

Alabama Archaeology Month 2020

Interviewing Women in Archaeology



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KELLIE BOWERS

*NAGPRA Coordinator
at the Alabama Department
of Archives and History*

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Saluting Women in Archaeology



Kellie Bowers

NAGPRA Coordinator

at the Alabama Department of Archives and History

1) What is your educational background?

BS in Anthropology at Florida State University, MA in Historical Archaeology at The University of Massachusetts Boston.

2) What are your primary research interests?

My background is postcolonial studies, which is the study of the complicated interactions between Native groups and European settlers, and how those interactions have rippled through history and still affect us today. I am also interested in issues surrounding decolonization and repatriation issues.

3) What is your current job? Please describe.

I'm in charge of caring for the archaeological collection at the ADAH, and for completing all NAGPRA compliance work. NAGPRA stands for the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act that was passed in 1990. It provides a pathway for Native American tribes to get ancestors (human remains), burial goods, and sacred objects returned to them.

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

I have wanted to be an archaeologist since I was 5 or 6. My family visited a lot of museums and I became fascinated with history and archaeology.

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

I was part of UMass Boston's Project 400 where we located the original site of Colonial Plymouth. Much of the excavation for that project has been on Burial Hill, a historic burial ground dating back to the original colony. We have found materials ranging from the remains of a 19th century schoolhouse, all the way back to pre-historic projectile points.

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

My mentors at UMass Boston completely shaped my interests and ethical views on archaeology. Dr.'s David Landon, Christa Beranek, and Steve Silliman helped me find my way in so many areas of the field and my identity within it...not to mention my thesis project!

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

I typically work with college students who study archaeology or anthropology as either volunteers or interns. Interested parties can email me at kellie.bowers@archives.alabama.gov.

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

My favorite thing about being an archaeologist is the tangible link that artifacts have to the past. Finding an awesome artifact in the field and thinking about the last person who owned it or used it last will make your head spin (in a good way).

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

Paperwork and back filling! This has now been expanded to email!

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

Even though the portrayal of archaeology in film has fallen far short of accurate, I think that it has helped raise awareness and excitement about the field in general. I've been to screenings of the Indiana Jones movies with commentary/a talk given by a real archaeologist afterward, and I thought it was a great way to engage the public and have an entry point for talking about real issues including site preservation, looting, etc.

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

Don't pick up artifacts! If you're interested in archaeology or concerned about a specific archaeological site, contact a professional who can help. Artifact hunting destroys the scientific value of the material you pick up and degrades archaeological sites.

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

I have less than 10 years in archaeology and I would consider my experiences as a female to be very positive and generally respectful. The majority of my cohort in graduate school was female.

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

Other than having to grapple with my own physical limitations in the field compared to some of my male co-workers, I would say that my gender has not posed a problem in becoming a professional in the field. I have been very lucky to work with and at institutions that treat everyone with respect and dignity regardless of their gender. I recognize that I've been lucky and that this is not always the case.

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

I worked at a site on Nantucket Island that was originally built by a former slave and occupied by his son, a famous Nantucket sea captain and merchant. We found a glass nipple shield (used for breastfeeding) and some shards of graduated glass that we thought might have been pieces of baby bottles. It was really interesting to think of the mother that may have been represented by those artifacts and what her experience of motherhood and child rearing would have been like.

