

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Michael Wiant

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Historians Speak – Illinois Pre-History Oral History project

Interview # HSP-A-L-2020-062

Dr. Michael Wiant, an archaeologist and anthropologist and former director of the Dickson Mounds Museum near Lewistown, Illinois, was interviewed on the dates listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Historians Speak – Illinois Pre-History* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Date: 15, 16, & 19 October 2020 Location: ALPL Recording Room, Springfield, IL

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Mark Flotow, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 2:37 + 2:34 + 1:44 / 2.62 + 2.56 + 1.73 = 6.91 hrs

Session 1: Early career, becoming an archaeologist, Koster site & contract archaeology

Session 2: Napoleon Hollow site, Illinois State Museum, & Dickson Mounds Museum

Session 3: Archaeological highlights, changes in archaeology and future of archaeology
in Illinois

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on (4/16/2021).

The interview is archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield,
Illinois.

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Abstract

Dr. Michael D. Wiant, *Illinois Pre-History*, HSP-A-L-2020-062

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Michael D. Wiant was born on 31 March 1949 in Illinois. In high school, he was a multi-sport athlete and graduated from University High School in Normal in 1967. He considered working toward being a high school teacher and athletic coach but was drawn to archaeology and anthropology through a chance meeting with Edward Jelks. He received his B.A. degree in Social Sciences Comprehensive from Illinois State University in 1971. His early field experiences included historical archaeological work at Fort Constitution in New York state. He was further attracted to field archaeology while at Illinois State University and Northwestern University in the early-to-mid 1970s. In 1975, he became the site supervisor of the Koster Site in the lower Illinois River Valley under the leadership of Dr. Stuart Struever, and served as its director from 1976-78. In 1977, he received two Masters degrees, an MS in Sociology-Anthropology from Illinois State University and an MA in Anthropology from Northwestern University. In 1979 he became the principal investigator of the Napoleon Hollow archaeological project for the Center for American Archaeology. He received his Ph.D. in Anthropology from Northwestern University in 1987. In 1983, he started a long association with the Anthropology Section of the Illinois State Museum, including Associate Curator (1983), Section Head (1988), and Curator (1991). He further advanced to Interim Director of the ISM's Dickson Mounds Museum near Lewistown, Illinois in 2002 and became the DMM's Director in 2003. When the Illinois State Museum was closed on October 2015, he accepted the role as caretaker for the Museum system. In 2016, he was appointed ISM Interim Director, serving until December 31, 2017, when he retired. At the time of this interview in 2020, he was an ISM/DMM Director Emeritus.

Dr. Michael Wiant's archaeological journey includes collaborations with notable members of the profession including Edward B. Jelks, Stuart Struever, James A. Brown, Kenneth B. Farnsworth, R. Bruce McMillan, Bonnie and Tom Styles, Alan Harn and many other Illinois and Midwestern colleagues. Among his interests, experiences and specialties are the recovery technique of flotation, contract archaeology, archaeological inventories and databases as well as other critical knowledge infrastructures, geomorphology and other interdisciplinary archaeological collaboratives, interpretations of past peoples in the lower Illinois River valley, and dissemination of archaeological knowledge to the public. He also was at the forefront of the transformation of the Dickson Mounds Museum from one primarily featuring a burial site to a regional prehistoric and environmental interpretive center.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Field archaeology; archaeological interpretation; flotation; the Koster site (including as a phenomenon); lithic analysis; the Lands Unsuitable for Mining program; the Napoleon Hollow site; Emiquon and the evolution of the Dickson Mounds Museum; the 2015 temporary closure of the ISM; changes in the nature and funding of archaeology in Illinois; and interdisciplinary collaboratives.

Note to the Reader: Readers of the oral history memoir should bear in mind that this is a transcript of the spoken word, and that the interviewer, interviewee and editor sought to preserve the informal, conversational style that is inherent in such historical sources. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library is not responsible for the factual accuracy of the memoir, nor for the views expressed therein. We leave these for the reader to judge.

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