

## Public Archaeology in the National Park Service: A Brief Overview and Case Study

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### **Abstract:**

Archaeologists are integral in National Park Service (NPS) culture. Some archaeologists “wear the hat” and the authoritative uniform symbolizing the park service, yet non-park service archaeologists can work at the parks with research permits under the Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979 (ARPA permits [Neumann et al. 2010]) or with a cultural resource contract award. Both endeavors provide information to help individual parks meet their management and interpretative goals. An added benefit for these archaeologists is working at some of the country's most beautiful, always intriguing, and often endangered archaeological sites. NPS cultural resources range from southwestern pueblos to Revolutionary battlefields, urban historic sites, and coastal lighthouses. Most national parks contain spaces and places with varied, large, and vocal constituencies, including archaeologists. To promote, regulate, conserve, preserve, and certify public enjoyment—these ideas reverberate a century after the park service's founding and are detailed in its national strategies (Everhart 1983; NPS 2011). A brief review of NPS history and of some of its leaders illustrates how archaeologists influenced this often-romanticized public organization. An example of how interdisciplinary archaeological research works at a national park follows that discussion.

**Keywords:** Archaeology | National Park Service | Cultural Resources

### **Article:**

#### **THE FORMATIVE YEARS**

The first archaeological preserve was created in 1892 by President Harrison to protect Casa Grande pueblo ruins (Archaeological Institute of America 2006). In 1906, Teddy Roosevelt signed into law an act supported by the fledgling American Anthropological Association. The Antiquities Act underlined congressional support for setting aside lands for science and preservation in the public's interest and guided the creation of national monuments while

protecting archaeological sites and natural areas (Archaeological Institute of America 2006; Barrie 1998; Everhart 1983; Waldbauer and Hutt 2006; Wirth 1980:42–43).

In 1916 Congress passed the Organic Act, which formed the fledgling NPS. In part it was created to stop the looting and destruction of sites, mainly southwestern pueblos, and six park properties were protected primarily for their cultural resources (Archaeological Institute of America 2006; Barrie 1998; Everhart 1983; NPS 2014b; Rettie 1995:47). The NPS was to be a regulatory federal agency overseeing U.S. monuments, national parks, and tribal reservations, whose mission would be “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein ... as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations” (NPS 2011:front flyleaf).

The first park service director was philanthropist and businessman Stephen T. Mather, and he was assisted by Horace Albright (Everhart 1983; NPS 2014b). These two energetic men dominated the early decades of the NPS, setting its tone of self-sacrifice and service to the NPS (Wirth 1980). Both were adroit at garnering support in Washington and from varied scientists and national scientific associations. Upon one early visit to Mesa Verde National Park, Albright was appalled at the site conditions, the roads, and frankly the quality of the park director who knew nothing of archaeology (Albright and Cahn 1985). He determined then that only specialists would work at and manage appropriate sites, that the resources would be protected, and that visitors would be able to visit the parks safely (Albright and Cahn 1985).

Jesse Nusbaum, who first worked at Mesa Verde archaeological site under the direction of A. V. Kidder in 1907, was an archaeologist, photographer, and materials specialist. He directed stabilization projects at Pecos and Mesa Verde. By 1921 he replaced the “political hire” as the new director at Mesa Verde (McManamon 2009; NPS 2014a: 1). Except for the war years, Nusbaum held two alternating or combined roles working for the NPS and the New Mexico Museum in Santa Fe, serving as the NPS official “departmental consulting archaeologist” (DCA), a position and term created in 1927 and in current use in Washington, D.C., headquarters. In that capacity, Nusbaum developed the permitting process for the Antiquities Act, especially pertaining to the Southwest (McManamon 1990; McManamon 2009; NPS 2014a:2). Artifacts could not be removed without a permit from one of three regulating agencies—Interior, Agriculture, and War—and then only for scientific purposes (King 2008; Waldbauer and Hutt 2006).

Polly Kaufman (2006) claims that the demand for a peripatetic and often-rugged lifestyle was used as an excuse to exclude hiring women, yet many NPS wives served as volunteer guides or were themselves archaeologists (Lister 1997). Specific parks had their own policies: Morristown National Historical Park hired women interpreters, historians, and archaeologists as early as the 1930s (Kaufman 2006:123). Jean McWhirt Pinkley was employed by the NPS upon her 1936 graduation from the University of Arizona. Mary Ann Levine (1994:34–35) writes that McWhirt Pinkley was promoted at Mesa Verde from museum assistant to head of interpretation, after

which she led significant research at Pecos Pueblo. Her contributions ranged from pragmatic considerations of archaeological reconstruction and preservation materials to the archaeological investigation of domestication and pueblo and mission life.

The Historic Sites Act of 1935 added all historic properties (prehistoric and historic) under federal control of the service, greatly expanding NPS's jurisdiction, while at the same time created the National Landmarks program (Barrie 1998; Carnett 1991; King 2008; Neumann et al. 2010). After World War II, NPS director Conrad Wirth realized park visitation was up while the quality of facilities was down, in line with decreased congressional allocations. He asked Congress for a ten-year commitment to refurbishing, rebuilding, and revitalizing the NPS. This "Mission 66," honoring the park service's golden anniversary, led directly to the hiring of more managers, rangers, and scientists, including archaeologists, and to improved maintenance of archaeological sites (Wirth 1980). Writer and naturalist Freeman Tilden answered the NPS's call to improve stagnant interpretive programs, sharing his six principles of interpretation (Tilden 2007:34–35).

## **GROWING NPS RESPONSIBILITIES**

In 1966, the National Historic Sites Act (NHPA) was enacted. This expanded the duties of the NPS to include creation of a National Register of Historic Sites, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and other cooperative and administrative duties leading to the promulgation of numerous additions to the code of federal regulations ("CFRs"), plus special publications such as the National Register bulletin series (Birnbaum 1994; Carnett 1991; King 2008; Neumann et al. 2010). This all-important act states that the "historical and cultural foundations of the nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation" to U.S. citizens (National Historic Preservation Act Section 1(b)(2); see Advisory Council on Historic Preservation 2009). As such, it directs the NPS to construct a scaffold of cultural resource rules and consulting relationships with tribal, state, county, and other preservation groups.

The full definition of the expanded service's terrestrial and marine authority is stated in Public Law 91–383 (Wirth 1980). The addition of cultural resource management (CRM) duties pertaining to the parks, all federal lands, and projects requiring federal permitting or funding has greatly increased the scope of archaeology in the Department of the Interior (McManamon 1996). The chief archaeologist's role is to advise the Department of the Interior director on archaeological matters and to oversee the NPS's diverse park and CRM archaeology programs. The structural relationship between parks and cultural resource branches is occasionally adjusted (Everhart 1983:34; King et al. 1977:67; Wirth 1980:41). Over time, archaeologists' duties grew with passage of additional laws related to, for instance, environmental review (National Environmental Protection Act of 1970), protection of archaeological resources on federal lands (Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1979; Executive Order 11593, signed May 13, 1971), and repatriation of sacred remains to North

American tribes (Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990; see Carnett 1991; King 2008; King et al. 1977; NPS 2014b, 2014c; Neumann et al. 2010; Sprinkle 2011).

Today's NPS archaeologists work in diverse roles, designing guidelines, interpreting cultural resource laws, and managing cultural resource programs; in curating, advocating, and advising regional centers such as the Southeastern Archaeological Center (SEAC); and in actual parks and national landmarks (Birnbaum 1994; King 2008; McManamon 1996; NPS 2013). (For example, approximately 46 archaeologists at various achievement levels staff SEAC, covering curation, NAGPRA, ARPA compliance, outreach, and research activities [NPS 2013]).

With increased park archaeology, the justification for the park's archaeologists has not been well articulated to the public, suggesting a need for improved outreach and public support. The national parks have lost at least 62 properties due to vandalism, erosion, neglect (lack of action or funds), and state-level political actions (Rettie 1995:244–249). Dirk Spennemann (2011) sees a growing lack of interest in heritage as one culprit in that “we have failed to express ... that the past has *relevance to the present* ... in a continually changing world (Spennemann 2011:7, emphasis in original). David Lowenthal (2005) views the notion of stewardship “for all time” as a hard sell to modern consumers of objects with built-in obsolescence. The NPS's current strategy plans to garner increased public support for park stewardship by expanding the diversity of their park types and their interpretative programs (including archaeology) by bringing in urban residents through special programs and by increasing the diversity of their “green corps” (Albright and Cahn 1985; NPS 2011).

These plans depend in part on funding, and the NPS circumvents funding cuts or delays by partnering with universities and research institutes either in official cooperative park study units or in loose affiliation (United States Committee on Improving the Science and Technology Programs of the National Park Service, National Research Council 1992). Outreach efforts illustrate that the hands-on excitement of archaeology draws a crowd, especially if research questions are made relevant to visitors (Shackel and Chambers 2004). Archaeologists know that community engagement means more than letting the public get their hands dirty. Through listening to questions and sharing knowledge, individuals find areas of mutual interest (Reeves 2004) and new levels of inquiry can be opened, even at a national park focusing on a single military event. This was the case during the partnership between the University of North Carolina Greensboro, Guilford Courthouse National Military Park, and the Guilford Courthouse Battleground Company (the park support group, the GBC).

### **GUILFORD COURTHOUSE NATIONAL MILITARY PARK (GUCO)**

Interdisciplinary researchers at the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) partnered with the park's superintendent to seek a NPS internal grant to apply remote sensing and archaeological techniques to locate potential below-ground remains, including those indicating

the location of the Guilford county courthouse. This courthouse (and surrounding farmlands) was the site of a Revolutionary War battle on March 15, 1781, and was later the first national military park established by the NPS. It is located in the northern part of Greensboro, North Carolina, a city named after the revolutionary general who organized the resistance to the British, Nathaniel Greene.

To initiate the remote sensing and archaeological research, UNCG contributed monies through research grants and the use of equipment and facilities, funding part of the work with a field school. The park's avocational support group, the Guilford Battleground Company (GBC), matched the NPS dollar for dollar in the grant. To proceed, the UNCG researchers proposed a research agenda to both GUCO staff and the regional archaeological NPS archaeologists (SEAC) for approval. With some adjustments, UNCG's principle investigator (P.I.) archaeologist received the ARPA permit to proceed.

The mutual research goals were to find physical remains indicating the location of key actions taking place during the 18th-century Battle of Guilford Courthouse, especially along the third and final major battle line (Stine et al. 2013). For some time, archaeologists, geographers, and historians have debated the location of the third line of engagement and the courthouse (Babits and Howard 2009; Cornelison et al. 2007; Hatch 1970; Stine et al. 2013). Soldiers left harrowing accounts of the action, describing clashes in woodlands, fields, roads, and while crossing declivities. Guilford Courthouse, standing on a rise near an intersection, was a landscape reference point but had been shoddily constructed and was eventually abandoned for a new courthouse in Greensboro, leaving little evidence of its location. Although the U.S. forces under General Greene ultimately lost the engagement, Cornwallis's British troops were left hungry and hurt and were forced to head southeast for rest and supplies (Babits and Howard 2009; Cornelison et al. 2007; Hatch 1970; Stine et al. 2013).

The two UNCG investigators sought to narrow the search area for significant features through use of interdisciplinary methods. Wielding remote sensing tools prior to archaeological testing allows scholars to improve their judgmental selection of excavation areas, a tactic pioneered in part and strongly supported by the NPS (Geier et al. 2011; McCoy and Ladefoged 2009; National Center for Preservation Technology and Training 2013). Primary landscape features were the location of Guilford Courthouse, the intersection of New Garden and the Retreat roads, and the distribution of artifacts and rubble (Stine et al. 2013). UNCG researchers reconciled, when feasible, their results with previous projects by NPS SEAC archaeologists, plus a bicentennial effort by UNC–Chapel Hill contractors and a later short study by William and Mary excavators (Coe and Ward 1974; Cornelison et al. 2007; Hatch 1970:56; Monroe 2004; Stine et al. 2013).

The remote sensing survey was undertaken using both a Bartington dual flux gradiometer (covering 4,605 square meters) and a ground penetrating radar (GPR model GSSI SIR3000 with 400 MHz antenna; 2,714 square meters) to seek evidence for below-ground physical remains. Remote sensors recorded more than 120 anomalies. After examining mapped results, the

archaeologist and her field school students excavated six  $2 \times 2$  meter units, one  $4 \times .5$  meter trench, and 11  $.5 \times .5$  meter shovel tests. A regional metal detecting club aided the effort by systematically searching  $20 \times 20$  meter gridded squares adjacent to the main site and by sharing their extensive knowledge of military artifacts. UNCG students (Figure 3) were paired with the hobbyists who taught students how to handle the machines, and in turn students taught the hobbyists systematic recording methods (Stine et al. 2013).

Guilford Courthouse

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



## Finding the Courthouse

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Within the park archeological investigations are currently underway



From May 23<sup>rd</sup> to June 24<sup>th</sup>, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and Guilford Courthouse National Military Park are conducting several archeological investigations to better understand our cultural history and locate the actual courthouse that served as a headquarters and hospital during the 1781 battle.

Feel free to walk by the excavation site at Tour Stop 6. Please stay behind the barriers for your own safety and for the safety of the equipment being used. Metal objects and cellphones can interrupt the accuracy of the instruments.

Funding for this project is made possible through the continued generous support of the National Park Service, the Guilford Battleground Company and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

As a special reminder: the National Park is a federally protected resource. Any unauthorized digging, metal detecting, or pot hunting considered a federal offense that may be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

If you have further questions, please post them on the group Facebook site: "Finding the Courthouse".

Also, see the National Park Service website to learn more about the science of archeology and the measures that are taken to better preserve our nation's history.

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EXPERIENCE YOUR AMERICA™

**Figure 3.** Metal detecting in the Guilford Courthouse National Military Park. (ARPA Permit GUCO 2011-001; courtesy National Park Service GUCO)

Close to 9,000 artifacts and discovered landscape features (structures, possible roads, and pits) were recorded during the UNCG project. Using remote sensing equipment greatly aided in those efforts and also helped to minimize the damage caused by excavation, as less was needed. These results intrigued daily public visitors, students, researchers, and park personnel. A wide range of interested persons robustly debated possible historic, Revolutionary-era scenarios that had played across this significant national park landscape. These discussions revealed common and contrasting viewpoints between management personnel, including regional National Park Service (NPS) archaeologists, research scholars, and advocates from outside NPS culture. In the subsequent final report, UNCG scholars highlighted internal NPS, Babits and Howard's (2009), and Coe and Ward's (1974) varied viewpoints and priorities and centered on resolving them.

The GUCO project occurred in an urbanized, highly visited park used by the local public more for jogging than for learning about history, much to the dismay of staff. UNCG principal investigators were initially surprised at the level of visitation at the excavations and questions about the remote sensing equipment from joggers, dog walkers, and some history buffs. Certain areas had to be roped off at times so visitors' cell phones would not affect the equipment signals. Some visitors understood, others were amused, and one was appalled by a NPS sign stating "Science in Progress," remarking "archaeology is history, not science!" The work fostered enough interest for local newspaper and television coverage. The principal investigators were not encouraged to speak to reporters without going through channels, and indeed GUCO appointed a spokesperson for the duration of the investigations. However, from day 1 of the project, several well-known historians and archaeologists who had learned of the study showed up to see what UNCG uncovered. They proffered sound advice, although their presence was a bit daunting for those used to working at isolated private archaeological sites.

GUCO is on the National Register of Historic Places because of the Revolutionary War. To interpret cultural assets at the park, the NPS and GBC sought artifacts dating from the war years, particularly military items. The reality is that artifact manufacturing dates often spanned before, during, and after the revolution. People also held on to items beyond their production date range. This led to some intriguing discussions about which artifacts could be classified as "revolutionary era" or not—or, in the case of lead shot or balls, military or citizen owned. Other items from the project evoked interest in life "after the battle." Guilford Courthouse village residents were changed by war, as was the landscape, paralleling transformations in other war-torn Revolutionary villages. The UNCG work also aided park interpretation for visitors and staff through reminders of the early antebellum town, Martinville, a planned village of Governor Martin's that encompassed the old courthouse and other battle-related features. The town faded after a new county center, Greensboro, was chosen in 1807 (Stine et al.2013).

GBC members visited the site and expected periodic updates, lectures, and eventually creation of an archaeological exhibit depicting the work, including materials from Martinville. They also worked with UNCG and the NPS to promote a public outreach day (Figure 4). In 2011, the revolutionary village as well as the postwar town remains piqued the interest of many visitors,

battleground members included. Between exposed features (possible road, walls, pits, and artifacts) and visualizing possible structures through remote sensing, individuals could sense the past landscape. This helped NPS personnel, UNCG investigators, battleground company sponsors, and visitors to discuss future research questions and possible locations for future fieldwork.



**Guilford Courthouse**  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
Guilford Courthouse  
National Military Park

**Archeology Family Day**

**Saturday  
June 11, 2011  
10 am to 3 pm**

Come join the National Park Service and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as we uncover the secrets of Guilford Courthouse.

From May 22nd to June 24th, excavations are being conducted within the park. However, most days the progress is blocked from public view. On June 11th we will be presenting what we have been working on, and what it actually takes to be an archeologist.

Activities and presentations will be available for all ages throughout the park from 9 am to 3pm.

UNCG GBC Guilford College

**Figure 4.** Remote Sensing at GUCO, “Archeology Family Day.” (Courtesy of the National Park Service, GUCO)

The careful excavation and survey techniques, along with remote sensing, illustrated that combined geophysical and archaeology programs disturb fewer cultural resources, are educational, and can excite a new and diverse generation with hands-on and visualization experiences. The 2011 project conformed to the goals of the NPS at GUCO and SEAC and to the mission of the GBC. Incorporating a field school, working with metal-detecting volunteers, holding a family field day, and answering daily visitors’ questions enhanced education, understanding of archaeology, and knowledge about the park’s purpose and the historic events it



commemorates. The “After the Battle” exhibit was well received in the community and used to teach K–12 students and other GUCO visitors. The importance of understanding the landscape change over time, including the antebellum overlay of Martinville on the battlefield, has been underlined through UNCG's work.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Archaeology has been sifted into the mission of the NPS in a number of ways, emerging from a somewhat-rocky past of mere preservation of cultural sites from looting and destruction to the GUCO-quality work that leaves less of a footprint on the landscape while appealing to the park, to those deeply engaged in the park's interpretive materials, and the general public. The work conducted by UNCG archaeologists and geographers illustrates the important role that uncovering material remains can play in research, education, and community outreach. What began as an inquiry into the location of a ramshackle courthouse and a battle line became, eventually, a community event.

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