

Transcript: KAREN SMITH, Director of ARD - SCIAA, University of South Carolina

Interviewers: BETSY NEWMAN, PATRICK HAYES

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Location: HOBCAW HOUSE REAR LAWN, HOBCAW BARONY

Length: 40 minutes

Betsy Newman: Would you talk about the history of the project.

Karen Smith: We did begin to talk about doing archaeology here at Hobcaw a couple of years ago now, and I think one of the first things we said we needed to do before we stuck a shovel in the ground, is to take a look at what Jim Michie had done. Because we know that although there hasn't been a lot of archaeology done at Hobcaw, Jim Michie's work is a substantial contribution to our knowledge of the cultural resources, the cultural heritage that is here, that is below the ground. He did an archaeological survey in late 1990, early 1991, looking for the earliest Spanish settlement in North America. He focused on the property that bounds Winyah Bay. He put in shovel test pits on a grid, up and down that coastline, or the water's edge, and generated a lot of material from that work, a lot of information. He wrote a report.

We felt like we needed to get back into those collections and take another look, and so in 2014, we did that. Heathley Johnson sat down with the curator of archaeology at the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, and they went back through Jim Michie's collection from Hobcaw. Once we finished that, we felt like we were in a good position to then think about where we might do additional work in the field.

What we're doing last week and this week, it's a two week project, is doing a survey within the Hobcaw House fenced enclosure, this large enclosure that surrounds Hobcaw House. We're here because Jim Michie tested north of here and he tested south of here, what he called Hobcaw North and Hobcaw South. This has been a big question mark, this property, this bluff in between Hobcaw North and Hobcaw South. What's here? We can see what's here today, what's been here since the early 20th century, but what was here before

that?

BN: Michie, he wasn't given permission to shovel. Can you talk about that?

KS: Sure. What I know is what he's told us, what he'd said in his report, and that is that the (Belle W. Baruch) Foundation at the time didn't want any archaeology done inside the fenced-in enclosure, on this sort of ornamental landscape that surrounds Hobcaw House. He doesn't tell us why necessarily, but he respected that, and then looked elsewhere, surveyed elsewhere.

We're very fortunate today to have George Chastain as the president of the Foundation, is very interested in seeing archaeology done here, has been very supportive, and they're not the least bit concerned about the grass that we might disturb. We're able to do our work and we fill our holes back in, and they'll reseed at some point. Actually we did a little bit of testing in 2014, just a few shovel tests to kind of get a feel for what the bluff was like, and you can't even see our shovel tests today. A year later, they're not visible on the ground.

BN: Would you like to talk about how you have approached this area? It's a pretty big area, so how have you made the decisions about where to dig? I don't think people like me know how archaeologists do that.

KS: Well, there are a couple of ways we could do it. We could certainly talk to people, look at historic records, at maps, use our intuition, and dig where we think we might find something. That would tell us something, whether the maps are right or the oral traditions are right, or our intuition is good. If you want to take a sort of unbiased systematic approach, you would do what we're doing today, and that is testing on an established grid. Our survey interval here is ten meters, so every ten meters, we have a flag set, that's our shovel test location, and those flags go out every ten meters in all directions until we've filled in all this area within the fence.

Actually, if there weren't structures here, if there weren't big trees and walkways, we think we could put in about 600 of those on that ten meter grid. We're probably going to end up with about 300, 280 to 300, given all the things that we can't dig. That sort of systematic approach will give us an idea about where things were in the past, based on what we find in those shovel tests, without being biased by anything else. I don't know if that makes sense.

BN: I think that is so fundamental to archaeology, to be as scientific as possible.

KS: Right, right, and unbiased. We can't ever get completely away from our biases, but a lot of the methods that we use today were developed in order to try to alleviate some of the personal and historical biases that we have.

BN: Tell me what you're finding.

KS: Well, I can tell you that every shovel test we've excavated so far, by the count this morning, we were at shovel test 100, so we're about a third of the way done. Every shovel test is what we call positive, so it has something in it. We did have one negative shovel test. We're not really sure why it was negative.

Everything else has been positive, and we're finding a variety of both historic and pre-colonial, pre-Columbian artifacts. From 20th century material, we've got evidence for the house that stood before the brick house that we see here today. We've got evidence that it burned. We've got melted glass and burned cut nails, right up next to the house. I feel pretty confident that that's associated with the earlier structure there. Then there's a very obvious native American presence in the artifacts that we're finding, particularly in the levels below the historic ... The top fifteen centimeters or so, twenty centimeters, that's where we get the historic material. Below that, we lose the historic material and it's exclusively Native American, for the most part.

We've got a couple of shovel tests where there's something else going on, and it's a different type of profile. The historic material might persist all the way to the bottom of the shovel test. In one case, around on the front of the house, I think that's probably slump coming off of the bluff, because it's down low below the bluff, and in that shovel test, all the way to 65 centimeters where I hit water and I had to stop, we had historic material in it. Everywhere else, usually that top zone will have historic.

The Native American material along the bluff, a lot of it I would date to the Woodland period. A lot of it I would date to the Middle Woodland period. Between 600 B.C. and 500 A.D., we're seeing a lot of material that dates to that sort of thousand year period, all along the front of the bluff. We don't see that particular time period in material back on the rise back behind the house. There is some spatial patterning in these occupations, as people come and go over time, they may come back here and live here, but they may live in a different spot from previous residents of the land.

BN: Can you talk a little bit about the interesting little shard that Keith found there? What I thought was really interesting about that was it wasn't from here. What does that tell us?

KS: We have seen very little stone material coming from our shovel tests here. There are very few flakes. We haven't found any arrow points in our work here, and I suspect that part of what's going on there is that, there are few local sources for stone raw materials to make points. There aren't great raw material resources on the coast, so people do have to bring their raw materials from elsewhere, and we saw that in this flake. It's a material that comes from the Piedmont.

BN: What does that tell us about, I mean, I know you don't like to speculate, but I guess it's an indication of trade, or movement?

KS: I would say movement. Although we definitely see evidence for trade off and on

through time, but we also know that people moved around a lot. It's often a little bit difficult to tell whether you're looking at evidence of trade or evidence of the movement of people. Are the objects moving, or are the people moving with the objects? That's a little bit hard to figure out sometimes.

One of the things we did find, actually over here on the bluff, you asked about trade, this is an item that we know was traded, because of where we find it. This is a large, either whelk or conch, I haven't studied it closely enough to tell which one, but a large shell, large snail shell from the ocean, right. It was found in association with a large pottery sherd, fairly deep in the shovel test, about 50 centimeters deep, and probably in a small feature, a small post, or something like that. It was hard to tell the context for it in a such a small shovel test hole.

This large shell is an item that's traded, particularly in the Middle Woodland. I said that there's a lot of evidence of Middle Woodland here. During the Middle Woodland times, this large shell we see moving from the Atlantic coast to the interior continent. We see it on sites in Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and as well other materials coming from the Gulf that end up in the Midwest, and from the Great Lakes to the Midwest. There's vast movements of these raw materials across the eastern North America to the interior, during this Middle Woodland period.

Here we've got a large shell that's local, it's from the Atlantic. They could've gone out across Winyah Bay and gotten it. We know that is a type of good that was moved great distances in the past. Who knows why it was collected here, this is where I can speculate, maybe they were collecting it to trade through that network.

BN: What would they have used it for?

KS: It had multiple purposes. These large shells, they would've used for drinking. We know they used them in drinking activities, the black drink ceremony. We see the use of these large shells for consumption of the black drink in historic times. We can imagine they did similar activities in the past with these large shells.

BN: What is the black drink?

KS: We know one of the uses of these large shells was for, they used it in the black drink ceremony to consume the black drink. It's a tea made from *Ilex vomitoria*. They would brew this tea, they would consume it in sort of large quantities, and it would induce vomiting. It was done during a ceremony. We have illustrations of this and this act of vomiting produced from it. I actually think they cut the shell in half and then filled it and used it as a cup.

BN: Is there anything else that you feel you have found about the Native American presence here that you could share?

KS: Let's see. Well, one of the things I'm really looking forward to doing when we take all of this material back to the lab is, I would really like to chart ... I imagine that, as we say, people didn't live here continuously, that it was a coming and a going. To be able to chart that coming and going through time, and see how use of the landscape and where people settled changed over time. Just within this fenced enclosure, from the work we've done so far, I think we're going to be able to see that people during Middle Woodlands times lived in a certain spot on the landscape, and people later lived elsewhere. Then trying to relate that to changes in how they were living, what they were eating, and that sort of thing. How big their communities were. Something I hope to do once we get back to the lab and begin to ...

We'll be able to do some of that through the identification of the surface treatments on pottery. Pottery, like our clothing styles change today, what we wore in the 70's is not necessarily the styles that are in fashion today. Pottery styles changed as well through time. We're able to use pottery as a kind of chronological yard stick or marker.

Here in South Carolina we get, when I say we've got a lot of evidence for Middle Woodland settlement along the bluff, it's primarily in the pottery we call check stamped

pottery. There's a lot of check stamped pottery coming from our shovel tests right along the bay, on the bluff. We see a little bit of fabric marked associated with that. Fabric marked pottery. This is pottery that's impressed with fabric, versus the check stamped pottery is impressed with a carved wooden paddle that has a checkerboard pattern carved into it.

The carved checkerboard pattern didn't persist forever. It was popular for about a thousand years. Actually, one of the things that replaced it was paddles that were carved with curvilinear lines instead of checkerboard lines. We see the curvilinear stamped pottery post-A.D. 1000 in South Carolina. We do have a little bit of that, so we've seen a little bit so far in our shovel testing here.

BN: It's neat that you can look into the ground and pull out this history. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about just how important that is, and give a little pitch for archaeology.

KS: I obviously think it's very important. One of the things that archaeology does really well is, it allows us to know and understand what was here that we can't see any evidence for whatsoever above ground. It's only through our work in these excavations that we're able to bring those materials to light. It's a little hard to think about, you have to sit and think about how that happens, that something is no longer visible on the ground. If you own a home, if you know what home maintenance is like, if you don't care for your house over several seasons, over several years, over several decades, things start to fall in and fall down, and eventually they are buried. That's a kind of simplistic view of how the archaeological record is created. Again, without our methods, these excavations, you wouldn't be able to necessarily know what had been here that long ago, because it is buried. I don't know. That's one of my pitches for archaeology.

BN: That's a good one. I'm just so struck by the idea that the Native American world was here for so long, and we see so-

KS: There's so little that remains of it on the landscape. Yeah. I think that's ... Some of the sites that are the best protected archaeological sites, Native American sites, some of the best protected sites in eastern North America, in the Southeast, are sites where the evidence for Native American use of the land is still very visible. Sites that have big mounds on them, Etowah in Georgia is a big mound site. There are these big earthen mounds that are still quite visible, so it's easy to say yes, that needs to be protected. The shell mounds, those are still very visible markers of Native American settlement and use of the land. We have several of those as heritage sites in South Carolina because of that. A site like we're on now, we don't have big shell mounds or big earthen mounds, but yet they're still important. They still have something to tell us about Native American life here.

Patrick Hayes: I did have a question. Update us on Jim Spirek, because I kind of lost touch with Jim and where they were going with the underwater archaeology. The last point we talked to him, they were bringing the second phase of it, there was ground magnetronomy. Will they revisit these sites? Are these sites of interest? Or do they kind of get shelved because there was nothing significant found?

KS: I think, like so much of our work, so much of what all of us do, we do our thing in the field and then we go back to the lab, and we work on it there, but then another project comes up and we get involved in that. Anyway, I don't think that they have plans to come back and do any more work here in Winyah Bay at this point. I know that he made a couple of Facebook posts on their results, the results of their survey, and so if you want some visuals to use, I can get some from him, or there are some great Facebook posts.

PH: I know they had some anomalies and we looked at what looked to be the kind of imprint or outline of a ship but it wasn't considered historically significant or archaeologically significant.

KS: I think he was thinking it was twentieth century, not sure what exactly he saw in

it that told him that, other than maybe it didn't have the characteristics that an older ship would have. He thought it must be twentieth century, and for most of us, that doesn't hold much interest. Although it was a great to see the side scan sonar image of it, and I enjoy just being out on the water with him. I'd never been involved in underwater survey before. I probably already said this on camera, but I thought it was great to see just how systematic they are in the water. They're just as systematic in the water as we are on land, and that was a revelation to me. It's not just a bunch of divers out there poking around. They survey in transects just like we do.

PH: You're picking up where Michie left off. Potentially someday, somebody might come here and find another part of Hobcaw that may add to the context of the story.

KS: As we've said many times too, there are lifetimes of work that could be done here. I think, I've already talked to several people, over the weekend for our public day, we had the chair of the Department of Anthropology out here. I think he had been to the property before, but this was an opportunity for him to come with new eyes, to think about how ... He's a historical archaeologist and he does work in West Africa and the Caribbean, but he has graduate students who are interested in working in South Carolina. I think he was looking at the property for he could suggest to his own students and what they may get out, what sorts of research projects they might be able to do here.

There's that avenue, and then Liz Bridges, whom you met earlier today, volunteering with us, she's an archaeologist who works in India, but she's looking to sort of do some work in South Carolina. Her husband is the new research professor at SCIAA, to replace Al Goodyear. Anyway, she's fascinated by the (Baruch daughters') dollhouse, and thinking about how elite that was. This is what she said to me. You think about dollhouses today, every family can go out and buy one for themselves, but at this time, this was probably only something people like the Baruchs, families like the Baruchs ... She was sort of thinking about how she could work that into some research, just this idea of elite children's games for the elite in the early twentieth century. That's something that never would have

crossed my mind, but it crossed hers. Just the possibilities for research here are endless, really.