



*MVAC at the University
of Wisconsin-La Crosse*

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*Newsletter Submissions:
(608) 785-8454 or
jdowiasch@uwlax.edu*

mvac.uwlax.edu

*https://www.facebook.com/
UWLMVAC*

*1725 State Street
La Crosse, WI 54601-3788*

Archaeology News

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Survey of Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center

Vicki Twinde-Javner, Research Archaeologist

In August 2015 MVAC performed a Phase I (identification) survey of 173 acres of the Tomah Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) in Monroe County, WI. In the late 1800s the land that is now the VAMC consisted of several farms, but in the 1890s the U.S. Government bought about 200 acres, and the property was used as the Tomah Indian Industrial School from 1893 to 1935. The school was one of 18 non-reservation Indian boarding schools opened by the federal government between 1879 and 1893, and one of three in the Midwest. Tomah was chosen as the location after a strong competition between several cities including Sparta, Eau Claire, La Crosse, and Black River Falls. The school was exclusively for Native American children, and courses of study included manual training of tools and dairying, and religious education. Athletics, military training, and agricultural training were emphasized for the boys and domestic arts training for the girls. Over time the property expanded to almost 380 acres, and the school was known for its excellent Holstein herds and crops grown on most of the property. In 1942, the U.S. Army took over the Indian Industrial School grounds to support operations at nearby Fort McCoy during World War II. From 1942 to 1945, the Army established the Army Air Force Radio Technical School on the former Industrial School grounds.

School buildings were remodeled and utilized as classrooms, and temporary barracks were built. Soon after the end of World War II, the Army vacated the grounds, and the land was transferred back to the State of Wisconsin in early 1945.

Due to a large increase in veterans after World War II, the Veterans Affairs (VA) underwent a period of expansion, constructing over 40 new hospitals to meet the needs of war veterans. The first VA hospital constructed specifically for returning World War II Veterans was the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Tomah, founded in 1945. Several old buildings on campus were renovated and several new hospital buildings were built prior to the hospital opening in March of 1947. During the 1950s and 1960s, various donations helped fund additions to the property including a ball park, a stocked fish pond, and a nine-hole golf course. Parcels of land not used by the VAMC were sold off, and the current 173-acre property was established. Since that time, various new buildings have been erected as the VAMC expanded and shifted its focus to a primary and secondary care facility with a focus on medicine, psychiatry, and long-term care. Some of the buildings from the Indian Industrial School are still being used by the VAMC today.

- see Tomah VA, p.2



Crew members (l-r) Alex Welsch, Max Pschorr, and Sarah Schultz shovel testing on the Tomah VAMC grounds.

Tomah VA -continued from p.1

MVAC's 2015 survey of the property revealed that the building and razing of buildings for the Tomah Indian Industrial School, the Army Air Force Radio Technical School, and the VAMC buildings and golf course had an impact on the property. Survey of areas where some of the Indian Industrial School buildings had been razed showed quite a bit of disturbance, and historic debris was found throughout the property. Some areas on the golf course exhibited pockets of slag, which was apparently used as fill to level out the landscape. Depressions were still apparent from some of the Army Air Force Radio Technical School barracks that were built in the 1940s and subsequently razed.

MVAC found four new sites on the property, including one prehistoric isolated flake and three historic sites. Historic maps were a vital part of the project, and were consulted frequently to determine what different deposits might represent. One of the historic sites was a round depression on the southern portion of the grounds that contained artifacts dating to the mid-1940s. Another of the historic sites consisted of potentially intact foundations of the annex to two former Girls' Buildings from the Indian Industrial School. One of the Girls' Buildings is still used today, and the potential intact foundation of the annex was found exactly where historic maps showed it should be. The last historic site is a limestone foundation of what appears to be some kind of small outbuilding or shed. This foundation could not be matched to anything specific on historic maps, but was likely from the Indian Industrial School due to the material. MVAC also found an older incinerator dump with some ceramics dating to the 1930s and 1940s.



Examining artifacts recovered during MVAC's survey of the Tomah VAMC grounds.

Education News

Matching Funds Grant:

Teachers interested in using MVAC's Archaeology Education Program resources in their classrooms can get financial help with our Matching Funds Grant. The grant matches a teacher or school's cost dollar for dollar. Thanks to the UWL Foundation for providing funds for this program.

La Crosse School District:

Funds are available from the La Crosse School District for their elementary and middle school teachers to use MVAC presentations and resources in their classrooms. Thanks to the La Crosse School District for providing funds for this program.

MVAC's WebSite

Visit MVAC's news page (<http://mvac.uwlax.edu/news/>) for stories including:

- Summer Field Notes from Dr. Kate Grillo
- WI Archaeology Summer from Dr. Heather Walder
- MVAC Public Field School - photo gallery
- Digging with Dad, a *UWL Campus News* piece on Bill Gresens and Family
- Archaeology Professor Earns Leadership Role with International Research Center, a *UWL Campus News* piece on Dr. David Anderson

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MVAC Staff Contacts

Director

Dr. Timothy McAndrews, (608) 785-6774
tmcandrews@uwlax.edu

Operations Manager

Dr. Katherine Stevenson, (608) 785-8451
kstevenson@uwlax.edu

Main Office: (608) 785-8463

MVAC Staff

Michael Bednarchuk
Jean Dowiasch
Wendy Holtz-Leith
Bonnie Jancik
Marcee H. Peplinski
Vicki Twinde-Javner

Research Associates

David Anderson
Constance Arzigian
Kate Grillo
Jessi Halligan
Suzanne Harris
James Theler
Heather Walder

2015 Public Field School

Constance Arzigian, MVAC Research Associate

The 2015 public field school brought together middle school, high school, and college students and adults to explore another portion of the Norskedalen Heritage site property just west of Coon Valley, WI. Surface collections from agricultural fields on the property indicated that occupations may extend back for thousands of years, into the Archaic and/or Woodland periods.

Our goal was to see whether there were any in situ deposits below the plow zone. We excavated eight 2x2 meter squares down through the plow zone. Some units had only a few artifacts, while others produced several hundred flakes per 10 cm level in the plow zone. In most units we also found scattered artifacts at the base of the plow zone, extending just into the subsoil. One unit, however, had the base of a nice chipping feature that extended in a tight concentration down at least 10 cm into the subsoil. This might be connected to the very high concentration of lithics in the plow zone of that unit and two adjacent units. Many of the flakes in the subsoil concentration were too small to capture in a quarter-inch screen, so we collected all the soil and returned it to the lab, and will wash it through window screening to recover all of the small flakes. Throughout the units we also found several cores, early stage bifaces, and a number of flakes that look like scraping and cutting tools, suggesting that we have a small workshop. We will be analyzing the material to see if we can identify anything diagnostic to tell us how old this concentration might be.

We look forward to the 2016 field season to continue exploring adjacent areas and see what else is out there.



The 2015 Public Field School was held at the Norskedalen Heritage Site in Coon Valley.

Lab Remodel Complete

The lab remodeling project has been completed, and the Archaeology Lab is once again open for visitors. This past summer the Archaeology Lab displays were closed so that the main floor could be repainted and the flooring replaced. This required packing up and removing everything from the first floor for the month of July. Staff worked from the Lab basement and Wimberly Hall during that time. Everyone is now moved back and we're getting the last pieces back in place.

Thanks to all who attended the Open House on Sept. 24, during which the new UWL Department of Archaeology & Anthropology was introduced!

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.

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Upcoming Events

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The City of the Falcon: Egypt's First Capital and Royal Cemetery at Hierakonpolis

Hierakonpolis is famous as the home of the Narmer palette, recording the unification of Egypt at the beginning of the First Dynasty, 3100 B.C. But 500 years earlier, this site was already one of the largest urban centers along the Nile River. Ongoing excavations are revealing the tombs of regional kings who expressed their power in the size of their graves, and most interestingly, with a royal menagerie of carefully buried exotic wild animals such as elephants, leopards, and troops of baboons to take to the afterlife. The menagerie gives us a glimpse of the reality behind many artistic symbols of power from this early period.

Speaker: Dr. Renee Friedman

Date: Wednesday, October 21, 2015

Time: 7 pm

Location: UWL Main Hall, Auditorium

Annual Awards & Lecture: Jim Gallagher's Favorite Archaeological Places in Ireland

Ireland is a country incredibly rich in well-preserved and spectacular archaeological sites and artifacts. Jim Gallagher has traveled to Ireland over twenty times, including most recently in June of 2015. He has hiked hundreds of miles along the island's many walking routes and visited most of the important archaeological sites. His talk will explain the colorful history of ancient cultures on the islands and show you lots of great photos of sites ranging from spectacular burial chambers to precipitous mountain-top forts. He'll show artifacts ranging from Iron Age bog bodies to spectacular golden treasures. In addition, he will share stories and scenic photos from his many hikes.

Speaker: Jim Gallagher, UWL Professor Emeritus and retired MVAC Executive Director

Date: Thursday, November 12, 2015

Time: Social 6 pm, Awards 6:30 pm, Lecture 7 pm

Location: UWL Cartwright Center, Port O'Call

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