Overview of the Center

The Andrew Fiske Memorial Center for Archaeological Research was established in 1999 through an endowment from Mrs. Andrew Fiske, as a living memorial to her late husband Andrew and his interest in archaeological research. The Fiske Center supports a wide range of interdisciplinary archaeological research, applied public archaeology projects, and educational programs for undergraduate and graduate students. In general, the Fiske Center has a temporal focus on the archaeology of the last thousand years and a geographic emphasis on the archaeology of the Americas and the Atlantic World. The Center’s research has a theoretical focus on issues of colonization, urbanization, and industrialization, all key social and historical processes that have shaped the modern world. These issues are investigated through careful archaeological fieldwork and detailed laboratory analyses. The Center has technical expertise and a practical emphasis on archaeological fieldwork and site sampling, material analysis and conservation, remote sensing, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) applications, paleoethnobotany, palynology, and zooarchaeology. This theoretical focus and methodological expertise, in combination with an experienced and accomplished staff, makes the Fiske Center a national leader in historical and environmental archaeology research.

As part of a public university, the Fiske Center also has a strong commitment to local and regional archaeology. The Fiske Center undertakes selected public-oriented projects that promote the cultural heritage of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the broader New England Region. In collaboration with the Massachusetts State Archives, the Commonwealth Museum, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and the Office of the State Archaeologist, the Center assists with the curation and conservation of significant archaeological collections unearthed in Massachusetts. The Center also carries out public service archaeology projects that are collaborative efforts with local governments, local historical societies, tribal nations, or other preservation organizations. These projects bring our staff’s expertise to bear on the preservation, interpretation, and management of significant sites and artifact collections. While many of these projects are funded by external organizations, our main focus is on projects that make genuine contributions to UMass Boston’s public service and educational missions.

Finally, the Center serves an important educational role at UMass Boston by creating educational opportunities for students, especially graduate students in the Historical Archaeology M.A. program. Center staff members teach courses, supervise independent study classes, and direct undergraduate Honors and graduate Master’s theses. Students also have many opportunities to engage in Center research projects, frequently in funded positions as Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs). Through these opportunities students learn about the process of archaeological research through participation in on-going projects, and gain valuable experience with applied projects in public settings. The Center also directly supports graduate student research through small grants for professional development.

Center Staff

The Center’s staff underwent a period of growth over the last two years, with the addition of three new people. Stephen Mrozowski, Professor of Anthropology, continues to serve as the Center Director. David Landon is the Center's Associate Director. John Steinberg and Heather Trigg are both Research Scientists, and direct the digital archaeology and paleoethnobotany labs, respectively. Dennis Piechota has a half-time appointment as the Center’s Archaeological Conservator. Leith Smith continues to work...
Exciting new additions in the last two years have expanded the Center’s staff, adding additional expertise and depth. Dr. Virginia Popper has joined the Center as a Research Associate, bringing her paleoethnobotanical research laboratory here from UCLA’s Cotsen Institute for Archaeology. Susan Jacobucci, a graduate of UMass Boston’s M.A. program, has been working as a Pollen Laboratory Technician, undertaking analytical projects and assisting with the development of a pollen-imaging database. Finally, our most recent addition is Dr. Christa Beranek, who joined the Center on a three-year appointment supported by the Vice Provost for Research. Beranek’s doctoral research at Boston University focused on 18th-century rural elites in Massachusetts. At UMass Boston she is working as a Project Archaeologist to help support and further develop our regional archaeology program.

**Research and Scholarly Activities**

**Sylvester Manor Volume**

One of our signature accomplishments of the last two years was the publication of an edited volume on the Sylvester Manor archaeology project (right). The Sylvester Manor project is one of the Center’s longest-running research projects, engaging all of the staff and several cohorts of graduate and undergraduate students in a wide-ranging series of field and laboratory analyses. Preliminary results of these studies were compiled together in an edited volume of papers and published as a special issue of the annual journal *Northeast Historical Archaeology*. This was truly a collaborative effort, and included papers from all of the Center’s staff as well as many former students who had worked on the project. One of these students, Katherine Howlett Hayes, worked with Mrozowski on editing the papers, and used her research on Sylvester Manor as the basis for her successful doctoral dissertation at the University of California Berkeley.

**Skagafjörður Archaeological Settlement Survey**

A three-year grant from the National Science Foundation helped establish Dr. Steinberg’s Iceland research program at UMass Boston. The Skagafjörður Archaeological Settlement Survey (SASS) seeks to identify, catalog, and assess the Viking Age and Medieval structures of a Northern Icelandic fjord valley to understand the changes in the settlement pattern from the Viking Age through Early Danish Rule (AD 874-1800). Over this period, Iceland was transformed from a system of chiefdoms to a manorial organization incorporated into the larger Norwegian State. The archaeological data (left) gathered by the SASS project will allow scholars to better understand the advantages of being the first to settle a landscape, the importance of farm economic potential for political success, and the changes in land use and labor during the fall of the chiefly and manorial systems.

**Archaeobiology and Environmental Archaeology Projects**

Center researchers continue to work on a variety of specialized studies of plant and animal remains from archaeological sites. For the past several years we have been engaged in a collaborative project with the Mashantucket Pequot Museum to study archaeobotanical materials recovered from the Museum’s...
excavations on the Pequot reservation in Connecticut. A similar project is ongoing with collaborators from Salve Regina to study archaeobiological samples from urban archaeological sites in Newport, Rhode Island. Several of our graduate students have completed theses on these projects and several more are underway. Heather Trigg and Susan Jacobucci have also been working on a major initiative to develop an image database of pollen from economically important plants (left). While many pollen identification tools have been developed for natural flora, less attention has been given to crop, weed, and ornamental plants used intensively by people. The goal is to develop this pollen database into a comprehensive, searchable tool for use by other researchers studying recent pollen spectra with strong signatures of human induced vegetation change.

Journal of Ethnobiology

Drs. Virginia Popper and Heather Trigg are beginning a term as the co-editors of the Journal of Ethnobiology. This professional journal includes two issues per year and is sponsored by the Society for Ethnobiology. Topical coverage includes a wide range of interdisciplinary studies of the relationships of plants and animals with human cultures worldwide, including past and present relationships between peoples and the environment. Having the editorship of this journal at UMass Boston will enhance the professional and academic visibility of the Center and its programs.

Parker-Borrego Site, New Mexico

Research continues on the Parker-Borrego Site, a 19th-century Hispanic ranch in New Mexico. During this period, governmental control of New Mexico moved first from the Spanish empire to the Mexican state and finally to the United States when the region became a territory. With change to American governmental control, English-speaking governors came to dominate the once politically and socially powerful Spanish New Mexicans. This research project examines how political shifts and expanded trade opportunities affected Spanish New Mexican household economies. While locally made and Mexican pottery (left) is present in the oldest layers of the sites, more recent deposits suggest Anglo-American imported goods replaced Mexican status goods.

Major Reports on Weir Farm, African Meeting House, and State Collections

Three major sponsored projects were finished in the last two years, with significant effort going to completion reports. Leith Smith lead a major study for the National Park Service, preparing an overview and assessment report on archaeological resources in the Weir Farm National Historic Site, Wilton, Connecticut. Dennis Piechota directed the study of archaeological collections in the Commonwealth that had been excavated for the State Department of Transportation. This resulted in a series of reports for the Massachusetts Historical Commission and the DOT documenting collections conditions and making recommendations for collections storage and preservation. Finally, David Landon edited a major report (right) on the archaeological excavations at the African Meeting House on Beacon Hill. In addition to working on scholarly publications from this project, Landon is currently working with the Museum of African American History to produce a public version of the archaeological report suitable for distribution to teachers, school groups, and visitors to the Meeting House.
The Fiske Center has a strong commitment to public archaeology in Massachusetts. Center staff and UMass Boston students work collaboratively with local governments, tribal nations, museums, and preservation organizations on the identification, interpretation, and management of sites important to the cultural and historical heritage of the Commonwealth.

**Hassanamesit Woods, Grafton, Massachusetts**

One of our most visible public projects is the on-going archaeological investigation of Hassanamesit Woods in Grafton, Massachusetts. This is a collaborative project involving the Town of Grafton, The Fiske Center and the Nipmuc Tribal Nation. The focus of the project is a 200-acre parcel purchased by the Town of Grafton that includes land that was once part of the 17th-century Native community of Hassanamesit. For the last several years we have run a summer archaeological fieldschool at the site, training students in field methods on an important local project. Recent excavations have focused on the 18th- and early-19th-century farmstead of Sarah Boston. Two M.A. theses have been completed on the project, exploring Sarah Boston's material life and efforts to secure her place in the face of social discrimination. The Town of Grafton and the Nipmuc Tribal Nation will use results of our analysis and of subsequent investigations to develop interpretive and educational materials for the public.

**Barrett Farm, Concord, Massachusetts**

The Center is working with Save Our Heritage, a preservation organization in Concord, MA, on a multi-faceted restoration project at the Barrett Farm. Colonel James Barrett was the commander of the Concord area militia on the eve of the American Revolution, and Barrett’s farm became the focus of the British military in mid-April, 1775. A column of soldiers left Boston on April 18th, determined to seize arms and munitions stockpiled in various places in Concord, including the Barrett Farm. The British failed to locate Colonel Barrett or the weapons. Along the way, the soldiers became involved in the battles of Lexington and Concord, the opening skirmishes of the American Revolution. Barrett Farm is now the focus of a major restoration, which includes remote sensing (left) and archaeological excavations. The results of the archaeological investigation will help to interpret the historical development of the house lot and contribute to the restoration.

**Gore Place, Waltham, Massachusetts**

Archaeological investigations at Gore Place, the late-18th and early-19th-century mansion and estate of Massachusetts Governor and U.S. Senator Christopher Gore and his wife Rebecca, are exploring Gore’s landscaping activities and identifying the locations of outbuildings and features such as the original carriage drive, the 1793 carriage house foundation, cisterns, the greenhouse, vegetable garden, flower garden, and the grapery. Excavations of the carriage house area in the fall of 2008 will investigate the layout of this service space and the possibility that the carriage house served as residential space for estate servants. The Gore Place Society has been conducting architectural and archival research about the site landscape, and these data will combine with the archaeological results as the Society attempts to restore the grounds to their Gore-period appearance.
**Higginbotham House, Nantucket, Massachusetts**

The Fiske Center is working in collaboration with the Museum of African American History to study the Seneca Boston-Florence Higginbotham House on Nantucket. This house was originally built just prior to the American Revolution by Seneca Boston, a former slave. One of his sons, Absalom Boston, became a famous Nantucket sea captain and merchant. After the Boston family, a series of African Americans owned the house until it was purchased by the Museum. Archaeological excavation at the site in the summer of 2008 will help to discover more about the history of the land and the families who lived there, and provide guidance for the Museum’s planned restoration and interpretation of the property. This project was run with a strong public archaeology component, including a public kick-off lecture, public site tours, and student visits to the site. In cooperation with the Museum’s education director we had public programs for school children, with the entire 2nd grade of Nantucket touring the site and engaging in archaeology activities.

**Teaching and Student Support**

The Fiske Center is closely integrated into the educational mission of UMass Boston, especially the Historical Archaeology graduate program in the Anthropology Department. Over the last two years Center staff supervised independent studies for undergraduate and graduate students, served on graduate committees and directed M.A. theses, participated in the Historical Archaeology graduate program committee, and oversaw the work of many GRAs. In Spring 2007, Landon taught a graduate course in Zooarchaeology through the MIT Center for Materials Research in Archaeology and Ethnography (CMRAE) program. CMRAE courses are open to students from UMass Boston and seven other Universities in a regional consortium. In Fall 2007, Trigg and Steinberg team-taught, ANTH 645: Topics in Environmental Archaeology. Center projects are also an important source of funding for students, with over $165,000 in graduate and undergraduate research assistantship support provided in the last two years.

**Professional Development Grants for Graduate Students**

The Fiske Center has an annual competition to award small professional development grants to graduate students in the Historical Archaeology program. These grants, ranging from $300 to $350, have helped students fund their thesis research. A list of student grants for the last two years is included below.

- Styger, Michelle. Archival research at the Newport Historical Society, Newport, RI.
- Wilkins, Andrew. Laboratory supplies for soil chemistry analysis of samples from the Stratford Hall slave quarters.
- Bowes, Jessica. Archival research in Richmond, VA and at Poplar Forest, Lynchburg, VA.
- Johnson, Kate. Archaeological survey and test excavations in Little Compton, RI.

**Publications, Reports and Presentations**

**Books, Monographs, and Edited Volumes**


**Articles**


Book Sections and Proceedings


Reports


Popper, V. Macrobotanical Analysis of Soil Samples from Site CA-VEN-1797, Ventura County, California. Report prepared for Compass Rose Archaeological, Inc. 8pp.


Piechota, D. “A Final Report on the Assessment of Transportation-Related Collections stored by Archaeological Services at UMass Amherst”, submitted in partial fulfillment of a grant from the Massachusetts Highway Department made under the Intermodal Surface Transport Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

Piechota, D. “A Final Report on the Assessment of Transportation-Related Collections Stored by the Massachusetts Historical Commission”, submitted in partial fulfillment of a grant from the Massachusetts Highway Department made under the Intermodal Surface Transport Efficiency Act (ISTEA).

Piechota, D. “A Final Report on the Assessment of Transportation-Related Collections Curated by the Boston Landmarks Commission”, submitted in partial fulfillment of a grant from the Massachusetts Highway Department made under the Intermodal Surface Transport Efficiency Act (ISTEA).


Conference Presentations


House, Boston, MA.” Paper presented at the Annual Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology, Albuquerque, NM.


2008 Mrozowski, S. “Pulling the Threads Together: Exploring the Fabric of the Modern World” Invited Lecture at Leicester University, UK.


Successful Proposals


### Grant Expenditure Summary

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<th>Project and Source of Funds</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Overhead</th>
<th>Student Support</th>
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