

Alabama Archaeology Month 2020

Interviewing Women in Archaeology



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Anne Dorland

An Archaeological Field Director and Public Archaeologist for New South Associates

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Saluting Women in Archaeology



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Archaeological Field Director

Public Archaeologist for New South Associates

1) What is your educational background?

B.A. in Anthropology from Auburn University and M.Ed. in Secondary Education of the Social Sciences from University of South Alabama.

2) What are your primary research interests?

My primary research interests are archaeology education, the origins of agriculture in the Southeastern United States, and most recently, historic African American lifeways in the Southeastern United States.

3) What motivated you to become an archaeologist or how did you become an archaeologist?

I was born an anthropologist. I have always been curious about other cultures and other ways of approaching life. I often daydream about what it would be like to live someone else's life. This led me to anthropology courses at Auburn University. After taking a few cultural anthropology courses I began to question my interest in anthropology. I explored social work, psychology, and even physical therapy. I always knew that I was meant to help people in my profession.

4) What is the most interesting archaeological site on which you've worked?

I have worked on several fascinating sites, all in the Southeastern United States. If I had to pick one, it would be Platt Mound. Platt Mound, located near Melbourne, Florida, is an Archaic Period Native American mound site. This site was exciting because of the amazing bone preservation created by calcified concretions in the soil. This removed some of the acidity, resulting in excellent preservation conditions. Even poop had been preserved! There was more animal bone than soil at the site, and it was absolutely thrilling to excavate there. We also found very early pottery made with fiber tempering.

5) Who was your most influential mentor? How did they influence your work?

It wasn't until I met Dr. John Cottier in his Introduction to Archaeology course that I knew exactly who I was meant to become. He inspired me and impassioned me to pursue a career in archaeology, despite his constant direction to do otherwise! I'll never forget the first day of that class when he practically yelled at everyone to leave the room and drop the course. That only served to pique my interest further. Field school with Dr. Cottier at the Canebreak Site sparked a fire in me that has never died. Although he never recommended a career in CRM, I think that he would be overjoyed to learn about the amazing community I found at New South.

6) Do you work with volunteers? If so, how do interested people become volunteers?

As president of the Gwinnett Archaeological Research Society (GARS), I work with volunteers frequently. Most recently I led a volunteer excavation at Hill's Mill Site here in Georgia. It is very simple for anyone to become a volunteer. Simply contact your local archaeological society and inquire about opportunities. If there aren't any available through the society, reach out to local universities. Many have archaeology programs and work with volunteers both in field and laboratory settings.

7) What public archaeological site do you think best handles preservation and interpretation? Why?

Fort Daniel is a public archaeological site in Gwinnett County, Georgia. This site is on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The *Fort Daniel Historic and Archaeological Research Park* was created to protect the site. The Fort Daniel Foundation holds a 25-year lease agreement with Gwinnett County. An annual event known as the Frontier Faire is held in October to promote community involvement and public archaeology.

8) What is your favorite thing about being an archaeologist?

My favorite thing about being an archaeologist is having the opportunity to share my findings with the public. It is absolutely thrilling to uncover a piece of history, but the truly rewarding part is sharing it with the community.

9) What is your least favorite thing about being an archaeologist?

My least favorite thing about being an archaeologist is staying in hotels for long periods of time. We are often required to do this for field projects.

10) Who do you most admire in our field and why?

In our field, I most admire Lauren Walls. Lauren is a principal investigator at New South and one of my mentors. I admire her incredible work ethic, her ability to see the big picture while remaining detail-oriented, her excellent oral and written communication skills, and her love for public archaeology.

11) Do you have advice for people who want to pursue a career in archaeology?

For anyone interested in pursuing a career in archaeology, I recommend taking a field school. The best way to find out if you really love archaeology is to do fieldwork. Archaeology is not an easy career, and there are many reasons not to become an archaeologist. However, if you are passionate about history and science it might be perfect for you!

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

Hollywood romanticizes archaeology and often confuses archaeology and looting. Context is everything in archaeology, and that point is almost never made in movies. Movies often show archaeologists exploring unknown territories and dangerously grabbing artifacts. In reality, archaeologists carefully record their findings and it is extremely tedious work.

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

My least favorite question from non-archaeologists is, "how much is that artifact worth?" Artifacts are priceless items when they are found in their original context. No value can be placed on the information they provide.

14) What can the general public do to protect and preserve archaeological sites?

The public can help to educate their community about the importance of archaeological sites as a non-renewable resource. In addition to being illegal, looting destroys the archaeological record. Once destroyed, information is lost that can never be regained. That information is our collective history, the story of our past. Without understanding our past, how can we ever fully understand who we are and what type of future we want to construct?

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

When I began my career in cultural resource management (CRM), the professional culture was very informal. Sexual harassment was an issue and fieldwork was dominated by males.

16) Do you think that your gender made it more difficult to become an archaeologist? If so, how?

I do think that my gender as a female made it more difficult to become an archaeologist. Systemic sexism caused my employers to constantly pigeonhole me to certain tasks, like laboratory work. That was frustrating, because I have always preferred fieldwork.

17) What barriers or challenges unique to women did you encounter?

There were instances in which a male was hired for a project instead of me, even though I had twice the experience. I was also told once by an employer that all the females on a crew would be paid less than the males. These events were demoralizing and almost pushed me away from archaeology.

18) What advantages unique to women did you enjoy?

As a woman, I have a more compact physique than many of my male colleagues. This is a great advantage in archaeology, which often requires us to fit into confined spaces. It is also easier to traverse through thick vegetation as a compact person.

19) Does being a woman influence your interpretation of the archaeological sites that you excavate? If so, how?

Being a woman does influence how I interpret an archaeological site. Archaeology and history greatly benefit from multiple perspectives. Thinking about a site from a female perspective allows me to consider aspects of life that a male might not. For example, as a woman I often find myself thinking about personal interactions and daily life. This helps me to interpret the lifeways of site inhabitants, rather than just identifying the function of a site.

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

Ongoing stories and archaeological interpretations of pre-contact Native American sites would greatly benefit from a female perspective. Most of the interpretations of such sites have been made by white males. Females offer different insights and would

21) Have you ever found something in the archaeological record that was specifically female? If so what? How did it make you feel?

I learned from studying archaeological literature that during the Archaic Period, females or children were sometimes buried with large seashells. In Native American beliefs, water is representative of the underworld and the afterlife. Further, the spiral of the shell represents the life cycle and the opening in the shell represents a mother's womb. I was on an excavation of an Archaic Period site and noticed a large seashell. Soon we uncovered human remains. I immediately knew that the remains were of a female and felt immense reverence for her life. I can only hope that our excavations told her story with the honor and respect that she deserves.

