longer with us, the passion for this field that he instilled in me at an early age continues to drive my pursuit of a higher degree.

4. Do you work with volunteers? If so, how do interested people become volunteers?

Absolutely. I welcome any curious minds or willing earthmovers to help with my research. They may contact me at: amsmith71@crimson.ua.edu

5. Who do you most admire in our field and why?

I am lucky one of the archaeologists I most admire is also a mentor. Dr. Maureen Meyers served as my Master's committee chair at the University of Mississippi. She has worked extensively in the Southeast through academia and private sector research, but she is also a leading researcher for the creation and application of the Southeastern Conference Sexual Harassment Survey. Her contributions and service to our discipline is incredible, and she has set herself as an example that I think many admire. Though I am no longer her student, she continues to advise and encourage me as a junior colleague.

6. Do you have advice for people who want to pursue a career in archaeology?

For anyone interested in pursuing archaeology as a career, I would advise for you to get involved in any archaeological endeavor you find interesting. I was lucky to have the resources during my tenure at Auburn to participate in many archaeological field schools and archaeological projects, but I also reached out to other project directors for any archaeological opportunity. I was a volunteer on several different projects from different time periods, and it not only confirmed my interest in the field, but it also helped develop experience.

7. How do you feel about the Hollywood and/or reality tv portrayal of archaeology?

I'm a fan of the *Indiana Jones* franchise, but most of my peers in the field would agree, the movies portray an unrealistic depiction of an archaeologist and the discipline. I'm also pretty sure anyone would agree that Hollywood portrays many disciplines in an incorrect way.

8. What is your least favorite question that you are frequently asked by non-archaeologists and why?

I'm going to tell you *two* of my least favorite questions. I hear this one all the time: what's the most interesting thing you've found? I know a lot of my peers get the same question, and I always find it so difficult to answer. I think people expect an answer that includes an extraordinary and exceptional artifact and there are archaeologists that can provide that with a cool story. I find it hard to answer because there are so many things that are interesting to *me* in my work. It may not be King Tut's tomb or the Rosetta Stone, but to find artifacts or features that might lead to more questions and answers in my research continues to feed my curiosity about the past. It can be something as "insignificant" as a trash pit that continues to challenge my interpretations and maintain my interest.

9. What can the general public do to protect and preserve archaeological sites?

The most important thing is not loot archaeological sites, and if you encounter a site, the first thing would be to contact an archaeologist who can properly document any information about it.

17. What was the professional culture in archaeology like from a female perspective when you began your career?

The majority of my classmates were women when I first started and that is still the case today. However, I don't think that translates as strongly in the representation of women holding professional positions in our field.

18. What barriers or challenges unique to women did you encounter?

I have had encounters with property owners who think my only purpose is to sit pretty and watch men work. I have had men tell me not to strain myself carrying a shovel and a screen to the job site too. It can be insulting and condescending, but I try to prove them wrong by moving more dirt than they think I'm capable of at the end of the day.

19. What advantages unique to women did you enjoy?

Though I have had rude encounters as a woman in archaeology, I do think I have an advantage when I meet with people on a project or speak to the general public about archaeology. I think some are more likely to trust a strange woman knocking on their door asking about a potential site in the area.

20. Are there ongoing stories or interpretations in archaeology that you think would be different if they had been interpreted by women?

The great thing about our field is how constantly our perceptions change about the past. There are plenty of examples of our interpretations changing because of a woman's suggestion. One of the more obvious cases of this is the inclusion of women in our analyses of the archaeological record. I think our field can only improve as we better understand approaches to identity and the creation and management of space.

