

The Documentation and Accessibility of information on historic resources in Mississippi

The Historic Preservation Division of MDAH contains the only comprehensive statewide body of information about the state's historic resources. Efforts over the past several years to produce archaeological context documents have resulted in a useful body of broad context information about Mississippi's prehistory. The Paleoindian and Early Archaic contexts have been published by the University of Alabama as a part of a larger work on the early archaeology of the Southeast, and the remaining contexts are being prepared for publication by MDAH. Survey work has provided documentation about more than 21,000 archaeological sites throughout the state, and archaeological survey work is ongoing, particularly directed toward locations where there is known or anticipated development activity.

Historical research and survey work has documented over 40,000 buildings and other historic properties throughout the state. Detailed architectural and historical surveys have been conducted in many of the communities that have the highest concentrations of significant historic properties, but comprehensive survey-based information is still needed for large areas of the state. Many scattered, individual historic properties remain unrecorded in much of Mississippi, though ongoing architectural and historical survey work continues on a regular basis.

Architectural and historical contexts are not as complete as for prehistoric resources. Historical overview contexts have been prepared for the colonial period and partially for the territorial period. Additionally, topical context studies have been written for several of the more important architectural styles and building types, and local context reports have been prepared for numerous local communities. A continually updated system of topical reference files and computerized topical lists of historic resources has proven to be invaluable in recent years, and has been particularly useful in providing a basis for assessing National Register eligibility. Much more context information needs to be compiled, however. The most critical need is for guidelines for assessing National Register eligibility for certain types of resources, such as schools, rural stores, and industrial facilities. Beyond this, there is a need for topical studies on a wide variety of subjects, and overviews are needed for the antebellum period, the Civil War, the post-bellum years of the nineteenth century, and the twentieth century up to and including World War II. Additionally, studies should be done to provide contexts for identifying significant properties from the recent past, including those associated with the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Of the historic and prehistoric resources identified and recorded in Mississippi, many have been listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Mississippi currently has approximately 1,270 listings in the National Register. These range from small, individual sites and buildings to districts encompassing more than 700 buildings.

There are other organizations and agencies that maintain information about historic properties in Mississippi, but their focus is more specific than that of the Historic Preservation Division. Certified Local Governments maintain information on historic properties within their own jurisdictions. In some communities, local historical societies or preservation organizations have reference files about historic sites, and in many communities public libraries maintain information of this type. The units of the National Park system in Mississippi all have a strong cultural resources emphasis. Other federal agencies, such as the Forest Service, have historic preservation programs directed toward the management of culturally-significant properties within their ownership or jurisdiction. Additionally, many of the state's colleges and universities have substantial collections of historical and archaeological reference materials.

Despite these sources of information, there is still a need for more widespread knowledge about and appreciation of historic resources among the general population of the state. In particular, there is a need for more books and other published information pertaining to the state's cultural resources.

There have been several major works published in recent years addressing the state's prehistoric and Native American legacy, as well as numerous specialized archaeological studies. These works include ***Choctaw Genesis*** by Patricia Galloway (1995), ***Excavations at the Lake George Site*** by Stephen Williams and Jeffrey P. Brain (1983), ***Tunica Archaeology*** by Jeffrey P. Brain (1988), ***The Wilsford Site (22-Co-516), Coahoma County, Mississippi: A Late Mississippian Period Settlement in the Northern Yazoo Basin of Mississippi*** by John Connaway (1984), and a booklet entitled ***The Natchez Indians*** by Jim Barnett (1998). The journal ***Mississippi Archaeology*** is an excellent source of information about the prehistoric and historic archaeology of the state. ***Indian Mounds of Mississippi: A Visitor's Guide*** (1999) was produced by the Mississippi Department of Archives and History through a grant from the Southeast Archaeological Center of the National Park Service. Intended to reach a broad popular readership, this free brochure features the state's twelve publicly-owned, visitor-accessible Native American mound sites. It is also available on-line as part of the National Park Service's "National Register Travel Itineraries." ***Mississippi Projectile Point Guide*** by Samuel O. McGahey (2000) is a comprehensive view of Native American projectile points found throughout the state. The forthcoming book ***Mississippi Archaeology Q & A***, by Evan Peacock, to be published by University Press of Mississippi in 2005, is an overview of archaeology in Mississippi.

Relatively few books and articles have been published that address the historic architecture of the state. An overview entitled ***Historic Architecture in Mississippi***, written by Mary Wallace Crocker with research assistance from MDAH, was published in 1973. Other works addressing the architectural

heritage of the state as a whole have included Mills Lane's ***Architecture of the Old South: Mississippi and Alabama*** (1989) and ***Lost Mansions of Mississippi*** (1996) and ***Lost Landmarks of Mississippi*** (2002) by Mary Carol Miller. ***Written in the Bricks*** (1999) and ***Great Houses of Mississippi*** (2004) by Mary Carol Miller and Mary Rose Carter provide an overview of the history and historic resources of fifteen Mississippi communities and thirty-five homes, respectively. There are several important works addressing specific individual communities. The rich architectural legacy of Natchez is addressed in a variety of books and articles, including ***The Great Houses of Natchez*** (1986) ***Classic Natchez*** (1996). Several other communities have published studies, including ***The Buildings of Biloxi: An Architectural Survey*** (1976, revised and reissued in 2000) and ***Architecture in Claiborne County, Mississippi: A Selective Guide*** (MDAH, 1974) and ***Reflections: History and Homes of Columbus*** (2001). Additionally, books have been published about several of the state's most important individual buildings, including the Old Capitol in Jackson, the Governor's Mansion in Jackson, "Beauvoir" in Biloxi, and "Longwood" in Natchez. A history of the present State Capitol (generally known as the "New Capitol" although constructed in 1901-03) is currently being prepared for publication by MDAH. Other historical accounts have generally focused on social and political history and have given little attention to the physical manifestations and symbols of the state's history and culture. Local communities have begun to privately publish their own history books with photographs from their past. These have allowed the general public to remember the historic resources lost in the community and remind them of the importance of these physical symbols of their past.

Many properties associated with Mississippi's rich African American heritage are included in ***African American Historic Places***, published by the National Park Service in 1994. Some local communities have guides to African American sites. The most extensive published guide to African American historic sites in a single community in the state is ***African American Associated Historic and Architectural Resources of Vicksburg, Mississippi***, published in 1993 by the City of Vicksburg and the Vicksburg Foundation for Historic Preservation, assisted by a federal Historic Preservation Fund grant through the Certified Local Government program. An extensive driving tour of Civil Rights sites in Jackson was published in 2002 by the City of Jackson with a Certified Local Government grant from MDAH and received local and national publicity of the publication. Other cities also have developed brochures and walking tours to promote awareness of their African American resources. The state's Division of Tourism Development has recently published an African American Tour Guide, which contains statewide touring itineraries.

A Guide to the Campaign and Siege of Vicksburg and ***A Guide to the Corinth Campaigns of 1862*** are concise but scholarly guides to the major engagements that constituted these two campaigns. MDAH has also prepared entries for Mississippi sites included in ***The Civil War Trust's Official Guide***

to the Civil War Discovery Trail, a Frommers Guide that features descriptions and visitor information about Civil War sites throughout the country. Mississippi Civil War sites are also included in **The Civil War Battlefield Guide** published by The Conservation Fund.

Appreciation for historic resources appears to be growing in the state. Newspapers often carry stories about historic buildings and archaeological activities, and the rise of heritage tourism has prompted a wider recognition of the tourist appeal of historic properties. Although the state has had few building projects in the past decade, legislators have seen grant programs for historic properties as positive public works projects to spur economic development in communities of all sizes throughout the state. In some communities, most notably Columbus, Natchez, and Vicksburg, heritage tourism is a very important aspect of the local economy. Other communities have begun to form relationships to promote their historic sites cooperatively. Interest in developing National Heritage Areas in the Mississippi Delta and the Mississippi Hills has led to better public acceptance of historic preservation as a tool of economic development.