

VIII. Doctoral dissertations

From Benjamin C. Pykles, University of Pennsylvania:

‘The Archaeology of the Mormons Themselves’: The Restoration of Nauvoo and the Rise of Historical Archaeology in America

Historical archaeology – the archaeology of the Modern World – was created primarily out of the American historic preservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its formal beginnings are linked to the institutionally sponsored excavations of famous historic sites in the 1930s, with particular reference to the federally supported excavations at Jamestown, Virginia. The field’s professional beginnings, however, are grounded in the 1960s, when historical archaeology emerged as an independent discipline of academic scholarship.

Significantly, the restoration of Nauvoo, complete with archaeological excavations, took place at the same time historical archaeology was emerging from its institutional roots and entering the academic world as a professional discipline of study. Remarkably, J. C. Harrington, widely regarded as the ‘father’ of historical archaeology, was involved in all of these events. Not only did he play a prominent role in both the early institutional phase of the discipline and its later professional development, but also he was instrumental in establishing historical archaeology in Nauvoo.

Consequently, the historical archaeology in Nauvoo is a particularly illustrative case study in the history of the discipline at large. In particular, the Nauvoo excavations offer a glimpse into a significant period of transition in the development of the field. Indeed, during the nearly twenty five years of excavations in Nauvoo, historical archaeology as a whole emerged from its formal beginnings in restoration archaeology and entered the academic world as a legitimate and professional scholarly discipline. Furthermore, the history of the Nauvoo excavations reveals how historical archaeology, by contributing to historic site restorations, has been used in efforts to legitimize and validate the particular ideologies of the various institutions that have sponsored it.

Overall, the historical archaeology of Nauvoo reflects broad national patterns of the field’s development. However, the unique peculiarities of this specific case study arise from both an internal interpretive conflict between two competing branches of Mormonism (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), and an external conflict between secular and religious interpretive models for the historic site.

Chapter Titles:

Introduction: The History of Historical Archaeology in America

Chapter 1: Nauvoo, the Beautiful: The Origins of the Restoration of a Famous Historic Site

Chapter 2: The Rise of Nauvoo Restoration, Incorporated

Chapter 3: Preserving the Past or Saving Humanity: Interpretive Conflict in Nauvoo

Chapter 4: ‘The Archaeology of the Mormons Themselves’: Historical Archaeology in Nauvoo

Chapter 5: Conclusion: The Nauvoo Excavations and the Development of Historical Archaeology in America